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Media, third sector and intellectuals in Slovakia

A round-table discussion which debates the interplay between media, government and civil society. How big is the media's influence on the perception of politics and politicians? Does Slovakia possess a functioning civil society that keeps the balance of power in check? And finally, what are the lessons to be learned from other post-communist countries?

Samuel Abraham: Dear guests, we agreed that in this and subsequent debates in the journal *Kritika & Kontext* we will debate about various political and interest groups that exert influence on our society and will influence it in the future. In the following discussion we will cover two of these groups: media and the third sector or NGOs. Let us try to map the basic problems concerning the media and journalists in Slovakia. It appears that the basic journalistic creed – independence, impartiality and comprehensiveness – has only a limited space in our society. The media are divided according to party ideologies, some journalists are corrupt and there are certainly pressures from owners. So how should we perceive a situation in which corruption and pressure from owners exist and may be dominant in the future, and where neutral papers are absent?

Frantisek Novosad: I can talk about this theme only as a reader. Basic information is disappearing from the Slovak newspapers. To learn a comprehensive set of facts, a person should have to read three or four newspapers. The dailies are giving ever more space to entertainment, and politics is becoming part of show business. TV station Markiza started this trend, but Slovak Television and the newspapers are now going the same way. Even two years ago, there was a clear difference between dailies *Novy Cas* and *Pravda* or *Sme*, but today this difference has already got lost. What is called a "quality newspaper" in the Anglo-Saxon world simply has not taken root here. Especially *Pravda* has lost its former ambitions. No newspaper even pretends to be objective or neutral, each one "kicks" for somebody, sales are falling, but this is a healthy reaction of the readers to what they are getting. Everywhere in the world, newspapers are dependent on their owners or financial groups, but everywhere in the world, newspapers are also part of the market economy. This is the key problem: the Slovak newspapers are not part of the market economy. I would very much like to see the account books of the Slovak newspapers: which newspapers are self-supporting, which are not directly dependent on specific groups. I am speaking of the dailies. The majority of them make losses, and it is necessary to ask: Who invests money in them and why? The only solution to this situation is to ensure that the newspapers exist in a market, so that they struggle for readers and not for sponsors. The situation in this area is constantly worsening. The fall to the level of entertainment has

been so great since 1999, that the newspapers are literally devalued, not to mention the further problem of infantilization of the picture of reality. A politician once said to me that when he goes to a press conference, what he sees is a nursery school in front of him. The fact that you do not find a journalist aged above thirty at a press conference also has certain consequences. Young people may be brilliant and talented, but they write about politics from the point of view of their 25 years. It is a matter of standing out and applying themselves in the jungle of news reports, not about analysis and a picture of reality.

S. A: From 1996 to 1998 the media played an essential role in changing the political regime of the time. This was, evidently, a unique situation. Was this – in my view, positive influence of the media – a thing of the past?

Egon Gal: The media still play an important role. They influence the results of elections, decide the order of popularity of politicians, and determine which cases receive public attention and which do not. They create a sort of virtual public space for "communal advice to citizens" about what is in the public interest and what is not. The problem is that this space is colonized by various group and party interests. There are not enough independent journalists and independent intellectuals. View-forming work not influenced by strategic manipulations is lacking.

S. A: Which newspapers apart from the daily *Sme* and the weekly *Domino Forum* give citizens the possibility to express their views?

F. N: Every newspaper, but nobody knows whether the letters from readers are really from readers or are ordered on a specific theme.

E. Gal: The problem is not that there are no columns, but how they are filled. There are not enough people with sufficient courage, erudition and ability to distinguish the relevant themes from others. If democracy is the formulation of policy from below, the citizen should have the possibility to form a reasoned view, which is not manipulated by the interests of power – political and economic groups.

Eugen Gindl: The main problem lies in the fact that, in the framework of its tabloidization, the media concentrate only on the highest levels of politics, reducing the results of this politics to the lowest level in the league table of attractiveness from the point of view of the editors. At the same time, the media, especially electronic media, also reflects "high politics" in an unfortunate way, since the key statements, which most resound among the people, are presented in the form of a tournament. Like tennis players going from tournament to tournament, 25–35 politicians go from medium to medium, usually from television to radio and back again. Interviewers ask them similar questions in different combinations, and their answers are often evaluated by points. There is no program apart from health, in which a representative of the public can participate – formerly an ornament of all good political discussions on television. The qualified citizen should be selected on the grounds that he knows the problem, is not afraid of the camera and microphone, does not have an inferiority complex towards politicians, but can conduct a direct and relevant dialogue with them. The citizen is, at best, degraded into a background in the studio. It is easier for producers to simply call the party secretariats than to find a qualified citizen. Civil organizations should have them available. A further problem is that a media act, which has not been put before parliament in the last 13 years, should contain a provision

that at least public service broadcasting (and why not also private?) must produce programmes, which include the qualified voice of the public. The present state reduces the consideration of politics to more or less ordered and manipulated responses. It is literally a game of blind man's buff. Somebody expresses suspicions, immediately they are denied, the cards are distributed so that not only a village boy, but even a qualified professor does not know who is guilty and who is not, and finally everything fades away without any catharsis and there is space for a new scandal. This is connected with the extraordinarily dangerous trend Mr. Novosád mentioned: a possibly deliberate and cunning imbecilization, idiotization and infantilization of society. The media deal with adults as if they were children. Look at how morning programmes are presented, how people say that something is "astonishing" is quite unbelievable.

E. Gal: But why is this happening? Because the citizens do not resist.

F. N: The citizens are resisting by ceasing to buy newspapers.

E. Gal: That is not resistance, but resignation.

E. Gindl: If you bring together the facts that Martin Simecka's *SME*, today the strongest daily apart from *Novy Cas*, has as many readers as *Pravda*, which means that *Pravda* has lost at least 150,000 readers. *Práca* has disappeared, while *Národná obroda* is keeping itself above water with losses. People sometimes need to use more sources of information, but today very few people buy two newspapers.

S. A: But *Novy Cas*, the most popular daily, is openly a tabloid.

E. Gindl: It is interesting that *Novy Cas*, which was regarded as a simple tabloid, maintained a high quality political part for a long time, with good editorials objectively and vigorously reflecting reality. When sales began to decline, the analysts came to the conclusion that even this "non-tabloid" superstructure needed to be tabloidized. At the same time, *Novy Cas* became the property of the solid German publisher Gruner und Jahr. The former owners of *Novy Cas* had an ambition to sustain a good weekly news magazine along side their tabloid daily. They invested a lot of money and built up a good editorial team, but the weekly *Cas* collapsed because, after buying it, Gruner und Jahr said they would not support such a project because it would not pay for itself. Last year, I came to the conclusion that foreign owners are not having a positive influence on our newspaper market. They buy the publications with the highest sales and the most advertisements, tabloidize them according to tried and tested methods, and take the greater part of the profits out of Slovakia. They do not rely on cultivating Slovak journalism, but only on turnover and profit, but the high profitmargins are also connected with low pay for qualified journalists, extraordinarily slow, more or less "second hand" modernization of production, and pirate journalism. In short: it is a matter of typical neo-colonialism in the media.

E. Gal: I think that newspapers and all the media are adapting to the market. They are tabloidizing themselves to increase sales. Perhaps the problem is not in the media, but in the lack of independent writers, thinkers and motivators...

Peter Zajak: I perceive the media in two basic contexts. On one hand are the American and to some extent also the Canadian media and on the other hand the European. There is a fundamental difference between them. The first

question is whether our media will be more similar to the American or the European media. This is a question of legislation, people, the relationship between public service and private media and so on. Since we live in Europe, our media will resemble the European whether we like it or not. Often then, the American freedom of speech is brought up here. In Europe, with the experience of the 20th century and the constant sliding into different forms of totalitarianism, racism, nationalism and anti-Semitism, I consider an elementary protection of human dignity more important, than the defence of an absolute degree of freedom of speech. I also think that, in European conditions, conflict of media and political interests, as well as conflict of economic and political interests, need to be dealt with in the constitution. I am thinking here, of course, of the power of private media in politics, as in the cases of Berlusconi, Zelezny [in Czech Republic] and Rusko [in Slovakia]. This is not their problem, they can wash their hands of it since they are only using the existing legislation. It is a problem of the laws.

S. A: Would you ban owners of media from participating in politics?

P. Z: There is a clear and evident conflict of interests between ownership of private media and participation in politics.

E. Gindl: The question is whether this should apply only to electronic media or to all media.

P. Z: Hardly any leading Slovak politician in recent years did not owe his position to the electronic media, either to perverting the public service function of television as in the case of HZDS [party of Vladimír Mečiar] or to the private media. TV Markiza literally "made" a whole series of leading figures and political parties, including the president, the prime minister, a past government party and a present government party. I think that such a situation is unhealthy both for politics and for the media. Since we live in European conditions, we should compare it first of all with the European and not with the American media. I will attempt a comparison with the German media, which I know. Germany has a system of extensive competition among the electronic public service and private media, with the private media not participating in the areas covered by the public service media. They do not compete in the areas of news and of social and political reporting. That is not their role. Diversification of the media is much greater than in Slovakia. Germany has no television channel viewed by more than 23 per cent of the audience. The most popular television channels vary around about the same level. Thus, none of them can have such a dominant position as [Czech TV] Nová or [Slovak TV] Markiza or perhaps other media in Hungary and Poland. However, today, it is especially a question of the ability or inability of public service television in Slovakia and its competitiveness, as well as the question of the competitiveness of the other private electronic media. I think the dual system of public service and private electronic media is reasonable, but just as there was the problem of separating television from the state at the beginning of the nineties, today the key problem is the functioning of public service television and limitation of the conflict of interests in the private electronic media. I do not know whether we have already missed the right time for this. When we speak of the printed media, we distinguish between the tabloid and serious press. Nobody expects serious reporting from the tabloid press. If I speak about the serious dailies in Germany, they are divided according to the political spectrum: *Frankfurter Rundschau* is leftist, *Süddeutsche Zeitung* liberal or centre-left, *FAZ* conservative-liberal and *Die Welt* conservative. This division is generally known. All the dailies must have a certain level, below which they

cannot allow themselves to fall for competitive reasons. For example the *Frankfurter Rundschau* cannot allow itself to be uncritical towards the left and critical only to the right. This applies not only in politics, but also in the cultural and economic spheres. This applies to all the media, and this preserves their natural pluralism. The structure of the serious dailies is such that they are not only political and economic, but also cultural dailies. Each of them has a part called *feuilleton*, which deals with the wider area of culture and socio-philosophical communication. It may be oriented more to the left or to the right, but, for example, the conservative paper *Die Welt* publishes the work of the leftist philosopher Habermas, and says why it is interesting. Thus, a different view is not perceived as a hostile view. In this cultural part, the newspaper turns to people, who have an interest in a more differentiated view of reality, authors from universities contribute interesting articles to them. This maintains what was called in the 19th century the *Bildungsgesellschaft*, that is the society of education. In fact, in today's *Spassgesellschaft*, the society of entertainment and a flood of unorganized information, these media are also beginning to have problems with declining sales. There are other more specialized magazines – political, cultural or literary, partially subsidized by cities or states in the federation. This is how the German media functions. If we compare it with the Slovak media scene, we see an immense difference.

F. N: It is necessary to see the relationship between the media and politics in a slightly more differentiated way. The electronic media are playing two games. The first is the game of objectivity, giving both governmental coalition and opposition the right to speak. The second game is: We made personalities from these. Both public service and commercial television play this game. Politicians also pursue several strategies in relation to the media, and I am afraid that the making of politicians by the media, about which Peter Zajac spoke, is actually the adoption of the ideology of those people from the media, who declare: We made him or her. That is Rusko's thesis: I made Dzurinda prime minister, I made Schuster president. It was exactly the same with public service television under Meciar. But the factors for the success or failure of such "production of personalities" do not lie only in the media. Where the politicians are concerned, some let themselves be carried by the media, some of them, as seen in the billboard campaign, came to the conclusion that they were not getting enough space in the media and sought alternative presentation. However, the media generally plays a smaller role than their owners and the majority of politicians think.

E. Gal: I read in [Czech daily] *Lidové noviny* the results of a survey on the influence of individual media on the presentation of politicians. The visual media were in first place by a long way. Direct contact with the voters came second, with billboards far behind. Where can a politician present himself to the public, if not on television?

E. Gindl: If you take the latest election results in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia – the Czech Republic is a bit exceptional – you see the same thing: Michnik himself admitted that his influential and really objective *Gazeta Wyborcza* did everything it could to prevent the Left winning the last elections, but nonetheless they still convincingly won. It was the same in Hungary with Orbán, he controlled all the key electronic media, but still lost to Medgyessy, who had ten times less money for his campaign. The same happened here with Meciar. In 1998, Meciar had five to eight times more money, he controlled the key media, but he still lost.

P. Z: When I spoke about the German media scene, I had in mind not only its form, but also the function of the media. What should the function of the media be? Perhaps the function of the private electronic media should be entertainment and relaxation, that is an absolutely legitimate function for people, just as legitimate as the function of public service media in the creation of civic culture and what is called constitutional patriotism. When they seek some rudimentary entertainment, they will not seek it on ARD, but on RTL, because they know the composition of the individual media. On the other hand, they will seek for information on public service channels such as ZDF or ARD. The same applies to the printed media. We do not have such a division of the media in Slovakia.

S. A: The discussion so far has shown that the media play an important and often positive role during the time of political and social crisis. However, as conditions have stabilized, as after 1998, the media have, for various reasons, paradoxically lost their role as trustworthy controllers of power. Perhaps it is a natural development in post-communist society, where the influence of various financial groups, leaky legislation and insufficient independent media inevitably place journalists in a second class position, in which the media retain their influence, but lose their independence and objectivity. Let us try to consider whether this positive influence can be found in other spheres and among other groups. What role do the third sector and politicians play in this area?

E. Gal: We elect politicians for four years, and after the elections they become the only players in the political playground. The only possibility for the citizens is to vote differently after four years. But what is the possibility to apply pressure on the politicians between elections? Is there a way to influence politics from below? Could it be independent intellectuals, who are not professionally involved in politics, but follow it and can express their views on it, as not everyone can, because it requires certain knowledge and abilities? It could also be the third sector, which has a certain power, is organized and can mobilize people.

N. B: The third sector is one of the groups, which influence the decision making sphere. However, various civil initiatives usually have a weaker position and form only a sort of counter-weight to other stronger, for example, economic interests.

E. Gindl: We have a representative democracy in Slovakia. We vote once in four years and elections are really the only chance for the majority of the population to have some influence on politics. The third sector, the sphere of alternative initiatives and controls, is in a very weakened state and the politicians do not need it, because that is simpler. What is worse is that the ordinary citizens do not have the ambition to have more influence on public life. The majority of ordinary citizens say they are exhausted, they sometimes have two jobs, and they do not have energy and free time left for any activity in the third sector, which requires traveling, meetings as well as stimulation of initiatives and production of printed or internet magazines. The third sector is a huge organism, allegedly composed of 14,000 mostly self-motivated to parasitic organizations. This real third sector should create its own ideas; it should create, promote and organize an alternative to the political parties. From this 14,000, perhaps only a hundred fulfil this role in local life.

S. A: Let us look specifically at the third sector. We often encounter the view that 4–5 years ago the third sector influenced the development of our society,

that it is a healthy part of democracy, which cultivates, finances and defends Slovak society. There is a large number of associations and foundations, which play an important role in the fields of politics, the economy, social affairs and so on, but how can we evaluate their functioning, how will politicians and society reflect the third sector?

E. Gal: Perhaps we should speak of the third sector on two levels: on the one hand there are organizations, which organize various campaigns and which penetrate into the political sphere, on the other hand there are informal social networks, which function alongside official politics, solving specific problems or organizing various educational programmes.

F. N: It is an excessively complicated sphere, which cannot be covered by a single formula. It appears to me to be a sort of political grey zone containing many bodies with unknown legitimacy. Who knows who they represent, and they receive an extremely broad space in the media. I would even be willing to support the view that the third sector is now used for stifling democracy. It simply avoids control mechanisms and replaces them with uncontrollable control mechanisms.

P. Z: We did not precisely define our theme at the beginning. In the widest sense of the word, there are clearly different types and forms of power. Power to do or influence something. It appears to me that we reduce the problem of power only to political power and to the problem of how to influence it. Today, the media and non-governmental organizations also do this. From the short-term perspective, this may bring them a feeling of importance, advantage and profit, but from the longer-term point of view it distorts the whole society. The original power of foundations and civil associations does not lie in directly influencing politics, but in creating a certain environment. I think civil society is paying for its connection with political power. Political power is corrupting parts of the civil society. This is precisely because the civil society and some intellectuals have taken on unwritten obligations towards the political sphere. The moment a person from the non-government sphere leaves his original role, he loses my trust. I could name specific people or foundations and civil associations. One of the reasons lies in the direct connection to politics, which was legitimated by the need to help democracy. However, this formula no longer applies, but the civil groups continue this activity, in spite of the fact that it discredits them. This is a problem of the last four years, which has not been considered. We also forgot another sphere – business.

N. B: I think that what we call the "third sector" is experiencing a crisis in its growth. After the regime change in 1989, there was a strong solidarity between individual groups and it developed more rapidly than similar structures abroad. This reached its limits when they began to build institutions of the third sector. These still do not function, and there is great confusion in the area of representation. The third sector is a heterogeneous structure and various groups can be distinguished in it. Ordinary people, who personally encounter a problem and seek ways of solving it in an unorganized way, could form one. There are also groups and organizations, which think out and attempt to implement changes on the system level. Here, as in other areas, a growing number of people are finding the third sector a comfortable space for a career, a source of money and influence. There are also people and groups, who are gradually taking over the roles of representing the third sector and forming a sort of establishment. Unfortunately, their ideas are sometimes implemented without any mandate or even against the will of those they claim to represent. I recognize as important the authentic groups, which are attempting to apply

system changes and then active citizens – from the point of view of their influence in the framework of the structures of the third sector, but I have the impression that they are in the minority. Mr. Zajac already mentioned a further problem: that of involvement in politics. The third sector was relatively successful in avoiding political influence until recently. It still proclaims an effort to be apolitical, but after the 1998 elections, some of them could not resist the idea that they helped "their own" to win. This also contributed to critical views of what was happening here almost disappearing for a long time. The third sector should also fulfil the function of critic or watchdog. I regard this as one of its basic attributes.

E. Gindl: How long will the third sector need this establishment?

N. B: I don't know if it is really needed. As in the rest of society, there are official structures here, which bureaucratise themselves and their agenda gradually becomes distant from the original stimulus, which led to their origin. I would like to add something further to the connection of the third sector with politics. It is necessary to distinguish internally empty relations between the third sector structures and politics from efforts by civil organizations to implement a specific agenda by means of applying pressure to politicians.

S. A: I see your division of the third sector into three parts: the first part carries out practical activity very industriously and thus does very positive work. The second part of the third sector consists of various strongly politically oriented pressure groups and the third is the establishment of the third sector, which is over-politicised, has money and influence and is subject to no clear regulation. However, paradoxically, the introduction of regulation paralyses the third sector. But when you leave it free, the division into three parts and the one you call the establishment that is connected to politics, may also be harmful. What should be done to avoid such anomalies arising in the third sector?

P. Z: There is an elementary problem here: resources for the activity of civil associations and foundations. A normal system of foundations has not developed in Slovakia. Everywhere in the world, a foundation is an institution with its own property, which contributes to publicly useful activity. Slovakia has a minimal number of foundations, which function in this way. Originally there were no foundations here with their own resources rather than resources from outside, and perhaps there are still none. A few foundations were able to convince foreign sponsors, and create a system of a few rich foundations in Slovakia, which now deliberately limit the activity of the others. Some foundations launder money. In 1992 or 1993, the Czech Republic gave some of the money from privatization to the third sector, which enabled Czech foundations to exist, but this did not happen in Slovakia. It was neither done after 1992 nor after 1998, because the large foundations were not interested in making this change.

E. Gindl: Was it against their interests?

P. Z: Yes, because it would have created a diversified system of foundations. The interests of those who are rich in the foundation system is to remain rich. The others can disappear. The shirt of their own foundation is simply closer than the jackets of the other's. There is very strong pressure – direct, indirect, formal, informal, simply very strong – to produce a few large foundations and no small ones. If there is not a sufficiently diversified system of foundations, diversified according to size and resources, the diversification of foundation activities will not function. Precisely those foundations, which are the

capillaries forming the basis of civil society will be the first to have problems. The second problem is the disproportion between the activity of foundations and their self-reproduction. Today it is common that in most civil associations and foundations, the proportion between activities and running costs are 70–90 per cent for running costs and 10–30 per cent for activities, although it should be the reverse.

N. B: According to law, foundations should spend no more than 15–20 per cent on administration, the rest should be used for their activities, grant programmes and so on. If we do not confine ourselves to foundations, but consider other organizations, there may be higher overheads. It is difficult to say whether they may be as high as 90 per cent.

P. Z: I don't know the exact figures, but the proportion is certainly getting worse.

N. B: That is the problem of which I spoke. Many organizations are used to having a disproportion of financial resources. Although their agenda, the reason for their existence, has disappeared, they survive thanks to these resources.

E. Gindl: In Poland, checks ascertained similar facts in the nineties. PHARE found that 60 per cent of the resources were spent on cars, furniture, office equipment, wages and so on, while only 35 per cent was used for the actual activity.

P. Z: It is no problem to show various things as activities. When we look at the civil campaign during this year's elections, I am sure that the disproportion is huge. When I say that an extremely large percentage goes on self-perpetuating measures, I am not thinking only of excessive operating costs for staff. Foundations think of activities, which have only a self-reproducing character.

E. Gal: In the former regime there were certain alternative social networks, communities of people, where views were discussed and formed in a different way to that found in the official sphere. An alternative culture was shaped. However, their problem lay in the fact that they were completely isolated and closed towards society. They had no output, no influence, their activity was only semi-legal. I miss such an alternative cultural discourse, independent environment of free people, which would generate dictionaries¹, and establish values and points of view.

S. A: Perhaps it is as with the unions which had their legitimate mission, but were politicised. They provided a good job for people, who do not care at all about what happens to the subject they should represent and defend. This happens here and everywhere in the world. Perhaps it is similar in the third sector. At the same time, we are faced with corruption in the whole of society. So can we conclude that there is not much hope even with respect to the third sector for the strengthening of a civil society?

F. N: I would not be so pessimistic. Today the public space is differentiated and divided, and it simply is not possible to see everything that happens. I will mention as an example philosophical literature in Slovakia. A large number of philosophical books, which never appeared in the bookshops of the larger cities, can be found in various provincial towns. They can be found only at [Slovak national library] *Matica*, which has a legal duty to have them. It will simply never be possible for everything to be visible to everybody, like when

there was one space, one plan, and everybody could immediately see from any place when something happened. Two or three newspapers are published in every small town in Slovakia. It is a miracle, but it happens. There are radio stations heard within a range of 5–6 kilometres. Television broadcasting operates. There are more than 3000 publishers in Slovakia. When we look at these facts in more detail, I see no reasons for dissatisfaction. For example, a small book about the sociology of religion was published in Stará Lubovna. I did not see it in Bratislava, but in the window of a bookshop in Prague.

E. Gal: That is a very optimistic statement. Let us hope that these people will replace the third sector establishment.

F. N: Nothing can be done about the establishment, it exists everywhere, and the iron law of oligarchy applies to it. Do anything, even found a Romany settlement, and an establishment will soon be created in it. Put 30 people in prison and a hierarchy will be formed among them. So why not in the third sector? It is almost a natural law. It is impossible to do anything about the fact that an establishment exists. To what degree you control it and to what degree it fulfils its functions are other matters. But that is another question.

S. A : So how should we describe a foundation, which speaks of basic themes, wants to do something positive, but also forms an establishment, and is subject to the ailments we mentioned? What role do you see for the third sector in the next three to five years?

E. Gal: It is difficult to say. If Václav Belohradsky is right to say that the quality of democracy depends on the quality of the views in the game, then high-quality democracy requires some degree of opinion forming work, debates, classification of information, search for a friendly context for certain experiences and facts. Such work cannot be left to specialized experts and state officials. In my view, this is a space where foundations can do something positive for civil society.

P. Z: That is only one of the functions of this sphere and not its primary role. The primary function of civil society is to create effective forms of solidarity. This whole area is the sphere of natural social solidarity, which must not be financed by the state, where people help each other because they live in one environment, in the same community, town or region. The function about which you speak is relatively exclusive, which naturally does not invalidate it. I only state that the primary function of this organism is solidarity. Elementary protection of rights and citizens is added to this function. For example, Hrubala does this by defending communities before the courts. That is a very important function. The function you mentioned is certainly also important. The community satisfies its cultural needs, cultivates local culture and so on. Associations fulfil an irreplaceable role in this area. One of the important functions is help with solving specific problems, which are solved by nobody else, are avoided or left unnoticed, for example, the Romany question. Another is pointing out the deficiencies and short-comings of society. But it is never a representative function, which is so popular today in our civil society. Everyone wants to appear with "celebrities", because then he has the feeling that he is becoming a celebrity. It is a pyramid turned upside down. The activities of foundations and civil associations should have a good basis and be visible. Institutions should remain in the background. It is entirely the other way round in Slovakia. The Third Sector Association, i.e representatives who also control the largest financial resources, form a civil society in the public view. This creates internal tension and sooner or later it will lead to conflicts

about the character of the whole environment.

F. N: I share your intentions, but this is a comment, which points to the autonomy of individual spheres – that is of the third sector and the political sphere. The problem in Slovakia is not the fact that there is not sufficient pressure on politics, but that politics itself does not have self-correcting mechanisms, internal political pressures on party leaderships. Local party organizations have no influence on what happens at the higher levels. The political parties are oligarchizing.

E. Gindl: You said that the parties are oligarchizing, which is true. We do not observe this tendency only in the post-communist countries. In almost every state of the European political scene, voices from outside the parties are increasingly saying that we now have a partocracy, in which parties are becoming oligarchies, which are constantly becoming less representative of their voters. The mechanisms of internal party control and the possibilities for effective and transparent control of the partocracy from outside are becoming stunted.

¹ Slovakia is critically short on high-quality Slovakian dictionaries. [Editor's note]

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