Visibility of Political Leaders in the Media in the Conditions of the Slovak Republic[1]

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Visibility of Political Leaders in the Media in the Conditions of the Slovak Republic. The position of political leaders in the conditions of the political and party system of the Slovak Republic attracts more and more attention. In many specialized studies, many views of their status, position, powers and influence can be found, but there is absence of their study from the point of view of their communication not only with society but with their respective parties as well. The aim of this study is to analyse not only the position of political leaders in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, but also both in the system and in the context of their communication with society, or to which extent their communication affects – if it does – their position in elections as well as political preferences of the party they lead.

Key words: political communication, visibility, media, political leaders, political preferences, political parties, Slovak Republic

Viditeľnosť politických lídrov v médiách v podmienkach Slovenskej republiky. Postavenie a pozícia politických lídrov v podmienkach politického a straníckeho systému vzbudzuje čoraz viac pozornosti. V rámci mnohých špecifických štúdiách môžeme nájsť rôzne pohľady na ich postavenie, pozíciu, mocenskú silu a vplyv, avšak neustále absentuje ich výskum z pohľadu komunikácie, respektíve do akej miery ich samotná komunikácia nielen ovplyvňuje ich postavenie v strane, ale aj navonok. Hlavným cieľom tohto príspevku je to analyzovať nielen pozíciu politických lídrov v podmienkach Slovenskej republiky, ale aj v systéme, ako aj v kontexte ich komunikácie smerom do spoločnosti. Respektíve do akej miery ich komunikácia, a či vôbec, ovplyvňuje ich pozíciu v rámci volieb, ako aj politické preferencie strany, ktorej sú lídrom.

Kľúčové slová: politická komunikácia, viditeľnosť, médiá, politickí lídri, politické preferencie, politické strany, Slovenská republika

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Visibility in the media

Modern political players who want to succeed in today's technologically advancing society in relation to their electability have to be visible in the media. As stated by Thompson, visibility in the media is a metaphorical phrase for "be visible, main be public" (Thompson 2000: 19).

The author does not understand visibility only as a visual depiction but includes there various communication types including the written and spoken ones. Based upon this, Thompson understands „*visual richness*" as a capacity of media channels to mediate in detail the activity of political players with the aim to induce a personal relationship with those who want to share their individual steps, or it gives space for political players to directly afflict real people so that they could better identify with and comprehend their position and their effort to create trustworthiness as well (Thompson 2000).

„Visibility" of political leaders is looked upon from two different directions. The first and simplest is counting the number of contributions of individual political candidates or political (party) leaders, or how they express their thoughts in them (Langer: 2007; Wilke – Reinamann 2001). This offers a view of the relation to the overall coverage in the media within an election period regarding both individual politicians and political parties and other institutions (for instance government). In other words, they look upon the relation between the leaders and political parties presented in the media, or upon the relation between the leaders and other politicians of the same party. Many authors prefer either a simple counting of references (or direct citations) of political parties and politicians, or they try to look upon the articles concerning both political parties and politicians through the set codes (Rahat – Sheafer 2007). „Visibility" of political players can be also analysed from the viewpoint of the relation of political (party) leaders to their own parties and to other politicians as well. From the point of view of individualisation (personalisation), allocating of codes to individual politicians and political parties seems to be most adequate mainly because the given procedure enables us to better observe the differences between the general visibility and the more or less „centralised" or concentrated visibility that tries to look upon a limited number of politicians. This allows us to study the relative attention of political (party) leaders within the share concerning other politicians. In other words, the given procedure allows us to view the extent to which the individual political parties are reduced only to their political (party) leaders through media news.

Methods

This study considers as the main tool of a political news analysis the so-called „artistic week" (Brosius – Koschel – Haas 2009: 165-166), which tries to

encompass a certain time-limited space with the aim of pursuing concrete trends within a media news service. Based upon a given key, this study has chosen relevant press media or their news service part, divided it into 52 weeks (1 year/52) and assigned each week to one concrete „research day" in a random way (drawing). Each research day that will fall on one week in relation to the chosen press and television news services will be completely analysed. Within the content analyses, the aim of the so-called artistic week is to clarify and demonstrate formal characteristics of the studied phenomenon. In other words, the given method aims to give certain information within the sampling without it being necessary to study each element individually (Lauf – Berens 2003).

The relevant media which will be analysed in this study are based upon other studies watching and reading the media in all quarters in 2010 and 2011, and upon accessibility or willingness of the media to communicate with researchers and to mediate them the required information. Based upon the above-mentioned limitations, the object of this study is the print media of SME and Pravda and the television media of TV Markíza and STV, or their news service themes. In the case of the print media, it is natural that the analysis will be focused on concrete news programmes. But in the case of the television media, it is necessary to define in beforehand which news programmes will be analysed since the essence of the „artistic week" is to analyse identical programmes in relation to their frequency and mediocrity. Therefore, based upon this, our research will proceed from the analysis of TV news. Based upon the above-mentioned methods, 2,971 media statements of political players in the Slovak Republic were analysed in the course of the two selected years (January 2010 – December 2011). It is important to take into consideration also the fact that in some media news that were presented through the selected media, there were differently coloured (including an emotional subtext) news what led to the fact that multiple political statements were perceived pursuant to different categorizations.

The main reason of the choice of a content analysis of the media with the aim of understanding visibility of political (party) leaders in the media in the Slovak Republic is the fact that our research enables not only to study to what extent the media themselves pay attention to individual political leaders, but also to what extent the political leaders themselves appear in the media in relation to the strategic choice of various types of presentations (neutral, positive, negative, etc.). It is also necessary to state that the chosen content analysis has a deeper expression value with respect to the analysed political subjects. Since the fundamental subject of the analysis is the political players themselves (in our case political party leaders), the analysis of media news is trying to limit to the least possible extent (un)conscious and personal ideas of a news presenter, in our case the print and mass media, through analysing only

concrete and direct citations of the representatives of the analysed political subjects in both the print and TV media. The aim of this study is to characterise the elementary variables that are visible in the presentation context / communication of political leaders (Scheme 1). As we know, political players try to maximise their gains or victories of their respective parties in elections as well as to retain a permanent support during the election period not only in relation to political preferences, but also in the measure of trustworthiness. This is based on the fact that the more are individual political leaders visible in the media, the more they strengthen their position not only in their respective parties, but also their trustworthiness in society. From this viewpoint, not only communication is an important criterion of evaluation of a position of political (party) leaders in society and their respective parties, but also its flexibility in an ideal form should help them in their subsequent placement within the system. The specified hypotheses of this study are based upon the viewpoint of this statement:

Hypothesis 1: *Bigger visibility of political (party) leaders within media presentation leads to the increase and consolidation of political preferences of their own political party.*

Hypothesis 2: *Bigger visibility of political (party) leaders within media presentation leads to the increase and consolidation of preference voting in parliamentary election compared with their party candidates.*

In other words, the above-mentioned statement is based upon the fact that it deals with a certain specific two-way process / effect that should be repeated permanently if a leader acts rationally, i.e. towards the maximization not only of their profit, but also of the election profit of a political party. Based upon this, the elementary independent variables can be defined as follows: 1. the visibility measure of political leaders, and 2. the colouring tone (positive vs negative communication), and the dependent variable in this relation is the political preferences of the leaders party, directly effecting their position within the system including elections, or bestowing of priority preferences to the given political party leader. The possible relations of these two variables will be analysed through correlation analyses.

Our analysis of the visibility measure of party (election) leaders is based upon the viewpoint of a narrower meaning of the term of Tresch who understands politicians as players trying to maximize their visibility in the individual media. This means in our case that we focused, as mentioned above, only on „direct" citations / statements of Slovak political leaders.

In this study, we will focus not only on the comparison of visibility measure between the individual party (election) leaders of the Slovak parties, but also on their position they occupied (coalition, opposition, non-parliamentary

parties) and on the legislative function that they carried out in the given period. We will treat similarly also the studied periods that were followed by parliamentary or other (in this case local) elections, and the position and activity of individual party (election) leaders. In this way, visibility of party (election) leaders will be compared – in the studied period, they were Robert Fico (Smer-SD), Mikuláš Dzurinda (SDKÚ-DS party chairman), Iveta Radičová (SDKÚ-DS election leader), Ján Figeľ (KDH), Ján Slota (SNS), Béla Bugár (Most-Híd), Richard Sulík (SaS), and marginally, though he became a leader by the end of the election period, Igor Matovič (OĽaNO), but from the viewpoint of his visibility in the media he is a specific phenomenon since he entered Parliament with his non-parliamentary party as a third subject in the 2012 election. Within the analysis, it is necessary to add that not only the individual party leaders of the Slovak political parties but also their positions – legislative or executive – they had in the studied period will be compared.

Table 1: **The division of the studied period based upon the research of political preferences**

Analysed No.	Data collection period (political preferences)	Studied period of author´s research
1	13.01.2010 – 19.01.2010	08.01.2010 – 17.01.2010
2	03.02.2010 – 09.02.2010	20.01.2010 – 08.02.2010
3	02.03.2010 – 09.03.2010	18.02.2010 – 09.03.2010
4	07.04.2010 – 13.04.2010	15.03.2010 – 12.04.2010
5	05.05.2010 – 11.05.2010	22.04.2010 – 11.05.2010
6	01.06.2010 – 07.06.2010	23.05.2010 – 07.06.2010
7	07.07.2010 – 13.07.2010	17.06.2010 – 06.07.2010
8	31.08.2010 – 07.09.2010	17.07.2010 – 08.09.2010
9	05.10.2010 – 11.10.2010	19.09.2010 – 08.10.2010
10	30.11.2010 – 06.12.2010	12.10.2010 – 30.11.2010
11	01.02.2011 – 08.02.2011	07.12.2010 – 07.02.2011
12	01.03.2011 – 08.03.2011	17.02.2011 – 08.03.2011
13	04.05.2011 – 10.05.2011	14.03.2011 – 02.05.2011
14	01.06.2011 – 07.06.2011	13.05.2011 – 01.06.2011
15	06.07.2011 – 12.07.2011	09.06.2011 – 06.07.2011
16	06.09.2011 – 13.09.2011	17.07.2011 – 13.09.2011
17	03.11.2011 – 08.11.2011	23.09.2011 – 08.11.2011
18	29.11.2011 – 06.12.2011	18.11.2011 – 04.12.2011
19	09.01.2012 – 16.01.2012	09.12.2011 – 28.12.2011

Source: author´s own elaboration

As for the SR Prime Minister post, Robert Fico (Smer-SD) held this position by the June 2010 election, followed by Iveta Radičová (SDKÚ-DS). In the case of

other studied party leaders, minister chairs were occupied by only two party leaders after the 2010 election: by Mikuláš Dzurinda (SDKÚ-DS) as a foreign affairs minister and by Ján Figeľ (KDH) as a transport, post and communication minister. After the June 2010 election, Richard Sulík had become Parliament chairman but only by October 13, 2011, when the then government coalition supported by the opposition recalled him from his function – the reason being mainly the government fall caused by the lack of support of the joint action when assenting to the European bail-out by the SaS club. On the other hand, neither Béla Bugár nor Ján Slota held any legislative or executive functions in the periods when their respective parties were coalition members.

Individualization of politicians in the Slovak Republic in relation to their "visibility in the media"

Party leaders play a very important role in their respective political parties. In other words, they are the most publicised persons of a political subject, creating at the same time the overall political image not only in relation to society, but also to other political parties in the system. In the last years, the strength and dominant position of party leaders have been growing proportionally to the given increase through the increase of new communication tools in relation to political communication (Isotalus – Almonkari 2011; Karvonen 2010, 2007; Rahat – Sheafer 2007; Dalton – McAllister – Wattenber 2000; Swanson – Mancini 1996).

Despite the fact that personalization of political news is more and more interesting in studies also in the Slovak Republic, it has not so far met with general comprehension of what it really means or to which extent operationalization and its measurability is possible. It can be said in general that there is a certain consensus in relation to the given term: (1) personalization refers to the modern trend when publicising of political communication is more personalized than in the past, (2) personalization of political news as consequence of media technologies and strategies of political players, (3) personalization of political news as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, or different dimensions of personalization of political players – personalization of political parties, or that between the individual public and private borders of political players (Aelst – Sheafer – Stanyer 2012).

Personalization of political news has been dominating for some years also in the Slovak life, and its presence is visible not only in pre-election campaigns but, as observed by Radoslav Štefančík (2006), the stable position of the given term has significantly been affected or supported by some specific factors as, for instance, the existence of a weak identification of electors with parties that proportionally completes high volatility, and the existence of one electoral

district and with it connected rights of citizens to apply the so-called preference voting. Several special studies are also positively inclined to the existence of the given phenomenon in relation to Mcallister´s statement that the individual Slovak governments are named rather after their prime ministers than political parties creating them (Mcallister 2007). But despite this distinctive interest, studies in the given domain absent considerably. In other words, personalization in the Slovak Republic had taken root before it started to be studied (Žúborová 2011). In this way, political parties more or less only copied conditions in the party system in which they were developing and, at the same time, the absence of ideological basis presented through "inanimate" party symbols (party/election programme, general party line, etc.) was filled with animate subjects in the form of party leaders that made it easier for them to get in awareness of potential electors. The measure of visibility of individual politicians in relation not only to their political (election) preferences, but also in the measure of trustworthiness in society seems to be an interesting domain from the viewpoint of politics personalization as well. As stated in the preamble to this study, potential electors tend to both sympathise and cast a vote for the political party whose leader they know best from the media, what can also be said of their measure of trustworthiness.

Visibility in the media of party leaders in their respective political parties

Personalization of both policy and a party in the person of a leader was most markedly expressed during the election campaign, and parties use the individuals in question to easier communicate their agendas, visions and aims, since they seem more "human" than some lifeless things in which only expertise can be felt. During the studied period (January 2010 – December 2011), there were some significant changes, but in this period the June 2010 parliamentary election, the November 2010 election in the bodies of municipality self-government, and shortly before the end of the studied period also the March 2012 early parliamentary election were held as well. Despite the fact that the given division of periods was based upon political preferences of the leader's parties, it will be used also in the analysis of the mutual relation between visibility and preferential voting. It should be noted that as far as some results are concerned, it would be possible only to guess since there is a set trend from the viewpoint of the visibility decrease and increase, but the parliamentary election either had already been over, or it was shortly before it.

When comparing visibility in the media and preferential votes, there is a clear connection through which we will try to account for the position of party (election) leaders in comparison with other members of their respective

parties[3]. Without comparing these variables, partial conclusions can be drawn suggesting that in the case of some party (election) leaders whose visibility in the media before the June 2010 parliamentary election had been increasing, this was reflected in their election results from the viewpoint of preferential voting. Out of seven political party leaders, six reached more than a 50 % share of all votes cast for their respective political party (Robert Fico – 64.75 %, Iveta Radičová – 57.37 %, Ján Figeľ – 54.45 %, Ján Slota – 50.22 %, and Béla Bugár – 67.10 %). The only leader who reached less than 50 % of votes in his party was Richard Sulík (39.21 %), and therefore a subsequent analysis of his visibility in the media as a leader in relation to his party members is necessary.

Table 2: **Preferential votes of Slovak election (party) leaders in the 2010 and 2012 parliamentary elections compared with the election results of their respective political parties**

|	2010 parliamentary election			2012 parliamentary election		
	Leader (preferential votes number)	Political party (valid votes number)	% share leader in party	Leader (preferential votes number)	Political party (valid votes number)	% share leader in party
Robert Fico (Smer-SD	569,921	880,111	64.75	762,360	1,134,280	67.21
Mikuláš Dzurinda (SDKÚ-DS)	-	390,042	-	27,242	155,744	17.50
Iveta Radičová (SDKÚ-DS)	223,762		57.37	-		-
Ján Figeľ (KDH)	117,548	215,755	54.45	104,002	225,361	46.15
Ján Slota (SNS)	64,527	128,490	50.22	-	116,420	-
Béla Bugár (Most-Híd)	137,913	205,538	67.10	121,414	176,088	68.95
Richard Sulík (SaS)	120,491	307,287	39.21	83,813	150,266	55.78
Igor Matovič (OĽaNo)	38,429		12.50	150,251	218,266	68.75

Source: Statistical Office, author´s own elaboration

The next common thing that could be visible in the comparison is that every party leader maximizes his / her position in the relation to the parliamentary position, especially in the coalition position. In other words, political leaders were more visible in their coalition / parliamentary positions as, for example, in the case of Richard Sulik (see Chart 1 for more details). His visibility fired after his party entry in parliament, and he obtained the position of the chief of

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3 Under comparison were enrolled party members who were placed in the last parliamentary elections within the first FIVE, including those whose frequency was higher than the other. Similarly to other interpretations discussed above, the given frequency was averaged, or, findings from the average number of occurrences per research day will be presented in the charts.

parliament. (The same pattern can also be seen in the case of the leader Igor Matovič). Some problems when reading charts need to be explained since there can also be seen periods where visibility of political leaders in the media rapidly decreases and then increases again. A typical example is line 8 which can be considered as a "silly season" (summer holiday), characterized by the lack of taste of the media presenting political leaders or parties.

Chart 1: **Overall visibility of party leaders during the analysed period**
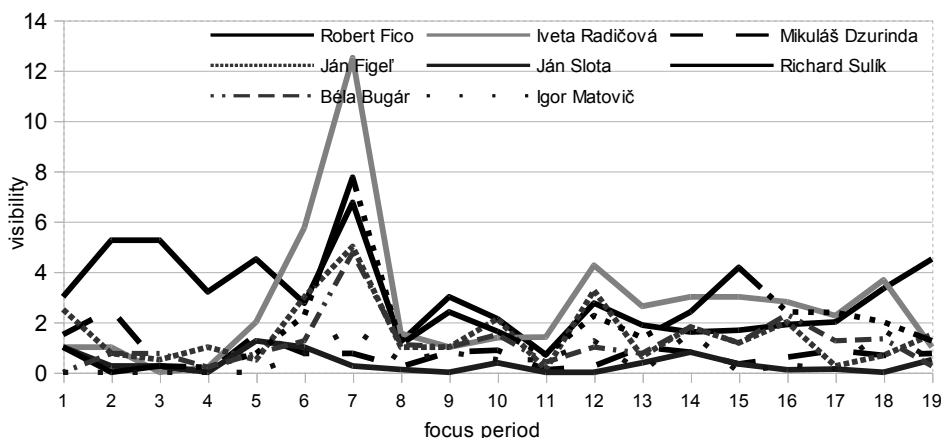
Source: Statistical Office, author´s own elaboration
Note: The degree of visibility was averaged to reduce the influence of the number of days of the studied visibility, since within each period there were a different number of study days. Naturally, this is the average number of occurrences per study day.

From the viewpoint of the study of the period before the election (including it), the findings only confirm that Robert Fico retained his stable position as for visibility in the media, and it was evident in preferential voting. As shown in Chart 2, the party and election leader clearly dominated compared with the other Smer-SD party members. From the viewpoint of the findings, visibility of other party members in the media is also interesting as for preferential voting. One of the most visible politicians was Robert Kaliňák who advanced from the third to the second position, as well as Ján Počiatek who advanced from the seventh to the fifth position. On the contrary, the party "number one", Pavol Paška, fell to the third position from the viewpoint of preferential voting, as well as Dušan Čaplovič who fell from the fifth to the sixth position. As mentioned above, the 2010 – 2012 election periods had brought many "turbulences" in relations between the coalition and opposition as well as in the coalition itself, and this finally led to the fall of government. As indicated some times above, the Smer-SD party aimed its activity or political communication

in its opposition position at an aggressive and critical attitude toward the activity of the then government.

Chart 2: **Overall visibility of party (election) leader Robert Fico (Smer-SD) compared with that of party members in the analysed period**
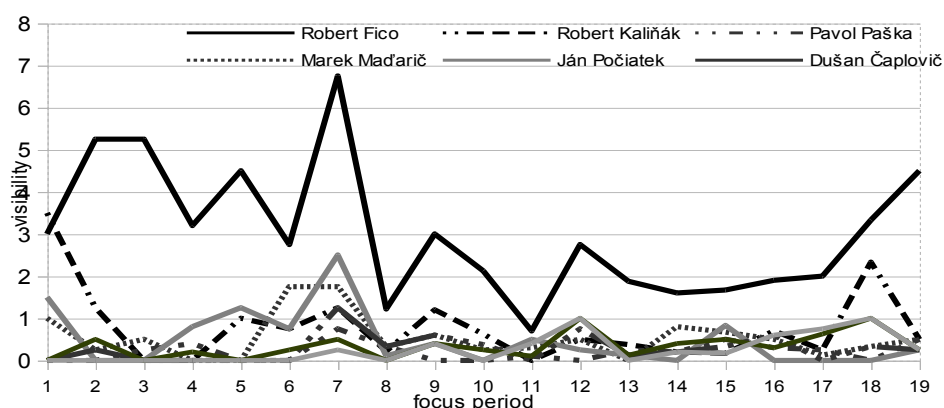
Source: author´s own research
Note: The degree of visibility was averaged to reduce the influence of the number of days of the studied visibility, since within each period there were a different number of study days. Naturally, this is the average number of occurrences per study day.

It can be stated that from the party leader position, Fico´s dominance in the period after the election in June 2010 was obvious. His dominance in the context of visibility in the media could become evident in preferential voting in the early election in March 2012 when he obtained more than a 67.20 % share of preferential votes, i.e. 762,360 votes. From the viewpoint of the shift of the individual party candidates in preferential voting, no evident opposite differences can be observed. Compared with the June 2010 parliamentary election, the second position was again confirmed in preferential voting by Robert Kaliňák (42.80 % – 485,594 votes) who proceeded from the third position and displaced Pavol Paška. Marek Maďarič retained his last position in preferential voting, but it is worth to notice Richard Raši´s visibility in the media, who reached a higher level of visibility among other party members in the studied period; one of the reasons was also the fact that at the beginning of the given period not only election took place (when he tried to win the post of mayor of Košice, he succeeded), but there were also many protests of doctors which were frequently commented by Richard Raši as the former health minister from the viewpoint of activities and relations between the minister and the protesters.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the increased frequency of visibility in the media could lead to a positive "growth" of a party member within their own party as well as in preferential voting. A typical example is Peter Kažimír who in the last parliamentary election in June 2010 stood as a candidate in the 25th position but in the early election he finished fifth, though he occupied the 8th position in preferential voting. However, if this voting is compared, the results are as follows – 1,504 votes in 2010, and 71,617 votes in 2012. As for his visibility in the media, it was similarly increasing in direct proportion during the whole period.

Looking at the position of the SDKÚ-DS election leader in relation to the party members in the context of visibility in the media, Iveta Radičová clearly dominated only shortly before the election and in the period when a new coalition government was formed (see Chart 3). From the viewpoint of the first two limited periods, the party leader was visible equally often as other party members trying to win votes of potential voters, or Ivan Mikloš (SDKÚ-DS party vice-chairman) was more visible in this period – though minimally –, what is witnessed by his retaining the "number two" position in the ticket for the parliamentary election in June 2010. As for visibility in the media, a similarly stable position was held by Lucia Žitňanská, especially shortly before and after the election, when she started to hold a government post. As for preferential votes in the SDKÚ-DS party, interesting persons were Ľudovít Kaník (he shifted from the 30th to the sixth position) and Magdaléna Vášáryová (she shifted from the 23rd to the fourth position) who had not been visible in the media in the studied period but despite that they took up front positions compared with the party members who were more visible in the media. We believe that they benefited from their positions of a media-known politician (Magdaléna Vášáryová) and a media-experienced and long-time politician (Ľudovít Kaník).

Another specific case in the analysed period appeared after the fall of the Radičová government and her resignation as the prime minister and also the electoral leader and member of the SDKÚ-DS party. She was replaced by the new (old) leader Mikuláš Dzurinda. In the analysed media, Ivan Mikloš was the most visible not only in comparison with the SDKÚ-DS leader but also with other party members. But despite that he was not able to utilize his above-average visibility in the media, from the viewpoint of preferential voting he placed second and he stood as a candidate in this position. From the viewpoint of preferential voting, the "number one" became the then justice minister Lucia Žitňanská, who gained a 66.46 % share of preferential votes (103,517 votes). On the other hand, it should be stressed that it was Lucia Žitňanská who kept a stable visibility in the media during the whole studied period and was not connected with any political affairs that began to resound gradually. A similar

case is that of Pavol Frešo who, as for his visibility in the media, kept reaching minimal, in some months even no visibility, but he belonged to those party members who were not involved in any political affair. The same can be said of Miroslav Beblavý as well.

Chart 3: **Overall visibility of party (election) leaders of the SDKÚ-DS compared with that of party members in the analysed period**
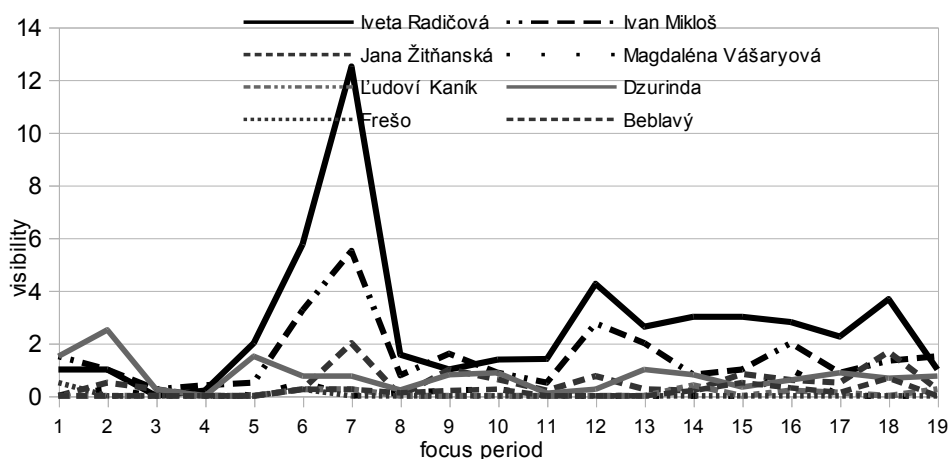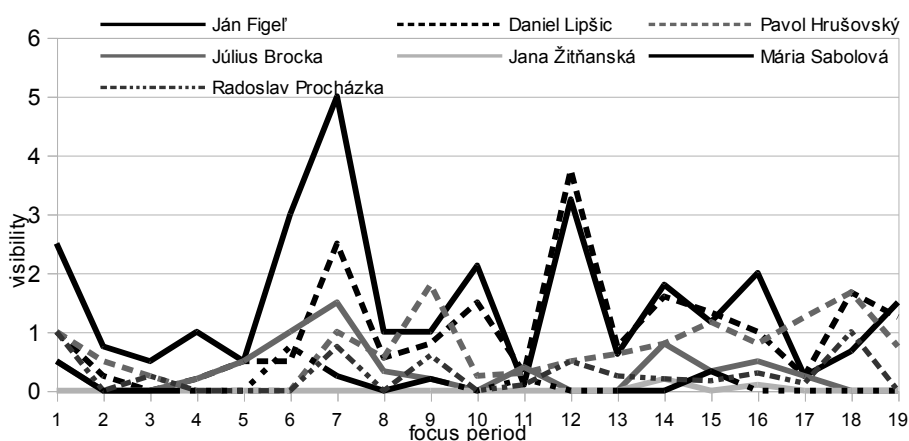

Source: author´s own research
Note: The degree of visibility was averaged to reduce the influence of the number of days of the studied visibility, since within each period there were a different number of study days. Naturally, this is the average number of occurrences per study day.

From the viewpoint of visibility in the media, the position of party and election leader Ján Figeľ had been dominant during the whole studied period prior to the June 2010 parliamentary election compared with other party members, as well as after it when he began to hold a government position (see Chart 4). Daniel Lipšic is another party member who occupied a leading position in visibility in the media and who utilised it maximally in preferential voting when he took up a position behind the leader, shifting from the third to the second position. Similarly, his visibility in the media kept increasing after the election when he began to hold a government post. Daniel Lipšic deposed Pavel Hrušovský from his second to the third position. A stable position in the ticket as well as visibility in the media was kept by Július Brocka. It is interesting to observe that when analysing visibility in the media, there were two female members in the party in question whose visibility in the media was low, but despite that they took up the fifth position (it was a move up from the sixth position) – Jana Žitňanská, and Mária Sabolová (from the viewpoint of preferential voting, she fell from the fifth to the sixth position).

The only leader who did not confirm "the number one position" in the ticket was the KDH chairman Ján Figeľ (a 46.15 % share of votes, i.e. 104,635 votes) who, though very closely, finished after the then interior minister Daniel Lipšic (a 46.43 % share of votes, i.e. 104,635 votes). Though Pavol Hrušovský kept a stable level of visibility in the media, he descended from the second to the third position from the viewpoint of preferential voting.

Chart 4: **Overall visibility of party (election) leader KDH compared with that of party members in the analysed period**

Source: author´s own research

Note: The degree of visibility was averaged to reduce the influence of the number of days of the studied visibility, since within each period there were a different number of study days. Naturally, this is the average number of occurrences per study day.

A similar case is Peter Kažimír (Smer-DS) whose visibility in the media was gradually increasing, and this could end up in his entry in the ticket including the number of the obtained preferential votes. As for Radoslav Procházka, this trend can be observed as well. When he stood as a candidate in the 20th position in the 2010 parliamentary election (he finished in the 9th position), he reached a 4.13 % share of preferential votes (8,902 votes). In the early parliamentary election, he stood in the 10th position (he finished in the 4th position) and reached a 20.93 % share of preferential votes (47,175 votes).

When comparing overall visibility in the media of party (election) leader Ján Slota (SNS) with other party members in the pre-election period, there are clearly visible differences contrary to other leaders who tried to win preferential votes. But despite his having won more than a 50 % (50.22 %) share of all cast votes for his SNS party, Ján Slota did not dominate as his political "colleagues" mentioned in Chart 5.

A clear indicator is not only the findings when, in the studied periods (1 – 3), the then SNS party vice-chairwoman, Anna Belousovová, who won 47.46 % of the preferential votes in the parliamentary election, and the then minister of education, Ján Mikolaj, who won 21.73 % of the preferential votes, had been visible in the media.

The last party member, or vice-chairman of the SNS party, who was more visible in the media, was Rafael Rafaj who shifted from the 7th to the fourth position in the ticket due to preferential votes (15.81 %). In other cases, the candidates who took up positions behind those above-mentioned did not win more than 5% of the preferential votes, and their visibility in the media was absent or at a zero level.

Chart 5: **Overall visibility of party (election) leader SNS compared with that of party members in the analysed period**
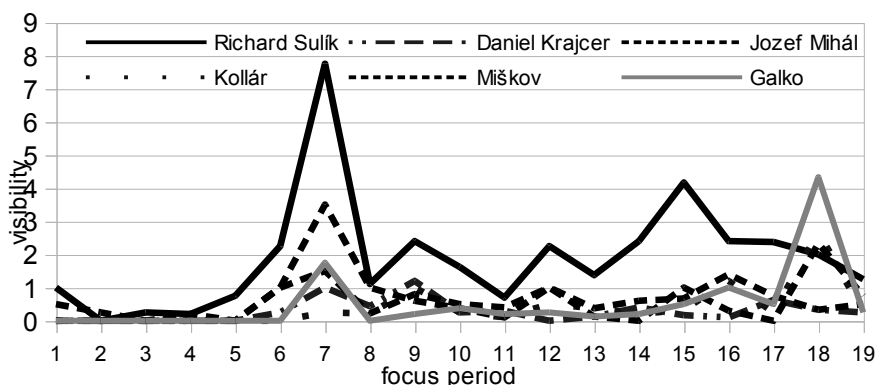**Source:** author´s own research
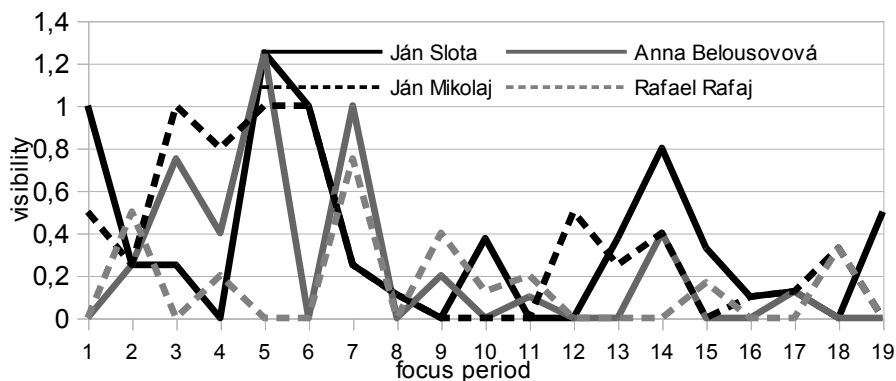
Note: The degree of visibility was averaged to reduce the influence of the number of days of the studied visibility, since within each period there were a different number of study days. Naturally, this is the average number of occurrences per study day.

When analysing visibility in the media of party (election) leader Richard Sulík in relation to his party members, two elementary differences can be observed (see Chart 6). The first is the fact that from the viewpoint of preferential voting, the leader himself did not reach as dominant position as all those above-mentioned (39.21 %). The second specific fact is that visibility of a leader in the media was compared with his party members so far, but in the case of Richard Sulík his visibility is compared also with non-party members standing as candidates in the ticket of the SaS party in the June 2010 parliamentary election. Three non-party candidates from the association of Obyčajní ľudia are meant – Igor Matovič, Erika Jurinová and Martin Fecko, who entered the election from the last positions in the ticket and occupied positions 4 to 7 in parliament. Since this is a very specific phenomenon,

another member of this association is included in the analysis – Jozef Viskupič, who finished at the seventh position. To the politicians visible in the media belonged also Daniel Krajcer and Jozef Mihál who finished behind not so dominant leader Richard Sulík in preferential voting, not only from the viewpoint of the obtained preferential votes.

Despite the fact that Jozef Mihál was more visible in the media in the period in question, he fell from the second to the third position in preferential voting (a 15.07 % share of the valid preferential votes). He was displaced by Daniel Krajcer who had entered the election from the seventh position and reached a 29.68 % share of votes. We believe that Daniel Krajcer eliminated the mentioned handicap in the visibility level by the fact that he had belonged to well-known television political commentators. The above-mentioned non-party members from the Obyčajní ľudia movement took up positions behind the analysed party candidates. It is interesting to observe that the analysed candidates had neither been visible nor presented in the media up to the moment when the election results of the SaS party were known.

Chart 6: **Overall visibility of party (election) leader SaS compared with that of party members in the analysed period**

Source: author´s own research
Note: The degree of visibility was averaged to reduce the influence of the number of days of the studied visibility, since within each period there were a different number of study days. Naturally, this is the average number of occurrences per study day.

But the research results are precise since the individual candidates from the Obyčajní ľudia movement did not present themselves in the main media and preferred to use social networks, especially the network of regional

newspapers[4] where they – mainly Igor Matovič – regularly published their comments, standpoints, opinions as well as the election programmes of the independent candidates. This permanent printed campaign could have been one of the main success factors of the individual candidates who together obtained more than 38 % of the overall votes for the SaS party, or a 56.48 % share of valid votes from the voters who had used preferential voting. From the viewpoint of visibility in the media, in the first studied period – before, during and after the June 2010 parliamentary election – the position of Richard Sulík was not so dominant as in the analysis of the second studied period compared with other members from the Sloboda and Solidarita (Freedom and Solidarity) party. But despite the fact that Richard Sulík went down from the viewpoint of the number of the cast preferential votes (120,491 votes in 2010, 83,813 votes in 2012), his share of preferential votes exceeded the 50 % level (a 39.21 % share in 2010, a 55.77 % share in 2012). From the viewpoint of some influence factors that could be taken into account including his visibility in the media, it is possible to claim that Richard Sulík himself "pressed" on liberal voters with his proclamations. They were published in the media in connection with his staying at the post of a party chairman. This was conditioned by the obtained results in the early election from the viewpoint of preferential voting, or retaining his position of an election leader – the election "number one". When comparing other (mostly) government officers from the SaS party, no differences in visibility in the media are obvious, or they were very balanced during the whole period. As for Ľubomír Galko, his visibility in the media slightly increased at the end of the studied period, and this can be connected with a political affair he was involved in, and which was related with eavesdropping on some politicians. Ľubomír Galko was immediately removed from his office of defence minister.

When analysing the position of party (election) leader Béla Bugár and his party politicians in the context of visibility in the media, it is necessary to say that within the comparison there is a similar non-party member as in the SaS, though not from the movement but from the OKS party whose members stood as candidates in the Most-Híd party ticket. But a similar scenario did not unfold in the Most-Híd party as in preferential voting in the SaS party.

One of the reasons was the evident visibility of party (election) leader Béla Bugár in the media, who dominated during the whole studied period (see Chart 7) and obtained a 67.10 % share in preferential voting. With a distinct difference, he was followed by Zsolt Simon with a 27.24 % share of preferential votes.

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4 RegionPRESS, a publishing company of regional direct-mail press in Slovakia with 36 regional weeklies, free distribution in more than 1,351,000 households in Slovakia. Its CEO is Igor Matovič.

Compared with the leader, other candidates obtained a very small number of votes, and this can also be said of their visibility that was absent in the studied period and increased only in the case of one party member, a secretary of transport minister (Ivan Švejna). A similar effect (as in the SaS party) of decreasing the number of preferential votes but of increasing the share in preferential voting was evident when comparing the election results of party chairman Béla Bugár (in 2010, he won 137,913 votes, i.e. a 67.10 % share; in 2012, he won 121,414 votes, i.e. a 68,95 % share) as well as from the viewpoint of his visibility in the media where his position was also dominant.

Chart 7: **Overall visibility of party (election) leader Most-Híd compared with that of party members in the analysed period**
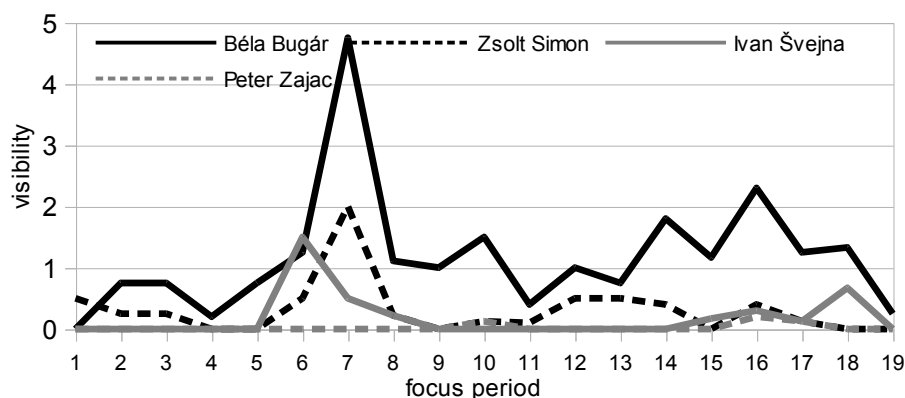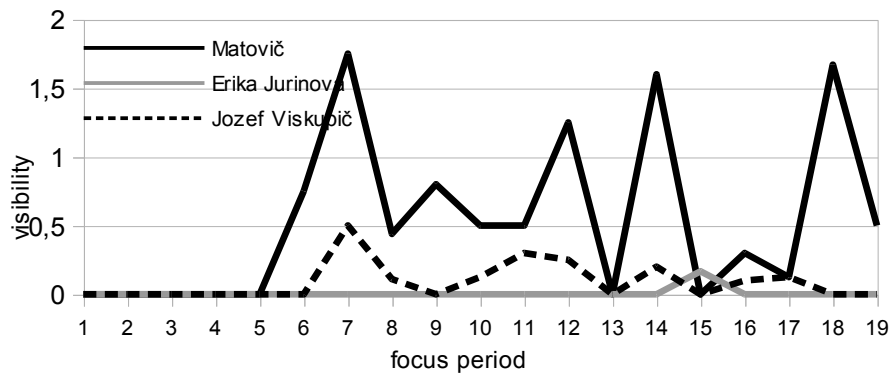

Source: author´s own research

Note: The degree of visibility was averaged to reduce the influence of the number of days of the studied visibility, since within each period there were a different number of study days. Naturally, this is the average number of occurrences per study day.

From the viewpoint of both visibility in the media and preferential voting concerning other party candidates (if comparing both periods), there is a clear dominance not only of the leader but also of the "individuals" who again reached the identical position in preferential voting. In other words, the politicians who had placed in the first five positions behind the leader of Most-Híd in the June 2010 election, placed in the same position also in the 2012 early parliamentary election.

As a specific case can be considered the position of the new political party or rather movement called OĽaNO. As indicated above, this subject had risen from the Obyčajní ľudia (Ordinary People) movement that had tried to win votes in the last positions in the SaS ticket, and at the end all four of them (Matovič, Jurinová, Viskupič, and Fecko) succeeded. Igor Matovič had been announcing a creation of his own political party for a long time, but the early

parliamentary election as well as a failure in changing the election law resulted – according to some movement members – in an official creation of a new political party that should consist of independent candidates and (also political) personalities. The first official meeting of the subject under the name of Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities) took place in less than 3 months prior to the election. Both in the June 2010 parliamentary election and in the March 2012 early election, the main promoter of the new party was Igor Matovič who was understood as a promotion and vote maximization tool in certain moments (see Chart 8). This opposition was visible not only within preferential voting (e.g. in 2010, it won 38,429 votes and a 12.50 % share, but in 2012 it won 150 251 votes and a 68.75 % share), but also in the overall visibility in the media compared with other party members or individual deputies in the OĽaNO ticket.

Chart 8: **Overall visibility of party (election) leader SaS compared with that of party members in the analysed period**

Source: author´s own research
Note: The degree of visibility was averaged to reduce the influence of the number of days of the studied visibility, since within each period there were a different number of study days. Naturally, this is the average number of occurrences per study day.

It should though be mentioned that the presented study results are limited as for higher relevance since the studied period finished by December 2011, but despite that a clear trend of dominance of Igor Matovič in his own party is obvious. Jozef Viskupič and Erika Jurinová were also visible in the media and they were reaching a higher level compared with the others who either absented (Štefan Kuffa, Alojz Hlina) as their party was created later and the ticket was presented only in 2012, or their visibility in the media was minimal (Martin Fecko).

Visibility in comparative perspective in Slovak politics

Personalization of politics can be seen in the Slovak political parties as well as in the political system for a longer time, but it does not manifest itself in a party leader interfering or controlling and amending party structures; it can rather be seen in the coordination and planning of public activities, those in relation to presentation and medialization of a party itself. In other words, in an ideal case a party leader is standing at a position of a "spokesperson" who presents individual party visions, goals and, in the election period, a programme of a political subject. From the viewpoint of a mutual relation between visibility in the media of individual party (election) leaders in relation with the trustworthiness level in the eyes of citizens (voters), it can be claimed that those leaders who regularly appeared in the media, or their visibility reached above-average results compared with the others, consolidated their trustworthiness level during the whole studied period also despite some fluctuations.

In this study, we tried to focus on another possible viewpoint of analysing visibility in the media that is connected with a relation of party (election) leaders to their respective parties, or to their party members or candidates. The aim was to find out to which extent is the general visibility concentrated or centralized in respect of the limited number of political players in every political party, or of the leaders themselves. In other words, to which extent a party is reduced to its party (election) leader within an election period and mainly within election campaigns. Based upon the findings that focused on the above-mentioned variables in the given sub-chapter, the aim was to confirm Hypothesis 2: *Bigger visibility of political (party) leaders within media presentation leads to the increase and consolidation of preference voting in parliamentary election compared with their party candidates.*

The findings clearly show that party (election) leaders dominate from the viewpoint of their visibility in the media in their respective parties. The results also show that the individual party (election) leaders try to increase their visibility in the media prior to parliamentary election with the aim of confirming their position as election "number one". The relation of a party leader's visibility in the media with that of the individual party candidates could clearly be seen in the June 2010 and March 2012 parliamentary election (also despite the fact that the research was finished in December 2011, but we proceed from the established trend that was given at the end of the period). It can be stated that above-mentioned Hypothesis 2 has been confirmed. The results disclosed not only a mutual relation between visibility in the media and choice in the form of preferential voting, but also the fact that as soon as some

of the leaders did not dominate in the media presentation in their respective parties, it reflected in their election results.

The Smer-SD party (election) leader was more visible in the media than his party candidates, and this could be seen mainly in preferential voting when he reached a higher share of preferential votes than 67 % in both elections, and mainly in comparison of both parliamentary elections his share kept increasing (by 192,439 votes). The party (election) leader of Most-Híd, Béla Bugár, was in a similar position because he dominated not only in his presentation in the media but in preferential voting as well. When the two parliamentary elections are compared, the number of votes he obtained decreased (-16,499 votes), but his share increased. Both party (election) leaders retained their positions of election "number one" excellently.

A contrary case is the SaS party (election) leader, Richard Sulík, who compared with the other party leaders did not get over a 50 % share in preferential voting in the June 2010 election, and this corresponds with the level of his visibility in the media that was relatively higher than that of his party candidates, but not so dominantly as in the case of other elected party leaders in the given period. Contrary to that, by the end of the studied period that followed shortly before the early election in March 2012, his visibility was increasing, and this could be connected mainly with his legislative position (Parliament chairman) as well as with "hot" topics connected with both him and his party at that time (e.g. refusal to approve the European bailout fund). The increased visibility was clearly reflected in the share of the obtained preferential votes, though their number decreased (-36,660 votes), as in the case of Béla Bugár.

As for the KDH party (election) leader, Ján Figeľ, a similar trend as in the case of Richard Sulík (SaS) is obvious, only with the difference that in the first period his visibility in the media dominated in relation to the others and this reflected in preferential voting. In the second period, it reached a stable level, but his party candidates slightly improved their positions, especially those who held important legislative and executive posts (Pavol Hrušovský as parliament chairman after Richard Sulík was recalled, and Daniel Lipšic as interior minister). The given relation of visibility in the media could lead to a placement within preferential voting when the KDH election leader did not retain his position of the election "number one". As for the other party and election leaders, the whole studied period cannot be compared, only the individual limited periods, since they either did not enter parliament in the March 2012 election (Ján Slota from the SNS), or did not stood as candidates in the June 2010 election (Mikuláš Dzurinda from the SDKÚ-DS) and in the March 2012 early election (Iveta Radišová, who had left the SDKÚ-DS). Igor Matovič can be included in this group as well, because he stood as a candidate

in the June 2010 election, but as an independent candidate in the SaS ticket and as an OĽaNO leader in the March 2012 early election.

In the SDKÚ-DS party, there were different posts of election leader in both last elections, though Mikuláš Dzurinda was party leader in the first period, and Iveta Radičová became election leader for the 2010 election and she dominated in the rate of visibility in the media with other party candidates, and this is also evidenced by both the number and share of preferential votes. Contrary to this, in the early election in March 2012, the rate of visibility in the media between election and party leader, Mikuláš Dzurinda (SDKÚ-DS), and other party members was balanced, or there dominated the then election "number two", Ivan Mikloš, who successfully defended his position in preferential voting. But despite the fact that Lucia Žitňanská did not reach the same preferences as the above-mentioned candidates, she not only increased the rate of preferential votes but their number as well, and she won the first position – the election "number one" – after the early parliamentary election. This could have been caused mainly by individual political affairs (tax directorship, Gorilla affair, etc.) in which mainly Ivan Mikloš and Mikuláš Dzurinda were in the centre of attention of the media.

The SNS party won seats in parliament only in June 2010 when visibility of its leader, Ján Slota, in the media was balanced with that of the other candidates from his respective party and, subsequently, that was reflected in preferential voting when he did manage to defend his "number one" election position successfully, but not with such a dominant lead as it was observed in the case of other leaders (64,527 votes against 60,984 votes for the election "number two", Anna Belousovová). The last analysed leader was Igor Matovič (OĽaNO) who compared with his other party candidates, also clearly dominated in his visibility in the media as well as in preferential voting. Based upon the above-mentioned concise analyses, we can claim that Hypothesis 2 was confirmed from the viewpoint of the mutual relation of visibility and winning preferential votes, and this significantly affected their stabilizing, leaving, or removing from the ticket.

From the viewpoint of comparison of the individual results of visibility study of party leaders as well as of verification of the stated hypotheses, a clear trend in the condition of the Slovak Republic can be seen concerning party leaders: a position of political leaders (coalition, opposition, or executive) is the decisive factor affecting their visibility in the media. On the other hand, the leaders whose parties kept not only a stable rate of visibility but also that of political preferences, experienced a slight or rapid decrease in their visibility in the media, but, at the same time, a decrease in trustworthiness (Ján Figeľ, Richard Sulík, Béla Bugár, partially also election leaders Robert Fico and Ján Slota in Period 4). Contrary to that, the mutual relation between visibility and

trustworthiness was different in the case of party (Mikuláš Dzurinda) and election leaders (Iveta Radičová) of the SDKÚ-DS party, since their visibility in the media did not affect their trustworthiness. In their case we can rather speak of their position as well as of overall (political and social) situation that significantly affected their trustworthiness. The verification of the individual hypotheses has confirmed the trend of personalization of politics (of political parties) in the Slovak Republic. In both parliamentary elections, political leaders won more than a 50 % share of preferential voting, which was obvious in the results of visibility in the media where they had dominant positions compared with the candidates from their respective parties. The findings also showed an interesting fact that as far as the leaders did not dominate in their visibility in the media compared with others, their positions of the election "number one" was not dominant from the viewpoint of the share of preferential votes (as was the case of Richard Sulík in the June 2010 parliamentary election), or their positions of the election "number one" was put at risk in respect of votes number (in the early parliamentary election, Ján Figeľ from the KDH party placed second after Daniel Lipšic, and Mikuláš Dzurinda from the SDKÚ-DS party placed third after Ivan Mikloš and Lucia Žitňanská).

Table 3: **The Pearson correlation coefficients – party leader's visibility vs political preferences of their parties**

Party (electoral) leader	Overall relationship between visibility and political preferences
Robert Fico	-0,33
Iveta Radičová	0,02
Mikuláš Dzurinda	-0,24
Ján Figeľ	-0,25
Ján Slota	-0,09
Richard Sulík	0,09
Béla Bugár	0,40

Source: author´s own processing, n = 19

The second hypothesis *Bigger visibility of political (party) leaders within media presentation leads to the increase and consolidation of political preferences of their own political party* goes of focus of interrelations between media visibility and political preferences of political parties in the context of visibility of leaders. One of the reasons that led us to compare these two apparently different phenomena can be the fact that various political parties severely channeled themselves through their political leaders at present. And not just within individual media outlets, but also the policies that present, including election campaigns. The leaders become "spokespersons" of their

own parties, but also promoters of party policies and objectives in the election debates, or at press conferences.

In terms of application of correlation analysis towards the media visibility of political leaders and political preferences, their ratio shows the same pattern, or absence of a systematic trend that would attest dependence of political preferences towards frequency of media visibility. The results are once again not without distortion, if we do not look deeper into the context of each of the nineteen of cases (n = 19). For example, no connection between the above-mentioned variables appears at the polling women leaders and later Prime Minister Iveta Radičová (0.02), and also in the party's leader Mikuláš Dzurinda (-0.24) as well as in the case of Ján Slota (-0.09), Richard Sulík (0.09) or Béla Bugár (0.40). As for the leaders of political parties of both Smer-SD and KDH, it could be observed moderately in the context of individual cases (n = 19), namely with Robert Fico (-0.33) and Ján Figeľ (-0.25). In both cases, a negative relationship could indeed be observed, but the cases of other political leaders showed the highest number of mutual relations between their media visibility and political party preferences.

Final comments

The frequency rate of the visibility is not the main and crucial factor that is affecting political preferences of political parties and also their position in the system. One of the main reasons is that the correlation analysis does not confirm it. In other words the result does not show a clear and systematic trend in it. Maybe in the future analysis it could be interesting to focus on the connection between visibility and credibility of party policies, but in this case we should have more research data focusing on credibility (not as in the Slovak case where we can observe only 4 researches that were focusing at this area).
In general, the hypothesis No. 1 was not confirmed. This trend has been recorded just in the case of Robert Fico and Ján Figeľ, but these two cases cannot be taken as a clear example of the relation between these two variables (visibility – preferences).

As the result also shows, visibility in the media is also active within political parties themselves, mainly the party apparatus can also select candidates who are more visible in the media and attractive in comparison with other political actors, thus unconsciously influenced also by the very media. In this case, political parties are giving space to candidates who are attractive to the media unlike those who are unattractive to the media.

We can also observe that the analysis can confirm the existence of a third (hidden) variable, which could be observed through two reasons. The first one, as Hopmann (Hopmann – Vliegenthart – Vreese- Albaek: 2009) noticed, visibility of political subjects in the media does not influence decided voters.

The second reason are the voters themselves, namely they behaviour and their electoral orientation. But this is contrary to the concept of visibility. Despite these facts, visibility of political actors in the media could influence voters in their thinking. In other words, every political message that is sent to them is basically influential, because it unconsciously forces them to think about its meaning.

The article also shows that personalization of politics in the Slovak Republic is not only visible, but it can be observed as the main strategy of all selected political parties. They tend not only to put their leaders in the position of party spokespersons (especially in the campaign period and, as the results showed, shortly before the parliamentary election), but also to give them more space to be visible people in their respective parties. These steps could be explained better by the theory that political parties tend to promote their policies, ideas and visions by political leaders, who are more readable for the voters as a deceased object in the form of an electoral programme. They see party leaders as a short cut for voters in their decision to vote or not to vote for a specific party. This trend is not new in the Slovak conditions, because many authors observed it, but only in a descriptive way without any research analysis. In this case, this article can serve a further and more precise explanation of processes and sub-processes of political communication in Slovakia.

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