

ŽÚBOROVÁ, Viera et al.: 20 Years of Transformation: Emplacement of Political Communication in the Czech and Slovak Republics
Trnava: UCM 2012. 158 pp.

Political communication is undoubtedly an extremely dynamic (sub)discipline of political science which has an enormous perspective of growing, not only in the academic sphere and on the field of theoretical research but also in practice. For politicians and political parties in the political environment of Western Europe where constitutional, political and party systems as well as the sphere of civil society are fully consolidated and structured, political communication is an extremely important factor to be paid close attention. In Central Europe which is still undergoing development and consolidation processes are not yet finished (whether in the sphere of civil society or in the case of party politics), the issue of political communication is not standard theoretical processed yet. Political parties are sure to apply various communication strategies in relation to their constituents and each of these procedures is intended to maximize electoral gains. However, there are still visible lacks of a theoretical base which would implement the practice of political communication in the theoretical concept. As a result, we can see a situation with huge disproportions and discrepancies in the practical level between parties and the voters.

The collective monograph from the authors under the leadership of Viera Žúborová is one of the first contributions to this complex issue in the Slovak political science as a whole. It is the factor of an international team of authors (including authors not only from Slovakia but also from the Czech Republic, Slovenia and Poland) that is the main reason why the monograph has such an original conceptual and methodological base. Its scope and perspective is partly based on the synthetic approach; on the other hand, its content is diversified into the base of case studies focusing on the development, design and current situation of political communication in the Central European countries.

The monograph consists of seven chapters. The first two are sort of an introduction and installed the phenomenon of political communication into the broader synthetic perspective. The first chapter by Michal Kuš and Piotr Piskozub called *Political Communication in Central and Eastern Europe* introduces the reader to the issue of development of political communication in both Central and Eastern Europe, respectively discusses about "finding a place" of this phenomenon in the society. It is understandable, as the authors note at the very first moment, that changes that have fundamentally affected the political and constitutional systems as well as society at all its levels have a marked influence on the political communication. Liberalization and the transition from non-democratic forms of government to democracy, to set the

elementary new cushions for the relationship between the state and political actors on the one hand and civil society on the other one. It also enabled some feedback, although we can say this feedback is today, more than 20 years after these changes, atrophied in many of these countries. The implication of these processes, however, was undoubtedly the creation of a new pluralistic political scene which has been looking for a new functional mechanisms for communicating with citizens. It is at this point, combined with the emergence of new features of the elections that have become an instrument for creation of political communication actors, where the authors see the effects that are explicitly relevant to the qualitative development of political communication.

The second chapter which forms the theoretical basis and the introduction of the monograph is the work of the Slovenian author Uroš Pinterič, *Political Communication under the Influence of Information and Communication Technologies*. As the author notes at the outset – "political communication is as important as never before ... evolves depending mainly on the development of society itself." (p. 29) The author focused explicitly on the fact that political communication has been more than other activities influenced on the field of the political life by the development of information technologies and mass-media. While the chapter by Kuš and Piskozub views political communication in a broader perspective, Pinterič focused on the factors that influenced and shaped political communication most. The chapter is therefore devoted to new models of political communication (especially Facebook, blogging and Twitter) created by the development of information and communications technologies on the theoretical background of neo-liberal ideology of the consumer. The author notes that voters – recipients of impulses, mediated through political communication as well as human nature are essentially unchanged, constant – people tend to succumb much more to the aggressive communication strategy of populists, as rational but very often unpopular arguments. The voters want "bread and games", they are attracted by the so-called "yellow themes" but they are still able to actually deal with policy only if their existence is secured. Therefore, they want simple solutions offered by populists, that are articulated primarily through the most effective tool – mass media.

The third chapter by Radoslav Štefančík (*We*)blogging as an Instrument of *Political Communication* is closely related to this issue. The author focused specifically on the phenomenon of blogging. He rightly notes that nowadays we have been witnessing an unprecedented level of exploitation of modern technologies. In this chapter, the reader will find a summary of aspects that create blogging, divided into five main characters – blogging is featured by the personalization, paying attention explicitly to the politician as a person. The blog is also a great platform for the implementation of a negative campaign in

relation to political opponents, or detection and subsequent treatment of public opinions. As for these features, really important is spin-doctoring as well, thus rendering politics or parties in making the best possible light. And just for this purpose a blog that is essentially based on online communication (which is also its fifth definition feature), is really an ideal base. (pp. 127-128) The remaining four chapters are case studies. Daniel Klimovský embraces his chapter *Civic Participation as an Arena/Expression of Communication in the Public Policy-making at the Local or Regional Level in the Slovak Republic* in a very original way. The author sees as one of the basic components of political communication not only communication within political parties or by election campaigns, but also the sphere of civic participation, because the importance of this component of political communication is growing. This fact is reflected in subsequent attempts to label the current form of democracy in Europe as participatory as well. Daniel Klimovský installs civic participation into the perspective of good governance theory which in his opinion is closely linked to decentralization. But in the question of decentralization of practical implications in post-communist countries the author is rather skeptical because its potentially positive effects were deformed during the early 1990s by the expectations that citizens put on the authorities at the regional level, or by the so-called myths that have been defined by Gorzelak in his work – by myths of autonomy, prosperity, property, own omnipotence, dedication and stability (pp. 52-53).

Looking at the Central European region through the prism of these facts, we can say that civic participation but also political authorities have failed – in the sense of communication with each other, and constantly fail in many ways. This is one of the reasons why Daniel Klimovský's chapter presents an important contribution to the understanding of the reasons why political communication could not be an exclusive one-way phenomenon but it must necessarily be two-way. Only through this way it is possible to ensure progress in building the capacity of functional civil society, political culture, and to transfer the concept of good governance into the practice and the real political life.

In the chapter *Europe as the Theme of ODS Election Campaigns*, Pavel Šaradín focused on the specific case of ODS, such as a party whose voters are (unlike the voters of other parties) sensitized to the topic of foreign policy, explicitly to the problem of the relationship between the EU and the Czech Republic, and how the party responds to this situation.

In the Central European conditions, the case of ODS is really original because until the Slovak dispute concerning the support of the European Financial Stability Facility that caused the downfall of the government in Slovakia in 2011, there was no such a marked effect of a “European” issue in

any other Central European country. The disintegration of the Slovak government in 2011 brought a bigger element of timeliness into this perspective. This case study, focused on the case of ODS and its approach to European issues, is therefore an original and actual contribution demonstrating that, even in the Central European region, a theme focused on the relationship between a country and European structures can play a crucial role and has influence on the stability of the government and thus on the internal political scene.

In her chapter *Smer-SD: A Party with Two Faces? Permanent Campaign and the Party Leader*, Viera Žuborová focused on the political communication of the party Smer-SD through the background of the so-called permanent campaign. As the author notes, this term was first used by Patrick Cadwell but it has been more generally known since 1980 when Sidney Blumenthal worked with this category in his publication *The Permanent Campaign* where it was described as an instrument of governance towards building of a popular and continuing support.

In the practical terms of political life, this theoretical concept means that elections are no more the top of the mobilization efforts for political parties but they are only like one part of the whole mosaic. The main tool and the central point of the concept of the permanent campaign are personified by the leader of the party, resulting in the personalization of politics. As a whole, the chapter is an original contribution to the issue of political communication in Slovakia because the application of this concept specifically in the Slovak conditions and on a Slovak party has never been applied before. Original research outputs increase the value of the chapter, too.

The last chapter is a case study by Alexander Čemez and Martin Klus – *Political Marketing in the Slovak Republic and in the Czech Republic*. This chapter is focused primarily on the phenomenon of political marketing which is closely linked with political communication. Since 1989, we have been continuously facing various forms of political communication in Slovakia and in the Czech Republic.

As in the case of political communication itself, the authors defined its actors also in the case of political marketing – elites, media and the electorate, while voters are the primary objects that transmit votes to the concrete political subject. Political marketing should persuade the voter to give a vote to the "right" subject, while the impact on the voter is realized through external channels as a communication between the voter and the political elite.

The situation in the political arena is constantly changing, while the changes are faster and faster. This is true also of Central Europe where voters themselves are increasingly more sensible to the methods of communication and political marketing. Nowadays it is not about what are the topics or ideas

of politicians or a party, but especially important is the way they accentuate to the public. It is therefore striking that in Slovakia there has not until now been a publication focused on this issue from a more synthetic view. This collective monograph is therefore an important contribution to this issue.

Juraj Hanuliak