

Political Marketing and its Professionalization: Ten Years of Campaigning for Slovak Presidency (1999, 2004 and 2009)

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Abstrakt

Štúdia Politický Marketing a jeho profesionalizácia: Desať rokov slovenských prezidentských kampaní (1999, 2004 a 2009) prezentuje vývoj prezidentských kampaní na Slovensku od zavedenie priamej voľby. Štúdia ponúka analýzu profesionalizácie kampaní a ako využívali rôzne médiá pričom spomína aj mediálne pokrytie. Zozbierané dáta ako aj komparatívna analýza ukazujú, že slovenský profesionálny politický marketing je stále vo vývoji. Práca prezentuje komplexnú a koherentnú analýzu využívania marketingových a mediálnych nástrojov, vrátane politických konzultantov a ako pretvárajú prostredie politickej komunikácie postkomunistického Slovenska. Štúdia ponúka prípadové analýzy všetkých prezidentských volieb s osobitným dôrazom na prezidentskú kampaň 2009 a jej porovnanie s predchádzajúcimi cyklami.

Abstract

The paper Political Marketing and its Professionalization: Ten Years of Campaigning for Slovak Presidency (1999, 2004 and 2009) describes the evolution of the presidential campaigns in Slovakia since the introduction of direct voting. The paper offers analysis of the professionalization of campaigns and the use of media whilst also mentioning media coverage. The data gathered as well as comparison study offer evidence to support the evolving, professional nature of political marketing in Slovak presidential campaigning. It presents complex and coherent analysis of the media and marketing tools - as well as political consultants used in transforming the environment of political communication in post-communist Slovakia. The paper provides case-to-case analysis of every election season with a special emphasis on the 2009 election and comparison of all three campaigns.

Kľúčové slová: Slovensko, prezident, voľby, kampaň, médiá, politická komunikácia, politický marketing, 1999, 2004, 2009, profesionalizácia

Keywords: Slovakia, president, elections, campaign, media, political communication, political marketing, 1999, 2004, 2009, professionalization

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this research essay is to offer first look into ten years of campaigning for Slovak Presidency. How did the media transform the presidential election and more importantly how did the political communications in campaigning for the Slovak presidency since 1999 professionalize. The first part of the paper describes the political system in Slovakia and why there is direct presidential election – it offers background on the political chaos of 1997-1999 and what lead politicians to give the power to decide to the people. It also describes the Presidential elections law - Law no. 46/1999 and how it regulates and restricts presidential campaigning.

The following chapter is a short case analysis of the first presidential election which was held in 1999. It was a very case-specific campaign run in a society that was still traumatized by Vladimír Mečiar's authoritarian rule which ended in 2008. The campaign of the anti-Mečiar parliamentary coalition, Rudolf Schuster was a clear frontrunner. Following this is an analysis of the 2004 campaign which ended in a surprising second round duel between two former allies from the past: Vladimír Mečiar and Ivan Gašparovič, who won the vote. This part will offer not only analysis of political marketing incorporated into the campaign of that year but will provide the reasons of the crushing defeat of the campaign of Eduard Kukan and what was behind the surprising outcome.

This will be followed by the first case study of the 2009 presidential campaign in Slovakia. For this part, research interviews with campaign managers of all major campaigns have been conducted. It was the first election that was not focused on Mečiar or trauma from his rule because he did not run. Even as Gašparovič is his former ally, this fact was largely ignored in the 2009 campaign. It will offer analysis of five individual campaigns, their professionalization, what media and marketing tools that have been used. It will offer insights into the opinion polling of the 2009 campaign season. Especially important is the part about the Internet. For the first time ever, Web played a vital role in the 2009 political campaign in Slovakia: from candidates' homepages to Facebook and Youtube. The case-study is concluding with the analysis of the televised debates and how was the campaign reflected in the leading mainstream media – both print and broadcasting.

The final chapter is a comparative analysis of all three presidential campaign seasons, how they evolved on the level of political marketing professionalization and is rich in comparative tables and figures.

SLOVAK POLITICAL SYSTEM, PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND MEDIA

The Slovak Republic is a parliamentary democracy with strong Prime Ministerial executive power. The President has a representative and largely symbolic role which might be even more powerful than all other legal competences. It stems from the tradition of the old Czechoslovak republic. The presidential candidate, according to the Slovak law, has to have either a support of at least 15.000 people through a signed petition or the support of 15 members of parliament to be able to stage a presidential run.

Notwithstanding, the president has many legal rights and obligations as well. He has the power to name the person who will form the government after the general election, he can dissolve the parliament and also has veto power in the legislative process. President is also responsible for negotiating, ratifying and signing of international treaties. However, a tradition is that the president transfers part of this power to the government and parliament. He also names members of the government and other state bodies – in the past it already happened that the president refused to name a cabinet minister. He is also the commander-in-chief of the army.

Slovakia has held direct presidential elections since 1999 (the first president Michal Kováč was elected in parliament). However the road to the direct vote was somewhat chaotic. The idea came up in 1997 as the parliament feared a deadlock over electing the new president. The political opposition tried through a people's petition to change the law with a referendum for a direct presidential vote. However the government of the authoritarian Vladimír Mečiar in May 1997 thwarted this plebiscite. As proved to be the case, the parliament was not capable of electing the president for a year and in 1998 then Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar and his right-hand and at later point political rival, chairman of the parliament Ivan Gašparovič, was executing the presidential powers during the interregnum.

In 1999, the presidential election law was one of the first promises fulfilled by the new government formed from the anti-Mečiar opposition parties. Currently, the Slovak

presidential elections and campaigning are held in accordance with the Law no. 46/1999. This law mentions some specifics that limit the campaign, these are:

- a) the official campaign takes place 15 days ahead of the vote
- b) 48 hours before the start of the elections, campaign moratorium is in place
- c) campaigning for the presidency before this time is prohibited (however, unofficial campaigning is always taking place as there is no punishment set for breaking this rule)
- d) the public service broadcasters Slovak Television and Radio have to devote equal time for all the candidates, up to 10 hours altogether
- e) the commercial service broadcasters can offer equal time in paid political advertising, up to 10 hours of airtime altogether
- f) in their news reports, all the broadcasters have to be unbiased, what is monitored by the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission
- g) the campaign is financially limited to 132.775 euros (including value added tax, previously 4.000.000 SKK) and this includes financial resources paid by third people on behalf of the candidate and all free resources have to be accounted for the tariff price.¹

Voting in Slovak presidential elections is split into two rounds if necessary, as an absolute majority is required. If there is no absolute majority (50 percent plus 1 vote of all registered voters), the second round takes place (a simple majority is required there). It is important to note that Slovak parliamentary and presidential elections are very personal and candidate-oriented. The importance of party leaders like Robert Fico, Vladimír Mečiar and Mikuláš Dzurinda are often greater than the parties themselves. Logically, within the presidential campaign the personality of one candidate plays a large role, but among some candidates the use of party affiliation is almost completely downplayed (e.g. current president Ivan Gašparovič). For purposes of the presidential election, the whole country of Slovakia is one electoral constituency.

As in other political processes, media plays a vital role in political communication. Not only through the paid marketing tools, but through the regular news-gathering and reporting as well. There was always a mix of media and politics in modern Slovak history.

¹ Law no. 46/1999 adopted March 1999 of the Election of the Slovak President, of plebiscite and its abjuration as amended by other laws

Strenuous relations between the media and new democratic governments started early on, just after the fall of the communist regime. However, it can be assumed that the transition time between 1993-1998 as the most tense with respect to journalists and government relations. Since 2006, there were significant tensions between printed press journalists and the government. The relations became very tensed when the Socialist party SMER under Robert Fico won the elections. Mr. Fico accused the journalists several times of being corrupt and even publicly called them “*prostitutes*” and “*idiots*,” among other insults. Robert Fico has been also accusing media of giving voice to political opposition to his cabinet rather than providing impartial information.

In presidential elections, as will be elaborated upon later, party politics often mixes with the presidential politics. In 2009 Prime Minister Fico came in to support the incumbent Ivan Gašparovič and his tactics did involve attacks on media as well. However, the media themselves exercised quite strict editorial line too – which is within their freedom of expression. For example, editor-in-chief of SME discouraged voters from voting Ivan Gašparovič whom he described as evil and its editorial page came in support of a candidate of the largest parliamentary opposition Iveta Radičová. However, when speaking about SME, the newspaper made an effort to keep balance in news reports and split negative and positive stories about both candidates – Radičová and Gašparovič. Notwithstanding, editors of SME complained that the team of Ivan Gašparovič refused to co-operate with the newspaper. In the 2004 elections no candidate particularly impressed the media. That might be one of the reason that the candidate of parliamentary opposition did not advance to the second round.

1999 ELECTIONS

The 1999 presidential campaign was very case-specific and there are a few hallmarks worth noting. It was the first campaign for Slovak Presidency and the candidate of the anti-Mečiar parliamentary coalition, Rudolf Schuster was a clear frontrunner. It was time when the public was tired from the era of authoritarian Mečiar. However, not the whole opposition was impressed that the forming coalition reached in 1999: Schuster’s party SOP will get three cabinet posts (which was the smallest number out of all parties), but in exchange it will get unanimous governmental backing for Schuster in presidential election. Only the Christian-Democratic KDĽ (Christian Democratic Movement) within the SDK (Slovak Democratic

Coalition) coalition of anti-Mečiar parties refused to back the former communist Rudolf Schuster. The media and politicians backed Schuster's run because his main competitor was Mečiar - former Prime Minister, who in 1998 along with his government thwarted the referendum for a direct presidential vote.

The monitoring Memo 98 proved that Mečiar got less media attention and was portrayed more in a negative manner, unlike Schuster who was described in a positive framing and received clearly more media attention. Especially in the broadcast of the main commercial TV station TV Markíza owned by Pavol Rusko who was a backer of the SOP (Party of Civic Understanding which did not reach the parliament in the 2002 elections) and Rudolf Schuster.² With the support of the nation's most watched television newscast, he definitely received undue advantage.

In the first round, there were nine candidates altogether, five of them could not reach more than one percent in the final tally (Ján Demikát, Juraj Lazarčík, Juraj Švec and Boris Zala). The scandalous nationalist and ultra-right-wing leader Ján Slota (which according to Memo 98 received the least favorable framing from the media) ended with 2,5 percent. The former diplomat and member of Mečiar's HZDS-party (Movement for Democratic Slovakia) has received 3,6 from all the votes.

Together with the two advancing candidates, the most impressive third candidate was a former actress turned diplomat Magda Vášaryová, whose campaign influenced especially the intellectual elite of the country. She ended with 6,6 percent of the vote. In her case, it was the media who started to ring the death bell of her campaign. The turning point of Vášaryová's campaign was her dismal performance in the presidential debate (aired on the most watched commercial TV station in the country - Markíza) a few days before the balloting. She seemed unprepared and could not effectively refute the pointed arguments of Rudolf Schuster. It was at that time that her numbers in opinion polls started to slide. Her sentence that "*if the problem is that she is a female*" was one of the quotes of the campaign season.

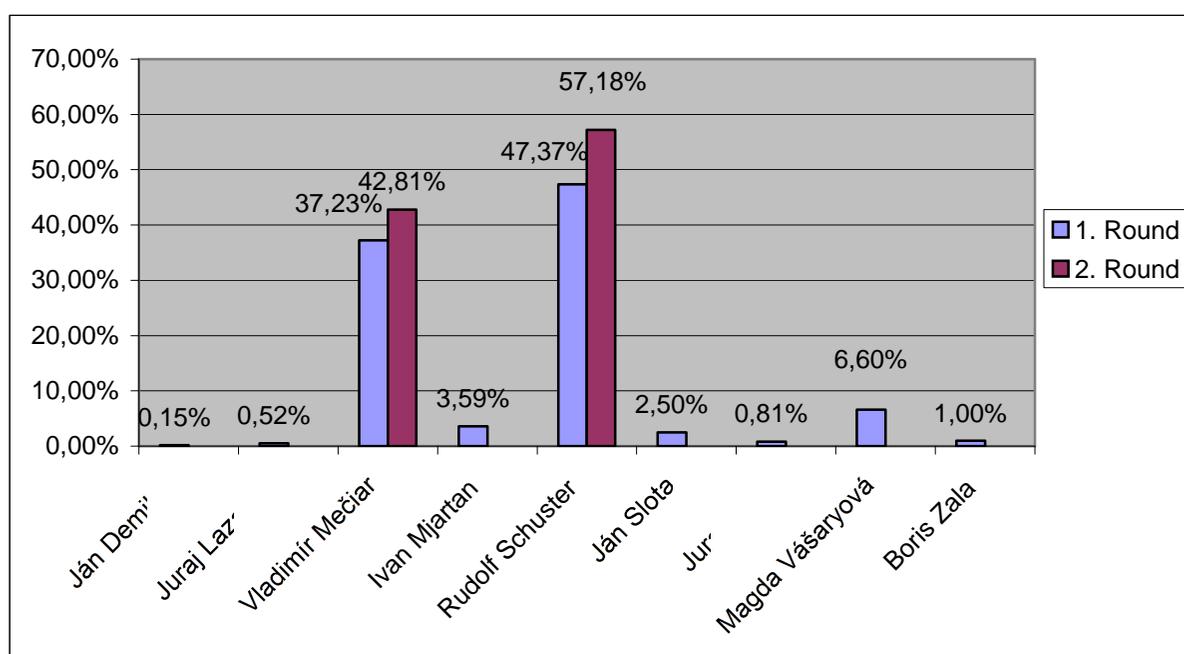
It was then already the 1999 election where media and television played a vital role in the campaign. Daniel Krajcer, sharp debate anchor, turned into celebrity by Markíza did moderate a debate every presidential elections and his tough questions turned to be make-or-break for some candidates. In the 1999 elections, his debate probably ended the hopes of

² Memo 98 (1999): *Prezentácia kandidátov na post prezidenta SR vo vybraných elektronických médiách.* (http://www.memo98.sk/index.php?base=data/spravvy/1999/sk_kandidati4.txt)

Vášáryová. It was as well the first and last election in which the public service broadcaster devoted a toll-free time for political advertisements of the candidates.

It was Mečiar and Schuster who advanced to the second round. Schuster was a clear front-runner and that is why he could refute demands of Mečiar not take part in a presidential debate ahead of the second round. Schuster scored a clear victory against Mečiar: 57.2 percent of the popular vote, while Mečiar had only 42.8 percent.

Figure 1: 1999 Presidential Election - Final Results



Source: Statistical Office of Slovak Republic

2004 ELECTIONS

The second presidential elections were interesting especially because the underdog Ivan Gašparovič was able to advance in the second round and win the election. Notwithstanding, the 2004 campaign had more candidates, including František Mikloško, the first sole candidate of KDH. It is interesting to note that the candidates actually tried to diminish their party's label with the traditional argument that they are going to be the president of all the citizens of Slovak Republic. Marušiak observed that symbols of political parties were missing from the billboards. Most of the candidates tried to gather more than a single party support.

Ivan Gašparovič, former ally of Vladimír Mečiar and speaker of the parliament, was the most surprising element of that campaign season.³ He ran a very disciplined campaign based on his social and national message. He already possessed strong name recognition; however he needed to distinguish himself from his alliance with Mečiar. He used various types of billboard media, including vans traveling around Slovakia depicting his face, Slovak flag and slogan.

Altogether in 2004 there were 12 candidates, a record for the short history of Slovak presidential campaigning. However six candidates were not able to reach one percent: Stanislav Bernát, Jozef Kalman, Ján Králik, Július Kubík, Ľubo Roman and Jozef Šesták.

As was already mentioned, all of the candidates tried to distance themselves from their party brands even as most of the candidates had a party background, or at least party backing. One of the major reasons of the failure of the campaign of Eduard Kukan was a split of the coalition parties. The major governmental party SDKÚ (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union) was supporting Kukan, the other right-wing conservative party KDH (Christian democratic movement) backed its candidate František Mikloško. The liberal ANO (Alliance of New Citizen) backed Ľubo Roman, but shortly before the vote he backed out and endorsed Eduard Kukan. And independent minded right-wing voters were backing the former diplomat and sociologist Martin Bútora.

Especially because of the unsuccessful campaign of Eduard Kukan, this campaign is worth of deeper analysis. As Školkay points, minister of foreign affairs Kukan started his campaign already in Fall of 2003 and he used billboards, newspaper and online ads as early as December 2003 – few months ahead of the start of the official campaign. He even used mobile phone text message contest. In an apparent practice in making, it was already the 2004 campaign where SDKÚ employed a wide use of celebrities including a popular actor Michal Dočolomanský (in the 1999 race he supported Michal Kováč), TV star Iveta Malachovská or the tennis player Karina Habšudová.⁴ His campaign, as was of the other major candidates, was very personality-centered, his program was in the background. Marušiak writes that it was

³ Marušiak, J. (2004): *Velkým kandidátom sa minuli „velké“ témy - prezidentské voľby primárne ako súboj strán*. (<http://www.infovolby.sk/index.php?base=data/prez/2004/analyzy/1080565999.txt>).

⁴ Školkay, A. (2004): *Prezidentské voľby na Slovensku. Komunikácia kandidátov v prezidentskej kampani na Slovensku*. In: Central European Political Review. (<http://www.cepsr.com/clanek.php?ID=205>).

emphasizing Slovakia's successes in foreign policies and integration processes (NATO, the European Union).⁵

The independent candidate Martin Bútora ended in the final tally with almost the same result as Magda Vášaryová five years earlier (in percentages 6,5 to 6,6 percent). He also started campaigning early on, already in January, focused especially on meetings with voters and as well had some celebrity backing (actors Stanislav Dančiak or Richard Stanke). František Mikloško was the candidate of the conservative right and thus his political reach was rather limited. Rudolf Schuster decided to run for the second term as well. Despite the fact, that he used free air time from his position as the president of the country (for example he delivered his State of the Republic address at the end of 2003), he was not able to convince the voters for a second time. However, in relation to the political marketing, he was the first candidate who was reportedly actively considering the advice of foreign consultants to run his campaign. *Nový Čas* reported that he had to be helped out by U.S. consultants George Gorton, Dick Dresner and Joe Shumate which run political campaigns in California. The offer was reportedly proposed by then U.S. ambassador in Bratislava.⁶

Eduard Kukan tried to run a professional marketing-oriented campaign. So why did he not succeed? One of the reasons might be that political process is not a chewing gum commercial and some of the concepts employed by his campaign were not very mature in nature – for example lucky quarter foil. The role of media played a visibly negative role in his campaign. Especially the presidential debate in the main TV station Markíza aired February 26, 2004. Kukan could not answer the questions about his communist past and reported accusations of his collaboration with the communist secret service ŠtB. He did not effectively refute the claim that he broke the law because his campaign was just with a laic look more expensive than the four million korunas that are mentioned in the law as the limit for campaign financing. The two advancing candidates of Vladimír Mečiar and Ivan Gašparovič hit especially hard on the issue financing during the debate. Mečiar accused Kukan, that according to the calculation he had from ad-selling agency, his campaign had to cost 139 million, Gašparovič put this number even higher to 250 million.⁷ Školky mentions other reasons why Kukan lost: negative publicity over the financing of his mother party SDKÚ that

⁵ Marušiak, J. (2004): *Velkým kandidátom sa minuli „velké“ témy - prezidentské voľby primárne ako súboj strán*. (<http://www.infovolby.sk/index.php?base=data/prez/2004/analyzy/1080565999.txt>).

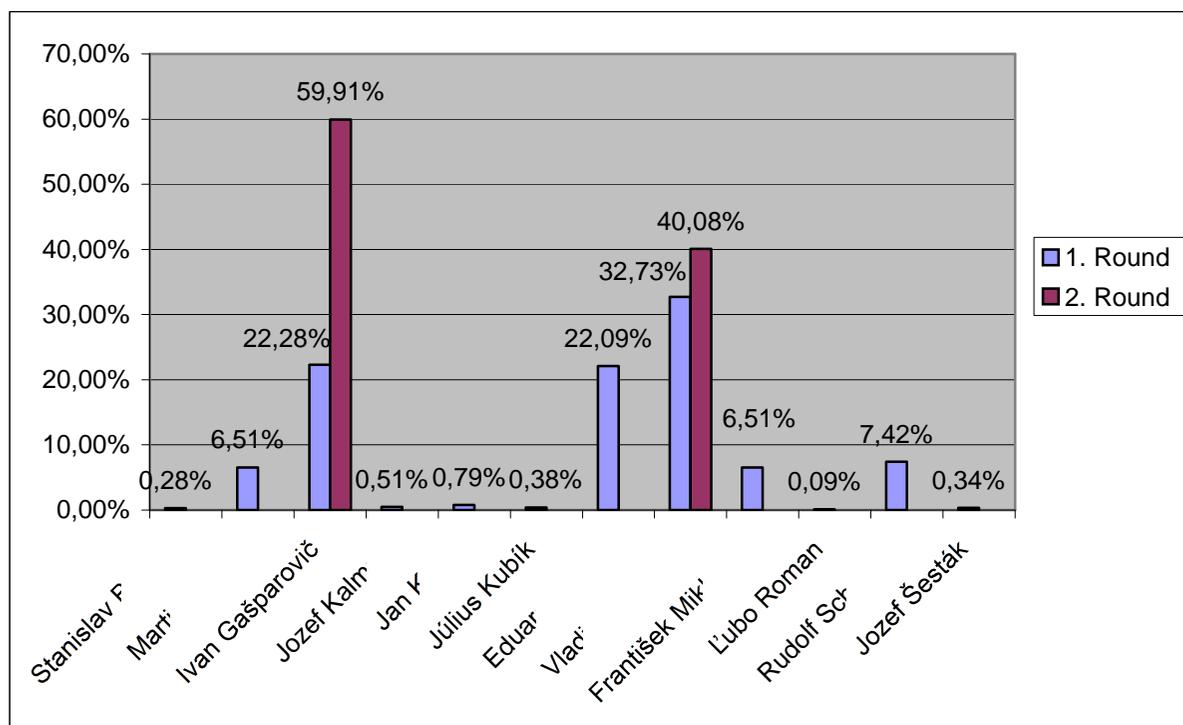
⁶ Vilček, I. (2004): *Schuster i Mečiar mlží, zda půjdou do prezidentských voleb*. (<http://www.novinky.cz/zahranicni/23602-schuster-i-meciar-mlzi-zda-pujdou-do-prezidentskych-voleb.html>)

⁷ Markíza, 2004. TV show SITO of February 26, 2004.

broke in the campaign season and the demobilization effect of the public opinion polls that put him as a frontrunner.⁸ The fact is, that Kukan's performance was a major setback and he lost to Ivan Gašparovič just with 3.644 votes.

Most of the reasons stemming from Kukan's failure served to Gašparovič's advantage as he was not only able to advance to the second round but win the Presidency. In the second round he could secure the support of the leading opposition party SMER and as well the support of Kukan's voters – they were highly antagonistic to the Mečiar's campaign. Krivý writes, that the opinion poll of IVO showed as well that Gašparovič could reach out to the supporters of the nationalist SNS party and the left-wing SMER.⁹ Mečiar lost because the society was still traumatized by his tenure as a prime minister in 1993-1998.

Figure 2: 2004 Presidential Election - Final Results



Source: Statistical Office of Slovak Republic

⁸ Školkay, A. (2004): Prezidentské voľby na Slovensku. Komunikácia kandidátov v prezidentskej kampani na Slovensku. In: Central European Political Review. (<http://www.cepsr.com/clanek.php?ID=205>).

⁹ Krivý, V. (1995): *Voľby v roku 2004*. In: Kollár, M.; Mesežnikov G.j (eds.): Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti. Slovensko 2004. Bratislava: IVO, 127-157.

CASE STUDY OF THE 2009 ELECTIONS

The 2009 elections had several specifics in comparison with the other two campaign seasons. First of all, it was the first election where the focus was not on Vladimír Mečiar as he did not run. This of course changed the tone of the campaign and other campaign topics had to be found. In this campaign, otherwise than in the former two, the party brands and endorsements played a major role. At times it almost looked like that the Prime Minister Robert Fico and his party SMER was running the campaign of “*independent*” Ivan Gašparovič.

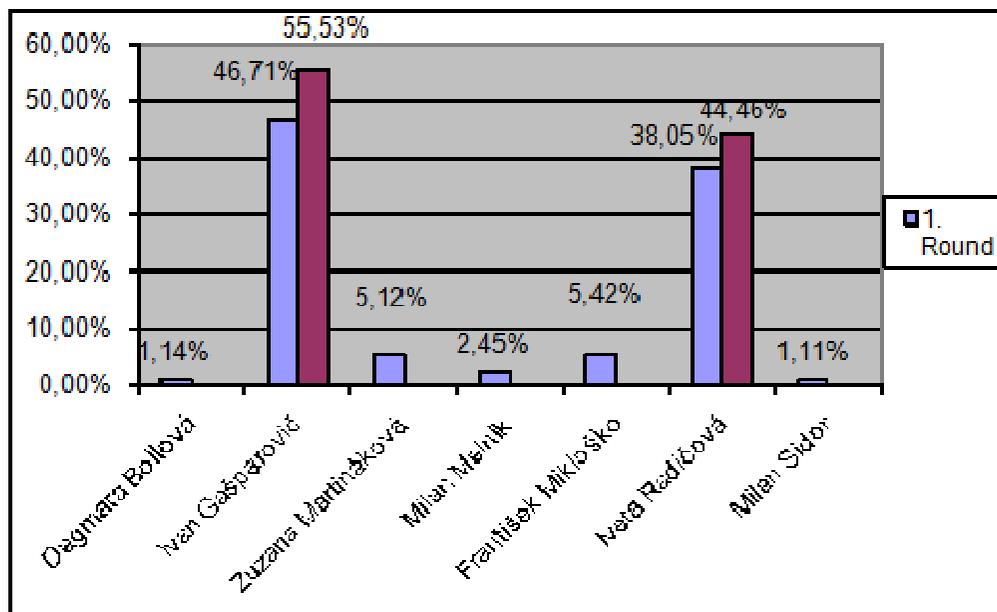
Very interesting on the 2009 season was import of the U.S. campaigning elements. On the side of Ivan Gašparovič it was the negativity of his campaign. Everytime there is fear part of the campaign and the campaign is able to brand the competitor in a negative light, the voter will probably reward. It does not have to be true, in many cases it is enough if the negative label holds. There are some notable examples from history. In the U.S. campaigning of 1988, George Bush Senior accused Michael Dukakis that his policies allowed a criminal Willie Horton walk free and kill – this of course was not true, but Bush Senior won the debate on crime. Iveta Radičová, the candidate of the parliamentary opposition (SDKÚ, OKS – Civic Conservative Party, SMK – Hungarian Coalition and KDH), never promised autonomy to the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia, despite that the nationalists made the claim and forced the Hungarian issue into mainstream media. Traumatizing problem of Hungarians in Slovakia suddenly polarized the society again and probably got the edge to the governmental candidate Gašparovič. Even as party brands and endorsements played a major role, there were some moments that one or the other candidate could have found rather damaging. Robert Fico retracted from the second round after a Slovak “*Joe the Plumber moment*”. During a river re-routing celebration, Prime Minister Fico alongside with Gašparovič accused a protestor – old man - of being paid by the Radičová campaign. However, the press – most notably evening newscasts – showed interview with the man, a supporter of Fico, whose protest was completely campaign-unrelated. Prime Minister apologized to the man personally and did not show up on the campaign trail anymore. With relation to the political marketing, the PM did the most he could and handled the protestor moment effectively after the mistake has been made. Much differently than ahead of the first roundd when he stumped for Gašparovič and even called press conferences were he accused the press of being anti-Gašparovič.

Other interesting “*American*” moment was the way how Radičová’s campaign has been conducted. It was a carbon-copy of Barack Obama’s concept of 2008. It used his slogan: “*Yes, We Can*” and commercial with celebrities that was very reminiscent of the viral ad of Will.i.am in the U.S. presidential race. Both of the candidates relied on campaign strategists for the elections and both of them tackled it in very effective ways. Radičová indirectly tried to distance herself from the unpopular former Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda who was missing from the campaign trail, she incorporated moderate tone and even reached out to the major governmental party. She tried to opt a positive and inspirational Obama style of campaigning, the focus was change in politics.

Overall the race was much closer to the people than ever before. It started several weeks early and all seven candidates were criss-crossing the nation. However, this had changed two weeks ahead of the second and final round when both candidates used mostly mediated messages. Most of them visited at least every district city. People saw them in villages, theatres, signing books (Radičová was signing her biographic booklet) and on large-scale concerts. One candidate – Zuzana Martináková of the liberal SF (Freedom Forum) – deployed a grassroot operation and she for herself knocked on voters’ doors.

Altogether there were seven candidates in the 2009 race, this was the smallest number as of yet and noteworthy is the fact that there were not a candidate who would reach less than one percent of the vote. Only three candidates did receive less than three percent – independent Dagmara Bollová, communist Milan Sidor and Milan Melník supported by HZDS, two candidates recorded a popularity slightly higher than five percent – liberal Zuzana Martináková and conservative František Mikloško. The most heated contest was in between the candidate supported by the socialist SMER and nationalist SNS Ivan Gašparovič and Iveta Radičová backed by the parliamentary opposition. Radičová recorded rather strong result in the first round (21 March, 2009), but as both advanced to the second round (4 April, 2009), she ultimately lost by more than 11 percent.

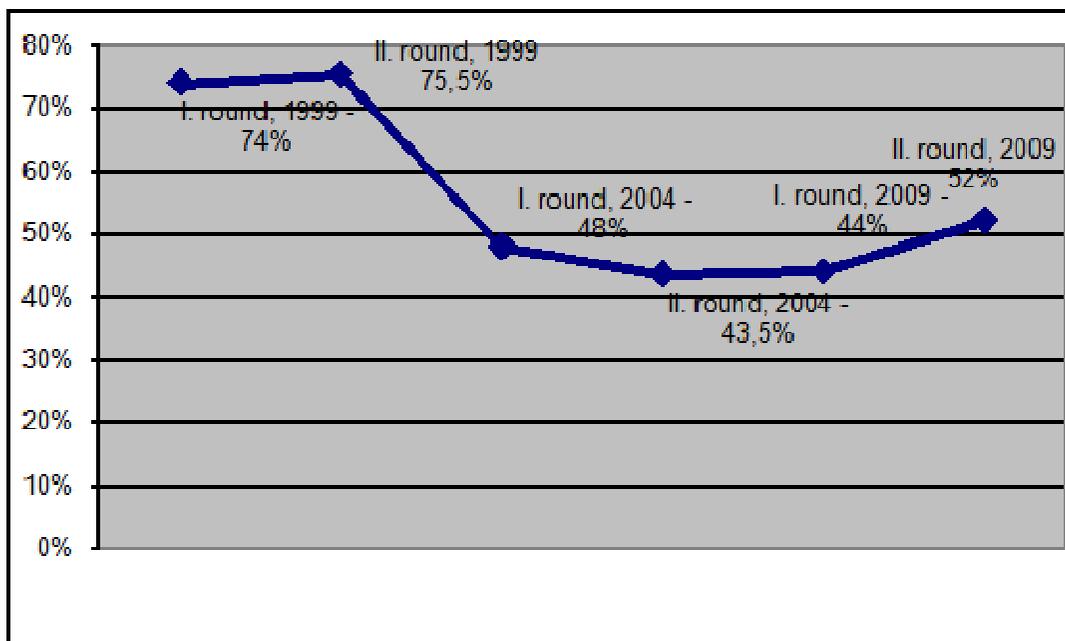
Figure 3: 2009 Presidential Election - Final Results



Source: Statistical Office of Slovak Republic

The candidates were able mobilize more voters in the 2009 elections: when in the first round 44 percent of the people voted, two weeks later, it was already 52 percent. This was not the case in 2004 when the turnout in the elections was much lower.

Figure 4: Voter's Turnout in Presidential Elections since 1999



Source: Statistical Office of Slovak Republic

ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL CAMPAIGNS

At this stage, political marketing, communication and campaign of leading candidates will be described in more detail. We will focus on five candidates: Ivan Gašparovič, Iveta Radičová, František Mikloško, Zuzana Martináková and Milan Melník. For the purpose of this research essay, interviews with campaign managers and chairman of all five teams have been conducted.

IVAN GAŠPAROVIČ

According to Jozef Grapa¹⁰ leader of Gašparovič's party HZD (Movement for Democracy) who was responsible for the presidential campaign, Gašparovič relied mostly on billboard communication, Internet and civic initiative Our president. He had TV outreach as well but his ads aired on national broadcaster in limited number. His team relied on the campaign strategy, visuals and tools provided by a private Advertising company Adventure. This agency was responsible for his 2004 campaign as well. The campaign did not directly hire foreign consultants but Adventure agency did follow the trends from foreign campaigns. They used volunteers and party organizations of SMER and SNS – Slovak National Party.

Gašparovič used stand-alone billboards and billboards with the Prime Minister, personalities of SMER like Prime Minister Robert Fico, the popular Interior Minister Robert Kaliňák and the nationalist leader Ján Slota.

IVETA RADIČOVÁ

The 2009 campaign of Iveta Radičová was one of the most professionally run in the short history of political marketing in Slovakia. She hired outside PR specialist Ján Füle and showbiz reporter of the main TV station Markíza Pavol Gmitter. Ahead of the campaign they conducted an analysis of the candidates strengths and weaknesses and prepared different tactics for different Slovak regions. "We will talk about different topics in friendly territories and different in others," said Füle.¹¹ The team conducted its own opinion polls to measure the

¹⁰ Ondrášik, B. (2009): E-mail interview with Jozef Grapa (leader of the HZD Party), March 9, Bratislava.

¹¹ Ondrášik, B. (2009): Interview with Ján Füle (chairman and manager of Iveta Radičová's campaign team), March 5, Bratislava.

effectiveness of campaign slogans (for example „*Let's find the courage to be decent*”) and what are the perceived weaknesses of her candidacy. One of those was that Radičová is too much specifically perceived as an expert in social affairs as she was a minister of social affairs in the cabinet of Mikuláš Dzurinda. Her team tried to broaden her appeal. They wanted her to look more presidential and that is why she met with German chancellor Angela Merkel or the Hungarian foreign minister Kinga Göncz in course of the campaign. However especially the latter meeting could be damaging to her candidacy as the Hungarian issue has been exploited by the opposite camp.

Her campaign team used the advice of foreign experts as well. Two experts from the team of Barack Obama advised on several issues, for example they were emphasizing the use of mobile text messages in the campaign process. However the team did not heed this advice.

As well, ahead of the presidential debates, Iveta Radičová took part in a training with mock questions and reactions and they have analyzed all previous appearances of Radičová, so she is consistent. In her billboards and TV advertisements she appeared alongside with celebrities like the popular actor Maroš Kramár or the Pop Idol juror and singer Laco Lučenič.

FRANTIŠEK MIKLOŠKO

Much more politically than marketing oriented was the campaign of František Mikloško. His campaign team was led by veteran conservative politician Vladimír Palko and with their campaign they probably wanted to strengthen the brand of their new conservative party KDS – Christian Democrats of Slovakia. They opted for three general messages: first one was oriented on the constituents that value life, family and conservative values, the second set of messages was devoted to people who appreciate and remember the values of the Velvet Revolution and third part were voters that are euro-skeptic.¹² They did not focus on any specific competing candidate as their internal analysis of published opinion polls showed that they could convince voters of both Radičová and Gašparovič. His campaign could afford 300 billboards around the country and printing of leaflets. They also organized gatherings in major cities which included exhibition and screening of a documentary about November 1989. They did not use any foreign advice, consultants and did not observe any foreign campaign. With professional marketing and advertising agencies they co-operated only on technical level.

¹² Ondrášik, B. (2009): Interview with Vladimír Palko (chairman and manager of František Mikloško's campaign team), March 5, Bratislava.

ZUZANA MARTINÁKOVÁ

The campaign of the liberal candidate Zuzana Martináková was lead by a veteran music producer Daniel Mikletič. Their campaign as well was trying to observe foreign trends and incorporate it into the campaign strategy. For example they have started image campaign already at the end of 2008: part of the outdoor advertising was Martináková and a phone number of her advising centers. According to Mikletič¹³, inspiration for this kind of campaign came from the U.S. and Germany. However they did not pay for service for any foreign consultants.

For their communication they have used mainly billboards: first with a phone number, in second phase they were communicating with the messages of Radičová (President needs more than a courage) and in the final stage they have used a TV commercial and not very clear billboard with road signs.

MILAN MELNÍK

Milan Melník was a proof that HZDS is a one man party. In 2008, their leader decided not run for a president, so the party picked this sharp-looking chemistry professor to be their candidate. Melník's media consultant Ivan Brožík categorically denied that his campaign would advice of foreign consultants or was inspired by a foreign campaign.¹⁴ They did not hire any PR, media or advertising agency. They relied on the help of the HZDS-party structure. In their communication, they used mostly billboards and direct mail. As in previous campaign, HZDS tried it with a billboard picturing Slovak mountains and national mountains and used not very credible motto „*independent candidate for president*“.

OPINION POLLS IN THE 2009 RACE

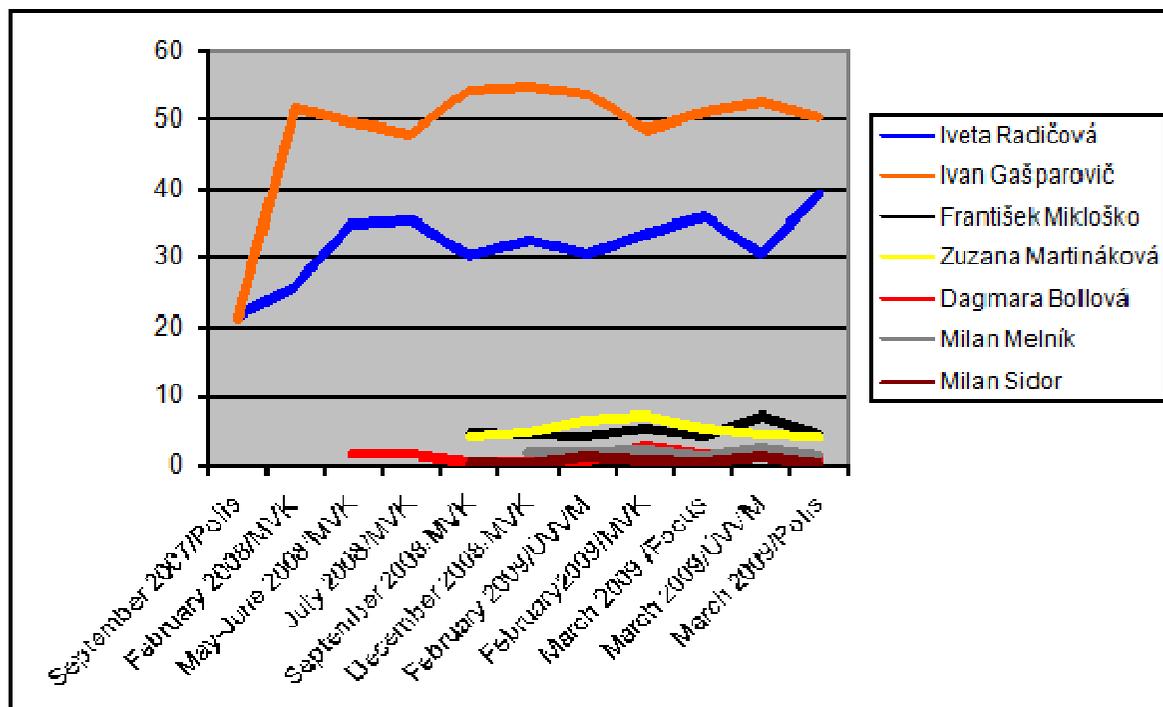
Neither any of the campaigns, nor the media hired a public polling agency to conduct public opinion polls or exit polls during election day (opinion polls conducted with the voters just

¹³ Ondrášik, B. (2009): Interview with Daniel Mikletič (chairman and manager of Zuzana Martináková's campaign team), March 5, Bratislava.

¹⁴ Ondrášik, B. (2009): E-mail interview with Ivan Brožík (consultant to the campaign of Milan Melník), March 8, Bratislava.

after they exit the polls). Only TV JOJ and TA3 asked agencies Polis and Focus to provide them with opinion poll data for their election day coverage (polls were conducted earlier). However ahead of the first round, the opinion poll agencies – both state and commercial - did provide the media with opinion polls data that were tracking the state of the race. The first was conducted by the Polis agency as early as September 2007 when it was far from clear, who will actually run for the office. From that point the gap between Radičová and Gašparovič at occasions broadened. Altogether, private MVK agency has conducted most of the polls – six, Polis recorded two (plus a poll for the election coverage), commercial Focus one poll and the state-run Institute for the Public Opinion Research at the Statistical Office (ÚVVM pri ŠÚ SR) made two opinion polls. There was not a single opinion poll conducted ahead of the second round of elections. Since during both rounds there were no exit polls conducted, it can be only speculated which group of voters supported one or the other candidate and which group was more influenced by the Hungarian issue or Radičová's positive appeal.

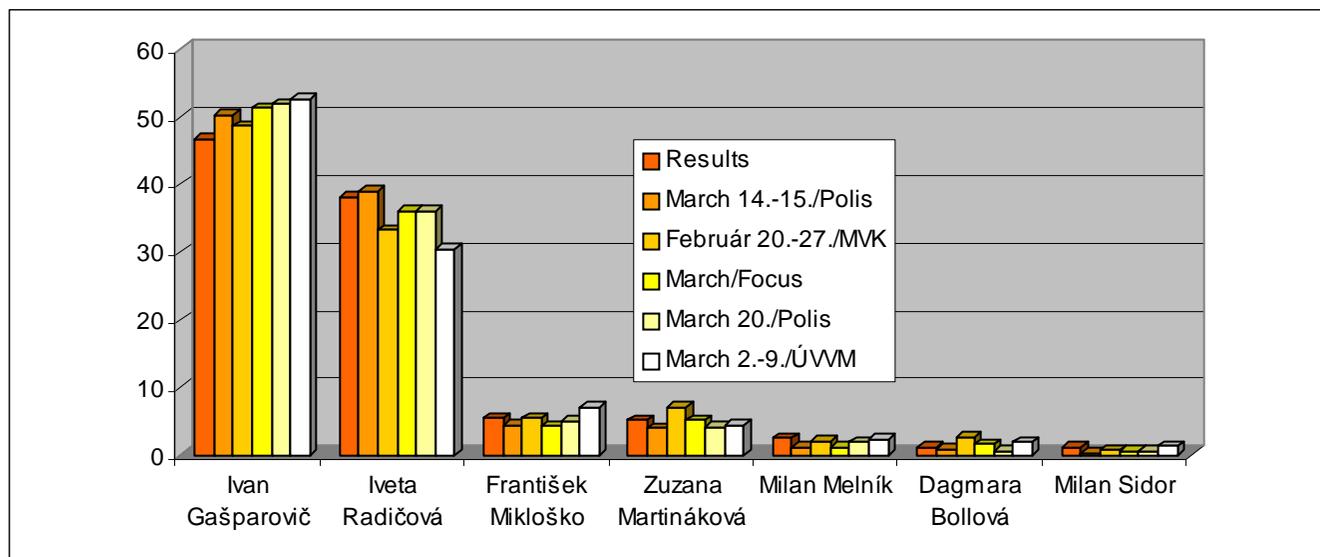
Figure 5: Support of 2009 Presidential Candidates in Opinion Polls



Source: MVK, ÚVVM, Focus and Polis data, compiled by B. Ondrášik

The most inaccurate was the opinion poll conducted by the state-run ÚVVM, they projected the discrepancy between the two leading candidates in the March 1.-9. poll to be more than 22 percent. In 11 days, Radičová would have to close the gap of 14 percent (the difference in the final tally of first round was 8,7 percent between the candidates). MVK (three weeks ahead of the vote) and Focus (early March) were stating that discrepancy between the two camps was 15 percent, so it can be definitely assumed that Radičová closed the gap somewhat, but nowhere close to the opinion data of ÚVVM. Most accurate was the Polis agency which estimated the difference between the two main candidates to be 11 percent on March 14.-15.

Figure 6: Accuracy of the Last Opinion Polls Conducted in the 2009 Race



Source: MVK, ÚVVM, Focus and Polis data, compiled by B. Ondrášik

INTERNET AS PART OF SLOVAK POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING

For the first time ever, Internet played a vital role in the 2009 political campaign. The trend might not be as big as in the US, were according to Pew Research 33 percent of Americans regard the Web as a key source for campaign information¹⁵ but it definitely shaped the race to a certain extent. Every relevant medium – print or broadcasting – had a special website, even

¹⁵ Ondrášik, B. (2008): *Volby vyhral Obama.com*. In: *SME* and *SME.sk*, 11 November 2008 (<http://pocitace.sme.sk/c/4171512/volby-vyhral-obamacom.html>)

the tabloid Nový Čas created its online presidential service at prezident.cas.sk. During pre-election time, all of these portals recorded increases in the readership, during election day weekend, election helped drive the readership up again (in comparison with average weekend) – most successful were the election projects of SME.sk, Aktuality.sk and Topky.sk¹⁶, SME offered many interactive tools for the voters – like voting test which would show which candidate has the opinion closest to yours, daily campaign news starting two months ahead of the vote, schedules of all the candidates and election related video.

However it was not only the Internet media which were part of the 2009 campaign season online. The candidates as well discovered that Internet is a useful tool. Iveta Radičová had advanced website with videos, campaign downloads, updated news, profile and program as did her main competitor Ivan Gašparovič. Zuzana Martináková had her website translated from Slovak into three minority languages – Hungarian, Rusyn and Roma. There were many initiatives out in the blogosphere. Especially the supporters of Radičová and Mikloško were blogging in support of their or against other candidates. Noteworthy projects were My President – Moja prezidentka (Radičová), I Vote for Fero! – Volím Fera! (Mikloško) or Our President – Náš prezident (Gašparovič).

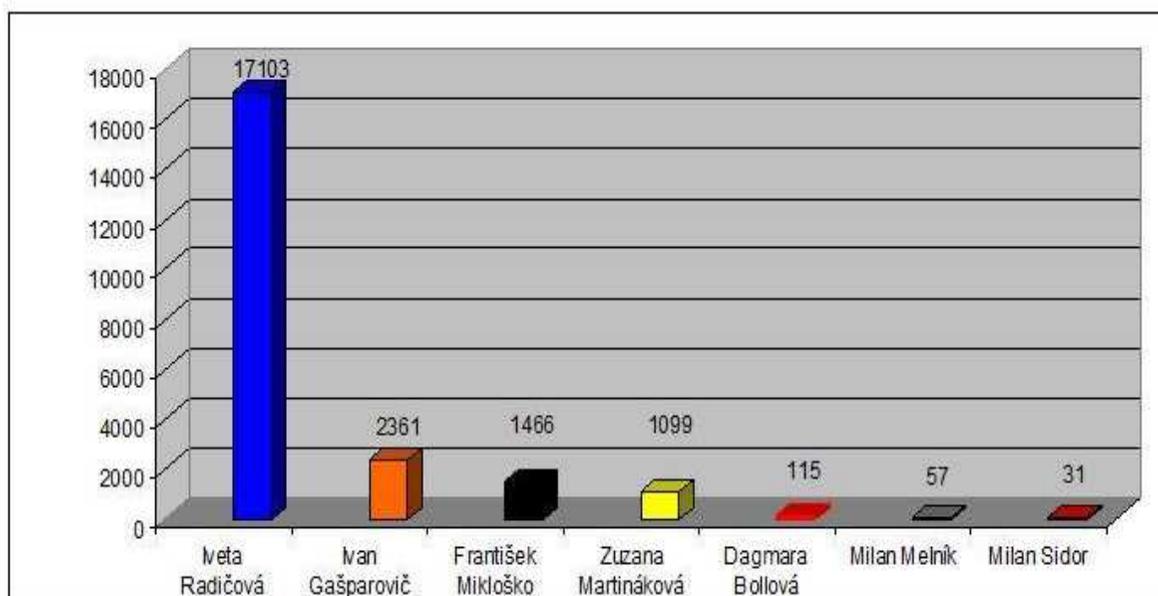
And of course the social network Facebook was part of the campaign as well. Here was the top candidate Iveta Radičová – as of March 21st, during the first round of election, she had more than 17.000 supporters in various Facebook groups, fan clubs and in the friend-list of her Facebook profile. Altogether more than 22.000 revealed their political affiliation on this community website.

The increasing relevance of medium as a campaign and news tool is closely connected to the rising penetration of this multimediu. In 2005 11,5 percent of Slovak households have been, according to the Statistical office of the Slovak Republic, connected to the Internet while in 2007 the number jumped to 34,5 percent.¹⁷

¹⁶ Vozárová, E (2008a): *Volby na internet nelákali. Viac používateľov než inokedy pritiahli len na Sme.sk a Aktuálne.sk.* (<http://medialne.etrend.sk/internet/sprava.php?sprava=10952>) and Vozárová, E. (2008b). *Volby pomohli Webnovinám a Aktuálne.sk. Malé weby profitovali viac než veľké.* (<http://medialne.etrend.sk/internet/sprava.php?sprava=10775>).

¹⁷ Brečka, S.; Ondrášik, B. (2009). *Das Mediensystem in der Slowakei.* In: Matzen, C.; Herzog, A. (eds.) *Internationales Handbuch der Medien.* Hamburg: Nomos Verlag, Hans Bredow Institut, 614-629

Figure 7: 2009 Elections on Facebook



Source: Research of B. Ondrášik

There was also a noticeable negative anti-campaign. Young members of the opposition SDKÚ party deployed a website called Bad President – Zlý prezident against Ivan Gašparovič, against Radičová was the project AntiRadicova.sk. On Facebook the campaign against Gašparovič was much more visible than against Radičová.

Figure 8: 2009 Anticampaign on Facebook



Source: Research of B. Ondrášik

TELEVISED DEBATES AND THE CAMPAIGN IN MAINSTREAM MEDIA

Experience from other nations proved that the televised debates can be crucial in the political campaign and that they can make or break the election. For example in 1976, Republican presidential nominee Gerald Ford said that Eastern Europe was not under Soviet domination and his potential vice president Bob Dole implied that Democrats were responsible for the nation's war deaths. Few weeks later, they lost the election to Jimmy Carter and his running mate Walter Mondale. In 1988 Democrat Michael Dukakis, who was against the death penalty, was caught with a question if he would seek the capital punishment if his wife was raped and murdered. His answer was a cool "no".¹⁸ Slovakia is no exception. As was already mentioned, TV debates seriously harmed the candidacies of Magda Vášaryová in 1999 and Eduard Kukan in 2004. The 2009 election witnessed the most TV debates yet – altogether ten debates, seven of them included the two major candidates and out of those, four were a presidential duel.

However, during the 2009 election season, there was no major mishap during the presidential debate that could decide the elections or switch large portion of the potential voters of one candidate towards the other. Notwithstanding, one moment is worth mentioning: when Ivan Gašparovič could not correctly answer in the debate on TV Markíza what is Google. In some of the early debates Ivan Gašparovič was visibly untrained and unprepared. However that has completely changed in the last three major debates on TV JOJ, Slovak Television and TV Markíza, where he went on an offence against Radičová.

Some of the candidates had aired their ads on national TV stations – for example Iveta Radičová was with celebrities on news channel TA3 and commercial JOJ, news channel was the place where you could see Zuzana Martináková and Ivan Gašparovič had as well paid TV ad ahead of the second round. Supporters of František Mikloško created audio-visual ad for him too. However that one was spread only via YouTube.

The campaign team of Ivan Gašparovič and the president himself criticized the press that it was biased against him. In one of the debates he would accuse Radičová that all the media are on her side. Some of the media did criticize Gašparovič that he refused to communicate with them. The campaign leader of František Mikloško, Vladimír Palko did

¹⁸ Ondrášik, B. (2008): *Third-Party and Independent Presidential Candidates in U.S. Presidential Election Campaigns*. Master of Arts Dissertation. Leeds: Institute of Communication Studies, University of Leeds.

accuse the media that they were biased. “*It is openly said that SME is supporting Iveta Radičová,*” said Palko.¹⁹ Paradoxically, consultant to the candidate backed by HZDS would select SME as the best source for election information from the print press (Ondrášik, 2009).

PROFESSIONALIZATION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS SINCE 1999

The last chapter of this research paper is a comparative analysis of the political communication and its professionalization in the campaign for Slovak presidency. Lilleker (2006) mentions several aspects of campaigning that we will compare in this last part of the essay: tools used in campaigning – broadcasting and narrowcasting, branding, framing, emotionalization, americanization and professionalization, messages and political advertising.

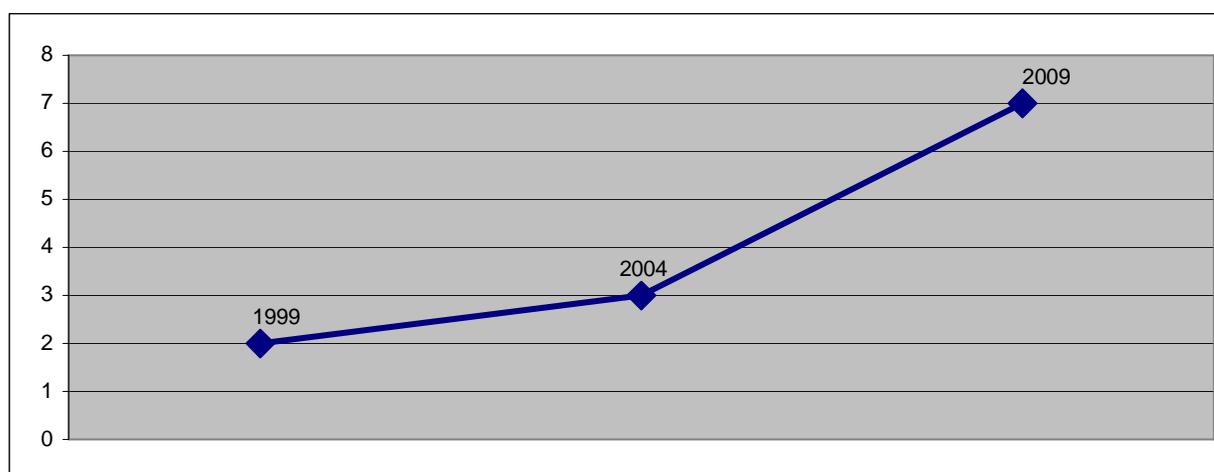
As in every country of the world, in campaigning and political marketing is on many occasions more emphasis on the communication of style over substance. Campaigning becomes more and more candidate centered as well. One of Lilleker's key findings is that there is an increase in the use of professional units and consultants. How does this translate to Slovak presidential election politics? In Slovakia, effective political communications and consulting was in 2009 still in its early stages. But as *Tables 3 and 4* show, there has definitely been developments comparing elections to elections. When in 1999, none of the three major presidential candidates (Vášaryová, Mečiar or Schuster) did use a professionally run campaign, relevant consultants domestic or foreign, this started to change in 2004. In that year, both Gašparovič and Kukan had professionally run campaigns – even as there were no particular political communications experts and they used general marketing and advertising instead. But it was that year that Rudolf Schuster was reportedly considering to hire American political advisers. In 2009 the Slovak campaigning scene moved closer to the U.S. style political marketing. Major candidates had transparent election teams, especially in Radičová's case, lead by media, PR and advertising professionals. Her team has been also advised by people from the team of Barack Obama and their campaign was definitely inspired by Obama's 2008 run. Ivan Gašparovič was relying on the help of advertising agency which as well was looking for viable campaign concepts and trends outside the country. The third

¹⁹ Ondrášik, B. (2009): Interview with Vladimír Palko (chairman and manager of František Mikloško's campaign team), March 5, Bratislava.

major candidate František Mikloško, as was the case in 2004, in 2009 as well he rather used help of political appointees than of political marketing/communication experts. See *Table 5*.

From year to year, more and more presidential candidates do not underestimate the role media play in the political process and campaign. And there is more interest in presidential politics among the media as well. When in 1999, there were only two presidential debates with major candidates, in 2004 we saw three – including a duel between the two major candidates. In 2009 this number has more than doubled to seven debates that included the two advancing candidates (see *Figure 7*). And there was interest in the debates. The discussion between four major candidates ahead of the first round of voting on the major TV Markíza was seen by 695-thousand viewers, which was more than the daily average, the debate on TV JOJ was watched by 326-thousand viewers and record-breaking was for the news channel TA3 its first debate 300-thousand viewers.²⁰ Not to mention the online news portals which in 2009 all devoted a special section to the presidential elections, this was not the case in 2004 or 1999.

Figure 9: Number of Televised Presidential Debates between Major Candidates



	1999		2004		2009	
	1st Round	2nd Round	1st Round	2nd Round	1st Round	2nd Round
Schuster - Mečiar	2	0		X	X	X
Gášparovič - Mečiar	X	X	1	2	X	X
Gášparovič - Radičová	X	X	X	X	3	4

Source: Research of B. Ondrášik

²⁰ SME.sk, (2009): *Debaty divácke rekordy netrhali*. 20 March, 2009 (<http://volby.sme.sk/c/4357100/debaty-divacke-rekordy-netrhali.html>)

The use of brands in political campaigns: in 2009 there was a clear shift in the use of party brands than in two other presidential election. When in 1999 and 2004 tried the major candidates distance themselves from political campaigns and run on personality concept, this was only partially the case in 2009. Opposition candidate Iveta Radičová tried indirectly to distance herself from the unpopular leader of her party SDKÚ, Ivan Gašparovič was more than eager to use the support of the coalition parties and endorsements of the nation's top politicians – like the Prime Minister Robert Fico or the extreme right leader Ján Slota.

Interesting to mention is also the break-up of marketing tools used in the 1999-2009 campaigns (see *Table 4*). Most of the tools from the mix were used in the 1999 campaign – the reasons were that the public TV broadcaster allowed every presidential candidate a free TV commercial. However, when in 2004 there were virtually no Television ads, they did return in 2009 – TV ad had Ivan Gašparovič, Iveta Radičová and Zuzana Martináková, audiovisual Web ad had František Mikloško as well. Because of the four million SKK cap on campaign finances, there are no large differences in the financial cost between 1999 and 2009. In 2004 the campaigns cost of the four major candidates was 13.280.000 SKK and in 2009 it was 11.890.000. However, there is speculation that unofficially at least the campaigns of the two advancing candidates have been much more expensive (see *Table 2*).

Usually the presidential campaigns in Slovakia are in form of the war of billboards. More about branding and billboard messages is in *Table 1*.

Table 1: Billboard and Ad messages used in the 2004 and 2009 campaigns

	2004	2009
Martin Bútora (independent)	Good President - As a diplomat he knows the world, as a sociologist he knows Slovakia, as a therapist he knows the human soul – People deserve a good state and bearable reforms – Let’s have courage to do good decisions.	x
Ivan Gašparovič (in 2004: HZD, SMER, EÚ in 2009: SMER, SNS, HZD, KSS)	I think patriotically, feel socially	I think patriotically, feel socially - with SMER: Experience and stability – with SMER and SNS: Together for Slovakia. President for the whole Slovakia, etc.
Eduard Kukan (SDKÚ, SDA – Social Democratic Alternative)	Eduard Kukan is a decent man and he can convince without screaming – I work for Slovakia at home and abroad	x
Vladimír Mečiar (HZDS)	I vote for a male, I vote for Vladimír Mečiar.	x
František Mikloško (in 2004: KDH, SMK, OKS in 2009: KDS)	Only self-confident nation deserves respect and admiration of other nations of Europe. – Good Day, Slovakia.	First Slovakia, than Europe. – I can look to your eyes – Values of November.
Rudolf Schuster (independent, KSS, trade unions)	You are not alone.	
Zuzana Martináková (SF)	x	Vote freely, vote for Zuzana - President needs more than courage
Milan Melník (HZDS)	x	Personality for the world, heart for Slovakia.
Iveta Radičová (SDKÚ, KDH, SMK, OKS)	x	Yes, We can. – Let’s find the courage to be decent – It is lot of us, who want righteous Slovakia.

Source: Školkay, A.. 2004. Prezidentské voľby na Slovensku...CEPR, 2009 research of B. Ondrášik

Table 2: Who spent how much in Slovak Presidential Elections 2004 and 2009

	2004	2009
Martin Bútora	2.643.852	X
Ivan Gašparovič	2.681.779	3.916.380
Eduard Kukan	3.984.893	X
Vladimír Mečiar	3.966.829	X
František Mikloško	2.310.051	2.161.122
Rudolf Schuster	1.868.274	X
Zuzana Martináková	X	1.816.453
Iveta Radičová	X	3.999.555

Source: Data compiled from news agency TASR in 2004 and from Hospodárske noviny daily in 2009

Table 3: Marketing Tools In Slovak Presidential Elections 1999-2009

	1999				2004				Ga
	Gatherings	TV Ads	Print/Leaflets	Outdoor	Gatherings	TV Ads	Print/Leaflets	Outdoor	
Schuster	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
Mečiar	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
Vášaryová	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	X	X	X	X	
Gašparovič	X	X	X	X	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
Kukan	X	X	X	X	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	
Radičová	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Mikloško	X	X	X	X	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	

Source: Analysis of B. Ondrášik

Table 4: Professionalization of Campaigns During Presidential Elections

	Inspired by a Foreign Campaign	Use of Foreign Consultants	U
Schuster	No	Partially, he was reportedly considering to hire high level consultants from California in 2004	N
Mečiar	No	No	P
Vášaryová	No	No	N
Gašparovič	Yes, admitted by his political party	No	Y
Kukan	Yes, especially use of marketing and commercial tools	Not available	Y
Radičová	Yes, inspired primarily by the Obama 2008 campaign	It invited people from the team of Barack Obama	Y pr
Mikloško	No, according to the campaign chair it was in 2009 campaign in "Slovak way"	No	N

Source: Analysis of B. Ondrášik

Conclusions

The paper presented a coherent and complex analysis of the campaigning process for Slovak Presidency since establishing the direct vote in 1999 through three campaign seasons - the last one in March - April 2009.

There are several noteworthy observances for all of these campaigns. First of all it is the archaic Law no. 46/1999 on Presidential Election which puts unnecessary limits on the campaign finances amount rather than requiring effective transparency. Because of the four million SKK cap (after the euro-SKK conversion: 132.775 euros) on campaign finances, there are no large differences in the financial cost between 1999 and 2009. However, there is speculation that unofficially at least the campaigns of the two advancing candidates have been much more expensive. As well, limiting the campaign for two weeks is not only threatening speedier development of professional campaigning in Slovakia but is also hindering the candidates effectively presenting their case. The same can be said about the campaign and opinion polls moratorium that is still in place even as it is retreating within many Western countries. The recommendation would be fast change and modernization of this legal act.

Every election season has its own specifics that are observed in this research analysis. From the anti-Mečiar sentiments of the 1999 and 2004 campaigns that resulted in the latter campaign with the win of his former ally Ivan Gašparovič towards the most modern campaign of 2009. Comparative analysis of all three campaigns is showing many interesting results. Media always played a vital role in the campaign, in informing the citizens and providing in-depth coverage. But their influence as well as attention to the topic of presidential elections is increasing from one campaign season to the next. When in 1999 there were only two televised debates among major candidates, in 2009 it was already seven. Every relevant traditional medium – print or broadcast – devoted extensive portions of their newscasts and news coverage to the presidential elections, including special supplements or news editions.

There is increasing importance of the Internet. The rising penetration of this multimediu is the reason that large portion of the campaign and news coverage is taking place online. News portals (many of the traditional news outlets) created special sub-portals for election news and all of the campaign teams tried to – less or more – use advantages of the free Internet for their respective campaigns. Community portals like Facebook or video services of YouTube are part of Slovak presidential campaigning as well.

Noteworthy is the break-up of marketing tools used in the 1999-2009 campaigns. Most of the tools from the mix were used in the 1999 campaign – the reasons were that the public TV broadcaster allowed every presidential candidate a free TV commercial. However, when in 2004 there were virtually no Television ads, they did return in 2009. Usually the presidential campaigns in Slovakia are in form of the war of billboards. When in 1999, none of the three major presidential candidates did use a professionally run campaign, relevant consultants domestic or foreign, this started to change in 2004. In 2009 the Slovak campaigning scene moved closer to the U.S. style political marketing. Major candidates had transparent election teams, especially in Iveta Radičová's case, lead by media, PR and advertising professionals.

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