

Get Negative¹ – the Case of Offensive Campaign in 2010 Slovak Parliamentary Election

Viera Žúborová²

Department of Political Science Institute of Social and Political Sciences,
University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Trnava

Get Negative – the Case of Offensive Campaign in 2010 Slovak Parliamentary Election.

This study deals with Parliamentary elections that took place in the Slovak Republic on the 12th of June 2010. The study focuses on the impact and position of negative messaging in the Slovak party system, and also on the ability to use the parties on the electoral and political market. It finds out that political parties in the Slovak republic were more – less influenced by the campaign of the political subject which appeared on the political and party cycle after the faulted parliamentary election in 1998 – the political party Smer, which used the negative messaging in a specific approach, which fits into the processes of hybridization, which is visible in many post-soviet countries. It also finds out that since 2002 parliamentary election, in Slovak political and party system, every electoral period has brought a political subject that copied the logic of the mediatization, but its life cycle lasts only one electoral period. And focus on the increase of the negative messaging in the electoral campaign of political subjects and civic society in 2010 parliamentary election that became a new symbol of the political communication research in the Slovak republic.

Key words: negative, mediatization, emotionalization, campaign, Slovak parties, offensive campaign, negative messaging

Smeron k negativite – ofenzívne kampane v rámci parlamentných volieb na Slovensku.

Táto štúdia sa zaoberá parlamentnými voľbami, ktoré sa konali v Slovenskej republike dňa 12. júna 2010. Štúdia sa sústreďuje na vplyv a postavenie negatívnych správ v slovenskom straníckom systéme, a tiež schopnosť strán využiť tieto na volebnom a politickom trhu. Autorka zisťuje, že politické strany v Slovenskej republike boli viac – menej ovplyvnené kampaňou politického subjektu, ktorý sa objavil na politickej scéne po neúspešných parlamentných voľbách v roku 1998 – politická strana Smer, ktorá používala negatívne správy prostredníctvom špecifického prístupu, ktorý zapadá do procesu hybridizácie, ktorá je vidieť v mnohých post – sovietskych krajinách. Štúdia tiež polemizuje, že od roku 2002, každé volebné obdobie prinieslo politické témy, ktoré kopírovali logiku medializácie, ale životný cyklus bol obmedzený len jedno volebné obdobie. Štúdia sa zameriava na zvýšenie negatívnych správ vo volebnej kampani politických subjektov a občianskej spoločnosti v roku 2010 a parlamentné voľby, ktoré sa stali novým symbolom politickej komunikácie a výskumu v prostredí Slovenskej republiky.

Kľúčové slová: negatívny, medializácia, emocionalizácia, kampaň, politické strany, ofenzívna kampaň, negatívne odkazovanie

¹ „going negative“ is a function of campaign factors, such as the type of candidate, and campaign environment factors, such as the competitiveness of the race and the size of the field (Haynes, Flowers and Harman: 2006, p. 109).

² Address: PhDr. Viera Žúborová: Department of Political Science Institute of Social and Political Sciences, UCM. Nám. J. Herdu 2, 917 01 Trnava. viera.zuborova@gmail.com

Introduction

The development, impact and intensity of political communication reached also the region of post-communist countries in Central Europe. The development of political communication with the comparison with the Western countries was characterized as a process of day – to – day learning. The main reason was that the post-communist countries step right into the third age of the political communication³. Both systems – political and media, from the beginning of their independence, were standing in front a new environment, in other words the actors entered into a new politics and mediated reality. They forced rapidly the processes of homogenization, Americanization, mediatization, globalization. However, the post-communist countries were not able to adapt to the whole scales of these processes in their political and media systems. The main reason was the position and the impact of former communist ideology in post-communist countries (Holmes 1997). The vacuum that appeared after the collapse was attended by the common crush of traditional institutions. Political parties lost their credibility as a tool of socialization. The new democratic institutions had to build their pillars on the voters support again.

Nowadays, the literature characterizes this process of changes as a “middle way” model of hybridization⁴ (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 1995; Blumler and Gurevitch 2001; Plasser and Plasser 2002) which many countries chose, due to disability of the adaption of the patterns which were characterized in the third age of political communication.

Nowadays, after 20 years of the successful end of democratization, integration in the international structures, the view of the position of political communication in post-communist countries of Central Europe have changed fundamentally. The mediatization and Americanization of the political and media system begins to create visible contours.

Professionalization, personalization, negativity and emotionalization as the main pillars of mediatization are more visible than ever in Central Europe, especially after the parliamentary election in 2005 – 2006 in Visegrad countries, especially in the Slovak republic (Šaradín 2008). But the “super-

³ The scientific literature focuses on three ages of political communication. The first age of political communication also known as the golden ages followed after the Second World War, when the connection of the voters and political parties was based on a strong ideological or party base. The second age of political communication started with the remaining impact of the television in the 60s. The media logic started to change rapidly, which climaxed in the third age of political communication.

⁴ As Nord (2006: 66 p.) observes the model of hybridization defined as a shopping model, where the domestic patterns of political communication interact with patterns from the American model or as Rizer’s Mcdonaldization (1993, 1998).

election” year 2010⁵ changed also this view on the negative campaign in the Visegrad countries, especially in the Slovak republic.

The main objective of this article is to analyze the mediatization of political communication in Slovak political (party) and media system, especially the position of negativity in the political – electoral campaigning.

The article will focus on three main processes which were visible in more professionalized way than before:

- a) the negativity appeals as a fundamental pillar of polarization of the electoral market;
- b) the negativity appeals as a fundamental pillar in civic self – mobilization in the (prior) electoral period;
- c) the negativity appeals as the main coverage tool of media reporting of election and candidates.

Theoretical framework

An essence of negativity is a part of political communication as old as political activity itself (Lilleker 2006). But we must observe that this process in the past was a top – down process. The revolution in this process was brought with the media, the second flow started to be visible and a bottom – up process came from the media system and society. Scholars also agree that the stabile position of the patterns showed up came in the Second Age of political communication in the 60s, when the television started to distribute political messages to a wider population of the society, particularly in the USA. Till the Third Age of political communication opened a media revolution in the countries (western European democracies, especially in Anglo – American countries, Blumler and Kavanagh 1999) all over the world. The Third age not only brought changes in the common flow of messages, but also new phenomena as homogenization, modernization, secularization, mediatization.

Mainly the homogenization (also known as Americanization or globalization) and mediatization intervene the political (party) and media system in European countries. We must observe that not in all countries in Europe the process of implementation of the new patterns of political communication was – or – is fulfilled. As Blumler and Kavanagh observe, the countries in transition, in the 90s, and rapidly entered in the new age – Third age of political communication, miss the fundamental grounds of the two before, due to an authoritative communist rules. Mainly the post-soviet countries were on a middle – way of implementation of these patterns. The term “hybridization” appeared in the political communication research. In other

⁵ The parliamentary elections were held in Slovak, Czech and Hungary republic and the presidential election in Poland.

words, this implementation process is based on a “shopping model” which is characterized through the coexistence of the process of copying American model and domestic patterns specific for a set of countries (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 1995; Voltmer 2007; Blumler and Gurevitch 2001).

The Third Age of political communication brought in the post-soviet countries many limitations and uncovered many barriers in the implementation process in all new patterns of political communication. This also brought me to selection of these patterns which were under-dimensioned in recent years (mediatization) and also to selection of a country where this under-dimensioning was most visible (the Slovak republic).

The Slovak case of mediatization

The accession to the Third age of political communication in the Slovak republic starts slower than in other Visegrad countries because it was attended by the ambition of emancipation from the delegate rule⁶ of charismatic leader Vladimir Mečiar. We can observe that the “independent” media system started to exist during and after the parliamentary election in 1998. Also the main theme (campaign theme) before and during the campaign period for the parliamentary election was the creation of the conflict lines – anti, without the absence of an offensive campaigning, only with the ambition of an appeal to change.⁷ The campaign theme had a huge impact not only on the behaviour of political parties but especially on the behaviour of the voters choice and the quantity of the voters 84.24 %, which was the highest since the 1990 parliamentary election (95.53 %).

Political camps had also a huge impact on the result of the “second” parliamentary election in 2002, but not so visible and strong as in the parliamentary election in 1998. In addition the ambition in the political communication research to discover the credibility and the impact of it was under-dimensioned in this period. The 2002 election not only confirmed the direction of the Slovak republic to an open and fully integrated country, but also created space for new political subjects based on different patterns than the current ones. The existence and bases of the new political subject arose from other ideas, directions and mainly they were more linked with the new media environment and subjects that operated there. The first political subject that entered to the age of mediatization of Slovak political and media system was

⁶ The so-called delegative democracy (O'Donnell) in Slovak republic existed in the period between 1994 – 1998 and was characterized as the government of one party – one leader.

⁷ In the electoral period two camps were created – (1) Anti – meciar camp represented by a large coalition of parties along the whole political scale under the name „Blue Coalition“ and (2) Pro-meciar camp represented mainly by the Movement for democratic Slovakia.

the political party Smer. Party was formed in an environment when the left – wing parties were fragmented. Smer was characterized, at the beginning, as a party without any ideological externalization, formed by popular politician Robert Fico, previous member of the Party of democratic left. The sense of negativism and emotionalization prompt was marginalized in this period, also in the new political subject.⁸

The premature parliamentary election in 2006 was bearing a different look than the two ones before, nowadays we can talk about seven different (special) signs:

- (a) the creation of the inner fight between the political parties that characterized the political right – and the current coalitions;
- (b) strengthening and stabilization of the voters' preferences of the current opposition political parties;
- (c) strengthening and stabilization of the voters' preferences of the small political parties (SF) or non-parliamentary political parties (SNS);
- (d) the existence of a political apathy of the civil society – especially the apathy towards the reform process which promoted the current coalition;
- (e) the visible feeling of the traditionally conflict camp (anti) pro-mečiar;
- (f) stripping of the traditional political line – left – right;
- (g) the aspiration of the creation of a new polarized conflict line (?);
- (h) the absence of a “real” electoral – ideological fight between opposition and coalition.

The negative messaging as a communication strategy had minimum impact on this parliamentary election in the Slovak republic, but a new environment of these patterns was opened in political and party systems. A sense of mutation of a permanent (negative) campaign that the political subject Smer used after the entry in the political cycle noted at last the fruits of it efforts. Smer as the winner of the parliamentary election had an exclusive right to form the coalition.

Before the parliamentary election in 2010 the political communication of the political subjects was in the relationship with the new patterns, which appeared in the Third age of political communication, especially very under-dimensioned mediatization. The personalization of political communication on both side – politics and media – was already implemented in the political and

⁸ Adumbration of any negativity was only visible in the European parliamentary election, where the party Smer tried to influence and take the attention to its side through a billboard campaign with the main title „*In the European union – yes, but no with naked backsides*“. It was the first time in history of Slovak political campaign that any political subject tried to use offensive campaign against another subject. The reactions of Slovak political and public society for the first time evoked mixed feelings and views.

party system, also with this process and the growing impact of political marketing the professionalization of political communication took roots in the Slovak system. As Norris (2000) points out the professionalization is strongly connected to the electoral professionalism, specific types of strategies downloadable to mobilize the voters' behaviour and to interest and attract the media. These patterns of mediatization in Slovak political – media – societal system were fully adopted and modified on the environment which exists in this post-communist country. But still the two patterns of mediatization – negativity and emotionalization – were under-dimensioned. In a way, this was changed during the 2010 parliamentary election.

Faulting election in communication?

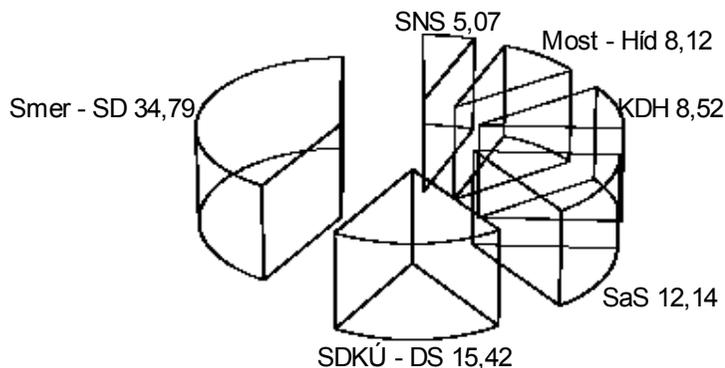
The winning party of the parliamentary election in 2010 was Smer (Smer-SD) with 34.79 %. Deeply behind followed by the Union of Christian Democrats (SDKÚ-DS) with 15.42 %, new non-parliamentary party Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) with 13.14 %, Movement of Christian Democrats 8.52 % (KDH), new non-parliamentary party The Bridge 8.12 % (Most – Híd) and the last party which crossed the election threshold with 5.07 % Slovak National Party (SNS).

The first resonant surprise was the election achievement of the new non-parliamentary parties, but the most visible and the most interesting boundary mark was the electoral crash of the „fixed star“ in the political and societal system. Political party Movement for Democratic Slovakia with the controversial and charismatic leader Vladimir Mečiar, achieved only 4.32 %, which means the end of their agency in fact after over 18 years. We could also allege that one era in the political and societal system of the Slovak republic has ended. In addition, the election crush of the party represented mainly by the Hungarian minority Hungarian coalition with 4.33 % was a surprise.

The media system in Slovakia not only before the parliamentary election, but also in the whole election period was signed by unusual relationship with the coalition parties. In other words, the connections, relations were further – out of the “liberal” model, also known as the Anglo – American model of media system, which views the media as a communication channel between government and citizens (Lauk 2008: p. 194). As the model describes, media should provide balanced and objective information, important for decision making of individuals. The hostility was most visible only between the media and the political party – Smer. This specific relationship was the result of the communication style of the party leader. After the Smer's entry to the parliamentary seats in 2006 as the winner and also as the dominant party of the

new coalition, the relationship started to be more intensive from the point of view of offensive (non) verbal attacks, from both sides.

Scheme No. 1: The results of parliamentary election held on 12th June 2010



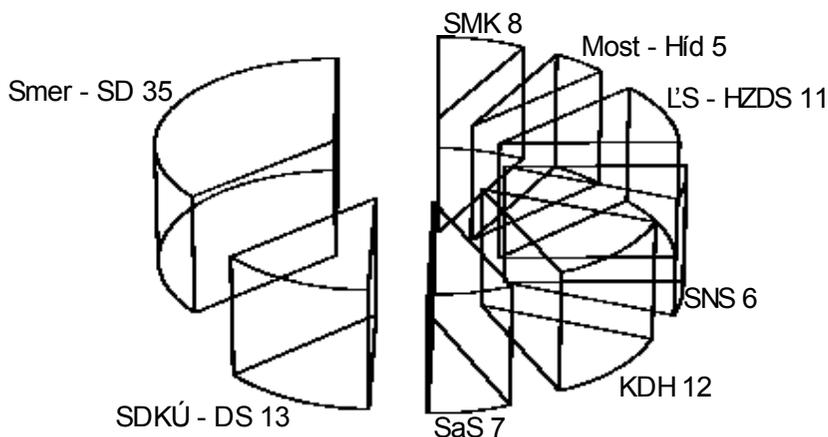
Source: <http://app.statistics.sk>, own data handling

The next impulse that strengthened the hostility between the government and media was the new printing law passed in the parliament in 2008, which orders to the newspapers commitment to advertise the answer of an individual about whom something was written up by three days. Which opened the space for manipulating of the media. As Oliver Vujovic, the general secretary of SEEMO (South East Europe Media Organisation), alleged, that this controversial law could lead the media to an automatic censorship, due to bankruptcy. It opened the space of self-promotion of politics.⁹

The Smer, although even if it did not have a good relationship with the media system in common, dominated in the sphere of political communication before the parliamentary election in 2010. As the scheme No. 2 showed, The Smer was the most mentioned political subject in daily news, especially in the official period of electoral campaign. Broadly, we can say that the dominating position was gradually built after the entry in 1999 (especially in the 2002 parliamentary election) in the political and party system through permanent campaigning.

⁹ General proclamation of the International Press Institute (IPI) and SEEMO in Vienna 18th April 2008. At: <http://www.wpfc.org/?q=node/175&page=3>

Scheme No. 2: Percentage of mentions of (relevant)¹⁰ political subjects in daily news in the period of 1st – 11th June 2010.



Source: <http://www.strategie.sk>, own data handling

To explain the dominant position of the political party – Smer, we must focus on their channels and strategies used in the parliamentary campaign, and also to compare them with other political subjects active in this period following the same target. For this explanation, I will use the six common strategic thinking tools, three are based on positive orientation and the other three on negative orientation (Reynolds and Whitlark 1995):

- (1) reinforce (strengthen the positives of the offered “product”);
- (2) refocus (modify the “product” to be better differentiated from similar “products” offered at the same political market);
- (3) redefine (uncover the weakness which is understood as strength);
- (4) reframe (uncover the strength of the main competitor, which is understood as his weakness);
- (5) redirect (turn-over from the strength of the main competitor to his weakness);
- (6) remove (pay attention to the strength of the competitor, present it as if it did not exist).

The official campaign period for parliamentary election on the 12th June 2010 in Slovak republic started on the 22th May 2010, but already before the official campaigning, political subjects started framing the political (electoral)

¹⁰ The term relevant political subjects describes these political parties that had the best position to be elected in the 2010 parliamentary election. Public opinion researchers finally issued this, 8 months before the parliamentary election.

market, presenting their “products” through billboards, slogans, covered advertisement.

If we focus on the first tool of the positive orientation – *reinforce* – every potential political party in the Slovak political environment (except for the new non-parliamentary parties) tries to reinforce the connection between the party basis and the followers at the electoral market. The best examples impending to this theoretical concept are the reinforcement of the party bases of the Movement of Christian Democrats, Slovak Democratic and Christian Union, Smer and Slovak National Party. Each of these subjects used their own communication rhetoric, leaders and channels to re-cover past traditional messages into a new visage. The typical example is the campaign of the Democratic and Christian Union because in the 1998 parliamentary election it offered to the voters “the chance to change” through a new electoral leader Iveta Radičová. Also Christian Democrats used a similar strategy, with a new electoral and party leader Ján Figel’, they presented the traditional ideas and agenda which were dominant and familiar for this subjects (tradition, family, Christianity, solidarity, nationhood and justice).

Smer, as in 2006 parliamentary election, during whole electoral period and also in the campaign period before the 2010 parliamentary election had a strong advertisement of the welfare state with the sub-term “safety with security”. Also a specific reproducing of old strategy was visible in the campaign agenda of the Slovak National Party, which again opened the Hungarian (Roma) question.

The positive communication tool – *refocus* – in Slovak conditions was and still is more influenced by the media system than by the parties themselves. The most visible example, or in other words the most useable term which media use to differentiate the political subject, was through two colours – red and blue. Mainly to differentiate the political party Smer from the opposing parties. This simple differentiation influenced also the rhetoric and negative orientation of the political subject, which I will mention later, and also the characterization and explanation of position of the negative tool in communication strategies of political parties. In addition, it was the media system, which played an important role in the advertisement of two potential blocks (camps), which, from their point of view, stand opposite to each other. This common view was formed for decades, mainly after the entry into the political (party) cycle of the political subject Smer, which was the main reason why the traditional camps crashed down.

As Reynolds and Whitlark observe (1995) the communication tools – *redefine and reframe* – are most commonly used in combination together to influence the public opinion. They maintained that in the “political campaigns it is important to redefine a potential weakness so that it is perceived as a

strength and reframe a competitor's strength so that it is perceived as a weakness" (1995: p. 13).

When we focus on the electoral campaign of Slovak political parties, in common we observe that the combination of this strategic communication is less used, or let us say that it is marginal. Mainly, political subjects are using only the negative tool – reframe.

Certain ambition to make use of this combination was visible in the campaign of the Slovak National Party which was criticized for their racist campaign and the offensive campaign against the Roma population, especially with the billboards. The party members, after a huge critique from non-governmental organizations, were looking for opportunities to show the parties' association with the "Roma question" in a positive light. The political party was asked to show that the open and promotion of the "Roma problem" is the only way to start a scientific discussion to solve it. They promote this view through a short documentary film of the Roma citizens which monitored the daily life of the community and they presented the solution of these problems through the integration of the Roma into the society, and not their exclusion as the other political subject presented in their agenda, if their anyway included it.

As we mentioned before, this parliamentary election was a fault in managing the communication campaigning. The negative orientation was the most used tool there. The first negative orientation tool – *redirect* – was visible mostly in the campaigning of the Smer.

The opposition political parties presented them as political subjects with the scientific potential and the only alternative which could stop the public spending and encumber of the society and state. However, their agendas (mainly the electoral agenda of the strongest political subject SDKÚ) promote also minimal interference to the social and welfare life to the citizens. Also through this positive campaign the researchers of the public opinion showed that the opposition parties had a good starting potential point to form a new government – coalition.

The investigations also showed that the strongest party Smer lost their preferences rapidly. After these proxy results, Smer changed the party communication from positive campaigning to negative – offensive campaigning. The next part (turn – over of the competitor's strength to his weakness) of the redirect tool started to act in the political system. The Smer started to promote a negative billboard campaign, they redirected attention away from the strengths of the opposition parties to the main areas in which they were weak, through the explanation of their antecedent governance. Smer

created an ad called “they will do it again!”¹¹ with the sub-banner “stop the coalition SDKÚ – KDH – SMK!”.

The next political subject, which used the negative communication tool – redirect – in a specific and conservative way was the Movement of Christina Democrats (KDH). The party redirected the attention of the main advertisement of the Smer – welfare state – to the area where the subject was very weak at this period. The weakness was visible mainly in the cooperation of the Smer with the small coalition parties, especially the past causes in the period of their governance. The Christian democrats, like the Smer, used the billboard campaign for presentation of this ad, they also used the “direction”¹² as a binding phrase to recognition that it is an offensive ad against the current coalition. The main negative phrases “Who votes for Fico, votes also for Mečiar and Slota”, was visible in every billboard throughout the country.

The negative communication tool – *remove* – was offensive and directly used only by the Smer. As the common definition described the process of using this tool as the most extreme to the negative placement. It uncovers that the competitor’s strength does not exist. The party members and leaders of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union are positioned as individuals who are transparent, independent and especially “clear” as they talk about the financing of the party. One effective approach for a political subject to take it to show that this party is not as clear as it looks. An example is the cause about the fictive sponsor of financing of the party. This cause was monitored before with the organization Fair – play, but the mediatization of it was only in the role of the strongest political subject before the parliamentary election – The Smer, mainly through its leader and current Prime Minister Robert Fico. As he mentioned, only two members of the party should know about the fictitious financing of the party – the cash keeper of the party and the party leader. Nevertheless, the cause went on and Prime Minister Fico accused the Democrats of washing fast money through foreign institutions, through a series of press briefings he gradually uncovered real evidence of it. The consequences of the mediatization was the demission of Mikuláš Dzurinda as the electoral

¹¹ The main campaign banner was supplemented with the comments: „They stopped down the highways. They will do it again!“, „They cleared off Slovak republic. They will do it again“, „They chiseled the invalids. They will do it again!“, „They gave the power to the Party of Hungarian Coalition. They will do it again!“, „They raised the prices of energy. They will do it again“, or „They charged the health system. They will do it again!“.

¹² The main motto of the communication campaign of the Christian democrats was „the way is more than the Smer“. The negative tool was used for the description of the past governance of the current coalition – in the words: „We are the way without explosive“, „We are the way without daubily road fee“, „We are the way without tunnels“, „We are the way without garage firms“.

leader in the parliamentary election. The new successor on the position of electoral leader was Iveta Radičová.

Get offensive

The use of negative strategies messaging can be used through various sources and networks as a tool to entice press attention of a cardinal message or use the negative message as a free – standing communication strategy (Haynes, Flowers and Harman 2006: p. 107). The negative messaging is used to point out the weaknesses of opponents, but also in many cases the offensive candidate – party used the negative messaging, not only to paralyze the opponent in a specific sphere – agenda, but also attack the opponent with his own agenda. The main reason for the negative messaging is the influence the behaviour of the voters. As Lau assertive (1982, 1984) voters in their decision process give a bigger weight on negative messages – negative information than on permanent positive information. The creation of a negative message doesn't automatically denote a positive attention of the attacking subjects. To influence the behaviour of society, political subjects must adjudge which type of media (free vs. paid media or commercial vs. public) they will use for the delivering. The free and commercial media are more effective, but also less controllable as paid and public media. Negative campaign often had a backward impact (Garramore 1984). The voters often compared the reaction of the candidate in the campaign period, with the period of governing. In other words, how the candidates responded to the negative messaging – campaigning the voters can subedit how they could act in the office (Mark 2009: p. 239). The conclusion of an effective negative campaign as Mark (2009: p. 236) observe that an ultimate winners in the permanent negative campaign will be those who take the most effective control of the language and vernacular of politics.

As we mentioned above through the analysis of the ability of the applications of the communication tool, only the political party Smer was able to combine both (positive and negative communication tool) effectively. Especially when we focus on the negative communication tools, only Smer used this orientation in its full – weight. But we must also deliberate the fact, if the use of negative mobilization tools really mobilized the voters or antagonistic – demobilize voters to vote.

If we try to recognize the result of the use of negative ads in the campaign period, we must focus not only on the ability of political subjects to operate in this orientation, but also to focus on the position and impact of media system, and last but not least on the position and the activity of the (electoral) society.

As the Memo 98¹³ concluded through the monitoring of the media broadcasting, the period from the 24th May till 7th June 2010, the top news were negatively oriented (Scheme No. 3). The most broadcasted theme during the campaign period was the High floods that hit the Slovak republic. When we count off the second theme campaigns which had to be broadcasted compulsorily in the public media¹⁴ (STV and Slovak broad cast), the television broadly didn't inform about the political subject, the election in general.

Scheme No. 3: Media broadcasting of actual themes in the domestic televisions (24th May till 7th June 2010).

Actual themes	STV	TA3	Markiza	JOJ	Aggregate
High floods	02:00:28	02:00:50	03:17:04	02:09:13	09:18:35
Campaign	00:34:25	00:45:20	00:56:52	00:12:33	02:39:10
Support of Greece	00:35:01	00:34:46	00:28:44	00:24:25	02:02:56
Hassle in the case of dual citizenship	00:33:16	00:36:51	00:25:59	00:19:00	01:55:06
Organized crime, Mafia	00:13:33	00:15:24	00:22:57	00:22:02	01:13:56
Built-up of highways	00:18:34	00:13:48	00:26:52	00:05:15	01:04:29
Roma question	00:11:18	00:09:59	00:10:42	00:06:03	00:37:02
Financing of political parties	00:08:49	00:08:10	00:12:51	00:04:05	00:33:55

Source: <http://www.memo98.sk/own> data handing

In other words, we can say that mainly the media system in a specific way dictated the intensity and the communication strategy of the political subject in the campaign period. As we mentioned above, that the political party – Smer – had a specific relationship with the Slovak media. Even in spite of this handicap, they have over-run the media broadcasting. In a decade of economic crisis, the decade of dimness, the Smer communicate with the (electoral) society with a simple and effective phrase – “Safety in hard times” – that described the governance style of the party. If we compare it with the campaign phrase of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – “The Change is near-

¹³ Memo98 is an internationally-recognized, independent and non-profit specialist media institution, with 11 year-long experience of conducting media monitoring and research and assisting civil society groups. More information at: <http://www.memo98.sk/en/index.php>

¹⁴ The law edit the broadcasting of a political advertisement The law imposes for the Slovak Television and Slovak broad cast, that they had to offere every political subject maximum of 30 minutes of its advertisement. The basis of equality in the broadcasting must also be observed

hand” – we could see only through a simple comparison the psychological effect of these two phrases. The secret message of these phrases should lead to the mobilization of potential voters on the both sides. As we know now that the Smer, even in spite of the fact that the research agencies estimated a downward trend in preferences, and estimated that the Smer wouldn't cross the 30 % border (Scheme No. 4). The negative mobilization in the end of the campaign period by the party was so enormous and offensive, that it reflected in the results of the parliamentary election, where the Smer achieved 34.79 %.

The most interesting was the monitoring of the permanently changed communication tools of the Smer. From the negative orientation (using the remove communication tool) in January – February over the positive orientation (using the reinforce, refocus and redefine communication tools) in March – April, back to the negative again in the period of May – June (using the redirect communication tool).

Scheme No. 4: Researches of the public opinion of Focus, MVK, Polis agencies in the period of 01/2010 – 06/2010 of relevant political subjects.

Period→	June			May			April			March			February			January		
Agencies	F	M	P	F	M	P	F	M	P	F	M	P	F	M	P	F	M	P
Party																		
Smer	29.5	32.3	29.1	35.3		34.3	36.8	35.1	36.2	38.4		38.0	39.6	37.1	40.8	41.4	42.0	
SDKÚ	12.1	13.0	15.9	14.0		16.0	13.4	11.7	13.8	14.3		12.7	11.3	12.8	14.4	15.2	9.4	
SaS	12.4	11.5	12.8	13.3		11.9	11.5	11.6	13.2	8.6		13.4	9.6	9.2	10.0	5.1	9.2	
KDH	9.2	10.6	9.8	8.3		9.9	8.6	11.4	9.2	9.7		8.0	9.6	12.7	8.1	9.0	8.9	
SNS	6.5	6.2	7.1	6.1		5.3	8.6	6.2	6.2	6.3		6.7	6.2	4.9	6.0	6.2	6.0	
SMK	7.7	5.6	5.7	5.9		5.1	5.1	6.0	5.8	5.2		5.9	5.1	6.0	5.1	5.6	6.7	
Most-Híd	5.2	5.9	5.0	5.6		5.0	5.1	5.2	5.3	6.9		5.2	5.6	6.6	5.6	5.2	5.4	
HZDS	5.0	5.2	4.6	5.1		4.0	5.4	5.1	4.0	5.4		4.4	5.8	5.2	4.1	6.5	6.4	

Key: F – Focus Agency, M – MVK Agency, P – Polis Agency;

Sources: <http://www.focus-research.sk/>, http://spravy.pravda.sk/prieskumy-agentur-focus-median-mvk-a-polis-f2k/-sk-volby.asp?c=A100421_160242_sk-volby_p12, own data handing

If we gather round to the analyse the selection of the negative tools in each period of the political party Smer, we observe that the strategy changes as the preferences of the political subject downturn.

In the period of January – February when the preferences were on the top level the Smer selected the removal of the communication tool with the goal

not to target the staunch voters of the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union, but rather to demobilize voters of it, to show non-credibility of the political party. The goal was to marginalize the potential rival in the upcoming parliamentary election. Most experts in the communication field alleged, that this strategy was employed earlier, and that the tactical timing was dismissed before the official parliamentary election started. The leader of the Smer Robert Fico eliminated the biggest rival much earlier, and instituted on his position a non-controversial and non-offensive leader Iveta Radičová.

Smer used the second communication tool – redirect – in the final period of the electoral campaign. When the preferences crashed down by approximately 10 %. This period was characterized by the mobilization of the society through the civic campaigns, where anti-direction or anti-Fico campaigns dominated. The civic campaigns through popular actors, moderators, or only ordinary (young) citizens appealed mainly through social networks to “VOTE”¹⁵ and to “VOTE THE RIGHT PARTIES”¹⁶. Nevertheless, the most visible interference came from the media system with the main theme of the financing of the political party Smer.

Smer turnover was from the strength of the main competitor to its weakness and from the weakness of the party to their strength with a massive negative campaign through billboards and promotion materials. The main goal was to target voters who were undecided or leaning toward the political party Smer. In other words, the Smer negative ads should not only have influenced the feelings of fear about the new right – wing coalition, but also to mobilize the constant voters to go voting.

Despite that, the Smer won the parliamentary election, it allocated a zero coalition potential in the negotiations with other political parties who took to the parliamentary seats.

Another case of negativity, that brought a political subject in the marginalized position, was the case of the Party of Hungarian Coalition. In the past elections, the party achieved the average from 9.12 % to 11.68 %. Before the parliamentary election, the party passed inner transformation and also a process of exchange at the position of (electoral) party leader. The popular Béla Bugár was relieved of Pál Čáky, a conservative and slightly radical politician. This also led to the separation of so-called Bugár wing from the Hungarian

¹⁵ The first appeal for the voters mobilization (especially young voters) was a non-party activity of a group of young students, whose were inspired from the video to the registration to the presidential election in USA under the title „5 Friends“, the Slovakian equivalent was „Go vote“ (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HEVnZqZLRpY>)

¹⁶ Vote the right – wing parties – a appeal came from group of actors. It was a short animated film with the title „if you would like to get your children out of the way, then vote for Fico, and they will leave you themselves. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjNCEFLQnCw>).

coalition, and a creation of a new non-parliamentary party The Bridge. The main campaign theme of Hungarian coalition was to discredit the new political party, which was also the main rival in the up – coming election. Mainly, the campaign was only built on negative tool, the party attacked the new Hungarian party, instead of a positive promotion of general themes, ideas and agenda of the party. The result of this offensive campaign was the electoral crush of the Hungarian coalition, and as Movement for Democratic Slovakia, one era was closed. This example of Hungarian coalition opens a new research environment in the position and the influence of negative orientation of (de) mobilization of the electoral market.

Conclusion

This paper has presented the position of the negative tools in campaign in Slovak parliamentary election. Mainly the ability of the political subject to be able to use the communication tools in their combination. In contrast to the theory, we posit that the Slovak political parties does not have the capacity to promote political participation through the negative ads, except for one political subject which dominated in the communication sphere. The political party Smer dominated and still dominates in this sphere. We could allege that Smer dictates the development in the political communication. The ability of using negative and positive tools is, in the Slovak party system, viewed as a revolution in the political communication, especially in the mediatization sphere. Smer, especially the leader, makes use of his position in the media broadcasting. He is able to redefine his potential weakness, or the one of his party in the relations with the media so that it is perceived as a strength and reframe the media strength so that it is perceived as a weakness, mainly in the eyes of the electoral society.

The main target of this paper was also to show the importance for the future to focus on the position and the impact of voter mobilization and demobilization through (positive) negative ads in the campaign period. If, as we mentioned above, the position of the political party Smer in the future does not fade, this subject will be able to dictate the ads of the whole party system in the Slovak republic. The best example for now, is the term “welfare state” which started to be used in the agendas of major part of the relevant political parties.

REFERENCES

Blumler, J. G., Kavanagh, D. 1999. The Third Age of Political Communication: Influences and Features. *Political Communication*, (16): pp. 209-230.

- Blumler, J. G., Gurevitch, M. 2001. "Americanization" Reconsidered: U.K. – U.S. Campaign Communication Comparisons Across Time. In Bennett, L. & Entman, R. M. (eds): *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Haynes, A. A., Flowers, J. F., Harman J. 2006. Going Negative. *Journal of Political Marketing*, (5:1), pp. 105-125.
- Kaid, L. L., Holtz-Bacha, Ch. (eds) 1995. *Political Advertising in Western Democracies. Parties & Candidates on Television*. London: Sage Publications.
- Lau, R. 1982. Negativity in Political Perception. *Political Behavior*, (4), pp. 353-377.
- Lau, R. 1984. Two Explanations for Negativity Effects in Political Behavior. *American Journal of Political Science*, (29) pp. 119-138.
- Lauk, E. 2008. How Will It All Unfold? Media Systems and Journalism Cultures in Post-Communist Countries. In K. Jakubowicz and M. Sükösd (Eds.), *Finding the Right Place on the Map: Central and Eastern European Media Change in a Global Perspective* (pp. 193-212). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lilleker, D. G. 2006. *Key concepts in political communication*. London: Sage Publications.
- Mark, D. 2009. *Going Dirty. The Art of Negative Campaigning*. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Memo98. 2010. Final reports of the broadcasting of the political subjects in the media in the electoral period.
<http://www.memo98.sk/index.php?base=data/spravny/2010/1276121715.txt>;
<http://www.memo98.sk/index.php?base=data/spravny/2010/1275038866.txt>;
<http://www.memo98.sk/index.php?base=data/spravny/2010/1273754951.txt>
- Norris, P. 2000. *A Virtuous Circle. Political communications in postindustrial societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Plasser, F., Plasser, G. 2002. *Global political campaigning. A worldwide analysis of campaign professionals and their practices*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Reynolds, J. Th., Whitlark, B. D. 1995. Applying Laddering data to communications strategy and advertising practice. *Journal of Advertising Research*, (35) pp. 9-17.
- Šaradín, P. (ed.) 2007. *Politické kampaně, volby a politický marketing*. Olomouc: Periplum.
- Voltmer, K. (ed.) 2006. *The Mass Media and Political Communication in New Democracies*, London: Routledge.

Viera Žúborová acts as a scientific lecturer at the Department of political science UCM Trnava, and at the same time as a full – time PhD. candidate at the Department of political science and European studies UP Olomouc in the Czech republic. Her specialization is in the fields of political communication, inter and intra – party communication, political (voter) behaviour.

PhDr. Viera Žúborová
 Department of Political Science
 Institute of Social and Political Sciences, UCM
 Nam. J. Herdu 2, 917 01 Trnava
viera.zuborova@gmail.com