

Gbúrová, M. et. al. (2018). Secondary illiteracy or on the causes and consequences of low public interest in politics in Slovakia. (in Slovak: Sekundárny analfabetizmus alebo o príčinách a dôsledkoch nízkeho záujmu verejnosti o politiku na Slovensku). Košice: Filozofická fakulta UPJŠ v Košiciach, 2018, 236 pp. ISBN 978-80-8152-699-2.

The aim of the publication is to draw attention to the problem of declining public interest in political events with regard to the consequences of consumer society. Among the products of a society oriented towards economic progress and consumer lifestyles, which increasingly neglects positive human values and qualities, we can include the low level of civil society participation. However, this problem is not the only cause of low interest in public affairs. The publication provides and explains further reasons for this problem.

The publication, that is the result of the project VEGA 1/0658/16 Research of secondary illiteracy in the Slovak Republic (state - contexts - perspectives) 1/2016 - 12/2018, also looks at the issue of multiculturalism, that has been escalated by the refugee crisis since 2015, which posed a challenge to both the competent authorities and political leaders. A serious consequences of this phenomenon were a sense of threat, fear of losing identity, or concerns about cultural diversity, that were reflected in society or on the political scene. The serious consequences have highlighted the need for a new concept of solutions of the consequences of the cultural differences that many countries are struggling with.

This publication is divided into seven chapters which describe sociological research of the levels of political consciousness of citizens of the Slovak Republic. The authors of individual chapters are Marcela Gbúrová, Renáta Bzdilová, Gabriel Eštok, Alexander Onufrák, Daniel Dobiaš, Tomáš Koziak and Jana Šutajová.

The first chapter written by M. Gbúrová, entitled "On the Issue of the Formation of Political Consciousness of the Citizens of the Slovak Republic Nowadays", deals with political consciousness in the period of socialism in the Czechoslovak Republic and after 1990 in Slovak society. The chapter focuses on the problems brought by the ideology of socialism.. However,

the consequences of public opinion manipulation by political elites, are still apparent after the collapse of the former regime. Such massaging of public opinion has had an impact on the formation and quality of citizenship, which is described in more detail in this chapter. It particularly touches on the democratic political system and its inevitable aspects that leads to the ability of a healthy critical view of the functioning of society as a whole and affects the level of education system, or the up bringing for the politically conscious use of civil rights.

R. Bzdilová, in the chapter “Theoretical and Socio-Political Contexts of the Problem of Secondary Illiteracy in the Slovak Republic”, presents a broader context of secondary illiteracy. It links the issue to the democracy of the 20th century, to its basic pillars of freedom, equality and order (Gbúrová et. al., 2018, p. 60), but especially to the state of democracy in the Slovak Republic, which is influenced by the level of political participation, that, according to R. Bzdilová, can be measured by several factors. She considers the electoral participation to be the most significant one that reflects the degree of its legitimacy. While the interest in political events and the exercise of political rights increases the legitimacy of democracy and its quality, the lack of interest and the apathy towards elections contributes to a possible mistake of the democratic nature of the political system. Therefore, the quality of civil society is primary in this issue. She sees secondary illiteracy, which can be considered as the inability and lack of understanding of the processes in politics, as one of the most recent problems of the practical side of politics (Gbúrová et. al., 2018, p. 77).

Increasing distrust and lack of interest in political life are also reflected in the European Union. The chapter “Euroscepticism in the context of secondary illiteracy” by G. Eštok, defines the causes of this phenomenon in the international environment. However, skepticism in the process of integration and supranational grouping is not homogeneous. It is characterized by a certain degree of heterogeneity. G. Eštok in his chapter defines hard and soft Euroscepticism. While hard Euroscepticism rejects integration and is substantial for anti-system political actors, its contradictory approach disagrees with the European Union’s partial policies (Gbúrová et. al., 2018, p. 91). The chapter reminds that this complex issue which arises in European society, cannot be adequately explained just by the soft vs. hard dichotomy. The problem of such a definition of disinterest and distrust in the chapter is argued. Since European policy immediately relates to domestic policy, the interconnection of Euroscepticism with secondary illiteracy is considerable. Disinterest in public affairs on the domestic scene can affect the degree of

apathy towards international policy as well, and it is a two-way process of interaction. The outcome of this process is particularly evident during the European Parliament elections. In his chapter the author presents the perception of European integration in the Slovak Republic from the perspective of national policy.

In the chapter "On causes of secondary illiteracy" A. Onufrák tries to find answers to the questions about the state of democracy, its extent, limits and possibilities for its improvement. In the introductory part of the paper, the author takes measures on the state of democracy and basic principles of a democratic political system. The true observance and respect of these principles is illustrated by the example of a pre-election and post-election atmosphere and the composition of the Parliament, or the interconnection of individual branches of power in the conditions of the Slovak Republic. In his chapter, the author pays attention to the essential pillar of democracy, a civil society whose position towards the state is to be balanced. In his paper he projects the problem of election procedures and rules. Among some of them, the author sees the shortcomings particularly in electoral legislation, lists of individual political parties and the effectiveness of preferential voting (Gbúrová et. al., 2018, p. 132). He seeks optimal solutions for more effective representation of regions and thus bringing the policy closer to the citizens, the way of placing individual candidates on the list or the effectiveness of preferential voting.

In the chapter entitled "The Phenomenon of Post-Truth - Its Causes and Socio-Political Consequences in the Context of Current Changes in the Information Environment", T. Koziak highlights the increasing importance of the term "post-truth". This term, which was proclaimed the 2016 Word of the Year by the Oxford Dictionary of English (Gbúrová et. al., 2018, p. 157), expresses a belief in the truthfulness of social and political phenomena based on feelings and not on objective facts. The problem of such a perception of reality, political and social phenomena lies in the way of work with information (Gbúrová et. al., 2018, p. 160). This is directly related to the quality of the news coverage and the transformation of traditional media, that increasingly take into account the quantity of information presented rather than the quality of it. Traditional media have been gradually replaced by the so-called modern media, thus changing the information environment. Among these modern media T. Koziak includes, in particular, the Internet and social media, which are de facto without any control, making them a suitable environment for disinformation. In this issue, he mentions several forms of cognitive distortion of information that affect handling of facts and

the subsequent perception of facts, political decision-making or the spread of “own truths” without objective explanations. At the end of the chapter the author proposes solutions to this emerging problem.

The chapter “On the Search for Man, Reason and Freedom in the Intellectual Tradition of Europe” D. Dobiaš briefly describes the evolution of the political reality of Western civilization since the Enlightenment. Rationalism, which was the central concept of this development, became immanent in the ability of cognition as the basis for developing and fulfilling the essence of freedom. D. Dobiaš speaks of the envy of the category of reason and freedom, in connection with the need to know the necessary things, which make man a rational being able to distance himself from the unnecessary, irrational. In connection with the development of society, he mentions the problems of globalization, democratization and the effort to establish a united ideology from a cosmopolitan perspective, which inevitably ties to Western liberal democracy. As he mentions, “*the actions of man and the direction of civilization do not proceed in universally comprehensible lines of development, but order and reason are being introduced into the*” meaningless “*nature of life by us, the people ...*” (Gbúrová et. al., 2018, p. 178). He sees freedom as the ultimate purpose of humanism, whose central object is a free, conscious being, that seeks to institutionalize freedom through law and thus to create a political system in which the power of its individual constituents would be limited. The author seeks answers to the issue of liberal democracy, its main attributes, the restriction of state power, the fulfillment of human, political, legal or social rights and the use of power as such in relation to the category of equality and freedom.

J. Šutajová contributed with her chapter entitled “Distrust of political parties and increase in the number of successful independent candidates in elections at local and regional level of self-government”. The main cause of mistrust in political parties is the apparent degree of disgust with politics, especially party policy, which is largely projected in the tendency to elect such representatives to representative bodies that do not hold the priorities of a particular political party. J. Šutajová presents the main reasons for mistrust of politicians, which include the unfulfilled promises of candidates in the pre-election competition, corruption scandals or pursuing mainly their own economic interests. The reason of the increase of success of independent candidates for local and regional level lies in the lack of interest of political parties in forming regional party structures. In the chapter the author mentions the issue of independent candidates, especially during the decision-making process and during the vote in the area of public affairs.

The chapter deals with the development of self-government in Slovakia after 1989. As it states, after the fall of the totalitarian regime, the state and public administration were transformed gradually. The question, which has remained open and unsolved for a long time, is the territorial division of the Slovak Republic.

The topic of the secondary illiteracy deserves the attention of the professional public. As ignorance of political and social processes and phenomena affects the state and the direction of society, the publication is very valuable. Parallel truths that are spread due to disinformation and hoaxes in societies, whether in Slovakia or abroad, pose a security threat in many cases, as their expansion in society influences voter's decision-making, which can undermine the stability of democratic institutions. The issue of secondary illiteracy has the potential to combat this problem and to bring to the public relevant arguments for the edification and strengthening of democracy. Only by understanding and learning about political and social processes and phenomena it is possible to constantly approach the democratic ideal.

Mgr. Benita Feketeová

Faculty of Arts

Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice

e-mail: benitafekete@gmail.com