Abstract
Parliamentary elections are a complex issue in parliamentary democracy. In addition to the experience of the first half of the 20th century, Slovakia has a renewed tradition of democratic parliamentary elections since 1990. 2020 is also the year of elections to the Slovak Parliament – the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The article describes a brief history and changes in election rules from 1990 to the present. From the political science point of view, it represents the warp points of the electoral system for the Slovak Parliament. Last but not least, the article deals with interesting and problematic areas of the current electoral system for the Slovak Parliament.

Right-wing populism may be defined as a political strategy based on a combination of nationalism, anti-elitism, anti-pluralism (manifested in seeing the people as a homogenous group provided that the “breakers” of this homogeneity should be excluded) and self-identifying with the people’s will, aimed at achieving electoral success.

In recent years, one may speak of the European right-wing populist parties (RWPPs) as a distinct party family. Party families is a concept invoked implicitly by classical theorists like Maurice Duverger (though he did not call the party clusters families) and Daniel-Louis Seiler (he mentioned political families [17, p. 73]). The most significant attempt to conceptualize party families was undertaken by Peter Mair and Cas Mudde who proposed the criteria of party origin and common ideological basis (in doing so, they rejected the criteria of membership in transnational party alliances, that is a very fluid criterion, and of party naming because it does not always reflect the de facto ideological position) [13, p. 223-225]. Klaus Von Beyme and Cas Mudde suggested considering right-wing extremist parties as a party family [20, p. 3; 14, p. 1]. The right-wing populist parfum came in to the spotlight in the works of Simon Bornschier; however, anti-elite discourse and hierarchical internal structure proposed by him as common denominators [7, p. 32], are not quite optimal: anti-elite rhetoric may be found in left-wing and in centrist discourses, and internal structure may differ from country to country. We propose considering RWPPs as a distinct party family basing on their positioning in a “double bipolarity”: being moderately anti-system, they share a populist strategy of achieving electoral success and a set of key ideological positions, mentioned above. (Such a positioning may be seen as a variation of the classical “political compass” with the intersection
of axes “left – right” and “system – anti-system”, the latter replacing the “liberal – illiberal” axis).

The functioning of right-wing populist parties (RWPP) on the supranational level makes the following paradox possible: Eurosceptics (or rather EU-sceptics [9, p. 6]) are elected into the governing bodies of the EU. Hence, RWPP are simultaneously the object and subject of European integration: it inevitably influences their discourse (adding Euroscepticism and making them introduce socio-economic demands in a pan-European context), but right-wing populists may also influence EU bodies and the decisions taken on the supranational level.

In the European Parliament, right-wing populists are present in three organizational forms: as national parties (represented by the nationally elected deputies), as European political parties/Europarties, and as political groups that are the main political process actors in the EP [4, c. 142]. These three forms do not exclude each other but rather form a kind of a matryoshka-doll, providing a certain institutional hierarchy.

After the EP elections of 2014, representatives of RWPP were included in the following Europarties: Alliance of Conservatives and Reformists in Europe (ACRE, 50 deputies from national parties The Finns, Latvian National Alliance, Alternative Democratic Reform Party of Luxembourg, Polish Law and Justice), Alliance for Direct Democracy in Europe (ADDE, 27 deputies from Alternative for Germany, Swedish Democrats, Lithuanian Order and Justice, UKIP), Movement for a Europe of Nations and Freedom (MENF, 33 deputies from the Dutch and Austrian Parties for Freedom, Flemish Interest, French National Front, Italian League, the Czech Freedom and Direct Democracy), European Alliance for Freedom (EAF, 5 deputies from Swedish Democrats and UKIP).

Political groups may be formed only providing they include no less than 25 deputies from at least 7 member states. They “play an important role in forming parliamentary committees (…), agenda setting and voting” [3, c. 119]. Groups may include not only European parties but also independent deputies. Out of eight political groups present in the former composition of the European Parliament, three included Eurosceptic Europarties, i.e., European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR, Europarty ACRE), Europe for Freedom and Direct Democracy (EFDD, Europarty ADDE), Europe of Nations and Freedom (ENF, Europarties EAF and MENF). The latter was labelled by Gianni Pittella, the leader of the S&D group, as “an anti-EU xenophobic group” [12] because it was formed in fact by the French, Dutch and Belgian Eurosceptics.

The coalition-building process is the most visible evidence of heterogeneity within the right-wing populist camp and of the lack of consent between different parties on the many issues. Miheana Stoica notes that the EU crises proved to be an unsatisfactory condition to provide for a long-standing and stable transnational Europopulism [19, p. 176] exactly because of the heterogeneity of the latter. Though RWPP may be considered a particular party family, they are included in different political groups on the European level, first and foremost due to the priority given to national issues and different degrees of radicalism. The
positions of some key right-wing populist actors are unbridgeable on the issues of economic policy, migration policy, etc. [16].

E.g., ahead of the EP elections in 2014, a possible coalition between the French National Front and the Dutch Party for Freedom was widely discussed. Some months before the elections, Geert Wilders and Marine Le Pen announced their plans to counter the “monster in Brussels” [18, p. 72]. However, the Greek Golden Dawn and the Hungarian Jobbik proved to be far too radical for FN and PVV (presumably because of their Antisemitism), and they rejected the possible coalition with these actors (Jobbik’s leader, Gábor Vona, responded by calling them “Zionist parties”¹). The ruling Fidesz also declined a coalition with Jobbik. The Swedish Democrats and The Finns, on the contrary, considered National Front and Party for Freedom too radical for a coalition because of their attempts to avoid political isolation in their home countries [1, c. 979]. Hence, the ENF group had to be formed as a rather abridged coalition.

The case of Fidesz is especially interesting. Viktor Orbán joined a more respectable union of Christian Democrats, i.e., EPP. However, on April 11th, 2018, EPP questioned Fidesz’s right to be a part of this Europarty because of the manifestations of populist authoritarianism in Hungarian laws and of distinct nationalist elements in the 2018 electoral campaign. On March 20th, 2019, Fidesz’s membership in EPP was suspended. The immediate occasion for this was a media campaign launched by Fidesz against EU migration policy, where portraits of Jean-Claude Juncker and George Soros were used, which was considered to be a violation of ethical norms².

The voting of the groups on particular EP political resolutions demonstrates the groups’ positions and the intragroup cohesion (see Table 1). Eurosceptic parties solidarize with the ruling RWPPs in Hungary and Poland (in refusing to vote for resolutions condemning their actions), vote for a counter-terrorist policy, and tend to “save face” while voting on Antisemitism and condemning it. Tony Judt’s formula that admitting the Holocaust is “our contemporary European entry ticket” [11, p. 803], is still relevant. So as not to demonstrate openly their anti-Roma sentiments, most Europarliamentarians from the groups discussed abstained from voting on resolutions targeting anti-Romanyism.

It is traditionally assumed that anti-system and populist parties have more chances to attract the electorate on European rather than on national elections. EP voting is considered to be “second-order elections” [15] that may be utilized to express the protest against the existing political system by voting for an outsider

without running any risks [10, p. 338]. RWPPs, in their turn, frequently use their EP membership to enhance their national influence. The type of the electoral system is also of utmost importance: proportional representation employed by the EU provides for more opportunities for outsider parties than a majority representation system common for such countries as France and the UK.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resolution</th>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Voting</th>
<th>for</th>
<th>against</th>
<th>abstained</th>
<th>cohesion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The EC decision to apply Article 7 of the Maastricht Treaty to the situation in Poland (01.03.2018)</td>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>81.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFDD</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>51.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENF</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>89.29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamental rights aspects concerning the Roma integration in the EU: fighting anti-Romanyism (25.10.2017)</td>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>51</td>
<td></td>
<td>65.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFDD</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td></td>
<td>56.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENF</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>41.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting Antisemitism (01.06.2017)</td>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>87.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFDD</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>19</td>
<td></td>
<td>36.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENF</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>70.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Situation in Hungary (17.05.2017)</td>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>90.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFDD</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>34.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENF</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>95.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fighting terrorism (16.02.2017)</td>
<td>ECR</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>70.49%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>EFDD</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>84.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ENF</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: author’s calculations based on VoteWatch database\(^1\).

Eurosceptic groups get the EU payments equally with the others. Cante Colomina notes that “European populism would have been unable to reach the heights of representation and influence it currently enjoys without the money and political instruments provided by the European Union it seeks to destroy” [8, p. 23].

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\(^1\) VoteWatch. URL: www.votewatch.eu (date of access: 18.04.2018).
Quite often, rather notorious personalities may be elected to the EP. For instance, Morten Messerschmidt, a member of the Danish People’s Party was sentenced in 2002 to two weeks detention for racism [6, p. 35], a member of the German National Democratic Party Udo Voigt in 2013 made antisemitic remarks [Ibid.], and a Jobbik member Krisztina Morvai is famous for her antisemitic and conspirological views targeting “liberal Bolshevik Zionists”.

Upon getting elected to the European Parliament, the RWPP representatives use it primarily as a tribune for self-PR (aiming at external and internal audience) and for propagating their ideas. C. Colomina thinks that for many right-wing populist parliamentarians, the EP is no more than a “television studio” [8, p. 23]. However, they also take part in defining the agenda, primarily regarding migration and economic issues.

![Figure 1. The number of EP seats got by RWPPs in 2019, out of the total number of seats allocated to a particular EU member state](image)

Source: Marco Fiber’s Twitter account (@mfieber)
In May 2019, the regular European Parliament elections took place, and the party/group composition changed significantly. A widely discussed initiative to introduce transnational deputy lists (meaning that a part of the deputy corps would represent not a particular country but the entire EU) was rejected. Taking into account the possible Brexit, it was expected that in the 2019-2024 electoral cycle the number of European deputies would be cut from 751 to 705; out of 46 “lost” seats, 30 would be just eliminated, and 16 reserved for future EU members. 27 other seats that belonged to the UK, would be given to the underrepresented EU members [5, c. 41]. However, the UK could not finish the Brexit process before the 2019 elections, and the above-mentioned schemes were not employed.

Two main trends were specific to the 2019 EP elections: the weakening of centrist parties (though EPP and social democrats remained quite influential) and a further polarization across the cleavages considering the extent to which the EU may influence national policies [2; 21]. The ENF group was succeeded by the group called “European Alliance of Peoples and Nations” (soon renamed as “Identity and Democracy”). Besides the national parties already represented in ENF, the parliamentarians from Alternative for Germany, Danish People’s Party, The Finns, and the Estonian Conservative People’s Party joined the ranks of a newly formed parliamentary group. The Dutch Party for Freedom got no representation in the new EP composition. The EFDD group was dissolved because it no longer conformed to the requirement of having deputies from at least seven countries represented in a group. To sum up, in the 2019 European Parliament, “Identity and Democracy” group became a key right-wing populist actor.

The results of the RWPP in the recent EP elections are schematically presented in a Figure 1.

References

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