

Political Entrepreneurs as a Challenge for the Party System in Slovakia*

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Abstract

This paper deals with the emergence and relevance of entrepreneurial parties in Slovakia. Its aim is to identify if the business-firm party model is an isolated phenomenon within the party system of the Slovak Republic, specific only for a certain segment of political parties, or if the business-firm practices are present also in the wider spectrum of parties, including those 'program-based' with the presence of the mechanisms of intraparty democracy. The main indicators followed by the article are the role of the party founders (leaders) after the parties enter the parliament, the organizational development of the parties and the role of party programs in the shaping of party identities. The paper brings an analysis of the penetration of business practices in Slovakia's political parties, and brings a detailed analysis of particular entrepreneur parties, such as the Civic Understanding Party (SOP), Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO), Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OLaNO) and We Are Family – Boris Kollár. Increasing support to parties which fall under the business-firm model, as well as the penetration of entrepreneurial practices into the functioning of other political parties, provoked new political conflicts in Slovakia. These are interpreted by some politicians as a conflict between so called 'standard' and 'non-standard' parties. The business firm party model and practices are increasingly attractive for many newly emerging parties, but also for the older political ones. Successful parliamentary elections, and even participation in the government, doesn't force the parties to establish territorial structures or to improve internal democratic mechanisms.

Key words: Slovakia; business-firm party model; political entrepreneurs; SOP; Direction; ANO; SaS; OLaNO; We Are Family – Boris Kollár

DOI: 10.5817/PC2017-2-179

1. Introduction

A high level of voter volatility and the institutional instability of the political parties are characteristic phenomena of the party politics in Slovakia. Almost every parliamentary

* The article was prepared within the framework of APVV project 'Democracy and Citizens in Slovakia: A Half-Century of Change (APVV-0627-12)'.
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election, with the single exception of the elections in 2006, resulted in the arrival of political 'newcomers' into the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The last elections, in March 2016, even introduced into the parliament a record-breaking number of new political parties – Network, led by former member of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) Radoslav Procházka, far-right Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia and We Are Family, led by businessman and millionaire Boris Kollár.

In 2012, the Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OĽaNO), led by the businessman Igor Matovič, entered the parliament for the first time. Two years prior, in 2010, the Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), led by another businessman – Richard Sulík and centre-right party Most-Híd, had focused predominantly on the cooperation between the ethnic Slovak majority and Hungarian minority.

Some of the above mentioned political parties could be clearly defined as the results of the political ambitions of some businessmen, like SaS, OĽaNO, We Are Family – Boris Kollár and Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO), established in 2001 by Pavol Rusko – the owner of the most influential TV station at the time, TV Markíza. They can be distinguished from each other by their organizational structures, by the role of ideology in the shaping of their politics as well as by their duration. Whereas ANO survived only one tenure and then it disappeared from the political scene, SaS and OĽaNO managed to persist for a longer time.

The coming of the new political parties is connected with the crisis moments in the political life of the country, when the 'old' mainstream parties failed to mobilize the voters or when the voters were tired of the competition between two irreconcilable political camps. Another reason for the establishment of the new, alternative political parties, is the emergence of the new segments of the voters with a new agenda. However, after the elections in 2016, the process of the de-consolidation of the political party system in Slovakia, established in 1990s, achieved its peak, as no political party has constantly been present in the National Council of the Slovak Republic since 1990. The structural and institutional instability of the political party system in Slovakia caused a situation in which even the relatively new political parties that entered the parliament in 2002 (Direction, in Slovak *Smer*) or 2010 (Freedom and Solidarity, SaS) should be considered to be 'traditional parties'.

The presented article will focus on the political parties, where the founding role of the political entrepreneur is apparent, in particular on ANO, SaS, OĽaNO and We Are Family. We will analyze the presence of the 'entrepreneur' elements in other political parties, with the main focus on Direction, as this party is widely described by some publicists as a 'joined stock company' (see for example Vagovič 2016).

The common characteristic of the political newcomers to the Slovak parliament is the central role of the party leader. On the other hand, they differ in many aspects. Whereas Direction, Most-Híd, Network or Kotleba's party developed their organizational structures, the political parties founded by entrepreneurs, such as ANO, SaS, We Are Family and OĽaNO, were not interested either in building regional and local party branches, or in the massive party apparatus. In the case of the first parties, in spite of the dominant position of the leader, the regional and local structures of the party were developed. The presence of the leader plays a crucial role in electoral campaigning, but, at least theoretically, the territorial structures might create a counterbalance to their leaders (founders). These parties made an effort to deepen their institutionalization.

However, in the second case ‘the leader behaves in the manner of a *dominus* (an owner) – without significant counterweight and he or she benefits from almost entirely undisputed support from followers’ (Vercesi 2015: 399). According to Michelangelo Vercesi, the crucial characteristics of such parties are the ‘personalist leaderships and internal organizations clearly developed to sustain and preserve, rather than counterbalance, the leadership of their founders’ (Vercesi 2015: 396). Vercesi called them ‘owner parties’. However, his definition covers not only the parties founded by entrepreneurs, but also the Northern League, established from the different regionalist movements, i.e. with structures on the grassroots level. Therefore, the parties founded by the entrepreneurs – the ‘entrepreneurial parties’ or ‘business firm parties’ are analyzed by some authors as a new party model (Krouwel 2006; Hopkin, Paolucci 1999; Harmel, Svåsand 1993).

The parties to be analyzed in the presented article – ANO, SaS, We Are Family and OĽaNO – were established on the grounds of the private initiative of their founders. The founders, at least during the first stages of their existence, before the first parliamentary elections in which they took part, were also the main (or even single) source of their financing. Krouwel distinguished two types of ‘business firm parties’. The first one is based on a pre-existing commercial company, whose structures are used for a political project. The second type represents a new and separate organization ‘specially constructed for a political endeavor’ (Krouwel 2006: 260).

The conceptual framework of entrepreneur parties, elaborated by Vít Hloušek and Lubomír Kopeček (2017) in the introduction to this journal volume, comprises not only the genetic origin of such parties, but also a ‘crucial formative influence’ of the leaders over the political project, at least in its first stage, especially in the prioritization of the issues. The party is not rooted in civic society organizations or social movements. The parties established on the business-firm model are distinguished by the centralized structure, dominated by the leader, with weak or even absent intra-party democracy. Generally, they didn’t develop territorial structures and they had only a small number of members. The leader and his circle have a decisive role in the selection of party elites. Marketing techniques and electoral experts play an important role in the external communication of the party. In general, entrepreneurial parties have easy access to the media. The ideological and program issues are taken instrumentally; they are subordinated to the political ambitions of the founder (Hloušek, Kopeček 2017; Hopkin, Paolucci 1999; Krouwel 2006). Robert Harmel and Lars Svåsand distinguished three phases of the development of entrepreneurial parties – identification, organization and stabilization. In the first phase, the message of identification is developed. The second stage is the period of the establishment of the party’s top structures and electoral growth. Subsequently, after entering the parliament and government, the establishment of the territorial party branches should follow (Harmel, Svåsand 1993).

In this article we analyze to what extent the parties established by entrepreneurs in Slovakia meet the above mentioned criteria of entrepreneurial parties. We will focus mainly on the role of the parties’ founders (leaders) after the parties entered the parliament, the organizational development of the party and the role of party programs in the shaping of party identities. Analyzing the results of the parliamentary elections since 2010, the role of the entrepreneurial parties, i.e. parties founded by businessmen (former or acting), is increasing; their electoral support has grown from 12.14 percent in 2010 to almost 30 percent in 2016 (Table 1).

Table 1: Parliamentary elections in Slovakia 2010, 2012 and 2016 – share of valid votes cast for entrepreneur parties (%)

Name of the party	Elections 2010	Elections 2012	Elections 2016
SaS	12.14	5.88	12.10
OLaNO	-	8.55	11.02
We Are Family – Boris Kollár	-	-	6.62
Total	12.14	14.38	29.74

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2010; 2012; 2016.

The paper will try to identify whether the business firm party model is an isolated phenomenon, specific only to a certain segment of political parties, or if business-firm practices are also more broadly present, including in ‘program-based’ parties, with the presence of the mechanisms of intraparty democracy. Largely, the political newcomers, including the entrepreneur parties, formulated their messages as demands for substantial changes. At the same time, as Kopeček and Hloušek (2017) pointed out, these parties serve as a personal vehicle for the party leader to the positions in the establishment. Therefore, we need to analyze the relevance and position of the entrepreneurial parties in the party system of Slovakia, i.e. to what extent these parties can be considered anti-establishment forces. Finally, we will try to examine the thesis of Harmel and Svåsand (1993); according to them the new parties need to enter the third stage of their development, i.e. to establish organizational structures in order to consolidate their position in the party landscape.

However, such analysis would be impossible without the study of the wider context of party politics in the country, mainly in terms of relations between politics and business, but also in terms of the mechanisms of internal functioning of the political parties. In the beginning, we will analyze the penetration of the business-firm practices in party politics in the 1990s. The following sections will analyze and compare the particular political parties founded by the businessmen. Finally, we will analyze the development of the new political projects since 2014, when several new ‘political entrepreneurs’ emerged, and their impact on the party landscape in Slovakia.

2. Business practices in party politics in the 1990s

The trends towards oligarchizing of the decision-making process at the expense of intra-party democracy, which is mentioned by V. Hloušek and L. Kopeček as a characteristic feature of the newly established business-firm parties, was previously described by Moisei Ostrogorski in relation to the ‘traditional’ political parties in United Kingdom (Ostrogorski 1902). In many contemporary European political parties a trend towards the ‘presidentialization’ of power is present, i.e. the ‘growth of leadership power and autonomy within parties and political executives, and the greater prominence of leaders in electoral processes’ (Webb, Poguntke 2005: 336). The process of the centralization of power and the dominance of the leaders not only in the decision-making process, but also in the political communi-

cation of the parties, has accelerated in Slovakia since 1998 after the adoption of the new electoral law in 1998. The electoral reform replaced the division of Slovakia into four electoral regions, corresponding with the administrative-territorial division of the country in 1960–1990, with the introduction of a single constituency in the entire territory. Thus, the formal and informal influence of the parties' leadership has increased.

In the 1990s, HZDS was an example of a strictly centralized party in Slovakia. As the research done by the Department of Political Science at Comenius University in Bratislava shows, the process of centralization was more advanced in the newer political parties in the later period (Malová, Lášticová 2013: 88). Since the early 2000s, the role of the party leader in the electoral campaigns of the political parties increased, whereas parties focused on some segments of the society rather than on the promotion of their leaders, like Party of Hungarian Community / Coalition or KDĽ, became gradually marginalized.

Probably the first example of the introduction of business practices in party politics in Slovakia was the electoral campaign of HZDS in 1994, directly inspired by Silvio Berlusconi and his party Forza Italia. HZDS was the first party to organize its campaign on the principles of marketing. The non-transparent privatization of the big state-owned companies during the third government of Vladimír Mečiar (1994–1998) increased the influence of the oligarchs on party politics in Slovakia. The close interconnections between big business and the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) led by Mečiar were demonstrated by the presence of the most relevant Slovak businessmen on the HZDS list of candidates in the 1998 parliamentary elections, and one of them, VSŽ corporation supervisory board member Alexander Rezeš, was a main coordinator of the party's electoral campaign (Leško 1997). The head of the supervisory board of VSŽ, Ján Smerek, was appointed Prime Minister, however, his mission failed.

The opposition parties enjoyed the support of influential businessmen who held a critical stance towards the rule of V. Mečiar, as well. They were represented by an informal group called 'G7'. While in the case of both HZDS and the opposition parties, intra-party democracy was formally preserved, the opposition parties attached importance to their ideology, and the decisive role in the policy making and campaigning was played by the political leaders of the parties, not by the 'sponsors'. The link between the opposition parties and commercial business was weaker compared to HZDS, and the businessmen, supporting the opposition, were in 1998 not directly involved in the politics of particular opposition parties, with the exception of Party of Civic Understanding (SOP), supported by Jozef Majský and Pavol Rusko.

3. Party of Civic Understanding

The founding of the party was announced in January 1998; the party was registered in the next month. Rudolf Schuster became the leader of the party. He was a popular mayor of the second largest city in Slovakia, Košice, and in 1997 he announced his ambitions to run for the office of President of the Slovak Republic. Other representatives of the party were the former minister of foreign affairs, Pavol Hamžík (1996–1997), who announced his resignation after the manipulated referendum on the direct election of president which was

obstructed by Mečiar's government, mayor of Banská Bystrica Igor Presperín, operatic tenor Peter Dvorský etc. However, one of the main pillars of the electoral campaign was the support of the party by the media, in particular the commercial TV station TV Markíza and the center-left daily newspaper Pravda. The party was financially supported by the Sipox holding, owned by the then-influential businessman Jozef Majský. His involvement in the financing of the party was emphasized by the placing of his spouse Diana Dubovská on the slate of candidates (Kopeček 2002). The influence of TV Markíza's owner, Pavol Rusko, was emphasized by the presence of his wife Viera Rusková on the party's slate (Poláš 2016).

The party officially proclaimed itself center-left (SOP 1999), however ideology didn't play a significant role in the shaping of the party policy. Initially, the aim of the party was to overcome the deep polarization of the Slovak society in two fighting and irreconcilable camps, however 'because of the EU's uncompromising stance toward the HZDS', the leaders of SOP didn't anticipate the coalition with HZDS and, in particular, with V. Mečiar, after the elections (Vachudova 2005: 170). Another crucial point of the party's agenda was the promotion of R. Schuster as the candidate for President of the Slovak Republic.

Following the 1998 parliamentary elections, SOP joined the coalition government. After the success of R. Schuster in the presidential elections in 1999, P. Hamžík became the new head of SOP. However, the party didn't manage to create a sufficient network of local and regional structures and its performance in the government was featureless. Since the electoral support of the party rapidly dropped in 2000–2001, one of its main sponsors – Pavol Rusko established his own political party in 2001. The decline of the interests of businessmen in the party, the loss of charismatic leader R. Schuster since he became a President of the Slovak Republic and finally, exhaustion of the idea of 'civil understanding' after the establishment of the wide right-left coalition caused the rapid decomposition of the party and its disappearance from the political scene. The party congress called the members to join the more successful Direction party led by Robert Fico (TASR 2003).

Regarding internal organization, SOP wasn't distinguishable from the 'mainstream' parties; it adopted the four-stage model of party structure (local branches, district, regional and national bodies) with the open membership. An individual became a party member after the payment of the membership fee. Membership had to be approved by the local club of the Party. The members were obliged to be registered in the local branch in their place of residence (Ondruchová 2000: 30–31). The element of centralization of the membership policy was the right of the Republic Council to cancel the party membership of any member on the grounds of a decision by three-fifth of its members (Article V., paragraph 5) in the case of the serious violation of the Party statute, effectual sentencing for wanton injury or for the non-payment of the membership fee for more than six months (SOP 1999). The presence of such provision was unique for the political parties in Slovakia that time (Ondruchová 2000). SOP was an example of the direct involvement of businessmen in party politics. The driving force of party success was the media support provided by Rusko, TV Markíza's owner. However, the crucial role in the shaping of SOP politics was played by democratically elected leaders, and therefore SOP cannot be considered to be a business-firm project. On the other hand, the close ties between SOP and commercial media, focus on the creation and promotion of the charismatic leader and low attention paid to the development of the territorial structures allow us to consider it to be a predecessor of future political entrepreneurial projects.

4. The coming of 'political entrepreneurs' – seeking a centrist voter

The character of the privatization process and later, the relations between commercial businesses and state institutions (in particular in the case of public procurement, public orders etc.) in Slovakia caused the leaders of the big business, mainly the owners of the privatized state owned companies, but also two main financial groups operating in Slovakia (Penta and J & T), to prefer to cooperate with the existing, 'mainstream' political parties, rather be directly involved with the establishment of new political parties. The consequence was the emergence of close and mostly non-transparent ties between the political parties and non-transparent business, as evidenced by numerous scandals presented in the media. The influence of oligarchic business on party politics continued even later and it caused the anti-corruption riots in Slovakia at the beginning of 2012.

However, we can also observe some elements of the penetration of business practices in party internal organization in some of the 'mainstream parties' with well-established regional and local structures (which clearly declared their ideological affiliations). This was the case of the most influential political party in Slovakia – Direction. Party leader Robert Fico has an unquestionable position, and the party is personified by him. The party statute distinguishes three levels of affiliation – founding members, full members, and activists and sympathizers. The founding members had veto power, they could block the decisions adopted by the elected party organs and even the quorum of the party congress. Their privileges were abolished by the party congress in September 2006 (TASR 2006). The high level of the centralization of the party organs was preserved, and the heads of the regional and district party organizations continued to be appointed by the party Presidium (Smer-SD 2010).

According to the information published in the Slovak media, the establishment of Direction was the result of the private initiative of several businessmen (sometimes called 'shareholders') affiliated with HZDS before the parliamentary elections 1998.¹ However, they were not directly present in the party structures. The single exception was the close relations with the Donar advertising agency. Its owner, Fedor Flašík, and his spouse, Monika Flašíková-Beňová, were the founding members of the party. Since 2006, however, M. Beňová has lost influence within the party.

The role of ideology in Direction's agenda is very instrumental and treated in a very flexible way. The party was established in 1999 as 'pragmatic' and non-ideological, but its switch to a social democratic orientation in 2004 was not accompanied by internal discussions. In spite of the highly-centralized organizational structure and the influence of the so called 'shareholders', Direction cannot be called a business firm party. The central and unquestioned position of the leader, R. Fico, is not the result of his economic influence, but rather the result of his popularity among voters. The party developed powerful territorial structures which have a significant influence in both the intra-party decision-making process and in the national bodies. The business groups or the particular businessmen don't play any direct formative role in the politics of Direction.

The privatization of the banks, so called 'natural monopolies', and re-privatization of some of the largest industrial companies by foreign investors, as well as the dominant

position of foreign direct investments in the establishment of the new industrial capacities (for example in the automotive industry), caused a situation in which the political parties that were directly founded by entrepreneurs couldn't achieve influence comparable to that of ANO in the Czech Republic or Forza Italia in Italy. The leaders of the potential entrepreneurial parties were mostly medium-sized entrepreneurs without direct access to state resources. In general, their economic influence can't be compared with the influence of Andrej Babiš and Silvio Berlusconi.

5. New Citizen Alliance – the rise and fall of the (political) entrepreneur

The leader of the New Citizen Alliance (ANO). Pavol Rusko, had already considered starting his political career before the 1998 parliamentary elections, when he was a co-owner and director of the commercial TV channel TV Markíza. This station was the first nation-wide private TV channel; it was available over the air and not only via satellite or cable TV, which were then available only in the big cities. The broadcasting of TV Markíza began in 1996. Initially, it was a tabloid channel without political ambitions, but it very soon became the most popular TV station in Slovakia, with the largest audience. However, in 1997 and at the beginning of 1998, TV Markíza switch its initially neutral stance towards the government of Vladimír Mečiar and started to criticize the authoritarian trends and growing international isolation of Slovakia. One of the reasons for the politicization of TV Markíza was the decision of the HZDS to privatize the second channel of the public Slovak TV (STV 2) in favor of the Pro TV Company, owned by businessmen and other people associated with HZDS (Vladimír Poór etc.). As such a decision threatened the economic interests of TV Markíza, Rusko supported the campaign against the privatization of public TV conducted by opposition parties (Sme 1998). Subsequently, on the eve of the parliamentary election in September, Rusko provided media support to the opposition parties, including the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) and, in particular, the newly established SOP.

The decline in popular support for SOP after the 1998 elections became the final impulse for Rusko to establish his own political party. According to Lubomír Kopeček, the first impulse for Rusko's direct political involvement was the conflict with the co-owners of TV Markíza on the eve of the 1998 elections when the TV station was occupied by their private security service (Kopeček 2006: 414). In 2000–2001, Rusko announced his preparedness to found his own political party several times; initially he considered a center-left orientation (Krno 2000; Matejčíková 2001). As the keeping of close ties with the government expected after the 2002 parliamentary elections was necessary for the strengthening of the position of his own TV company in order to weaken the competitors in the field of electronic media, cooperation with the decaying center-left parties was no longer of interest to him.

On 22 April, 2002, Rusko announced the establishment of the new party Alliance of the New Citizen (its abbreviation ANO means YES in Slovak), however it was defined as center-

right and focused on the 'followers of liberal values'. An anti-establishment appeal became a crucial component of the new party's agenda, besides the promotion of liberal values. According to Rusko, the party was 'an alternative for the people disappointed in the actual development of the Slovak political scene' (Mesežnikov 2001: 109). Rusko was elected leader of the new party in May 2001.

The new party stressed the program and ideological issues. It was focused on the further continuation of market reforms, integration of Slovakia into the EU and NATO, as well as on the promotion of an anti-discrimination agenda. The party expressed its interest in joining the Liberal International and ELDR. It became an observer of the Liberal International in 2002, and since 2005, it has achieved full-fledged membership. In November 2003, ANO joined ELDR as well (Kopeček 2007: 411). On one hand, the international involvement of the party and its program documents show that Rusko intended to found a stable party, with a great deal of coalition potential on the domestic political scene and a strong position in the European and international context. On the other hand, his oscillation between the center-left and center-right political affiliation in 2000–2001 confirms that the party was rather suited to be a personal project of its leader. Therefore, the main aim of the party wasn't the promotion of certain values or its ideology, but Rusko's leadership was rather linked to the promotion of the personal popularity of the leader himself. At that time, Rusko was not only the unquestionable leader of ANO, but also its most important sponsor (together with his business partner, Ján Kováčik). According to his own words, he spent 25 million Slovak Crowns on the party before August 2002 (Horobová 2002).

The political communication of ANO took course mostly through the media owned (or co-owned) by Rusko himself – the commercial TV channel TV Markíza, the popular weekly Markíza, commercial Radio Okey and the daily newspaper *Národná obroda*. That time, all of them belonged among the most popular in Slovakia (Šípoš 2004). Before the parliamentary elections 2002, ANO's list of candidates largely consisted of the people connected with TV Markíza and the world of show-business, like journalists Lubomír Lintner, Aneta Parišková and Eva Černá etc. (Život 2013). The former PR manager of TV Markíza, Jozef Heriban, became a manager of ANO's electoral campaign and he was put on the party's slate as well. In the elections held in September 2002, ANO received 8.1 percent of the votes and, in spite of the previous declarations, it became a part of the coalition of center-right parties together with the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ), KDH and the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK). The electoral support of the party was concentrated in the urban environment. The party assumed the positions of the ministry of economy, the ministry of health and the ministry of culture. ANO was interested in the last mentioned ministry, because Rusko stated his aim to strip the advertising profits from the public Slovak Television (Jiráček, Potůček 2002) by prohibiting them from running advertisements, which therefore would help the commercial television stations.

ANO was criticized several times for misusing the media sources owned by Rusko during the electoral campaign. Rusko preserved his control of the above mentioned media after the election, although officially he sold his share in TV Markíza to another person, his close friend and collaborator František Vizváry (Jiráček, Potůček 2002). Another of Rusko's close collaborators, journalist Vladimír Repčík, was appointed as the new director of TV Markíza. According to independent monitoring conducted by the organization

Memo98, in spite of the official change in the ownership structure, ANO and Rusko himself were the most preferred political subjects in the broadcasting of TV Markíza in 2002–2004 (Memo98 2004).

Rusko, as the main sponsor of the party, de facto concentrated power in his own hands, even by using informal methods in the decision making process (Kopeček 2006). Rusko was appointed as the Minister of Economy of the Slovak Republic in September 2003. Subsequently, the links between ANO and private firms owned by Rusko became apparent, as Rusko appointed his close collaborators from TV Markíza to the relevant positions at the Ministry of Economy. ANO's financial dependence on the companies linked to TV Markíza continued. In 2004, ANO received 10 million Slovak Crowns as a donation from the company www.markiza.sk (Žemlová 2004).

The governmental performance of the party was not successful. It was accompanied by permanent conflicts with the coalition partners and accusations were made against Rusko of clientelistic and even criminal behavior (Daniška 2005). The popular support for the party rapidly declined. ANO's position was undermined by internal conflicts, which resulted in the withdrawal of some members of the parliamentary caucus. The party failed to establish local and regional structures, and it preserved its elitist character.

Rusko's business activities were not only the main driving force behind the rise of the ANO party, but they also became its main threat. Rusko took a loan for more than 100 million SKK from a private businessman in 2003, i.e. when he was already Minister of Economy. The scandal regarding 'Rusko's bills' broke out in 2005 and, in consequence, Rusko was dismissed from his position (Žuborová 2015: 97). Subsequently, ANO was excluded from the government coalition in August 2005, but the major part of its deputies in the parliament and two ministers left the party and supported the government of Mikuláš Dzurinda as independent deputies. Thus, ANO joined the opposition, but the aim of the members of the ANO caucus was to back the governmental coalition. In few months, in November 2005, Rusko lost any influence he had had in TV Markíza (Tettinger 2005) when the company was restructured. One of the reasons for Rusko's dismissal from TV Markíza was pressure from the U.S.-based co-owner, the CME Company, who was interested in extending its broadcasting license (Poláš 2016).

The concentration of the electoral campaign on the personality of Rusko and the single dependence on the financial sources from his private business, at least before the parliamentary elections 2002, show that ANO can be considered more as a personal project of the leader than a program-based liberal party. Also, the disintegration of the party took place simultaneously with the decline of the political and economic influence of its leader, Pavol Rusko. Finally, the dismissal of Rusko from the government and from his business activities resulted in the marginalization of the party. This shows that, in spite of the democratic spirit of the party documents, the party institutionalization failed and, probably, the informal methods of controlling the party played a decisive role in the party functioning. The process of founding ANO, its performance, and the direct 'personal union' with the private business of the leader allow us to conclude that ANO can be considered to be a 'business-firm party' in accordance with Hopkin and Paolucci's (1999: 322) definition.

6. Freedom and Solidarity – between the establishment and anti-establishment party

The Freedom and Solidarity party (SaS) was established in 2009. Its increasing popular support in 2009–2010 was connected with the weakening of the SDKÚ and the lack of a political party representing the liberal voters. The founding of the party was announced in 2008 by its leader Richard Sulík, former owner of the medium sized company Fax & Copy (1991–2006).

According to Sulík, the main principle of the new party should be ‘freedom’, i.e. personal and economic freedom. However, in his first proclamation he stated that freedom and democracy ‘mustn’t be confused’. He stressed the primacy of the freedom of the individual above the democracy associated with the policy of increasing of taxes. However, he stressed his commitment to democratic principles as well. The aim of the proposed party was to enter the parliament in 2010 and to join the government in 2014. Sulík also stressed the anticommunist character of the future party. According to the announcement, the party would be financed by Sulík himself and three other medium-sized businessmen (Juraj Miškov, Ľubomír Benkovič and Jozef Boskovič) (Sulík 2008b). The party was officially registered in February 2009.

According to its self-definition, SaS was established as a liberal party. Before the elections in 2010 it applied for membership in the ELDR, where it was accepted in October 2010. In spite of the proclaimed liberal orientation of the new party, SaS presented libertarian elements in its agenda (conservatism in fiscal issues) and soft Eurosceptic attitudes (Mesežnikov 2010: 71), for example in the case of the participation of Slovakia in the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF). However, in the period before the registration of the party Sulík made some anti-Roma statements, where he portrayed members of the Roma community as recipients of social benefits and perpetrators of criminal delicts (Sulík 2008a). He also proposed ways to prevent ‘populist’ party voters from voting. Sulík said that people should have a choice either to vote or to receive seven euro instead of voting (Sulík 2009). On the other hand, SaS incorporated some social-liberal issues in its program, like the legalization of registered partnerships of same sex couples, de-criminalization of marijuana and separation of the state and church (Sloboda a Solidarita 2016: 89–94). However, when SaS entered the ruling coalition with the conservative parties SDKÚ-DS, KDH and Most-Híd after the parliamentary elections in 2010, the leaders of SaS didn’t insist on incorporating these issues in the government manifesto (Sulík 2010). In spite of the proclaimed liberal orientation, ideology didn’t play a crucial role in the party politics. Sulík’s criticism of the federalist concept of the future of the EU, shared by ALDE, led him to join the caucus of European Conservatives and Reformists after the elections to the European Parliament in 2014. He stressed the proximity of his views to the euro-sceptic Alternative for Germany and to the UKIP leader, Nigel Farage, but he, according to his own words, didn’t support the dissolution of the EU (AECR 2014; Krempaský 2014).

SaS has a highly centralized structure. The party didn’t establish regional or local structures. Only regional electoral assemblies were established on the regional level. Regional electoral assemblies appoint the delegates to the party congress. The power in the party is concentrated in the hands of the chairman. The highest party organ in the period between

the party congresses is the Republican Council. Only the leader of the party is allowed to call the sessions of the Republican Council. The position of the party's chairman is strengthened in an informal way by the low number of party members (Sloboda a Solidarita 2009a; Ďurovský et al. 2013: 54).

The elitist character of the party and the high level of centralization are underlined by the facts that 41 percent of members came from the Bratislava region and 79 percent had a university education (Sloboda a Solidarita 2015). According to the official data provided by SaS, at its founding congress on 28 March, 2009, the party had one hundred members (Sloboda a Solidarita 2009c). Later, in November 2016, their number was 170. However, party leader Sulík stressed several times that he was not interested in building the party through mass membership (Pravda 2016).

SaS introduced very strict conditions for the admission of new party members. The criteria are not only lack of corruption, but any future member must have 'properly secured the financing of the living costs'. The candidates for party membership must provide data about their previous political affiliations, and former members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia or the Communist Party of Slovakia, as well as former collaborators with State Security, are not allowed to join the party (Sloboda a Solidarita 2009b). In June 2009, party leader Sulík obtained a mandate from the Republican Council to control the process of admission of new party members personally (SITA 2009). Party sympathizers could be registered in the informal group the Friends of Freedom, however, they are not allowed to participate in the decision making processes within the party.

SaS introduced entrepreneurial methods not only in its internal organization, but also in its political campaigning. In the electoral campaign in 2010, R. Sulík suggested that employers may grant the allowances to those employees who bring them the ballots of then-ruling parties Direction, HZDS and SNS. According to him, the entrepreneurs could provide discounts to clients who showed the ballots of above mentioned parties. An e-mail message from 9 June, 2010 was sent from the domain sulik.sk, owned by the Fax & Copy, i.e. officially the former company of Sulík (Zaujímavosti.net 2010).

The electoral campaigns in 2010, 2012 and 2016 were organized mostly through the internet and social networks, accompanied by a massive billboard campaign. In 2010, SaS received 12.15 percent of the votes and 22 seats in the parliament. It became a member of the ruling coalition in 2010–2011, but as SaS refused to support an increase in liabilities in the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF) in the October 2012 vote connected with the confidence vote for the Iveta Radičová government, the party fell into the opposition. In the 2012 early elections, SaS received only 5.88 percent. Both before the 2010 elections and since October 2011, SaS was not only the uncompromised opponent of the center-left Direction, but this party opposed the policy of other center-right parties as well on the grounds of euro-sceptic and anti-establishment rhetoric. The crisis of Slovak center-right parties – the decline of popular support for the conservative-liberal SDKÚ and KDH in 2012–2016 – contributed to the electoral success of SaS in 2016. SaS received 12.1 percent of the votes and the second largest caucus in the parliament after Direction (Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2016). Immediately after the elections, Sulík announced the aim to create a center-right coalition government, but he failed. When SNS and two center-right parties – Most-Híd and Network – refused to join the government that would be led by

Sulík, he, together with the movement OLaNO – Nova, organized the anti-establishment meetings against the center-right mainstream parties.

SaS faced internal conflicts in April 2013, when 5 deputies and 75 members left the party. Subsequently, in April 2014, 4 additional deputies gave up their party membership (Webnoviny 2014). Another crisis took place in 2016, when the vice-chairman of the party, Jozef Mihál, announced his candidacy for party leader; however when he realized the strong position of chairman Sulík, he withdrew his candidacy (SITA 2016a). Both cases contributed to the strengthening of the position of the incumbent leader. Besides the libertarianism, radical pro-market orientation and soft-euroscpticism, since 2015, the new component of party's agenda has become an anti-immigration rhetoric. In fact, since the elections 2016, SaS has competed for the center-right electorate with the other center-right parties, accusing the parties of corruption and treason because they joined the coalition with Direction. SaS, in spite of ambitions to participate in the government, is an example of a successful return to anti-establishment rhetoric.

In 2009, when the party was established, the party leader and main 'sponsor' Sulík was not an active businessman anymore, unlike the other co-founders of SaS. However, their influence decreased in the later period and it was never comparable to the role of Sulík. After the parliamentary elections in 2010, the dependence of SaS on private financial resources decreased, however the high level of centralization continues. Taking into account the classification of the business firm parties by Krouwel (2006), SaS is functioning as an organization constructed on business principles, not as a party based on the structures of some commercial company.

7. The coming of anti-party politics – Ordinary People and Independent Personalities

Whereas parties like SOP, Direction, ANO or SaS criticized the incumbent political elites, they still didn't dispute the model of political competition with the crucial role of the political parties. However, the new political projects, like Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, and We Are Family – Boris Kollár, are contesting the traditional model of party politics, based on the presence of local and regional structures.

One of the most successful examples of a business-firm party since 2010 was the establishment of the movement OLaNO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities). Its leader Igor Matovič was an entrepreneur until 2007. He is a former owner of the company Regionpress, publishing 36 regional weekly newspapers in the entire territory of Slovakia. Since 2007, his wife, Paulína Matovičová, has been the owner of the company. In 2010, he, together with three other collaborators, established the civic association Ordinary People and declared their priority to fight against corruption. Their aim was to prevent the establishment of the constitutional majority by Direction and SNS after the upcoming parliamentary elections in June 2010. They considered establishing a new conservative party, however, they were invited by Sulík to run on the list of liberal party SaS, which they did. All four members of the association were placed on the last place of the slate, but due to the media support provided by Regionpress, they managed to enter the parliament. Subsequently,

Matovič announced that a group of four deputies would represent the ‘conservative wing of SaS’, but in June 2010 he declined to establish his own political party (Piško 2010).

Although the Ordinary People joined the caucus of SaS and supported the government of Iveta Radičová (coalition of SDKÚ, SaS, Most-Híd and KDH), in some aspects they became an opposition within the ruling coalition. They continued with their anti-establishment behavior, as they required the abolition of immunity for deputies, published a list of the people appointed to managerial positions in the state institutions by political parties and, finally, in 2011, Matovič did not support the amendment aimed to change the provisions of law forbidding dual citizenship, which had been approved on the proposal of Direction in the previous electoral cycle. In November 2011, they finally withdrew from the SaS caucus and registered Ordinary people as a distinct political movement.

The new party – Ordinary People and Independent Personalities – didn’t establish any local or regional structures. In fact, the status mentions only two party organs: congress and the chairman. The reason for this is that the movement has only four full-fledged members, former founders of the group Ordinary People. The formation ran in parliamentary elections two times – in 2012 and 2016 (in 2016 they created a joint list with the party NOVA led by the former Minister of Interior Daniel Lipšic). In both cases, the most of the candidates on the slate were independent candidates. Matovič refused any ideas about the creation of the party with the party structures and mass membership several times and he insisted on calling his formation a ‘movement’. Only in 2016, after the elections, when traditional representatives of the conservative voters (Christian Democratic Movement – KDH and Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – SDKÚ-DS) failed to meet the electoral threshold, I. Matovič signaled the possible transformation of the formation when he agreed to admit new members. He still refuses the creation of a ‘standard political party’, however, understood as a political party with permanent local and regional structures and with the leadership accountable to the party members. His aim is to transform OLaNO into a ‘wide popular movement’ (Teraz.sk 2016b). Even after the brief experience with participation in the ruling coalition, the OLaNO movement continues in anti-elitarian and anti-establishment behavior. Although I. Matovič himself is not an official owner of Regionpress, the headquarters of both company and political formation is in the same building in Trnava. Matovič also published the records of his talk with his rival Radoslav Procházka, taped before the presidential elections 2014. According to them, Slovak Republic presidential candidate Procházka asked him to publish some advertisements on non-transparent conditions in the media owned by Regionpress (TVNoviny.sk 2015). Such moments point out the possible persisting connections between the political movement and the private company.

The data concerning the financing of OLaNO confirm its links to Regionpress. Regionpress is an owner of the internet domains igormatovic.sk, jozefviskupic.sk, obycajnuludia.sk and olano.sk. This could be considered as an act of sponsoring the movement by the private firm, although such sponsorship is not present in OLaNO’s annual reports.² After its founding in 2011, OLaNO was financed by its membership fees (1000 euro per member) and a loan 30,000 euro from Paulína Matovičová. While a large portion of the party expenditures are the services provided by Regionpress, Regionpress gave OLaNO significant discounts for their advertising services. Such financial schemes provide significant profit both for OLaNO and Regionpress (Lučaiová 2015).

The internal structure of the movement, the way of its financing, its links with the media environment and the role of the leader in the shaping of party politics show that OLaNO meets the criteria of the ‘business firm party’ set by Krouwel, as the structures of the commercial firm Regionpress are in large extent used for the political activities of OLaNO. In fact, the central position of the leader controlling the party financing, allows to define OLaNO as an example of ‘owner party’.

8. Millionaire vs. the politicians – We Are Family

A few months before the 2016 parliamentary elections, the extravagant millionaire Boris Kollár, owner of the private radio station Fun Radio and some tourist facilities in the Tatra Mountains, announced the establishment of his own movement. He focused on the young people who would take part in the upcoming vote for the first time, and on the conservative protest electorate. He announced his political ambitions through anti-establishment and anti-immigrant posts on Facebook. Other tools of his political influence are the commercial media and radical ultraconservative and Eurosceptic websites Konzervatívny výber (Conservative Choice) and Medzičas (Meantime). In spite of the Euro-scepticism on the web, Kollár himself never expressed negative attitudes towards the EU or NATO. Kollár is very often present in the tabloid media, due to his extravagant and confrontational statements and his extravagant way of life. Among the candidates on his slate were several people widely present in the media – former TV moderator Martina Šimkovičová, known for her anti-immigrant statements, anti-Roma activist Oskár Dobrovodský, Kollár’s former spouse Petra Krištúfková, and the organizers of the anti-corruption protests that were held in January 2012. The name of the movement – We Are Family – indicates the conservative orientation of the movement. Its priorities are the defense of family values, protection of the country against the external threats represented by immigrants from the Middle East and improvement of the business environment. However, Kollár himself avoids the discussion about ideology. When asked if he is more conservative or liberal, he used the famous statement by Deng Xiaoping ‘it doesn’t matter whether a *cat* is *black* or *white*, if it catches mice it is a good *cat*’ (Sme Rodina 2016a). The movement’s electoral campaign was focused not on program issues, but on the personality of the leader and it targeted the establishment and politicians as such. The main slogan of his electoral campaign was ‘I don’t vote for the politicians, I vote for Boris.’ Whereas in February 2016 Kollár expressed his doubts about a possible coalition with the center-right parties, immediately after the elections in March 2016, when his movement received 6.62 percent, he expressed his willingness to support the center-right government led by R. Sulík (Teraz.sk 2016a).

The way the movement obtained their legal status was more typical of how a business would acquire new assets than of how a political party would ordinarily acquire legal status. As Kollár announced his entrance into politics only a short time before the elections, he was unable to collect the 10,000 signatures necessary to register a new political party or movement. However, he tried to take over the small regional party from Eastern Slovakia ‘Náš kraj’ (Our Land) which represented local politicians and the Rusyn minority. After the protests published by the former party leader Ľuba Kráľová, who expressed doubts about

the legal character of such a step (Frank 2015), Kollár closed the deal with the another small party – Party of the Citizens of Slovakia – also from Eastern Slovakia. Following that deal, the party changed its name to We Are Family – Boris Kollár, and some members of the party, including its former chairman, Peter Marček, were included on the list of candidates; Marček became a member of the parliament (Teraz.sk 2015). According to Kollár, the electoral campaign of the new party was financed by the founders of the party from their own sources. At the end of February 2016, the new party (defined as a ‘movement’ by Boris Kollár) had seven members (Tódová, Gális 2016).

As this formation has been in operation for a little more than one year, it hasn’t managed to establish regional or local structures. Its status presumes their existence; however, almost absolute power remains in the hands of the leader. He is authorized to appoint not only his deputies, but also the regional and district coordinators and the plenipotentiaries of the movement. The presidium decides about the admission and expulsion of movement members (Sme Rodina 2016b). Thus, the movement is highly centralized, with a very limited level of internal democracy. The dominant position of Kollár is stressed by the location of the headquarters of the formation, placed in the same building as Fun Radio.

The post-electoral development in Slovakia was not in accordance with Kollár’s initial plans. He aimed to provide support to the center-right coalition, and since We Are Family joined the opposition, he hasn’t further developed the movement’s strategy. This has led to internal conflicts within the movement which have resulted in the expulsion of three parliamentarians (Martina Šimkovičová, Peter Marček and Rastislav Holúbek) from the movement and its caucus in June 2016. This step was interpreted by the media and Kollár himself as the leader’s personal decision (Kern 2016).

9. Conclusions – political entrepreneurs as a potential new political mainstream in Slovakia?

Increasing support to the parties which follow a business-firm model, as well as the penetration of entrepreneurial practices into the functioning of other political parties, has provoked new political conflicts in Slovakia. Before the parliamentary elections in March 2016, the representatives of the incumbent ruling party Direction, like the speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Peter Pellegrini, interpreted it as a conflict between the ‘standard’ and ‘non-standard’ political parties. According to them, the most preferable governmental coalition after the elections would be the coalition of Direction with some ‘standard parties’ (Netky 2015). According to Prime Minister Robert Fico, the results of the elections were an ‘attack upon the standard parties’ (Noviny.sk 2016). He made this pronouncement immediately after the elections and he expressed his intention to create a new coalition with the Slovak National Party, Most-Híd and Network, although before the elections he had found the ‘standard parties’ KDH, SNS and Most-Híd to be ‘value-based’, but not Network. At the same time, the leader of Network, Radoslav Procházka, stressed his party was not satisfied with ‘the standard offered by an old politics’ (Hospodárske noviny 2016). After the elections, SNS chairman Andrej Danko, the coalition partner of Direction,

Network and Most-Híd, raised the proposal to change the existing legal framework of the work of political parties by introducing a lower limit of 500 members and by strengthening intra-party democracy as an inevitable condition for the registration of the party (Sliz 2016). On the other hand, the leader of Sme Rodina Boris Kollár said: ‘We came into politics in order to send these standard politicians, who only lie to you, rob you and don’t keep their word, to the junkyard. They are neither social nor human, they really act only against you...’ (Poništ 2016). It follows then that the marking of the party as ‘standard’ or ‘non-standard’ was used instrumentally, in order to disqualify political opponents.

The penetration of business practices plays an important role in Slovak party politics, in particular since 1998. The newly established political parties are highly centralized; their electoral campaigns are focused rather on the methods of political marketing than on program issues. Even the political parties which are, according to their own statements, focused on program issues, are built around the personality of the leader, who plays the crucial role not only in the campaigning, but also in the decision making process within the party. Such trends are apparent especially in the parties in which acting or former businessmen play a crucial role in shaping their agenda. However, as Table 2 shows, the level of ‘entrepreneur practices’ is different in particular parties.

Table 2: Presence of ‘business-firm’ practices in selected political parties

Party	Formative role of ‘political entrepreneur’	Financial dependence on the leader	Level of centralization	Existence of territorial structures	Links to media and P.R. agencies	Role of ideology in the party agenda	Durability
SOP	Medium	No	Low	Yes / underdeveloped	High (till 2001)	Medium / social democracy	1 term (1998–2003)
ANO	High	High	High / informal	Yes / underdeveloped	High	High	1 term (2001–2006)
Direction	No	No	High	Yes / highly developed	Low	High / social democracy, center-left	Stable (since 1999)
SaS	High	High (before 2010)	High	Low (party has approximately 100 members)	Yes / active promotion on social networks	High / switch from liberalism to Eurosceptic conservatism	Stable (since 2009)
OLaNO	High	High	High	No / lack of permanent members (only 4 founding members)	High	Low / conservatism, social populism	Stable (since 2011), 2 tenures
We Are Family	High	High	High	No / presumed by the party status, lack in practice	High / active promotion on social networks	Low	Fist term since 2016 / personal instability

Source: Author.

The presence of certain ‘business-firm’ practices in parties like SOP (direct involvement of businessmen, links to the media before 2001) or Direction (high level of centralization, presence of businessmen among the party founders, the influence of the so called ‘shareholders’) doesn’t allow us to define them as business-firm parties according to the conceptual framework set by Hloušek and Kopeček (2017). In the case of Direction, the role of ideology in the party agenda has increased after its integration with the minor center-left parties in 2004 and after the accession of Direction to the Socialist International and Party of European Socialists in 2005. Parties like ANO, OLaNO and We Are Family meet Krouwel’s criteria to be considered business-firm parties, as the commercial business structures played a crucial role in their formation. The case of SaS is different. At the moment of its creation, the main co-founder of the party, Sulík, was no longer an acting businessman, however, the party was supported by other businessmen, including those involved in the advertising and P.R. business. The role of Sulík as a main ‘sponsor’ of SaS has decreased since the parliamentary elections in 2010, when the party received access to the state funding. However, even the state financing of the party and the presence of ideological elements in the party agenda didn’t contribute to a change of SaS’s organizational model, which is similar to the business firm, with the central role of the leader and the limited role of the individual members and territorial structures.

However, since 2010, the role of the ‘traditional media’ (like newspapers, public or commercial TV and radio) in the promotion of the agenda of some political parties has changed. Whereas in the SOP campaign (1998) or ANO (2002), the support of commercial media played a crucial role, for SaS or We Are Family their focus on promotion through social media outlets such as Facebook or on their websites is characteristic (like ‘Konzervatívny výber’ or ‘Medzičas’).

Direction is an example of the successful abandonment of the main principles of the business-firm party and the successful institutionalization of the party by increasing the number of party members and establishing territorial structures, as proposed by Harmel and Svåsand (1993). This was one of the reasons why Direction, unlike SaS and OLaNO, was successful in local and regional politics and why it has managed to stabilize its position in the government since 2006 (with a short break in 2010–2012).

The role of the business firm parties in Slovak politics is increasing (see Table 1); on the other hand, the roles of program issues and intra-party democracy are declining. In spite of their protest rhetoric, these parties are interested in becoming part of the ruling coalitions. Therefore, they can hardly be characterized as exclusively anti-establishment forces.

In general, even these business firm parties and parties with elements of business practices which have successfully managed to create their own ideological agenda, did not abandon their business practices after the stabilization of their position on the political scene after successful elections, like in the case of SaS, OLaNO or We Are Family. The examples of SaS or OLaNO show that these parties don’t see it as their priority to create territorial structures, even after long-term presence on the political scene and after the short-term experience of being part of governmental coalitions. Thus, the creation of the territorial structures and the increase in the number of party members is not a necessary condition for the successful persistence of business-firm parties, as it is laid out by Harmel and Svåsand (1993). Such a state of affairs provides favorable conditions for the stabilization of the po-

sitions of the political leaders, however, the case of ANO shows how potentially vulnerable these parties, and subsequently a large segment of the party system, are.

Footnotes:

1. For example Vladimír Poór, Juraj Široký, Jozef Brhel, Ján Gabriel etc. See more Kováč (2011), Vagovič (2016).
2. Jozef Viskupič is one of the co-founders of OĽaNO and a cousin of Igor Matovič.

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