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THE PARTY "DIRECTION – SOCIAL-DEMOCRACY" AND ITS PLACE IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

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ПАРТИЯ «НАПРАВЛЕНИЕ – СОЦИАЛ-ДЕМОКРАТИЯ» И ЕЕ МЕСТО В ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЙ ЖИЗНИ СЛОВАЦКОЙ РЕСПУБЛИКИ

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В статье рассмотрена краткая история создания словацкой политической партии «Направление – социал-демократия» и эволюция ее партийных установок. Выделено ее место в политической жизни страны по итогам парламентских выборов в XXI в. Определены причины роста электорального успеха партии (до 2016 г.) и причины падения популярности «Направления – социал-демократия» по итогам голосования в 2016 г. Дана характеристика партийной системы Словацкой Республики и ее эволюция.

Ключевые слова: Словакия, политическая система, партия, «Направление – социал-демократия», Роберт Фицо, выборы.

The article deals with the brief history of the creation of the Slovak political party "Direction – Social Democracy" and further evolution of the party policy. Its place in the political life of the country on the results of parliamentary elections in the XXI century is emphasized there. The reasons for the growth of the party electoral success (until 2016) and the reasons for the decline of the popularity of "Directions – Social Democracy" after 2016 voting are also determined. The characteristics of the party system of the Slovak Republic and its evolution are featured in the article.

Keywords: Slovakia, political system, party, "Direction – Social Democracy", Robert Fico, elections.

Introduction. The leading researchers of the political development of the Slovak Republic at the beginning of the XXI century are, naturally, Czech and Slovak historians and political scientists. First of all, these are S. Balík, L. Kopeček, O. Gyárfášová, M. Slosiarik, M. Krištofik, J. Marušiak's works. In the Russian Federation, the multi-party system in Slovakia nowadays is studied by the head of the department of modern history of Central and South-Eastern Europe of the Institute of Slavic Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences E. Zadorozhnyuk and senior researcher of the Department of Eastern Europe at the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences of the Russian Academy of Sciences Y. Scherbakova. In our country, this problem has not been explored before and it caused the choice of the research topic.

The aim of the work is to determine the place of the political party "Direction – Social Democracy" in the political life of Slovakia. In order to fulfil it such issues as the creation of a new political subject and its identification; participation in parliamentary elections; the reasons for the growth of the party electoral success until 2016 and its fall on the basis of voting in 2016 will be considered there.

The main body. In 1999, the deputy of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Robert Fico announced the creation of a new subject of the political system of the country – the party "Direction" (SMER). Its constituent assembly was held on December 10, 1999. The main reason for the creation of a new party was "disagreement with the policy of the ruling coalition" [1], which had the most negative influence on the middle and lower groups of the population [2].

As for the researchers, the main reason for the creation of the party was R. Fico's ambitions and the ruling coalition as well as the opposition immediately felt that. The party and R. Fico personally started to "gain points" actively following the principle "a plague on both your houses", and since 2001, no one's name but his appeared so often on the pages of the Slovak press [3, с. 407].

From its very beginning the party supported the idea of a social state, which included the

active role of the state in the economy, the refusal to privatize strategic enterprises, social equality and consolidation of the society. The foreign government policy orientation "with its one-sided reliance towards the USA" was sharply criticized [2].

The party positioned itself as a party of the "third way" offering a pragmatic and rational solution of problems and a party of "new faces" insisting on generation changes in the political life of the country [1]. Although the Czech researchers S. Balík and L. Kopeček were surprised with the last statement because the leaders of "Direction" could not be called hommo novus [4]. Thus, R. Fico himself, like his deputy Dušan Čaplovič were members of Left Democrats Party, Milan Murgaš – Communist Party of Slovakia (before 1990), Boris Zala – Social Democratic Party of Slovakia, Monika Flašíková-Beňová – Movement for Democratic Slovakia.

In the initial period of its activity the ideological orientation of "Direction" was difficult to be determined. R. Fico himself insisted that it was a non-ideological party of a new type that would not allow itself to qualify in the co-ordinate system of right and left wing political party [5, s. 79]. But the key statement was that the party was formed in post-Mečiar[1] period, therefore self-definition in the co-ordinate system of Mečiarism – anti-Mečiarism had been already irrelevant [6, s. 283]. More appropriate its description was the "party of one person" as the most well-known party member was only its leader R. Fico. He was also the only party representative in the parliament from 1999 to 2002. Other researchers referred it to centrist and populist parties [5, s. 79].

In 2002 parliamentary elections were held. 25 political subjects took part in them. According to the voting results, "Direction" was the third, gained 13.46% of the vote [7] and received 25 deputy seats [8].

After the parliamentary elections "Directions" shifted to the left and a number of left-wing marginal political parties (Left Democrats Party, Slovak Social Democratic Party, Slovak Democratic Alternative, Civic Understanding Party) were included in it or even absorbed. That led to the changes in the party name: from December 2004 it became known as "Direction – Social Democracy" (D–SD). However, according to S. Balík and L. Kopeček, declaring themselves as a party of a "new center" was a bit of formality, as most often the D–SD appealed to its voters with populist slogans [4]. Moreover, if the European Social Democrats gave the first place in their program to the issues of equality, social integration and globalization, then the issues of the national state came first for D–SD [9, s. 29].

D–SD won next parliamentary elections (2006) gaining 29.14% of the vote [10] and receiving 50 deputy seats [11]. The voting results indicated that the party had already formed its electoral core.

In its pre-election program, the party focused on building a social state, combating economic crime and corruption. In comparison with previous elections, that campaign was not so aggressive. The main slogans posted on the billboards were "Let's decide!" and "Towards the people!" [12, p. 106].

According to the Slovak political scientist Ľuboš Blaha, in 2006, the "standard left-wing party of the social democratic type" had won in Slovakia for the first time since 1998. He also called that "the historical success of Social Democracy" [13, c. 129]. His enthusiasm could be explained by the fact that in 2004–2006 L. Blaha was a head of the International Department of the Communist Party of Slovakia, and since 2012 has been a member of D–SD. Slovakia became the last among Visegrád countries, where Social Democrats took the leading place in the government coalition.

The Russian researcher Yulia Shcherbakova, citing the works of foreign researchers, highlighted several reasons for the victory of D–SD: the loss of support of pro-European and pro-market parties in many countries of Eastern Europe up to the transfer of power to the coalitions propagandized nationalism, including Slovakia; populism; a mixture of nationalism and populism [13, c. 137].

As for the identification of D–SD after 2006 elections, the researchers said that the party retained "programmatic and behavioral features" strongly differed from those of the European Social Democrats. It was concerned with nationalism and ways of maintaining law and order in the country. L. Kopeček, in turn, noted: "Robert Fico could not develop "Direction" in other way ... "Direction" project was firstly based on those positions that only need was to react to the current electoral request and provide simple and reliable solutions. That political strategy – easy adaption to the changing

[1] Vladimír Mečiar is a Slovak politician and statesman. In 1990–1998 he was a head of the Slovak government three times. He came to power on the wave of anti-communist moods and then was criticized for nondemocratic methods of management.

conditions – might lead to the transformation of party identity in future" [6, s. 301].

The next parliamentary elections were held in 2010. D–SD won, gaining 34.79% of the vote [14] and receiving 62 seats [15]. That electoral success made it possible to talk about the formation of a multiparty system in Slovakia with a dominant political party [5, s. 85].

That solid victory of D–SD could be explained by next factors. Firstly, it was the personality of R. Fico who remained the most popular politician as the results of a survey of the population opinion showed. Secondly, it was a favorable economic situation, accompanied by GDP growth, average wages increase, unemployment decrease, relatively painless entry into Eurozone etc. Thirdly, it was the usage of national and nationalistic plots. For example, the Law on State Citizenship (2010)[1] was enacted as a response to the Hungarian authorities' policy. The fact was that more easy procedure for obtaining Hungarian citizenship for ethnic Hungarians living on the territory of neighboring countries (including Slovakia) was established in Hungary. Following that, Slovakia prohibited dual citizenship: ethnic Hungarians who decided to take advantage of the proposal of the Hungarian authorities would lost their Slovak citizenship. The second example was a campaign that appeared in Slovak society connected with the erection of a monument to the prince of the Great Moravia Sviatopolk I (2010) , etc. [16, s. 70].

Despite the positive results, D–SD failed to form a coalition in the parliament. As the Russian researcher Ella Zadorozhnyuk noted the representatives of four right-wing parties that entered the parliament refused any negotiations with left centrists on the formation of ruling coalition [17, c. 54]. The opportunity to form a government passed to the leader of the second largest number of seats in the parliament – "The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic party".

In 2011 financial and economic crisis expanded and forced the right centrist government in Slovakia to assist Greece. For the Slovaks, it was a paradox because the Greeks had an average wage three times higher and the average pension four times higher than Slovaks had, the size of GDP per capita in Greece was 27 thousand Euros, in Slovakia – 23 thousand [17, c. 56]. So representatives of D–-SD did not support the ratification of the treaty on assistance to Greece. In the current situation, it was proposed to hold early parliamentary elections. They were appointed on March 10, 2012.

D–SD won the elections with a result of 44.41% of the vote [18]. As the winning party received the absolute majority of parliament seats (83) [19], a government was formed by one party without any coalition. It was occurred for the first time in the history of the Slovak republic. Since those elections the balance of political forces in the Slovak parliament had significantly changed.

Among the reasons for that electoral success were the popularity of the party leader R. Fico and proposed solutions of the economic problems. In particular, the there was a promise to create a strong social insurance system.

Such a convincing victory of D–SD confirmed that in Slovakia other conditions for functioning of the political system had been formed. The appearance of one dominant party (D–SD) changed the nature of political competition: the right-wing parties were forced to integrate in order to found an effective and efficient opposition, to elaborate an alternative program of social development [5, s. 86].

Throughout the whole period of its activity, D–SD in comparison with other Slovak political parties is distinguished by the stability of its personnel. Since its presence within the parliament, none of the party parliamentary group in the electoral cycles of 2002–2006, 2006–2010, 2010–2012 and 2012–2016 did not left D–SD. Among the reasons for that factional stability were the fact that in 1999 "Direction" was not formed by merging political entities or splitting up the already functioning party structures, but by creating one single center. Another factor was R. Fico himself and the concentration of power in the hands of a narrow party leadership. The sphere of their competence is the approval and withdrawal of regional leaders. That centralization of power stimulated discussions about the lack of democracy within D–SD [20, s. 585].

The last parliamentary elections (2016) were marked by decrease of D–SD popularity. Thus, according to the results of voting, the party received 28.28% of the vote and 49 seats in the parliament [21]. The largest outflow of former D–SD voters occurred into the Slovak

[1] The creation of the monument caused controversy in Slovakia. Some critics were convinced that prince's outward did not correspond to reality. Others accused the authorities of trying to rewrite history and create a new hero. On the pedestal of the statue it is written: "Sviatopolk is the king of the ancient Slovaks". They saw there was an attempt to present the Great Moravia as a Slovak principality and Sviatopolk, a Hungarian by nationality, as an ancestor of modern Slovaks.

People's Party (9.6%), into other political parties the number of defectors was not so significant. That situation differed sharply from 2012, when almost 9 out of 10 D–SD voters reelected it [22, s. 7]. The results of the vote led to the fact that D–SD had to search for allies. As a result, in April 2016, the so-called "patchwork" ruling coalition formed (D–SD, nationalist Slovak People's Party, the Hungarian minority party "Most" (from Slovak and Hungarian – "Bridge"), right centric "Network" (# Sieť)).

Conclusion. Thus, the parliamentary elections in 2016 significantly changed the configuration of the political scene in Slovakia. The share of new non-systemic parties increased. Heterogeneous coalition was formed. The results of the voting also have shown that the party and political system in Slovakia continues to change, there is an electorate flow from "Direction – Social Democracy" to new political subjects ("We are the family", "Network") and ultra-right ones ("People's Party – our Slovakia"). Therefore, after the parliament elections in 2016 in Slovakia, the tendency of the formation of a multi-party system with one dominant party (D–SD) has been reduced.

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