

Buzzwords in politics?

Communication and discourses of national politics in context to the local and regional level.

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Abstract

The themes of regionalization, good governance, autonomy, decentralization and reforms are very popular words of the politics at the national level when it comes to their re-election, or holding their power interest. The paper will focus mainly on the communication of national politics, how they used these local and regional themes, how they promote their view and how exactly the reality looks according to their activities. The results should be presented not only the political discourse of national politics, but also the reality; these two different worlds are often struggling together.

Key words: buzzwords, discourses, local and regional politics, political communication, negativity, positive and negative tone, responsibility, finance.

1 Buzzwords vs. discourses in politics, a theoretical framework

Words are the tool that creates politics and power position, words creates the world. Politics are communicated in the society (potential voters) to influence their activities and position in the relation to them, especially in the campaign period they try to convince them to vote for them. We can observe many discourses that are visible in the society, some of them are visible for decades, and some of them are visible in specific events. This is especially visible in the political sphere, where the political discourses create the reality. Political discourses are mainly expressions of a complex relationship between the man and society focused on the shaping of the image perception of the world policy in context of the recipient. There is still missing a general definition of political discourse. For example Baranov and Kazakevič

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(1991) define political discourses as a complex summary of all speech acts used in political discussions, rules of public policy, proven political tradition and experiences. Irina Dulebová (2012) defines political discourse as verbal communication in specific social or psychological context in which the author and the recipient allocate certain social roles in accordance with their participation in political life, which is the subject of communications.

Teun A. van Dijk (1997) observes more complication in the relation to the definition “what is a political discourse”? He notices that there are more complications that rise from the perspective of the number of the participants in the communication sphere in context of the political discourse. There are not only politicians (in sense of a group), but also other dominant participants in the domain of politics, as various recipients, such as public, people, “masses” or citizens, voters, people as members of pressure and issue groups, dissidents, demonstrators, groups or individuals, organizations and institutions and etc. All of them could be added in the political process and in this reason there are also actively involved in the political discourses. (van Dijk, 1997, pp. 12-13)

Van Dijk also examine various factors and areas of political discourses according to the discourse structure (a discursive methods of doing politics) (van Dijk, 1997, p. 25):

- Topics,
- Schemata,
- Local semantics,
- Style and rhetoric,
- Expression structures,
- Speech acts and interaction,
- Lexicon,
- Syntax.

We can observe that van Dijk in-depth analyses all the dimensions and levels of political contexts. Which isn't our purpose in this article, the main aim is the present the (political) topics that are preferred in the communication of national politics in the context of local and regional level.

The political actors often communicate the main topics with words that are created as a short cut for the society. In other words, the words are explaining difficult terms and processes that are visible in the political sphere through fashionable context that should impress the recipient or that should allow him easier to understand the context. Politicians

want to be trendy and modern so they often used these types of words that are connected with a specialized sphere or topic that usually sounds very important, to impress the society.

The scientific or modern term, which described these words, is “buzzwords”, devoted from jargon or neologism. But we can still observe that there is missing a complex definition and typology that is related to the world of the buzzwords, which are more often used by the journalist or some analysts that are describing the world of politics.

As Cornwall and Brock (2005) observes, “buzzwords are essentially contested concepts, making sense of what they do for development calls for closer attention to the discourses of which they form part and where contestations over meaning take place.” (Cornwall – Brock, 2005, p. 1046)

2 Methodology

This study considers as the main tool of a political news analysis the so-called „artistic week“ (Brosius – Koschel – Haas, 2009, pp. 165-166), which tries to encompass a certain time-limited space with the aim of pursuing concrete trends within a media news service. Based upon a given key, this study has chosen relevant press media or their news service part, divided it into 52 weeks (1 year/52) and assigned each week to one concrete „research day“ in a random way (drawing). Each research day that will fall on one week in relation to the chosen press and television news services will be completely analysed. Within the content analyses, the aim of the so-called artistic week is to clarify and demonstrate formal characteristics of the studied phenomenon. In other words, the given method aims to give certain information within the sampling without it being necessary to study each element individually (Lauf – Berens, 2003).

The relevant media which will be analysed in this study are based upon other researches of watching and reading the media in all quarters in 2010, and upon accessibility or willingness of the media to communicate with researchers and to mediate them the required information. Based upon the above-mentioned limitations, the object of this study is the print media of SME and Pravda and the television media of TV Markíza and STV, or their news service themes. In the case of the print media, it is natural that the analysis shall be focused on concrete news programmes. But in the case of television media, it is necessary to define in beforehand which news programmes shall be analysed since the essence of the „artistic week“

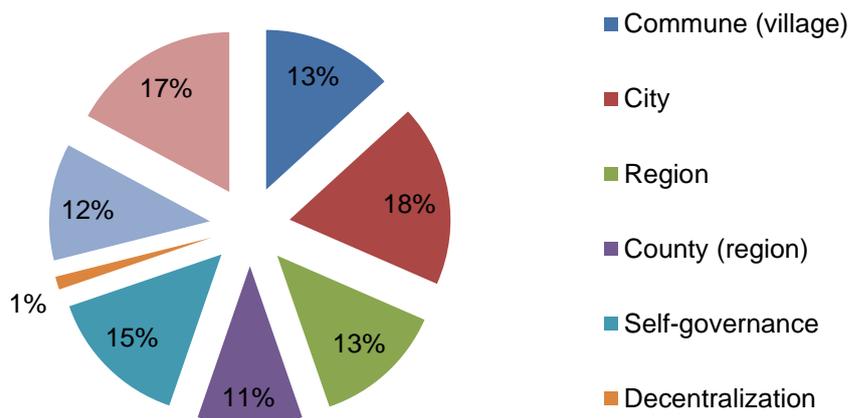
is to analyse identical programmes in relation to their frequency and mediocrity. Therefore, based upon this, our research shall proceed from the analysis of TV news.

Based upon the above-mentioned methods, 2,971 media statements of political players in the Slovak Republic were analysed in the course of the two selected years (January 2010 – December 2011). It is important to take into consideration also the fact that in some media news that were presented through the selected media, there were differently coloured (including an emotional subtext) news what led to the fact that multiple political statements were perceived pursuant to different categorizations.

3 General overview of the dominant “words” in the local and regional context

As I mentioned a few sentence up, 2971 media statements of national politics were analysed, but from this “bunch” of messages only 2, 56 % were related to something that is in relation to local and regional level. The main purpose of these selections was to divide the discourses that were related to analysed subjects (local and regional). If you look a little bit closer to the founded words, we can observe that the most visible or multitude word related to our research “topic” is the word “city” and the second “city mayor” (see scheme no. 1). This multitude visibility of these words could be related to the fact that in Slovak case more city mayor are also elected as MP in Slovak parliament and in this sense more visible than “normal” local or regional leaders.

Scheme No. 1: Multitude of words related to the local and regional level in the political messages of national actors in Slovakia



Source: Authors' own data from the quantitative research of communication of political actors in Slovakia (2010-2011)

At the beginning of the analyses I must notice that these selected period January 2010 – December 2011 was very specific in the relation not only to the national politics, these specifics started to be more visible at the beginning of the deeply analyses of the political messages of national actors in the relation to the local and regional „terms“. In other words, in this period were not only parliamentary election (June 2010), but also local election (November 2010) and also the „fall“ of the new coalition government (October 2011). These events as I will be described further influenced the communication of the national actors in the relations to the local and regional level.

One of the main goals of this article was not only find words that could be related to the term buzzwords, but also find any regular repeatability of political discourses in the communication of national actors in relation to the local and regional level. The political messages will be analysed through their multitude in general and through their discourse at specific time and events. And this is also the main reason why the analysed periods are not systematically divided into some number of months, etc. The main aim of this specific divided period – before parliamentary election, after parliamentary election, before local election, and after local election till the “fall” of the government - is to analyse how also the position of national politics influence their communication in the relation to the local and national, and also the “tone” of the communication if differ how.

3.1 Multitude of discourses in Slovak case

The multitude of the “words” – those were associated with the local and regional level in the communication of national politics – was achieved through the internet software called Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net/>), all messages were generated through this. The “first” most multitude word – *responsibility* – was also in favour with the communication of national actors at the national level, not only to the local and regional level. On the other positions of the most frequently used terms were placed terms as “money, finance, work, social (adjective), social (attribute), exhaustively, service, obligation, European funds, ensure, independent, conditions, decisions and etc.

Despite the fact that every single "word" deserves detailed analysis in the present article, I will address in particular to the words that are morphed into existing discourses under other investigations or created within the "new" political discourse context on the local and regional level in communication of national actors.

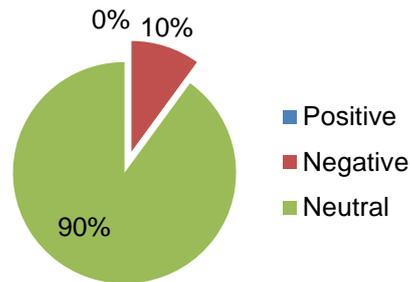
Scheme No. 2: Most frequently used terms of national politics in the relation with local and regional level in research period



Source: Authors' own processing in the Wordle software, data from the quantitative research of communication of political actors in Slovakia (2010 -2011)

Using this filter we are able to detect these words – responsibility, social and “social”, work, money and finance. These words are deliberately chosen because they are related or associated to the other main and frequent used words as European funds, service, conditions, decisions, program, independent, obligation, exhaustively.

Scheme No. 3: Multitude of the term “Responsibility” in the communication of national politics in context of local and regional level



Source: Authors' own data

As previously indicated, the term accountability bears a national context, respectively is among the most used and the most frequent words in Slovak politics, without any differences in the levels of performance. The term is associated with the declining credibility of politicians in the eyes of society, and the discourse for it is named “ethics policy” (Bútorová – Gyarfášová, 2012, p. 4; Čuchtová : 2014)

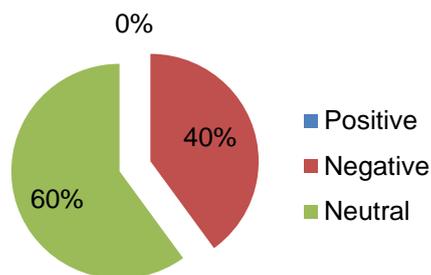
We can also observe that “responsibility” had a neutral tone of communication from the national actors, which was related to the main information about conditions and obligations of municipalities. In the relation to the negative tone, it was visible only in the relation with the proposal of new “debt” brake that should also include municipalities:

„We are trying to convince them, that these things aren't needed to be associated with it ... but we also believed that it will be better that also municipalities doesn't remain aside from this constitutional law“. (Ondrej Matej, 19.10.2011)

We should understand the municipalities' positions, because for them it is impossible to seek any constitutionally responsibility, if some right wing conglomerate takes their money.” (Peter Kažimír, Smer-SD, 19.10.2011)

In general we can observe that the term „responsibility“ is maybe often used by the national politics, but without any „emotional“ tone (negative vs. positive), they are tend to use dominantly only neutral tone which could be related to the sensibility of this term in the relation to the „ethics policy“.

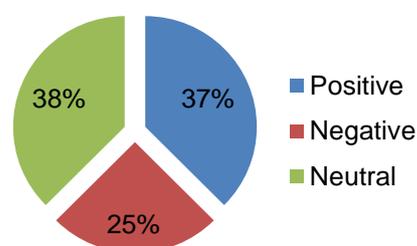
Scheme No. 4: Multitude of the term “Social” in the communication of national politics in context of local and regional level



Source: Authors' own data

Also the same pattern of using dominantly neutral or negative tone was visible within the other words associated with “social” as work, service, security, benefit and etc. The term social was also visible in the parliamentary election of 2010 and also in 2012 in every party manifesto, mainly in the manifesto of social democrats and also on their billboards, or media statements. The most often used connection was “*people deserve social security*”. But the term in local and regional context was associated with bad spending of social benefits of municipalities, or the lack of finance for payment of social benefits of municipalities. At the first moment this could be look like normal, until we realized that social benefits are not the responsibility of municipalities. From these words, that where associated with “social” only word “work” has a positive tone in communication. It was link with the context of government funding of regional projects, creation of new jobs, reform of the Labour Code, which should also bring new job opportunities in various regions, especially with high unemployment.

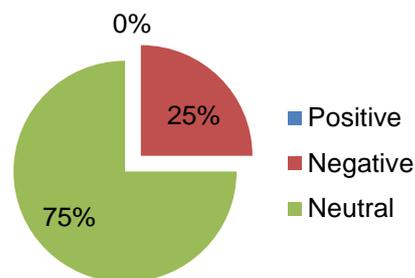
Scheme No. 5: Multitude of the term “Work” in the communication of national politics in context of local and regional level



Source: Authors' own data

Also the next word – money – was commonly used at the national level in the regional and local context, without any change of the pattern, neutral tone dominant, and negative is used, and positive absent.

Scheme No. 6: Multitude of the term “Money” in the communication of national politics in context of local and regional level

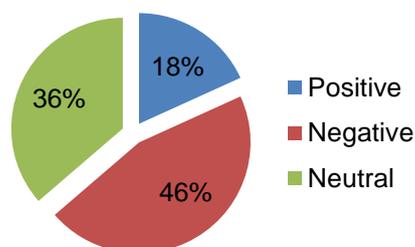


Source: Authors' own data

The neutral tone was in link with the conditions how the municipalities get more money to their local (regional) budget, or obligations that municipalities should have in order to achieved a higher amount of it, or drawing state budget and allocating money within them. The negative tone of the communication of national politics in the local and regional context was related to the bad management of state money.

In this case the communication was maybe link to lost, but if we compare “money” and “finance” as the next word, we can observe differences especially in the ability of national actors to used positive tone of communication.

Scheme No. 7: Multitude of the term “Finance” in the communication of national politics in context of local and regional level



Source: Authors' own data

The positive tone of communication in this sphere was visible in the connection with the state financing of municipalities, and co-financing of individual local or regional areas (European funds especially), with the reform process that should improve financing and management of local authorities, and etc. And again the negative tone, as it was visible in the term “money”, was link to the negative funding of municipalities, in other words allegations of inefficient management of the financial resources of towns and villages, or inefficient spending of finance dues.

3.2 The discourses of different times and events in Slovak case

As we mentioned at the beginning of this article the period which was analysed was very specific in the relations of interesting events that took place in it. The first interesting event that took place in June 2010 was the parliamentary election in Slovakia and should be completely change the communication of national actors also in the relation to the local and regional context. Discourses that were presented in this period tends to create broad electoral discourses that have the role to mobilize potential voters and also the position of every political entity who's run in the campaign. The electoral communication that was already visible in January 2010 presents every topic that was related to local and regional level in neutral tone. The national actors were trying to promote these themes merely in neutral communication in the connection not only with new reforms at these levels, but they tend to indicate some reform problems within communicate some reforms problems with a lightweight tones, and in certain case direct threats are coated in notification sentences. One of many examples is the dictum of former Prime Minister Robert Fico (Smer-SD), when he was in publicity in favour with his party members in the cities and villages:

„We will not be deemed inadmissible if, in the case of two equal projects, with the same quality and the same overall effect, the responsible minister gives priority to the project of any city and village mayor from our party, or our ruling coalition”. (Robert Fico, Smer-SD, 07.06.2010)

At the opposite side, the negative tone of communication was dominantly used only be the opposition leaders, were for example one direct quote is trying to point out the “unfair” practices of ruling party, which was trying to “blackmail” mayors from other – opposition parties in the relation to the spending of EU funds:

“The mayor shall advise the entrance to a coalition political party if they want European funds They got a notice from the party officials that they have no chance to get the funds if they are from SDKU -DS. Than in order to have change, they should enter to the party Smer-SD”. (Ivan Mikloš, SDKÚ-DS, 14.04. 2010)

In general we can say that within the electoral discourse, which was recorded in this period before parliamentary election (June 2010) in the context of our pursued entities (municipalities, cities, counties, etc.) the topic was clearly established at the beginning of the electoral campaigns and was related to the financing of towns and villages, as well to the themes of building motorways, their reconstruction in individual regions. In these themes were predominantly used positive tones of communication from the national politics, especially governmental politics. As one of the most examples of such propaganda we used the announced of the opening of the new motorway by the Prime Minister Robert Fico (Smer-SD). This announced was promoting shortly before the date of the election itself:

„Highway and their sections Prešov – Svinia, Beharovce – Studenec, Studenec – Jablonov. The journey from the East to the West of Slovakia has a new 15 kilometre. From the 6 pm we are able to drive a car from Presov to Svinia on a new highway. Every highway kilometre which will be added will be our victory!”(07.06.2010)

Another theme that was visible in the electoral period in the relation to the local and regional level, were the pretended activities of national politics. This discourse tend to promote active politicians whose tend to build a functional feedback with the local and regional level, or between the national and local (regional) level. In other words, they promote that they are able to ensure that their (municipalities) demands are heard.

“The politician who is honestly is working also in the summer period. The job description of a MP is not only meeting in the Parliament, in summer he is travelling to the regions, to the citizens, to the municipalities, looking for feedback, creating and preparing new laws and amendments (Iveta Radičová, SDKÚ-DS, 11.05.2010)

“We are planning to spend 44 days within the people in the regions, and also we are planning to visit more than 500 villages and cities around the Slovak republic.” (Juraj Miškov, SaS, 12.04.2010)“

„In me 20 years of political carrier I haven't got such summer that I wouldn't went to the regions and villages and wouldn't have meetings there.” (Béla Bugár, Most-Híd, 26.05.2010)

In the relation to the communication, especially to tone which was used before the parliamentary election in the local and regional context, the communication after the parliamentary election fundamentally changed. The themes maybe remain, but the context and also the tone changed. As also before the election, also after them the discourse about financing the municipalities remain, or better said dominate. But the main difference was the tone of communication, neutral was changing to negative tone, which was link with the changes in the power positions and also taking “new” governmental responsibilities and also agendas from the old government.

„We inherited a very bad situation with regard to the additional expenses, which is particular associated with works from removing the effects of floods, partial compensation of the financial deficit of municipalities that does will be visible in this yearly deficit. This is best illustrated by the budget for the people - victims that were affected by the floods; the public account shows only the amount of 200 euros. So these are the main reasons, why we can eliminate the deficit only to a very limited extent. The largest consolidation should come in the course of the year 2011.” (Ivan Mikloš, SDKÚ-DS,19,07,2010)

The negative tone is only used through comparative political messages, which again is visible in the communication of new coalition government. The coalition politicians blamed previous government leadership in context of lack of funds at the municipality level.

„We will negotiate as soon as we have a mandate. Still the current leadership Robert Fico and his ministers get salaries, so they should work on it....” (Ivan Mikloš, SDKÚ-DS 30.06.2010)

In this period we can also observe the fact that politicians tend to be more careful in their statements, especially in the relation to the reform process of the municipalities, including their partial spheres, also including the distribution of money to them.

In the analysed period was visible also another specific event – local election in November 2010 – that should fundamentally change the communication of national politicians in analysed context (local and regional). We can observe that the “main” discourse about financing the municipalities doesn’t changed, but the negative tone was replaced in more political messages by positive one. This was visible especially in the steps that the current government announced in the implementation of new budget in each municipality in Slovakia.

„I understand that we are public figures and people like gossips. But we are also proud for the new budget that was implemented in every municipality in Slovakia.” (Ivan Švejna, Most-Híd, 08.09.2010)

In the comparison of the parliamentary elections where earlier rhetoric was directed by the presentation of an active policy and active politicians at the local and regional level (building an efficient and effective feedback between national and local / regional level), the rhetoric in this pre-election time changed. Despite the fact that remained in neutral tone, they promote mutual cooperation between the parties, or creation of “strong” electoral tandem at the local level to succeed in municipal election.

On the other hand we must say that within discourses began to accrue the terms that have been associated with the inability to create coalitions, or inability to negotiation and compliance, and problems in the nomination of potential candidates. In general such actions or problems of political parties, or alliances were always visible within the local (as well as regional) level. Respectively “national” division of two opposing camps was not copied automatically at the regional or local level:

“In the region we can observe the competence between right – wing parties, which is curious and strange if we look on the national level. But this situation doesn’t come from our side or arrogance. What we do with it? The main problem is that the negotiations were not friendly, especially the negotiations in Košice region.” (Béla Bugár, Most-Híd, 02.10.2010)

At least, we can also observe than in this short period minimum numbers of any discourses were presented, but rather national politicians focused on national themes, or neutral report on these (municipal) activities. We can observe that this “neutral” trend of communication may be related to the political and social situation that prevailed within each party. As well as the subsequent election results, the defeat of right wing parties was expected mainly in their traditional bastions.

The last period that was analysed (after the local election till the fall of the government) was very different in the relation to the local and regional level, but not only in the discourses that were visible but also in the tone of the communication.

In this period only the coalition parties presented themes associated with the local and regional level, especially in the context of an effective financing and effective reform process. They tried to present not only the steps but also the reforms that could effectively increase the activity of local governments and their individual parts, as also the fact that they are helping with better functioning. In other words, the present sub-themes related to the municipalities and their performance. The examples are presented mainly by “financial inject” into improving technical background, or help investors in the region, as well as help to strengthening safety in regions. The interesting thing in these activities was the fact that these reforms were predominantly presented by the governmental ministers, rather there but the political (party) leaders which was visible in the previous periods. The main aim of such propaganda was to draw the picture that the governmental officials are trying to help at every corner at the local and regional level.

„Strengthens the special police unit ... (in Presov region). This will be positive error in the regional security that also the people will feel. (Daniel Lipšic, KDH, 04.01.2011)

„Technical background for rescuers. If some operator will be not able to redirect links to other regional coordination centre we will have a backup solution. We will be able to localise the callers for help from any geographical local or regional unit through navigation satellite.“ (Daniel Lipšic, KDH, 19.01.2011)

„New rules for investors. We will mainly support Eastern part of Slovakia, but Žilina and Banská Bystrica region, through a finance shortcut for investors. We

are convinced that investment incentives distort the business environment, but on the other hand we have neighbors like the Czech, Poles and Hungarians who give investment incentives, and we want to attract his investment to Slovakia, so we have donate them also.” (Juraj Miškov, SaS, 19.01.2011)

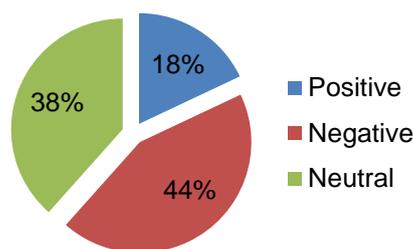
In this period we can finally observe some “word” that tends to wear marks of political “buzzword”. The term – “slimmer” municipalities (Richard Sulík, SaS,08.04.2011) – is describing the effective and efficient government, which should be achieved by the reform and reduction of the number of deputies at the local councils (in Slovak propels by reduction of 30 %). Another most mediatized statement that was visible in the “long” period was presented in global context and associated with the “Slovakian region”. The message was link with investment opportunities in the regions, as well as strengthening the weaker regions with financial incentives – “Slovak region the Singapore of Central and Eastern Europe”. (Juraj Miškov, SaS, 04.12.2011²)

3.3 Self-governance as punching doll at national level

The main theme or term that was visible through all analysed periods was associated with the finance of local and regional level. It became a very universal for all segments of society, including politicians, which was already confirmed by several polls. The theme was communicated differently according the position (coalition vs. opposition, parliament vs. non-parliament) of national politics in the system, and also according to the events in the society (elections, the fall of the government, etc.) Some of national politicians have started to raise the importance of this theme to an independent discourse that was related to the function and effectiveness of local and regional level. We must also notice, that this theme was in the communication of national politicians mainly visible by the negative tone (44%) or neutral tone (38%) the positive tone was maybe visible but at minimal level (18%).

Scheme No. 8: Political discourse “Finance” in the communication of national politics in context of local and regional level

² The first mention of this term was used in 06.,06.2011.



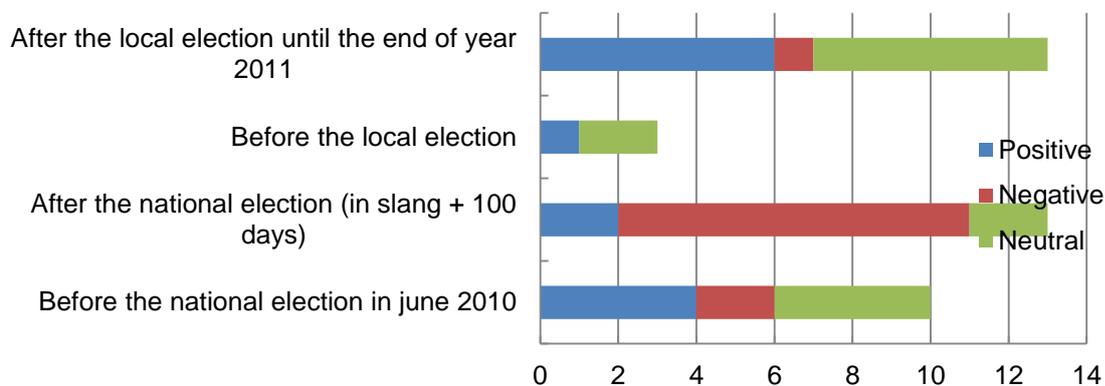
Source: Authors' own data

We must also notice that the tone of communication in the relation of this theme was changed not only by the position of the national actors, but also by the specific events where they operated. A positive tone was predominantly visible in the electoral period (parliamentary election June 2010), as also neutral tone of communication, the negative tone was on his minimum. We can in this case also assume that politicians tried to follow and reflected the mood of the society within the main discourses. We can assume that the main priorities in the policy belonged to the improvement and enhance municipal finance, construction of motorways in the regions with the aim of linking towns and villages together in Slovak republic.

The situation change after the parliamentary election, as we already mentioned it upper in the text. This was visible in the activities of new coalition government, when in fact the Money (finance) and the municipalities were connected through a negative tone of communication. In this case the municipalities were set into the position of a “punching doll” in the perspective of the new government politicians who inherited financial problems of municipalities after the previous government. The positive tone of the discourse was slowly retreated into the background, because if was not necessary to reach and mobilize potential voters.

The situation again changed shortly before the local election in the context of the “finance” theme. The national politics tends to promote neutral and positive tone of communication in context of local and regional level, rather to used negative messages, but in comparison to other analysed period the frequency of this discourse decline. I suggest that it was closely linked to the local elections themselves, respectively to the electoral agendas of individual candidates for the local level, which doesn't enjoyed some many attention not only from the media, but also from the national level, who also did not communicate these agendas towards to the media.

Scheme No. 9: Term „Finance in general“ in the communication of national politics according different time period and different events



Source: Authors' own data from the quantitative research of communication of political actors in Slovakia (2010-2011)

The last analysed period in the relation to the theme “finance” was in favour to the positive and neutral tone of communication of national actors in context to the local and regional level. This was mainly related to the fact that in this period was predominantly expressed by government politicians, mostly ministers, who presented the new reforms within certain areas in municipalities, which should contribute to the improvement and function of their services, as well acquiring strategic positions in the context of increasing employment in the regions and etc.

Final remarks

If we notice that this theme was visible through all analysed periods, we are able to re-create dominant political discourse that were present in the communication of national politics in the context of local and regional level. We are also able to identify the type of discourse according to the result from the research. As we know there discourses are visible in every sphere of society, including the political area. But in the relation to the mediated political messages we are analysed solely “media political” discourse, that is different like “normal” political discourse. The difference rallies on the position of the media in it, while in the “normal” political discourse the position of the media is zero, in the media political discourse we observe media who are monitoring the activities of politicians. In other words monitored discourse is intended for the general public, this requires mutual cooperation between both actors who are created this discourse – media and politician. This cooperation give them the

opportunity to participate in creating conditions by which de facto power created to power configuration in society.

According this short description we can notice that in the Slovak case the main media political discourses in the context of regional and local level are following features and arguments:

- *Legacy of the former government / what we have inherited from the former government* (current government is trying to justified their problems that occurred before they were the “rulers”);
- *Villages / towns without money* (this discourse serves as a supporting rationale for the measures taken in relation to municipalities, especially the finance reform);
- *Communities threatened with bankruptcy* (also serves as a supporting rationale for the reducing the volume of giving money from the state to local governments)
- *The government buys work* (the investments into the region with high unemployment);
- *Slimmer municipalities*, also define as a specific buzzword (describing the effective and efficient local government, which should be achieved by the reform and reduction of the number of deputies at the local councils)
- *Počiatkove statements are for a doctor*, also define as a specific buzzword (criticism of populist statements and also criticism of politics call “appearance of doing political activities”)
- *“MP in the skip of Mayors”*

As far as national politicians at the parliamentary level use mostly discourses that are in conjunction with the ethic of politics, transparency, openness or transparency, in the communication to the (or about) local and regional level they often used words in the negative sense, especially in the case of finance. They tend to promote the local and regional sphere only before parliamentary (or local, regional) election.

As far as we can observe the main context or discourse in the communication of national politicians to the (or about) local and regional level, we could look forward and analyse the communication of the local or regional actors to the national sphere. Maybe we can achieve similar results as in this article that also local and regional actors are often using discourses and fashionable words in the context of finance, or non-finance from the state level.

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