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EUROPEAN IDENTITY OF THE SELECTED SLOVAK POLITICAL REPRESENTATIVES DURING THE PERIOD OF EUROZONE CRISIS

L'ubica Šebeňová*

ABSTRACT

Identity is integral in understanding politics, shaping their interpretation and response to events. This article analyses the process of formation of the European identity during the times of Eurozone crisis within the discourse of selected Slovak political representatives – Róbert Fico and Richard Sulík. The main research question is: „How is the European identity of the examined political leaders being built in the context of crisis?” The research is accomplished by analysing texts and speeches of selected politicians using the discourse analysis based on the model created by Paul Chilton. Through discourse analysis, it was possible to describe ways, which led to the formation of European identity of each politician during the examined period. Fico shares the pro-European attitude towards the integration and solutions of its internal problems in the period of debt crisis. He primarily used a function of coercion in order to explain the steps, his government took in regards to the EU and to approve his decisions in front of the public. In the discourse of Richard Sulik, the delegitimisation, which is associated to the criticism of the functioning of the EU, dominates. Thus, his European identity is mainly created through opposing the particular points of the future development of the Union. The article tries to be a contribution to the wide discussion about the European identity crisis having its roots at the times of economic crisis.

Key words: European identity, economic crisis, Eurozone, Slovakia, discourse

Introduction

The global economic depression, particularly the Eurozone crisis, and the responses of the Union to it pushed national political elites to put the EU affairs at the top of their domestic agenda. In fact, necessity of finding a solution to the crisis on the European level led to the Europeanisation of national elites' policies, whether Europhiles or Eurosceptics. European integration became contested at the national level and European questions became part of the

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narrative of national politicians. In the political programs of their parties, national elites often define their attitude towards the process of EU integration, the term Europe became part of their political entity.

It is precisely the actor's identity, which is integral in understanding politics, shaping their interpretation and response to events. As argued by **Risse et al.**, the attitude of politicians towards the European integration process is not based only on their economic and geopolitical interests, thus they are influenced by their visions of European political order, which depend on the identity of the actors. The interaction of visions of European political representatives are shaping the EU to its current form (Risse et al., 1999, p. 148-149). Therefore, the European identity is built in the everyday political life, taking place in individual institutions on both, domestic and EU level. The particular decisions, regulations or other legislative documents and statements of politicians create an opportunity of the EU citizens to identify themselves with the EU values, build attitude towards the integration process, and form their European identity.

Politics cannot exist without the use of language. Political representatives use the language to address their opinions and persuade the voters, they have the same perceptions and profess the same values. It is therefore the language and linguistic processes, which construct, negotiate and represent the identities (Fina, Schiffrin, Bamberg, 2006, p. 341). The European identity is being formed within the political discourse.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the discourse of selected political leaders of the Slovak Republic – **Róbert Fico** and **Richard Sulík**. Slovakia was one of the EU members affected by the crisis the less. Nevertheless, it was the only country that opposed the Greek bailout which directly led to the fall of the then government. It was the first time in the history, when EU topics were discussed in the Slovak parliament in such intensity and even had impact on the Slovak political scene. In this context, the selected politicians took opposing stands – **Róbert Fico** as a supporter of all the initiatives for saving the integration process as proposed by the European Commission and **Richard Sulík** as the one who was of the opinion that only no supporting measures but leaving the Eurozone can save Greece.

It has often been pointed out that the beginning of European integration was known by a "permissive consensus" of the European public in favour of further integration (see e.g. Lindberg, Scheingold, 1970). However, during the Eurozone crisis, the increasing public interest on European policy issues and rising Euroscepticism in many European member states is notable. At the same

time, the degree of public support for European integration has become increasingly important in shaping member state governments' incentives to oppose or promote the further transfer of policy-making responsibilities to the European level (Hooghe, Marks, 2009). In particular, the financial crisis in the EU once more highlighted that domestic public opinion can have a critical impact on the governments' policy positions on European policy issues (Hobolt, 2014). However, the case of Slovakia is specific mainly in the fact that Slovak political representatives always supported the accession of the country in the Union as well as closer integration in terms of joining the Eurozone. During the times of the crisis, all of the political parties showed the stronger or weaker signs of Euroscepticism in their policies and statements. This state evolved into the fall of the government that led to **Fico's** return to power and raising criticism towards the EU policies in the Slovak political opposition led by **Richard Sulík**.

The basic research question was determined as follows: *How is the European identity of the examined political leaders being built in the context of the crisis?* This question has two dimensions. First, the essence is to find characteristic in opinions that define their relationship to European politics in times of the economic crisis using the chosen methodology. The second goal is to describe based on prevailing function appearing within the discourse of the politicians whether they appear to be pro-European or rather sceptical towards the integration process during the EU economic crisis (Horník, 2012, p. 6).

The work consists of theoretical and practical parts. The following section explains the concept of European identity and outlines the role of national elites in the process of its formation. At the same time, chapter describes the used methodology while briefly introducing the concept of political discourse and consequently characterising the very method. Methodology, chosen for this paper, is based on the idea of three strategic functions of political discourse, as described by **Paul Chilton**. The part of the section is also the description of the objects of the analysis.

The empirical part consists of the actual analysis of individual political leaders, which was achieved through the citation of concrete parts of the text and their subsequent parsing of the context. Finally, in order to find out the way of identity creation of the chosen national politicians, the used functions in their discourse define their attitude towards integration in times of the economic crisis in the years of 2011-2015 (Horník, 2012, p. 14).

1 Theoretical part and methodology

1.1 Creation of European identity

Collective identity can be defined as a feeling of belonging to some group, connected with the impression of difference towards the outside. It is then easy to define the national identity as a perception of being part of a group sharing common values, traditions, language, having the same political institutions, etc. On the other side, it is much more problematic to explain European identity as it is a new concept which is still in the process of construction and it is more difficult to find the common. The common values such as “*principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law*”¹ as stated in the Treaty of Lisbon are the precondition for building the perception of being European. These common values should ensure the solidarity and legitimacy of a group. Controversially, **Diez** is of the opinion that the core values, and norms of the EU lie at the centre of othering, and that the European self and at the same time the other are being constructed (Diez, 2005, p. 617).

It is a widely shared view that the process of European integration has been and still is driven by the initiative of elites. The European Union is based on contracts and treaties, which put elites into a pivotal role. They are considered to be the consignors, architects and contractors of building the EU, as well as the European identity itself.

National elites play an incontestable role in the EU decision-making process and EU functioning, they approve all the EU legislation as well as the delegation and pooling of sovereignty. The EU and topics related to it became an essential part of the political debate and the fight for votes. Politicians at the national level must often express their attitudes to integration and, willy-nilly, they are becoming a part of the Europeanisation process, they create their own European identity. Therefore, this article sees the European identity as complementary to the national one.

National elites are looking for being a part of this supranational political and economic organisation as it offers them a possibility of higher impact on world affairs and gives protection to their national realms. They establish a feeling of being European and of sameness with other EU countries’ elites based on common cultural, historical and religious traditions (Best, Lengyel, Verzichelli, 2012, p. 6).

¹ Article 6 of Treaty of European Union

Therefore, it can be seen that the European identity is built in the everyday political life, taking place in individual institutions on both, domestic and EU level. The particular decisions, regulations or other legislative documents and statements of politicians create an opportunity of the EU citizens to identify themselves with the EU values, build attitude towards the integration process, and form their European identity.

Identity of political representatives is integral in understanding politics, shaping actor's interpretation and response to events. Politicians create their attitude towards the EU not only by their economic and geopolitical interests but they base their attitude also on their visions of the shape of EU, which depends directly on the identity of the actors (Risse et al., 1999, p. 148-149). Politicians with strong European identity would see the future of EU in federal structure, while the Eurosceptic actors see the future of EU in a grouping of national states.

1.2 The rise of Euroscepticism

Elements of so-called Euroscepticism of the political elites is present from the start of the integration process. National elites want to be the decision-makers, so they would like to prevent governance from being imposed over them (Best, Lengyel, Verzichelli, 2012, p. 5). They do not want to be punished by their voters for unpopular decisions made at the EU level. As the reason of the fact that the citizens do not understand the European Union, they do not agree with the EU decisions and the cession of national sovereignty rights to the EU level are inaccessible for any direct interventions by them, there has been an increasing antipathy of citizens towards closer and deeper EU integration which is leading to estrangement between the Europe of citizens and the Europe of elites (Real-Dato, Göncz, Lengyel, 2012, p. 67). At the same time, the populist politicians, opponents of the integration process, are gaining more and more popularity within the EU electorate. Since political elites try to respond to the preferences of national electorates, it may play out against pro-European politicians, nowadays.

It is obvious that it cannot be assumed that the ultimate goal of European elites is to achieve a federal European state, as a somewhat simplified version of functionalist theory would suggest. Hooghe and Marks came up with an idea of 'constraining dissensus' (Hooghe, Marks, 2009). As EU issues became an important part of national political agendas, the European integration is

confronted by the EU electorate. Party leaders now need to take into account also opinion of their voters when negotiating European issues (Hooghe, Marks, 2009, p. 6). Domestic and European politics have become more tightly coupled as governments have become responsive to public pressures on European integration (Hooghe, Marks, 2009, p. 3). The public discourse on Europe is essentially about identity rather than material advantages.

Slovakia was always a pro-European country and the integration was welcomed not only by political elites but also by citizens. However, in the last years, the Eurosceptic trend is notable also in Slovakia. It could be understood as a part of deeper crisis which was created by lower support of EU by public and political representatives and the fact that Greece bailout and Euro crisis was the direct cause of the fall of the government of **Iveta Radičová**, so it directly affected the political situation in the country and Slovak citizens themselves. Another reason is also the democratic deficit which emerged by the financial crisis and changes of the attitude of member states towards the integration process. One of the manifestations of the crisis is also low participation in elections to both, European and national parliaments. The Slovak political parties, which were usually hold pro-European, stand where putting themselves to the position of more Eurosceptic parties. **Sulík's** SaS even built their whole campaign on the opposing Greece bailout and financial solidarity to countries affected by the crisis.

2 Methodology

2.1 Language in discourse analysis

Only in the second half of the 20th Century, researchers began to realise that language must be seen as an innate part of all human minds (Chilton, 2004, p. 11), dialectically interconnected with other elements of social life (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2). Language allows to research text as a significant element. The first ones who distinguished to link language, politics and culture were the representatives of Frankfurt School: **Benjamin, Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas, Bourdieu**. This School was followed by linguists, linked with the term Critical Discourse Analysis, who professed the theory which investigate language as a social phenomenon (Mey, Fairclough, van Dijk, Wodak and others) (Chilton, 2004, p. 10-11).

As mentioned by **Fairclough**, the real understanding of the social reality is possible only with looking closely at what happens when people use language – when they talk and write. The discourse is not only the linguistic analysis of text. It also includes the relatively durable social structuring of language which he calls “order of discourse” (Fairclough, 2003, p. 2). The focus on text itself is insufficient though, as the complexity of the relation between text and contexts creates discourse (Chilton, Schäffner, 1997). Language actively builds the social reality, helps to understand and define how the actors think and what influence their attitudes.

The term discourse could be then defined as the view of language as an element of social life that is closely interconnected with other elements (Fairclough, 2003, p. 5-6). It implies that language and politics as the social elements are sharply interdependent.

2.2 Political discourse

There are many versions of discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1997). The one used in this paper is the political discourse. It can be identified by its actors, people being paid for their political activities or being elected or appointed as relevant participants in the polity. This analysis is designed to answer significant political questions and deal with all the issues appearing in the political discussions (van Dijk, 1997, p. 12-13). Politicians are considered to talk politically, when their speech is contextualized in occasions that can be dubbed as political (parliamentary sessions, election campaigns, interviews with media etc.) (van Dijk, 1997, p. 18). Politicians do not only communicate with their opponents but the most of their speeches and talks are addressed to their citizens. Politicians often create their language based on what people want to hear in order to get electoral votes. Therefore, voters also represent one very significant group of the actors within the discourse.

Politics does not exist without the use of language. The political process usually contains persuasion and bargaining (Chilton, 2004, p. 4) – ways of communication which include force or the threat of force. Nevertheless, politics cannot exist if decisions are reached by force or its threat only, yet it is crucial to the realisation of collective decisions. People can identify themselves within some political group based on the shared perceptions and values. Language has the function to indicate, according to the shared values of the group, what is right and wrong, what can be seen as just and unjust or what is useful and

harmful for the group as a whole (Chilton, 2004, p. 19-20). Politicians often use the language as a tool to persuade the voters, they have the same perceptions and profess the same values. As per **Habermas**, it is the strategic use of language, when interests affect the communication and participants use the specific linguistic expressions to achieve their goals (Chilton, 2004, p. 45).

2.3 Chilton's three strategic functions

As already mentioned above, the methodology, used in this paper to analyse the form of Europeanisation of national politicians of the Slovak Republic, is the theory of strategic functions as proposed by **Chilton**. Rather than look for the strategic potential of the linguistic expressions in general, **Chilton** defines three main strategic functions based on which the concrete text is analysed. This division into categories is used to define the basic characteristics of the text and its linguistic tools (Horník, 2012, p. 14).

1. *Coercion* – the language which can be judged as coercive: speech backed by sanctions - commands, laws, edicts, etc., speech roles when participants seem to have higher status or power - they set agendas, select topics in the conversation, control others 'use of language, usage of such language which can automatically evoke a strong emotion.

2. *Legitimation and delegitimation* – the language to legitimise themselves, to present themselves in a positive light, being an insider (arguments about voters' wants, general ideological principles, charismatic leadership projection, boasting about performance, positive self-presentation) and on the contrary language to delegitimise others, being an outsider (foreigners, opposition have to be presented negatively with the use of ideas of difference and boundaries, and speech acts of blaming, accusing or insulting).

3. *Representation and misrepresentation* – the language to represent the reality as it is and on the contrary to provide false, insufficient, inadequate information. The implicit, hidden meanings of particular statements play major role in this case (Chilton, 2004, p. 45-47).

Using the categorisation, as proposed by **Chilton**, allows to focus on phenomena which can be dabbed as political without the deeper analysis of their character (Chilton, Schäffner, 1997, p. 212). The reason for choosing this discourse analysis is not only the linguistic dissection of particular texts and speeches, it aims to create a complete picture of the perception of each selected politician towards the political phenomenon of European identity in

times of the Eurozone crisis. Therefore, the focus will not only be at each text itself, but I will look on the broader context in which the text was created (Horník, 2012, p. 16). Because, as it was already mentioned in this article, discourse is formed by the complexity of relationship between the text and its context, they are mutually interconnected (Horník, 2012, p. 14).

Based on the context of the statement on the EU, the citation befits to some strategic function. The aim is to analyse which function is used by the politician the most. The functions used in their discourse can be a tool for describing and understanding of their identity (Horník, 2012, p. 16). Based on the prevailing function in the discourse, the attitude of politicians towards EU, their opinions and European dimension of their identity can be identified.

2.4 The objects of the analysis

The fundamental objects of the research are the national political representatives of the Slovak Republic. The selection of specific persons has been based on two conditions. Firstly, the selected politicians are focusing on the EU issues in the context of their activity on a political scene. The second condition for selection was their involvement in the area of EU affairs throughout the entire examined period, the period during the end of economic crisis and emergence of the Eurozone debt crisis of 2011-2015. As previously stated, politicians represent, when forming a European identity, one of the most important entities involved in its formation. However, they became a subject of their own Europeanisation. This Europeanisation of national politicians is also the subject of this research (Horník, 2012, p. 14). Specifically, it will be the politicians, representing the two political parties, defining themselves in their program as pro-European (SMER-SD) and Eurosceptic political party (SaS).

The resources for this analysis are the authorial texts of the selected politicians in their original form. These can be the articles published in national newspapers, in their personal blog or blog of their institution, interviews and discussions, speeches in National Council of the Slovak Republic or political party assemblies (Horník, 2012, p. 14). The texts originate mostly from the blogs of politicians and are related to the economic crisis mainly during the times of the fall of then Slovak government of **Iveta Radičová**.

3 Practical part

3.1 Discourse of Róbert Fico

Creation of the government of SMER-SD together with SNS and LS - HZDS led, mainly abroad, to considerable concerns about the future direction of the country, as at a time when both of SMER-SD coalition partners, ruling in Slovakia in the years 1994 - 1998, thwarted the EU integration chances of the country by their authoritarian policies and created obstacles to democratisation reforms needed for the EU accession.

The biggest question was the attitude of Prime Minister **Fico** to the European integration, since in 2006 he still doubted the adoption of euro. On the first day of a new government, established in 2006, members of the European Parliament for Party of European Socialists even approved the suspension of their European party structure. Originally lukewarm attitude of Smer-SD to the EU started changing gradually. Party, which before entering the Union proclaimed that “to the EU yes, but not with bare asses” was trying to increase its own credibility (Török, 2014, p. 131).

In spite of the known credit on the euro adoption of the **Dzurinda**'s government, which adopted unpopular economic reforms, and introduced the flat 19% tax rate (Dąborowski, 2009, p. 2), **Fico** manifests, his government to be the mastermind of the success in form of the euro.

“I believe that adoption of euro is an unrepeatable historic achievement of the Slovak Republic and I am very proud that the adoption of euro will be primarily associated with the government, of which I am Prime Minister” (Fico, 2009).

First, **Fico** explicitly states his pro-European stance when he expresses his belief that deeper integration in form of a monetary union represents a positive step for Slovakia. Secondly, this activity described as a success and the accentuation of the role of his government in the euro adoption represent the legitimisation function as defined by **Chilton**.

His key attitude to EU, **Fico** expressed already during his first government when he undertook a pro-European stance.

“The new government will be pro-European, fundamentally pro-European and will fulfil all the obligations that the Slovak Republic has in relation to the Stability Pact, the Maastricht criteria and other things. In this spirit, I will also inform all international partners, including the Socialist International and the Party of European Socialists” (Fico, 2006).

Defining the conditions is directly associated with the strategic functions of coercion, which is, in this case, obtained through the identification of factors that are necessary. Setting the reality is not intended to dominate the discussion, but rather to illustrate their own opinion, namely his pro-European stance. Explicitly, through coercion, he puts a pressure on fellows of his political fraction within the European Parliament, aiming to convince them of the incorrectness of a decision to exclude the party, which wants to play a role of a reliable partner and enhance the integration efforts in the future.

Crisis and finding the solution to it awaken the discussion about the future of the European Union. **Fico** is persuaded that it is a national interest of Slovakia to be a part of “ever closer Union” and that *“the success of Slovakia is closely connected with the success of the EU”* (Fico, 2014). He believes that for Slovakia, as a small open country, the integration is beneficial. Thus, he is ready to comply with the commitments resolving from the EU membership. According to the Prime Minister, if the European project failed, it would have catastrophic consequences for the country.

“Slovakia has to stay in the core of European integration; it has to be a part of the discussion on European integration. It has to participate in all rescue mechanisms for the euro. If it comes to the disintegration of the Eurozone, Slovakia has to be part of the stronger Europe, not a weaker Europe” (Fico, 2012a).

By utilisation of imperative (Slovakia has to), referring to the strategic function of coercion, author creates a sense of the necessity of this act for the Slovak Republic. To support his opinion he uses, in this case, also the function of misrepresentation (disintegration of the Eurozone), which serves to control the discourse. This rhetorical and thematic control allows the speaker to persuade his audience to accept the reality that is presented to them, namely that Slovakia needs to be the part of the “core”, not periphery. Saying so, **Fico** indirectly presents his opinion that Slovakia has to participate in a formation of closer Union.

The crisis showed that the monetary union cannot function without the common budgetary and economic policies. According to **Fico**, a result to the crisis is in the unprecedented deepening of integration that has to take place in addition to the political level, also on economic and financial area. On a political level, the reasonable agreement between the European and national parliaments should be reached. Thus, **Fico** is willing to sacrifice part of the national sovereignty in favour of the European project.

“In case of positive loss of sovereignty, let’s be bifarious. Wasn’t the very accession to the EU already a loss of sovereignty?...If there is a deeper integration, it will require a change of the Constitution. We are too small, we cannot play to be the navel of the world. We are too vulnerable” (Fico, 2013).

Through strategic function of coercion, Prime Minister **Fico** creates a strong emotion of perception of Slovakia as a vulnerable country, trying to achieve the reader to consider his solution as the only alternative. Coercion is also implemented through a set of conditions to be met (constitutional change). Doing that, author illustrates his own perception of the deeper form of integration as a catalyst for a better future for Slovakia.

In the context of Greece bailout, there were two strong opposite argument in regards to the Slovakia’s position: the single currency represents the common fate and shared responsibility for other members (Rupnik, Balážová, 2010) and the argument that Slovakia became a sovereign member of the Union and is not afraid of expressing its opinion (Szomolányi, 2010). In comparison to SaS, which firm unfavourable viewpoint to Greece and ESM led to the fall of **Radičová’s** government, **Fico** understood the consent with stabilisation mechanisms as a saving net of Eurozone which will secure national interest of Slovakia.

“It strikes me that the gentlemen in SaS, fortunately as the only ones, do not realize that Slovakia had no other than a European future. That when we are economically, on the 80 percent, dependent of the largest Eurozone economies, we have to be a reliable partner, who is doing its homework in restoring its finances, and also in supporting the common European stabilisation mechanism. Not in the interest of Brussels, Berlin or Paris, but in the interest of Slovakia. If gentlemen in SaS still did not realize such a basic thing that the economies and the banking sectors are linked among the EU countries, thus, the decline in one is spilling to the others, then I can only say, let them live in their ignorance, and especially let them not interfere in making any necessary decisions. Today, we are not protecting Greek pensions or Spanish banks, but our own currency and economy. Jobs and living standards of our people. The fact that Slovak liberals are ignoring this interconnectedness, alternatively, they raid the line of “the worse in the Eurozone, the bigger our truth” is just their calling card” (Fico, 2012b).

In this statement, **Fico** primarily uses strategic functions of coercion and delegitimation. Both are associated with application of his own understanding of European integration at the domestic political fight. By coercion, **Fico**

demonstrates the need of following the rules as agreed at the EU level, which, according to him, leads to the fulfilment of the interests of Slovaks. Imperative language forces the listener to accept his statement. Delegitimation is applied mainly in connection to the opposition, while this argumentation is supported by the major opinion streams within the EU, which are in accordance to **Fico's** statements. Through this statements, **Fico** points to the inaccuracy in the considerations of opposition.

Because of the economic crisis, others, particularly, wealthy member states of the euro area faced the dilemma of either exercising the mutual solidarity or creating the dangerous precedent. This question provoked a discussion whether financial redemption of one member is accordance to the treaties and perceived as a sign of solidarity or as precedent, which could cause that other countries, drowning in debt, will violate the obligation of the EU membership and rely on a financial support of other states. Prime Minister was of the opinion that the assistance for Greece will be as well the help for Eurozone and it will implicitly help Slovakia.

“We want to be a fair sympathetic player within the EU, which recognises that money are not only taken but that in difficult times, some volume of solidarity must come also towards the EU” (Fico, 2012c).

This statement is said in a spirit of coercion, which is realised through proposing an action, government should do.

Although the economic situation of Greece was triggered by the global economic crisis, its foundation lies in the high public debt, which Greece had built in a few years and which was hiding by providing misleading information. The dismal economic performance was caused also by the failure of European control mechanisms within the monetary union. The government exchange in the country has also changed its view on the austerity measures. Political party Syriza refused to adhere to the given conditions of financial assistance and tried to negotiate the mitigation of drastic saving to cushion their impact on public, due to the fear of social unrest. Creditor Eurozone countries began to realize that Greece will practically never be able to meet its payment obligations under the current conditions. They started to raise questions about the conditions and setting of financial aid in a way to attain the objectives of consolidation of Greek economy.

“It is unacceptable for us that Slovakia and its citizens, who literally suffered many years of reforms, belt-tightening and recovery packages, should bear on their shoulders the consequences of irresponsibility of generations of Greek

politicians. Commitments and debts are simply being paid. On the one hand, we can understand that Greece is entitled to a negotiating of the new technical parameters of the financial assistance that will create a better foundation for the future development of their country... But what is for us a red line, we will never cross, is any debt cancellation. If anyone imagined that he wins the election and come to Brussels, with reference that the old commitments are not being paid, must have realised that such things do not work and cannot work” (Fico, 2015).

In this article, Prime Minister uses the delegitimation tools, several times, for description of his opponents who are, in this case, politicians from Syriza. This is mainly due to the will of defending his policies, which, from the beginning of the Greek crisis, underwent several changes, which were in line with the main European countries, and so that other Eurozone countries will express their solidarity to Greece only if it plays according to their rules. The significance of this quote lies in the fact that the author assumes a posture of an actor, who based on his own experience, points out to the inaccuracy of their stance (old commitments are not paid).

However, this statement does not represent the change of the attitude towards integration itself. The crisis has increased the price for maintaining existing successful integration and costs associated with the EU deepen the dividing line between the Member States, offering new foundations for an alternative for the European project, which is partially deviated from the idea of “ever closer Union”. It is caused by the fact that countries are not prepared to pay a higher political and financial costs for maintaining the euro and a Single Market. Another reason is also the fact that thanks to the establishment of stabilisation mechanisms, economic situation in Greece was no longer a direct threat to the functioning of Eurozone.

3.2 Discourse of Richard Sulik

Most Slovaks consider themselves to be good Europeans and have a positive attitude towards the European integration. All Slovak governments were pro-European and their ultimate goal was first to become a member of the Union, and second to be in the core of integration process. Nevertheless, the economic crisis and inability of EU to effectively tackle its impacts, evolved to the rise of politicians openly criticising the state of the Union. One of the politicians falling into this category is also **Richard Sulik**. **Sulik** entered the political sphere already after the evolving of economic crisis and in emerging of

the Eurozone crisis of countries' debts, when his newly established party Freedom and Solidarity (SaS) gained 12% of votes in June 2010 elections (Sloboda a Solidarita, 2010). This success is mainly connected to the success of his proposal of flat tax which was positively accepted by public as well as his firm stance towards the Greece bailout.

It is **Sulik**'s tax reform from 2004 that is considered to be one of the triggers of economic success of **Dzurinda**'s government which started the Slovakia's way towards euro. **Sulik** himself does not oppose either against the European Union, or against euro.

"We, from the party SaS, and definitely not me personally, we are not against Europe. I took part in the referendum in 2004 and I think that Slovakia belongs to the European Union. We are entitled to it. As for me, I wanted Slovakia to be in there, therefore I have clearly expressed my will in 2004. I also wanted and did everything that was within my power as an advisor to the then Minister of Finance Ján Počiatek, for us to enter the Eurozone. So, it does not mean that everything that is from Brussels, is bad. But unfortunately, the politicians in Brussels, in the meantime, convinced me, despite my displeasure, that their words simply did not have any sufficient value for one to be able to rely on such word" (Sulik, 2012a).

In this statement, **Sulik** describes his own experience in order to support his opinion in relation to the Union. Using the function of legitimisation, he expresses his good faith when he supported and made an effort for Slovakia to enter the EU. He considers EU to be a good project, Slovakia should be a part of but which has its negatives, as well. Through delegitimation of the EU, which is labelled as "Brussels", and criticising its activities, author mentions his negative stance to the activities of the EU politicians.

After the start of Eurozone crisis, **Sulik** had only two negative arguments against the functioning of the European Union. The first basic argument is that EU did not evolve in a way it should. In his understanding, the EU should have a form *"in which it was established, so with that big idea of Single Market, free movement of persons, goods, services, and capital...I think that that's the defect of the EU. It evolved in a direction which, originally, was not planned."* But it became *"over-bureaucratic juggernaut and 60 000 Brussels' officials revel in a regulation fury. They do not respect the basic agreements and everyone is definitely not equal. The winner is the one who lobbies more. Unfortunately, our officials are accustomed to keep you head down and Slovakia is paying for it more and more"* (Sulik, 2013a). The EU functioning, **Sulik** again describes

through delegitimation. Although, the negative “other” is, in this case, not only Brussels’ officials but also other members of this community. Using the type of labels such as Brussels (and its headless regulations) refers to a sceptical perception of the present state of functioning of the Union.

The second basic argument against the EU comes up out of his belief that rule of law is needed for a politically organised unit to be successful. He criticised the EU politicians for non-compliance with the rules, as stated in the treaties, and for non-eduction of consequences in case of rule infringement.

“In the first 10 years of single currency the Maastricht criteria were broken 97 times, but no country was punished. In 2004 Germany and France publicly declared that they will not follow the Maastricht criteria” (Sulik, 2012b).

He accuses the irresponsible member states for the bad shape of the Union. He invites the compliance with the treaties and obligations. Similarly as a function of delegitimation, this method serves for the criticism of the then state of the EU.

In this matter, the problem of unequal handling within the Eurozone popped out. Slovak membership in the Eurozone was connected with following the strict fiscal rules. In order to adopt the single currency, country had to make great effort to comply with Maastricht criteria and handle the budget more responsibly. **Sulik**, with his liberal thinking, welcomed such a pressure on a budget control from a “higher level”. The problem was that the Treaty does not apply at every member of the Eurozone in the same way and that Greece, which did not fulfill the criteria when adopting the common currency, had falsified the statistics even before the emerging of crisis. The solidarity, as understood by pro-European politicians, who claim that the members of Eurozone should help each other in problematic times and further violated the treaties in order to preserve euro, was not accepted by **Sulik**.

“After the fall of the Berlin Wall, Slovakia underwent painful but necessary economic reforms, with the burden of the transition to capitalism squarely on the shoulders of the Slovak people. Meanwhile, Greeks were enjoying artificial prosperity stimulated by government borrowing and spending. The average income in Slovakia was \$17,889 in 2011; in Greece, it was \$27,875. The average Slovak pension was \$491 in 2010; in Greece, it was \$1,775. Slovakia’s national debt is 45% of GDP; Greek debt is approaching 160%. Yet Slovakia is now being asked to borrow in order to lend to Greece, thereby sacrificing its relatively high credit rating and low interest rates. Is this solidarity?... This kind of ‘solidarity’ with Greece also flies in the face of the rule of law. Article 125 of

the Lisbon Treaty, for example, states that each EU member state is responsible for its own debts, and Article 123 prohibits the European Central Bank from lending to EU member states. Both stipulations have been breached” (Sulík, Tupý, 2012).

In defence of his vision of solidarity, **Sulík** uses economic data and dichotomy “we-Slovaks” vs. “they-Greeks”. In his statements, **Sulík** often calls for the compliance with treaties in order to delegitimise the EU. Function of delegitimation aims against the current state, which allows him to propose his own idea for the EU reform.

Sulík simply preferred a different solution to the crisis. According to him, the solution is not in a deeper integration but “*we have to strictly adhere to the existing rules, such as not being liable for others’ debts, just as it’s spelled out in Article 125 of the Lisbon Treaty*”, Greece should go bankrupt and “*we have to be adamant about cost-cutting and manage budgets in a responsible way*” (Sulík, 2011).

Sceptical view, framing this whole issue, is expressed in the summarisation of the three points that should be implemented. Utilisation of imperative (we have to) represents the strategic function of perception and creates the feeling of necessity towards application of his proposed solution. It is also worth to mention that **Sulík** notices EU as “we”, which suggest that he feels to be a part of the EU, his own Europeanisation becomes evident.

Sulík, in that time, even doubted his positive attitude towards euro not only because the treaties were not followed by the member states of the Eurozone and countries are not treated equally which directly led to the depth crisis, he also sees this non-compliance as “*very big political mistake and showed up to be also very big democratic deficit. Because then I am asking where like European living in Slovakia, should I go when I don’t like the politics of **Draghi**, **Merkel** or **Barroso**. I have no option to remove them from office*” (Sulík, 2013b).

Notably, in this case, **Sulík** puts himself into the position of European, which again suggests his feeling of belonging to the Union. He defines himself against concrete European politicians and accuses them from the non-compliance of treaties, which is again the tool of delegitimation.

It is necessary to mention that with his rejection of Greece bailout, **Sulík** simply remained truthful to what he promised his voters. But not only that. Negative stance to Greece bailout was not expressed only by **Sulík’s** party Freedom and Solidarity. It was the attitude of the government, SaS was the member of, and the Prime Minister **Radičová** herself, when she claimed that

the assistance for Greece has nothing in common with solidarity, rejected the solidarity with those who are irresponsible and do not follow the Stability Pact. (Török, 2014, p. 140) Slovak government was aware of the economic and financial interconnectedness of the euro area. Slovakia tried to promote such action in regards to Greece bailout, which would not be of a short term nature. One of the proposals was a controlled bankruptcy of the country, which was fully in line with **Sulík**'s views. To overcome the debt crisis, Slovakia asserted "*respect for the rules, fiscal consolidation, strengthening the fiscal discipline and automatic enforcement of sanctions for its violation*" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2012, p. 1). By this policy, the government also pushed through a more objective distribution key for contributions to the European Stability Mechanism. Since before the vote on amendment of the EFSF in autumn 2011, it threatened that non-approval will jeopardise the European future of Slovakia, Prime Minister **Radičová** changed her position (Török, 2014, p. 140-141). Therefore, Prime Minister decided to join the vote on EFSF with the vote of confidence to the government. **Sulík** and his party decided to vote in accordance to their promises to electorate, which led to the fall of the Slovak government.

He did not change his stance even a year later when he stated: "*I haven't changed my mind. The bailout of Greece was wrong. Following my personal initiative we rejected it [in 2010]. We did not succumb to blackmail. I know that I am viewed as a bad European by the politicians in Brussels. The good ones are those who obey*" (Sulík, 2012c).

This is another example of the strategic function of delegitimation when he again defines himself against the statements of Brussels. **Sulík** implied that such views of EU politicians about "good Europeans" are one-sided. He criticises the opinion of EU politician that he is a "bad European: and implicitly, he is convinced that the implementation of his proposals would be beneficial for the EU. In his view, it is wrong to consider as pro-European politicians who agree with every decision proposed by majority of EU politicians. Those who have different vision on the EU rescue and its direction do not have to aim towards an EU disintegration.

Sulík thinks that the European Union should not be headed towards the deeper political integration and end up as a federal state. He sees the fate of the Union as a voluntary alliance of sovereign states, which can but does not have to agree with transfer of powers to the EU level and closer Union.

"All agreements must be voluntary, otherwise it will not work. That means that when such agreement is not reached, it will simply not be reached. If the

European Union wants to function long term and successfully, it must function in such way that there will be a "win-win situation" for all concerned. This means that the EU gives an offer to all countries and those countries will decide whether they want or not, and I will now give you concrete examples. EU countries will say: we want to be in the euro area or do not want to be in the euro area. Great Britain and Denmark said, they do not want to be in, we said that we want to be in. We picked this raisin. It should be such that here you are, here is a Eurozone, countries, tell yourself, which of you want to and which of you don't. Also in regards to Schengen, etc. This is how the European Union can work great" (Sulík, 2016).

Sulík legitimises the elements that support the sovereignty of member states in deciding on further participation in the integration process and the concept of multi-speed Union. In this context, he uses the function of coercion, which defines his basic attitude to the functioning of the EU. He is convinced that the reckless policies pursued to maintain the integrity of the Eurozone at any price are not just against Slovak national interests, they do not serve European interests either.

4 Comparison

The fundamental point defining the identity of **Fico** during the time of the Eurozone crisis is his clear pro-European stance. Deeper integration in terms of economic and financial policies, Slovakia in a core of the EU integration and Eurozone rescue at any price are some **Fico's** basic school of thought in relation to the EU development.

The author is very consistent in his opinions towards specific topics related to EU since the beginning and he supports basic lines of his discourse over time even more. The only topic which underwent a change in opinion over time, is a question of solidarity for Greece. **Fico** changed his stance of compulsory solidarity of Greece to the opinion of the need for the countries affected by crisis to meet all the obligations arising from the EU membership.

The topic of the solution of Eurozone debt-crisis is, in the discourse of **Fico**, usually associated with the strategic function of coercion, eventually the function of legitimisation. Coercion is primarily accomplished by proposing the steps that the government should do. The European Union figures mainly as a tool for strengthening the ability of individual members to solve economic problems through deeper integration and increased cooperation. **Fico** did not oppose his

long-term pro-European attitude, which remained unthreatened even during the crisis.

The function of delegitimation is used in a much lesser degree. Author mostly defends his opinions in a way that he points to the false claims of his ideological opponents. Using the normative language, he forces the public to accept his arguments. To the normativeness of the text also contributes his representation of his opponents' opinions as something implicitly incorrect.

On the contrary, **Sulik** puts himself into the position of Eurorealist. He perceives the positive aspects of the EU such as Single Market and free movement of people, goods, services and capital but the state of the Union does not correspond with his views and therefore proposes the reform of its future development. He legitimizes the aspects of the Union that support the sovereignty and voluntary decision of members, concept of multi-speed Europe and limited transfer of powers to EU level.

Delegitimation is mostly used against the state of the Union, which is perceived negatively by **Sulik**, and enables him to propose the reform of the EU functioning as it should be done in his view. In the context of the Eurozone crisis, **Sulik** often uses hard data and argumentation by legal regulations. It is also used for delegitimation of the stance of his ideological opponents (majority view).

Sulik often uses the term "we" (European Union) when he talks about the EU affairs. It could mean that he perceives membership of the Union as a positive thing for Slovakia and integration as a process based on mutual cooperation of member states. On the other side, he often uses the term "Brussels" (and its decisions) which points to his sceptical view on deepening of the integration. He uses this term to criticise the current state of the Union and the majority view on the solution to the Eurocrisis.

Conclusion

The formation of European identity of politicians is acquired through their everyday interaction related to the EU affairs. They either define themselves or oppose the EU, its direction and decisions. The fact is that the EU fundamentally determines their own national political agenda, enables them to have the greater political influence and promotes national interests of their countries. Politicians, operating in one of the EU member states, consider themselves a part of the EU, which creates a condition for developing their European identity.

Through discourse analysis, it was possible to describe ways, which led to the formation of European identity of each politician during the examined period. **Fico** shares the majority pro-European attitudes towards the European integration and solutions of its internal problems in the period of debt crisis. In his statements, he primarily used a function of coercion in order to explain the steps, his government took in regards to the EU and to approve his decisions in front of the public. His pro-European stance is evident also from his attitude towards dealing with the crisis, which he saw in the greater integration and transfer of more competences to the EU level. The function of delegitimation is, in his discourse, used later in order to express criticism of policies of the new government in Greece which disagreed with the rules on granting a loan as proposed by the Union. On the other hand, in the discourse of **Richard Sulik**, the delegitimation, which is associated to the criticism of the then functioning of the EU and its idea of saving the Eurozone at the cost of the violation of applicable legal obligations, dominates. Thus, his European identity is mainly created through opposing the particular points of the future development of the Union. According to him, the future of EU is in a multi-speed Union based on voluntariness and promotion of national interests of member countries. He is convinced that EU is a good project, Slovakia can benefit from, but he is sceptical towards further integration and therefore he is considered a moderate Eurosceptic.

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