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Populist Political Movement ***Sme rodina – Boris Kollár*** **(We Are a Family – Boris Kollár)**

Abstract: This is an exploratory study of populist political movement Sme rodina – Boris Kollár (We Are a Family – Boris Kollár, since November 2019 only Sme rodina). The paper first locates this movement into a loose concept/sui generis family of political parties (the niche party), arguing in contrast to some typologies that this is primarily protest populist party presenting some niche issues, and only secondarily, an entrepreneurial party. The paper also answers the question why this party is considered as being populist by many political and non-political actors and analysts. The paper also suggests that there is actually non-existent, but assumed direct correlation between the support for this party and the decline in the standard of living, as sometimes presented in public discourse. In contrast, it is suggested here that there may be stronger links between relative poverty, feeling of being abandoned by political elites/parties, and low educational levels. Moreover, there played an important role previous knowledge (celebrity status) of the party leader who was often presented and discussed in tabloid media. For this reason, many young females voted for this party. The party also managed to raise a widely perceived problematic issue that was seen as not tackled sufficiently or at all by the previous governments and other competing political parties (the niche or salient issue).

Key words: Slovakia, Sme rodina – Boris Kollár, populism

Introduction

Firstly, it should be highlighted that the article deals with an exploratory research, which is a non-formal research. Exploratory studies define a range of causes and research issues, as well as alternative

options for a solution of a specific problem. Exploratory studies apply limited or no rules for collecting data. Nevertheless, exploration can produce valid findings relevant for social sciences, provided they are conducted in a transparent and self-reflexive way (Reiter, 2017). Exploratory studies are usually connected with inductive reasoning. In such reasoning, validity and reliability of conclusions are limited. The main outcome of such research is extension, expansion and diversification of insights and frameworks, and the expectation that it will enable to perceive more, better and differently complex and blurred issues, and that eventually, it will be possible to make sense of what was previously found meaningless or difficult to explain (Reiter, 2017, p. 139). Thus, exploratory inductive research allows for limited or preliminary generalizations (Reiter, 2017, p. 141). In short, exploratory research is not intended to provide conclusive evidence, but it helps us to have a better understanding of the problem. Considering that populist movements and parties, and in fact populism as such are extremely difficult to study and generalise, this approach is certainly justified. The main problem with traditional scientific methods is that they either allow to study a niche issue in detail (for an academic article) or expect that there will be a book format with both complex and in-depth analysis. For important in-between research area, there is a room for exploratory research. Moreover, as put by K. Popper: “Knowledge consists in the search for truth – the search for objectively true, explanatory theories. ...It is not the search for certainty.”

The increasing support to populist and anti-establishment political parties is not a new trend in Europe, since it has been seen for more than the last two decades (Heinisch, Holtz-Bacha, Mazzoleni, 2017). This could also be seen in Central Europe (Ágh, 2018). In Slovakia, the presence of populism has been most critical in mid of the 1990s (Školkay, 2000), and then again – according to some analysts – around the turn of century (Gyárfašová, Mesežnikov, 2008). Carpenter (1997) in much cited work titled tellingly “Slovakia and the triumph of nationalist populism” offered culture-based explanation of emergence of populism. Specifically, in his view, there emerged or rather survived two types of political cultures and institutions in post-communist countries – “traditional” and “civic.” Thus, legacies of political subjugation and backward socio-economic conditions allegedly led to populism, while civic political cultures and institutions arose as a result of greater political

autonomy and industrialization. In hindsight, this explanation – popular among historians and some sociologists – did not survive the test of truth. From a historical perspective, one can find populism more politically autonomous in industrialised countries, such as the US or Austria (Hobelt, 2003).

In any case, at a political party level in Slovakia, we have witnessed continuation of these political developments:

- a) **continuous emergence of anti-establishment or protest (and partly or fully populist) parties and movements:** ZRS (The Association of Workers of Slovakia, in government in 1994–1998), OĽaNO (Ordinary People and Independent Personalities, for some time with suffix NOVA, further OĽaNO), *Sme rodina – Boris Kollár* (We are a Family – Boris Kollár, further WAF-BK);
- b) **long-term tendency of founding political (partly or fully populist) parties by wealthy entrepreneurs:** Alliance of a New Citizen (ANO, founded in 2001 and dissolved in 2011), SaS (Freedom and Solidarity, founded in 2009), *WAF-BK*, and most recently, a new party *Za ľudí* (For the People), led by the former President Andrej Kiska, a former successful businessman, and a new non-parliamentary political party of *Progresívne Slovensko* (*Progressive Slovakia*), initially funded by five and later supported by three businessmen;
- c) **new popularity of populist far-right movements and political parties** (Kotleba-ĽSNS (Kotleba – People’s Party – Our Slovakia), in the National Parliament since 2016, and in the European Parliament since 2019).

Although an entrepreneurial party ANO was already in government in 2002–2005, since the parliamentary elections in 2010, we have witnessed growing popularity of entrepreneurial parties, i.e. parties founded by businessmen (former or present). Their electoral support has increased from 12.14% in 2010 to almost 30% in 2016. The list includes three parliamentary parties: SaS, OĽaNO and WAF-BK (Marušiak, 2017, p. 182). Out of these three, two are entrepreneurial parties which also show (many or all) key characteristics of being populist. These are *OĽaNO* and *WAF-BK*. Their business background and the lack of clear ideological preferences may have a crucial impact on the democratic party system in general.

Origin of *We Are a Family* – Boris Kollár

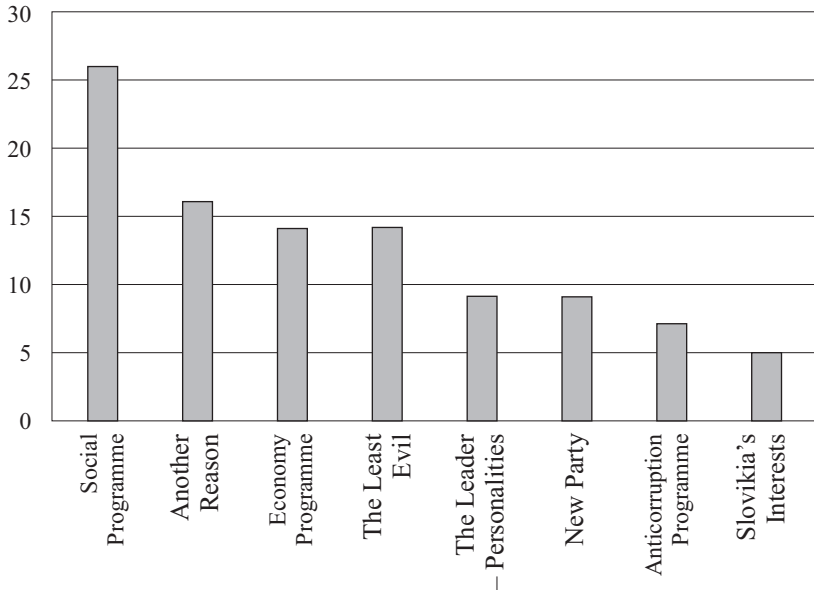
The political movement of the *WAF-BK* was established in November 2015. Already from its founding, it took an unorthodox approach. Instead of gradually attracting grass-root supporters, Boris Kollár simply purchased one of many already established but inactive political parties. *Strana občanov Slovenska* (acronym SOS, Party of Citizens of Slovakia) was then renamed and adjusted to the needs of a new political movement. Nevertheless, in the March 2016 Parliamentary elections, it won 11 parliamentary seats with 6.62% electoral support.

On the communication level, the political marketing and campaigning was developed around the founder/leader Boris Kollár. Key negative messages during their pre-election campaign were twofold: fighting against domestic political elites and spreading fear towards immigrants (Zvada, 2016, pp. 228–229). These messages had been disseminated mainly via Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, especially via selfie video posts (Zvada, 2016, pp. 228–229). Slosiarik, a sociologist, stated that for the first time social media played an important role in elections in Slovakia (Sme, December 31, 2016, p. 2). Some students (usually girls) who often followed Boris Kollár's on Facebook believed that he appeared to be a sincere and nice person (Goliaš, Hajko, Piško, 2017). In addition, Kollár relied on radical ultra-conservative and Eurosceptic websites of *Konzervatívny výber – Conservative Choice*, run by another co-founder Milan Krajniak, and *Medzičas – Meantime* (Marušiak, 2017, p. 193). Boris Kollár videos were the most popular, as all of them focused not on the agenda but on his personality and his attitudes towards politicians as such. The main slogan of his electoral campaign was '*I don't vote for politicians, I vote for Boris*' (Marušiak, 2017, p. 193).

Several students in focus groups expressed their opinion that since Kollár was rich, he did not enter politics to get richer (Goliaš, Hajko, Piško, 2017, p. 24). The party/movement was able to attract protesting voters and voters with anti-establishment attitudes (Gyárfášová, Bahna, Slosiarik, 2017). There was a higher ratio of female to men (64:36%) among *WAF-BK* voters. Moreover, the most typical voter age group included people between 22 to 39 (half of all voters for the party, but only fifth largest cohort in this age group among all parties)

and the most typical educational level of voters was high school (Focus Agency exit poll, in Kern, 2016). *WAF-BK* voters were less aware of the link between the quality of democracy and the quality of life, which explains their willingness to vote for a party promoting radical solutions in many public policy areas (Golias, Hajko, Piško, 2017, p. 126). Compared to other voters, they were slightly less willing to leave the EU, although still in favour of it (Golias, Hajko, Piško, 2017, p. 126). However, the exit poll research suggests that voters tend to show their preferences towards the *WAF-BK* for a number of reasons, especially their appreciation of its ‘social programme’ (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Reasons to voting for *Sme Rodina* – Boris Kollár



Source: FOCUS Agency, exit poll, 2016.

Obviously, a “social programme” is a broad term. Slosiarik suggests that this can also mean “amnesty for debtors or excessive rewards for executors” (in Kern, 2016). This is a niche issue that played an important role in the party appeal and it is going to be discussed in detail in the further part of the article.

Which main populist features does *We are a Family* – Boris Kollár include?

As already discussed, especially since the parliamentary elections in 2010, there has been a growing popularity of what some label primarily as entrepreneurial parties, i.e. political parties founded by businessmen (former or current) in Slovakia. Their electoral support, measured by the number of seats in the Parliament, has more than doubled in the past six years (Marušiak, 2017, p. 182).

Hloušek and Kopeček (2017a) offer a general concept of an entrepreneurial party, which emerges from a previous concept of “the business-firm model.” The entrepreneurial party concept is based on the central role of a leader and his private initiative. The leader/founder is a promoter/sponsor of a political organisation or a social movement. Logically, a party is their “personal vehicle.” However, while Hloušek and Kopeček (2017a) emphasise the crucial formative influence of a leader over the political project, the case of the *WAF-BK* appears to be slightly different in this respect. This is related to the role of Milan Krajniak, apparently the key ideologist of the *WAF-BK* and the second most visible representative of the party, who also ran for the president of the country as the *WAF-BK* candidate in 2019.

Marušiak (2017) includes among Slovak entrepreneurial parties some political projects that no longer exist, such as the Party of Civic Understanding (SOP) and the ANO. However, certain popular parties and movements, such as the Freedom and Solidarity (SaS), OĽaNO and the *WAF-BK* still exist and could be defined as entrepreneurial or business-firm political parties. Nevertheless, the article argues that these do not share the most relevant characteristics from ideological or programme points of view. In the end, it is less relevant who founded a party than what its goals are. We are going to discuss this issue in the further part of the article. We would like to point out that Slovakia is not the only country in Central Europe that has had entrepreneurial or business-firm model political parties. Examples of such political parties are also observed in Poland (Kosowska-Gąstoł, Sobolewska-Myślik, 2017), as well as the Czech Republic (Hloušek, Kopeček, 2017b; Cirhan, Kopecký, 2017). Nonetheless, while the concept of an entrepreneurial party explains its unique or at least non-traditional way of establishing and funding, there is still room to study its ideology and rhetoric. Not all entrepreneurial

parties show key features of populism, including **anti-elitism**: discrediting the elite, blaming the elite, separating the elite from the society, or in short, using a dichotomy of good and evil, then **restoring the sovereignty of People** with reference to the “will” of the people (denying power to current elite and demanding power for the people). Finally, there is the **people centrism**: stressing virtues of the people, considering the people as a monolith structure, showing closeness to the people) (Werner et al, 2016, p. 52). Werner et al. (2016) do not mention three additional features of populism, i.e. the comparison with more ideological and/or radical parties: At the same time, populism is **not revolutionary** and does not show **anti-democratic tendencies** at large. Yet it is **against additional liberal features** of the liberal democracy (checks and balances, rights of minorities, etc.). Moreover, populists usually use the “**othering**” strategy, i.e. they exclude some segments of a society.

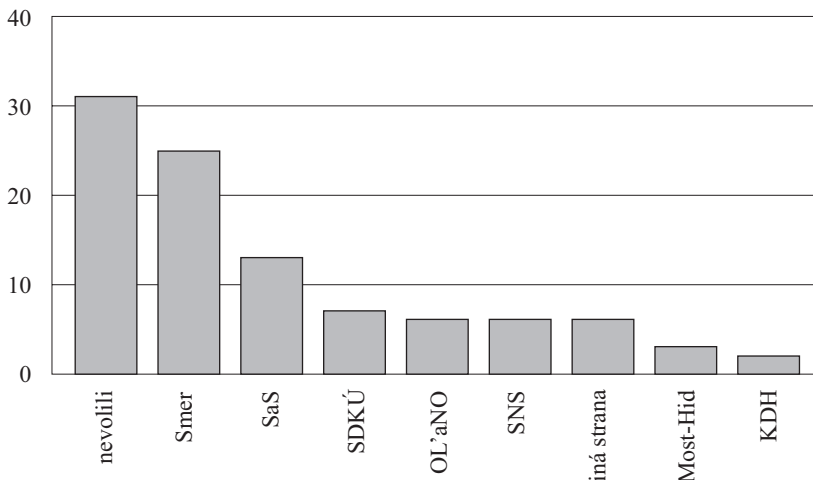
As mentioned above, there are two entrepreneurial parties in the Slovak Parliament that at the same time show all key characteristics of populist parties: *OLaNO* and *WAF-BK*. In fact, if the funding and establishing models are considered to be an entrepreneurial characteristic, populism can be seen as its political message. Therefore, it is perhaps more useful to focus on the main category, which is populism, and consider explanatory characteristics of the entrepreneurial political party as a secondary issue. If we follow this line of argumentation, one can find further theoretical classification in four ideal types of new political parties stemming from political projects that they pursue (Lucardie, 2000, in Gyárfášová, 2018, p. 113). These are: 1) ‘**Prophetic**’ parties (articulate new ideologies), 2) ‘**Purifiers**’ or **challengers** (their main motto is to ‘cleanse’ the political system off corruption), 3) ‘**Prolocutors**’ (they represent interests disregarded by other parties), 4) **Personal vehicles** (or idiosyncratic parties – these seem to overlap with the model of entrepreneurial parties described above).

Firstly, the *WAF-BK* includes first and seemingly the most important sub-characteristic of **personal vehicles/entrepreneurial parties**. This means that all other members and candidates of this party have been relatively unknown (first of all its leader, Boris Kollár, and Martina Šimkovičová, a female anchor from a major private TV channel *Markíza*). Only some of the top representatives and later MPs of this political party were politically experienced and partly known to the public (Milan Krajniak, Peter Pčolinský, to certain extent also Peter Marček,

president of SOS party). Boris Kollár was not only a famous playboy (having ten children with nine women, and still being single), but first of all, he had money to finance his political enterprise. Therefore, the role of the founder and leader was put in the forefront in the election campaign.

Secondly, a more important sub-feature of the *WAF-BK* is its role as ‘**Prolocutors**’. Its major specific “positive” agenda (not just criticising, but making promises or suggesting solutions) shortly after the establishment was to eliminate the distress of debtors. Previously, this issue was actually ignored by analysts. In addition, this issue was by and large ignored in programmes of major political parties that run in 2016 Parliamentary elections. Indeed, Dalmus (2018) suggests that the lack of engagement in a salient issue seems to open up opportunities for a populist party. The incapacity of citizens to manage their own finances has been actually a major issue neglected by the government for years. According to the then estimates 40–60,000 people had been seriously indebted that it did not make sense for them to search for a job in the early 2017. Additionally, there were 34,000 pensioners whose pensions were cut by executors. At that time, the total number of partially distressed debts was around 3.5–3.7 million in a country with population of 5.4 million peo-

Figure 2. Where does WAF-BK voters come from?



Source: Focus Agency Exit Poll, in Kern, 2016.

ple. More than 10% of debtors had multiple debts (KRUK, 2018). This critical and widespread issue was finally tackled by the government and Parliament in April–May 2019. Of course, the *WAF-BK* competed with some other parties that promoted other agendas seen as insufficiently addressed by the government, such as the perceived threat of immigration, “Brussel’s elite or European integration pace,” or long-term corruption (see Gyárfášová, 2018, p. 125). In contrast to some analysts, and their comments about the election campaign discussed above, or perhaps in contrast to the *WAF-BK*’s focus on immigration in the 2016 election campaign, as compared to electorates of other parties, *WAF-BK* voters considered this topic to be **the least** important (but still very high on the agenda). However, voters of the *WAF-BK* were also apparently **the second least** opposed of further European integration (but still mostly adversarial).

Thirdly, *WAF-BK*’s could be seen as ‘**Purifiers**’ or challengers to the establishment (to be discussed in next section). However, it competed either with a movement already represented in the Parliament (*OLANO*) or with a new more radical political actor, the extreme right-wing party *ESNS*. Although the largest part of supporters did not vote previously, almost two thirds of *WAF-BK* voters were “defectors” from former supporters of other established political parties.

Finally, the *WAF-BK* cannot be called a ‘**Prophetic**’ party, since it does not articulate any specific traditional or radically new ideology, but it is rather eclectic in this aspect. Perhaps what could be seen as ‘Prophetic’ was the focus on a major salient issue discussed below.

The analysis of the party (leader) rhetoric/ideology/programme

This section is based on a) conclusions and observations by other authors and projects, b) content analysis of the Party Programme, c) content analysis of the most popular and most popular Boris Kollár videos on Facebook. In May 2019, Kollár had significantly more followers (124,000) than the party itself (82,553 followers). Initially, priorities of the movement included the protection of family values, protection of the country against the external “threats” allegedly represented by immigrants from the Middle East, and improvement of conditions for business. Garaj (2018, p. 151) highlights that key topics of the party

included anti-corruption, anti-immigration, foreign affairs and agriculture, namely protection of domestic production and producers. However, Kollár himself avoided discussing ideology. When asked if he is more conservative or liberal, he used the famous statement by Deng Xiaoping ‘it doesn’t matter whether the *cat* is *black* or *white*, if it catches mice it is a good *cat*’ (Marušiak, 2017, p. 193).

In 2018, key topics presented by the *WAF-BK* in the public agenda included agriculture and sufficient production of domestic food (aim of self-sufficiency). In the early 2019, the key agenda included protection of borders, tradition and social welfare (Aktuality.sk, 2019).

In the late 2018, Kollár acknowledged that his programme was eclectic: “selecting issues and topics *«per partes»*” (TASR, 2019).

The following analysis shows how rhetoric and ideas presented in the programme are populist and demagoguery in terms of their style and content. The analysis is based on criteria of populist rhetoric as summarised by Werner et al. (2016):

- a) evidence of claims for **restoring sovereignty of people** with reference to the “will” of the people (denying power to elite and demanding power for the people);
- a) evidence of the **people centrism** (stressing virtues of the people, depicting society as monolithic structure, showing closeness to the people);
- a) evidence of **anti-elitism** (discrediting the elite, blaming it and separating it from the people).

We can add the fourth, fifth and sixth aspects, namely **the lack of revolutionary goals** and **anti-liberal attitudes, and the othering strategy**. Obviously, sometimes there is an overlap. Interestingly, all above mentioned key criteria suggested by Werner et al can be ultimately seen as fundamentally opposed to liberal aspects of liberal democracy.

According to the analysis of the communication of the *WAF-BK*, the main claims towards **sovereignty of the people** can be found in the following sub-indicators:

- a) claiming popular sovereignty and conflictive denial of power through improving direct democracy in Slovakia:

“The aim of our proposed amendment is to strengthen the right of the citizens of the Slovak Republic to participate in the administration of public affairs through the institute of referendum. Such strengthening of citizen participation in the decision-making pro-

cesses is necessary because political parties do not protect the public interest but the interest of financial groups” (WAF-BK, 2019).

- b) conflictive denial of power through the critique of supranational governance – the European Union: Kollár labelled the EU bureaucracy as “*euro-rubbish*” (Zvala, 2016, p. 229). After the migration protests in Germany, Kollár recommended to Germans to remove the “*witch-chancellor*,” Angela Merkel (Zvala, 2016, p. 229). Moreover, the WAF-BK stated that it: “...refuses to continue in policies of stealing, lying and cheating that are typical for so called standard political parties” (SME RODINA, 2016). The key message during the EU election campaign of 2019 was “*Less Brussels, More Common Sense*.”

The **second dimension – people centrism** rhetoric can be found in the political communication of the *WAF-BK*. The *WAF-BK* has built up its communication strategy on the classic populist division between the people and corrupted political parties/elites/oligarchs.

B. Kollár: “There already have been parties like HZDS, Smer-SD, and SNS that focused on the top 10,000. Then, there were parties like SDKÚ-DS and SaS that favoured especially those successful who account for about half a million in our society. We focus on the remaining five million of who practically nobody has cared for in the last 25 years” (TASR, 2019).

Vladimir Mečiar (former P.M.) and Robert Fico (former P.M.) “sold” the Slovak Republic to oligarchs, while former P. M. Mikuláš Dzurinda helped to repay the debts of banks. But we from the WAF-BK will cover debts of common people from the state budget (Čas, 2019).

In perhaps the most popular video on Facebook (1.3 million views, uploaded on January 2019), B. Kollár presented himself as a “pregnant man” in front of the Labour Office, arguing that two unemployed men were found in registry in the category of “pregnant.” Pregnancy prevents the Office from releasing an unemployed person from evidence. However, this criticism was not targeted at the men, but at the employment policies. Kollár also eclectically mentioned “third gender ideology.” In general, his criticism addressed governmental efforts to lower unemployment by forcing unemployed people to accept any jobs, which allegedly leads also to a new category of a “pregnant

man” being created for such a purpose (to lower official unemployment figures).

Thirdly, negative attributes of elites (anti-elitism) were also emphasised in the political communication of the *WAF-BK*. This was used as a strategy to discredit political elites and to put them in the same group with “bad” oligarchs.

Against internal threats – local oligarchy/financial groups (SME RODINA, 2016).

“The government designs such policies that redistribute the values of Slovak economy unfairly, and the vast majority is consumed by a group of oligarchs and financial groups” (Čas, 2019).

In one of the most popular videos on Facebook (400,000 views), uploaded in December 4, 2018, B. Kollár criticised the decision of the Parliament to loosen the rules for foreign workers to be employed in Slovakia. Kollár repeated some key negative terms aimed explicitly at coalition leaders and expressed his negative attitude toward their policies: “drag in cheap foreign workers, social evil, parasites, oligarchs, self-interests, insufficient funds to cover current minimum wage requirements for some publicly funded institutions, social suicides in the past due to unemployment, increase local salaries instead, and sponsoring grand capital with cheap labour.”

In *the most liked* Facebook video (562,000 views, published in early 2018), B. Kollár accused the ruling “standard” politicians in general, and the Speaker of the Parliament in particular, of stealing, lying and cheating, as well as of being nasty. This was, interestingly, as Kollár mentioned, reaction to another video in which the Speaker invited him to a televised public debate.

Despite the fact that all key populist dimensions are visible in the communication and in the *WAF-BK* programme, as mentioned, we need to add the fourth dimension “**No evidence of a revolutionary/radical/extremist policies**” as well as of not having anti-democratic tendencies at large, or a **lack of such contrary evidence**. This indicator is necessary in order to separate between populist parties and nationalist, far-right or far left ideological parties such as communist or fascists. This is not to deny that both these ideologies appeal to populist rhetoric – however, their core is clearly ideological. Indeed, in a rather detailed Party Manifesto of 2016, one cannot find any revolutionary messages.

The leader of the *WAF-BK* also claimed in the past that he was open to any kind of negotiation with everyone inside or outside of the parliament. This proves that the *WAF-BK* was trying to display itself as non-ideological political force that keeps its promise to promote their programme for the people under any conditions.

“I am willing to negotiate with every parliamentary political party after the election. I will talk with Mr. Kotleba, with Smer-SD (Direction – Social Democracy) and also with Mr. Sulík (SaS – Freedom and Solidarity). But I do not know if I would like to rule with those who are leading Smer-SD or with the Slovak nationalists. At the same time, we are convinced, that in these parties there are also decent people, they are just not getting the chance at the moment” (etrend.sk, 2018).

Finally, some tentative *anti-liberal attitudes* can be found in the 2016 Party Manifesto. For example, there is an idea “to merge individual state and public institutions and their competencies and to cancel self-governing regions.” Kollár rejects possible coalition with *LSNS* (etrend.sk, 2018). Thus, some key aspects of his eclectic ideology or rather rhetoric are not anti-liberal. Nonetheless, perhaps the most relevant anti-liberal element, and at the same time clearly populist rhetoric, can be found in the party stance towards refugees. For example, “Millions of people are arriving to Europe who have fundamentally different cultural habits from us. These people have definitely decided not to accommodate themselves to our way of life. On the contrary, they want us to adjust to their life-style” (SME RODINA, 2016).

The *WAF-BK* programme is eclectic, but clearly with an anti-establishment focus. There are only minimal direct anti-liberal elements in both the programme and rhetoric. In fact, a direct attack on liberalism is to be found mainly in the strong anti-immigrant attitudes or in the so called anti-gender ideology (which was topical in the early 2019 in public discourse). However, their attitude towards “corrupted elites,” suggests an anti-liberal stance. There is no presence of anti-democratic or revolutionary goals either in the rhetoric or in the programme. Yet there is “**othering strategy**” present, very much visible in its programme and anti-immigrant rhetoric (this issue is not discussed in detail here due to the lack of space, just briefly mentioned at the beginning of this section).

Scan 1. FB Page of Boris Kollár



The text reads: “Sme rodina Boris Kollár. Non-standard party. We do not make dirty business. We are helping.”

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/Boris-Kollar-1464024763918594/>, 26 March 2019.

Is this party considered populist by the broader society and other political actors?

There is no consensus how to label such a party. Based on the analysis of its rhetoric, party programme and non-ideological background of the self-labelled “non-standard” party/movement, the *WAF-BK* perhaps could be defined as a populist entrepreneurial protest political project.

The categorisation is also supported by the following statements. For example, Gyárfášová, Bahna and Slosiarik (2017) define *WAF-BK* and the extreme-right *LSNS* primarily as *the new anti-system parties*. In contrast, Goliaš, Hajko and Piško (2017, 15) call the *WAF-BK* a *populist* political body. Be that as it may, explicitly or implicitly, most local experts agree that this party (as well as *LSNS*) should be seen in a morally negative light. Local experts believe of all political parties, the *Kotleba-LSNS* followed closely by the *WAF-BK* were *mainly harmful* to democracy, while the *SNS* and *Smer-SD* are seen as *rather harmful* to democracy. No political party is seen as making substantial contributions to democracy. Parties such as the *KDH* (Christian Democratic Movement, non-parliamentary party), *SaS*, *Most-Hid* and *OLANO* are seen as slightly contributing to the development of democracy (Goliaš, Hajko, Piško 2017, p. 10). On the other hand, a conservative journalist Martin Hanus suggests that the *WAF-BK* is a *social-nationalist movement* (Mrvová,

2018). Gyárfášová (2018, p. 124) suggests that the *WAF-BK* is possibly an alternative to the *OLaNO* for the young generation. Garaj (2018, pp. 150–151) puts the *WAF-BK* among “*centre-right subjects with conservative attitudes*,” although he mentions that the party does not have clear ideological profile but “rather reflects current issues according to their attractiveness.”

The *WAF-BK* is seen not only by local scholars and commentators through negative connotations and anti-elitist attitudes. Foreign observers are also inclined to share this view. The *WAF-BK* is seen as a *hard-core anti-Western political party* ranked 22nd in terms of ideological-political attitudes. For example, the Kotleba-ĽSNS is on the second position after Ataka in Bulgaria at the same list (Fouloy, 2019). In contrast, the BTI report (2018) defines the *WAF-BK* as a *populist xenophobic* political party that is rather built around a personality than a social programme. The communication and rhetoric style of its founder and leader Boris Kollár is defined as a mixture of “an anti-politics appeal and rude xenophobic messages with stress on his business career and personal wealth” (BTI, 2018). Stojarová (2018, p. 34) defined the *WAF-BK* as “clearly populist subject still lacking any ideology.” Finally, it is important to note that in February 2019, the *WAF-BK* joined a somewhat new movement of Europe of Nations and Freedoms led by the Italian populist Matteo Salvini.

What is a relative weight/importance of populism compared to other elements in this case?

Interestingly, Čekmeová (2016) argues that there is no significant evidence that the growth in the support for populists in Slovakia has been caused by unfavourable economic conditions. The same conclusion can be drawn from comparison of regional development and votes in favour of populist parties. There is no systematic tendency to prefer populist parties (measured by the parties’ shares in votes) in average or in poorer regions (Čekmeová, 2016). Comparatively, Slovakia does show overall positive to medium or average results in almost all social and income levels inequality indicators (Blanchet, Chancel, Gethin, 2019). Although main economic indicators seem to be indecisive, some less visible local economic and social factors could play a more substantial role in the increasing support for populist parties, since many of them are present in

their electoral programme. For example, Sharma (2016, p. 100) argues that it is “often the perception of inequality, even more than the reality, that shapes the political reaction and economic cycles.” Furthermore, inequality has economic and political consequences “when the population turns suspicious of the way wealth is being created” (Sharma, 2016, p. 99). Clearly, the support for populist parties is not caused by an absolute drop in the standard of living, because the opposite is true (Goliaš, Hajko, Piško 2017, p. 17). Most likely, it is caused by persisting or only slightly shrinking regional differences in the standard of living and relative poverty. Pauhofová, Stehlíková, Staněk and Páleník (2018, p. 7) report “extremely serious situation” with respect to “disposable income” and “rapidly growing indebtedness of households.” Furthermore, they identify such major problems as “working poor” and “people living at the edges of a society,” so called “precariat” (Pauhofová et al., 2018, pp. 7–8). Most importantly, the authors suspect that growth of consumption reported at a macro-level has been most likely the result of debts and loans contracted rather than an increase in income (Pauhofová et al, 2018, p. 30, see more on complexity of personal income and well-being in Kopcsayová, 2019). This leads us back to the concept of a niche party and salient issues. Apparently, the WAF-BK has managed to discover and exploit important niche issues.

In general, it appears that that the support for populist protest parties, either their softer versions (such as *WAF-BK*) or harder, anti-system versions (such as *LSNS*) can be seen as, indeed, a subjectively justified protest or a fight against traditional political parties/elites in both cases, and as a voice against the political system expressed by a number of voters.

Conclusion

The purpose of the article is to provide an exploratory overview of the populist movement WAF-BK. Of course, this analytical exercise could cover only some relevant issues. Nonetheless, the analysis has both academic and policy relevance that may also be useful for further academic studies and policy recommendations. Moreover, there are some tangible, although inevitably preliminary findings.

The WAF-BK represents an entrepreneurial self-defined “non-standard” niche issues and it is a specific protest populist political party or

a movement. While the ‘entrepreneurial’ feature defines its establishment and initial financial support, populism defines its political rhetoric and strategy. The niche aspect defines its ability to discover and utilise some neglected but important issues. The WAF-BK attracted voters in the 2016 parliamentary elections for several reasons, mainly due to its ‘social programme.’ Voters with a low level of education and low income are more likely to feel threatened by the developmental gap (relative poverty or relative decline in standard of living – precariat or working poor). It should be mentioned that the WAF-BK put a new topic into its agenda, a topic which has been ignored by all major parties – high level of private individual debts. Voters felt abandoned by the political elite of major parties. Therefore, they preferred “a new party” or the “lesser evil.” This position certainly explains support for anti-establishment or protest parties. The exit poll findings confirm that two thirds of voters supporting the WAF-BK voted previously for well-established parties, while one third of voters did not participate at elections previously. However, considering the similarity of programmes of different competing parties (save for important exception – niche issue of private indebtedness), and since voters usually do not read programmes (party manifestos), one can assume that the role of the leader – entrepreneurial celebrity – is perhaps a more important factor while deciding to vote for this particular party. Kollár promoted the agenda of his party so it became well-known.

WAF-BK rhetoric and programme display all key characteristics of populism, especially its anti-establishment positioning, request to restore the sovereignty of the people, and allegedly representation of true public interests. In addition, it is non-revolutionary or non-radical and strongly anti-liberal (using othering strategy) as regards refugees or migrants in general (including guest workers). The Kollár’s personal heritage defines the party attitude to the right-wing Kotleba – LSNS. Kollár, himself partly Jewish, repeatedly refused cooperation with that party until it clearly departed from fascism.

The WAF-BK has received many labels among analysts. Although some prefer to label political parties depending on their analytical needs (e.g. entrepreneurial party, anti-western or protest party), the WAF-BK is quite often independently described as a populist and/or anti-establishment protest party. Thus, populism is the key feature of this “non-standard” party. This can also be seen in its ideological and programme

self-acknowledged eclecticism, as well as most recently in the joining of the Europe of Nations and Freedoms movement.

Considering party-ideal types, based on a political project they pursue, the WAF-BK can be categorised, especially before entering the Parliament, as a “Purifier” or a “Challenger” and partly as a “Prolocutor” (or niche party). At the same time, it serves as a “Personal vehicle” for some personalities that could not succeed in their previous political activities or wanted to join politics. It is definitely not a “Prophetic” party (save for a single salient issue in its agenda).

Finally, this attempt of an in-depth exploratory analysis of a populist party shows that a dichotomous, black-white image of populist parties may be analytically misleading. Rather than mirroring seemingly irrational behaviour of voters, a populist party/movement reflects low political efficacy of political system among that segment of voters.

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Populistyczna Partia Polityczna Jesteśmy Rodziną – Boris Kollár

Streszczenie

Artykuł opisuje badanie wyjaśniające dotyczące populistycznego ruchu politycznego Sme rodina – Borisa Kollára (Jesteśmy Rodziną – Boris Kollár, od listopada 2019 wyłącznie Sme rodina). W pierwszej kolejności artykuł umieszcza ruch w generalnej koncepcji *sui generis* rodziny partii politycznych (partia niszowa), w przeciwieństwie do niektórych klasyfikacji określających ruch jako przede wszystkim populistyczną partię protestu, koncentrującą się na niektórych kwestiach niszowych, a dopiero w drugiej kolejności jako partię przedsiębiorców. Artykuł odpowiada na pytanie dlaczego partia uważana jest za populistyczną przez licznych politycznych i niepolitycznych aktorów i analityków. Artykuł również sugeruje, że w rzeczywistości nie ma zakładanego bezpośredniego związku pomiędzy poparciem dla tej partii a pogorszeniem się poziomu życia, jak czasem jest to przedstawiane w dyskursie publicznym. Wręcz przeciwnie, artykuł sugeruje, że mogą występować silniejsze powiązania pomiędzy względnym ubóstwem, poczuciem opuszczenia przez polityczne elity/partie a niskim poziomem wykształcenia. Ponadto, istotną rolę odgrywa znajomość lidera partii (o statusie celebryty), który często pojawiał się i był opisywany przez media bulwarowe (tabloidy). Z tego powodu, wiele młodych kobiet oddało głos na tę partię. Partia zaczęła również podnosić kwestie postrzegane jako problematyczne, którymi poprzednie rządy i inne partie polityczne nie zajmowały się w ogóle lub w niewystarczającym stopniu (kwestie niszowe lub szczególnie istotne).

Słowa kluczowe: Słowacja, Sme rodina – Boris Kollár, populizm