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# **PRESIDENTIAL PRE-ELECTION DEBATES**

## **A BATTLE FIELD OR A PLACE FOR BARING SOULS**

**Zora Hudíková\***

*PanEuropean University, Faculty of Mass Media, Tematínska, 20, 851 05 Bratislava,  
Slovak Republic*

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### **Abstract**

Slovak nation has elected the president for the fifth time already; for the fourth time by the direct election of popular vote. In last elections Slovak citizens could choose from the record number of the candidates, which was 15. The important role in this time of electoral campaigns is played by media, which are not only obliged to, but also interested in presenting candidates to voters. In this paper the author analyses the form and style of the latest presidential pre-election interviews and debates. She points out the novelties, as well as the differences between the latest and previous pre-election discussions, and defines characteristic features of the communication style of moderators and politicians in the presidential elections 2014.

*Keywords:* television, media communication, moderators, politicians, culture

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### **1. Introduction**

Term of office has always played an important role in the life of whole society. Democracy allows voter to decide upon his political representatives, who during their terms of office handle the public affairs. Voter according to his belief, attitudes, opinions or his country elect those, who will form not only his life, but also the lives of the EU citizens of. According to A. Leftwik "politics is at the root of all collective activities, formal and informal, public or private, and is present in all groups, institutions or societies" [1]. An important communication, informational and motivational space for candidates are pre-election debates. Both the classic and new media use their influence and offer their presenting space. For voters, the most attractive form of presentation is that in which allows them not only to hear the candidates, to read their evaluations, opinions and visions, but also to directly watch their non-verbal reactions to the topics, as well as of their opponents. From the psychological point of view, it is a proved fact that in stressful situations the non-verbal means of communication produce significant amount of information necessary for voters to decide, or for the voter's consequent spontaneous reaction [2]. That is why the audiovisual form of discussions has become prominent not only in classic media, but in the

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\*E-mail: zorahudikova@gmail.com

times of growing influence of social networks, which have their effect on decision making especially of the young voters, is becoming prominent also on various websites.

The author of the present study focuses on the analysis of the pre-election TV debates in three key nationwide TV stations – RTVS, TA3 and TV Markíza. Traditionally, TV JOJ, as the only one of this kind among the Slovak TV stations, does not broadcast programmes of this type. The latest pre-election debates were unique in different aspects – the highest number of candidates standing for the presidential elections, the atmosphere of the debates, types of the discussed topics, programmes structure, the way of discussing, the environment of the debates and the related factors. One of the key topics and issues was the question of candidates' religion and the accusation of one of the candidates from the religious unsteadiness, and for the allegiance to the Scientology Church. The author in this paper defines and characterises typical features of communication during the presidential pre-election debates, their atmosphere, dissimilarities with the previous pre-election debates, and predicates its impact on the communication in television and in whole society.

## **2. Pre-election television debates**

The key information channel of the 21<sup>st</sup> century society is media. Their role is crucial not only for everyday social and political life, but media come to their prominence mainly during the important periods of time in the life of society, such as are the pre-election periods. According to J. Ftorek mass media are, including television, the main intermediating factor and tool in transmitting relevant information and messages [3]. According to H. Pravdová mass media communication has become an integral part of any social, cultural, economic and political processes. Production, transmission and receiving of media contents and messages can be defined as one of the most prominent factors in forming of cultural environment of modern and postmodern era. This specific way of human communication is possible due to the existence of symbols, which help man to gain information from his immediate surroundings or from the distant worlds, and to interpret them with the help of the language of his culture [4]. For politicians, the TV is an ideal public relations (PR) space in which they can present their opinions, attitudes, concepts, their outlooks on the world and on various issues and their solutions, their visions, as well as the criticism of their opponents.

Besides that, there is an outbreak of communication variants and of new creative methods, which implements both traditional the approach of print and electronic media with the quickly increasing possibilities of various communication forms that offer to recipients specific variations of media reality [5].

However, efficiency of this kind of communication depends on several factors. In today's information society predominate the opinions of individuals, as well as the opinions of the whole public on current affairs and issues [6]. To

achieve the desired effect and to influence public opinion, it is necessary that the potential voter accepts the presentation, identifies with its content and reacts to it according to the needs and expectations of the communicator. “For politician’s message to be successfully transmitted, but above all to be successfully received, the high-quality presentation based on the credibility of the information source is needed (his education, experiences, cognitive skill, etc.).“ [3, p. 113] The efficiency of political communication is primarily influenced by the culture of communication.

Culture of communication has its clear rules. The most important are:

- expressing opinions clearly and support them with arguments;
- getting to the point – not disturbing concentration by digressing from the main theme;
- using relevant arguments, no personal attacks;
- reflecting reality and not making stories;
- reacting to a statement, not to the author of the statement;
- no interrupting the communication partners;
- respecting all partners in their communication and in their opinions;
- equal time limit for all participants.

Pre-election television debates are of a specific kind of debates. Most often they are broadcasted live, so what is said in the real time cannot be taken back or corrected. Thus viewers (the potential voters) experience the authentic moment. The other specific feature is that all participants of discussion, whether they are politicians or presenters, are professionally trained in communication, including communication in media.

Audiovisual record presents the speeches of the candidates in the most realistic way. Viewer can not only perceive and analyse candidate’s ideas, opinions and attitudes, but can also hear the way they are saying it. From the attitude towards the discussed topic and towards co-discussants, the intensity and quality of interaction each candidate can be identified. Apart from that viewer perceives non-verbal reactions – posture and body movement, gestures, facial gestures and eye contact. By non-verbal signals candidate communicates not only his personal feelings, but also comments on his opponent’s statements, and thus it forms one of the relevant means of expressing. By being able to receive both non-verbal and verbal expressions, viewer can make the whole picture of a candidate.

Cultivated television debate is conditioned by: the quality of moderators and politicians and their communication skills; the quality of their political relationships and relationships between the political parties; the political and individual targets, with which they enter debate and which are crucial for the whole campaign; selected topics; other participants of debate (audience, political scientists, sociologists, respondents in polls); the quality of moderator and his/hers skill to lead and control the discussion.

Voters’ picture is created not only by the statements of politicians (which are the product of marketing), but is also completed by the analysis and evaluation of experts and scientists as political scientists, sociologists or

economists, etc. Thanks to that the amount of information directed to the voter is increasing, which forms for an effective tool of building politician's credibility and reliability [7].

### 3. Presidential elections 2014

Presidential elections have taken place in the history of the independent Slovak Republic for the fifth time already. The last presidential elections were announced by the current speaker of the Slovak National Council - Pavol Paška on Thursday, 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013. The first round was planned for the 15<sup>th</sup> March 2014, the second 14 days later – on the 29<sup>th</sup> March 2014. A record number of candidates – 15 – aspired for the office of President: Robert Fico (Smer), Pavol Hrušovský (KDH, with the support of the parties Most – HÍD and SDKÚ), Radoslav Procházka (independent candidate), Milan Kňažko (independent candidate), Ján Čarnogurský (independent candidate), Andrej Kiska (independent candidate), Gyula Bárdos (SMK), Milan Melník (independent candidate), Jozef Behýl (independent candidate), Jozef Šimko (SMS), Stanislav Martinčko (Koalícia občanov Slovenska), Viliam Fischer (independent candidate), Ján Jurišta (KSS), Helena Mezenská (independent candidate) and Peter Osuský (SAS – abandoned his candidacy on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 2014). Out of this number, 8 (which make more than 50%) were independent. For 2009 presidential elections seven candidates were subscribed, for 2004 twelve candidates and for 1999 ten candidates. None of the candidates obtained the absolute majority of votes, therefore Robert Fico and Andrej Kiska went forward to the second round. In the second round, held on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2014, Andrej Kiska (1,307,065 votes, 59.38%) won over Robert Fico (893,841 votes, 40.61%) [<http://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal>].

### 4. Pre-election presentation of presidential candidates in TV broadcasting

Presidential pre-election TV debates were broadcasted by three out of four nationwide television stations – public television RTVS (Slovak Radio and Television) and commercial televisions TV Markíza and news television TA3. Commercial television TV JOJ remained true to its word – obviously different – and did not broadcast any debate.

#### 4.1. Public television RTVS and presidential elections

RTVS decided to start presenting the candidates even before the start of the campaign, and prepared a targeted systematic introductory programme. It began with 28-minute long thematically structured interview and discussion on the current topics individually with each candidate in the programmes ‚Z prvej ruky‘ (*At First Hand*) and ‚Sobotné dialógy‘ (Saturday Dialogues) on Slovak Radio. Similar interviews were broadcasted in the main news – ‚Správy RTVS‘ (*RTVS News*) on Jednotka channel. Candidates equally obtained 15 minutes per

debate, which ought to be used for commenting current socio-political topics. Interviews were running in a friendly atmosphere; moderator asked questions about candidate's past and work, as well as about the socio-political situation and election programmes of candidates. In case the candidate did not answer moderator's question, he was asked politely or even relentlessly to provide an answer.

RTVS also broadcasted classic presidential election debates, i.e. moderated discussions of candidates, in which they discussed current affairs. Debates took place at the end of the whole campaign on the three nights of 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> March in the exclusive premises of Bratislava Castle. Candidates were divided into groups according to the average rate of the polls. Debates were broadcasted parallelly on Jednotka channel and on Slovak Radio. In case of absence of one of the candidates, the time range would be adjusted according to the number of present candidates. Each candidate obtained 12 minutes, which is the time limit provided by law. The debates were led by the moderator Martin Strižinec. In the premises of the Castle courtyard they were presented by Lubomír Bajaník, who at the beginning of every debate repeated the rules of discussion. The moderator posed two types of questions – common questions concerning home and foreign affairs, and individual questions concerning candidates' election programmes. Discussants were allowed to react to each other's statements. On the day of debate the main news RTVS brought profiles of appearing candidates. In the profile, the candidate and his/hers programme were presented. The debate started with the same warm-up question for all – *Why should we vote for you?*

Debates were proceeding in a constructive atmosphere. Participants also react to each other's speeches, at the some points the discussion was escalating but never crossed the borders of a sophisticated debate. Moderator provided participants with sufficient space for their statements and at the same time remained sensitive to their individual needs and gave them the time to react. By posing right questions and by using right wording he pushed the discussion forward; he ensured discussants used their limited time equally. His overall performance provided for the dynamics of the debate.

Since none of the candidates obtained sufficient amount of votes, the second round of elections had to take place, to which first two candidates advanced, i.e. Andrej Kiska and Robert Fico. RTVS created two presidential debates. The first official place, where Prime Minister Robert Fico met with independent candidate Andrej Kiska, was Slovak Radio. On Saturday, 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2014 at 12:10 p.m., RTVS broadcasted radio discussion recorded by television cameras, thus it could be heard on Slovak Radio and watched on Jednotka. For the first time it happened that the primarily radio discussion was also broadcasted on television channel. Each candidate had 25 minutes; debate was led by the moderator of 'Sobotné dialógy' Branislav Dobšínský. Debate was pre-recorded due to agenda of one of the candidates on Saturday morning; it was broadcasted without any editing. The atmosphere of the discussion was highly confrontational, since Andrej Kiska fiercely criticised Robert Fico's actions and

his incompetence to resolve crucial issues, and additionally offered his own solutions. At some moments, A. Kiska was taking on moderator's role, who was forced to take it back verbally again. Robert Fico put himself into the position of a patient mentor, explaining political possibilities and connections to someone, who does not possess any knowledge of politics. Moderator of the discussion Branislav Dobšínský was balancing this one-way criticism by confronting Andrej Kiska too, thus the debate had the air of a well balanced discussion and prefigured the character of the second round of elections.

RTVS as public broadcaster did not only open, but also closed the presidential debates. The last pre-election debate of Fico and Kiska took place again at the Bratislava Castle. RTVS broadcasted this discussion on Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2014, both on Slovak Radio and Jednotka TV channel at 20:15 p.m. It was led by two moderators – the moderator of the political discussion on Slovak Radio - Branislav Dobšínský and the moderator of the political discussion on Slovak Television - Martin Strážinec. The debate was opened quite unconventionally by the symphonic suite of Štefan Moyzes 'Dolu Váhom', performed by the Symphonic Orchestra of the Slovak Radio. Its passages served as a jingle of the presidential elections programmes. Debate lasted for approximately one hour and each candidate obtained 25 minutes. The discussed topics were various. The debate ended with one-minute speech of each candidate with Andrej Kiska as the first to speak. The debate was closed by national anthem.

Both debates of the second round kept its cultivated standard. Candidates answered the questions and also presented their thoughts, ideas and messages. It happened occasionally that moderator had to guide the discussants back to answering the posed question. Usually candidate registered his appeal and after finishing his thought got back to the question. Majority of the questions were common for all candidates, and the candidates rotated in opening a new topic. If a specific issue was raised for one candidate, others could react to it too. Candidates talked reasonably and prudently from their own positions – Andrej Kiska as the critic of the Government and supporter of citizens' rights, Robert Fico as the experienced and deliberate politician who is being detached. Since they were sitting next to each other, at the more confrontational moments, they even were turning their whole bodies when reacting, which not only implied the targeted statement, but also attracted attention to it and increased its forthrightness. Andrej Kiska had a greater tendency to this behaviour. Throughout the whole debate they did not increase the level of their voices, the atmosphere of the debate was that of giving explanations. Moderators in turns led their own topics and by their talk created a cooperative atmosphere of the debate. The discussion was conducted, which means that they registered the interest of the candidate to react to his opponent's statement, and thus he was allowed to react. Participants were not sitting appropriately; the communication was directed towards viewer or towards moderator, the environment was agreeable.

#### **4.2. News television TA3 and presidential campaign**

Television TA3 also created for its viewers a serie of programmes, in which the candidates were presented individually, as well as in mutual confrontations. Eventhough some of the candidates were already invited to discussion last year, all of the candidates were invited again to the studio in the special edition of ‚Téma dňa‘ (Daily Issues) titled ‚Presidential Elections 2014‘ and subtitled ‚Spoznaj svojho kandidáta‘ (Know Your Candidate). From the 19<sup>th</sup> February until the 7<sup>th</sup> March, except weekends, in the time of the programme ‚Téma dňa‘, which starts at 19:50 p.m., all candidates were gradually presented in the specially structured programme. Programme was opened by the short video produced by the candidate, in which he introduced his lifestory. This was followed by the so-called depth interiew, in which he was asked about his past and about important issues connected to his life. Afterwards the key points of his election programme were discussed. Lastly, all candidates were asked the same question concerning their opinions on registered partnerships, abortion and amnesty. Interviews lasted for approximately 50 minutes up to one hour. Moderators of debates were Peter Bielík and Ľuba Oravcová. Their strategy was to receive answers and statements to prepared questions and topics, and not letting the candidates avoid them and to talk out of topic. Therefore, within the framework of the presentor’s communication style, they interrupted candidates’ talk more often; if candidate was not answering their questions repeatedly, they formulate the question more straightly and aggravated the tone of their speech, and even verbalised his/hers behaviour in case viewer did not notice their first appeal. The intention to violate the comfort zone and cliché behaviour of the candidates, so they were not inhibited and could be seen in their true colours, was supported by the environment and the arrangement of seats. A jutting transparent chair standing solo, white background color-separated the space of moderators and candidates, greater distance between moderators and candidates – all these factors supported the feeling of stress. Confrontation got to its peak while discussing with Helena Mezenská, who was not asnwering moderator’s questions and was presenting her criticism of the current Government. During the tense moments Ľuba Oravová turned the attention to herself and made the situation less intense. Since the interviews were structured in the same manner, voters could observe what messages individual candidates want to present and how they can cope with the confrontational questions of moderators. Some were successful, others struggled.

TA3 serie of debates with candidates was ended on Sunday, 9<sup>th</sup> March, by the special double edition of the programme ‚V politike‘ (In Politics). In each episode seven candidates have met in mutual fight for the President’s Office. Moderators were the ones to raise the topics, candidates were the ones to answer and react to them. The discussed topics were: the situation in Ukraine and how EU and NATO should intervene; if they would regularly brough the Report of the State of the Slovak Republic and what would be its content; if there are any changes needed to be done in the Constitution; how would they use President’s

competences. Other discussed topics were the state of judiciary and the law enforcement, and using of the right to grant amnesty. The debate was led by Peter Bielik. TA3 made its pre-election debates interesting by bringing interviews with competent experts.

The crucial debate of Robert Fico and Andrej Kiska was broadcasted on the 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2014 at 11:00 a.m. The debate lasted for one hour and candidates were conducted to discuss the topics as: what is the most relevant for the foreign policy of Slovakia; what should be the attitude to the political situation in Ukraine; official recognition of Kosovo; Scientology; Government's failures; cases of giving order of the state defence; the basis of family – relationship between man and woman; rights of registered partnerships; changes in the Constitution – e.g. in judiciary, section of the President of the High Court and Judicial Council. During the debate, the tension between the candidates, which had already started to develop a day before in the programme 'Sobotné dialógy', was escalating. The atmosphere kept its confrontational character. Moderators interrupted candidates' communication only to a small degree by posing clarifying and inquiring questions. Candidates reacted to each other without any appeal of moderators; discussion often had the air of lengthy monologues. The greater distance between candidates, and between candidates and moderators, created less personal communication, and increased the need of raising one's voice when trying to be understood. At some moments, moderators resembled with the audience at the tennis match when watching the word exchange between the candidates. Once they had to soothe the high voice level, and oftently they had to regulate the growing tension by clarifying the questions. The tension, with what both candidates entered the discussion, was produced by the personal convictions and oppositions. Andrej Kiska gave the impression of a preacher in opposition to Robert Fico, who acted as someone, who is superior by his experiences, and competent to explain things to the unaware one. This led to an even greater tension. Moderators provided the discussion with only minimum of inputs; they alone named the discussion as the duel, in which they were engaging very well. It is possible to state that this debate was the most confrontational and fiercest of all television discussions and duels. This debate also concerned to the greatest extent with the Kiska's connection with the Church of Scientology. This issue was raised by Robert Fico. He stated that Kiska had taken the legal action against him unjustly, and that Kiska is spinning a yarn, because there exist several evidences of his connection to some of the members of the Church. Fico highlighted, that Kiska's book was published at Pavlík's publishing house, who is also connected to the Church and that he had even written the foreword for Kiska's book. Kiska had been also writing interviews for a scientological magazine, hosted a book launch party for the Director of the Scientological Church in Trebišov, attended the lectures of L. Ron Hubbard at the School of Management, that he is a little helper of the right wing and is a high-risk person in the terms of security checks. Andrej Kiska stroked back in the same manner, emphasized that he has no connection to the Scientology and his daughter is attending the First Holy Communion on the 1<sup>st</sup>

June. Kiska further criticized Fico for his governing failures and supported his statements by clear numbers and percentages. Robert Fico's respond to it was that if Kiska wants changes to happen, he ought to establish his own party and solve the issues in parliament. In this debate, Robert Fico's appearance was more of the Prime Minister than of the candidate for the President. Both participants, under the influence of conflict, emotions, and of the large studio and distance between them, were shouting, using expressive gestures and facial gestures, which led to the growing tension on both sides.

### ***4.3. TV Markíza and pre-election debates***

TV Markíza broadcasted three presidential pre-election debates, in which were presented all candidates. Debates broadcasted from the TV Markíza studios, started at 21:50 p.m. and lasted for one and a half hour. Broadcasting time was coordinated; debates were hosted alternatively by Zlatica Puškárová (10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> March) and Michal Kovačič (11<sup>th</sup> March). All candidates discussed the same topics with the following time duration: usury, law enforcement, the constitutional amendment of marriage (29:13 min), atheism, belief in God, Scientology, afterlife and Archbishop Bezák (15 min), companies' interests, judiciary, drugs, election campaign (15 min), situation in Ukraine, message for voters (16:02 min).

Moderator coordinated the discussion, pushed it forward by posing confrontational or direct questions that often quoted candidates' statements said in different media, on press conferences, during public appearances, during or out of the campaign, or were stated in their election programmes. What was interesting was the behaviour of some of the candidates with the highest number of preferences, e.g. Milan Kňažko took on the role of a humorist/an elder in politics, who named, and at some moments hyperbolized political and public issues. It was obvious at some points that he was entertaining himself. At the same time he used his political experience and experience with acting and exemplified his statements by stories; to a great extend he used his interpretative level of speech. Radoslav Procházka reacted to the confrontational statements of Pavol Hrušovský by declaring obvious lack of interest in communication with him. He was constantly veering from the group (which was allowed by his position at the far right side of discussants row) and mostly he looked straight to the camera and ignored other discussants. His performance gave an impression of superiority and arrogance.

Before the second round of voting, the debate took place on the 25<sup>th</sup> March 2014 at 21:50 p.m. and lasted for one hour and four minutes. In the studios of TV Markíza the debate was led by Zlatica Puškárová. It consisted of two parts – candidates' discussion on selected topics and one-minute final speech to voters. Moderator's preparation for discussion was based on candidates' public appearances, interviews and their statements. She focused on more detailed explanation of ideas, opinions and visions of the candidates, who have completely different visions of presidency. Even though the tone of the

candidates' speech was calm, their words were fierce, confrontational, referring to errors and deficiencies of the other party, and every attack was stroked back. Verbal attacks were escalating as the debate was approaching its end. Moderator's role was to regulate the debate; even at the moments of mutual reacting, she was the one who allowed discussant to talk, and eventually completed the statement with a supplementary question. Throughout the discussion she was an equal partner to the candidates, and the number of questions and sub-questions was considerably higher than in other debates.

Both candidates accepted her as a competent partner to whom they showed respect. Among the discussed topics were those already discussed in other debates, but also some new ones (President's competences, candidacy of Harabin, Kosovo and its recognition, Ukraine, Slovakia's 2% obligation to NATO, the Report of the State of the Slovak Republic, fairness in campaign, who would they take with them to the Presidential Palace, what would they wish to each other). Apart from that, TV Markíza broadcasted during the main news (TV News – 21.3–26.3) short interviews 'Dvaja kandidáti' (Two Candidates) – candidates were given two questions and 15 or 30 seconds to answer (according to the question).

## **5. Conclusions - characteristic features of presidential pre-election debates**

Television presidential pre-election debates possessed several common significant features, by which they differ from previous pre-election or between-election political debates in form, as well as in content.

The formal aspects of the pre-election television debates can be described as follows:

**Television channels co-ordinated their times of broadcasting** – television channels harmonised the broadcasting times to not compete between each other, so the viewer obtained the possibility to watch each television without any time pressure; several televisions had started with presenting the candidates even before the start of campaign.

**The average duration of a debate was approximately one hour, the maximum was one and a half hour** – comparing to previous pre-election debates television channels kept on meeting this time limit to not unnecessarily tire the viewer with programmes with an open end; moderators and respondents were forced to more exact and dynamic communication.

**Developing the new forms of programmes** – television TA3 linked together candidates' presentation with their promotional videos; RTVS was using the premises of the Bratislava Castle and the last debate was opened by the concert piece; televisions combined discussions with presenting the candidates on the main news; television TA3 broadcasted programmes in which people from various social spheres commented on the pre-election behaviour of the candidates; RTVS connected radio broadcasting with television broadcasting, what might caused certain obscurities mainly for the listeners, due to the lack of

flexibility of moderators to describe sufficiently all the actions taken in the television studio.

**The television studio environment was adjusted to create the intended atmosphere** – a chair jutting out into the empty space (stress), long distance between candidates standing opposite each other, presence of the neutral audience and of supporters in the pre-election studio, broadcasting from the adjusted studio of Teleráno, or from the Bratislava Castle, which makes the programme unconventional. **Debates conducted by moderators** – even if a candidate only wanted to react to the other statement, he/she indicated his/her intention and by the moderator was allowed to speak.

The aspects of the content is presented below.

**In all debates the same or similar topics were discussed** – similar topics repeatedly occurred in discussions with more candidates, as well as in duels. The most frequented topics were: President's competences, Ukraine, reporting on the state of the Slovak Republic, recognition of Kosovo, family as the union of a man and a woman. This might have been tiring for the viewer, since candidates usually repeated the same arguments and formulations.

**Moderators functioned more as partners of discussants and were not only raising the questions** – they did not allow the candidate to speak at length, but entered the communication by posing sub-questions. **To a significant extent comparing with the previous discussion were used the particular quotations from candidates' presentations** in media or various public forums. **Moderators did not allow respondent to avoid answering the posed question**, and in the case of digressing from the topic candidates was asked to again, or asked clarifying question.

**Various domestic and foreign affairs were discussed.** An important topic, which basically formed the leitmotif of the whole campaign, was the question of religion and religious belief also in connection with understanding marriage as the union of a man and a woman. This issue was discussed by traditionalists emphasising their allegiance to Christianity (e.g. Hrušovský, but also Fico), but also by the new politicians as Procházka or Kiska. Especially for Kiska this topic was of a great importance, since he had been accused being connected with Scientologists; several facts were mentioned in connection to this issue and he had to refute many of the accusations and prove his relationship to Christianity.

Even though the atmosphere of discussions was less personal, cooperative, friendly and relaxed, participants maintained it to be **cultivated and sophisticated**. On one side, there was mutual respect, but on the other also tension and distance. Although the debates remained well cultivated in the first and the second round, the fighting attitude was reflected in the content of formulations and arguments used by candidates: “if you were at least a little experienced, you would know that ...; we will meet one more time and we will get to know the exact phrases you say, you are trading on charity grossly, who will stand for the ombudsman, the doctor from Nitra...; people can see what are you like, classic dirty fight of classic politicians, instead of showing us what they

intend to improve; a nasty anticampaign, people are disgusted – classic politicians create the pattern of how should people behave; I have never in my life gotten so much insulted as I have just now; people are losing trust in politicians, stop whining that somebody is criticizing you.” Fierceness of the fight led to taking a legal action against the winner of the first round for labelling his opponent as usurer.

**Each candidate entered the election campaign and the debates by taking on a certain role**, which reflected his/her political and life experience and past, and to that role he/she hold throughout the whole campaign. For example Fico stylized himself into the widely experienced and not only domestically, but also internationally recognized politician; Procházka was the one to bring the new culture of politics; Hrušovský as a defender of traditional values important for Slovakia; Kňažko as a symbol of breach and change; other candidates emphasised their professional experiences, which they wanted to apply in the President’s Office to help change people’s lives and Kiska as someone, who has an important life mission to help people, and sees the need of helping People of Slovakia, who live in poor conditions and there is nobody to stand for them. The whole campaign had the air of fight between the classic experienced politicians and inexperienced independent candidates.

Overall, it can be stated that the last pre-election debates of presidential candidates brought to the media communication concreteness, sophisticated political competition, and as with the previous pre-election debates, these too set the communication style in television debates for the next period. It will be interesting to observe how the culture of these media debates will reflect in local pre-election debates, which are taking place in autumn 2014.

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