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We are pleased to inform you that the first issue of *Studia Politica Slovaca* for 2024 has just been published. The issue includes three research papers exploring more or less directly snap elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic of September 2023. In addition, the reader may find one contribution in the Discussion section and two reviews.

After the last regular elections of 29 February 2020, an (oversized) coalition was built consisting of Ordinary People and Independent Candidates (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti; OĽANO), the centre-right liberal Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS), the national-conservative populist We are Family (Sme rodina) and the liberal-conservative For the People (Za ľudí).

Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic and – first and foremost – personal animosities between Prime Minister Igor Matovič (OĽANO) and Finance Minister Richard Sulík (SaS), this coalition quickly ran into turbulence. Following various cabinet reshuffles and votes of no confidence, a civil servant government received a confidence vote on 15 May 2023. On 30 September 2023, Ľudovít Ódor's government led Slovakia to snap elections.

The result of these third snap elections after 1994 and 2012 was surprising, although not entirely. Direction-Social democracy (Smer-SD), led by Robert Fico, won the elections with 22,94%. With its fifth victory after 2006, 2010, 2012 and 2016, Smer has become Slovakia's most successful political party since 1993. The liberal party Progressive Slovakia (Progresívne Slovensko) fell short of expectations with 17,96%, as did Voice-Social Democracy (Hlas-SD) with 14,70%. Both parties have been represented in parliament for the first time. In addition, four other political subjects passed the 5 per cent/7per cent threshold for single parties and coalitions, respectively: the conservative Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťansko-demokratické hnutie; KDH; 6,82%), which has gained seats in parliament for the first time since the 2012 elections, the SaS (6,32%), the national conservative Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana; SNS; 5,62%), which re-entered parliament after dropping out in 2020, and a coalition consisting of OĽANO, Christian Union (Kresťanská únia) and For the People (8,89%).

The failure of the far-right Republika party, a spin-off from the equally far-right People's Party of Our Slovakia (Ľudová strana – Naše Slovensko; ĽSNS) led by Marian Kotleba, brought some relief. The ĽSNS was represented in the National Council in the previous two legislative periods. Its entry into parliament in 2016 was a turning point in domestic politics. To examine the extent to which the voters' social environment and possible right-wing extremist attitudes contributed to the success of the ĽSNS, **Natália Varabyeu Kancelová** conducted an inquiry in villages where the ĽSNS party achieved above-average election results in the 2016 parliamentary elections. Analysis of the election results within these communities across successive parliamentary elections in 2020 and 2023 elucidates possible changes in political preferences and their implications for ĽSNS's and its splinter party Republika's failure to re-enter parliament in the 2023 snap elections. Varabyeu Kancelová's study in this context explores whether the decline of these parties can be attributed to shifts in voting patterns particularly towards SMER-SD (Direction-Social Democracy) or SNS (Slovak National Party), the latter of which marked a turn towards greater radicalisation.

The coalition talks in the newly elected parliament were eagerly awaited. For Slovakia, the question of coalition building is an important one. Except for the legislative period 2012-2016, when Smer formed the government alone, all post-1993 governments in independent Slovakia have been coalition-based. With the greatest coalition potential, Peter Pellegrini's Hlas-SD was soon recognised as the kingmaker. Ultimately, the government was formed by Smer-SD, Hlas-SD and SNS.

Petr Just's paper discusses the coalition formation process. The author analyses both the pre-election and the post-election coalition strategies of parties that succeeded in the parliamentary elections. Furthermore, he stresses the increasing importance of cultural and ethical cleavages in the Slovak political scene, arguing that these play a greater role than the traditional socio-economic left-right scale.

With his fourth election as head of government, Robert Fico has become the most successful politician in independent Slovakia. His election has raised questions about further development of democracy in the country. Frequently, fears are voiced that Slovakia could follow the path of Hungary under Viktor Orbán or that of Poland under Jarosław Kaczyński. In this context, the term "democratic backsliding" is used to describe a process of regime changes toward autocracy.

Democratic backsliding is the topic of **Ján Mykhalchyk Hradický's** comparative study. He aims to identify and analyse the causal processes that led to democratic inoculation in Slovakia and in Serbia. Because of the experience with the so-called Mečiarism in the 1990s, democratic backsliding is (still?) absent in contemporary Slovakia. In other words, the country's prior encounter with Vladimír Mečiar may have enhanced its resistance to this trend. This, however, was not the case of Serbia under Milošević, which had experienced democratic backsliding in the 1990s. Although, like Slovakia, Serbia also experienced a regime change (albeit a few years later), it backslid again in the 2010s. It is argued that the democratic inoculation failed due to the lack of polarization and the stalled reforms in the post-Milošević era.

In the Discussion section, the Czech philosopher **Michael Hauser** reacts to Peter Daubner's paper published in the second issue of the 2023 volume. Daubner reviewed Hauser's book *Manifest socialistického hnutí* (Manifesto of the Socialist Movement), explaining Hauser's main theses. He raised thought-provoking questions, now answered by Hauser.

The issue also incorporates two book reviews written in Slovak, where the political scientist **Tomáš Profant** reviews the Slovak edition of André Gorz's books *Écologie et Politique* and *Écologie et Liberté* (*Ekológia a politika*; *Ekológia a Sloboda*, respectively), published in Slovak as a single volume by the Bratislava-based O.Z. KPTL Publishing House in 2022. In Profant's view, both texts (first published in 1975 and 1978) are holistic; moreover, Profant believes that Gorz's critical arguments have "in a sense modernized the radical-ecological critique of modern society."

The second review, by philosopher **Vladimír Manda**, discusses Dominika Dinušová's book on Rosa Luxemburg (*Róza Luxemburgová. Cesty revolúcie – Rosa Luxemburg. Paths of Revolution*, published by VEDA, Publisher of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. For Manda, this book should stimulate its readers to think about how "to establish a society of equal, free, mutually co-operating and mutually developing individuals."

The final section, *From the Life of the Institute*, provides information about events organised by the Institute of Political Science of the Slovak Academy of Sciences over the first three months of 2024, and also about major projects and activities of the institute's members.