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Studia Politica Slovaca's multilingual second 2024 issue is somehow a Visegrad edition. It reflects current events and developments in three Visegrad states: Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland. Only Hungary is left out.

The two-article Slovak section focuses on the early parliamentary elections on 30 September 2024 (see SPS's first 2024 issue) and the Slovak presidential elections in the spring of 2024.

The 2023 snap elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic on 30 September 2023 ended with a victory for Direction-Social-Democracy (Smer-SD). A coalition consisting of Direction-Social-Democracy, Voice-Social-Democracy (Hlas-SD), and the Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana, SNS) was quickly built. Robert Fico (Direction-SD) is the leader of the government for the fourth time. After one year in office, this governing coalition is shaken by crises. New early elections cannot be ruled out. However, the issue's first article is not about analysing or recapitulating the first year of government. It deals with the specificity of the Slovak electoral system for the National Council of the Slovak Republic: the possibility for citizens entitled to vote to select concrete candidates from the unbounded list with the help of four preference votes. These preference votes make it possible to change the order of candidates on the list. However, candidates must receive at least three per cent of the preferential votes to improve their position on the list.

In her Slovak written article, **Martina Hurčalová** displays that preferential voting in the 2023 elections significantly influenced the composition of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. She gives concrete examples of how voters used this instrument to influence the parliament's composition. Based on voter support alone, 25 members of parliament were elected, mainly from political parties that narrowly missed the closure clause. As the author shows, the effect was clearest with Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (OBYČAJNÍ ĽUDIA a nezávislé osobnosti; OĽaNO) and SNS. In Slovakia, preferential voting has some limits. Hurčalová notes disadvantages such as the significant disproportionality between the 150-name candidate list and only four preferential votes of the electorate and the concentration of the complete party leadership at the top of the candidate list.

Six months after the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, presidential elections were held in Slovakia on 23 March and 6 April. Although the Slovak Republic is a parliamentary democracy, the head of state is directly elected by Slovak citizens for a five-year term. Any citizen of the Slovak Republic who has the right to stand for election and has reached the age of 40 on election day can be elected president. The President of Slovakia is elected using the two-round plurality. Both rounds are held under choose-one voting. A person may be elected President for a maximum of two consecutive terms. As is usual in parliamentary democracies, the head of state primarily fulfils representative functions. Nevertheless, he or she also has certain political powers, such as authorising a person to form a government. Above all, his or her main task is to integrate the society.

The incumbent president, the left-wing liberal *Zuzana Čaputová* (\*1973), did not stand for re-election after one term of office. It was therefore clear that a new person would hold the highest office in the country. The elections were characterised by a fairly high voter turnout by Slovakian standards (51,91 % in the first and 61,14 % in the second round). *Peter Pellegrini* (\*1975), former head of the Slovak government (2018–2020) and later Chairman of the National Council (2023–2024), was elected as the sixth President of the Slovak Republic. In the run-off election on 6 April, he beat his opponent, the former foreign minister and Slovakian ambassador to the United States, *Ivan Korčok* (\*1964), who emerged victorious from the first round on 23 March. It was Pellegrini's first-ever election success, after being defeated in the 2020 and 2023 parliamentary elections (with Smer-SD and Voice-SD). Following his election, he resigned from the office of Speaker of Parliament. He also suspended his membership in his party. Although there were tensions between Prime Minister Robert Fico and Peter Pellegrini, the election was perceived as a success for Fico who saw his ally elected as President. It is too soon to draw an interim balance and analyse the often tension-filled relationship between Slovakia's two-headed executive, the government and the president.

The Czech-written article by **Pavel Hynčica** and **Daniel Šárovec** takes a closer look at the newly elected Slovak president and tries to answer interconnected questions. Firstly, the context and circumstances of Pellegrini's decision to run for president. It also analyses his election campaign. The results of the first and second rounds of voting are also analysed. Furthermore, it critically assesses Peter Pellegrini's electoral success in the context of the characteristic features of current Slovak politics. Finally, it evaluates the consequences of the election's result for Slovakia. According to Hynčica and Šárovec, Pellegrini was elected because he brought his positions closer to the prevailing views in society, even on controversial and divisive topics (e.g., the war in Ukraine).

As their perception in the Western European press shows, the V4 countries suffer from an image deficit, which is partly self-inflicted. There is talk of a democratic back-sliding, and not without good reason. There were serious illiberal tendencies and developments, particularly in Hungary under Viktor Orbán and in Poland during the government of the right-wing populist and national-conservative political party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) under its chairman Jarosław Kaczyński. Controversial developments in these two countries, such as the control of the media or the restriction of the rule of law, are indiscriminately generalised as deficits of all V4 states. Albeit to a much lesser extent, Slovakia and the Czech Republic are also affected by these developments.

The subject of the third article, written in English by **Jakub Potulski** and **Katarzyna Kamińska-Korolczuk** is the problem of democratic backsliding in *Poland* in general and critical developments in the media in particular. According to the authors, representatives of the Law and Justice party brought about the politicisation of the public media and the limiting of their role as a critic and controller of the actions of people in power. As a consequence, democratic *check and balance* mechanisms were weakened.

Dealing with the *Czech Republic*, the fourth article also stays in a wider context. Its general topic is (asylum-)migration. Politicians and society in the Visegrád states are almost completely opposed to the admission of refugees from the Near and Middle East. Poland, Czechia, Slovakia and Hungary shared a negative attitude toward accepting refugees, particularly from Muslim states. Public opinion is dominated by fear of penetration by elements of a foreign culture. This became apparent during the refugee crisis in the European Union in 2015/16. Back then millions of refugees from war and crisis-affected areas attempted to reach the territory of European countries. When the EU decided to release a binding

number of refugees to relieve other member states in the autumn of 2015, the outrage in these countries was immense. At the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 21 September 2015, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Romania rejected mandatory quotas to redistribute asylum seekers among EU member states.

What is less known is that the V4 countries are open to accepting refugees from the war-torn Ukraine. The example of the Czech Republic proves this. Since the start of open Russian aggression in February 2022, the east-central European state has taken in tens of thousands of Ukrainians. In addition, the Czech Republic has been experiencing a large labour migration of Ukrainians in the last few years.

As **Jan Rovenský** shows, the two groups overlap and combine. At the same time, Ukrainians, who have now become the largest minority in the country, do not form a unified bloc. Instead, there are cultural and mental differences. The Czech-language article examines the problems and challenges that arise for the Czech state and Czech society from the refugee and labour migration of Ukrainians. These include finance and housing. In contrast to Germany, financial support for refugees is low, but access to the labour market is easier. At the same time, he analyses the positions of Ukrainians' plans. Return to their old homeland or create a new one? Concerning the latter, the question of (permanent) integration into Czech society arises. So, like every society affected by migration, the Czech Republic is also faced with the problem of integrating (Ukrainian) migrants. Concerning this problem, Rovenský presents three scenarios (temporary stay with the option to return, gradual integration scenario and full integration scenario) and analyses their advantages and disadvantages. According to the author, the integration process of Ukrainians raises more questions than answers. It requires further investigation and (interdisciplinary) research dealing with the social, political, economic, and cultural aspects, needed for a deeper understanding.

The issue is rounded off by a book review, written in Slovak by **Tomáš Profant**. The Political scientist reviews "K-punk. The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher", edited by Darren Ambrose. Known for his writing on radical politics, music and popular culture the English writer, lecturer, culture and music critic, and political theorist, Mark Fisher (1968-2017), is also known as "k-punk", his blogging alias. According to some commentators, Fisher, after his death became "one of the most influential thinkers and writers of our times" and his writing „became ground zero for a different kind of cultural criticism, one as insatiably enthusiastic for pop culture as it was unshakably cutting, urgent, and radical.“ Profant critically examines and scrutinises some of Fisher's controversial thesis in this mentioned – post-humously – published book, covering the years 2004-2016.