National Identity in the Political Discourse in Slovakia

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Abstract: *The present paper seeks to integrate social identity theory and theory of social representations, in the attempt to describe the links between the national identity and Slovakia's attitudes towards the Other. The paper's position is founded in the assumption that national identity is constructed and deconstructed discursively through the means of socialisation (media, education, legislation and everyday practices). Slovakia has recently adopted several controversial acts that substantially regulate the aforementioned means of socialisation, and are said to be designed to protect the nation, national identity and integrity, which itself implies perception of a threat of some kind. It is hypothesized that rhetoric of such laws constructs national identity as one that is threatened by the Other, while overemphasizing the presence of intergroup threat and conflict. Such discourse thus makes people defend themselves and re-evaluate their national identity, by reaffirming who they are in the respective intergroup affairs. The conflicts not only heighten identification with a group but also create antagonistic intergroup attitudes. Through a brief discourse analysis of the abovementioned laws (Act on the State Language, Act on Citizenship and Patriotism Act) the paper aims to analyse social representations of nation and national identity in the political discourse and their potential impact on intergroup relations between the so called 'Old Slovaks' (ethnic Slovaks) and the Other. We thus seek to test the extent to which Slovakia adheres to the universalistic principles of equality and justice, or to which it heightens social significance of ethnicity and creates division within society.*

Key words : national identity, intergroup relations, intergroup threat, discourse.
Cuvinte cheie : identitate națională, relații intergrup, amenințare intergrupală, discurs.

Representations of national identity in the political discourse in Slovakia

Changes in European socio-political landscape in the past 20 years, such as expansion and deepening integration of the EU and immigration has once again drawn the attention to the issues of ethnic and national identities. Changing social context of the population of Europe has posed certain challenges to the old identities of the nation-states, particularly Central European ones defined in the 19th century by ethnic and cultural principles, rather than civic and territorial ones (de Cillia, et al., 1999; Vašečka, 2009).

In the recent years, Slovakia has been actively adopting nation-building policies, thus continuing the construction of the state in ethnic terms. Such policies are in line with the widely accepted foundational myth of a state of ethnic Slovaks who share common culture, history, language, past, present and future and who were finally

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able to establish their own state, after centuries of subjugation from other nations, primarily Hungarians. In the Slovak context, it is almost desirable to share the opinion that Slovaks were harshly oppressed and had no rights whatsoever in the former Kingdom of Hungary. Hungary is thought to have never accepted the Trianon Treaty and secretly plans to annex the southern regions of Slovakia and recreate the great Kingdom of Hungary; this belief can be understood as a part of Slovak ethno-history, i.e. ethnic members' memories and understanding of their communal past (Petöcz, 2009; Smith, 1999). Historical argumentation is used not only as a means to construct Slovak national identity but had also political meaning of constructing relations with Hungary and Hungarian minority in Slovakia (Zelenák, 2005). Currently, no political party dares to counter such arguments of the nationalists in order not to be ostracized. Most political representatives shift their attitudes to the issue of Slovak-Hungarian relations to the 'middle'. Any party or organization that takes the side of Hungarians in a dispute becomes suspicious immediately (Petöcz, 2009).[1] Since 1993 when independent Slovak Republic was established, most politicians, not only the ones explicitly declaring their nationalist orientation, such as the Slovak National Party (SNS) have been reinforcing the population's perception of threat to the Slovak statehood. Activities of the so called 'seditious elements' trying to undermine and deny Slovak Republic's legitimacy have been constantly brought forward to emphasize the vulnerability of the newly born Slovak state and nation. The calls for unity and homogeneity of the Slovak nation as the one whose right to self-determination had been denied for a 'millennium', have been an everyday part of most politicians' rhetoric. [2] However, during the twenty years of independence not only words were used for 'national-mobilization'; few legislation acts, such as the State Protection Act in 1996, were proposed or even adopted that were to protect Slovak statehood and nationhood against the threat from the inside (so called pseudo-liberal media and other 'seditious elements') and from the outside (neighbouring countries). Demonstrative occupation of public space by national symbols[3] and mythologisation of national history, in order to accentuate Slovak nation's superiority and uniqueness have also been used in the attempts to homogenize the population and secure legitimization of the state's power. Indeed, ethnic model of the nation has proved most influential in the past (e.g. expansion of the first nations in the West formed around ethnic principles), with the emphasis on genealogical ancestry, language codes and historical nativism in a homeland (Smith, 1999). As a consequence to such political discourse a certain communication habitus has developed in Slovakia, a habitus that draws lines and creates division between groups of people based on their nationality or ethnicity (Mesežnikov, 2009). The salience of ethnicity in constructing the nation is a critical factor determining intergroup relations (Vašečka, 2009). Alertness towards the largest national minority – the Hungarians – has been deeply rooted in the Slovak political discourse for decades, even though governments led by SDKÚ (1998–2002 and 2002–2006) made declaratory statements promising to improve the relations between Slovaks and Hungarians; some of the goals set in the government's programme statement were achieved (establishment of the Hungarian university in Komárno), some of them were not (amendment to the Act on Minorities that was to include financing of minority cultures) (Dostál, 2006). Many members of Slovakia's polity[4] have often used construction of a common enemy to mobilize the electorate and to legitimize any actions undertaken in the name of the nation (Mesežnikov, 2009). Permanent emphasizing of the ethnic component when constructing the nation seems to follow one goal – homogenization and increase of loyalty of Slovakia's population to the state. These efforts are clearly present in

several acts adopted or amended in the recent years, such as the State Language Act, State Symbols Act and Citizenship Act.

State Language Act, amended in 2010, enforces the use of Slovak language in the public sphere under financial penalties, thus implementing language assimilation. According to the State Symbols Act, which was amended also in 2010, state schools are obliged to display the national flag, lyrics of the national anthem and the Preamble of the Slovak Constitution on an appropriate place and in classrooms in a non-demeaning way, thus securing enculturation of children into the 'Slovak context' from an early age. Currently the most controversial is the Citizenship Act causing turmoil in the Parliament. The Act No. 40/1993 was amended in 2010 as somewhat hasty reaction to the adoption of the Hungarian Act on Dual Citizenship that enabled ethnic Hungarians living outside the borders of Hungary to apply for Hungarian citizenship without permanently residing in the country. Hungarian Act on Dual Citizenship was perceived by the then administration of Robert Fico as "disruption of friendly neighbour relations (...) an effort to prevent citizens of the Slovak Republic with Hungarian nationality from identifying with Slovakia as a successful state (...) an effort to strengthen Hungarian identity and to weaken identification with the Slovak Republic." In his official statement the then Prime Minister also claimed that such actions are "against our [Slovak] national interests" (SMER-SD, 2010). The Slovak government promptly adopted amendment to the Citizenship Act stipulating the loss of Slovak citizenship in case of voluntarily acquiring citizenship of another state. As opposed to Slovak provisions regarding multiple citizenship there is a trend of growing tolerance of this phenomenon across Europe as increasing cross-border mobility and number of children in multinational marriages has posed a challenge to the Strasbourg Convention of 1963 on The Reduction of Cases of Multiple Nationality and Military Obligation of Multiple Nationals. Even though some of the EU-15 countries (Germany, Austria, Denmark, Spain, Luxembourg and the Netherlands) require immigrants to renounce their original citizenship when naturalizing, the states also allow many exceptions in this respect. For instance, Germany does not require EU nationals to renounce their original citizenship; Spain allows multiple citizenships for major immigrant groups, such as Latin Americans. Finland, Sweden and Belgium also facilitate emigrants' possibility to keep their citizenship when naturalizing abroad (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2008). Trends in Slovakia have been, however, rather opposite. At the time of Hungary adopting its Act on Dual Citizenship, the then Slovak government's rhetoric implied presence of a threatening Other whose difference lies in the ethnicity which points to the polity's fear and conviction that national identity is determined by one's citizenship, that multiple identities are not feasible and that identity can only be maintained by eliminating differences and otherness. It also indicates the ways that nation is represented in the dominant political discourse – personified entity with its own will and interests that is unique and distinct from others (de Cillia et al., 1999; Drál', 2009). The Prime Minister's statement implies conflation of state and nation when he says that citizens with dual citizenship cannot identify with Slovakia and that such provisions are against national interests, thus implying primordial and perennial conceptualization of nation as a tangible entity. The notion of multiple identities is apparently an unknown or rather unacceptable concept, in the context of a nation-state.

Nation and national identity as social constructs

Is nation really a tangible entity? Is it a substantial, natural phenomenon that exists

independently of objects of the outer world? This paper adopts the position that conceptualizes nation as a social construct, a social representation. The notion of social representations, as defined by Moscovici (1988), represents a group-specific shared complex of concepts, attitudes, images and explanations of phenomena that are the product of daily experiences and are sustained in communication. According to Anderson (1991) nations are mental constructs, imagined political communities existing in the minds and memories of the nationalized subjects (individuals) and should be thought of in constructivist rather than essentialist manner. One cannot 'have' a nationality in the essentialist sense; nation is neither natural, nor genetically or biologically determined attribute that one is born with. Calhoun (1997) argues that nation exists only when individuals share certain representations and interpretations of a community and perceive themselves through the framework of belonging to a community called nation that is attributed autonomy and other rights. For a nation to exist there must be a consensus on the content of the nation and national identity.

This assumption is supported by the fact that nations have not always been here; they appeared in the recent past as a response to the need of industrial societies to communicate more easily (Gellner, 2006; Drál', 2009). Even though nations are not based on face-to-face contact, their members are nevertheless convinced they are part of a unique national community. Their conviction stems from the fact that members of particular national communities are subject to the same socialisation – they read the same newspaper, watch the same television programmes, attend the same education etc. (de Cillia et al., 1999). The sense of belonging to a certain community, the sense of identification, is thus facilitated in the process of socialization with various means of communication serving as instruments of diffusion of social representations of nation and national identity into commonsense knowledge. Representations of what it means to be a part of a national community are embedded, created and shared in a particular social context. National identity as a specific form of social identity is not consistent or unalterable; its nature is rather dynamic, fragile and susceptible to changes of situational setting of the discursive act (de Cillia et al., 1999). Identification with a particular nation is promoted by putting emphasis on the uniqueness of the nation at stake; with its individuality elevated to the national level, the unique character of the group encompasses entirely positive attributes serving to maintain positive image of the group which in turn results in positive evaluation of the self (Wodak et al., 2009). According to Tajfel's social identity theory, group identity, as an extension of personal identity thus lends individuals higher self-esteem (Brown, 2000). In order to achieve positive image, the in-group needs a relevant out-group to construct its positive distinctiveness. Groups thus function as status providers for its members (Druckman, 1994). Group identity can be enhanced by drawing the line between the in-group and the out-group, while emphasizing positive features of the in-group and focusing on the in-group's superiority and distinctiveness. However, this does not necessarily involve out-group derogation (Nezlek and Smith, 2005). National identity encompasses not only the notion of the in-group but also commonly shared ideas of the out-group (the Other) against which the in-group defines itself. According to de Cillia et al. (1999) national identity is a habitus in a sense of a complex of common ideas and images, concepts and perception schemes of related emotional attitudes and similar behavioural dispositions towards the outside world (including members of the out-group), that are internalized through national socialization. In this sense, national identity provides schemata for making

sense of the world in accordance with previous experiences and meanings ascribed to them. It can be explained as a mental representation, a cognitive frame that guides our understanding of the outside world and gives meanings to human actions. Habitual use of such schemata transforms them into common sense (Ting, 2008). Notions of other nations are constructed in the same stereotypical manner as in-groups are imagined; specific history, cultural heritage and characteristics are attributed to the out-groups as well as to the in-groups. Plichtová et al. (2009), for instance, in their analysis of the construction of Slovak national identity (the 'slovakness'), posits that Slovak media construct the Roma as a homogeneous group in terms of their job-seeking practices, although these assumptions are a generalization of few individual cases of Roma leaving Slovakia in search of better economic opportunities. Such habitus, thus, runs hand in hand with stereotypical construction of difference and uniqueness.

Discursive construction of national identity

Consistency of national identity beliefs and schemata is preserved via their generational transference by national narratives – metaphors, analogies, insinuations, as well as stories, which implant them deeper in cultural frames and transform them into commonsense knowledge or representations (Wodak, 2006). Martin (1995) suggests that it is the language as the main instrument that enables construction and sharing of differences and uniqueness of putative nations. It is thus through discourse as a social practice that national identity is constructed and conveyed. Discourse also enables dominant structures of the society to determine and stabilize conventions and "confer upon the cultural arbitrary all the appearances of the natural" (Wodak, 2001; Meyer, 2001; Bourdieu, 1994, 2). Social phenomena, such as national identity, are thus interpreted as given (biologically, genetically, etc.) even though they are, in fact, constructed, perpetuated, transformed and dismantled in discursive practices (Wodak et al., 2009) and can therefore be understood as social artefacts. As well as nation and national identity the notion of the Other is also discursively constructed; in the case of Slovakia, discourse of the Other includes several relevant out-groups – Hungarian minority living in the territory of the Slovak Republic and Hungarians and Czechs in their respective states. Significance of these groups for Slovakia is historically determined. [5] The establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993 has been represented in a romantic manner as a 'victory in the thousand-year struggle for independence' (from both Hungarians and Czechs). The discourse of the Other has been changing over time; however, it can be said that Slovakia's position of a threatened victim (with reference to various out-groups) is still prevailing in the public discourse. The presence of intergroup threat has been emphasized in the public discourse for decades, even though, perhaps, threatening groups have changed. Apart from Hungarians and Czechs allegedly doubting the sovereignty of the independent state of Slovakia, Roma and immigrants have been present in the discourse with also threatening potential, although in these cases it is more a realistic material threat than a symbolic one (Stephan et al., 2005; Plichtová et al., 2009).

Politics and national identity discourse

My concern in this paper is how national identity is represented in the political field, particularly in legislation which has a significant power to regulate and control social practices.

National narratives do not operate in a vacuum; they are produced, reproduced, transformed and deconstructed by actors in a specific institutionalized context. As Martin (1995, 13) puts it, "the identity narrative channels political emotions so that they can fuel efforts to modify a balance of power." Representations of particular national identity can be used to unify and homogenize populations by saturating one of the basic human needs – the need for belonging. Nation saturates individuals' economic, socio-cultural and political needs, and at the same time, it provides them with a sense of security, belonging and prestige (Druckman, 1994). From the political point of view, unified national identity also serves to legitimize political autonomy and self-determination (Ting, 2008). The identity narratives have the power to transform perception of past and future, change the organisation of human groups, emphasize certain traits, thus modifying interpretation of the world and constructing the imagined community of nation. The macro-level narratives of nation and national identity are often complex and authoritative, and certainly contribute to the shaping of the collective psyche of the population (Ting, 2008). What is interesting here is the notion of power relations associated with representations of nationhood and national identity. Power encompasses control of one group over other groups and has the potential to affect actions or cognitions of the subordinate group. The dominant group may, for instance, restrict 'inferior' group's freedom of action. Van Dijk (1993, 254) views cognitive ways of exercising power as more effective and defines them as "strategic ways to change the mind of others in one's own interest." Language, i.e. text and talk, was recognized as an instrument of structuring the power. Language through its conventionalized forms plays a vital role in establishing and naturalizing social hierarchies. However, language only gains power by the way people in power use it. It has the potential to structure experiences and also involves an interpersonal aspect constituting relationships between participants (Wodak, 2001). In relation to the polity's communication of specific representations of nation and national identity to the broad public the relationship between the two participants (the polity and the public) of such discourse is unequal – ordinary people are only recipients and have essentially no power to influence the representations; the more so that for most people it is the only discourse they have experienced that shaped their individual frames of perceptions. When interpreting and evaluating discourse on national identity individuals mainly rely upon collective representations that are promoted and spread by the dominant group who thus controls how national identity is represented. The major function of the dominant discourse is to manufacture consensus and acceptance as, undoubtedly, homogeneous and united populations are easier to control and rule. Unifying goal may also serve as a justification of any action taken on behalf and for the good of the population. In order to reach and engage as broad an audience as possible common goals must be relatively easy to understand and concern all members of the community; it should also be of emotional nature addressing the basic needs common to all. Terhune (1964) suggests that nations are relevant for individuals when they become affectively involved with the traits attributed to the nation, when they are goal oriented (e.g., on helping the country) and ego involved, building their identity and self-esteem through the nation. According to such criteria, constructing a common threat to the in-group's security is feasible in establishing the power of the state. As Petöcz (2009, 262) argues, "in such atmosphere [of threat] the state faces much less resistance of the public, even when restricting basic civic rights and political freedoms because the state representatives can always justify their actions by the outside threat." Specific representations of the nation and national identity can thus be instrumentally used to legitimize the state's power, by discursively designing such na-

tional identity and national culture that links membership within a political nation-state with identification with national culture; state and culture thus become identical (de Cillia et al., 1999). Such identity entrepreneurship can be understood as a political strategy aimed at imposing a specific vision (representation) of the state and of values and interpretations of those in power (Bourdieu, 1994). Representations of the putative nation are mediated by state institutions, such as schooling system, national history or civic lessons of citizenship. National identity as devised by the state polity is internalized through persistent institutional actions and interactions. Individuals usually encounter representations of the nation when engaging in activities involving state actors or through mass media (Ting, 2008). As Bourdieu (1994) suggests, culture is unifying. If the state aspires to exercise great power over its population it is important to create a dominant unique culture that would help homogenize the population and increase its unity. The state contributes to construction of the national identity through constitution of the dominant culture, i.e. legitimate national culture which can be established via unification of all cultural and juridical codes, homogenization of all forms of communication (including bureaucratic), classification systems (sex, age, and ethnicity), bureaucratic procedures, educational structures and social rituals. The state, thus, generates mental structures, representations of what is appropriate thinking and perception regarding state and nation (Bourdieu, 1994).

Critical discourse analysis

Exploring the discursive sources consolidating representations of national identity is one of the options of describing how a particular national identity is constructed. This paper is based on critical discourse analysis (CDA) as defined by Wodak (2001) which conceptualizes discourse as both being shaped by and shaping the social practices. Situational, institutional and social settings shape discourses and, at the same time, discourses influence discursive as well as non-discursive social and political processes. According to van Dijk (1993), CDA should mainly be concerned with discourse dimensions of power relations and social inequality, which is why it was chosen to analyze discursive construction of nation and national identity in Slovakia. Van Dijk (1993, 252) further posits that critical discourse analysts should take an explicit socio-political stance and "their critical targets are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate, condone or ignore social inequality and injustice." Social inequality, for the purposes of this paper, is represented by unequal positions of ethnic minorities and the majority that are discursively devised by social actors of the dominant group who constitutes knowledge, situations, social roles, identities and interpersonal relations between different social groups.

Despite the complexity of the topic I intend to introduce only a brief preliminary analysis of the current Slovak legislation regulating saturation of the key terms such as 'nation', 'state', 'citizen', 'national minorities', thus promoting a specific representation of nationhood and national identity in the Slovak context. It should be noted that CDA of legislative acts cannot be carried out in its complexity, as legislation uses specific rhetoric. Rhetorical means, such as argumentation, idioms, sayings, vocabulary and style are determined by the legislative context of the analyzed texts. Text surface is also given by the genre of the text and is uniformed to all legislative acts. The focus, therefore, lied upon insinuations, meanings and the ideological statements based on the content: What notion and understanding of nation, national identity and the Other respective acts convey? How are the relations between the

nation (in-group) and the Other (out-group) constructed? (Jäger, 2001).

Selected materials for analysis

Legislation can be understood as an instrument of creating a basic normative framework, defining 'good' and 'bad' social practices and determining penalties for acting in a wrong way. Power and dominance are usually institutionalized and may be supported by courts, legitimated by laws, put in force by the police or reproduced by textbooks, which is precisely this paper's argument in the case of intergroup relations in Slovakia (van Dijk, 1993). Legislation norms can thus be interpreted as mirroring representations of the dominant groups' vision of society and state, which they attempt to impose on the population by regulating the public, semi-public and even private spheres of individual lives. Legislation is also state's tool used to control enculturation into particular national identities and a discursive strategy that legitimizes control and 'naturalize' the social order (Plichtová et al., 2009; van Dijk, 1993). In order to explore the fundamental framework of enculturation it was decided to analyze the existing legislative acts related to nation, nationality and intergroup relations with the Other. The currently ongoing discussion devoted to the three controversial legislation acts – or rather their amendments – adopted in 2010 by the former administration serves as a sample of the political discourse through which particular national identity is diffused into the commonsense knowledge (top-down approach). The legislation acts at stake include the State Language Act, the State Symbols Act and the Citizenship Act. It was also decided to include the Preamble of the Slovak Constitution, as this was the very fundamental document that constituted the idea of the state and the nation in 1993, when Czechoslovakia split and independent Slovak Republic was established.

Analysis

Preamble of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic

The very core of Slovak legislation, the Constitution, is itself composed in a manner explicitly manifesting essentialist conceptualization of the nation:

> *"We, the Slovak nation,*
> *bearing in mind the political and cultural heritage of our ancestors and the centuries of experience from the struggles for* ***national existence*** *and our own statehood,*
> *mindful of the spiritual heritage of Cyril and Methodius and the historical legacy of Great Moravia,*
> *recognizing the* ***natural right of nations*** *to self-determination,(...)"* (emphasis added)

The Preamble, and its creators, understands nation as a natural entity, as something that exists independently of human actions and objects of the outside world and that also has its natural rights. This is clearly in opposition to the constructivist point of view explaining nation as a social artefact, something that is arbitrary and thus cannot have natural rights or essences. The nation is constructed here as a result of struggle, fight, as a final reward for centuries of suffering, which refers to the prevailing rhetoric of struggle and threat also present in other legislative acts as will be demonstrated later. The text also overtly differentiate who is included in the Slovak nation: those who identify with the national myth of a 'thousand-year-long' struggle for existence and with the tradition of Cyril and Methodius who brought Christianity to the territory of contemporary Slovakia which in fact excludes all those who identify with

other religions. Distinction is also present in the reference to Christianity and common Great Moravian[6] history, thus creating an ethno-space and suggesting ethnic definition of the Slovak nation (Smith, 1999). Struggle for self-determination and common historical heritage serve here as sources of distinctiveness, which is also demonstrated by the fact that national minorities are mentioned in addition further in the Preamble (*"...together with members of national minorities and ethnic groups living on the territory of the Slovak Republic,..."*); however, they are only added as someone passive who just 'tags along' but *"we, the Slovak nation"* take all the initiative. To compare, Germany, France or United States for instance only mention 'people of' the respective states in their Preambles, without distinguishing whether one is a member of a minority or majority. Rhetoric of the Slovak Preamble implies the unequal relationship between the so-called state-forming nation and the Others – the relations of dominant and submissive group. Following ethnic rather than political principle in constituting the state is, in fact, incompatible with basic principles of constitutionalism, i.e. equality of all citizens, and with liberal democracy (Plichtová et al., 2009).

State Language Act

State Language Act was adopted in 1995, in order to ensure legislative protection of the state language, i.e. the Slovak language as defined by the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. Protection of the Slovak language is the major purpose of the Act. The Act also constitutes the relations between the state language and minority languages.

The State Language Act begins with the following preamble:

> *"Bearing in mind that* ***the Slovak language is the most important attribute of the Slovak nation's specificity*** *and the most precious value of its cultural heritage, as well as an* ***expression of sovereignty of the Slovak Republic*** *and a general vehicle of communication for all its citizens, which secures their freedom and equality in dignity and rights in the territory of the Slovak Republic, the National Council of the Slovak Republic has resolved to adopt the following Act."* (emphasis added)

The above cited extract from the Act conflates Slovak nation and citizenship represented by the sovereign Slovak Republic (*"Slovak language is (...) an expression of sovereignty of the Slovak Republic")* and confirms the ethnic definition of the Slovak state (Smith, 1991). This also constitutes the Slovak nation as a state-forming nation exercising its right to self-determination through language as a source of distinctiveness. At the same time, it implicitly excludes citizens whose first language is not Slovak and who use Slovak only in selected situations, e.g. in official communication (*"Slovak language is (...) the most precious value of its cultural heritage (...) and also general vehicle of communication of all its citizens..."*). Nation's uniqueness is constructed through its cultural heritage and statehood (*"...Slovak language is (...) an expression of sovereignty of the Slovak Republic..."*). What is interesting is that the use of Slovak language is conceptualized as an instrument of securing freedom and equality in dignity and rights for all citizens, which seems as if these principles did not apply to those who do not speak Slovak. Potential differences are entirely omitted, i.e. existence of those whose general vehicle of communication is not Slovak is not even acknowledged here. Is it because the creators of the Act are genuinely convinced that all citizens generally communicate in Slovak? Or is it because those who generally communicate in other languages are of no interest to them?

Introductory provision of the Act (§1 Art. 2) further reads:

> *"The state language shall have priority over other languages used in the territory of the Slovak Republic."*

Superiority and dominance of the Slovak language is thus incorporated officially in legislation, which explicitly establishes unequal power relations between the majority language and minority languages. If we adopt the position of those who drafted this Act, that is the essentialist concept of nation as a tangible entity whose most important attributes is the language, then it could be assumed that such provision also determines superiority of the nation bearing the superior attribute and constructs relevant Others (national minorities using different languages) as less important, secondary and subordinate. Superior position within social relations can be understood as a source of distinctiveness ensuring positive image of the in-group in relation to relevant out-groups (recognized national minorities) in the territory of the Slovak Republic (Finell anf Liebkind, 2010).

Entire §2 of the Act is devoted to establishing measures of protection of the state language. The need for legislative protection of the state language suggests that those creating such provisions, in fact, perceive presence of a threat to it, otherwise there would be no need to explicitly formulate measures for protection. Conveying a representation of nation, or of its attribute, that is threatened elicits an affective response of fear and may result in hostile behaviour towards those posing the threat. Threat, however, remains ambiguous and it is not clear what the state language should be protected from and how (by whom) it is threatened. The Act makes it obligatory to protect the state language for all state institutions ("*State authorities, territorial self-government authorities and other bodies of public administration are obligated to protect the state language. For that purpose they are obliged to access actively to the control of compliance of provisions of this act.").* Adopting the essentialist perspective, the perceived threat to the state language could be conceptualized as a symbolic threat representing a menace to the nation's very inherent attributes. With respect to language, out-groups practicing minority languages may be perceived as threatening to the dominance of the state language and to the group 'owning' the language, although the threatening Other is not explicitly formulated (Stephan et al., 2005).

Through the State Language Act, the dominant group (the polity representing the state-forming nation) is able to control social practices not only on the level of public sphere, but also semi-public and private sphere, by stipulating situations and territories where the use of state language is obligatory:

> *"The state authorities, territorial self-government authorities, other bodies of public administration, the legal persons established by such public authorities and the legal persons established by law* ***shall use*** *the state language in their official communication; this provision shall be without prejudice to the use of the languages of national minorities in official communication pursuant to a separate regulation and the use of other languages in official communication with foreign countries in accordance with the established practice in international communication practice."* (emphasis added)

The *"use of the languages of national minorities in official communication pursuant to a separate regulation"* refers to the Act No. 184/1999 Coll. on the Use of Languages of National Minorities which defines the 'quorum of native minority language speakers' as 20 per cent[7] of the local population. The dominant group, thus

regulates where the minority language **can** be spoken in official communication, this way explicitly controlling social practices of the less numerous – subordinate – groups, whereas State Language Act stipulates that Slovak language **must be spoken**. Official communication in minority languages is, therefore, not allowed in regions where national minorities are represented by less than 20 per cent of the local population; using other than the state language in these regions can even be sanctioned by monetary penalties:

> *"If the Ministry of Culture finds a breach of obligations pursuant to section 9(1) and the authorities or legal persons referred to in section 3(1), or the self-employed natural persons or legal persons, fail to eliminate an* ***unlawful state of affairs*** *or to remedy deficiencies within the set time limit in spite of the written caution, the Ministry of Culture shall impose a fine of €100 to 5,000 on the authorities and legal persons referred to in section 3(1), or the self-employed natural persons and legal persons."* (emphasis added)

Using minority languages in other than designated regions and territories is explicitly interpreted as an **unlawful state of affairs** which confirms the inferior position ascribed to nationalities other than the Slovak and reaffirms the dominant position of the state language in the public sphere (*"The text* [on monuments, memorials and memorial plaques] *in another language shall be presented in the same or* ***smaller font*** *than the state language text."* (emphasis added*)*.

The Act not only controls the use of the Slovak language in the public sphere, but also regulates its use in the semi-public or even private sphere of doctor-patient relationship:

> *"The staff of these facilities* [health providers] *communicates with their patients or clients usually in the state language; if a patient or client does not have a command of the state language, the communication can be in a language in which the patient or client can be comprehended. If the facility is located in a municipality where the language of a national minority is used in official communication pursuant to a separate regulation, the patients or clients belonging to that national minority can use their mother tongue in communication with the staff. The staff is not obliged to have a command of the language of the national minority."*

It is questionable whether state should be able to exercise such power over private social practices of its citizens, as to determine where they are allowed to speak their native language and where they are not.

Unequal positions of different nationalities are an underlying notion of the entire document. Language is often understood as an integral feature of the nation; it is conceptualized as an essential part of its cultural heritage and an expression of one's national identity. The research of Plichtová et al. (2009) brought interesting findings on how young people perceived their national identity in the context of Slovakia's integration in the EU. The interviews with participants revealed that Slovak national identity was defined *inter alia* through the use of the Slovak language, which was identified as the main distinctive feature of national identity. Regulation of the use of languages in that state language has the priority over all other languages sends a clear message of which national identity is desirable and considered 'full-value' in this country.

State Symbols Act

The Act was adopted in 1993 and last time amended in 2010; the 2010 amendment served as a substitute for the Patriotism Act proposed by the Slovak National Party (SNS) and designed to enforce patriotism. The State Symbols Act regulates

the use of state symbols, such as the state flag, national anthem etc.

The Act enforces patriotism and reverence to the state symbols, thus attempting to stimulate strong emotional attachment to the nation (*"Everyone is **obliged** to maintain reverence to the state symbols of the Slovak Republic. Patriotism and reverence to the state symbols shall be incorporated into the state educational programme."* (emphasis added). Finell and Liebkind (2010) define national symbols as emotionally loaded material object that are used to make abstract notions visible. All state symbols in Slovakia are ethnically laden and rooted in the historical myth of a 'thousand-year-struggle' of the Slovak nation for independence from either Hungarians or Czechs, referring to the shared memories of the putative Slovak nation. Smith (1991, 23) identified that cultivation of shared memories is an integral to cultural identity and "essential to the survival and destiny of a collective identity". Furthermore, state and ethnically defined nation in the Slovak context are often conflated as was discovered above. Patriotism here is thus understood as ethnocentric, as opposed to civic conceptualization of patriotism. The Act only identifies and accepts one group (the nation) as legitimate. Its adoration is considered so important that it needs to be included in the school curricula, so that children from an early age are socialized into this particular conceptualization of social world. As Duckitt (1989) proposed, ethnocentric patriotism is associated with insecure group identification, which encompasses greater need for distancing one's group from others. Such affective attachment to the nation thus can result in internalization of antagonistic attitudes and behavioural dispositions towards members of the relevant out-groups.

Nation membership is promoted through the obligatory display of the state flag, lyrics of the national anthem and text of the Preamble of the Constitution in state schools and every classroom.

> *"Schools with the state educational programme are **obliged** (...) to display in an appropriate place in the school premises the state flag, the lyrics of the national anthem and the text of the Preamble of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic in a manner that does not disturb their dignity."* (emphasis added)

The provision makes it obligatory to enculturate children from the youngest age into understanding of the dominant national culture. The symbols can serve as mediating mechanisms enabling us to switch into the particular discourse. Rituals and symbols play a vital role in differentiating an in-group from an out-group and as a manifest of the nation's particularism (Finell and Liebkind, 2010). Ting (2008, 469) suggests that "discourses and practices engendering a sense of nationhood such as 'national history' and civic lessons of citizenship are imparted on adolescent students as part of the nation-building project." Through such practices thus children and adolescents internalize promoted points of view and representations of their belonging to a community called nation, even though they might be of a different national origin. Through national symbols, the desired identity can be imposed on all children, whose ability to critically evaluate, however, is not fully developed, in order to homogenize the population into one uniform community.

Citizenship Act

For the purposes of this paper the 2010 amendment of the Citizenship Act is the most important part of the Act as it regulates, or rather outlaws, dual citizenship.

Exclusivity of the citizenship is stated in §9 Art.1:

> *"Citizenship of the Slovak Republic can be lost by (...) acquiring foreign citizenship based on explicit declaration of will."*

If a citizen decides to apply for a citizenship of another country he or she automatically loses his or her citizenship of the Slovak Republic, as dual citizenship seems to be associated with disloyalty to the 'homeland'. Furthermore, individuals are obliged to notify relevant state authorities about their private decision to become citizens of other country (*"He who lost their citizenship [Slovak] is* ***obliged*** *to announce this to the relevant district office without delay"* (emphasis added*)*. This amendment was adopted as a panicky reaction to the Hungarian Act on Dual Citizenship stating that ethnic Hungarians living abroad are entitled to Hungarian citizenship, which seems to have mainly symbolic value for those claiming Hungarian identity and living outside the territory of Hungary; it could also have significant meaning for Hungarians that are citizens of non-EU countries (e.g. Ukraine). Dual citizenship in Slovakia had been in force before this Hungarian law was adopted and had not caused any difficulties. It is therefore plausible that such anxiety over dual citizenship is based in the historically rooted resentments towards Hungarians that are also present in Slovak national myths of the nation being subjugated by Hungarians for thousand years. Multiple citizenship is thus clearly perceived as a threat to state's sovereignty; one must decide to be either loyal or disloyal to the Slovak nation-state. Conflicting loyalty is one of the main objections against multiple citizenship (Bauböck, 1997). This way, the state only accepts one exclusive membership which, in case of Slovakia as a nation-state, refers not only to legal ties to the country, but also to one's relationship and loyalty to the nation. Coincidence of nation and state is the greatest myth of nation-states (Gülalp, 2006).

Discussion

The paper has examined how nation and national identity are represented in the legislative discourse in Slovakia. Based on the analysis of the *Preamble of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic* and the three Acts (*State Language Act*, *State Symbols Act* and *Citizenship Act*) it was discovered that the ways nation and national identity are constructed in the Slovak legislation contribute to the continuation of nation-building processes through anchoring of the system of thinking about the nation into pre-existing cognitive schema and common social practices. However, it should be noted that this paper does not aspire to be a comprehensive analysis of the representations of nation and national identity in Slovakia, as that would require more complex methodology, including triangulation of methods. The paper offers a brief analysis of the basic ideology framework of how the nation and its content are constructed in the documents regulating social practices in the country.

The study identified that social representations of Slovak nation and national identity as conveyed by the selected legislative acts construct the nation as a tangible entity and strive to elicit emotional attachment to it, through references to shared notions of historical wrongdoings and achievements (e.g. self-liberation from the thousand-year-yoke evokes national pride). However, such representations of shared history and ancestry create cognitive schemes that also organize perception of the relevant out-groups (e.g., Hungarians) and intergroup relations resulting in potentially antagonistic attitudes and hostile behaviour towards out-group members. The so called state-forming nation, i.e. the Slovak nation, is constructed through constituting its distinctiveness with its dominant position being the source of it. Explicit formulations defining the Slovak nation as a group

whose 'attributes' have priority over 'attributes' of other groups help sustain the differences, and construct (and re-construct) the dominant core-group and the subordinate groups. Given that the core-group is granted certain privileges that others are not allowed to benefit from (e.g., free use of its language), such division is in opposition with principles of equality and justice as basic values of democracy. Dominant position of the core-group and imposition of its 'attributes' on other group (e.g., compulsory use of the core-group's language) sends a clear message about which group membership is desirable, which might be understood as assimilation or separation pressures on subordinate groups. Such representations of the national identity are far from establishing inclusive and integrated society and it may imply potential (or real) discriminatory behaviour, as demonstrated by Ng (1982) whose study showed that dominant groups were more discriminatory towards the low-power groups than vice versa. Grant's study (1990) suggested that perception of threat to the core values of the in-group motivates ethnocentric attitudes and reactions towards the out-group, with the emphasis on the uniqueness of the in-group being a part of the ethnocentric reactions. If applied to the intergroup relations in Slovakia it explains the construction of distinctiveness and uniqueness of the Slovak nation as a response to threat, whether symbolic or realistic. Constituting groups (nations) as either dominant or subordinate with obvious preferential treatment of the dominant group members might lead the subordinate group members to adopting various strategies of maintaining their positive self-image. From social-psychological perspective it could be expected that members of the low-power group would decide to leave their in-group and join the out-group (assimilation), i.e. the dominant group. Ellemers et al. (1999) explains this by the fact that individuals tend to be more affectively committed to groups with positive image and distance themselves from less attractive groups.

Threat was identified as a prevailing way of constructing the Other and intergroup relations. Rhetoric of threat was found to be supported by historical 'facts' or rather historical myths, portraying the Slovak nation as a super-ordinate national community struggling for independence and statehood for centuries (Findor, 2009). Struggle and feeling threatened are here identified as in-group's (Slovak nation's) common practices of differentiating itself from the relevant out-groups which are represented by national minorities, particularly Hungarians. The legislative acts analyzed in this paper, however, do not explicitly specify the Other; the concept of the Other remains ambiguous. Nevertheless, the measures defined by particular acts (protection of the dominant language, protection of national symbols, etc.) suggest that national identity is the dimension on which the intergroup comparison is carried out. Intergroup threat is a situation in which group identity becomes salient and individuals tend to shift from personal to group identity which may serve as an instrument for homogenizing the putative nation and legitimizing the distribution of power (Hewstone and Greenland, 2000). Representing the nation as threatened thus unifies individuals and stimulates greater emotional attachment to their in-group that needs to be protected against a common enemy. Dispositions for protective pro-nation behaviour are thus adopted and internalized.

Constructing intergroup relations as conflicting, in fact brings the conflict into being. Instead of supporting an inclusive society, differences are emphasized and even exaggerated. Uniqueness of the Slovak nation is also constructed through emphasizing the exclusiveness of identity which is manifested in the Citizenship Act outlawing dual citizenship because it is 'against the national interest'. Such rhetoric forces

individuals to choose their exclusive national affiliation, their identity.

Despite Slovakia's declaratory self-definition as a modern democratic country, apparently there are certain dimensions that are severely underdeveloped, such as respect, equality and inclusion of otherness and diversity or plurality of opinions. Smith (1991, 24) defines nation as a "named human population sharing a historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass, public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members", which suggests important civic aspects in the definition of nation. Slovak legislation analysed in this paper, however, contains descriptions of the nation that are rather compatible with Smith's (ibid, 25) understanding of an *ethnie*, i.e. ethnic community as a "named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories and one or more common elements of culture, including an association with a homeland." It is clear that definition of the nation and state through ethnicity of the core-group is still the dominant ideology in Slovakia.

Notes

1. In 2008, Open Society Foundation published a research study indicating that attitudes of primary school children towards Hungarians and Hungarian language have worsened. The then government of Robert Fico claimed the research was manipulated, in order to serve the interests of foreign agents.
2. This position is not only confined to those parties that explicitly declare their nationalist tendencies. For instance, Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) that received great support of the public in the 1992 parliamentary elections (37.26%) poses as „the only protector of the national interests, a fighter against alleged threats, an architect of the Slovak statehood." (Havlík, 2003, 114; Mesežnikov, 2008, 12). Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) is built on principles of Christianity, which the party considers „the power that helps Slovaks to preserve and develop their national identity during the centuries of national subjugation." (Bobula, n.d.). SMER-SD, that has currently the greatest support of the public (43.2%), is built on national populism and pro-national principles. The party's aim is to "search for the national meaning and historical anchoring of the Slovak-hood" (Mesežnikov, 2008, 10). The only party that was formed on civic, rather than national principles, was the Slovak Christian and Democratic Union (SDKÚ). However, even this party often shifted towards national principles in issues like Hungarian Status Law in 2002, when representatives of this party expressed their concern that the Law could threaten the sovereignty of the Slovak Republic (Szmrecsányi, 2003).
3. Slovak National Party (SNS) uses installation of national symbols, particularly the double cross, in ethnically diversified regions as a means of confrotational self-definition against the Others, mainly Hungarians. SNS stated that the aim of such initiatives is to „show the world that the Slovak nation is autochtonous here so that it is clear where Slovakia is and who is at home here" (Mesežnikov, 2009, 53).
4. Presence of national populism in the political discourse became overtly apparent when SMER-SD, HZDS and SNS formed the government after the 2002 parliamentary election. HZDS and SNS formed a government in the 1990s as well (1992–1994, 1994–1998). Long-term presence of these parties in the public sphere significantly shaped atmosphere in the society (Mesežnikov, 2009).
5. The territory of conteporary Slovak Republic had been a part of the Kingdom of Hungary until 1918 when the first Czechoslovak Republic was established. This period is often described as a period of subjugation of the Slovak nation by the ruling Hungarians. During this period, teaching in most schools was carried out in Hungarian language which contributed to the fact that Slovakia had practically no intelectual elite which is why after World

War I, when the first Czechoslovak Republic was established, Czechs (as being more educated) assumed many positions related to the governance of the new state (e.g. teachers, clerks, state officials, etc.) (see, for instance, Kováč, 2007).

6. Svätopluk, one of the sovereigns of the Great Moravia (9th century A.D.), is often referred to as the „King of Old Slovaks", which is historically incorrect; Svätopluk was neither a king nor did he reign Old Slovaks who at the time could be hardly labelled a consistent community. As Smith (1991) pointed out, Slovaks before 1850 could only be described as ethnic category, not as an ethnic community. Despite these severe inconsistencies, the term „Old Slovaks" is widely used in the political discourse in Slovakia when referring to the common national ancestry (see for instance the dispute over SMER-SD's installation of the statue of 'Svätopluk – the King of Old Slovaks' at the Bratislava castle (Kováčová and Piško, 2010).
7. In Finland, for instance, this quorum is set to six per cent of the population, and some states do not even have such a quorum (Petöcz, 2009).

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