

## **Ethical and moral issues of Slovak politics in the 2000s: Contribution to political ethics in Slovakia**

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### **Abstract**

The author deals with analysis of four areas of ethical and moral issues which, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to a greater or lesser extent, stirred Slovak public opinion, attracted the significant attention of media and very often were a topic for various populists. The article focuses on the issues concerning conscience and conscientious objection, national or traditional moral values, "ethical government" and (im)morality of the MPs allowance. All four cases relate to problems or issues with universal validity, or a form which concerns values, including moral values of Slovak society and politics, or political representation.

**Keywords:** Slovak society, ethical issues, morality, populism, conscience, moral values, politics

### **Introduction**

Society, its morality and morality of an individual is developing. The changes reflect the development in social, scientific as well as technological cognition. People's values, attitudes and opinions on solutions to moral problems of the era they live in also change. Moral crisis or decline is often mentioned in relation to morality of the time period in question (including the present). In Europe (as well as Central Europe, including Slovakia, Poland and the Czech Republic), abortion, euthanasia, the death penalty (e.g. with regard to terrorism), rights of homosexuals, cloning, etc., are often discussed. Can it be considered a manifestation of moral decline or crisis? Although populists and conservatives often say yes, I do not think so; this is a reflection of natural development of European society in search of possibilities for its further direction. First of all, these moral issues need an impartial discussion, a search for morally acceptable solutions; as rejection or prohibition are counterproductive and dangerous.

In this article, I am going to deal with analysis of four areas of ethical and moral issues which, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to a greater or lesser extent, stirred Slovak public opinion, attracted the significant attention of media and very often were a topic for various populists. Regardless of individual problems I am going to contemplate, I consider their nature most important, as all four cases relate to problems or issues with universal validity, or a form which concerns values, including moral values of Slovak society and politics, or political representation. It does not matter where they took place, what exactly happened, who was the active subject or object. However, it can be stated that, in various forms, they can be found in the past as well as the present age, they were described in works of historians, as well as in belles-lettres (such as Honoré de Balzac, Charles Dickens and many other authors), they can be found in present Slovakia, and also in Poland, the Czech Republic and other parts of the world.

It could be stated, as Solomon once did, "all is as it was and always will be". Nevertheless, I think these problems need to be paid attention to, as only through their analysis can we realise their nature and file them correctly to the all-inclusive context of morality and history of

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humankind, or find something to learn in them for future reference, if we, as humankind in general, are capable of that. I am not quite sure of that, as, otherwise, it would not be possible for mankind to solve more or less the same moral issues over and over throughout the entire history, even though that is natural on a different level of cognition and development. If it is possible to talk about some moral progress; then, it should be done in a very careful way and, maybe, by means of comparing it with our past (hopefully not very recent) and prove that we have actually learnt something and we find, at least, cannibalism a monstrous and immoral deed.

### **Research methodology**

It is a philosophical-ethical methodology based on the theory of values and the theory of right in the ethics of social consequences, which is to serve to analyse, compare and evaluate issues concerning ideas of populism in Slovakia in the 2000s.

Ethics of social consequences is a form of non-utilitarian consequentialist ethics (narrow non-utilitarian consequentialism) and is defined primarily as a theory of good (but it also contains a definition of understanding the right), because it is based on the formulation of a clear value structure, including the formulation of what is meant by the common good. The basic starting values of the ethics of social consequences are humanity, human dignity, and moral law, which are developed and implemented in conjunction with the positive social consequences that express the clear consequentialist value orientation of this concept. The core values are followed by others, which are also being developed in a context with positive social consequences. Second-line values in the ethics of social consequences include justice, responsibility, moral duty, and tolerance. Their role and importance within this structure is given by their ability to contribute to the achievement and realization of the moral and common good (Gluchman, 1994; 1995; 1996; 1997; 1999; 2003; 2008; 2018).

The value structure of the ethics of social consequences is open to accept and implement other values that meet the criteria defined within what can be understood as the common good and positive social consequences. These are not values that can be filled with exclusive content. There, perhaps at first glance, even formal definition creates enough space for them to be concretized, i.e., filled with real content, depending on real-life situations. Their misuse and thus their fulfilment with undesirable content is hindered by the requirement that the basic condition for their acceptance and implementation is identification with the content of moral good. The second means of protection against their misuse is the requirement of their mutual correlation and thus the content of one of these values should also correspond to the requirements or conditions arising from other values. In concrete terms, this means that the realization of one value should not be in conflict with other values that make up either the core values or the values of the second tier in the ethics of social consequences. These requirements are formulated in relation to the normal circumstances of the moral agent's activities. In exceptional circumstances, the values and their implementation take precedence. The realization of the core values, therefore, takes precedence over the values of the second tier (Gluchman, 1994; 1995; 1996).

The value structure of the ethics of social consequences is close to the position of one of the most important representatives of non-utilitarian consequentialism, Amartya Sen, who accepts both the nature of internal values, but also tries to preserve space for their instrumental use.. The ethics of social consequences accepts, develops, and implements values that are part of many other ethical concepts, often non-consequentialist. However, it approaches values from a material (content) and not a formal point of view. Thus, moral values cannot be identified with certain types of ethical concepts on the basis of formal criteria alone. The decisive factor is the content of a specific moral value in a specific real-life situation. It is also important what value correlation it is in and how it is realised. Only on this basis can a judgment be made about the

nature of a certain value. Ultimately, this means that it is wrong to say that some values are utilitarian or consequentialist and others are deontological without us accurately identifying the content of those values. For example, the value of happiness has been addressed by almost all ethical concepts in the history of human thought. This does not mean, however, that we should classify them all as utilitarian concepts, for example, because utilitarianism considers happiness to be one of its core values. Kant and Hegel, for example, have dealt with the value of utility or consequences, but in no case can they be classified as utilitarians or consequentialists (Gluchman, 1997; 1999).

The ethics of social consequences is clearly consequentialist based on the evaluation criteria, and its value structure also has a consequentialist character. The proof of this is the content of these values and not their formal similarity with the values to which some deontological ethical concepts claim exclusively. Its value structure is pluralistic, but with the definition of the hierarchy of values and the acceptance of their internal as well as instrumental character, depending on the specific situation in which the moral agent realizes these values.

The ethics of social consequences incline to a partial and “agent-relative” position when resolving a dispute concerning the individual or collective moral agent’s relationship to values and self-interests, projects, and plans. The reason for this opinion is the fact that every moral agent has special obligations to his loved ones and therefore to do moral good, which consists in doing good for the benefit of these people. On the one hand, the legitimate interests and needs of the other moral agents concerned must be sought as far as possible. On the other hand, in connection with the typology of moral agents, according to the ethics of social consequences, it is not possible to unambiguously identify a certain type of moral agent with either an “agent-neutral” or an “agent-relative” position. Both positions are compatible with both types of moral agents. However, it is important that both positions contribute to the moral good of the individual, his/her loved ones also, the entire moral community (Gluchman, 1997; 2003; 2018).

In the ethics of social consequences, the aim is not to formulate maximum goals for the moral agent, the fulfilment of which would only be considered the right action. The strategy of this ethical concept is to formulate gradual goals, which in each subsequent step should at least exceed the previous steps in the production of positive social consequences. In certain situations, compared to previous situations, even a smaller number of positive consequences can be considered a good practice when the predominance of positive consequences over negative ones is maintained. The criterion of moral conduct is, in a sense, both acceptance and maximization. This does not mean understanding maximization as a basic criterion at all. In order for a course of action to be considered correct, we do not have to strive to maximize its positive consequences.

Within the framework of the mentioned ethical concept, the possibility that in specific situations a person will contribute to achieving the maximum possible positive social consequences is not rejected. Proof of this is that in the ethics of social consequences, it is also possible to use the assessment that a certain action is moral. This means that this action has brought almost or not the maximum predominance of positive social consequences over negative ones. Within this concept, therefore, there is the possibility of achieving the maximum positive social consequences, but maximalism is fundamentally rejected as a criterion of what is considered to be good practice. This extends the range of good practice evaluation criteria to any action that outweighs the positive social consequences over the negative ones. It is not a justification of moral mediocrity, but an acceptance of moral reality. At the same time, it is a defense against the demotivation and demoralization of the moral consciousness of the individual or community, which could realistically occur as a result of the average one ceasing to believe in its ability to be moral, as the vast majority of actions would be considered wrong. This means that it is one of the versions of narrow non-utilitarian consequentialism, along with

Amartya Sen's evaluator relative theory, Michael Slote's satisfying consequentialism, and Frank Jackson's probabilistic consequentialism (Gluchman, 1999).

The ethics of social consequences develops an understanding of these values, which is consistent at its core, as the emphasis is on achieving the positive (social) consequences resulting from our actions. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that this is not a classical version of consequentialism very often incorrectly identified with utilitarianism, because the intention is to form a concept that combines basic universal moral values with efforts to achieve positive (social) consequences. Despite the fact that motives and intentions have their place in the behaviour and actions of man (and therefore also in morality), the decisive factor for shaping the morality of community and morality of the individual, i.e. what speaks of the moral state of the community and moral level of the individual and the consequences arising from it (of course in terms of a longer time horizon) (Gluchman, 2018).

We know a number of models of political ethics from the history of philosophy and ethics, such as in antiquity, where the interests of the Greek polis played a major role and were carried out through Plato's philosopher (sage) or Aristotle's virtuous citizen. Then we can mention from the modern age the model of Niccolo Machiavelli's prince, who encouraged him to be a lion and a fox at the same time, i.e. strong and fearless, but also clever, even hypocritical, or the model created by Erasmus Rotterdam, who on the contrary perceived the ruler (or modern politician) as human values seeking the public good and the well-being, favouring peace and justice over all others.

Another model of political ethics can be found in the 20th century, for example, in Max Weber, who emphasized responsibility as one of politician's most important moral values, along with a duty to the truth (Weber, 2008). Thomas Garrique Masaryk finds a relatively similar character of the model of political ethics, emphasizing above all the necessity of the moral dimension of politics. According to him, moral order was to stand above politics and economics, politician was to be primarily a representative of 'life in truth' (Masaryk, 1938). Václav Havel, who presented Masaryk's idea of 'life in the truth' and the human ideal, together with the Levinasian understanding, as an ideal of Czechoslovak and Czech 'non-political' politics after 1989, followed directly on from Masaryk with his model of political ethics (Havel, 1991).

### **Conscience and conscientious objection**

Within the first half of 2006, excitement and tension was brought into political, intellectual and public spheres of Slovakia by a polemical discussion of the soon-to-be approved conscientious objection pact. Naturally and understandably, the Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie – KDH) played an important part in this discussion and turned the matter of conscience into a "battlefield" for principle promotion of their ideological positions and a topic for the then pre-election combat. It is a shame that this Slovak political party (KDH) was not also as principled in other issues as it was with regard to conscience, such as corruption of the Slovak political scene or directly in the parliament or even in the KDH itself (the case of Bielik – a Slovak mayor and politician who was accused of bribery), at the very top of which is, or rather, was KDH's leader Pavol Hrušovský. This political party, especially through the then Minister of Justice Daniel Lipšic, argued that the conscientious objection pact is a completely natural matter, in spite of the fact that Slovakia is only one of a few EU countries to have an international agreement with the Vatican adjusting the issues of conscience, placing it above Slovak Constitution. The pact primarily provides an international guarantee to Catholic Church believers and, consequently, although to a lesser extent, also to believers of those registered Christian Churches which will sign the conscientious objective pact with the state.

I am no lawyer; thus, I am not going to deal with legal aspects of polemics or pacts, only with ethical and moral issues resulting from it. One of the questions which should naturally arise in this polemic, although that did not happen, is what conscience actually is. Many, including politicians and lawyers, often, or even too often, mention conscience, and I am not quite sure whether it is entirely clear what is understood by conscience and, on the other hand, whether all the participants to the discussion understand it the same way. In philosophy, and especially in ethics, which deals with the notion of conscience, it is not at all unambiguous what can be understood by conscience. I will provide several examples of this divergence. Jean Jacques Rousseau wrote that conscience is a divine instinct, an immortal and heavenly voice, a safe leader of ignorant and simple, although sensible and free, beings; an infallible judge of all good and bad, who makes man godlike! (Rousseau, 1979, p. 290). Johann Gottlieb Fichte was of the opinion that conscience clearly directs to man what to want and what not to want. It directs this to him *freely* and *on his own incentive* without any external force. If he is to listen to this inner voice, he cannot be forced from outside, he has to be liberated from any outer influence. No stranger can, thus, be arbitrarily in his control, he has to do so himself according to the law in himself. He is free and he must stay so. This law is the only one in control and man contradicts it if he allows a different one to force its way through (Fichte, 1996, p. 124).

So much from long ago. If we, for instance, look at the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can also find the opinion of Erich Fromm who understood conscience as a *reaction of oneself to oneself*. According to him, it is the voice of our true self which calls us back to ourselves to live a productive and full life and develop in harmony – i.e., to *become what we potentially are* (Fromm, 1990, p. 158). A different author Viktor E. Frankl has come to the conclusion that conscience is a specifically human phenomenon. It could be defined as an intuitive ability to find the one-time and unique meaning hidden in every situation. In brief, conscience is the *organ* of meaning. However, it is not only human but superhuman, as, according to him, it takes part in *condition humaine* (human condition) and is subjected to his signature of finality. Conscience, however, can trick man. Or even more: until man draws his last breath, he cannot be sure whether he really fulfilled the meaning of his life or whether he was mistaken (Frankl, 2019, p. 41).

The opinions of many other authors could be presented that, in various, and often very conflicting, ways, expressed their ideas on what should be understood by conscience. Regardless of individual definitions of conscience, it can be stated that the common characteristic of these opinions is the individual uniqueness and non-repeatability of our conscience. The existence of conscience, however, does not mean its guaranteed truthfulness, or the correctness of our actions, although we do so based on our conscience. There is a well-known Slovak proverb that the road to hell can be paved with good deeds. They are what should come from our conscience. To rely on our conscience does not have to mean that we will act correctly in every single case. I think that moral decision making and actions of modern man who is confronted with more and more complicated forms of ethical and moral issues, such as the area of bioethics, medical ethics, ecological ethics, business ethics, etc., requires a much more ambitious approach than just relying on the voice of our conscience.

I have found the conscientious objection pact an attempt to institutionalise conscience and create some form of collective conscience which should solve our moral problems *for all of us*, or at least Catholics, or Christians of all registered churches. Attempts to institutionalise conscience are always dangerous, as, on the one hand, they lead to the loss of moral independence of an individual and, on the other hand, they remove the obligation to search for one's own answer to moral issues of personal or professional life, which we are confronted with. I have difficulties imagining a collective body representing institutionalised conscience (be it that of Catholics or all Christians) which is able to adequately answer all moral problems of a believer in various parts of the world, always able to decide what is correct or incorrect for

the person in question in her/his own unique and non-repeatable life situation and moral dilemma, brought along by life. Any institutionalised form of collective conscience, with the best possible intentions, will, in the end, be only a sum of values, interests, knowledge, opinions and viewpoints of its individual members with their strengths and weaknesses; which is also the case of parliaments creating laws. The difference, however, lies in the fact that laws approved of in parliament, in democratic countries, do not claim the right to control, or guide, people's conscience, while the Hierarchy of the Catholic Church can, in this way, not only interfere in the conscience of Catholic believers, but also into their civic, as well as moral rights and duties.

On the other hand, it will restrict the rights (including moral rights) of others by favouring one group of people based on their religious belief over another group of people in their actions within some duties, such as freeing them from work duties on Sunday. This will either lead to legal and moral discrimination of certain groups of people or to an even higher level of moral hypocrisy in society, as everybody, regardless their view of the world or religious belief, will have to claim to be Christians, or even Catholics in order to be able to take advantage of positive discrimination, which is included in the above conscientious objection pact for Christians, and especially Catholics. The then Slovak Minister of Justice, a member of the Christian Democratic Movement, (Daniel Lipšic) had already, at the Constitutional Court, attacked a law, which was supposed to positively discriminate one part of the population of Slovak society (the Romany people). It was an example of populism, because part of the Slovak public felt humiliated by such a law. I am not sure if the minister would also act in the same way in this case.

Then, a question arises whether someone is worried about the weakness of their conscience, or the weakness of other people's conscience and, therefore, needs an institution of collective conscience, which would decide for us about what is or is not correct, and what is good or bad? Every attempt to create an institute of collective conscience in any form deciding about what someone should or should not do, based on his conscience, has, in a shorter or longer time range, proven to be unproductive and is largely populist because it meets the ideas of groups in society about the need to institutionalize moral regulation. There has been enough experience in history about humankind being tragically collectively mistaken, including representatives of religions and churches, and also Christian churches. Each of us has to solve their own moral dilemmas himself and each of us has to formulate what they conscientiously do or do not object to. There is no collective conscience of humankind, there is no collective conscience of society and nation; however, in the vast majority of cases, there is unique and non-repeatable conscience of the individual which must not be forced, tied or manipulated by a legal control or guidance. It was already Fichte who cautioned that no one else can govern our conscience.

Law should (at least to a certain extent) reflect the morality of society and time, and, as there is no collective conscience, then there is no need for a legal regulation of the control or guidance of conscience based on the decision of a higher collective body, even if it comprises the most sensible, honest, fair, etc., individuals. That is usually the path to discrimination or manipulation of the behaviour and actions of man, and, in this case, it would even be approved of by the government and parliament.

### **National or traditional moral values?**

A discussion about the national, or traditional, values of European culture (Bitušiková, 2002, p. 6; Špachta, 2003, p. 9; Porubánová, 2003, p. 9) was another publicly discussed area within ethical and moral problems of the recent Slovak past, and, possibly, almost present. These discussions were also entered into by people of various professions, such as lawyers, economists, etc., however, printed media almost completely lacked opinions of philosophers or

ethicists. It might have been caused by the fact that philosophers and ethicists prefer scholarly grounds for this type of discussion; however, the reason may, to a certain extent, lie in the fact that, for many of us, these problems are not philosophical enough to be dealt with. As opposed to opinions such as this one, I think that it is philosophers (including ethicists) who could, in this way, significantly affect the formation of public opinion and alter their image in the eyes of the wider (especially lay) public, who often accepts their work and publications with incomprehension and we can also come across the opinion that it is useless. The effort to isolate Slovakia, based on a populist protection of cultural, moral and religious values by means of sovereignty declaration of Slovakia, gives, in this matter, space for analysis and evaluation of the contemporary situation of morality in Slovakia.

I would like to especially talk about the issue of national and traditional values. First of all, I do not think that, with regard to morality in contemporary Europe, we can talk, on the one hand, about some national values, and traditional European values on the other hand. In the conditions of contemporary Europe (or at least Central and Western Europe), there is an exchange of values, a dialogue between values where we could, at the most, say that, in a particular country, some values are preferred to other values; but we cannot at all say that Slovakia, for instance, has its own national values which are substantially different from the values of other developed European countries. On the other hand, traditional European values cannot quite be considered as values given to European culture by Judeo-Christian traditions. In spite of the fact that some values, which could be perceived as traditional, have had their names for a long period (e.g. since the rise of Christianity or even Ancient Greece), their content has changed over the course of time, depending on many social, political, cultural, spiritual and ideological changes, which Europe, in its development, has undergone. The content of all values, including moral values, undergoes this development, and, therefore, it is controversial and especially populist to talk about some traditional values the content of which we would like to root somewhere in the past. Such a value as, for instance, respect for man has, in its content, undergone substantial development and encountered significant changes.

The attempted Claim of Sovereignty of Slovakia in ethical and moral issues, pursued by the Christian Democratic Movement in the Slovak Parliament in 2002, was a way of building a Great Wall of China, by which this political party wanted to isolate Slovakia from the outside world and, by means of legislation, prevent an exchange of values and dialogue between values preferred in Slovakia and those of developed Western Europe. In any case, a such populist isolation is a step back and I think that we would not benefit from it. We should rather make an effort to defend the values we prefer, in a dialogue with other values, and to succeed in a positive confrontation with values of developed Western Europe; which, surely, cannot be achieved by isolation. In this sense, there is a lot to do, especially in the area of education, and also legislation. This was also pointed out by Alexandra Bitušíková (2002, p. 6).

It seems to me, however, that the author, in her description of the situation in Slovakia, connected two things: First, us being behind in the area of ethical regulation of scientific research and second, the moral situation of Slovak society. She derived Slovak lapse in the second area from Slovak lapse in the first. In reality, it does not have to be true, as being behind countries of Western Europe in the legislation of ethical regulation of scientific research (which the author wrote about in 2002 and which has, to a significant extent, lasted until the present day in spite of the fact that after Slovakia entered the EU, much good has come about) does not automatically mean being behind in the moral situation of Slovak society in comparison with the European Union. The moral situation of Slovak society is what it is. In some aspects we are better off than other countries in the EU; in others we are worse off. I do not intend to compare it here. Slovak lapse in the area of ethical regulation of research is, however, a reflection of Slovak legislation and the situation of work in the area of applied ethics and, by implication, also in theoretical ethics. In Slovakia, there is still no institution to systematically and

professionally deal with these issues. Thus, there is space for a remedy, to create sufficient conditions for positive confrontation of Slovakia with values preferred in countries of Western Europe.

### “Ethical government”

During 2006, the then Slovak Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda presented himself several times with a populist claim which suggested that ethics and morality are standards of his government’s work and when approving important decisions regarding economic or political directions of the country. For example, before the election of 2006, he had claimed that ethical government in the existing political situation in Slovakia will not privatise or sell property in other ways. This applied to the sale of buildings and sites connected to the completion of the Slovak National Theatre building. Had we not known other contexts of the functioning of Mikuláš Dzurinda’s government, we could certainly appreciate the approach of the then Prime Minister and the whole government, or even boast in front of the whole Europe and maybe even the whole world that the Slovak government is ethical – possibly the one and only in the world.<sup>2</sup>

Reality is not, however, as rosy as it might seem at first sight. First of all, it needs to be remembered that Mikuláš Dzurinda’s government, in a non-transparent way, carried out a concealed privatisation of the Slovak Airlines, which, in 2007, resulted in a tender of this company; signed a privatisation contract with Deutsche Telecom, which, as it appears, contained some clauses which objectively disadvantage customers and competition of Slovak Telekom, as, who knows for how long, a monopoly, or dominant, position of this company has been legislatively guaranteed in the market. I am not mentioning the contracts with the South Korean automobile manufacturer Kia/Hyundai, for the managers of which the government even committed to build multi-million crown villas. We could provide more examples; however, it is not the aim of my article to count all the lapses of the then government.

What I mean is the fact that the then Prime Minister made a silk purse out of a sow’s ear of his whole term of office and his government, as the opposition clearly declared that, in the case of further attempts for privatisation, it would propose revoking the whole government. Mikuláš Dzurinda tried to take advantage of this populist moment in his pre-election speech gaining more plus points in the process of creating the pre-election image and used a posh name *ethical actions* for his approach. It reminds me of the fable about the fox who fancied some grapes and, as the vine was too high to reach, he said to himself they were bound to be sour for sure. To cut a long story short, after the Prime Minister had found out that it was not possible to privatise further without the approval of the opposition, not even the railway company Cargo, or any other projects, he populistically considered his options and decided to reap further political advantage before the election in the form of voices of voters who should appreciate the principled approach of Mikuláš Dzurinda’ government in this case. As it, in the end, appeared, Slovak voters were not fooled and remembered well the many cases of privatisation which took place across the Slovak political and economic landscape especially during the rule of Mikuláš Dzurinda’s second government in 2002-2006 and voted for a change.

From the viewpoint of political, and especially pre-election, tactics or strategy, the actions of the then Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda are quite understandable and his populist approach to the whole situation was, in a sense, worthy of admiration. However, a different picture is painted when we look at it from the standpoint of ethics. The posh term *ethical* or *highly moral* can hardly be used to name the actions of any person enforced by the circumstances. If we chose this for a criterion to judge the actions of an individual, we would also have to find ethical, or morally correct, if, for instance, a thief decided not to rob his victim when he finds out there are

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a lot of people around and he could be caught red-handed or interrupted in his endeavour. If we used this criterion to judge all similar actions and types of behaviour of man enforced by the circumstances, then we would have to state that the moral level of Slovak society is much higher than it really is. Peter Schutz's claim that in Slovakia "the elite is not a moral model, but it hangs somewhere between canals and the basement" (Schutz, 2006, p. 14) would not be true. In no case, however, does the bipolarity apply here, i.e. the principal opposition in the judgment of our actions when the actions are either moral or immoral, as human life and our everyday problems, or dilemmas (including political and moral) are much more complicated than this black and white scheme of vision and evaluation is able to encompass. Between moral and immoral, there is also evaluation of correct and incorrect actions and that, on the one hand depends on the intentions of the acting man, the circumstances on the other hand, and, naturally, also the consequences of his actions.

In the case of the approach of the then Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, we could then conclude that it was a correct action especially enforced by external circumstances, be it the approach of the opposition or the early election, but in no case can we find this a highly moral or an ethical action. Also in relation to the consequences it could be presumed that they will be rather positive than negative in spite of the fact that, from the economic viewpoint, the state can lose for a short time. In our evaluation, we should rather consider positive consequences regarding stabilisation of the political and social atmosphere prior to the election and also in relation to the consequences regarding the post-election development in Slovakia.

To evaluate the whole government as ethical or highly moral, as Mikuláš Dzurinda did, would mean to empathise that all its decisions were and are highly moral. I have already mentioned several cases which controvert the possibility of such evaluation. Not to mention whether all the decisions of individual members of the government would fulfil this criterion of evaluation. With regard to this I will mention the opinion of the sociologist Pavol Haulík who said that, in politics, there is never much morality (Haulík, 2006, p. 6). Therefore, from the standpoint of ethics, or an ethicist, I find it more appropriate to judge individual decisions of the government and its individual members than the government as a whole (the same also applies for evaluation of other institutions and their members, which is especially significant in the case of the nation and society). Then we can more easily judge whether the individual steps were correct or incorrect, or even moral or immoral. To judge someone, be it an institution or an individual, on the basis of one action as highly moral or immoral is misleading and inaccurate, as the action or deed in question might be a result of the influence of many factors (such as in the case of the abovementioned decision of the government or the Prime Minister), which do not have to reflect the character and values of the particular subjects.

In general, it can be stated that, in the pre-election period (although not only then), the populist rhetoric of politicians has accelerated; thus, in such cases, we must keep a cool head when judging the claims of individual politicians, regardless of their political affiliation.

### **On (im)morality of the MPs allowance**

An example of political morality in Slovakia at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century can also be found in contemplations of the Slovak parliament on the approval of life-long allowance of members of parliament (Velecký, 2002, p. 6). It seems that beside other nonsense which the Slovak parliament implemented during its existence after 1989, it was going to commit some more, by which it could be entered in historical records. What is, however, more important is the question of how Slovak MPs could justify approving the allowance in front of their voters. One of the most probable answers (although probably never uttered) would read that many of them were planning on leaving politics or had to leave; therefore, they did not care about it, but they certainly cared about guaranteeing a tidy stable income for the future, and, even, without

having to work. We can often hear politicians and MPs of various political parties populistically to talk about ethics and morality of Slovak society, just like we could see in the case of the former Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda (however, this probably applies to them all, regardless their affiliation to the left or the right wing and, also regardless of the term of office in which this is said or the country where these claims were uttered). Let us, thus, contemplate on the morality or immorality of the MPs allowance.

By allowance we usually understand the profit resulting from the ownership of property, be it land, other real estates or even securities or debit notes. Nevertheless, a question arises based on what MPs can require a lifelong allowance paid by the state using the tax money of all citizens. What is there that is lifelong that they have provided the state or tax payers with which makes them require such an allowance? If we omitted the fact that, for their work and “work” they receive a highly excessive salary, and when they leave parliament, they get a significant gratuity, still, after they have left parliament they lose their right to having their living paid by the state and tax payers, as they have enough opportunities to make their own living without being dependent on an allowance or unemployment benefit. If this is not so, they have absolutely no right for any allowance at all, because that shows that citizens have elected incompetent people their representatives. If we evaluate the quality of their work carried out within the preparation and approval of laws, which need amendment almost on the very next day, then, it would be more appropriate to contemplate of them having their salaries decreased and not of them being granted an allowance. If we were to, on the other hand, contemplate MPs still deserving an allowance for a well-done job; then, we would have to admit that, in the same way, it is also all teachers, medical workers, people working in culture, state and public administration, and all others who work. I think that, in many cases, this would be a much more appropriate investment than in retiring or outgoing MPs.

However, there is still one other aspect of the issue, and that is the aspect of morality: does MP mandate make people entering the parliament more valuable people who deserve, also in everyday life, such advantages and consideration that do not belong to other people? It seems that Slovak MPs certainly think so, as at that time applicable law of MP immunity gave them such protection which provided them with an unambiguous advantage over other citizens also in such areas of life which are not connected to the MP’s mandated work. In spite of all political parties (in every term of office) coming to a verbal and populist agreement in the matter of the need of such abnormality and immorality, nothing major has changed about it, maybe even the opposite, MPs, by means of various amendatory proposals, have yet strengthened their impunity. The existing situation was not changed by the new government of Robert Fico, which came to power after the June 2006 parliamentary election. Robert Fico, in the then pre-election campaign, populistically and harshly criticised the extent of MP immunity and blamed the then coalition for unwillingness to change anything about it. Many months have passed since the election; however, the new law regarding the immunity of MPs has not been approved.

Did Slovak MPs really find it moral to even think about allowance in the situation when, in the given period, due to economic and social reform, the level of poverty in Slovakia was growing and chronic or long term unemployment, in a great number of regions reached over 20 per cent? In the then economic and social situation in Slovakia, it could only be those to contemplate of MPs allowance who had completely lost any conception of the situation in Slovakia and are rather an embarrassment for representatives of citizens and their voters. This proposal can certainly not be considered morally excusable, as there are no reasons which could make acceptable such an extraordinary fact that someone was for a period of time (shorter or longer) an MP. It is completely immoral that a group of citizens, who also have incomes higher than standard, should be made privileged for a rest of life. This breaks the principle of moral equality which is essential to moral and all legal rights.

John Rawls considers it fair to make some people materially advantaged over others; however, only based on their talents and outcomes of their work, which bring *benefit to those that are made least advantaged*. The MP allowance, however, makes just their potential beneficiaries advantaged and that is not to the benefit of other citizens, and not in the least to the benefit of the least privileged. Rawls's contemplation of justice is especially connected to actual work outcomes and not merits in the voting machinery of the parliament (Rawls, 1971). The MP's allowance cannot, thus, be morally excused even by Rawls's theory of justice. I assume that it cannot either be done based on other present significant philosophical, ethical, political or legal theories of justice, such nonsense as lifelong MP's allowance cannot be morally excused or justified. Such attempts (in their various forms) are rather a reflection of the (im)morality level of the Slovak MPs (it can almost certainly be claimed that such (or very similar) abnormalities can probably be found in all parliaments in the whole world, or politics as such).

### Conclusion

All these examples from the environment of the Slovak political scene demonstrate how power tries to use its influence on ethics or rather morality, by means of populist pressure on modification of the moral code, or moral consciousness of society. As, for example, Petr Jemelka claims, political power and politicians do not deprecate or avoid ethics and morality but try to duly modify their understanding (Jemelka, 2005, p. 115). Peter Singer, reflecting on the period at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, wrote that the present day becomes a stronger and stronger period of confrontation between ethics and one's own sake, or selfishness. In such circumstances, according to him, to live ethically and morally will be a difficult and unpleasant task, enforcing self-sacrifice and, usually, with no reward. Nevertheless, he still considers ethics as hope, a perspective alternative to selfishness and one's own sake. According to Singer, such a life is ethical in which we identify ourselves with other, higher goals and, in this way, give purpose to our life (Singer, 1995, pp. 18-20).

Then, with regard to politics, we can state that only such politics is ethical which serves the substantial interests of the public and its common good. The public co-creates and examines this politics. Lawfulness, humanism, keeping human rights and freedom, transparency and responsibility are ethical and political means. However, in the context of the previous contemplations, I have to state that it is quite difficult to talk about ethical politics in Slovakia from the viewpoint of how substantial interests of the public have recently been realised in the 2000s. It seems that a very similar situation can also be found in other Central-European or Eastern-European countries which, after 1989, resumed the journey of democracy based on respecting its three classic pillars: independence of legislative, judicial and executive power. Scandals and affairs on the political scene of these countries, as well as in developed democracies, point out the fact that the process of building ethical and moral politics and public politics is permanent. Together with Derek Parfit, we can, however, share hope (let us hope it is not utopian) that in ethics (and, according to him, especially in non-religious ethics) there is a possibility of a new and promising development of world history, which could save us from the danger of our own liquidation (Parfit, 1986, pp. 453-454). Here, however, not only theoretical but also practical ethics (and, in this context, especially morality) must be raised, and, then, this could apply to ethics of politics including ethics of public politics in Slovakia and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and, as a result, also in the whole world.

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