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CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS CONTENTS

POLITICAL SCIENCES

- 1. ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF THE PARLIAMENT – CASE STUDY REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA**, Assist. Prof. Dr. Agron Rustemi, South East European University, FYR of Macedonia3
- 2. APPROACH OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC TO THE PREVENTION OF ENVIRONMENTALLY ORIENTED TERRORISM**, Pavel Dobes, Ph.D.; Barbora Baudisova, Ph.D.; Jakub Dlabka; prof. Pavel Danihelka, ass. prof. David Rehak, VSB - Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic11
- 3. ARAB SPRING: WHY IS MOROCCO DIFFERENT?** Iva Krakorova, M.A., Prof. Jan Osterreicher, MD., PhD, CEVRO Institute, Czech Republic.....19
- 4. BUZZWORDS ON LOCAL POLICY? POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND POLITICAL DISCOURSES OF NATIONAL POLITICS.**, Dr. Viera Zuborova, Ph.D., University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia27
- 5. CLIENT-INITIATED OCCUPATIONAL VIOLENCE AGAINST PUBLIC OFFICIALS**, Prof. Dr. Maria Nemcekova, PhD. Ivan Masar, PhD., College Danubius, Slovakia35
- 6. COMPARATIVE ASPECTS AT EUROPEAN LEVEL ON THE ORGANIZATION AND SWORN IN**, PhD, Senior lecturer Maria Ureche, 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, Romania41
- 7. COMPARATIVE STUDY REGARDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES**, Alina Ciobanu, Prof. Armenia Androniceanu, Academy of Economic Studies, Romania47
- 8. CONCEPTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC - TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY**, Dr. Pavel Dobes, Prof. Dr. Pavel Danihelka, Prof. Pavel Polednak, Prof. Vladimir Klaban , VSB - Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic55
- 9. CONFLICT INTERACTION BETWEEN BUSINESS AND AUTHORITIES: THE CASE OF RUSSIA**, Dr. Andrei Aleinikov, Prof. Igor Osipov, PhD Anna Pinkevich, Saint Petersburg State University, Russia63
- 10. ELECTORAL ENGINEERING IN THE DEVELOPING DEMOCRACIES. SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON GIOVANNI SARTORI'S FRAMEWORKS OF ANALYSIS**, Lecturer Mihaela Ivanescu, Ph.D, Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania.....69

11. EMIGRATION TO THE EUROPEAN STATES AND SECURITY THREATS, Assoc. Prof. Phd. Ina Raluca Tomescu, Prof. Phd. Sorin Vasile Purec, University Constantin Brancusi of Targu Jiu, Romania.....	77
12. ETHICAL VALUES OF STUDENTS, PhDr. Marian Ded, PhD., PhDr. Andrea Jankurova, PhD., Danubius University, Slovakia	85
13. EUROPEAN UNION ENLARGEMENT TO THE WESTERN BALKANS APPLIED TO THE ACAPULCO TYPOLOGY OF AGENDA-SETTING: FOCUS ON ALBANIA, BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, AND KOSOVO (UNDER UNSCR 1244/1999) REVISED, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Denisa Ciderova Ing. Beata Fejesova, MSc. Ing. Dubravka Kovacevic, dipl. oec. , University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia.....	93
14. EUROPEAN UNION ENLARGEMENT TO THE WESTERN BALKANS APPLIED TO THE ACAPULCO TYPOLOGY OF AGENDA-SETTING: FOCUS ON MONTENEGRO, SERBIA AND FYROM REVISITED, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Denisa Ciderova Ing. Beata Fejesova, MSc. Ing. Dubravka Kovacevic, dipl. oec., University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia.....	101
15. EUROPEAN UNION, THE UNITED STATES AND THE TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONSHIP, Peter Csanyi, Alexander Dubcek University in Trencin. Faculty of Social and Economic relations, Slovakia	111
16. EVALUATION OF RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT IN SELECTED PORTUGUESE - SPEAKING COUNTRIES, Dr. Ruzena Stemberkova, Dr. Pavla Matulova, Mgr. Josef Stemberk, Dr. Petra Maresova, Prof. Kamil Kuca, University of Hradec Kralove, Czech Republic	119
17. FULFILLMENT OF MONTEVIDEO CRITERIA OF STATEHOOD BY ABKHAZIA, Mgr. Lukas Mutina, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic	127
18. FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF DRAFTING THE CONSTITUTION, Prof. Assoc. Zemri Elezi, South East European University, FYR of Macedonia	135
19. GOOD GOVERNANCE AND HOW TO ACHIEVE IT: A CASE STUDY IN ROMANIA, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Georgeta Chirlesan, University of Pitesti Faculty of Sciences, Romania.....	143
20. HOW MANY CHANGES ARE TOO MANY? ELECTORAL REFORMS IN ROMANIA BETWEEN 1990 AND 2015: THE CAROUSEL NEVER STOPS TURNING, Lecturer Mihaela Ivanescu, Ph.D, Ovidius University of Constanta, Romania.....	151
21. HUNGARIAN-ROMANIAN CROSS-BORDER CO-OPERATION BETWEEN 1990 AND 2013, Zoltan Zakota, Partium Christian University, Romania.....	159

22. HYBRID POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS, Prof. Elena Morozova, Dr. Inna Miroshnichenko , Kuban State University, Russia.....	167
23. IMPLEMENTING OPEN GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON SUBNATIONAL LEVELS, Dana Dobric, PhD, University of Rijeka Faculty- Faculty of Law, Croatia	175
24. INTERCULTURAL CONFLICTS WITHIN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, PhDr. Andrea Jankurova, PhD., Assoc. Prof. Rastislav Kazansky, PhD., Danubius University, Slovakia.....	183
25. LIMITS OF DEMOCRATISATION IN UNRECOGNIZED STATES: A CASE STUDY OF ABKHAZIA, Mgr. Jakub Kaspar, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic	191
26. MACRO-REGIONAL STRATEGIES OF THE EUROPEAN UNION THROUGH THE PRISM OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY GEO- HETEROGENEITY, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Denisa Ciderova, Dipl. oec. Dubravka Kovacevic, University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia.....	199
27. MODERN ADMINISTRATION (MANAGEMENT) OF ELECTIONS, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zemri Elezi, South East European University, FYR of Macedonia.....	207
28. NATO AND THE RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE: DIFFERENT REACTIONS TO THE RUSSIAN ACTION, Assoc. Prof. PhDr. Zdenek Kriz, Ph.D., FSS, Masaryk University, Czech Republic	215
29. PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN RUSSIA, Assist. Prof. V.V. Kovarda; Assoc. Prof. Larisa Viktorovna Bychkova, South-West State University, Russia.....	221
30. POLITICAL ASPECTS AS A DETERMINANT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION FUNCTIONING- THE CASE OF SLOVAKIA AFTER 1989, Jan Machyniak, Richard Brix, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia	227
31. POPULISM AS A TOOL IN CREATION OF COMMON FOREIGN AND SECURITY POLICY OF EUROPEAN UNION, Mgr. Martina Gabajova/PhDr. Jaroslav Mihalik, PhD., University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia...233	
32. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE ROBERT FICO: THE POSSIBILITY OF INTRODUCING SEMIPRESIDENTIALISM IN SLOVAKIA, PhDr. Pavol Juhas, PhDr. Marek Hrusovsky, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia 239	
33. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION CHALLENGES ON THE WAY TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, Assoc Prof. Fadil Zendeli, South East European University, FYR of Macedonia	247

34. PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN FUNCTION OF PROTECTION OF CITIZEN'S RIGHTS , Assoc Prof. Fadil Zendeli, South East European University, FYR of Macedonia	255
35. REFLECTION OF V4 INTERESTS IN THE CONTEXT OF V4 PRESIDENCIES IN THE ENLARGING AND REFORMING EUROPEAN UNION AS A PREREQUISITE FOR AGENDA-SHAPING , Dipl. oec. Dubravka Kovacevic Assoc. Prof. Dr. Denisa Ciderova, University of Economics in Bratislava, Slovakia	263
36. REGIONAL ELECTIONS IN SLOVAKIA - THE SOLE ARENA FOR PARTOCRACY? PhDr. Karol Sebik/PhDr. Martin Svikruha/PhDr. Michal Imrovic, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia.....	271
37. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ISLAM, CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRACY IN KOSOVO: THE ROLES AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCES , Assist. Prof. Ardian Kastrati, University of Prishtina, Kosovo	279
38. RELIGIOUS POLICY IN DE FACTO STATES OF CAUCASUS - ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA , Mgr. Barbara Baarova, University of Ostrava, Czech Republic.....	291
39. RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT: 10 YEARS ON , Kristina Jankova, Comenius University in Bratislava - Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Slovakia	299
40. RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN CONFLICT OVER CRIMEA ON THE MAP , Jiri Panek, Alzbeta Brychtova, Palacky University in Olomouc, Czech Republic	307
41. SOCIAL ASPECTS OF QUALITY URBAN LIFE , Prof Hasan Jashari, South East European University, FYR of Macedonia	315
42. SOCIAL POLICY IN THE SECOND FICO'S CABINET , doc. PhDr. Olga Bocakova, PhD, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia	323
43. SOCIAL TRUST IN ROMANIA , Assist. Prof. Sergiu Tara, Politehnica University of Bucharest, Romania	331
44. SOME ASPECTS OF POLITICAL REGIONALIZATION OF VISEGRAD COUNTRIES , Olga Gubova, VSB-Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic	339
45. SPECIAL FEATURES OF FORMING THE EXECUTIVE AUTHORITES IN RUSSIAN REGIONS DURING THE 1990S , Assoc. Prof., PhD in History Tatiana I. Shirko, National Research Tomsk Polytechnic University, Russia	345

46. SPECIFICITIES OF CONFLICT AND CRISIS RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF POLITICAL CONFLICTS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS , Assoc. Prof. PhDr. Rastislav Kazansky, PhD. ; Ing. Dusan Masar, PhD., College Danubius, Slovakia	353
47. THE ATTEMPTS FOR IMPROVEMENT OF SOCIAL SITUATION OF ROMA CITIZENS (GYPSIES) IN SLOVAKIA IN 1968-1973 , Karol Janas, Alexander Dubcek University in Trencin, Slovakia.....	361
48. THE CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION , PhDr. Dana Bernardova, Ph.D.; JUDr. Blanka Vitova, LL. M., Ph.D.; Mgr. et Mgr. Martin Zielina, Moravian University College Olomouc, Czech Republic.....	369
49. THE CONFLICT AND THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL POLITICAL ORDER , Prof. Dr. Aleksandr I. Strebkov, Assoc. Prof. Ph.D. Daur Abgadzava, Ph.D. Artem Sunami, Saint Petersburg State University, Russia	377
50. THE HOLY SEE AS A SOFT POWER ACTOR , Iva Krakorova, M.A., Prof. Jan Osterreicher, MD., PhD, CEVRO Institute, Czech Republic.....	383
51. THE NATIONALIST POPULISM AND RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM AS A THREAT OF ESTABLISHED DEMOCRACY IN SLOVAKIA , Mgr. Gabriela Klincakova, Matej Bel University, Slovakia	391
52. THE PHENOMENON OF STRONG POLITICAL LEADERSHIP EMBODIED IN SLOVAK PRIME MINISTERS - VLADIMIR MECIAR AND ROBERT FICO , Mgr. Michal Kluciarovsky / Doc. PhDr. Branislav Kovacik, Phd, Matej Bel University, Slovakia	399
53. THE PROBLEMS OF THE ELDERLY PEOPLE IN SLOVAKIA AFTER 1989 , PhDr. Darina Kubickova, PhD., University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia	407
54. THE ROLE OF MASSMEDIA IN CONFLICT DYNAMICS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS , Assoc. Prof. Peter Ondria - Assoc. Prof. Rastislav Kazansky - David Kollar, PhD, College Danubius, Slovakia	415
55. THE SOCIAL DISTANCE AND INTERETHNIC RELATIONS IN MACEDONIA , Hasan Jashari, South East European University, FYR of Macedonia	427
56. THE SUPPORT FOR RADICALISM AND EXTREMISM AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE IN SLOVAKIA , PhDr. Jaroslav Mihalik, PhD., University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia.....	435
57. V4 COUNTRIES –COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL CULTURE , Olga Gubova, VSB-Technical University of Ostrava, Czech Republic ..	443

- 58. WEAK AND FAILING STATES: SPILLOVERS AND GLOBAL THREATS FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY**, doc. PhDr. Branislav Kovacik, PhD., Mgr. Lucia Spisiakova, Matej Bel University, Slovakia.....449
- 59. WHEN HUMAN RIGHTS ARE AT STAKE: THE EU MISSIONS AND RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT**, Kristina Jankova, Comenius University in Bratislava - Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences, Slovakia457
- 60. WHY DIRECT DEMOCRACY HAS NOT BECOME A MODERN FORM OF GOVERNMENT?** prof. PhDr. Jan Koper, PhD. , Matej Bel University, Slovakia465

LAW

- 61. ACQUISITION AND EXPROPRIATION OF REAL ESTATE FOR THE PUBLIC BENEFIT IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**, PhD Jakub Hanak, Masaryk University, Czech Republic.....475
- 62. ADMINISTRATIVE PENALTIES IN UKRAINE: SURVIVAL OF THE TOTALITARIAN PAST OR PROGRESSIVE TOOL OF LEGAL REGULATIONS?**, Prof. Dmytro Lukyanets, V.N.Karazin Kharkiv National University, Ukraine483
- 63. ANALYSIS OF LEGAL REGULATION OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN EDUCATION MANAGEMENT (ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE CITY OF MOSCOW)**, Senior lecturer Anna Nikitova, Senior lecturer Natalia Zhilenko, Razumovsky Moscow State University of technology and management, Russia491
- 64. APPLICATION OF RISK BASED APPROACH RELATED TO NON-FINANCIAL SECTOR IN THE SCOPE OF ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING SYSTEM**, Assist.Prof. Sonja Cindori, Faculty of Law University of Zagreb, Croatia 499
- 65. ARE CROWDINVESTING PLATFORMS MANAGERS OF ALTERNATIVE INVESTMENT FUNDS?**, Prof. dr. sc. Edita Culinovic Herc, Nikolina Grkovic, univ. spec. iur., University of Rijeka Faculty-Faculty of Law, Croatia507
- 66. ATTRACTING VOTERS AS A FUNCTION OF THE PROGRAMME OF A POLITICAL PARTY**, Assoc. Prof. A.N. Gutorova, Assoc. Prof. S.V. Sheveleva, South-West State University, Russia.....515
- 67. CONSIDERATIONS ON THE NEED TO AFFIRM THE ROLE OF THE PATIENT WITHIN THE ROMANIAN HEALTH SYSTEM BY MODERNIZING THE NATIONAL LEGISLATION**, Assoc. prof. Cristina-Luiza Erimia, Prof. Rodica Sirbu*, Assoc. prof. Aneta TOMESCU. prof. Stelian Paris, PHARMEBA, Romania .521

- 68. CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS AND THE CIVIL SOCIETY'S INSTITUTIONS IN RUSSIA: THE COOPERATION SYSTEM AND THE SOCIAL FACTORS INFLUENCING ITS EFFICIENCY**, Assoc. Prof. Andrey Kozyavin, Teacher Darya Chistilina, Southwest State University, Russia529

- 69. DEALING WITH CROSS-BORDER CONFLICTS IN BOHEMIA DURING THE REIGN OF THE PREMYSLID DYNASTY: TO THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE CZECH LEGAL MEDIEVAL STUDIES**, PhDr. Mgr. Jakub Razim, Ph.D.; Mgr. et Mgr. Nada Stachova, Ph.D., Masaryk University, Czech Republic537

- 70. ENGAGEMENT – A LEGAL INSTITUTION RECENTLY INTRODUCED IN THE NEW ROMANIAN CIVIL CODE**, Assoc. Prof. CETEAN-VOICULESCU LAURA, 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, Romania545

- 71. EVIDENTIAL POWERS OF DEFENSE COUNSEL IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS OF RUSSIA IN CONTEXT OF THEORY, LAW AND PRACTICE DISCONNECTION**, Assoc. Prof. Andrey Kozyavin, Assoc. Prof. Irina Chebotareva, Southwest State University, Russia.....553

- 72. FALSIFIED MEDICINES – A PROBLEM OF REGULATING THE PHARMACEUTICAL LEGISLATION BY STANDARDIZING THE EUROPEAN LAW**, Assoc. prof. Cristina-Luiza Erimia, Prof. Rodica Sirbu, Assoc. prof. Stelian Paris, PHARMEBA, Romania.....561

- 73. HARMONIZATION OF APPLICATION OF SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE LEGAL REGULATION CREATING THE COMMON EUROPEAN FORENSIC SCIENCE SPACE (SUBJECTS AND FORMS)**, Egle Bileviciute, Vidmantas Egidijus Kurapka, Snieguole Matuliene, Zaneta Navickiene, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania.....569

- 74. ILLEGAL WORKING AND ILLEGAL EMPLOYMENT IN THE REGIONS OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC**, Mgr. Monika Gullerova, PhD., JUDr. Jana Psenkova, PhD., Alexander Dubcek University in Trencin. Faculty of Social and Economic relations. Dept. of Public Administration and Regional Development, Slovakia577

- 75. IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW CIVIL SERVICE LAW IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC: ECONOMIC-ADMINISTRATIVE VIEW**, Ing. Jitka Pekna, University of Economics - Faculty of Economics and Public Administration, Czech Republic.....585

- 76. LEGAL REGULATION OF THE PROCESSES OF WASTE MANAGEMENT IN RUSSIA AND GUIDELINES OF ITS IMPROVING**, Assoc. Prof. Iraida Kirilchuk, South West State University, Russia.....591

- 77. MORAL HARASSMENT AT WORK UNDER THE FRENCH LEGAL SYSTEM - ANALYSIS OF RELEVANT CASE LAW**, Ph.D/J.SD Student Isabela Delia Popa, University of Bucharest, Romania.....599

78. MURDER CIRCUMSTANCES IN ROMANIAN CRIMINAL LAW (I). PREMEDITATION, MATERIAL INTEREST, lecturer phd. Raluca Voinea, University Of Craiova, Romania.....	607
79. NEW RULES FOR RESCUING AND RESTRUCTURING STATE AID - SHARING BURDEN OF PRESENT TO SHARE GAINS OF FUTURE, Mrs Tamara Obradovic Mazal / Prof.dr.sc. Edita Culinovic Herc, University of Rijeka Faculty-Faculty of Law, Croatia.....	615
80. NON-CRIMINAL COMPETENCE OF PUBLIC PROSECUTION AND ITS FORMS IN THE V4 COUNTRIES, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Bystrik Sramel, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia.....	623
81. PARTICULAR ASPECTS OF BIOTECHNOLOGICAL INVENTIONS AND THEIR PATENTABILITY, Ass. Prof. Dagmar Pospisilova, Prof. Karel Pospisil, CDV - Trasport Research Centre, Czech Republic.....	631
82. POSITION OF THE HOLDERS OF NON-VOTING SHARES IN CORPORATE TAKEOVERS – A COMPARISON OF CROATIAN AND EU LAW, Dr. Antonija Zubovic, University of Rijeka Faculty-Faculty of Law, Croatia..	639
83. PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AGAINST SEXUAL ABUSE WITHIN CIRCLE OF TRUST: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS TO INTEGRATE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LAW POLICIES, Prof. Anastasia Atabekova, Assoc. Prof. Maria Simonova , Peoples Friendship University of Russia, Russia	647
84. REFORMING THE INSTITUTE OF THE DISCIPLINARY LIABILITY OF LAWYERS IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION ACCORDING TO THE LEGAL EXPERIENCE OF THE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, Assoc. Prof. Andrey Kozyavin, Magistrate Student Anna Ovchinnikova, Southwest State University, Russia	655
85. SETTLEMENT IN RESOLUTION OF CRIMINAL CONFLICTS, Prof. Dr. Sandra Kaija, Riga Stradins University, Latvia.....	663
86. SOCIAL SECURITY OF POLICEMEN AND SOLDIERS IN SLOVAK REPUBLIC, doc. JUDr. PaedDr. Ivan Podhorec, PhD., Constantine The Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia	671
87. SOME ASPECTS ABOUT EXTINGTIVE PRESCRIPTION IN THE ROMANIAN CIVIL LAW, Assis. Professor Dr. Ioana Nely Militaru, Assistant Lecturer Dr. Cristina Cojocaru, Academy of Economic Studies, Romania	677

88. STATE AND PUBLIC SECURITY AS OBJECTS OF CRIMINAL LAW PROTECTION. PRACTICES IN THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AND THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA, Assoc. Prof., Candidate of Science (Law), Denis Vladimirovich Iroshnikov Assoc. Prof., Candidate of Science (Law), Lyubov Yur'evna Larina, Ryazan State University, Russia	685
89. SURVEILLANCE OF THE EMPLOYEE AND THE RESPECT OF THE PRIVATE LIFE, Senior lecturer Phd. Ada Hurbean, 1 Decembrie 1918 University of Alba Iulia, Romania.....	691
90. THE BASIS OF THE INTERACTION OF LEGAL SYSTEMS OF MODERNITY, S.A. Markova-Murashova, Kuban State University, Russia.....	699
91. THE COURT'S JURISPRUDENCE ON THE FREE MOVEMENT OF GOODS – THE MARKET ACCESS APPROACH, Assist. Prof. Ana Poscic, University of Rijeka, Croatia.....	707
92. THE CURRENT TRENDS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RIGHT OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY (NOT ONLY) IN THE CONDITIONS OF SLOVAK REPUBLIC, JUDr. PhDr. Tomas Peracek, Mgr. Alexandra Mittelman, Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia.....	715
93. THE ENSURING OF RIGHTS OF DEFENSE AND SAFETY OF PARTICIPANTS OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE IN LATVIA, As. Prof. Marina Sumbarova, Baltic International academy, Latvia.....	723
94. THE FUTURE OF THE ADMINISTRATIVE-TERRITORIAL UNIT'S DEVELOPMENT: A BETTER ADMINISTRATION OF THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE DOMAIN. A LEGAL APPROACH OF ROMANIA, Assoc.Prof. Emilia Lucia Catana, Dimitrie Cantemir University from Tirgu Mures, Romania	731
95. THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRINCIPLE OF LEGITIMATE EXPECTATIONS IN PUBLIC SERVICE OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA, Prof. PhD Audrius Bakaveckas, Prof. PhD Rolandas Kriksciunas, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania	737
96. THE LEGAL REGULATION OF TELEVISION AND RADIO BROADCASTING CONTENT AND THE CONTROL OF ADMINISTRATIVE BODIES WITH THE PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE PROTECTION OF JUVENILES, JUDr. PhDr. Tomas Peracek, Mgr. Alexandra Mittelman, Comenius University Bratislava, Slovakia	745
97. THE MORAL CONTENT OF LEGAL NORMS REGULATING THE STATUS OF A PERSON IN CRIMINAL PROCEEDINGS, Prof. Tatyana Ryabinina, Southwest State University, Russia.....	753

98. THE NATURE OF THE LEGAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CONSUMER, THE WEBSITE OPERATOR AND THE MERCHANT WHEN CONCLUDING THE CONTRACT ON THE DISCOUNT WEBSITE , JUDr. Blanka Vitova, LL. M., Ph.D., Palacky University Law Faculty, Czech Republic	761
99. THE NOTION OF PROFESSIONAL AND ENTERPRISE IN THE ROMANIAN CIVIL CODE , Ass. Lecturer Dr. Cristina Cojocaru, Academy of Economic Studies, Romania.....	769
100. THE REFORM OF ADMINISTRATIVE LAW IN UKRAINE: EUROPEAN INTEGRATION ASPECT , Zavgorodnaya Vladyslava, Ukrainian Academy of Banking of the National Bank of Ukraine, Ukraine	777
101. THE RIGHT TO INHERITANCE – BETWEEN THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE SOVIET LAW OF SUCCESSION AND THE CONCEPTION OF THE EU REGULATION 650/2012 , PhD Associate Professor Liviu-Bogdan Ciuca, Dunarea de Jos University of Galati, Romania.....	785
102. THE ROBLEM OF ORPHAN WORKS , Mgr. Anna Smywinska-Pohl, Polish Academy of Sciences and Art, Poland	793
103. THE ROLE OF AN INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT IN THE REGULATION OF INTERSTATE RELATIONS IN THE FIELD OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION , Sandugash Tussupbekova, Baltic International academy, Latvia.....	799
104. THE ROLE OF DATA PROTECTION REGULATION FOR A PROPER IMPLEMENTATION OF VISION FOR EUROPEAN FORENSIC SCIENCE 2020 , Prof. PhD Vidmantas Egidijus Kurapka, Prof. PhD Snieguole Matuliene, Sigute Stankeviciute, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania.....	805
105. THE ROMAN LAW RULES OF INTERPRETATION IN THE MEDIEVAL TOWN LAW , Mgr. et Mgr. Lenka Smidova Malarova, Mgr. Bc. Alica Virdzekova, Masaryk University, Czech Republic.....	813
106. THE STATUS OF HOMES FOR THE ELDERLY IN THE SYSTEM OF CARE FOR SENIORS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC , JUDr. Ing. Renata Korcova, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague, Czech Republic.....	819
107. THE SYSTEM OF ADMINISTRATIVE COURTS IN LITHUANIA , Prof. PhD Audrius Bakaveckas, Assoc. Prof. PhD Rolandas Kriksciunas, Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania	827
108. THE TYPOLOGY OF INTERESTS AS AN INSTRUMENT OF MEDIATOR AND NEGOTIATOR , Assoc.Prof Elena Ivanova, Saint Petersburg State University, Russia	835

109. THE USE OF INVESTIGATIVE INFORMATION WHILE BRINGING A PROSECUTION: THE PROBLEMS OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE REGULATION , Associate Professor Yaroslava Ryapolova, Southwest State University, Russia.....	843
110. THE USING OF TRADE CUSTOMS IN RUSSIA: LEGISLATION AND JUDICIAL PRACTICE , Assos.Prof. Nataly Shtykova, Murom Institute of Vladimir State University, Russia.....	851

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THE PHENOMENON OF STRONG POLITICAL LEADERSHIP EMBODIED IN SLOVAK PRIME MINISTERS - VLADIMIR MEČIAR AND ROBERT FICO

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ABSTRACT:

The transformation process of the Slovak Republic from a socialist state into a democratic republic left scope and considerable potential for the creation and establishment of the charismatic leadership in terms of emerging young democracy. The development of Slovak political system after the fall of communism was the least linear in all the surrounding countries undergoing these transitions. The aim of this work will therefore mean serving an analysis of meciarism period and its main protagonist-Vladimir Meciar in Slovakia and look for parallels in the attributes of this specific phenomenon in the current political system and the integrity of Prime Minister Robert Fico. Our effort is not a comparison of individual mandate of these leaders in the executive branch of the country, but finding parallels in terms of political culture that persuaded citizens and thus the electorate to the devotion and support for political parties HZDS-Movement for a Democratic Slovakia SMER-Social Democracy not only in the past, but also in the current parliamentary term. We believe that the establishment and the development of the phenomenon of alike strong leadership is becoming an integral part of the political culture of some post-socialist countries that turned in young democracies. The personality of Vladimir Meciar was and remains once the most important, but also the most controversial in the history of independent Slovak statehood. Meciarism also accounts for a period called the era of hard and uncompromising policies, documented by a famous statement of this main representative: "The elections are over - get used to it". In a transferred meaning this statement describes the period from 1990 to 1998 during which a fully apparent strength of the charismatic personality of Vladimir Meciar and seek to promote his own interests sheltered as his party's view at the cost of tiny fine suppression of democratic rights and freedoms, or culminating political competition. In the political culture in Slovakia, however, it is possible to find a kind of natural tradition of trust and faith of the people in powerful political leaders. The name "Father of the Nation" earned Meciar from common people after the fall of communism when they saw a strong leader who would lead the nation in situation so requires direct use of force and the people would give them a sense of security and safety under stable leadership. That is why we have synthesized these phenomena in order to find a basic starting point for the re-birth of the "cult" of strong political personality in the form of leadership of Robert Fico, whose social-democratically oriented political party filled a vacancy on the party spectrum of HZDS gradual departure from the political scene. The phenomenon of "meciarism" reincarnated in the form of "ficism" increasingly resonating on the Slovak political as well as the media scene, on us to reflect its basic ideological resources that can attract potential voters of today.

Keywords: Vladimír Mečiar, meciarism, Róbert Fico, HZDS, SMER-SD, political party, leadership, charismatic leadership, election, dominance, government

INTRODUCTION

Meciarizmus is currently represented as a phenomenon, which occurred in Slovak politics after the fall of communist regime, but received its denomination only afterwards, when significant causes of the controversial transformation period bringing about democracy became evident. The personality of Vladimír Mečiar became not only highly socially accepted, but also penetratively refused and rejected. The year after the revolution, 1990, represented the first and basic pillar of the new liberal-democratic political system. The state has to be democratized by thorough asserting the principle of responsibility, not only in case of actions of the parliament, state byrocracy, political parties, but all forms of "struggle", contention on lower levels (union activities, ecological movements) have to assure that societies, like the state, are dependant on the process, the aim of which is to secure increasing responsibility. [1] The consequent period of two years was necessary for profiling and crystallization of the primary democratic party scene. The growth of the most powerful political party, which reinforced the strategic position of innovation and society democratization, was a logical consequence of this process. This fact opens the period of first dominance of the HZDS until 1994 and the establishment of the first two antagonistic camps. If we raise the question "In what consisted the extreme raise of popularity and support of one concrete politician?" we strike into several crucial attributes of that period, which formed the contemporary society:

- ❖ escalating riots against the contemporary socialistic establishment
- ❖ subsequent fall of socialism by the "velvet revolution"
- ❖ unclear political, social, economical future of the common Czechoslovak state
- ❖ the onset of the transformation process – application of democratic components into society
- ❖ democratization of controlling and controlled institutions
- ❖ political culture built on the message of strong, charismatic personalities of the past After the revolutional events in Russia and directly after the end of World War I significant political personalities seized historic tasks, whether in exile or on the territory of the Czech Republic and Slovakia: T. G. Masaryk, E. Beneš, K. Kramář, resp. A. Hlinka, V. Šrobár, F. Juriga, M. Hodža, M. Dula, in Czech and Slovak foreign action also M. R. Štefánik and others. [2]
- ❖ establishment of the cult of strong personality – law of competence ("Slovak nation, the administration of your affairs is back in your hands.")
- ❖ position of the highest defender of the Slovak nation in Slovakia – it was the chairman of HZDS and prime minister Vladimír Mečiar

The previous question evokes the need to investigate why citizens of the Slovak Republic so long and that massively supported the political party HZDS and consigned them strong political mandate in the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Is it only question of fanaticizing and faith in strong leader, or occurs in our political culture an element of strong conservatism of the electorate, which is afraid of radical changes? Attributes, which had an impact on the political scene between 1992 and 1998 can be summarized as follows:

- ❖ existential question: what is next with the Czesho-Slovak Republic?
- ❖ agreement of two leaders: Klaus and Mečiar
- ❖ division and independence of the Slovak Republic
- ❖ revitalization of the political environment
- ❖ privatization

- ❖ reactions on privatization and the eruption of first scandals and causes
- ❖ SIS: Slovak Information Service – at the head of which stood Ivan Lexa
- ❖ dragging the son of president Michal Kováč abroad
- ❖ absolutization of personality and leadership: establishment of the cult of "meciarism"
- ❖ democratic regime with latent elements of authoritarianism and manipulation of contemporary mass media and public opinion.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The contemporary power demonstration by Vladimír Mečiar is currently classified as misuse of majoritarian rights, in political science referred to as realization of tyranny strategy of the majority. The views of the political science community included meciarism in demagogy, in which according to the British political scientist Baylis the specific traits are inability to create compromises, to negotiate and find consensus. Exactly because of that it is possible to find associations leading to communistic transition. As D. Olson puts it, the existence of these movements is characteristic for the plebiscite stage of transformation. [3]

As a consequence, we suppose that the period of meciarism presents an unflattering chapter of illiberal democracy on our territory. The concept of a hybrid regime, denominated by the attribute illiberal democracy, was first used by the American political analyst Fareed Zakaria. A hybrid regime is according to Zakaria a political establishment making use of elections, but avoiding liberal elements. In practice it means conscious and targeted manipulation of electoral outcomes and loss of transparency in the decision-making process and administration of public affairs. This regime does not have other resources as to directly head for absolutization of popular sovereignty.

The thoughts of Zakaria became the starting point for the German political scientist Wolfgang Merkel, who exposed Dahl's theory of polyarchy to forceful criticism. Merkel created his own typology, in which he called a regime standing in between authoritarianism and liberal democracy a "defect democracy". This can have three different types, whereas in the first case it is an "exclusive democracy", localized especially in the South African countries, connected with limitations of human and citizen rights of racial motivation. The second type, which has neither been localized here is "domain democracy", respecting by the decision-making process the existence of armed forces in the country. The last type, which partially fulfills the characteristic traits of the period of meciarism until 1994 in Slovakia is "illiberal democracy", which consciously and targetly suppresses certain civil and human liberties, right for information and brings unclear parliamentary procedures or influences the activity of the judiciary.

In order to apply these theoretical concepts on the political regime and government in Slovakia between 1994-1998 we regard the most appropriate the thought of competitive authoritarianism of two American political scientists – Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way. In sence of their competitive authoritarianism there occurs separation of powers and official political institutions gain legitimacy and political authority through elections. However, the election outcomes and the concrete victories of the governing political elite are not achieved through the prism of manipulating elections. Moreover, there is an opposition, which is capable of taking part in the elections in a not negligible way. Nevertheless, here we are getting to a breaking point, as election rules of the game are

often violated by the governing power. It is especially enabled by direct grasp on the state apparatus, finances and impact on the public opinion through mass media. This kind of regime thus in the long run constantly maintains space for regime change. Orthodox competitive authoritarianism had a relatively short carrier in Slovakia, which ended with the elections in 1998, and thus it did not come to its fixture in neither political nor social community. [4]

One of the key determinants of creating the young Slovak democracy is a dual system of government. The system of oligarchic democracy, based on visible democratic government and invisible government, which possessed economic resources had its roots in privatisation following the political line of the economic transformation and institutional abuse of power tools by V. Mečiar. The governance of V. Mečiar overshadowed the political spectrum. The distribution of right - wing and left-wing parties was not strong. [5]

The phenomenon of meciarism has naturalized on the Slovak political and mass medial scene only after 1998. Exactly because of that fact we divided the political career of Vladimír Mečiar into two periods. The first one begins with the velvet revolution and regime change and escalates in the elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic in 1998. The second one is characterized by the activity of the HZDS political party and its leader in opposition until the election year 2006 and the subsequent coalition years with SMER-SD and ends at present times. The current view on HZDS means a definitive break-down of the party and departure of its founder and chairman from politics for pension.

The first stage represents a period, when the Slovak political community and also society were to a large extent mouldable and influencable. Citizens got into contact with the first democratic accomplishments and freedoms. The demographical growth of the country was also significant. [6] The first free news were broadcasted and political culture begin to change expressively. Mečiar was aware of the needs of the nation in difficult transformational times, which reminded of ideas of democracy, freedom, equality and was built on the ideals of victory over socialism, but behind the scenes had to face innumerable challenges and reziduals of the past regime. Specific feature of the bursting party system in Slovakia was cleavage of existing political parties and subsequent establishment of their intergrades, from which new political subjects began to form. Mečiar also understood this social inquiry by building up VPN – ZDS (Public against Violence – For a Democratic Slovakia). This platform addressed a great amount of members of the original party VPN, who afterwards became an immanent part of the newly established HZDS – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko (Moverment for a Democratic Slovakia).

That strong and charismatic personality as was Vladimír Mečiar constructed respect from party colleagues or co-workers in contemporary governments. Leadre was not only rich in positive traits, but charismatic leadership, stability and strong mandate from citizens in the elections raised in him a feeling of exceptionality and power. Several unpopular famous political, economical or medial practices are here getting on the scene, used by Vladimír Mečiar.

The change of regime and social affairs brought about several security challenges, which fell into the cognizance of the Ministry of Interior, at the head of which Mečiar stood at the beginning of the Slovak statehood. Mečiar many times declared that the "Prisons are empty and there is several place in them." Elements of authoritative leadership of the party and state from the post of prime minister in his first term of

office were also felt from the impact on SIS – Slovak Information Service and from denomination of its new chairman, Ivan Lexa, who operated in some inappropriate causes. Who controls information services and the secret service, gains an unbeatable comparative advantage against his counterparts. Mečiar was aware of that fact, and he began each workday with his staff with a meeting, where he dealt with actual events in the country. These thoughts are underpinned by several causes between 1994 and 1998 with the signature of I. Lexa. Among the most famous and most socially compelling belong: the causes of Triptich: adoration of three kings, the assassination of Róbert Remikáš, dragging Michal Kováč jr. to Austria, aspiration to sabotage the authority of the president of the Slovak Republic and reduction of his tenure. From these facts it is apparent that the police and the secret service became immanent tools of the Mečiar propaganda and power and secured him safe and almost unrivaled position. [7]

The field of mass media in the Mečiar era and currently is almost not comparable. Before 1996 only public televisional media operated in Slovakia. Because of that, the broadcasting time, space and possibilities of contemporary politicians of the governing party were de facto unlimited, as the governing party or the coalition decided on the annual financial package for these public companies. The absence of wide coverage of internet services and higher readability of printed media absorbed the possible creation and expansion of some causes, which did not have to space to proliferate. Alternative perception of medial reality is seen on the example of causes as Gorila or Sasanka before the elections in 2012, which directly exploded in the Slovak medial field. As Ondria puts it, with its own moralistic approach mass medial tools can operate as an influential guard of ethic and legal norms. Great amount of research in political science especially in the 60th of the 20th century, however, did not approve the fact that mass media are the dominant factor in forming personal values. Mass means were tools of strengthening political views, but not instruments of change. [8]

"Finances under control" was one of the main mottos of all Mečiar's governments. The country in transition was characterized by surplus state estates, which legitimately needed to find private investors, who would administer them. Privatization was a moving power of fruiting economics and pour into the state the first important hundreds of billions crouns. The language of numbers, crucial attribute for economists, however, tells about the disadvantage of the second wave of privatization under the third Mečiar government in 1994-1998. The government with the FNN – Fond národného majetku (Fond of National Property) decided on the sale of state assets Mečiar defended privatization as one of the main incomes for state budget of the contemporary era and camouflaged untransparent government steps with decision-making power. However, it is a clear fact that for the second wave of privatization were prepared assets in an estimated market height of 109 billion and feasibly it was sold only for 31 billion Slovak crouns. From this results that Mečiar's government, in contrast with Dzurinda's government, privatized with a loss for the Slovak state. [9]

The second stage after 1998 is characterized by the profilation of the cult of meciarism and new political ambitions of the HZDS leader. As Uhlerová indicates, after the parliamentary elections in 1998 HZDS did not get into governmental position and was reliant upon secondary roles in opposition. After 1998 trade unions partly took advantage of the fact that with their activities in the election campaign they participated in the fall of the previous government, and by that also in democratization of political terms in Slovakia, what for a certain time period ensured raising prestige. Secondly,

they took advantage of the situation that into the first "post-Mečiar" government got involved also left-orientated subjects, especially SDE (Social Democratic Left). [10] The leader of the party thus attacked the second highest constitutional function of the state – the position of the president of the Slovak Republic. The first presidential elections in 1999, however, were not successful for him, in spite of that, he fought his way to the second round, in which he gained respectful 42% votes. His ambitions to apply for the position of head of state continued after five years of Rudolf Schuster's tenure and in 2004 Mečiar again ran for the position against his long-term political co-belligerent, Ivan Gašparovič. He did not uphold the essential majority of votes nor in the second round. According to Kováčová, among the primary determinants of electoral participation belong two main institutional factors, parallelism of other elections' proceeding and introduction of compulsory voter turnout. [11] Both factors visibly strengthen voter turnout. The last attempt at big comeback to politics was involvement in the governing coalition of SMER-SD, at the head of which stood Róbert Fico. However, this partnership was not for the HZDS equal and by far advantageous. Growing position of R. Fico and his strengthening political influence even more emphasized the disparity between him and Mečiar, who was only a necessary complement of the government and seen as a kind of requisite of the past with similar penetration of election programmes and possibility to address the old generation of HZDS voters. In fact, it was a coalition and association from rationality that did not give that legitimacy to Mečiar as he expected, or wanted.

The end of Vladimír Mečiar's political career came in 2012 after the parliamentary elections, in which the party gained only 1% of voters' support. The reasons for the fall and sink of the party's preferences were several. In the foreground there stood an excessive effort of the leader to control affairs in the party and society and eliminate healthy competition. These carrier purges gradually created an absence of young and skillful politicians. However, the party was under constraint of the events on Slovak political scene and began to branch off the original values. [12] The social-democratic message of the Movement was disappearing so fast as the electoral basis of the party SMER-SD strengthened, which raised oneself during one electoral term to the strength of the Movement from the times of fruting democracy in Slovakia. The historic experience and dosing interval since the government of V. Mečiar enables us to examine this era also on the basis of the impact of his decisions on the current society. The second phenomenon arising in the last years, built around the message of meciarism, but taking advantage of the even more powerful position of Róbert Fico in society is considerably specific and more sophisticated. The SMER-SD party proved to address wide masses of voters and establish oneself relatively fast and resolutely on the Slovak party scene, as evidenced by the establishment of first coalition government in 2006, the subsequent victory in 2010, even without constituting government. The most notable factor came in the preterm parliamentary elections in 2012, which ensured the party and its leader a comfortable coalitional majority of members of parliament for establishing a one-party government. Mečiar under his career and three terms of office did not manage to achieve a situation, in which he would not need a coalition partner. Fico is the proof of the fact that also in moderate pluralism, as we classify the Slovak party system, can by certain circumstances operate as a system with a dominant political party.

Finding parallels between the personality of Róbert Fico and Vladimír Mečiar is indeed relatively easy, but is built on diametrically different political and social basis. The era,

when the country needed to lean on a strong leader, also at the expense of loss of certain sovereignty of civil rights and freedoms, is over. A charismatic leader in the person of Róbert Fico has currently to face much more competition from the right, mass medial constraints and messy causes, which can move with public opinion. In the Slovak political culture there occurs an effect of drawing personal responsibility by faults of political functionaries or nominats of the party, as it was after the cause of CT against Pavol Paška. Whereas, paradoxically, under Mečiar the moving force was the street, which got him on the pedestal of the Slovak executive and saw in him a stabilizing pillar of fruting democratic society. [13] Just the same street afterwards warned the government 20 years later that citizens sensitively perceive redistribution and pumping public means from the state budget. Here we can feel the message of the era from the first and second wave of privatization, whose consequences are felt also in current times. Last but not least, under pressure of significant medialization and ability to address masses the constraint and extent of social control of politicians is increasing. Similarly as his predecessor, Róbert Fico also tried the bitter taste of defeat in presidential elections. He decided to candidate in the mid-term of his governing, what was perceived considerably negatively by the public. Presidential elections between Andrej Kiska and Róbert Fico, however, were not a referendum about Fico, as he predicted in the beginning. In the political culture of the Slovaks, the position of the prime minister is the highest and most serious authority, exactly because of that fact, citizens did not want the incumbent chef of executive to leave and let an unclear governing garniture under the leadership of someone, who before the elections was not even medialised as his successor. The single campaign of Fico falsely rested on the support of the political party, as he entered these elections by himself and did not manage to motivate electors outside his own party spectrum. His aims towards the conservative electorate did not succeed and subsequently blocked the possibility od gaining young liberal first-voters and voters. The defeat of R. Fico was according to the political scientist, G. Mesežnikov, caused mainly by the fact that a large political party, as the Smer is, should have more candidates on different positions. Its chef and Prime Minister Róbert Fico established that kind of power system that forced him to candidate in the presidential elections and the party did not generate any other candidate and Róbert Fico lost. It is an advice for him. [12]

CONCLUSION

The message and the historic imprint that the personality of Vladimír Mečiar graved in mind of the nation has not been totally destroyed by his departure from politics, but only dropped back. Despite the controversial steps, actions and decisions that Mečiar during his career accomplished, he by right deserves the denomination "father of the nation". Meciarists after the fall of socialist regime managed to build an independent, sovereign, democratic state on a greenfield, without significant support of West European countries, to which the existence of such subject in Central Europe did not always seem favourable. Mečiar thus managed something that no-one yet achieved, recast all Slovak dreams about independence, statehood and freedom into a functional state, and because of this, no-one can refuse and withdraw from him. Society set up different mirror for Róbert Fico, in which we do not find any reflection of a need for national hero or combatant for independence, statehood and sovereignty of the nation. With his charisma, performing and of course, political steps and decisions, he built up an image of strong leader, who administers his party and his government firmly, last but not least he

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ABSTRACT

The article bears the name of problems contribution of older people in Slovakia after 1989. It is divided into two parts. The first part is addressing to issue at the theoretical level and in the second part we examine them empirically.

Keywords: Old age, Aging, Problems of elderly people, Slovakia, 1989

INTRODUCTION

1989 was a year of great changes, when the character of the state and society began to change. The society acquired Liberal Democratic form. State was not so generous in social policy due to lack of resources. Changes in subsidized social policy also reflected in the decrease of demographic indicators as marriage and fertility. Nowadays, aging population is dramatically increasing in Slovakia. This article focuses on the question how older people aged 62 years and over assess their social situation.

1 THEORETICAL PART

Population aging is a global phenomenon which has far-reaching economic, social and political consequences and grows over the years. [1] Each of us is getting older since the moment he is born, and everyone ages differently. This process always discontinues that in certain stages of life one ages faster and in different stages slower. Therefore, we know the old teenager and young ragwort. [3]

Human during his existence goes through several stages of development, each of which has its own characteristics. Each developmental stages solve certain problems whose solution could form a platform for further problem associated with the next stage and with the previous problem. Each of them put on a person other requirements, whereas the last station of life is death, which the entire lifecycle closes. [2]

Population aging is a significant phenomenon of nowadays. Every year the society increases the share of the elderly, the share of children and young people and increases an average age. In this aging process is not the contemporary society alone, demographic aging of the population is likely to be experienced in most developed countries. In our society, in comparison with Western society, the process of aging comes with some delay. Population aging is associated mainly with long-term decline in the fertility and mortality, with decreasing infant mortality and also the extension of life expectancy. Forecasts of population expect that it will continue to increase the proportion of older people in our society. Today, in the age category 65 years and older entering numerous