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# SOME COMMENTS ON THE PRODUCTIVITY OF DICHOTOMIES IN THE CURRENT ARENA OF IDEOLOGICAL CONFRONTATIONS<sup>1</sup>

**Daniel Dobiaš – Marcela Gbúrová\***

## **ABSTRACT**

The history of the development of human communities opens up a large number of chapters of the alliance of rationality and power. The determining power of the implementation of elements of purposeful rationality at the political level is almost always represented by the legitimation of a certain type of interest associated with the greatest power to enforcing them. The primary goal of this paper is in an endeavour to place the normative nature of current (democratic) political regimes where we encounter the need for a more fundamental theoretical argument that would enable us to respond to their dynamic, often contradictory development. We focus on the productivity of dichotomies in the theory and practice of rationalism, irrationalism and liberal democracy. Their interaction in fact defines and creates the conditions for experimenting with different forms of political structures in the search for a better human and the world. At the same time, its performance not only defines the conditions for the theoretical justification of the idea of power, but also becomes a tool for its implementation. The theoretical background of this approach develops monitoring the content turbulences in the political systems of liberal democracies, with an emphasis on political life in Slovakia. Hence, in the present study, in the context of possible effects of the infectious disease COVID-19 on the activities of individual political actors, we point to a unique experience that contributes to addressing the issue of the way of establishing "softer" forms of political communication instead of political struggle, especially at the level of relations between the conservative, socialist, and liberal party-political communities not just in Slovakia, but also in other countries around the world.

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**Key words:** Rationalism, Irrationalism, Productivity of Dichotomies, Ideological Confrontations, Liberal Democracy, Political Communication

## **Introduction**

An immanent part of the intellectual tradition of Europe is systematic reflection of the established ideational constructs as the background of historical metamorphoses in the theory and practice of rationalism, irrationalism, totalitarianism and liberal democracy. Their interaction in fact defines and creates the conditions for experimenting with different forms of political structures in the search for a better human and the world.

The primary goal of this paper is in an endeavour to place the processes whose character determines the content of political doctrines and dominant lines of practical policy in the implementation of the ideal of a good, just, and free society by applying the idea of reason. At the same time, its performance not only defines the conditions for the theoretical justification of the idea of power, but also becomes a tool for its implementation. The determining power of the implementation of elements of purposeful rationality at the political level is almost always represented by the legitimization of a certain type of interest associated with the greatest power to enforcing them. In fact, the undisputed component of progress makes it possible to seek, create and, where necessary, adapt legitimacy practices to justify the content and exercise of political power, subject to the author's ability to change his or her perception of their specific application.

It is especially in deriving the normative nature of current (democratic) political regimes where we encounter the need for a more fundamental theoretical argument that would enable us to respond to their dynamic, often contradictory development. Productivity of this effort is enhanced by the situational framework of quite specific conditions, within which and through which solutions to various problems of a political, economic and legal nature are specified, including the variable classification of historical experience. In the arena of current ideological confrontations, the fixation of the line not only leads to a systematic cultivation of citizens' belief in the ideal of democracy, humanism, liberal virtues, and authentic citizenship, but intensifies the feeling of deep disillusionment with (non) functioning state or supranational power structures, often shifting perceptions of content and scope of politics to the position of a failed cartoon.

The theoretical background of this approach develops monitoring the content turbulences in the political systems of liberal democracies, with an emphasis on political life in Slovakia. In the context of possible effects of the infectious disease

COVID-19 on the activities of individual political actors, we point to a unique experience that contributes to addressing the issue of the way of establishing "softer" forms of political communication instead of political struggle, especially at the level of relations between the conservative, socialist, and liberal party-political communities not just in Slovakia, but also in other countries around the world. At the same time, when projecting possible variants of political solution of some dominant problems of the Slovak society, may be draw several assumptions of professional or political-value orientation, which will influence the implementation of ideological ideas, political plans, and government policy in relation to its citizens and to the European Union.

Examining the productivity of dichotomies and the role of values and power in the political theory and practice presents us with several paradoxes and contradictions: the influence of the strategic power interests of supranational economic institutions of global capitalism on basic policy structures in modern liberal democracies results to specific relations between rational and irrational, theoretical and practical, objective and subjective element in political theory and praxis, reverses the original idea of representative democracy to the idea of representative oligarchy transforming the logic of life connections into a grandiose plan to implementing the vision of a new human and the world in which not just the content and nature of politics change, but in which the content and scope of thinking is being shrunk. Therefore, from the perspective of modern political systems, we have outlined irrationally conditioned modelling of reality under the guise of rationality may be considered an important aspect of the ideological compromise between politics, economics, and the media sphere on the lasting continuity of prosperity for the rich ones.

## **1. The productivity of dichotomies in the evolution of rationalism, irrationalism and liberal democracy in the search for a better human and the world**

As we enter the arena of historical human experience, we witness an interesting phenomenon represented by the formulation of a huge number of theories and narratives on the continuous continuity of progress, leading to the creation of a new (perfect) human, a better (perfect) society or a better (perfect) world. The quest for civilisational cultivation, having been woven for centuries from the threads of the ancient human dream of *regnum homini*, has been in the intellectual tradition of Europe moving towards modernity, characterized by the

institutions of democracy, liberalism, and capitalism. At its core, there is the belief that the world is lawful and rational, that this lawful rationality is made available to thought in the mirror of reason, so it is within the power of reason to understand it and thus control the future perspectives of social reproduction. The idea of the image of the world, corresponding to the process of its mechanisation of science and its ambition to create a true, unbiased image of reality, where every phenomenon or process is lawful, necessary and predictable, is a fundamental starting point of secular worldview. It also defines borderlines for a systematic conceptualisation of the ideological agenda paying due respect to dignity and freedom as the essence of humanity in order to elevate humanity and create a better world.

However, despite the doctrinal unity of the ultimate improvement of human (the world) through reason, moral will, and scientific progress, we still face the problem of classifying what it means to be modern. The problem, which the US poet **John Ashbery** pointed out when he wrote: "*Tomorrow is an easy thing, but today is uncharted.*" The real weakness of anthropologically determined cognitive activities is in our inability to understand the present precisely because of the "inherited" irrational belief in a modern plan of thought based on the ideas of infinite progress, rationality of the world with universal and cosmopolitan values. It's immanent constituents have been represented by political projects of reforming the human (the world) through a universal form of government.

The idea of a definitive push for rationalist-based theories acquired an ideological dimension, especially in the light of the reflections on representative democracy and the market economy, which have their origins in the Enlightenment. Combining the ambition to improve the exercise of power through the application of representative and liberal procedures in democracy with irrational belief in the productive and distributional power of the market has created all the preconditions for legitimising ideological, political, and economic-military structures that form the basic axis of modern Western history. Although they use the language of reason (science), they actually prioritise a belief in the idea of Western dominance over the world through imperial power hegemonism and the promotion of the strategic interests of global capital. One of the rarest contributions to the good of humanity, produced for the sake of social and political progress, has been gradually transformed over several centuries into one of the ideologies which defines the defining framework of politics into one defining type of democracy, with the necessary link to liberalism and capitalism. Into one defining type of democracy, whose philosophical, political or economic impact is

an immanent part of processes called globalisation.

Thus, even the current regimes of modern liberal democracies are, just as they have been so far, oversaturated with an ideology that imposes its own content on individual categories of political theory and practice according to a certain type of interest associated with the greatest power to enforce them. The content of freedom, human rights, the rule of law or the sense of rationality has been changing throughout history, so that dealing with the above-mentioned general concepts can sometimes take on a totalitarian form as early as in the process of developing the Enlightenment: *"It is generally felt that the promises of the modern age are being missed. The movement for enlightenment and liberation, which was supposed to rid us of superstition and tyranny, brought us into a world in the twentieth century in which ideological fanaticism and political oppression reached extreme proportions that history had never known before"* (Bellah, R. – Madsen, R. – Sullivan, W. – Swidler, A. – Tipton, S., 1985, p. 277). Thus, the authenticity of the idea of progress in the implementation of the common good does not necessarily mean the use of reason, science, and technology to create a new human and the world, but may take on the character of a tool for increasing power in reproducing the old world.

In this context, **John Gray**, the English philosopher and political scientist, even speaks of the dangers of scientific racism and openly calls the belief in progress a human illusion. He does not see history as an ascending spiral towards the creation of a better world, but as an endless cycle of interacting variable human knowledge and unchanging needs: *"At the heart of the idea of progress, there is the belief that human life will become better as knowledge increases. The mistake is not that human life cannot be changed. The mistake is to imagine that those improvements will be increasing"* (Gray, 2006a, p. 11). And he goes on to say that: *"The leading thesis of the Enlightenment is in the assumption that the key to human liberation is the growth of knowledge ... but the belief in progress based on the growth of knowledge is in itself irrational. There is, in fact, no strong connection between the adoption of modern science and technology on the one hand and the application of human reason in human affairs on the other. On the contrary - new technologies are able to revive the side of human nature that is not and will never be rational"* (Gray, 2006b, p. 26). At present, there is no power in the world to guarantee that, in addition to a modern, rational worldview, fundamentalism will not flourish and that we can control the

use of technology solely to improve the quality of life.<sup>2</sup>

Despite many impressive achievements in the creation of modern societies based on the tradition of the Enlightenment (founding the universal brotherhood of men on a rational, unencumbered individual), reason did not fully fulfil the expectations associated with it. This basis has proved unreliable because the rational actor is erroneous, guided by personal interest, not by the universal ideas of brotherhood. In addition, everyone has their own social experience and, depending on how it affects them, they need to orientate themselves within it in a meaningful way. Autonomous, rational actors, enjoying transcendental freedom and autonomy of will, are almost non-existent, they are rather represented by illusions created by the process of abstraction, and the basis of consciousness of "rationally independent" individuals is most often formed in the family, community, origin or tradition. A rationalistically planned State without any tradition as a link between institutions, intentions and values of individuals cannot be built, as all the laws, including general principles, must first be interpreted on the basis of principles derived from daily practice before they are applied. The most important of them include those that form the moral framework of a society (in accordance with the institutional legal framework) and express the society's preserved sense of justice, decency, and pride in its political system, way of life or degree of morality. The difference between people in the intensity of emotional experiences, the focus of the will, authenticity of instincts and passions is thus actually unified in reason, more precisely in the agreement on what is and what is not reasonable. Although in most dimensions of social reality we may trace the element of rationality, human behaviour is never exclusively rational, reason and irrationality are two sides of the same undisciplined human nature. We may not be far from the truth even if we say that human action (the direction of civilization) does not proceed in universally comprehensible lines of development, but we, people, introduce order, reason into the "meaningless" essence of life, because our life is

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<sup>2</sup> Questions related to the search for (i) *rational* foundations of modernity are noted by **F. Fukuyama** (*The End of History and the Last Man*), according to whom modernity has a political, economic, and cultural (value) component. He considers liberal democracy to be the decisive organisational principle, literally the completion of the ideological development of humanity in the pursued intentions, not only as a legitimate system of government that prevailed over competing ideologies, but also as a definitive form of state establishment that resolved all the internal contradictions in the development of our fundamental principles or institutions. **E. Luce** (*Twilight of Western Liberalism*) thinks similarly, but for whom the worldwide expansion of the model of liberal democracy is just one form of the idea of the moral superiority of the West and believes in the belief in progress as a modified belief in the superiority of the Western way of thinking.

a process seeking knowledge.

In addition, respect for the individual, confidence in the ability of people to make rational decisions about their lives, their emancipation against tyranny by upbringing and education may not be a matter of course, as there have always been and will always be people who tend to live their lives the way they want and certain groups of people who will try to use power to force others to act, think or feel differently than they themselves want. The removal of obstacles to the satisfaction of desires or the creation of a situation where people do not desire anything they cannot achieve opens up room for freedom of choice, but to secure it in this form, it is possible to use and justify coercive force to prevent the formation of "inappropriate" desires or support the formation of desires "appropriate". **Rousseau** and some utilitarians pointed out that in this situation it is possible to use the desire of slaves to satisfy their needs, to cover up the planned manipulation with their being aware of it and to force them to be free and rational. The diagnosis of this condition therefore raises a fairly legitimate question: according to what (who) does the world actually work? If at all, what type of rationality does this idea fit to? Who is the subject of the administration and inspection of its effectiveness?

### 1.1 Irrational attraction of rationality

Experiments with projects to transforming man, society or the world with a universal form of government, legitimised by a rationally conditioned interest in the highest good represent an impressive part of the history of political doctrines. Their theoretical starting points may be identified already in the ancient tradition at the level of the relationship between thinking and reality, where reason was understood as a basic identifying factor for a unified picture of reality. Its essence was in a unique combination of the belief that the world is lawful and rational, that it is within the power of reason to understand and control future trajectories, with an irrationally conditioned notion of a good, happy life, consisting in the ability of reason to know the highest virtues - the idea of the good. For example, **Plato** in his conception of the ideal State assumed that by thinking (*noésis*) and reasoning (*dianoia*) we can capture the ideal beings and attain knowledge as the highest form of true knowledge. The ontological determination of what is and what can be both unique and unchanging and even thought presupposes here the agreement of thought and reality, the truth understood as wisdom, the highest good. At the same time, the knowledge of the noblest idea predestines its bearer to rule, so that the political capacity to exercise power is conditioned by wisdom.



In the ancient tradition, however, we may also note the roots of another way of thinking, which is the product of realising the limits of one's own knowledge, or the cognitive imperfections of the person knowing. It connects with knowledge based on searching, exploring, considering, in which the idea of error is contained in the idea of truth as standard. Accordingly, our knowledge, more precisely our belief that in knowledge we touch reality, is always just improvisation, is of the most probabilistic nature. Cognition works on the principle of reflexivity - people's thoughts, feelings, actions are part of the reality they are thinking about, so their opinion will never fully coincide with the world as it really exists. It is precisely the absence of agreement between the rational subject and the actual state of affairs that brings an element of uncertainty, unpredictability into the participants' understanding, as well as into the events in which they participate. Such an attitude not only corrects the resistance of any opinion in terms of its exclusivity, but paradoxically points to the fact that a basic rational attitude is the result of a belief in reason. Free choice in favour of a rational position admits its origin in an irrational decision, it is even conditioned by the presumed irrational belief in reason. The same is true of the irrational belief in progress based on the development of knowledge.

Optimistic visions of the highest as the substantial core of politics, in their Renaissance - humanistic form, have been transferred to the level of planned use of scientific knowledge. The acquisition of knowledge gradually acquired the character of a tool for controlling nature, transforming the human destiny, and promoting conflicting goals in gaining and maintaining power. In the indicated contexts, together with the separation of reasoning and deepening the considerations from the knowledge gained through activities and experience, we thus have the opportunity to reflect on the situation when individual scientific disciplines in different time periods and in different ways are pushed to defend their legitimacy by modifying theoretical production in favour of social (political) orders. At least in terms of the classical modern idea of the unity of science, it is especially the field of humanities that does not have a goal in itself, but must prove its practical usefulness.

However, when projecting the horizon of the future in the struggle to creating a better world by applying the idea of reason, we reach an imaginary crossroads. The belief of Western monotheism is gradually beginning to be alternated by a belief in infinity, the infinite possibilities of human knowledge, and the belief in the cumulative replicability of progress. The dream of *regnum homini* in the perspective of modern, secular Enlightenment ideologies embodies a new type

of "ordinary" man who, by reason (knowledge) transforms his destiny, creates a new, better world. The situational complexity of the modernisation era is completed by a coordinated causal chain from individualisation, industrialisation, economic development, social mobilisation to the transformation of values, and the requirement to participate in political life in most developing industrial societies. Paradoxically, however, man becomes a reality here only by becoming a member of the system, he is only real as long as he is reducible to the function of the system, as long as he may be defined by his needs. It is by entering the area of (economic) relations that he is, independently of his consciousness, drawn into the regular context of his own realisation. What appears - as **K. Kosík** points out - is the transformation of the subjective into the objective, when man is no longer defined by himself,<sup>3</sup> but becomes a definable element of the construction and operation of the system (Kosík, 1966a, pp. 71 – 74).

## **1.2 Political rationalism and the idea of the common good**

The basic premise of the idea of the system as fixable, subsequently knowledgeable regularities is represented by the ideologized essence of the idea of the common good (well-being) that we follow. If man is to be a functioning part of this system, he must be equipped with the characteristic features necessary for his proper functioning. Reason in fact belongs to one of them, but it is not primarily an immanent part of an individual's consciousness to develop rational abilities, but rather a necessity of life, something that is a tool of mediating a reasonably shaped reality (system). The reason of classical rationalism of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, which created a modern civilisation with the technology and conveniences of science, formed a reasonable individual with the ability to think exactly, paradoxically has the potential to create a reality that it can neither rationally organise nor rationally understand. Political rationalism, accompanied by the demand for a direct rule of reason and the gradual expansion of institutions (political, economic, legal ...) falling under this rule, also offers the summarisation and glorification of technical knowledge, full of rules and principles.

The political objective of the ultimate triumph of reason in establishing social

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<sup>3</sup> The concentrated expression of the logical structure observed represents the intellectual heritage of one of the greatest representatives of the Enlightenment period, **I. Kant**. He thought of man as a free being who could autonomously determine his will by rationally transforming natural lust. The postulate of freedom is, in **Kant's** view, determined by a general moral law, the subject of which is man as a purpose for himself (a noumenal being), capable of autonomously directing his will in accordance with the general requirements of practical reason.

harmony thus set in motion the forces for which rational behaviour leads to the efficient use of resources, to the attainment of the objective with minimal effort or the maximum degree of benefit. Reason is a technique of behaviour and action, a technique of its most perfect expression, and science is a guide to how to use resources rationally (effectively) to achieve an objective. Thinking about the legitimacy and rationality of the objective is actually precluded by science, which leads to a symbiosis of two split ontological spheres - the rationalisation of irrational and irrational consequences of rationalisation. One of the consequences of such a fixation in the line we follow is in the already proclaimed division of sciences into the field of nature and society, the independence of their methodological orientation or the factual and theoretical division of human reality into rationalism (means, technology, efficiency) and human values and meanings, which in a paradoxical way become the domain of irrationalism. An adequate solution to the researched issue seems - once again in the words of **K. Kosík** - a dialectical reason as a higher kind of rationality, as a universal and necessary *"process of knowing and formation of reality which leaves nothing outside and is therefore the mind of both science and thinking and human freedom and reality. So, it knows in itself that its activity is in raising and resolving the contradictions, it does not exist outside reality, nor does it leave reality outside itself. It exists only by realising its reasonableness, i.e., it is created as a dialectical reason only as long as it creates a reasonable reality in the historical process"* (Kosík, 1966b, pp. 73–74).

The idea of a definitive push of rationalism-based theories in the transformation of nature, man and society according to the universal model gained in magnitude in the golden era of modernity by connecting scientific knowledge and the accumulation of capital (profit) with political and military power. The new logic of shaping the political, legal or economic reality of (not only) Europe according to the capitalist formula was further accentuated by the compromise between the feudal lords, the bourgeoisie and the industrialists, bound together by the institution of private property. The legitimacy of open, critical science has also grown in line with the idea of positive performance dynamics, which only confirms the already proclaimed connection between science, power, capital, and technology. The production and usability of knowledge was gradually conditioned by their transferability into the language of numbers, technological features that are a tradable commodity. In fact, knowledge itself has become an information commodity, a necessary precondition for the production of things that humanity wants, so - as we have

already indicated - it is not (cannot be) just pure good, because it ceases to be an end in itself. One of the rarest contributions to the good of humanity, made for social and political progress, has gradually become an immanent part of ideological struggles for the liberation of man from the fate that makes him human over the centuries.

Behind the entire, almost exclusively optimistic rhetoric of people who have power, there is the idea of a bright future. However, when analysing the ways of enforcing the abstract principles of truth in science, the general good in politics, or the improvement of the exercise of power in the State, we come across another issue that seems theoretically unresolvable. This contradicts the inner meaning of our regulatory concepts in relation to reality. The tradition of their content fulfilment is based on the determination of a certain pattern - the concept of its own, which determines what is right, good, just in itself, i.e., what it "should be"! This "should be" characterises unambiguity, immutability in time, can be only one and does not contain any opposing parts. It acquires an abstract nature, it becomes a general, absolute, but an unusable principle from the point of view of addressing specific situations. Man's behaviour in the real world is influenced by the factual ambiguity of the conditions in which it takes place, which predisposes him to the necessary improvisation in choosing between the various options. Thus, a practical guide to action in terms of a specific situation requires an intermediary article to develop the content of the abstract concept, which is its interpretive interpretation. But the concept in itself, due to its abstractness, has no content, so it cannot be developed theoretically (interpretatively). Addressing the issue of developing the content of the concept of its own on a practical level means giving it, more precisely inserting in it, subjective preferences into the abstract idea (Valach, 2001a, pp. 33–43).

This contradiction in the indicated contexts further complicates the paradox of the interpretation itself, because due to the absence of the content of the idea of good - as productively recalled by **M. Valach** - is not "*able to proceed in developing the idea of good* ., *it becomes a process in which the interpreting entity inserts their own ideas and beliefs in the answer, which, however, should have been completely non-subjective in nature, that is, a simple expression of the idea of good*" (Valach, 2001b, pp. 37-38). The observed argumentative trajectory, especially in the context of modern political theory of democracy, leads us to a relatively absurd realisation that the plurality of political principles and the absence of a universal, generally binding criterion of what is good (right) legitimises not only content dispersion but also dispersion of interpreters.

Completing the ideological development of humanity (**Fukuyama**) by accepting a state establishment that presupposes multiple interpretations, followed by the choice of performers in legitimising power means not just a departure from the original idea of good, but also chaos from the perspective of legitimacy of one (generally acceptable) single binding interpretation (of the interpreter) of what is good, right. The personification of the will of one, several, most or all (if such a thing is really possible at all) is basically identical to the idea of perfect good in itself, we will just "fill" its original, abstract concept with rational content. Due to its reasoning, its essential essence is therefore in a manipulative function in the reproduction of a system that has a certain value potential. Therefore, in the long run, the legitimacy of democracy stands and falls with the possibility of maintaining an irrational belief in the ability of each individual to understand the essence of political decisions based on rational argumentation in implementing the ideal of the common good, through elected representatives fulfilling the will of the people.

### **1.3 Alliance of rationality and power in modern liberal democracies**

Efforts to modify the elements of purposeful rationality to a political and ethical level have greatly boosted the political and legal theory of democracy by providing a relevant definition of the sovereign will of a people who delegate their power, in whole or in part, to elected representatives. The right to have good government, to be well-governed, and to participate in governance him-/herself thus came into conflict with the logic of government performance as the need to create organized majorities by providing specific services to each consensus group. The system of modern representative governments thus not just determines the invisible undemocratic exercise of power, but by buying the support of the majority it creates the preconditions for a new source of arbitrariness, which is in the right of parliament to unlimited sovereignty. Its role is not exhausted by establishing or enforcing general rules of justice, but by passing laws to achieve specific government goals. In **Hayek's** terminology, a sovereign parliament is not legislative because it passes laws, but the law is everything that comes out of parliament. The logic of the functioning of political parties in the fulfilment of their own interests further emphasises this tendency and the power of the individual or the people<sup>4</sup> ostentatiously codified in

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<sup>4</sup> Postulating the identity and will of the people or the majority to some meaningful definition does not solve, as **J. A. Schumpeter** suggested, one of the fundamental dilemmas of classical political theory:

accordance with the optimism of the Enlightenment ideals, it has gradually transformed into a tragic helplessness against the power of its economic and political representatives, more precisely the owners and representatives of political parties! The sovereign people delegate in whole or in part, i.e., they lose their power in favour of the selected representatives of the financial oligarchy, thus reversing the original idea of representative democracy to the idea of a representative oligarchy.

The key turning point is in the influence of the strategic power interests of the supranational economic institutions of global capitalism on the basic structures of politics in liberal democracies of the modern type. Today's democratic practice takes on the character of an illusory Enlightenment metaphor of perfect rationalism or the use of progress as a tool for implementing exclusively optimistic visions of the new man and the world, as it is an expression of demands to increase power determining structures of unchanging, opposing human needs, unlimited competition and unlimited flow. The economisation of all the spheres of human life, combined with its legitimisation in the logic of democratic and liberal principles, ultimately creates a state of semantic emptiness of authentic ideas of democracy and liberalism, with the social and economic power of a privileged minority, alongside with the political ones that support them, create an almost impenetrable dam for the effective exercise of the social, political and civil rights of the discriminated majority!

In the light of diligently cultivating illusions about our (liberal) democratic presence and future, we cannot, in principle, be surprised by the oligarchic ethos of democracy mentioned above, really referring to the legitimacy of the process of concentrating political power in the hands of private supranational financial and bureaucratic centres standing above the scope of powers of national parliaments! In attempts to abstract from the infinitely complex conditionality of the construction of humanity's future, the question arises as to how to reconcile the generally acceptable humanitarian agenda with the forces that set the ideological agenda on a global scale. Is it at all possible to build a barrier for global markets and multinational corporations if we have elevated personal interest to a universal principle that extends not just to individual choice expressed in markets, but also

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*"In order for problems to be decided and for policy to be shaped in accordance with the will of the people, it must come to the conclusion that even if the will of the people were unequivocal and real, decisions taken by a simple majority would often not express but distort it. It is clear that the will of the majority is just the will of the majority, and therefore it cannot be identified with the will of the people. People are a mosaic that the majority simply cannot represent"* (Schumpeter, 2004, p. 290).

to social choice expressed in politics? Why question the power of undistorted competition in mitigating class antagonisms with the idea of a fairer distribution of pre-existing wealth? How to cultivate faith in the ideal of democracy, sovereign citizenship or transparency of public flows in the boundaries defined by capital relations? What type of rationality does democracy actually reflect?

The concentrated manifestation of progressive and regressive elements in the era of full-fledged liberal democracy leads us to the conclusion that the already mentioned Enlightenment ideas about representative democracy and the market economy in confrontation with political reality often sound like a false metaphor. Under the influence of methods used for commercial purposes, a situation has arisen in which political and economic elites in the regimes of liberal democracies, consciously and with the consent of the electorate, no longer care about their real needs, but about the desires they manipulate and incite! Pressure on elected political leaders to ensure return on investment for their sponsors, total transfer of funds from the public to the private sector, efforts to maximize profit privatisation and socialisation of costs transform the logic of life context into a grandiose plan to implement a vision of a new person and the content and nature of politics, but in which the content and scope of thinking narrows! It is therefore up to us citizens whether and how we use the potential of authentic citizenship, which is to defend certain values regardless of re-election, to cultivate the right to think differently and to make full use of social capital.

## **2. The productivity of dichotomies in the political systems of liberal democracies, with an emphasis on political life in slovakia**

Identification and understanding the ongoing processes in the context of the productivity of dichotomies in contemporary political theory and reality complicate the situation surrounding an infectious respiratory disease known as COVID-19, which they first identified in the Chinese city of Wuhan in Hupei Province, from where it began to spread epidemically around the world. The aggressiveness of the disease, combined with the relatively high mortality of people, especially the older generation, and the fact that science did not find an adequate response to it by the time this study was submitted, have caused enormous complications in all areas of public life around the world, including political life. It turned out that, in particular, the political systems of liberal democracy had, for a relatively long time since its outbreak, resisted restricting citizens' personal and social freedoms.

The progressive rise in the disease and death rate of citizens in countries with a long tradition of liberal democracy has pushed aside the hitherto accepted principle of creating collective immunity (its essence is that the virus will spread uncontrollably among people until it is finally overcome by all and acquire anti-antibodies against the infection), thus creating space for politicians proposing more effective, tried-and-tested (Wuhan, China) and controlled political-medical solutions (countries or municipalities imposed extraordinarily strict restrictions on free movement, including ban of people assembling, while combining these with extensive testing and strict quarantine of patients).

The controlled solutions (strict restrictive security and health measures) forced the countries concerned to gradually restrict or temporarily postpone the liberal freedoms still functioning for individuals and the civil public, and instead to refine the extraordinary solutions, which in many ways resembled instruments of war (Hungary is an extreme example where at the time of the deteriorating situation due to the coronavirus pandemic, Prime Minister **Orbán** had the opportunity to take over the power of parliament and govern the State by decrees; the Slovak example is in an approved amendment to the law act which could monitor the movement of coronavirus-infected citizens via mobile phones).<sup>5</sup>

We do not know how humanity's struggle with its invisible enemy will develop. It is more than obvious that the unique experience gained in its elimination can become a suitable experimental platform for political actors not just in Slovakia but also in other countries around the world in resolving a fundamental issue: how to set up inter-ideational, inter-ideological, inter-party, and inter-governmental communication and cooperation and how to achieve a "softer" forms (ecumenism, compromise, convergence) of political communication instead of political struggle, especially at the level of relations among the conservative, socialist and liberal party-political communities. This question raises another question, based on the present and heading for the future: The World Health Organization has officially classified COVID-19 as a pandemic of global proportions. As no effective drug for coronavirus has been found so far, it has become not only a health problem, but especially an economic and social

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<sup>5</sup> The Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic dealt with the initiative of the Smer-SD party, which objected that the so-called spy law, which emerged from the workshop of the current coalition of political parties, is unconstitutional. On 13 May 2020, it suspended the effectiveness of those parts of the amended law act that could infringe on the privacy of individuals. See more details on the Internet: The Constitutional Court stopped the spy law. <https://primar.sme.sk/c/22361118/ako-funguje-kolektivna-imunita-holandania-stavaju-na-kontrolovane-sirenje-nakazy.html> [cit. 2/06/2020].



problem. It attacked the "ruts" of our lives and forced the human community to look for another path that no one has yet taken. Nature has mirrored globalised times, national and transnational politics, our financially undersized education, our economy, trade, the legal, social, and health systems, our economy, public and state administration, culture, artificial intelligence and digital infrastructure, our businesses and our plans how to beat coronavirus.

COVID-19 also gave us a little confidence. We have found that we can be disciplined, helping, empathetic, tolerant, accommodating, understanding of the limitations of our personal and social freedoms, creative in devising beneficial things for our collective protection, and even self-sufficient in some goods and services. At the time of the "corona crisis" period, we were able to unite as a family, as a civic and political community, as a nation, as humanity.

Therefore, the question is appropriate: is it a positive enough platform for us, as humanity, to continue to work together to heal democracy even after the epidemic? We have the opportunity to perceive more intensively than before such concepts as life, family, home, which belong to the standard equipment of our private life, but also such concepts as nation, state, humanity, peace, justice, freedom, order, equality, which belong to standard equipment of especially public life. We will focus our attention on the last three terms, which, as we have indicated, belong to the standard equipment of public life in particular. These are the concepts appearing most frequently in political lexicon (party oriented, public, governmental, parliamentary, that put aside the parliament), but also in scientific and journalistic reflections on politics (political-scientific and sociological analyses of political and ideological discourses, journalistic analyses of political activity), while they have a symbolic validity: they denote three forms of ideational projects, which serve as a basis for justifying political action programmes.

These projects can be divided into either ideologies legitimising a certain social group or political party to take power (socialism, conservatism, liberalism), ideologies that justify the validity and adequacy of the current political power (nationalism, patriotism, traditionalism, technocracy, gender ideology, religious ideology...), ideologies of pressure groups that seek to influence political power without exercising it themselves or seeking to take it over (Consumer Union, Business Union, NGOs...). In democratic societies, the bearers of these projects are primarily political entities, which transform them into their programme goals and power interests. Depending on which ideological projects they legitimise, we divide political entities into conservative, left-wing, and centrist (liberal), and this division is closely related to which symbolic values they represent. While

conservative entities bind, in our view, the symbolic value of order, the left-wing parties have a common symbolic value platform of equality, and liberal political subjects share the symbolic value of freedom. The historical dimension of political ideologies and political entities, as well as the current market situation with political ideas, entitles us to state that in addition to the traditional model of political parties forming their programmes on a strong value platform, political entities are being formed without a strong membership base building their programme vision predominantly on the power of money, marketing, and messianism.

In the following section, we therefore focus on two objectives. The first is an outline of the basic ideological - value basis of conservatism, socialism, and liberalism and their application in the conditions of the Slovak political space and the second is an approximation of the political - value dimension of addressing some dominant problems of Slovak society, including implementation of Government policy in relation to the European Union (EU). We devote the largest portion of the text to the issue of the ideology and politics of socialism because of its long-term negative impact on the political, civic, ethnic and social life of Slovak society until 1990, an impact that was gradually lost thanks to the flexible emancipatory policies of the new formed leftist political entities after the Velvet Revolution and especially after 1992, when the independent Slovak Republic was established.

## 2.1 Conservatism

Defining the concept of conservatism is not an easy task. Since the time this concept was introduced in the political discourse of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century by the British statesman and political philosopher **Edmund Burke**, it has undergone many reforms to date. At the time of its classical form, it began to be fixed in political theory as a political ideology that confronted two other classical ideologies - liberalism and socialism. According to **Burke's** conservative thinking, it was not an ideology, but an attitude toward life, because ideology is an abstraction, a political doctrine that does not express what characterizes the essence of human existence, its transcendence, the preservation of its collective experience and social structures. They have their order given by a natural compact among the members of the community. This is why he emphasized the importance of family, people, institutions, tradition, customs, blood relatives, parish, village community, urban community, church, social class, constitution, social status, etc. He saw in them a natural order given by the diversity of inequalities among people. He

emphasised that they should respect this order, they should be extremely responsible for it. He perceived freedom as a part of the natural order, it was mainly related to the protection of individual or family property, and equality emphasised as something, what is not the product of practical measures, the product of nature (Burke: 1993).

Religion and faith are for conservative thinking an important unifying factor of human coexistence, a moral guarantee of unity of society, nation, stability and continuity of its development and a source of human, public, civil and political order, but also the basis of natural, not artificial, hasty, purposeful, radical, utopian changes and reforms of this order. In order for this natural development of society to continue, **Burke** assigned an important role to a politician, who is to have two basic virtues - prudence and humility. These are important from the point of view of observance of natural (common-law) justice and management of State institutions. In connection with this question, **Burke** opened up the problem of natural law, which, he emphasized, comes from God, is in each of us, and is based on our nature.

Neoconservative concepts have adopted classical conservative values, ideas and attitudes, but under the influence of new knowledge and especially under the influence of disputes with liberal and socialist concepts of social and political life, they have expanded or modified their content characteristics. They agree that conservatism is not an ideology, but a set of attitudes arising from generations of proven values, as well as from the specific time and situation in which they are applied. They associate freedom, within it, personal freedom with order and personal responsibility, they are defined against those views of neoliberalism, which perceive freedom without any restrictions. Therefore, they have a problem with freedom in the issue of abortions, euthanasia, various forms of internationalisation (for example in the form of globalisation), the rights of homosexuals, drug addicts, and the like (Oravec: 2003). The principle of authority that **Burke** thus emphasized in connection with divine and ecclesiastical authority has been preserved in conservatism, but its transcendent dimension has become more of a defence against the negative consequences of various forms of alienation in today's globalised world than a means of suppressing secular manifestations.

Conservatism emphasises the importance of personal faith, strong state, family, smaller communities, nation, natural relationships, especially marriage between man and woman, respect for life from birth to death, observance of the rules of Christian morality, natural social order, cultural diversity. Some political

lines of conservatism emphasise principles of ensuring individual freedom, protection of property, security of citizens, justice, maintaining order and continuity of human society through the rule of law and not the rule of man. For this to happen, the State needs a "strong hand" of law. Over the last century, in states with a democratic tradition of government, but also in the states of the former Soviet bloc, positive law, given by state power, legislation, has begun to dominate. Its rules come from the bearer of political power, and are separated from the morals and rules of natural law. It should be added that in some states (the UK the USA, etc.) some of the rules of natural law have become part of the positivist, utilitarian, and pragmatic conception of legislation. When it comes to freedom and equality, neoconservatism has a clear position: it is an incompatible relationship. For him, freedom is important for the protection of individual and family property. The principle of equality is a kind of *"balancing the unequally distributed tangible and intangible values of a given community. However, individuals differ from birth in their mental and physical dispositions, and all attempts to compensate for these different dispositions through the law and the exercise of state powers violate the freedoms of all involved, especially the strongest and most capable"* (Nisbet, 1993, p. 62).

## 2.2 Conservatism in slovak politics until the parliamentary elections in 2020

Conservative values and attitudes penetrated the Slovak political space in the period of Austria - Hungary. The Slovak National Party, which was established on 1 June 1871, profiled itself as a representative of the national defence and national emancipation struggle of Slovaks in Hungary. Its political programme had a markedly national - conservative-Christian profile, resulting from the adoption of the program theses of the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation of 1861. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the party internally divided into three political directions: conservative, vocalist, and clerical. During the first Czechoslovak Republic, the party was already politically insignificant; in the 1930s, it came ideologically closer to **Hlinka's** Slovak People's Party, which had a strong Christian-nationalist orientation, so that they would eventually merge into the Party of Slovak National Unity.

After 1989, its activities resumed, subscribing to the party's values of 1871. It was defined as a conservative, centre - right party, based on a European - Christian value system, built on three programme pillars: national, Christian, and social. In a turbulent party-political environment, it has more or less succeeded in

promoting these pillars in various government groups. On the Slovak political scene, several political subjects have emerged on the principles of conservatism (Civic Conservative Party; Slovak Democratic and Christian Union - Democratic Party; Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement; MOST - HÍD; Slovak Conservative Party; Kotlebovci - People's Party Our Slovakia; NOVA and Independent People; Christian Union, etc.), with the most famous of these entities - the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), most influencing political life in "post-November" Slovakia. Unfortunately, even this party did not avoid intra-party controversies about the party's direction in a modern political environment, while failing to absorb the latest trends in conservative Western democracy.

A fundamental intra-party debate on whether traditional conservative principles such as family, municipality, State, morality, traditions, etatism (in the form of protective attitudes towards agriculture, excessive caring function of the State in the social security system, etc.) should remain clearly dominant in the party, or include to a greater extent to the party program theme principles of the market, freedom of choice or autonomy of the individual, and to align them with the programmes of other right-wing political entities promoting a modern version of Christian liberalism, in the KDH it did not take place before the latest parliamentary elections in 2020. The result of this indecision is in the life of the party in a non-parliamentary political environment, which is not good news for the conservative current of Slovak civil society.

### 2.3 Socialism

The foundations of the theory, ideology, and political system of socialism were laid by **K. Marx** and **F. Engels** in 1848 in their book *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which was created in response to the poor state of the then economic and political system and human rights in Western Europe. The basic theses of this book were focused on revolutionary changes in the position of manual labourer, progressive agricultural workers, and working intelligence. The idea of this struggle became the irreconcilability of the class struggle. The response of this book was particularly pronounced in the eastern part of Europe, as evidenced by the socialist movements in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, which wanted to turn the then capitalist system into a socialist by taking an evolutionary path.

Another goal was in the communist (**Marxist-Leninist**) movement, which, unlike the socialists, wanted to make social and political changes in a revolutionary way. An example of this journey was the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917, which started a series of other revolutionary changes in other

parts of the world. The socialist movements in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, from which the Social Democratic and Socialist parties emerged, operating mostly in Western, conservative - liberal democracies, sought to promote (in addition to civil and political rights) social rights as well. In States where the communist movement was transformed into communist parties, the leading role of the communist party in society was enshrined in the constitutions of these States. Socialism was mentioned in them as a social order that we know in our territory in the years 1948 – 1990, while it was considered only as an intermediate stage in the construction of a communist classless society, with a dying State and governed by a system of self-government. The socialist State was to create a society of a new type, conditions for the *equality* of all people and man free from exploitation. The principle of equality, which was primarily linked to the “*social dimension of society*” (Bobbio: 2003), and the application of the principles of the class struggle, have been implemented in all the areas of public life. In Czechoslovakia after 1948, this situation looked as follows: expropriation of land ownership; nationalisation of private factories, production tools; land reclamation and improvement according to a joint plan; equal work obligation for all; efforts to gradually eliminate urban and rural disparities; economy based on administrative - directive planning, management and production of products; prices of goods and services regulated and subsidised by the State budget; education and healthcare paid for from the State budget and provided free of charge to citizens. Housing construction and civic amenities infrastructure were planned and their construction subsidised by the State; land reform and collectivisation were carried out using State coercive instruments; the principle of collective guilt has been applied in criminal law; suppression of freedom of thought, lack of private media and freedom of private enterprise; censorship of freedom of movement, speech, association, and religious freedom.

#### **2.4 Socialism in slovak politics until the parliamentary elections in 2020**

Negative experiences with the manipulation of public opinion and political awareness in Czechoslovakia in the years 1948 – 1989 were developed under the pressure of **Marx's** thesis on “*consciousness as a conscious being*” (Marx – Engels: 1977, p. 224). According to it, consciousness does not exist in an immaterial form as an ideal antipole of matter, but it can only exist in a materialised form. In this sense, all manifestations of consciousness were evaluated as a reflection and response of consciousness. As a result, consciousness began to "separate" from man as a subject of social and practical

action, ontologised, and interpreted as a self-sufficient entity. On this principle, the theory of social consciousness developed, which became the basis for the interpretation of individual forms of social consciousness, including political consciousness. The content of this consciousness became a "useful" abstraction, which in Soviet-type societies was tied to certain ideological goals related to the theory and practice of socialism. On this basis, a "textbook-like" theory of social consciousness was developed in Slovakia as well, which fixated abstract schemes through which it was not possible to "see" the real spiritual reality (Mužik: 1981), and certainly not the fragile spiritual world of men (Remišová: 1988).

In the 1980s, research was carried out into some forms of socialist social consciousness: political, nationalistic, national, patriotic, and internationalistic, aesthetic, cultural, historical or literary. Despite the fact that research began to ask critical questions focused on the practical implementation of various forms of social consciousness, it did not question **Marx's** initial qualification of social consciousness as a conscious being. In terms of content, all forms of social consciousness were considered a gnoseological reflection of certain conditions in the economic base of socialist society and differed only in what and how they reflected. The theoretical elaboration of the functional forms of this consciousness was not an end in itself. Its aim was to create a form of socialist citizen's identity that reduced the bond with the individual, minimized the emotional and will dimensions of its consciousness, and strengthened the specific form of life, spiritual equality, and unity of socialist society as a whole.

The ideology of socialism (**Marxism-Leninism, Stalinism**) paid particular attention to the problem of nationalism, especially in connection with the solution of the national question. Its essence was the projection of proposals on how to eliminate class and national antagonisms, how to establish national equality, friendship and cooperation between nations and "*internationalist unity of workers*". The ideologues of socialism in Czechoslovakia, too, were based on the idea that racial and ethnic oppression evoked the domination of private property and the power of the bourgeoisie, interested not only in the exploitation of its own nation but also in the enslavement of other nations. They referred in particular to **V. Lenin**, who emphasised that "*for the bourgeoisie, the requirement of equality of nations in practice very often means the same as the proclamation of national exclusivity and chauvinism, it is very often compatible with the proclamation of mutual separation and alienation of nations*" (Lenin, 1956, p. 267). The proclamation of "national exclusivity" was associated in the conditions of

Czechoslovakia in the 1950s with the notion of bourgeois nationalism. The starting point for evaluating nationalism from the point of view of **Lenin's** theory was the principle of class struggle and the principle of classes. According to it, nationalism has its social bearers: the ruling classes of individual socio-economic formations (under capitalism it was mainly the petty bourgeoisie). Since these classes cannot secure their economic interests without enforcing, for example, State interests, nationalism "takes on" the form of a state law, cultural policy or another movement, the "hegemon" of which is one or part of the above-mentioned classes (Škodáček: 1982). Its historical and ethnic conditionality was also derived from the class points of view. The ideologues of socialism feared the manifestations of nationalism at the beginning of the application of internationalist ideas, i.e., after the victory of the socialist revolution, but also during the building of socialism. Therefore, in order to paralyse its manifestations in socialist conditions, they developed a policy of rapprochement of socialist nations, based on the ideology of socialist and proletarian internationalism. Although its essence was the process of mutual knowledge and understanding of socialist nations and nationalities, in reality it implemented a policy of levelling ethnic differences.

Another problem in the ideology of socialism applied after the February political events of 1948 in Czechoslovakia was the concept of citizenship. Based on the **Marshall** Triad of Citizenship (civic, political, social dimension of citizenship), in Soviet-type societies (such was the society in Czechoslovakia after the above-mentioned year), the concept of citizenship was experimented with. It emphasised the social dimension of citizenship, circumventing or negating the civic and political components of citizenship. It was basically the context of plebiscite citizenship, i.e., "democracy" from above, "emptied" citizenship, or vice versa. In it, the State, through a leading political force, managed a public space in which central values, such as freedom, marked subordination, where democracy and dictatorship were the same, where progress was important in a permanent struggle with the class enemy. In this way, the hierarchy of human identification multidimensionality naturally ceased to develop, while the political self-identification of the citizen could manifest itself only within the framework of class norms and schemes.

The Slovak socio-political environment in the past two centuries has always been an importer of various ideological and political visions, concepts. The ideas of Pan-Slavism and Neo-Slavism, respectively, had an Eastern origin, while archaic conservatism (neoconservatism) and modern liberal and social democratic ideas were coming to Slovakia from the western part of Europe. Due



to the weak, even opinion-differentiated political elite, the Slovak variants of these political ideologies were being born very slowly and complicatedly. The parties were most successful with a conservative policy that could rely on traditionally strong Catholic religiosity. The liberal dimension of politics in Slovakia has always been under strong pressure from conservatism, so it did not prevail before 1918, while in the new conditions after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, it entered the political scene in a very fragmented form. Social democratically oriented political parties established their tradition in the Historic-Hungarian social democracy.

From November 1938 to November 1989, with the exception of a short period (1945 – 1948) of the government of "people's democracy", politics in Slovakia was under the control of autocratic regimes, especially in their far-right (fascist) or far-left (Stalinist) variant. After November 1989, the dominant features of parliamentary democracy from the first Czechoslovak Republic were restored in Slovak society, including the traditional position of political parties as bearers of political will and political power in legislation and the executive. With the establishment of a democratic political system, problems arose that bore the seal of historical, party-political and ideological resentments. This was most evident in the creation of a system of political parties, in the emergence and crystallization of political elites, and in the formation of a modern political culture.

Left-wing politics was in a difficult position after the Velvet Revolution. Although the Communist Party of Slovakia transformed into the Party of the Democratic Left, its attempt to draw a rough line behind the party's past and profile itself as a modern left-wing party of the social democratic type was only partially successful. The first successful left-wing project on the integration of the left in Slovakia was the Common Choice project (1994), which brought together several left-wing political entities: the Democratic Left Party, the Social Democratic Party of Slovakia, the Slovak Farmers' Movement, the Green Party in Slovakia. However, this project did not record electoral success. In 1998, the Slovak left, represented by the Party of the Democratic Left, joined the anti-**Mečiar** bloc with the right-wing parties, which did not meet with a favourable response, especially from the older left-wing voters. This led to a self-destructive intra-party process with known consequences: a sharp decline in voter support, the departure of **R. Fico** and the emergence of SMER own party, and finally the emergence of two intra-party wings - the so-called old wing (**J. Migaš**, **P. Koncoš**, **P. Magvaši**) and the so-called reform wing (**P. Weiss**, **L. Orosz**, **B. Schmögnerová**, **M. Ftáčnik**), from which a new political party emerged: the

Party of the Democratic Alliance (SDA). Instead of one strong modern left-wing political bloc of parties, a fragmented left part of the political spectrum emerged, into which other small left-wing entities were integrated before the 2002 elections. Based on the reality of the distribution of political parties on its left spectrum after the elections in 2002, it could be assumed that the Smer party would create all the preconditions to attract the modernisation wing of the left-wing electorate and its party leaders.

After the 2002 elections, the party transformed the "transitive" conflict mečiarism-anti-mečiarism into a left-right value conflict. By integrating other political entities of the left and centre-left orientation and clarifying its party programme (social democracy), it strengthened its position as a leader on the left spectrum of the party system, while with its flexible emancipation policy it created room for manoeuvre in a relatively wide party spectrum. The party did not begin its political life with an authentic social democratic agenda and with political leaders without a party-ideological past. It was established at a time when the world of politics was in a rather paradoxical situation. In the market of ideas, it was possible to see an increase in ideological clashes and mass production of various ideological mystifications, but at the same time several serious considerations emerged about the end of history and political ideologies. In this context, the considerations of whether the concept of ideology becomes a ridiculous neologism, a symbolic figure tied to a certain type of obsolete party propaganda, or a term with new or revitalized symbolic equipment that can be specifically linked to political attitudes fit quite organically into this context with values and lifestyle of man in modern collectivities.

At that time, the latest variant of the "Third Way" resonated in the political discourses of left-wing or centre-oriented European parties, better known in Germany as the "new centre which for a time became a modern political and intellectual challenge to the European<sup>6</sup> **Blair-Schröder**-type politics to deal with the contradictions and antinomies of the globalisation process. The concept of the Third Way in its Anglo-Saxon and German versions was an attempt to find an answer to the ideological dichotomies in the new situation of the world. British sociologist **Anthony Giddens**, considered the father of the theoretical project. In analysing the two unilateral strategies for the development of a democratic

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<sup>6</sup> Although this version of modern politics is mainly linked to social democratic and neoliberal European politicians (**G. Schröder**, **T. Blair**, **R. Prodi** et al.), its principles were also adopted by the former President of the USA **B. Clinton**.

market society in Western Europe (the strategies of classical social democracy and neoliberalism in the 1980s and 1990s), he noted that all the compromises made between them did not have the desired positive effects in political practice. For this reason, he did not seek new compromise solutions between these strategies, but came up with a new political project that minimised the impact of militant ideological models on socio-political life, and at the same time was open to substantive solutions to a complex, globalising world. He therefore singled out several political themes (dilemmas) in this world (the process of globalization in relation to national development; modern individualism of new generations in relation to social responsibility; a new sense of dividing political orientations into left and right; a shift in politics from orthodox mechanisms of classical democracy to participatory democracy; integration of environmental issues into the political strategy), on which he focused his attention.

Experience from the application of the **Giddens** project (England, Germany) has suggested that the use of some traditional political values of conservatism in creating a modern political discourse, which the Third Way project envisaged, may be stimulating in the political environment of post-communist countries. It could even be said that, given the known problems of their transition from the authoritarian model of social establishment to a democratic society, this is necessary. **Giddens** made it clear to all social democratic and neoliberal politicians that he intended to highlight one of the central conservative values - the *family* - in his project as a social unit that positively influenced society as a whole. It was not about returning to the traditional family and its contribution to the creation of national collectivity, but about democratising the family in terms of creating such values as mutual respect for spouses, independence, decision-making based on argued communication and openness to the opinions of others. He assumed a similar model in the relationship between parents and children, which he perceived as one of the most problematic issues of modern politics. **Giddens'** Third Way project allowed for room for manoeuvre in a wide range of political values, as well as in their application to specific State's political conditions.

The creation of cosmopolitan democracy in the conditions of Central and Eastern European transition countries presupposed the creation of space for the development of multidimensional civic potential, including the ethnic identity of the citizen. Without cultivating this identity, cultivating other identities, including civic identity, or especially - from the point of view of the project of a united Europe - European identity would be very problematic. The creation of a cosmopolitan

democracy presupposed the rule of law with clearly defined competencies and a political society based on the principle of subsidiarity. These arguments were particularly important at a time when post - socialist States were preparing for EU membership with their ethnic-cultural specificities and confirmed by State borders and national symbols. The creation of an educated society proved to be the most effective remedy for the creation of this space for a post-communist citizen. This society is best placed to produce enough social capital to create a space for constructive and active inter-ethnic communication, a well-thought-out intercultural policy, a sense of social justice, an environmentally oriented economy, democratic and global responsibility, but also own historicity and ethnogenesis. This marks the civilizational competencies needed to master the crucial goals of human society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.<sup>7</sup> In a sense, **Tony Blair** realised this fact, who identified three of his government's priorities: *education, education, education*. He perceived education as the key to international competition and the opportunity to participate in the progressiveness of social growth.

The political party Smer-SD not only subscribed to the initiators and implementers of this idea incorporated into the political strategy of the "third way" Anglo-Saxon (**A. Giddens, T. Blair**) and the German type (**G. Schröder**), but tried this initiative, which on the soil of social democracy in Europe and beyond has gained many advocates and sympathizers to import into the Slovak political space. The main executive tool of this idea was the emancipation policy, by which **T. Blair** and **G. Schröder** quite successfully dealt with unilateral strategies for the development of a democratic market society - the old left (classical social democracy) and its emphasis on social justice and the role of the State and the new right (neoliberalism), with its emphasis on the market, private property and conservative values. The policy of the active left, which flexibly used room for manoeuvre in a wide range of political values, as well as in their application to specific State-political conditions, Smer-SD in the following period appealed to a large part of citizens who stood politically from the centre to the left. At the same time, we must remember the fact that by emphasising some conservative tools for the modernization of our democratic establishment (order, rule of law, democratisation of the family, etc.), it also had a stimulating effect on part of the

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<sup>7</sup> **Jozef Lysý** adds to this one fundamental observation: "*Preparing the workforce and citizenship for a new society will require a transformation of the traditional educational model, which applies rigid teaching, memorization of facts, reductionist thinking and autonomous learning. The primary goal of education in the era of the Third Industrial Revolution will be to train students to think and act as part of a common and shared biosphere*" (Lysý, 2012, p. 64).

electorate of the right.

After the 2002 elections, the Smer-SD party opened, as we indicated, the process of crystallisation of the party space on the basis of two narrower lines of value defined: a/ the social democratic, b/ the conservative-liberal line. By defining these lines, it transferred to the Slovak party-political environment the pan-European dialogue on the topic of the economic crisis, neoliberal ideology and economic globalisation. It took over the basic premise of part of the Western European social democratic elite that modern society, developing in the conditions of the global corporate-capitalist market system, breeds social injustice. This fact convinced the party leadership of Smer-SD that the principles of market capitalism, over which neoliberal ideology holds a protective hand, are not a good solution for creating a balanced distribution of wealth and property in the world. Finally, the negative consequences of this ideology in the governance of human society have long been highlighted by prominent figures from the political and economic sciences and financial sectors (such as **Henry Kissinger**, **Joseph Stiglitz**, **Klaus Schwab**, etc.), who saw inequality of income distribution as one of the causes of the current crisis as well as a potential source of future problems at the political, social and economic levels. The problem with this discourse was that the issue of the welfare state and social justice opened up more politically than professionally. The Smer-SD party incorporated it into its party documents, used it in marketing during the pre-election period, but rarely initiated professional discussions on this topic. Discussions on this topic were similarly rare in political, philosophical, economic or sociological circles. Nevertheless, these discussions have also shown the difficulty of defining the content of the terms "welfare state" or "social justice". For this reason, after the early elections in 2012, the Smer-SD party, when drafting the Government of the Slovak Republic Statement, deleted the adjective welfare state and replaced it with a relatively indefinite but marketing-usable adjective effective State.

The party's adaptable policy was confirmed by its foreign course, but especially by its attitude to European Union policy. This institution, which was established as a political - pragmatic post-war construct of vital integration within the framework of economic cooperation based on coal and steel and as a tool for revitalising interpersonal relations torn by war events, got into serious institutional, ethnic-cultural and economic problems at that time. These problems were mainly based on the fact that Europe (unlike the USA) does not have a vision of a dominant nation (mainly for historical and political reasons), but only as something of "*a central agency of humanity*" (Manent, 2007, p. 9). For this

reason, the almost insurmountable problem has arisen to unite old historical nations with modern civilisational integration ideas and to develop a European collective identity. This problem lies in the knowledge of the limits of implementation and the limits of European cohesion, that the steps taken so far towards European unification, from the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC, 1951), through the creation of the European Economic Community (EEC, 1957), after the then stage of coping with the countries of the European Union with the economic crisis, they were implemented through economic-administrative and political measures, while neglecting the "non-market" conditions of European cohesion.

This trend of creating European cohesion has continued until now without addressing the basic institutional framework of European integration, which, in order to be functional, must "*combine the administrative dimension with the spiritual dimension*" (Plesu, 1999, p. 54) or a market economy with cultural "polyphony". In addition to the institutional crisis, the European Union is also in a debt crisis, in the Euro-crisis, in a crisis of unemployment, in a social crisis, in a crisis of ethics and morality, in the crisis of values, in the crisis of democracy, in the crisis of European identity, and most recently in the corona crisis. It therefore sets tough economic rules for its Member States in the sense that it restores economic and monetary union by curtailing the fiscal sovereignty of the euro area countries, significantly interfering in budgetary surveillance in the euro area, pursuing economic reforms and an ambitious plan to strengthen the euro unit, which would underpin the overall recovery of the European Union and its transformation into a real union of stability.

The political party Smer-SD integrated the strongly pro-integration strategic goals of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament (S&D) into its election programme before the 2012 elections. In doing so, it has also committed itself to a number of unpopular measures by the European Commission, but in particular to contribute to the euro currency, the eurozone's financial mechanism, which aims to help national economies in the event of a crisis. The party continued those traditions of Slovak politics, the basis of which was adaptation to the current European political-ideological current. Its leaders understood that the party would have a chance at political longevity only if it adopted a social democratic policy option that would allow room for manoeuvre in a wide range of political values, as well as in their application to specific State-political conditions. The way in which the party participated in the active left-wing policy, which emerged from **Giddens'** ideological project of the

Third Way, how it dealt politically and in marketing with the content of the imported concept of welfare State and political leaders of the European Union, related to the deepening of its fiscal and economic integration, is a harbinger of the future political behaviour of this party. The point is that politics at all costs is not a successful strategy in the long run, as confirmed by the parliamentary elections in 2020, in which the Smer-SD party lost its government position after a long time.

## 2.5 Liberalism

In its classical form, as we have known it from the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, liberalism began to be profiled as a systematic political teaching, an influential direction of civilisation and right-wing ideology, the basic aim of which was to emphasise the central social and political value of freedom (within the law) in its various forms and shapes (personal, political, economic, religious, etc.), justice within the liberal constitutional system, equality before the law, equal civil rights and liberal institutions. **John Locke**, the English philosopher of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, who, thanks to the authorship of the social compact theory, is considered one of the forerunners of the liberal line of thinking about the world in question, expressed an idea that became perhaps the most quoted motto representing the essence of liberalism: "*My freedom ends where the freedom of another person begins.*"

To this day, liberalism has formed not as one traditional line of classical liberalism, but as an open, internally differentiated set of ideas and means for their implementation, based on the political and economic environment in which it originated and what personalities formed its philosophical-political concepts. Therefore, we can talk about democratic or social liberalism, combining basic democratic principles with the welfare State and positive discrimination, or neoliberalism, idealising the mechanism of free competition and private initiative (Gbúrová – Dobiaš: 2014). Branches of liberalism arose mainly after major socio-political and war events, such as the First and Second World Wars, the world economic crisis in the late 1920s, or the events associated with the end of the Cold War and the advent of new technological and digital technologies.

The common value for all liberal conceptions is, above all, in the effort to emancipate the individual, to recognize them as a human being, endowed with dignity and freedom. In this context, mention should be made of the dispute that theorists of liberalism have been resolving for longer than two centuries. It was a dispute between positive and negative freedom. Positive freedom could be characterized as a version of freedom that "*applies mainly to control over one's*

*own life. In line with this position, we are only as free as we have been able to define ourselves and the form of our lives. The concept of freedom is linked here to the experience of freedom"* (Król, 1999, p. 26). This is a more difficult path of freedom because it requires a high intellectual culture. It can be defined in particular in the context of equality of opportunity, which is associated with freedom of choice. In order to implement it, it is necessary to rethink the whole concept of liberalism so that human coexistence in society takes place in a political environment that does not suppress the development of the human personality, its self-assertion ambitions, but at the same time culturally, legally) emancipated. Mutual communication and cooperation can only take place, as recommended by **Król**, in a voluntary, effective democracy, meaning in a democratic arrangement in which all the citizens share the same political rights. In the current political discourse, we denote that arrangement which we might also call the public rational justification of social action by the concept of "participatory" democracy.

On the other hand, we are dealing with the concept of negative freedom, which is an easier way to freedom. Its condition is not experience, but possibility. Freedom, according to this theoretical conception of liberalism, depends on what we can do, what lies ahead, independent of whether we take advantage of this opportunity. An example of negative freedom can be in our private and social life after 1989. Although Czechoslovak citizens have acquired more freedoms, such as the freedom to travel across national borders, but - due to socio-economic restrictions - not everyone has the opportunity to use this type of freedom. The idea of negative freedom allows for simple solutions that do not always bring long-term positive benefits. On the other hand, this type of freedom (we could also call it conditional freedom) is subject to certain restrictions, for example because of the rights to freedom of other people, generally accepted customary rules in relation to men and women, the size of property, biological inequality of people, different life expectancy, differences in the principle of justice, the mass spread of diseases, etc.

Another dispute that has long occupied theorists of liberalism is the dispute over the interpretation of the concept of justice. In this context, it is necessary to recall in particular the political conception of justice as decency of **John Rawls**, based on the symmetry of rationality and morality, which opened up a professional debate on this topic. The American philosopher **Robert Nozick** also took part in the debate, who, based on the principles of positive freedom, defended the idea of property rights as a basis for a non-model perception of



justice. He considered what was not in line with this idea to be an unjustifiable restriction on human freedom. The modern liberal thinker **Friedrich August von Hayek** distinguished the general notion of justice as an attribute of morality from the notion of social justice, which he called the "mirage," that is, a kind of misleading notion of its true meaning. Another modern liberal and critical rationalist, **Karl Raimund Popper**, opened up a debate on open pluralistic civil society, including in the concept of justice, including social justice and its limitations. The American political scientist **M. Waltzer** added another theoretical dimension to the issue of justice, namely the relationship between justice and equality, thus providing room for the idea of social liberalism, which can be characterized as tolerance for State influence in the functioning of the market mechanism.

## **2.6 Liberalism in slovak politics until the parliamentary elections in 2020**

Slovak intellectuals, who reflected on the issues of modernisation of social, national, and political conditions in Slovakia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, paid close attention not just to politics and politicians in the then Austro-Hungarian monarchy, but also to philosophical and political-ideological stimuli coming from different parts of Europe. Some of these intellectuals were fascinated by liberalism, which in its classical variant represented the political and ideological emancipation of opposition ideas to the theory and practice of absolutism. It has opened up room for the defence of religious tolerance, freedom of faith, individualism and new institutional, economic and economic reforms.

The immediate impetus for following liberal modernisation trends was in the political events in the Austrian Empire, which spread even under the influence of Western European liberal ideas and values. They were promoted by **Lajos Kossuth**, the most famous representative of the Hungarian liberal movement, who significantly contributed to the overall modernisation of Historic Hungary and its independence from Austria. The shadowy aspect of this reformer in the political and economic field was the promotion of the idea of a single nation-state whole (the so-called "natio magyrica", with Hungarian as the only diplomatic and administrative language). He did not allow reforms in the national politics area. According to him, the nation is a historical and political category filled by the unity of the population, tied to a certain territory, political institutions and, ultimately, to the State. In Historic Hungary, according to him, only Hungarians and Croats met such conditions.

Despite this controversial view of the top representatives of Hungarian reform political liberalism on the modernisation of the Austrian monarchy, some representatives of Slovak political and public life expressed sympathy for the **Kossuthian** stream of contemporaneous Hungarian politics. Penetration of the liberal idea into Slovak public and political life in the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries got into those concepts of addressing the Slovak issue which in a way corresponded with liberal modernisation trends in the development of civil society in Hungary. It was especially **Palárik's** Christian-liberal concept of addressing the Slovak issue, **Launer's** ethnic-emancipation theory, which was a contribution to addressing the ethnic-cultural process taking place within the modernisation of multilingual Hungary, **Mallý's** reform policy of the "possible", **Záborský's** enlightenment vision of improving the civic and national emancipation of the Slovak countryside, **Blaha's** policy of promoting **Masaryk's** reformist idea of "small work" among the people of the Slovak population, or **Šrobár's** theoretical idea of liberal democracy and its application in the turning point of Czechoslovak political history after 1918. Some Slovak reform intellectuals who presented their political and modernisation projects in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, were seeking inspiration outside the Hungarian political scene. For example, members of the movement united around the magazine *Hlas* were interested by the reforms of Czech intellectuals and politicians, especially the representative of political realism, **T. G. Masaryk** (Gbúrová – Dobiaš: 2014).

We have been encountering liberalism as an ideology and political practice in the Slovak public and political space since 1989. The long years of socialism have meant that a plurality of political thinking has not developed in this country. Liberalism and liberal democracy were taboo theories and political projects that should not be publicly discussed. They were in sharp contrast to the principles of socialist political and economic theory, the essence of which consisted in the defence of the social ownership of the means of production and the monopoly governmental power of a communist-type party.

Since the events of November 1989, political and public life has developed significantly in Slovakia. Within its framework, political parties underwent changes and through them the ideas of various currents of Western political philosophy came to the attention of the civic public. Of these, the ideas and values of conservatism, social democracy and liberalism were most entrenched in the Slovak party system. Liberal democracy has aroused in this area, but it must be emphasised that even in the whole of post-communist Central and Eastern

Europe, the greatest interest of intellectuals, politicians, but also of the civil society. This was because it was the liberal type of democracy in its classical form that brought values and ideas to this territory, which were in direct opposition to the values and ideas of the previous, socialist political system. These included, in particular, the market economic system, freedom of religion, political and civil freedom, the right to property, human rights and the concept of a minimal State. Part of this transformation process included the constant confrontation of these values and ideas with conservative and social-democratic values and ideas, but also with the extremes and weaknesses of the liberal ideological and political concept itself. It can be stated that the values and principles of liberal democracy have taken root in political and social life in Slovakia, although they are not the dominant current in the party-political environment.

The practice of Western democracies to date shows the need to attract a civil society, especially intellectuals, to public discourses on liberalism. In particular, however, how to improve awareness in society and political life of fundamental liberal virtues. In this regard, intellectuals in the Slovak Republic in particular did a positive service after 1989. It is necessary to recall their discussions on various topics of liberal democracy, but also, for example, the implementation of translations of the works of liberal theorists. In this context, attention should be drawn to the Kalligram publishing house, which published the works of the classics of liberalism (**John Dewey, John Stuart Mill**). Slovacontact publishing is to be credited for publishing a translation of the 1993 book by the American social philosopher, philosopher of politics, morality, and culture, **John Rawls**, "*Political Liberalism*".

The second dimension of the presentation of the ideas, thoughts and values of liberalism is mainly related to synthetic and analytical views on the ideology of liberalism, its political and historical dimension. Here it is possible to draw attention especially to the offers of Czech publishers (for example **Heywood, Gray, Hayek, Berlin**), but some interesting book titles have also been published by Slovak publishers (**Król**). Many publications on liberalism in English are available to the professional political-philosophical community. A lot of anthology and journal sources give space for partial views of classical and modern liberal theories, liberal political traditions, but also of the possibilities of promoting liberal ideas in addressing the issues of human society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

From this it is clear that liberalism has the potential to create new party-political units, to participate in the political profiling of the time, to interfere with the quality of civil society, but especially to develop its most original values in

public and private life, such as individualism, freedom, justice, market, contractual relationship, human rights. In order for this to happen, it is necessary to further open a discussion forum in the Slovak professional, political, and public space, which would provide answers to various questions related to the possibilities and preconditions for the functioning of a liberally oriented society. In this regard, it is necessary to draw attention to the discussion forum, which was attended by four Slovak intellectuals (**Samuel Abraham, Egon Gál, Martin Kanovský, František Novosád**), which was also published in journals ("*Spor bez konca*", 2010). This dialogue continues, especially at scientific conferences of political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, ethicists, economists, sociologists and other scientists from the social sciences, economics and humanities. These discussions are important in the profiling of liberal ideas, values and thoughts on the conditions of Slovak politics and Slovak public life.

Political life in Slovakia after 1989 is proof that liberalism penetrated it mainly through liberally oriented political entities, which, however, did not significantly influence the modern political history of Slovakia. This is mainly because they seem closed, intellectual, and elitist. They have a looser hierarchical structure, a lower degree of party discipline, they focus mainly on more educated and richer sections of the population. Due to these characteristics, they were not very successful in the parliamentary elections. The exception is the political party Freedom and Solidarity, which, despite various agenda and personnel turbulences, has been part of parliamentary political entities since 2010. Freedom, solidarity and common sense - these are the values on which it built its agenda and addresses Slovak voters with it, while in 2020 it became part of the government coalition.

## **SOME WORDS BY WAY OF CONCLUSION**

We consider it important to emphasise that the powers related to the evolution of the categories analysed by us in the intellectual tradition of Europe should be perceived as something that enters the scene of being with man, a being whose essence (nature) is simultaneously equipped with the desire to command and willingness to listen, to be a part of nature and at the same time destroy it by their activity (including themselves). The being that is thus still the most and the least reliable factor in the indicated frameworks! Self-awareness and the content saturation of the atmosphere in which we grow up shape individual opinions, actions, feelings, while reciprocally emotional and cognitive

predispositions very significantly affect our sociability. The fact that man does not live in isolation, but implements their substantial dimension of humanity together with other people and through coexistence, is one of the key ones in classifying and analysing the agenda coordinates of dichotomy productivity in political theory and practice. This moment of contradictoriness and paradoxicality ultimately leads us to the idea that once we recognise the moment of active human intervention in the flow of history (we mean their wanted or unwanted, conscious or unconscious, voluntary or involuntary action), there will not remain too many things left to wonder about.

It is not at all surprising, then, that even the current moments in history are marked by an ever-increasing asymmetry between the political eschatology of the elites and the logic of the basic (natural?) life connections. Changes in the global distribution of power are destroying the middle class, labour market segregation has resulted in segregation based on social inequality (social apartheid), the primary target group for investment (concentrated capital power) is global "plutonomy" (about twenty percent of the population the remaining eighty percent are employees without any economic (social) security. The market reduces the freedom to choose to buy goods, individual consumption, not to the area of solidarity or care for others, but perhaps the most obvious manifestation of the (old) new division of modern societies is the multicultural nature of their metropolises, which literally embodies an oligarchic paradox - their nature does not determine the people who live there, but the "global billionaires" for whom these are places to save their money. Thus, one of the most striking consequences of globalisation and the technological revolution is the "non-national" elites, loyal to global economic growth (success), self-interest (prosperity), but the power of which remains thoroughly hidden. The main idea of the democratisation wave in Europe ("*you can't develop economically unless you have democracy*") is thus logically turning into thinking about capitalism (liberalism), which does not necessarily need democracy (open society) for its development, because they are mutually incompatible.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, modelling reality under the guise of rationality obviously helps. Despite the many indisputable signs of progress in the organisation of power, politics, society still remains in the hands of representatives of private supranational

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<sup>8</sup> D. Rodrik speaks of a *global "trilemma"* - a state in which democracy, national self-determination, and economic globalisation cannot be pursued at the same time, because once the territories of sovereign nations are now limited by international law and global guidelines (Rodrik, 2011).

financial and bureaucratic centres, standing above the powers of national parliaments. The State is basically controlled by groups of investors who have enough resources (private power) to set the agenda according to the rules of trade also in the field of ideological direction - due to their share of power, market and profit maximisation. Modern liberal democracies can actually be understood as zones of conflict between different groups of private capital (Chomsky, 2019), embodying undemocratic, absolutist structures, because they function without the possibility of exercising public, democratic control from the bottom up. The consequence of this situation is in the cognitive retardation of the representatives of the power elites, the separation of control and management from politics, and the determination of the nature of the social system by the people who "own" it and thus to a large extent also control it. They preach democracy on behalf of the public, but in fact they control the public on behalf of democracy.

Rationalism, the functionality of modern principles of values or pluralism are not what the most pressing problem in democratic liberal societies is. Maybe it's the unreality of human ambitions in formulating their regulatory ideals in the realm of justifying (natural?) inequalities, maybe it's the resignation to project a simple, understandable vision of a good, decent and friendly environment for all. But we must not forget the idea that if liberal democracy is the definitive form of State establishment, the "*culmination of the ideological development of mankind*" (Fukuyama, 2002, p. 11), then in the context of our storyline reversing the idea of representative democracy to the idea of representative oligarchy completing the development of social, property and economic inequalities of mankind, a compromise between politics, economics and the media spheres on the lasting continuity of prosperity for the rich.

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