

# Self-Government, Development and Political Extremism at the Regional Level: A Case Study from the Banská Bystrica Region in Slovakia<sup>1</sup>

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**Self-Government, Development and Political Extremism at the Regional Level: A Case Study from the Banská Bystrica Region in Slovakia.** This article is a contribution to the debate on specific and interrelated problems of regional government, regional development and the electoral success of radical political forces in post-socialist Europe in the late transition times and during the financial and economic crisis and its aftermath. We document these issues based on the case of the Banská Bystrica region, which is perceived as one of the most problematic territories in Slovakia in terms of socio-economic development. We attempt to explain the political success of the radical far-right political party Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko, observable since 2013, through an assessment of socio-economic data, in-depth interviews, as well as statistical analysis. We suggest that the persistently difficult social and economic situation, the contradictory population structure and processes (ageing, migration, multi-ethnicity), less successful regional development policies of central state and EU cohesion policy goals and implementation, as well as the weaker position and capacities of regional self-government have contributed to growing apathy and disillusionment in mainstream political parties, rising Euroscepticism and finally the electoral success of the far-right in this region.  
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## Introduction

In recent decades, the issue of regionalism and regional self-government has attracted significant attention from academia in both parts of united Europe. The situation in the Anglo-Saxon world was analysed by Keating (1997) as well as Herrschel and Newman (2000), but regionalism and related topics seemed to be much more attractive in the context of the transformation processes of Central and Eastern Europe, including Slovakia. (Surazska et al. 1997; Wollmann 1997; Jordan 2003; Brusis 2005; Bruszt 2008, Pitschel – Bauer 2009; Pálne Kovács 2015) The significance of the regional dimension

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was heightened by rising attention to regional development and regional disparities, both within the EU and individual states. The regional level is also debated as an opportunity for rising political parties, including extremist ones. (See e.g. Kestilä – Söderlund 2007; Schakel 2015) It can serve as one of the beginning platforms for increasing the political visibility, influence and progress of such parties within the governmental hierarchy.

The issues of regional self-government and regional development have often been addressed in recent years in Slovakia. Mesežnikov and Nižňanský (2002), and Slavík (2003) in particular have mentioned them in terms of public administration reform in the Slovak Republic. The role of political parties in the decentralization of public administration and constituting regional level in the three Central European countries (Slovakia, Czech Republic and Poland) was previously highlighted by O'Dwyer (2006) and Yoder (2013). Regionalization and its related reforms in Slovakia as well as the first decade of regional self-government functioning were also covered by Buček (2011). The existence of deep regional disparities and regional development policies has attracted the attention of many scholars, e.g. Sokol (2001), Korec (2005). Furthermore, an increasing number of studies combine administrative issues, development in the political environment (e.g. Halás – Klapka 2016), and the rising role of extremist parties and potential sources of their support, including in the regional context. (e.g., Gyárfášová – Mesežnikov 2015; Hlavac 2016; Mikuš et al. 2016) Nevertheless, the depth of research remains insufficient, as many aspects require elaboration. It also concerns conditions suitable for the emergence and initial strengthening of such political parties.

The aim of this study is to contribute to research on the specific and interrelated problems of regional government, regional development and the electoral success of radical political forces in post-socialist Europe in the late transition times and during the financial and economic crisis and its aftermath. We document these issues with references to the Banská Bystrica region (in Slovak – Banskobystrický kraj), which in terms of socio-economic development, is perceived as one of the most problematic territories in Slovakia. The paper also describes its recent social and economic situation, as well as the effectiveness of national regional policy and EU cohesion policy. Based on an analysis of selected social and economic indicators, as well as the perceptions of local experts, we strive to reveal the factors underlying the social and economic development of this region. We also attempt to explain the success of the far-right political party Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko (ĽS NS, in English as Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia) and primarily its leader Marián Kotleba in the 2013 regional elections by means of statistical analysis. We maintain that the persistent lack of improvement in the social and economic situation, the complicated population structure and processes, ineffective state

regional development policies and the EU cohesion policy (goals, implementation), as well as a weaker position and capacities of regional self-government have contributed to growing apathy and disillusionment in mainstream political parties, rising Euroscepticism and the growth of extremist parties in this region. Our primary focus is not on LS NS as such, but the social, economic, political and institutional context that contributed to its early electoral success at the regional level. Nor do we intend to provide an in-depth analysis of the development of LS NS, or other sources of its political support which cover a wide range of historical, social, political as well as geographical aspects. (e.g. Nociar 2012; Kluknavská 2013; Kluknavská – Smolík 2016; Mikuš et al. 2016; Bahna – Zagraban 2017)

### **Context and theoretical background**

#### ***Regional self-government and its position in Slovakia***

Although local self-government was introduced immediately after the change of regime, in 1990, the “meso level” of government continued to be absent for more than a decade in Slovakia. The regional self-government as a separate level of government began to operate after the first regional elections held in 2001. Its introduction in Slovakia reflects a set of processes and expectations concerning this scale of policy making in Europe. In general, the main intentions in institutionalizing such level of governance are to strengthen democracy, economic performance and socio-spatial cohesion. (e.g. Scott 2009) This shift also reflected a set of influential concepts such as Europeanization, new regionalism, subsidiarity, and multilevel governance. (e.g. Herrschel – Newman 2000; Bruszt 2008; Pitschel – Bauer 2009; Pálne Kovács 2015) Now, it is one of three key levels (central, regional, local) of public administration with elected bodies in Slovakia. Both sub-state levels of government are autonomous and independent of each another. Nevertheless, regional self-government continues to suffer from many contradictory developments that make it less influential than originally expected (e.g. compared to local self-government).

Since the early stages of post-socialist transformation, Slovak public administration has followed the dual model in its organisation (separate lines of state administration and self-government). Necessary decentralization processes were implemented in line with prevailing approaches to regional government and regional policy in the European Union, albeit with a delay. (Brusis 2005; Buček 2011; Yoder 2013) Creating the second level of self-government was a key part of public administration reform gradually enforced from 1998 to 2006. The transfer of numerous competences from state administration to local and regional self-governments, as well as fiscal decentralization, can be described as one of the most important political

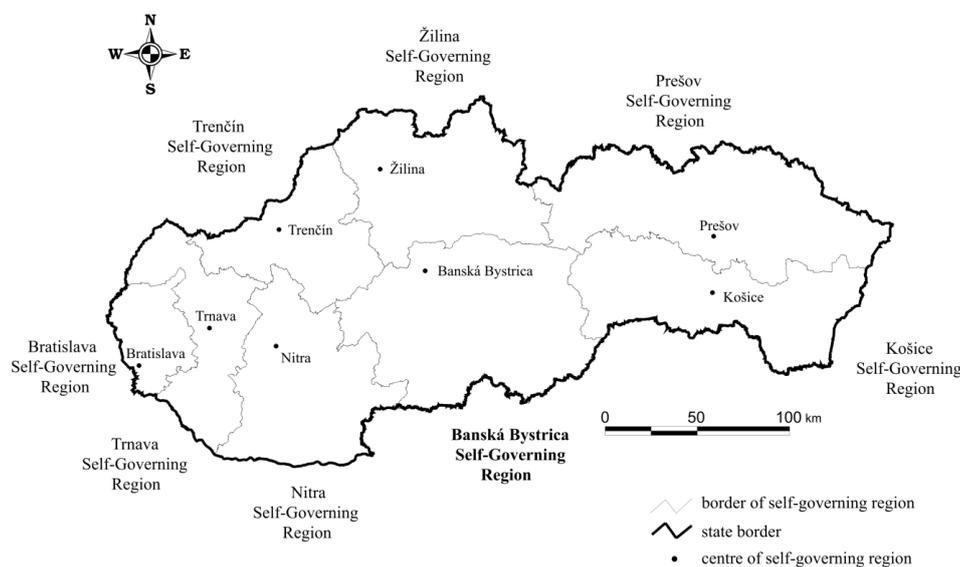
reforms carried out in Slovakia since 1989. As a result, a new level of governance with a democratic framework and a stronger impact on social and economic life in the regions was established. Drawing on international experience (e.g. Scherpereel 2010), regional self-governments should multiply implementation capacities in regional development, increase their governance efficiency thanks to more active cooperation with EU institutions in Brussels, expand regional cooperation (particularly of an international character) and strengthen their position towards the central state.

According to valid legislation (Act No. 302/2001), the self-governing region takes care of the all-round development of its territory and the needs of its population. The powers managed by regional self-government relate to such important fields as education (secondary, including professional, vocational), social services (e.g. social-service housing, housing for the elderly), health services (e.g. regional hospitals), regional transport (e.g. regional road networks) and regional culture (e.g. regional theatres, libraries, museums). However, in comparison, local self-government can be considered as a more influential level of government from the point of view of the everyday life of citizens (with powers over lower levels of education, social assistance, technical and social infrastructure development and maintenance, environmental services and local planning). Residents of self-governing regions participate in regional public affairs primarily through the regional self-government bodies. Citizens have the right to vote and be elected to the Regional Council (in Slovak – zastupiteľstvo samosprávneho kraja). They can be elected and vote for the Regional Chairperson (In Slovak – predseda samosprávneho kraja), in two-round elections (the winner must obtain more than 50 % of the votes). The lesser legitimacy of elected bodies of regional self-government caused by low participation in regional elections is one of the greatest challenges for their future (it was only slightly above 20 % in the last two regional elections). Despite the key role of the Regional Council in the adoption of decisions and regional by-laws, the position of the directly elected Regional Chairperson is also very influential (e.g. in representing the region, confirming all decisions, influencing activities of the Regional Council Office, and setting agendas). The two-round election format for the Regional Chairperson was valid until the 2013 election, when it was replaced by simple one-round majority system, which has been applied since the 2017 elections for a five-year period 2017 – 2022 (Act No. 180/2014 as amended).

The suitability of territorial division at the regional level has been debated for years. In 1996, the division of the country into eight regions (Figure 1) to serve state administration purposes entered into force. However, this territorial division did not respect the boundaries of naturally existing and traditional regions. Unfortunately, despite an attempt to change the regional territorial

administrative division of the country after 1998 (e.g. for 12 regions in 2001), it has also been applied for the organization of regional self-governments. When assessing the (un)suitability of the territorial division of the country and the regional arrangements, namely the delimitation of territorial units, regionalization criteria needs to be taken into consideration. (Bezák 1993; Sloboda – Dostál 2005) The unsuitability of the current territorial division has had an impact on the subsequent distortion of overall regional characteristics and reduces the efficiency of regional institutions and policy implementation at the regional level.

Figure 1: Territorial division of Slovakia into self-governing regions



Source: Act No. 302/2001 Coll. On the self-government of higher territorial units

Regional self-government is considered a key player in regional development at the regional level. Its powers are important in the regional development perspective, but of a less executive nature (e.g. regional physical planning, regional development planning, coordination in tourism development). Nevertheless, it was anticipated that regional self-government would be important in the initiation, funding and coordination of regional development in partnership with other entities (not only regional). For the purpose of regional development, regional self-government should be active in the European funds

agenda, especially in the field of their programming and management. (Buček 2011) Important roles in regional development governance are also held by local self-governments, especially in larger cities. As elected regional councillors, many representatives of local self-government efficiently participate in regional self-government and regional development issues.

### ***Regional development theories and regional disparities***

Issues regarding regional development and social and economic disparities are of crucial importance in Slovakia (Banerjee – Jarmuzek 2009), which is frequently criticised by the EU and other international bodies, as well as many scholars for the slow decline of such internal differences between countries and regions. (Barro – Sala-i-Martin 1995; Tondl 1999; Giannetti 2002; Cuadrado-Roura – Parellada 2013) This is also a matter of political and public dispute within Slovakia. In reality, practical regional development policies reflect numerous theories and the interventions of many bodies. The extent to which models are adopted, approaches are applied, and institutions are involved in regional development in Slovakia, as well as the priorities and measures that are suitable and efficient in particular regions are implemented is often debated. Many regional development theories have limited success in underdeveloped regions and post-socialist countries. It also influences the efficiency of European cohesion policy (including EU funds priorities) and national regional development policies based on dominant theories.

We can distinguish between two basic approaches to regional development. (e.g. Blažek – Uhlíř 2011) The first is ideologically linked to a neoclassical and neoliberal theoretical basis (classical school of economic thought and its successors) emphasizing the natural long term countervailing tendencies in the development of the region. Differences between regions are perceived as natural due to the different conditions and regional peculiarities of different origins. The positives that regional differences offer are emphasized, notably through specialization options, decentralization and a greater plurality of views and approaches to solving the problems of the regions. The second stance is based on Keynesian, (post- or even neo-) Marxist theory and, to a certain extent, the theory of institutionalism. The spontaneous nature of capitalism evoking social injustice and associated with social instability concentrated in problem regions is seen as a cause of regional disparities. Supporters of this line are convinced that without state interference trends that widen the gaps would then exist over the long-term or permanently. (Blažek 1996) The regional policy of the European Union has evolved based on these approaches. Besides the strong redistributive features, there is also pressure for public-private cooperation and the protection of free market competition and limited state aid. It is complemented by the regional policies of nation states and the

rising role of regional and local governments focusing on endogenous development and local initiatives.

Regional development theory has paid more attention to the competitive, progressive and successful regions. Such theories of regional development have been established for decades and have undergone several stages of evolution. Since the 1980s, numerous new concepts and theories of regional development have emerged, such as the theory of manufacturing zones (e.g. Becattini 1978; Brusco 1982), flexible specialization (e.g. Piore – Sabel 1984; Scott 1988), learning regions (e.g. Saxenian 1991), clusters (Asheim et al. 2008), regional innovation strategies (e.g. Cooke 2001; Radosevic 2002), and global production networks (e.g. Ernst – Kim 2002), which initiated relatively intense (and often very sharp) interdisciplinary discussion on basic theoretical, epistemological and methodological issues of regional research. They also influenced, in various scope, regional development policies, their goals and measures. Lagging regions were usually recommended to learn from the best ones, or grasp what could be applicable in their regional conditions, combined with “social state” guarantees by the central state. The ideas on place-based regional development and smart specialization (e.g. Barca et al. 2012; McCann – Ortega-Argilés 2013) represent a promising shift in this context. It is important to apply the policy of regional development based on knowledge related to the strengths and weaknesses of the area, while combining an integrated top-down and bottom up framework. (Crescenzi – Rodríguez-Pose 2011) A specific part of the debate concerning the applicability of approaches to regional development has developed in more advanced countries (regions) and their transferability to post-socialist conditions has been discussed. This is also the case for many concepts that entered into the background of EU and/or national regional development policies. Ženka et al. (2014) outlined the limited transferability of such concepts as regional innovation systems and clusters in Central Eastern Europe regions, and noted the more promising applicability of the concept of global production networks.

There also exists a tradition of the critical assessment of the influence of EU regional policy on regional development (also known as “cohesion policy”), including the role of regional government and regional institutions in Central and Eastern Europe. (e.g. Bachtler – McMaster 2008; Scherpereel 2010; Ferry – McMaster 2013; Capello – Perucca 2015) In general, they argue that there is no guarantee that the EU framework and Structural Funds will necessarily promote “ideal” regionalism and “admirable” regional development. It is recognized that many CEE regions are facing long-term economic development and restructuring problems. Even well-intended EU and national policies contrast with limited institutional capacities and financial resources at the regional level. We also have to take into account the long tradition of

centralised and sectoral policy making EU-wide, or nation-wide development priorities that do not fit all regions, especially those with a lower degree of development. The need for more specific approaches (e.g. Capello and Perucca 2015), indicates that regional policy should also concentrate on those areas with a lower degree of globalization and which are characterized by the presence of second-tier cities. Indeed, these territories constitute fertile ground for the political success of radical parties, especially those of a far-right orientation. Therefore, calls for cohesion policy reform are not uncommon (and some adaptations are observable) when considering the growing support for extremist parties who have been successful, especially under the phenomenon of second-order elections. (Jeffery – Hough 2003; Schakel 2013)

### ***Extremism and its context***

The period in post-World War II Europe was characterised by established democratic systems of a liberal orientation, increased political and social stability, and the developing idea of the welfare state, with varying degrees of durability from place to place. By the end of the 1960s, the relatively strong level of political turbulence across the European continent resulted in social conflicts taking place to a greater or lesser intensity in the coming decades. (Betz 1993)

Despite the fact that some authors date the emergence of extremist political forces in Western Europe at the second half of the 1980s, the term itself has a considerably longer history. According to Backes and Jesse (1993), those formations which were considered as extremist and with a significant deviation from dominant political forces were identified in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jaschke (2006) claims that these political tendencies appeared firstly as variants of conservative and socialist orientation, in response to the liberal ideas of the Enlightenment and the French Revolution.

However, extremist stereotypes are common not only for members of extremist formations, but also in the minds of people who are usually negatively, although not firmly entrenched in an extremist way of thinking. In Western Europe, this hidden potential has contributed to the surprising success of extremist parties. (Backes – Jesse 1993)

In regard to the increasing popularity of the far-right parties, the outstanding study by Langenbacher and Schellenberg (2011) drew on the examples of the formation of right-wing extremism in 13 European countries, and provided measures to combat it. The authors note that although the radical right has common features (in terms of content as well as political and marketing strategies), their spatial projection is regionally differentiated in Europe. Despite the gradual increase in the significance of regional elections, comparative studies are still relatively sporadic. (Hearl et al. 1996; Thorlakson

2007; Jeffery – Hough 2009) Within Central Europe, there has been increased interest in the study of far-right parties and their success in elections, including regional elections when the phenomenon became more serious. (Kopeček 2007; Mareš 2009; Gyárfášová – Mesežnikov 2015; Mikuš et al. 2016)

For scholars, the emergence of far-right parties logically generated the need to explain the reasons behind them, as well as different spatial and temporal aspects of their support. Over time, two basic approaches to the study of this phenomenon – demand theory and supply-side theory were formed. (Eatwell 2003; Norris 2005) Demand side theories reflect on the importance of regional and local ethnic conditions, immigration, protest votes against the mainstream parties and the socio-economic situation in the area under study. (Mayer – Perrineau 1992; Lubbers et al. 2002) On the other hand, supply side theories stress the impact of the existing party system, party leaders and media influence. (Golder 2003) Moreover, regional elections can be seen as second national election (based on second-order election theory), since the campaign largely addressed current issues of regional and not national politics; thus, these elections are rather understood as a test for the ruling parties as well as the opposition and their chances to succeed in "more important" elections (usually parliamentary ones). It was determined that economic factors such as unemployment, one of the main issues of national political debate, was far more important to voters than public finance issues of regional self-government. (Jerôme – Jérôme-Speziari 2000; Bussi et al. 2004) For individual countries and their regions, there is a great variation in terms of the electoral system, ethnic relationships, party competition and socio-economic conditions, which inevitably reflects the need for a special approach to assessing the reason for the success of radical parties in regional elections.

Studies dealing with the issue of the support for extremist parties of a right-wing orientation have emphasized the importance of several contributing factors, but within the academic community there is little clear consensus. The immigration effect, supported by a certain group of scholars, is commonly mentioned (Anderson 1996; Knigge 1998; Martin 1996), while others do not consider it as important in this context (Mayer – Perrineau 1989) or operating only in part. (Givens 2000) Other factors such as unemployment and the institutionalism of elections are equally questionable. The quorum for access to Parliament is an important factor for Jackman and Volpert (1996), while Swank and Betz (1995) attribute only indirect significance to this issue. In the case of unemployment, Knigge (1998) along with Jackman and Volpert (1996) arrived at converse conclusions, as some identified a surprisingly negative relationship between the unemployment rate and support of the radical right, while Lewis-Beck and Mitchell (1993) among others, stated that these variables must be evaluated in the context of immigration flows. Many of these studies are

hindered by a number of methodological problems primarily associated with the selection of entering parameters as well as the interpretation of their outcomes. (Golder 2003)

Based on the socio-economic problems of the countries and regions within them, the increased support for political parties and movements forming their agenda alongside Euroscepticism is understandable to some extent when considering the recent context of the European Union project. As declared by Hartleb (2012), these movements can be classified as either populist or extremist, with an effort to strengthen the role of nation states within Europe. It is now possible to talk about the second generation of such parties which have benefited from the problems generated by the global financial and economic crisis, that has had different effects from region to region, but also by the uncertain future for the United Europe project, as well as resignation in solving problems requiring comprehensive solutions. Despite enjoying EU membership, individual countries and regions have to cope with serious financial difficulties, and thus the debate about the EU's ability to tackle the recent challenges can be viewed as legitimate. Euroscepticism is largely considered as a mere right-wing ideology, reinforcing the importance of nation states as well as the centralization of national interests, but in this context it is also important to be aware of its left-wing subtype struggling for the radical reform of Europe, and whose central theme is linked to the idea of social justice, at all levels of decentralized forms of governance, the regional level included. (Conti – Memoli 2011)

### **Methodology**

This study is based primarily on documents and relevant publications, standard statistical data and statistical analysis. Part of the source information was prepared within the 7FP GRINCOH project conducted in selected regions of Central and Eastern European countries, including the Banská Bystrica region. (Buček 2014) The research included 11 extensive semi-structured (in-depth) interviews carried out with professionals dealing with social and economic development issues and working in important institutions active in the Banská Bystrica region. (Annex 1) They focused on social and economic development in the region after 1989, with a special emphasis on the period after EU accession, the role of regional policy and EU cohesion policy, as well as the impact of the global financial crisis. We reflect a set of key regional development factors and concepts, including technological and sectoral restructuring, the quality of human capital linked to economic development, the role of the regional institutional environment, the innovation process, the role of cities and city regions, governance and development planning. (See e.g. Grossman – Helpman 1991; Sen 1994; Cooke 2001; Pike et al. 2006; Scott –

Storper 2007; Bruszt 2008) We attempt to reveal transformation problems as well as the strengths and weaknesses in the institutional environment, regional development, national regional policy and the effects of EU Structural Funds. Since our ambition is to cover the early stages of extremism support, the main sources of information are from 2011 to 2014, when the first well-known far-right party in Slovakia, Kotleba – Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko succeeded in the regional elections in the Banská Bystrica region. As this party gained the chairmanship in the regional parliament after 2013 elections, we conducted a correlation analysis with socio-economic and election data that preceded this breaking point in the modern history of Slovak domestic politics.

In the analytically oriented part of the work, we contemplate the problems of political success concerning just ĽS NS, in which Marián Kotleba, the party leader, was able to gain the chairmanship of the region for a four year term (based on the results of the 2013 regional election). Due to the very low turnout (20.11 % state-wide, 24.59 % regionally), as well as the evaluation of the victory of ĽS NS, the most important far right political entity of the recent period in the Slovak Republic, we decided to use the results of the parliamentary elections held in March of 2012 when analysing voting behaviour under socio-economic conditions. We gave preference to this type of election because it was characterised by the highest turnout among all types of ballots and thus it has the greatest informative value (59.11 % state-wide and 57.28 % regionally). Moreover, the spatial pattern related to the results of these two types of elections is similar when evaluating ĽS NS election outcomes within the Banská Bystrica region. The correlation test shows moderate and strong statistical dependence between ĽS NS's parliamentary and regional election results at the district level (Pearson correlation coefficient for ĽS NS election results at district level: 0.535; based on the order of districts by ĽS NS election results: 0.730). We were not able to run this test for the local level since spatially disaggregated regional election data is not available. In the next step of the analysis, the parliamentary election results for this party are observed not only at the district level, but also at the less aggregated community level. By applying the regression analysis method as well as the values of the Pearson correlation coefficient, we attempt to identify a statistical link between electoral support for parties on both sides of the left-right ideological scale (from standard nationalist parties up to the far right and the far left orientation) and the socio-economic characteristics of the territory, since we expect that support for radical parties is directly related to their character and the territorial differentiation of their values. For this purpose, we operated with the election results of six parties with a radical, nationalist or ethnic minority orientation, ĽS NS as a priority, but also the Slovak National Party (SNS), Nation and Justice (NaS), the Party of the Hungarian Community (SMK-MKP), Bridge-

Bridge (Most-Híd), and the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS), as well as the values of the socio-economic indicators for all 79 districts of Slovakia as follows:

- Population of Slovak ethnicity (based on the census carried out on 21 May 2011)
- Population of Hungarian ethnicity (based on the 2011 census)
- Population of Roma ethnicity (based on the 2011 census)
- Population with primary education (based on the 2011 census)
- Population with secondary education (based on the 2011 census)
- Population with tertiary education (based on the 2011 census)
- Average monthly wage (for 2012)
- Unemployment rate (as at 31 March 2012)
- Benefit in material need (and the contribution to the benefit) per capita (as at 31 March 2012)
- Dwellings completed (for 2012)

For individual communities and districts, data on the elections and socio-structural situation from the population and housing census, as well as data of an economic character were obtained from the databases of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Subsequently, data entering into the correlation model, in order to identify the statistical links between the variables under consideration, were based on the available statistical data. The role of the regression and correlation analyses is to determine whether any mathematical formulae of systemic circumstances affect the examined statistical causality.

Standard modelling attempts to identify a functional relationship between explaining variable  $y$  and regressors  $x$ ,  $y_i = f(x_1^1, x_1^2, \dots, x_1^k)$  using linear regression equation:

$$y_i = X_i\beta + \varepsilon_i, \quad j = 1, \dots, n$$

where  $i$  refers to a given spatial unit,  $i = 1, \dots, n$ ,  $y_i$  refers to the value of the explaining variable:  $X_i$  represents (1 x k) a vector of explanatory variables,  $\beta$  embodies a given coefficient vector and  $\varepsilon_i$  represents random error. The coefficient vector  $\beta$  is obtained by the method of least squares.

In statistics, the Pearson correlation coefficient ( $r$ ) expresses the degree of mutual correlation (of a linear relationship) between two variables (the independent X variable and the dependent Y variable). This indicator is widely used in many scientific disciplines to measure the power (linkage) of a linear relationship between two variables, which in numerical terms may vary between +1 and -1. A value of +1 expresses the maximum value of the direct

linear relationship, while a value of -1 reflects the maximum indirect linear relationship between the variables under consideration. The Pearson correlation coefficient is calculated for interval and ratio variables. It represents a parametric test that assumes a normal distribution of variables. (Robinson 1998)

This rate was first used by Francis Galton at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is defined by the following formula:

$$\frac{n \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \cdot y_i - \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n y_i}{\sqrt{\left( n \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n x_i^2 - \left( \sum_{i=1}^n x_i \right)^2 \right) \left( n \cdot \sum_{i=1}^n y_i^2 - \left( \sum_{i=1}^n y_i \right)^2 \right)}}$$

where one dataset {x1,...,xn} contains n values and another dataset {y1,...,yn} contains n values

Of course, a simple linear regression and correlation cannot cover all of the causalities that might come into consideration (e.g. of a non-linear character, the context of spatial regression), but we believe that given the overall profile of our study and its objectives, there is no urgent need to apply advanced mathematical methods. However, it is necessary to ensure that the findings are appropriately interpreted in the context of all potential impacts as well as the effects of ecological fallacy.

## **Banská Bystrica region – regional development and extremism in politics**

### ***Location, settlement and population development patterns***

The development of the Banská Bystrica region is influenced by its less advantageous location between the two main poles of the Slovak economy – Bratislava and Košice. It also suffers from the absence of larger urban centres, negative demographic characteristics (e.g. ageing, emigration, unfavourable educational structure) and is complicated by diverse ethnic conditions.

Regarding the data (2012) of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic linked to the temporal context of the study, this region, which is located in the southern part of central Slovakia (also as a border region with Hungary), is the largest in the country in terms of area (9,454 km<sup>2</sup>), and 5<sup>th</sup> largest in terms of population (655,359 inhabitants), and last in terms of population density (69 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup>). It is composed by contrasting mountains and valley areas. Its settlement structure is fragmented (24 cities and 492 rural self-governments), and unbalanced, with a lack of large urban centres that could serve as development accelerators. The two largest cities are Banská Bystrica (approx. 80,000 inhabitants) and Zvolen (more than 40,000 inhabitants); both are

located in the north-western part of the region. The largest cities in the south-eastern part of the region are smaller (Lučenec 28,000 inhabitants and Rimavská Sobota 24,000 inhabitants).

The varied population structure and processes (e.g. age, education, ethnicity, migration) are perceived as being an important indicator concerning the development prospects of the region. For example, the ageing index of the population, which is growing in all regions of Slovakia, is slightly higher here compared to the national average. Older cohorts are concentrated mainly in the districts with the largest cities of Banská Bystrica and Zvolen, along with the adjacent district of Žiar nad Hronom, located in the north-western part of the region. The younger population centres are found in the south-eastern part of the region.

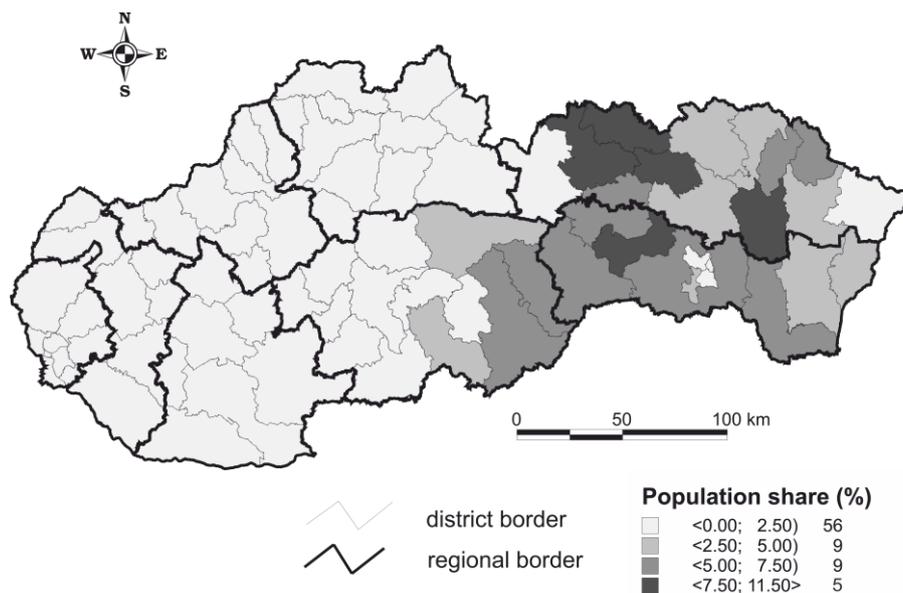
The level of education of the population living in the Banská Bystrica region is characterised by an above average share of inhabitants with no more than primary school education (16.43 % compared to the national average of 14.98 %) and a relatively low percentage of persons with tertiary education (12.33 % vs 13.86 %). This can be viewed as a serious factor for the social and economic development of the region. The proportion of the population with a secondary education is almost identical to the national average (52.72 % vs 52.63 %).

The Banská Bystrica region is ethnically diversified. Compared to other regions in Slovakia, it has the third highest share of Hungarian (10.2 %) and Roma minorities (2.4 %). The behaviour of Roma can be considered as special when a census is taken, as they are usually unwilling to reveal their own ethnicity; as a result, their genuine number is estimated to be fourfold higher than the reported number. Partially, this is due to the fact that during the socialist era they were not recognized as an official minority. Moreover, Roma often do not distinguish between citizenship and ethnicity. Therefore, it is assumed that Roma compose up to one fifth of the total regional population (Mušínska et al. 2014). Since a significant percentage of the Roma population lives in permanent poverty, this constitutes one of the most serious obstacles for the socio-economic development of the region. The greater territorial representation of the Roma minority is located in the eastern and southern parts of the region (Figure 2), while the territorial concentration of the Hungarian minority is spread along the border with Hungary.

Along with the Prešov region, the Banská Bystrica region has the least favourable migration numbers. It loses hundreds of inhabitants to migration each year (e.g. about 900 inhabitants in 2012), especially in favour of more developed parts of the country (with the highest flow to the Bratislava region). However, total emigration is significantly higher compared to the official data. While in the south-eastern part of the region there is a very important outflow

of young people in general, in the western part the problem is related to qualified young people in search of better employment opportunities in other more developed regions in Slovakia or abroad; this region has among the highest numbers of citizens working abroad.

Figure 2: Territorial division of the Roma population at district level in Slovakia as at 21 May 2011 (Census)



Source: The 2011 Population and Housing Census, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2011

Along with unemployment, ageing, low educational level and the poverty of certain social groups, extensive emigration is one of the most serious problems of the region in terms of its further socio-economic development.

#### ***Post-socialist era achievements in social cohesion and development***

The nature, effects and perception of the post-socialist transformation in terms of the social situation, economic development and availability of basic public services are important in the formation of the expectations and attitudes of citizens. It has been generally concluded by respondents that the social and economic situation in the region has substantially changed during the previous two decades. It also underwent a substantial increase of its productive capacities and living standards. However, the situation on the labour market (unemployment, wages) is far from satisfactory. There are also shortcomings regarding accessibility to public services and facilities. Along with the Prešov

region, the Banská Bystrica region has long been considered as the most depressed with the worst values in the main social and economic indicators within Slovak regions (e.g. GDP per capita: 9,518 EUR in 2012, STATdat 2012).

The respondents usually stated that there were only very minor remnants of the former socialist regime. They mentioned more general influences of the previous regime, such as sustained older economic structure and spatial development priorities (e.g., non-adjusted priorities in transport infrastructure). Many “monuments” of socialist development are still visible in untransformed and unused industrial and agriculture premises spread across the region. There are still uncompleted reconstructions of old socialist housing stock, obsolete public buildings and cultural heritage monuments, as well as the unreconstructed peripheral road network and technical infrastructure networks. Furthermore, environmental damage caused during the socialist period (e.g., in industrial and military locations) has yet to be resolved.

The accessibility of main public services is generally considered by respondents as good. Occasional problems with accessibility are caused by a very fragmented settlement network and the peripheral location of particular sub-regions. This includes difficulties in the operation of very small schools, fewer places in nursery schools, more distant health centres and the absence of shopping facilities. The situation is better in the more developed and urbanised north-western part of the region. Due to the direct involvement of the state, the region is served well by standard labour market services.

The education networks at elementary and secondary levels is well developed. They are financed mostly by the state via local and regional self-governments. Numerous school facilities have been renovated and modernized through the use of EU funds. Some respondents mentioned the deterioration of secondary professional and vocational training. The previous network had been partly re-oriented in their training profile (also due to the collapse of selected sectors of the regional economy). At present, a stronger position is held by education for the service economy and administration. On the other hand, an absence of a young prepared work-force in selected technical professions has arisen. Due to the less positive social situation of households, access to quality secondary education has decreased; one respondent mentioned the decreased ability to pay costs to study outside daily travel to school.

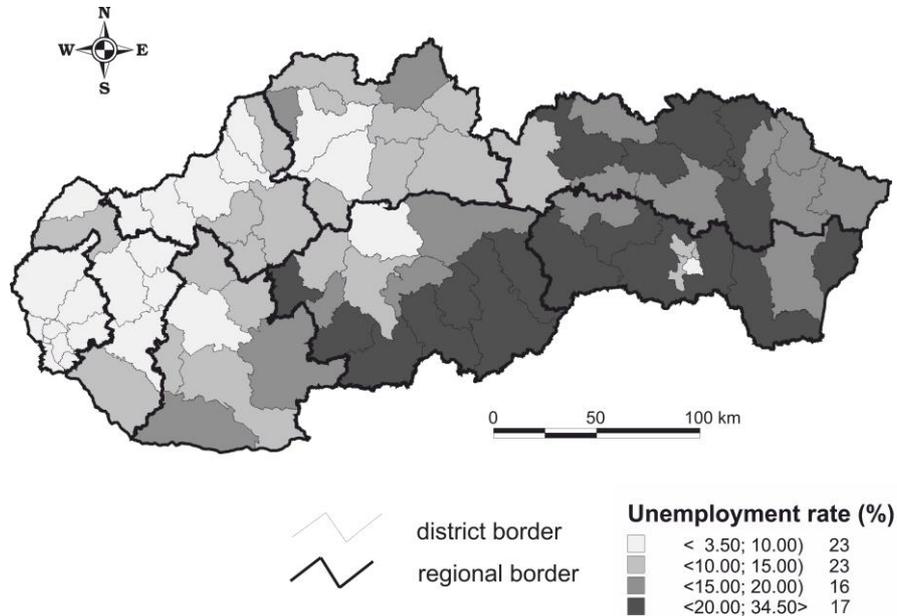
There are standard opportunities for university education within the region. Two leading universities (Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica and the Technical University in Zvolen) have a total of about 14,000 students (2012). Nevertheless (as several respondents confirmed), they do not provide a full spectrum of university programmes (being significantly weaker in technical, ICT and sciences programmes). There are also other universities not far from

the region (in the cities of Nitra, Žilina, Ružomberok, Martin) and two small universities specialised in art (visual, drama, music).

Due to the well organised and state guaranteed social system, the scale of social problems has been reduced. The at-risk-of poverty rate in this region is 15.6 % (2012), compared to the national average of 13.2 %. The social system is under permanent attention from all government levels and has improved in the last ten years thanks to changes in legislation and investments. Local self-governments are required to prepare and implement local community plans concerning the social situation and to formulate needed measures in this field. Parts of the powers in daily assistance have been decentralised and are provided by local self-governments that are able to respond to many social problems immediately. Much larger attention to Roma communities (which is a more complex problem concerning their living conditions and access to work and education) is required. The more difficult prevention of social problems can be found in micro-regions composed of very small villages too remote from urban centres, facing hardship and the cost of access to centres of employment.

The poor social and economic situation is demonstrated by the high unemployment rate in the Banská Bystrica region (14.9 %, STATdat 2015) and above average employment in the public sector. Compared to other Slovak regions, the unemployment rate has been the highest – in 2012, it was above 20 %. (Figure 3) At the turn of the millennium, the unemployment rate in the Banská Bystrica region even reached 23.8 % (STATdat 2002). Afterwards, thanks to more positive economic development, the unemployment rate was reduced by almost ten percentage points, to below 15 % (14.1, STATdat 2007). However, following the outbreak of the global economic crisis, unemployment began to grow and was approaching the 20 % level. The problem of this region is not only the unemployment rate, but also the fact that in positive economic times, the decrease in the number of people out of work is of the slowest. When the research was being conducted, the Banská Bystrica region could be divided into the south and east struggling with a 25-35 % unemployment rate and, on the other hand, the north and west, with values ranging from 10 to 20 % (especially in the industrial and service based districts of the region). As a result of the transformation processes, lack of interest by larger investors and the absence of deeper restructuring of the regional economy, the Banská Bystrica region has also taken the leading position among Slovak regions in the share of employment in the public sector (e.g., public administration and social security – 12.8 %, education – 10.6 %, STATdat 2012). Nevertheless, industry is a very important source of workplaces with 27.7 % (mostly manufacturing), e.g. compared to 3.5 % in agriculture. (STATdat 2012)

Figure 3: Registered unemployment rate at district level in Slovakia as at 31 March 2012



Source: STATdat Database, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2012

It is important to mention that the region substantially influenced the economic development of the Hungarian and Austro-Hungarian states (e.g., during early industrialisation of then Hungary). However, it was marginalised in economic terms during inter-war Czechoslovakia. The regional economy lost its traditional links to the rest of former Hungary and faced a more competitive environment within the newly established Czechoslovakia. The economic structure of the region was substantially changed by “socialist industrialisation” with large investments in various kinds of industry spread across the region. However, this feature of the planned economy structure made it vulnerable and less competitive during the post-socialist transformation to a market economy after 1989. Despite the collapse and downsizing of a substantial part of “the old economy”, there are still important companies in operation. Old traditions continue to offer many opportunities thanks to an experienced workforce and knowledge of the market. Any developmental consideration is influenced by the fact that the region has two diverse parts – the more developed north and west, and the less developed south and east.

### ***Impact of regional governance***

One of reasons for the introduction of regional self-government was its impact on the extensively perceived regional development. It should be at the core of the regional governance framework oriented on the mobilisation of in-region capacities and resources, as well as efforts to increase the region's attractiveness in the eyes of outside investors. Nevertheless, a set of sub-optimum circumstances since the introduction of the regions has undermined these expectations. In addition to the already mentioned territorial division and interrelated lack of clear regional identity, combined with weak electoral participation and political instability (based on the 2013 regional election results, for the first time in the modern history of Slovakia a representative of a radical political force became the chairman of a regional self-government), it is the story of long term financial scarcity and financial autonomy, less efficient planning and programming, slowly progressing regional institutional environment building and its efficiency. Despite almost 15 years of functioning, the high expectations concerning the role of regional self-government in regional development have not been sufficiently fulfilled. The regional institutional environment and its participants face limited autonomy, a lack of resources and less efficient cooperation and policy implementation capacities.

Fiscal decentralization introduced a more autonomous financing system of sub-state governments in 2005. However, both levels of sub-state government lack sufficient resources, especially as the financial and fiscal crises expanded. Strong limits in financial autonomy indicate the dependence on transfers from the central state (tax and non-tax about 80 %) and its own weak resource base. Another issue is the high level of mandatory expenditures (obligatory expenditures based on legislation) and budget expenditures. They usually oscillate at about 90 % of total expenditures in the case of regional self-governments, and during the economic crisis years, they were even higher. (Buček 2011) The lack of free resources in fact limits the initiative and expansion of self-government activities, as well as their investments. The total annual budget of the Banská Bystrica self-governing region was slightly above EUR 150 mil. and the total debt exceeded EUR 30 mil. For comparison, the budget of the City of Banská Bystrica exceeded EUR 50 mil. (City of Banská Bystrica 2013) and in the case of the City of Zvolen it was EUR 27 mil. (City of Zvolen 2013).

Besides regional self-government, the Regional Development Agency, the Regional branch of SARIO (Slovak Agency for Investments and Trade Development), the Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business and Innovation Centre represent other important institutions influencing regional development in this region. A dispersed set of offices are responsible for labour and social affairs at the district levels. The larger cities,

in particular, enjoy a vital associative life and non-governmental activities. Efficient cooperation among governments, the private sector and non-governmental sectors is questionable and slow moving in favour of effective regional governance. In the past they cooperated in preparing various developmental documents, but their direct participation is unbalanced and less systematic, or concerns selected joint projects. Only minor scale partners outside the public sector are directly involved and have taken over direct responsibility for certain development tasks. The opinions of respondents can be summarised in the perception that there is an intensive learning process. There are already professionals and representatives of institutions who know each other and are used to cooperating. Development in this field faced problems with institutional instability and staff changes, political intervention, as well as a lack of capacities and financial strength to fulfil more ambitious tasks. The partnership principle is already quite accepted and is starting to be a general practice. Cooperation between cities and neighbouring local self-government is also less developed among cities in the core urbanised area of Banská Bystrica – Zvolen. Activities initiated within the LEADER programme and their local action groups were marked by some of respondents as good practice examples.

Following existing legislation, regional and local self-governments are obliged to elaborate, adopt and implement their development strategies known as Programmes of Economic and Social Development. The Banská Bystrica self-governing region adopted its strategy according to the 2007 – 2013 programming period (modified in 2011). It focuses on seven priority axes, each elaborated into many measures. The regional strategy also contains its own map of priority sub-regions for support in order to reduce intra-regional disparities. Such an extensively outlined strategy was not easy to implement under the available capacities and resources. Similar strategies were adopted by all cities, including the region's leading cities Banská Bystrica and Zvolen. (City of Banská Bystrica 2007; City of Zvolen 2008) Most of the cities have been successful in the activities closer to their powers, but less successful in addressing economic development. Although prepared with good intentions, the older documents are in fact less strategic. Too many priorities are defined without enough executive implementation procedures or fully elaborated sections dealing with financing (e.g. depending on uncertain external resources). According to some of the respondents, there were signs of a more formal elaboration of strategic development documents. They were also too pragmatically adjusted according to potentially available external resources (and not so according to urgent regional needs). During the last few years, new strategic documents have been elaborated with better quality expected in all aspects of strategic planning, programming and future implementation.

Positive outcomes of local and regional policies have been achieved in fields in which a favourable combination of their own and external interests and resources were possible. Effects are also more evident in fields closely related to their powers. There are fewer widespread outcomes in economic development, if assessed by contributions to new employment generation or new businesses start-ups attraction. Local and regional policies have been successful in fields such as the modernisation of education facilities (primary schools), social assistance improvement (including needed facilities), partial improvements in road infrastructure, a modernised system of environmental services and facilities (e.g. waste collection and disposal), health services (rescue system, hospital facilities), regional marketing and promotion activities, as well as tourism infrastructure. Activities regarding the adoption of a secondary school system to meet the needs of regional labour markets, support for innovation, complete development of available locations (e.g. industrial parks), and local roads have been less successful. The unreformed and fragmented local government system with a large number of small units (although modernised as local self-government or by means of inter-municipal cooperation) also reduces the efficiency of certain developmental policies.

***External interventions: EU cohesion policy and national development policies***

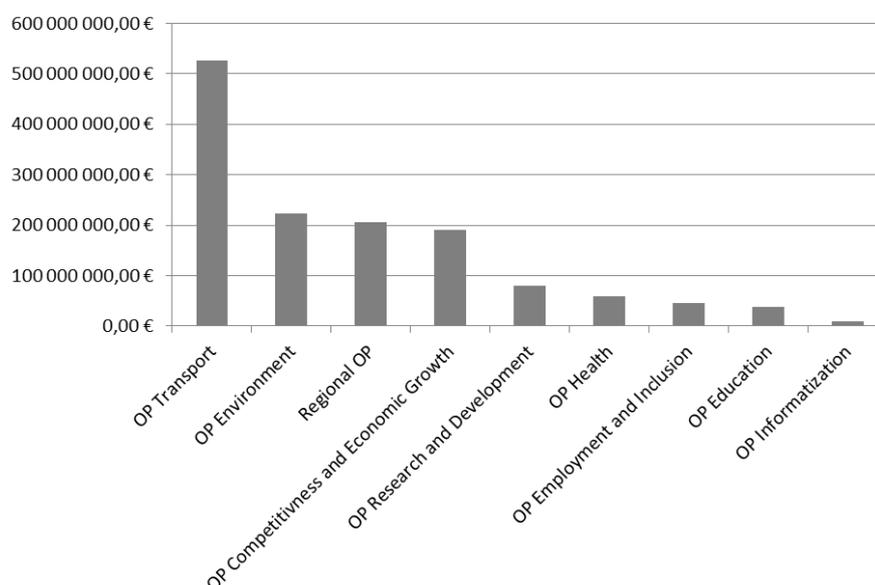
Due to the fact that a specific and well elaborated national regional policy outside the EU operational programmes is missing, the role of EU funds is crucial in Slovakia. Despite the success in utilising EU funds in general, the cohesion policy is perceived as being more successful in the field of “public consumption” and less efficient in economic development support. The absence of a regionally specific regional operational programme is often mentioned as a significant factor influencing the less than satisfactory outcome of external intervention by EU structural funds in this region. The necessary “concord” among regional, national and EU levels concerning development goals had been lacking, and rendering the regional “voice” less respected has caused a certain degree of disillusionment in the region. It has also damaged the image of mainstream parties responsible for decisions and the implementation of policies which thus prepared fertile ground for the future electoral success of radical political forces in the region.

A complicated hybrid of prevailing approaches is represented by the economic and regional policies of the Slovak central government embodied in its two key objectives – on the one hand, the real convergence of Slovakia to the EU level, and thus contributing to maximizing economic growth, and on the other, the harmonious development of the entire territory of the Slovak Republic – in other words, to minimize regional disparities. Maximizing the

sustainable growth of the country's economy, while guaranteeing a perceptible increase of living standards even in less developed regions, can be considered as a goal to be pursued. (Sloboda 2005; 2006) The final approach to regions and regional development represents an unstable mixture of liberal framework, direct interventionism and redistributive policies. The role of regional self-government, regional governance and bottom-up activities is unclear and vulnerable, which also gives opportunities for political parties located outside the standard place on the scale of political ideologies.

The Banská Bystrica region has been quite successful in its implementation of EU funded projects compared to other Slovak regions. It has the third highest allocation of funds among all Slovak regions (2007 – 2013) and its share of total contracted projects in Slovakia exceeded 14 %. The highest share on all projects, with a total value of EUR 1.314 bil., were the projects within three OP programmes – Transport, Environment and Regional Operational Programme. (Figure 4) However, respondents' experiences concerning the structure and spatial allocation of projects were often critical. They did not fully respect regional needs and are of only potential value. In many measures, the region had a small absorption capacity; in fact, projects based in the region have been less competitive in some measures, while on the other hand, demand has been massive in others. The balance and concord that should be achieved in combining the goals of development in wider terms (EU, national) and regional were not reached to a sufficient extent. Nevertheless, even if the structure of measures had been suitable, the scale of successful projects was insufficient. It meant a lower number of supported projects without any significant impact on regional development. Lower absorption capacity concerning the business sphere was mentioned by a minor number of respondents as part of the problem. Critical reflections also concerned dispersed support for many less coordinated projects, the absence of larger development projects within the last 4-5 years (except for motorways), as well as the slow implementation and contracting of projects in the 2007 – 2013 programming period. Such criticism can be efficiently used in regional political debates by leaders not directly involved, and emphasised most obviously by politicians of radical persuasions (far-right, Eurosceptic, etc.).

**Figure 4: Proportion of contracted projects in the Banská Bystrica region according to operational programmes 2007 – 2013 (by end 2013)**



Source: based on GRINCOH Working Paper Series 2014, Paper No. 6.03.03.01

The most important projects focused on:

Motorway construction (EUR 437 mil.)

Reconstruction of 1st class roads (EUR 81 mil.)

Integrated water management (EUR 92 mil.)

Waste management (EUR 70 mil.)

Educational infrastructure (EUR 77 mil.)

Regeneration of settlements (EUR 63 mil.)

Support of business activities in tourism (EUR 53 mil.)

Construction and modernisation of general hospitals (EUR 50 mil.).

According to most respondents, the cohesion policy is perceived as being more successful in the field of social well-being. However its impact on economic development was less positively evaluated. The support of business activities, innovation, vocational training, university-business links were less successful. Investment in the motorway network linking the core area of the region, the cities of Banská Bystrica and Zvolen, with the western part of Slovakia (Bratislava) were considered as the most respected fields of cohesion intervention with an impact on economic development. It has begun to be integrated into production networks expanding from the west, and this opens

opportunities for better use of its location in the central part of Slovakia. Regarding sectorally focused policies, support of tourism had been considered as being more influential. However, various projects that led to improvements in the fields of education, the regeneration of the physical environment in cities, social services, environmental improvements and energy savings were more visible and accepted by citizens. This is considered a significant improvement of the standard of public services in the region.

The relocation of important central state institutions headquarters to Banská Bystrica (Slovak Post Office, Slovak Patent Office, Financial Directorate of the Slovak Republic) can be considered as a positive central state decision, while the support of the expansion of regional universities and the assignment of state administration offices to smaller cities (e.g. Banská Štiavnica, Poltár, Revúca) has been extensive

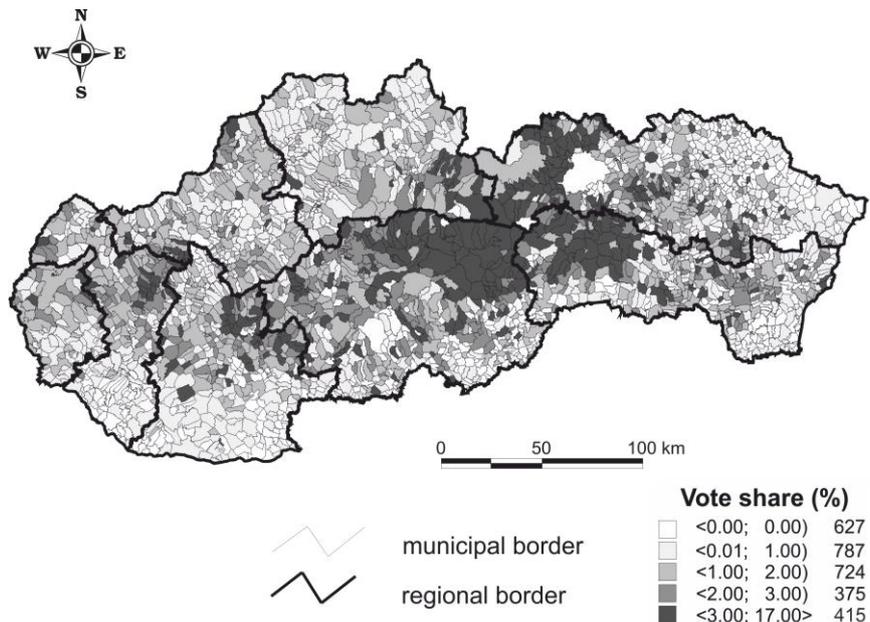
### ***Extremism in regional politics***

However, increasing support for populist and radical political forces, partly caused by less efficient development policies, is becoming an obstacle to regional development supported by domestic and European sources, explicitly manifested in the case of the Banská Bystrica region. In the regional election conducted in 2013, Marián Kotleba, leader of the most powerful far-right party in Slovakia (ĽS NS), became chairman of the regional self-government. Its nationalistic and anti-European orientation caused serious difficulties in absorbing the available EU funds in practice, which largely limits the development opportunities of the Banská Bystrica region for the upcoming future (regional self-government is strongly dependent on external resources especially in its investment activities, with a major role played by EU funds). In the next part of the paper we would like to reflect on the socio-structural characteristics of the area under study that are important in assessing the risk of the rising support for a radically oriented party, i.e., ĽS NS, and the position of this party in comparison with other radical forces of the Slovak political spectrum.

The political story of ĽS NS validates the concept of a second-order election also under conditions of the Slovak Republic. A smaller sized, radically oriented party established itself in the region through the possibility of a regional election characterised by a very low turnout, which corresponds with the assumptions of the concept originally introduced even in the first half of the 1980s, then primarily in relation to the European elections. (Reif – Schmitt 1980; Reif 1985) However, the issue of the second-order election inherently affects regional elections as well, as confirmed by several recent studies. (Jeffery – Hough 2003; Schakel 2013; 2015) The extreme right-wing ĽS NS utilized the relatively low voter turnout, the peculiarities of elections to

regional self-government and its rules, as well as the established position of the party in the region, which had recently been able to successfully influence the political climate. The party has taken advantage of the difficult living situation concerning most citizens of this socio-economically deprived region struggling with the problems of unemployment, low wages, poverty or the Roma issue and, last but not least, the moment of building the party, given the birthplace of its long-standing leader, just in the Banská Bystrica region (so-called the *friends and neighbours effect*). Moreover, it succeeded in mobilizing its own electorate while the region suffered from low interest, to convince undecided voters and those greatly disappointed with the development results of the region ruled by representatives of standard political parties for years (so-called *retrospective voting*). Generally speaking, the Banská Bystrica region is one of the more electorally apathetic ones, yet in the 2013 regional elections it achieved the highest turnout compared to the rest of the country. As mentioned before, the political success of this party was largely caused by the accumulation of social and economic problems concerning the region, which had not been adequately resolved by standard political parties at the national or regional level.

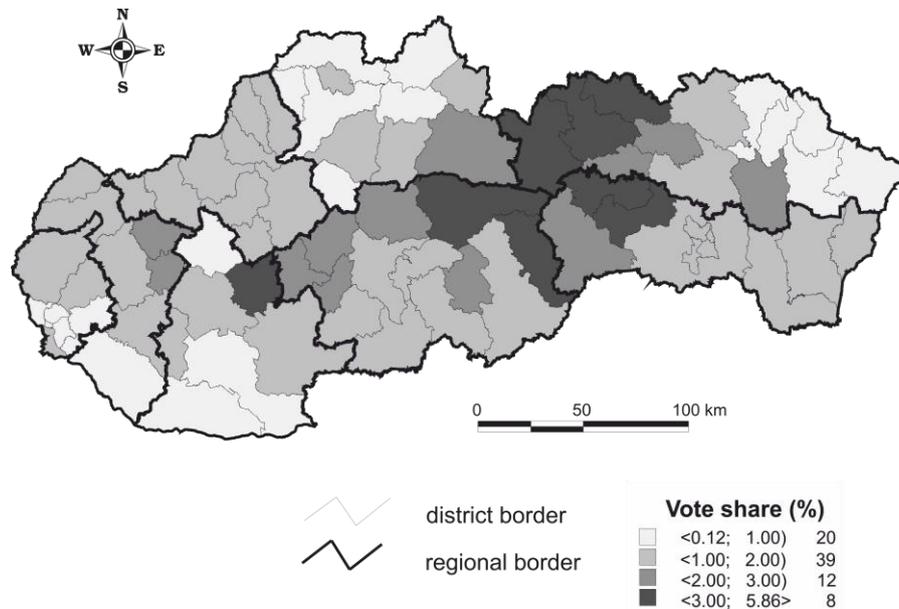
Figure 5: Share of votes for Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia based on the 2012 parliamentary election results at local level in Slovakia



Source: Election and Referendum Statistics, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2012

Looking at the map of LS NS's electoral support in the 2012 parliamentary elections, which is more relevant for the genuine preferential power of the party than regional elections (often considered as second-order), we observe that its electorate is concentrated almost exclusively in the areas of Slovakia characterised by a higher territorial concentration of the Roma population. We found that in the first decile of communities arranged according to the party's 2012 electoral outcome, up to 16.86 % of those from the Banská Bystrica region are ranked there, which is absolutely the highest number among all eight regions (followed by Prešov – 13.25 % and Košice – 11.71 %), while in up to half of them this indicator amounted to less than 5 % (the least in Trenčín and Bratislava, 3.26 % and 3.37 % respectively). (Figure 5) Within the region, the highest support for this party was identified in the districts of Brezno and Revúca. (Figure 6)

Figure 6: Share of votes for Kotleba – People's Party Our Slovakia based on the 2012 parliamentary election results at district level in Slovakia



Source: Election and Referendum Statistics, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic 2012

It can be assumed that to a large extent, the election results of radical parties would be dependent on several social dimensions of Slovakia, but particularly the following ethnicity, education and socio-economic conditions covering two crucial conflict lines. (Ethnic/ nationalist and socio-economic, see e.g. Mad-

leňák 2012) Thus, if we take a closer look at the relation between the election results of the far right and far left parties, the nationalist and ethnic minority parties representing these two most important socio-political cleavages (ĽS NS, NaS – far right, KSS – far left, SNS – nationalist, Most-Híd, SMK-MKP – ethnic minority parties) on the one hand and the aforementioned socio-economic determinants on the other, we find that the electoral success of ĽS NS is to a limited extent linked to the territorial share of the Roma population ( $r = 0.527$ ), the population with primary education (0.316, a closer link was observed only by SMK-MKP, 0.391), which are positively correlated with electoral outcomes of the party. The unemployment rate (0.378) and the amount of contributions paid in material need per capita (0.367) seem to be statistically significant predictors related to the voting support of this party as well. We should stress that all of these links between the election results of ĽS NS and the examined socio-economic determinants are the absolutely closest compared to other parties in the study. A statistically significant relationship with the territorial composition of ĽS NS electoral support is observed by the dwelling (housing) factor (-0.233). The link to the geographical composition of the Roma population has also been proven by Mikuš and Gurňák (2012). Threats from the presence of various “internal outsiders” such as ethnic or national minorities, was identified as a reason for the emergence of extreme right parties by Minkenberg (2002) and Kluknavská (2015). On the other hand, there are studies disputing such conclusions, at least at the individual level. (e.g. Bahna – Zagrapan 2017) Therefore, these results have to be applied very carefully, whereas some papers using advanced statistical tools declare uncertainty when searching for the reasons for the increased voting for protest parties. (e.g. Mikuš et al. 2016) The context of the economic crisis, mainly affecting the most underdeveloped regions in Slovakia, has also been discussed in recent literature. (Kluknavská 2013; Kluknavská – Smolík 2016) All values of statistical dependence related to the variables under study are displayed within the correlation matrix shown in the table 1.

From the foregoing, the electoral success of the far-right ĽS NS is based on ethnic, social and economic reasons. The prevailing economic stagnation of the Banská Bystrica region expressed by the accumulation of socio-economic problems such as high unemployment, low job opportunities, low wages, high level of poverty or less successful development policies has resulted in the social frustration of the people living there. Subsequently, due to both their complicated personal situation and dissatisfaction with the performance of the ruling parties, they tend to reject the solutions repeatedly suggested by standard political actors that are considered by the public as promises, not deeds. This creates fertile ground for the success of extremist political parties offering radical, quick, but populist and dangerous solutions.

Table 1: Correlation Matrix for electoral and socio-economic data

|                                 | Election Outcomes |        |        |        |        |          |         | Ethnicity |           |        | Education |           |          | Socio-Economic Dimension |              |                          |           |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|----------|---------|-----------|-----------|--------|-----------|-----------|----------|--------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|-----------|
|                                 | Turnout           | SNS    | ES NS  | NaS    | KSS    | Most-Hid | SMK-MKP | Slovak    | Hungarian | Romany | Basic     | Secondary | Tertiary | Wage                     | Unemployment | Benefit in material need | Dwellings |
| <b>Turnout</b>                  | 1                 | 0.597  | -0.230 | 0.390  | -0.118 | -0.302   | -0.361  | 0.541     | -0.335    | -0.561 | -0.469    | 0.298     | 0.325    | 0.344                    | -0.563       | -0.638                   | 0.303     |
| <b>SNS</b>                      | 0.597             | 1      | -0.041 | 0.427  | 0.230  | -0.429   | -0.366  | 0.536     | -0.378    | -0.362 | -0.100    | 0.385     | -0.160   | -0.069                   | -0.096       | -0.187                   | -0.164    |
| <b>ES NS</b>                    | -0.230            | -0.041 | 1      | 0.142  | 0.099  | -0.256   | -0.205  | 0.133     | -0.219    | 0.527  | 0.316     | -0.193    | -0.289   | -0.213                   | 0.378        | 0.367                    | -0.233    |
| <b>NaS</b>                      | 0.390             | 0.427  | 0.142  | 1      | 0.154  | -0.570   | -0.505  | 0.562     | -0.523    | -0.198 | -0.145    | 0.329     | -0.125   | -0.076                   | -0.191       | -0.263                   | -0.173    |
| <b>KSS</b>                      | -0.118            | 0.230  | 0.099  | 0.154  | 1      | -0.348   | -0.288  | 0.062     | -0.306    | 0.042  | 0.199     | 0.254     | -0.279   | -0.289                   | 0.246        | 0.266                    | -0.405    |
| <b>Most-Hid</b>                 | -0.302            | -0.429 | -0.256 | -0.570 | -0.348 | 1        | 0.932   | -0.826    | 0.963     | -0.010 | 0.217     | -0.122    | 0.013    | 0.037                    | 0.086        | 0.180                    | 0.268     |
| <b>SMK-MKP</b>                  | -0.361            | -0.366 | -0.205 | -0.505 | -0.288 | 0.932    | 1       | -0.853    | 0.990     | 0.060  | 0.391     | -0.069    | -0.205   | -0.167                   | 0.254        | 0.295                    | 0.141     |
| <b>Slovak</b>                   | 0.541             | 0.536  | 0.133  | 0.562  | 0.062  | -0.826   | -0.853  | 1         | -0.853    | -0.334 | -0.416    | 0.184     | 0.221    | 0.238                    | -0.383       | -0.454                   | -0.021    |
| <b>Hungarian</b>                | -0.335            | -0.378 | -0.219 | -0.523 | -0.306 | 0.963    | 0.990   | -0.853    | 1         | 0.045  | 0.363     | -0.074    | -0.166   | -0.128                   | 0.211        | 0.267                    | 0.184     |
| <b>Romany</b>                   | -0.561            | -0.362 | 0.527  | -0.198 | 0.042  | -0.010   | 0.060   | -0.334    | 0.045     | 1      | 0.561     | -0.579    | -0.368   | -0.392                   | 0.714        | 0.694                    | -0.247    |
| <b>Basic</b>                    | -0.469            | -0.100 | 0.316  | -0.145 | 0.199  | 0.217    | 0.391   | -0.416    | 0.363     | 0.561  | 1         | -0.251    | -0.796   | -0.663                   | 0.757        | 0.712                    | -0.357    |
| <b>Secondary</b>                | 0.298             | 0.385  | -0.193 | 0.329  | 0.254  | -0.122   | -0.069  | 0.184     | -0.074    | -0.579 | -0.251    | 1         | -0.236   | -0.053                   | -0.383       | -0.406                   | -0.042    |
| <b>Tertiary</b>                 | 0.325             | -0.160 | -0.289 | -0.125 | -0.279 | 0.013    | -0.205  | 0.221     | -0.166    | -0.368 | -0.796    | -0.236    | 1        | 0.769                    | -0.621       | -0.512                   | 0.450     |
| <b>Wage</b>                     | 0.344             | -0.069 | -0.213 | -0.076 | -0.289 | 0.037    | -0.167  | 0.238     | -0.128    | -0.392 | -0.663    | -0.053    | 0.769    | 1                        | -0.623       | -0.487                   | 0.501     |
| <b>Unemployment</b>             | -0.563            | -0.096 | 0.378  | -0.191 | 0.246  | 0.086    | 0.254   | -0.383    | 0.211     | 0.714  | 0.757     | -0.383    | -0.621   | -0.623                   | 1            | 0.936                    | -0.458    |
| <b>Benefit in material need</b> | -0.638            | -0.187 | 0.367  | -0.263 | 0.266  | 0.180    | 0.2951  | -0.454    | 0.267     | 0.694  | 0.712     | -0.406    | -0.512   | -0.487                   | 0.936        | 1                        | -0.429    |
| <b>Dwellings</b>                | 0.303             | -0.164 | -0.233 | -0.173 | -0.405 | 0.268    | 0.141   | -0.021    | 0.184     | -0.247 | -0.357    | -0.042    | 0.450    | 0.501                    | -0.458       | -0.429                   | 1         |

Source: STATdat Database, Election and Referendum Statistics, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, authors` calculations

## Conclusions

The current development in the Banská Bystrica region confirms that we should be aware of important links between social, economic and population development, ethnic structure, the role of the regional self-government and regional institutional capacities and the political environment. The situation in this region confirms that when examining the issues of regional development, we have to be aware of the fact that long term unresolved specific socio-economic problems can easily be used to foment social tension, often tied to the ethnic sphere. This can be accelerated by sudden problems like economic and financial crises and the related less positive future prospects. It is in agreement with opinions that the frustration of the public expressed also in electoral apathy increases the chances for success of radical right-wing political parties, especially in regional or European elections, seemed of second-order relevance. (Reif – Schmitt 1980; Jeffery – Hough 2003; Schakel 2013) Moreover, their success might be considered as a failure of the standard political forces that are expected to not give up the struggle for the preservation of genuine democratic values, criticising the alleged rationality of the Euroscepticism idea. (Taggart 1998; Taggart – Szczerbiak 2004; Harmsen – Spiering 2004; Mudde 2012) It can also have a contradictory effect on strengthening regional self-government in Slovakia, in order to prevent regions from taking on higher powers and resources if under the control of radical parties.

If we take into account external intervention influences generated by national and European levels, there are diverse effects. Both levels positively influence the social sphere and quality of life. There has been support backed by a wide range of resources, including those spent on investments. This role is highly esteemed within the region. However, the effects on economic development were less impressive. We can find extensive criticism of EU policies and EU funds programmes among citizens as well as experts. Disillusionment has been expressed many times towards the EU funds role in regional development by Regional Chairperson Marián Kotleba (directly elected in November 2013, when he defeated the incumbent, representing governmental party Smer-SD as a member of the EP). He emphasised the need to reduce dependence on EU funds. Slow progress in social and economic development and less efficient EU policies can be considered as one potential source of rising Euroscepticism in the region. This was later confirmed by less intensive interest in fulfilling needed conditions and participating in EU SF project preparation, as well as their co-financing, leading to huge loss of funds available for this region in various fields. (e.g. app. 20-30 mil. EUR for road infrastructure, SME 2017)

Similar criticism has also been directed at the national level, as less responsive to regional needs. The well-developed national policy of central

state intervention into regional development in this region is absent (and does not offer good conditions for the region to do it due to under-financing of regional self-government). The existing support framework is often considered as being too sectoral, not appropriate for the specificities of the region. We have to cope with the opinions of less attention to this region and not enough preferential policy tools to attract more business by upper level institutions. It is related to the less important role of FDI in the region, and the inability to attract more businesses to come. There have been opinions on the formulation and elaboration of different development models, combined with different sources of economic acceleration, as often prescribed by external actors.

Despite a standard institutional framework, including regional self-government, expansion of planning and programming activities, and access to EU funds, the outcome is not clear. The most successful policies covered “public consumption” fields (physical improvement of key public spaces and public buildings, school buildings and their teaching facilities, environmental improvements, partially in transport infrastructure). Despite clearly visible progress, poorer performance is documented by a set of basic characteristics which indicates contradictions in development. Policies in secondary education, innovation support and the preparation of development areas have progressed slowly. Adopted policies have not been enough to intervene in natural economic processes and generate economic growth comparable to other more developing Slovak regions. After decades of post-socialist development, such outcomes can be perceived by people living in this region with bitterness and an increasing willingness to call for radical changes in regional political structures and public apathy. It seems that a set of factors combined to allow the Banská Bystrica region to become the weak link in the Slovak political system that was successfully used by a rising far-right party as an electoral and then a power base. The time has come for standard political parties to prove that the voters were wrong in 2013. They should provide proper feedback and critically assess the political decisions and measures adopted by Chairperson Kotleba and explain to people the actions that are feasible for improving the socio-economic situation in the region. The potential of this topic can be found in retrospective voting related to the ĽS NS electorate in the upcoming regional election to be held in late 2017. Are the voters of the party discerning of governance as well as the results of its leader as regional chairperson to some extent, and, if yes, what is the geography of this contentment or disappointment within the region like?

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Annex 1: **Institutions covered by in-depth interviews** (all conducted during January 2014):

1. Banská Bystrica City Office, Department of Social Affairs and Project Management.
2. Zvolen City Office, Department of Urban Development.
3. Office of Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, Department – Intermediate/Management Body for Regional Operational Programme.
4. Office of Banská Bystrica Self-Governing Region, Department of Regional Development.
5. Banská Bystrica Regional Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
6. Regional Development Agency in Banská Bystrica.
7. Business Incubator and Technology Center Banská Bystrica.
8. SARIO – Slovak Investment and Trade Development Agency, Regional Office Banská Bystrica.
9. Matej Bel University, Department of Geography, Geology and Landscape Ecology.
10. Matej Bel University, Faculty of Economics, Department of Public Economy and Regional Development.
11. Rural Parliament of Banská Bystrica Region and Regional Office of National Network for Rural Development.