

# AM ANNALES

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## ADAPTABILITY OF POLITICAL PARTIES TO THE ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRISIS? SOME EVIDENCE FROM SLOVENIA AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the adaptability of Slovenian and Czech political parties to the global economic and financial crisis that hit Europe in 2008. Following many political scientists, we expected parties to adapt to the public's preferences and to address, directly or indirectly, the issue of the growing scope of precarious work in their election programmes. The analysis revealed that parties barely followed the public's preferences, opting not to directly respond to the challenge. However, it is obvious that the parties made considerable adaptations in response to challenges from the international environment because virtually all of their election programmes mentioned the issue of the labour market's flexibility. As expected, in this regard, it is possible to detect the importance of party ideology since liberal and conservative parties as a rule saw a bigger need to introduce flexibility to the labour market to a greater extent.*

**Keywords:** political party, crisis, Slovenia, Czech Republic, adaptability

## ADATTAMENTO DEI PARTITI POLITICI ALLA CRISI ECONOMICA E FINANZIARIA? ALCUNE PROVE DALLA SLOVENIA E DALLA REPUBBLICA CECA

### SINTESI

*Il presente articolo esamina la capacità di adattamento dei partiti politici sloveni e cechi nel contesto della crisi economica e finanziaria globale che colpì l'Europa nel 2008. Dato l'elevato numero di politologi nelle loro fila, ci aspettavamo che i partiti politici si sarebbero adattati alle preferenze del pubblico affrontando nei loro programmi elettorali, direttamente o indirettamente, il sostanziale aumento del lavoro precario. L'analisi ha rivelato che i partiti hanno quasi completamente ignorato le preferenze del pubblico, scegliendo di non rispondere alla sfida direttamente. È evidente, comunque, che i partiti abbiano apportato considerevoli adattamenti in seguito alle sfide lanciategli dall'ambiente internazionale, perché praticamente tutti i loro programmi elettorali citavano la questione della flessibilità del mercato del lavoro. Come previsto, è possibile rilevare a questo proposito l'importanza dell'ideologia di partito, dato che i partiti liberali e conservatori di norma riconoscevano la pressante necessità di introdurre una maggiore flessibilità nel mercato del lavoro.*

**Parole chiave:** partito politico, crisi, Slovenia, Repubblica Ceca, adattabilità

## INTRODUCTION

As many political scientists have shown (e.g. Harmel and Janda, 1982; Panebianco, 1988; Harmel, 2002; Mair et al., 2004; Meyer and Wagner, 2013), parties operate in different environments and are supposed to adapt to challenges stemming from these environments. Indeed, parties have frequently been described as vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking organisations (Müller and Strøm, 1999), although gaining as much electoral support as possible is their main aim. Therefore, parties should for the most part take the preferences of the public or voters into account. This also means parties should be responsive actors who react sympathetically to the short-term demands of voters and public opinion (Bardi et al., 2014).

This article deals with the question of the adaptability of Slovenian and Czech political parties to their environments, more precisely, to the economic and financial crisis which hit both countries hard. One of the key challenges faced by parties in both countries in the 2008–2014 period should have been the issue of precarious work and its scope, a clear consequence of globalisation and the prevalence of neoliberal policies (Standing, 2011). It was also obviously connected with calls from different international organisations to implement structural reforms, among them the need to introduce greater flexibility to the labour market. The European Commission (2014, 5) revealed that Portugal in particular had seen a significant reduction in employment protection legislation, but reductions are also visible in other countries, including Slovenia. Temporary work is close to precarious work, and the issue of the widespread diffusion of temporary work may become problematic when coupled with low transitions to permanent jobs (European Commission, 2014).

*This is most notably the case of Poland and Spain, where temporary work make up for a large share of total employment (respectively, 26.8% and 23.7%) and low transitions to stable jobs render temporary contracts 'dead ends' rather than 'stepping stones' into the labour market. Some other countries, among them Slovenia, also recorded above EU-average of temporary contracts (13.7%) (European Commission, 2014, 6–7).*

Given these findings, one might expect the issue of precarious work and/or flexibility of the labour market to be more heavily addressed by Slovenian than by Czech parties. To find out how the parties responded to these challenges, an analysis of their election programmes was conducted since it is precisely *via* (changes in their) programmes that parties usually adapt to their environments (Wilson, 1994). However, willingness, capacity and/or the strategic decision to

adapt (can) vary among parties and, importantly, can be determined by party-specific characteristics.

To sum up, the main goal of the article is to find out whether Slovenian and Czech political parties adapted to the preferences of the public/voters (and therefore acted as responsive actors) during the global economic and financial crisis that hit Europe in 2008. In particular, we focus on how the parties reflect the issue of the growing scope of precarious work and/or the flexibility of the labour market in their election programmes, and if party-specific factors like mainstream or challenger party status, party ideology and (non)governmental status of the party can explain parties' (in)adaptability to the crisis.

## POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR ENVIRONMENTS

Political parties are organisations that perform many functions and which have, like other organisations, several ambitions or goals they try to achieve. According to Müller and Strøm (1999), parties can be described as having three main goals: vote-seeking, office-seeking and policy-seeking. As stated by Panebianco (1988, 5), parties are the only organisations that operate in the electoral arena and gaining as much electoral support as possible is their most important goal because it can serve as a means for achieving the latter two goals (Müller and Strøm, 1999).

However, like other organisations, parties operate in environments that have (in)direct influences on them. Indeed, they even operate simultaneously in different (internal and external) environments and frequently adapt to the challenges in those environments (Harmel and Janda, 1982; Panebianco, 1988). However, parties usually adapt more to some environments than to others. The reasons for the specific levels of parties' accommodation to their environments may lie within the parties themselves but can also arise from the complexity of the environments. It is worth bearing in mind here that parties are conservative organisations so changes will not be introduced if they are not necessary (Panebianco, 1988) or, in the words of Harmel and Janda (1994, 265), parties change only when it is established that there is a good cause, and not simply for the sake of change. Nonetheless, empirical evidence supports the conclusion that parties do indeed change (Harmel, 2002, 119).

Harmel (2002, 121–127) identifies three historical reasons why parties change: party change is a function of a party's maturity and growth; party changes can be seen as an adaptive response to environmental challenges; and party change can be a reaction to some combination of the above two reasons. The relevance of the same environment for a party can vary over time (Panebianco, 1988), although it is up to individual parties to estimate the importance of different environments and to decide whether or how to respond to pressures from the environment. Therefore, it is no surprise that

some parties decide to respond to a particular pressure or challenge in their environment, while others decide not to do so, and still others fail to respond altogether (Mair et al., 2004). However, it would be wrong to see parties solely as organisations that tend to adapt themselves more or less to their environments since parties can also dominate an environment (Panebianco, 1988). The choice of strategy is not solely dependent upon parties but is also determined by the characteristics of the environment (Harmel and Janda, 1982; Panebianco, 1988).

#### LINES OF INTER-PARTY COMPETITION AND PUBLIC PREFERENCES

In line with the concept of responsiveness, as well as the conviction that parties are the main agents of representation in modern democracies, they should primarily adapt to the preferences of the public or voters. Developed by Stimson et al. (1995), the concept of dynamic representation pushed this idea to the extremes: parties are expected to sense changes in the public and to alter their policies and behaviour accordingly, even though parties generally are reluctant to alter their stances on policies radically, especially in the short term (Adams et al., 2004).

Several reservations arise concerning the idea that parties should dynamically reflect the public's/voters' preferences (be re-active to them).<sup>1</sup> First, parties may be unable to adapt for intra-party reasons or are unwilling to adapt because they are unsure about voter expectations (Zons, 2015). Second, even when parties try to respond to shifts in public/voter preferences, they can misperceive them (Adams et al., 2004). Third, it is easier for parties to change the saliency of issues than their position on a particular issue (Meyer and Wagner, 2013). Fourth, voter/public preference is not the only external environment in which parties operate in the era of globalisation and open economies; market and international actors have become increasingly important and, in some respects, there are important discrepancies between public/voter preferences and those of market actors (Ezrow and Hellwig, 2014, 818). Fifth, much evidence has shown that parties also form or adjust their stances in response to the stances of other parties and their strategies (Downs, 1957; Adams et al., 2004; Zons, 2015); in particular, parties are responsive to the stances of other parties from the same party family (Adams and Somer-Topcu, 2009). In relation to the latter observation,

two theories of party competition should be noted here: a) spatial theory, or the classic theory of party competition (Downs, 1957); and b) saliency theory (Robertson, 1976). The first stresses the idea that all parties, aiming to secure as much electoral support as possible, take a stand on the same topics or issues, while the main idea of the second theory is that parties introduce new/neglected issues of party competition.

#### INTER-PARTY COMPETITION AND PARTY-SPECIFIC FACTORS

Since potential differences among parties and their 'willingness' to introduce/adapt to new issues lie at the heart of this article, several party characteristics can be important. Among party-specific factors that stimulate parties' introduction/adaptation to new issues are mainstream or challenger party status and party ideology while, in relation to the economic and financial crisis, the (non)governmental status of a party is more commonly mentioned.

Several empirical studies have found that new and challenger parties (parties that have not previously held political office)<sup>2</sup> in particular are more inclined to adopt new issues or issues that have been (almost) neglected by mainstream parties. The reasons range from the belief that such parties have a powerful incentive to promote new/neglected issues and redirect party competition lines, the belief that it is easier for new parties to adapt to new challenges because they have not developed highly distinctive and durable identities that need to be overcome if new issues are to be addressed, through to the belief that such parties have less to lose if a new idea fails (Caul and Gray, 2000; Kittilson, 2011; De Vries and Hobolt, 2012; Wagner, 2012; Meyer and Wagner, 2013; Zons, 2015). New/challenger parties in need of innovation have to be cautious because the new/neglected issues they (try to) introduce have to be (at least partly) relevant to the public; otherwise, their potential electoral success could be seriously threatened (De Vries and Hobolt, 2012). For new/challenger parties to be electorally successful, voters also have to vote on the basis of preferences on the new/neglected issue.

In deciding which issues to focus on in party competition, parties mainly follow voters' current concerns or stress issues they have ownership over (Wagner and Meyer, 2014). The latter idea is strongly connected with party families<sup>3</sup>/ideologies; historically, some parties have been more closely connected with certain is-

1 In this perspective, parties only try to shape public opinion to a limited extent.

2 In several works, it is possible to identify an overlap among categories of challenger and niche parties, although some differences between the two concepts are clear (see Meguid, 2005; De Vries and Hobolt, 2012).

3 Even though it is often presumed that in a post-ideological period, party families may become an obsolete concept it is still widely used and proves to be relevant in many comparative as well as case studies. It is true there have been many variations within party families and changes within them, but it is still a useful concept to reveal variation among the different ideologies of parties (Elff, 2013). This seems to also be true regarding the parties and party systems in new democracies, where indeed in some cases parties do not correspond to the "model" types defined by "Western" political science (Cabada et al., 2014, 13).

sues and policies and have a long-standing reputation for handling them successfully. While conservative and liberal parties are usually seen as more competent to deal with macroeconomic matters, social-democratic/socialist parties are typically seen as more competent than their adversaries are on welfare issues, equality and the protection of workers' rights. In the inter-party competition, parties should aim to increase the overall salience of the issues they own because it will be to the party's electoral advantage if elections centre on those issues (Wagner and Meyer, 2014, 1021). Based on the presented arguments, we expect new/challenger parties from the left or centre-left in particular to adapt to and address the issue of precarious work in their election programmes, given the rise in the issue's salience.

As Wagner and Meyer (2014) noted, parties are more likely in their election programmes to address issues for which they were responsible in government. Given that precarious work and its scope are a consequence of globalisation and the prevalence of neoliberalism (Standing, 2011), it is interesting to note the finding of Ezrow and Hellwig (2014, 816, 821) that the responsiveness of parties to moves in public/voter preferences will be more accurate when the national economy is sufficiently sheltered from the world economy and that the constraining effect of economic globalisation is more pronounced for parties with governmental experience because they are/should be better able than other parties to incorporate into their programmes the enhanced relevance of market/international actors for voters' preferences.

## ANALYSIS OF ELECTION PROGRAMMES

### Selection of Countries

Due to the importance of parties' electoral function, parties are expected to form election programmes. Election programmes are formal documents that are presented to voters and party members as recognisable statements on policies (Klingemann et al., 1994) and are used to attract voters and mobilise intra-party groups. Still, as Harrison contends (2013, 51), programmes have a predominantly external orientation. Even though some authors (e.g. Budge, 1987; Bara, 2006) are convinced that only a small number of voters read election programmes (and decide on parties on these grounds)<sup>4</sup>, they are still an important feature of party competition because they can add relevance to some issues. According to Wilson (1994), it is precisely *via* (changes in their) programmes

that parties usually adapt to their environments.

In addition, as Merz and Regel (in Uršič et al., 2015) mention, one of the best ways to grasp the multitude of differences between competing political actors is to examine their election programmes, as they are an authoritative statement of a party reflecting its programmatic profile for an election. Harrison (2013) believes that programmes are the closest thing to an official view of the parties' discourse.

Such an approach has been taken by several political scientists (see Bara, 2006). Therefore, election programmes for the 2011 and 2014 parliamentary elections in Slovenia and for the parliamentary elections in 2010 and 2013 in the Czech Republic will be analysed.

Slovenia and the Czech Republic have many similarities, especially in terms of the development of democracy (see Nations in Transit, Bertelsmann Transformation Index) and their party systems (see, for example, Lewis and Mansfeldova, eds., 2006; Haughton and Deegan Krause, 2015), but differences can also be detected. In terms of cleavages, it is obvious that all the traditional cleavages revealed by Lipset and Rokkan (1967)<sup>5</sup> can be seen in the analysed countries, albeit in Slovenia more of these cleavages have been relevant for inter-party competition than in the Czech Republic (see Krašovec and Cabada, 2013). However, in both countries the communism–anticommunism cleavage has been similarly persistent and important, while there has been difference regarding the importance of the socio-economic cleavage (Krašovec and Cabada, 2013). In the 1990s, Slovenia opted for a specific economic transition in the context of other Central and Eastern European countries (i.e. gradualism), when the population's clear expectations (Bernik and Malnar, 2005) that the welfare state should be preserved led all parliamentary parties to advocate similar social-democratic socio-economic policies (Stanojević and Krašovec, 2011; Fink-Hafner, 2012), and only with the 2004 elections did the saliency of the cleavage become more evident. In the Czech Republic, this cleavage was already more prominent at the start of the 1990s because some parties were more inclined to introduce neoliberal economic policies. Given this difference, one might expect the Czech Republic to be affected earlier by the consequences of globalisation and neoliberalism, including precarity, but the prominence of the issue has increased, especially during the economic and financial crisis that hit both countries. Slovenia was heavily affected by both the crisis (see Tables 1 and 2) and international actors' 'recommendations'

4 Given the quite high instability of party systems in both analysed countries in recent years and especially the more general trend of the personalisation of politics and campaigns seen particularly in some newly established parties whose success or failure strongly depends on the qualities of the leader (Tomšič and Prijon, 2015), some might ask whether election programmes are indeed worth analysing. However, Karvonen (2010) and Kriesi (2011) revealed that the personalisation thesis has been overstated although, on the other hand, also the scope of different kinds of programme analyses shows that this research approach continues to be relevant in political science.

5 Although there have been several waves of broad discussions about the cleavages defined by Lipset and Rokkan in the mid 1960s, it seems these cleavages have been highly adaptable and give little room for additional categories (Deegan Krause, 2007, 543) or as Mair (2006, 374) exposed, have tended to persist.

**Table 1: Selected economic indicators for Slovenia (Sources: Ministry of Finance, 2013, 2014; Slovenian Economic Mirror, 2013, 2014; Statistical Office of Slovenia, 2015a; 2015b).**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Growth of GDP (in %)	3.3	-7.8	1.2	0.6	-2.6	-1.0	2.6
Public debt (in % of GDP)	21.6	34.5	38.2	46.5	53.7	70.3	80.9
Budget deficit	1.9	-6.1	-5.7	-6.2	-3.7	-14.6*	-4.5
% unemployed	6.7	9.1	10.7	11.8	12.0	13.1	13.1
% unemployed (ILO)	4.4	5.9	7.3	8.2	8.9	10.1	9.7
Level of risk of poverty	12.3	11.3	12.7	13.6	13.5	14.5	14.5

\* The increase was due to a one-off expenditure – the recapitalisation of five banks.

**Table 2: Selected economic indicators for the Czech Republic (Sources: Ministry of Finance of Czech Republic, 2015; Czech Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 2015; Eurostat, 2013; ILO, 2015; OECD, 2015).**

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Growth of GDP (in %)	3.1	-4.5	2.5	1.9	-1.7	-0.9	2.0
Public debt (in % of GDP)	27.1	34.21	38.37	41.41	46.15	46.04	39
Budget deficit	-0.5	-5.8	-4.7	-3.2	-4.2	-1.5	-2.0
% unemployed	4.4	6.7	7.3	6.7	7.2	6.7	6.1
% unemployed (ILO)	5.4	8.1	7.1	6.7	7.0	6.9	6.4
Level of risk of poverty	8.6	9.0	9.8	9.6	9.6	8.5	9.0

about how to respond to the crisis, frequently including the introduction of greater flexibility to the labour market. Although the Czech Republic has sometimes been mentioned as a country unaffected by the crisis, this was true only in the first stage; by the end of 2009, the impact of the economic crisis was also evident in the Czech Republic (Veverková, 2012).

### Party Characteristics

In line with the specified party factors above, the new/challenger and mainstream parliamentary parties are presented in Table 3.

Before the 2011 elections, SD, Zares, DeSUS and LDS could be regarded as the governmental parties in Slovenia, although at the end of the term only SD and LDS remained in the governmental coalition. In the Czech Republic, the government in the 2010–2013 period was composed of ODS, TOP09 and VV but, after the internal split of the latter, with Liberal Democracy (LIDEM), the pragmatic pro-governmental faction that had left the VV.

In Slovenia, the Ministry of Labour in the 2008–2014 period was run, for the most part, by *de facto* the social-democratic SD, and in the Czech Republic by 'neo-liberal' parties – in the period 2006–2009 by the Civic Democrats and after the period of the caretaker government by the TOP09 party.

Despite major changes in the government coalition in 2013 in Slovenia, the governmental parties before the elections will be defined as those parties that participated in government from 2013 to the 2014 parliamentary elections: PS, SD, DeSUS and DL. In the Czech Republic, the governmental parties prior to the 2013 elections were ČSSD, ANO 2011 and KDU-ČSL.

Although several instruments can be used to determine the ideological position of parties, we believe that a reliable and comparative way indicating party ideology is to use their (former) affiliation or membership of party families at the European level.

The Slovenian PS only requested full membership of the liberal grouping in 2014 and later withdrew its request, but it will be treated as a liberal party because at one point it clearly showed an interest in becoming an

**Table 3: New/challenger and mainstream parliamentary parties in Slovenia and the Czech Republic.**

2011	2010	2014	2013
Slovenia	Czech Republic	Slovenia	Czech Republic
mainstream parties	mainstream parties	mainstream parties	mainstream parties
Social Democrats (SD)	Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)	Social Democrats (SD)	Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD)
Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	Civic Democratic Party (ODS)	Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)	Civic Democratic Party (ODS)
Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS)	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM)	Slovenian People's Party (SLS)	TOP09
Zares (For Real)	The Greens	Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia (DeSUS)	Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM)
Slovenian People's Party (SLS)		New Slovenia (NSi)	Christian-Democratic Party (KDU-ČSL)**
Slovenian National Party (SNS)		List of Zoran Janković – Positive Slovenia (PS)	
Democratic Party of Retired Persons of Slovenia (DeSUS)		Citizens' List of Gregor Virant (DL)	
New Slovenia (NSi)*			
new/challenger parties	new/challenger parties	new/challenger parties	new/challenger parties
List of Zoran Janković – Positive Slovenia (PS)	TOP09	Party of Miro Cerar, later renamed Party of Modern Centre (SMC)	Dawn of Direct Democracy (Úsvit)
Citizens' List of Gregor Virant (DL)	Public Affairs (VV)	United Left coalition (ZL)	ANO 2011
		Alliance of Alenka Bratušek (ZaAB)	

\* NSi again managed to pass the parliamentary threshold; it did not pass it in 2008.

\*\* KDU-ČSL again managed to pass the parliamentary threshold; it did not pass it in 2010.

**Table 4: Party families at the EU level – Slovenia and the Czech Republic.**

	Slovenia	Czech Republic
Conservative	SDS, NSi, SLS	TOP09, ODS, <sup>1</sup> KDU-ČSL
Liberal	SMC, LDS, Zares, DL, ZaAB	ANO 2011
Social Democratic	SD	ČSSD
Radical Left		KSČM

ALDE member. Although the ZL coalition has not been a member of any EU grouping, the fact that it took part under the banner of the European Left during the European Parliamentary elections in 2014 (Krašovec and Deželan, 2014) may indicate its sympathies. DeSUS and SNS, as well as Úsvit in the Czech Republic, have not been members of any EU grouping.

### Election Programmes

In an ideal world, election programmes would be a rich source of information on issues and parties' positions on specific topics. But there have been bigger differences among parties and their programmes since some produced long and comprehensive election programmes, some prepared short programmes,<sup>6</sup> while others did not even prepare special election programmes, using their 'normal' party programmes instead. Although this can pose some methodological reservations, in such cases we decided to include these 'normal' party programmes in our analysis.

To analyse the programmes, we employed the approach of a qualitative traditional content-analysis of the whole programmes. In recent years, computer-assisted text analysis has been widely used to scrutinise programmes (Harrison, 2013), including in Slovenia and the Czech Republic (e.g., Eibl, 2010; Chytilék and Eibl, 2011; Kustec Lipicer et al., 2011; Kropivnik, 2013; Krašovec and Deželan, 2015; Uršič et al., 2015; Maksuti et al., 2016; Naxera, 2015). However, Harrison (2013) believes that parties' attitudes to issues can be revealed and understood by employing traditional content-analysis and that such analysis can also help the researcher understand the substance of the text in a bigger part as well as define the content-related similarities/differences among parties (Slovenian and Czech researchers have also used such traditional content-analysis recently, e.g. Mansfeldová, 2003; Procházková and Hloušek, 2013; Krašovec and Deželan, 2014).

As shown by the analysis, Slovenian and Czech parties did not assess the issue of precarious work as a very relevant issue; the term was hardly used in the election programmes. Although some parties mentioned it, none of them dealt with the issue to any great extent.

### Slovenia

Among the Slovenian parties, only SD and ZL coalition addressed the issue of precarious work directly in their election programmes for the 2014 elections. While SD mentioned the issue in one sentence (*"higher social security will be guaranteed for precarious workers"*) (SD programme, 2014, 4), ZL coalition referred to the issue a few times. First, when ZL presented itself as a *"party*

*that stands with working people"*, it directly mentioned precarious workers (ZL coalition programme, 2014, 2). Later, it argued that *"all forms of work should be associated with workers' basic and social rights"* (ZL coalition programme, 2014, 10). In light of the position held by the issue in the election programmes, it is clear that both parties saw the issue as an economic and labour market problem.

Given that the consequences of the crisis largely emerged in Slovenia after 2011, it is not surprising that the issue of precarious work was even less prominent in 2011. It was mentioned by only one party indirectly: SD addressed the issue under the section 'Decent Work for All', promising to *"reduce inequality in the labour market between those employed for indefinite periods and those employed in other forms of employment"* (SD programme, 2011, 10).

However, in many election programmes it was possible to detect the 'substance of the issue', albeit different terms were used to describe (problems related with) the issue of precarious work. The phrases 'flexibilisation of the labour market' and 'segmentation of the labour market' were most common. This is not surprising because the substance of globalisation and the neoliberal model in relation to the labour market is usually expressed in terms of 'flexibilisation of the labour market', 'non-fully-fledged working contracts' and 'erosion of employees' rights', together with the division of workers into those who have managed to keep workers' and social rights and those without them (Keller, 2011). These results are somewhat expected because calls to introduce greater flexibility in the labour market have often been made in Slovenia by employers' organisations and some international organisations (e.g. the OECD). According to OECD data (in Lušina and Brezigar Masten, 2011), Slovenia and the Czech Republic had an almost identical level of strictness of employment protection for regular employment at the start of the crisis, while a huge difference was reported between the two countries when temporary employment was investigated (Slovenia exhibited an above-average level of strictness and the Czech Republic a significantly lower level). In this situation, one might anticipate such calls in Slovenia.

The term 'flexibilisation of the labour market' was frequently used and not hard to detect in most election programmes of Slovenian parties examined in the article. However, it was sometimes hard to determine whether the parties were calling for the introduction of greater flexibility, for the broadening of flexibility to cover more of the population or for the introduction of greater security for all employees (e.g. to reduce the flexibility of the labour market). We selected some examples to illustrate how parties dealt with or adapted to the outcomes of globalisation and the global predominance of neoliberal economic policies.

<sup>6</sup> Especially parties established just some months or even weeks prior to elections prepared short election programmes and/or programmes without clear stances on (some) issues.

While in 2014 SD called for less segmentation of the labour market, particularly relative to the regulation of students' work, ZL coalition heavily criticised neoliberal policies and the reduction of workers' rights and cuts to salaries. It also espoused the need to stop the privatisation processes. ZL called for the *"abolition of segmentation in the labour market and for an active policy of employment that can guarantee workers safe passage between jobs"*; as ZL stressed, *"in a time of crisis, when some economic sectors have been literally vanishing, an immediate return to full employment with an indefinite time of employment cannot be promised"* (ZL coalition programme, 2014, 10).

Two liberal parties (SMC, DL) addressed the issue but somewhat differently than the social-democratic and radical left parties. SMC referred to the need to stimulate 'flexibility', with *"the aim of assuring easier entrance to and exit from the labour market and ensuring a predictable working environment for workers"* (SMC programme, 2014, 8). The party also emphasised *"the need to increase the inspector's control over abuses of the labour code and need for such control to be stricter"* (SMC programme, 2014, 8). On the other hand, DL clearly called for the withdrawal of the state from the economy. The call to *"simplify and reduce the number of legal forms of employment, with the aim of increasing solidarity among workers in different forms of employment"* (DL programme, 2014, 4) can in this case be interpreted as a way for the party to call for even greater flexibility in the labour market. The party (DL programme, 2014, 6) announced *"the need to reform the labour code to make the Slovenian economy competitive and productive"*. The party stated the same reform should also make the abuse of workers and their rights impossible, along with other anomalies. Promises were made by the party to ensure the same taxation of all legal forms of employment and to form a special fund for temporarily unemployed people that would ensure greater flexibility alongside stronger protection of employees, while again stressing its promise to make the labour market more flexible (DL programme, 2014, 8, 9). Two other liberal parties (PS programme, 2014 and ZaAB programme, 2014) did not address the problems of labour market flexibility, segmentation of the labour market etc., in their election programmes.

Like DL, the three conservative parties with a neoliberal economic policy orientation stressed the need for greater labour market flexibility and other more neoliberal policies in their 2014 election programmes. Yet some differences can be identified; the biggest of these parties, SDS, espoused such an ideological orientation to a smaller extent than NSi and SLS did. The party promised to proceed with labour market reforms to reduce the administrative and financial burden on employers, alongside adequate security insurance for employees in case they became unemployed. It announced *"the introduction of a transparent – in terms of expenses – com-*

*parative and stimulative system for different forms of employment"* (SDS programme, 2014, 9). SLS promised *"a labour code that would ensure flexibility in employment, while people would be dismissed only on the basis of objective reasons, while temporary employment would be abolished"* (SLS programme, 2014, 3). The party also called *"for measures that would ensure greater flexibility in the labour market"* and *"that regular employment would become more attractive and that would stimulate the creation of jobs with higher added value"* (SLS programme, 2014, 6, 8). Many observers described the electoral programme of NSi as the best economic programme of the 2014 elections, but also as a typical neoliberal economic programme (Kořak, 2014) with regard to labour market reforms. NSi announced *"the introduction of a simple procedure for the standard termination of employment contracts without reason and without a period of notice"*. This could *"only happen, however, if the employer gave compensation to the employee of the same amount as that given in cases of termination of employment contracts due to business reasons"* (NSi programme, 2014, 109). The party noted the need to make the labour market less rigid, with a pledge to do this in negotiations with the social partners within the social dialogue framework (NSi programme, 2014, 118).

Unsurprisingly, given the financial woes facing Slovenia, questions about how to deal with the country's economic difficulties figured prominently in the 2011 parliamentary elections; some parties (e.g. SDS and DL) in public debates put forward a mostly market-driven vision of how to cope with the economic challenges facing the country (Haughton and Krařovec, 2013). However, calls to introduce (some) neoliberal economic policies seemed to be less visible in the election programmes of the parties. NSi supported reforms of the labour code to ensure the principle of flexicurity to a greater extent, and saw employment for indefinite terms in particular as the basis of a solid and healthy economy (NSi programme, 2011, 7). SDS (SDS programme, 2011, 19) also declared the *"need to reform the code in terms of the introduction of greater flexibility and equalisation of different forms of employment"*. Still, the party stated it would encourage measures for employment for indefinite periods. The liberal Zares party promised *"to strive for greater flexibility in employment relations, along with guarantees of adequate security for employees"* (Zares programme, 2011, 4). Somewhat surprisingly, almost the same formulation was found in the SNS programme. DeSUS promised *"to respect strictly the implementation of the labour code"* (DeSUS programme, 2011, 13). SDS (SDS programme, 2011, 57) promised to *"reform the labour code to reduce the differences among workers' rights arising from the different forms of employment"*. Despite some resemblance between the two party programmes, it is obvious from other programme segments that the ideological positions of these two parties are different. While SD wanted to introduce a more social-

democratic response to the crisis, SDS clearly favoured economic policies that were more neoliberal. DL did not specifically address the problem of labour market reforms but often showed itself as one of the main advocates of more neoliberal economic policies (Haughton and Krašovec, 2013).

### Czech Republic

The only relevant political actor in the Czech Republic to use the term 'precarity' in its document was the Young Social Democrats, whose preface to its elections programme stressed the negative influence of the globalisation of financial capital since the 1980s and the subsequent 'push of the welfare state onto the defensive'. The Young Social Democrats also criticised neoliberals who use the term freedom in its crude, absolute sense. They argued that the social climate in Europe had become more extreme during the bank, financial and economic crisis, especially

*towards persons in a difficult situation, i.e. the so-called precariat, which is pushed to the societal periphery. We consider the basic responsibility of the youth association to be the protection of the interests of precariat, i.e. the specific class of persons that produces work and receives a wage for it, but on the basis of continually worsening conditions (Přemýšlíme, vnímáme, bojujeme, chceme spravedlivý stát, non dated).*

With all due respect to the Young Social Democrats, in terms of government policies the programme of its umbrella organisation was more important, i.e. the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD). In the party election programme for the elections in 2010, the use of the term 'common people' in particular is interesting – respecting the discourse established by the party chairperson; it might at least in some connotations and meanings be understood as a synonym for the term precariat.

In the programme for the early elections in 2013, in the chapter 'Economics' (ČSSD programme, 2013, 14), ČSSD defined unemployment as the most oppressive problem of the present day. The state is presented as the most important actor in minimising long-term unemployment. In comparison with the election programme for the 2010 elections, the programme is much shorter; moreover, the above-mentioned programme points that might be related to the issue of precarity are only presented as a goal, without any clear implementation strategy.

ODS presented itself as liberal-conservative but a 'social-conservative' faction may also be discerned within the party, led by Nečas. Since he became the party leader shortly before the 2010 elections and later became the prime minister, we might expect some differences between the programmes for the 2010 elections and the

early elections in 2013. For the 2010 elections, ODS' programme accentuated unemployment as an important problem but rejected the view that the state had to be the most important actor in the process of creating new job opportunities.

*The key to growing employment is the motivation for employers to create and maintain workplaces. A more flexible labour market is necessary, as well as a motivating social system preferring active behaviour and penalising passivity in the search for work (ODS programme, 2010, 7).*

For the 2013 early elections, ODS presented a new election programme and claimed that there were no left-oriented or right-oriented themes, only left-oriented solutions or correct solutions. For the purposes of our analysis, the chapter entitled 'Labour Market' seems important. ODS declared that

*it is not the state's goal to create workplaces. Nevertheless, the state should not restrict the creation of new job opportunities and should support it with every tool. We believe that the labour market has to be flexible, allowing firms to react easily to new opportunities, but also during periods of lower growth opportunities (ODS programme, 2013, 11).*

We will now focus on documents presented by new/challenger and small parties. We include in the analysis only those that became parliamentary parties after the elections in 2010 or 2013, but we have added the Green Party, which was present in parliament in 2006–2010.

The liberal-conservative TOP09 was a member of the Nečas government, where it played the role of a reformist, neoliberal actor. The party members, especially Finance Minister Kalousek, became a symbol of the 'neoliberal reform' of the government. In the programme for the 2010 elections, the party stressed the role of the family, mutual responsibility and intergenerational solidarity. The issue of creating better opportunities for graduates in the labour market is also mentioned: "We see legislation for greater flexibility of the labour market as an indispensable precondition in the fight against unemployment" (TOP09 programme, 2010, 17).

For the early elections in 2013, TOP09 presented a new document. Regarding the theme of our analysis, the TOP09 party touched on the correlation between education and the social status of youngsters in quite a comprehensive way. The programme stressed the need to support apprentice education and cooperation with firms: "The lack of qualified technical craftsmen considerably affects the production" (TOP09 programme, 2013). Nevertheless, we could not find any further comment on the questions related to the topic of our analysis elsewhere in the programme.

In 2010, the radical-leftist KSČM promised to “*create new job opportunities in the public services, such as assistants for seniors and disabled persons, assistants for teachers at grammar schools, care for public/open areas etc.*” (KSČM programme, 2010, 2). Similarly, in its programme for the 2013 elections the party set out very general comments without any clear details of how to implement them.

In 2010, the new VV party presented a programme with a clear neoliberal background. “*The state is not and cannot be the creator of economic growth, but can provide an adequate institutional environment for it*” (VV programme, 2010, 6). It also called for a more flexible labour market; one important item mentioned was the possibility of repeating the agreement on definite work periods for employees (VV programme, 2010, 8). The party also supported the implementation of tuition fees at universities (VV programme, 2010, 23). The VV failed to cross the threshold at the 2013 elections.

By contrast, after having been a non-parliamentary party for one legislative period, the KDU-ČSL returned to parliament and into government after the 2013 elections. In the foreword to its election programme, written by the party chairperson, we can see ideas concerning the topic of our analysis. For employment growth, the party promised to support domestic industry and firms, as well as technical education and cooperation between firms and schools so “*that our schools system does not produce future unemployed*” (KDU-ČSL programme, 2013, 2). The partnership between firms and schools was to be strengthened by tax concessions; the aim was to ensure higher employment among graduates (KDU-ČSL programme, 2013, 5).

At the 2013 early elections, two new parties entered parliament: the radical/extremist Dawn of Direct Democracy and the populist Yes: it will be better or Yes 2011 party (ANO 2011), led by the businessperson and media-magnate Babiš. ANO 2011 became the party in government.

We will first present the short election programme of Dawn. In the ‘Education, Science and Research’ section, Dawn accentuates cooperation between the school system and the national economy within the technical schools but also argued that universities should be financed based on the employment of their graduates.

For the 2013 elections, the ANO 2011 party presented only a very brief programme and just a few sentences referred to the issues of interest to us. In the chapter ‘Industry and Business’, support for technical education in high schools and universities and cooperation with firms within technical education is mentioned, as well as graduate unemployment as the biggest problem. Since Babiš is the most important Czech businessperson in the agricultural sector, we cannot neglect the chapter ‘Agriculture’; the programme promised to create 40,000 new jobs in the agricultural sector and 80,000 in related sectors (ANO 2011 programme, 2013).

In its 2010 election programme, the Green Party stressed that many problems cannot be solved by standard economic tools and argued for a change in thinking towards new green technologies and development of research in the hi-tech sphere (Green Party programme, 2010, 24). It also promised to create such new workplaces. Economic policies, the party argued, should also incorporate excluded social groups (Green Party programme, 2010, 14). An important part of the programme, ‘Education as the Key to the World’ discusses the importance of education for global citizenship alongside other tools, as well as to open up opportunities to work abroad.

### Precarious Work and the Education System

Although the issue of precarious work has not been directly addressed in the education system and policies (which is of special interest in the journal), this does not mean it is completely absent. Both countries analysed have been under strong pressure to conduct structural reforms with the aim of being successful economies in the long term and to deal with the crisis in the short term. Among sectors that need to be reformed, the education system, especially the tertiary system, has frequently been identified by domestic and international actors. The most common ‘recommendations’ included several calls to introduce greater flexibility, and even the (partial) privatisation of some public services, including the education system. Therefore, in the next section, we will briefly present the parties’ main ideas regarding the education system.

During the crisis in Slovenia, it was almost the norm for parties to address the problem of debt and the public deficit alongside calls to undertake reforms in the public sector. Conservative, but also liberal parties, called almost unreservedly for the introduction of the neoliberal concept of the ‘slim state’. Parties with a social-democratic or social-liberal orientation found themselves in a vice between the need for some reforms due to the bad macroeconomic situation and their traditional stance regarding the welfare state, which the majority of the Slovenian population still considered worth fighting for (Kolarič, 2012).

In 2011 and 2014, almost all parties used the term ‘quality of education and of the education system’. While some parties simply advocated quality of the system, others stressed the need to chiefly ensure the quality of public schools or a strict separation between public and private schools (SD, DeSUS, ZaAB, PS). SD, for example, issued “*warnings about granting concessions to private schools since assuring continuity of quality in the public school system is an important achievement of the welfare state*” (SD programme, 2011, 6). DeSUS expressed its “*resistance to granting concessions to private universities for the study programmes already implemented by the state universities*” (DeSUS programme,

2011, 16). In contrast, in 2011, NSi was convinced that *“establishing a line of separation between public and private schools is not appropriate if both pursue modernisation and quality, as well as modern university management models”* (NSi programme, 2011, 24).

Reforms of the education system and policy were even more salient in the 2014 election programmes than in 2011. The liberal DL (DL programme, 2014, 22) argued for *“the modernisation of standards and norms”*, as well as *“the need to adjust them to the capacities”*; the party stressed *“the need for expenditure efficiency”* by the universities as well. *“Relations between public and private schools will be solved by employing the criteria of quality, while greater choice and flexibility will help to improve quality”* (DL programme, 2014, 22). SDS announced an *“increase in working norms, issued a call for more flexible forms of employment in the education system”* and suggested that *“teachers could be taken out of the system of public employees”* (SDS programme, 2014, 13). Although it was interesting to see that SDS was inclined to stimulate entrepreneurship at all levels of education and training, this was no surprise given the party’s increasing support for neoliberal economic policies. Some could even say that by introducing market principles into the education system, which SLS (SLS programme, 2014, 19) did by announcing a voucher system to finance universities, the party was introducing equality between public and private universities. The idea rested on the assumption that students would take their vouchers and bring them to their chosen university, which would then receive money from the budget according to the number of vouchers collected. SLS saw this system as *“a guaranteed way of making expenditure in the system more transparent and just”* (SLS programme, 2014, 19). The winner of the elections, the SMC (SMC programme, 2014, 5), clearly opted for the *“demarcation of public and private universities”*. PS sought to reduce funding for private universities from 85% to 75% and the need to ensure the quality development of the top public universities (PS programme, 2014, 16). ZL made an urgent call to *“stop robbery and expropriation of the key social institutions, among them the public education system”* (ZL coalition programme, 2014, 14). In relation to one of the more important themes of the 2014 elections, namely, privatisation (Krašovec and Haughton, 2014), it argued that the privatisation of public services, among them the public education system, had to be stopped.

Most parties also accepted the need to reform the education system in light of the needs of the economy, although these ideas were more prominent in the programmes of the conservative parties.

With regard to the Czech parties, we can observe

this approach in practically all of them. For the most part, however, the idea is very general and stresses the secondary school system.<sup>7</sup> Basically, the left-oriented parties (and, in 2013, TOP09 and Dawn) emphasised the importance of apprenticeships, including the need to strengthen the position of workers in society, including their incomes.

The right-wing parties, but also the Greens, reflected the theme of the quality of education – but above all research work – in universities.

Unlike in the Slovenia, the separation between public and private universities was not included in election programmes. The first reason for this is that the state budget is allocated only to public universities, therefore private universities do not influence the financial position of public universities.

A popular term among Czech parties was the ‘knowledge economy’, used by ODS and TOP09, or the term ‘economy 4.0’, often mentioned by ČSSD. Both terms are related to the creation of an innovative economy based on research in selected spheres, such as nanotechnology, cybernetics etc.

Based on these presentations, one can see in the Czech Republic a clear dividing line between the parties in terms of ideology: the conservative (and to some extent the liberal) parties more strongly emphasised the need to introduce different aspects of neoliberal economic policies, as well as the idea of ensuring greater flexibility into the education labour market than did the other parties.

## CONCLUSION

This article dealt with the impact on political parties of the global economic and financial crisis that hit Europe in 2008. Given that parties operate in different environments and that in competitive democracies political parties should adapt to changes in their environments, including the public’s preferences (expressed in particular through the concept of dynamic representation), we expected this to have happened in Slovenia and in the Czech Republic.

Our analysis focused on how parties adapted, if at all, to one issue not originating in the crisis but heavily intensified during it, namely, precarious work. On the basis of a literature review, we expected that especially new/challenger parties, coming from the left or centre-left, would accommodate the issue and deal with the topic in their election programmes. Analysis of the parties’ election programmes revealed that the issue of precarious work was almost completely absent from the election programmes. However, in Slovenia, the ZL coalition, a left-oriented challenger, briefly referred to the

<sup>7</sup> A frequent practice at grammar and secondary schools, where teachers are often employed for only 10 months and not during the summer holidays (July and August), combines the issues of education and precarity. This practice has also been seen in Slovenia and is strongly criticised in both countries. In the Czech Republic, the Chamber of Deputies started a debate in September 2015 on an amendment that would forbid the practice. In December 2015, the such practice was finally prohibited by law.

topic a few times in the 2014 elections. In addition, SD, an established centre-left party (and one of the governing parties at the 2014 elections) that has 'ownership' of welfare issues and equality and the protection of workers' rights, mentioned the issue once in its programme. In the Czech Republic, no parties mentioned the issue at all.

Since Slovenia and the Czech Republic are strongly dependent on the world economy, it is no surprise that the issue was more frequently addressed indirectly in the parties' election programmes. Globalisation, the prevalence of neoliberal policies, and calls to adapt to them led parties to strongly espouse the need for greater 'flexibilisation of the labour market' which, as we can see, is directly connected with the problems of precarious work.

Calls to introduce some private-sector principles into the public sector's activities were significantly expressed during the crisis in both countries and the public education system clearly could not remain completely isolated from such ideas.

We can conclude that the problem of precarious work, despite its increasing saliency, was not important enough for the parties and inter-party electoral competition to address it more vigorously in their election pro-

grammes. It is also possible to say that parties did not follow voters' preferences to any great extent. Instead, parties adapted to a greater extent to challenges from the international environment (globalisation and the prevalence of neoliberalism), since in virtually all the election programmes the flexibility of the labour market was mentioned. Here, at least, it is possible to detect a difference among parties regarding party ideology; while liberal and conservative parties as a rule argued for the need to introduce greater flexibility and private-sector principles into the public sector, social-democratic parties were more reserved.

Following Bardi et al. (2014), it seems that during the crisis parties decided to espouse responsibility (for considering the long-term needs of their people that go beyond the short-term preferences of those same people) and at the same time were able to adjust and react to the policies of international organisations, such as the European Union, the IMF, the OECD and the World Bank, which impose constraints on domestic policies to a bigger extent than responsiveness does. This also means that Ezrow and Hellwig's (2014) expectation that parties' responsiveness to voter/public preferences will be less pronounced in countries that depend heavily on the global economy was met in the countries analysed.

## PRILAGODLJIVOST POLITIČNIH STRANK EKONOMSKI IN FINANČNI KRIZI? NEKATERE UGOTOVITVE IZ SLOVENIJE IN ČEŠKE REPUBLIKE

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### POVZETEK

Članek preučuje prilagodljivost slovenskih in čeških strank ekonomski in finančni krizi, ki je Evropo prizadela leta 2008. Upošteva ugotovitve mnogih politologov, pričakujeva, da so se tudi analizirane stranke prilagodile pričakovanjem volivcev oziroma javnosti in so v svojih volilnih programih (ne)posredno izpostavile problematiko naraščajočega prekarnega dela. Analiza je razkrila, da so stranke v tem pogledu v zelo majhni meri sledile pričakovanjem volivcev oziroma javnosti in so se na ta izziv v volilnih programih odzvale le posredno. Vendar pa so se stranke v bistveno večji meri prilagodile izzivom iz mednarodnega okolja, saj so dejansko vse v svojih volilnih programih ome-nile problematiko fleksibilnosti trga delovne sile. V tem pogledu je, pričakovano, moč identificirati pomen ideologije strank, saj so liberalne in konzervativne stranke praviloma izpostavile večjo potrebo po uvedbi večje fleksibilnosti trga delovne sile.

**Ključne besede:** politična stranka, kriza, Slovenija, Češka republika, prilagodljivost

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