



International roundtable  
«Political Parties and Elections: International Practice  
and Legislation of Uzbekistan»

I wanted to point out a few characteristics and general trends of Slovenia, as a country that is still, in my view, in transition towards becoming a mature democracy, even though it has already passed the initial stages; and also to make a comparison with more mature democracies. My observations stem from studies as much as personal experience, as a Slovenia citizen who spent over 13 years abroad.

My basic premise is that there are a number of elements, which are vital for a mature democratic political system. The ones I would point out are diverse political parties, which have defined programs and policies on particular issues, as well as a number of leadership personalities across the political spectrum. Another key element is an agreement across the political spectrum on the most basic common interests of a country – agreement on particular national security interests such as security, health, economy, etc.

Over the last decade there have been significant changes taking place in the Slovenian political space. After its independence, which also marked a beginning of the transition period, the political space was very much marked by a division between the left and right. This stemmed from the previous political order where the conservative, liberal and socialist pillars were clearly defined and there was a wide gap between them. While a number of political parties formed after independence (i.e. multi-party system), the approach and the perception of political space was still very much marked by the two sides – left and right. However over the last decade there has been a decisive move away from that bi-polarity and a movement of political parties towards the center. There are a number of reasons for this occurrence:

1. First, the entering of the younger generation, which is not defined by the past but takes a different view of the political parties and personalities. The sides of the

political spectrum are less important than in the past. An increasing number of voters is migrating to the center and into the ranks of the 'undecided' (i.e. willing to switch votes depending on the party /leader).

2. Secondly, the political parties have migrated to the center – taking a moderate stance on a number of issues – again, this is a reaction to the voters, the majority of which sit in the middle and as mentioned above are turning into swing voters.
3. Thirdly, there is another trend that has developed in the past decade and that is the 'personality effect' in politics. The party programs (and party leaning), which were the predominant driving factor in the past is now giving way to personalities in the political parties. There are a few leaders in Slovenia, which continuously marked the political space ever since independence and formed whole movements around their name (ex. Milan Kucan, Janez Drnovsek etc). In that sense the personality has become a much more important pull for the voters than before. It also seems that voters want to entrust their votes not only to an abstract group or institutions but to an actual person, which they feel they need to know well enough to trust. As a consequence the written party programs have basically become less important and the parties themselves do not put much emphasis on elaborately defining their programs.
4. And to add another point, fourthly, it is important in Slovenia that the politician portrays the image of someone approachable, like an ordinary citizen. People would like to relate to their politicians, for their leaders to be of course gifted but on the other hand to be approachable like 'everyone else'. Politicians who openly miss-use their positions or any assets that are deemed to belong to the state, and hence the people, quickly become unpopular and are discredited.

To compare some of these points to a more matured democratic political system, for instance the United States. The difference is that in the US the persona of the leader and the party program are both equally important. The issues themselves are already clearly defined for instance: social security, health care, economy, national security – these are



some of the key issues which always feature high in the party programs and on the leader's agenda. The clear definition of these issues also implies that there is a general consensus in the US, across the isles, of what should feature high on the US national agenda. While the parties have varied approaches to these issues, there is a basic consensus that these are important for the country and hence should be discussed and driven forward. The approaches are defined mostly through political programs. While of course these programs develop and vary, nevertheless it is clearly defined where the Democratic party stands on let's say tax deductions and where the Republican party stands on the same issue.

In addition the leaders have to have clearly defined views and policies on these key issues, as that is what they are ultimately judged on. In this sense it is both the party programs as well as the leaders that define the political system. In this respect the US is a more mature democratic system.

In Slovenia for instance we are still missing clearly defined consistent policies and programs from the political parties. While personality has become more prominent in the political sphere, in my view, so will the party programs and policies in the future. As the political electorate becomes more and more educated and interested in particular key issues it will demand from the political parties that they also give more defined and comprehensive programs.