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SLOVENIA'S PARLIAMENTARY ELITE: REPRESENTATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY SINCE 1992

Abstract. *The recent frequent attempts to hold Slovenia's parliamentary elite to account through pre-term elections (together with the introduction of a gender quota system) have resulted in a reduction in the core number of experienced MPs and at the same an increasing share of MPs being either highly educated or female or both. The fact that the current MPs have the same low levels of political experience as was the case during Slovenia's democratic consolidation stage during the 1990s is confirmation of the electorate's power to hold MPs to account and select new representatives. However, the declining level of professionalism among MPs cast doubt on whether hyper-accountability and the radical replacement of the national parliamentary elite is a long term solution to the current problems of representation.*

Keywords: *parliament, elite, representation, accountability, Slovenia*

60

Introduction¹

This article addresses the hierarchical representative mode of governance in Slovenia. It tackles a critical element of a young representative democracy. Since the 1990s, Slovenia's national parliament has been increasingly interconnected with the ever more complex web of modes of EU governance.

For emerging post-socialist democracies like Slovenia it is critical that elections do actually allow citizens to use mechanisms efficiently to hold their elite to account. It means that citizens do have the actual power to replace the incumbent government with the opposition if they evaluate the

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political elite's performance negatively (Markowski, 2005: 2). Parliamentary elites are particularly crucial in parliamentary systems (compared to semi-presidential or presidential systems). Indeed, representation and the accountability of the national parliamentary elite feature high on the democratic agenda.

In spite of recent debates on governance (see the article by Fink Hafner and Hafner in this special issue), political elites in general and parliamentary elites in particular are central to the concept of democratic representation (Hoffman-Lange, 1992; Higley and Burton, 2006; Best and Cotta, 2000; Sasaki ed., 2008; Best et al., 2012; Semenova et al., 2014). Parliamentary elites are also regarded as being accountable and responsive to citizens' demands (Kim and Patterson, 1988: 396). They are not only expected to guarantee political stability but are also expected to ensure an inclusive and responsive democracy.

What do parliamentary elites look like? What happens when voters are so disappointed with the national parliamentary elite that they turn to hyper-accountability (a consecutive replacement of a significant share of MPs) – as happened in Slovenia and in other countries in the context of the recent economic and political crisis? What does a significant replacement of a national parliamentary elite mean for democracy at the national level and in the EU multi-level context?

Studies reveal that some of the main characteristics of long-established Western democracies are now also present in the newly established democracies (Semenova et al., 2014). Due to the recent destabilisation of Western parliaments and post-socialist parliaments searching for political stability among their increasingly common characteristics have been: weak partisan and strong electoral linkages; a reduced relevance of party membership; a predominance of professionals and party leaders (Katz and Mair, 1995; Semenova et al., 2014).

Representation and the accountability of the political elites in younger democracies have been incomprehensibly overlooked in academic research. Furthermore, Slovenia is unfortunately missing from a pioneering project on parliamentary elites in Central and Eastern Europe (Semenova et al., 2014). The task of this article is therefore primarily to offer preliminary insights into the longitudinal changes in Slovenia's parliamentary elite in order to obtain a comparative view on national developments in Slovenia and to identify the main dynamics between the citizen voters and their parliamentary representatives and link this with the problems of democracy.

If we look at research into Slovenia, we can identify only a few sociological or political-sociological academic works on Slovenia's political elites and even less on parliamentary elites (Kramberger and Rus, 1995; Adam and Tomšič, 2000; Kramberger and Vehovar, 2000). Iglič and Rus (2000) looked

at the persistence of old communist elites in recruitment and elite circulation patterns based on interviews with members of the elite in the framework of social network analysis. Some data has been gathered in studies of the legislative behaviour of MPs, conducted by Danica Fink-Hafner and Drago Zajc during the 1990s (for an overview of this research see Fink-Hafner, 1998). However, survey questionnaires and low response rates mean that these offer a limited analysis.

In order to fill the gap in the literature, the article offers some empirical insights into Slovenia's parliamentary elite since the transition to democracy and relates them to the basic notions of representation and accountability. We build on Bovens' (2007: 447) definition of democratic accountability defined as *'The relationship between an actor and the forum in which the actor has an obligation to explain and to justify his or her conduct; the forum can pose questions and pass judgement, and the actor may face the consequences'*. More precisely, we understand democratic accountability of parliamentarians as their effective dependence on voters' choice at parliamentary elections. Representation is understood from a macro and micro (individual parliamentarian) point of view. At the macro level we take Saward's (2010: 36) understanding of representation as an on-going process - the actual performativity of representation and its capacity to shape society and people's views. At the micro level we look at the socio-economic and political characteristics of individual MPs.

As this contribution is pioneering, we aim to answer the following basic research questions. Firstly, ever since the first multi-party elections in Slovenia it has been possible for new political parties and new MPs to enter parliament (unlike certain other parliaments, such as Hungary during the 1990s). Therefore, we would like to know how the characteristics of parliamentarians have changed during the period between the first elections following the adoption of the 1991 Constitution (in 1992) and the latest elections in 2014. Secondly, as several political parties from the first decade (until 2000) have consolidated and survived the parliamentary arena, is it possible to reveal a stable core of parliamentary politicians with a distinctive profile? Thirdly, how have parliamentarians in Slovenia been changing compared to parliamentarians in Western democracies and other post-socialist countries?

We follow the approach from a comparative research (Semenova et al., 2014). Our thesis is that, at the macro political level, the development of representation in Slovenia since the transition can be described by four main characteristics. Firstly, trust in political parties and the National Assembly has been low and is declining. Secondly, since the 1992 elections, the parliamentary arena has been opened to new and even small parties (which has introduced new MPs). Thirdly, gradual changes in parliamentary representation in the period between the 1992 and 2008 elections have been

replaced by radical changes in the parliamentary elite in the context of the global financial and economic crisis (at two pre-term elections in 2011 and 2014) and an increase in corruption since 2006 (Nations in Transit, 2010 and 2017). Fourthly, radical voter dissatisfaction with their representation has translated into a hyper-accountability of the national parliamentary elite. At the micro level these changes can be observed by looking at individual MPs' socio-economic and political characteristics. A methodology and sources for our analysis are presented in the empirical section.

In the next section we will present a theoretical framework. In subsequent sections we will address Slovenia's contextual variables: the volatility of citizens' trust in parliament and the general volatility of parliamentary parties; longitudinal changes in MP demographics (sex, age, education); and MPs' affiliations (party age, party family) during the period between 1992 and 2014. In the conclusions, we summarise and comment on our findings at the macro-level citizens-parliamentary elite dynamics and the shift from gradual to radical change in parliamentary elite from the perspective of MPs' characteristics as well as from the broader perspective of representation and accountability of representative governance.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framing of the article is based on theories of the political and parliamentary elite (elite theory and representation theory) as well as on two main approaches to studying the parliamentary elite (macro and micro level).

General, sociological-founded elite theories of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century emerged particularly in the writings of Mosca (1939), Pareto (1935) and Michels (2009)[1915]. While they were criticised as 'elite theorists' (providers of anti-democratic sources of elite theory) or 'Machiavellians' (Nye, 1977; Christensen, 2013), academic interest has subsequently focused on parliamentary elites as drivers of fully democratic and egalitarian societies (Higley and Burton, 2006). According to elite theory, the emergence of consensually united elites is a favourable condition for democratisation (Higley and Burton, 2006). A more comprehensive study of political elites was carried out at the beginning of the 1960s in which elites were recognised as a significant element of nation building, as well as an important segment of the political structure. For elites it is not only important to pay attention to their closed internal processes (horizontal elite integration), but also to their democratic openness to their citizens (vertical elite integration) (Hoffmann-Lange, 1992).

Theories of representation first of all link political elites with their electorates through political parties (Pitkin, 1967) in providing the

vertical citizens-elite integration. Indeed, the precondition for representative democracy is considered to be the power of citizens to select their political personnel and through elections to influence politics and policymaking (Schumpeter, 2003). In light of their representation and also accountability function, MPs – together with their political parties – are thus the people who citizens would most expect to exhibit some degree of organisational stability and elite continuity (Scarrow and Burcu, 2010).

For competition for citizens' votes to be effective and accountability to take place, political parties represent voters through their elites, most directly through the members of parliament (MacKenzie and Kousser, 2014). Since the 1960s, representation has not been only understood in terms of 'acting for persons' (substantive representation), but also 'standing for persons' (symbolic representation) (Pitkin, 1967: 209). Elections in these settings represent a starting point of the so called vertical elite integration frameworks where the principals (i.e. the voters) transfer their right to be represented to the agents (i.e. the parties and their candidates on the lists) on the assumption that they have been adequately represented by the agents in the past (Markowski, 2005). For representation in the context of the proliferating new modes of governance and the multi-level regional political system of the EU, the understanding of representation needs to go beyond the traditional understandings of the elite and representation (Taylor, 2016). This is why the literature has increasingly focused on Saward's (2010: 36) understanding of representation as an on-going process of performing actual representation, shaping society and people's views.

Indeed, as Francis (2011) argues, the elites possess power and political influence, so – based on their legitimacy – can make the most important political decisions impacting on their environments. Kim and Patterson (1988) believe that they can do this because their various social origins, career experiences and beliefs enable them to be more responsive to citizens. Some authors believe that this can help to improve political institutional stability (Field and Higley, 1973). By contrast, Arslan (2004) notes the potential of the parliamentary elite to work as an agent of social change. Scholars looking at representation and political accountability second this thesis (Kersbergen and van Waarden, 2004; Higley and Pakulski, 2008). Nevertheless, in studying representation in the context of new (post-liberal) governance forms, researchers tend to identify other dimensions of representation, such as symbolic (image-conscious) representation (Saward, 2010; Taylor, 2016).

Studying elites in Western European democracies remains related to the recognition of stable representation and accountability patterns (Best and Cotta, 2000; Sasaki, eds., 2008; Best et al., 2012; Borcherd, 2014). At the same time, the majority of the studies of young democracies have been

predominantly occupied with the roles of the political elite in the processes of political system transformations to democracy (Semenova et al., 2014).

Empirical research into parliamentary elites so far emphasises the autonomy and homogeneity of elites as one of the crucial pieces of information about elite recruitment (Quandt, 1969: 4). The comparative study of the structural history of the European representative elites identifies institutional change, social-structural and value change as three main factors underlying long-term changes in parliamentary recruitment (Best and Cotta, 2000: 16, 17). In young democracies however, the professionalisation of MPs remains a precondition for the consolidation of democracy. New democracies now face the problems of empirical political professionalism perceived by voters as being in tension with their democratic expectations – the tension Borcherd (2014) finds in older democracies. The proportion of MPs with prior political experiences had been increasing until the political turmoil in the context of the recent financial and economic crisis. This political turmoil had not only shaken the party arenas in Slovenia and other post-socialist countries, but also those of many Western countries (Kriesi, 2014; Bermeo and Bartels, ed., 2014; Luengo, Marín Fernández-García, 2016).

A recent study of elite circulation (Gherghina, 2015) focuses on measuring the re-election (re-nomination) rate of MPs. It has been argued that increased elite circulation has significant benefits: a higher quality of democracy and legitimacy, greater accountability and lower levels of corruption (Gherghina, 2015: 394–399). The question of how political elites circulate after regime change also remains important as new leadership is considered to have higher legitimacy (Higley and Lengyel, 2000). However, Francis (2011: 7) warns that the relatively large variability in the partisan electoral support in the post-transition countries is not automatically a democratic indicator. Rather, it is the result of increasing volatility based on the non-democratic behaviour of political elites. It can also result in discouraging MPs, reducing political interests in representation, and result in a higher level of economic and managerial sphere in politics (Tavits, 2008). Furthermore, it can encourage destructive party dynamics – i.e. rapid changes in parliamentary party groups accompanied by party realignment among MPs (Tavits, 2011; Semenova et al., 2014: 296).

Within the theoretical framework presented, a study of Slovenia's parliament is expected to reveal similarities with Central European parliaments both in terms of the dynamics of change as well their characteristics in their various stages of evolution since the transition to democracy. More precisely, we expect to see a consolidation period of parliament during the 1990s, a related increase in the professionalisation of MPs, and socio-economic characteristics that are increasingly similar to those in the parliaments of Western democracies. We expect the financial and economic crisis to

have affected the socio-economic and political characteristics of Slovenia's parliamentary elite, mirroring the experiences of the elites of post-socialist countries in Central and Eastern Europe. For the case study we will apply macro and micro approaches.

The Macro and Micro Approach to Studying the Parliamentary Elite

The macro approach has been important in studying transitions to democracy and the consolidation of new democracies. Studies of the latest CEE countries emphasise the importance of considering the role of the elites in the framework of the wider political system as triggers of political changes and stabilisation (Best and Cotta, 2000). In this regard it is held that elites significantly contribute to a higher quality of democracy, legitimacy and especially accountability (Higley and Lengyel, 2000). Many scholars relate the latter to the phenomena of volatility, e.g. the variability of the partisan electoral support as a result of dissatisfaction or low party identification (Elster et al., 1998; Tavits, 2008; Francis, 2011), leading to the effect of hyper-accountability (Roberts, 2008). It is believed that party volatility strongly affects the elite-mass linkage and the stabilisation of the party system in new democracies, as well as parliamentary recruitment and elite formation (Semenova et al., 2014), and that instability of the party system is more likely to occur due to irregular and erratic elites than a lack of strong political identity among voters (Tavits, 2008).

The micro approach to studying parliamentary elites as polls of members of the parliament rests on the key empirical finding that, although multiparty parliamentary democracies are in their essence built upon groups and although decisions are made according to institutional rules and procedures, power and decision making resides with individuals (Weber, 1992; Best and Cotta, 2000). This clearly brings the role of individual representatives and their characteristics to the core of our understanding of democracy (Hoffman-Lange, 1992; Crowther and Matonyte, 2007; Oñate, 2012).

MPs as individual democratic representatives, agenda setters and professionals are important actors. The role of political representatives is attached to their social background (including age, gender, social class, education, occupation, regional belonging), political attachments and allegiances (Pulkkinen, 2008; Semenova et al., 2014). Recent empirical studies of parliamentary elites in post-socialist countries (Semenova et al., 2014) have revealed that parliaments have been becoming more heterogeneous in terms of the increasing representation of women and minorities – to some extent moving in a similar direction to parliaments in Western countries.

While in this article we understand the parliamentary elite and its dynamics to be crucial to the processes of democracy (Best and Edinger, 2005), we

rely on the approach used in studying parliamentary elites in Central and Eastern Europe (Semenova et al., 2014) to investigate the Slovenian parliament. This includes an analysis of: (1) political changes, particularly of the party system; (2) the social characteristics of MPs; (3) professionalization; and (4) the ideological-political affiliations of MPs.

Empirical Analysis: The Macro and Micro Approach to Studying the Parliamentary Elite in Slovenia

Two main approaches are combined in comparative perspective in our case study of Slovenia. The macro approach includes an analysis of the general dynamics of representation and accountability in the relationships between voters and the parliamentary elite. The micro approach is used to reveal longitudinal changes in the socio-economic and political characteristics of MPs.

We can observe a continuity in the Slovenian parliamentary elite in the period from 1992 (the first parliamentary elections based on the new constitution of 1991) to 2014 when the most recent elections were held. On the basis of data on individual members of parliament and official election data, we study the general characteristics of the parliamentary elite as a whole with a specific focus on the volatility of parliamentary parties. We analyse three main clusters of variables longitudinally in the period between the 1992 and 2014 elections: (1) the macro variables – the decrease in public trust in parliament and the general volatility of parliamentary parties; (2) the demography of MPs (sex, age, education); (3) the characteristics of a political party to which an individual MP belongs (party age, party family).

We based the exploratory account of Slovenia's parliamentary elite in the period between the 1992 and 2014 elections on a statistical data set of elected MPs during the years 1992–2014 (NEC, 2016; OFGRS, 1992–2016; RNARS, 1992–2001; Kustec Lipicer et al., 2017). The longitudinal changes in voters' general attitudes toward political parties is based on Slovenian public opinion data from Politbarometer (Toš et al., 1997, 1999, 2001, 2008; Kurdija and Toš, 2009, 2013) and Slovene Public Opinion (Hafner Fink and Malešič, 2016; Kurdija and Malnar, 2016). We gathered the official data on parliamentary elections from the National Electoral Commission and the data on party family belongings from the homepages of the political parties.

The Macro View: Voters and Parliamentary Elites in Slovenia (1992–2014)

Representation is, to an important extent, the symbolic and instrumental linkage between social groups and elites (Mansbridge, 2003). In democracies, it is a dynamic phenomenon because elections allow voters to enforce

the accountability of parliamentary parties. The dynamics between voters and the representative political elite in Slovenia has been dynamic due to the institutional framework. Indeed, the proportional electoral system with its low effective threshold, and since 2000 a legal threshold of 4 per cent, has ensured that the national parliament has remained open to changes in parliamentary parties and individual MPs². Nevertheless, the scope of the change became much greater in the context of international financial and economic crisis. As shown in Table 1, since the earliest stage of democratic consolidation in Slovenia citizens have not placed much trust in political institutions. The longitudinal measurement of Slovenians citizens' trust in political institutions additionally declined in the context of managing of the economic and financial crisis. The most recent parliamentary elections (2014) took place in circumstances of the poorest levels of trust measured in political parties since 1993 (Table 1).

Table 1: TRUST IN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 5, WHERE 1 MEANS 'NOT AT ALL' AND 5 'ENTIRELY' (MEAN VALUES)

Institution	1993	1997	2000	2004	2008	2012	2014	2015
Government	2.12	3.03	3.10	2.81	2.98	2.01	2.08	2.43
Prime Minister	—	3.54	3.64	2.94	3.20	2.48	2.38	—
National Assembly	2.26	2.88	3.02	2.90	3.00	2.59	2.11	2.16
President of the Republic	3.02	3.84	3.89	3.46	3.44	3.19	2.74	2.79
Political parties	1.67	2.28	2.60	2.56	2.51	2.31	1.80	1.95

Source: Calculations based on Toš et al. (1997; 1999; 2001; 2008); Kurdija and Toš (2009; 2013); Hafner Fink and Malešič (2016); Kurdija and Malnar (2016).

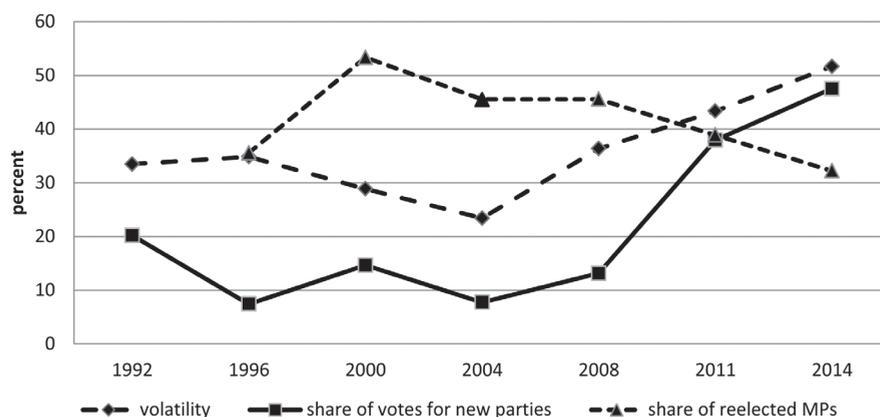
Extremely low levels of trust in political parties led voters to turn away from old parties to new parties, from well-established politicians to new political faces, from old party politics to personalist politics. The party system, which was consolidated during the period between 1990 and 2004, has been radically shaken up since 2008.

As shown in Figure 1, the level of volatility remained comparatively high (above 30 percent) after the first elections in 1992. This was due mainly to the party consolidation processes which took place in the disintegration and merging of smaller, mainly left-wing political parties. After this, volatility declined and was at its lowest (23 percent) in 2004 when a coalition was formed by the right-wing parties for the first time following Slovenia's independence. Volatility increased again with the 2008 elections in which new

² <http://www.us-rs.si/o-sodiscu/pravna-podlaga/ustava/spremembe-in-dopolnitve-ustave/>.

(predominantly left-wing) political parties were established and the volatility rate rose to 50% in 2014, although they failed utterly at the subsequent elections (Kustec Lipicer and Henjak, 2015). The political turmoil post-2008 explains the declining number of re-elected MPs during the last three elections in Slovenia (Figure 1).

Figure 1: VOLATILITY, VOTE SHARE OF NEW PARTIES AND SHARE OF RE-ELECTED MPS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN SLOVENIA 1992–2014



Source: authors' calculations based on data from the National Electoral Commission (2015).

At the macro-political level, the voters re-shaping the parliamentary structure since 1992 can be viewed in three stages. During the first decade, a tri-polar structure (parties belonging to socialist, conservative and liberal party families) was reliant on liberals in the metric centre (Fink-Hafner, 2012) (Table 1 in the Appendix). Secondly, at the 2004 elections there was a shift toward a bi-polar structure (predominantly socialist – conservative). Thirdly, the re-establishment of a liberal segment since 2014 appears to have cemented the return to a tri-polar structure (predominantly socialist, liberal and conservative) (Table 1 in the Appendix). However, this re-structuring does not appear to have returned the same kind of socialist, liberal or conservative representation formerly known in the 1990s. Nor has it returned the welfare state to its pre-2004 status; Slovenia is still affected by the EU's neoliberal turn and the austerity measures it has dictated on Slovenia since 2011.

The Micro View – The Individual Characteristics of Slovenian MPs (1992–2014)

Social characteristics of MPs

As shown in Table 2, the gradual aging of Slovenia's parliamentary elite (the average age being 42.9 in 1992 to 50.4 in 2008) is similar to other post-socialist countries, e.g. in Hungary the average age being 46.7 in 1990 and 50.5 in 2008 (Illonszki and Schwarcz, 2014: 61). In Slovenia the party system shake-up in 2011 returned a trend toward a lower average age (the average age being 49.1 years in 2011 and 47.6 years in 2014).

Table 2: INTERNAL DIFFERENTIATION/HOMOGENEITY OF MPS IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING EACH GENERAL ELECTION (1990–2014)

Characteristic	1990	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011	2014
Average age of all MPs	–	42.9	46.1	47.5	48.2	50.4	49.1	47.6
% of female MPs	–	12.5%	6.6%	12.2%	11.2%	13.5%	32.2%	36.4%
% of highly educated MPs (% with PhDs) ^a	–	75.0% (22.7%)	73.6% (15.4%)	74.4% (14.4%)	77.6% (13.5%)	74.2% (12.4%)	84.4% (4.4%)	84.1% (12.5%)
Parliamentary Experience % of returning MPs who had previously held office	–	–	35.6%	55.0%	53.8%	46.2%	44.0%	32.2%

Source: calculations based on the Kustec Lipicer et al. (2017) data base.

^a Highly educated MPs include those who have completed at least university degree education (4–6 years of study and degree). The percentage in parentheses refers to individuals with doctoral or equivalent education (PhD).

As in other post-socialist countries, the majority of MPs in Slovenia attended higher education (Mansfeldová, 2014; Illonszki and Schwarcz, 2014). However, since the pre-term elections of 2011, education levels among Slovenian MPs have risen. The proportion of highly educated MPs rose from 75% to slightly above 84%. Voters increasingly support MPs holding doctorates (4.4% in 2011 and 12.5% in 2014).

The extent of gender inequality between parliamentarians in Slovenia has been quite high, peaking in 1996. Nevertheless, the low rate of the re-elected female representatives has increased since the 2008 elections. There are probably two main reasons for this. Firstly, the introduction of the quota system (Humer and Panić, 2015) based on the modification of Article 43 into the Slovenian constitution in 2004³. Secondly, the success of new political parties established just before the elections. These new political parties lack

³ <http://www.us-rs.si/o-sodiscu/pravna-podlaga/ustava/spremembe-in-dopolnitve-ustave/>.

cadre and are, as a rule, more open to female members and candidates. This is often because new parties are not in position to calculate (based on previous election results) in which electoral constituencies it has highest chances to win seats; whereas established parties with such knowledge based on previous experiences often field male candidates (rather than female candidates) to run in 'winnable' electoral units (Fink-Hafner and Krašovec, 2000). A similar trend can be observed in Hungary (Ilonszki and Schwarcz, 2014: 59).

The re-election of MPs and problems of professionalisation

The re-election patterns of Slovenian MPs have changed considerably over time. The election in 2000 saw 48 – the highest number of MPs – re-elected, more than half of the whole parliamentarians. This was at a time when the rate of volatility and the number of new political parties competing at the elections was at its lowest. On the contrary, the lowest rate of re-election occurred in Slovenia's second (1996) and the latest (2014) elections. In both cases, several previous parliamentary parties failed to re-enter the parliament. In 2014, the volatility and the number of new political parties running was the highest so far. In the period analysed between 1992 and 2014, 257 MPs were re-elected once, 75 twice, 36 three times, 14 four times, 9 five times, one six times, and two seven terms (Kustec Lipicer et al., 2017).

The political turnover in the context of the financial and economic crisis has brought about a decline in the proportion of MPs with parliamentary experience. In Hungary in 2010, only 54.7% had prior experience, compared to 72.3% in 2006 (Ilonszki and Schwarcz, 2014: 65). In Slovenia, the percentage of MPs with experience sharply decreased to 32.2% in 2014 compared to 45% in 2008 and 2011. Compared to old parties (i.e. those established before 2008), MPs of new political parties (established since 2008) are often elected to the National Assembly once and do not return. The percentage of MPs with parliamentary experience has recently dropped to the level of the party system consolidation stage – with around one third of MPs in the National Assembly being experienced (Table 2).

As expected, the age structure of re-elected MPs tends towards the older age groups when compared to previously unelected MPs. Of the re-elected MPs in 2014, about one quarter are 31–45 years old, two thirds of 46–60 years old, and some 7% older than 60. Of those, re-elected for five or more times (e.g. more than half of all elections so far in Slovenia), they are all male MPs from the old political parties with clear ideological orientations, and none from old interest parties. The majority of them have previously undertaken some kind of important political functions either inside parliament or as local mayors while this was legally permitted. Most of them had also previously served as prime ministers.

The data shows that the most solid segment of Slovenia's parliamentary elite has tended to be made up of middle-aged university-educated and politically experienced men. The percentage of the highest education category (master's degree or higher) is lower for MPs who were re-elected a greater number of times (32% for those re-elected twice and 0% for those re-elected 6 or 7 times).

The professionalisation of MPs has been gender biased. Almost 60 percent of female MPs (compared to about 40 percent of male MPs) have only experience of one election. A similar gender biased pattern has also persisted since the 2011 elections.

Overall, the data on the recent younger, more gender-balanced and more educated parliamentary elite tells us little about their capabilities as accountable representatives. More detailed research is needed to be able to estimate the quality of parliamentarians. It is necessary to join current researcher endeavours (Bursens et al., eds., 2017) studying the qualities and responsibilities of politicians to search for solutions to the problems of post-liberal democracy.

Nevertheless, the empirical findings on trends in Slovenia show beyond doubt that Slovenia's parliamentary elite is becoming less politically experienced while problems of democratic governance are becoming ever more complex and interlinked with the big questions of guaranteeing representation and accountability – not only within the nation state, but also within the framework of the EU and globally.

Conclusion

Political parties and parliaments in post-socialist countries have been considered to be key actors in the process of democratic consolidation. They have also been held accountable to voters. While in some post-socialist countries (e.g. Hungary) where institutional rules made the freezing of the parliamentary party system possible (Ilonszki and Schwarcz, 2014), Slovenia stands out as having permitted the renewal of its parliamentary elite since its transition to democracy. Nevertheless, Slovenian voters have joined the recent trend that has been observed both in post-socialist countries and in the West in shaking up its national parliament.

As with other post-socialist countries (with the exception of Poland), the average age of Slovenian parliamentarians has until recently been rising, becoming more educated with a gender imbalance. However, instead of the much-needed stability required for the consolidation of a new political and economic order, Slovenia has experienced a combination of financial, economic and political destabilisation. On one hand, voters have continued to re-elect only a tiny elite of politically experienced male MPs in their 50s,

while voting into parliament a large share of new and politically inexperienced and somewhat younger MPs who are increasingly more educated and more of whom are female. Indeed, the pattern of MP turnover in Slovenia corresponds directly to the radical renewal of the party system and the rise of personalist politics.

In contrast to the continuous tiny core of MPs, a type of temporary (one-mandate) and increasingly educated parliamentarian has emerged in Slovenia since 2011. While Slovenian voters seek a politically articulate and responsive elite, they remain committed to democracy as a system of representation. However, Slovenian voters have been placing their hope in new political personnel and new political parties within the existing national political system. Unlike in many other post-socialist and western countries which have witnessed a trend towards personalist politics, the parliament in Slovenia has not become a home to extremely radicalised left or extremely radicalised right parties. Although some stability is returning to parliament, with the first regular elections (i.e. as opposed to pre-term elections) in ten years due to be held in 2018, it remains to be seen whether a return to the re-established tri-polar balance of power with a new liberal centre will sufficiently satisfy voters' expectations to survive and also contribute to the rise of a proportion of the re-elected MPs.

The question remains whether the systemic problems of democracy, representation and accountability in the framework of the EU political system (and Slovenia being its part) (Palonen, Pulkkinen, Rosales, eds., 2008; Hobolt and Tilley, 2014), can be resolved by the hyper-accountability of the parliamentary elite at the national level. Rather than being part of the solution, the effect of hyper-accountability on a national parliamentary elite has arguably contributed to the problem of representation and public trust within the EU. Beside the necessary additional research into political and parliamentary elites so as to identify their capacity and the factors affecting their behaviour, the search for institutional solutions to ensure representation and accountability (as noted in the article by Ana Železnik) will continue.

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Appendix 1: PARTY CLASSIFICATIONS AND PARLIAMENTARY MANDATES

Party name	Age	Party family*	1992	1996	2000	2004	2008	2011	2014
Demokratska stranka Slovenije (DS)	Old	NCA	6	–	–	–	–	–	–
DeSUS – Demokratska stranka upokojencev Slovenije	Old	NCA	–	5	4	4	7	6	10
Državljska lista (DL)	New	NCA	–	–	–	–	–	8	–
Koalicija Združena leвица (DSD, IDS TRS)	New	Left	–	–	–	–	–	–	6
		Green	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Liberalna demokracija Slovenije (LDS)	Old	Liberal	22	25	34	23	5	–	–
Nova Slovenija (NSi)	Old	Conservative / Christian Democrat	–	–	8	9	–	4	5
Pozitivna Slovenija (PS)	New	NCA	–	–	–	–	–	28	–
Slovenska demokratska stranka (SDS)	Old	Socialist-anti-communist	4	16	14	29	28	26	21
		conservative							
Slovenska ljudska stranka (SLS); SLS+SKD Slovenska ljudska stranka	Old	Conservative / Agrarian	10	19	9	7	5	6	–
Slovenska nacionalna stranka (SNS)	Old	NCA	12	4	4	6	5	–	–
Slovenski krščanski demokrati (SKD)	Old	Conservative / Christian Democrat	15	10	–	–	–	–	–
Socialni demokrati (SD)	Old	Socialist / Social Democrat	14	9	11	10	29	10	6
Stranka modernega centra (SMC)	New	Liberal	–	–	–	–	–	–	36
Stranka mladih Slovenije (SMS)	Old	NCA	–	–	4	–	–	–	–
ZARES – socialno liberalni	New	Liberal	–	–	–	–	9	–	–
Zaveznitvo Alenke Bratušek (ZaAB)	New	Liberal	–	–	–	–	–	–	4
Zeleni Slovenije (ZS)	Old	Green	5	–	–	–	–	–	–

Source: Kustec Lipicer et al. (2017) and party web pages.

Party family – based on European party family affiliation

NCA – no clear affiliation