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Student Periodical

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BISLA — Bratislava
International School
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THE OPINIONS, BELIEFS AND VIEWPOINTS EXPRESSED BY THE VARIOUS AUTHORS IN THIS STUDENT PERIODICAL DO NOT NECESSARILY REFLECT THE OPINIONS, BELIEFS AND VIEWPOINTS OF BISLA (BRATISLAVA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS) OR ITS FACULTY AND STAFF OR IL PONTE'S EDITORIAL BOARD.

Beyond Intractability: Anti-democratic Resistance

by Laura Palenčíková
photo: Martin Repka from event Reakcia



Two months ago, I was diagnosed with a case of chronic mistrust. Today, I am struggling with the disease, trying to defeat it.

The disease started out inconspicuously. I received dose after dose of bold-faced lies but did not realize that is what was happening. I believed them although they sought to kill me.

Yet, the abnormal, unnecessary and irresponsible consumption of lies and deceptions aroused resistance in me. Just as antibiotic resistant bacteria are no longer affected by treatment, I too became unaffected by the lies I continually heard. I stood up to them. I am resistant to the lies of those trying to infect my consciousness and conscience with the intent to blind me. And I am ready to stand up against that which seeks to devour the basic pillars and principles of liberal democracy in the 21st century.

The emergence of this generation resistant to falsehoods, fraud, corruption, and organized crime is found in a phenomenon I have dubbed “antidemocratic resistance”. Just as the concept of antibiotic resistance is embedded in the laws of nature, anti-democratic resistance is naturally anchored in the unwritten laws of our society. It was only a matter of time before it would arise.

Why I stood by it and its awakening is difficult, and perhaps impossible, to answer. Someone had to stand there. It is, however, much more important to ask and see who has taken my hands (and those of other young organizers), and where are we going. There are hundreds of thousands of hands belonging to hundreds of thousands of people calling for justice and decency in our nation. The murder of two young people has mobilized them and has made them strong, a strength we have not seen since 1989. People have stopped being blind. They no longer tolerate injustice. They have found their voices. We all have realized that Slovakia is OUR country and it is our responsibility to define and fight for a better future. We resist and will continue to resist anti-democratic trends. The murders of two young people are a sad milestone in our history, by which we will judge future situations. We all might have different political affiliations, different views on the course of our future steps, and even different values. But there is only one goal for which we all fight: a better and decent Slovakia!

A Slovak Investigative Reporter’s Perspective:

Ján Kuciak wasn’t just a colleague — he was a good person. One who couldn’t be bought or scared off

by **Zuzana Petková**
First published by eTrend.sk 26.02.2018, 14:05

Zuzana Petková is the Deputy Editor-in-Chief and head of the Economics and Society unit at TREND magazine in Slovakia.

[WRITTEN AND PUBLISHED THE DAY AFTER INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST JÁN KUCIAK AND HIS FIANCÉ MARTINA KUSNIROVA — BOTH 27 YEARS OLD — WERE FOUND SHOT TO DEATH AT POINT-BLANK RANGE IN THE HOME THEY WERE FIXING UP TO MOVE INTO FOLLOWING THEIR WEDDING IN MAY 2018 - ED.]

The mood at the top settles over an entire society. We have long been witness to high-ranking politicians insulting the work of the free press. We have seen how threats made against an investigative journalist were not dealt with and even doubted. The status and role of journalists in society have been eroded out from under them. So, too, has their protection. Even so, I never thought that there was so little protection that I would now be in tears, grieving for a colleague and friend who was the victim of an assassin.

I first met colleague and friend Ján Kuciak years ago when he came to the TREND offices as a rookie reporter to do an overview and analysis of a series of news stories I had written. I do not even remember what scandal they covered. I think it might have been the solar panel business connection to the majority party. In any case, I was surprised by this young reporter’s conscientiousness, attention to detail and ability to analyse the facts.

We, journalists, can often be superficial in our work, only touching the surface, quickly moving on from one topic to the next, and jumping to another story when we hit an obstacle elsewhere. Janko was not like that. He always followed a story through to the end. It was this tenacity, along with his courage, relentless

determination, and tireless sense of justice that most likely got him killed.

Janko and I worked on many stories together even though we were from two different news outlets. And despite the fact that he grew as a reporter and showed all the signs of becoming one of the best investigative journalists Slovakia has, Janko remained modest, sometimes to the point of being ordinary. That had its advantages because those he wrote about often did not expect that it would be Janko asking the well-formed, evidence-based questions. Janko was not the type of reporter who was handed information which he would then publish without question. Most of his discoveries came from studying publicly available sources, from digging into companies’ annual financial

reports and comparing them with financial disclosure records. He was always about doing the right thing, never about getting an exclusive or achieving fame as a journalist. Those were things he wished for others.

Janko always willingly shared information, and when Xénia Makarová and I won the Journalism Award for our work on Ladislav Bašternák [A SLOVAK BUSINESSMAN WHO HAS BEEN UNDER INVESTIGATION FOR FINANCIAL MATTERS - ED.] and tax fraud, he along with Marek Vagovič [HEAD OF THE INVESTIGATIVE UNIT AT THE AKTUALITY.SK NEWS OUTLET AND JANKO’S BOSS - ED.] were the first to congratulate us.

A year ago, I gave Janko all the documents I had put together in my investigation into tax fraud and the original criminal case, which was later dropped, against

photo: Maňo Štrauch



controversial businessman Marián Kočner. He found some connections that I had missed and published a series of news stories on them upsetting Mr Kočner to the extent that he threatened Janko. Although he filed a criminal complaint with the police, Janko’s concerns were not given much credence. Minister of the Interior Róbert Kaliňák (Smer-SD) [WHO RESIGNED MARCH 21, 2018 - ED.] made light of his fears and even made fun of them. Today, when he has to cancel his official program — a Smer-SD event in honor of International Women’s Day — he is no longer laughing.

I do not see a connection between Marián Kočner and what happened this last weekend. Considering his very public feuds with journalists, I do not think he would carry out any one of his threats. But there were many influential people (and bastards) whose nerves Janko got on.

I tried repeatedly to get Janko to come work at TREND. I made him a great offer, including excellent work opportunities and salary. He turned me down on principle every time. It bothered him that TREND is owned by Penta [A CENTRAL EUROPEAN INVESTMENT GROUP - ED.]. His colleagues at Aktuality.sk laughed at my attempts to get him to TREND:

“Our Janko isn’t for sale, only for rent.” They were referring to his selfless willingness to help me with whatever stories I was working on.

We were supposed to go get a beer this week. Janko loved beer. He would probably have told us about the story he was working on. It was supposed to be something big. That will not happen now.

One enduring memory I have of Janko is from just last November. Together with the Czech Centre for Investigative Journalism we were digging through the infamous documents known as the Paradise Papers and struggling to get through Malta’s registry data. Janko was willing to pay hundreds of euros out of his own pocket to get copies from the registry that would help us figure out the links between Slovak companies and businesses in tax havens. He spent all day on my behalf going through thousands of documents in Prague. He then drove the three hours back to Bratislava in the middle of the night and, not wanting to wake my children by ringing the doorbell, waited for an hour in the dark in his car, in the freezing cold, outside my house until a light came on. Then he transferred the files to my computer, turning down my offer of coffee and breakfast. He was one

of the kindest people I have ever met. Janko was just a good guy.

Recently, Janko had bought a small house outside of Bratislava which he was fixing up himself. He was looking forward to not only moving into it but also to getting married to his girlfriend. It is particularly horrific that both of their lives were snuffed out in that dream house.

Janko, I owed you an evening out for that work you did on the Paradise Papers. Instead, I will be buying a bouquet of flowers to put on your grave. When they killed that journalist in Malta [CARUANA GALIZIA WAS SLAIN OCTOBER 16, 2017 - ED.], a local newspaper ran the headline “The Pen Is Victorious over Fear”. Janko, I am determined to continue working on the stories you were investigating. And I am not the only journalist committed to doing so.

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No Longer Sleeping

by Laura Palenčíková

photo: Martin Repka from event Reakcia, Matej Bórik

- Twenty seven years
- One hundred and fifty articles
- Thousands of hours dedicated to investigative journalism
- Two thousand and eight hundred words about massive corruption
- Five hours one afternoon, sitting in their living room
- Dozens of rounds and two dead
- Two and half months since the murders
- A dozen of ‘the best’ investigators
- Thirty security cameras
- Zero leads

Freedom of press is one of the most fundamental criteria in every country that values democracy and justice. The flood of information in which we are drowning every day offers fertile soil for censorship which might take many forms. One example of self-imposed censorship is when an author decides what information they are willing to share or receive. Another is enshrined in our Labour Code. These are not necessarily negative situations. However, when censorship is carried out by the state, the situation is very serious. Dear reader, welcome to Slovakia.

The date of 17 November 1989 brings up memories of peaceful student demonstrations and the series of events that changed the course of the Czechoslovak nation. Although the events were held because of the International Student Day, the atmosphere in the streets shouted a clear message. Those young people sought the change of the Communist regime. Peacefully giving flowers to police officers resulted in them being attacked and beaten. This was the Velvet

Revolution when the oppressive and inhumane Communist regime finally fell from power. The spark of hope awakened at that moment. But not for long. Although a new political strongman, Vladimír Mečiar, won power by fair and democratic means, the truth was mirrored after some time. His administration was perhaps the most controversial one in the history of Slovak nation accompanied by enormous political and economic scandals. His controversial regime shaped Slovak history, and the nation's mentality, until 1998 when a “parliamentary coup” as the result of free and fair elections successfully ended his government. This was followed by two rounds of Mikuláš Dzurinda's administration which will especially be remembered for Slovakia's accession to the EU and NATO. However, we seemed to forget that no government had managed to pluck out roots of communism and Mečiarism in order to plant truly democratic principles and values. The roots remained even though they were not visible. Those greedy for money and might kept every

unhealthy stalk of grass and dead flower trimmed neatly so that we could not see the ugliness. It has been twelve years now, twelve years of a government headed by Robert Fico and made in the likeness of that strongman of the '90s. There have been numerous scandals in Slovakia on Fico's watch. Here are just a few: highway construction (or the lack of it for exorbitant costs), the embezzlement of EU funds, the embezzlement of funds from the military news service, the emission sales scandal, the social projects scandals (which did not work anyway), the overpriced CT scanner, the Váhostav scandal, the overpriced and underdeveloped Slovensko.sk website and service, the VAT scandal involving former minister of the interior Kaliňák and current Minister of Finance Jan Počiatek, the Bašternák real estate scandal, and the Gorila investigation scandal. Somehow, we tolerated all that. Until the headlines hit our screens on Monday morning, February 26, 2018.

Several groups of organized crime have operated in Slovakia.



To wake up hundreds of thousand Slovaks to the depths of the evil taking place and to mobilize them to take to the streets, it took the murders of two young people.

While during Mečiar's governments, there were serious allegations of collusion with high-ranking state officials, today there is neither simple suspicions nor allegations in case of Robert Fico. Today, there is evidence. That evidence exists thanks to people who have dedicated their lives to seeking the truth, to calling for justice and fair play, and to being the public watchdogs in our corrupt society. These are investigative journalists and one was named Ján Kuciak. He and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová were shot to death on February 23, 2018. The bodies were found on February 25th, and the breaking news notifications popped up on our phones on February 26th. At that moment, investigative journalism as the fundamental antidote to political censorship was undermined. That moment reflected a deep political crisis and mobilized hundreds of thousands of people calling for decency in Slovakia. The first march on March 2nd was in memory of Ján and Martina.

At the time of his death, Ján Kuciak had been investigating and working on finalizing an article

about high-level corruption in the ruling party of Smer. That unfinished article was published simultaneously by all news outlets in Slovakia at midnight on February 27th.

Smer, with a label "social democracy", is a populist political party led by Robert Fico who leans towards either popular welfare measures or right-wing nationalist and anti-Muslim rhetoric. Ján Kuciak was investigating the connection of government authorities to organized crime, more precisely to a branch of the Italian mafia. Specifically, it appears that the Secretary of the State Security Council Viliam Jasaň and Fico's chief state advisor Mária Trošková were involved. The mafia side of the corruption is headed up by Antonio Vadala, who is a member of an organized crime group known as 'Ndranghetta from Calabria.

At this "early stage" in the political crisis, few will ever forget the bizarre and theatrical scene from the press conference at Government House. Prime Minister Róbert Fico, Police President Tibor Gašpar, and Minister of Interior Róbert Kaliňák stood next to

a table covered in stacks of cash. They were offering a million euros for information concerning the murders.

The day after Ján's article was published and Trošková and Jasaň quietly resigned. The story, however, did not die. People went out into the streets demanding a prompt investigation of murders and other scandals and cases that that Ján had been writing about. This was followed by the President Andrej Kiska's public speech during which he suggested a radical reconstruction of the government was called for. This, of course, did not appeal to Fico. At his next press conference, he spread a few conspiracy theories, this time choosing George Soros as the outsider trying to mettle in Slovakia's business.

The next significant moment was when Public Prosecutor Vasil Špirko publicly announced that he had filed a criminal complaint against Minister of Interior Kaliňák, the Police President, the director of the National Criminal Agency (NAKA), and on the director of the National Anti-Corruption Unit who had all allegedly



tried to complicate an investigation into a certain politically sensitive case. Mr. Kaliňák still refused to resign. The investigation into the murders was full of crucial errors for which the police president was responsible. Fico's rhetoric became more and more absurd and conspiratorial. On March 9th, a hundred thousand people across Slovakia marched in the streets. Three days later, Minister of Interior Kaliňák resigned (although he never submitted his formal resignation to the President). Three days after that, Prime Minister Fico resigned. None who watched it will forget the arrogance of that moment as he handed his resignation to the Mr. President with a smile on his face. He told Kiska, "Don't worry, Mr. President, I'm not going anywhere."

These changes might be considered very successful. Powerful people stepped down. A new government would be put in place. Yet these changes have not and cannot bring positive effects because they are only formal changes. Fico's ruling party continues to be the one pulling

the strings in government. And so, for a third time, people were handed a reason to head back to the streets. On March 16th, they demanded deeper and more systematic changes. Peter Pellegrini from Smer was appointed the new prime minister and claimed to be independent, although his links to Fico, Slovak oligarchs, and corruption are undeniable. The office of the minister of interior was taken by Denisa Sáková, the former minister's "right-hand woman". Personnel changes have also been made in public television where newly-elected Director Jaroslav Rezník seems to be leading a new era of normalization. A regional head of Smer, Lubica Laššáková, has become minister of culture and is facing strong opposition.

In the meantime, more significant changes have been taking place behind the scenes. The atmosphere persistent in our Slovak society is startling. These events are clear indicators of the civil and social pains suffered by thousands of citizens and residents of this nation. The fact that the requirements of society are not being fulfilled is reflected in

the rising mistrust towards the government and what should be competent institutions, like the judiciary. People are tired, angry and ashamed of their current government. We call for decency in our nation, something to we are fully entitled. Yet, to make real changes, we must keep up the public and civic pressure. By free and fair elections, we must get these people who care more about themselves than our nation out of office. We cannot allow the killing our country.

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A Student's Perspective: Values Revealed

by **Jonáš Jánský** (BISLA Class of 2020)
photo: **Martin Repka**

[THIS PIECE WAS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN FOR THE ACADEMIC
ENGLISH AND WRITING II COURSE AT BISLA]



On 26 of February 2018 nearly all media in Slovakia informed the public that young investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová had been murdered in their house. [TÓDOVÁ, 2018] In the following days, a massive public response emerged. This response was not only given by the colleagues of the deceased journalist, but also by the general public as seen in memorial marches and subsequent anti-government protests. What is more, this response was not only limited to Slovakia itself as many cities with Slovak Diaspora residents also joined. All of these protests were organized under the name For a Decent Slovakia, all of them started at five o'clock in the afternoon, and most importantly all of them were closed by the singing of Slovakia's national anthem. These protests together with journalists' response clearly showed that the death of this young couple inspired many

people to show how much they care both for their values and for Slovakia.

The journalists' message was powerful. Two days after the information about murder had been published, many news outlets released the same article. This was introduction to that article given in one of the outlets, Denník N: "in collaboration with Aktuality we bring you the last article on which Ján Kuciak worked. He could not finish the article as he, along with his girlfriend Martina Kušnírová, were murdered. Aktuality gave access to several media outlets." [KUCIAK, 2018] By publishing this article, journalists gave the simple message that they as journalists are all connected. You might have killed one of them, but Kuciak's work will be carried out. Consequently we, as general public, could truly see all ideals behind the work of these journalists. In this country, where we have got used to repeated offensive state-

ments against them, we could, for a moment, see all these humans who truly value truth and who do not take their job as a necessary evil to survive. Regular people who, in spite of the many difficulties their work brings, try to keep us informed, and in a sense free.

The Slovak national anthem finally made sense. The evening of Friday, 2 March 2018, was cold. It was the first time in my life I had seen so many people in one place. We had all been standing there, in that cold, for almost an hour when the anthem started. Twenty thousand people sang in unison. This was actually first time in my life I realized that I like Slovakia. And I did not like valaská or halušky or that idiotic notion of sharing blood with the rest of the nation. What I liked was that I was not alone in that square. I liked that there were thousands of people who cared about a young couple they did not know personally. I liked that they endured the cold



just to pay their condolences and show admiration for the values which that young couple have come to embody. I even liked our anthem which was given completely different meaning at that moment. Our anthem which I, until that point, had found silly. I liked it because I finally understood it.

It was all of Slovakia. Right after the protests on 9 March 2018, the news headlines read "Protests this massive and this widespread have not been seen in Slovakia's modern history." [KRAJANOVÁ, DEMIGER, & ČIMO VÁ, 2018] The whole of Slovakia was in it. It was not a demonstration of 'just Bratislava café culture' or 'just students'. These protests, a result of this tragedy, showed us that there are people who value the values on which all states should be based. All these people said no to manipulation built on fear and hatred, and they came to show that the government is not doing their job properly if a tragedy like that can

happen. What was even better was the fact that not a single violent incident was reported during those protests. Those crowds all around Slovakia were not only angry, they were resolute and most of all dedicated to simple human decency — the same human decency they had seen violated more than once since 26 February 2018.

Those two weeks after the event were overwhelming. I never thought some time period could be so sad and fundamentally wrong and inspire so much hope at the same time. But as the aftermath of the murders showed, be it through the work of journalists who refuse to be intimidated or through the crowds that stand in town squares, there are many people in Slovakia who truly believe in the values on which states should be built and who are resolute. They truly want a better, a more decent Slovakia. And all of them are singing the anthem.

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The View of an Organizer of the Slovak Student Initiative #niejenamtojedno: It Matters

photo: Ondrej Koščík

FIRST-YEAR BISLA STUDENT DANIEL CSÉFALVAY
AS INTERVIEWED BY CLASSMATE JONÁŠ JÁNSKY

What is #niejenamtojedno?

[TRANSLATION: IT MATTERS; WE DO CARE, ED.]

Basically, it is an initiative created by [UNIVERSITY, ED.] students two months ago, after the murders of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, and as a reaction to the current political situation in Slovakia. It was meant to show that students are interested in what is happening in the political field and that they care about politics. It also seeks to show that we, as students, are unified and will not allow politicians to do as they please.

How did you become involved?

I got the email that they wanted to create this initiative with representatives from all the universities in Slovakia. I became a representative because I am also the BISLA representative to the Student Council of Higher Education, so automatically everybody thought, “Oh, representative, so it should probably be Daniel.” So that is how I got the email, then I asked the [BISLA] Academic Senate whether I could actually go. I got their approval and I went.

So, how did you guys organize that big march?

[ON MARCH 25TH, 25.000 PEOPLE JOINED A STUDENT MARCH WHEN THE LARGER EVENT WAS CANCELLED, ED.] [HTTPS://SPECTATOR.SME.SK/C/20788261/THOUSANDS-OF-PEOPLE-RETURNED-TO-THE-STREETS.HTML](https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20788261/THOUSANDS-OF-PEOPLE-RETURNED-TO-THE-STREETS.HTML)

The first time we met, we were a bunch of guys who didn't

even know each other. We met at the place of a guy who studies law at Comenius University and it was really interesting, because it was bunch of active guys, politically. No, not politically. More like activists. Well, not even activists, but rather young, active students. That is the best description.

And so, we met and we wanted to create this march from Šafarikovo Square to SNP Square where there would be, I think, the third huge protest organized by the Za slušné Slovensko [TRANSLATION: FOR DECENCY IN SLOVAKIA, ED.] initiative. So initially we wanted to just organize our march and join the big protest. But as things escalated, they announced that there would be no big protest. We felt that the situation called for a protest, and that people would come to protest even without anything being officially organized. So we decided to include a legal protest on SNP Square. Things quickly escalated after that.

We had a meeting with the police, a rather interesting one, because there is a lot of security going on during these protests, things I didn't even know about. Like camera systems and everything. Facial recognition. Of course, it is useful but it is also super scary.

Then we needed the stage and some microphones. Everybody was super helpful! Everybody was like, “Yeah, we are going to help you because we agree with you!” And they did not even want

money. Everybody was really kind and understood our situation, so they gave us the equipment really cheap, so we were able to pay for it ourselves.

How did you feel when you were standing in front of so many people?

The feeling of standing on the stage in front of, I think it was officially 25 or 30 thousand people? Well, originally, we thought there would be a maximum of three thousand. We had officially told the authorities there would only be 300, but they told us, “Guys, the situation has changed so you should prepare for 10.000.” So the actual number was a shock. But we managed somehow. As I stood there on the stage, I felt I had to be professional. I couldn't just smile, because it was a commemorative march for a murdered journalist. Only one person gave a speech and we then lit candles in memory of him and his fiancée. And I felt an enormous responsibility. But I also felt the deep frustration of the crowd. Those people really appreciated that we had organized that protest, but they were really frustrated by the situation. So it was interesting but there was a lot of responsibility involved.

What do you think about the current situation in Slovakia?

Well, prior to these protests, nobody could have imagined that Fico [FORMER PRIME MINISTER, ED.] would step down. If anyone had



suggested it, everyone would have laughed at him. But he did resign. And then Kalinak [FORMER MINISTER OF INTERIOR, ED.] stepped down. And also Tibor Gaspar [FORMER POLICE PRESIDENT, ED.]. So, even though each and every one of them was replaced by a puppet, the symbolic power of these resignations is really strong. And I do feel that our initiative helped that to happen. I have this feeling it was useful.

I do not know how much can be achieved as we go on. That is questionable. But what we achieved up until now is unbelievable for many. For nearly 15 years, it has been unimaginable that Fico would step down voluntarily.

How do you see future of #niejenamtojedno and these protests?

Well I am not really optimistic, to be honest. I see that we have the energy to continue but, right now, everything that has been done has been done through initiatives. It's been done using the power of people in the streets and not by stepping into the political arena directly. It has been really effective, but I don't see much space for continuation.

I do see that, in the future, it has to be political parties and politicians who continue this fight and we can only be there as support. Because with every protest somebody is going to ask, “Okay, you are not politicians, but who are you to say who should govern?” And I feel this is relevant. We did what we could and we have a lot of energy to continue, but we cannot be the main pillar of the change

in the future. It has to be through the political system directly. And I don't think that our initiative will become a direct part of the politics. «

Slovak National Anthem

Janko Matuška
Free translation by Linda M. Steyne, PhD

*There is lightening over the Tatras
The thunder crashes wildly
Let us stand firm, brothers,
For it will disappear
And Slovaks will be revived*



*This Slovakia of ours
Has been in a deep sleep
But the thunder and lightening
Are calling it
To awake*



Around the world

Students' Protests Against Guns

by Pavlina Jones (Class of 2020)
photo: Austyn Henerson



On February 14, 2018, a mass school shooting occurred at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, USA. Nineteen-year-old Nikolas Cruz walked into the school, fired his AR-15, and killed seventeen of his former classmates and teachers. Due to this horrible tragedy, a wave of shock and anger hit the nation. Parents and teachers, but especially students all over the country are demanding it is time for change to gun laws.

A student-led demonstration called March for Our Lives was held in Washington, D.C. on March 24, 2018. Somewhere between 200,000 to 800,000 people participated, calling for tighter gun control in the United States. All of the speakers were students, high school kids or younger, who have suffered from gun violence.

One of the most memorable and compelling speeches was delivered by Emma González, a survivor of the Parkland Massacre. González started by listing the names of all seventeen victims and then stood silent for the next four minutes. Once a whole six minutes and forty seconds went by, she proceeded by saying, “Since the time that I came out here, it has been 6 minutes and 20 seconds. The shooter has ceased shooting, and will soon abandon his rifle, blend in with the students as they escape, and walk free for an hour before arrest. Fight for your lives before it’s someone else’s job.” The crowd applauded her loudly as she walked off the stage.

The Washington rally, however, was not the only form of protest by students around the nation. On March 14, 2018, stu-

dents had organized a National School Walkout which started at 10 AM local time and lasted seventeen minutes in respect to the seventeen lives that were lost at Parkland. Unfortunately, the high school I graduated from in Marietta, Georgia — Joseph Wheeler High School — was one of those many high schools across the country that did not allow students to participate in the walkout. On that day, my former teachers were told to block school exits and punish any students attempting to leave. Seven girls successfully made it out and took their stand for tighter gun control as well as paid respect to the students who had been killed. In return, those seven had to serve one day of ISS (in-school suspension). But they knew it was for a worthy cause. And, since many students had been



threatened with punishment not to participate, the school received plenty of backlash from parents and alumni.

Fortunately, since the Parkland shooting, the student-led protests have seen some victories in pushing for stricter gun control. Over twenty US states have banned bump stocks (which can make a semi-automatic weapon fire almost as fast as an automatic), corporate America has distanced itself from the NRA (National Rifle Association), and Florida has raised the minimum age for buying a rifle from nineteen to twenty-one. Additionally, Congressional bills to tighten gun restrictions are also being tabled.

Teenage students have done an extraordinary job in pushing for all these changes despite the doubt and slander they have been

on the receiving end of. These young people have discovered the power they have, and they are using it for good.

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“For every kid that sat in school one morning not knowing they’d be killed in a place they had always felt safe. I walked out for you”. Facebook post.

The View from Elsewhere: Corruption de España

by Sanna Perämäki
photo: Chris Slupski

[A FINNISH EXCHANGE STUDENT]



I had never been worried about corruption until I moved to Spain.

I'm a 23-year-old Finn who has lived in Spain the last three and a half years. During these years, I have really started to realize how much difference there can be between countries when we talk about corruption. Finland, among the other Nordic countries, is one of the countries with the least corruption. I was trying to find some cases of corruption on the internet because I can't remember any and I couldn't really find any serious cases even after some research. Here in Spain, I can stop any person on the street and they can name a large number of different scandals and it's always a hot topic. In Finland, it's not a normal subject to talk about, because

there isn't really much to talk about.

In Finland, all citizens are expected to follow and respect the rules of the society. You will be heavily judged by other people if you try to take advantage of it somehow, and our political culture condemns any personal conflicts of interest. We are proud of what we have achieved and we are going to keep it that way. The mentality is different in Spain. In Spain, many people think that it's admirable if you play your cards right and take advantage of an opportunity to get something for yourself. They have even a name for that kind of behaviour: picaresca.*

In the Nordic countries, honesty and trust are highly valued. Finland has a political culture

which prioritizes legal certainty and prevents public officials from abusing their positions. Everybody's access to official records is constitutionally guaranteed. For these reasons, the cases of corruption are very rare.

I think it's necessary that all the sectors of the society collaborate in this project of building a better country.

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*EDITOR'S NOTE: "A PICARESQUE OUTLOOK ON LIFE [...] INVOLVES RESORTING TO GUILE AND TRICKERY IN ORDER TO GET AHEAD OR SIMPLY SURVIVE. IN SPANISH-SPEAKING COUNTRIES, THIS IS OFTEN REGARDED AS AMUSING OR UNAVOIDABLY NECESSARY." (PONS GMBH, STUTTGART. 2018)

The View From BISLA

by Paula Svatoňová (class of 2019)
photo: Peter Mojžiš



Doc. Samuel Abrahám, PhD.

Much has changed in Slovakia since the murder of investigative reporter Jan Kuciak and his girlfriend two months ago. The Prime Minister Robert Fico resigned, along with two Ministers of Interior. The crucial matter is that just as important as arresting the murderers is the investigation of collusion between organized crime and political elites — which was the topic of Kuciak's investigative report. It was most likely this that cost the lives of those two young people. Yet the police and the State Prosecutor deal solely with the murder itself and not the reasons behind Kuciak's. This is the primary challenge for our society today: to face, fight those politicians who are connected to the murky world of shady business, corruption, and the use of state coffers as the bank account for mafia deals. Ján Kuciak and many others wrote that these acts of corruption have taken place and concrete individuals bear the responsibility for each one of them. Those should be brought to justice, for the sake of Slovakia's future.

James Griffith, PhD.

I think the demonstrations have been inspiring — to see people demanding more from their government, to see those demands have (admittedly limited) effects within a month, and to see people continue with their demands is impressive. I question For a Decent Slovakia as an organization for the decision to cancel the March 23 demonstrations (if I have the date correct), but am grateful that the students picked up the slack. When that happened, I began to wonder whether slusna expressed the feeling on the street well enough, and perhaps lepsie might be more appropriate, more open and less predetermined. But we'll see, I guess.

Linda M. Steyne, PhD.

Although I support the 'For a Decent Slovakia' movement, I think 'decent' was a poor word choice. Even a thief can be polite and decent. Politeness can simply hide the ugly truth underneath. I'd like a Slovakia for future generations in which integrity, honesty, respect and the common good are valued more highly than getting ahead. But then I guess that might hit too close to home for too many. It'd also be too long to fit on a Facebook cover and protest banner.

Dagmar Kusá, PhD.

The arrogance of the power nomenclature in its attempts to capture the state is astonishing, even if not surprising. It is also an opening, an opportunity. Opportunity to rethink the meaning of citizenship, to stand up to the abuse of power, to insist on the values of democratic governance. It is an important moment for this up and coming generation, and therefore, in the long run, I dare to be a cautious optimist.

Prof. PhDr. Iveta Radičová, PhD.

Slovak society has become polarized into 'winners' and 'losers'; her citizens are dissatisfied because their expectations haven't been met, and because of the depth of corruption and social inequality; and the uncertainties and perceived injustice has resulted in a complete distrust of democratic institutions. This is what Slovakia suffers from at the moment.

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A Philosopher's Take: Respect or not to respect? That is the question

Prof. PhDr. František Novosád, CSc.

PROF. PHDR. FRANTIŠEK NOVOSÁD, CSC. IS PROFESSOR OF PHILOSOPHY, SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW OF THE INSTITUTE OF PHILOSOPHY OF THE SLOVAK ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, AND HEAD OF DEPARTMENT FOR SOCIAL AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY.

My capacity to get angry is pretty limited. Therefore, let me just touch on the configuration of hard facts and on some political nuts and bolts.

Fact No. 1: Two young people were murdered. Today, more than six weeks since the event and the public knows next to nothing about the murderers and why the couple was murdered. Nor do I have more knowledge of the tragedy. What I do know, however, is that the murder will not be unraveled by any journalist, NGO activist, or philosopher or political scientist. One thing is clear and that is, namely, that this case can be cleared up by the police, and by the police alone. We are free to have second thoughts about the quality of the Slovak police, but, alas, we have no alternative. No foreign country can help us in trying to find the wrongdoers either.

Fact No. 2: We have the sort of government we have as the legitimate result of the 2016 national election. No one has ever doubted that election's democratic character. One can be disconcerted, feel concerned, or even embarrassed, but anger, wrath and embarrassment are not politics. And whoever sets their anger over the rules of parliamentary democracy paves the way to hell. One may wish we had better MPs or, on the

whole, a better government. You may even wish we had a better president. But rules are rules. If you want to know what happens when the rules are not respected, just look at one of our neighboring countries [REFERENCE TO HUNGARY - ED.]. As a rule, "revolutions of dignity" tend to deliver quite perplexing results, often ones nobody intended or really wanted.

Today, many activists and protesters tend to see the link (even a direct one) between the murder of the two young people and the politics of the incumbent government. I admire the perspicacity and shrewdness of these activists. But try as I may, I am afraid I am not able -respecting the elementary rules of causal and correlation analysis — to see any causal relationship, or even the correlation, between the quality of the government and the tragic unpardonable murder. That, at the same time, by no means diminishes my respect for those who are convinced of those links.

To be clear, I do have respect for those angry people on city streets and squares. I understand their motives. And yet, if these very same people agree to be instructed in the political morality and virtues by the journalists who advocated the murderers in Kosovo and Baghdad, and also the mur-

derers in Nitra; and are willing to listen to the priest who has lost confidence in his own church or the theatre and film actors whose one and only political virtue is void arrogance, I, then, prefer to keep away from the crowd.

It's worth remembering: respecting the rules sounds like a good idea.
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*Do you have something
to share with the wider BISLA
community or even the world?*

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The Il Ponte Editorial Staff invites all students, alumni, teachers, and all interested individuals to send their submissions (1500 word limit) as an MS Word attachment (or Google doc) to bisla.ilponte@gmail.com.

Please be sure to include 'submission' in the subject line together with your last name.

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