

NGO Campaign for free and fair elections

OK '98

Lessons Learned

**An Analysis of Planning, Communication and Conflict Management
Aspects of the Campaign from the Stakeholders' Point of View**

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Bratislava, 1999

PDCS would especially like to thank to all interviewed Campaign's stakeholders for sharing their experience for the purpose of this review and for producing bright and useful insights about the Campaign.

We are grateful to the funder of this report - Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, for their initiation and support of this review. The elaboration of the report was enabled due to the Mott Foundation project # 98-174 in the years 1998-1999. The opinions expressed in the report are those of PDCS authors and the interviewed and not necessarily of the Mott Foundation executives or trustees.

Many thanks to Gabo Bianchi, Kaja Miková, Aleš Bednařík and Monika Červená for their very useful comments and hard work on technical production of this report. Our thanks belong also to translators and editors of the study.

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Introduction - Why was this study written

The general elections in 1998 meant new experience for Slovakia. The involvement of non-partisan subjects in informing and motivating citizens to vote and supervise the correctness of elections represents this new experience. The activities of non-governmental organizations associated in the OK '98 – a Civic Campaign stirred the calm surface of a civic activism. People were given an opportunity to fully realize their place in social activities. The OK '98 Campaign excited social discussion, often controversial reactions from the politicians, in the media and in public.

The Elections '98 saw an unexpected, high turnout – 84%, which is a unique turnout both in the Slovak and Central European context. According to the research (Bútorá M., Bútorová Z., Mesežnikov G., 1999), OK '98 attracted attention of a majority of citizens and, moreover, 70% of respondents were positive about the OK '98 Campaign. The Campaign was considered as futile or harmful by 11% of respondents. The Campaign influenced 19% of first-time voters to cast their votes and at least 9% out of the total number of voters were encouraged to vote by the NGO Campaign.

The gained experience, helps to move the direct democracy in Slovakia from theory to practice. To achieve that, we need to evaluate and self-reflect the contribution of the third sector to this development. We need to analyze what happened and generalize the experience for our future needs. The analysis can be helpful for everyone who find themselves in a situation similar to the situation of Slovak citizens at the end of 1998. The aim of this paper is to summarize the knowledge obtained by the third sector in OK '98.

The study analyses mainly:

- **the structure of the Campaign,**
- **questions of management and a conflict management in the Campaign,**
- **how non-partisanship was reached,**
- **and the Campaign communication with the media.**

All topics we focused our attention on, were selected based on the experience of the Campaign participants, and are aimed to generalize and provide as much experience from the Campaign as possible for the future.

We would like to offer this paper as encouragement mostly to participants and leaders from the third sector in those countries, which still expect their campaign of OK '98 kind. It would be great, if they somehow manage to avoid the same mistakes we made and if they manage, under their circumstances, to apply the effectivity factors of the campaign at least to the extent Slovakia did. We would be very pleased by their success.

The specific orientation of the paper is also determined by the effort to enrich a mosaic of already published views on the OK '98 Campaign, by presenting a rather unusual perspective; from the management point of view on the Campaign, and from the perspective of those who welcome the opportunity to be inspired and enriched by the gained experience.

There is no point in repeating what has been already written. In some passages we only refer to what has already been published. The issue of OK '98 was elaborated upon in many evaluation papers and publications, some are just being prepared¹. However, this paper might not be the last one. It presents a retrospective view on the Campaign trying to grasp it from many different angles. It has no aspiration of being exclusive, but its authors have tried to present the most objective view possible, which would equally present the views and experience of the interviewed, written documents and media products reporting variously about the Campaign.

¹ The case study describing an overall factographic picture of the campaign was promptly prepared by Pavol Demeš and a book publication is being prepared by SAIA/SCTS to be released shortly. IVO released two „after-election, books. Together with 24 authors, it edited a brilliant book review of all connections in Slovak elections called „Who? Why? How?“. This book contains also a chapter by M. Bútorá and P. Demeš called „Civic organizations in 1998 elections“. Second, a more scientific, publication is going to be „Slovakia in elections“. Exquisite book publications with many pictures and other documents are being prepared by other organizations, such as Gemma, about „The March for Slovakia“, and NOS, about „The Elections Rock“. All these materials should serve as a public knowledge reservoir for future campaigns. Moreover, involved donor organizations have elaborated their evaluation reports (e.g. Donor Forum, FCS/NOS, NPOA, OSF..)

I. Questions we address in the study

This paper consists of two main parts. The first part is based on views of people who were directly involved in implementation of OK '98. The second part is about the media aspects of the Campaign; media campaign of OK '98 and reactions of public and media to the Campaign.

We were looking for answers on these questions areas:

1. How was the campaign progressing; which moments were crucial for the success and which campaign moments were problematic according to the respondents?

What was the original idea of the campaign?

What has proven to be focal and crucial for the success of OK '98 from the original idea about a structure and management of the campaign?

What were unpredicted moments and how did the campaign cope with them?

2. Who were the real stakeholders of the campaign?

Who was involved in the campaign?

What was the role of individual stakeholders and how was their relationship?

What should be (based on existing experience) the relation structure?

3. To what extent should the campaign be decentralized or organized from the center?

What should be the status and task of local bodies in the campaign?

How should effective communication between the center and regions be reached?

4. What problems and conflicts arose in communication among stakeholders in management of the campaign?

What types of conflicts occurred and why?

How were the problems and conflicts resolved during the campaign?

How is it possible to resolve those conflicts that could not be resolved during the campaign?

How to prevent such conflicts?

5. How did the campaign address the stakeholders demand to operate as a political at the same time non-partisan initiative?

What were successful approaches and steps for achieving this goal?

What are the recommendations for addressing this issue?

6. How to fund the campaign activities?

How were the activities of the Donors Forum coordinated?

What helped the projects most and what was not supportive to them?

7. How did the campaign behave in relation to the media?

What is both positive and negative experience in relation to the media?

Based on that, what are the recommendations for a media campaign?

8. To what extent can experience gained in the OK '98 campaign be transferred to different contexts?

Which parts of the experience are universal and which are specific?

To what extent did the experience from previous campaigns in Slovakia or abroad help organizers of OK '98?

The answer on each question makes a separate chapter in this paper. The analysis of basic data and statements of individual participants of the Campaign is followed by recommendations in a frame, based on the response of the participants and our observation. Naturally, some of the recommendations in different chapters overlap.

Before we answer these questions, here are two more introductory chapters. The first one describes a methodology of the study; the way in which interviews were done and analyzed. The second offers the overall information about social, cultural and topical political context of the Campaign.

II. Process used to develop the study

The first part of this paper is based on interviews with some of the direct organizers of the Campaign. Its aim is to summarize the experience and generate recommendations, which could inspire those who will organize a similar type of campaign, whether in Slovakia or abroad. Questions areas listed above served as a base for the interviews, bounds for respondents to move within. Despite defined bounds, enough room was left for respondents to express their own perspectives. We have used a half-structured interview, progress of which was co-created by the respondents themselves.

We have addressed many stakeholders of the OK '98 Campaign, from different areas, e.g. management/coordination of the Campaign and its administrative and technical support, regional coordinators, representatives of donor's organizations and some projects. We have managed to establish a network of respondents, which was gradually complemented according to recommendations from the stakeholders already interviewed. These recommendations were more or less the same. In total we have conducted twenty one interviews that took about an hour up to an hour and a half each.² Names of the authors of the citations are stated in the text.

Interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis, which was completed by information gained from the shorter occasional, ad hoc, interviews. On top of the twenty one in-depth interviews we conducted more than forty occasional ones with other organizers of the Campaign. The opinions presented at the final evaluation meeting of OK '98 on January the 15th, 1999 in Žilina were also included to this review. The study presents a mosaic of various views and perspectives.

The second part of the study, dealing with the media strategy of OK '98 and the media reaction to the Campaign, was based on:

- analysis of the stories, news, commentaries of printed and electronic media during the pre-election and election period
- documents of the OK '98 coordinating group and of the media group in the Campaign, and media products used in the Campaign
- in-depth interviews with the organizers of the OK '98 Campaign on the media campaign topic
- and media response to OK '98.

² We conducted in depths interviews with Pavol Demeš (SAIA), Šarlota Pufflerová (Nadácia Občan a demokracia Foundation Citizens and Democracy, member of the coordinating group, spokesperson of the Campaign), Andrej Bartosiewicz (ZPLD, member of the coordinating group), Filip Vagač (Children of Slovakia Foundation, representatives of Donors Forum), Jan Surotchak (FCS, Donors Forum), Peter Novotný (NOS, project officer of the secretariat), Silvia Pinterova (NOS, media assistant), Marek Kapusta (NOS, Rock the Vote), Hana Hanúsková (media adviser), Daniel Brezina (GEMMA'93, member of the coordinating group, March for Slovakia), Juraj Mesík (Ekopolis, member of the coordinating group), Michal Kravčík (Ľudia a voda, People and Water, member of the coordinating group), Pavol Bakoš (Človek a obec, regional coordinator for Nitra region), Braňo Orgonik (Trenčianske neformálne združenie, Trenčín Informal Association, member of the coordinating group, regional coordinator for Trenčín region), Richard Medaľ (Trenčianske neformálne združenie) Martin Novák (SAIA-SCTS, regional coordinator for Banská Bystrica region), Peter Bronček (regional coordinator for Žilina region), Peter Németh (regional coordinator for Prešov region), Karoly Tóth (Forum Inštitút, member of the coordinating group) Myrtil Nagy (Forum Inštitút), Michaela Galvánková (Vydra), Silvia Pintérová (NOS) and Mark Line (PDCS). We thank to all of them. Without their openness to share with experiences, this review wouldn't be possible.

III. Social, cultural and political context of the campaign

Every country needs to have a certain predisposition to do a civic campaign - to feel the need for political change and to have the potential to make the change. This need for political change became more apparent when democratic principles and law were not respected by the governing coalition in Slovakia. The foiled referendum on direct presidential elections and the membership in NATO in May 1997, can serve as an example where, according to the verdict of the Constitutional Court, the governing coalition violated the law. Considering violation of law and democratic principles by the Government, Slovakia was excluded from the first group of the countries aspiring for the membership in the NATO and the EU. The political spectrum was characterized by a sharp polarization on the governing and opposition parties.

In the summer 1998, Bratislava-based firm AISA conveyed a survey with a representative sample of 1305 respondents. According to this survey, in the pre-election period 68% of citizens did not trust the Government of V. Mečiar. 73% of citizens had no trust in the Parliament, 61% in justice system, 64% in the police and 34% in the Army. This non-flattering percentage has a very clear message. People longed for a change and expected it from political leaders and new political programs.

Importantly, the coming elections offered a chance for a change. The main agent of this change could only be the citizen, by expressing his/ her opinion in the elections.

However, public opinion polls showed that people were apathetic, feeling helpless and without influence on the development of the society and were afraid that the elections would be manipulated. Citizens, especially first-time voters, were insufficiently informed about the election law, about the structure and differences between Government and Parliament, and about the political situation in Slovakia in general. The older and middle generations perceived the participation in the elections as their duty, but younger generations did not see a reason why they should choose between quarrelling political parties.

With the above-mentioned situation, the aims of the Campaign and the need to engage the third sector clearly came out. Although the public did not seem to know much about activities and tasks of the third sector in a society, the inner potential (quality of activities, cooperation network and infrastructure) of non-governmental organizations was present. The society in general, considered non-governmental organizations mostly to be charitable and social, or environmental and educational. Political parties had problems with accepting the third sector as their partner and only gradually, during the Campaign, some political parties accepted it as part of the public and political life.

Inside the sector had developed a group of NGO representatives who lead the discussion about the role of NGOs in the Elections. Discussion created ideological hot-bed of the Campaign. Another part of the third sector was afraid to enter the political sphere and was lacking an experience with such a activity of NGOs.

Therefore, to clarify the position of the non-governmental organizations, initial consensus among initiators of the Campaign to be publicly-political but non-partisan in their activities was reached.

Cultural specifics of Slovakia

Although we can not unambiguously place Slovakia among the countries with a mostly collectivist culture, some authors (Smith, Dugan, Trompenaar, 1996) place the former Czechoslovakia among cultures where:

- interpersonal relationships are highly evaluated (more than abstract social expectations) meaning that relationships towards specific persons are being preferred to universal value standards
- status is given (i.e. the status assigned is based on who the person is, or to which group he belongs more than on what he accomplished by his effort and abilities).

On one hand, this can result in a prior self-appointment (the phenomenon of self-delegation) of somebody who feels to be either a former or current member of a high status group, and on

the other hand, others could tend to passively wait until somebody assigns them with responsibility.

These attributes are typical of such cultures where the members perceive being "in a group" as very important and thus, without going deeply into cultural analyses, we can consider the group principle to be a mechanism typical of Slovakia.

Experience of some of the representatives of the OK '98 Campaign provide evidence. One of the representatives of the Donors Forum, Jan Surotchak, said: *"Slovakia is essentially a group oriented society ... and so it was important (in Slovakia) that this things were achieved on a group basis, and if it had been led by existing organization or an existing person, rather than sort of in a group fashion, where everybody sacrifices a piece of their time and resources, the same thing that always happens would happen. The organization or that person would be attacked by the others because it cannot stand the fact that somebody has too much power on that. Slovakia is a small universe ... everybody knows everybody and everybody knows everything about everybody"*

IV. Progress of the campaign

- ❖ How was the Campaign progressing, which moments were crucial for the success and which were problematic?
- ❖ Which moments in the Campaign were considered crucial by the respondents?

IV. aCrucial moments of the Campaign

While the Campaign it is rather difficult to evaluate all the things going on. Only later some moments are recognized as extremely important. Due to the four-month distance between the Campaign and interviews we assumed a very different picture, cleared from the enthusiasm so typical for the campaign itself. Moreover, we assumed that views of different stakeholders on important moments of the Campaign would not overlap. We assumed that the respondents would give very different responses to the questions "what was it like" and what is the key to the success of the Campaign. Much to our surprise, the answers of the Campaign stakeholders were very much alike.

The important crossroads of the Campaign were divided into two phases by the respondents:

- 1) the preparation and initiation of the Campaign
- 2) the launching and implementation of the Campaign

Almost every stakeholders considered the following to be particularly important:

- the moment of the Campaign release (NGO meeting in Zvolen in March 1998)
- coordination meetings (in Košice, Zvolen, Stupava), information exchange about how the Campaign is progressing, and are problems areas
- and 95-minute Kroky; Slovak Television (STV) discussion show with high ratings, where despite the effort of this manipulated medium to discredit the Campaign, a great part of voters were positively addressed and public support for OK '98 was obtained along with interest in voting.

On the other side, as we can see from the time scale, there are not many events really, which were considered crucial and most important ones within the eight-month period.

Outlines of individual steps within each phase of the Campaign follows:

1) The preparation and initiation of the Campaign

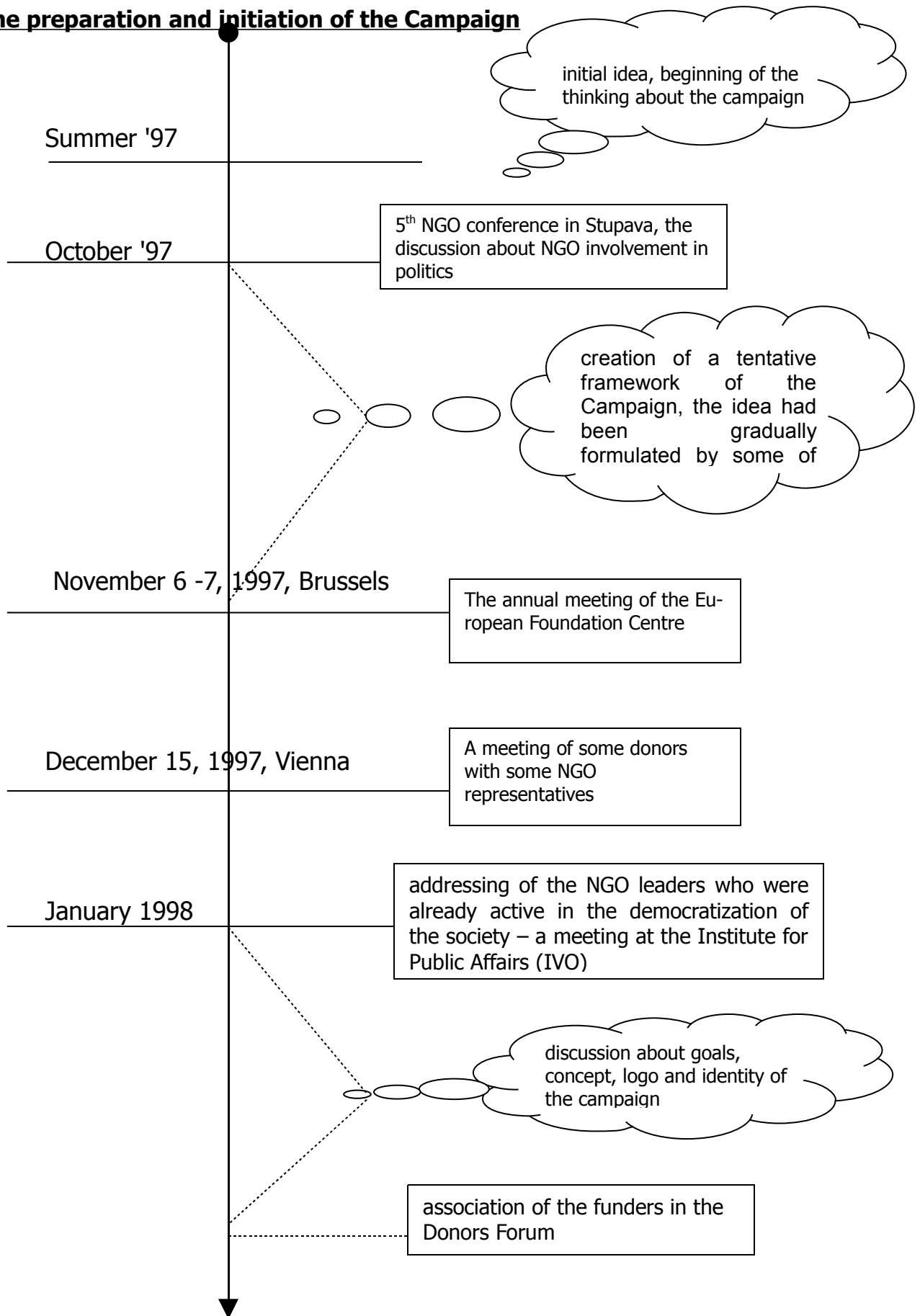
- births of an initial idea, beginning of thinking about the Campaign, shared attitudes among joining NGOs' leaders; the hot-bed of NGO – Summer '97
- 5th NGO conference in Stupava, discussion among NGOs about their involvement in politics that ended with the decision actively participate in the pre-election period – October '97
- maturing of the idea, creation of a tentative framework of the Campaign, the idea had been gradually formulated by some of later leaders of the Campaign
- Brussels: the annual meeting of the European Foundation Centre – November 6-7, 1997 Representatives of Slovak NGOs returned with the information that, if the NGOs will provide a clear campaign concept to donors, donors might support it financially.
- Vienna: a meeting of some donors with some NGO representatives; passing on the experience from the pre-election NGO campaign in Bulgaria and Romania – December 15, 1997
- addressing and inviting NGOs' leaders who had previously worked on democratization of the society – a meeting at Institute for Public Affairs (IVO), creation of the coordinating (initiating) group OK '98 – January 1998

- discussion of the OK '98 initiation group which resulted in formulation of three basic goals and concept of the Campaign; the logo was created and the identity of the Campaign was clarified
- association of the funders in the Donors Forum - their decision to share information about steps to be taken in the pre-election campaign and its linking to the activities of whole third sector in Slovakia

2) Launching and implementation of the Campaign

- meeting of the NGOs' representatives in Zvolen - March ' 98
- developing the crucial areas for projects
- coordination meetings (Košice, Zvolen, Stupava) – exchange of information about the Campaigns' progress, identifying the problems
- the coordinating group decides to launch "The March for Slovakia" as the "skeleton" or main frame of the Campaign to which other activities should be incorporated, the decision to publish a booklet (meeting of the coordinating group in Košice)
- Kroky, a discussion show in the STV - the most influential appeal to the public
- discussion among NGOs' representatives – non-partisanship was clarified
- two days of the parliamentary elections

The preparation and initiation of the Campaign



Launching and implementation of the Campaign

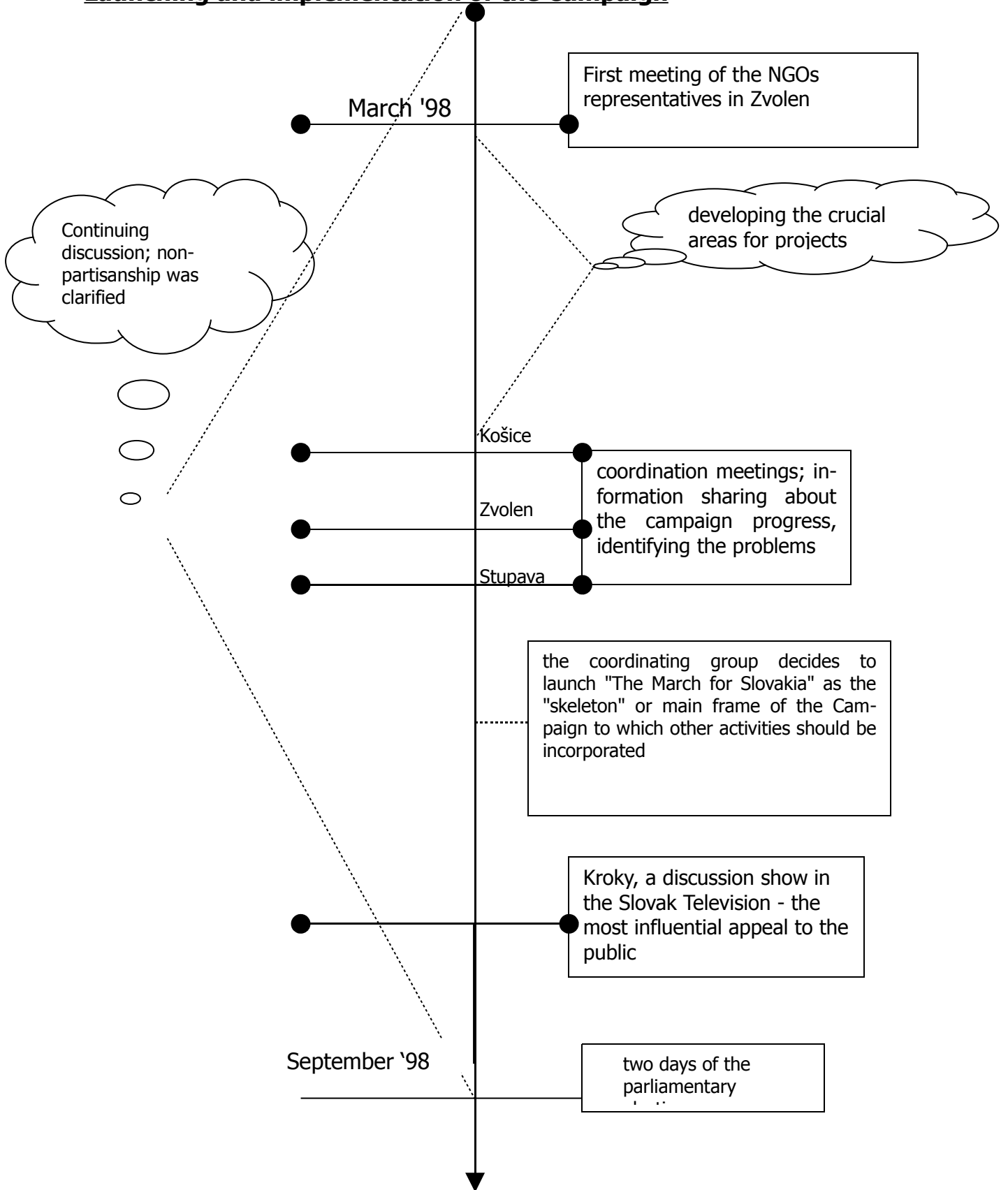


Figure 1: Key moments of the campaign

IV. bThe original idea of the Campaign

Looking back, it is sometimes hard to distinguish the original idea from the experience that enriched it during the Campaign, the unconscious interchange of assumptions and experience with the original concept could appear. The reality was that the idea of how to conduct the Campaign had been defined through a gradual process. It was created during „never-ending“ discussions. Therefore, it is not easy to capture the original idea, influenced by the dynamics of the preparation phase. However, we will try to outline at least basic key points, which served as the foundation for the further development.

The main goal of the OK '98 Campaign was to clarify to the citizens the connections between a responsible attitude to assert one's right to vote and a possibility to solve one's problems of the day. Contrary to the campaign „SOS for the Third Sector“ from 1996-1997, which was meant as a „defense“ of the third sector, the OK '98 Campaign preferred a positive and pro-active approach to the Campaign.

"...not to have it as the SOS for the third sector we had before, when we were defending ourselves, here I thought more of involving an element of hope and activity. If we go for it, it will be OK in 1998." (Pavol Demeš)

"From the beginning, the whole Campaign, now I mean the media campaign...from the very beginning we were decided to do it positively. We even tried to react positively on all negative attacks and there were quite a many of those. " (Hana Hanúsková)

The Campaign was defined as non-partisan, public and political initiative of the citizens associated in an NGO for free and fair elections. The Campaign pursued three particular goals, which according to the organizers were alike and very well chosen because of their comprehensibility and easy remembrance. These goals, known as the three „I“ (three „Z“ in Slovak), were the following:

- **improve the information the voters have about parliamentary and municipal elections in 1998**
- **increase participation of the citizens of the Slovak Republic in the elections**
- **increase the influence of the citizens on the election laws preparation and ensure civil supervision over the fair election process**

The preparation of the organizational structure of the Campaign was framed by the basic requirements of the Campaign, expressed by words of Pavol Demeš: *"any campaign must have one address, spokesperson and a management committee, which should not, according to the campaign theories, go over nine people"*. This basic frame provoked many questions, such as who was going to be the management committee, how was the administrative and technical support going to be provided for, who was to provide funds and how was the Campaign going to be launched.

IV. cTask covered in the organizing of the Campaign

Based on a management point of view on the Campaign following tasks were necessary to cover:

▪ *managing/coordinating of the Campaign*

According to Pavol Demeš, the key for the establishment of the coordinating group was to invite such organizations *"which work in the area of democracy and civil society anyway, not people from social or charity areas because they could be afraid or not willing to do these things, they would not know how to do them..."*

The coordination committee had eleven members, including two representatives of the Gremium of the Third Sector (G3S) and a representative of the Donors Forum.

Tasks of the coordinating group:

- to create a strategy of the Campaign and model projects
- to watch the process of election laws preparation and comment on them

- to publicize OK '98 activities
- relations with the state administration bodies and political parties
- management of the secretariat
- ***technical support and executive functions for the coordinating group – the secretariat***

The secretariat involved program manager, assistant, PR person, and eight regional coordinators in various regions. This task was fulfilled by the Foundation for a Civil Society.

Tasks of the secretariat of OK '98:

- to provide technical support and execute decisions of the OK '98 coordinating group
- to collect and spread information about NGO activities and projects linked to the elections
- organizationally support of the mutual activities within OK '98 (meetings, workshops, conferences, press-conferences)
- to provide for communication with foreign partners
- to provide for communication between NGO with the Donors Forum
- to provide for communication and coordination with OK regional coordinators
- to coordinate volunteers
- to prepare and manage the projects of the OK '98 coordinating group

Assuming the need of legislative, media counseling and consultations for projects, this should be covered by experts in the areas in demand and they were externally attached to the secretariat.

- ***representing the Campaign in the media – a spokesperson of the Campaign***

Ideally, a spokesperson should be from an organization functioning as the secretariat, but this is not necessary. Requirements for a spokesperson were these: it should be a person with skills in work with the media, able to articulate with a clear diction and clearly express ideas, without political history and respected in the NGO community.

- ***financing of the Campaign activities and projects***

At the meeting in Vienna, the donors expressed their willingness to support Slovak NGOs, but they were very clear that Slovakia had to be initiator and provider of a clear concept definition, or they would not do anything; they clearly stated that they were not the initiators.

A platform for deciding about financing of the projects was provided by establishing the Donors Forum, which informally associated grant organizations and embassies to communicate and to finance (co-finance) projects more effectively. However, the decision about the actual financial support, was done individually by the foundations in the proceeding of awarding grants to the projects.

- ***launching of the Campaign***

Two strategies of launching the Campaign were in consideration. Either to assign one key project and ask other NGOs to cooperate, or to present an idea only and wait for NGOs to respond. The coordinating group finally decided to take on the latter alternative.

- ***implementing diverse activities and project in all regions of Slovakia – main types of projects***

An education and a motivation of citizens; an education of citizens in a specific area, an education of citizens about law on the election and an election procedure, increasing voter participation.

RECOMMENDATION BASED ON THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE:

- **Before launching a campaign it is necessary to have a certain activity and co-operation of NGOs; it would have been very difficult to launch a campaign of such extent if the third sector had not gained experience from other campaigns of a smaller size.**
- **The presumption to launch a campaign is an implicit perception of shared need and goal of a campaign; to have an ideological „hot-bed“ of more potential leaders who urgently feel the need to do something.**
- **A campaign needs a social set-up to begin; dissatisfaction of a substantial part of inhabitants with the situation and spreading the feeling of necessity to be active.**
- **In terms of the process of a campaign it is beneficial to have nation-wide projects and promotion materials prepared as soon as possible; e. g. invite organizations to propose projects with a nation-wide coverage first and only then deal with regional and local projects**
- **During a campaign, the national coordination meetings of the organizers of a campaign have proven to be very effective, discussion was promoted, topical questions and problems clarified, isolation, information distortions reduced and apparent conflict points clarified.**

V. Stakeholders involved in the OK '98 Campaign

- ❖ Who were specific OK '98 stakeholders and what was their involvement in the Campaign activities?
- ❖ What was the role of specific stakeholders, and what were their relationships?
- ❖ Based on a lesson learned from the OK '98 Campaign, what are choices for the Campaign structure and what is their impact on stakeholders' relationships?

Various players involved in the OK '98 Campaign

Complicated Campaign's structure (Figure 2) indicates difficulties of its management. The final number of stakeholders involved in the Campaign had far outgrew participation expected at its beginning. No one member of the coordinating group ever thought how complicated and multitudinous relationships ties among individual Campaign stakeholders could be. No one expected difficulties with maintaining of a regular communication among all stakeholders, and complications with coordination of their own activities with other partners. In spite of all unexpected difficulties, the coordination of activities among various partners was, looking at the Campaign results, basically successful. There is no question about a critical role of the coordinating group, though a great deal of criticism has emerged. Neither there is a doubt about the significance of a balanced relationship with political parties, or acceptance to the key role of involved donors. The importance of relationships with diverse Campaign stakeholders was perceived differently by individual respondents. In this chapter we stress Campaign stakeholders whose role was wholly recognized as critical only after the Campaign was concluded.

We concentrate on following, later recognized and appreciated, or controversial stakeholders: the church, political parties, trade unions and municipalities -- though the institute of the democratic round-table, the neutral facilitator of the Campaign, well-developed environmental NGO's, and supporting projects carried outside the of OK '98 Campaign. These stakeholders were identified, and their involvement and role described, by Campaign participants during the interviews. The final part of this chapter deals with the relationship between coordinating and executive bodies. Their relationship was pointed out as an issue and a source of troubles by almost all respondents in their reports.

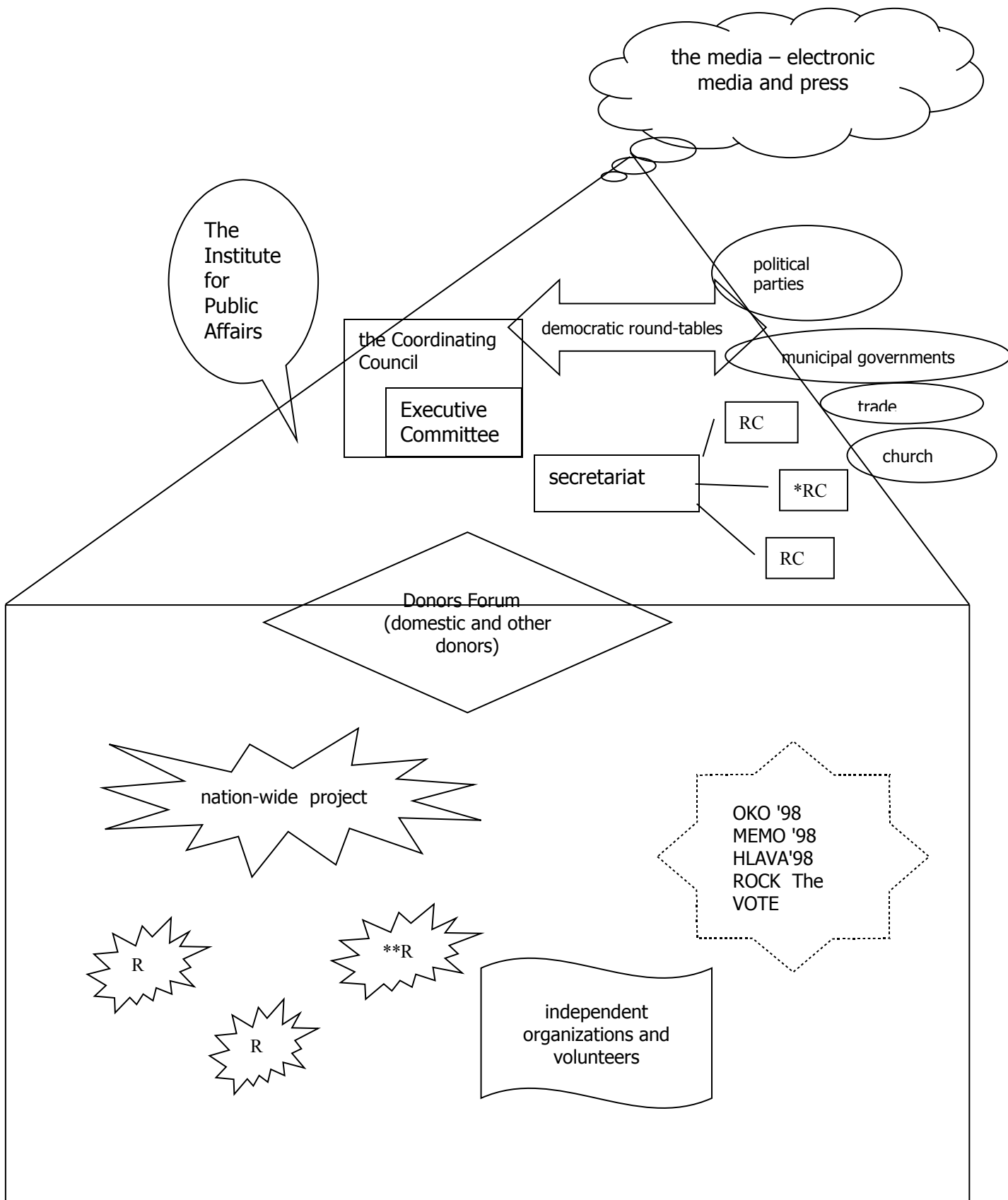


Figure 2: **Stakeholders of the OK '98 Campaign**

* RC - regional coordinators

** RP - regional projects

V. a The church

Involvement in the Campaign varied accordingly to the region. In Central and Eastern Slovakia, church was involved more actively than in the western part of Slovakia. „...we *didn't* succeed in working with them (church) but I think it's important to do so.,” (Lota Pufflerová, Bratislava), „...it was possible to cooperate with them (church).,” (Peter Bronček, Žilina)

„... priests helped us organize discussion forums in villages ... If the priest or the parish council approved of the discussion forum, then many people participated. Thus, in a majority of cases, we invited the mayor and right after him the priest.,” (Peter Németh, Prešov)

According to Juraj Mesík, the church played an important role especially in the country, „through its great influence on the elderly people and people in the countryside, the church undoubtedly contributed to the fact that the election results were what they were”

Without having considered general dilemmas regarding the social engagement of the Church more deeply, we have clearly understood that if the church becomes actively involved in the Campaign, it has to be non-partisan, as other stakeholders, „... I had the feeling that it is also the interest of the church to have a standard society here... In Žilina, we even published special material for churches. It was non-partisan material translated from the recommendations of the Michigan Conference of Bishops from the U.S., which clearly stated that a priest can never speak in favor of, or against a certain candidate, and that the main criteria for selecting a candidate should not be his/her declarations of principles only, but candidate's compliance of these principles...” (Peter Bronček)

V. b Democratic round-tables

Democratic round-tables became a platform for discussion of several players important for the Campaign: political parties, the third sector, trade unions and municipal governments.

„The democratic round-table was a breaking point in our political culture because of the fact that partisan and non-partisan subjects started to meet. At that point, major political parties began to perceive us as a subject doing a politically relevant work.,” (Pavol Demeš)

V. c The neutral facilitator

Several respondents stressed that it is very useful to have a neutral player in the Campaign to mediate conflicts and facilitate meetings.

„... it has to be somebody whom both sides trust, who none of the sides believes about that he is on somebody else's side. But it is hard to find somebody who is willing to be that person.,” (Jan Surotchak)

„... it is good that the meetings were facilitated by the PDCS...The PDCS functioned as the communication glue among all stakeholders...” (Pavol Bakoš)

Marek Kapusta positively commented on the lesson learned from the successful mediation of the conflict between Rock the Vote and Hlava '98 accomplished by the PDCS. „...An experienced mediator is necessary for such meetings....”

V. d A matured environmental NGOs

The OK '98 Campaign provided room for initiative to all non-partisan subjects. Many of NGOs have worked in the fields of a citizen education and strengthening of the democratic principles in our society prior the Campaign. Juraj Mesík gives following reason why he finds participation of an experienced environmental NGOs a great contribution to the Campaign: „Environmental NGOs carry out many campaigns, and they have been carrying them out for a long time... ...environmentalists are made for fight. In the environmental movement, specific type of people participate -- fighters, different from helpers - people who do not tend to fight,

attracted by social NGOs. To sum it up, for the type of a fight that OK certainly is, experience of environmental NGOs are precious.,,

V. eSupporting projects carried outside the of OK '98 Campaign

Participants of the final evaluation meeting of the OK'98 Campaign in Žilina stated that supporting projects which were not officially associated with the Campaign, such as the Civic Eye, Hlava '98, Rock the Vote, and MEMO, are necessary and should the Campaign - for some reasons – be suppressed, they role might become especially significant.

V. fThe relationship between the coordination and executive bodies of the Campaign

The nature of the cooperation between coordinating group and secretariat was described by Pavol Demeš: „... the question of the secretariat could have been managed better... members of the coordinating group from the regions lacked sufficient information... We operated under time pressure since the elections cannot be postponed. It just does not work in the way we try, and in case we fail, we can try again later... People lived under the stress and in a fear of the election results... Moreover, we have strong personalities here... with a variety of thoughts and concepts, not all of them necessarily corresponding to the reality... if we repeated the Campaign, the same issue would arise again.”

What choices are available to resolve issues related to coordinating group-secretariat relationship? A majority of people criticized a physical and function separation of the secretariat and the coordinating group, and an ambiguity in their responsibilities; their location at different sites resulted in ineffective communication, and decreasing flexibility.

„The secretariat cannot be cut apart from the key people who implement a majority of initiatives. ... it just does not work due to the connection that is missing... This connection has never been clarified. It needs to be explicitly defined who reports to whom... The responsibility of the secretariat could not be resolved ex post... People from the secretariat were not able to change their position of not reporting to anyone but their boss... They were not a supportive group for us and we were not a leading group for them either... they were not flexible enough, and they could not deal with unexpected, occasional tasks.” (Lota Pufflerová)

Various stakeholders preferred rather contrary relationship's models -- from a free model, through the partnership, to the hierarchy. Several stakeholders in the interviews proposed to address the issue of unclear relationships through formal, written agreement establishing new legal subject, or an association of legal subjects.

„... organizations which decide to participate, should establish an association of legal persons, and become a legal subject. Its role would be to fundraise and possibly also to form a secretariat. Then, it the reporting responsibility would be clear. One possible solution might be, let say, the board of directors...” (Lota Pufflerová)

„... organizations which decide to coordinate the Campaign, should establish a new legal subject (either a new civic association or an association of legal subjects)... maybe, a lot of our worries would disappear...” (Pavol Demeš)

„... The coordinating group consisted of eleven members... I do not know if the secretariat should report to it; I do not know how effective such a model could be... I suppose that a centralized campaign would not probably be the best solution. However, even the executive committee did not sometimes function well, because there were three people who could not consent easily. Maybe, in such a case the best solution would be to have one director of the campaign. In this Campaign, I did not find it realistic. I think this Campaign was not centralized.” (Peter Novotný)

Two primary models of the relationship between the coordinating and executive bodies in the Campaign

There seem to be two main model choices of the relationship between the coordinating group and the secretariat:

The first model - „partnership“

Necessary in this model is the ability of participants to reach consensus, and clearly define, divide and accept the authority and responsibilities. The agreement should be formalized in a contract. Also it is inevitable that both, the secretariat and the coordinating group communicate very closely, which requires them to reside at one and the same place.

The second model - „asymmetric“

In this model the secretariat provides administrative and technical services, and complies with the coordinating group's governance. The coordinating group is established as an association of legal subjects and its role is to make decisions about money, fundraise resources to run the secretariat, and its legally responsible to the supporting donors. Usually ad hoc established coordination council have difficulties to fundraise money; donors seek security, and an organization with the credit to ensure responsible spending of their funds. Donors cannot trust and rely on an organization, which was established only for the purpose of the campaign, and once the campaign is over, it will not exist anymore.

„An informal group needs a formal body to be able to fundraise. Nobody gives financial resources to an informal group. Therefore, an informal group needs to become associated with a group that would shelter it, fundraise, and provide service for its initiatives.“

The size of the coordinating group

The OK '98 coordinating group, consisting of eleven people, proved to be too big and resulted in a decision to establish a three-member executive committee. Although a great deal of antagonism caused by the initial misunderstandings inside the group were difficult to overcome. Despite an unquestionable argument that the group needs to be 'representative', several difficulties came forth regarding the internal functioning of the group and its activities outwards. Speaking about the problems inwards, regular participation at the meetings by all members turned out to be a problem. In terms of the outward 'transparency' of the group, a number of the respondents stated that in order to make the communication more transparent, one or two members of the group should be well visible in the public.

The nature of the cooperation between the coordinating group and the secretariat was preordained by the fact that the coordinating group was more or less self-appointed with informal, volunteering character. In the case of OK '98, the secretariat consisted of a group of employees from one organization, through which have fundraised a substantial part of funds for the administration of the campaign. When a disagreement occurred, the same issues of unclear authority, mutual responsibility, and responsibility towards other subjects in the campaign repeatedly came to the fore.

The model described above, does not seem to work well as a structure that could coordinate the campaign. The model with professionals and a newly established organization managing the campaign might not work either. An acceptable compromise might be to establish a consortium governing the campaign with binding relationships (e.g. based on contracts) between the coordinating and executive elements and mutually among all coordinating partners. If enough attention is given to these relationships and responsibilities at the beginning of the campaign, it brings benefits in its later stages; spared energy otherwise spent on on-going clarification of one's responsibility and authority.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE:

- **Initiators of a civic campaign comparable with the scope of OK '98, should actively involve all stakeholders as illustrated in the Figure 2.**
- **An effective communication channels established among the stakeholders are critical. Although for the process to establishing these communication channels is needed extra time and energy, at the end it is worthwhile and it results in more effective coordination and governance of the campaign.**
- **Any initiative with similar goals outside the official campaign structure is beneficial and should be appreciated and cooperation should be established.**
- **Environmental NGOs are specially equipped for a political campaign oriented outward of the sector; they are experienced in conducting campaigns and able to fight.**
- **On the other hand, it is also needed a neutral subject in the campaign, which is not driven to fight, but plays an important role within the campaign structure as a facilitator and mediator in case of internal conflicts.**
- **The core of the coordinating group might consist of two to three people from the center, with capacity to meet regularly; however, permanent communication with the regional „advisors,, as well as occasional meetings of the broader coordinating group are necessary.**
- **The model with professionals and a newly-established formal organization supervising the campaign doesn't work in our cultural conditions. An acceptable compromise might be to establish a consortium governing the campaign with binding relationships (e.g. based on contracts) between the coordinating and executive elements and mutually among all coordinating partners. Adequate attention given to these relationships and responsibilities at the beginning of the campaign will be utilized in later stages, as less energy is needed for the continuous clarification of the responsibility and rights.**

VI. A management of a national campaign

- ❖ What should be the position and the role of regional subjects in the campaign?
- ❖ What are alternatives for establishing effective communication?
- ❖ How should the communication between the center and the regions be effectively organized in the campaign?

VI. a Centralized versus decentralized model

The issue of a centralized vs. decentralized management and consequent choice of appropriate campaign strategy is essential, though it does not necessarily seem critical at the first sight. However, ignoring and underestimating this issue might destroy the campaign.

On one hand, locating the leadership or the coordination of the campaign into the center is necessary because -- as Pavol Demeš said: *„...both, the crucial political bodies and the media, reside in the capital city, and also major political decisions are made here.”* This fact, on the other hand, frequently evokes resistance on the side of a regional partners because *„... the third sector in Slovakia is highly developed; we have so many powerful organizations that if one of them was about to take over the leadership, others would not accept it.”* (Pavol Demeš)

From the very first steps in the campaign regions should be taken into a consideration. *„It must be clear from the beginning that the campaign does not take place to implement ideas; on the contrary, it accepts ideas from the regions, from the bottom up, or simply from people. It originates at the grassroots level and then it culminates...”* (Peter Németh, Prešov)

Also other interviewed activists stressed the power of the regions, and their ability to take action:

„...there are many experienced people in the regions who can work independently... there needs to be coordination but the decision what to do, and how to do it, should totally depend on the regions.” (Michal Kravčík, Košice)

„... speaking of the regional coordinators, maybe the idea of establishing their own regional groups was underestimated. As there was a coordinating group in Bratislava, there was OKOI in Košice, or OI3S in Prešov. It was useful; e.g. Peter Németh who coordinated such group in Prešov was at the same time, as a regional coordinator, in the national coordinating group... In this way, the genuine coalition established from the grassroots was used...” (Peter Novotný, Bratislava, OK '98 secretariat)

A majority of respondents view the fact that the Campaign was decentralized as a powerful moment. However, decentralization can be perceived in many different ways; from the campaign with a clear directing body, which takes responsibility over some decisions but mostly leaves the decision-making autonomy up to individual subjects, through the center that conducts coordination, to the complete decentralization of the campaign.

Yet, some people would prefer more centralized leadership. It is up to every subject, which is thinking of joining the Campaign to consider the specifics of the country together with pros and cons of decentralization. We would like to offer some of those, which reflect the current situation in Slovakia:

The centralized management model provides a possibility to establish transparent communication and organization mechanisms, though, mainly in the countries with functioning and advance informal groups, it can cause their resistance to enter the campaign. In the case of OK '98, the centralized model would not work well in the long run, because it would decrease a participation and an involvement of organizations. It is in concordance with an opinion of Lota Pufflerová: *„The original idea of the coordinating group was that of a „drawer,, pulling the others; however, it turned out to be unproductive. At first, there was an active group, which also tended to be a coordinating group. This group was originally supposed to be a strong leader that all the others would join. This original idea was not acceptable - it became clear... I realized we cannot just announce: „here we are and you join us now” - it does not work... It must happen the other way around; either as a decision of the Gremium, or people... They want to hear - we definitely*

have to do something, but you tell us what to do, and who should do what, not that we (from Bratislava) will think everything over...

Similarly, the Donors Forum would not accept one donor organization appropriating the right to propose the model and direct the Donors Forum. Accordingly, it is better when a neutrally perceived and rather smaller foundation initiates establishing of a platform such as the Donors Forum and addresses the other donors. A big foundation doing so might be perceived as trying to seize the given area. As Filip Vagač stated, *„that idea had to become everybody's idea, otherwise it had no chance to function...”*

Experience shows that the question is not whether to centralize or decentralize but to what extent decentralize; that is what kind of decisions are effectively made centrally and what decisions should be left upon individual subjects. Again, it depends on conditions of the particular country, its size and structure.

Which activities would be accepted by a majority of respondents as suitable to be centrally directed?

According to Juraj Mesík (Banská Bystrica), *„... it makes sense to produce certain materials like stickers or brochures centrally... and distribute them to regional subjects... as well as media coverage of the Campaign can be done from the center.”* Similarly, Michal Kravčík identifies as central the designing of common materials, *„the basic material can be developed by one organization in charge of it ... a group of people will develop fundamental materials for three to four months. Specific materials referring to the regions will be designed by other groups.”* Dano Brezina (coordinator of „The March for Slovakia”) thinks that the media coverage of a nationwide project should be conducted from the center, *„there should be a media crew which would monitor the overall course of the campaign, and provide various branches of the campaign with the information on how the media comment on their activities; especially if negative attitudes or conflict situations emerge. Fresh information should be provided every morning, or even during the day if something happens. During „The March for Slovakia” itself, we did not have time to read newspapers.... Somebody else should do that in the center. Secondly, the media campaign should be carefully prepared. At least six weeks before the start of the campaign the media should be informed about what is going to happen... It is helpful if the center manages to address the regional media through professional journalists...”*

What does a regional coordinator expect from the center? Martin Novák (regional coordinator for Banská Bystrica) summed up his expectations in the following items:

- to know about the meetings well in advance (to know at least the tentative schedule of meetings);
- meetings should be focused on the work of coordinators: what would be beneficial to do, and what they should do - it must be clear in Bratislava. Mainly, they should clarify if they understand each other correctly;
- the acceptable frequency of meetings is twice in a month, the location of meetings should change (it should not be Bratislava every time).

VI. bCommunication flow between the Campaign stakeholders – the center vs. regions

Sufficient information should flow to regions in order to prevent feelings of discrimination and tension. *„If the regions do not obtain information, they a priori feel discriminated, though it is not true. The only thing they lack is latest information... we got used to provide information by means of declarations... It is unwieldy... it should be... brief, clear, without any formal preparations where we care about stylistics... a priority is to present facts.”* (Peter Németh)

Without personal, face-to-face contacts, there cannot be any sufficient identification with the others. At the first meetings, when the coordinating group was being established, people from the regions were absent *„... Consequently, these people had no contact with this group, and I think they did not identify with it.”* (Lota Pufflerová)

An issue of „Bratislava-centrism” marked the relationships among the members of the coordinating group, though it was also reflected in poor communication of the regions with the

center. Certain regional leaders expressed dissatisfaction with communication, others, on the contrary, did not lack communication at all - they perceived its shortage as an autonomy - „we did everything ourselves”- and considered it beneficial. Communication between the regions occurred spontaneously, based on the need and personal relationships.

Different opinions were uttered with regards to e-mail and disseminating news through the Internet; „personal meetings are valuable but the primary form of communication should be electronic... it is worth to meet people from the country who are isolated..” (Juraj Mesík) On the other hand, a number of respondents was not satisfied with the course of the Internet discussion. In their opinion, it was not factual but full of personal attacks, which escalated in the written communication more than they probably would have in case of a direct, immediate conversation.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE:

- **Some activities should be done centrally; it is not good to defuse energy. It refers to:**
- **preparation of nationwide projects, advertising materials, and media products; leaflets, posters, and brochures with the information why to vote, how to vote, what to ask at the discussion forums; analyses of the election programs of the political parties, and the like.**
- **Peoples attitude of involvement, their feeling of “being in” can be increased through:**
- **well-functioning communication channels**
- **clarifying of tension and misinformation at meetings**
- **delegating of the authority to the managing body of the campaign by themselves.**

VII. Conflicts and problems during the campaign

- ❖ What problems and conflicts arose in communication among stakeholders in management of the Campaign?
- ❖ How were the problems and conflicts resolved during the Campaign?
- ❖ How is it possible to resolve those conflicts that could not be resolved during the campaign?
- ❖ What types of conflicts occurred and why?
- ❖ How to prevent such conflicts?

Conflicts and problems are natural part of each activity which requires coordination of interests and action of several subjects. We are able to eliminate some of them, others always occur. If we expect them, if we are aware of them in time, they will not surprise us much. This can help us prevent a lot of consequent problems.

„There are always conflicts. I cannot be friends with everyone...the thing is how to explain contradictions to each other.” (Peter Bronček)

„The campaign must be ready to face frustrations coming from inside of sector as well as attacks from outside. OK '98 did not avoid its own weak points either.” (Pavol Demeš)

Learning in the course of the process and learning from own mistakes have been significant for OK '98. The problems which had emerged needed improvisation and creative „last minute” solutions in the course of the campaign. These ad hoc solutions often used for resolving of conceptual problems and gaps in coordination have been made possible thanks to the flexibility and existing informal links. In this respect informal links have been beneficial.

Respondents' opinions about causes for conflicts vary. New activities are always connected with a lack of experience. Since OK '98 was the first of its kind in Slovakia, its leaders had no chance to get a real idea on what the struggles would be. Conflicts came from outside as well as inside of the Campaign.

VII. aConflicts coming from outside the Campaign

The outside conflicts had its roots in a strong polarization of the political spectrum. The governing coalition accused NGOs of doing political action, being partisan, and violating laws. Non-governmental organizations were labeled as people selling out Slovakia, and established with the only purpose to ruin the state.

Funding of the initiative by international foundations and embassies was interpreted as asserting of foreign interests. Activities of OK '98 were perceived out as unnecessary.

Some of partial conflicts between individual NGO and political party, and eventually its supporters, were caused by interference between their planned meetings.

„... sometimes contacts with political parties did not work... each NGO had planned its small project at the end of the Campaign, in the last one or two weeks. At that time parties already had their own final events. That was the case of biggest conflicts.” (Karoly Tóth)

„...an hour before there was a rally of the HZDS and afterwards all that mob came to a discussion forum so that the atmosphere was tense... I did not have a problem to manage politicians but people. It was the only forum where this happened to me, where people interrupted a man because he said, he is young, he is a first-time voter and he is afraid of results of the elections. Those people coming from the HZDS rally didn't allow him to talk...” (Miška Galvánková)

Conflicts existed also between organizations of the Union of Civil Associations and Foundations, an NGO heavily subsidized by Mečiar's government, and NGOs that participated in OK '98.

„They accused organizations which participated in the Campaign of being engaged in politics and not taking care of what relates to the third sector: charity and social activities...” (Richard Medal)

VII. bInside conflicts

As a number of respondents stated, the conflicts inside the OK '98 Campaign were predominantly caused by time stress. There is always little time, especially if the overall conditions were changing quickly – changes in the election laws during campaigns for the parliamentary as well as municipal elections. Despite anticipating of this common phenomenon it was possible to observe the inexperience of NGOs to realistically estimate the time needed for preparation and realistic evaluating of their own capacity. The stress was enhanced by the uncertainty and worries about a possible interference with the Campaign since it was a political action.

„I think none of us was aware enough of the impact of the tension and the pressure on the way we all behaved.” (Jan Surotchak)

Pavol Demeš has a similar opinion on the problems caused by the time stress:

„... We worked under the time pressure since it was impossible to postpone elections - it was not like that we will try another time if it did not work. People lived under the time stress worrying about results...”

„...But it was impossible to do it differently because everything was too hectic, everything was done in a hurry.” (Peter Bronček)

Answers of the respondents and experience of the mediators imply that the unavoidable sources of conflicts are factors connected with the personality of the campaign leaders - their maturity as well as personal features of character. Strong personalities are very often active in the field of civil activism or in foundations oriented towards the civil society and democracy development. These personalities are often controversial, non-conformist, having different opinions on what brings about a higher probability of conflicts.

„... people working for NGOs which focus on democracy building are characters of their own kind in general...they are different from people of the social and educational fields... they are more stubborn, self-asserting solitary individuals...” (Pavol Demeš)

Other sources of conflicts on the personal level were as follows:

- different level of experience in the field
- different „personal history” and eventually perceived age differences. If a synergy of these factors happened, the conflicts were more intensive.

Numerous problems interconnected with organizing and coordinating activities and communication in the Campaign had its origin (according to respondents) in the informal character of the Campaign relationships, with fulfilling of the agreements depending largely on personal involvement and willingness of every participant. The unclear mechanism of establishing the coordination committee could also contribute to the complications. There was an issue of „Bratislava-centrism,” which was perceived differently by people from Bratislava and regions. It is difficult to determine which factor was the primary one. Probably, a snowball effect and a concurrence of factors were critical.

Management, eventually coordination of the Campaign, was based on a voluntary and group basis, preferring the informal structures based on „gentlemen agreements,”. This alternative worked well in Slovakia due to the existing infrastructure of the third sector as well as a small size of the country.

„...managing by a committee is almost always a disaster. Particularly if you are dealing with a very large, very complicated environment. Slovakia is neither large, nor complicated - so it is possible.... I am not saying it is better, I am saying it is possible. In a country of the size of Poland for example, it is unimaginable to me that a committee could run a campaign to influence 45 million people.” (Jan Surotchak)

Besides positives, the informal groups can carry a risk of an unclear definition of responsibility which could have been one of the reasons of misunderstandings in the coordination committee:

„...It has been proposed several times in the coordination committee to create some model projects. It would be helpful for people in the regions and they could join our action. It has never been done...we never succeeded in dividing the competencies and quantity of work.” (Lota Pufflerová)

„... Nowadays, I would say it was a fatal mistake... The mistake was that it was not based on contracts. It was voluntary and enthusiastic and the personal involvement of every participant was extremely important.” (Andrej Bartosiewicz)

Another consequence could have been the unclear definition of responsibilities, competencies and authorities, eventually their different interpretation and creation of a false consensus between the coordination committee and secretariat

„...We have always had verbal agreements but not always have they been fulfilled... At the beginning we met every week, however the steady schedule disappeared later, communication got worse...the rules and authorities of the executive committee, coordinating committee and secretariat were not clearly defined.” (Peter Novotný)

„Unfortunately, when you run a group structure, the line of authority is much less clear and it was never established from the very beginning, who answers to whom and who decides on what. If somebody came at the beginning and delegated authority to himself (to make the lines of authority clear) it would not work...there were no professional positions established, there were no job descriptions established.” (Jan Surotchak)

The informal structure requires a high level of personal commitment. Therein, the issue of identification with the campaign itself or with groups created in the campaign proved to be a crucial one.

„There are two aspects of the issue. One is the organizational structure which makes the effective communication easier. The other one is the personal commitment. If I want to do something, I will do it, regardless of what the communication structure is like.” (Andrej Bartosiewicz)

Many problems were considered to be a consequence of preferring one's own interests in the Campaign and a lack of zeal for the cause. It has become clear that concepts of individuals about how to function and communicate within the coordination committee varied. An agreement became a problem. To provide for a successful action it was necessary to establish a smaller executive committee.

To clarify relationships between the Campaign managing bodies (coordination committee, secretariat, leaders,...) and the elected representative institution, Gremium of the Third Sector, became impossible during the Campaign. Several respondents considered the mechanism for creating the coordination committee and its relationship with the Gremium of the Third Sector to be unclear. In the struggle to react to the critical opinions and accusations of tendencies to seize power or leave out the elected structures of the Gremium, „the coordination committee,, sometimes designated itself as the „initiating committee,,.

The following statements of the respondents illustrate the above mentioned uncertainties:

„... In any campaign it is beneficial to make a step ahead and say: whoever is interested, please come and we can think how to prepare the campaign... In this Campaign it happened this way: a decision was made that eleven people announced the Campaign and afterwards the others were called in. Obviously, it caused tensions... In the future, anytime, if something like this is to be organized (even without the official structures like the Gremium), a broader appeal to more people could prevent some of the conflicts and tensions which existed...” (Filip Vagač)

„...There was an opinion among people...why people have not been selected according to the criteria: here is the elected Gremium and elected representatives of NGOs. It did not happen this way. Members of the coordinating group had been chosen not because they were in the Gremium but according to some other, unclear criteria. Therefore, many people felt rejected and did not know why. Moreover, they were members of the Gremium... I knew it would not work this way, we could not simply announce that we were there and they should join

us... Then it changed a little for the regional gremia participated...they came together and discussed what could be done...they identified an area of activity. If it had continued this way it would have been better. Unfortunately, that tendency lasted only for a moment..." (Lota Pufflerová)

"...For me, personally, OK '98 started up rather quickly (maybe, because I am from the Prešov region, which is far away). Suddenly I heard that a group called OK '98 was created. I did not even know their names, afterwards I found out that it was a Bratislava group, not in the sense of being from Bratislava all of them but in the sense of being close to each other, being able to co-ordinate themselves technically so that they joined together. If somebody from us should come to Bratislava it would delay the process. Basically, the news was very quick... Second, some of these people were from the Gremium...it was not clear to me how they took their role in the Gremium and in OK '98. Because both institutions claimed that they would like to interfere with the election process..." (Peter Németh)

"When the group OK '98 was established, many NGOs did not understand what the purpose of such institution is when the Gremium was there. It was not explained what functions both institutions had." (Richard Meda)

"... the campaign should be led according to a plan. There is no campaign without a plan. The plan comes first. Afterwards it is approved by somebody. It could have happened in Zvolen where all Slovak NGOs came or through SAIA or I do not know where, but basically a concept should have been approved and somebody should have been appointed to implement the plan. If everybody agrees, if everybody knows their place, it is possible to do it. But something like this was missing. There was no plan...therefore it was so spontaneous." (Károly Tóth)

Despite problems, as well as thanks to the problems, the third sector is richer in experience. It will return to this experience when planning new campaigns, when clarifying and defining next directions and, maybe, when being weak and seeking for new ways out.

RECOMMENDATION BASED ON THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE:

- **It is necessary to count on a certain extent of conflicts.**
- **Individuals involved in a civil activism or in NGOs oriented towards the development of civil society and democracy have often distinctive, controversial personalities and conflicting opinions. When the coordinating group is established, it is beneficial to ask also potentially conflicting people to cooperate, although this risks controversies. In a long-term perspective it is more efficient to resolve conflicts inside the campaign than to experience questioning of activities by outsiders from the NGO sector. In this respect it is beneficial to resolve conflicts through mediation, i.e. to count on the necessity of a neutral organization which has the mediation potential available.**
- **Civil campaign with a political orientation is very sensitive to publicly resolving its internal discrepancies. In case of OK '98, the Campaign was constantly attacked by the governing coalition and accused of being partisan, serving the opposition, being sponsored by foreign donors who prefer their own interests in Slovakia. It is more than obvious that if internal discrepancies of the Campaign would have been presented in the media they will contribute to the atmosphere of rumors and half-truth.**

VIII. OK '98 - political but non-partisan campaign

- ❖ How did the Campaign address the stakeholders demand for political at the same time non-partisan initiative?
- ❖ What were successful approaches and steps for achieving this goal?
- ❖ What are the recommendations for addressing this issue?

VIII aInternal understanding of non-partisanship in the Campaign

The definition of non-partisanship, as the bearing principle of the Campaign, turned out to be a crucial point. The Campaign's management, the coordinating group, needed to make clear what was and what was not non-partisan during the whole Campaign, with every decision they took.

„We were in the process of permanent learning about that. It is not enough just to say it once at the beginning what we wanted and that it was, all clear to us. It is a process of continuing clarification of principles on the basis of concrete cases and you can't give an academic definition of it. With every serious project or taking of a decision it is necessary to discuss it and verify it again and again, as there is simply no stable standard of it... Principles of non-partisanship must be put on a paper explicitly...otherwise everyone will add their own definitions of it. Also funders have to be sure that these people won't let them down...“ (Pavol Demeš)

How was the Campaign perceived in terms of the criterion of non-partisanship? The answers of the respondents show that the issue of non-partisanship was complicated. Some of the answers are even a bit bizarre:

„The mechanisms of non-partisanship were followed, but beliefs of people were partisan towards the then opposition.“ (Peter Németh)

„It was non-partisan, but also a bit typical of the day.“ (Peter Novotný)

„The Campaign was non-partisan in terms of not siding with anyone on the democratic side of the political spectrum...at the same time it was anti-totalitarian and totalitarian political parties can be clearly defined... I did not see it as an ethical conflict at all, for me it was a fight for freedom and democracy, and elementary values of western civilization...“ (Juraj Mesík)

„I say that it was a non-partisan Campaign because it did not side with anyone or any small group of non-partisan subjects. It was political because it presented real information on the state of the society...it presented issues of the election law and pro-democratic values.“ (Dano Brezina)

The mechanism of making sure the Campaign was non-partisan rested on the effort to address all political subjects.

„We addressed all political parties that had more than five per cent and a chance to get to the Parliament... it is not our problem that our ethical values are closer to the present ruling power than the previous one...I joined the Campaign because I thought the ruling power was violating basic moral values...I have to do something to change it“ (Peter Bronček)

„...our non-partisanship was also shown by the fact that the Slovak Radio and the STV received the same portion of all materials we delivered to the Radio TWIST or the TV Markíza. We communicated with them in the same way, and then it was up to them what they would do with the them.“ (Hana Hanúsková)

Implementers of projects protested severely when some of the political parties wanted to join the Campaign:

„At the beginning we publicly said that everyone who wanted to support the idea that people should go out to vote could join us but you can say that when political subjects were interested in joining us we refused them all.“ (Dano Brezina)

„The core of a success is that no member of the coordinating group can appear on a candidate list of any political party, not even in its end...from the beginning till the end it is

necessary to communicate with all political parties equally, no matter what temptation you might have...and you have to declare that in public again and again.” (Pavol Demeš)

Ensuring non-partisanship in terms of motivating people to vote in the election did not face any serious problems. Nevertheless, dilemmas and problems appear in connection with providing, or evaluating information.

„...the dilemma is that, when I am informing voters about what the Government did, it can be both partisan and non-partisan. The criterion is whether this information secondarily foists an opinion on a voter.” (Braňo Orgoník)

Richard Medal said that the material explaining what is partisan and what is non-partisan (made by PDCS) was very helpful, as it provided good examples, such as *„when they write about certain politicians during all the four years of their term and they keep doing it also before elections, it is all right. But if it has not been done those four years and it is being done only before the elections, then it is not all right.”*

Some of the people working on projects did not consider providing (delivering) and evaluating information to be a dilemma: „...to present the position of the Government in terms of what they did, to work with really objective and publicly accessible information...” (Dano Brezina)

The issues of how to formulate the text in materials distributed in the public (leaflets, brochures...) seemed to be the greatest issue. Jan Surotchak formulated it as the difference between the western and Slovak point of view *„...differences were based on any sort of loose or tight legal definition of partisan and non-partisan. It was much more based on a question of sophistication of argument, where westerners said „you know you don't have to be this... assume that people know something. Assume that people have some degree of a common sense, assume that you don't have to talk to them as if they were children. Because if you talk to them like children they behave like children. If you use a higher degree of sophistication not only that your message is just effective, it allows you a luxury of not using a terminology and style which could be considered partisan.”*

An important role was played by donors: they were *„the guardians of non-partisanship ... they did it with the most effective lever: money” (Pavol Bakoš)*

VIII bCommunication of non-partisanship of the Campaign to the public

Preventive information campaigns were the way to face disinformative campaigns. Therefore it is necessary to foresee concrete attacks, be proactive and eliminate the attacks in advance, as an example the permanent explanation of the principle of non-partisanship.

Richard Medal's opinion is that *„the public was not informed sufficiently that the organizations involved in the Campaign don't only carry out projects in the Campaign, but that in normal society and normal times they do a lot of useful things, things that make the third sector the third sector.”* His own experience confirms that such sort of informing of the public is the „weapon“ against the accusation that the organizations involved in OK '98 are one-time organizations founded for the purpose of breaking our state. In the event of an attack it is necessary to find out whether it was not a provocation.

To permanently inform the public and explain to both the public and political subjects how the third sector understood its role in politics proved to be effective. It is important to permanently educate citizens on issues of civil society. The starting point has to be an analysis of accusations and a concrete situation: *„you simply have to sit down and listen to what the person says to you because such reactions are worst when people are intentionally irritating each other...that typical Slovak behavior that something is nonsense and then the other one says something and that is even bigger nonsense...such are often also the reactions of politicians to one another and that is what we tried not to do... it was necessary to abstract the greatest problems...for example one time we abstracted what negative names the civil campaigns was given, then another time we tried to differentiate whether it was against individuals or they considered us to be all the same. At the same time we still repeated in all OK material what OK was from our point of view” (Hana Hanúsková)*

It is important to know the society, for which campaign is design; to know the way it thinks about public affairs and politics. According to that, you have to choose a strategy for reacting to the outside accusations and attacks. Here is a citation of OK '98 media advisor Hana Hanúsková:

„I felt it was not clear to the people at all how our Campaign could be non-partisan and political at the same time. We came from the fact that the stereotypes that have been existing in this society for years due to socialism caused the politics to be identified with the party leadership... our people never even heard of something like civil politics so far...” (Hana Hanúsková)

„...the ruling élite had a clear argument: „you are not supposed to engage with politics... we had to explain to the people in a very simple way that even the shop you buy your bread every day is your political decision...” (Hana Hanúsková)

The above-mentioned permanent education of citizens is a positive contribution for the Campaign not only in terms of getting citizens active but also from the organizational point of view. Because the bonds and structures established in the non-campaign period are priceless.

„the networks NGOs relied on had been built for many years.” (Juraj Mesík)

One of the examples is a network of clubs in southern Slovakia *„...we were building such a network of people in southern Slovakia one year ahead of the elections already... first we had this project to get them involved in public life and then six months before the elections we prepared them for the elections... so first we appealed to them to get interested in public affairs and only then we did concentrate on the elections. The clubs we established founded civil associations afterwards, they became independent but stayed in touch with us... „...because under such political systems as the one we had with the previous government people were so insipid. They got used to it so that they did not have to take care of anything at all because it did not make any sense...”* (Myrtil Nagy)

It is useful to devote a lot of energy into the issue of identifying yourself with the campaign, establish a commitment and create atmosphere of enthusiasm toward it *„to do something artificially just because of the money for example, I do not think that is a good reason to do things.”* (Pavol Bakoš). However, in civil activism a problem arises at the same time that people enthusiastic for the thing do not necessarily have to have dispositions for such work:

„...when we want to do something on an adequate level of quality, then we should understand that some people can't do certain things as they are not skilled enough to do them, they don't know how to do it. We are facing a dilemma...but still-someone should decide it... look at it and say: you better not do this, or you'll produce more harm than good.” (Michaela Galvánková)

Part of the conflicts caused by incompetence should be resolved by competent professionals involved in the campaign: *...“when you have no idea how it will be, you only know main points (you know the target point, you know approximately how long it will take)...then you have to get the biggest ones involved .”* (Hana Hanúsková)

The feeling of being part of a team and personal enthusiasm for the common interests seems to be one of the main factors motivating cooperation in such activities as a campaign. However it is necessary that this personal enthusiasm is clearly transparent within the communication with one another, or the cooperation will be distorted, and even though the feeling of being part of a team remains, the activities will not be coordinated. Lack of willingness to communicate and to stick to rules that everyone understands in a different way, is interpreted as ignoring, non-commitment and it creates mutual mistrust that can result in a circle of accusations.

RECOMMENDATION BASED ON THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE:

- **make a commitment that no coordinating group member will run on the candidate list of any political party**
- **address all political subjects**
- **put on paper explicitly what the principles of non-partisanship are and distribute as much as possible among participating subjects**
- **declare you are non-partisan towards political parties, public, donors as well as NGOs**
- **when organizing public events with external partners (e.g. music bands) it is good to close a contract with them that should prevent possible misunderstandings or partisan abuse of the campaign**
- **the polls should bring feedback, whether the campaign is perceived by public as a non-partisan activity**
- **it is necessary to react to the statements of politicians in time (write an open letter that is clear and easy to understand, clearly formulate relations with political parties, explain to the public what is the base of a civil society and the identity of the campaign, give clear arguments, stress mechanisms of non-partisanship**
- **as arguments you can use statements of politicians, who despite their undemocratic practice, like saying nice words about the citizen and his role in society**
- **underline that the Constitution and politics are public affairs and that in democratic societies the state power welcomes citizens involvement in politics, instead of saying that it is subversive of the state**
- **inform about who the activists of the campaign are -- especially on the local level. Individual organizations should also inform the public about their work – present activities they carry out besides the campaign. It is necessary to inform who activists are in the media nation-wide.**
- **it is efficient if organizations are created throughout the country, to make citizens involved in their regions, and to create a network of citizen activities (clubs), to educate people to participate in public life. Then, the elections are just a additional activity within this wide range of activities. Activities supporting citizen activism are necessary regardless of whether there will be an election campaign in two years or not and if such a campaign starts, it is an advantage because there is something to follow up.**

IX. Financing of the Campaign

- ❖ How were the activities of the Donors Forum coordinated?
- ❖ What helped the projects most and what was not supportive to them?

IX. aThe role of the Donors Forum

The fact that individual grant foundations were able to form the platform of the Donors Forum and communicate with each other about funding and co-funding projects was possible thanks to their previous communication and trust.

„...we have been meeting regularly for one and a half years...(private funders at least) so having the private funders together in one room to talk about common grant making strategies was not new...”

At the same time Jan Surotchak translated this experience into the following recommendation: *„so, to the extent it is possible (for other countries) begin the process of developing donors forums now. No matter what the political situation is, to me it makes sense because it is smart to have donors becoming comfortable with each other. So the first thing would be finding the way. It doesn't have to be a donors forum. It doesn't have to be something formal like we had, but the mechanism, that allows the donors to communicate on the regular basis, in some structured fashion, is what is important.”*

Separating the Campaign management from project funding, i.e. the distribution of competencies — who decides on the concept of the Campaign and who on the funds — was mostly perceived as a contribution for the Campaign. *„the executive committee was about managing the Campaign, about strategies and the Donors Forum was about assessing the quality of projects and allocating funds. That is important, to clearly separate the managing functions of the Campaign and funding of projects...”* (Pavol Demeš)

One has to keep in mind that to increase the flexibility of allocation of funds in the Campaign requires an agreement on the shortened grant proceeding.

Other positives of the Donors Forum were:

- creation of the common „call for proposal,” a common form and unified image of NGOs towards the public and politicians
- *„it was important from the NGOs point of view that no small group is created that would decide on funds and from the donors' point of view that the identity of individual donors remains unchanged, i.e. that every foundation was able to maintain integrity in accordance with their purpose“* (Filip Vagač)
- redistribution of projects, in the event of projects with similar intentions the Donors Forum initiated meetings for these organizations (applying with the same type of projects) to agree on cooperation, or even joint work (Rock volieb and Hlava '98, or Gemma and the coordinating group preparing the brochures together, or the cooperation between OKO and the Tunega Foundation)
- communication with foreign donors (Mott Foundation, General Marshall Fund) about the situation, what are the trends, and how foreign donors can join the effort

A phenomenon of extreme importance is creation of mutual confidence among funders. Though the cooperation of the Donors Forum was a new element, certain communication on projects and possible co-funding (provided that an NGO applied for funds with more than one foundation) and confidence between individual foundations had already been established.

„...it was important that such an agreement was achieved within the Donors Forum — that individual grant foundations were willing to go to the Campaign together...it did not start by accident. It is very important that communication between individual funders existed already, therefore such an agreement was possible“ (Filip Vagač)

Looking back, feedback communication between the Donors Forum and those who applied for grants proved to be insufficient.

„there was no feedback communication from the Donors Forum about the decision taken in individual grant foundations, no feedback to organizations...those organizations who submitted their projects to one address and expected information on the result from that address.” (Filip Vagač)

The applicants were informed by the Donors Forum of which foundation accepted their project. Often those foundations contacted the applicants themselves, because they needed supplementary information on the projects. However, information on decisions of the foundations did not come back to the Donors Forum *„... at the end it seemed to miss coordination. Decisions made by individual donors...as what, from individual project, is going to be cover, or which part is supported was not coordinated... for example it happed that from five of them (donors), two decided not support the project, and so it caused big problems for implementers, because the project was in fact not financed. Maybe if it would have come back to Donors Forum, we could have talked about it – we would tried to find a way to solve it...” (Filip Vagač)*

This produced uncertainties for organizations applying for grants; they didn't know what to relay on.

„...the relationship between the Donors Forum and individual organizations was not clear, it means that it (project) was dealt with at Donors Forum , which took some time, and then the same project was going through approval process of another donor organization –through regular meeting of the Board of Directors, which had a different schedule than the Donors Forum promised. It all lead to prolonging of time ... it wasn't 'killing ' waiting, but it took longer then we expected. ... We wanted just to know whether we can count on the project, or not.... because if you are ready for something and you keep you colleagues in readiness, you need an unambiguous decision of yes or no very soon, to know where your activity should be focused...” (Peter Németh)

On one side donors expected to be informed by the coordinating group about the main trends inside the Campaign, how programs are coordinated, how all of Slovakia is covered by activities, where there is enough projects and where they are missing. Also which are the key projects already coordinated and financed and how individual projects can be combined and together ask for financing – printing of brochures and other PR materials. It might have been helpful to provide information, by the coordinating group, to NGOs about which projects where already financed and, in which areas the demand is already covered. For NGOs considering applying for a grant, it would be useful information, it would increase their flexibility.

On the other hand the Donors Forum was perceived as lacking interest in the opinion of coordinating group members. *„...cooperation between Donors Forum and the coordinating group rested on a lower level then it was demanded... Donors Forum, maybe overloaded by their agenda, behaved as it if was not interested in what was going on in the coordinating group” (Lota Puflerová)*

IX. bLocal Funders

The role of local funders was less important then was expected, especially by OK '98 stakeholders (in their dreams).

„...It is a problem of legislation and our (Slovak) economics, and maybe also of our (Slovak) historical – moral and social tradition. There is a missing tradition of giving plus there is no legislation, which would make it easier for funders to give, and the economic situation is weak.” (Braňo Orgoník).. „here it is not profitable for funders to support something. We have no sufficient legislation for that ... there were few (local funders) who supported something, but not through money...” (Lota Puflerová)

„ It is helpful if right at the beginning one account is created for the nationwide fundraising campaign... The reason for that would be to involve, from the very beginning, all Democratic sources in the country for the campaign. From a political point of view it is of great importance, especially in the case where foundations were accused of lobbying for interests of foreign capital.” (Michal Kravčík)

RECOMMENDATION BASED ON THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE:

- **The platform similar to the Donors Forum, could be effective, but it may not succeed in the situation where is missing, experience with a mutual information exchange, communication and trust among donors. It takes many months to create the trust.**
- **Local funders and civic contributions can function as a crucial justification against the attacks relating to foreign capital e.g. disrupting the country to please foreigner sponsors. For in-country fundraising there is needed one appointed person.**
- **It is helpful to ask one representative of the coordinating group to participate in meetings of Donors Forum as an adviser and for the purpose of assessing the priority of projects.**
- **The coordinating group should regularly report on actual trends, program directions and regions, which need to be covered.**
- **Self-discipline of donors is important, to come to each meeting with prepared information about projects selected and rejected. There needs to be one person facilitating communication among funders in time between the meetings.**
- **Similar projects need to be coordinated and have agreements on cooperation. The initiative for agreements should come from NGOs because their will to collaborate is necessary. Another possibility is to organize cooperation through the Donors Forum, but this should be the last option.**
- **From the technical point of view, mobile phones, internet (WEB pages) and e-mail are extremely valuable. They should be considered in the budget of the campaign.**

X. The campaign in relation with the media

- ❖ How did the Campaign behave in relation to the media?
- ❖ What is positive and negative in relation to the media?
- ❖ What are the recommendations for a media campaign?

X. aThe media environment entered by the OK '98 Campaign

The media environment that the civil campaign entered was non-standard. We will give a brief description of the Campaign's starting point in the media environment.

The law on the pre-election campaign

Since 1990 several versions of the law on the pre-election campaign have been passed. All of them determined that the pre-election campaign could take place only in the state-owned electronic media and the press. Pre-election spots could be broadcast only through the Slovak Television (STV) and the Slovak Radio. Commercial TVs and radio stations with high ratings were excluded from the pre-election campaign. But it does not mean that the issue of elections was not tackled on these stations. For example the Radio TWIST creatively, before every news program, broadcasted the announcement on limitations caused by this law. During the pre-election period the TV Markíza started new programs about the political scene of the day at the hours with the highest rating: „Na Slovensku je to tak“ (That is the way it is in Slovakia) and „Na telo“ (The body-blow). 1998 saw another significant change: the pre-election campaign was prolonged by one more week. The law allowed each political subject entering the campaign to use twelve millions Slovak Crowns.

TV and Radio broadcasting

Private TV channel Markíza was undoubtedly the channel with the highest ratings. Due to the unprofessional behavior of the owners as well as an insensitive approach of the Government, TV Markíza became a political case in the last few months before the elections. What, at the beginning, was a dispute referring to the rights of property, became a political and criminal issue. Later on the opposition and NGOs were accused of political abuse of the dispute, though it was probably someone else who initiated it. It is apparent that the "Markíza case", similar to the foiled referendum in the past, contributed remarkably to the mobilization of the Slovak citizens.

TV Markíza broadcasted a series of the pre-election spots "I vote, therefore I am" appealing especially to young voters. It was an initiative of civil association Hlava '98. Also this TV station broadcast objectively about the election activities of NGOs.

The behavior of the state-owned STV, both before and during the elections was highly partisan, which was illustrated in e.g. MEMO '98 monitoring in July 1998. The research showed that as many as 39 per cent of STV news was about the then government and another 30 per cent about the HZDS, while non-coalition parties were given 12.2 per cent. The TV Markíza devoted 16 per cent of its news to the HZDS, 17 per cent to the activities of the Government, both SDK and SDL were given 17 per cent each, SOP 11 per cent, and SNS and ZRS 9 per cent each. (Storin, Ltd. Monitoring, Markíza, TV News, 23 July 1998)

Apart from the state-owned Slovak Radio, several commercial stations have high ratings in Slovakia. Because the Slovak Radio supported mostly the coalition, some of the radio stations decided to assume the duties that by law should be provided for by a public institution: objective news and journalism. The most significant example was the news on the Radio TWIST. An alternative radio station, the Radio Ragtime, addressing

young people, broadcasted recent home and international news several times a day, called „Správičky“ (Brief News).

The dailies

In Slovakia there is a great number of national and regional dailies but their influence was obviously not as strong as that of the electronic media. Except for the daily Slovenská Republika and some of the regional dailies, a majority of them tried to present objective information about the pre-election campaign as well as the pre-election activities of NGOs.

The internet

The internet entered the Slovak media scene as a new and necessary - sometimes even inevitable - means of communication. Above all young people, students, researchers and people working in NGOs had access to it. Older and less educated people did not have access to a computer technologies (their motivation was insufficient, or they did not have the need to use „the latest kind of communication“). Political parties, NGOs and state administration (the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and others) set up several websites on elections. Almost all organizations taking part in the Campaign used the internet to a great extent. The internet network became a new channel of communication between NGOs. The pro-government press considered this phenomenon to be a dangerous weapon, but democratic opposition got very enthusiastic about this technology that made central control of information impossible.

„...Free citizens associated in non-governmental organizations are not asleep either. At the end of the 20th century information does not flow through one and only one TV or radio station any more, or one and only one censored newspaper, the way it did thirty years ago...“ (the Daily SME, August 26, 1998, by M. Toman).

There is no similar example in Slovakia to the NGO activities both before and during the elections. Of all media presentations of the NGO sector in the last ten years this was the most powerful one, and despite some ‘children’s diseases’ the third sector strongly influenced civil awareness and the activity of citizens.

The main goal of the OK ‘98 Campaign was to explain to the citizens the relation between a responsible approach to exercise their right to vote and the chance of solving their own social problems. Šarlotta Pufflerová, the spokeswoman of the OK ‘98 Campaign, put it like this: *„we wanted to help provide for fair political competition in the pre-election campaign, civil supervision of the elections while supporting the legitimate expression of free will of all citizens...“* (the Daily Národná obroda)

X. bInitial principles of the OK ‘98 Campaign in media

The initiating group of the OK ‘98 Campaign more or less intuitively felt the need to have a definition of the media campaign. The reality made them reduce their original, maximalistic notions and structure of the media campaign. But the leading philosophy that was the result of the very early discussions remained unchanged.

The leading principles of the Campaign included:

1. positive approach to citizens, supporters and even opponents

„...From the very beginning we were determined to run the Campaign in a positive way, we were determined to respond positively even to negative attacks...“ (H. Hanúsková)

The dilemma about the positive or negative campaign was clear from the beginning. As Juraj Mesík said, some of the crucial observations of the Bulgarian *activists* „warned against a

negative campaign. It would result in discouraging people and dissuading them from going to vote. This is what we prevented people from doing so that they couldn't go that way."

2. involving professionals in the Campaign

From the very beginning the conceptual approaches were initiated and worked out by a professional (journalist and expert in PR strategies), and there were two more contract-workers involved, both experts in PR who were working with the NOS (Foundation for An Open Society). Other attempts to involve more professionals in the steps in the media were only partly successful (e.g. the attempt to found „The Club of Journalists“ that was not established formally and there was „only“ cooperation based on personal contacts with journalists and on the use of the official media procedures.)

3. presenting OK '98 as both political and non-partisan

This kind of presentation (especially by means of the media) was crucial for obtaining understanding and support for the Campaign by citizens.

Among the basic activities in the media campaign were the preparation and presentation of positions in the media, press conferences, monitoring of published articles and news reports on OK '98 in the media.

X. cKey media issues that the OK '98 Campaign had to react on

During the Campaign its participants faced a enormous reaction from the media. After some initial hesitation (roughly three months after the start of the Campaign), the logo „OK“ , or „OK '98“ became so frequent that even ordinary readers or viewers understood it without any further explanation. Along with the polarization of the pre-election competition, the manner in which various media commented on and interpreted the Campaign began to become polarized. Some of the media controlled by the Government (Slovak Television, Slovak Radio and pro-governmental daily Slovenská Republika) started to describe the OK '98 Campaign in a very hostile way. The amount of demagogic, false information presented by these media was so great that the coordinators of the Campaign were not prepared for „negative advertising“ and such a massive response in the media even in their wildest dreams. This media reaction had both helped and complicated the work of leaders and grassroots activists of the Campaign to such an extent that it was impossible to avoid this phenomenon. Perhaps it had even helped that none of the leading Campaign stakeholders had not anticipated this great media impact of the Campaign at the beginning. The anticipation of such a massive impact of the Campaign from the very beginning could have had a demobilizing effect.

The media systematically produced several issues, which became for OK '98 a source for discussion and created both strategic and ethical dilemmas. OK '98 over and over had to present their positions to the demagogic distorting of facts. Over and over these issues became the confrontation lines of the „fight for the citizen.“

X. dResponse of the Campaign to media accusations of a partisanship

The OK '98 Campaign presented itself as a non-partisan activity. In the strongly polarized conditions in Slovakia this was by no means easy. Even encouraging people to take part in the elections was considered a partisan attitude supporting the democratic opposition. The effort to open a dialogue with the former coalition was at best ignored, or at worse looked upon as provocation. The daily Slovenská Republika's attitude was probably the most accusing one:

„...And here is the root of the matter. OK '98, pretending to be non-partisan, does not conceal the fact they are political. Their aim - and many citizens could see it - is to persuade people that life in Slovakia is not good, that this Government does not fulfill its promises. Propagandists and activists intentionally ask such questions that cannot be answered in a positive way in any country of the world, such as: Are you satisfied with the health care system...“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 9, 1998, by E. Šipošová)

On July 22 and 23, 1998 Slovenská Republika published a series of two articles entitled „How To Murder Slovakia“. Among other things, the articles criticized the Slovak non-governmental organizations and accused them of supporting activities of political parties, which was in contradiction to Part IX of the Slovak Law on Foundations. The Ministry of Interior was also accused of being too indulgent toward foundations (Memorandum of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights and Slovak Helsinki Committee, August 19, 1998).

OK '98 coordinating group responded to these and similar accusations during the whole campaign period in press releases. One of the first releases of this kind was the one of 31 March 1998 that defined the Civil Campaign as *„...a non-partisan initiative of NGOs in Slovakia aiming at increasing the turnout of the voters and their information about the parliamentary and municipal elections, strengthening the influence of citizens on preparation of election laws and providing for supervision of citizens over an honest and fair course of elections...“* (Press Release of March 31, 1998)

Not only the statements of NGO activists and members of the coordination team were of great importance, so were the opinions of citizens and journalists who managed to clearly and understandably say what it was all about:

„...In the pre-election period NGOs concentrated their effort on goals such as increasing the turnout of citizens in the elections, awakening their interest in public issues, improving their information about the political scene and providing for a correct course of elections. These aims are not non-political but they can, by no means, be classified as partisan... because it is quite clear that the results of this kind of activities will improve the position of the current democratic opposition and worsen the situation of the current ruling Cabinet for whom stabilizing democracy is not a priority...“ (Daily SME, August 26, 1998, by O. Dostál)

The issues of political and partisan character of the Campaign were discussed many times in the pro-government dailies and media during the Campaign. Therefore the immediate and understandable communication of the coordinating group of OK '98 towards the citizens was of a vital importance .

„...When presenting their goals as well as in every meeting of democratic forces ahead of parliamentary elections, representatives of NGOs associated in the Civil Campaign '98 always emphasized that all their activities were non-partisan. For more than six months now OK '98 has been operating as a non-partisan civil and political initiative of NGOs. To support any particular political subject has never been and is not its goal. Its goal was and still is to teach our citizens to understand that politics is a matter concerning all citizens, not only a limited group of politicians.“ (Press Release OK '98, October 14, 1998)

The competition among several political parties was not the main issue in Slovakia. The parliamentary elections were about basic values that an open democratic society rests on. Many civil activists considered the non-partisanship hardly satisfying and that is why they did not join the non-partisan mobilizing activities directly. (There were more reasons for that: By taking part in such activities representatives of some organizations would have threatened the existence of their NGOs, others wanted to remain loyal to

the policy of the Government as they were obtaining funds from the Government). Some NGOs used these attitudes to publicly express their approval of the governmental policy.

„...NGOs are not supposed to get involved in the election campaign, ...through OK '98 they enter the political struggle... it is interfering with internal affairs of the Slovak Republic.“ (STV News, June 10, 1998, by M. Pridal of the Union of Civil Associations and Foundations)

The media (STV, Slovak Radio, and daily Slovak Republic) that supported the existing government coalition considered the non-partisan proclamation and implementation, to be part of political tactics of the opposition. The Slovak Radio on its channel, Slovakia One, broadcasted an interview with Prime Minister Mečiar on August 28, 1998. Speaking about NGOs, the Prime Minister said that *“the citizen had the right to execute the freedom in all fields that he wants to act freely in. On the other hand, if these institutions usurp the right of being the sole representative and express their support for some of the political groups, they can be only regarded as a supporting political body of this or that party ...“* (Storin, Ltd.)

„...The democratic table that already met five times without the ruling coalition's parties having been invited and had converted into the unified candidate list of the National Front as it was known in the time of socialism when voters were obliged to take part in elections, whether deliberately or being forced. Today they are driven by OK '98 activists in four streams in order to knock-out this state at last, by a K.O blow of mercy. And after this unified candidate list consisting of the candidate lists of the so-called Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK), Party of a Civil Understanding (SOP) and Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) the saviors will kindly come who on September 27 declare themselves the winner of the elections, although they will not have won the elections.“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, August 28, 1998, by S. Háber)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The coordinating group should formulate and be ready to use in the media:

- **a very straightforward and easy-to-understand statement on its non-partisanship**
- **to react immediately to the key demagogic reports describing it as partisan (react by a series of standard materials repeating the basic starting principles, and react also to new examples of partisanship it is being accused of)**
- **the campaign should be the first to introduce the topic of being non-partisan, or political but non-partisan, not only react to accusations**
- **the campaign should equally support statements of both coalition and opposition politicians as long as they contain an adequate definition of non-partisanship**

- **the campaign should count with the fact that in spite of all efforts to explain its own position and the concept of a non-partisanship some of the media will accuse it of a partisanship, those media that intentionally try to bring a distorted picture of the NGO sector and do not take any facts into consideration. In terms of this it is important for the campaign to behave in a non-partisan way and try to maintain that position by its activities, explain it to citizens, to political parties, to both domestic and foreign observers and their institutions.**

X. eReaction to forged documents, misleading and inaccurate information about the Campaign.

The media gave great coverage to NGOs' activities related to the Campaign. The method of informing depended on who controlled the medium. On one hand there was factual information on the OK '98 activities (in the majority of dailies, Radio TWIST, TV Markíza) and on the other hand, state-owned Slovak Radio and daily Slovenská Republika described the Campaign in a completely different way. Often state owned media were not informing about what OK '98 was doing, but they discredited and attacked the Campaign as such: *„...They want to obtain votes not by their programme manifesto, but by shouting that draws attention and they try to hide it by the Bomba '98 contest. But despite that it is quite obvious to every voter with common sense that they are trying to hide the shortcomings of their programme...“* (Daily Slovenská Republika, August 28, 1998, „They know why they are shouting 'hop'“, by S. Háber)

Daily Slovenská Republika published a fabricated story pretending they discovered *„strictly confidential material coming from the headquarters of the Christian Democrats (KDH)“*. The newspaper repeatedly quoted citations from this forged document that was to prove that the opposition and foreign offices used dirty methods and involved the NGO sector in the partisan fight. Later it was found out that this „authentic document“ was most likely produced by the pro-government state police. The story included statements such as: *„...These days it is necessary to use civil associations, foundations, initiatives to provoke permanent local unrest with any intentions possible. The NGOs associated under Mr. Demeš as well as funds to pay students: Get in touch with them and make some agreement on the way of financing...“, „...organize informal meetings with citizens too and use various slogans: rule of law, protection of the freedom of a speech, the right of the citizen for information, money for the health service, education and science, heating subsidies to municipalities ahead of the winter, blame Government, HZDS and Vladimír Mečiar for everything. Get local civil associations, foundations and NGOs within the district involved in these activities, they will be funded by the headquarters.“*

KDH reacted immediately to this faked story and so did the NGO sector. OK '98 coordinating group issued a press statement containing the following:

„...We are outraged and disgusted by permanent accusations against NGO activities in STV, Slovenská Republika and most recently in the fake named Internal Regulations for KDH Regional and District Centers and we reject everything it says...“ ...„We declare that NGOs carry out all their activities in accordance with the Constitution and laws of the Slovak Republic and to the benefit of its citizens. We find particularly offensive that this malicious bogus description of our young people as corruptible disorganizes those who can be misused by anyone...“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 18, 1998)

In reaction to these attacks the coordinating group chose demanding but clear tactics. Their goal was to react quickly and warn of the absurdity of such attacks. On September 18, 1998 Pavol Demeš sent an open letter to the Chairmanship of the Psychiatric Society SLS saying:

„...Recently some media have come up with coarse slurring of NGOs. They (NGOs) allegedly carry out disorganizing and illegal activities, moreover they should be connected with some foreign centers. The latest of the series of such attacks appeared today in the forged „Internal Regulations for KDH Regional and District Centers“. I would like to ask you to monitor these paranoid symptoms as well as ask for expert advice on how we should react to these ill attacks without bringing any further traumas to the society...“

RECOMMENDATION:

- **It can happen that the campaign is not capable of responding to all these false and misleading statements appearing in the press. Nevertheless, the media group should react to the most obvious lies at least. You have to repeatedly use these misleading quotations against the manipulating media as proof of their unfair approach and a proof of little credibility of such media.**

X. fAccusing the Campaign of manipulation, breaking law and sedition

The OK '98 Campaign and many events accompanying it were accused of manipulating the public. Sometimes concrete and sometimes abstract enemies were named as the leading manipulators who in pursuit of their own interests misused students, NGO activists, politicians and all those *who „do not love the Slovak Republic“*. Members of the coordinating group and NGO activists were fully aware of the dangerous contents of the famous saying about Goebbels-like methods of government-controlled media that *„A lie repeated a thousand times will become true“*. They knew that the Government relied on the fact that citizens had little information, and on fabricating and depicting an influential enemy. By that it intentionally distracted the attention away from the fact that a lot of the citizens living and wanting to stay and live in this country longed for a change.

„...Opposition parties, various campaigns and foundations fight for young people to make them not vote HZDS which is to be thanked for founding the sovereign Slovak Republic. If Vladimír Mečiar's Government falls, then what they call true democracy and wealth will rule this country! Most of these young people are still studying, they are preparing for their future careers. They should realize they are still receiving (their education etc.) from this State. And where is their gratitude...“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 22, 1998, by S. Parašín)

„...Members of the march are secondary school students who dare to explain to citizens the principles of behavior at the elections! The march managed to send its brave climbers up to the Lomnický peak to post the Civic Campaign '98 logo up there...“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 9, 1998, by E. Šipošová)

„...Democracy, as if designed specially for that purpose, becomes a leaky sieve, eldorado for foreign „humanitarian“ organizations we did not beg for (Helsinki

committees, civic associations, civic campaigns, foundations, NGOs, etc.). They sneaked in often with a truly partisan message, suitable only for Uncle Sam, which is Soros in this case. Credit to those with good intentions but several of them became a nightmare, cancer in the face of the state crawling unseen and then again openly fighting the democratic and sovereign Government to conquer both Government and the country and turn it into a provincial banana republic... OK '98's advice to the citizens about who our undecided souls should not vote, sounds blunt and stupid. Therefore we should remind these „helpers“ what N. Chomsky said: „Violence rules in a totality and demagoguery rules in a democracy,“ which means brainwashing and brainwashing until there is no brain left.“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 21, 1998, by F. Pecháč)

Objections against amateurism of people involved in the Campaign appeared repeatedly saying they were not authorized to explain to the others anything about the rights of citizens in the election (pro-government media claimed that was an exclusive role of the state). Objections were repeated against „dragging young people into politics“ ... To these never-ending accusations of manipulative character the OK '98 Campaign responded with one of many press releases on August 24, 1998, which stated:

„...Using shots from the archive (without stating their source) shifted the already misleading statements and comments of the partisan representatives participating in the discussion to a very dangerous level encouraging citizens to be intolerant. OK '98 considers such increasing of the feeling of tension and threat by STV as extremely dangerous and increasing the risk of social violence with the worsening social and economic situation.“

A number of the OK '98 events were attacked and called seditious. The media controlled by the Government called for the organizers of the Campaign to be taken to court:

„...I was deeply offended by the subversive activity of the „alleged“ non-governmental organization Civil Campaign '98 that is offering its agenda ahead of the elections - a march across Slovakia in the pre-election period called The Way for Slovakia. The organizers of the Civil Campaign '98 received millions of dollars from the US to „brain massage“ voters' brains (as Ms A. Malíková put it), and mainly first-time voters between 18 and 22 years of age... Citizens will find „massage supplies“ in their letterboxes. OK '98 printed two million (!) brochures written for the citizens of Slovakia by „mixers“ from abroad. Obviously it is an attempt to interfere with the elections in Slovakia in accordance with American opinions, which is in contradiction to all laws of democracy. This offence should be filed with the International Court in the Hague...“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, June 27, 1998, by E. Šipošová)

RECOMMENDATION:

- **The organizers of the campaign should get ready for possible very severe attacks and dirty tricks launched by the media. There should be lawyers among them who are able to immediately recognize the nature of violations of law by some media. Of course during the campaign there is not enough time to resolve the most serious violations before court. Nevertheless it is preferable to recognize these violations and name them in public.**

X. gThe issue of observers

One of the three main targets of the Campaign was having the international and domestic observers at the elections, which would provide for civil supervision over a fair course of elections. Despite some doubts at the beginning, international observers were invited after all. But the Government - by means of the Central Election Commission that it controlled - did not admit any domestic observers. The decision was justified by saying they were useless, unprofessional and superfluous.

„...OK '98 members want not only to „observe“ in the polling stations, they also want to count the votes! How do they think they can do it? There will be almost 750 polling stations in Slovakia, i.e. polling precincts each political party can appoint its representatives to. Where would the SDK and SOP find them? And this is exactly where OK '98 trained by American „trainers“ spotted its chance..“

However, all competent persons must be aware of the fact that only those who were accredited by the Central Election Commission can operate in the polling stations. Should any Mayor violate this law, he will not avoid sanctions. It is unthinkable that secondary school and university students, mostly first-time voters, or those who are still not entitled to the right to vote should manipulate the opinions of the voters...

...What kind of control of „fair elections“ is the US so much interested in when they must be aware of the fact that the Slovak Government invited almost 120 short-term and about 20 long-term OSCE observers to come to Slovakia?...” (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 9, 1998, by E. Šipošová)

„...Our citizens do not have to be instructed in how to supervise the regularity of elections, we have had three elections by now and all of them were regular.“ (STV News, June 10, 1998, by M. Pridal)

On August 7, 1998 the Deputy Chairwoman of the Slovak National Party (SNS), A. Malíková, supported the presence of OSCE observers at the parliamentary elections but strictly refused any election monitoring by domestic observers sent by NGOs saying that

„... elections and counting the votes is not a circus anybody can take part in.“ (Memorandum of the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights, pp. 6)

The Civic Campaign was patiently and repeatedly explaining the role of domestic observers. To the question why the civic supervision over elections was necessary OK '98's Spokeswoman, Šarlotta Pufflerová said on Radio TWIST on 4 August 1998 in the programme Slovakia and Democracy - Elections '98:

„...that we, citizens of this country, have too much experience with the fact that what the executive power prepares for us does not necessarily have to be fair and honest...it is a common practice all over the world, therefore observers from other countries are always invited as well, it is part of international agreements...“

Two days later, HZDS legal expert Mr. Ján Cuper said for Radio TWIST 's news programme Rádiožurnál that in his opinion

„...the Government is not obliged to invite OSCE observers. The only obligation for the Government by Copenhagen Protocol is to take the decision on the date of elections. It is up to the OSCE member countries to decide whether they will send their observers at their own expense or not.“

One of the targets of the OK '98 Campaign was to cooperate in supervising the elections by the placement of citizens in election commissions.

The NGO explanatory material Občianske OKO '98 (Civic Eye) justified it like this:

„...we want to make sure that people who are going to represent our interests during the next four years obtained their mandates on the basis of democratic, free and fair elections. Only then will we, the citizens, have a real influence on public matters“ (Občianske OKO)

X. h Attacks on specific personalities and a role of visible leaders in the media campaign

To defame the OK '98 Campaign, its goals were falsely interpreted and distorted and NGO representatives attacked. There were even cases of scandalizing individual personalities when they were attacked and accused of pursuing their own political interests.

„... Pavol Demeš runs Soros foundations in Slovakia and „devotes his time“ to the third sector, i.e. to NGOs - whether it is The Way for Slovakia or Gemma 83 - the march through more than a thousand villages and towns...“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 9, 1998, by E. Šipošová)

„...Roughly what Henlein was to the former Czechoslovak Republic Pavol Demeš is to Slovakia. This opponent to an independent Slovakia recently traveled overseas to receive praise and a reward for the „successful“ management of the elections in Slovakia. Demeš's crew set out for the journey upon invitation by Freedom House who is digging a grave for democracy. Without any evidence they spread a lie all over the world about partial freedom and democracy and lack of freedom for journalists in Slovakia! They should come to Slovakia now! They strengthen democracy by „exterminating“ inconvenient people. Not even fascists and Bolsheviks would have done it better...“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, December 4, 1998, by L. Kafka)

OK '98 activists were attacked and libeled every day. Repeated press statements were ignored as well.

„...It is proved by the discussion forums of candidates to the National Council, which Mr. Kravčík licensed himself to nationwide. The latest example of it dates back to 21 August 1998, when he wanted to force Deputy Prime Minister Sergej Kozlík to agree to be tyrannized by Kravčík at one of his events... (Lúč, Newspaper of East Slovakia, November 23, 1998)

„...STV intentionally does not respect the statements by the OK '98 representatives that no coordinating group member runs for any political subject. STV „borrows“ Pavol Demeš again and again as an example of a significant OK '98 representative running (for the Party of Civic Understanding). STV repeatedly uses the false article published by daily Slovenská Republika (August 15, 1998) and claims it to be objective truth, even though the person in the article is another person with the same last name only. The truth is that Pavol Demeš does not run for any political party. STV deceives its viewers instead of broadcasting a correction. OK '98 strictly refutes such methods by STV in connection with legitimate activities of citizens.“ (Press Statement of August 24, 1998, by Š. Pufflerová)

„...What is certain is that Juraj Mesík „produced“ (in the name of the third sector that tried to pretend to be neutral, the same neutrality that P. Demeš so „vividly“ illustrated in his heckling speech in TV Markíza) in SME of September 10, clearly shows what opposition representatives intend to do with our State and nation.“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 18, 1998, by D. Slobodník)

„...The OK '98 Campaign is said to be supported by many celebrities, actor S. Dančiak included. There is no doubt that this trumpet of the opposition that would like to control not only representatives of political parties but also the course of elections will make even more noise. What is this game about? It is about a very simple thing: gradual abolition of sovereignty for Slovakia.“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, August 31, 1998, by I. Hamar)

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **At the very beginning of the campaign its organizers should understand they may become targets of very unfair and severe attacks and that this situation will require a great deal of endurance, civil bravery and character: they should prepare their families, friends and organizations for possible attacks in the media too. Along with formal meetings the coordinating group members should also hold informal meetings in order to find space for mutual support and maintain a certain distance from emotionally demanding situations.**
- **One of the most effective ways of visualizing manipulation and dirty tricks is to mock them, organize third sector events which would ridicule and parody such methods.**

X. iFinancing and foreign interests

The issue of financing was discussed in almost all media too. Journalists of the pro-government media trying to discredit the Campaign were interested in possible high-profile scandals that could prove foreign interests and misuse of funds for partisan activities. The speculations that repeatedly appeared in the pro-government media included the following issues: What power relations brought the money used in the OK '98 Campaign, and what advantages will it bring to the NGOs, *„who and what they sold themselves to.“*

OK '98 clearly and in the public (at numerous forums and in various forms) disclosed the sources and mechanisms of their funds. In its basic media material (and at numerous other occasions) OK stated *„that it is financed by voluntary contributions and grants obtained by individual NGOs as well as civic initiatives. Funding of OK '98 is in accordance with legal provisions of the Slovak Republic.“* (OK '98's Information Leaflet)

This issue was one the hottest in the pro-government press.

„...Well, let it be as it is. The Devil knows who gives this and other similar „companies“ thousands, if not millions, to fund such „unselfish“ events.“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 22, 1998, by I. Žvach)

„...They offer citizens brochures like “Legal Advisor for the Voting Citizen”, or “The March for Slovakia” published upon American request and funded by American funds... OK '98 wants to serve its master - American foundations that pay it astronomic money by our standards. Of course, OK '98 will do everything its donors might wish...Why does the international community seek any possible ways to make sure the present opposition wins the elections? Why do they invest millions of DEM or USD into various activities, parties closely related to them and various dubious associations such as OK '98?...“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, September 9, 1998, by E. Šipošová)

„Civil associations can be effectively used in this game because to control their financing is problematic and big money can be poured through these institutions. Rich sponsors from abroad keep forgetting that the words of American writer Leon Uris in the book Exodus: „One-dollar bill became the soldier in the Army of the world's new empire. Millions of these green paper soldiers went out to all parts of the world. It is the biggest army that has ever existed and it will conquer the world without any bloodshed...“ cannot be applied always and everywhere.“ (Daily Slovenská Republika, August 31, 1998, by I. Hamar)

„...All of them, the so-called independent journalists and the so-called independent and private periodicals and media, as well as the so-called independent civil associations and foundations associated in the so-called Gremium of Third Sector are financially, organizationally and ideologically connected to international channels. So what kind of independence are they talking about? As ordered from abroad and for foreign money and foreign aims, these agents hired by foreign countries are actually working on a massive preparation of ideological justification of the fight against our Statehood, of manipulation of our citizens and handing our country, our resources, forests, soil, industry and our hardworking people over to foreign servitude in favor of foreign interests...“ (Slovenská Republika, September 25, 1998, by R. Hofbauer)

A lot of these commentaries had quite an opposite effect: they excited interest in and curiosity over the above mentioned materials. Thanks to the OK '98 pre-election activities people had a chance to see with their own eyes and meet the "domestic enemies" so that they could use their own view to help them make the right decision in the polling station.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Organizations participating in the campaign have to count on the need for transparency about their funds and adequately inform the media about their financial resources even more thoroughly than in everyday situations.**
- **It is necessary to keep in mind that harmful media might try to discredit the campaign by publishing false information about funding of the campaign. The organization should prepare very simple information on the real situation and repeatedly inform the public about it.**

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE MEDIA CAMPAIGN:

- **The media part of such a big campaign must be planned, implemented and controlled by professionals - i.e. a team of PR experts with contacts in the media community.**
- **At the very beginning the plan of the media campaign must be set up with clearly stated starting principles, target groups and regions, a clear and understandable logo and message.**
- **Starting points of the media campaign have to be formulated in several ways, from complex ones to very simple statements and they have to be sent out repeatedly and through all possible channels to all relevant people (campaign participants, individual projects and coordination centers and groups, media...)**
- **Besides explanatory materials it is necessary to prepare in advance „a reserve“ of materials containing data and standpoints that may be needed to deny false or inaccurate data.**
- **Education on basic principles of communication in the media is necessary before the start of the campaign, as there will be no time to do that once the campaign has started. However, it is necessary to have experts at hand who are able to provide specific consulting, “tailored” for individual projects (preparation of materials for the press, organizing press conferences, writing reports for press agencies, ability to react in time to media attacks).**
- **„The campaign’s spokesperson“ should be at the same time a strong personality and a person who has no media history, a person with a very positive past (in the case of OK '98 having a spokeswoman proved to be specifically advantageous).**

XI. The transfer of the experience from the OK '98

- ❖ To what extent can experience gained in the campaign be transferred to other contexts?
- ❖ Which elements of such experience are universal and which are specific?
- ❖ To what extent did experience gained in other previous campaigns in Slovakia or abroad help OK '98 activists?

When analyzing the Campaign we repeatedly asked the question to what extent gained experience is transferable, what principles and steps can be implemented universally, and which of them are specific, related to some particular culture and political situation. Is the transfer of experience possible and meaningful? What was the source of experience to OK '98 stakeholders?

What is their own opinion of passing their experience on others? This is what some of them said:

„I think much depends on the cultural context. I don't have an idea whether something like this could be possible in the Ukraine or any other country, for example Croatia... But this experience could be interesting to people in other countries who would like to start a campaign of this kind. But then I would recommend bringing a group of such potential leaders here, and show them how we did it ...because individual tools that we used can be relevant for them while the overall situation does not have to be applicable. They simply have to pick up some of the existing opinions and prepare their own mix... the only thing we can do is to give them inspiration... it will definitely be possible to use our experience but we don't know how much of it they can use, they have to find out themselves.“ (Juraj Mesík)

„A lot of pieces of information about OK '98 would be useful but I think everyone should choose by themselves.“ (Marek Kapusta)

„...the people who were part of this Campaign, or somehow took part in its preparation, should come to the other country and listen to the people there and to problems they have before they can start giving them advice.“ (Filip Vagač)

"People who will give lectures based on how we did it here should by all means learn the facts about the other country, what the starting points are in that country, what the initial situation is like. Because without knowing that, what happened to us can also happen to them that they explained things to us, which were totally unrealistic, they were interesting but I knew they were unrealistic.“ (Dano Brezina)

„I have to say that only the very little experience that I had by then corresponded with things to be done in the Civic Campaign... My experience from previous campaigns (SOS Third Sector) was that they (campaigns) worked although they were „spontaneous“. But the campaign, as big as this one, must be formally put on paper – contracted. You can't rely only on commitment of people and on the fact we all are after the same thing.“ (Braňo Orgoník)

„Slovakia was lucky. The SOS third sector campaign in 1996...built a great deal of capacity in the sector... I personally don't believe that OK '98 would have been that successful, if that experience had not been there...“ (Jan Surotchak)

„We gained the necessary experience mainly in our previous activities, those five years of work with the public...“ (Michal Kravčík)

As many other respondents agree, the most valuable source of experience for the OK '98 Campaign came from their previous activities and from experience of local

governments. Another positive contribution was the pre-campaign cooperation between NGOs.

The possibility of applying experience depends to a great extent on cultural, political and social conditions in the given country as well as on the tradition, the way in which NGOs work, and how they cooperated and communicated with each other before the start of the campaign. The scope of the campaign is also important: whether it is nation-wide or concerns only a certain part of the society.

A majority of the interviewed agrees that transfer of experience from one cultural context to another is possible but campaign cannot be just replicated. Therefore recommendations suggested in this material have to be understood to be themes, inspirations and warnings, not “how to” instructions.

Respondents agree unanimously that the sole fact that the campaign was already done in other countries is encouraging and motivating. Meeting those who implemented the campaign elsewhere give people beginning with the campaign the feeling – which helps break the barrier – that it is feasible and “*it can be done*”. As Peter Németh put it: *„It would have been very difficult to apply something in Slovakia, it was more of encouragement, sort of ‘Look, it is nothing crazy, it can be done, people do it, let’s do it our way’, that moment when the barrier breaks...it is probably about bringing the idea and then making people understand it is the time for them to do something“*

Similarly Marek Kapusta said it was very useful to meet representatives of Bulgarian and Rumanian NGOs that had already carried out their campaigns:

„...It showed us the way, the light appeared at the end of the tunnel and I think that vision was fundamental for OK’98 efforts. Because I think that at the beginning only very handful of people believed it’s possible, and that something could really be changed by our activities and exactly that positive example of Rumania and Bulgaria... The bare fact that it is possible, that it has been done in three countries already, is a fascinating thing, I think.“

The respondents have identified as transferable techniques, methods and sort of models of projects e.g. training of civil observers, media monitoring, „get out the vote“ techniques, which can and need to be adapted to the conditions in a given country. As an inspiration can serve also media products and PR materials used in other campaigns. Many of such an adapted approaches, taken from previous experience, become then the content of educational projects created to train activists for implementing techniques in a field. Braňo Orgoník says: *„A lot of projects were about passing on experience“*, e.g. the project of training organizers and moderators of the candidate forums. Jan Surotchak comments on the need to adapt these techniques to the concrete conditions: *„I think it is possible to transfer specific techniques and methodologies, adaptable for the local conditions. Because something is universal - importance of message, focus, grassroots activity, engaging people - encouraging people to become engaged because it is fun, not because it is duty – those, I think, are all universal and there are techniques developed all over the world, probably most in the sort of post modern media democracies - western Europe and the States, Canada, Australia, but those techniques need to be back down a couple of steps to be able to be transferable to the situation somewhere else.“*

Similarly Pavol Demeš states: *„There is some international experience that can be transferred... the training of civil observers and their activity; OKO ‘98, pre-election media monitoring; MEMO ‘98, those can be carried out in any country, then also get out the voting techniques for young people; Rock Volieb, Hlava ‘98; rock concerts and videoclips, the combination of these two was excellent, plus discussion forums which is the technique brought in from abroad – these are things that can be adapted, applied,*

they are transferable...artifacts can be copied - the taste is very similar these days, which means that leaflets, and posters can be copied quite well with some slight modifications only. The other things such as forming coalitions, cooperation simply can't be copied."

RECOMMENDATION BASED ON THE PARTICIPANTS' EXPERIENCE:

- **Offer your own experience but warn of the context it comes from.**
- **Pass your experience on selectively no sooner than after obtaining information on cultural background and making yourself familiar with concrete conditions and problems of the given country.**
- **Techniques, models of projects and media products can be applied with modifications in various contexts. Therefore it would make sense that people who worked on a concrete project write a manual based on their experience on how to carry out this kind of project.**
- **Maybe even more needed than concrete facts and approaches is the psychological effect of encouragement, praise and self-confidence that automatically comes with the success of the campaign in another "problem" country.**
- **Mutual support between the Gremium of the Third Sector's and OK '98 coordinating group is needed. It seems that the Gremium is redefining its role right now and its position is perhaps not quite clear on how to face the „self-appointed" groups that want to set on specific campaigns. The OK '98 Campaign would welcome greater support and assistance by the Gremium; perhaps if the Gremium directly coordinates some parts of the Campaigns (suppose the Gremium is flexible enough for such an activity). The relation between the Gremium and organizers of the Campaign will become more important for future potential campaigns (e.g. about tax laws) and in any case it shouldn't be a relation of two parallelly functioning but insufficiently communicating structures.**

Concluding remarks

The OK '98 Campaign fulfilled its aim. For the development of both the civil society in Slovakia and the NGO sector it definitely was a boon.

„Martin Bútora said it with buoyant words that Slovakia saw a cultural change. I think that after elections '98 the participation of citizens in the political process or in public politics will improve. Next elections will show it clearly - and the municipal elections showed it already - that the civil observer is part of the process. They were not accredited for the parliamentary elections, they only could do it where they were let in, but in the municipal elections it was taken for granted. In all future elections all civil observers who ask for accreditation will be accredited, it will be a normal thing. It will be normal that discussion forums will be held, it will be normal that NGOs will inform citizens on the process, on elections, on the necessity to vote. It means that all this was important not only for the NGO sector, for its growth but the NGO sector brought about a different understanding of participation of citizens in the political process.“ (Pavol Demeš)

Ján Čarnogurský's words are probably the most truthful evaluation of what happened before the 1998 Elections in Slovakia *„...Activities of citizens were the most positive aspect of the past period. Having seen the impotence of the Parliament, they took the defense of law and democracy in their own hands...“*

„Success has many fathers...failure is a bastard,“ that is a loose translation of an old English proverb. Now a lot of people and organizations claim to have contributed to the OK '98 Campaign. That is a good sign. It is an indirect proof that in spite of all objections, difficulties and doubts the Campaign is considered a success. The Campaign will probably become a part of the "star period" in the development of Slovakia's third sector. The third sector will be returning to it when planning other campaigns, it will be returning to it when clarifying and newly defining its role and further orientation. The Slovak third sector may be returning to it even when it is weakened and has to search for new starting points to take off.

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APPENDIX