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Media coverage of corruption: the role of inter-media agenda setting in the context of media reporting on scandals

Abstract: The study focuses on two Slovak corruption cases, both well-documented and of similar social relevance, of which one did not receive any cross-media coverage. Moreover, the case of large-scale bribery was rather under-hyped in comparison to other major corruption scandals occurring in the country. The case of cronyism formed a typical example of extremely poor inter-media coverage of highly unfair and politicised cronyism. Through these cases, especially in the one in which the media failed to stimulate the creation of a full-blown scandal, the study further analyses the criteria and circumstances that determine the worthiness of a case for wide media coverage. The study on Slovakia is framed within theories of scandalous reporting and the theory of agenda setting and inter-media agenda setting role of the media, and supported by quantitative analysis of actual media coverage of the bribery case.

Key words: corruption, media, Slovakia, scandals

Introduction¹

Corruption, especially bribery and clientelism, remain a serious problem in Slovakia. Corruption was perceived as widespread by 90 per cent of respondents asked in the 2013 Eurobarometer survey, while 14 per cent of the respondents had experienced corruption themselves.² Public perception of corruption is often enhanced by extensive media coverage

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² European Commission: *EU Anti-Corruption Report*, Brussels: COM (2014) 38 final, p. 6.

of various corruption scandals. Such a number of potentially scandalous reports on alleged corrupt behaviour is, however, prone to disperse the attention of the media and most likely means some of the reported cases pass unnoticed or are under-hyped (not to mention those which are never revealed). Even respected commentators of Slovak current affairs imply that it is therefore almost impossible to give each case the proper attention in this situation (Leško, 2015). Indeed, research suggests that there is no direct correlation between the perception of corruption as projected by media coverage and the actual level of corruption in a country (Charon, 2013). For instance, Austria was not seen as highly corrupt country (score 69, rank 26/177, CPI TI 2013),³ yet the level of trust in the portrayal of corruption by the local media was relatively and comparatively low. On the other hand, Romania is regarded as a highly corrupt nation (score 43, rank 69/177, CPI TI 2014), but the faith in the media handling of corruption cases was among the highest. Slovakia fared at about 4.2, with a lower level of trust in the media coverage of corruption in politics and the public sector, on an equal footing with Spain. Slovakia had a score of 50 (rank 54/175, CPI 2014), and a score of 47 (rank 61/175, CPI 2013).

Nevertheless, the occurrence of such widespread reporting on corruption in Slovakia is also linked to the broader phenomenon of the potential de-sensitisation of the general public towards news reports along with a loss of ability to differentiate the validity of information (Höschl in Wirtzner, 2015). The complex public responses to corruption reports, as well as the causes of those instances of grave corrupt behaviour which never receive sufficient publicity to stimulate a full scandal (or any extensive attention at all) are, however, difficult to discern (Entman, 2012).

The present study therefore focuses on the analysis of two Slovak cases which both involve well-documented, serious corrupt behaviour. Despite this fact, only one of these corruption scandals was relatively well-covered by the media. The other one, of similar social relevance, failed to garner enough attention from the media to initiate a full-blown nation-wide scandal. Nevertheless, even the case which actually received quite considerable media coverage at time, as it involved serious misbehaviour in the form of large-scale bribery in two areas where corruption is especially harmful to the whole society – namely, education and public order – more spectacular media reporting and extensive public outrage could have been expected. We have thus conveyed a quantitative analysis of media coverage of this case.

³ <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2014/infographic/compare>.

The other case, however, documents a rather typical example of extremely poor inter-media coverage of highly unfair and politicised cronyism which occurred in a provincial Slovakian town but in which statistical analysis of media coverage was not possible, due to there only being one article regarding this corruption scandal.

Apart from being relatively or absolutely disregarded by both the media and general public, the two cases also present another interesting connection: the initial reports were both issued in periodicals belonging to the same publishing house – the bribery case was first reported by the tabloid daily *Plus jeden deň* (Plus One Day) and the cronyism case by its affiliated publication, the weekly magazine *Plus 7 dní* (Plus 7 Days). This particular circumstance of the choice of medium is therefore tackled throughout the study as well.

With regard to these two – either relatively or absolutely underhyped corruption cases, the study further analyses the criteria and circumstances that determine the worthiness of a case for wide media coverage, as well as its potential to become a fully developed scandal. The research is thus framed within theories of scandal reporting, and supported by the theory of agenda setting and inter-media agenda setting role of media in Slovakia.

The background of the cases

Bribery in the Police Academy

On 27th June 2012, a police raid took place in the office of the bursar of the Police Academy in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, due to suspicions of criminal activity related to EU funds. Although the police could not prove any financial criminal activity, they found other interesting material – evidence of bribery of the rector and several other people. Four functionaries, including the rector Václav Krajník, were therefore detained two days later.

According to the evidence, the tests used for the entrance examination by certain applicants were replaced by ones with the correct answers already entered and, moreover, the whole selection process of candidates was apparently manipulated. The police investigation proved that 29 out of 120 applicants in one (documented) year were accepted through fraud.

The rector was immediately recalled and he was also expelled from the police force. In April 2015, the rector pleaded guilty at the first day of the judicial proceeding and thus immediately received a suspended sentence of three years and a 5,000 euro fine.

The involvement of the Police Academy with its rector in the centre of the scandal is a very alarming fact, suggesting that not only both areas of education and public order are affected by corruption, but corrupt behaviour also extends up to the top-levels of Slovakian higher education. Nevertheless, this was the first time in the history of Slovakia where a rector was detained by the police. In addition to the major investigation of the rector, police found that one of the bribers was a former religious representative of the armed forces, lieutenant colonel Miroslav Táborský. Therefore, apart from the main story, a scandalous sub-plot of a corrupt priest can be detected here, making the case even graver, worthy of huge publicity and profound public outrage. As already mentioned, and in comparison to the second case, this scandal received relatively broad media coverage (about 500 news stories), although this was still with a lesser quantity than some other major Slovak corruption cases at the time (compared with, for example, the Notice Board Scandal⁴ with more than 1,300 mentions or the Gorilla Scandal⁵ with more than 5,400 mentions in the Slovakia Online database up to August 2014).

Cronyism at the labour office

The first, larger scandal was initiated by the intervention of an official institution, consequently followed by media coverage, whereas at the beginning of the second 'silent' scandal was a single report (Lacková, 2013) published in the weekly magazine *Plus 7 dní*. It recounted the rigging of the hiring process at the labour office in the town of Zvolen. The article was supported by photographs of original documents, including CVs and covering letters with notes and markings indicating the person or institution and recommending the job seeker(s) for the given position.⁶ The kingpin of the operation was ultimately identified as the MP from the governing leftist party Smer-SD, Ján Senko. The article further revealed that

⁴ See <http://www.monitoringfondov.eu/article.php?nastenkovy-tender>.

⁵ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorilla_scandal.

⁶ See <http://www.pluska.sk/plus-7-dni/domov/na-zvolenskom-urade-prace-vyhrali-vyberove-konania-vyvoleni.html>.

all the candidates whose CVs were marked with the name of Ján Senko or mentioned the “regional club of the Smer party” were given the job.

These comments were written by the director of the office, Milan Beľa. Initially claiming that the markings had been made to help recall the name of the recommender, the director later contradicted himself by stating that the written comments had no impact on the candidate selection and that the CVs and covering letters did not come from MP Senko, but were received directly from the applicants. MP Senko also denied the allegations against him. The former head of the personnel department in the office, Eleonóra Ostrihoňová, however, claimed that she did receive the marked documents along with a request from director Beľa to appoint the selected applicants for the jobs. Ostrihoňová asserted that this practice of giving preference to certain candidates was definitely linked to Smer-SD and that it occurred only after the appointment of the Smer-SD party nominee Beľa as director.

The story was actually published in just one media outlet – a major semi-tabloid weekly. There was no mention of it in other media by way of inter-reference or follow-up. The failure on the part of other media outlets to disseminate such information emerges as an interesting subject for further in-depth study in the context of inter-media agenda setting.

Analysis of the media coverage: selected theories

Why the Slovak media did not perceive both cases (and the case of bribery in particular) as worthy of greater coverage and with a consequently greater public response is the major question to be answered throughout this study. The methodological support for such an analysis is therefore provided by two influential media theories connected to the potential of any particular corruption case to become a full-blown scandal: the theory of agenda setting, agenda building and inter-media agenda setting, and the theory of media reporting on scandals.

Theory of agenda setting, agenda building and inter-media agenda setting

The well-established agenda setting theory describes and explains the ability of the media to tell readers which issues are important (McCombs,

2009). If a news item is covered frequently and prominently, the viewer/reader will regard the issue as more important. Two basic assumptions underlie most research on agenda-setting: the press and the media do not reflect reality, but filter and shape it; media concentration on a few issues and subjects results in public perception of those issues as more important than other ones.⁷

Malik (2004) has enumerated the general criteria of newsworthiness as the surprise element, negativity, conflict, personalisation, social prominence, cultural proximity, and visualisation of topics. Of these, social prominence, an element of surprise, distance and social relevance seemed to be the most influential factors in her sample of German editors. Many editors also mentioned the generalisability of a topic and its exclusiveness as valuable selection criteria (Malik, 2004). Regarding these criteria, it seems rather striking that both cases did not get much more attention from the media as they clearly fulfil most of them, with the exceptions of the questionable social prominence and distance of the provincial labour office's practice (although with a connection to an influential MP). However, this factor can be easily replaced by both social relevance and cultural proximity, as the misdeeds in the labour office closely affected the general public, i.e. ordinary job applicants. In both cases, exclusiveness was not guaranteed, although in the bribery case there was a sort of exclusiveness, initially at least. Both cases thus had potential to become major scandals from the perspective of the newsworthiness of their topic, so the reason why they failed to do so has to be found somewhere else.

Weaver and Choi (2014) summarise the most recent important findings in the closely related theory of agenda building, which include five possible influences on the media agenda: (1) influential news sources, (2) other media (inter-media agenda setting), (3) journalistic norms and traditions, (4) unexpected events and (5) media audiences. The authors suggested that there is no single factor that determines the media agenda, but a combination of two or more factors.

With regard to influential news sources, the findings of researcher Galmišová (2015) indicate that, in Slovakia, when the dailies *SME* (We Are) and *Nový Čas* (New Time) in addition to the weekly *Plus 7 dní*, as key agenda setting media (but not inter-media agenda setters in the case of the weekly), publish something scandalous, and/or when the ma-

⁷ See: http://www.utwente.nl/cw/theorieenoverzicht/Theory%20Clusters/Mass%20Media/Agenda-Setting_Theory/.

For private TV *Markíza* broadcasts major scandals (not necessarily as the first medium to do so), the other media largely follow suit, especially when a reaction to the news report by the agenda setting/building media, or other media, politicians and other important personalities/public actors (including organisations) is present. This phase of the media-politics interaction model was explained by former Minister of Culture, Marek Maďarič: “Only a person who accepts his or her political responsibility at the proper time has the chance, after some time, to gain the public trust. However, a man or woman who stubbornly keeps his or her position, even though he or she may be at that time connected with a scandal or create a negative impression on the public, and is unable to self-reflect on his or her position, then loses in the long-term.”⁸ This does not mean that the interaction between politics and media always functions in this manner, but that it is most likely to do so.

However, as is apparent from the cronyism case, although the initial article was published in *Plus 7 dní*, no other instrument of news media took up this socially and politically important challenge, thus failing in their inter-mediate function. Trampota and Nečas (2007) found inter-media agenda setting correlated with the type of media, with the most significant function between the print media and television: more than 80 per cent of the news reported in television referred to sources from print media. Their investigation showed very low inter-media agenda setting in identical types of media. These findings demonstrated the impact of competition in the market, and so the possible failure of non-existent follow-up in the case of cronyism may partially lie in this notion. However, the television news also totally ignored this potentially scandalous topic. The interview with Tibor Mattyašovský (2015), the editor of TV *Markíza*, revealed that his TV does not monitor other media professionally. He also expressed the opinion that if the person who gave information to the weekly had approached the TV first, they would have definitely made at least three reports out of the single story, as he clearly regarded it as very interesting. One can therefore assume that the actual choice of medium, although apparently one of the key agenda setting ones (but not inter-media agenda setting) in Slovakia, must have had some effect on the non-existence of the scandal (see also Pflüger, Baugut, 2015).

A clarification about the absence of a synergic effect of the popular weekly *Plus 7 dní* on affiliated publications from the same media house,

⁸ STV Teletext, 26 December 2015, M. Maďarič: Scandals are in any Government.

such as the daily tabloid newspaper *Plus jeden deň*, is also required. Simultaneous publication of such interesting news in both publications would have benefited the publisher, the readers and society at large. Subscribers of the tabloid would have learned about this outrageous case, and those interested could have turned to the weekly *Plus 7 dní* for details. Catchy headlines in both publications would have boosted circulation and benefited the media house. From a larger perspective, awareness would have been created in the minds of the public about the wrongdoing of senior government officials and their lack of moral responsibility. This synergic effect has been noted only occasionally, but not in this particular case.

Theory of media reporting on scandals

This analysis is also theoretically underpinned by studies about scandalous reporting. Scandals can be defined as a process of public outrage over a (presumed) transgression of the dominant moral norms and usually signal that the government or public officials are not entirely credible or moral (Carlin, Love, Martinez-Gallardo, 2014), or that state institutions are not very effective in the prevention of, or dealing with, wrongdoing. Yet Bergsdorf (2002) argues that the media can make public only a fraction of all the wrongdoings they are aware of. Moreover, contrary to the general assumption, full-blown scandals which are concerned with substantively grave misconduct are rather difficult for the media to initiate and, if left without reactions from official institutions, politicians and relevant public personalities, are virtually impossible to sustain on their own (Entman, 2012).

In order to separate a scandal from a non-scandal, Lull and Hinerman proposed a set of ten criteria which have to be met: “(1) *social norms reflecting the dominant morality must be transgressed* [and] performed by (2) *specific persons* who carry out (3) *actions* that reflect an exercise of their desires or interests. [...] Further, individual persons must be (4) *identified* as perpetrators of the act(s). They must be shown to have acted (5) *intentionally or recklessly* and must be (6) *held responsible* for their actions. The actions and events must have (7) *differential consequences for those involved*. [...] The revelations must be (8) *widely circulated via communications media* where they are (9) *effectively narrativized into a story* which (10) *inspires widespread interest and discussion*” (Lull, Hinerman, 1997, pp. 11–12, emphasis in original).

It is apparent that both these cases definitely met the first five or six criteria (depending on whether we consider responsibility in moral or practical terms) as the particular forms of misdeeds and those who committed them were unusually well-documented. Nevertheless, the seventh criterion brought consequences only to the offenders in the case related to the Police Academy, which was also widely circulated in the media (although not widely enough to consider it as one of the major Slovakian scandals) and, to a certain degree, inspired interest among the general public. Both cases were also effectively narrativised into a story, as the evidence in both cases along with the moral and legal trespasses were definitely considerable. However, personalisation of the agents is critical to establish newsworthiness (Entman, 2012). Scandals involving high state officials and members of government clearly draw much more attention than the case of corruption at the Police Academy, the publicly unknown rector or university employees, or in the provincial labour office, albeit connected to an influential MP. Also, the expectations of the public are, thus, much higher when it comes to such widely covered scandals as in the case of, for example, the Gorilla scandal⁹ in Slovakia.

Waisbord (2000) further suggested that factors unrelated to the quality of journalistic work also affect the impact of an exposé. These include the timing of the report's release, the prestige of the news organisation, and the production values of the investigation. Let us briefly turn to the timing of cases, as both the original articles were published at the beginning of the summer vacation (bribery in 2012, cronyism in 2013), which might have found the media office understaffed at that particular point in time. Although the timing might have affected the relative indifference of the reporting in the bribery case, it cannot be the major explanation for the non-existence of any follow-ups in the cronyism case, due to the relatively considerable follow-ups on the bribery story, while both stories came from affiliated media outlets.

Regarding the prestige of the news organisation, it has been argued that despite the evidence for the agenda setting function of the media house which published the initial articles, the results of other media follow-ups (inter-media agenda setting) were not as high as might have been expected in the case of bribery, and absolutely absent in the cronyism case. However, the affiliated publications, *Plus 7 dní* and *Plus jeden deň*, are both tabloid in style, and their audience is quite accustomed to nu-

⁹ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gorilla_scandal.

merous ‘shocking’ cases reported on daily basis with exaggerated accentuation, and scandal fatigue can consequently result. The nature of these news outlets may have thus led to a de-sensitisation and loss of ability to differentiate the importance of information (Höschl in Wirnitzer, 2015) among both readers and other media, condemning the cronyism case to be overlooked and forgotten. Also, public and media outlets, which are generally deluged with plenty of potentially serious Slovakian corruption scandals, may easily overtly denounce that misconduct but tacitly condone it as “business as usual” (Entman, 2012).

Another possible explanation for the lack of agenda building leading to a full-blown scandal, especially the absence of inter-media agenda setting in the cronyism case, may be connected to the wide range of readily available, and similarly shocking or scandalous information on the Internet, which may be something of a double-edged sword, as the fragmentation of the public sphere means that scandalous information often cannot reach the critical mass necessary to initiate a proper reaction (Entman, 2012).

The important conditions of a story’s potential to become a major scandal also include the capacity of the state to respond, the political will to act in a case, or high public expectations for state action (Carlin, Love, Martinez-Gallardo, 2014). In general, when politicians and state institutions begin to be concerned with a particular corruption case, the media gladly monitor the commentaries, debates and possible frictions in the political and legal struggle. This is true in the case of bribery in the Police Academy, where the media’s work consisted largely only in following the proceedings of the police, prosecutors, and finally (briefly) the court. Perhaps surprisingly, it is also very likely that the swift and radical approach of the Slovak state authorities to this case actually lowered the visibility of this scandal in the media and public discourse, or at least made it impossible for the case to develop into a full-blown scandal, which would probably have happened if the offenders had not been punished (as in numerous large-scale corruption scandals in Slovakia).

Quantitative analysis of the media coverage

We have analysed only the case of bribery here, due to there being just a single article in the cronyism case. In order to analyse the quality of journalistic work, we established three key qualitative criteria. These criteria

are based on the Fundamental Values established in the Journalist’s Code of Ethics (article II): impartiality, balance, objectivity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility and scrupulous fact-checking.¹⁰ It would have been difficult to measure them independently, as they are very loosely defined, so we created three categories that can be empirically analysed: **objectivity** (includes impartiality, balance, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility), **verification of the facts** (includes objectivity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility and scrupulous fact-checking) and **stating sources** (includes impartiality, balance, objectivity, honesty, truthfulness, responsibility).

The criterion of **objectivity** was established to determine whether the journalists/media gave space to all parties involved, or if any signs of bias were present. However, a problem in exploring the concept of journalistic objectivity and which actually permeates a high number of articles lies in the fact that either no space is given to the accused persons in reports, or those people are not interested or available to comment. It is simply not possible for all the media to contact all the actors involved in a story.

Verification of the facts refers to the whole process of obtaining sources. Usually, the information is verified by the use of at least two mutually independent sources.

Journalists/media are always (with some legal and ethical exceptions) obliged to state the **source of information**. However, when the main source mentioned is a wire agency, we do not expect other sources to be mentioned in the article.

The analysis of the three above-mentioned categories was done independently by two researchers, with a third researcher checking and verifying possible inconsistencies. The ratio of inconsistencies was initially at 30 per cent. The research period covered 28th June 2012 till 26th June 2014. Table below shows the results of the analysis.

Table 1

Results of the analysis of objectivity, verification and the source of information by media

| Medium | Coverage (total) | Objectivity | Verification | Source | Objectivity | Verification | Source |
|----------------|------------------|-------------|--------------|--------|-------------|--------------|--------|
| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| SME | 24 | 12 | 18 | 22 | 50 | 75 | 92 |
| Plus jeden deň | 8 | 6 | 5 | 7 | 75 | 63 | 88 |
| HN | 14 | 7 | 12 | 12 | 50 | 86 | 86 |

¹⁰ See <http://trsr.sk/dokumenty/eticky-kodex-novinara-uinny-od-1-1-2011>.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|----------------------|----|----|----|----|----|-----|-----|
| Nový čas | 8 | 4 | 7 | 7 | 50 | 87 | 87 |
| STV | 3 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 67 | 67 | 67 |
| SRO | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 100 |
| Topky.sk | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| Markiza | 5 | 3 | 3 | 3 | 60 | 60 | 60 |
| Trend | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 100 | 100 |
| Electronic media | 14 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 57 | 64 | 64 |
| Print media | 55 | 31 | 45 | 51 | 56 | 82 | 93 |
| Standard print media | 38 | 20 | 31 | 35 | 53 | 82 | 92 |
| Tabloid print media | 16 | 11 | 13 | 15 | 69 | 81 | 94 |

Surprisingly, the medium with the highest rate of objectivity was, in this case, the tabloid daily *Plus Jeden Deň* (which got first access to the case and the key source) and the ones with the lowest objectivity rate were the other print media. An exception was the weekly *Trend* which, obviously, more or less summarised the event.

The verification, as well as identification of sources was very much present in the majority of the media.

The highest number of articles on the case of the Police Academy was published by *SME* (24), the lowest by the business magazine *Trend* and public radio station *Slovenský rozhlas* (each with the total coverage of one).

If we compare the various types of media, the press generally paid more attention to this corruption case. As far as objectivity is concerned, it was approximately equal for both groups of media. Press media have a higher percentage of verification (82 per cent) and referenced sources (93 per cent) than electronic media (64 per cent and 64 per cent, respectively).

If we further compare tabloid and quality media, the tabloid print media paid only occasional attention to this case, in contrast to quality print media. On the one hand, this could show the importance of the tabloid media as agenda-setters, and, on the other hand, the quality print media as the keepers of socially relevant topics in public discussion. Yet, perhaps surprisingly, the print tabloid media had slightly higher percentage of objectivity (69 per cent) than standard print media (53 per cent). The percentage of verification (around 80 per cent) is almost equal for both groups; the same is true for acknowledging sources (around 90 per cent).

In general, it is hard to come to a final assessment about the role of the media in this case. It seems that each type of medium fulfils its role

in the social-political and economic system. The tabloid media initiate stories, but do not follow them continuously – which is rather the role of the quality media. Yet, the tabloid (especially print) media do not seem to provide a lower quality of coverage from the point of view of objectivity, verification and the referencing of the sources of information.

Conclusions

The study focused on the analysis of the criteria and circumstances that determine the worthiness of a case to become a scandal, widely reported by both major and minor media houses. A relatively under-hyped corruption case and absolutely under-hyped corruption case, both with similar social relevance, were therefore selected to underpin this analysis, based on two theories: the theory of reporting on scandals and theory of agenda setting, agenda building and inter-media agenda setting.

Why the Slovak media did not perceive both cases as worthy of greater coverage with a consequently greater public response was the major question to be answered. The various theories connected to newsworthiness (agenda setting, inter-media agenda setting) and the scandalous nature of media reporting were listed and examined with regard to these two cases. Surprisingly enough, both cases generally met most of these criteria (and the accusations and relevant actors were very well-documented), despite the fact that one of them failed to garner any attention from the media, while the other one received less than expected attention from the media. Nevertheless, it was also argued that the media reporting on the scandal can be heavily dependent on circumstances that have nothing to do with journalistic work, such as the social/political prominence of the perpetrators, timing of the scandal, prestige of the news outlet and, perhaps most importantly, the political/legal will to act.

Regarding the analysis of both theories, the criterion which probably furthest prevented the cronyism case from becoming a major public scandal, or being at least covered by any other media house apart from the weekly *Plus 7 dní*, was the choice of this very medium to launch the initial article. Although ranked among the key agenda setting media in Slovakia, the weekly and its affiliated daily *Plus Jeden Deň* are both tabloid in style, thus making their audience, along with potentially interested journalists from other media houses, quite accustomed to numerous 'shocking' cases reported on daily basis. This might have led to the loss

of the ability to appreciate the importance and seriousness of the information presented in the article, which implicitly condemned the cronyism case to be overlooked and forgotten.

Interestingly enough, the other case was initially reported by the same media house (the daily *Plus Jeden Deň*) due to the presence of its journalist during the police raid on the Police Academy. It was, however, the official state intervention which launched the subsequent and relatively decent media coverage of the case. The follow-up of this case was also mainly dependent on the proceedings and actions of institutions such as the police, prosecutors and courts, and did not require much journalistic investigation. Nevertheless, it has been argued that the media did not cover the scandal on such a scale as could have been expected. It is thus very likely that the swift and radical approach of the Slovak state authorities to this case (the police raid followed by prompt investigation) actually lowered the visibility of this scandal in the media and public discourse, or at least made it impossible for the case to develop into a full-blown scandal for a longer period and with more extensive coverage, which would probably have happened if the offenders had not been punished.

In the case of the bribery, we also compared the various types of media which reported on it and came to the conclusion that the printed press paid, in general, more attention to it than other media. The highest number of articles on the case of the Police Academy was published by *SME*, although this major, key agenda setting and inter-media agenda setting daily displayed lower objectivity (together with other print media), in contrast to the initial publisher, the tabloid daily *Plus Jeden Deň* (which had exclusive access to some sources). In general, the tabloid dailies did not provide a lower quality of coverage, and it was apparent that each type of medium fulfilled its role in the social-political system – the tabloid media initiated the story, yet did not follow it up as rigorously as the quality media.

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- E-mail from Tibor Mattyasovský, the editor of TV *Markíza*, June 10, 2015.
- Interview with Ivan Mego, journalist who was the first to cover the Police Academy story, reporter at weekly *Plus 7 dní*, previously at the daily *Plus jeden deň*, October 8, 2014, Bratislava, by Andrej Školkay and Martin Matis.