



## Presidential Candidates in Television (18 February – 10 March 2019)

*Issued on 13 March 2019*

MEMO 98 has a long history of monitoring the coverage of political subjects and their representatives in the media, both in Slovakia as well as abroad. This report analyses the presentation of the candidates running for president of the Slovak Republic in the major news programs of the nationwide Slovak TV channels – RTVS, TV Markíza TV Joj and TA3 – during the three weeks (18 February to 10 March) before the final week of the election campaign.<sup>1</sup> The report simultaneously introduces an analysis of presentation of the political parties and coalitions in the media as well as media coverage of some other key stakeholders of the Slovak politics (president of the Slovak Republic, government of the Slovak Republic).

The monitored criteria included the time that the media dedicated to the presidential candidates and other subjects as well as the manner (positive/neutral/negative), in which the candidates and other subjects were presented.

- **Zuzana Čaputová (28%) received the biggest portion of airtime among the candidates in the summary of all the monitored TV channels. Another leading election candidate, Maroš Šefčovič received comparable share of airtime (20.5%), while Robert Mistrík (17.7%) and Štefan Harabin (11.2%) came as third and fourth respectively. Zuzana Čaputová received most media attention in TV Markíza (8.5 min) and RTVS (2 min), while in TA3 it was Robert Mistrík (3.5 min) and Maroš Šefčovič in TV Joj (over 2 min).**
- **When it comes to the manner of presentation, most information about the candidates was neutral or positive (in RTVS solely positive). Zuzana Čaputová was presented in TA3 and TV Joj with a larger share of negative information, the same applies to Maroš Šefčovič and TA3 as well as Štefan Harabin on TV Markíza.**
- **During the monitored period, several major themes and events resonated across the nation – investigation of the murder of journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírova (dominant in RTVS and TV Joj, in total more than 70 minutes across all monitored TV channels), abuse of EU subsidies in agriculture and the related protests of Slovak farmers (almost 60 minutes), and regional transport-related issues, mainly in relation to the extensive traffic limitations in Bratislava (40 minutes in total). When it comes to the total time devoted to all topics, however, the individual aspects of the presidential elections dominated with TV channels dedicating it 2 hours and**

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<sup>1</sup> The length of the monitored evening news is different – the news on TV Markíza took approximately 54 min, RTVS approximately 48 min, TV Joj approximately 32 min, and news on TA3 approximately 26 minutes.

15 minutes. On the other hand, this means the average of only around 1.5 min per day per TV channel.

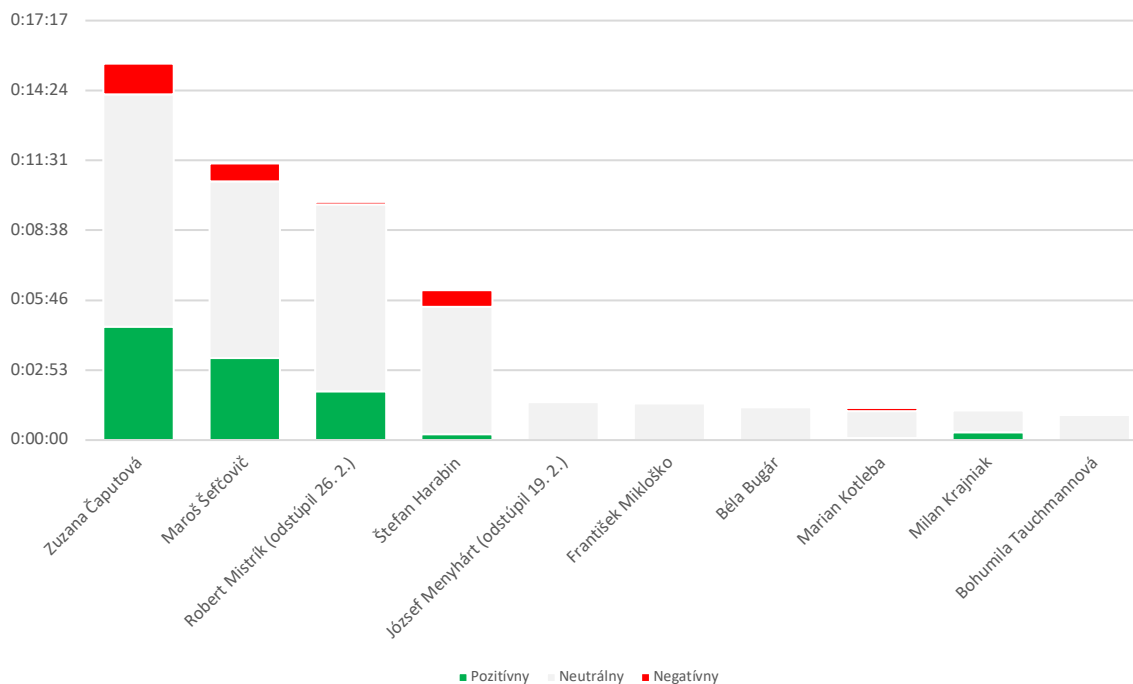
- When comparing the respective TV channels, TV Markíza dedicated the biggest time to the election campaign (71 minutes, approx. 3,5 minutes per day), while covering 11 various aspects of the campaign, the largest number across all TV channels (in RTVS and TV Joj it was 7, aspects and only 5 in TA3). As the publicly funded institution, RTVS dedicated 38 minutes to the campaign in total. Among the top 10 affairs covered on this channel, only 3 were actually related to the elections (for TV Markíza as well as TA3 it was only a single topic). TA3 dedicated the smallest share of its news primetime to the presidential campaign (fewer than 7 minutes, making this less than 20 seconds a day), while it was the only TV channel, where top 10 most intensively covered topics did not include even a single major theme related to the presidential election.
- When it comes to the respective aspects of the presidential campaign, the most resonating topic was the general organizational aspect of the elections (24%) as well as the opinion polls among voters (18.3%). Along with the above, substantial coverage was dedicated also to the campaign itself (14.6%). The influence of other, apolitical subjects as well as the resignation of one candidate for the benefit of another contender received an almost identical coverage in the media (9.1% for both topics respectively). Conversely, the messages and visions contained in the election platforms of the respective candidates resonated less intensively (7.4%).
- Just like in the previously monitored periods, all TV channels dedicated the most extensive coverage to the government. During the monitoring period, the government enjoyed the biggest portion of coverage in RTVS (48%). At the same time, RTVS was the only television which covered the cabinet with the largest share of neutral information – almost 85% (at the same time, when it comes to the share of positive and negative coverage, the critical tone dominated over the positive one). Among the other TV channels, TA3 showed a different approach as it presented the government in the most positive light.
- Media dedicated time to political parties present in the parliament: Smer-SD enjoyed 18%, twice the time compared to the time TV channels dedicated to other two parties of the ruling coalition (SNS 6% and Most-Híd 3%). Among other parties, the opposition SaS and OĽaNO enjoyed similar share of the coverage (6% respectively). The incumbent president received 14% of the politically relevant time in total. Smer-SD was the most intensively covered political party across all the media, most often in TV Joj and TV Markíza, while TV Joj was the most critical in their coverage compared to all other media.
- Media offered their audience multiple ways in presenting the candidates. MEMO 98 has indicated several times already that an interactive and dynamic

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**discussion with several candidates participating, hosted by an experienced journalist and not bound by too strict compliance with the rules for keeping the dedicated time slots is the most attractive and most informative form of coverage from the audience perspective during an election campaign. We therefore appreciate the approach of several media outlets which preferred exactly this type of presentation of the candidates.**

### Presidential candidates

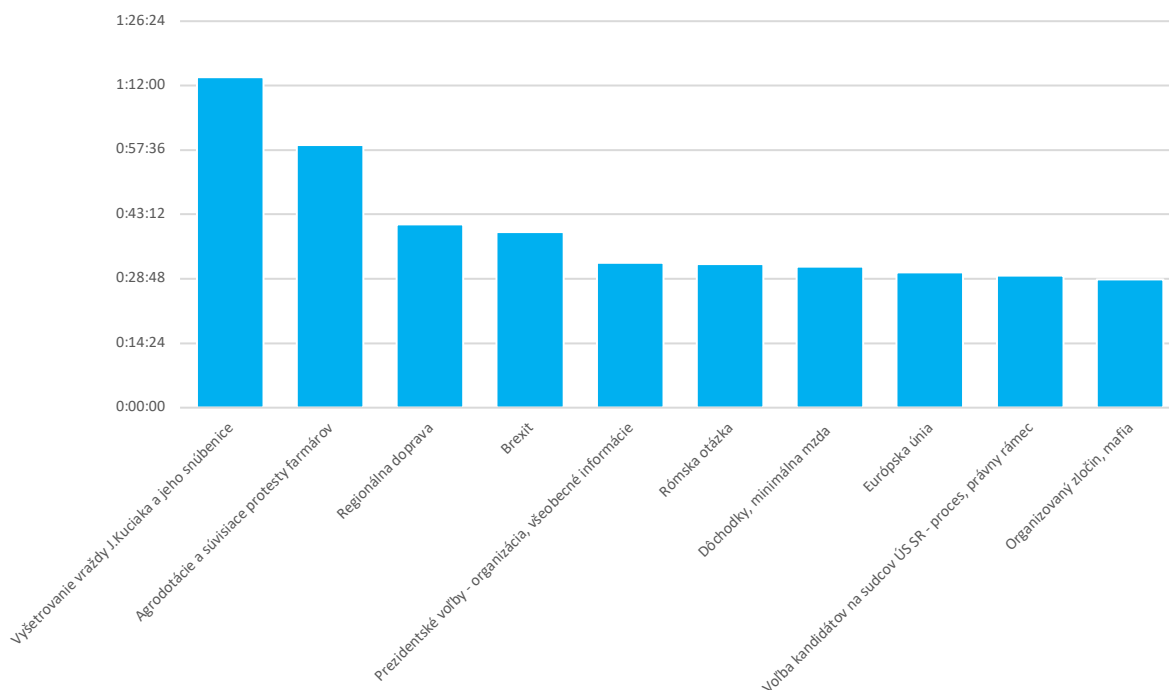
- Zuzana Čaputová (28%) received the most prominent time among the candidates in the summary of all the monitored TV channels. Another leading election candidate, Maroš Šefčovič, received comparable time (20.5%), while Robert Mistrík (17.7%) and Štefan Harabin (11.2%) came as third and fourth respectively. When it comes to the manner of presentation, most information about the candidates was neutral or positive (solely positive in RTVS) and Zuzana Čaputová was presented in TA3 and TV Joj with a larger share of negative coverage. The same applies to Maroš Šefčovič and TA3 as well as Štefan Harabin on TV Markíza.).

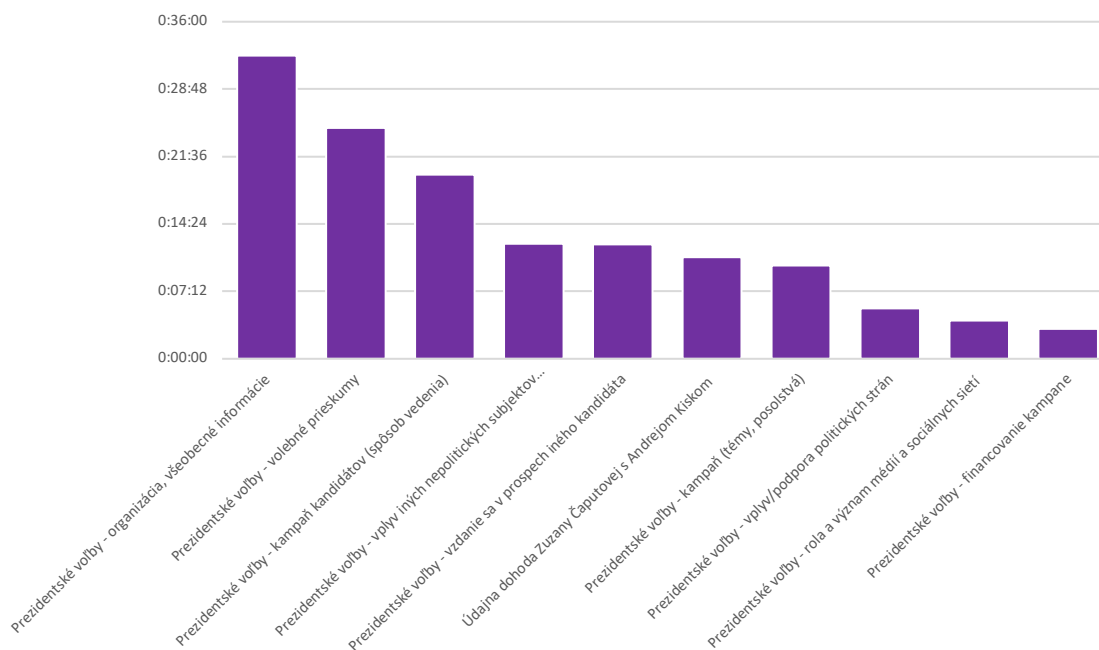


From the perspective of individual TV channels, Zuzana Čaputová was most intensively presented on three channels - TV Markíza (8.5 minutes), TA3 (the largest coverage from the currently running candidates - 3 minutes as R. Mistrík received the biggest coverage despite his resignation - 3.5 minutes) and RTVS (2 minutes). TV Joj dedicated the largest time slot in its prime-time news program to Maroš Šefčovič (over 2 minutes).

### Themes of the campaign and affairs

When it comes to topics covered in the news, the report covers the period when the presidential campaign was only one of the major affairs resonating in the media together with several topics with nationwide relevance – primarily the continued investigation of the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírova that dominated in RTVS and TV Joj (in total more than 70 minutes across all monitored TV channels). Another major affair was the abuse of EU subsidies in agriculture and the related protests of Slovak farmers (almost 60 minutes) as well as regional transport-related issues, mainly in relation to the extensive traffic limitations in Bratislava (40 minutes in total). When it comes to the total time devoted to all topics, however, however, the individual aspects of the presidential election dominated as the TV channels dedicated 2 hours and 15 minutes in total to this topic. On the other hand, this means the average of only around 1.5 min per day per TV channel.





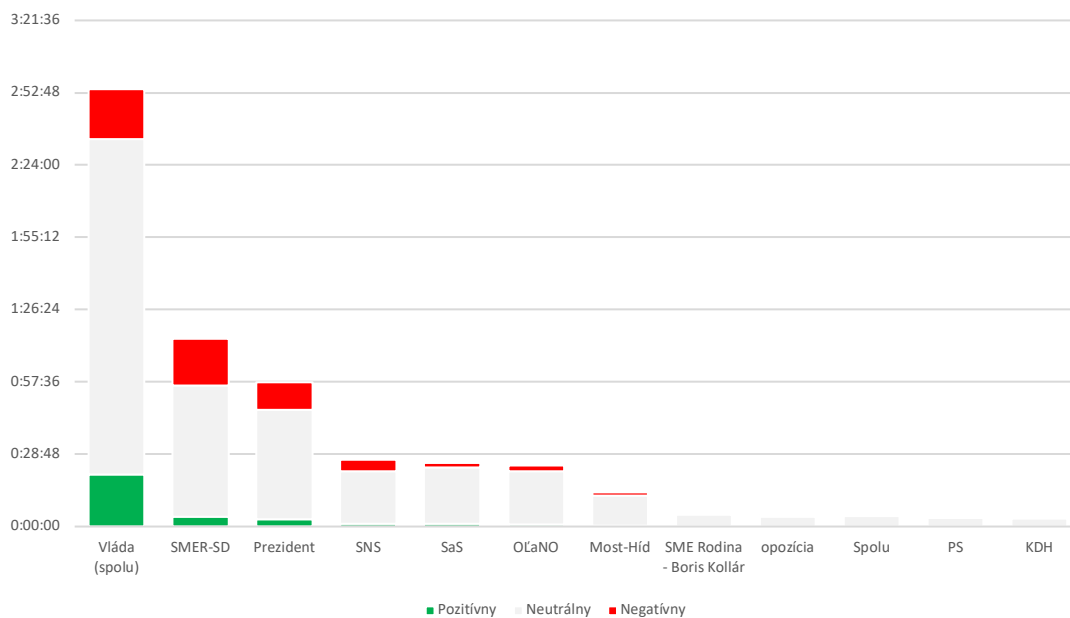
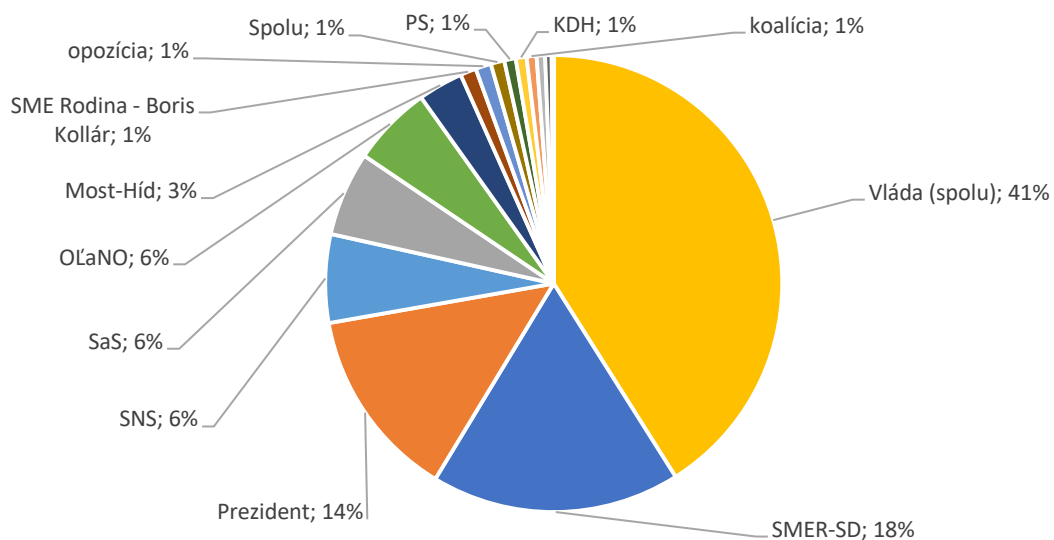
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#### Political subjects (the president, the government, political parties and movements)

Just like in the previously monitored periods, all TV channels dedicated the most extensive coverage to the government. During the monitoring period, the government enjoyed the biggest coverage in RTVS (48%). RTVS was at the same time the media outlet which covered the cabinet with the biggest share of neutral information – almost 85% (simultaneously, critical tone dominated over positive one). Among the other TV channels, TA3 showed a different approach, as it presented the government in the most positive light.

In general, TV channels dedicated time mainly to the political parties present in the parliament: Smer-SD enjoyed 18%, twice the time compared to the time TV channels dedicated to the party's other two coalition partners combined (SNS 6% and Most-Híd 3%). Among other parties, the opposition SaS and OĽaNO enjoyed similar share of the coverage (both 6%). Smer-SD was the most intensively covered political party across all the media, most often in TV Joj and TV

Markíza, while TV Joj was most critical in their coverage of Smer-SD compared to all other media, which were mostly neutral although with a slight domination of negative information.



Discussions programmes



As indicated by MEMO 98 several times in the past, an interactive and dynamic discussion with several candidates participating, hosted by an experienced journalist and not bound by too strict compliance with the rules for keeping the dedicated time slots is the most attractive and most informative form of the coverage from the audience perspective during an election campaign. It is exactly the dialogue between the candidates themselves that offers voters the best comparison and evaluation of the contestants' strengths and weaknesses. We therefore appreciate the approach of several media outlets, which organized their own discussion formats (some of them also with participation of the public in the audience) and interviews with the selected candidates – Denník N, Radio Expres, Fun Rádio, Postoj, Pravda, SME/My, Trend, as well as TV channels which attempted to introduce all the candidates – the public nationwide TV channel RTVS as well as privately-owned TA3 and TV Markíza.

In the past, we have criticized certain media during election campaigns, in particular the publicly-funded RTVS (previously called STV), for their too formalistic approach when complying with the provisions of the election law which had a negative influence on the format and conduct of the actual discussions. In this specific campaign, the public broadcaster (as well as the privately-owned TA3) selected a combination of formats including individual interviews with all candidates as well as discussions programmes. TV Markíza introduced some candidates within the scope of its specific program titled “Na telo” and then all contenders in a series of three consecutive presidential debates.

Apart from print or online media, TV coverage of candidates during the campaign is regulated by the legislation (Act No. 181/2014 Law on Election Campaign), which specifies the time limits for the presentation of candidates quite rigorously (as well as the matters of political advertising and discussions) with respect to publicly funded media, while the program concept of private media is subject to approval by the regulatory authority – the Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission (in Slovak: “Rada pre vysielanie a retransmisiu”).<sup>2</sup> MEMO 98 will continue conducting media monitoring also in case that there is a second round of presidential elections.

*This report has been written thanks to the support of the National Endowment for Democracy.*

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<sup>2</sup> [Stanovisko Rady pre vysielanie a retransmiu k voľbám prezidenta SR vo vysielaní 2019.](#)  
(ENG: *Statement of the Committee for Broadcasting and Retransmission on the elections of the president of the Slovak Republic in broadcasting 2019*)