

AUTHORITATIVE ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

The legislative and executive processes of forming, negotiating, and approving the budgetary chapter of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic are analyzed within the context of the contemporary political system. The budgetary cycle is described, emphasizing that the allocation of public resources is not merely a technocratic and bureaucratic procedure, but primarily an arena of intense political struggle. The text applies the theoretical concepts of prominent political scientists, particularly Lasswell's understanding of the distribution of values, Easton's systems theory of the authoritative allocation of goods, and Peters' new institutionalist framework. The theoretical foundations are further adjusted within the contemporary scholarly discourse through the works of post-2020 authors who describe the specifics of Slovak budgetary policy and the impact of the political cycle on public resources. Attention is drawn to the tension between rational governance and political pragmatism, critically reflecting on the impacts of political populism on macroeconomic stability, deficit policy, and the functionality of the educational system, including the risks associated with a provisional budget.

Keywords: *resource allocation, political struggle, provisional budget, education, state budget*

Introduction

The processes of forming, negotiating, and approving the budgetary chapter of the Ministry of Education, Research, Development, and Youth of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter referred to as the Ministry of Education) under the conditions of the political system of the Slovak Republic possess specific characteristics. From the perspective of political sciences, the state budget represents one of the most significant institutional tools for implementing public policies, in which the declarative level of government programs is transformed into material reality. The budgetary process, therefore, cannot be understood as a technocratic or purely administrative and accounting procedure. On the contrary, it is primarily an arena of intense political struggle, featuring a confrontation of particular interests, ideological doctrines, and efforts by political actors to maximize their own power and electoral support. The distribution of scarce public resources within a deficit financial environment implicitly generates conflict

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among individual ministerial actors, social partners, and the political parties forming the governing coalition.

This essence of the political process was precisely defined by the American political scientist Harold Lasswell in his classic work *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How* (Lasswell, 1936), where he pointed out that the study of politics is essentially the study of influence and the influential, with the central question remaining how and under what conditions individual groups allocate social goods for themselves. In the context of educational budgetary rules, this distribution manifests as a result of power asymmetries and negotiating positions. Lasswell's work is built upon by the systems theory of David Easton, presented notably in *The Political System* (Easton, 1953) and *A Systems Analysis of Political Life* (Easton, 1965). Easton defines politics as the authoritative allocation of values for the entire society. In this model, the state budget functions as the final output of the political system, which responds to demands from the environment, including pressure from trade unions, professional organizations, or economic elites.

Contemporary political science reflection after 2020 further develops these classic approaches and applies them to post-communist transitional democracies, where the political struggle over the budget is amplified by a high degree of polarization. A significant contribution to understanding this issue is the monograph by a collective of authors led by Darina Malová, *Politický systém Slovenska: kontinuita a zmeny* (Malová et al., 2021), which analyzes how institutional tensions and the fragmentation of governing coalitions in Slovakia directly paralyze the rational planning of public finances and turn budget approval into a tool for political survival. In an international and comparative context, this topic is followed up by the work of the Polish political scientist Balcerowicz, *The Politics of Budgetary Surplus and Deficit in Central Europe* (Balcerowicz et al., 2023), which demonstrates that in the Central European region, the budgetary chapters of state budgets such as education or healthcare are permanently dependent on pre-election cycles and populist pressures, leading to a chronic underfunding of their respective budgetary chapters and, consequently, of structural reforms as well.

The budgetary cycle is thus determined by an institutional framework that both limits and shapes the behavior of actors. A representative of historical and empirical new institutionalism, B. Guy Peters, in the monograph *Institutional Theory in Political Science* (Peters, 2019), emphasizes that institutions and their formal rules – in this case, expenditure limits, macroeconomic forecasts, and procedural deadlines – are not neutral; instead, they actively shape the structure of political conflict and define the boundaries within which the political struggle takes place. Peters warns that institutional heritage and established approval processes often limit radical reform efforts, leading to incremental budget changes. This opens up fundamental political science themes: the phenomenon of governance, the tension between rational-technocratic state management and the political pragmatism of governing parties, the influence of populist discourse on the sustainability of public policies, and the deepening deficit of democratic legitimacy resulting from information asymmetry between political elites and citizens. The starting point for understanding this reality is a detailed look at the actual

legislative and procedural process in the Slovak Republic regarding the educational budget chapter.

1. Actors in the Educational Budgetary Process

In public policy, and consequently in educational policy, we observe various approaches to the behavior of actors. Three basic interests manifest within educational policy; while they can merge, they are mostly distinct and depend on the reasoning and actions of educational policy actors. These include individual, societal, group, and other interests (Plavčan, 2021).

Individual interests – in educational policy, these represent the interests of individuals who possess ambitions and aspirations and seek to establish themselves in the public eye or within the execution of public policy through their actions. With media support, the result of their activity can be generally well-received public opinions, for example, on the direction of educational policy. However, their activity can also lead to reckless attacks on the actions of politicians in the decisive sphere, even when those politicians are making sound decisions for the development of the educational system.

Societal interests – in educational policy, these are the interests declared by individuals or groups of educational actors regarding the state's educational policy direction. These interests are mostly declared in the program documents of educational policy.

Group interests – in educational policy, these represent the interests of specific groups of actors. Even in the presence of an all-society consensus on the direction of educational policy and during the execution of specific measures, these groups may partially agree with the changes, while simultaneously campaign against them.

Other interests – in educational policy, these are represented by individuals or groups who do not belong among the direct actors of educational policy, but who attempt to partake either in the achievements of the educational system for personal gain or public visibility, or conversely, their specific interest conflicts with the actions of an educational policy actor (e.g., an easement of a school on their land, etc.).

In pursuing interests within educational policy, individual actors or groups of actors focus on the following activities:

- They perform state assessments across various areas of educational policy.
- They propose alternative solutions within educational policy.
- They initiate negotiations with the decisive sphere and political actors in educational policy, striving to push forward their proposals for policy change.
- They generate individual, group, or political pressure on the decisive sphere to alter educational policy or a part thereof through public expressions of dissatisfaction.

2. Mechanisms, Institutions, and Conflict Lines of the Budgetary Process

How are funds for education actually approved? It is a specific procedure that follows a more or less standardized path. This process stems primarily from the wording of legal regulations. These establish the processes that must be adhered to so that public resources can be legally utilized or distributed. In the Slovak Republic, education, similarly to many other states, is funded predominantly by the state; the overwhelming majority of financial resources spent on education at all levels of the educational system originates from public sources.

Based on the Act on Budgetary Rules, the Ministry of Finance of the Slovak Republic prepares the draft budget for the entire public administration, and individual chapters receive so-called expenditure limits. These are based on macroeconomic forecasts and limits set by the Council for Budget Responsibility, an independent body monitoring and evaluating the development of Slovakia's public finances. During May and June of the calendar year, the Ministry of Education prepares a list of priorities accompanied by financial calculations for the upcoming fiscal year. Based on this list of priorities, statistical data, limits from the previous year, and changes in legal regulations (such as salary increases, etc.), the Ministry of Finance prepares the draft budget for the chapter of the Ministry of Education.

This draft is tentatively consulted on jointly towards the end of June. During these consultations, the Ministry of Education clarifies its priorities and limit calculations, and the ministries seek a compromise in accordance with the anticipated revenues and proposed expenditures of the state budget for the next calendar year. These consultations usually take place at the level of state secretaries and directors-general of sections. For the Ministry of Education, these typically involve the section of financing and budget, alongside the substantive sections for regional education, higher education, and science. Naturally, during this period, the ministries negotiate with their social partners, in this case with the educational trade unions as well as with employer representatives. The procedure of preliminary negotiation regarding priorities and their financial limits is purposeful; it enables the state budget to be approved consensually during government sessions, albeit with certain adjustments subsequently submitted by cabinet members during the budget session.

In the autumn months, following parliamentary and government recesses, the draft state budget is deliberated upon by the Government of the Slovak Republic, and after its approval by the cabinet, it is submitted to the National Council of the Slovak Republic for negotiation. The draft state budget is a concrete manifestation of the wishes and priorities of the political parties in government. When deciding on the structure of the state budget, political parties attempt to fulfill pre-election promises made to their voters, which are articulated in the Government Manifesto and approved by the National Council. Alternatively, they aim to gain a positive opinion not only from their own electorate but also from other citizens to secure votes in the next parliamentary elections. Negotiations over the state budget are quite demanding for all actors, particularly when striving for a balanced budget of state revenues and expenditures. Even relatively minor financial items are negotiated because individual departments typically declare a high number of priorities. These negotiations take place within the Committee on Education, Youth, and Sports of the National Council, which submits its conclusions via resolutions to the plenary session of the National Council. Budgetary

amendments are also proposed within the committee. In principle, in most cases, this is a political activity designed to secure a sufficient number of MP votes to pass the document during the ballot. Exceptionally, an amendment proposed by an opposition MP may be approved within the committee, but such a proposal must substantively and significantly improve the submitted draft. If such a proposal accompanied by high demands on the state budget was submitted in the committee in the past, the author did not register its approval in practice. If a proposal is approved in the committee, it is incorporated into the committee's resolution, which is then debated in the plenary session of the National Council.

For instance, in 2016, a specific amount of budget increase for education by EUR 2 billion over four years was included in the Government Manifesto of the Slovak Republic, which meant an annual increase of EUR 200 million, each year building on a higher base, including a fivefold increase in teacher salaries. It was the first time since 1990, and so far the last time until the end of 2021, that specific figures for funding reform measures in education and teacher salaries were stated in the Government Manifesto of the Slovak Republic. Ultimately, this increase meant that average teacher salaries exceeded the average wage in the Slovak economy. Even some opposition MPs publicly expressed positive views regarding this fact, and some of them received party punishments for doing so. In the opposition, one does not praise the government. However, this is no news for citizens; there are plenty of daily examples in the media confirming this fact.

The volume of the educational budget is decided politically every year in the National Council toward the end of the calendar year. The deliberation of the state budget takes place in a relatively hectic atmosphere; MPs from both opposition and coalition parties attempt to declare the redundancy of certain expenditures in individual chapters, or conversely, the insufficient funding of some planned expenditures in individual chapters of the draft state budget. Specific proposals for changes in individual chapters are ultimately submitted in the plenary session of the National Council as well. In the effort to maintain a balanced state budget, these negotiations require a counter-proposal specifying which other chapter of the state budget will have its planned expenditures reduced. Many MPs have had the personal experience of requesting an adjustment to the state budget as opposition MPs and failing, but they failed equally when requesting an adjustment as coalition MPs. The governing coalition is also composed of multiple political parties, and these have diverse interests. Their common goals are outlined in the coalition agreement. On the contrary, some proposals are acceptable across the entire plenary spectrum of MPs, regardless of the political party they represent in the National Council of the Slovak Republic. For example, the proposal to increase teacher salaries in June 2016 was supported by the affirmative votes of all present MPs without a single abstention.

A brief reflection in this paragraph deals with a topic that is received very controversially by the public. In public discussions, politicians' statements contain not only a great deal of populism but also lies, unfortunately often intentional. When it becomes excessive, it provokes public aversion not only toward the public decision-making of state organs but also toward politicians, particularly as journalism has become personalized in recent years. A positive or

negative image does not focus on the activity itself, but centers on the person as its bearer in the public sphere, as well as on their privacy. Often justifiably, and often unjustifiably. Citizens cannot be experts in everything, but it must be critically noted that, in general, citizens do not know how the state and its institutions function as a whole. In principle, they would not even need to know, provided they received truthful information regarding the actual state of affairs.

Fulfilling electoral promises or meeting demands that do not correspond to the performance of the economy, beyond the scope of balanced revenues and expenditures in the state budget, leads to the creation of a state budget deficit. This triggers inflation and price increases, a drop in real wages, and ultimately a reduction in the living standards of several population groups. Ultimately, we have witnessed this in practice in recent years. The result is the consolidation of public finances, and today the state must even borrow to repay state loans. Logically, it is clear that if you still have to borrow to repay a loan, the debt grows. Corrective measures have a major economic impact on citizens and the private sector.

The reallocation of financial resources is one of the main instruments of politics, and thus of educational policy, for enforcing not only party but also personal agendas. Practice confirms that "politics (is) who gets what, when, how," as Lasswell aptly remarked as early as 1936 in his book of the same title. After the state budget is approved in the form of a law, enters into force, and is published, the Ministry of Education must break down its chapter into the prescribed structure and allocate it to individual organizations within 60 days from the date of approval. If it happens that the 60-day deadline extends into the following calendar year and the Ministry of Education is unable to prepare the budget breakdown by the end of the calendar year in which the state budget was approved, a so-called provisional budget (provisional regime) occurs. Until the breakdown is approved, individual institutions receive monthly financial limits amounting to one-twelfth of the previous year's budget. The entire complex and seemingly bureaucratic process of creating the state budget is not just technical accounting. It is the very core of politics. It is the place where the real political struggle unfolds. The result of this political struggle is then the decision of which group in society (WHO) will gain more money and influence (WHAT) and in what manner (HOW). If you want to see what real politics is, do not just look at the speeches in parliament, but look at how money is divided in the budget. Because that is precisely where it becomes clear who possesses the real power (Who) to enforce their interests (What) and through which paths (How).

Conclusion

The conclusions derived from the analyzed text clearly confirm that the legislative and executive processes of approving public resources for education in the Slovak Republic are inherently political and fundamentally conflictual. Although the initial stages of budget formulation exhibit characteristics of a high degree of bureaucratic formalization and efforts toward technocratic objectification through limits and forecasts, the final allocation of resources remains largely the result of power compromises and political calculations. The political struggle does not take place solely between the governing coalition and the opposition in the plenary session of the National Council SR; it occurs primarily within the

executive branch, where individual ministries compete for limited resources and where the divergent interests of coalition government partners manifest. The budget thus serves not only as an economic plan but primarily as a mirror of power, which precisely exposes the hierarchy of values and the actual priorities of political elites, regardless of their pre-election promises.

Implicitly, there is a warning against the destructive consequences of political populism and short-sighted opportunism, where budget items are utilized as a tool to buy the favor of voters with the aim of maximizing electoral gain in the subsequent election cycle. This approach generates macroeconomic instability, deepens deficits, stimulates inflationary pressures, and ultimately reduces the living standards of the population and the credibility of democratic institutions as such. The case study from 2016, when an unprecedented consensual increase in the budget and teacher salaries occurred across the entire political spectrum, demonstrates that strategic reforms in education are achievable only if political actors manage to overcome paralyzing polarization and elevate the public interest above particular goals. Such moments, however, are an anomaly rather than the rule in the Slovak political context.

Institutional threats, such as a provisional budget caused by the inability to approve the state budget on time and properly distribute financial resources to specific organizations, furthermore point to the limits of state capacity and the negative impacts of political instability on the day-to-day operation of the educational system. In this sense, the text clarifies parliamentary journalism and political proclamations. Verbal declarations in parliamentary debates are often merely symbolic politics for the media and the public, while real politics – characterized by the redistribution of power, influence, and privileges – takes place within the details of the budgetary tables. Understanding the budgetary process as the core of the political struggle is therefore key to unmasking the true nature of governance and developing critical political literacy among citizens, without which effective public control of political power is impossible.

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