

The municipal elections 2018 held in town Zvolen

Jitka Mlynarčíková

Faculty of social sciences, University of ss. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Bučianska 4/A,
917 01 Trnava, Slovak Republic, jitka.mlynarcikova@gmail.com

Abstract

Zvolen is one of the oldest towns in Slovakia in its central part. Zvolen is situated on the confluence of Hron and Slatina river. The author puts emphasis in this article on the issue of the municipal policy and analyses the outcomes of electoral behaviour by residents in town Zvolen during the municipal elections 2018. In view of the election results author indicates the forecast of further development in Zvolen.

Keywords: Municipal Policy; Behaviour of electors; Elected representatives; Municipal council; Mayor

1. Introduction

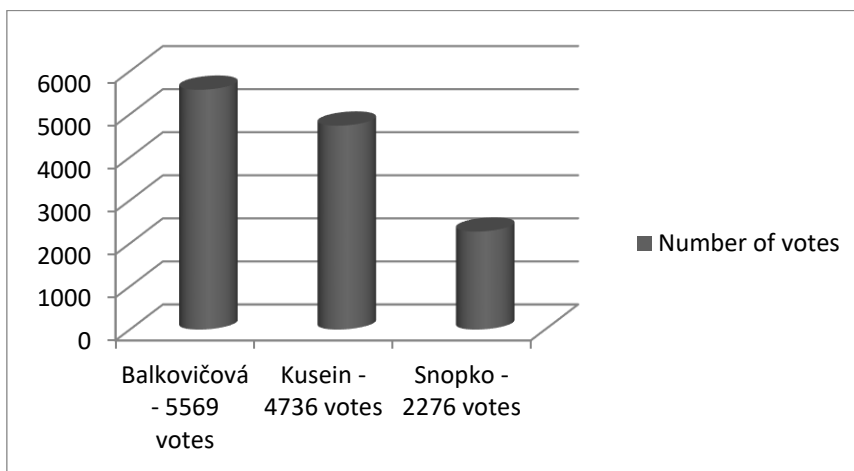
The municipal elections in the Slovak Republic for the election period 2018 - 2022 were announced by the decision of the President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic - the Act Law Nr. 2013/2018 Coll. The municipal elections held on 10 November 2018. The municipality and the regional municipality, called as Self-Governing Region, are independent territorial self-governing and administrative units of the Slovak Republic associating people with permanent residence in their territory (Article 64a of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic). Pursuant to Article 69 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic the municipal authorities are the municipal council consisting of the deputies who are residing in the municipality and the mayor. The mayor is also a resident in the municipality. Deputies as well as the mayor of the municipality are elected by residents of the municipality on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage by secret ballot for four years. The municipal elections have one round. The members of the municipal council are those candidates who received the most valid votes in the constituency. The candidate with the most valid votes shall be elected as a mayor. In Slovakia the conditions for the right to vote and the organization of municipal elections are governed by Part 7 of Law Nr. 180/2014 Coll.

2. Initial facts

Zvolen is a district town in the Banská Bystrica region. On 1 January 2018 the town had 41 278 inhabitants (Zvolen.sk 2018). According to the number of the inhabitants, the town may have from 15 to 25 members of municipal council, because it is a town with more than 20 001

inhabitans and less than 50 000 inhabitans (§ 11 subpar. 3 h) of Law Nr. 369/1990 Coll.). Previous municipal elections for the election period 2014 - 2018 were held on 15 November 2014. Municipal elections 2018 for the election period 2018 - 2022 were held in Zvolen in a situation where the post of mayor of the town, as the highest executive body, was held by the economist - Ing. Lenka Balkovičová. Ing. Lenka Balkovičová has tried to get at the forefront of the town already in the municipal elections in 2010 with the support of political parties as The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (hereinafter referred to as SDKU – DS) and Freedom and Solidarity (hereinafter referred to as SAS). SDKÚ - DS has profiled itself as a centre-right liberal-conservative, christian-democratic political party and SAS has profiled itself as a liberal and eurosceptic political party. Ing. Lenka Balkovičová reached 28.7% of votes and lost the match with Ing. Miroslav Kusein who was the supporter of Direction-Social Democracy (hereinafter referred to as SMER-SD) and who achieved 51% of the votes (SME.sk 2010). SMER-SD is a social-democratic and a left-wing political party. A candidate for the mayor, Lenka Balkovičová, finally succeed in municipal elections in 2014 in which she stood as an independent candidate and received 5 569 votes. Her victory in 2014 ousted Ing. Miroslav Kusein, the acting mayor of Zvolen. The results which she achieved in municipal elections in 2014 defeated also Matej Snopko who was another independent candidate for the post of mayor of town and a deputy in the municipal council. Matej Snopko is well known in town Zvolen as an entrepreneur and former criminalist (ZVONLINE.sk 2014).

Figure 1: The official results of the elections of mayor of Zvolen in 2014



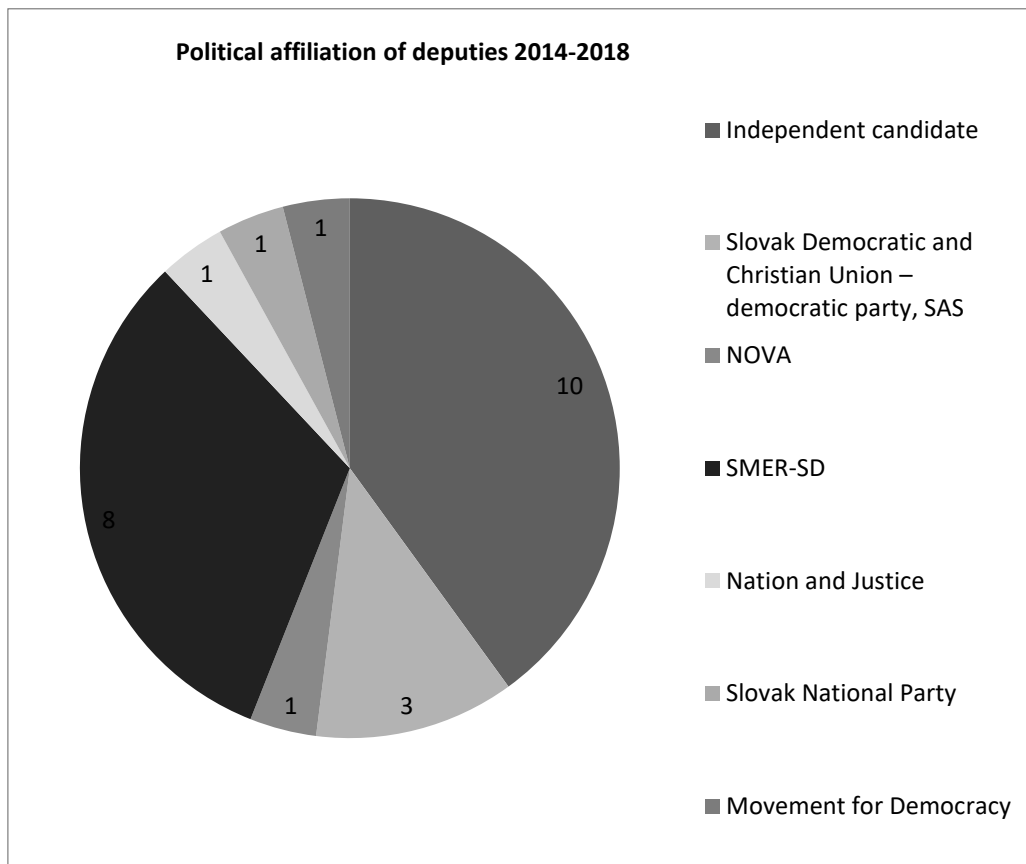
Source: Statistics Slovakia

2.1 Municipal Council of Zvolen in the electoral period 2014 - 2018

For the favor of the voters in the six electoral districts of Zvolen were fighting in 2014 in municipal elections 115 candidates in relation to the 25 seats in municipal council. The constituencies in municipal elections in 2014 were as follows: the constituency Nr. 1 - Sekier, Záhonok, Lipovec, Môt'ová, Kráľ'ová, settlement Sekier with 6 deputies and 31 candidates, the constituency Nr. 2 - Zlatý Potok, Bakova Jama, Lukové, Zolná with 3 deputies and 16 candidates, the constituency Nr. 3 – Západ, Stráž with 7 deputies and 30 candidates, the constituency Nr. 5 – central city zone East with 3 deputies and 12 candidates, the constituency Nr. 6 - central city zone West with 5 deputies and 21 candidates (ZVONLINE.sk 2014). Voter

turnout was 35.99 %. The municipal elections in 2014 reached 12 796 participants from the total number 35 548 of registered voters (Statistics Slovakia). Of the 25 deputies in the municipal council, 40% were independent candidates, 32% were for the political party SMER – SD, 12% were for the political party Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – democratic party, SAS, 4% were for the political party NOVA, 4% were for the political party Nation and Justice, 4% were for the political party Slovak National Party and 4% for the Movement for Democracy.

Figure 2: Political affiliation of deputies - starting point



Source: zvonline

2.2 Some investments in town Zvolen during electoral period 2014 - 2018

The constituency Nr. 1 - Sekier, Záhonok, Lipovec, Môťová, Kráľová, Sekier Valley:

- repair of 2 km road to Môťová dam, installation of solar lamps, revitalization of dump at Môťová dam, reconstruction of pavement, construction of interconnecting pavement, reconstruction of kindergarten, construction of parking places near the cemetery.

The constituency Nr. 2 - Zlatý Potok, Bakova Jama, Lukové, Zolná:

- construction of a fitness field in nature, climbing walls, pavement repair.

The constituency Nr. 3 - Západ, Stráž:

- reconstruction of the courtyard, revitalization of the sandpit, building a playground for teenagers, reconstruction of streets, construction of parking places, revitalization of the former kindergarten, revitalization of selected roads and pavements, revitalization of barrier-free playground, construction of half underground waste containers, construction of 20 parking places.

The constituency Nr. 4 - Podborová, Borová hora:

- return the area of Borová hora to the town's property.

The constituency Nr. 5 - Central city zone East:

- construction and reconstruction of pedestrian paths, change in the transport system, an increase of parking places, modernising of inside areas, construction of the playing structures in the garden of a leisure centre Domino, open negotiations with Slovak railways on the obtaining the cultural house into the property of town.

The constituency Nr. 6 – Central city zone West:

- revitalisation of the primary school site at Hrnčiarska street, the renovation of the nursery school, renovation of the road with the location of ambulance service in town, the revitalisation of the inner courtyards, updating of public street lighting system, construction of containers for untreated mixed municipal waste.

3. Preparation for elections and an election campaign 2018

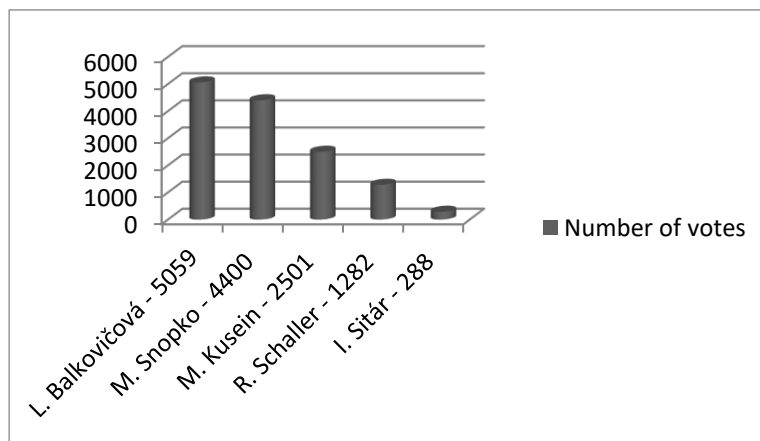
The election campaign before municipal elections in 2018 was run by personal meetings of candidates with the citizens of town Zvolen as well as by facebook. Promotional posters, billboards, banners, leaflets, newspapers and other printed matters and media were design for the municipal elections 2018 in town Zvolen. The planned candidate's debate for the post of mayor in town Zvolen was during the election campaign repealed. Pre-election debate didn't take place. Ing. Roland Schaller, the candidate for the post of mayor and the director of the Sliach airport, argued the bias of the presenter of the show as well as the range of selected topics for discussion. He perceived that it was a part of the Lenka Balkovičová's campaign as a re-candidate for the post of mayor of Zvolen (MARTIN24). Matej Snopko as the candidate for the post of mayor was also unable to escape the negative media campaign because of his lawsuit at the district court. During the campaign the candidates for the post of mayor also answered questions sent by residents of Zvolen to the discussion forum (MY Zvolen). There was also a TV debate broadcast by Central Slovak Television. All five candidates were invited to participate in the TV debate "Municipal Elections 2018" but only two of them, Matej Snopko and Miroslav Kusein, involved to debate. Lenka Balkovičová declined an invitation to attend the TV debate and Ivan Sitár and Roland Schaller apologised for not attending the TV debate.

4. The results of the municipal elections 2018 and interpretation

In the municipal elections 2018 were participated 13 693 voters from 35 067 of eligible registered voters. Voters cast 13 341 valid ballot papers (Urad.zvolen.sk). The turnout in Zvolen in municipal elections in 2018 was higher than in municipal elections in 2014 and reached 39.04%. Despite the increase in voter turnout compared to year 2014, it did not reach the turnout as in year 2010 when 47.38% of voters came to the polling stations (Statistic Slovakia). There

was an increase in the number of candidates for the post of the mayor compared to 2014. In 2014, three candidates applied for the post of the mayor of Zvolen. There were five candidates in 2018 for the post of the mayor of Zvolen – Ing. Lenka Balkovičová, Ing. Miroslav Kusein, Matej Snopko, Ing. Roland Schaller and Ivan Sitár with the support by political party – Kotleba People’s party our Slovakia.

Figure 3: The official results of the municipal elections 2018 in town Zvolen



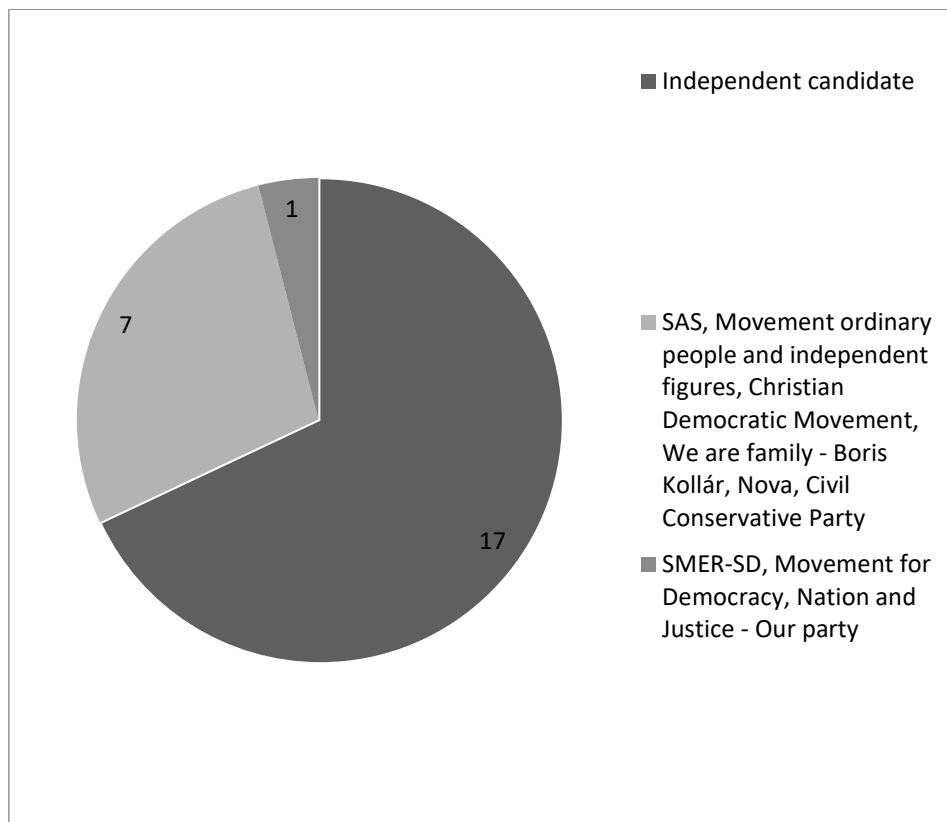
Source: Statistics Slovakia

Mayor, Ing. Lenka Balkovičová, defended her mandate in municipal elections 2018 and reached 5059 votes. Matej Snopko, the member of municipal and regional council, the face of initiative with name “Zvolen for people” and the biggest competitor of Lenka Balkovičová reached 4400 votes. Matej Snopko’s results in municipal elections in 2018 were much better than in 2014. He was only 659 votes away from reaching the post of mayor of Zvolen.

4.1 The municipality of Zvolen in the electoral period 2018 - 2022

There were ninetyeight candidates for six constituencies who were competing for the voters on 10 November 2018 in relation to seats in municipal council. The number of candidates decreased compared to year 2014 (Roháček 2014). Eleven municipal councillors in the legislative term 2014 – 2018 defended their positions in municipal elections 2018 and they stay on the benches in the municipal council of Zvolen another four years.

Figure 4: Political affiliations of municipal councillors in Zvolen (2018 – 2022)



Source: Report with the results of the municipal elections 2018

The municipal council of Zvolen has 25 deputies. After municipal elections 2018 in the municipal council are 68% independent candidates, which is an increase of 28 % on the year 2014. With the support of a coalition of right-wing parties ran 28% of candidates. SMER-SD reached 4 % in the municipal council of Zvolen. At present the municipal council has 22 men and 3 women. In spite of the fact that there has been an increase in independent candidates in our opinion, the uniqueness of the "independence" of the candidate disappears. Regard to previous political party affiliation of candidates we may have justifiable doubts about their independence. While Ing. Miroslav Kusein in previous periods openly proclaimed collaboration with SMER SD, he stand in municipal elections 2018 as the independent candidate. It can be doubted whether Ing. Miroslav Kusein was really independent and not a political candidate in municipal elections 2018.

4.2 Interpretation of the results of the municipal elections 2018

The final results of the municipal elections in Zvolen validated the long-term trend of the popularity of independent candidates. This trend is extended in many other towns in Slovakia not just in Zvolen. The number of non-attached members of the municipal council in Zvolen in 2018 has increased by 4,47% compared to year 2014 and it's a further upward trend. The fact that there is the upward trend of the independent candidates has shown that the behaviour of the voters is less determined by the candidate's political affiliation. This might be

caused by the fact that the policy and the politicians are perceived by voters in Slovakia as unreliable.

Table 1: The number and percentage of non-attached elected mayors and members of municipal councils in Slovakia in 2018, 2014, 2010, 2006

Election year	2018	2014	2010	2006
The number of non-attached mayors	1232	1104	979	895
Percentage	42.42 %	37.95 %	33.67 %	30.83 %
The number of non-attached members of municipal council	7301	6000	4764	3638
Percentage	35.36 %	28.91 %	22.66 %	17.10 %

Source: Statistics Slovakia

The difference between the elected mayor Lenka Balkovičová and Matej Snopko, as the second most successful candidate for the post of mayor of Zvolen, was 659 votes. However Lenka Balkovičová defended the post of mayor of Zvolen, it became evident that many people in Zvolen want change in a further direction of town. The most progressive alternative to the policy of re-elected mayor was citizens' initiative "Zvolen for people" with the leader Matej Snopko. The citizens' initiative won 12 of 25 seats in municipal council (Roháček 2018). Another seven seats in municipal council in Zvolen won initiative „Together for Zvolen“. The initiative "Together for Zvolen" was a supporter of Lenka Balkovičová. Ing. Lenka Balkovičová has campaigned with the wish to finalise on-going projects and plans in a further four-year period. Five other elected candidates for the post of municipal councillors of Zvolen ran in the municipal elections as independents or supported by a coalition of right-wing parties. One candidate for the post of municipal councillor of Zvolen ran with support of these political parties: SMER-SD, Movement for Democracy, Nation and Justice – Our party. According to the results of municipal elections it can be stated that in the municipal council will be more candidates who have been candidates supported by the coalition of right-wing parties than candidates with the support of left-wing parties.

5. The projection

The projection of the further development of Zvolen in the period 2018 - 2022 is that the mayor Ing. Lenka Balkovičová will continue her activities. Development of the town for period 2014 - 2020 was already declared in Action Plan and included several activities. According to the overview of fulfillment of the Program of development of the town in the period 2014 - 2017, the town has not carried out several attractive activities yet. The fulfillment was 23.81 % in 2017 (Development Program of the City of Zvolen 2018). Re-elected mayor of Zvolen announced within election campaign that in the next four years several large projects will be realized in Zvolen. Her priority activities in the period 2018 - 2022 are:

- realization of sports and recreational complex in Bariny,
- renewal of the surroundings of the railway station in Zvolen according to the prepared study,

- reconstruction of the square and Park of Ľudovít Štúr in front of the shopping centre,
- repair of school yards,
- reconstruction of the surroundings in front of the primary school in the city centre,
- settlement of ownership over land and reconstruction of the rest of the road to the dam,
- construction of roundabout at the entrance to the town from Banská Bystrica,
- improving parking situation and construction of a new parking house in town,
- the northern road bypass of the town of Zvolen.

It is assumed that the re-elected mayor will find sufficient support among the municipal councillors in Zvolen for the implementation of several mentioned activities. Several of these activities are the same with the goals of those who did not support Ing. Lenka Balkovičová during municipal elections, but they are interested in solving these issues. Re-elected mayor announced in relation to some of the identified activities the financial funds and support. However, there are also problems and issues in relation to which were visible diametrically different proposals for solutions by the initiative "Zvolen for People" during the previous period 2014 – 2018. The biggest argues were related in financial means for the reconstruction of the existing swimming pool in Zvolen. The issue was also the revitalization of the swimming pool "Neresnica" and the proposal for the construction of a brand new swimming pool. The initiative "Zvolen for People" clearly supports the revitalization of the already existing swimming pool "Neresnica" when a petition among the citizens was launched to save this swimming pool (Petície.com). The previous management of the town has been accused of not supporting the mentioned swimming pool by enough financial funds. The intention to invest into to the construction of a brand new swimming pool instead of maintaining the functionality of the existing swimming pool "Neresnica" was also considered by initiative "Zvolen for People" as illogical. Many residents of Zvolen share the view of this initiative in the sense that it is more effective to reconstruct the existing buildings in the town instead of building a brand new complex and funding long-term mortgage or using the reserve (Samosprava.zvolen.sk 2018).

According to our projection the differences of opinion will cover the issue of dam in the constituency Nr. 1. because many citizens in relation to dam call for creating the zone for relax and recreation. This issue was concluded by previous municipality of Zvolen in period 2014 - 2018 without visible results and with statement that the dam is run by management of river and not by the town and that the land surrounding belongs to private persons. According to these arguments we can indetify that an initiative in the direction of overcoming the mentioned barriers by re-elected mayor seems to be unrealistic and unwilling. The initiative "Zvolen for People" takes the opposite view to this issue and has intention to realize a recreational zone (Zvolenpreludi.sk 2018). The problem is also creation of enviromentally friendly urban public transport in town due to resignation of using compressed natural gas by the current bus operator.

6. The conclusion

Nearly half of the seats in the municipal council of Zvolen were filled in municipal elections 2018 by candidates supported by initiative "Zvolen for People". Initiative "Zvolen for

People” is a strong promoter of Matej Snopko who is the biggest critic of the re-elected mayor of Zvolen. According to the results of the municipal elections 2018, we indicated serious and growing interest of the inhabitants of the town in change. The citizens of Zvolen expressed during the municipal elections 2018 their sympathy for independent candidates. The credibility of political parties is decreasing in general. The abovementioned trend is all over the Slovak republic not just in Zvolen. The results of the municipal elections 2018 in Zvolen showed that there is a strong polarity among the inhabitants of Zvolen in the field of setting priorities related to the further running and strategic development of the town. The re-elected mayor will try to find a support for the implementation of some activities which were set by her or started in the previous period in the ranks of the municipal councillors. We assume that the re-elected mayor will find supporters for many of these activities among the independent municipal councillors and others who were supported by initiative “Zvolen for People”. The reason is that some of these activities were included in their election programmes. On the other hand, it is probable that there will continue argues and differences in determining future strategic development of the town. Initiative “Zvolen for People” has a chance of succeeding in the adoption of some proposals from its election programme.

References

- BALKOVIČOVÁ, L. (2018). [online] <https://www.facebook.com/balkovicova.sk/>
Martin24: SCHALLER, R. (2018). *Primátorom Zvolena sa chcem stať v čestnom súboji* [online] <https://martin.dnes24.sk/r-schaller-primatorom-zvolena-sa-chcem-stat-v-cestnom-suboji-313319>.
- MOJŽIŠOVÁ, Ľ. (2018). MY Zvolen. *Pýtate sa. Odpovedajú kandidáti na primátora Zvolena* [online], <https://myzvolen.sme.sk/c/20952885/pytate-sa-odpovedaju-kandidati-na-primatora-zvolena.html>.
- Peticie.com: Petícia za záchranu majetku občanov vo Zvolene – kúpaliska Neresnica [online] <https://www.peticie.com/neresnica>.
- Program rozvoja mesta Zvolen (2018). Akčný plán [online] http://strategia.zvolen.sk/download_file_f.php?id=1011022
- ROHÁČEK, F. (2014). *VOLBY 2014. Zoznam kandidátov na poslancov mestského zastupiteľstva vo Zvolene* [online], <http://zvonline.sk/volby-2014-zoznam-kandidatov-na-poslancov-mestskeho-zastupitelstva-vo-zvolene/>.
- ROHÁČEK, F. (2018). *Výsledky volieb: Lenka Balkovičová ďalej primátorkou, v zastupiteľstve dominantný Zvolen pre ľudí* [online] <https://zvonline.sk/vysledky-volieb-lenka-balkovicova-dalej-primatorkou-v-zastupitelstve-dominantny-zvolen-pre-ludi/>.
- Samosprava.zvolen.sk (2018). *Uznesenie mestského zastupiteľstva Zvolen* [online] http://samosprava.zvolen.sk/download_file_f.php?id=973993.
- SME.sk (2010). *SME Volby* [online] <https://volby.sme.sk/komunalne-volby/2010/vysledky/banskobystricky-kraj/zvolen/zvolen>.
- Stredoslovenská televízia (2018). *Komunálne voľby 2018 – Zvolen* [online] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6JOSKdUArNI&fbclid=IwAR3XCtwPtYs7zaeEnJ5GI5IUsUgnxy4C7QEiH25HcKnifubJbuYbOHNm534>.
- Štatistický úrad SR (2018). *Voľby do orgánov samosprávy obcí* [online] https://slovak.statistics.sk/wps/portal/ext/themes/elections/oso/about!/ut/p/z1/jZHNcoMgFEYfiQ9BxSXaiKSaCKhJ2XRcdZxp0y46ff4a66I_Uww75p5zufeDeHIm_jJ-TE_j-_R6GZ_n-4NPHoe6FXIOJeCaDHPwvDuKNNNo3MTktgEn1FyAOdgfdyVbZPafgMfFzWRpjXD0MUE

NUQjOqcOh7oExXPwD47-

3R3BdzWVcml5ZC89UvlKx4WgOiVjG0rHqbGcYg2eJvzo9_jsRtfmDAH76AiyFVS7k1LZh
OVj8AXP3StZHMuCru7HGOpysi4eokAujqB4DA_HEb_X7_L3DT_gHAh-
M9Eb8goR_c6uG3QvKhLRhlYeCawttLv54zJj3JT_awpL8!/dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSE
h/.

Urad.zvolen.sk (2018). *Zápisnica z výsledkov komunálnych volieb 2018* [online]
http://urad.zvolen.sk/download_file_f.php?id=1046902.

Zvolen.sk (2018). *Materiál na rokovanie 5. zasadnutia Mestskej rady vo Zvolene dňa 11. 06. 2018* [online] <http://urad.zvolen.sk/komunalne-volby-2018.phtml?id3=137830>.

Zvolenpreludi.sk(2018. [online] <https://www.facebook.com/zvolenpreludi/>.

Zvonline.sk (2014). *Komunálne voľby 2014 - Zvolen* [online] <https://zvonline.sk/komunalne-volby-2014-zvolen/>.