

## 7 Slovakia

### Pathways to a democratic community

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#### Introduction

Any analysis of the transformation process in the post-communist countries tends to reflect the subjective beliefs of the analyst more strongly than is the case with other research topics. This is in part a result of persistent flux in this region that hinders the development of a coherent theoretical framework for the exploration of the post-communist transformation. It is a matter of increasing contention within contemporary academic literature whether *any* theoretical framework could lead to a more objective evaluation. However, in the case of Slovakia, this post-modern dilemma has been not been terribly relevant because the unpredictable fluidity of political and socio-economic developments has rendered the Slovakian case a problematic one for analysis. Indeed, until 1998–9, Slovakia was regarded as the exception among the four Visegrad<sup>1</sup> countries, i.e. the anomaly in central Europe.

Observers of Slovakian politics and society habitually measure phenomena with western yardsticks. Everything that broadly resembles “the western way” is perceived as normal and standard, while deviating features are regarded as strange and unorthodox.

This method is not very precise, since it ignores the dynamic nature of the benchmark (i.e. the western capitalist system in general). Furthermore, it carries the ethnocentric notion that all countries which shy away from the direct path to political plurality and a free market economy are of a pathological nature. This latter tendency often results in a masochistic self-abasement on the part of Slovak commentators when they look at their country’s deviation from the blueprint drawn at the dawn of the post-communist era by western neo-liberal enthusiasts and reformers in the East. This template basically consists of a complete rejection of communism and any form of political regulation of society and economy. The negative reflex with regard to anything perceived as non-western results from living on the “wrong” side of the Iron Curtain. History has proved this to be the case and thus the citizens and politicians of eastern Europe have been found lacking. Finally, this strong tendency to take the

West as the one and only source for explanations as well as possible models for the transformation process has prevented the analysis of east European developments in a dynamic *global* context.

This study addresses these shortcomings in order to balance the exclusive emphasis on the Western model. I will analyze global influences on east European transformation, some positive, and some posing serious challenges. Slovakia’s political and socio-economic trends are explored on the basis of studies written by Slovak and foreign observers, academics, journalists and politicians, as well as on empirical data collected by the World Values Survey. The basic hypothesis is that there are no significant differences with regard to political culture and its manifestations between Slovakia and other central European countries.

Several years after gaining independence, Slovakia finds itself locked in a problematic situation. While the transformation to a market economy was comparatively successful, the results of political reforms remain, at the least, ambivalent. Hopes for a continuous and linear unfolding of democracy and its institutional and legislative environment were disappointed throughout the 1990s. The situation improved after political changes in 1998.

Moreover, the election results of 2002 can be seen as a major turning point for the country that could help to eliminate the remaining discrepancy between economic and political reform. Though it shared a common starting point with the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, why has Slovakia followed a different path?

The simplest answer is that in 1993 Slovakia had to start building state institutions from scratch. Furthermore, the new state differed from its peers to some extent – in terms of economic development, ethnic homogeneity and proximity to the West. It most definitely lacked the experience of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary in governance and administration.

While all these factors undoubtedly play an important role, we also have to pay attention to societal and political *culture* if we want to understand both the tensions within Slovak society and between Slovakia’s representatives and the international community. We have to bear in mind that the post-communist societies (and this might be particularly true for Slovakia) embody only few traditions of pluralist democracy, if any. Consider that Slovakian citizens aged more than 80 years in 1993 had experienced seven regimes and eight different constitutions in their lifetimes, all without moving to another country. Only two of these periods could be considered democratic.

If we want to fully comprehend the contemporary Slovak pathway to democracy, we should first identify its historical roots and then describe its main features. This means in the first instance we have to examine the country’s *non-democratic* traditions. Like other post-communist states, Slovakia has a mixed tradition of democracy and authoritarianism with roots

going back at least to the early nineteenth century and the Slovak emancipation movement. Furthermore Slovakia belongs to the countries reflecting the cultural and religious heritage of two empires – namely that of the Habsburgs and the Soviet/Leninist regime. I will give a brief account of these features in the following section.

### A brief history of Slovakia

Slovakia became a part of the Habsburg Empire after the defeat of the Turks in the battle of Mohacs in 1526. Through several politically calculated marriages, the Habsburg Empire grew to be one of the most diverse and wealthy in European history. However, the Empire's continuing inclusion of diverse groups sowed the seeds of its disintegration at the dawn of the nineteenth century, since the Habsburgs never solved or even acknowledged the problem of integrating the different nationalities and ethnicities living under their rule. Indeed, "the fundamental problem of the 19th century, the bringing together of peoples into some sort of mutual and moral relationship with their governments – the problem of which nationalism, liberalism, constitutionalism and democracy were diverse aspects – remained unconsidered by the responsive authorities of central Europe" (Palmer and Colton 1978: 471).

After the Austro-Hungarian *Ausgleich* (Compromise) in 1867, Slovakia was degraded to a Hungarian-ruled suburb. Count Kalman Tisza (1875–90) and his son Istvan (1903–6) pushed an official Magyar nationalism<sup>2</sup> to prevent further marginalization and to homogenize the population. Half of the inhabitants of the Slovakian territory were not ethnic Hungarians. This meant for non-Magyars, and Slovaks in particular, a disintegration of national symbols and heritage. Furthermore, the intelligentsia and its instruments – Slovak language, schools, newspapers and cultural and academic institutes – were closed or severely restrained (Lipták 1998).

The Slovak national movement was in a state of crisis after the closing of *Matica slovenská*<sup>3</sup> and three Slovak-speaking gymnasiums in 1875. The Hungarian government sought to weaken the national consciousness of all minorities and severely limited their right of political participation. A National Congress of Romanians, Serbs and Slovaks met in Budapest on 10 August 1895 and issued a 22-point decree on cooperation in pursuing national and political rights of all suppressed nationalities. The Hungarian answer was persecution of some participants, as well as censorship and increased monitoring of the political activity of non-Magyars.<sup>4</sup> Only 20 percent of citizens were entitled to vote. District functionaries, who sometimes decided according to their individual preferences whom they would allow to vote, controlled elections. Slovakian representatives in the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest were rare. There were just four in 1901, two in 1905, seven in 1906 and three in 1910. Slovaks held only 2 percent of civil service positions in the year 1910 (Lipták 1998: 21–2).

This experience of coercive Hungarian assimilation challenged Slovak political identity. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Slovakia was an underdeveloped country, largely agrarian in nature, with hardly any cultural or academic institutions. It was at this time that the Slovak diaspora in the United States became an important voice in the call for autonomy. The more than 700,000 emigrants helped to create a national identity outside Slovakia (Gawdiak 1989: 90). One expression of this development was the Cleveland Agreement, signed in October 1915, that pledged to "connect the Czech and Slovak nations into a federal union of states with complete national autonomy" (Chovanec 1994: 94). The Pittsburgh Pact, concluded in May 1918, further strengthened the movement for an independent nation-state.

The Allied victory at the end of World War I witnessed the collapse of central and eastern Europe's great multinational empires and the beginnings of the Russian revolution. The aspirations of the Slovak diaspora in America were implemented when the Czechoslovakian state emerged from the Paris Peace Negotiations in 1918. President Woodrow Wilson's 14 Points, specifically Points V and X, guaranteed that the principle of national self-determination would be granted to the nations that were newly created from the remains of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Central Europe was meant to acquire a Wilsonian, not a Bolshevik flavor.

The merging of Czechs and Slovaks was a political calculation on both sides, because it allowed them to form a voting majority within the constitutional framework of the First Republic.<sup>5</sup> The Czechs regarded the Slovaks as a counterweight against the Sudeten Germans living in Bohemia, while the Slovaks regarded the Czechs as Slavic brothers and protectors against Hungarian assimilation. Both sides benefited from the creation of Czechoslovakia. The Czechs were much better prepared than Slovaks to undertake the enormous administrative and governing functions required. They benefited from their experience under Habsburg Austria, which allowed them to draw personnel from a trained cadre of bureaucrats and intelligentsia to staff positions in administration, diplomacy and the military. Slovakia on the other hand basically had to invent brand new institutions after shaking of the yoke of Hungarian rule. The "re-Slovakization of Slovakia" got under way. An entire school system was founded, publication of Slovak newspapers and journals increased, a radio broadcast industry was started and cultural institutions began to flourish. However, the Czechs' advantageous position, apparent from the very beginning of the Czechoslovakian state, allowed for a more pronounced role and visibility for the Czechs in governance. This led to the impression on the part of the Slovak population that the country was becoming a centralized state controlled from Prague rather than the initially planned federal republic.

Slovaks were nonetheless granted better conditions for fostering their own identity during the First Republic than under Hungarian rule. Great

effort was focused on rebuilding and reforming Slovak society and national institutions. Another important factor was the concept of "Czechoslovakism." This ideology proclaimed that Czechs, Moravians and Slovaks formed one "Czechoslovak" nation, a brotherhood led by a strong central government in Prague. Over time, the treatment of Slovakia from Prague became paternalistic, as the Czechs tended to think *they* were able to determine what was the best for the whole country.<sup>6</sup>

The signatories of the Munich Agreement of 29–30 September 1938 sealed the fate of the First Republic. A new government was formed in Czechoslovakia after Beneš resigned on 4 October 1938. Dr. Emil Hácha, the chairman of the Supreme Court, became the new president and nominated Dr. Jozef Tiso as administrator of the autonomous Slovak government (Lettrich 1993: 102).

After Munich, confusion reigned on the question how an autonomous Slovakia would fit into the structure of the Federal Republic. It soon became clear that the Germans intended to form a Protectorate in the Czech part, thus accommodating the Sudeten Germans living there, and to allow Slovakia to exist as a separate state, albeit controlled by Berlin. On 21 December 1938, the Chief of the German General Staff signed an amendment to an earlier order declared by Hitler on 17 December calling for the liquidation of Czechoslovakia (Lipták 1998: 174). Slovakia became an "independent" state with the Catholic priest Jozef Tiso as President. Germany began directing Slovak foreign and military policy shortly after the March declaration of Slovak independence and Tiso's government introduced legislation on the deportation of thousands of Jews from Slovakia.

The Slovak National Uprising (1944) was the defining moment for the Slovaks during World War II. It is one of the most important events in Slovak history and is an impressive example of individual patriotism and sacrifice on the part of both soldiers and civilians who participated in the struggle to defeat Nazi Germany.

The Czechoslovak Republic was re-created on 4 April 1945 in Košice under the leadership of the formerly exiled President Eduard Beneš. After the elections one year later, the Czechoslovak Communist Party started to infiltrate key ministries of the government and began laying the groundwork for an eventual take-over (Ďurica 1996: 213).<sup>7</sup> Communists gained control of the ministries of information, internal trade, finance and the interior and began activities to suppress political opposition (Ďurica 1996: 214). The communist coup d'état on 25 February 1948 effectively ended any kind of independent Slovak politics. The speed of the collapse of the Democratic Party surprised every observer. The communists immediately took control of the state security apparatus and started Stalinist purges and show-trials. The Czechoslovak political system was forced completely into the Stalinist mould and was subordinated to the pursuit of Soviet interests in Europe. A reform movement led and represented by Alexander Dubček that culminated in the so-called "Prague Spring" failed and

was ended by the invasion of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact forces on 21 August 1968. Gustáv Husák became Chairman of the Communist Party in early 1969 and immediately re-established rigid party control over the whole society. He remained in a leading position until the end of communism in Czechoslovakia.

### Post-communist Slovakia in retrospect

I will analyze the developments in Slovakia since 1989 in two sections. The first deals with the period from the collapse of communism in November 1989 until the June 1992 elections and the consequent dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Republic (formerly Czechoslovakia) on 1 January 1993 (the two events are fundamentally interconnected). The second covers the consolidating rule of Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and its two coalition partners, the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS). The short interregnum of 1994, marked by Mečiar's fall after a vote of no confidence and the resulting early September 1994 elections, will also be analyzed here. Special attention is given to the end of this period and the September 1998 and September 2002 elections, and their impact on the image of the Slovak state, both nationally and internationally.

Each transition toward democracy has its own unique characteristics and I will use the case of Slovakia to show that, on the one hand, it is possible to manage a complicated undertaking like dividing a country peacefully. On the other hand, I will demonstrate that the Slovak case is also as an example of a transition associated with negative factors such as nationalism, xenophobia and renewal of authoritarianism. Are these ingrained in Slovak political culture? If so, how can we understand contemporary developments in Slovakia?

The response of the Slovak population to the post-1989 changes was in many respects similar to that in other post-communist countries, but it also features some unique characteristics. The most notable was the prevailing ambiguity with regard to the direction of the transition: should it be a transition toward democracy or a "new model" of authoritarianism? The priority of nationalistic demands and an independent nation-state gave observers the impression that Slovaks might prefer to live under a non-democratic state of their own nationality rather than accept a "democratically inclusive" non-national state. They might be ready to support a non-democratic government to achieve their national goals rather than press for full democracy (Shain and Linz 1995: 96).

### Slovakia between 1989 and 1993

The brief period between the collapse of communism and the creation of a Slovak independent state was marked by a highly politicized struggle

between the Slovak and the Czech elites about the future shape of the federation. This struggle took place in the context of a complex transformation process. The process, directed from Prague by federal politicians, involved economic and political reforms in line with the standard neo-liberal transformation package. In economics, the reforms included rapid liberalization, restructuring and small- and large-scale privatization. In the political sphere, institutions and procedures that previously played only a cosmetic role were to be transformed into genuine organs of a democratic state that embody the principles of plurality, tolerance and compromise. Only then, it was assumed, would the east European identity and the accompanying negative externalities fade. The reintegration into western civilization would follow, and with it all the benefits of a capitalist market economy rooted in democratic governance.

This posed serious challenges to the unity of Czechoslovakia. The two parts of the federation brought with them different legacies, not only from the recent past but also from more distant history. However, separation was not inevitable. First of all, the now two republics were closer in terms of basic economic and social indicators at the time of the separation than at any other time in their shared history. Second, public polls conducted before, during and after the division indicated that the majority of both Czechs and Slovaks favored the preservation of the Czechoslovakian state. Third, those who pushed for Slovakia's independence and positioned themselves at the forefront of the independent state after its creation had no history of commitment to emancipation. They were opportunists and populists. Yet many Slovaks did believe that the existing Federation was to their disadvantage, and thus they voted for political parties that promised to represent Slovak grievances. In the first chaotic and difficult years of the new democratic regime, the Slovak question provided a popular and accessible issue with which parties could rally political support. The channeling of popular discontent into Slovak nationalism turned out to be populism's easy solution for many difficult questions. This led to a radicalization of the debate around the shape of the future state. Ultimately, however, the fact that the reform policies of the new independent Slovak state did not differ dramatically from those promoted by the former federal Prague government testifies to what were in fact many shared aspirations.

Taking a closer look at this complex picture, there is no doubt that the transition initially influenced the Slovak economy more negatively than the Czech economy. Slovakia faced higher unemployment figures and the level of foreign investment was lower. Furthermore, Slovakia's heavy industry – a legacy of communist modernization and equalization policies – proved to be difficult to restructure and/or privatize. Slovakia differed slightly from its Czech counterpart with regard to ideological profiles prevalent within society, due to a milder period of normalization after 1968. Its dissident community was less active and the Slovak population was more inclined to tolerate state intervention (social planning) and

paternalism. One of the causes for different political and ideological orientations in Slovakia and the Czech Lands was the different political arrangements established in the two republics during the normalization period following the Warsaw Pact army's invasion of Czechoslovakia. The purge in the Czech Lands after 1969 led to a complete turnover of the elites within political and administrative structures. The division and alienation between the communist regime and the society was broad and clearly accentuated. On the other hand, the Slovaks did at least achieve federation and vainly hoped that this would protect them from encroachment on the part of the communist regime. The logic behind this naive belief was that Slovak communist rulers would be more understanding with regard to Slovak issues and sentiments than those ruling from Prague. On the surface, normalization in Slovakia was a less stormy experience. Even though there were widespread purges of thousands of communists in Slovakia and the existential persecution of many others, in many cases the doors were left open for those expelled from the Party and/or work to make a comeback. A far greater proportion of those Slovaks who were active in the 1960s were gradually co-opted into the political and administrative structures. In addition, the rate of economic and social growth was comparatively higher in Slovakia than in Bohemia. Increasing prosperity was understood as the regime's achievement, although it was paid for with environmental devastation and further growth of the economic gap between Slovakia and the West. Thus Slovaks were more inclined to rely on and trust in the state than their Czech counterparts. These factors would increase Mečiar's appeal. Unexpressed dissent between Czechs and Slovaks with regard to issues such as the interpretation of Czechoslovakia's birth or the conduct of the two republics during World War II added to an atmosphere where Slovak independence seemed to be the only alternative.

The differences between the Czechs and Slovaks escalated in the June 1992 elections, where they found political expression. Two parties based on national lines won the elections and proved to be unable to compromise. The leaders of the Czech-based Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and the Slovak-based HZDS, Václav Klaus and Vladimír Mečiar respectively, opted to dissolve the federation. The dissolution took place on 1 January 1993, without a referendum.

While the transition to independent statehood proved to be relatively easy for the Czech Republic – she inherited the capital city and appropriated formally federal institutions – Slovakia faced the problem of building a new state almost from scratch.

### **Slovakia under Mečiar's rule 1994–8**

A number of Slovak political scientists and foreign observers argue that, after the separation, Slovakia left the transformation path that was clearly

set out by the federal government in Prague (Carpenter 1997; Kaldor and Vejvoda 1997; Szomolányi and Gould 1997; Fish 1999). Undoubtedly, there was a tendency toward regression that was intensified after the early 1994 elections. From this election a coalition government emerged in which the Movement for Democratic Slovakia, the Association of Workers of Slovakia and the Slovak National Party participated. It was led by Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. This coalition government constituted a majority which meant that the opposition was plainly excluded from decision-making. Furthermore, important functions were taken over by the coalition parties' candidates. In parliamentary committees, the coalition MPs held a two-third majority, that led the input of the opposition MPs to remain largely irrelevant.

These circumstances allowed Mečiar's government to abuse its power. It was able to break constitutional laws, disregard verdicts of the Constitutional Court, and develop and foster dubious economic relations. A striking illustration of deficiencies in democratic governance is the case of František Gaulieder, an MP expelled from parliament because he quit the Movement for Democratic Slovakia parliamentary caucus. In a letter to Ivan Gašparovič, speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic (Slovak Parliament), Gaulieder stated his intention to remain in parliament as an independent deputy. Within days, however, Gašparovič received another letter – allegedly from Gaulieder, but later denounced by the latter as fraudulent – stating that the former HZDS member would resign his seat. The case was referred to the parliament's mandate and immunity committee, in which the government coalition held the majority. Despite the fact that the committee's chairman agreed that the second letter had not been written by Gaulieder, the committee recommended that the letter be accepted. Consequently, the ruling majority in parliament voted to accept the resignation of deputy Gaulieder and to replace him with an HZDS substitute. Despite a verdict of the Constitutional Court that declared this act unconstitutional, and public protests on Gaulieder's behalf, the parliamentary majority maintained its position. Only in 1998 and 1999 did the newly formed parliament acknowledge what had occurred and provide moral and financial compensation to Mr. Gaulieder.

Among other unsavory episodes was the strange abduction of President Michal Kováč's son to Austria and the state authorities' reluctance to investigate his disappearance. Another was the involvement of Mečiar's government in privatization schemes which discontinued coupon privatization and instead redistributed property on the basis of direct sales to predetermined buyers through a Mečiar-controlled Fund of National Property. Especially revealing were the cases of Nafta Gbely, Ironworks Košice and Devín Bank (Mikloš 1998).

As a result of this deterioration of politics in Slovakia, a clear political polarization emerged by the mid-1990s. The cleavage was not along clas-

sical partisan (i.e. ideological) lines, but along a socio-political and somehow cultural axis. Two broad political camps can be distinguished (Mesežnikov 1998). The first, represented until September 1998 through the governing coalition parties, consisted of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia, the Association of Workers of Slovakia and the Slovak National Party. The second broadly encompassed the opposition parties from both the left and the right, i.e. the Christian Democratic Party, Party of the Democratic Left, Democratic Union, Democratic Party, Social Democratic Party of Slovakia, parties of the Hungarian Coalition and the Slovak Green Party. In 1996, the Christian Democratic Party, the Democratic Union and the Democratic Party established the so-called Blue Coalition. In 1997, the Social Democratic Party of Slovakia and the Slovak Green Party joined and formed the Slovak Democratic Coalition.

The first camp could be characterized as a grouping of national-authoritarian parties that pursued politics in a confrontational manner and preferred unilateral decision-making and enforcement to compromise and agreement. In contrast, the second camp was anti-authoritarian in nature and had a strong democratic and pro-European leaning. The September 1998 elections ended the semi-authoritarian government led by Mečiar – and put a halt to Slovakia's growing “democratic deficit.”

Besides this polarization, tensions among legislative, executive and judicial organs were a feature of the mid-1990s. The conflict between President Michal Kováč and Prime Minister Mečiar and his government was especially pervasive. It actually resulted in a “temporary” elimination of the Presidency after a failed and muddled referendum (Mesežnikov and Bútorá 1997). Conflicts between the legislative majority and the government on the one side and the judiciary on the other were reflected in the former's refusal to submit to the latter's verdicts. It could be stated, therefore, that the division of power between the main state organs remained incomplete. Indeed, the struggle for their positioning and their role in Slovak political life continued until at least 1998.

Mečiar's rule has been described as unstable though still formally democratic, since the struggle over rules and procedures took place *within* the existing (formal) framework of democratic institutions (Szomolányi and Gould 1997). This leads to another conundrum, namely the notion that having a democratic institutional framework does not necessarily mean having a functioning democracy. For instance, while laws were passed in a semblance of a democratic procedure, they were often ineffectual, since the executive force were not able (or willing) to enforce implementation.

This rather unstable political environment was also reflected in the realm of international affairs. It accounts for the disqualification of Slovakia in the west European and transatlantic integration processes. During the 1997 summit in Madrid, Slovakia was excluded from the group of countries

included in the first wave of NATO enlargement, despite its obvious military readiness. Furthermore, notwithstanding the country's impressive macroeconomic performance (at least until 1996/7) – and its status as an associated member of the European Community (EU). – it was not invited to further integration talks until the end of 1999. Thus the mid-1990s were years of lost opportunities for Slovakia in the field of international relations.

Despite the overall negative political development in Slovakia after 1994, economic performance improved until 1996/7 (Mikloš 1998). Indeed, the years 1994 and 1995 were marked by a revival and macroeconomic stabilization. However, 1996 brought a growing deficit. Low inflation rates and a stable currency were maintained through a strict monetary policy, involving high interest rates, which did not encourage investment. The biggest problem was a tendency of Mečiar's government to restructure economic policy according to its own interests. Lack of transparency and circumvention of laws – e.g. in the privatization process – further discouraged foreign investment and hindered economic growth. The blocking of reforms resulted in a severely imbalanced state and a slowing down of growth rates. The end of the decade therefore was characterized by attempts to stabilize the economy, to complete general reforms and to start new, more demanding reforms. These efforts were clearly expressed in the government's programmatic declaration after 1998 elections and guided its first moves toward policy implementation.

### The September 1998 elections

The September 1998 elections signified a break with the policies and conduct of the previous government. Although HZDS still received the

*Table 7.1* Gross Domestic Product GDP<sup>a</sup> rate (at constant prices), various years, %, Slovakia

Year	GDP growth
1994	4.9
1995	6.7
1996	6.2
1997	6.2
1998	4.1
1999	1.9
2000	2.2

Sources: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic – quoted from: *National Human Development Report. Slovak Republic 2000*. Bratislava, UNDP, 2000 p. 19 (for year 2000, from Kollár and Mesežnikov 2001: 19).

Slovakia ranked with GDP purchasing parity power in US\$ in 1997 (7.860) between the Czech Republic (10.380) and Hungary (6.970) (Fuchs and Klingemann 2000: 12).

#### Notes

a GDP revised by ESA 95 methodology. Data for 1994 to 1996 are final; data for 1997 to 1999 are preliminary.

largest single share of votes, the former opposition gained a constitutional majority in the Parliament. The election turnout was very high. Over 80 percent of eligible Slovaks voted – thanks to the participation of many young people and first-time voters.<sup>8</sup> The ballot thus rejected “Mečiarism” and voted for those parties committed to the redirection of Slovakia's path toward democratic consolidation and integration within the West (the two are considered virtually identical goals).

After month-long talks, a coalition agreement was reached on 28 October 1998 between the Slovak Democratic Coalition, the Party of Democratic Left, Party of the Hungarian Coalition and the Party of Civic Understanding. Theoretically, the new government had the support of 93 MPs – a constitutional majority. It sent out strong signals to the international community immediately, since it was committed to return to the path to Europe. Indeed, European integration is one of the most important challenges the new leaders are facing.

However, factions within the two strongest parties, Slovak Democratic Coalition and the Party of Democratic Left, might turn out to be the main source of tension within the government coalition. This in turn complicates and inhibits cooperation between the coalition partners in fulfilling the government program. Since the 1998 elections, three new political parties appeared on the Slovak political landscape: the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union founded by representatives of the Slovak Democratic Coalition led by Prime Minister M. Dzurinda; the SMER (meaning “direction”) founded by Robert Fico, a former Vice-Chairman of the Party of the Democratic Left; and the Alliance of New Citizens, or ANO (meaning “yes”) led by Pavol Rusko, the owner of the country's most popular TV station (Markiza).

In fact, Slovakia's new government has succeeded in transforming the country's image abroad, but it still needs to convince analysts that it is able to tackle problems at home. In 1999, the Dzurinda government accepted this challenge. Since this is not the place for details, it might be sufficient to indicate that after the NATO's fiftieth anniversary summit in Washington in April 1999, the prospect for Slovakian participation in the second wave of NATO enlargement became salient. As for the EU, the year's progress in Bratislava was enough to overcome former scruples with regard to Slovakian membership. The Council of Ministers' meeting in Helsinki (December 1999) decided that Slovakia should be invited to start pre-accession talks in 2000. Up to October 2002, Slovakia had closed 27 negotiation chapters and entered a qualitatively new phase of negotiations with the EU, beyond technical issues to real substantive political themes. Furthermore, Slovakia was invited to join the OECD.

The most concrete achievement of Slovakian foreign policy in 1998/9 was an improvement of relations with neighboring Hungary. The government had pledged to push through a reform of language laws to satisfy the demands of the 500,000-strong ethnic Hungarian minority, which often

complained about unfair treatment by Mečiar. On 17 January 2000, the Slovak cabinet approved the European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages. The charter rules the treatment and protection of minority languages in education, the judiciary, state and local administration, the media and culture. The law can be exercised in communities where minorities make up at least 20 percent of the population. The Slovak cabinet also approved the establishment of a faculty with Hungarian-language tuition within the existing Nitra University. The faculty plans to train Hungarian-language teachers and offer other arts-related degrees. A new conflict between Slovakia and Hungary emerged in June 2001 when the Hungarian Parliament in Budapest approved a law on Hungarians living abroad. Slovakia regards this law as an attempt to intervene with Slovak legislation and does not recognize its validity.

With regard to the economy, problems persist but ambitious plans have been formulated. The government sold a large stake of the state telecom company and wants to lower the budget deficit to 2 percent of GDP. However, the pace of reforms slowed during 1999 as a result of increasing tensions between coalition parties. Furthermore, Slovakia experienced rising unemployment rates and costs of living. During the recent election period, unemployment was the most topical economic concern, with the unemployment rate reaching 14.5 percent in 1998. This trend continued in 1999, as unemployment rates reached 20.1 percent by the end of the year, with the long-term unemployed making up 43 percent of all unemployed persons (22 percent of all unemployed were unemployed for more than two years).<sup>9</sup>

The initial euphoria after 1998 election derived mainly from the new government's promise to fight corruption. It was soon replaced by disappointment. Surveys indicated intensified corruption in Slovakia and public access to information was not broadened. Although there were police investigations into some cases of suspected illegal practices, there were also a growing number of cases of suspected new illegal or quasi-legal politico-economic relationships. In spite of all this, Eugen Jurzyca of the Institute for Economic and Social Reforms stated that there are no significant differences in the economic performance of Slovakia and other central European countries. The growth rate of Slovakia's economy has exceeded its pre-transformation level by 1.5 percent.<sup>10</sup>

Slovakia stands at the beginning of a new era of change, characterized by more sophisticated politics and a slower pace of transformation. The most important pending reforms include the restructuring of the banking sector, the reform of the business environment, changes in the education and health sectors, the public state administration, improved transparency in politics and economics, and harmonization with OECD standards.

### **The September elections 2002: a turning point?**

The results of the September elections – a victory for a bloc of center-right-wing parties – showed that voters nowadays relish a more civilized, statesmanlike and western-style brand of politics than Slovakia has experienced in its first decade of independence. This, above all, is the “message” of these elections. More than three-quarters of voters rejected authoritarian-style leaders, choosing free market politicians who resemble European Union leaders. This choice was made in spite of the probability that these leaders' reform policies will influence living standards and unemployment negatively in the short term.

What has happened? During the election campaigns, many western diplomats had predicted a return to power for the quasi-authoritarian Mečiar and the HZDS, an eventuality which could have become a barrier to Slovakia's NATO and EU membership. Although the HZDS won the election with 19.5 percent of the vote, the result was its lowest return in over a decade on the political stage, and the party was given no chance to form a government. Dzurinda's SDKÚ (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union) took the second place with 15.09 percent, and thus surprised observers who had expected the Dzurinda government's economic belt-tightening since 1998 to alienate voters from the SDKÚ. Together with the center-right-wing Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) with 11.16 percent, Christian Democrats (KDH) with 8.25 percent and the New Citizen's Alliance (ANO) with 8.01 percent, the bloc headed by Dzurinda's party controlled 78 seats in the 150-mandate parliament, thus securing a narrow two-seat majority.

The leftist Smer party of Robert Fico finished third in the elections, with 13.46 percent, a result that excluded him from government. This was entirely unexpected, especially after polls in early September had put him in first place with a chance of reaching 20 percent and anchoring the next cabinet. Fico's recipe for Slovakia's problems was simple – justice, order and taking from the rich to help the poor. Fico's enemies were the ostentatious and illegitimately wealthy, as well as the ostentatious and helpless non-Slovak, including the Roma. The steps proposed to defeat the enemies were just as simple – cutting the Roma's social benefits and forcing the rich to prove the origin of their property. It came as little surprise that Fico was seen in the West as, in the memorable phrase of a German paper, “Mečiar-light,” or that his campaign billboards were defaced by Hitler-like mustaches.

One of the major surprises of the 2002 elections were the results of the unreformed Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) which won 6.32 percent, i.e. an 11-seat legislative caucus in the parliament assembly. This means that communists are returning to the Slovak parliament for the first time in the decade-long history of independent Slovakia. Despite the repressive history of the communist experiment in Czechoslovakia and

the dissolution of the COMECON trading bloc in 1989, the KSS leadership says that it is a modern, forward-looking leftist party working for the interests of Slovak citizens. The KSS remained untouched by refusals from other parliamentary parties to cooperate in the legislature. While rejecting Slovakia's bid for NATO entry as expensive and unnecessary, the KSS did support some measures of integration within the European Union. The surprisingly successful communist result could be seen a response to the political self-destruction of viable socialist alternatives.

The outcome of September 2002 elections reassured Western governments about the maturity of Slovakia's democracy, and about the sincerity of the country's commitment to join the European Union and NATO in the months to follow

### **Making democracy work in Slovakia**

The responses to the challenges after the collapse of communism in Slovakia resemble roughly those of other central European countries (CECs). In part, however, they differ as a result of the country's specific history and political situation. Throughout the 1990s, the level of democratization within Slovak society remained uncertain. Some commentators, as we have seen, altogether denied that democracy had taken hold, and saw its tender shoots swamped by a revived authoritarianism. Certainly, Slovakia's image in international media and organizations deteriorated significantly after 1994. Despite some positive macro-economic achievements, the country was regarded as the most problematic of the Visegrad Four by national and international observers. Since Slovak independence in January 1993, all Slovak governments have unequivocally declared the desire to become regular members of western international structures. However, until 1998, their representatives violated the basic principles of a fair dialogue with NATO and EU.<sup>11</sup> The state authorities received several official and unofficial *démarches* and diplomatic recommendations from western Europe and the United States that urged respect for democratic principles and civil liberties, the freedom of speech in the media and public life and increased respect for minority protection. These had little or no effect on Prime Minister Mečiar's actions. In other words, the message was sent but the receiver remained deaf, showing no signs of any positive reaction. Most exasperating was the Janus-face of Mečiar's foreign policy: it can simply be described as "You behave differently at home and in Brussels" (Wlachovský 1997). Thus it was not surprising that Slovakia was initially excluded from the list of countries invited to talks about NATO enlargement and EU membership. Although the institutional framework defined by the Slovak constitution constitutes a parliamentary democracy with free and fair elections, observers criticized that democratic principles were not implemented in daily political life.

There is a growing body of literature on this phenomenon. While it

recognizes progress in building democratic institutions, the main concern articulated is the stability of these institutions, the actual implementation of democratic principles, the lack of a "spirit of democracy" among ruling elites as well as among the Slovak population. The role of the political elites is crucial, as became evident in Slovakia between 1994 and 1998, years of continued political polarization and behavior which brought the country into international isolation. Although it might sound paradoxical, the most pressing problem in Slovak foreign policy has been (and could be again) the domestic situation; namely the political elite's competitive behavior and their disrespect for democratic rules in the power game. Furthermore, the complaint of a lack of competent personnel legitimizes a recycling model for the recruitment of political personnel (Mihaliková 1996b). The same people appear on stage repeatedly – President Schuster being only one example.<sup>12</sup>

Another remarkable feature of Slovakian political life is that top politicians claim a "political date of birth" after November 1989, disregarding their age and political involvement in the previous regime. Apparently important factors that determine the specific configuration of the political elites of contemporary Slovakia, their attitudes and skills as well as their shortcomings, relate closely to practices and procedures common under communist rule.

Certainly this explains why Slovakia's international isolation in the mid-1990s was often explained by reference to the state's democratic deficit. Two versions of this argument circulated. The pro-Mečiar faction treated it as semantic insidiousness of an "international conspiracy against our young state" supported by "internal enemies of Slovak independence" who might be found in all social strata, in particular among intellectuals. Consequently the therapy was seen in the establishment of a special information agency, journals and media, ideally paid for and controlled by state authorities "to improve the positive image of Slovakia abroad." Simultaneously, the ruling elite tried to limit critics' freedom of speech and access to foreign media. Those critics who promoted the second interpretation of the democratic deficit took a different view. They considered the return of old and the birth of new authoritarian tendencies to be the main reason for the negative international image of Slovakia. In their opinion, only increased respect for basic democratic principles and the rule of law inside the country, as well as a clear orientation for Slovakia's foreign policy, could improve this image.

These sharply contrasting views on national politics were prevalent in the media, in statements of political parties and in everyday conversation. Slovakia appeared on the verge of becoming a divided society. This tendency was intensified by a strategy of the governing coalition, which introduced a kind of loyal mirror-society; that is, after failing to gain control over key civil society groups, HZDS and its allies established their own competing counterpart organizations, e.g. the Association of Slovak



Journalists, the Slovak Youth Congress, the General Free Labor Union and the Association of Mayors. This technique was used to create separate interest groups as well as umbrella organizations, such as the Union of Citizen's Associations and Foundations. The approach even gave rise to the creation of parallel party structures. HZDS inspired the rise of the Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS) to undermine the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) and actively supported the establishment of the Hungarian People's Movement for Reconciliation and Prosperity, which parallels the Hungarian Coalition, and the Civic Liberal Party of Slovakia as a rival to the Democratic Union. Slovak political scientists use the term "party-state corporatism" to describe such "efforts of the ruling party to found its own party-affiliated and party-controlled organizations or to gain control over already existing groups" (Malová 1997: 93–113).

### **Divided society – divided political culture?**

The political culture of post-communist Slovakia represents a kind of cognitive map that can be identified as a specific psychosocial constellation typical for central European countries in transition. No matter how far political and economic change has progressed, transformation processes in Slovakia have been hindered by patterns of thinking and behavior rooted in its past. De-communization appears to be more difficult than many expected. The communist mindset has proved to be harder to change than the institutional framework. Furthermore, even if establishment and procedures of the new democratic institutions will ultimately change mentalities and cultural legacies, it will not happen soon. It may well take a generation to get rid of the vestiges of the past since change must occur at two levels. These are, first, the level of personal commitment (personal values, motivations, drives, thought patterns) and, second, a more hidden level of cultural code typical for a given society (shared and objectified patterns and blueprints for acting and thinking).

Symptomatic of a society thus adrift is a kind of value confusion that manifests itself in political polarization which is much in contrast to the "certainties" characteristic to society and politics under the communist regime.

Not only elites are deeply divided. The entire population is becoming more and more politically polarized. The dividing line goes across families, informal groups and professional associations. A growing number of divorces and mental or psychological disorders are attributable to political squabbles. Perhaps this is not completely different from the situation in Poland or Hungary, but in Slovakia the condition appears especially acute.

Some examples of how political polarization has affected all social strata, regardless of the level of formal education, occupation, age, gender, religion and rural or urban residency might sufficiently demonstrate how severely this "splitting syndrome" has affected Slovakian society.

The patterns of these examples are by no means unique. They have become sufficiently commonplace to be a subject of discussion among political commentators and social and political scientists.

Even close relatives and intellectuals are not immune. Stefan and Jozef Markuš – the former a highly educated lawyer (today the Slovak Ambassador in Hungary), the latter head of Matica Slovenská, a renowned organization established in 1863 to preserve Slovak's language and culture – are politically active and influential public figures. However, they have publicly acknowledged that they do not speak to each other anymore, since they stand on opposite sides of Slovakia's political landscape. Štefan Markuš, summarizing their relationship, says: "well, we exchange Christmas postcards, that's it. I would prefer not to speak about this. It is a rather intimate issue and it hurts ... Slovakia is now sharply cut into two parts. ... Perhaps it is something in the Slovak character, that we are too emotional when it comes to politics" (Dorotková 1998: 2).

Other stories confirm life-long friendships broken due to political misunderstanding and dissent. For example, women who have met regularly for years cease to spend time together due to fierce arguments over Slovakia's independence and their different interpretations of history and politics. These disputes often end in unpleasant personal vituperation, breaking up the traditional Sunday dinner or birthday parties. This sociopolitical split also appears in former dissident Catholic groups whose members hated the communist regime and often gathered illegally to pray and plot. Today, they often cannot find a common language for debate.

The prevalence of a simplistic black and white picture of the world and protracted discussions about the past and present fate of the nation have been observed in all post-communist societies and among their elites. The Slovak variant includes an excessive misuse of history for the sake of political strategies. Politicians indiscriminately invoke events or personalities belonging to past centuries or contemporary Slovakia. Thus it is very popular to cite the 1,000-year oppression of the Slovak nation by Hungarians. Usually this type of argument is used to show who are and always have been our enemies. History is somehow used in a "horizontal" way, to manipulate and mobilize the public.

It is hoped that the improved political atmosphere of recent times will reduce this destructive habit. There are signs that this might be the case. However, the question remains whether the fissures opened up in the 1990s, especially in the Mečiar years, are being permanently mended or only temporarily bridged. The 2002 election campaign proved that Mečiar and his party faced almost complete domestic and international isolation. Slovak political parties joined ranks, with all major election contestants declaring they would not cooperate with Mečiar after elections, whatever the election results. It seems that the man who pushed the country to independence in 1993 was no longer deemed fit to lead the nation a

decade later. The 2002 election results confirmed that a majority of citizens were aware that history would not offer them a chance to join NATO and the EU a second time.

### Past versus current political system

The changes that took place in society and politics in Slovakia after November 1989 – including developments after January 1993 – brought many contradictions. Retrospectively, the majority of Slovaks regard the early 1990s skeptically. This is evident in the succession of names given to events that surrounded the collapse of the old regime. The first poetic term, the “Velvet Revolution,” soon lost its popularity. By 1989, students started to talk about the “Stolen Revolution,” and since then derogatory labels spread, like the “Velvet Outbreak,” the “Communist Riot,” the “Palace Revolution,” or the “Jewish–Bolshevik Conspiracy.”

Dissatisfaction in the mid-1990s mainly concerned the character of the current regime. In one survey 74.8 percent of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that “we are living in democracy,” 76.3 percent believed that “real politics does not respect democratic principles at all,” and 75.4 percent diagnosed the “presence of authoritarian tendencies in our politics” (Mihaliková 1996a: 18). In Slovakia, like in other post-communist countries, a nostalgic tendency to idealize the communist regime thrived in the 1990s, while the suffering under socialism was increasingly negated or forgotten. This became obvious in everyday life, in the (at best) lukewarm acceptance of economic transformation, and in growing anxiety about the future. Citizens seemed to miss the guarantees that had become part of their way of life under the communists.

Opinion surveys recorded almost unanimity among Slovak respondents when they were asked to indicate if they believed the former social security system to be superior over the current regime (94.4 percent). The same results were to be observed for the question of free education (96.9 percent) and free healthcare (97.4 percent) (Mihaliková 1996a: 24).

According to the World Value Survey, the general support of Slovak respondents for the past political system also exceeds the level of support for the current regime:

Table 7.2 Level of support for the past and present political regime, 1999, %, Slovakia

	<i>Low</i>	<i>Medium</i>	<i>High</i>
Past political system	38	29	33
Current political system	46	34	20

Source: World Values Survey.

Slovaks are more supportive toward the past communist regime than other central Europeans. Only 16 percent of Czech respondents and 19 percent of Poles indicate high levels of support for the past political system, while 30 percent of Hungarians did the same.

Economic reform affects the lives of Slovakia's citizens in direct and indirect ways. It is therefore not surprising that they hold strong opinions about the extent, pace and fairness of this process. Even before 1989, a relatively large share of Slovaks systematically underestimated the extent to which a fundamental restructuring of the economy was necessary. They were not sufficiently aware of the fact that the socialist economic system had reached its limits for growth and was functioning at the expense of future generations. Throughout the mid-1990s, a majority of the population believed that the country's economy as it was structured before November 1989 did not require profound changes. That is to say, they had not accepted the need for fundamental transformation of the pre-1989 socialist economy (Table 7.3).

Those who recognized the need for change favored liberal or conservative orientations in economy and politics, namely a pro-Western course. However, for many Slovaks breaking away from communism was also important in that it gave rise to aspirations for independence. Thus the broadly positive sentiment about the end of communism was based on two contradictory impulses. First there was a genuine liberal orientation emphasizing the values of freedom, plural democracy, individual responsibility and a pro-Western foreign policy. The second impulse followed from the strong conviction that sovereignty of Slovakia was a logical outcome of the fall of the communist regime.

Through the mid-1990s, preference for the current political system (including the Mečiar years) seems to have been strongest among men and the younger generation. It was also a function of the level of formal education and command of foreign languages. Surveys indicate that more than 70 percent of students considered the post-communist order preferable to “real socialism.”<sup>13</sup>

At the same time the Slovak population developed a strong feeling of alienation from the “new power.” Levels of confidence in political

Table 7.3 “Did the pre-1989 Slovak economy require changes?,” various years, %, Slovakia

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1997
No, it did not	6	6	6	5	6
Yes, but only minor changes	32	39	46	44	44
Yes, profound changes	49	49	41	44	39
Do not know	13	6	7	7	11

Source: Bútorová, Z. (ed.) (1998) *Democracy and Discontent in Slovakia: a Public Opinion Profile of a Country in Transition*, Bratislava: IVO, Bratislava, p. 24.

institutions (President, Cabinet, Parliament, coalition's deputies and opposition's deputies) are rather low. Apparently people doubt the ability of the new elites to safeguard the interests of the common people. Furthermore, a very strong sense of impoverishment prevailed, a fear of economic failure stemming from social insecurity and a pessimistic evaluation of the effects of economic transformation. As George Schöpflin (1993) has observed, low levels of trust in institutions are a part of the communist heritage. There was, and still is, very little understanding of the role of institutions as stabilizing agents that help to manage problems and prevent power accumulation of elites. Personal relations are regarded as far more authentic than the impersonal world of institutions, which is perceived as strange. Additionally it is personal, not political, loyalty or disloyalty that dominates politics.

A similar degree of high confidence (18.4 percent) in governmental institutions is shown by people in Slovakia and Hungary, compared to 8 percent in the Czech Republic and 14 percent in Poland.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the Slovak army has consistently enjoyed high levels of confidence since 1993 (roughly 70 percent in the mid-1990s). In no neighboring country did the army inspire this level of confidence; nor did any other Slovak institution.<sup>15</sup>

In June 1997, almost 90 percent of Slovakian respondents expressed the conviction that politicians prioritize their own interests and those of their associates. Almost 80 percent believed that nepotism, utilitarianism and careerism prevail in politics. Almost as many thought that, to achieve something, one must have connections either in the government or in the opposition. It was a widely shared opinion that "the rich buy democracy, they have always done so and they always will" (Miháliková 1997: 36).

After a short period of euphoria during and shortly after the "Velvet Revolution," the same attitudes and views that were prevalent during the old regime returned to dominate Slovak political culture in the Mečiar years: "politics is a dirty business."

### **Confusion in value and belief systems**

The development of the Slovak society during the last decade reflects contradicting political traditions, frequent changes in officially declared basic values (both before and after 1989) and a disruption of social structures. Following from, and probably as a result of, four decades of indoctrination, citizens have still not been able to develop and internalize a new hierarchy of values. The communist mentality was not dead in the 1990s, it was simply manifested differently. It remained part of the social consciousness, convictions and behavior of the average citizen and of a large share of politicians in Slovakia. The internalization of communist thinking explains, at least partly, the prevailing preference for strident nationalism, demagoguery and authoritarian patterns of governance. No matter how

enthusiastically the people welcomed the fall of communism in the streets, they were not disposed to a total rejection of the socialist ethos.

One realm of contradictory beliefs in Slovakia is the relationship between the individual and the state. Slovakia has a strong tradition of collectivism and state-paternalist orientations. The results of opinion polls in the mid-1990s confirm that the shift away from the state toward individual responsibility had not taken place by then (and perhaps still has not).

No doubt the nation's severe economic problems are part of the explanation, since they easily stimulate demand for protective state intervention. This attitude corresponds with a low level of support for self-responsibility and contradicts the rather high level of support of individual competition.

The data in Table 7.4 indicate that the main difference between Slovaks, Czechs and Hungarians regarding the ethics of daily life is to be found in the higher share of Slovak respondents who believe that the state should take more responsibility – only 31.9 percent hold the opposite view, compared to 42.9 percent of Czech and 34.0 percent of Hungarian respondents (Table 7.4). With regard to all other items in question, the Czech and the Slovak sample indicate rather similar or even identical values, such as evaluation of competition, the proper fruit of hard work and attitudes toward poverty. Much larger differences are to be found between the former "Czechoslovaks" and Hungarians. As such, this data corroborates my argument that 70 years coexistence in a common state influenced the political culture of the two nations substantially.

Attitudes concerning the role of the state remained rather stable over time. The conviction that the state must retain important functions is widely shared. According to a mid-decade poll, 50 percent of the population opposed comprehensive privatization, almost 75 percent thought economic performance could not improve without serious state intervention and more than 85 percent held that the state should organize cooperation between banks, entrepreneurs and trade unions (Miháliková 1996: 28). These interventionist expectations did not, however, prevent a substantial portion of the population from favoring a free market. Clearly, this denotes confused and openly contradictory orientations among the population. On other occasions the confusion is more subtle; for instance 67.8 percent of the respondents to another poll thought Slovakia was selling off national property while the proportion believing that the country is becoming a colony of western countries was only 52.9 percent. This impression is confirmed by the results of the World Values Survey.

The data show that support for self-responsibility and ethic tolerance in Slovakia remains rather low, especially if compared to the Czech Republic. Nevertheless, the two former constituent parts of the Czecho-Slovak federation are still much closer to each other than to Hungary.

Table 7.4 Values of the community: ethics of daily life, various years, %, East Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary

	East Germany	Czech Republic	Slovakia	Hungary
<i>Ethics of individual achievement</i>				
People should take more responsibility vs. government should take more responsibility	39.7	42.9	31.9	34.0
We need larger income differences as incentives for individual efforts vs. Incomes should be made more equal	49.2	71.0	60.1	38.9
<i>Ethics of individual competition</i>				
Competition is good vs. Competition is harmful	91.1	89.3	89.3	91.0
In the long run, hard work usually brings a better life vs. Hard work doesn't generally bring success - it's more a matter of luck and connections	62.7	67.2	69.1	78.8
<i>Solidarity with the poor</i>				
People are poor in this country because society treats them unfairly	90.2	60.9	64.5	83.9
Poor people in this country have very little chance to escape from poverty	91.9	61.5	63.4	93.7
Government is doing too little for people in poverty in this country	81.3	67.1	66.0	79.7

Source: World Values Survey.

Table 7.5 Citizen support of different types of democratic community at cultural level, various years, %, East Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary

Countries	SRE (%)	SOL (%)	TRU (%)	WET (%)	ETO (%)
East Germany	19	86	24	33	35
Czech Republic	23	51	27	43	30
Slovakia	14	52	26	45	17
Hungary	12	82	22	43	13

Source: World Values Survey.

Notes

SRE: Self-responsibility; SOL: Solidarity; TRU: Trust in others; WET: Work ethics; ETO: Ethic tolerance. Cell entries are percentage of positive support.

### Political participation

The deterioration of the economy, the inability of the political elite to manage mutual coexistence with the Czechs (in Czechoslovakia and, later, the Czech and Slovak Republic) and the increasing number of political scandals progressively undermined the confidence of the Slovak population in state policies and in the legitimacy of state institutions. By the end of 1998 people had lost trust in all political institutions.

They had also lost their illusions about the necessity and benefits of participation in political life (Przeworski 1995).<sup>16</sup> In the mid-1990s, roughly 80 percent of the respondents in a survey believed that citizens should delegate the solutions of important problems to politicians and limit their own involvement to the election of capable representatives and deputies. These citizens did not completely refuse to participate in political life, but indicated that participation should not be too frequent or demanding. Only 19 percent of respondents believed that they should be involved in politics and public life as much as possible (Miháliková 1997: 42).

However, the legalization of rights to associate and to gather together in assemblies encouraged a rapid growth in the number of civil organizations. While, before November 1989, there were only 306 officially registered associations, their number increased up to almost 4,000 voluntary associations in January 1991. In February 1998, there were more than 12,500 associations registered.<sup>17</sup> In Spring 2001, the Ministry of Interior listed 16,849 organizations which could be considered as NGOs in a broad sense. In December 2001, the Slovak Parliament passed the Foundation Law and the amendment of the law about non-profit organizations. These legal norms precisely define the functioning of these types of NGOs. Nevertheless the Slovak party system in the late 1990s was very unstable, and strong bonds between citizens and parties were not established. Thus, political parties did not serve as a basis for an active political life in Slovak society.

Table 7.6 Political involvement, various years, %, East Germany, Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary

	<i>East Germany</i>	<i>Czech Republic</i>	<i>Slovakia</i>	<i>Hungary</i>
<i>Importance of politics</i>				
Very or rather important	47.2	25.9	28.5	27.2
<i>Political interest</i>				
Very or somewhat interested	75.7	55.9	58.0	49.7
<i>Political discussion</i>				
Frequently or occasionally	88.5	81.1	80.3	72.9
Active in one or more voluntary associations	45.6	29.8	27.6	31.5
<i>Protest behavior</i>				
Have done:				
Signing a petition	57.4	26.0	35.3	25.2
Attending lawful demonstrations	21.9	10.8	12.0	9.2
Joining in boycotts	11.2	10.1	11.3	3.2

Source: World Values Survey.

The data indicate that a majority of citizens in the respective countries do not regard participation in politics as a priority in their lives. It is impossible to determine whether this is a result of a conscious or subconscious rejection of absurdities in current politics, or of a more general trend in post-communist societies. All post-communist countries are confronted with rapidly decreasing levels of public interest in membership of political parties. In any case membership in newly created interest groups and organizations was more popular than membership in new political parties, which were somehow connected with the compromised Communist Party in public opinion in every post-communist country. The rejection of party politics is even evident in party names themselves, such as "movement," "forum," "alliance," "union," which try to deny the "party" character of the association.

With regard to types of political participation beyond party memberships, the Slovak respondents score comparatively high, especially in the more passive modes of participation, e.g. signing a petition.

Our findings indicate that "interest in politics" and "participation" measure two different items. The level of interest in politics is obviously higher than the willingness to participate in politics or take part in protests. This is also true for the younger generation that is not at all willing to act through any kind of formal organization, not least political parties. Exceptions are only those young people who consider involvement in politics as the best starting point for their future career. This pattern of behavior is not so distant from communist practices where party membership was the entry for a career.

## The state of society in public perception

How did public opinion reflect the fact that Slovakia failed to be invited to negotiations with the EU and NATO together with the first group of post-communist countries? In October 1997, almost half of the citizens (47 percent) had a critical view of Slovakia's international status. As many as 59 percent thought that the country's international status deteriorated after the 1994 elections (Bútorová 1998: 177). Some 41 percent of the respondents felt this would lead to Slovakia's political, cultural and economic isolation within Europe, with 35 percent believing that the main consequence of poor international standing would be a slowing down of economic growth. Meanwhile, 32 percent foresaw new complications with regard to Slovakia's exports, and 18 percent feared a possible intensification of cooperation with the countries of the former Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the failure of the Mečiar government's policy had not discouraged citizens with regard to European integration. In the cited surveys, 74 percent of people in Slovakia supported membership in the EU, and only 21 percent opposed it. Regarding NATO, there was less unanimity: 48 percent supported membership, while 46 percent were opposed.

There is a broad consensus across all segments of Slovak society regarding the need for European integration: a majority of men and women, respondents with a lower and higher level of formal education, inhabitants of large towns and small villages, ethnic Slovaks and ethnic Hungarians support this aim. The majority of all political parties favor Slovakia's EU accession.

When evaluating the likely impacts of increasing cooperation between Slovakia and the EU, citizens' positive expectations exceed negative ones. They generally expect that integration will bring along more benefits than costs. Respondents to polls give five reasons for EU membership: overall progress, economic improvements and open markets, higher living standards, further integration into Europe through EU structures and financial aid granted by the EU. As for NATO membership, respondents expect these five gains: security and stability in the region, reforms of armed forces and armament industries within NATO structures, military progress and cooperation, NATO support for Slovakia and protection against Russia. Despite the fact that accession requires significant investments in

Table 7.7 "Do you support the entry of Slovakia into the EU and NATO?," various years, (% answers "yes," "no," "do not know") Slovakia

	<i>October 1997</i>	<i>April 1998</i>	<i>June 1999</i>	<i>October 1999</i>	<i>August 2000</i>	<i>December 2000</i>	<i>June 2001</i>
EU	74:14:12	79:11:10	66:24:10	66:25:9	72:19:9	74:21:5	62:26:12
NATO	52:35:13	58:31:11	35:53:12	39:50:11	50:39:11	48:46:6	41:46:13

Sources: Institute for Public Affairs, January 1999–August 2001; MIC, December 2001

the armed forces in order to reach compatibility/interoperability, experts agree that NATO membership will be a cheaper alternative for would-be members than, for example, neutrality (Pírek 1997).

A problem peculiar to Slovakia's European integration is the Roma community. Shortly after an encouraging statement from the EU Commission in July 1999 that Slovakia was doing well in meeting political criteria, a serious problem emerged with regard to the Roma minority. A relatively large group of Slovak Roma began an exodus to Finland and other West European countries and requested political asylum. Those countries, in an attempt to stop the influx of Slovak Roma, suspended its visa-free entry agreement with Slovakia. The Romany migration was perceived as economically motivated and western governments stated that, despite shortcomings in the living conditions of the Roma, Slovakia is a democratic country. Slovak authorities demanded a European harmonization of legislation to cope with the problem of Romany emigration. The "soft" legislation in countries like Finland and Norway, where asylum applicants receive sums several times larger than average Slovak monthly salaries and where applications can take as long as a year to be processed, need to be changed.

Although the EU Commission welcomed the progress made in Slovakia in the field of human rights and minorities, it urged the Slovak government to take all necessary measures to integrate the Roma minority, and especially to overcome discrimination in society and public institutions.

## Conclusion

The agenda since 2002 has been clear and stands in contradiction to the greater part of the first post-communist decade where very little progress was made toward resolution of the ambiguities, contradictions and tensions in Slovak politics and society. Instead, the reinforcement and perpetuation of ambivalence in both domestic and international affairs was the HZDS leader's style.

Mečiar's legacy was a country "isolated at the heart of Europe" (as one western commentator put it) and, at least temporarily, excluded from integration talks. The Dzurinda administration did much to end Slovakia's isolation and made up lost ground. However, EU and NATO accession criteria are still challenging, with the country still struggling with socio-economic problems.

Nonetheless, Slovakia, like the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, was among the first group of countries invited for EU membership and follows its neighbors into NATO. The process of transition has not been completed, though the struggle for the rules of the game seems to be over. At least the crises and conflicts of the 1990s did not lead automatically to the end of the process of democratization. However, there are some crucial empirical results concerning the democratic attitudes of the

citizens. The support for the past political system is significantly higher than the support for the current political system. The belief that the state and not the individual is responsible for his or her destiny is strongly pronounced. The emphasis on the responsibility of the state is even higher than in the other Visegrad countries, which in turn have emphasized state responsibility more strongly than have the western European countries. Apparently, Slovakia's communist legacy has not entirely dissipated.

I am, however, convinced that democratization – and this also includes the attitudes of citizens – will continue, and that the citizens will not become mourning survivors, wailing over the grave of an adolescent democracy. What remains of Slovakia's "democratic deficit" is a product of the configuration of attitudes of the national elites. Thus the future will depend upon the behavior of this elite, the degree of their consensus over the "rules of the game" regarding both domestic and foreign policy as opposed to depending upon direct political participation of citizens.

The road ahead for the country is far from smooth. But the trend is clearly toward maturity. The population's comprehension of political realities evinced by the results of the 2002 elections can be seen as a major turning point for the country – away from political experiments and saviors and toward acceptance of often painful truths about the present and the past.

## Notes

- 1 The "Visegrad Four" is an unofficial name of a consortium of the four central European post-communist countries, i.e. the Czech Republic, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Poland and the Slovak Republic. Before the split of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic in 1993, the group was called the Visegrad Troika. The name was chosen in a meeting of the President of the ČSFR, Václav Havel, the Prime Minister of Hungary, József Antall, and the President of Poland, Lech Walesa, in the north Hungarian city of Visegrad on 15 February 1991. In this meeting the participants signed a declaration to promote close cooperation on the way to European integration and democracy. The meeting recalled a 1335 royal summit at the Castle of Visegrad (then the domicile of the Kings of Hungary), which brought together the kings of Poland, Bohemia and Hungary. They agreed to cooperate closely in politics and economics, and were thus a source of inspiration for their late successors to launch a successful central European initiative (see [www.visegrad.org](http://www.visegrad.org)).
- 2 The Nationalities Act came into force in 1868.
- 3 *Matica slovenská*, the preserver of Slovak literary artefacts and culture in Martin, was closed by the Hungarians in 1875 and many of its assets confiscated.
- 4 *Dejiny Slovenska III (od roku 1848 do konca 19.storocia)*, (Neografia, Martin, 1992), pp. 689–91.
- 5 1921 census figures report 8,819,455 (65.5 percent) of citizens of Czech or Slovak nationality out of a total population of 13,613,172 Czechoslovak inhabitants. Slovaks comprised 1,913,792 of this figure. A significant number of Germans, 3,218,005 (23.4 percent), also lived within the First Republic's borders. See *Dejiny Slovenska IV* (Neografia, Martin, 1992), p. 32.

- 6 Also see *Slovenska IV* (Neografia, Martin, 1992), p. 46.
- 7 In Slovakia, the Democratic Party gained 62 percent, the communists 30.4 percent, the Workers Party 3.1 percent and the Freedom Party 3.7 percent of the votes (Đurica 1996: 213).
- 8 According to a daily *SME* some 320,000 first-time voters participated in the September elections.
- 9 Data quoted from *National Human Development Report. Slovak Republic 2000* (Bratislava, UNDP, 2000), pp. 20–1.
- 10 Jurzyca argues:

The per capita regional gross domestic product value for Slovakia ranks fourth among central European countries, behind Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The highest level of per capita GDP of all central European countries was recorded for the region of Prague, which is 120 per cent of the European Union average and 311 per cent of the average for central European countries. This is followed by the region of Bratislava, representing 97 per cent of the European Union average, and 250 per cent of the average for central European countries.

(UNDP 2000: 25)

- 11 The seven-month tenure of Jozef Moravčík's coalition government (March–September 1994) could be seen as an exception to this trend.
- 12 Rudolf Schuster's political career started under communism. Previously, he had a high position in the Communist Party hierarchy. After 1989, he became the Chairman of the Slovak National Council and remained in this position until the first free parliamentary elections in summer 1990. After the communal elections of 1994, he became Mayor of Košice and strengthened his position as a charismatic, active and successful local politician. Schuster decided to create his own party after his failed negotiations with SDK and SDL, and when it became clear that he had no chance to be elected President by the MPs of the former Parliament. After the 1998 elections, Schuster was nevertheless appointed by SDK as its candidate for the presidential election, which he won.
- 13 See various surveys by Focus, MVK and Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.
- 14 *Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*. No. 8, Fessel + GfK Austria, Politische Kultur, 1998.
- 15 For international comparison see: *Central and Eastern Eurobarometer*. No. 8, Fessel + GfK Austria, Politische Kultur, 1998; regular opinion polls conducted by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic as well as different Slovak survey agencies confirm this trend over the course of the 1990s.
- 16 The situation in Slovakia regarding mistrust and the willingness to participate in politics is very similar to other post-communist countries. Przeworski notes:

Survey data indicate that new democracies often show a syndrome consisting of the mistrust of politics and politicians, sentiments of personal political inefficacy, low confidence in democratic institutions. Yet curiously, the belief in democracy as the best form of government does not bear an obvious relation to these attitudes.

(Przeworski 1995: 59)

- 17 *National Human Development Report: Slovakia 1998* (United Nations Development Programme, Bratislava, 1998), p. 38.
- 18 *Názory verejnosti na integráciu Slovenska do NATO a EÚ. Ústav pre výskum verejnej mienky pri Štatistickom úrade SR*, Bratislava, October 1997.

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## 8 Poland

### Citizens and democratic politics

*Renata Siemienska*

#### Introduction

Poland, similar to other countries in central and eastern Europe, is still facing problems related to consolidating democracy and a free market economy. For almost half a century, from World War II until after the end of the 1980s, an idealized image of democracy emerged in Polish civil society. However, the ideal and the reality did not match. Many of those who expected a democratic and economic paradise after 1990 were deeply disappointed by the day-to-day reality of the emerging democratic regime. Standards of living declined steadily, the share of citizens with incomes far below the social minimum continued to rise, unemployment rates were increasing and services offered by the Polish welfare state continued to decrease. Whereas objective economic development was on the increase, subjective perceptions did not seem to match this perception.

This chapter focuses on the question of the preferred type of social, economic and political order and the processes linked to it by different groups in Polish society since 1990. This question will be discussed in light of theories proposed and empirical findings. This chapter's analyses are mainly based on data generated in the second half of the 1990s by the World Values Survey (1997, 1999) describing political value-orientations and current political behavior. However, data from the 1980s are also included when available.

I am going to discuss results of regression analyses for dependent variables measuring selected attitudes considered as being characteristic for democratic societies (see Inglehart 1997; Fuchs and Klingemann 2000; see also the discussion below). The independent variables are chosen in accordance with earlier empirical results pointing to their significance in explaining political value orientations and attitudes prevalent in different segments of society. These include age, gender, level of formal education, economic status, religious activity, trust in others, interest in politics and social value orientations. The last section of the chapter focuses on differences in attitudes and behaviors that are related to the respondents' value hierarchy and his or her position regarding the democracy-autocracy index.