election the scale of the problems that might face the economy. But an early success for the government was its victory in the referendum on the Nice Treaty, which passed at the second attempt in October.

The leadership of the Labour party also changed in October. Pat Rabbitte replaced Ruari Quinn, and this change could have major consequences for *Fianna Fail*'s coalition strategy in the run up to the next election. Rabbitte is determinedly anti-*Fianna Fail* and would be extremely unlikely to countenance entering government with *Fianna Fail* after the next election (which Quinn was more than happy to countenance at the 2002 election). This leaves *Fianna Fail* highly dependent on the Progressive Democrats as a coalition partner—unless, of course, *Sinn Fein* proves to *Fianna Fail*'s satisfaction that it has distanced itself sufficiently from the IRA to be considered a legitimate coalition possibility. In that event, the smart money would be on an FF–SF coalition forming in 2007; *Fianna Fail* would not wish to gain a reputation for only ever coalescing with a small party with right-wing views on the economy.

References

Gallagher, M., Marsh, M., Mitchell, P. (Eds.), 2003. How Ireland Voted 2002. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Gallagher, M., 2003. Stability and turmoil: analysis of the results. In: Gallagher, M., Marsh, M., Mitchell, P. (Eds.), How Ireland Voted 2002. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Garry, J., Kennedy, F., Marsh, M., Sinnott, R., 2003. What decided the election. In: Gallagher, M., Marsh, M., Mitchell, P. (Eds.), How Ireland Voted 2002. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Lyons, P., Sinnott, R., 2003. Voter turnout in 2002 and beyond. In: Gallagher, M., Marsh, M., Mitchell, P. (Eds.), How Ireland Voted 2002. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Murphy, G., 2003. The background to the election. In: Gallagher, M., Marsh, M., Mitchell, P. (Eds.), How Ireland Voted 2002. Palgrave Macmillan, London.

0261-3794/$ - see front matter
doi: 10.1016/S0261-3794(03)00037-4

The parliamentary election in Slovakia, September 2002

John Fitzmaurice ✠

As in the 1998 election,[1] the main issue in the 2002 Slovak parliamentary election was whether Vladimir Mečiar would return to power. It was also an issue of

✠ Editor's note: Sadly, John Fitzmaurice died last summer, shortly after this note was completed.

[1] For an account of the 1998 election, see Fitzmaurice (1999).

considerable concern to the outside world. In the event, Mečiar was defeated, which enabled the outgoing Prime Minister, Mikulas Dzurinda, to form a second, more centre–right administration with some different partners.

1. Background

Slovakia is a parliamentary republic with a unicameral parliament (Slovak National Council) of 150 members. The electoral system is a proportional list system, with the whole country as a national district. (Before 1998, the country was divided into four electoral districts.) In the first distribution, seats are allocated by the Hagenbach–Bischof method; in the second round, by the largest remainder method. Voters may give up to four preference votes to candidates on the same list. Parties must win 5% of the vote to obtain a seat in parliament (Fitzmaurice, 1998: pp. 72–73, 117–120).

In common with most East-Central European countries, elections in Slovakia are generally not won by the government of the day.[2] In this case, the opposition was the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). The achievements of the Dzurinda government, however, had been substantial. First and foremost, it had survived for the full 4-year term, despite the odds often seeming against it and despite its very broad 'rainbow' composition (SDK, SDL, SOP, and SMK). From the outset, the coalition was undermined by the bitter feud between Dzurinda and Jan Čarnogursky, the two heavy hitters of the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK); Čarnogursky had even voted against the government's programme soon after the government was formed. The more leftist ministers of the Democratic Party of the Left (SDL) fell into dispute with their SDK colleagues over economic policy. (The SDL even supported an HZDS motion of no confidence in the government in which it had several senior ministers!) The Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK) almost left the government over the regionalisation bill, but was just persuaded to remain by pressure from intellectuals and human rights and pro-EU NGOs. Two of the coalition parties, the Party of Civic Understanding (SOP) and the SDL, collapsed and eventually ran on a joint ticket in 2002. That the Dzurinda government survived was due to the political skills of the Prime Minister—and pressure from the European Commission. Had the government collapsed, the chance of the Opposition winning the election would have been greatly enhanced.

The other achievements of the Dzurinda government were similarly not inconsiderable. It gained OECD membership and took Slovakia to the threshold of EU and NATO membership, thereby taking the country out of the isolation of the Mečiar years. It completed the interrupted process of democratic transition, tidying up the 1993 Constitution and providing for the direct election of the president (Fitzmaurice, 2001). It adopted a law on the use of languages in the administration, allowing the use of Hungarian in those areas where Hungarian speakers constitute 20% of

[2] The Czech Republic has been virtually the sole exception to the 'iron law' of East-Central European politics that governments lose elections.

the population. It also created regional authorities, which were elected in late 2001. Further, the bases of a market economy were laid down, with a bankruptcy law and several flagship privatisations, such as public utilities, implemented. Indeed, in its Progress Report on Slovakia in 1999, the EU Commission stated that Slovakia was "a functioning market economy" (EC, 2001: p. 36). Less successful, even patchy, were the government's efforts to stem corruption and to unscramble the dubious privatisations undertaken by the previous government for the benefit of its associates. For example, it rescued the illegally privatised VSŽ Steel Works in Košice by selling it to US Steel (Henderson, 2002: p. 123).

Meanwhile, the alternative government—the opposition HZDS—had become less confrontational and seemed rather less radically different. Even so, the European Commission issued warnings that if the HZDS returned to power, Slovak accession would be put on hold. There has been much debate about the impact of EU conditionality (see, e.g., Pridham, 2002), but suffice it here to say that the electorate was made aware that there would be a price to pay for re-electing Mečiar.

2. Political parties[3]

The nationalist group of parties consists of the HZDS, the Slovak National Party (SNS), the Movement for Democracy (HZD), and the True Slovak National Party (PSNS). HZDS is difficult to classify, but can be regarded as an authoritarian nationalist/populist party; indeed, its main ally has been the SNS. Support for the HZDS is mainly in rural and western Slovakia (but not Bratislava). During the 1998–2002 legislature; however, it pursued a zigzag course, declaring itself a party of the centre–right in 2002, which did not correspond with its earlier record. In 2002, one of its leaders, Ivan Gašparovič, was suddenly and unexpectedly dropped from the party's candidate list. He left and formed a new party, the Movement for Democracy (HZD), which achieved only 3.3% of the vote in the 2002 election. The SNS, a conservative and traditionalist party, split owing to a bitter dispute between Anna Malikova, its modernising new leader, and Jan Slota, a traditionalist. Slota, in turn, left the SNS to form the PSNS. This ensured that neither party crossed the 5% threshold.

The main party on the left of the party spectrum was the SDL, a moderate socialist party that developed out of the old Communist Party. It was the major partner in the 1998–2002 Dzurinda coalition, having won 15.3% of the vote in 1998. Strategically, it was in a difficult position. As a broad party with a considerable left and ex-communist wing in what was in essence a centre–right coalition, it inevitably faced the greatest difficulties of cohesion and relations between the leadership and the party's grass roots. Its more left-wing ministers, such as Finance Minister Schmögerova, inevitably felt like hostages on issues such as fiscal policy and privatisation. Beyond that, the SDL made serious errors and faced internal conflicts that were as much personal as political. The party's leader, Jozef Migas

[3] See Henderson (2002: pp. 62–72) for an overview of the party system.

(who had never even been an M.P.), misguidedly took the position of Speaker for which he was not well qualified. He denied the post of Justice Minister to Robert Fico who had won the highest number of preference votes on the SDL list in the 1998 election. Fico, a popular figure, then left SDL in October 1999 and formed a new party, called SMER (Direction). For most of the other modernisers in the party, it was strategically too early to leave, so initially they remained in the SDL. Eventually, however, by 2002, they too were forced out, but it was too late for them to join SMER. They had no alternative but to form another party, the Social Democratic Alternative (SDA), which, despite out polling the SDL, failed to enter the parliament. In the event, even in alliance with a new centre–left new party (SOP), the SDL imploded.

The Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) consisted of hard core of loyalists who had not joined the reform Communist SDL. Although the KSS had contested all Slovak elections, and had made small gains at each election, it failed to gain enough votes to enter the parliament. The core electorate of the KSS represents that part of the political spectrum alienated by the transition and nostalgia for the old system. In 2002, the KSS became a slightly broader vehicle for voters who considered themselves to be on the left and wanted to register a protest. It called for state control of strategic industries, free health care and education, and declared that it was ready to cooperate with all other parties. It accepts rather than supports EU membership, but opposes NATO membership.

On the centre–right, the old 'rainbow' Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) split after conflict broke out between Dzurinda and Čarnogursky, who were both originally leaders of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH). Dzurinda's supporters formed the mainstream Christian Democratic Party (SDKU) in 2001, with KDH remaining separate. Thus, KDH lost its battle for dominance of the centre–right and has remained somewhat more conservative, especially on social and moral issues—and has remained remarkably free of scandal. The Hungarian Party (SMK) is also a centre–right party, representing the Hungarian minority of about 10% of the population. SMK enjoys relatively stable support and succeeded in entering the 1998 government, where it achieved important practical results, such as the law on language use, enacting a charter for minority languages, and the enactment of regionalisation (albeit a compromise that came close to forcing the SMK out of the government but at least established the principle of decentralisation). The SMK has also proved scandal free, and its participation in government has won favour from the EU and the wider international community.

Amongst the 'new' parties, the Party of Civic Understanding (SOP), founded as a new centre–left party in 1998, disappeared as an independent entity and ran on a joint ticket with the SDL. SOP had been founded almost exclusively to serve as a vehicle for the presidential ambitions of Rudolf Schuster, former Mayor of Košice. Without its charismatic founder and leader, who—as President—was above party politics, the party became virtually leaderless. Pavol Hamžik was unable to fill the gap, especially when he was forced to resign as Minister for European Integration over a serious scandal about the misuse of EU funds. Hamžik refused to back Pavol Rusko, the media tycoon, when he sought to join SOP and made a bid for

the leadership, despite Rusko having supported the party strongly in 1998. Such a media party without structure or roots could not survive without strong and charismatic leadership. Rebuffed, Rusko, owner of the Markiza TV station, set up the New Civic Alliance (ANO) that has—at least since the election—adopted a more centre–right stance than the centre–left SOP. Even so, ANO remains in essence a non-confessional centrist party. The other new party, SMER, formed by Robert Fico, calls itself a 'third way' party in the image of Tony Blair, and is pragmatic and centrist. SMER is now the only non-nationalist and non-communist opposition in the parliament.

3. Election campaign

EU and NATO membership, the foreign image of Slovakia, the effect of an HZDS victory, and unemployment were the dominant issues in the election campaign. The government parties—which had now become SKDU and KDH, SDL/SOP, and SMK—campaigned independently. The Prime Minister ran an impressive campaign; indeed, Dzurinda has become an effective and charismatic figure on the Slovak political scene. The parties ran campaign busses from town to town. The most professional billboard campaign was run by SMER, which had a number of witty or provocative slogans and pictures. SMER began its campaign very early, which may well have proved counterproductive, as its poll results were falling as polling day approached. ANO exploited the advantage that Rusko, its leader, owns the most important TV station in Slovakia.

HZDS tried to reverse the verdict of the 1998 election by arguing, first, that it had learned from its past errors and changed, and, second, that the government had sold out to EU pressure and had failed to deliver on its promises of economic reform. For their part, the main government parties—SDKU, KDU, and SMK—asked the voters to build on the 1998 verdict by creating conditions for a more coherent centre–right coalition in the next legislature. This, it was claimed, was the logic of both the success of the government and the collapse of its left-wing component (SDL and SOP).

In addition to the parties, as in 1998, there was an active and important campaign by human rights NGOs encouraging people to vote. The campaign received more financing from the US and EU countries than even in 1998. This campaign was successful in preventing turnout falling even further, especially among supporters of the government coalition.

4. Results

At 70%, turnout was notably down from the 1998 figure of 84.2%, and rather closer to the levels for the 1994 and the 1999 presidential elections (76.6% and 73.9%, respectively). Altogether 12 parties contested the election, compared with 18 in 1998, which represents a certain degree of concentration. However, seven parties won seats as against six in 1998 (although several of the parties in 1998 were coali-

tions). In 2002, no party won less than 1.4% of the vote, whereas in 1998 no fewer than nine parties won less than 1%. This represents a considerable concentration.

The HZDS remained the largest party, winning 19.5% of the vote. But, in fact, the result was a clear defeat for the party. It failed in its bid to return to power; its vote fell significantly, even taking account of the 3.3% won by the splinter HZD; and its SNS nationalist ally failed to win any seats. The new parties in the parliament—the ANO, SMER, and even KSS—are not natural allies for the HZDS. In strategic terms, HZDS' support is falling and the party remains isolated (see Table 1).

On the left, the SDL suffered from its divisions, not only failing to win any seats but also seeing its vote fall precipitously to 1.4%. On the right, the SDA (the splinter party from the SDL) won 1.8% of the vote, so failed to achieve any breakthrough. The SMER, led by ex-SDL leader Robert Fico, won a respectable 13.5%. The arrival in the parliament of the KSS (11 seats but on a slim 6.3% of the vote) was a surprise. It was widely argued in the Slovak press after the election that the KSS gained from voters who wanted to protest against the coalition parties without voting for the HZDS. It may be conjectured that the KSS swept up some (small) proportion of support from among voters who had previously supported the SDL or the Slovak Workers Party (ZRS); and even some ex-HZDS voters. Overall, after the election, the left is almost non-existent in the parliament, represented only by the KSS and winning only 9.5% of the vote.

The parties of the right did well. The SDKU emerged as the strongest party of the right and the second largest in the parliament (28 seats). Together, the SDKU

Table 1
Results of the parliamentary election in Slovakia, 20 October 2002

	Votes (%)	Seats
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)	19.5	36
Slovak Christian Democratic Union (SKDU)[a]	15.1	28
Direction (SMER)	13.5	25
Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK)	11.2	20
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)[a]	8.3	15
New Citizens Alliance (ANO)	8.0	15
Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)	6.3	11
True Slovak National Party (PSNS)	3.7	0
Slovak National Party (SNS)	3.3	0
Movement for Democracy (HZD)	3.3	0
Social Democratic Alternative (SDA)	1.8	0
Party of the Democratic Left (SDL)	1.4	0
Others (nine parties)	4.6	0
Totals	100	150

Source: Slovak Statistical Institute.

[a] These two parties emerged from the SDK, the five-party rainbow coalition that had run in 1998.

and KDH (the two ex-SDK parties) won 23.4% of the vote, compared with 26.3% for the five-party SDK coalition in 1998. The SMK also did well, with its vote reaching an all-time high (11.2%), which probably exceeds its core Hungarian vote. With the inclusion of the Hungarian SMK, the parties of the old centre–right won 34.9% of the vote (as against 35.4% for the broader SDK and SMK in 1998). Finally, both the rump SNS and the PSNS failed to get into the parliament, although their combined vote was close to the score traditionally achieved by the SNS.

5. Aftermath

Dzurinda rapidly formed his second administration, supported by the SDKU, KDU, ANO, and SMK, with 78 seats out of 150. Unlike his first administration, which rested on a mainly anti-Mečiar 'rainbow' coalition, Dzurinda's second administration is a 'closed' coalition of parties of the centre–right. Thus, it is anticipated that, by avoiding the left-right tensions that marred Dzurinda's first administration, the new administration will prove to be more unified and coherent.

Meanwhile, the party system remains volatile. New parties are still emerging from nowhere, as it were, in the case of SMER and ANO, whilst old parties such as the SDL and the SNS have disappeared from the parliament even after having been continuously represented in three successive parliaments. Despite new entrants, however, the number of parties in Parliament remains virtually stable. Interestingly, ANO, which—like SOP—is a media creation, achieved exactly the same share of the vote as SOP; that may be the maximum potential for such parties. Although still unstable, there is some modest trend towards a simplification of the party system. Parties have now become genuine parties, rather than 'rainbow' electoral coalitions such as the old SMK or the 1994 Common Choice (consisting of the SDL and three other small parties). Moreover, the party system is gradually coming closer to the European norm—even though the nationalist HZDS and its allies still obtained close to a third of the total vote.

References

European Commission, 2001. Regular report on Slovakia's progress towards accession. EU, Brussels.

Fitzmaurice, J., 1998. Politics and Government in the Višegrad Countries. Macmillan, Basingstoke.

Fitzmaurice, J., 1999. The Slovak parliamentary election of September 1998. Electoral Studies 18, 290–296.

Fitzmaurice, J., 2001. The Slovak presidential election, May 1999. Electoral Studies 20, 321–325.

Henderson, K., 2002. Slovakia: The Escape from Invisibility. Routledge, London.

Pridham, G., 2002. EU accession and domestic politics: policy consensus and interactive dynamics in central and eastern Europe. In: Ross, C. (Ed.), Perspectives on Enlargement of the European Union. Brill, Leiden.

0261-3794/$ - see front matter
doi: 10.1016/j.electstud.2003.09.002