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Complying with the European Union's Democratic Conditionality: Transnational Party Linkages and Regime Change in Slovakia, 1993–1998

GEOFFREY PRIDHAM

PRE-ACCESSION RELATIONS BETWEEN the EU and prospective member states involve a progression through a series of stages: policy reorientation towards Brussels leading to membership application, the formalisation of links (notably with an Association agreement), various pre-negotiation consultation procedures and then, finally, negotiations for entry. An obvious way in which prospective member states are affected is through policy choice, content and commitment and of course economic interests. But perhaps more telling is the impact and influence on élite mentalities in new democracies emerging from international isolation as these are likely to be. Such influence, deriving from ever closer contacts with political and other élites in established democracies, may well be system-reinforcing.

Normally it has been assumed that the systemic influence of the EU is conditional on actual membership and tending over time to promote the consolidation of new democratic regimes.¹ However, prospective entrant countries have to satisfy various basic requirements, of which the most political is the democracy test. New democracies, which are still likely to be in transition at the time they apply for membership, have to demonstrate they are moving in the right direction, have a potential for stability and meet a range of particular criteria. Increasingly, the EU's criteria have moved from mainly procedural conditions (e.g. rule of law, separation of institutional powers, free elections, freedom of expression) to include also criteria of substantive democracy, such as the role of political parties as a vehicle for political participation, the pluralism of the media, the importance of local government and an involved civil society. The Copenhagen criteria, established at the European Council meeting in 1993, included human rights and respect for minorities as well as the rule of law and stable democratic institutions.

Since entry to the EU is a lengthy and elaborate process, it allows ample time to observe the practice of democratic conditions in what must be still unconsolidated new regimes. This period invariably lasts around a decade, although conceivably in the case of some countries from Central and Eastern Europe more time may elapse before accession is accomplished. However, applying the notion of democratic conditionality as part of the EU's pre-accession strategy has not been easy. The criteria have been criticised for being very broad, but also as difficult to measure in

practice in a way that is cross-nationally valid.² Much depends on the determination of new democracies to accede, this providing the EU with a compelling leverage over their élite groups and a possible source of influence over their domestic interests. When new democracies are less than fully committed to EU entry, however, problems may arise.

There is nevertheless one consistent and pertinent level of pre-accession involvement of political élites from new democracies. Transnational networks linked to the EU and other European organisations provide an important channel whereby democratic practices and procedures may be encouraged. This article focuses on the example of transnational party linkages, as these present a specific arena for testing international influences on democratisation.³ Moreover, they relate to a crucial element in liberal-democratic systems—the guarantee of political pluralism through viable party organisation. They also correspond with the shift in EU strategy of external influence on new democracies from institution building to furthering civil society. As such, transnational party linkages act as an influential mechanism for underpinning democratic conditionality.

General problems of applying democratic conditionality will first be discussed, and then the case of Slovakia will be examined drawing on élite interviews in the mid and late 1990s with party élites and senior officials in Bratislava as well as some transnational party actors. This case is chosen as, while located in East-Central Europe—the region with the most likely entrants to the EU—Slovakia has presented a deviant example of transition and in doing so has highlighted the problem of political factors in democracy building. It will be used, therefore, to explore the kinds of problems that may face democratic conditionality and in particular the European influences that derive from transnational party activity.

Operationalising democratic conditionality

‘Conditionality’ requires specifying conditions or even pre-conditions for support, involving either promise of material aid or political opportunities, and it usually includes political monitoring of domestic developments in the countries under discussion. It is a method adopted increasingly by several international and European organisations, and parallels the greater international attention to minority rights since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. However, it is the EU that has come to be most associated with practising democratic conditionality while the prize for compliance is no less than eventual membership for new democracies.⁴

The conditions for the EU’s democracy test have been elaborated during the past half-decade with respect to the countries from Central and Eastern Europe. The Copenhagen criteria were a more specific version of the stipulation in the 1991 Treaty on European Union about ‘liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law’ (article F). The Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997 then made these principles an explicit condition for membership and even envisaged the suspension of the rights of a member state in the event of a breach of these principles. It followed too that pre-accession progress towards membership could be stalled if not aborted were democratic practices to be violated in an applicant country.

In 1997 the Commission issued its *avis* on 10 such countries in application of the

Copenhagen criteria. Slovakia was the one case judged to have failed to meet the political conditions, with four others being excluded on economic grounds. Bulgaria and Romania were seen alongside Slovakia as lacking the stability of institutions required for the proper functioning of public authorities and for consolidating democracy. But their changes of government in 1996–97 were noted as evidence of their regime change moving in the right direction.⁵ Slovakia was therefore the one clear-cut instance of failed response to democratic conditionality:

The operation of Slovakia's institutions is characterised by the fact that the government does not sufficiently respect the powers devolved by the constitution to other bodies and that it too often disregards the rights of the opposition. The constant tension between the government and the President of the Republic is one example of this ... The frequent refusal to involve the opposition in the operation of the institutions, particularly in respect of parliamentary control, reinforces this tendency.⁶

Reference was also made to official treatment of the Hungarian and Roma minorities and the use made by the government of the police and secret services. The *avis* concluded that Slovakia 'does not fulfil in a satisfying manner the political conditions set out by the European Council in Copenhagen, because of the instability of Slovakia's institutions, their lack of rootedness in political life and the shortcomings in the functioning of its democracy'.⁷ Does the case of Slovakia simply illustrate that the real influence of the EU over recalcitrant applicant countries was minimal?

It is necessary here to point out the limitations to democratic conditionality. Essentially, it trades on persuasion and therefore influence. There is no element of coercion, although the ultimate sanction of aborted membership negotiations can be effective. An element of formal constraint does gradually enter relations once agreements are made (notably with Association) and entry negotiations start to produce decisions. But the main limitation on conditionality relates to the transition path being played out in individual countries. While no transition is ever smooth, clear evidence that a particular case is moving down the road to a familiar brand of liberal democracy suggests that conditionality has a chance or is actually working. But what if the transition trajectory is not clear or appears to be taking a different path? Pressures from Brussels are not likely to help overturn a negative dynamic in regime change.

The main problem here arises in the case of what are called 'hybrid regimes'. These are post-authoritarian regimes which meet only minimum standards for democracy and operate in a manner contrary to democratic practice. Such regimes are sometimes labelled *democraduras* ('hard democracies') in the transitions literature, for they retain some authoritarian elements or reconstruct these in a different form from the predecessor regime. This is evident, for instance, in the retention of political power for the military or in such regimes being 'delegative' as opposed to representative democracies, leading to weak or non-existent accountability.⁸ A post-communist version of hybrid regimes may occur with the maintenance of power by former regime élites who—predominantly unreconstructed—exercise that power in a way not readily conducive to easy democratisation despite meeting formal democratic requirements. It follows in whatever case of hybrid regime that democratic rules have a weak legitimacy, although much may depend on the degree of social backwardness and

traditional political culture, hence the acceptability of such outcomes of regime change. Clearly, too, the scope for European influence on these regime outcomes is probably very limited. But that may also depend on how far hybrid cases stabilise or not, or whether they turn out to be transitory, to be succeeded by either a clear version of democracy or, alternatively, a full-scale authoritarian regime.

There is a weaker form of problem regime, more likely to be transitional, which may be termed 'pariah regime'. By and large, this satisfies the criteria of procedural democracy but falls down on some but not all areas of substantive democracy. In other words, the game of democratisation is not lost and may therefore be influenced from outside. Furthermore, there is less danger of weak legitimacy for democratic rules. The term does draw attention to international factors, in particular external disapproval, although the problem is not simply one of image, for there have to be genuine reasons for this disapproval. A key issue is how far external disapproval affects domestic debate and in some way or other influences the course of events. If that happens, it may be supposed that internal opportunities open up for outside influence, and that it is not purely the latter impacting on the country in question. In other words, once again, the limitations of conditionality are illustrated and not least by the fact pariah regimes offer less resistance to outside pressures than do outright hybrid regimes.

It therefore seems that external pressures deriving from the EU are really a dependent variable with the readiness of internal actors, in particular their European preferences, being the decisive factor. There is nonetheless a possibility of circular behaviour, for insofar as transnational élite socialisation—including the increasing participation of new democratic personnel in EU institutional fora—affects the attitudes of elite groups in applicant countries they might then become more disposed towards external pressures. But there are limits to this form of Europeanising dynamic, and in the case of Central and Eastern Europe they must reside most of all in nationalist tendencies.

The Europe Agreements provided for 'political dialogue'—an innovation in EU agreements with outside parties. This institutionalised regular meetings at executive and parliamentary levels, including Association councils at ministerial level as well as parliamentary Association committees. These bodies embrace all subjects of common interest, and there is systematic consultation with these partner countries concerning EU positions on international affairs as well as working groups on a range of policy issues. The general motive behind this was to develop 'structured relations' and create 'a pre-accession atmosphere' through the progressive involvement of these new democracies in the business of the EU.⁹ Recent Accession Partnership agreements have reinforced the EU's pre-accession strategy with identified areas for action and partnership objectives. There will be annual reports on progress, and the Commission has introduced the idea of strict conditionality for its financial support.¹⁰ These agreements amount to a tighter follow-up to the Commission's *avis*. In Slovakia's case, it was noted that 'Community assistance will be conditional on respect by Slovakia of its commitments under the Europe Agreements, further steps towards satisfying the Copenhagen criteria, and progress in implementing this Accession Partnership'.¹¹ At the same time, these growing links and pressures from Brussels have been complemented by support mechanisms for democracy building.

Of the various aid programmes, the most pertinent is the Phare Democracy Programme administered by the Human Rights Foundation in Brussels. Its brief is to 'support the activities and efforts of non-governmental bodies promoting a stable open society and good governance' and it focuses support on 'political reform and democratic practice, where local advocacy bodies are weak and professional expertise is particularly lacking'.¹²

There are therefore different ways in which democratic conditionality may be promoted, both by pressure and by support programmes. Democratic conditionality and democracy building go hand in hand. It is important to see transnational party linkages in the context of these intensifying official relations between the EU and applicant countries. They have operated in different parallel ways: party groups in the European Parliament (EP), EU party federations with which they are directly linked, the traditional party internationals and, not to be omitted, bilateral links between parties in different countries—a growing pattern all the more significant when it involves those belonging to the EU party organisations. Such transnational cooperation, normally very secondary to mainstream EU activity, has nevertheless increased in importance with the growing institutional weight of the EP. And so far as applicant countries are concerned, its potential impact may be enhanced if new party systems are more open to international influences—among a range of formative ones—than are those in established democracies.

Possibilities for influence from transnational activity may cover party identity and early programmatic development, the acquisition of political experience and expertise and building up party organisation. Such tasks tend to be the source of most concern in early transition. Over the 1990s cooperation between parties in Western and Central and Eastern Europe has broadened to include training and material support but also political monitoring—in itself a concrete mode of democratic conditionality at the party-political level. Various procedures were adopted by the internationals and the EU party federations to vet the democratic commitment of prospective members and associates. These proved fairly strict and were directed to particular conditions relating to the handling of party history, credibility of leadership, programme and electoral strength.¹³ International solidarity has been a factor, with parties in new democracies benefiting from association with established and somewhat prestigious networks—or not, where such links conflicted with anti-Western attitudes. Undoubtedly, the transnational intensification of party cum personal links has had its political socialisation effects—grandly called 'Europeanisation'—where mentalities from élites in established democracies rubbed off on new party leaders and officials—many often young and with no previous political experience—from Central and Eastern Europe.

Over time, transnational party networks became more institutionalised through programmes of mutual visits, common policy seminars and the granting of observer or associate status as stages towards full membership of transnational organisations. Full membership of the EP groups was not possible until countries entered the EU, although informal links with them were developed just as national delegations from Central and Eastern Europe to the EP have grown markedly in recent years. Parties were allowed to send delegations to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe once their countries joined that organisation, and membership of the internationals was already possible.¹⁴ More significant has been the increasing habit in the

past few years to regard these transnational linkages as a non-official means for developing prospects for EU entry. They are widely seen among party elites in Central and Eastern Europe as useful if not potentially influential here, all the more as Western European delegations include government leaders or possible future government personnel in the case of opposition parties. The increasing emphasis on policy training and consultations in such transnational activity should be seen in this light. There are many roads to Brussels and this side-road is one of the lesser known, but not to be underrated, ways of arriving there.

These transnational linkages have therefore played the role of stimulant and support factor in democratising countries in the East. But they are limited in their influence for they cannot be expected to instil democratic values *ab initio* and depend on potentially receptive ground—a point that needs to be taken in much of Central and Eastern Europe, where democratic traditions at the mass level were largely absent or weakly developed before 1989. There are therefore cultural barriers to the impact of transnational networks, just as there may be political ones if party élites in new democracies are either uninterested or mistrustful.

Slovakia: pariah regime and chequered democratisation

Slovakia offers a number of challenges to students of democratisation. It represents an ambiguous example of this process with its difficult transition—one complicated by the separation from the Czech Republic in 1993. The 1992 elections not only opened the way for the split in that country but also, in the Slovak case, represented a turning away from a more or less recognisable transition to democracy to one evidently moving towards a personal form of authoritarianism. The victory of Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) in 1992 did not bring uninterrupted rule, but his second victory in 1994—leading to the formation of a coalition with the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the populist left Association of Workers (ZRS)—was followed by a four-year period which showed increasing signs of overt or subtle efforts to introduce 'creeping authoritarianism' and thus undermine the chances of democratisation. The 1998 alternation in power, replacing the Mečiar government, presents therefore a new chance for democratisation to proceed on course.

Slovakia also demonstrates in its own way some of the complications arising from the concurrence of the three transformations—political regime change, economic system transformation and nation building. Economic reform lay at the centre of the dispute between Bratislava and Prague that, together with other factors (an historical legacy of estrangement, personal antipathy between the two prime ministers), led to the split of 1993. The difference in their economic strategies became more evident thereafter with, in the Slovak case, a more halting reform policy—one marked by government-inspired clientelism—although the performance of the economy has been relatively positive notwithstanding. Nation building had been predominant both in the 1989–93 period and also subsequently as Slovakia had, more than the Czech Republic, to build afresh state institutions but also form a national identity—having rarely existed previously as an independent state. While economic transformation may be beneficial as well as burdensome for new democracies, the task of nation building

has invariably complicated political regime change as it raises issues and incites attitudes that do not easily accord with consensus formation and political pluralism, especially in ethnically mixed societies. The provincial populism of Mečiar expressed this problem.

It is commonly said that Slovakia's new regime satisfies the formal requirements of a democracy but that it falls substantially behind in democratic practice. This is tenable, but it overstates the dichotomy. Certainly Slovakia has all the necessary institutional components of a parliamentary democracy. And it is not correct to view it as a 'delegative democracy' since this suggests rule based on charismatic rather than legal-rational authority.¹⁵ As background to analysing transnational linkages, the post-communist regime in Slovakia may be examined at three systemic levels: the state, the party system and political society. These will be briefly discussed to illustrate to what degree Slovakia has or has not a hybrid regime.

Firstly, in Slovakia there is a procedural democracy that could with a democratically committed government provide the framework for regime consolidation. A formal separation of institutional powers exists and power-holders are elected in competitive elections. Furthermore, it has no difficulties with civilian control over the military.¹⁶ Problems have arisen, however, from the operation of the state system, given the Mečiar government's monopolistic approach to power. This has involved efforts to concentrate institutional and procedural powers. Most visibly, the struggle between the Prime Minister and President arising from Mečiar's resentment at a former ally's independent stance reflected this. The tight requirement for indirect election of the President demonstrated on Kováč's retirement in 1998 a constitutional deficiency whereby presidential powers were transferred to the government. Additionally, there have been problems of this monopolistic approach in relations with the bureaucracy, the judiciary and the electronic media as well as in political use of the security service.¹⁷

Secondly, there are some positive qualities in the party system. There is a functioning multi-party structure, while the occurrence of alternation in power several times suggests that competition works at an important level. But difficulties have arisen from the lack of élite consensus over the democratic rules of the game—a key indicator of a country's potential for regime consolidation—and there has been virtually permanent conflict between government and opposition. The latter has acquired a systemic meaning with different value orientations concerning democratic principles, and it has been reflected in government attempts to undercut the opposition's parliamentary privileges. This occurred notably soon after the appointment of the Mečiar government in autumn 1994 over membership of parliamentary committees and the right of the Democratic Union (DU) to parliamentary representation.¹⁸

Thirdly, developments in political society are mixed but paint by no means a pessimistic picture for the future. There have been several government-inspired attempts to subvert autonomous elements of civil society like the mass media and NGOs but with limited success.¹⁹ Signs of ethnic intolerance have also been evident in the discriminatory line of the Mečiar government towards the Hungarian minority to a degree that has cast doubt on the prospects for democratic consolidation at the societal level.²⁰ Despite these pressures from above, there are many positive indications as, for instance, in the substantial growth of the NGO sector, which has

benefited from foreign funding.²¹ Patterns of political culture are divided between traditional and populist tendencies with increasing evidence of public attachment to the rule of law but also concern over issues of democracy.²² In this context, the voter-induced alternation in power of 1998 becomes significant.

These tendencies have not however made Slovakia a straightforward example of a hybrid regime. It is more akin to the pariah regime type, given the emphasis on international perceptions and criticisms of what have been, admittedly, real infractions of democratic rule. Hybrid regimes are more easily identified among some of the Balkan countries in the 1990s, such as Croatia, where Tudjman, more dominant than Mečiar in Slovakia, has continued to exhibit an executive-centred and anti-pluralist approach such as in systematically curbing the activities of opposition parties and democratic expression in the media. Serbia is hybrid in some respects but closer to the personalistic version of authoritarian rule, while Belarus is now a clear-cut case of democratic inversion towards the latter. Slovakia has developed, by comparison, not so far down the authoritarian road as any of these cases. Hence it has been relatively more open to European pressures. Had Mečiar won in 1998, it is of course possible that with a further four-year term in office the regime might well have acquired more 'hybrid' characteristics. Nonetheless, Slovakia under Mečiar did acquire a stereotypical reputation abroad suggestive of a possible hybrid type—an interpretation highly personalised in the form of the 'Mečiar phenomenon'. But it is precisely this divergence between external repute and internal somewhat 'greyer' reality that places Slovakia among the pariah regimes.

In fact, the Mečiar government of 1994–98 followed an ambivalent line towards Brussels determined by conflicting pressures such as ideological antipathy of the HZDS's coalition partners to EU entry and broad public support for the same.²³ It was Mečiar's monopolistic view of power, as expressed in various incidents of active hostility towards former political allies, that caused Slovakia's exclusion from the first group of accession negotiations.²⁴ There remained a distinct tone of defensiveness in the government's line also when claiming its successful fulfilment of Brussels economic and legislative conditions for entry.²⁵ This defensiveness could of course be traced to the series of demarches from the EU in 1994–95 criticising Slovakia's democratic deficiencies—and these provided the opposition with an opportunity to exploit the government's predicament.²⁶

During the late 1990s opinion shifted further towards entry, although the issue remained polarised and support varied noticeably in relation to party positions—adherents of the three governing parties were markedly less enthusiastic than the centre-left and particularly the centre-right opposition parties.²⁷ There thus appeared to be little outright opposition to EU entry. At the level of political discourse, arguments polarised not about the substance of the issue but over which side of the political divide was to blame for Slovakia's unfortunate reputation in Europe.²⁸ The government parties maintained, for instance, that the opposition ones blackened the country's image—an implicit self-identification on the part of the former with the state, given that the opposition specifically criticised particular government actions. In fact, this criticism placed opposition parties in an awkward position since their attacks on the Mečiar regime abroad increased the probability of Slovakia's accession being stalled. These kinds of argument reappeared in domestic polemics over the trans-

national linkages of opposition parties, as will be seen below. It is important, therefore, to look at the quality of Slovakia's links with the EU not merely with respect to government action.

Transnational party linkages and democratisation in Slovakia: a case study

In view of the close interconnection evident between EU strategy and policy concerns and domestic politics, with a tendency for the latter to predominate,²⁹ it should be no surprise to find the same pattern dictating the development of transnational linkages between Slovak political parties and their identifiable opposite numbers in Western Europe at both EU and member state levels. This might simply appear to confirm the limitations to democratic conditionality. However, the very polarisation at home tended to intensify the search for such linkages especially on the part of the opposition parties which by and large viewed these as a welcome, although not necessarily crucial, outside expression of solidarity in the face of the domestic challenge from Mečiar's authoritarian pretensions. This bodes well for the quality of relations between these opposition élites and the EU in the event of their coming to power, which in fact occurred in October 1998.

Nevertheless, transnational party cooperation between the Slovak Republic and the EU was not just a simple reflection of domestic concerns and developments in the former. Although limited politically, it had its own dynamic with some noteworthy patterns of influence from outside on the Slovak scene. This activity will therefore be discussed from various angles: its evolution; how extensive it became; the advantages it offered parties which became involved; how this activity related to Slovakia's wider relations with the EU; and, finally, the form of its domestic impact.

Firstly, the evolution of transnational party linkages started basically from scratch after the collapse of communism, as almost everywhere in Central and Eastern Europe. Nothing occurred similar to the informal transnational contacts in the case of Polish Solidarity and some emerging parties in Hungary in the few years before 1989, even with historical parties like the Social Democrats (SDSS).³⁰ The reason lay primarily with the severity of the Czechoslovak regime under communism. However, contacts developed apace once regime change commenced and before Slovakia split with the Czech Republic. This reflected the different party system there, so that Prague did not dominate such links. Apart from the SDSS, which was accepted into the Socialist International (SI) before the 1992 election, the Christian Democrats in particular were active in this early period, while some Liberal forces searched for Western partners like the German FDP and the European Liberals.³¹ The reformed ex-regime party, renamed Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) in 1990, made approaches to the SI but for a time was not successful, since the latter's early priority was furthering SD parties and it initially took a sceptical line towards the former communists.

Secondly, these linkages have since become extensive with the major exception of the parties in the Mečiar government. Among the Centre-Right parties, the Christian Democrats (KDH) were perhaps the most prominent on the transnational front. This is due to their ready ideological affiliation with the conservative and CD formations like the European Democratic Union (EDU), the European Union of Christian

Democrats (EUCD) and the CD International, opening the way to full membership of these as well as association membership of the European People's Party (EPP), which was linked to the EP group. A strong general adherence to European integration among Christian Democrats facilitated this development, although the KDH felt ideologically closer to conservative forces in the EDU and was perceived by some CD parties in Western Europe as too fundamentalist on moral issues.³² On the Liberal side, the Democratic Union (DU) moved to establish links with requisite formations like the Liberal International (observer status from 1994 and full member in 1996) and the EU-based European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party—ELDR (a member from 1995). With the formation of the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) in 1997 there has been no change, for the component parties—the KDH, the DU and the Democratic Party (DS)—have maintained their previous affiliations abroad and all these European partners expressed their support for the SDK in the 1998 election.³³

Noteworthy is the decided effort of the Hungarian parties to pursue transnational linkages as a means of external solidarity for an ethnic minority. The international secretary of one of these parties (MKDH) stressed these linkages as

... of utmost importance to us, as we represent not only Christian Democratic values in this country but also the special interest of the Hungarian minority. There are quite intense tensions in Slovakia concerning the national question. One of the ruling parties in the government is the Slovak National Party, which attacks the Hungarian minority every day. For this reason, international contacts are very important for us, as we feel the support, the moral support of the CD parties of Western Europe, the EUCD, which has held a lot of conferences, of meetings, dealing with the minority problem in Europe, and has adopted several resolutions. One of these meetings was held in Bratislava. And, in this way, we can use these contacts when representing the interests of the minority at the international level, which has a positive attitude towards national minorities.³⁴

But the Hungarian parties' actual linkages vary and include both Conservative-CD and Liberal formations. While the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (MKDH) joined the EDU and EUCD and has formal links with the EPP, the Hungarian Civic Party (MOS) and Coexistence both belong to the Liberal International.³⁵ In the MKDH's case there were also a number of bilateral linkages established, such as with the South Tyrol People's Party (SVP) in north-east Italy, as this was seen as 'the best example for us concerning the minority position'—the SVP representing the German population in the Alto Adige (South Tyrol). Meetings took place between the MKDH and SVP at leadership level and cooperation included training in local politics, e.g. the SVP ran a study programme for 40 mayors from southern Slovakia in 1994 to advise on the practicalities of the mayor's role.³⁶ Of particular appeal to the MKDH was the SVP's organisational ability but beyond this was a clear motive of democratic learning with ethnic minority protection in mind. Links were also established with relevant parties in Hungary, in the MKDH's case with the Hungarian Christian Democratic People's Party involving regular meetings at high and low levels.³⁷

Transnational linkages thus became a common pattern among the non-government parties. Even the Slovak Green Party (SZS) has maintained regular contacts with other environmentalist parties in Europe, especially with the German Greens, and is

a member of the European Federation of Green Parties (EFGP).³⁸ The Party of Civic Reconciliation (SOP), established in spring 1998, had no time to develop links abroad—except with the Liberal D66 in Holland—all efforts being focused on the 1998 election.³⁹ On the other hand, the SDL presents both a typical and a complicated story. It is typical as ex-regime parties resolutely sought the link with the Socialist International as a recognition factor in their transmutation into centre-left forces and hence their legitimation in the new democratic context.

It took some while for the SDL's acceptance into the SI, it acquiring observer status in 1994 and becoming a full member in 1996. The SI applied its strict vetting procedure for acceptance, but the factor that caused most concern was the SDL's factionalism and the temptation among part of the leadership to deal with the Mečiar government. SI officials were much aware of these problems and admitted to some confusion over detailed conditions inside the SDL, but caution dictated their approach. Peter Weiss, the SDL chairman, pressed the SI to send a delegation to Bratislava, but his own weak position following the party's heavy loss of support in the 1994 election and the fear in Brussels that the party could actually split alerted the International.⁴⁰ While ideological factors were present, it was the possibility that a change of leadership following Weiss might open the way for a deal with Mečiar which warned against full membership.⁴¹ The SDL nevertheless continued to highlight its contact with the SI inside Slovakia and it was clear the party placed a strategic importance on acceptance.⁴² How much this consideration influenced party development is not clear but it was probably minimal, for the SDL continued to ponder dealing with Mečiar. But it did not actually join the government, and SI membership was eventually confirmed.

If there is any remaining gap in this explanation, a key factor has to be the degree of sponsorship. This did not come from the Hungarian Socialist Party because of the minority problem in Slovakia and the SDL's overtures to Mečiar.⁴³ It was the Italian PDS, itself a converted Communist party and a model to some parties of the European left, that gave the SDL the necessary backing. This was at a time when Italian parties (and, for that matter, Italian foreign policy) were seeking a more influential role in Central Europe following the collapse of communism, among other things as a counter-balance to German influence.⁴⁴ Such bilateral contact has been regular and at times intensive at both top leadership and sub-national levels, and has included attendance at party congresses, training for local mayors, bilateral cooperation between regional branches of the two parties and considerable liaison over detailed organisational matters.⁴⁵ Altogether, statements by SDL officials and contacts between the two parties have revealed some warmth between Bratislava and Rome.⁴⁶

The basic difficulties encountered by the three parties in Mečiar's coalition in developing their own transnational linkages were primarily due to ideology. Either they did not ideologically conform to the European party formations (the HZDS) or their linkages were insignificant because of the absence of viable partners (SNS and ZRS). The HZDS in particular owed its failure to network to its own character as an umbrella movement of a populist kind embracing mixed and often contradictory elements.⁴⁷ The HZDS's predicament over transnational linkages was further reflected in the reluctance of the established party groups in the Parliamentary Assembly of the

Council of Europe to embrace it. Originally in the Liberal group, it was asked to leave. It then tried the Socialists and Christian Democrats in vain, and eventually became an associated member of the conservative European Democrats. But since there was resistance to this from Scandinavian conservative parties, the HZDS was given to understand there was no hope of full membership.⁴⁸

The point may therefore be made that the often cited distinction between 'standard' and 'non-standard' parties in Slovakia fits perfectly with this stark difference in the fortunes of the opposition and government parties in establishing transnational linkages.⁴⁹ Behind this ideological mismatch between the government parties and transnational organisations lay of course more basic objections to Mečiar's dubious democratic credentials. Thus a systemic factor entered such linkage between Slovakia and Western Europe. Moreover, the Slovak case illustrated—as, indeed, did also some Balkan countries—that nationalism proved a basic obstacle to transnational networking between East and West Europe.

The government parties did establish some contacts, but these were not significant save for their very sparseness. The HZDS's failure to get accepted into any of the transnational organisations meant it sought some comfort in bilateral links, notably with Berlusconi's party Forza Italia from Italy. This media-focused party gave the HZDS some assistance in the 1994 election, but the link did not really develop. Its other contacts tended to be with parties that played a negligible part in European politics.⁵⁰ The Slovak National Party has expressed an interest in linking up with 'nationally oriented entities' in countries like Moravia, Austria, Serbia and Scotland, but its main catch proved to be the French National Front, whose chairman Le Pen visited Bratislava in 1997. This effort to break its international isolation caused some controversy in the Slovak media.⁵¹ The Association of Slovak Workers (ZRS) had a sole transnational connection in the International Federation of Workers' Parties based in Paris, but this offered no hope of influence in EU circles.

Thirdly, the advantages gained by parties involved in transnational cooperation have included regular contacts and visits as well as transferred experience such as programmatic influence and reinforcement of party identities. In the early stages, visits by party leaders from Western Europe provided a fillip to parties emerging from the 'cold' of post-1968 normalised Czechoslovakia. The pressure of early free elections (June 1990) undoubtedly added an urgency to these contacts. Developing party and electoral programmes therefore featured strongly in this activity then and for some years to come. Some parties needed this influence more than others, though. The Democratic Union, for instance, was established shortly before the 1994 election and drew heavily on European liberal programmes not least as 'liberalism doesn't have a long tradition in Slovakia', so that 'we have to implement the experience of our partners and make this work in our Slovak conditions', this being an 'important source of information but also of inspiration'. In other words, the DU's identity was significantly determined by European patterns of liberal philosophy, but also specific programmatic tenets like devolution of power to the local level were mentioned.⁵² In later years, programmatic influence became less formative but rather conformed to a pattern whereby member parties of transnational organisations adapted their broad policy lines to agreed European positions.⁵³ Also evident was the adoption of election techniques from abroad. In 1998 the SDL for instance sought to develop a more

modern campaign by giving attention to direct contacts with voters through door-to-door canvassing and telemarketing and not simply traditional meetings.⁵⁴

At the same time, contacts intensified once Slovak parties were accepted into transnational structures. The SDL was invited to special meetings of the Party of European Socialists, such as on enlargement, but was also present at its Bureau meetings and thus privy to general decision-making procedures. Contacts were, furthermore, taken up with the Socialist group in the EP, not least to inform it about the latest political developments in Slovakia—for which read: briefing fellow Socialists who might then use information in publicity adverse to the Mečiar government.⁵⁵ The Hungarian Coalition (SMK) in particular noted the great regularity of links by the late 1990s and drew sustenance from these: there were ‘day-to-day contacts with other friends, by phone, by fax, by email’, technological information being seen as a significant boost to transnational activity. The SMK’s status as now permanent observer of the EPP group in the EP had immensely facilitated this networking.⁵⁶ The prestige attached to these international contacts was, however, not always exploited as fully as in some other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, the reason being the controversy these sometimes occasioned in domestic politics. This did not however prevent the appointment of leadership personnel from Slovak parties to key positions in EU or other transnational organisations.⁵⁷

Probably, the most important single advantage for Slovak parties was external solidarity in their conflict with the Mečiar government. This theme pervaded élite responses on both interview occasions in 1995 and 1998.⁵⁸ Typical was this summary by one former party international secretary of the message carried abroad through transnational contacts by opposition parties:

The situation in Slovakia is bad; we have a lack of democracy, but the present government is not Slovakia. We try to bridge this period with the future—in every country, from time to time, elections don’t go well, but soon will come the time when the situation will change. We want to become part of the [European integration] process. Don’t isolate Slovakia, and we shall fight together for democracy.⁵⁹

Most of the time this external solidarity was a reference point or source of moral but also material support. But on exceptional occasions it could act as a direct influence. The most significant example was the effort by Mečiar to have the DU expelled from the parliament after the 1994 election on specious procedural grounds. One factor that greatly helped the DU in defending itself was support from organisations like the Liberal International. Whereas normally transnational membership was not a very visible matter in Slovak domestic politics, that changed when, according to Kukan, ‘our partners in the West came to support us and expressed very strong feelings about the illegal approach of the Slovak government—at that time, it was known by the Slovak public that the DU had its friends in foreign countries’.⁶⁰

This external solidarity must, furthermore, be seen in the context of democracy-building programmes from outside. This was a more routine form of outside support than the crisis response of European actors to Slovak government threats to democratic rules and procedures. Slovakia benefited from such support as much as any other country in the region. To some extent, no clear distinction was drawn between party-political and democracy-building support—notably in the case of political

foundations from the USA, Germany and other European countries.⁶¹ Of the various support programmes the most prominent was the Phare and Tacis Democracy Programme. Its projects in operation in 1996 included, for example, various training activities for trade unions, promoting democratic practice in the work of Slovak journalists, strengthening the Association of Landowners and Agricultural Employers and support for the Association of Slovak Judges.⁶² The influence of foreign foundations proved particularly discernible in the development of NGOs in Slovakia, not only in being instrumental in setting up new ones but also as this very activity helped to connect Slovaks to the outside world in the face of government repression.⁶³

Fourthly, transnational party cooperation provided an informal and useful channel for networking between Bratislava and Brussels, Strasbourg or wherever else meetings occurred. This paralleled official links increasingly directed towards eventual EU entry in the countries of East-Central Europe. The question that naturally arises with Slovakia is whether this informal channel acquired a special importance, because the official level was increasingly marred by ructions over the country's democratic deficit and the government's awkward posturings when faced with EU criticisms. There was no sign at all that such transnational contacts suffered from the government's behaviour; on the contrary, they seem to have benefited from it. The opposition parties placed more emphasis on these contacts than they would probably have otherwise done. Moreover, transnational actors in EU circles did not show any signs of disadvantaging Slovak parties on the grounds that the country was a problem.⁶⁴

How far therefore were transnational contacts in the Slovak case used as a substitute for unsatisfactory official ones? The answer broadly is that this idea was certainly present, that it did influence some activity but that opportunities here were constrained by the limited nature of transnational cooperation. This will be shown by looking at three aspects: the functioning of the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) set up under the Association Agreement with Slovakia, participation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and, less tangibly, the degree to which Slovak party leaders thought in terms of utilising transnational contacts to promote EU entry prospects or rather to mitigate the harmful effects of Mečiar's policy approach.

The JPC was conventionally provided for under the Association Agreement of 1993. Its first meeting took place in Bratislava in November 1995 in rather dramatic circumstances, immediately following the EP's resolution expressing fundamental concern about democracy in Slovakia. There were polemical exchanges between members of the Slovak government and EU representatives, revealing a pronounced sensitivity in relations.⁶⁵ Since then meetings have been held about twice yearly, alternating between Brussels and the Slovak capital, and agendas have covered a range of questions including Slovakia and the EU internal market, security questions, the Phare programme and energy and social policy.⁶⁶ Domestic political tensions overflowed in that for a while there was an issue about the composition of the Slovak delegation. There are 15 members to match the 15 MEPs and they had to be chosen to reflect party balance, but the government ignored the rules including granting a vice-chairmanship to the opposition.⁶⁷ Eventually under pressure the government conformed. As a whole, the JPC meetings have been found useful for enlarging

transnational networking by Slovak parliamentarians from different parties. However, interview responses from some participants indicated a low value placed on the JPC as a forum for policy debate and a meeting of minds between both sides. This was partly because meetings have tended to become sucked into altercations between members of the Slovak delegation.⁶⁸ One perceptive member of the Slovak delegation commented ironically on the problems of rapport:

... I felt our colleagues from the EP were not informed enough. I've spent many years understanding the way people speak ... Mr Huska was chairman on the Slovak side. When he was asked, 'Why was the law on the use of languages of national minorities not adopted?', he gave a long explanation, and he almost persuaded your people [i.e. from the EP]. They are so nice—they said, you know, 'We so appreciate your information'. This diplomatic language was understood by Slovaks as if you were praising them. And then, they came back [to Bratislava]—'Well, it's fine, everything is fine; we defended our position, and they praised us'. And sometimes it was useless ... It was a dialogue between the deaf.⁶⁹

Participation in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has provided a more institutionalised means for integrating Slovak politicians into European circles since the country joined that organisation in spring 1993. In late 1998 there were nine Slovak deputies in the Assembly from the following parties: four HZDS, one SNS, one KDH, one DU, one SMK and one SDL, these being in groups analogous to those in the EP, e.g. the DU with the Liberals, the KDH in the EPP and the SDL with the Socialists, with SNS non-aligned and HZDS having a loose link with the Conservatives.⁷⁰ There was initially a problem about the Hungarian party's representation there, the Mečiar government blocking this. But the president of the Parliamentary Assembly was lobbied and during a visit to Bratislava announced that if the problem were not resolved then the Slovak delegation would be dismissed.⁷¹ Interview respondents strongly stressed the value of individual networking through this forum and tended to place some importance on the institutional aspect. The Council of Europe and its Assembly were generally seen as a pre-stage for eventual membership of the EU although its lesser importance was acknowledged.⁷² The key difference from the JPC connection was of course that the Slovak delegation was integrated along party-political lines. According to the Christian Democrat Jan Figel, 'diplomacy and inter-governmental relations cannot provide the whole mechanism for European matters' since political learning and the opportunity for a Slovak influence could take place effectively 'in the groups of similarly oriented people'. He also argued that European concern about democracy in Slovakia was better expressed through these party-political channels than officially.⁷³

Increasingly by the late 1990s, these transnational linkages were viewed as an alternative and conceivably more influential channel for lobbying in favour of EU accession compared with the fraught state of official relations between Bratislava and Brussels. This was reflected, for instance, in the reference made to the fact that some transnational actors were ministers in EU member governments, while others could be in government when decisions about Slovakia's entry were taken in the future. Eduard Kukan, DU chairman, commented on transnational party cooperation as an unofficial channel for influencing EU entry: 'We think that it's very important for strengthening these kinds of ambitions for integration into Europe, and we try to use it as much as

possible because we think that it is a good means to promote Slovakia's future development, being part of Europe. So we attach great importance [to it] and we think it can be used very well for the goals of Slovakia'.⁷⁴ Transnational linkages have always been that much more attractive to opposition parties, as in EU member states, because they provide an international stage for politicians missing the paraphernalia and travel opportunities of government office. In the Slovak case, however, these linkages distinctly acquired a surrogate function, given the unproductive line of the Mečiar government and its risk of isolating the country from mainstream EU politics.⁷⁵

There are, however, limitations to the possibilities for influence through these linkages. They are very much focused on the EP, where influence may indeed be sought. Official circles could be lobbied such as through the practice of EU transnational party organisations holding meetings of leaders just before the European Council (EU summit).⁷⁶ Lobbying of the European Commission was not however a practice generally adopted when utilising transnational party channels. Asked whether opposition parties tried to influence the Commission's *avis* of 1997 on Slovakia's application for membership, Kukan made it clear this was not the case although his party's contacts over time with members of the Commission were used to 'give a fair picture, evaluation of the situation in Slovakia; not negative information because it would be used against us'.⁷⁷

Fifthly, the domestic impact of transnational linkages is normally marginal as these tend to enjoy little public resonance. The limited public attention to transnational linkages is suggested by the absence of opinion poll data on this matter.⁷⁸ Transnational links are far better known among educated sectors of the population. This explained for instance the DU's lack of inhibition about publicising its LI link, given its electoral base among educated voters.⁷⁹ Similarly, the SDSS international secretary commented with respect to his party's membership of the SI: 'One can say that in intelligentsia circles that has played a part; at the mass level, less', for the former 'firstly, have heard of the SI, know what the SI is and, secondly, they also have a greater knowledge of international connections'.⁸⁰ This feature is pertinent bearing in mind that the more highly educated were less likely to be found among supporters of the parties in the Mečiar government.⁸¹ In other words, while some opposition parties felt no reluctance to push their transnational links on grounds of either ideology or electoral base, the government parties had nothing to lose from their lack of such links.

However, in Slovakia's case domestic polarisation has sometimes embraced these linkages as part of general polemics arising over EU matters between the parties in government and in opposition. This has occasionally given such linkages a visibility unusual among new democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, just as EU terms like 'demarche' have become common currency outside élite circles, at least among people around Bratislava. This does not, of course, vouch for these linkages enjoying an abnormal influence despite these untypical conditions. More precisely, they furnished an excuse for Mečiar government parties to attack the opposition. This fitted with the nationalist line of the government parties. All respondents from the opposition parties on both interview occasions (1995 and 1998) complained about this pattern. Particularly sharp was the attack on the Hungarian parties for their trans-

national linkages, implying these were undermining the national interest.⁸² This accusation of 'anti-Slovak' activity was felt by other parties whether on the left or the right and it could inflate the limited meaning of transnational networking to an extraordinary level including responsibility for Slovakia's negative image abroad.⁸³ Sometimes opposition politicians chose to respond in the face of such absurd arguments. The KDH in particular argued in public that they had 'friends and partners' while the HZDS was 'a party which doesn't have friends because of their policies, not because of us'. They even encouraged some of these 'friends' visiting Bratislava, usually parliamentarians from EU countries, to speak out bluntly about Slovak problems.⁸⁴ Other opposition parties however played down their transnational connections as publicity for these could be 'counter-productive' or because they felt vulnerable to HZDS attempts to damage their political position by sensationalising their transnational links.

As a whole, the visibility of transnational linkages is no true guide to their influence—just as their otherwise low profile need not be suggestive of their lack of importance. The 1998 parliamentary elections in Slovakia was widely seen at home and abroad as crucial in its outcome for the chances of the democratisation process in that country. Even though coverage of the Slovak election was sparse in the international press in Western Europe, official circles in Brussels and—not least—transnational actors were very conscious of the systemic importance of the election outcome. It is therefore not surprising that international efforts were made to influence that outcome. These were however maintained at a relatively discreet level given the risk that too much outright intervention might produce a populist backlash, one instigated by a government beginning to feel the harsh winds of change in the air. There was consistent international involvement particularly for the purpose of political monitoring to ensure a genuinely free and fair campaign and, it seems, this constraint added immeasurably to the fact this proved the case. Here, transnational party activity in line with previous patterns operated through financial and material assistance, election training, visits by party speakers from abroad and, not to be forgotten, moral support from fraternal allies in the EU.

It is of course difficult to estimate the exact impact of such outside involvement, let alone that of transnational party activity specifically. More relevant is to see the latter in the longer-term context of its evolution since Slovakia became a new sovereign state in 1993. In the short period since then political élites have come to be increasingly networked in EU and other European channels at different levels. Such unofficial linkages have had a variety of benefits for EU-Slovak relations, Slovak politicians' careers and for some aspects of party development in that country.

Conclusion: towards democratic consolidation?

The case of Slovakia undoubtedly highlights basic problems in applying the EU's approach of democratic conditionality. Although this approach was tightened up during the 1990s, it has remained dependent on the willingness of political, especially governmental, élites in applicant countries to respond. Such willingness is available and most open to EU pressures when the country in question is fully committed to

accession. The government of Vladimir Mečiar, while formally accepting the strategy of membership, nevertheless pursued a path that progressively conflicted with the EU's democracy test. It would therefore appear that democratic conditionality has negligible influence when a government is really determined to pursue its own deviant transition trajectory. All the same, in fact it is not clear whether Bratislava would have taken an even harder domestic line in the absence of pressures from Brussels.⁸⁵ The EU cannot ultimately stop an applicant country from altering its form of regime change even though the negative consequences for its relations with Brussels may be evident.⁸⁶

Our examination of Slovakia shows nevertheless that pariah regimes are more open to outside pressures than hybrid ones, since in the latter authoritarian tendencies are more firmly based and possibly institutionalised. This was evident in a number of different ways. Firstly, the Mečiar government showed at times a certain defensiveness in the face of European criticisms, thus reinforcing the nominal element in a pariah regime, even while external disapproval did not appear to have a direct effect on the course he was taking. Thus, at the state level, the effect of democratic conditionality was quite small but not insignificant. Secondly, at the society level, different actors and particularly NGOs were indeed encouraged by outside support and a critical awareness in Europe of what was happening in their country. This came to fruition in the 1998 election, when NGO activity was pronounced in furthering participation, and international monitoring was extensive, knowing as it did that the outcome would probably be decisive for the future of Slovak democracy.⁸⁷ The role of international influences, both long-term and immediate, in this turning-point election of 1998 should not be underrated.

Thirdly, the party system provided an important opening for European pressures on Slovak politics. The very polarisation, combined with fears among opposition parties over Mečiar's intentions, forced them to look outwards for support and assistance. This meant that their partners in Europe, with whom they were linked transnationally, acquired a greater importance than is normally the case in countries making the transition to democracy. Transnational linkages not only provided the mechanism for transferred experience, thus providing or reinforcing democratic expertise, but they also offered a most welcome form of external solidarity. In this way, such linkage contributed to party development in Slovakia at a time when the new democracy there was still unconsolidated and increasingly threatened.

The professionalisation of party politics was seen in the usual know-how acquired from transnational partners. This took the form of political training and policy advice. Originally focused on election campaigns, such influence gradually occurred in more continuous ways. Moreover, the particular kind of political monitoring adopted by transnational party organisations acted as a version of democratic conditionality; indeed, it was one with more immediate effect than the EU's general approach here, for decisions on Slovak party involvement were affected. This was particularly seen in the case of the former regime party, the SDL. Transnational influences on party development were evident with smaller parties too, notably the DU in its early programme as well as in the support it received from abroad when its parliamentary group was threatened with expulsion. This European support was, again, especially vital in the case of the Hungarian parties, the vehicle of Slovakia's main national

minority. In other words, democracy building with outside assistance formed an important complement to democratic conditionality.

Domestic polarisation also emphasised the one-sidedness of transnational party linkages. These were not cross-party since the parties in the Mečiar government all faced ideological obstacles in establishing partners. Additionally, the latter had doubts about the former's democratic credentials and sought to distance themselves in any case. Electorally, this caused no problems for the Mečiar government parties, as transnational linkages only affected party élites and educated circles (in fact, the source of their wider influence). However, the success of the opposition parties proved an irritant to the government and tended to increase its defensiveness. Slovak opposition party élites gradually became integrated into transnational networks, a process not seriously harmed by difficult official relations between Bratislava and Brussels. This had the usual political socialisation effects through party élite involvement, with likely effects over time in underpinning democratic politics. Several interview respondents linked transnational activity to this wider systemic consideration, although as an aspiration for the future, such as in the binding effects of eventual EU membership. But closer links already with the EP in addition to participation in the Council of Europe and ever increasing channels for unofficial contact with political actors in EU member states were viewed as progress in this direction. Equally, the role that these might play in furthering democratic values was seen as a vague possibility, one at least not absent from the minds of some Slovak politicians involved in transnational contacts.⁸⁸

If the 1998 change of power is consolidated, it could be that transnational linkages will cease to have such an urgent systemic importance, now that the new ruling élites are committed unambiguously to the democratisation path. Whether they become more cross-party depends of course on the fortunes of the new opposition parties, but these are less clear. However, one other effect may be noted. The parties of the new government are already well connected transnationally, and this is likely to facilitate their ability to relate effectively to EU institutions and governments in member states. Given that Slovakia is unlikely to enter the EU for some years, almost certainly remaining in the second wave of Central and East European entrants, then transnational party cooperation will continue to provide a useful channel for smoothing the way. However, the fact that the keenest advocates of transnational linkages are now in government will mean the overall attention paid to them will diminish. In this sense, Slovakia will become that much more of a 'normal' candidate for membership of the European Union. And the more tranquil atmosphere in which transnational cooperation takes place is likely to reflect progress in the country towards democratic consolidation. At the same time, the scope for democratic conditionality will be enhanced.

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This article draws on élite interviews with party leaders and senior party officials. These interviews were carried out in Bratislava in November 1995 and September 1998. In the former case, the visit was funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council for the project on Regime Change in East-Central Europe under its East/West Change Programme. The author gives warm thanks to Karen

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¹ Full membership of the EU, in Whitehead's summary, 'generates powerful, broad-based and long-term support for the establishment of democratic institutions because it is irreversible, and sets in train a cumulative process of economic and political integration that offers incentives and reassurances to a very wide array of social forces ... it sets in motion a very complex and profound set of mutual adjustment processes, both within the incipient democracy and in its interactions with the rest of the Community, nearly all of which tend to favour democratic consolidation' (L. Whitehead (ed.), *The International Dimensions of Democratization: Europe and the Americas* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 19).

² H. Grabbe & K. Hughes, *Enlarging the EU Eastwards* (London, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998), pp. 41ff.

³ These party linkages relate well to Tarrow's typology of different transnational interactions involving social movements: unified social movements that cross national boundaries, the diffusion of national movements across international boundaries, transnational political exchange between groups of national actors and transnational issue networks which target international institutions (S. Tarrow, *Fishnets, Internets and Catnets: Globalisation and Transnational Collective Action*, Working Paper 1996/78, Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales, Instituto Juan March, Madrid, March 1996, p. 19).

⁴ See the discussion of the EU's approach to democratic conditionality in G. Pridham, 'The European Union, democratic conditionality and transnational party linkages: the case of Eastern Europe', in J. Grugel (ed.), *Democracy Without Borders* (London, Routledge, 1999), section (3).

⁵ Grabbe & Hughes, *Enlarging the EU Eastwards*, pp. 42, 45.

⁶ European Commission, *Agenda 2000: The Opinions of the European Commission on the Applications for Accession*, Strasbourg/Brussels, July 1997, report on Slovakia.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ See D. Collier & S. Levitsky, 'Democracy with adjectives: conceptual innovation in comparative research', *World Politics*, April 1997, p. 430.

⁹ Pridham, 'The European Union, democratic conditionality ...'

¹⁰ Grabbe & Hughes, *Enlarging the EU Eastwards*, pp. 63–64.

¹¹ European Commission, DG 1A F/6, *Accession Partnership: Slovakia* (Brussels, 1998), pp. 3–4, 7.

¹² See Pridham, 'The European Union, democratic conditionality ...'

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ S. Szomolányi, 'Identifying Slovakia's emerging regime', in S. Szomolányi & J. Gould (eds), *Slovakia: Problems of Democratic Consolidation* (Bratislava, Slovak Political Science Association, 1997), p. 20, argues this point in application of the concept normally applied to Latin American regimes. She also rightly notes that Mečiar's political style aims at 'delegative democracy', which is a different matter—a distinction which hints in fact at a pariah rather than hybrid regime.

¹⁶ S. Wolchik, 'Democratisation and political participation in Slovakia', in K. Dawisha & B. Parrott (eds), *The Consolidation of Democracy in East-Central Europe* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 221–222.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁸ S. Szomolányi & G. Mesežnikov (eds), *Slovakia: Parliamentary Elections 1994* (Bratislava Slovak Political Science Association, 1995), pp. 79–80.

¹⁹ See for example A. Školkay, 'The role of the mass media in the post-Communist transition in Slovakia', in Szomolányi & Gould (eds), *Slovakia: Problems of Democratic Consolidation*, pp. 187–207.

²⁰ M. Kusý, 'The state of human and minority rights in Slovakia', in Szomolányi & Gould (eds), *Slovakia: Problems of Democratic Consolidation*, pp. 169–185. However, minority rights is an issue that has featured prominently in European criticisms of Slovakia.

²¹ Wolchik, 'Democratisation and political participation in Slovakia', pp. 218–219 and 235.

²² See Szomolányi & Gould (eds), *Slovakia: Problems of Democratic Consolidation*, pp. 28, 144ff.

²³ Karen Henderson, 'Slovakia and the democratic criteria for EU accession', in Karen Henderson (ed.), *Back to Europe: Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union* (London, UCL Press, 1999), pp. 227ff and 233–234.

²⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 228–230. These incidents included the abduction of the President's son by the Slovak security service as well as the attempt to expel the DU from the parliament.

²⁵ E.g. Mečiar's comments on his cabinet's report of August 1998 on this to the EU (*Slovak Spectator*, 14–20 September 1998).

²⁶ The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), for instance, claimed these EU demarches harmonised with its own position and used the occasion for extensive press coverage, although the government-controlled state radio played down the EU criticisms—the issue was seen as undermining the 'moral position' of the government (Interview with Juraj Kohutiar, international secretary of the KDH 1993–97, Bratislava, November 1995).

²⁷ Henderson, 'Slovakia and the democratic criteria for EU accession', pp. 233–235; and K. Henderson, 'The Slovak case of EU enlargement: foreign policy and domestic political conflict', paper for ECPR Standing Group on International Relations/International Studies Association joint conference, Vienna, September 1998, pp. 9ff. According to the latter, pp. 7–9, most party programmes for the 1998 election favoured EU membership although a few with somewhat less positive clarity.

²⁸ Henderson, 'The Slovak case of EU enlargement', p. 13.

²⁹ This is the main message in Henderson, 'Slovakia and the democratic criteria for EU accession'.

³⁰ Jan Sekaj, international secretary of the SDSS from 1992, was responsible as Dubček's last secretary for organising meetings between the latter and Willy Brandt in the first transition years. He emphasised Brandt's crucial influence in helping to promote the identity of democratic socialism in Slovakia, since 'for 40 years Social Democracy was demonised in the CP', and one had to explain that it was 'not a dictatorial but a democratic Socialist party' (Interview with Sekaj, Bratislava, November 1995). This recalled Brandt's powerful influence, for instance, on the ideological redirection of the Spanish PSOE after Franco.

³¹ Interview with Dionýz Hochel, European Commission office in the Slovak Republic, Bratislava, September 1998.

³² Interview with Kohutiar, KDH, November 1995. The KDH's activity has included links with similar parties in East-Central Europe. In September 1996 it organised a meeting of such parties from Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic in Bratislava.

³³ Interview with Drahomír Mihálek, manager of the electoral staff of the SDK for the 1998 election, Bratislava, September 1998. He also commented: 'after the election the SDK will remain as a party, and it will be decided probably which partners abroad will be the most suitable partners for the SDK as a party, and these contacts will be established and developed in the future'.

³⁴ Interview with Ildikó Harasztí, international secretary of the MKDH, Bratislava, November 1995.

³⁵ Information Centre of the Hungarian Coalition in Slovakia, *The Hungarians in Slovakia*, Bratislava, 1997, p. 16. As with the SDK, the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) has accepted these different transnational links of its components.

³⁶ Interview with Harasztí, MKDH, November 1995.

³⁷ *Ibid.* The Hungarian party facilitated the MKDH's membership of the EDU and EUCD. This was a familiar pattern in Central and Eastern Europe for Hungarian parties tended to be in the forefront in developing links among the new democracies there. This of course gave Hungarian parties a special influence in the region.

³⁸ G. Mesežnikov, 'Domestic politics', in M. Bútora & T. Skladony (eds), *Slovakia, 1996–1997: A Global Report on the State of Society* (Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs, 1998), p. 24. The SZS played an active part at the EFGP congress in 1996 over a resolution against the construction of nuclear power plants in Central and Eastern Europe.

³⁹ Interview with Andrea Kovacikova, member of SOP executive board, Bratislava, September 1998.

⁴⁰ Interview with Bo Toresson, secretary-general of the SI's European Forum for Democracy and Solidarity, Brussels, January 1996.

⁴¹ Interview with Sekaj, international secretary SDSS, November 1995. The SI rule was that if one member party already existed in a country it had a right of veto over another applicant from the same country. According to Sekaj, there was generally good cooperation with the SDL and 'its programme is Social Democratic' although its membership consisted largely of former communists; but the internal battle between factions counted most for if that favouring an approach to Mečiar won then the party would fail SI membership.

⁴² 'It is our main goal ... to have contacts with all parties of the SI, to debate in discussions on different issues and to participate'. It was agreed that SI membership was important for party prestige, contacts having commenced with the SI in 1991 (Interview with Jutka Takatova, assistant to SDL international secretary, Bratislava, November 1995).

⁴³ Interview with Takatova, November 1995.

⁴⁴ Interviews with Takatova, November 1995, and with Ivan Puškáč, international secretary of the SDL, Bratislava, September 1998.

⁴⁵ E.g. in 1992 the Italian PDS was already sending the SDL its local election guide for the campaign in Reggio Emilia (letter from Angelo Malagoli, PDS federation for Reggio Emilia, to Peter Weiss, 10 March 1992).

⁴⁶ E.g. letter from Peter Weiss to Piero Fassino, PDS international secretary, 4 October 1995, in which he extended an invitation to visit Slovakia and asked a favour of Fassino to convince Rudolf Scharping, the SPD leader, to visit Bratislava and 'to become acquainted with the situation in Slovakia directly', as a way of influencing favourably the SDSS's attitude to the SDL's joining the SI: 'His visit before the congress of the SDSS could strengthen the position of those who are in favour of continuing close cooperation with the SDL' (a copy of the letter was given to me by one interview respondent).

⁴⁷ These contradictory elements included anti- and reform Communists, advocates of a market economy and state intervention and those who were pro-Western or Slavophile (Z. Bútorová & M. Bútorá, 'Political parties, value orientations and Slovakia's road to independence', in G. Wightman (ed.), *Party Formation in East-Central Europe: Post-Communist Politics in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Bulgaria* (Aldershot, Edward Elgar, 1995, p. 123). During the author's visit in November 1995, the story was related in various opposition party headquarters that the HZDS had in vain sought membership of the Socialist, Liberal and Christian Democratic internationals—apparently simultaneously!

⁴⁸ Interview with Ján Figel, KDH vice-chairman and vice-chairman of the Christian Democratic group at Strasbourg, Bratislava, September 1998.

⁴⁹ 'Standard' parties were those that related without too much trouble to the left/right spectrum in European politics; while 'non-standard' parties failed to do so because of their propensity to national and social populism, authoritarianism, radicalism and extremism as well as a confrontational and charismatic approach (G. Mesežnikov, 'The parliamentary elections 1994: a confirmation of the party system in Slovakia', in Szomolányi & Mesežnikov, *Slovakia: Parliamentary Elections 1994*, pp. 105ff).

⁵⁰ For its 1996 congress the HZDS invited delegations from (Milošević's) Socialist Party of Serbia, Our Home is Russia, the Polish People's Party, the Democratic Party of Montenegro, the Social Democratic Party of Romania and the Moravian National Party, i.e. West European parties were notable for their absence (Mesežnikov, 'Domestic politics', in Bútorá & Skladony, *Slovakia 1996–97*, p. 19). Significantly, these links—which outside Europe included the Communist Party of China—confirmed the suspicions of those who saw Mečiar as having Slavophile rather than pro-European inclinations in his foreign policy.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵² Interview with Eduard Kukan, DU chairman from 1997 and Slovak Foreign Minister 1994 and from 1998, Bratislava, September 1998. Kukan linked his party's relative success in 1994, with 9% of the vote, to—among other things—its ability to construct a viable programme under this strong European influence.

⁵³ The SDK's 1998 election programme was 'influenced by the general standards that are being used in the EU', and it had studied the programmes of some parties in West European countries (interview with Drahomír Míháleč, manager of SDK electoral staff, Bratislava, September 1998).

⁵⁴ This was attributed to the SDL's political learning from the Party of European Socialists (PES) and its member parties (interview with Ivan Puškáč, SDL international secretary, Bratislava, September 1998). The SDL even imitated the British Labour Party's technique of distributing small glossy cards with key election promises listed on the back.

⁵⁵ Interview with Puškáč.

⁵⁶ Interview with Pál Csáky, SMK member of parliament and vice-chairman responsible for foreign affairs, Bratislava, September 1998.

⁵⁷ A prominent example would have been Alexander Dubček, who was due to be elected a vice-chairman of the Socialist International in 1992 but his death in a car accident prevented that (interview with Jaroslav Riha, SDSS international secretary, Bratislava, September 1998). Ján Figel, deputy chairman of the KDH and member of the Slovak National Council (Parliament), was until 1998 vice-chairman of the Christian Democratic group in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

⁵⁸ Typical was the response of a prominent member of Coexistence who said that through transnational cooperation 'all kinds of signals' were possible; most of all 'countering authoritarian tendencies by providing information to partner parties in Western Europe' (interview with Istvan Batta, Coexistence, Bratislava, November 1995). The interviews in November 1995 were held a week after the EP's resolution criticising democratic conditions in Slovakia and during the very week of

the constituent meeting of the EU-Slovakia Joint Parliamentary Committee; and in September 1998 in the final week of the election campaign. There is, however, no reason to suspect the need for external solidarity diminished at other times although it certainly became less visible.

⁵⁹ Interview with Juraj Kohutiari, KDH international secretary 1993–97, Bratislava, September 1998.

⁶⁰ Interview with Kukan, DU chairman, September 1998. This episode was one of several political issues that counted against Slovakia's early consideration as an EU applicant (see Henderson, 'Slovakia and the democratic criteria for EU accession', p. 228). The Constitutional Court rejected the case of the government against the DU.

⁶¹ E.g. the programme of support to Slovakia from the British Westminster Foundation in late 1995 included both direct party support (e.g. the Conservatives were provided with funds for visits from the KDH to study economic policy and also security policy) as well as support for an independent institute of foreign affairs in Bratislava (basic office equipment), a 12-month pilot programme for training union management run by Ruskin College, Oxford and Cranfield School of Management and the publication of a report monitoring political life in Slovakia by the Sándor Márai Foundation (information supplied to the author by Siobhain O'Beirne, Project Manager, Westminster Foundation, November 1995).

⁶² European Human Rights Foundation, *The European Union's Phare and Tacis Democracy Programme: Projects in Operation 1996* (Brussels, 1996), section on Slovakia, pp. 121–126.

⁶³ K. Quigley, *For Democracy's Sake: Foundations and Democracy Assistance in Central Europe* (Washington DC, Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 1997), chapter 5 on Slovakia, p. 70. The Mečiar government showed some concern about this NGO activity and set about monitoring it through the security service SIS (*ibid.*, p. 62).

⁶⁴ This is not to say that such actors did not express frustration, sometimes volubly, over developments in Slovakia, as the author's interviews in Brussels, Vienna and Bonn, for example, attested. But they invariably drew a distinction between government and parties (of the opposition) in Slovakia, unlike some commentators in Western Europe on the state of Slovak affairs. The point is that transnational actors were usually well-informed, not least because their partners in Bratislava saw to that. Furthermore, they had links of ideological sympathy with their Slovak opposite numbers which reinforced a consciousness of the party dimension.

⁶⁵ See EU-Slovakia JPC, constituent meeting, Bratislava, 22–24 November 1995, declaration and recommendations, PE 215.488; and Daily News Monitor, Press Agency of the Slovak Republic, 23 and 24 November 1995. Both Mečiar and his ally parliament president Gašparovič were present at this meeting.

⁶⁶ European Parliament, DG for Committees and Delegations, Information Note on the Work of the EU-Slovak Republic JPC, PE 209.197/rev.

⁶⁷ Interview with Geoffrey Harris, head of EP secretariat, Brussels, January 1996.

⁶⁸ According to Pál Csáky, SMK (interview, September 1998), these meetings were 'not a discussion between members of parliament of Slovakia and members of the EP; but it was always a discussion between the members of the Slovak delegation, between the opposition and the coalition, because we had different points of view'.

⁶⁹ Interview with Eduard Kukan, DU chairman, Bratislava, September 1998.

⁷⁰ Information provided by Joanne de Leon, Office of Clerk of the Assembly, Council of Europe, fax to author, 30 November 1998.

⁷¹ Interview with Ildikó Haraszti, MKDM international secretary, Bratislava, November 1995.

⁷² E.g. interview with Pál Csáky, SMK, September 1998: 'The Council of Europe is important for the discussion, for the building of the thinking of our partners from the Slovak government—maybe [it was like] a school, a secondary school for politicians from Eastern Europe, but in reality the possibilities are not very effective'. He commented that 'we prefer contacts now to the EP, to the European Council' concerning the solution of political and minority questions in Slovakia.

⁷³ Whereas official criticisms of Slovakia tended to polarise and were taken as 'an affront to the independence and sovereignty of Slovakia', there was a habit with ideologically linked colleagues from different European countries to 'understand why these friends are concerned, and we are glad they are concerned because friends are those who tell you the truth' (interview with Jan Figel, Bratislava, September 1998).

⁷⁴ Interview with Eduard Kukan, Bratislava, September 1998. Shortly afterwards Kukan was appointed Foreign Minister in the Dzurinda government.

⁷⁵ A warning of this possibility came when Mečiar visited Bonn in January 1996. Although head of the Slovak government, he was shunned by Chancellor Kohl and attempts to construct even a brief meeting—the Slovak embassy was located right near the Chancellor's Office—proved unsuccessful.

⁷⁶ In this way, attempts were also made to influence the deliberations of the Inter-Governmental

Conference. The KDH for instance highlighted in 1995 the need to preserve national sovereignty in EU institutional reform (interview with Kohutiar, KDH international secretary, Bratislava, November 1995). Clearly, such influence from a party in a country with then distant prospects of accession was negligible, but such attempts should not be entirely discounted as a novel form of networking for such parties.

⁷⁷ Interview with Kukan, September 1998. While claiming to be 'objective' about Slovak conditions, this was also an admission that transnational party activity could be restrained by a concern over attacks back home, i.e. from the Mečiar government.

⁷⁸ However, in March 1997 one representative sample survey was conducted by the FOCUS agency, asking about the partners abroad of the Slovak parties. This highlighted the prominence here of the KDH and SDL, but otherwise revealed some ignorance on the matter (information supplied by Dr Olga Gyárfášová, FOCUS, Bratislava).

⁷⁹ Interview with Zora Butorova, FOCUS, Bratislava, November 1995.

⁸⁰ Interview with Jan Sekaj, SDSS international secretary, Bratislava, November 1995.

⁸¹ Z. Butorova (ed.), *Democracy and Discontent in Slovakia: A Public Opinion Profile of a Country in Transition* (Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs, 1998), p. 81.

⁸² There was a touch of paranoia in government attacks, e.g. 'they think we lobby everywhere; that this demarche of the EU was one of our activities' (interview with Ildikó Haraszti, MKDH international secretary, Bratislava, November 1995).

⁸³ E.g. 'they blame the bad coverage of the foreign press on our links abroad; they attack our finances from the West given to parties and especially to NGOs; they blame the positions of the West as being provoked by the opposition parties' (interview with Juraj Kohutiar, KDH international secretary 1993–97, Bratislava, September 1998).

⁸⁴ 'We try to ask them [visiting parliamentarians] not to be very diplomatic, to be very popular [i.e. easily understood] in dealing with either sensitive or ordinary issues concerning everyday life of the Slovak nation—two important seminars were organised by the EUCD on national minorities in Bratislava, which is one of the hottest issues for the public' (interview with Jan Figel, KDH deputy chairman, Bratislava, September 1998).

⁸⁵ Henderson, 'Slovakia and the democratic criteria for EU accession', p. 233.

⁸⁶ An earlier case, which did not transpire, was the attempted coup in Madrid in February 1981. This occurred in the middle of Spanish negotiations for entry and, if successful, would have halted these. As it was, the event caused momentary shock waves in the EU.

⁸⁷ There have in fact been few national elections in new democracies with such a direct impact on their prospects. In postwar Europe these would include Italy in 1948 and Portugal in 1975. Romania in 1996 is another possibility since it may turn out to be fairly decisive for that country's 'second transition'.

⁸⁸ E.g. Kukan, DU leader, saw transnational activity as significant in encouraging Slovaks in developing participatory attitudes in politics in place of the traditional 'tendency to look at people in positions [of power] as gods, they are bosses, you cannot touch them—explain to people *they* are the masters ...' (interview with Kukan, Bratislava, September 1998).