



# Era of Vladimír Mečiar and its end

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10.3.2020

# Beginning of the story

- Born in 1942
- Communist party:
  - Active member of the Communist youth organization
  - 1962 – joined ranks of the party
  - 1970 – excluded from the party
- 1970s and 1980s:
  - Graduated from Law faculty
  - Company lawyer until the end of this period

# The career leap

- Reconstruction of Slovak government in 1989
- Nearly a contest to find a proper person to lead the Ministry of Interior
- Mečiar as one of the candidates:
  - Alleged support of Alexander Dubček
  - Excellent overview about the ministry and its structures
- Mečiar selected and became member of the government

# A new star in politics

- Rising popularity of Mečiar
- VPN's demonstration '*Let's tell the truth*':
  - Beginning of 1990
  - Called against the communists who did not allow VPN's leader to become chairman of Slovak parliament
  - Mečiar warned those '*who misused their positions that there is enough space in the prisons*'

# A new star in politics



- Riot in Leopoldov prison in Spring 1990:
  - Prisoners demanded amnesty and demolished the facility
  - Lt. Sámel (from federal ministry) chosen to lead the intervention against the riot
  - Expected casualties – 200-250 on both sides
  - Mečiar refused to directly take part in the intervention

# A new star in politics

- March 28 – the intervention
  - Prisoners asked to surrender (only 172 out of 1,006 did)
  - Sámel demanded that Slovak government (in fact Mečiar) approves to conduct the charge
  - In the following fight the riot was suppressed with only one dead prisoner
- Later events:
  - The intervention interpreted as a great success
  - Lt. Sámel promoted to general
  - 1992 during the trial with prisoners Mečiar stated that *'he personally had to take command in the intervention'*

# A new star in politics

- Rising popularity of Mečiar in the society
- An unknown member of the new government in 1989
- Public surveys:
  - April 1990 – No. 7 in highest popularity
  - May 1990 – No. 4
- After election 1990 one of three candidates of VPN for Prime Minister

# Elections 1990

Party	Votes (in %)	Seats
VPN	29,4	<b>48</b>
KDH	19,2	<b>31</b>
SNS	13,9	22
KSČ / KSS	13,4	22
Hungarian parties	8,7	14
DS	4,4	<b>7</b>
Green party	3,5	6
Others	7,6	0
		150





# 5 VEREJNOSŤ PROTI NÁSILIU



ĽALFA



BUDA



DUBČEK



MÍŘINSKÝ



KNÁŽEK



ČÍČ



KOSTA



NINDEŠTÁ

KANDIDÁTI  
SPOLUPRÁCE  
A DÔVERY



PONICKÁ



ZASZLÓS



KOVÁČ



MEČNÍČEK



ONDŘEK



STRAČAR



KOVÁČ



SNOPKO

# Government after elections

- Prime Minister – Vladimír Mečiar
- The strength of a bulldog: *'All will go on vacation...after two years!'*
- Conflict between VPN's liberal leadership and Mečiar:
  - Office of Prime Minister given to Christian Democrats (KDH)
  - VPN leader Fedor Gál ostracized and later decided to leave the country
- 1991 – Mečiar creates Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (**HZDS**)
  - Slower economic reform
  - Populism
  - Nationalism

# Elections 1992

Party	Votes (in %)	Seats (in %)
HZDS	37,3	<b>74</b>
SDL	14,7	29
KDH	8,9	18
SNS	7,9	15
Hungarian parties	7,4	14
ODU	4	0
Others	19,8	0
		150

# HZDS first rule (1992-1994)

- Type of government?
  - Officially HZDS ruled alone
  - HZDS backed by 2 independents and also by nationalist SNS and leftist SDL
  - One minister from SNS
- Problematic features of the political style:
  - University of Trnava
  - Internal confrontations of Mečiar with other party officials → always ending with their departure from HZDS

# End of government in 1994

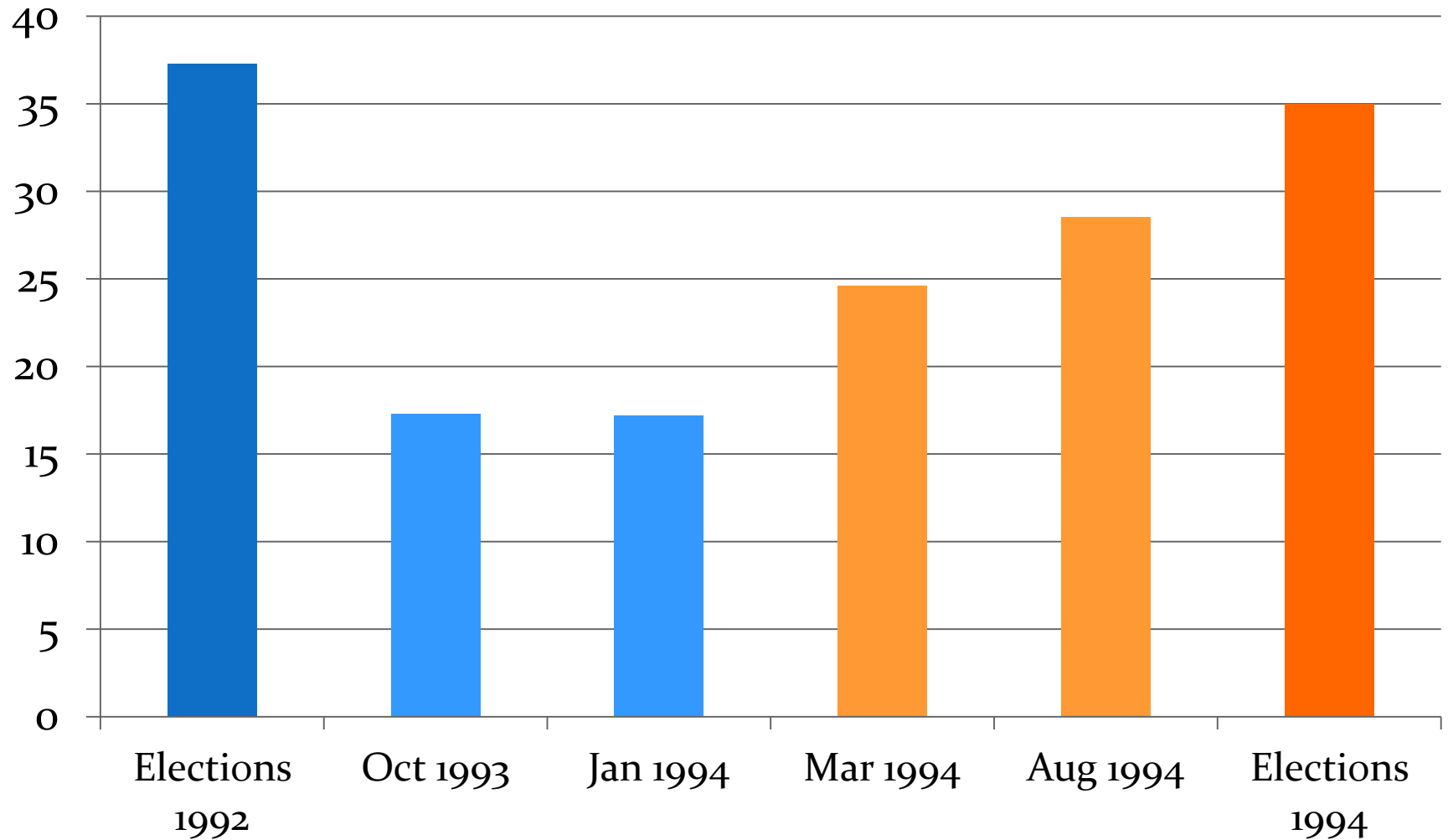


- 1993 – Michal Kováč elected for president:
  - Candidate of HZDS
  - Very soon became independent and later an arch-enemy of Mečiar
- Publication of Mečiar’s private „steamroll“ speech about gaining total power in the state
- Spring 1994:
  - President’s criticism of HZDS in parliamentary report
  - Government did not survive a vote of no confidence

# Interim government

- Prime Minister – Jozef Moravčík
- In office only for several months
- Very heterogeneous coalition:
  - Christian democrats - KDĽ
  - Ex-communists – SĽ
  - Former HZĽS members → Democratic Union (DU)
  - Supported by Hungarian parties
- Mečiar: „This is not a Slovak government. This is a rule of foreigners in Slovakia.“

# Support of HZDS



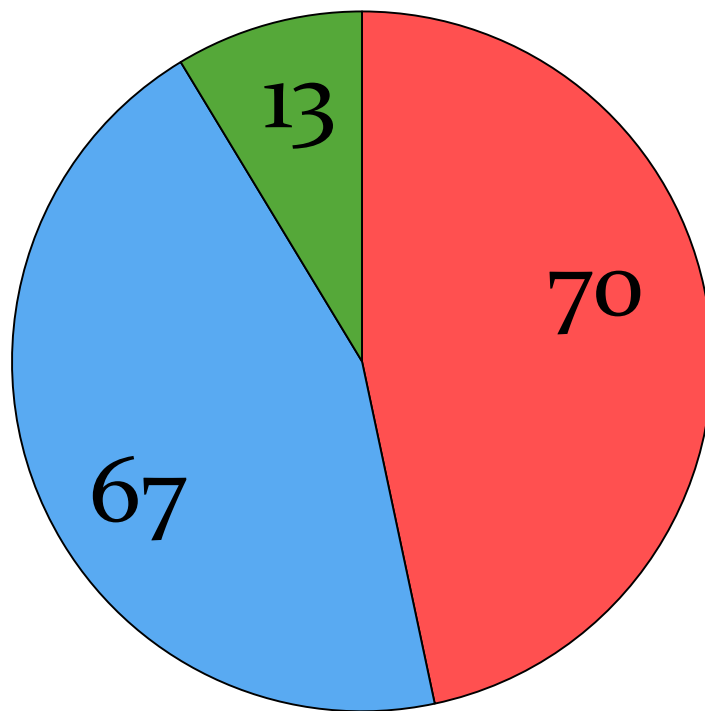
# Early election 1994 – no clear winner

Party	Votes (in %)	Seats (in %)
HZDS	34,96	61
SDL (SV)	10,41	18
Hungarian parties	10,18	17
KDH	10,08	17
DU	8,57	15
ZRS	7,34	13
SNS	5,4	9
Others	13,06	0
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# Early elections 1994

■ HZDS + SNS   ■ Moravčík's government   ■ ZRS



# Government 1994 - 1998



- Prime Minister – Vladimír Mečiar
- Extremely heterogeneous coalition
- Dominance of HZDS
- Most problematic Slovak government since 1993 until now
- „*This is not a Prime Minister. This is a boomerang.*“  
(Milan Markovič, comedian)



# Coalition partners of HZDS

- SNS:
  - 1993 – Ján Slota elected as leader
  - Far right party
  
- ZRS (Association of Slovak Workers):
  - Created in 1994 by secession from SDL
  - Radical left, populism
  - Leader – Ján Ľupták



# Government – problematic features

- 1. Mastery of state and its institutions
- 2. Economic policy
- 3. Power performance and clientelism
- 4. Mečiar as the leading factor
- 5. Public media
- 6. Search for enemies

# 1. Mastery of state

- Traditions of power control:
  - Independent audit institutions
  - Independent media
  - PR electoral system transformed into parliamentary committees
- No respect to these traditions
- In accordance with Mečiar's „steamroll“ speech

# 1. Mastery of state

- November 1994:
  - „*The long parliamentary night*“
  - „*Night of the long knives*“
- Demonstration of power in parliament:
  - Opposition MPs granted only low rank positions
  - Full power in parliamentary control committees
  - Change of leadership in media, General Attorney, National Audit Office etc. (38 offices)
- Violation of laws and constitution
- Mečiar: „*The elections are over. Get used to it*“



## 2. Economic policy



- Vast privatization of state property
- Aim to create a Slovak „capital-generating“ class
- The real story:
  - Unprofitable sells to people connected to the governmental parties
  - Direct sells without competition

	1995	1996	1997
Price as % of value	74,67	28,17	18,02

# East Slovakian Ironworks



- March 1994 (the day of Mečiar`s fall):
  - Sell of 10 % of shares to Mečiar`s friend Alexander Rezeš
  - His company was created on the same day
- Rezeš became member of Mečiar`s government after election 1994 and the state sold him further shares
- 1997 – Rezeš controlled about half of the shares (f.e. bought the football club Sparta Prague)
- After 1998 – risk of bankrupt → company sold to U.S. Steel



# 3. Power performance

- Forced stability of parliamentary groups:
  - Contracts with MPs
  - Exclusion of disloyal MPs from the parliament
- Colonization of the state service:
  - New territorial division of Slovakia
  - Assignments only of fully loyal people or party members to this positions → rise of HZDS membership
- Vast clientelism:
  - Creation of alternative professional associations (journalists, towns, NGOs)

## 4. Mečiar as the leading factor

- Most important person in the government and HZDS
- A sole decision maker
- Highest popularity of all during most of the 90s
- Close to a personality cult among his supporters
- Direct contact with voters on regular mass meetings
- „*The father of the nation*“, „*Only he*“ (*LenOn* in Slovak)



# The peak of world



- HZDS - *'Where no political party has gone before'*
- 1998 – successful expedition to climb Mt. Everest
- After successful climb three flags have been installed on the top – Chinese, Slovak and HZDS

# 5. State owned media

- Full control of these media acquired during the long parliamentary night in November 1994
- The nationwide Slovak television:
  - Absolute support during years 1994 – 1998
  - Propagation during campaign 1998 – more than 4x more time devoted to government than the opposition
  - Journalists moderated HZDS campaign meetings (!)
- Minor newspapers (The Slovak Republic), party magazines

# 6. Search for enemies

- **Opposition:**
  - Not allowed to exercise real control of the politics
  - Aim of HZDS to exclude DU from parliament
  - Portrayed as the enemies of the country
- **President:**
  - No. 1 personal enemy of Mečiar
  - Government had no power to force him to resign
  - Graduation of confrontation to extremists

## 6. Search for enemies

- A clear sign of Mečiar's style of politics
- **Internal enemies:**
  - Hungarians, opposition, president
  - Mečiar revealed 9 attempts of his assassination
- **External enemies:**
  - EU, NATO – application of double standard
- **Combination:**
  - Conspiracy theories about aims to end the government

# Impact of the government 1994 -98

- Economic problems
- **Character of the regime:**
  - Definitely not a liberal democracy neither an authoritarian regime
  - Possibly a hybrid regime
- **Devastated foreign image:**
  - Isolation, exclusion from integration to EU and NATO
  - Madelaine Albright called Slovakia a „*black hole on the map of Europe*“



# Party system

- Extremely polarized
- Division into two blocs – pro-Mečiar and anti-Mečiar
- Party of the Civic Understanding (SOP):
  - Leader – Rudolf Schuster (ex-communist, popular mayor of Košice)
  - Vague ideology, populism
  - Aim – to fill the position between the blocs
  - Forced to choose → anti-Mečiar bloc

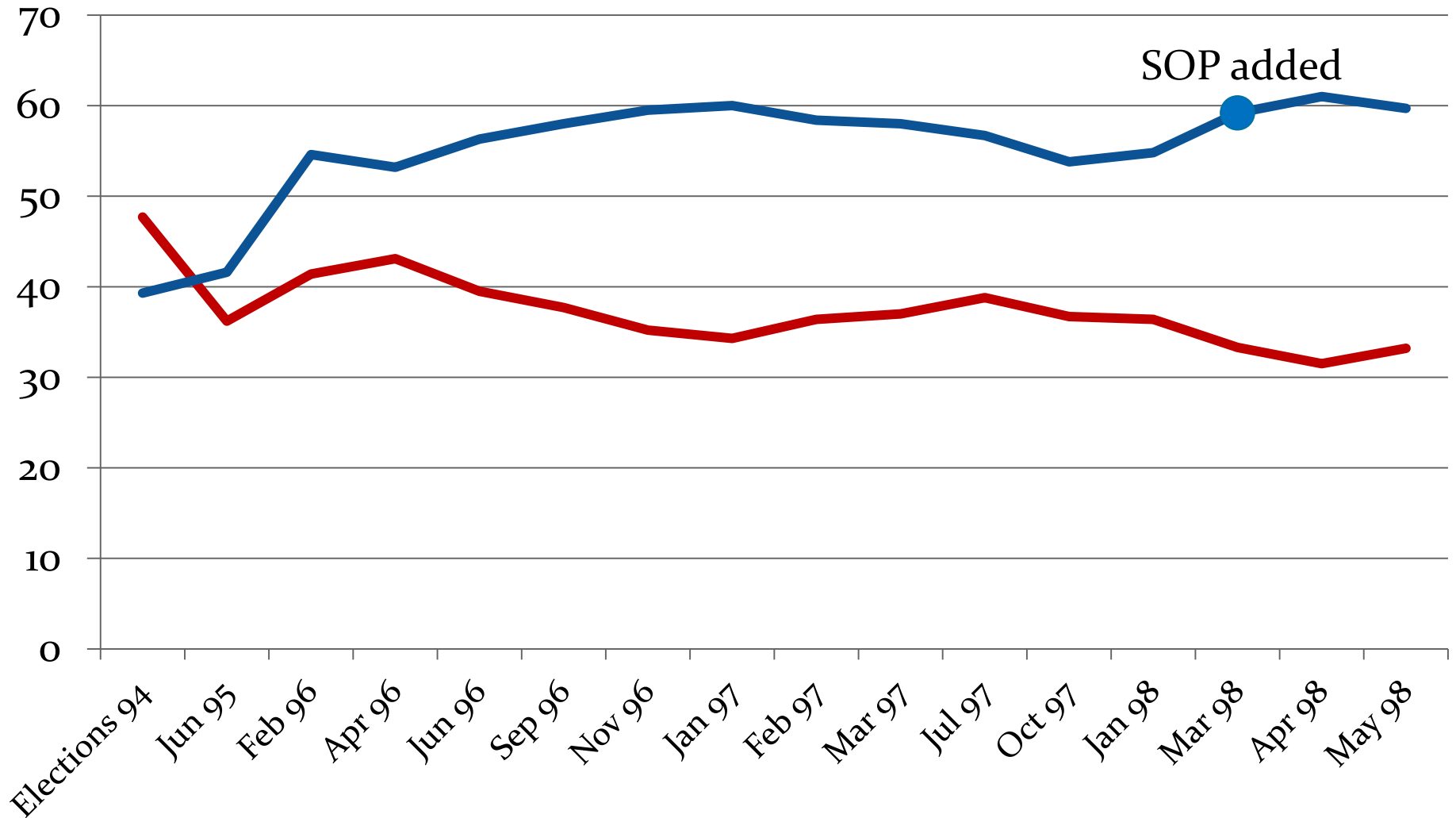


# Party system

- Integration and cooperation of opposition
- Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK):
  - KDH, DU, DS, social democrats, greens
  - Prevailing centre-right orientation
- Opposition more popular than government → electoral reform only **few months** before elections aimed against coalitions (SDK, Hungarians)
- Transformation of these coalitions into single parties

# Public support

— Government — Opposition



# The „map“ of the party system in 1998

- Pro-Mečiar bloc:

- HZDS
- SNS
- ZRS



- Anti-Mečiar bloc:

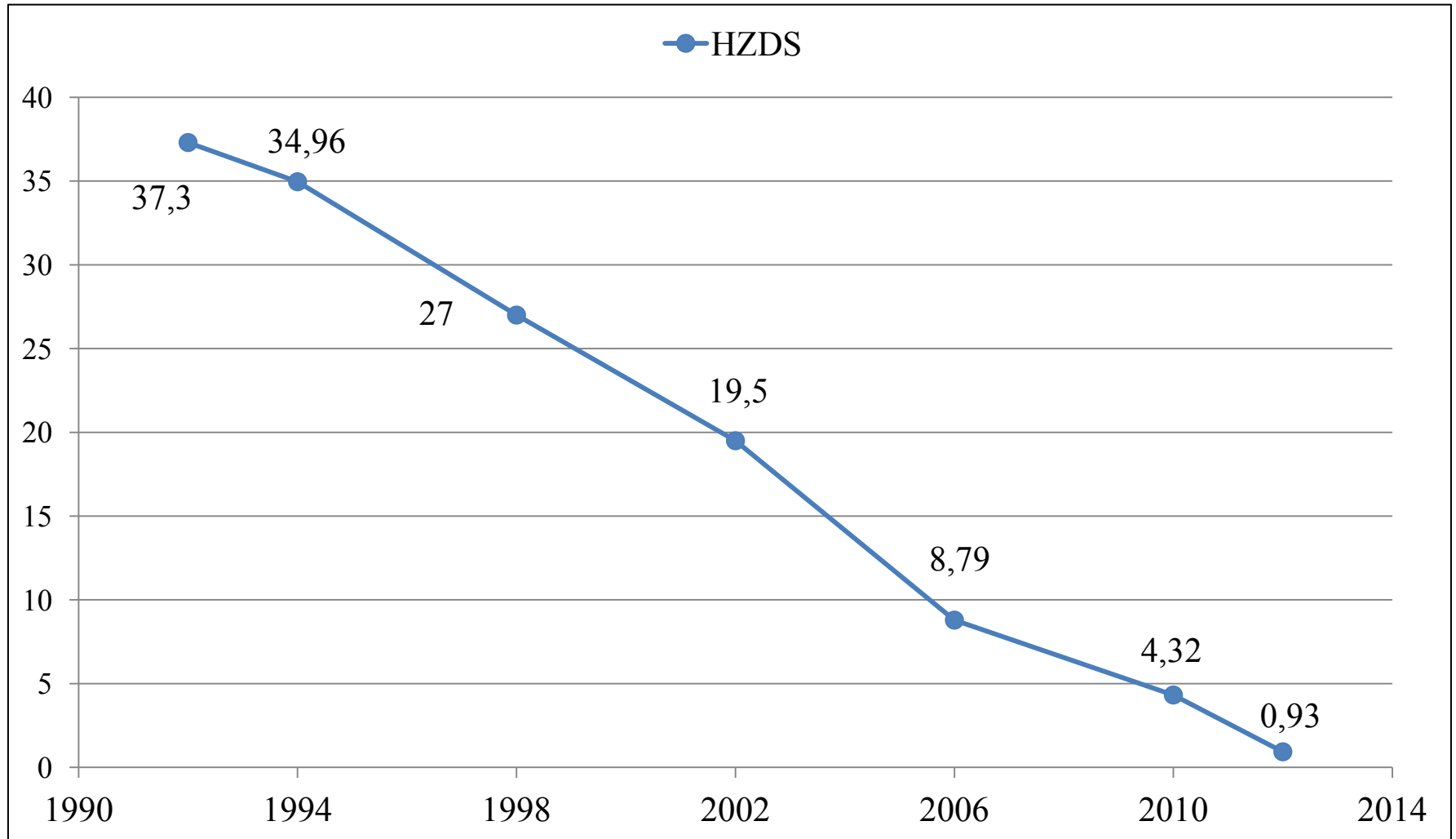
- SDK
- SDL
- SOP
- SMK (Party of the Hungarian Coalition)



# Elections 1998

Party	Votes (in %)	Seats (in %)
HZDS	27	43
SDK	26,33	<b>42</b>
SDL	14,66	<b>23</b>
SMK	9,12	<b>15</b>
SNS	9,07	14
SOP	8,01	<b>13</b>
ZRS	1,3	0
Others	5,81	0
		150

# The fate of Mečiar



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