

# **Political system of Slovakia**

## **Parliament, government, president**

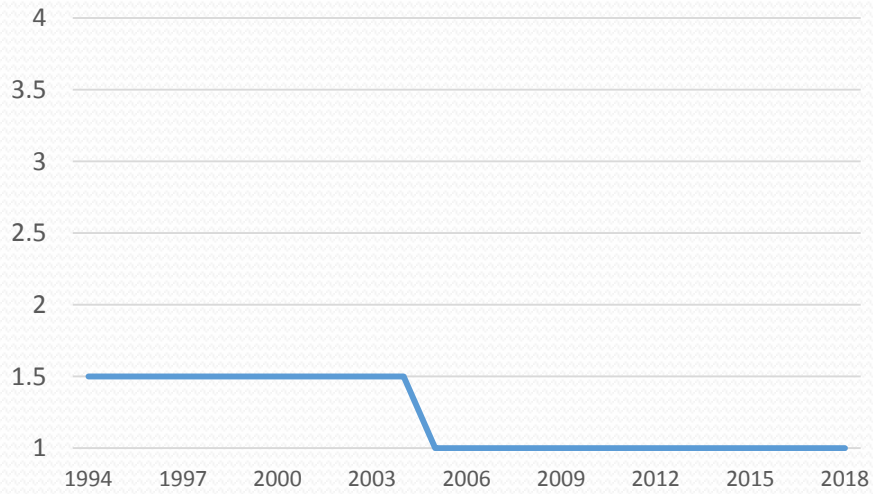
Peter Spáč

# Basic facts about Slovakia

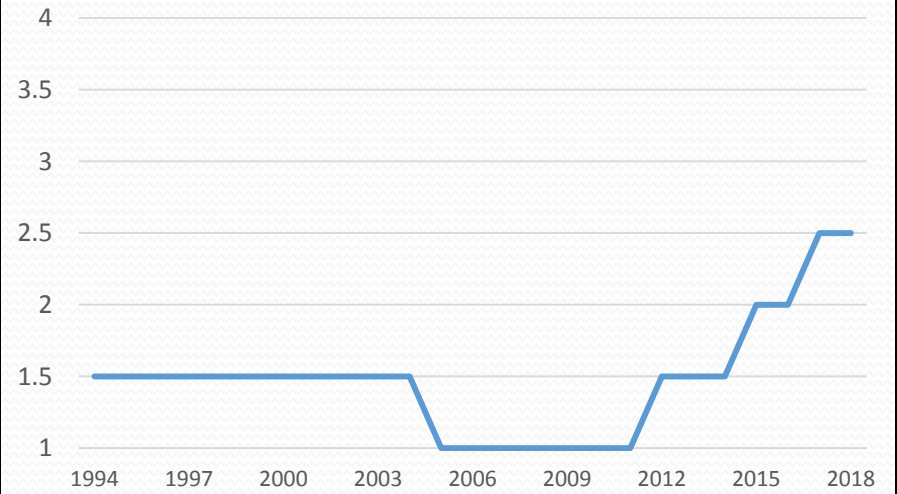
- One of two successor of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic
- Parliamentary republic
- Liberal democracy:
  - „*Free*“ according to Freedom House
  - Political rights – rank 1
  - Civil liberties – rank 1

# Freedom House Rating (1 – 7 scale)

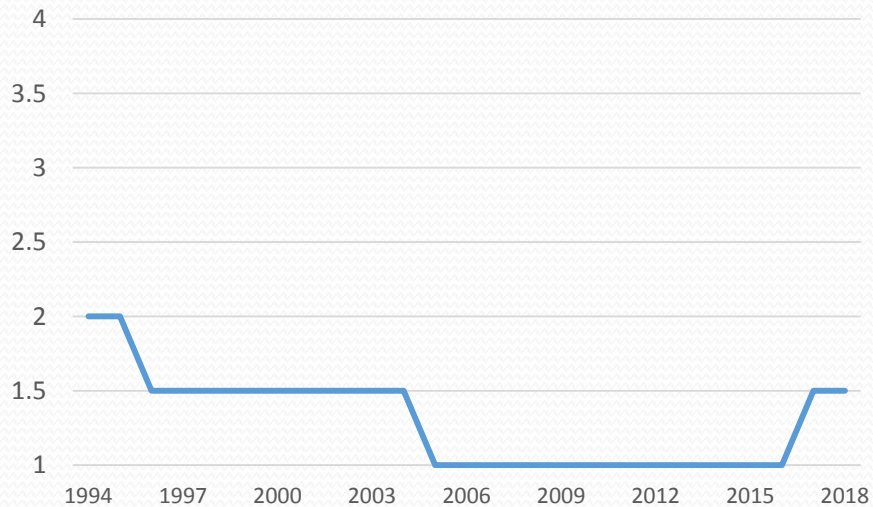
Czech Republic



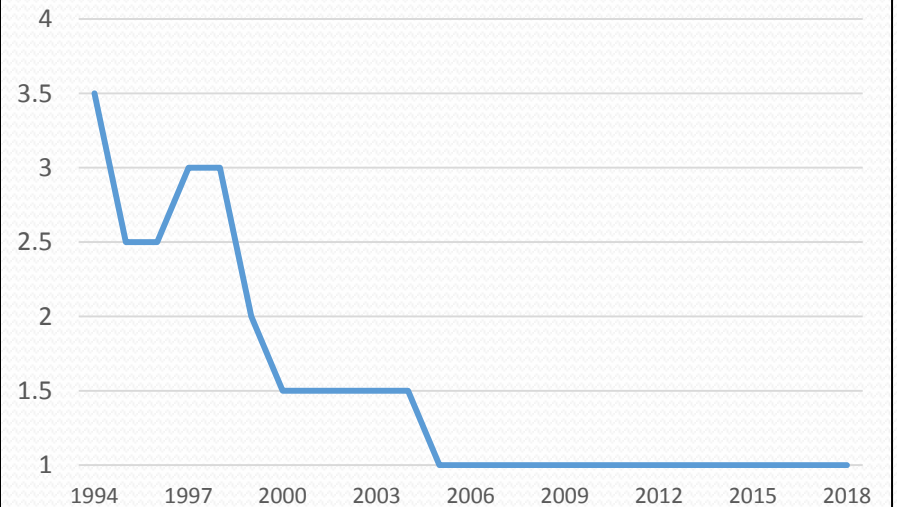
Hungary



Poland



Slovakia



# Freedom House Rating 2020

Country	Political Rights (max 40 points)	Civil Liberties (max 60 points)	Result
Czech Rep	36	55	91 (FREE)
Hungary	27	43	70 (PARTLY FREE)
Poland	35	49	84 (FREE)
Slovakia	36	52	88 (FREE)

# Division of power

- **Legislative:**
  - Parliament
- **Executive:**
  - Government
  - President
- **Judicial**

# Parliament



- Name:
  - Until 1993 – Slovak National Council
  - Since 1993 – National Council of Slovak Republic (NR SR)
- Unicameral, 150 MPs
- 4 year electoral term

# Parliament

- Free (representative) mandate
- MPs :
  - Are not bound by any directives
  - Act according to their „sense and conscience“
  - Cannot be dismissed from NR SR except a few situations stated by law
  - Cannot be revoked by voters



# Parliament - powers

- Adoption of law
- Control of the government and the executive power in general
- Main arena for government-opposition relations
- Personal nominations:
  - Chairman of the Supreme Audit Office
  - General Attorney



# Legislative process

- Condition – at least 76 MPs have to be present

Issue	MPs needed
Common decisions and „regular“ laws	Majority of at least the needed 76 MPs
Overriding president's veto	76 MPs (majority of 150)
Constitution, war declaration	90 MPs (three fifths of 150)

# Electoral law

- A crucial field with impact on the political system
- Constitution:
  - *„Deputies are elected by secret ballot in general, equal, and direct elections. (..) **Details** concerning the election of deputies will be set out in a law.“*
- How many MPs (at minimum) are needed to change the electoral system?

# Executive power

- Traditional division into two main subjects:
  - Government
  - President
- Government as the most powerful body in Slovak politics
- Weak president with a question mark



# Government after 2020 election



# Government

- Responsible to NR SR
- A vote of no-confidence may concern:
  - The government as a whole
  - Each individual minister
- Votes of 76 MPs needed
- Very often a symbolic gesture of opposition's dissatisfaction with government's results

Term	Government	Members	Months (app.)
1990 – 1991	Mečiar	3	11
1991 - 1992	Čarnogurský	3	14
1992 – 1994	Mečiar II	1 (?)	22
1994	Moravčík	3	9
1994 – 1998	Mečiar III	3	47
1998 – 2002	Dzurinda	4	48
2002 – 2006	Dzurinda II	4	46
2006 – 2010	Fico	3	48
2010 – 2012	Radičová	4	21
2012 – 2016	Fico II	1	48
2016 - 2018	Fico III	4 → 3	24
2018 - 2020	Pellegrini	3	24
2020 - ?	Matovič	4	1*

# President

- The head of the state
- The highest state official
- Elected for 5 years – vs. 4 years of parliament (and possibly the government)
- De facto not responsible for performing the office



# President - elections

- Originally elected by the parliament
- High polarization in 90s → inability to elect new president
- Result - for more than one year Slovakia had no head of state (1998 – 1999)
- Solution – direct elections since 1999 based on two-round system

# President - elections

- „Majority of **valid votes** of the **eligible citizens**“
- What sort of majority is that?
- Eligible citizens: 4 409 793
- Voted: 1 914 021
- How many votes does a candidate need for victory?
  - Most constitutional lawyers say a majority of 4,4 mil. votes is needed but not all agree

# President - powers

- Belongs to weaker presidents
- Numerous powers not only of symbolic meaning
- Adoption of direct elections in 1999 was **not accompanied** by strengthening of his position
- Some powers were even weakened (countersignature)

# President - powers

- **President and government:**
  - Appoints and recalls Prime Minister
  - Appoints and recalls ministers based on the proposal of the Prime Minister
  - Since 1999 the proposal of Prime Minister is **imperative**
- **President and parliament (NR SR):**
  - No right of legislative initiative
  - Dissolution of NR SR (very limited)
  - Veto
  - NR SR may call for a plebiscite about president's revocation

# Slovak presidents

- 1993 – 1998 – Michal Kováč
- 1999 – 2004 – Rudolf Schuster
- 2004 - 2014 – Ivan Gašparovič
- 2014 – 2019 - Andrej Kiska
- Since 2019 – Zuzana Čaputová



President		Government	
1993 – 1998	Michal Kováč	– 1994	V. Mečiar
		1994	J. Moravčík (interim)
		1994 - 1998	V. Mečiar
		1998 - 2002	M. Dzurinda
1999 - 2004	Rudolf Schuster	2002 - 2006	M. Dzurinda
2004 - 2009	Ivan Gašparovič	2006 - 2010	R. Fico
2009 - 2014	Ivan Gašparovič	2010 - 2012	I. Radičová
		2012 -	R. Fico

President in Slovak politics –  
decisive factor or a weak  
symbol?

# Michal Kováč



- Economist, member of VPN and later HZDS
- Elected by parliament as nominee of HZDS
- In office during two Mečiar's governments
- Expected loyalty to HZDS
- Reality:
  - Increasing independence from his party
  - Raising conflicts with Mečiar
  - Finally became the arch-enemy of HZDS and its chairman



# Michal Kováč



- 1993 – 1994 – „*the separation*“:
  - Presidential report in NR SR in spring 1994
  - Impact → end of Mečiar’s government
- 1994 – 1998 – „*the open war*“:
  - Mostly one-sided conflict
  - Aim of Mečiar to weaken, delegitimize and humiliate the president

# Michal Kováč



- Revocation of president's powers not backed by constitution
- NR SR called a no-confidence vote even without any legal impact
- Verbal accusation of high treason
- Installment of digital clocks showing the remaining days of Kováč's term

# Michal Kováč



- Kidnapping of Kováč's son to Austria
- Organized by Slovak secret service under leadership of HZDS nominee (never officially confirmed by court)
- Later events:
  - Violent death of direct witness
  - Mečiar's amnesty on the whole case
- 2012 – court ordered Kováč to apologize to that time director of the secret service

# Rudolf Schuster



- First directly elected president
- **Career:**
  - High communist official before 1989
  - After 1989 – chairman of Slovak parliament, diplomat, mayor of Košice
- **Presidential election in 1999:**
  - Nominee of his party SOP with support of the majority of Dzurinda's government
  - Beat Mečiar in 2<sup>nd</sup> round with 57,2 : 42,8 %

# Rudolf Schuster



- Aware of his own stronger legitimacy
- Prepared to be a more active head of state
- Aim to create an **alternative power arena** under his supervision
  - Round tables for political parties
  - Supplementary arena for dialogue between parties
  - Political parties strictly refused such arrangement

# Rudolf Schuster



- Gradually rising discontent with Dzurinda's government
- 2000 – Schuster's serious illness
- 2002 – Dzurinda's centre-right government and its liberal economic reforms
- Veto:
  - 1999 – used three times
  - Later years – higher intensity
  - Together used for more than 100 times

# Tactics failure



- 2004 – trade unions backed by party SMER announced the idea of referendum for early elections
- Public opinion strictly opposed to governmental economic reforms
- Trade unions asked the president for help
- Schuster joined the referendum with presidential elections

# Tactics failure



- **Logic of the plan:**

- Higher chance for referendum to be valid (turnout)
- Easier situation for SMER as it could mobilize for both presidential elections and referendum
- Support of trade unions and SMER for Schuster

- **Result:**

- No support from SMER
- Trade unions asked people only to take part on elections



# Ivan Gašparovič



- **Career:**

- Since 1989 – general attorney, MP, chairman of NR SR, vice-chairman of HZDS
- 2002 – left HZDS and created his own marginal party

- **Presidential elections 2004 and 2009:**

- Nominee of nationalist parties and later SMER
- Beat V. Mečiar in 2004 and I. Radičová in 2009

- First reelected president so far

# Ivan Gašparovič



- Two models of behavior

## 1. Loyalty and passivity

- During governments of R. Fico
- Helped Gašparovič to gain reelection

## 2. Criticism and activity

- During government of I. Radičová
- Usage of formal powers to block or delay governmental decisions

# Ivan Gašparovič



- Main differing tool – veto

Government	Term	Appointed laws	Veto used	Veto used (in %)
Fico	2006 - 2010	530	28	5,28
Radičová	2010 - 2012	208	29	13,94
Fico	2012 - 2014	228	12	5,26

# Elections 2014



40,6 %



59,4 %

# Andrej Kiska



- First non-partisan president
- Businessman, chairman of charity organization
- His `accompanying` Prime Minister is his main rival from presidential election
- Found the party For the People (Za ľudí) after serving his mandate
- The party scored 5.8 per cent in 2020 election and joined the government
- Kiska seems to withdraw from (party) politics

# Zuzana Čaputová



- First female Slovak president
- Lawyer and civic activist
- Elected as a candidate of Progressive Slovakia party
- Won in runoff against nominee of SMER-SD
- After one year in office still extremely popular among most segments of society

# Real position of president

- Not the leading factor of Slovak politics
- Indicators:
  - Weak party and political background
  - Position „in between“ the parties and not „above“ them
  - No alternative power arena
- Will this status quo last for the future?
  - Depends on whether some party leader obtains the office (unsuccessful attempt of R. Fico in 2014)