



Era of Vladimír Mečiar and its end

Peter Spáč

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



Tough times after 1968



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 room 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	48
KDH	19,2	31
SNS	13,9	22
KSČ / KSS	13,4	22
Hungarian parties	8,7	14
DS	4,4	7
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

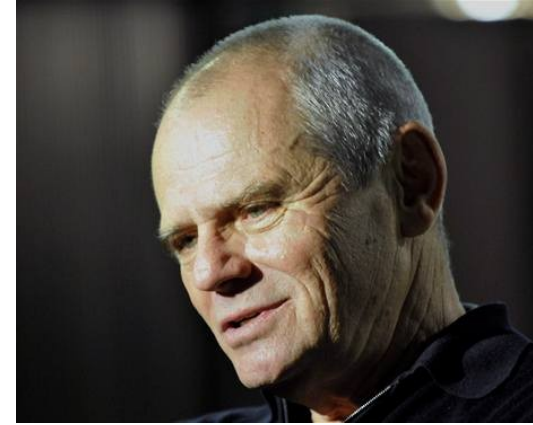
Government after elections

- 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	74
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

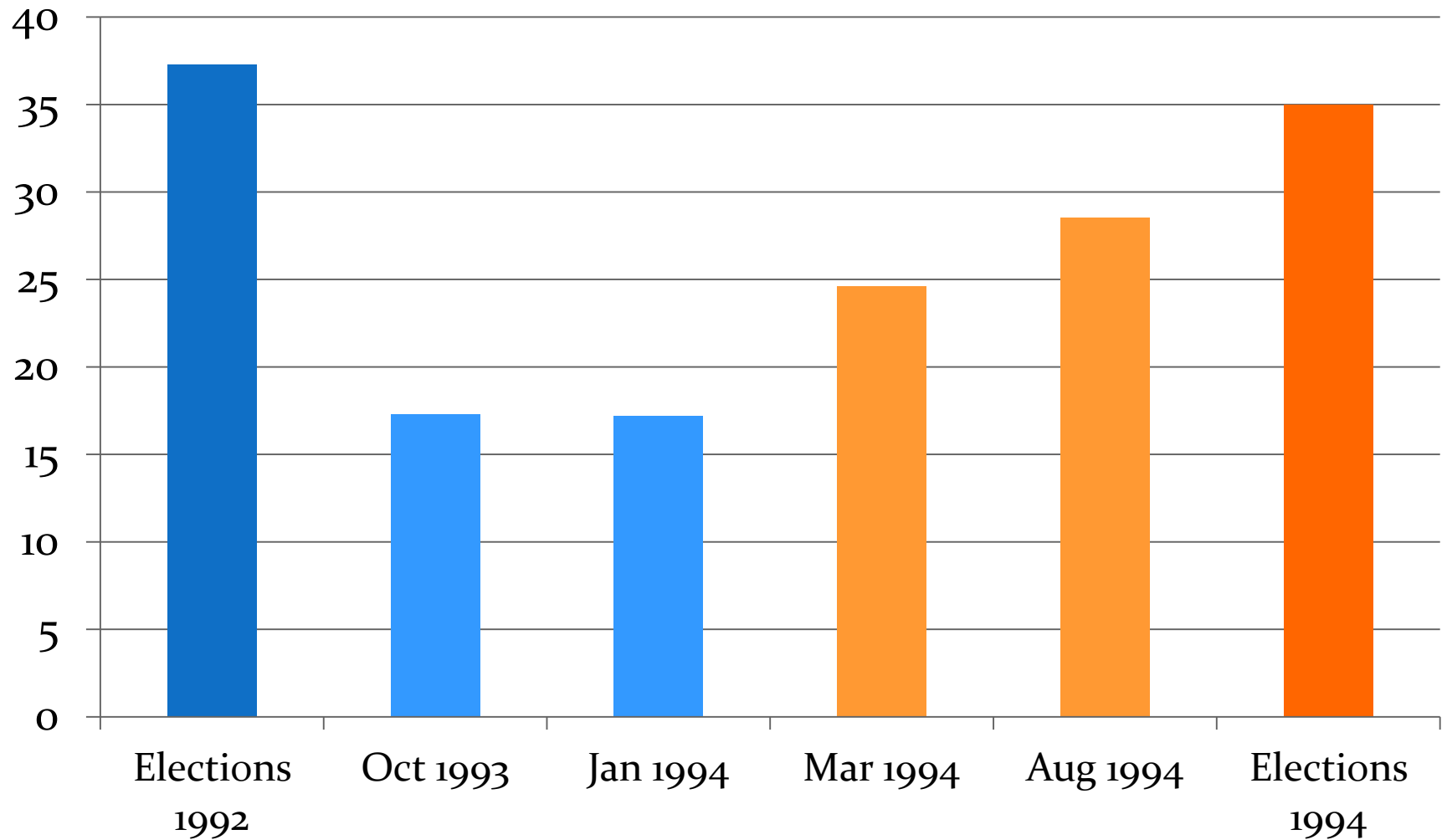


- 1993 – Michal Kováč elected for president:
 - Candidate of HZDS
 - Very soon became independent and later an arch-enemy of Mečiar
- Publication of Mečiar's private „steamroll“ speech about gaining total power in the state
- Spring 1994:
 - President's criticism of HZDS in parliamentary report
 - Government 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 - KDH
 - Ex-communists – SDL
 - Former HZDS 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



1994 Election



Early election 1994

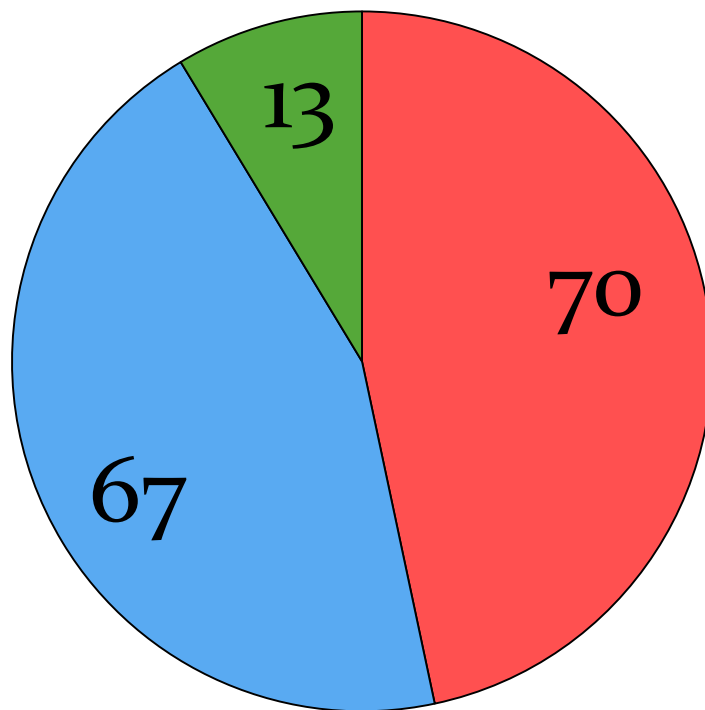
Party	Votes (in %)	Seats (in %)
HZDS	34,96	61
SDL (SV)	10,41	18
Hungarian parties	10,18	17
KDH	10,08	17
DU	8,57	15
ZRS	7,34	13
SNS	5,4	9
Others	13,06	0
		150

Early election 1994

Party	Votes (in %)	Seats (in %)
HZDS	34,96	61
SDL (SV)	10,41	18
Hungarian parties	10,18	17
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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

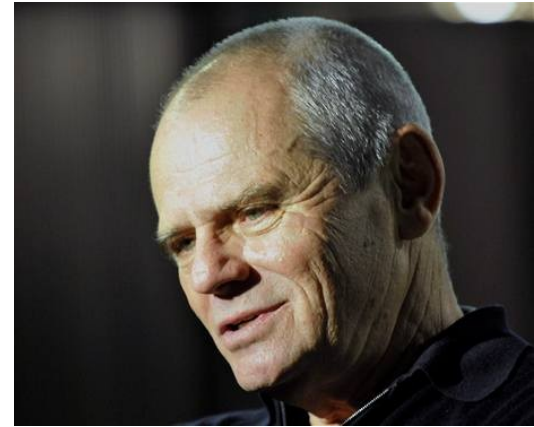
6. Search for enemies

- **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

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

The masterplan



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

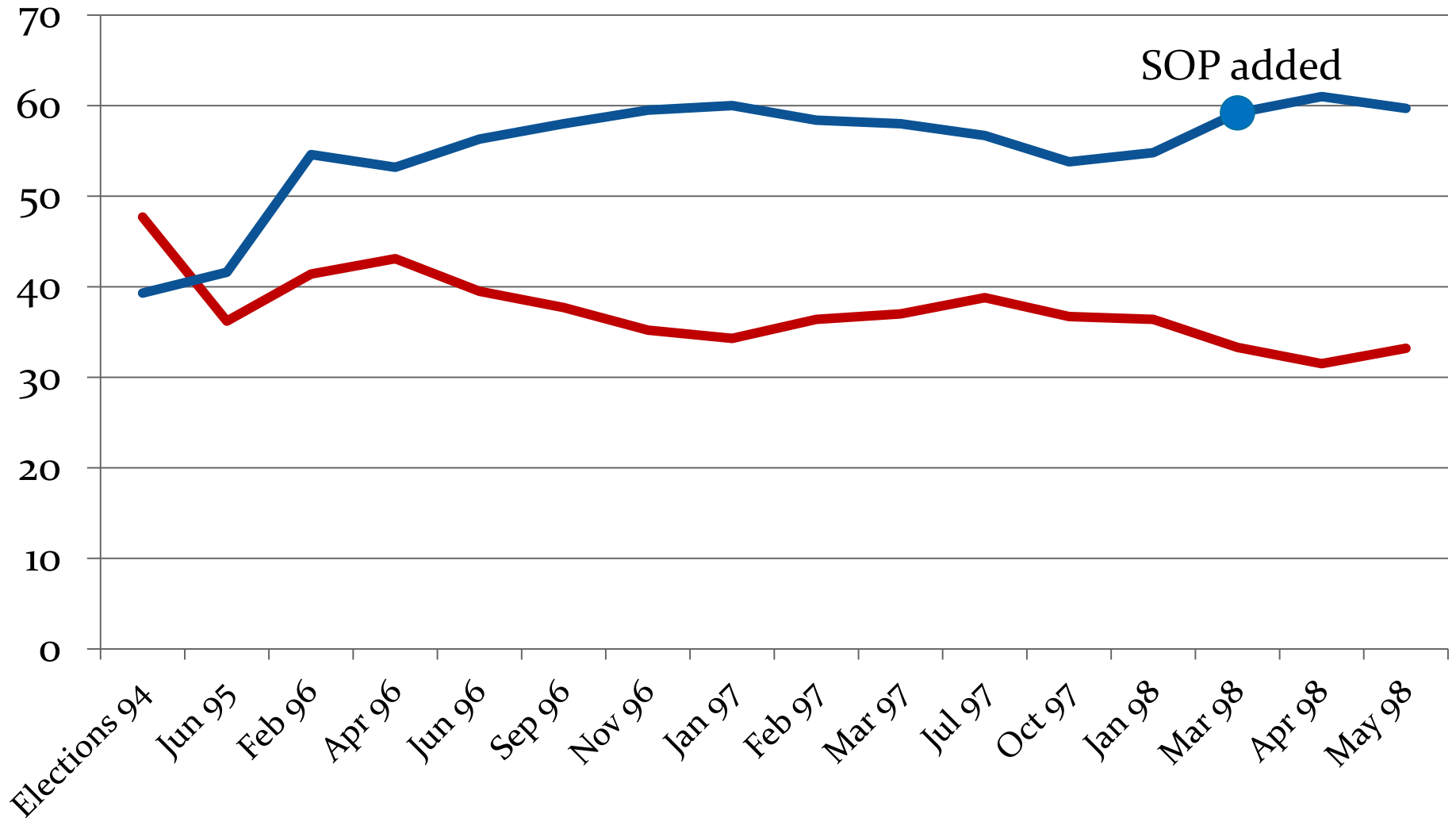


Party system

- 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	42
SDL	14,66	23
SMK	9,12	15
SNS	9,07	14
SOP	8,01	13
ZRS	1,3	0
Others	5,81	0
		150

The fate of Mečiar

