



# Era of Vladimír Mečiar and its End

POLb1135 Slovak Politics

# 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 Rise

- 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 were 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



# Election 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



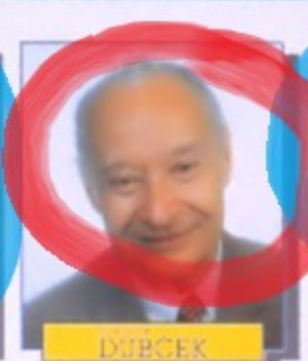
# 5 VEREJNOSŤ PROTI NÁSILIU



ČALČA



ČIŽNÁR



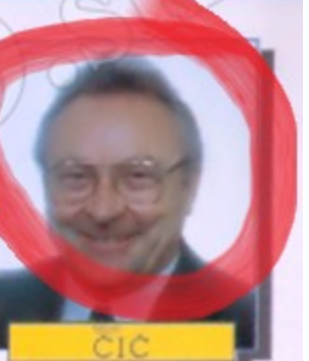
DŽURČEK



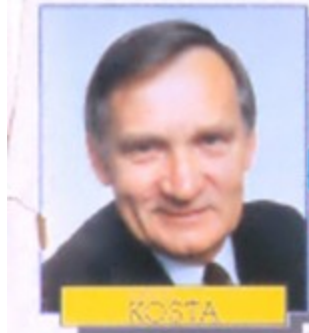
ĽUDOVÍK



KŇAZKO



ČIČ



KOSTA



ĽUDOVÍK

KANDIDÁTI  
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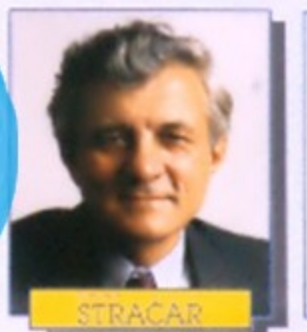
KOVÁČ



MEČIAR



ONDROŠ



STRAČAR



KOVÁČ



ŠNOPKO

# Government after elections

- Prime Minister – Vladimír Mečiar
- The strength of a bulldog: *`All will go on a 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

# Election 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	0
Others	19,8	0
		150

# HZDS First Rule (1992-1994)

- Type of government?
  - Officially HZDS ruled alone
  - HZDS backed by 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 the Government in 1999

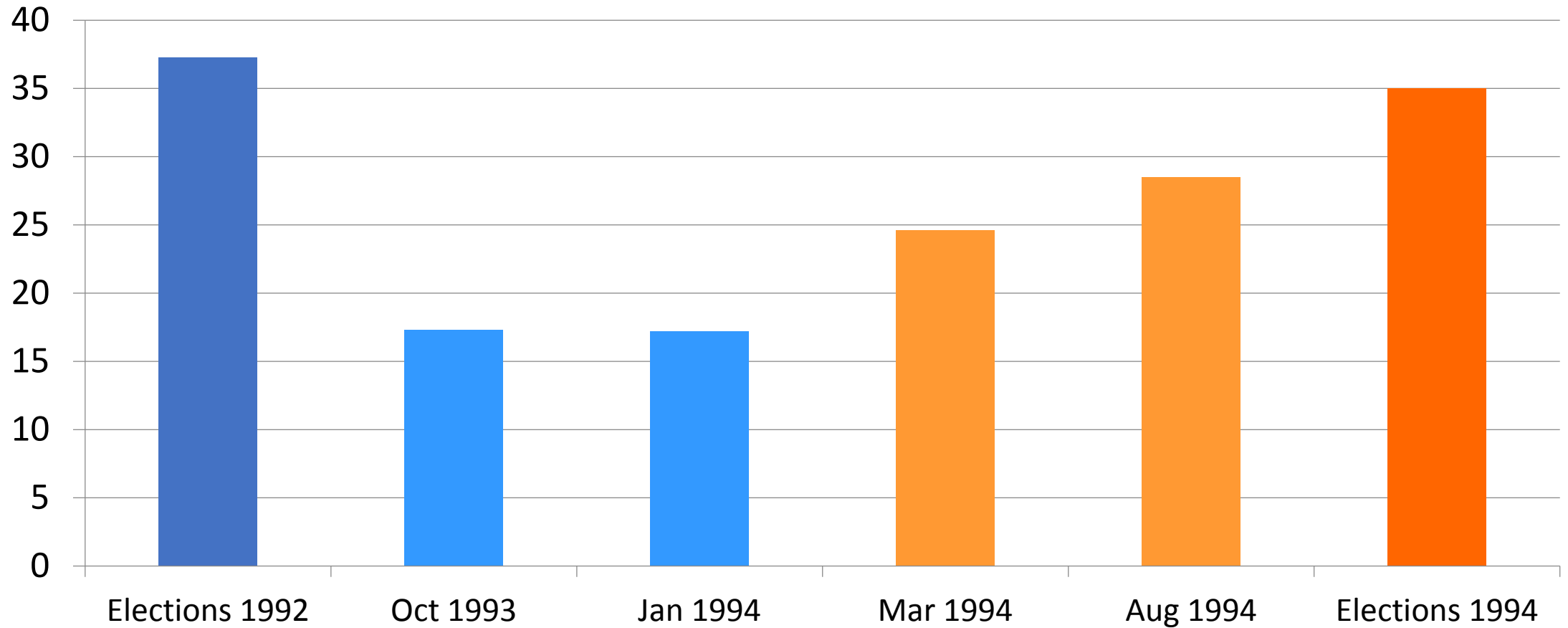


- 1993 – Michal Kováč elected for president:
  - Candidate of HZDS
  - Very soon became independent and later an arch-enemy of Mečiar
- Publication of Mečiar's private „steamroll“ speech about gaining total power in the state
- Spring 1994:
  - President's criticism of HZDS in parliamentary report
 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

# Interim Government

- 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





# Election 1994



# 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	5,40	9
Others	13,06	0
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# 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 (Slovak National Party):
  - 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 the 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 the 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 the 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	74,7	28,2	18,0

# 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
- He later 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

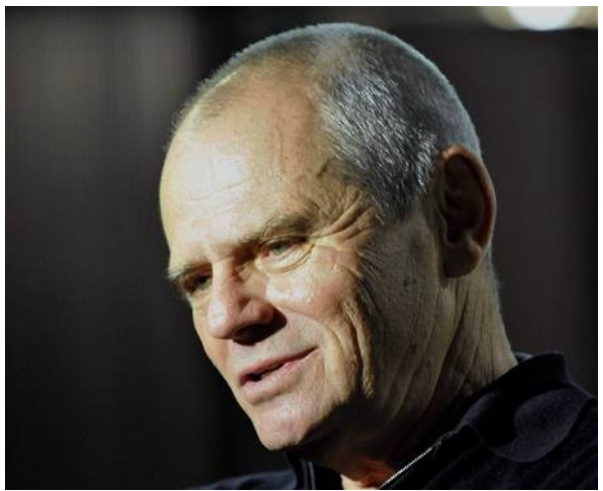
- **President:**

- 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 the so-called double standards
- **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

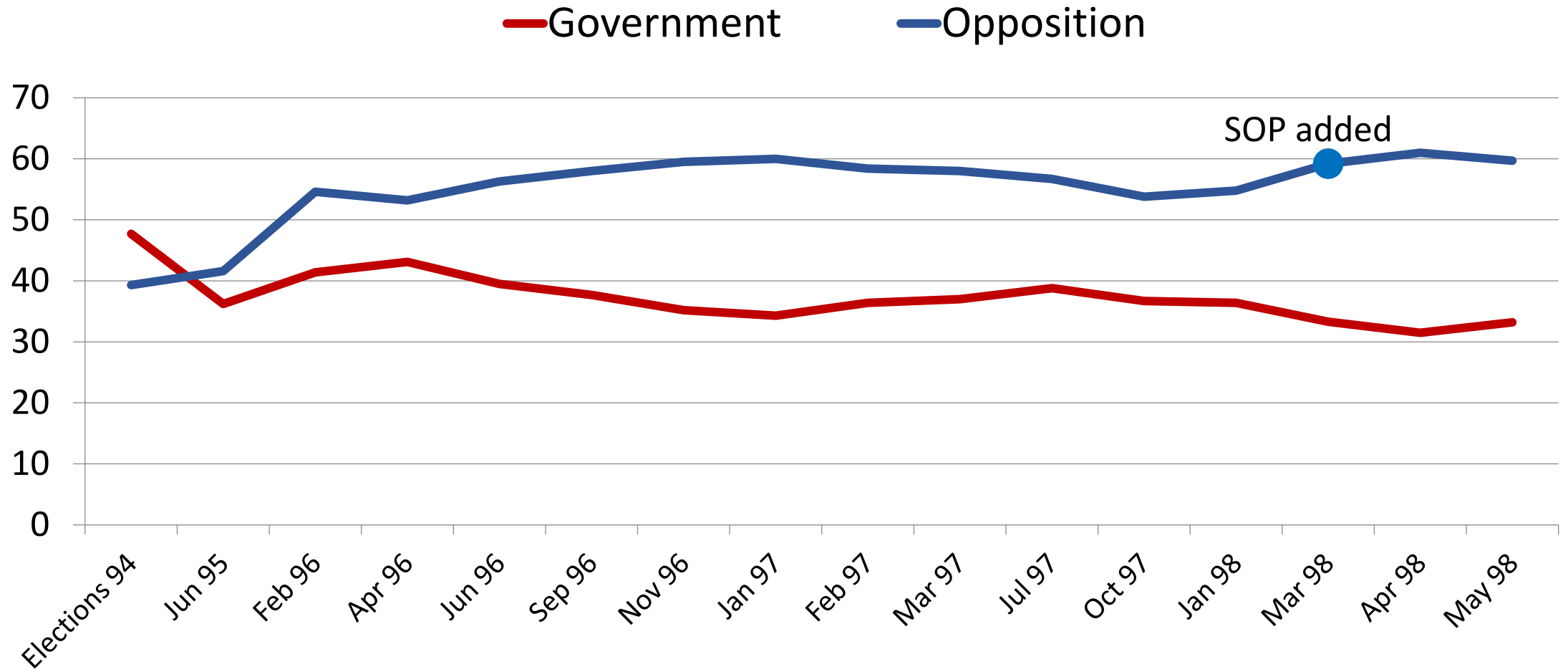
- Extremely polarized
- Division into two blocs – pro-Mečiar and anti-Mečiar
- Party of the Civic Understanding (SOP):
  - Leader – Rudolf Schuster (ex-communist, popular mayor of Košice)
  - Vague ideology, populism
  - Aim – to fill the position between the blocs
  - Forced to choose → anti-Mečiar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



# Party System

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

# Public Support





# 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	27,00	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	1,30	0
Others	5,81	0
		150

# The fate of Mečiar

