

# From Velvet Revolution to Velvet Divorce

POLb1135 Slovak Politics

# Communist Regime in Czechoslovakia

- Rigid nature of the regime
- The impact of normalization
- No political liberalization (unlike Poland or Hungary)
- Absence of dialogue between the regime and the opposition



# Second half of the 1980s

- Rising discontent in the society
- The regime as a set of compulsory rituals without legitimacy
- **Candle demonstration (1988)** in Bratislava
  - First mass demonstration against the regime
  - Organized by catholic dissent
  - Request for respecting the citizen freedoms
  - Suppressed by police and state forces



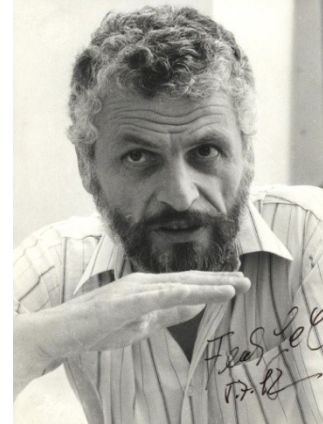
# November 1989

- Mass demonstrations against the ruling regime
- Creation of **two** main dissent movements:
  - Civic Forum (OF) – Czech Republic
  - Public Against Violence (VPN) – Slovakia
- Regime forced to enter discussions with the opposition
- Evident inability of KSC to react to the new situation



# Public Against Violence

- Slovak dissent movement
- Leaders – Fedor Gál, Ján Budaj
- Comparison with Czech OF:
  - Higher support towards non-political politics
  - Less pragmatic than OF
  - Lesser interest in gaining political positions
  - Primary aim to **control** and not to directly **rule**



# Reconstruction of the Government(s)

- A Game of Thrones in Czechoslovakia
- Proof of differences between OF and VPN
- Petr Pithart as Prime Minister of Czech government
- Slovak government:
  - 9 non-partisans, 6 communists, only 1 person from VPN
  - Prime Minister – Milan Čič – Minister of Justice in 1988-89



# Change of Tactics in 1990

- VPN understood its mistake when it was **too late**:
  - End of euphoria from November 1989
  - Dubček not elected as president
- Unsuccessful efforts of VPN to gain positions:
  - Slovak parliament refused to elect Budaj as its chairman and kept this post for communist official Rudolf Schuster
  - After that VPN did not even try to get the office of Slovak Prime Minister

# Crisis of VPN in 1990

- In spring 1990 the support of VPN declined to 10%
- Reaction – adding communists on candidate lists:
  - Dubček, Čič, Schuster, Čalfa, Kováč
  - VPN thus legitimized their political careers in the post 1989 situation
- This pragmatic step helped VPN to win elections 1990



# 5 VEREJNOSŤ PROTI NÁSILIU



Zdroj: SNM

# Slovak Party System After 1989

- Restoration of party plurality
- The main rivals of 1989
- Historical parties
- New parties

# Fate of KSC and KSS

- **What happened to them?**

- a) changed the name and transformed to social democracy

- b) changed the name and remained the same

- c) kept the same name and ideology

- d) lived long and prospered



# Rivals of 1989



- **Communists (KSS):**

- Cooperation with KSC until elections 1990
- Transformation to social democracy → 1991 – **Party of the Democratic Left (SDL)**
- Leader – Peter Weiss

- **VPN:**

- Originally right-winged and liberal
- Dissent movement

# Historical parties

- **Slovak National Party (SNS):**
  - Official claims of its rich history
  - Very questionable historical link
  - Strong stress on the position of Slovakia
  
- **Democratic Party (DS):**
  - Weak historical link
  - Civic, right-wing orientation
  - Remained without bigger support



# New Parties

- **Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH):**

- Christian and conservative values
- Catholic dissent
- Leader – Ján Čarnogurský



- **Hungarian parties:**

- Smaller parties
- Support by ethnic Hungarians
- Mutual cooperation





# 1990 Election

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

# Government after 1990 election

- Officially center-right government
- Prime Minister – Vladimír Mečiar (VPN)
- Impact of previous personal changes in VPN:
  - Most executive posts of VPN gained by former communists
  - Internal tension about the character of economic reform
- Conflict between VPN's liberal leadership and Mečiar → new Prime Minister Čarnogurský

# Party System in 1990 - 1992

- Intensive dynamics
- Low stability of party system
- Secessions and emergence of new parties
- Most parties affected by these trends (VPN, KDH, KSS-SDL, SNS)
- New parties ended as marginal – with only one crucial **exemption**

# Birth of a new star

- Escalation of conflict in VPN
- Party of two faces – liberals vs. former communists
- 1991 – Mečiar creates Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)
  - Slower economic reform
  - Populism
  - Nationalism
- Overwhelming support of Mečiar in society (80-90 %)



Let's Move on to Czechoslovakia

# Czechoslovakia after 1989

- November 1989 opened discussions about the character of the state
- Different ideas about:
  - The role of federation and of both republics
  - The speed and shape of the economic reform
- December 31, 1992 – end of the game

# Two Isolated Party Systems

- Most parties operated **within their „national“ borders**
- Communists:
  - Together in elections 1990
  - Czech hardliners vs. Slovak reformists
  - Dissolution into two separate parties in 1991
- Unsuccessful efforts to make party links:
  - Greens, Christian Democrats, Social Democrats
  - Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and elections 1992

# The Hyphen War (spring 1990)

- Conflict about the name of the federation
- Slovaks wanted to add a hyphen → Czecho-Slovak Republic
- Czechs refused this because of its usage in 1938-1939
- Hyphen:
  - Symbol of equity between nations for Slovaks
  - Reminiscence of a negative experience for Czechs
- Final solution – Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (CSFR)



# Slovak Parties and Czechoslovakia

- Diverse ideas about the statehood
- Independence was not a goal shortly after 1989
- After elections 1990:
  - **Independence (SNS)**
  - **Stronger position** of Slovakia within the state (VPN)
  - **Confederation** – to grant Slovakia a sole chair and a star in the European Union (KDH)

# Discussions about the CSFR

- Aims of Slovak governing parties:
  - Stronger position of Slovak political institutions
  - Stronger republics within a weaker federation
- Beginning of 1992 – **agreement in Milovy**:
  - Compromise between Czechs and Slovaks
  - A weaker form of federation
  - Led to split of KDH → Slovakia refused the agreement
- Mečiar and HZDS took the lead as protectors of Slovak nation and its interests

# Last Federal Election (June 1992)

- HZDS offered five scenarios to its voters:
  - Federation
  - Confederation
  - Union
  - „Benelux“ model
  - Independence
- Election results:
  - Success of HZDS (and Czech ODS of Václav Klaus)
  - Failure of pro-federal parties

# End of the Federation

- **Declaration of Independence of the Slovak Nation:**

- July 1992 (shortly after the elections)
- Appointed by the Slovak parliament
- Proclamation of sovereignty of Slovakia

- **Constitution of the Slovak Republic:**

- September 1992

- Both KDH and the Hungarian parties voted against or did not vote at all



# End of the Federation

- Debates after elections 1992 between HZDS and ODS
- Important feature – political leaders refused to enter federal government
- 25.11.1992 – Federal Assembly approved the Constitutional law 542/1992
- Alternative ideas or a referendum were rejected
- 1993 – Czech Republic and Slovakia

# The People's Choice?

- Survey in **1993** - if referendum would be held (ČSFR):
  - 29 % for split
  - 50 % for federation
- In later years the split gained a more positive stance
- Survey in **2012** – split of ČSFR (Czech Republic):
  - 37 % for
  - 36 % against
  - 27 % do not know



# What has Changed?

- Typical issues of arguments between Czechs and Slovaks before 1993
  - The flow of public money
  - Who allowed communists to rule since 1948
  - Who is the strongest nationalist



# Legacy of 1989 - 1992

- Vladimír Mečiar labeled himself as the founder of Slovakia
- Parties that voted against the split of federation got an image of those who „*did not want this state*“
- Need to find a new target for Slovak nationalists