

SLOVAKIA'S HISTORIC CHOICE

Slovakia held its parliamentary elections on September 21-22 while the international community observed with great anticipation. Would the Slovak electorate choose isolationism or Europe? Slovakia's choice was clear: European integration.

Four pro-European parties formed a governing coalition: the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) led by Mikuláš Dzurinda, the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK) led by Béla Bugár, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) led by Pavol Hrušovský, and the Alliance of New Citizen (ANO) led by Pavol Rusko. These pro-Western and democratic forces will ensure that Slovakia continues on the path of reform and will integrate into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

Congratulatory messages were sent by the international community to Prime Minister Dzurinda. U.S. president George W. Bush, British prime minister Tony Blair, European Commission president Romano Prodi, and NATO secretary-general Lord George Robertson all congratulated Slovakia on its decision to choose European integration over isolationism. The September 2002 election will be remembered as a decisive moment in Slovakia's history.

The Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) holds six government portfolios, including the premiership (Mikuláš Dzurinda), Foreign Ministry (Eduard Kukan), Finance Ministry (Ivan Mikloš), Defense Ministry (Ivan Šimko), Transportation Ministry (Pavol Prokopovic), and Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs and Family (L'udovit Kaník). The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) is responsible for the Interior (Vladimír Palko), Justice (Daniel Lipšic), and Education (Martin Fronc) portfolios. Current chief negotiator with the EU Ján Figel (KDH) will become chairman of the parliament's Foreign Affairs Commission in December. The Alliance for New Citizens (ANO) holds the portfolios of Health (Rudolf Zajac), Economy (Robert Nemcsics), and Culture (Rudolf Chmel). The Hungarian Coalition (SMK) has the deputy premiership (Pál Csáky) and the portfolios of Construction and Regional Development (László Gyurovszky), Environment (László Miklós), and Agriculture (Zsolt Simon) (*From Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Newslines, October 8, 2002 and the Embassy of the Slovak Republic in Washington, D.C.*).

To assess the election and post-election developments in Slovakia, the CSIS Eastern Europe Project hosted a two-hour "Post-Election Slovakia Roundtable" on Thursday, October 10, 2002. Two well-respected Slovak analysts from Bratislava, Grigorij Mesežnikov, president of the Institute for Public Affairs, and Pavol Lukac, senior analyst at the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, were the guest speakers. The meeting was chaired by Janusz Bugajski, director of the CSIS Eastern Europe Project and Theodore E. Russell, former U.S. ambassador to Slovakia. The event was sponsored by Friends of Slovakia.

This issue of *Europe East* is devoted to the analysis of Slovakia's September parliamentary election and the challenges that lie ahead for the country as it moves toward membership in NATO and the EU. This issue contains presentations made by both guest speakers, as well as a summary of the discussion that followed.

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THE 2002 PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN SLOVAKIA AND PROSPECTS FOR FURTHER DEVELOPMENT

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Results of Slovakia's parliamentary elections held on 20-21 September 2002:

Party	% of votes	seats
HZDS of Vladimír Mečiar (Movement for a Democratic Slovakia)	19.5	36
SDKÚ of Mikuláš Dzurinda (Slovak Democratic and Christian Union)	15.1	28
Smer of Robert Fico (Direction)	13.5	25
SMK of Béla Bugár (Party of Hungarian Coalition)	11.2	20
KDH of Pavol Hrušovský (Christian Democratic Movement)	8.3	15
ANO of Pavol Rusko (Alliance of New Citizen)	8.0	15
KSS of Jozef Ševc (Communist Party of Slovakia)	6.3	11

PSNS of Ján Slota (Real Slovak National Party)	3.7	-
SNS of Anna Malíková (Slovak National Party)	3.3	-
HZD of Ivan Gašparovič (Movement for Democracy)	3.3	-

SDA of Milan Ftáčnik and Peter Weiss (Social Democratic Alternative)	1.8	-
SDL of Pavol Koncoš and Jozef Migaš (Party of the Democratic Left)	1.4	-

General Overview: Immediately after the elections, four liberal and conservative parties - SDKÚ, SMK, KDH, and ANO – reached an agreement to form a new ruling coalition. During the first week these parties defined their programmatic priorities and personal preferences. In the parliament they have 78 out of 150 seats. HZDS, *Smer* and KSS remain in opposition.

A political configuration emerged that was most favorable for the continuation of positive trends from the previous legislative period, for the creation of a programmatically homogeneous reformist government, and for Slovakia's membership in NATO and the EU.

In sum, the elections brought: 1) a weaker result for Vladimír Mečiar's HZDS than was expected; 2) surprisingly high gains for the SDKÚ and overall solid results for three other centrist and moderate right parties; 3) a weak result for the *Smer* party; 4) the complete failure of post communist social democratic forces; 5) the total decline of the nationalists; and 6) success for communist hard-liners.

The voter turnout in the election was 70.1%. This was lower than the turnout of the 1998 election. However, in the 2002 elections, the urban, and more well-educated electorate was more highly mobilized than the rural. Due to the activities of the NGO community, which concentrated on delivering information and analysis to certain categories of the electorate (target groups), voters of democratically oriented parties balloted in larger numbers than voters of authoritarian or ideologically amorphous political formations. Twenty-percent of votes, given to all other parties, were "lost" and seats for these votes were consequently redistributed among the successful parties.

Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS): HZDS lost 350,000 votes compared to the 1998 elections and became a medium-size party comparable in size with two other parties: SDKÚ and *Smer*. The reasons for HZDS's weak electoral results were: domestic and international isolation, old fashion style of politics, inability to implement efficient political technologies, and the preservation of the internal character of the party. Before the elections, HZDS was confronted with strong internal problems, such as a split by the Gašparovič faction and numerous scandals attributed to HZDS-leader Mečiar.

Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ): The SDKÚ's election result was a clear success. The party succeeded in attracting a large percentage of undecided voters. The SDKÚ carried out a persuasive pre-electoral campaign, with a good performance by its leader, Mikuláš Dzurinda, in public debates (including on television). Dzurinda was the first Slovak political leader who admitted his own mistakes and explained the reasons for them. The SDKÚ presented the government's domestic and foreign policies, and communicated to the public the EU and NATO integration agenda. The decision by the small but influential Democratic Party to give up its participation in the election in favor of the SDKÚ, contributed to SDKÚ gains. The massive nonpartisan pre-electoral activities of Slovak NGOs targeted those groups of voters with critical attitudes towards social reality. Many of them decided to support continuity, which meant democracy, reforms, and

integration rather than unclear promises offered by the proponents of “alternative” policies (*Smer* and ANO).

Direction (*Smer*): The *Smer* Party became a parliamentary formation, but by a substantially smaller gain than many analysts had expected. The reasons for *Smer*’s shortcomings include: 1) a less than stable electorate; 2) poor communication with the public during the electoral campaign; 3) a confrontational style; 4) an egocentric approach; 5) the perception of *Smer* leader Robert Fico by citizens as a “politician of promises” rather than a “politician of action”; 6) the personal attacks against potential partners in a future government; and 7) an unclear position on the question of possible cooperation with HZDS.

Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK): SMK received the same portion of votes as it did in the 1998 election. The party has a stable electorate consisting predominantly of ethnic Hungarians. The position of the SMK will be substantially stronger for the next four years than it was during the previous legislative period.

Christian Democratic Movement (KDH): KDH succeeded to keep the core of its traditional electorate.

Alliance of New Citizen (ANO): The newly established liberal party, ANO, attracted a portion of the voters who were disappointed by the previous ruling coalition. The party tried to use the phenomenon of “bad mood” to increase its own political rating, but without substantial success.

Center and moderate right forces kept and even improved their position among voters. While in 1998 the five-member coalition Slovak Democratic Coalition (*Slovenská Demokratická Koalícia*, SDK) won 884,000 votes in 1998, three liberal and conservative parties (SDKÚ, KDH, and ANO) won 900,000 votes in 2002. This fact discredits the notion that center-right parties failed.

Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS): KSS, the orthodox communist formation, entered parliament for the first time since Slovakia became an independent state. The party used the idea of being the strongest leftist party, when a section of voters from other leftist parties chose the option of supporting a party with better chances for parliamentary representation. Communists won twice the number of votes than they did four years ago.

Slovakia’s Future: Expectations for the future include the strengthening of the reform policies in the economic and social spheres; the further stabilization of the institutional system and deepening the trends of

democratization; good conditions for stable governing during the entire legislative period, based on the programmatic closeness of the coalition parties; and a favorable framework for Slovakia’s membership in both NATO and the EU.

SLOVAK FOREIGN POLICY AFTER THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

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The following political parties have formed the new ruling coalition: the Slovak Democratic Christian Union (SDKÚ), the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK), the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), and the Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO). The first three parties formed the past government and therefore have experience working together. The new party of the coalition, ANO, brings less experienced politicians to the new government.

General Remarks: Three of the four members of the coalition were in the previous government, thus providing a sense of predictability and continuity in foreign policy. The two key players in foreign policy will continue in the same positions: Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda and Foreign Minister Eduard Kukan. Chief Negotiator with the European Union, Ján Figel, will also retain his post from the previous government until December 2002 when the European Council will announce the new, projected European Union candidates expected to complete accession negotiations this year. Ján Figel will then become the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee. The new Minister of Defense, Ivan Šimko, served in the previous government as Minister of Internal Affairs. The foreign policy orientation of the new government will be marked by continuity on all basic points.

NATO Policy of the New Government: The entire government can be described as strongly pro-Western. However, there is some hesitation regarding NATO policies from a few personalities within the Christian Democratic Movement, who may be reluctant NATO supporters. These include the new Minister of Internal Affairs Vladimír Palko (who is the strongest critic of NATO from a conservative point of view) and former Minister of Justice Jan Čarnogurský (who is no longer in government or parliament). Continuity in Slovak politics will help with the process of NATO enlargement before

the Prague summit, and Slovakia may become a leader among the candidate countries.

European Union Policy: Slovakia needs to finish negotiations with the EU by the end of the year. The remaining chapters are highly complex and include those on agriculture, finance and budget, and competition. Slovakia would like to sign the accession treaty with the EU during the Greek Presidency of the EU in the first half of 2003. Slovakia hopes to become a full member of the EU in 2004 or 2005. With regard to the transatlantic agenda, Slovakia and the other countries of the Visegrad-4 (Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic) are striving for a balanced diplomacy, with the aim of working together to create a new platform to help restore good relations between the United States and the EU.

Regional Cooperation: Slovakia will have the only center-right government in the Central European region. The other Visegrad countries have left oriented governments. However, this will not hinder regional cooperation. Given the change of leadership in the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary, Slovak prime minister Mikuláš Dzurinda is the only premier in the region who was active during 1999 in the process of revitalizing Visegrad cooperation. Prime Minister Dzurinda would like to continue to play a crucial role in regional politics.

Slovak-Hungarian relations: There have been many positive steps in the Slovak-Hungarian relationship. The Party of the Hungarian Coalition will now be in the Slovak government for a second consecutive term and there are no similar examples of such cooperation elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe. The experience of having ethnic Hungarians in government has broken down several negative stereotypes and is an important example of a functioning multiethnic society in Slovakia.

There are a number of representatives of the Hungarian minority in government - three in the last government and four in the new one. Deputy Prime Minister Pál Csáky will be responsible for issues relating to European integration, while one of the two new deputies of the Foreign Ministry is from the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (Jozsef Berényi). The new Minister of Culture is former Czechoslovak ambassador to Budapest, Rudolf Chmel, who is one of the most prominent architects of Hungarian-Slovak reconciliation. Culture is a crucial aspect of Hungarian-Slovak relations, with many of the competencies for promoting the rights of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia falling under the auspices of the Culture Ministry.

Foreign Policy Approach of the Parliamentary Opposition: There are three political parties in the

opposition: the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), led by former Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, SMER (Direction) led by Robert Fico, and the Communist Party, which is back in parliament for the first time since the fall of communism. Only the communists are against Slovakia's membership in NATO. The big question now centers on the political future of the HZDS since there are attempts within the party to replace Mečiar with someone more acceptable as a potential coalition partner and for the West. Although *Smer* was not initially founded as a left-wing party, it is now trying to distinguish itself from the ruling coalition by voicing strong criticism of the Dzurinda government, which naturally pushes it toward the left side of the political spectrum. Both the HZDS and *Smer* are expected to support the new cabinet on questions of EU and NATO integration.

Challenges for Foreign Policy: Slovak foreign policy will face many new challenges, including those concerning the transatlantic agenda. Bratislava needs to create a new concept and sense of purpose upon becoming a member of NATO and the EU. Slovakia will also play a role in shaping the EU's new eastern policy toward Ukraine, Belarus, and the Balkans. The problem of the political elite in Slovakia is that many members lack a clear foreign policy vision as to how the country will contribute as a member of NATO and the EU. There has been so much focus on gaining membership that few have stopped to consider the crucial question of what Slovakia can offer these organizations. In this regard, Slovaks working for non-governmental organizations and policy institutes can play a role in formulating future foreign policy approaches.

DISCUSSION

New Government's Agenda: The new ruling coalition faces many challenges in the area of domestic politics, such as introducing needed reforms in the security and judicial sectors, tackling unemployment and addressing corruption. Foreign policy will not be the main goal of the new government, but will have an important place on the agenda. Slovakia's foreign policy orientation will be marked by continuity. New challenges, such as healthcare, social and other domestic issues may cause foreign policy to lose its importance on the parliament's agenda. Reforms in social policy, health, and education will be difficult. The new government needs to prioritize the crucial reforms and attempt to develop them from the outset. The government must be clear in explaining the necessity and the consequences of needed reforms. No

dramatic differences will be seen in approaches towards these issues among opposition parties.

NATO: The Prague Summit is quickly approaching. Should Slovakia receive an invitation, as expected, the process of ratification will be a serious challenge for the country. Slovakia will have to prove that it can contribute to NATO and must develop a new vision on how it sees itself within the Alliance. There is a need to recognize that most threats to security now come from outside of Europe and not from within its borders.

European Union: In the EU accession process three chapters are still open, but with Ján Figel as the negotiator until December, continuity will be ensured. The upcoming EU chapters will be a serious challenge for the government. A committee within the parliament should be established to deal with these issues and develop ideas. The committee would also enable representatives from the opposition to participate in the process; this would provide the committee with more legitimacy in closing the remaining chapters.

Slovakia may be the first country from the Visegrad-4 (V-4) to hold a referendum on EU membership that could potentially serve as an example for the remaining V-4 states. Support for EU membership within Slovakia is high - close to 70%. The expectations for EU membership are also high, as the Slovak public foresees benefits such as a higher standard of living and an enhanced quality of life. The government has a pro-active approach towards membership and informing the public of decisions. Information campaigns will be costly. Once the debate switches from advantages to disadvantages, there may be some decrease in support but not enough to derail integration plans.

Transatlantic Balance: A challenge for Slovakia, as well as for all of the Central and East European countries, is the complicated relationship between supporting both EU and U.S. policies. Slovakia hopes to act with the Visegrad-4 in order to smooth out tensions between the United States and Europe and renew the transatlantic partnership. There is no clear preference for pro-EU or pro-U.S. diplomacy. Slovakia wants to maintain a balance between the EU and U.S. and does not want either side to attempt to push Slovakia in one direction or the other. Securing understanding between the U.S. and the EU is vital for these partnerships.

U.S. Unilateralism: Slovakia accepts and supports the United States and the newly elected government is pro-American. Critics of unilateral action exist among leftist political parties, as well as within some of the media. However, on the whole, Slovakia has little difficulty with

the U.S. acting as a “global policeman”. Slovakia may need to inform the public why force is necessary at times and why rogue states need to be dealt with in a forceful manner. Currently, the center and right parties understand the American position.

Visegrad-4 (V-4): Slovakia will keep working within the V-4 in order to increase cooperation and communication throughout the region. Slovakia’s center-right oriented government is unlikely to clash with the other left-oriented governments in the V-4. Slovakia believes that good relations have been established and hopes that there will not only be an increase in cooperation, but also an increase in joint activities developed and implemented by members of the formation. Cooperation among the Visegrad-4 is important for the new government.

NGO Involvement: The NGO community played an instrumental role in the election process, just as it did four years ago. Eighty-eight projects were implemented in total – thirty-six nationwide, thirty-two region wide, thirteen at the district level and seven in specific towns. These projects focused upon educating voters on the significance of voting, the electoral system, the ideology of parties, the pre-electoral process, political party funding, and election observation.

Alliance of New Citizen (ANO): ANO is perceived as the weakest link of the new governing coalition, as the party holds a small number of seats and lacks strong structures. However, ANO’s presence will be beneficial, as it will balance the conservative side of the government with its more liberal approach. Pavol Rusko, head of ANO, promised to give up his ownership stake in the private channel Markíza TV within ten days following the election, as he was appointed Vice-Speaker of Parliament. This party has constructed itself as a well-defined, liberal party, and its future prospects look strong.

Smer Party (Direction): The unofficial name of *Smer* is “The Third Way”. *Smer* is considered to be a left-right party because some of its members do not want to profile the party as a left formation. These particular members joined the party with the objective of becoming part of the next government. Now that *Smer* will be in opposition for the next four years, there are signals that these party members will work with pro-liberal economic forces instead of the opposition.

Smer proved unsuccessful in the recent elections. Robert Fico, the party’s leader, is very ambitious and strong-willed. His party is built around him and his personality. It is difficult to predict what his actions will be. He is now part of a broader opposition. His remarks during the election campaign regarding ethnic issues cost him some

votes. Once Slovakia becomes a member of the EU, Fico will have to be more cooperative with the government in order to avoid a schism within his own party, which may negatively impact him in future elections.

Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and Vladimír Mečiar: Vladimír Mečiar is committed to staying in politics and has made many appearances around the country, attempting to postpone the next HZDS congress. It is believed that Mečiar will not be removed by his party, but rather that some members may leave and establish a new faction. HZDS will not be stronger in the next election although it may be able to maintain moderate strength in the future.

The HZDS lost many votes because it failed to mobilize voters, had zero negotiating potential with other political parties, and was suffering from internal problems. The dissident movement within the HZDS will most likely force a split in the organization, creating a new, medium-sized party. The HZDS will never be as strong as it once was, even with Mečiar as its leader.

Communist Party: The democratic left side of the political spectrum appears to have collapsed. Concerns were raised that the recovery process will be slow and that the Communists may monopolize the left in the future. Though attempts will be made, different opinions regarding economic and social policies will ensure that the Communist Party's potential for monopolization will be undercut. Four years ago, the Communist Party won 95,000 votes. This year they won 200,000. A substantial number of voters who typically vote towards the left supported other parties and this enabled the Communists to gain seats.

Privatization: Within the new governing coalition, strong support for privatization is present. Concerns about

corruption challenge the government to promote complete transparency in the privatization process.

Slovak Presidency: Slovakia's forthcoming presidential election will be by direct vote in May/June 2004. The position of president is a largely symbolic one, but represents the country in international fora. Slovakia will join both NATO and the EU, and therefore, the new president should be a public figure with experience in foreign policy. It was predicted that Mečiar would not return to power in this capacity. At this time, it is unknown who will represent the opposition forces in the presidential election. It is expected that the NGO community will play an important role in the presidential election process and will potentially support its own candidate for the presidency.

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