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**FACULTY OF ARTS**

**Department of Political Science**



## **Political System of the Slovak Republic for Foreign Students**

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## Political System of the Slovak Republic for Foreign Students

University Textbook

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## CONTENTS

Introduction.....	5
1 Political Developments in the First Czechoslovak Republic.....	7
1.1 Political system .....	17
2 Political developments between 1939 and 1945.....	29
2.1 Foreign resistance during the Second World War.....	33
2.2 Domestic resistance during the Second World War.....	37
2.3 The situation in the liberated territory .....	39
2.4 Political system .....	41
2.4.1 Political system of the Slovak Republic/Slovak State.....	41
2.4.2 Provisional Czechoslovak State Establishment.....	47
2.4.3 Liberated territory until the declaration of the KVP .....	50
3 Political developments between 1945 and 1948 .....	52
3.1 Political system .....	59
4 Political developments between 1948 and 1960.....	73
4.1 Political system .....	83
5 Political developments in 1960–1968 .....	98
5.1 Political system .....	104
6 Political developments between 1968 and 1989 .....	110
6.1 Political system .....	123
7 Political developments in Slovakia 1989-1992.....	130
7.1 The Velvet Revolution .....	130
7.2 Electoral term 1990-1992.....	137
8 Political developments in Slovakia 1993-2025.....	141
8.1 Electoral term 1992-1994.....	141
8.2 Electoral term 1994-1998.....	147
8.3 Electoral term 1998-2002.....	156
8.4 Electoral term 2002-2006.....	161
8.5 Electoral term 2006-2010.....	166
8.6 Electoral term 2010-2012.....	171
8.7 Electoral term 2012-2016.....	178
8.8 Electoral term 2016-2020.....	185
8.9 Electoral term 2020-2023.....	191
8.10 Electoral term 2023 – now .....	202
Bibliography.....	207

List of abbreviations..... 243

## **Introduction**

This university textbook, „*Political System of the Slovak Republic for Foreign Students*“, is designed to introduce Erasmus students and other international students to basic information regarding the historical and political development of Slovakia and the political system of the Slovak Republic. It focuses on political developments since 1918. It introduces foreign students to pivotal historical events that influenced political developments in Slovakia (the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic, the Munich Agreement and the Vienna Arbitration, the Slovak State, postwar developments and the Košice Government Program, the 1946 elections, February 1948, the Prague Spring of 1968, normalization, the Velvet Revolution of 1989, the dissolution of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic, the establishment of the Slovak Republic, and its integration into the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and with the political system of the Slovak Republic (constitutional institutions, the party system, the electoral system).

This university textbook is intended for Erasmus students enrolled in the bachelor's program in political science at the Faculty of Arts of Pavol Jozef Šafárik University (UPJŠ) for the course “The Political System of the Slovak Republic,” but it is also suitable for other levels of study and for Erasmus students in other fields who wish to provide international students with basic information about the history and political development of Slovakia.

In a relatively compact format, it presents a synthesis of a wide range of basic information on political developments in Slovakia. It focuses on political developments and constitutional institutions in Slovakia after 1918. Because this university textbook is intended primarily for political scientists, in addition to a brief overview of political developments in individual periods, it devotes particular attention to the status of the legislative power, the executive power, the electoral system, and the political party system in each period, as well as the relationships between them.

This university textbook consists of eight parts that follow one another logically and chronologically. Each part is divided into several chapters devoted to political developments and the political system (parliament, president, government, party system, and electoral system). The first part briefly outlines developments in interwar Czechoslovakia. The second part focuses on developments in the Slovak Republic from 1939 to 1945, as well as related issues concerning the foreign and domestic resistance during World War II. The third part deals with developments in postwar Czechoslovakia up to February 1948. The fourth part focuses on developments from 1948 to 1960. The fifth and sixth parts briefly outline developments from 1960 to 1968 and from 1968 to 1989. The seventh section covers changes related not only to the democratization following November 1989 but also the events that led to the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic. The final section covers

developments in Slovakia from the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic to the present. While Parts One through Six focus primarily on institutional aspects and changes during specific historical periods, Chapters Seven and Eight place greater emphasis on political developments themselves within the context of democratization and integration processes after 1989.

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## 1 Political Developments in the First Czechoslovak Republic

*“Already during the First World War, groups inspired by the idea of Czech-Slovak mutuality were forming abroad, based on the gradually emerging idea of the demise of the Habsburg Monarchy. At home, the open proclamation of such ideas was limited by martial law and fears of repression.”*<sup>1</sup> In October 1915, the Slovak League in America and the Czech National Association formulated these ideas into **the Cleveland Agreement**, concerning joint action in the creation of a Czech-Slovak state based on the principle of a federation. The individual points of the agreement mentioned the independence of the Czech and Slovak lands and the union of the Czech and Slovak nations in a federal union of states with full national autonomy for Slovakia. Slovakia was to have its own parliament, its own state administration, and cultural freedom with Slovak as the official language.<sup>2</sup> In 1916, a group of political émigrés in Paris formed the Czechoslovak National Council, chaired by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, with Josef Dürich and Milan Rastislav Štefánik as vice-chairs and Edvard Beneš as secretary. In the last year of the war, negotiations on a common state were confirmed by **the Pittsburgh Agreement** of May 1918 on the union of Czechs and Slovaks in an independent state of the Czech lands and Slovakia, where Slovakia would have its own administration, its own parliament, its own courts, and the Slovak language would be the official language in schools, offices, and public life. The agreement was signed by representatives of the Czech National Association, the Union of Czech Catholics, the Slovak League in America, and the chairman of the Czechoslovak National Council, T. G. Masaryk. In relation to its allies, the democratic and progressive character of the new republic was confirmed by **the Washington Declaration** of October 1918, when T. G. Masaryk published the Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation, which he had drafted and which was co-signed by Milan Rastislav Štefánik and Edvard Beneš, in American newspapers.<sup>3</sup>

The Czechoslovak Republic was proclaimed on 28 October 1918. The highest state authority temporarily concentrating legislative and executive power was **the Czechoslovak National Committee**, which adopted a law on the establishment of the Czechoslovak state. In order to avoid confusion and ensure a peaceful transition to the new state system, this law on the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak state declared continuity with the Austro-Hungarian legal system and entrusted all power in the state to the National Committee. **The Slovak National Council** also declared its support for the Czechoslovak state in **the Declaration of the Slovak Nation (Martin Declaration)** on 30 October 1918. These two declarations were isolated from each other. Slovakia's interests in the National Committee were represented by Vavro

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<sup>1</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov I*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 532.

<sup>3</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, s. 28; DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov I...*, pp. 544-546.

Šrobár, who happened to be in Prague at the time and was only authorised retrospectively.<sup>4</sup>

On the Hungarian side, there were strong tendencies to keep Slovakia within the Kingdom of Hungary. Where the old Hungarian state and security apparatus was still operating, it continued to serve the Budapest government. In many places in Slovakia, councils or national committees took power, and revolutionary or national guards were formed. The position of the Slovak National Council was problematic because it was not organisationally, personally, or materially prepared to take over executive and legislative power. On 4 November 1918, the National Committee appointed V. Šrobár to lead the provisional government for Slovakia, which assumed its duties in Skalica on 6 November 1918. Pavol Blaho, Ivan Dérer, and Anton Štefánek were its members. The provisional government attempted to establish state administration, leaving all Hungarian laws in force.<sup>5</sup>

The provisional government's authority lasted only until 14 November 1918. In Prague, the Revolutionary National Assembly was established as the highest legislative body in accordance with the provisional Constitution adopted the day before by Act No. 37/1918 Coll. The Revolutionary National Assembly was not elected, but was formed by expanding the National Committee to 256 members, according to the 1911 elections to the Imperial Council in the Austrian part of the monarchy. The number of Slovak deputies selected by Vavro Šrobár and the chairman of the Slovak National Party, Matúš Dula, was set at 40, of whom 31 were Slovaks. Slovakia was represented, for example, by Edvard Beneš and Alice Masaryková. Pavel Blaho and Ferdiš Juriga, who were members of the Hungarian Parliament, became members automatically. The Revolutionary National Assembly dethroned the Habsburgs, appointed Karel Kramář as Prime Minister, and elected Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk as President of the Republic. Members of the 'Skalica government' also became members of the National Assembly. Since neither the Slovak National Council, nor the Skalica government, nor the Czechoslovak military units were able to enforce the sovereignty of the Czechoslovak state in Slovakia in November and December 1918, the issue of Slovakia was resolved by Act No. 64/1918 Coll. of 10 December 1918, which established the Office of the Minister with Full Powers for the Administration of Slovakia. The Czechoslovak government appointed Šrobár to this post. As Minister with Full Powers for the Administration of Slovakia, he exercised power in Slovakia with the help of government officials and laid the foundations for the establishment of

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<sup>4</sup> FERENČUHOVÁ, B.: Vznik Československa a začlenenie Slovenska do nového štátu. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939*. Bratislava : VEDA 2012, p. 25; KRAJČOVIČOVÁ, N.: Začleňovanie Slovenska do Československej republiky. In: ZEMKO, M. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. (Eds.): *Slovensko v Československu 1918 – 1939*. Bratislava : VEDA 2004, p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, p. 28; KRAJČOVIČOVÁ, N.: Začleňovanie Slovenska do Československej republiky. ...., pp. 66-73.

state administration in this territory. His extensive powers were based on full powers temporarily granted by the government. His main task was to consolidate the situation in Slovakia and subordinate the administrative and judicial apparatus to the Czechoslovak Republic. Among other things, in January 1919, Šrobár dissolved all local national councils being formed in villages and towns, including the Slovak National Council. He argued that there could be no duality in public administration.<sup>6</sup>

*"It took several months for Czechoslovak statehood to be established in Slovakia. It was not until the end of 1918 and the beginning of 1919 that Prešov, Košice, and Bratislava were occupied by Czechoslovak troops. The process of stabilising the Czech-Slovak border was also affected by the establishment of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on 21 March 1919 in Hungary, which sought to restore Greater Hungary in the form of a left-wing dictatorship. With its support, the Slovak Soviet Republic was proclaimed in Prešov on 19 June 1919 under the leadership of the Revolutionary Government Council of Antonín Janoušek. Only pressure from the victorious Allied Powers forced Hungarian troops to withdraw from this territory and gradually stabilise Slovakia's southern borders. This process was finally completed with the adoption of the peace treaty with Hungary in Trianon on 4 June 1920. Following prior negotiations with the émigré leadership headed by Grigorij Žatkovič, Subcarpathian Ruthenia also became part of the Czech-Slovak Republic, which was confirmed by the peace treaty of St. Germain."*<sup>7</sup>

An important step in stabilising the state was the adoption of the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic on 29 February 1920.<sup>8</sup> The 1920 Constitution was modelled primarily on the Constitution of the French Republic. The people were declared the sole source of all power in the state. The Czechoslovak state was characterised as a democratic republic headed by an elected President. The territory of the Czechoslovak Republic was declared to be unified and indivisible, with the self-governing territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia as an integral part, which would be granted the widest possible autonomy compatible with the unity of the republic. The Constitution made no mention of the Czech or Slovak nations, but was based on the fictitious existence of a unified Czechoslovak nation and a unified Czechoslovak language in 'dual form'.<sup>9</sup> *"The Constitution established a parliamentary system dividing state power into legislative, executive, and judicial powers and defining the boundaries between them."*<sup>10</sup>

Other laws were also adopted at the same time as the Constitution. Act No. 122/1920 Coll., which laid down the principles of language law in the Czechoslovak

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<sup>6</sup> KRAJČOVIČOVÁ, N.: Začleňovanie Slovenska do Československej republiky. ..., pp. 66-73.

<sup>7</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, pp. 28-29.

<sup>8</sup> BROKLOVÁ, E.: *Československá demokracie. Politický systém ČSR 1918 – 1938*. Praha: Slon, 1992, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 71-106. [Constitutional Charter of the Czechoslovak Republic. Act No. 121/1920 Coll.]

<sup>10</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost*. Praha: Portál 2011, p. 28.

Republic and stipulated that “Czechoslovak” was to be the official language of the republic. According to this law, all courts, offices, institutions, enterprises, and authorities of the republic were to use the Czechoslovak language, “generally Czech” in the Czech lands and “generally Slovak” in Slovakia. In districts where, according to the latest census, more than 20% of the population spoke a language other than the official language, courts, offices, and authorities of the republic were obliged to accept submissions from members of this minority in their language and to issue documents not only in the official language but also in the language of the submission.<sup>11</sup>

The Czechoslovak Republic had a high proportion of citizens belonging to national minorities. The German minority was the most numerous. In Slovakia, it was geographically concentrated in three areas: Bratislava and its surroundings, central Slovakia with settlement centres in Kremnica and Nitrianske Pravno, and the Spiš region. A large part of the German population in Spiš supported the integration of Slovakia under the St. Stephen’s Crown and later engaged in the pro-Hungarian Spiš German Party.<sup>12</sup> *“Even during the rise of fascism, they did not adopt the National Socialist German identity. Most Spiš Germans remained passive towards the efforts of German activists.”* A large Hungarian minority lived in southern Slovakia and southern Subcarpathian Ruthenia. *“As a result of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Hungarian population in Slovakia became a minority. According to the 1921 census, 650,597 Hungarians lived in what is now Slovakia, making up 21.7% of the population. After the end of the war, the population that had adopted the Hungarianisation policy in Hungary began to return to the Slovak nationality. After the establishment of Czechoslovakia, a decline in the Hungarian population was recorded in the censuses of 1921 and 1930 compared to 1910.”*<sup>13</sup> A Rusyn (Ruthenian) minority lived in Subcarpathian Ruthenia and north-eastern Slovakia. The self-government of Subcarpathian Ruthenia in Czechoslovakia was guaranteed by the Czechoslovak Constitution of 29 February 1920. *“They had a governor, their own education system, partially their own representative bodies, a national anthem, and a national theatre. At the end of 1938, they gained true autonomy and the official name of Subcarpathian Ruthenia. Three decisive currents of national orientation emerged in Slovakia. The Ukrainian-oriented PROSVITA society was not very successful, while the society of Alexander Duchnovič was oriented towards Russians and Subcarpathian Rusyns. The use of the name Ukraine for the Rusyn population was banned by the administrative court of the Czechoslovak Republic because, according to the law, the inhabitants of Subcarpathian Ruthenia were not Ukrainians but Rusyns.”*<sup>14</sup> Roma also lived in Slovakia. *“As elsewhere in Europe, they lived on the margins of society, scattered in small communities, which weakened their sense of belonging. In pre-Munich Czechoslovakia, they were able to declare their*

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<sup>11</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém Československa. In: *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka*, Brno : Masarykova univerzita v Brně 2011, pp. 124-126.

<sup>12</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>14</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, p. 30.

*ethnicity, but the state's interest in this ethnic group ended with the establishment of a special police register and dactyloscopic collection of members of Gypsy groups (1925) and the law on itinerant Gypsies (1927), which mainly registered nomadic Gypsies, who were issued with nomadic certificates and so-called Gypsy identity cards."* Overall, however, the Czechoslovak Republic pursued a liberal policy towards ethnic minorities on its territory.<sup>15</sup>

The interwar Czechoslovak Republic was an industrial-agrarian state with more industrialised Czech regions and predominantly agrarian Slovakia, with relatively low agricultural productivity. The least developed region was Subcarpathian Ruthenia, where industry was almost non-existent. After the establishment of the state, the Czechoslovak governments sought to reduce these differences by directing investments to support agriculture and industry in the less developed areas of the state. Part of the strategy to integrate Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia into Czechoslovakia was to move intelligentsia (civil servants, teachers, etc.) from the Czech lands to these territories. The relocation of Czech intellectuals to these territories was also related to the fact that a large part of the Hungarian civil service emigrated to Hungary due to their disagreement with the creation of Czechoslovakia. Political developments in the state were also influenced by the consequences of the economic crises of 1921–1923 and 1930–1934, but the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian economic space and the fact that the Slovak economy had to adapt to the changed conditions in the new state also had a big impact on the economy in Slovakia. The integration of the Czech and Slovak economic areas progressed only slowly.<sup>16</sup>

*"The territorial-administrative division of Slovakia in the new republic initially followed the county (župa) system. Sixteen counties were created in Slovakia, which had previously had their centres within Slovak territory. **The County Establishment Act** of February 1920 was intended to unify and democratise the state administration. However, it was never implemented across the entire state. The law was not applied in Czechia because it contradicted the established regional tradition, and there were fears of German domination in the new structure. Based on a government decree of 1922, six counties were created in Slovakia from 1 January 1923: Bratislavská (seat – Bratislava), Nitrianska (Nitra), Považská (Martin), Zvolenská (Zvolen), Podtatranská (Liptovský Mikuláš), Košická (Košice)."*<sup>17</sup>

Parliamentary elections were held in Czechoslovakia in 1920, 1925, 1929, and 1935. Despite this, 20 governments (including caretaker governments) changed during the interwar period in Czechoslovakia. The first, Kramář government of a national coalition, was replaced in 1919 by a government of the so-called red-green coalition

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<sup>15</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, p. 30.

<sup>16</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 398; MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska*. Bratislava : Academic Electronic Press 2003, pp. 274-275; ČAPLOVIČ, D. a kol.: *Dejiny Slovenska*. Bratislava : AEP 2000, pp. 230-233.

<sup>17</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, p. 29.

led by Vlastimil Tusar. In addition to the Social Democrats, it included significant representation from the Agrarian (Republican) Party. As a result of internal divisions within the Social Democrats, the government resigned, and the first caretaker government was formed, led by Jan Černý. This government was later replaced by the government of Edvard Beneš. In October 1922, it was replaced by a government of the so-called national coalition, in which all parliamentary parties participated, with the exception of the Communist Party, the German and Hungarian parties, and the Slovak People's Party. Antonín Švehla led the government. After the elections in November 1925, A. Švehla unsuccessfully attempted to restore the national coalition, so Jan Černý's caretaker government briefly returned to power. A. Švehla then tried to form a coalition without the participation of left-wing parties and approached German activist parties and the Slovak People's Party to join the government. Almost a year after the elections, a coalition government was formed, which included representatives of the German minority and was joined in 1927 by Hlinka's Slovak People's Party. It was the only government in the First Czechoslovak Republic without representation of left-wing political parties.<sup>18</sup>

*"In 1927, parliament passed a law on the reorganisation of public administration **and the establishment of a system of provinces...** The 1927 law officially abolished the Ministry with full powers for the administration of Slovakia. The county system was also abolished. The law established a system of provinces headed by a provincial president. In addition to the Provincial Office, which was the executive office of the new institution, a provincial council and a provincial committee were also established."*<sup>19</sup> The Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSLS) accepted the provincial system as a step towards autonomy. They were to have the position of provincial president secured and two ministerial seats in the Czechoslovak government. However, the powers of the authorities under the provincial system proved to be formal, and for this reason, among others, the HSLS left the government coalition in 1929.<sup>20</sup>

At the end of October 1929, another parliamentary election was held. Based on the election results, a so-called broad coalition government was formed, led by František Udržal and including ministers from eight parties. In addition to the parties that formed the landowner coalition, Czech and German Social Democrats, National Socialists, and National Democrats also participated in the government. As a result of the escalating economic crisis and political tensions, František Udržal's government resigned in October 1932 and was replaced by Jan Malypetr's government. The last

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<sup>18</sup> ŠUCHOVÁ, X.: Kríza a stabilizácia demokratického režimu v unitárnom štáte. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939*. Bratislava : VEDA 2012, pp. 292-293, 298, 301-302, 305-307, 316; ŠUCHOVÁ, X.: Politický vývin v období hospodárskej konjunktúry. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939*. Bratislava : VEDA 2012, pp. 329-332, 336-339, 345-346, 351-352, 355-356.

<sup>19</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, p. 29.

<sup>20</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, p. 29.

pre-war parliamentary elections were held in 1935, and based on their results, a broad coalition government was formed, led by Jan Malypetr, who was replaced a few months later by **Milan Hodža**, the first Slovak to become Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia. Despite the victory of the Sudeten German Party in the elections, the ruling coalition managed to maintain a reliable parliamentary majority.<sup>21</sup>

The foreign policy of Czechoslovakia was oriented towards the Western powers, mainly France. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was headed continuously until 1935 by the renowned diplomat Edvard Beneš. Czechoslovakia became a founding member of **the League of Nations**, based in Geneva. Great attention was paid to security issues and the security system in Central Europe, which would eliminate potential territorial claims by Germany, Austria, and Hungary. **The Little Entente**, which guaranteed mutual assistance in the event of conflict and the territorial integrity of Yugoslavia, Romania, and Czechoslovakia, was one of the cornerstones of Czechoslovak foreign policy. Another important element was the signing of the Czechoslovak-French alliance treaty, which guaranteed the independence of the Czechoslovak Republic, the inviolability of its territory, and assistance in the event of an attack by Germany and Hungary. France concluded similar treaties with other members of the Little Entente.<sup>22</sup>

The Czechoslovak security system thus relied primarily on post-war peace treaties, the League of Nations, the 1924 treaty with France, and treaties with the Little Entente states, united primarily by fears of Hungarian revisionism. In 1935, an alliance treaty was concluded between Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. After Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany in 1933, the perception of security in Czechoslovakia changed significantly. From the mid-1930s, the defence of the state was also supported by the extension of military service, the expansion of the army, extensive rearmament, and the construction of border fortifications.<sup>23</sup>

The Munich Dictate (**Munich Agreement**), signed by the leaders of four great powers, Adolf Hitler (Germany), Benito Mussolini (Italy), A. Neville Chamberlain (Great Britain), and Édouard Daladier (France), and based on which areas inhabited by Germans were separated from Czechoslovakia, also dramatically changed the political map of the state. President Beneš abdicated and went into exile. Hlinka's Slovak People's Party took advantage of the crisis in the regime, and on 6 October 1938,

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<sup>21</sup> ŠUCHOVÁ, X.: Politický vývin v období hospodárskej konjunktúry..., pp. 357-358; BARTLOVÁ, A.: Vnútropolitické konflikty za veľkej hospodárskej krízy. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939*. Bratislava : VEDA 2012, pp. 415-417, 420-421, 428-429, 439-440; KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy...*, p. 436.

<sup>22</sup> For more details, see VESELÝ, Z.: *Mezinárodní vztahy v zrcadle dějin*. Plzeň : Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, s.r.o. 2020, pp. 288-290; FERENČUHOVÁ, B.: Československo v medzinárodnej politike 20. rokov. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939*. Bratislava : VEDA 2012, pp. 69-84; FERENČUHOVÁ, B.: *Medzinárodná politika v 30. rokoch a Mníchov*. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939*. Bratislava : VEDA 2012, pp. 394-395.

<sup>23</sup> MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska...*, pp. 280-281.

their efforts culminated in the signing of the Žilina Agreement and the publication of the Žilina Manifesto.<sup>24</sup> Representatives of five other political parties also joined the declaration of autonomy. In the given political situation, the Czechoslovak government accepted Syrový's declaration of autonomy and subsequently appointed the first autonomous government of the Slovak region, headed by Jozef Tiso.<sup>25</sup>

In the following periods, jurisdictional disputes between the Slovak government and the central government continued. The central authorities retained exclusive competence in matters of foreign policy, national defence, currency, and the budget. Complications arose because the mutual relations and competencies of the central and autonomous governments were not clearly defined. As a result, jurisdictional disputes did not end even after the adoption of the Act on the Autonomy of the Slovak Land, which was passed by the National Assembly on 22 November 1938. The Act stipulated that until the formation of the Slovak Provincial Government, to be proposed by the Slovak Provincial Assembly, governmental and executive power in the territory of the Slovak land would be exercised by the Slovak Provincial Government, consisting of five members, forming part of the central government. On the same day, a constitutional law on the autonomy of Subcarpathian Ruthenia was also approved, though it was not published until several weeks later.<sup>26</sup>

The changes that took place in Czechoslovakia after the Munich Agreement also had an impact on the constitution. When Constitutional Act No. 299/1938 Coll. on the autonomy of the Slovak region was adopted on 22 November 1938, the election of the President was also amended so that the majority required to elect the President of the Republic had to include an appropriate majority of the members of the National Assembly elected in the territory of the Slovak region.<sup>27</sup>

Further changes were introduced by Enabling Act No. 330/1938 Coll. on the authorisation to amend the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic and on extraordinary regulatory powers. Under this act, the President of the Republic was granted the authority, subject to the unanimous consent of the government, to issue decrees with the force of constitutional law, through which the Constitution and related constitutional laws could be amended. The government, in turn, gained the power, with the consent of the President, to issue regulations having the force of law. It stipulated that the President in Slovakia was authorised to issue decrees amending

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<sup>24</sup> During the existence of the Czechoslovak Republic, Hlinka's Slovak People's Party submitted several proposals for autonomy to parliament (25 January 1922, 8 May 1930, 19 August 1938).

<sup>25</sup> VESELÝ, Z.: *Mezinárodní vztahy v zrcadle dějin...*, p. 331-333; MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska...*, pp. 280-281.

<sup>26</sup> RYCHLÍK, J.: *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Spolupráce a konflikty 1914 – 1992*. Praha : Vyšehrad 2012, pp. 162-163; Ústavný zákon č. 299/1938 Sb. z. a n. zo dňa 22. novembra 1938, o autonómii Slovenskej krajiny. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 283-289.

<sup>27</sup> Ústavný zákon č. 299/1938 Sb. z. a n. zo dňa 22. novembra 1938 o autonómii Slovenskej krajiny..., pp. 283-289.

the Constitution and constitutional laws for a period of two years from the establishment of the Slovak National Council based on a unanimous proposal by the government. However, his power to issue decrees with the force of constitutional law did not apply to laws on the autonomy of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia. When appointing and dismissing members of the Slovak and Subcarpathian Ruthenian governments, he was bound by the proposals of the presidiums of the provincial assemblies. The provincial governments were accountable only to the provincial assemblies, and the head of state did not have the right to dissolve these provincial legislative bodies.<sup>28</sup>

The session at which the enabling constitutional law was adopted was the last session of both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. After passing the enabling law and the provisional budget, the National Assembly adjourned for the parliamentary recess and never reconvened. The Standing Committee also ceased to function, and all decisions remained solely with the executive power – the Czechoslovak government and the President.<sup>29</sup>

The autonomous Slovak government had to almost immediately address the territorial claims of Poland and Hungary, resulting from the resolutions of the Munich Conference. To avoid more serious conflict, the Czechoslovak government ceded parts of Silesia and northern Slovakia to Poland in November. In October 1938, based on a decision by the International Commission for the Determination of Borders, German troops occupied the Bratislava suburb of Petržalka. Negotiations with Hungary were unsuccessful. The result was **the Vienna Arbitration**, which, on 2 November 1938, with only Germany and Italy participating, decided on the new Czechoslovak-Hungarian borders. Germany was represented by Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and Italy by Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano.<sup>30</sup> *“According to the Vienna Arbitration, Slovakia had to cede 10,390 km<sup>2</sup> of territory with a population of 853,670, of whom 503,980 were Hungarians, 272,145 Slovaks and Czechs, 26,151 Jews, 8,967 Germans, 1,825 Rusyns, 14,617 of other nationalities, and 26,005 foreigners.”*<sup>31</sup>

From the Munich Conference until March 1939, the state, which was now officially called the Czechoslovak Republic, was referred to as the “Second Republic”. In addition to the reduced territory of the state and the autonomous administration of Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia, this period was also characterised by a shift towards authoritarianism and the end of the parliamentary democratic system in the

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<sup>28</sup> Ústavný zákon č. 330/1938 Sb. z. a n. zo dňa 15. decembra 1938, o zmocnení ku zmenám ústavnej listiny a ústavných zákonov republiky Česko-Slovenskej. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 301-303.

<sup>29</sup> ZEMKO, M.: *Politický systém Československa...*, s. 129; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, p. 301.

<sup>30</sup> VESELÝ, Z.: *Mezinárodní vztahy v zrcadle dějin...*, pp. 333-334; DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, s. 656; MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska...*, pp. 281-282.

<sup>31</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II...*, p. 658.

whole state. Emil Hácha was elected President of the Republic, the powers of parliament were curtailed in favour of the executive, and traditional civic parties were gradually dismantled and “unified”.<sup>32</sup>

After the declaration of autonomy, the HSLS gained a dominant position in Slovakia. The Slovak government dissolved left-wing political parties, and other civic political parties were either disbanded or merged with the HSLS, whether voluntarily or under pressure, which saw political fragmentation as an unnecessary division of the nation. The merger of the parties took place on 8 November 1938, and it was declared to be the unification of the Slovak nation and the HSLS as the Party of Slovak National Unity, as the sole representative of the will of the nation.<sup>33</sup>

Associations were also dissolved, trade unions forcibly unified, and self-governing municipal bodies that did not suit the new regime were disbanded. In December 1938, elections to the autonomous assembly were held, which the HSLS considered one of the key prerequisites for consolidating political power in Slovakia. Elections were scheduled for 18 December 1938, and through administrative maneuvers, HSLS prevented other parties from submitting their own candidate lists, ensuring the election of their proposed candidates. The secrecy of the vote was also problematic, as in some polling stations, the elections had more of a demonstrative character. Originally, 80 deputies were to be elected, but in the post-arbitration territory, under predetermined conditions (20,000 votes to obtain one seat for a political party and another seat if the remaining votes exceeded three-quarters of this number), only 63 members of parliament were elected, despite high voter turnout. Of these 63 members of parliament, two-thirds were members of the Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, the rest included defectors from former centralist political parties and representatives of the German and Hungarian minorities. Given the nature of the elections, more than 90% of voters voted in favour.<sup>34</sup>

On 1 December 1938, Rudolf Beran became head of the central government with Karol Sidor as his deputy in the position of state secretary. By late February and early March, Beran’s government had information about deepening separatist tendencies within the HSLS. Some ministers sought to overthrow the autonomist government in Slovakia and replace it with pro-Czechoslovak circles. On the night of 9–10 March 1939, a military dictatorship was imposed in Slovakia; power was taken over by military commanders, the army, and the gendarmerie. At the same time, President Emil Hácha dismissed Jozef Tiso as the President of the autonomous government and, after complicated negotiations, appointed Karol Sidor as chairman of the autonomous

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<sup>32</sup> MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska....*, pp. 281-282.

<sup>33</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945*. Bratislava: Literárne informačné centrum 2012, p. 20.

<sup>34</sup> MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska....*, pp. 281-282; PODOLEC, O.: K niektorým prvkom prvej slovenskej ústavy a ich reálnej aplikácii v politickom živote štátu. In: LACKO, M. (ed.): *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945 očami mladých historikov I*. Trnava : Katedra histórie FF UCM Trnava 2002, pp. 14-15.

government. This so-called Homola coup was based on the assumption that the Nazis did not support the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party.<sup>35</sup>

## 1.1 Political system

### Legislative power

On 13 November 1918, Act No. 37/1918 Coll. on the provisional Constitution was adopted by the National Committee. According to the constitution, the National Committee was renamed **the National Assembly** and expanded to 256 members according to the same formula as the National Committee (based on the 1911 election results).<sup>36</sup> Slovakia was represented by 40 deputies. The number of Slovak deputies in the National Assembly increased to 54 on 1 March 1919, according to Act No. 138/1919 Coll. The total number of deputies thus increased to 270.<sup>37</sup> The National Assembly was to exercise legislative power for the entire state and oversee the executive power until such time as, according to the definitive constitution, a chamber elected by the people was convened and established.<sup>38</sup>

According to the 1920 Constitution, the National Assembly consisted of **the Chamber of Deputies** and **the Senate**. The Chamber of Deputies had 300 members elected by universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage according to the principle of proportional representation (unlike the majority system previously used in Hungary). All citizens of Czechoslovakia, regardless of gender, had the right to vote for the Chamber of Deputies if they were at least 21 years of age. Eligibility to stand for election required the age of 30. Deputies were elected for a term of six years. The Senate had 150 members. Like members of the Chamber of Deputies, senators were elected based on universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage according to the principle of proportional representation. However, they were elected for a term of eight years. The right to vote was tied to the age of 26, and the right to stand for election was tied to the age of 45. The validity of elections was decided by the electoral court.<sup>39</sup> The court also ruled in cases where a deputy or senator failed to observe party discipline and did not vote in accordance with the instructions of the party leadership. Deputies or senators were expelled from the party, and the Electoral Court subsequently stripped them of their mandate. Deputies were thus bound by party discipline, contrary to the

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<sup>35</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, pp. 48-50, 52-55.

<sup>36</sup> Zákon č. 37/1918 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 13. listopadu 1918 o prozatímní ústavě. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 53-56.

<sup>37</sup> Zákon č. 138/1919 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 11. března 1919, kterým se mění § 1 zákona ze dne 11. listopadu 1918, čís. 37 Sb. z. a n., o prozatímní ústavě. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, p. 64.

<sup>38</sup> Zákon č. 37/1918 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 13. listopadu 1918 o prozatímní ústavě..., pp. 53-56.

<sup>39</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., pp. 71-106. [Constitutional Charter of the Czechoslovak Republic. Act No. 121/1920 Coll.]

constitution. They signed a so-called electoral pledge, whereby they undertook to relinquish their mandate in the event of a loss of confidence by the party leadership.<sup>40</sup>

According to the Constitution, the right of legislative initiative belonged to the government and members of both chambers. The consent of both chambers was required for the adoption of laws, unless the Constitution provided otherwise. If the National Assembly rejected a government proposal, the government could decide to let the citizens themselves decide by vote whether the government proposal should become law. However, the government's decision had to be unanimous. Such a referendum could not, however, concern bills that would amend the Constitutional Charter or its parts.<sup>41</sup> However, this institute of referendum was never implemented in the first Czechoslovak Republic. According to Ferdinand Peroutka, one of the reasons was the conviction of Czechoslovak politicians that political parties were more responsible and rational than the unorganised public.<sup>42</sup>

When the chambers were not in session or had been dissolved, their legislative, administrative, and supervisory functions over the government and executive power were temporarily exercised by a **Standing Committee**. It was composed of 24 members elected for one year. Sixteen members and sixteen substitutes were elected by the Chamber of Deputies, and eight members and eight substitutes were elected by the Senate. According to the constitution, the Standing Committee could not elect the President or his deputy, amend constitutional laws, extend military service, impose new permanent financial obligations on citizens, or dispose of state property. Nor could they give consent to the declaration of war. Emergency measures that would otherwise require legislation were only permissible upon a government proposal approved by the President. Such measures were signed by the President, the prime minister or his deputy, and at least half of the ministers. The chair of the committee and his deputy then had to report on the committee's activities at the next meeting of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Both chambers then had to approve these measures. If they did not do so within two months of the chambers reconvening, the measures ceased to be valid.<sup>43</sup>

The wording of the Constitution suggests that the Chamber of Deputies had a stronger position than the Senate. Some laws had to be submitted first to the Chamber of Deputies and only then to the Senate; the Senate's disagreement with ordinary laws could be overruled by the Chamber of Deputies, while the opposite was not true; the government was accountable only to the Chamber of Deputies. This dominance of the Chamber of Deputies over the Senate was also evident from the fact that, despite the

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<sup>40</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, pp. 30, 40.

<sup>41</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., pp. 71-106.

<sup>42</sup> BROKLOVÁ, E.: *Československá demokracie. Politický systém ČSR 1918 – 1938. ...*, p. 34.

<sup>43</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., pp. 71-106.

different lengths of the electoral terms, elections to both chambers were held at virtually the same time and had almost identical party compositions. Consequently, the Senate did not function as intended - as a corrective body to the legislative decisions of the Chamber of Deputies. It very quickly began to serve as a retirement home for distinguished but no longer influential politicians.<sup>44</sup>

## **Executive power**

### **President**

According to the provisional Constitution of 1918, the head of state was the President of the Republic. The President was elected by the National Assembly by a two-thirds majority of the deputies present from a majority of all deputies. His term of office lasted until a new President was elected under the new permanent constitution. The Constitution granted the President unlimited immunity. According to it, the President could not be prosecuted even in the case of treason. The powers of the President were also regulated by the Constitution. He was the representative of the state abroad, the supreme commander of the army, he received ambassadors, declared war based on a resolution of the National Assembly, and submitted peace terms to the National Assembly for approval, appointed officers, state officials, and judges of the VI<sup>th</sup> rank and higher. The President had the right to pardon or mitigate sentences and the legal consequences of a criminal offence, convictions, or punishments. He also had the right to order that criminal proceedings not be initiated or that criminal proceedings already initiated be terminated. In the exercise of his governmental functions, he required the countersignature of the relevant member of the government. The Constitution also granted the President the right to veto laws passed by the National Assembly. To override the veto, it was sufficient for the deputies to re-approve the law by the same majority as before. The President signed the adopted laws, and in the President's absence, the prime minister signed the laws on his behalf. The President took the oath of office before the members of the National Assembly. The text of the oath was not precisely defined.<sup>45</sup>

Under the provisional constitution, presidential powers were therefore quite narrowly defined. The provisional Constitution did not grant the President the right to convene the National Assembly, the right of legislative initiative, or the right to appoint and dismiss members of the government, as they were directly elected by the National Assembly. Given the prominent position of T. G. Masaryk on the political scene in Czechoslovakia, it was only a matter of time before the powers of the President were strengthened. At the direct request of President Masaryk, Act No. 271/1919 Coll. of 23 May 1919 significantly increased presidential powers, especially

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<sup>44</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém Československa..., p. 120.

<sup>45</sup> Zákon č. 37/1918 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 13. listopadu 1918 o prozatímní ústavě. ..., pp. 53-56.

in appointing and dismissing the government, previously elected by the National Assembly, but also in relation to parliament.<sup>46</sup>

The President gained the authority to appoint university professors, negotiate international treaties, and the right of veto was also explicitly mentioned and modified so that it could be used within 14 days of the delivery of the approved proposal to the government. Under the new amendment, the President's veto could only be overridden by a renewed approval in the presence of a majority of deputies. New provisions allowed the President to attend and chair government meetings and to request written reports from the government and its individual members. Although he still did not have the right of legislative initiative, he could, at his own discretion, recommend measures to parliament, and according to the amendment, occasionally he had to report to the National Assembly on the state of the republic.<sup>47</sup>

Under the Constitution of 1920, the President was elected by the National Assembly. Candidates had to be Czechoslovak citizens eligible for election to the Chamber of Deputies and had to be at least 35 years of age.<sup>48</sup> This age limit was introduced in the Constitution by President T. G. Masaryk, who had E. Beneš in mind as his successor.<sup>49</sup>

For the election of the President to be valid, a majority of all members of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate had to be present, and the candidate had to be approved by a three-fifths majority of those present. If none of the candidates received a sufficient number of votes, a second round of voting was held between the candidates who received the most votes. The candidate with the most votes in the second round won. In the event of a tie, the decision was made by lot. The President was elected for seven years, and one person could only be elected twice in a row. A third term could only be taken after seven years had elapsed since the end of the second term. However, the Constitution explicitly stated that this provision did not apply to the first President of the Czechoslovak Republic.<sup>50</sup> He was elected four times in a row in 1918, 1920, 1927, and 1934 and served in office for seventeen years.<sup>51</sup> President Masaryk was an influential figure in Czechoslovak politics. The President and his political entourage were commonly referred to as "the Castle" (Hrad). His entourage included representatives of the Social Democrats, National Socialists, and most of the Agrarians, and the President's office intervened in political life in various ways when support for these political circles was important to "the Castle". "The

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<sup>46</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939....*, p. 243; BROKLOVÁ, E.: *Československá demokracie. Politický systém ČSR 1918 – 1938....*, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Zákon č. 271/1919 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 23. května 1919, kterým se mění zákon o prozatímní ústavě. ..., pp. 67-70.

<sup>48</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky...., pp. 71-106.

<sup>49</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém Československa...., p. 121.

<sup>50</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky...., pp. 71-106.

<sup>51</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém Československa...., p. 121.

Castle" held a particularly important position in foreign policy, embodied by Masaryk's close associate Edvard Beneš. When Masaryk abdicated in 1935 for health reasons, he recommended Foreign Minister Beneš as his successor. The presidential election took place on 18 December 1935. Beneš was elected by a majority vote (340 deputies and senators voted in favour). Masaryk died in 1937.<sup>52</sup>

The election of candidates was to take place in the last four weeks before the end of the term of office. The previous head of state was to remain in office until his successor was elected.<sup>53</sup>

The President represented the state abroad, negotiated, and ratified international treaties. The consent of the National Assembly was required for the conclusion of trade treaties or treaties that imposed any financial or personal burdens on the state or its citizens, military treaties, or treaties altering state territory. Any change to the state territory required a constitutional law. The President received and appointed ambassadors, declared a state of war, declared war with the prior consent of the National Assembly, submitted an agreed peace treaty to the National Assembly for approval, convened, adjourned, and dissolved the National Assembly, and declared the sessions of the chambers closed. He signed laws approved by the National Assembly, the Assembly of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, and measures of the Standing Committee. He also had the right of veto, and deputies had to vote by roll call in a revote. He had absolute veto power over the laws of the Subcarpathian Ruthenia Assembly and the measures of the Standing Committee of the National Assembly. The President did not have the right of legislative initiative, but he could submit oral or written reports on the state of the republic to the National Assembly and could also recommend measures he deemed necessary. The President appointed ministers, determined their number, and dismissed them from office.<sup>54</sup> President Masaryk repeatedly exercised this right to appoint and dismiss ministers according to his own ideas, thus participating in the formation of coalition and technocratic governments.<sup>55</sup>

The President also appointed university professors, judges, civil servants, and officers of rank VI and higher. He granted pardons and, at the government's suggestion, could grant gifts and pensions from the treasury. He was also the commander-in-chief of all armed forces.

According to the constitution, the President of the Republic was not responsible for the performance of his office. Responsibility lay with the government, and all of the President's acts of governmental and executive power required the countersignature

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<sup>52</sup> KRĚN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy...*, s. 406, 437; ZEMKO, M.: *Politický systém Československa...*, p. 124.

<sup>53</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., pp. 71-106.

<sup>54</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., pp. 71-106.

<sup>55</sup> ZEMKO, M.: *Politický systém Československa...*, p. 122.

of a responsible member of the government to be valid. The President could only be prosecuted for treason. In such a case, he was tried by the Senate on the basis of an indictment by the Chamber of Deputies. The only punishment was loss of office and the inability to run for it again.<sup>56</sup>

## Government

The provisional Constitution clearly entrusted executive power to a 17-member government elected by the National Assembly. According to the constitution, the seat of government was Prague. **The government** decided collectively, in the presence of at least ten members, including the President or his deputy. The prime minister and members of the government took an oath before the National Assembly to perform their duties conscientiously and impartially and in accordance with the laws. The government was accountable to the National Assembly, which could dismiss it by a simple majority vote in the presence of at least half of its members.<sup>57</sup>

The amendment to the provisional Constitution removed the reference to a strict number of government members, thus giving the President an effective tool in forming the cabinet. It was also determined that members of the government would be appointed and dismissed by the President of the Republic. For this reason, according to the amendment to the constitution, it was no longer the government but the President, at the proposal of the prime minister, who determined which member was responsible for which department. A motion of no confidence in the government now required 100 signatures instead of the signatures of at least a quarter of deputies, and the committee receiving the motion had at least eight days to submit a report. In addition, the government was given the opportunity to request a vote of confidence. According to the amendment, a majority of the members of the government was required to be present for the government to make decisions, instead of the previously fixed number of ten.<sup>58</sup>

Initially, Czechoslovakia could be characterised as a state in which the cabinet was part of the parliament that created and controlled it, which suited domestic politicians in particular, as it gave them an advantage over exiled politicians. After Masaryk's return from abroad, changes to the system led to a compromise in the form of a parliamentary democracy in which the powers of the President were emphasised, but so was the considerable political and economic power of the political parties. This concept was then preserved in the wording of the 1920 Constitutional Charter.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., pp. 71-106.

<sup>57</sup> Zákon č. 37/1918 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 13. listopadu 1918 o prozatímní ústavě. ..., pp. 53-56.

<sup>58</sup> Zákon č. 271/1919 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 23. května 1919, kterým se mění zákon o prozatímní ústavě. ..., pp. 67-70.

<sup>59</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, p. 27.

According to the 1920 Constitution, the President appointed and dismissed the prime minister and members of the government. The President also determined which ministers would head the individual ministries. Prague was the regular seat of the government. The government elected a deputy prime minister to represent the prime minister. If the deputy could not represent the prime minister, the oldest member of the government did so. As in the provisional constitution, the 1920 Constitution stipulated that members of the government could not be members of the board of directors or supervisory board, nor representatives of joint-stock companies and limited liability companies, if they were engaged in profitable employment. However, members of the government could be members of the National Assembly. Only deputies, not senators, were members of the government.<sup>60</sup>

The government was accountable solely to the Chamber of Deputies. A motion of no confidence had to be submitted by at least 100 deputies, and a designated committee had to give its opinion within eight days. A majority of deputies had to be present for a vote of no confidence, and a majority of them had to vote in favour of the motion. The vote was taken by roll call. The same procedure was followed if the government itself asked the Chamber of Deputies for a vote of confidence. In that case, the motion was not referred to a committee. If the Chamber of Deputies passed a vote of no confidence in the government or did not pass a vote of confidence, the government submitted its resignation to the President. The President then determined who would lead government affairs until a new government was formed. If the President was not in office at the time the government was to resign, the government submitted its resignation to the Vice-President. If no Vice-President had been elected, the government submitted its resignation to the National Assembly Committee (Standing Committee), which also decided who would lead government affairs until a new government was formed.<sup>61</sup>

No government in interwar Czechoslovakia faced a vote of no confidence. During coalition crises or other political problems, governments preferred to resign to the President rather than face a vote of confidence in parliament.<sup>62</sup>

Members of the government were criminally liable if they intentionally or through gross negligence violated constitutional or other laws within their remit. At the proposal of the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate then conducted criminal proceedings against them. The government made decisions collectively and had a quorum if a majority of ministers (excluding the prime minister or his deputy) were present. The President could attend government meetings and even chair them. He could also

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<sup>60</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., p. 71-106; ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém Československa..., p. 122.

<sup>61</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., pp. 71-106.

<sup>62</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém Československa..., p. 122.

request written reports from the government and its individual members on any matter within their remit. He also had the right to invite the government or its individual members to a meeting. Government regulations were signed by the Prime Minister or his deputy and the ministers responsible for their implementation, but at least half of the ministers.<sup>63</sup>

Czechoslovak governments were formed as coalition governments, which was a result of the nature of parliamentary democracy and the political party system. During the interwar period of the Czechoslovak Republic, 20 governments came to power, including four technocratic governments and one government of experts.<sup>64</sup>

### The Five

The so-called **Five** was an important mechanism ensuring the functioning of the entire system. It emerged at the end of Tusar's government and especially during the first technocratic government in 1920 as a committee of representatives of the five Czechoslovak political parties forming the majority in the National Assembly (agrarians, populists, national democrats, national socialists, and social democrats). It decided on all major political issues and had virtually unlimited influence. The government effectively became merely the executor of its will, and the parliamentary and senate clubs of the individual parties were the voting buttons for pushing through agreed motions. The voting discipline of members of parliament was ensured by the de facto application of an imperative mandate, which ensured the full dependence of deputies and senators on the headquarters of their political parties. The Five continued to exist even after the end of the technocratic government. Only the number of its members was modified in a certain way as the number of coalition parties expanded.<sup>65</sup> This resulted in a deformation of the parliamentary system through the creation of extra-parliamentary centres of power, where decisions on the most important issues were made without the involvement of the National Assembly.<sup>66</sup>

### Party system and electoral system

The electoral rules for elections to the Chamber of Deputies (Act No. 123/1920 Coll.) and the Senate (Act No. 124/1920 Coll.) had identical provisions, except for the number of seats and constituencies. In order to distribute the seats as accurately as possible according to the number of votes obtained, three rounds of voting were introduced for both chambers of parliament, in which the seats were first distributed

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<sup>63</sup> Ústavní listina Československé republiky. Zákon č. 121/1920 Sb. z. a n. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky..., pp. 71-106.

<sup>64</sup> ŠUCHOVÁ, X.: Přílohy II – Politický systém. In: ZEMKO, M. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. (Eds.): *Slovensko v Československu 1918 – 1939*. Bratislava : VEDA 2004, pp. 598-609.

<sup>65</sup> HLOUŠEK, V. – KOPEČEK, L. (eds.): *Demokracie*. Brno : Mezinárodní politologický ústav Masarykovy univerzity 2004, p. 219; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost*. Praha : Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2007, p. 343.

<sup>66</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, p. 30.

in the constituencies and the remaining seats at the national level. To get into parliament, it was necessary to obtain a number of votes reaching the regional electoral number, or 20,000 valid votes, in at least one electoral district. A system of “bound candidate lists” was introduced, which was the subject of controversy throughout the interwar republic. Their opponents argued that this was an anti-democratic restriction on the free choice of deputies and senators.<sup>67</sup>

In 1920, a total of 22 political parties and groups took part in the first parliamentary elections. In the following elections in 1925, their number rose to 29. The number of candidate parties and coalitions subsequently fell to 19 in 1929 and to 16 in 1935. However, only some of these political parties and groups ran in all electoral districts of the republic. Political parties played a very important role in the political system of interwar Czechoslovakia. Contemporaries referred to it as a “state of political parties”, which reflects the concentration of power in the hands of a few political parties. Their status was not regulated by any special law, and the Constitution did not mention their position in the political system. Political parties were not granted legal personality, did not officially own any property, and could not enter into contractual relationships. However, the existing situation suited the political parties, and they had no interest in changing it significantly.<sup>68</sup>

Given the large number of political parties, governments were formed as coalitions of the strongest of them. They were based on the five major parties: the Social Democratic Party, the Agrarian Party, the National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People’s Party, and the National Democratic Party. **The Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers’ Party** focused on workers and the middle class, such as clerks, teachers, civil servants, etc. One of the party’s representatives was Vlastimil Tusar (Prime Minister 1919-1920). In 1920, the radical left wing split from the party, and in 1921, **the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia** was formed. It was led by Bohumír Šmeral, who was replaced by Klement Gottwald in 1929. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia was always legal and had a stable voter base, especially in the eastern parts of the republic, but it was an outsider in the political system of Czechoslovakia. **The Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants** (also known as the Agrarian or Republican Party) was based on the ideas of agrarianism. Its representatives included Antonín Švehla, Jan Malypetr, František Udržal, Milan Hodža, and Rudolf Beran. Each of them was the prime minister of one of the Czechoslovak governments, with Švehla even heading three governments. **The Czechoslovak National Socialist Party** was very close to T. G. Masaryk. It was led by Václav Klofáč, and Edvard Beneš was also a member of the party before being elected President. **The Czechoslovak People’s Party** was focused on Christian-Catholic voters and had a strong position, especially in Moravia. It formed part of all governments except the technocratic ones. It was led by

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<sup>67</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém Československa..., pp. 124-126.

<sup>68</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Politický systém Československa..., p. 129.

Jan Šrámek. **The Czechoslovak National Democracy** was a conservative party with strong nationalist elements. Its chairman was Karel Kramář, prime minister of the first Czechoslovak government (1918-1920). In the 1930s, the party leaned heavily towards fascism and later became part of the semi-fascist National Unity. In the 1930s, the deteriorating living standards led to increased support for extremist political forces. After Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany, support grew primarily for fascist entities such as the National Fascist Community (NOF - Národní obec fašistická), led by former legionnaire Radol Gajda, inspired by Italian fascism, and the Czech fascist organisation Vlajka, which was close to the ideas of German National Socialism, anti-Semitism, and chauvinism. Fascist tendencies were also evident in Jiří Stříbrný's National League (Jiří Stříbrný was a former member of the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party), which formed a coalition with the National Fascist Community in the 1929 elections - the so-called League Against Bound Candidate Lists. In 1934, the merger of the NOF, Vlajka, and seven other entities formed the fascist National Front, which subsequently merged with Stříbrný's National League and Kramář's National Democracy. This led to the creation of the National Union, which ran in the 1935 parliamentary elections.<sup>69</sup>

While in the first half of the 1920s the government was headed by a Social Democrat, governments in the following period were formed under the leadership of representatives of the Agrarian Party. In 1935, Milan Hodža became the first Slovak to become Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia. During periods of coalition and political crises, experts (J. Černý, Gen. Syrový) were appointed to head the government.

The strongest political party in Slovakia since 1923 was the Slovak People's Party, renamed **Hlinka's Slovak People's Party** in 1925. This conservative right-wing party focused on Catholic voters, and its main programme was the autonomy of Slovakia. In addition to Andrej Hlinka, its representatives included Jozef Tiso and Vojtech Tuka. The party was part of the governing coalition only once, in 1927-1929 (it left the coalition in protest against the imprisonment of Vojtech Tuka). **The Slovak National Party** (SNS), a conservative civic political party whose programme was based on autonomy and defending the needs of Slovakia, also operated exclusively in Slovakia.<sup>70</sup>

Political parties of national minorities also played an important role. Some members of minorities joined national parties (Social Democratic, Agrarian, Communist), while others formed minority political parties. After 1918, the political activities of the German minority in Spiš were carried out through **the Zipser Deutsche Partei**, led by

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<sup>69</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy...*, pp. 400-402; ŠUCHOVÁ, X.: Politické strany. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939...*, pp. 266-273.

<sup>70</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, pp. 29-30; ŠUCHOVÁ, X.: Politické strany. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939...*, pp. 275-279.

A. Nitsch. This political party was pro-Hungarian, which did not change until the fascistization of the German minority after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Its main competitor was **the Carpathian German Party**, founded in 1928 by Franz Karmasin, a native of Olomouc, whose goal was to unite Germans in Slovakia.<sup>71</sup>

The political activities of the Hungarian minority were linked to the **Hungarian National Party** and the **Provincial Christian Socialist Party**. These opposition political parties pursued an irredentist policy towards the Czechoslovak state and maintained close contacts with Hungarian representatives. The parties operated independently, although since their inception, there had been attempts to merge them on an ethnic basis. Both parties shared a parliamentary club, a joint press organ, *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, presented joint candidate lists in elections, and sometimes acted together vis-à-vis foreign countries. Even after the younger generation of Hungarian minority politicians took office (in 1932, A. Jaross succeeded J. Szent-Iványi in the Hungarian National Party, and J. Eszterházy succeeded G. Szüllö in the Provincial Christian Socialist Party), bringing a new spirit of radicalism to minority politics, there was no change in the idea of unification. The parties did not unite until 1936, under pressure from Budapest. The United Hungarian Party was formed; however, it had two wings: the moderate wing around J. Eszterházy and the radical wing led by A. Jaross, which promoted nationalist demagoguery and attempted to apply totalitarian models.

Among the political parties operating in Subcarpathian Ruthenia, the Russian National Party and the *Zemleděľčeskij autonomnyj sojuz* (Agricultural Autonomous Union) were the most significant. In the 1930s, the communists also gained a stronger position in Subcarpathian Ruthenia.<sup>72</sup>

The strongest minority party in Bohemia was the **Sudeten German Party**, which was formed before the 1935 parliamentary elections by transforming Henlein's Sudeten German Front into a political party. This group held a dominant position in the Czech borderlands and, thanks to the support of many Sudeten Germans, won the

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<sup>71</sup> GABZDILOVÁ, S.: Spoločenské a politické diferencie karpatských Nemcov na Slovensku v medzivojnovnej Československej republike [Social and political differences of Carpathian Germans in Slovakia during the inter-war Czechoslovak Republic]. In: TAUCHEN, J. – SCHELLE, K. (eds.): *Češi a Němci v meziválečném Československu* : sborník z kolokvia pořádaného Katedrou dějin státu a práva Právnické fakulty MU, The European Society for History of Law a Moravským zemským archivem v Brně. Ostrava : KEY Publishing s.r.o., 2013, pp. 71-83; GABZDILOVÁ, S. - OLEJNÍK, M.: Defensive Measures Adopted by Czechoslovak Authorities in Reaction to Danger Posed by Nazi Germany during Years 1935 - 1937. In: *Central European Papers*, 2020, Vol. VIII, No. 2, pp. 29-44. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.25142/cep.2020.005>

<sup>72</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku...*, pp. 30-31; ŠUCHOVÁ, X.: Politické strany. In: FERENČUHOVÁ, B. – ZEMKO, M. a kol.: *Slovensko v 20. storočí. V medzivojnovom Československu 1918 – 1939...*, pp. 280-283; SIMON, A.: Maďarská (politická) elita v medzivojnovom Československu – náčrt témy. In *Forum historiae*, 2018, roč. 12, č. 1, pp. 114-128; ŠUTAJ, Š.: Slovakia in Czechoslovakia and Hungary – Slovak-Hungarian Relations Between the Two World Wars, In: ŠUTAJ, Š. et al.: *Key Issues of Slovak and Hungarian History (A View of Slovak Historians)*. Prešov : Universum, 2011, pp. 198-213.

elections. The activist German parties that had gained the majority of votes in previous elections suffered significant losses in the 1935 elections.<sup>73</sup>

**Review questions:**

1. *Describe the political system of the Czechoslovak Republic between 1918 and 1938.*
2. *Who were the most important figures of interwar Czechoslovak politics?*
3. *Characterise the nationality structure in Czechoslovakia.*
4. *List the most important political parties in Czechoslovakia.*
5. *Which political parties operated only in Slovakia?*
6. *What circumstances led to the signing of the Munich Agreement, and what were its consequences?*

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<sup>73</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy...*, p. 435; ČAPLOVIČ, D. a kol.: *Dejiny Slovenska...*, p. 238.

## 2 Political developments between 1939 and 1945

The Slovak State emerged as a by-product of Hitler's policy. After talks between Jozef Tiso and Adolf Hitler, during which Hitler informed him of his next steps regarding Czechoslovakia (the military occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and the division of Slovak territory among neighbouring states), a proposal to create an independent Slovak state was submitted to the assembly (Snem) on 14 March 1939. The independent state was proclaimed by the Act of the Assembly of the Slovak Land No. 1/1939 Coll. of 14 March 1939 on the independent Slovak state. Its first paragraph declared the Slovak Land to be an independent and sovereign Slovak State, transforming the Assembly of the Slovak Land into the legislative assembly of the Slovak State. The act also stipulated that until the adoption of a Constitution of the Slovak State, all governmental and executive power would remain in the hands of the government appointed by the Presidium of the Assembly. All existing laws, decrees, and measures were to remain in force, with changes resulting from the spirit of independence of the Slovak State. The government was further empowered to carry out, by decree, everything necessary during the transitional period to maintain order and safeguard the interests of the Slovak State by means of regulations.<sup>74</sup> After the adoption of this act, the Speaker of the Assembly, Martin Sokol, announced that the Presidium of the Assembly had appointed the first government headed by Jozef Tiso. A day later, under pressure, Czechoslovak President Emil Hácha agreed to the occupation of the Czech lands, which were turned into the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia.<sup>75</sup>

On 23 March 1939, representatives of the German Reich and the Slovak State signed a Treaty of Protection in Berlin, valid for 20 years. Germany undertook to protect the political independence and territorial integrity of Slovakia. However, it reserved a so-called protection zone (Schutzzone) in western Slovakia, where the German army could establish military facilities and maintain military forces as it deemed necessary. In the agreement, Slovakia undertook to organise its economic and military affairs and foreign policy in close alignment with Germany.<sup>76</sup> Despite this, the Hungarian army occupied additional parts of eastern Slovakia and Subcarpathian Ruthenia.<sup>77</sup>

A special commission chaired by Vojtech Tuka was tasked with drafting the Constitution of the Slovak State. The commission members drew inspiration from the constitutional documents of Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy, and the authoritarian regimes of Portugal and Austria. The Constitution was also based on the papal

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<sup>74</sup> Zákon Slovenského snemu č. 1/1939 Sl. z. zo dňa 14. marca 1939 o samostatnom slovenskom štáte. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 - 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 483-484.

<sup>75</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 - 1945*. Bratislava : Literárne informačné centrum 2012, p. 59; KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 444.

<sup>76</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 - 1945....*, p. 78.

<sup>77</sup> BAKA, I.: Slovak-Hungarian Relations in the Years 1938-1945. In: *Key issues...* , pp. 213-227.

encyclicals *Rerum novarum* by Leo XIII and *Quadragesimo anno* by Pius XI. The Assembly approved the Constitution of the Slovak Republic as Act No. 185/1939 Coll. of 21 July 1939, with effect from the date of its entry into force.<sup>78</sup>

From the moment of the adoption of the constitution, the official name of the state was the Slovak Republic. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic characterised the Slovak state as a republic headed by an elected president. Slovak citizenship was the only and uniform citizenship, and the territory of the Slovak Republic was declared unified and indivisible. The Constitution designated Bratislava as the capital city.<sup>79</sup>

The structure of the state's power bodies took shape during 1939. The President was the head of state. In October 1939, **Jozef Tiso** was elected to this office, and he was also elected chairman of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSLS). The legislative body of the state was the Assembly of the Slovak Republic, which had been established under the conditions of the Czechoslovak Republic as the Slovak Provincial Assembly. In its very first law, the Assembly appointed the government, which it also authorised to issue legislative decrees, justifying this with the extraordinary circumstances and the need to ensure order in the state. The government thus decided on many important issues, and the Assembly gradually lost its significance. According to the Constitution, the State Council, an appointed supervisory body, was also supposed to have considerable powers in addition to the Assembly, but in practice, legislative and executive power was increasingly concentrated in the hands of the president/leader and the government, as well as other influential HSLS officials (Ferdinand Ďurčanský, Alexander Mach, Vojtech Tuka). Government positions in the Slovak State were relatively stable. The only changes were associated with the election of Jozef Tiso as President and the removal of Sidor and Ďurčanský from political life. The new government headed by Štefan Tiso was not appointed by President Jozef Tiso until 5 September 1944.<sup>80</sup>

The Slovak State took over the administrative apparatus and power structures from the Czechoslovak Republic. The Provincial Office was abolished in 1939. Its powers were transferred to the Ministry of the Interior and later to the county (*župa*) offices. Elected self-governing bodies were gradually replaced by appointed ones, which were also supposed to ensure the hegemony of the HSLS at the district and local levels. The Slovak State was administratively divided into six counties, which were further divided into districts. County administration was carried out by county committees and county commissions. County councils were not created. The members of the county committee were appointed by the Minister of the Interior from lists prepared by political parties; they were therefore no longer elected, as had been the case under

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<sup>78</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, pp. 64, 66.

<sup>79</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 491-515. [Constitution of the Slovak Republic (Constitutional Act No. 185/1939 Coll.)]

<sup>80</sup> ŠUTA, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, p. 33.

the previous provincial system. The organisational structure of the HSLS, various institutions, and associations were also adapted to suit the new division. The law also abolished district self-government, transferring the competencies of district offices to county and notarial offices. Notarial offices were the lowest level of state administration. Notaries were directly subordinate to district chiefs and gained a leading position in municipal administration.<sup>81</sup>

The process of gradual dismantling of self-government began during the period of autonomy and was one of the steps that accompanied the demise of democratic government in post-Munich Czechoslovakia. During the transition to new economic and political conditions, municipal councils whose composition did not provide sufficient guarantees for the rapid consolidation of the situation, or where mayors did not fit the new conditions, were to be dissolved. They were then replaced by appointed government commissioners. All these steps were taken within the framework of the laws in force in the First Czechoslovak Republic, which allowed almost unlimited intervention by the state administration in the sphere of self-government. In the political practice of the First Czechoslovak Republic, such interventions were used as an extraordinary measure, but under the changed political circumstances, they facilitated the dissolution of local government. Municipal councils were supplemented with members to ensure the hegemony of the HSLS; where this was not possible, councils were dissolved and replaced by a government commissioner who assumed the powers of both the mayor and the municipal council.<sup>82</sup> *“The Municipal Self-Government Act of 1943 also eliminated the last formal remnants of the right to elect candidates to municipal councils. It provided the HSLS with an opportunity to impose complete totalitarianism on municipal councils. The German authorities demanded stricter measures against tendencies hostile to the state. Laws were issued restricting the inviolability of the home, domestic peace, and other rights and freedoms. On the basis of a decree by the Minister of the Interior, all persons arrested for communist or other anti-state activities could be interned without trial in the concentration camp in Ilava. Police records of individuals were tightened, and auxiliary security forces were created from among politically reliable members of the HSLS.”*<sup>83</sup>

Under the Constitution, Slovak society was to be divided into six estates (agriculture, industry, trade and commerce, finance and insurance, liberal professions, public employees and educators). Each estate was to be divided internally into employers and employees. The introduction of the estate system was intended to

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<sup>81</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, pp. 89-90; TIŠLIAR, P.: K otázke organizácie a fungovania štátnej správy na Slovensku v rokoch 1938 – 1945. In: LACKO, M. (Ed.): *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945 očami mladých historikov II*. Trnava : M. Lacko 2003, pp. 68, 75.

<sup>82</sup> PODOLĚC, O.: Postavenie obecnej samosprávy na Slovensku v rokoch 1938 – 1945. *Historický časopis* 51,4,2003, pp. 650-659; TIŠLIAR, P.: K otázke organizácie a fungovania štátnej správy na Slovensku v rokoch 1938 – 1945...., p. 78.

<sup>83</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, pp. 33-34.

eliminate social tensions in society. Ultimately, however, the estate system was not implemented in the Slovak Republic. There were concerns about an increase in bureaucracy and financial expenditure, and the estate system did not suit Germany or the German minority in Slovakia. It was due to concerns that the German minority could be outvoted by the Slovak population within the individual estate groups.<sup>84</sup>

It is noteworthy that in the area of citizens' rights and obligations, the Constitution was characterised by a predominance of obligations. Obligations were defined first in the constitution, which aptly reflected the nature of the state regime and the position of the individual in the state. Social rights, such as the protection of labour and the socially disadvantaged, were specifically defined. From a formal perspective, the Constitution also proclaimed certain rights and freedoms, such as the guarantee of personal freedom, privacy of correspondence, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, etc. However, during the existence of the Slovak state, these rights and freedoms were restricted or not respected at all.<sup>85</sup> The significant position of the Church in the state can be seen not only in the preamble to the Constitution, but also in the fact that its legislators devoted a separate chapter of the Constitution to it and referred to the observance of Christian morals in many provisions of the Constitution.<sup>86</sup> According to the Constitution, members of national minorities were to participate in political life through national minority political parties. Only one minority political party per minority could be registered, and the scope of the party's activities was limited by the principle of reciprocity.<sup>87</sup> In political practice, however, only three minorities were accepted: German, Hungarian, and Ruthenian. Although the status of minorities was regulated universally in the legal system of the Slovak Republic, in political practice, the state's relationship to these minorities varied.<sup>88</sup>

As for other nationalities, the exercise of their rights was not realistic in the context of the political and power relations of the time. The presence of persons of Czech nationality was considered a remnant of the employment policy of the former Czechoslovak state and was addressed by the forced departure of Czech employees from Slovakia. The ruling regime perceived the presence of Jews and Roma in the country as a "problem" that needed to be "resolved". Their persecution on racial grounds was enshrined in special legislation.<sup>89</sup> *Government Regulation No. 198/1941*

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<sup>84</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 - 1945....*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>85</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 - 1945....*, p. 71; Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939...., pp. 491-515.

<sup>86</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939...., pp. 491-515.

<sup>87</sup> PODOLEC, O.: *K niektorým prvkom prvej slovenskej ústavy a ich reálnej aplikácii v politickom živote štátu....*, p. 28.

<sup>88</sup> PODOLEC, O.: *Postavenie národnostných menšín v Slovenskej republike (1939 - 1945)*. In: IVANIČKOVÁ, E. a kol.: *Z dejín demokratických a totalitných režimov*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV 2008, pp. 115, 130.

<sup>89</sup> PODOLEC, O.: *Postavenie národnostných menšín v Slovenskej republike (1939 - 1945)*. In: IVANIČKOVÁ, E. a kol.: *Z dejín demokratických a totalitných režimov*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV 2008, p. 115.

*Coll., which became known to the public as the Jewish Code. The regulation based the solution to the Jewish question on racial principles. It confirmed and clarified the existing legal norms that deprived Jewish citizens of their political, economic, social, and, ultimately, basic civil and human rights. In addition to the Aryanisation and the dismissal of the Jewish population from employment, unless they had been granted exemptions, Jews were prohibited from membership of any public organisation. For example, they were not allowed to own radio sets or sports equipment, which were confiscated if they did, nor were they allowed to own furs or valuables. They were not allowed to associate with so-called Aryans, enter into mixed marriages, and were subject to a ban on assembly. Regulations determined the times when they were allowed to shop, as well as evening and morning curfews. They were evicted from their homes and were not allowed to move within certain areas or their parts. They were also banned from participating in sporting events. They were then divided into labour camps, where men also performed compulsory military service. From September 1941, all persons of Jewish origin over the age of six had to wear an identifying symbol, a six-pointed yellow star. President Tiso had the right to grant exemptions from the code. The Jewish Code was a comprehensive compilation of legal regulations on the social and economic degradation of Jewish citizens in Slovakia, which culminated in the deportation and murder of most of them in concentration camps.”<sup>90</sup> In March 1942, the deportation of Jews from Slovakia to German concentration camps began. The order was issued by Prime Minister Tuka without consulting the President or members of the government. By October 1942, when the deportations were halted, 58,000 Jews had been deported. The next phase of deportations continued from the end of September 1944. A total of about 70,000 Jews were deported from Slovakia, 67,000 of whom perished in concentration camps.<sup>91</sup>*

*“The economy of the Slovak Republic was subordinated to the demands of Nazi Germany. Production for Germany gave the impression of economic stability and social harmony among the majority of the population. The economy was also supposed to be supported by the Aryanisation process as part of the solution to the Jewish question, which forced the Jewish population to hand over their property to “Aryans”, mostly members of the ruling elite. Relative economic stability, combined with wartime economic expansion and rising employment, enabled the development of Slovak culture, which was, however, influenced by the ideology of the regime.”<sup>92</sup>*

## **2.1 Foreign resistance during the Second World War**

After the creation of the Slovak State, several centres of foreign resistance aimed at the restoration of Czechoslovakia were established. The pre-Munich political

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<sup>90</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, pp. 701-702.

<sup>91</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, p. 34.

<sup>92</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 669.

representation was concentrated in Paris and later in London and Moscow (Communists and part of the Social Democrats).

After the signing of the Munich Agreement on 29 September 1938, President Beneš resigned on 5 October 1938 as an expression of protest and disagreement and travelled to the United States as a private individual for a lecture tour. Although Beneš initially accepted the new situation and the new president, Emil Hácha, after the occupation of the Czech lands by German troops and the creation of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (15 March 1939) and the declaration of the Slovak State (14 March 1939), he changed his opinion on his position and that of Czechoslovakia and formulated a new interpretation of the situation.<sup>93</sup>

The group around Edvard Beneš assumed that his resignation from the office of President of Czechoslovakia had been forced. Beneš surrounded himself with people who sought to restore the legal status that had been in force before he submitted his resignation. The first successful step was the creation of **the Czechoslovak National Committee**, founded in Paris on 17 October 1939. This institution proclaimed the idea of restoring the pre-Munich Czechoslovak Republic. At the end of 1939, Great Britain and France recognised the Czechoslovak National Committee as the representative of the Czechoslovak people.<sup>94</sup> *“The Munich Agreement, by whose verdict Czechoslovakia lost a large part of its territory to Germany, and the subsequent Vienna Arbitration of 2 November 1938, based on which large parts of Slovakia were annexed to Hungary, were perceived as acts of aggression against the Czechoslovak Republic. The revision of these decisions was the basis of Czechoslovak exile policy. All concepts for the restoration of Czechoslovak statehood considered the declaration of the invalidity of these acts to be the basis for the post-war settlement in Europe and the position of Czechoslovakia. The Allied powers of the anti-Hitler coalition gradually accepted the elimination of the consequences of the Munich Agreement and the Vienna Arbitration as part of their policy towards Czechoslovakia.”*<sup>95</sup>

After disagreements with Edvard Beneš, the former Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Milan Hodža, established the Slovak National Council in Paris on 22 November 1939, with Peter Prídavok as the secretary. The programme of the Slovak National Council was to restore the Czechoslovak state, based on the equality and equal rights of Czechs and Slovaks, with Slovakia enjoying an autonomous status. The Slovak National Council offered cooperation to the Czechoslovak National Committee, which, however, refused to officially acknowledge the existence of the Council. In 1942, following a split with Hodža in London, Peter Prídavok created the Slovak National Unity. In 1944, it was transformed into the Slovak National Council. Its programme was a federalist arrangement of Central Europe. The Slavic federal

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<sup>93</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 9.

<sup>94</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, pp. 236-240.

<sup>95</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 9.

union with the Czech Republic and Poland was supposed to be at its core. However, this concept failed to gain international support.<sup>96</sup>

The centre of resistance formed around Edvard Beneš gained the most significant international support. After the fall of France, the position of the Slovak section of the resistance was significantly weakened, and the group around Beneš was strengthened. Gradually, he managed to weaken his opponents as a whole and bring Hodža and Osuský to greater compliance. Subsequently, on 9 June 1940, he requested recognition of the provisional government and the entire system of state organisation he had proposed, which he addressed to British Foreign Minister Edward Halifax.<sup>97</sup>

**The provisional state arrangement** was thus represented by the President and **the government** he appointed, **headed by Jan Šrámek**. On 21 July 1940, Great Britain recognised this body as the temporary Czechoslovak government and established diplomatic relations with it. In addition to the government in exile, **a State Council** was also created. Its activities and composition were regulated by Presidential Decree No. 1/1940 on the establishment of the State Council as an advisory body to the provisional government of the Czechoslovak Republic. Initially, President Beneš attributed considerable importance to this body, which was intended to play the role of a kind of provisional parliament. Ultimately, however, it became more of a symbolic representation and served primarily as an advisory body to the President and as an auxiliary control body within the temporary state system of the Czechoslovak Republic. It was composed of representatives of pre-Munich political parties in exile. According to the decree, it could have a maximum of 40 members; the President ultimately appointed 32 members. Rudolf Bechyně (Social Democrat) became its chairman, with Milan Hodža and former HSLS secretary general Pavol Macháček as vice-chairmen.<sup>98</sup>

The Czechoslovak political system was always characterised by the strong position of parliament, controlling also the executive powers. However, in the provisional state system, due to the non-existence of a parliament, the London-based government-in-exile was not subject to parliamentary control. The position of the President in exile was also particularly strengthened, since at that time no other democratically established bodies existed. Gradually, this development was accepted by virtually all groups of the domestic and foreign resistance.

Constitutional Decree of the President of the Republic No. 2/1940, Official Gazette of Czechoslovakia, on the temporary exercise of legislative power of 15 October 1940 marked a change in the principle of a parliamentary republic. Due to the absence of a

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<sup>96</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, pp. 242, 259.

<sup>97</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, p. 244.

<sup>98</sup> Ústavní dekret presidenta republiky č. 1/1940 Úř. věst. čs. ze dne 21. července 1940, o ustavení Státní rady jako poradního sboru prozatímního státního zřízení ČSR. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 430-432; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, p. 430.

legitimate legislative body elected by the citizens of the Czechoslovak Republic, legislative power had to be temporarily exercised by another authority. Legislative power was transferred to the President and the government. The President was thus able to issue constitutional decrees and decrees upon the proposal of the government (subject to countersignature).<sup>99</sup>

The date of 15 October 1940 is also significant in relation to the institution of the President and is associated with the beginning of the so-called “**decree period**”, which lasted until the establishment of the Provisional National Assembly on 28 October 1945. During this time, the President was in a unique position that allowed him to issue decrees with the full force of law and constitutional laws. His position in the so-called provisional state system of Czechoslovakia was therefore very strong. The concentration of legislative power in the hands of the President was necessitated by specific circumstances and made it possible to preserve legal continuity with the pre-Munich Czechoslovak state. President Edvard Beneš was to remain in office for a seven-year term (1935–1942). In 1942, his position in the provisional state system was confirmed by the Czechoslovak government-in-exile, which issued a resolution stating that it had never considered his resignation to be valid as it had been unlawfully enforced. Beneš thus remained head of the Czechoslovak state continuously from 1935 onward. The Prime Minister further declared that, in accordance with Act 161/1920 on the election of the President of the Republic, he was convening a session of the National Assembly for the election. As this session could not be convened under the circumstances at the time, the Prime Minister proposed that the government agree that the President should remain in office until it became possible to elect a new president. This proposal was based on a provision of the 1920 Constitution stating that the head of state remains in office until a new President is elected.<sup>100</sup>

The legal situation after the end of the war was also important. The issue was resolved by Constitutional Decree No. 11/1944, Official Gazette of Czechoslovakia, of 3 August 1944 on the restoration of the legal order. Preparation for this decree dates back to 1942. It established legal continuity with the pre-Munich legal order. It stipulated that constitutional and other legal regulations adopted before and including 29 September 1938, “*are based on the free will of the Czechoslovak people*”, remained part of the valid legal order, and that all regulations adopted during the period “*when the Czechoslovak people were deprived of their freedom (the period of oppression)*”, i.e. after 30 September 1938, were not part of the Czechoslovak legal system. The end of the period of oppression was to be determined by government decree. It was further stipulated that all presidential decrees would cease to be valid six months after the date of the National Assembly session, unless they were repealed or amended earlier, or re-

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<sup>99</sup> Ústavní dekret presidenta republiky č. 2/1940 Úř. věst. čs. ze dne 15. října 1940, o prozatímním výkonu moci zákonodárné. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 433-435.

<sup>100</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945...*, p. 433.

adopted and promulgated as laws.<sup>101</sup> After the establishment of the Provisional National Assembly in the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic, the decrees were subsequently ratified.<sup>102</sup>

Another centre of foreign resistance was Moscow, where Czechoslovak communist émigrés settled, with their leader, Klement Gottwald. After the invasion of the Soviet Union, the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London was also recognised by the Soviet Union in 1941. Following the failure of the Nazi plan for a swift victory over the USSR and the development of the war in 1942, Beneš realised the growing importance of the USSR. Therefore, on 12 December 1943, in Moscow, he signed a Treaty on friendship, mutual assistance and post-war cooperation between Czechoslovakia and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, valid for twenty years. This treaty guaranteed the restoration of the Czechoslovak state and was the first treaty of such far-reaching significance signed by the Soviet Union with a small Central European country. In the following days, President Beneš held six talks in Moscow with representatives of the Czechoslovak Communists, focusing on the exchange of views and concepts on the post-war organisation of Czechoslovakia. Despite certain disagreements, a fundamental consensus between the two centres of foreign resistance was achieved.<sup>103</sup>

## 2.2 Domestic resistance during the Second World War

Shortly after the establishment of the Slovak Republic, anti-fascist resistance groups began to form on its territory: communist, social democratic, and civic democratic. The civic resistance groups were mainly made up of representatives of the former centralist (Czechoslovak) political parties. The resistance groups mostly carried out intelligence tasks in cooperation with the London emigration, organising escape routes abroad for people from Slovakia or Bohemia who were threatened by fascism. Particularly after 1943, it was within these groups that ideas about the post-war coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks in a common state began to take shape. After the establishment of the Slovak State, communist resistance groups also started to emerge. After being banned by both the Czechoslovak and Slovak autonomous governments, the Communist Party went underground. In May 1939, the independent Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) was formed. The Soviet Union and the KSČ leadership operating in the USSR were an important source of support for the communist resistance. The KSČ leadership

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<sup>101</sup> Ústavní dekret presidenta republiky č. 11/1944 Úř. věst. čs. ze dne 3. srpna 1944, o obnovení právního pořádku. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 460-466; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945....*, p. 460.

<sup>102</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 57/1946 Sb. ze dne 28. března 1946, kterým se schvalují a prohlašují za zákon dekrety presidenta republiky. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha : Karolinum 2006, p. 172.

<sup>103</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945....*, pp. 450-451.

abroad also gradually directed Slovak communists towards the restoration of Czechoslovakia.<sup>104</sup>

During 1943, social and economic problems became increasingly apparent in the Slovak State, and disappointment and disillusionment grew. The crushing defeat of the Nazis at Stalingrad, the Tehran Conference, and Beneš's trip to Moscow in December 1943 were other impulses for the cooperation between the civic resistance and the anti-fascist activities of the communists. The result of this process was the adoption of the 'Christmas Agreement' at the end of 1943 on the creation of the illegal Slovak National Council as the unified centre of the anti-fascist front in Slovakia and on its programme. It was the basis for the creation of the Slovak National Council as a collective body.<sup>105</sup>

Its task was to coordinate the resistance activities of civilian groups and resistance fighters in the Slovak army. The main goal was to prepare an uprising. The uprising broke out as a result of the German occupation of Slovakia in conditions that were not the most favourable for the resistance. These events had a fundamental impact on the formation of Slovakia's party-political structure and the position of individual political parties and political groups after the end of the Second World War. The HSLS and its branches were banned. The Communist Party of Slovakia was legalised. Despite the disagreement of some Social Democrats in Slovakia, they merged with the KSS. During the uprising, the Democratic Party was founded, bringing together various civic groups. The Czechoslovak Republic was restored in the rebel-controlled territory. Those who were labelled as collaborators and traitors were removed from political life in the rebel-controlled territory. The uprising addressed the issue of the administration of the liberated territory. The old state apparatus was dismantled, and revolutionary national committees were formed.<sup>106</sup>

In Banská Bystrica, power was taken over by the revolutionary national committee, which appointed Vavro Šrobár as its leader. It was not until 1 September 1944 that the 13-member **Slovak National Council (SNR)** was formed.<sup>107</sup>

In its declaration of 1 September 1944, the SNR proclaimed itself the supreme body of the domestic Slovak resistance and assumed legislative and executive power and the defence of Slovakia throughout the country, declaring that it would exercise this power until the Slovak nation democratically elected its legitimate representatives.<sup>108</sup>

Its very first regulation – Regulation of the Slovak National Council No. 1/1944 Coll. of SNR of 1 September 1944 on the exercise of legislative, governmental and executive

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<sup>104</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, pp. 267-272.

<sup>105</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945....*, p. 546.

<sup>106</sup> MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska....*, pp. 292-294; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 14-15.

<sup>107</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, pp. 296-299.

<sup>108</sup> Deklarácia Slovenskej národnej rady z 1. septembra 1944. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 548-549. [Declaration of the Slovak National Council]

power in Slovakia – had far-reaching significance. This regulation (with the force of law) made the SNR the second centre of legislative power in Czechoslovakia. The wording that SNR “*exercises all legislative, governmental and executive power in Slovakia*” excluded the decrees of President Beneš issued in London from validity and effect in Slovakia. This legal dualism was not resolved until 1945.<sup>109</sup>

*“The SNR declared its allegiance to the Czechoslovak state, rejected the regime of the Slovak state, and declared mobilisation. They expressed their intention to proceed in full agreement with the Czechoslovak foreign resistance, rejecting Beneš’s doctrine of full constitutional continuity in the form of the interwar Czechoslovakia. According to the SNR, these issues were to be resolved only through a joint agreement between representatives of the Czech and Slovak nations. Among other things, this meant that Slovakia and the Slovak nation would have a different status in the post-war state than they had in the interwar common republic. In their further activities, the SNR also accepted the foreign policy initiatives of the London exile government. According to the Memorandum of the SNR delegation to Edvard Beneš of 2 November 1944, this position applied in the future as well, but with the proviso that the SNR requested, if circumstances permitted, to be informed of major international matters to adopt their own position.”*<sup>110</sup>

From 5 September 1944, the number of SNR members increased to 41, and from 13 October to 48. The SNR had two chairmen. The executive body was **the Board of Commissioners (Zbor povereníkov)**, a collective body divided into individual commissions.<sup>111</sup> The SNR did not issue laws, but regulations of the Slovak National Council. Edvard Beneš sought to influence the situation in the insurgent-controlled territory through the delegate of the London government, František Němec, but his mission was only formally accepted. He was perceived merely as an intermediary between the SNR and the President and the government. The SNR fully exercised all the powers established by SNR regulations and politically defined in the Declaration of the SNR.<sup>112</sup> *“The administration of towns and municipalities was carried out through revolutionary **national committees** as organs of state administration and self-government.”*<sup>113</sup>

### **2.3 The situation in the liberated territory**

*“At the beginning of 1945, the situation in Slovakia was very complicated. Parts of the former Czechoslovak territory were still under the administration of Hungarian troops, even though on 20 January 1945, the new Hungarian government signed an armistice agreement, under which the territory annexed to Hungary after the Vienna Arbitration was to be returned*

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<sup>109</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945....*, 2005, p. 550.

<sup>110</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 14-15.

<sup>111</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945....*, pp. 296-299.

<sup>112</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 17-18.

<sup>113</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, p. 36.

to Czechoslovakia. The territories liberated by the Red Army were temporarily under the control of Soviet commanders. The territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia was annexed to Soviet Ukraine, following the initiative of local authorities supported by Soviet commanders. The Soviet commanders did not accept the demands of Beneš's plenipotentiary minister Němec to assume control over liberated territories. The Bratislava government of the Slovak Republic exercised its authority over parts of the territory occupied by German troops. The Red Army was supposed to hand over the liberated territories to local authorities; however, the situation remained complicated. Němec was accepted by the representatives of the SNR only as a representative of Beneš's London administration, but the powers were handed over to the representatives of the Slovak national authorities."<sup>114</sup>

Košice temporarily became the seat of central authorities, including the Delegation of the Slovak National Council for the Liberated Territory, based there since the end of January 1945, the Presidium and Plenary of the SNR, the restored Board of Commissioners from 7 February 1945, the seat of Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš from 3 April, and the Czechoslovak government from 4 April to 6 May 1945. Slovakia, and eastern Slovakia in particular, was severely affected by frontline operations. It was necessary to rebuild roads, railways, bridges, and houses, to restore production in damaged factories, to provide food for the population, and to protect them from epidemics and unexploded ordnance. It was essential to ensure the functioning of life in the liberated territory. The SNR authorities responded to the situation by issuing decrees (during the so-called Košice period of the SNR's activity, a total of 32 decrees were adopted from 21 February 1945 to 21 April 1945) and the Board of Commissioners issued ordinances.<sup>115</sup>

Negotiations on the future internal organisation of the Czechoslovak Republic and the programme of the future Czechoslovak government took place in Moscow from 22 to 29 March 1945. At joint meetings, the London and Moscow representatives quickly agreed on the post-war order. The representatives of the London exile did not submit a comprehensive draft government programme, and negotiations focused on a programme statement prepared by the communists, which the other parties accepted. The SNR delegation only participated in negotiations on the sixth point of the agenda, focused on relations between Czechs and Slovaks and Slovak national authorities, and in negotiations on the allocation of ministerial posts in the new government. Edvard Beneš was informed about the ongoing negotiations, but did not directly participate in the negotiations, taking on the position of a non-partisan president.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 18.

<sup>115</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 18-20.

<sup>116</sup> KRĚN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 571; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 22.

On 5 April 1945, the Program of the First Government of the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks, known as the Košice Government Program (Košický vládný program - KVP), was proclaimed in Košice. In 16 chapters, it addressed issues of the social, economic, cultural, and international position of post-war Czechoslovakia, which influenced political life in the following periods.<sup>117</sup>

## 2.4 Political system

### 2.4.1 Political system of the Slovak Republic/Slovak State

#### Legislative power

The Assembly exercised legislative power over the entire territory of the republic. Under the constitution, it was to have 80 members, elected by universal, direct, equal, and secret ballot. In reality, this number of members was never reached. Of the 63 members of the Slovak Assembly, 48, or 76%, were original members of the HSĽS, 12 were former members of other parties, two were German, and one was Hungarian. The Assembly was to be elected for a five-year term. The right to vote was restricted to those aged 21 and over, and the right to stand for election was restricted to those aged 30 and over.<sup>118</sup>

However, no elections to the Assembly took place during the existence of the Slovak State. In fact, the Assembly of the Slovak Republic was created under the conditions of the Czechoslovak Republic as the Slovak Provincial Assembly.<sup>119</sup> After the adoption of the constitution, no elections were held. The natural decline in the number of members was not addressed by calling new elections, but by the adoption of Constitutional Act No. 225/1941 Coll. of 7 October 1941, which allowed the President of the Republic to fill vacant or unfilled seats until the end of the Assembly's term of office. Another constitutional act, No. 165/1943 Coll. of 2 December 1943, extended the term of office of the Assembly until 31 December 1946.<sup>120</sup>

After being elected, members of the Assembly were required to take an oath, the wording of which was precisely specified in the Constitution. Members could be stripped of their mandate by a decision of the State Council at the proposal of the Presidium. Members also enjoyed immunity. They could not be prosecuted for their voting in the Assembly or committees, and for statements made in the exercise of their

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<sup>117</sup> Program nové československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků (Košický vládní program). In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha : Karolinum 2006, pp. 21-33.

<sup>118</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 491-515; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 12-13.

<sup>119</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, p. 493.

<sup>120</sup> PEKÁR, M.: Volebné právo a volebný systém na Slovensku v rokoch 1938 – 1945. Historické súvislosti. In: OROSZ, L. – MAJERČÁK, T.: *Volebné zákonodarstvo v Slovenskej republike*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach 2014, p. 59.

mandate, they were subject only to the disciplinary power of parliament. However, the consent of the parliament was required for criminal or disciplinary proceedings. If the Assembly did not grant such consent, prosecution was permanently excluded. If a member was caught and arrested for a criminal offence, the Assembly's opinion was required. If the Assembly did not agree to further imprisonment within 14 days of the arrest, the imprisonment ceased. The consent of the Presidium of the Assembly was also required if members (including former members) were to testify in matters they had learned about during their mandate.

The Assembly was to be convened by the President of the Republic for regular sessions twice a year, in March and October. However, at the request of a majority of members, the President was obliged to convene an extraordinary session. If he failed to do so within 14 days, the Speaker of the Assembly had the right to convene it. For a resolution of the Assembly to be valid, it had to be approved by a majority of at least one-third of all members of the Assembly present. The presence of two-thirds of all members and a majority vote of those present was required for resolutions on the constitution, constitutional laws, changes to the territory of the state, declarations of war and peace treaties, and the election or impeachment of the President of the Republic. Members of the government had the right to attend sessions of the assembly, its committees, and commissions. At the request of the Assembly or a committee, they were required to attend the proceedings.

The exclusive competence of the Assembly included the election of the President of the Republic, the adoption and amendment of the Constitution, constitutional laws and laws, the approval of the state budget and decisions on final accounts, the adoption of laws on military service, the adoption of laws imposing new permanent financial burdens on citizens, adopting laws on the organisation of the judiciary and decisions on the approval of international treaties.

The right of legislative initiative was held by the government, the State Council, and members of the Assembly. During the dissolution of the Assembly until the establishment of a new Assembly, urgent measures were to be taken by a special committee of the Assembly, made up of members of the Assembly.<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, the Assembly gradually lost its influence, and more and more legislative power was transferred to the President and the government.

## **Executive power**

### **President**

Unlike in the interwar Czechoslovakia, the President was given a separate chapter in the constitution. The President was the bearer of executive power in the state. He was elected by the Assembly, and candidates had to be at least 40 years of age and could be elected for a maximum of two consecutive terms. For the election to be valid,

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<sup>121</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939..., pp. 491-515.

at least two-thirds of all members had to be present, and a three-fifths majority of those present had to vote for the candidate. If none of the candidates obtained the necessary quorum, a second round was held between the two most successful candidates from the previous round. In this case, the required number of votes was reduced to a simple majority. If both candidates received the same number of votes, the future President would be decided by lot. The term of office was set at seven years and started with the oath of office. The Constitution no longer contained only a general formulation, but specified the exact text of the oath that the President had to take.<sup>122</sup>

In case the office of the President of the Republic was vacant, his powers were temporarily exercised by the Prime Minister. Jozef Tiso was elected President of the Slovak Republic in October 1939.

The President's constitutional powers were standard: to represent the state abroad, to receive and appoint diplomatic representatives, and to conclude international treaties. He declared a state of military alert and, with the consent of the Assembly, declared war and concluded peace. In relation to the Assembly, the President had the right to convene and dissolve it, and could also declare a session closed. He signed laws and regulations with the force of law. He also had the right of veto and could return a law to the Assembly within 15 days. In that case, the Assembly needed a three-fifths majority with at least two-thirds of all members present to re-approve it. He also had the right to address the Assembly with a message (report).

The President had further powers in relation to the government and the State Council. He could appoint and dismiss members of the government, request its convening, be present at its meetings, and even chair them. In relation to the State Council, he also had the right to convene its meetings and preside over them. The President's powers also included the appointment of all university professors and judges, as well as senior state officials and officers of the three highest ranks. The Slovak President also had the right to grant pardons, remit or mitigate sentences, and order that criminal proceedings not be initiated or be terminated. In addition, he awarded orders, decorations, gifts, and pensions by grace.

According to the Constitution, the head of state was not responsible for the performance of his office. Therefore, the countersignature of the President's decisions was enshrined in law. The co-signature of the relevant minister was required for the validity of each presidential act of government. During his term of office, the President could only be prosecuted for treason, with the only penalty being loss of office and loss of eligibility to hold it again. The President could only be prosecuted by the State Council.<sup>123</sup>

His powers were further increased during the existence of the Slovak state. According to Constitutional Act No. 200/1944 Coll., the President could issue decrees

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<sup>122</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939..., pp. 491-515.

<sup>123</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939..., pp. 491-515.

with the force of constitutional law, thus also sharing in legislative power.<sup>124</sup> His role in appointing members of the Assembly was also significant, as no elections to the Assembly were held during the existence of the Slovak state.<sup>125</sup>

The constitutional powers of the President as defined above indicate that, within the structure of relations between the highest constitutional institutions, the President had a relatively strong position, a position that continued to strengthen. This strengthening was also related to Tiso's position as chairman of the HSLŠ and Leader (Vodca). Act No. 215/1942 Coll. on Hlinka's Slovak People's Party defined that the Slovak nation participated in state power through Hlinka's Slovak People's Party. The party is represented externally by the Leader, who *"determines the direction of the Party's policy within the programme principles approved by the congress and how the Party is to fulfil its mission. The orders issued by the Leader in this regard are binding on every member and official of the Party. The Leader presides over the congress, the central committee, and the presidium, and appoints and dismisses the general secretary and the chairmen of the county and district organisations."*<sup>126</sup>

## Government

The government consisted of the Prime Minister and ministers. The government was appointed by the President, who also determined the allocation of individual posts. Before assuming their duties, members of the government took an oath of office before the President. The tasks of the government included issuing regulations for the implementation of certain laws within their limits. The Constitution, however, unusually allowed the government to issue regulations with the force of law if irreparable damage was imminent and serious economic, financial, or political interests required it. Certain areas were reserved exclusively for the Assembly, such as constitutional laws, laws on the state budget, military service, financial burdens imposed on citizens, laws relating to the judiciary, or the ratification of international treaties. Such a government decree was only valid if it was signed by a majority of the members of the government and the President. The Assembly could express its disagreement with the decree within three months.<sup>127</sup>

This amendment clearly defined and thus limited the government's powers of emergency legislation. Until then, the executive had often abused Section 4 of Act No. 1, which allowed it to issue decrees without any restrictions. However, Tuka's government continued to make frequent use of this institution without the Assembly

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<sup>124</sup> Ústavný zákon č. 200/1944 Sl. z. zo dňa 27. októbra 1944, o splnomocnení meniť ústavné zákony a o rozšírení nariadenia právomoci za brannej pohotovosti štátu. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, p. 582.

<sup>125</sup> MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska....*, p. 286.

<sup>126</sup> Zákon č. 215/1942 Sl. z. zo dňa 22. októbra 1942, o Hlinkovej slovenskej ľudovej strane. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 541-545.

<sup>127</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939...., pp. 491-515.

reviewing or repealing the regulations, and thus, the situation enshrined in the Constitution and laws did not correspond to the political reality.<sup>128</sup> A State Secretariat for German Minority Affairs was even created under the Prime Minister's Office, which was supposed to ensure the participation of Slovak Germans in government power. The State Secretariat was headed by Franz Karmazin, who had the right to participate in government sessions.<sup>129</sup>

The government made decisions in a body that could pass resolutions if, in addition to the President or his deputy, a majority of its members were present. The government was accountable to the Assembly, which could express no confidence in the Assembly or in any of its ministers. If the Prime Minister or any of the ministers intentionally or through gross negligence violated the Constitution or other laws in the exercise of their official duties, they were criminally liable. The indictment was the responsibility of the Assembly, and the criminal proceedings were the responsibility of the State Council. In the Slovak state, members of the government were not allowed to be members of profit-making companies.<sup>130</sup>

### **State Council**

The State Council was an entirely new state body. It was inspired by the Italian council. Its powers included determining whether circumstances had arisen that permanently prevented the President of the Republic from performing his duties. It could also prosecute the President of the Republic, prosecute the Prime Minister and ministers, compile a list of candidates for Assembly elections, and decide on the loss of a parliamentary mandate upon the proposal of the Presidium of the Assembly. It also had the right to submit legislative proposals to the Assembly and to advise the President of the Republic and the government on political, cultural, and economic matters. Like members of the government, members of the State Council took an oath before the President of the Republic before taking office. Their term of office lasted three years, and they enjoyed parliamentary immunity. The State Council passed resolutions by majority vote, and in order to be quorate, the majority of its members had to be present, in addition to the chair or his deputy.<sup>131</sup>

During its first term, the State Council consisted of the Prime Minister and the Speaker of the Assembly. Six members were appointed by the President of the Republic, ten members were delegated by the HSĽS, and one member each by the registered parties of national groups (Deutsche Partei, Szlovenszkói Magyar Párt) and professional estates. Members delegated by political parties had to be at least 35 years

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<sup>128</sup> PODOLEC, O.: K niektorým prvkom prvej slovenskej ústavy a ich reálnej aplikácii v politickom živote štátu. In: LACKO, M. (Ed.): *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945 očami mladých historikov I*. Trnava : Katedra histórie FF UCM Trnava 2002, pp. 19-20.

<sup>129</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, p. 34.

<sup>130</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939..., pp. 491-515.

<sup>131</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939..., pp. 491-515.

old. After the amendment of the laws concerning the State Council, only the Prime Minister, the Speaker, and members appointed by the President became members of the State Council. They were also subject to the minimum age requirement of 35 years.

In 1943, the powers of the State Council were significantly reduced. It could no longer draw up a list of candidates for elections to the Assembly, lost the right of legislative initiative, and the right to submit opinions to the President. However, its plenary sessions were strictly closed to the public, and it gained the right to propose to the President the removal of a State Council member if, in its view, he had “become unworthy of membership”. The presidium was elected from among its members. Viktor Ravasz (1940–1943) became the first chairman, and Ján Drobný was chairman during the second term. Throughout the entire period of government, it remained a formal body with no practical influence on everyday life.<sup>132</sup>

Although the Constitution granted considerable powers to the Assembly and the appointed supervisory body, the State Council, legislative and executive power gradually became increasingly concentrated in the hands of the President and the government. The government’s regulatory power was strengthened, and in 1942, the President was given the title of Leader (Vodca). The regime gradually headed towards consolidation and deepening of dictatorship.<sup>133</sup>

### **Party system**

The foundation of the party system in the Slovak State had already been established by the Žilina Agreement. By signing the Žilina Agreement on 6 October 1938, the participating political parties effectively recognised the leading position of the HSĽS. In addition to securing autonomy for Slovakia, all political parties (except the Communist and Social Democratic parties) agreed to form a coalition government. The signing of the agreement was also the result of pressure from the leaders of the HSĽS, who were already clearly determining the basic direction of Slovak politics at that time. Left-wing political parties were not invited to sign the agreement. There is clear evidence that Jozef Tiso considered a one-party system to be the only correct one. The unification of political parties proceeded by force. Political parties were dissolved, their secretariats sealed shut, and the publication of party periodicals was halted. The HSĽS - Strana slovenskej národnej jednoty (Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party - Party of Slovak National Unity) was created. In November 1938, the provincial court suspended the activities of the Social Democrats on the orders of the Minister of the Interior, and in January 1939, Slovak social democracy was dissolved by a resolution of the autonomous government. The activities of other political parties were also banned. At the end of 1938, apart from the HSĽS, only the Deutsche Partei, led by

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<sup>132</sup> PODOLEC, O.: K niektorým prvkom prvej slovenskej ústavy a ich reálnej aplikácii v politickom živote štátu..., pp. 21-23.

<sup>133</sup> MANNOVÁ, E. (ed.): *Krátke dejiny Slovenska...*, p. 286.

Franz Karmazin, and the Hungarian United Party in Slovakia, led by János Esterházy, were active. Both parties were also represented in the Slovak parliament.<sup>134</sup>

Even after the establishment of the Slovak State, the Constitution stated that the Slovak nation was to participate in state power through the HSLS (Party of Slovak National Unity). This excluded the participation of any other parties with the exception of national minority parties, which, according to the Constitution, could participate in state power through their registered political party.<sup>135</sup> Subsequently, in September 1939, the parliament passed Act No. 245/1939, codifying the leading role of the HSLS in Slovak society. In 1942, another law on the HSLS was passed, organising the party on the principle of leadership. The Leader became the highest authority, followed by the Presidium, the Central Committee, and the Party Congress.<sup>136</sup> Jozef Tiso accepted the title of leader and consolidated his position against the radicals (A. Mach, V. Tuka). Party membership rose sharply from 50,000 in 1939 to 280,000 in 1943. Women's, youth, interest, cultural, and several religious organisations became a direct part of the ruling party. The Hlinka Guard – originally a paramilitary organisation of the HSLS – was declared a paramilitary organisation with voluntary membership after the proclamation of the Slovak State. President Tiso became the supreme commander of the Hlinka Guard, while real power was held by the commander-in-chief (Karol Sidor, later Alexander Mach). The Hlinka Youth, modelled on the Hitler Youth, also performed military tasks.<sup>137</sup>

#### **2.4.2 Provisional Czechoslovak State Establishment**

The Provisional Czechoslovak State Establishment, as the supreme body of Czechoslovakia in exile, began to be formally and legally established “on 21 July 1940, when Edvard Beneš, as President of the Republic, in accordance with the concept of legal continuity with the pre-Munich Czechoslovak statehood, issued a constitutional decree of the President of the Republic (in its legal essence a constitutional law) No. 1/1940 Official Gazette, entitled *On the Establishment of the State Council as an Advisory Body to the Provisional State Establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic*. The following day, Beneš announced in a letter to Jan Šrámek his appointment as Prime Minister and the appointment of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile based in London.”<sup>138</sup> The provisional Czechoslovak state Establishment was thus based on three institutions: the President of the Republic, the government, and the State Council.

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<sup>134</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 11-12; ZEMKO, M. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. (eds.). *Slovensko v Československu (1918 – 1939)*. Bratislava : Veda, 2004, pp. 221-222.

<sup>135</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky (ústavný zákon č. 185/1939 Sl. z.) zo dňa 21. júla 1939..., pp. 491-515.

<sup>136</sup> CSÉFALVAY, F. – KÁZMEROVÁ, L.: *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945. Chronológia najdôležitejších udalostí*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV 2007, pp. 34-35, 90.

<sup>137</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, p. 34.

<sup>138</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 10.

## President

Decision-making power in exile belonged to President Edvard Beneš. He relied on the theory of legal continuity of the republic and pushed for its restoration within its pre-Munich borders, rejecting all political and legal ties created after the signing of the Munich Agreement and the very existence of the so-called post-Munich Czechoslovak Republic, along with the dictated change of state borders. The declaration of the invalidity of Beneš's abdication from the office of President of the Republic as a forced act meant that Beneš considered himself President of the Republic since his election in 1935 and, under the provisions of the 1920 Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, his term of office ended in December 1942. The issue of Beneš's continued tenure was resolved by applying the provisions of Section 58 of the 1920 Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic. Based thereon, the provisional government-in-exile issued a resolution in early December 1942 stating that Beneš was to remain President until conditions for the election of a new President were in place.<sup>139</sup> *"From the point of view of the legitimacy of the position of President of the Republic, the most problematic issue was that of his decree-making authority, which could not be based on any provisions of the 1920 Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic. Therefore, also in this case, it was based on the theory of the constitutional continuity of the office of the President of the Republic and the spirit of the 1920 Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic. On this basis, the key legal act was issued, forming the foundation for the entire concept of constitutional continuity and the provisional state establishment of Czechoslovakia. This was Constitutional Decree of the President of the Republic No. 2/1940, Official Gazette of Czechoslovakia, on the temporary exercise of legislative power of 15 October 1940. Considering the circumstances, its issuance clearly represented the most optimal variant of the legal status and Constitution of the structure of the provisional state establishment of Czechoslovakia. President Beneš had legislative power and thus the right to issue laws in the form of decrees from 15 October 1940 until the establishment of the Provisional National Assembly (DNZ) on 28 October 1945."*<sup>140</sup>

## Government

The government headed by Jan Šrámek was the second most important body of the provisional state. It was composed of Czech and Slovak members of centralist political parties and acted as the representative of the Czechoslovak resistance abroad. In November 1942, a second government-in-exile was formed, headed by Jan Šrámek.

The Slovak members of these governments were Ján Bečko (State Secretary of the Ministry of Social Welfare), Ján Lichner (State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign

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<sup>139</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 569; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 10-11; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945...*, p. 433.

<sup>140</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 10-11.

Affairs), Štefan Osuský (State Minister), Juraj Slávik (Minister of the Interior), and General Rudolf Viest (State Secretary of the Ministry of National Defence). In terms of their composition and character, these were broad coalition governments. The government also attempted to guide the resistance efforts at home and cooperated in issuing decrees of the President of the Republic, which exercised legislative power during the Second World War.<sup>141</sup> *“The government’s activities were based entirely on the theory of constitutional continuity with the pre-Munich Czechoslovak state, and Edvard Beneš, who appointed and dismissed its members, had a considerable influence on its work. About the President of the Republic, under the Presidential Constitutional Decree No. 2/1940 Official Gazette, the government was the only body with legislative initiative, which was a prerequisite for the legislative activity of the President of the Republic.”*<sup>142</sup>

### State Council

The State Council was established in addition to the government in exile. Its activities and composition were regulated by Presidential Decree No. 1/1940 on the establishment of the State Council. It was an advisory body to the President of the Republic and also an auxiliary and supervisory body of the provisional Czechoslovak state. According to the provisions of the founding decree, the President of the Republic had the exclusive right to establish this body and appointed its chairman, three vice-chairmen, and members. The State Council could have a maximum of 40 members (it had 32 members at the time of its establishment). It was composed of representatives of pre-war political parties in exile. Members of the government could also be members of the State Council, but they did not have the right to vote in its proceedings. In terms of its powers and authority, it was the weakest link in the structure of the provisional Czechoslovak state. Originally, President Beneš attached considerable importance to it, and it was supposed to play the role of a kind of temporary parliament, but in the end, it became more of a symbolic representation and acted as an advisory body to the President and as an auxiliary control body within the temporary state system of the Czechoslovak Republic. Its chairman was Rudolf Bechyně (Social Democrat) and its vice-chairmen were Milan Hodža and former HSĽS Secretary General Pavol Macháček.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, pp. 1155-1156; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 11.

<sup>142</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š. – MOSNÝ, P. – OLEJNÍK, M.: *Prezidentské dekréty E. Beneša v povojnovom Slovensku*. Bratislava : Veda, 2002, p. 20.

<sup>143</sup> Ústavní dekret presidenta republiky č. 1/1940 Úř. věst. čs. ze dne 21. července 1940, o ustavení Státní rady jako poradního sboru prozatímního státního zřízení ČSR. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, pp. 430-432; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945*. Praha : Karolinum 2005, p. 430; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 11; ŠUTAJ, Š. – MOSNÝ, P. – OLEJNÍK, M.: *Prezidentské dekréty E. Beneša v povojnovom Slovensku*. Bratislava : Veda, 2002, pp. 20-21.

### 2.4.3 Liberated territory until the declaration of the KVP SNR

In December 1943, the illegal Slovak National Council, as the unified centre of the anti-fascist front in Slovakia, was established based on the "Christmas Agreement". The SNR was established as a collective body, had no chairman, and only six members. The communists were represented by Gustáv Husák, Ladislav Novomeský, and Karol Šmidke, and the civil resistance by Matej Josko, Jozef Lettrich, and Ján Ursíny. At the beginning of 1944, Peter Zaľko and Ivan Horváth (representing the Social Democrats) became members as well.<sup>144</sup> The main task of the illegal SNR was to prepare for the uprising, but also to coordinate the resistance activities of civilian groups and resistance fighters in the Slovak army.

After the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising on 1 September 1944, a 13-member SNR was formed, consisting of Vavro Šrobár, Karol Šmidke, Matej Josko, Ján Ursíny, Gustáv Husák, Jozef Lettrich, Ivan Horváth, Rudolf Blažovský, Daniel Ertl, Jozef Styk, Ján Púll, Viliam Paulíny, and Ivan Pietor. Initially, the SNR was headed by the Presidium as a collective body (Ertl, Husák, Šrobár, Ursíny). During this period, the SNR continued to adhere to the principle of equal representation, which had been central since the Christmas Agreement.<sup>145</sup>

From 5 September 1944, the number of members increased to 41, and it grew to 48 as of 13 October. The SNR was headed by two chairmen (Šrobár and Šmidke). *"The SNR met in plenary sessions. To avoid conflicts of interest, the SNR did not issue laws, but rather regulations of the Slovak National Council. The Slovak National Council began to exercise legislative power on 1 September 1944. In the first period, lasting until 23 October 1944 (the so-called Banská Bystrica period), it adopted a total of 40 SNR regulations. It worked under this system until 23 October 1944, when the powers of the Slovak National Council were transferred to the SNR Delegation for the Liberated Territory, composed of Púll and Novomeský for the KSS and Šrobár and Ursíny for the DS. Faltan, Šoltész, and Vašečka from the KSS and Tvarožek, Štefánik, and Zaľko from the DS were appointed as collaborators."*<sup>146</sup>

#### Board of Commissioners

The executive body of the SNR was **the Board of Commissioners of the SNR**. It was a collective body divided into individual commissions. Initially, there were nine, but as of 4 September 1944, their number increased to 11. The commissioner was always from a different bloc than his deputy.<sup>147</sup> From 7 February 1945, the Board of

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<sup>144</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa I. 1914 – 1945...*, p. 546.

<sup>145</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945...*, pp. 296-299.

<sup>146</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 17-18.

<sup>147</sup> LETZ, R.: *Slovenské dejiny V. 1938 – 1945...*, pp. 296-299.

Commissioners resumed its activities in the liberated territories. The Board of Commissioners in these territories issued decrees on SNR regulations.<sup>148</sup>

### **Party system**

During the Slovak National Uprising (SNP), there were three political groups: communists, civic groups (democrats), and social democrats. However, in September 1944, the KSS and the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers' Party in Slovakia merged. K. Šmidke was elected chairman of the KSS, G. Husák and former social democrat J. Čech were elected vice-chairmen. The merger meeting strengthened political stability in the rebel territory but weakened the social democratic movement after liberation, and was the source of many problems in the left-wing movement in Slovakia.<sup>149</sup>

Politicians from the civic bloc also realised that it was necessary to build a solid organisational structure in the form of a political party. In September 1944, various components of the Slovak civic anti-fascist representation joined together to form the Democratic Club, which became the foundation for the emerging Democratic Party (DS). At that time, it was not a political party with a comprehensive organisational structure. The party did not have a membership base, in the form of a free association where both members and sympathisers could belong. The coordinated organisational activity of the civic bloc was reflected in the publication of the DS press body *Čas* from 17 September 1944. A leadership was formed – honorary chairman Vavro Šrobár, chairman Ján Ursíny, vice-chairman Jozef Lettrich, and general secretary Milan Kulich. The military defeat of the SNP temporarily prevented the further ideological and organisational development of the DS.<sup>150</sup>

### **Review questions:**

1. *Characterise the regime in Slovakia in 1939–1945.*
2. *What was the fundamental goal of the domestic and foreign resistance during the Second World War?*
3. *Where was the most important centre of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance, and what was the structure of its organs?*
4. *Describe the party system that was formed in Slovakia during the uprising and in the liberated territory.*

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<sup>148</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 18.

<sup>149</sup> LIPTÁK, L. (ed.): *Politické strany na Slovensku 1860 – 1989*. Bratislava : Archa 1992, pp. 263 – 264; ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 15-16.

<sup>150</sup> LIPTÁK, L. (ed.): *Politické strany na Slovensku 1860 – 1989*. Bratislava : Archa 1992, p. 255; ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 16-17.

### 3 Political developments between 1945 and 1948

Although the representatives of both the Czechoslovak exile in London and the domestic resistance agreed on the concept of uninterrupted continuity of the First Czechoslovak Republic, it was clear that after the war, it would not be possible to completely restore Czechoslovakia to its pre-war form. The reason was the situation in Slovakia. Representatives of the domestic resistance demanded recognition of the Slovak national authorities that had been created during the resistance and the Slovak National Uprising (Slovenské národné povstanie – SNP) and rejected the restoration of the administrative provincial system. It was clear that Czech political parties would have to accept Slovakia's new status and changes in the constitutional arrangement. Another reason was the conviction, supported mainly by Communists but also shared by representatives of other political movements, that post-war reforms were necessary in Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak resistance continued to promote one of its main goals – the restoration of the state within the borders that existed before the Munich Conference. During the war, the conference participants, except for Germany, had already declared it invalid. The declaration of the great powers of 5 June 1945 on the division of Germany into occupation zones did not mention the Sudetenland, thus implicitly confirming that this territory belonged to Czechoslovakia. Under the Armistice Agreement, Hungary had to return to Czechoslovakia the territories it had acquired in 1938–1939, as early as January 1945. The exception was the territory of Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which was annexed to the Soviet Union under pressure from Moscow and influenced by a “spontaneous” campaign of the local population. The territorial dispute with Poland was more complicated. Given that Poland was one of the victorious states, it was not possible to directly impose an obligation to return the territories. Nevertheless, Czechoslovakia managed to regain the Těšín region and had to return smaller territories in Orava and Spiš to Poland.<sup>151</sup>

The post-war political arrangement in Czechoslovakia was also influenced by negotiations between representatives of the Czechoslovak exile in London and Moscow, which took place in March 1945 in Moscow with the participation of a delegation from the Slovak National Council (SNR). As a result, **the Government of the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks** was formed, headed by Social Democrat Zdeněk Fierlinger, who had previously served as Czechoslovak ambassador to Moscow. The London exile government resigned before entering the territory of Czechoslovakia (Slovakia).

On 5 May 1945, the first National Front government presented its government program in Košice, with lasting impact on political life. The significance of **the Košice Government Program** (KVP) lay primarily in the fact that it formulated the main

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<sup>151</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost*. Praha : Nakladatelství Lidové noviny 2007, pp. 421-422.

principles of the post-war arrangement in Czechoslovakia. It became a program document for building a new post-war society, strongly influenced by the war and the international and domestic political context of pre-war and wartime developments. The government program set out the basic principles for foreign and domestic policy, for the economy, and outlined the basic principles for resolving the question of nationality, cultural and educational policy, the character of the army, etc. In the KVP, the government declared the establishment of a system of the National Front, in which all political parties were government parties. All political parties (in Czechia – the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People’s Party, the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party; in Slovakia – the Communist Party of Slovakia, the Democratic Party) committed to fulfilling their principles through their activities within the National Front. The KVP also introduced strong left-wing principles into politics, declaring the nationalisation of heavy industry and land reform. The Czechoslovak Republic was to be built as a nation-state of Czechs and Slovaks, without non-Slavic national minorities. It declared the loss of citizenship for Germans and Hungarians and the confiscation of their property, and retributive justice (people’s courts) was to be used to punish traitors and collaborators.<sup>152</sup> After the Second World War, the ethnic composition of Czechoslovakia changed significantly. The most significant intervention was **the expulsion of the German population**. Immediately after the end of the war, there was a so-called wild expulsion, during which the German population was mistreated, and crimes were committed against them. The organised expulsion of the German population from Czechoslovakia, approved by the superpowers at the Potsdam Conference, was carried out mainly in 1946 under the supervision of the Allies. In 1947–1948, additional expulsions took place, mainly for the purpose of reuniting families. In total, more than 3 million Germans were displaced from Czechoslovakia.<sup>153</sup>

The KVP also significantly influenced the previously moderate actions of Slovak national authorities and Slovak political representatives in their approach to non-Slavic minorities. Repressive measures against the German and Hungarian populations, such as the loss of Czechoslovak citizenship, confiscation of property, and the expulsion of Hungarians to Czechia, were based on Edvard Beneš’s decrees. However, not all of Beneš’s decrees applied in Slovakia, as some measures against the Hungarian population, such as the confiscation of land and people’s courts, were implemented by SNR regulations. The expulsion of the Hungarian population was not

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<sup>152</sup> Program nové československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků (Košícký vládní program). In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha: Karolinum 2006, pp. 21-33 [Program of the new Czechoslovak government of the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks (Košice Government Program)]; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha: Karolinum 2006, p. 21.

<sup>153</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha Argo, 2019, p. 573; PEŠEK, J.: Od oslobodenia po parlamentné voľby v máji 1946. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 106-111.

approved by the superpowers. The government therefore attempted to resolve the issue of the Hungarian population in Slovakia through reslovakisation, whereby these inhabitants declared Slovak nationality, the expulsion of Hungarians to Czechia for the purpose of compulsory labour, or through an inter-state agreement between Czechoslovakia and Hungary dated 27 February 1946 on the exchange of populations, based on which an exchange of populations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary took place.<sup>154</sup>

In foreign policy, the KVP emphasised the orientation of the state's security, defence, and foreign policy towards the Soviet Union, which served as a model for reforms in the economy, culture, and army. The orientation towards the Soviet Union in all areas was a dominant political feature of the KVP. The country was to be governed by national committees.<sup>155</sup> The administration of towns and municipalities in the liberated territories was already being carried out through the revolutionary national committees as organs of state administration and self-government. *"The creation of a new administrative structure and administrative bodies in the liberated territory was of particular importance to the KSS. There was generally no continuity with the old authorities. New people who had been in opposition to the previous regime or had not been involved in public life joined the national committees. The radical replacement of governing structures from the highest levels down to the villages enabled new (insurgent) political entities to take complete control."*<sup>156</sup>

The idea of Czechoslovakism was to be abandoned, and according to the KVP, the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks was to be based on the principle of equality. Although the Constitutional Charter of 1920 remained formally in force after 1945, the foreign resistance and, after the restoration of state power to the Czechoslovak Republic, the national republican authorities had to respect the binding legal status under which the Slovak national authorities operated – with the Slovak National Council as the legislative body and the Board of Commissioners performing the tasks of the government – even though the Constitution did not recognise such institutions. No similar bodies existed in the Czech lands. Bohemia and Moravia were administered by the central Czechoslovak government, which, in some cases, meant that ministers nominated by the Slovak side had full powers in Bohemia, but in Slovakia, they were limited by the powers of the commissioners. This created an asymmetrical model and gave rise to complex disputes over powers, which had to be resolved but for which there was no solution in the existing legislation or in the formally valid Constitution

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<sup>154</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š. – ŠUTAJOVÁ, J.: *Výmena obyvateľstva medzi Československom a Maďarskom (v rokovaníach Československo-maďarskej zmiešanej komisie)*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2022.

<sup>155</sup> Program nové československé vlády Národní fronty Čechů a Slováků (Košický vládní program). In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha : Karolinum 2006, pp. 21-33; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha : Karolinum 2006, p. 21.

<sup>156</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 21.

of the Czechoslovak Republic of February 1920. According to the Košice Government Program, the resulting legal dualism was to be eliminated by dividing powers between the central and Slovak government bodies, as agreed by representatives of both nations. The central government later attempted to weaken the position of the Slovak national authorities based on the three Prague agreements, which were intended to regulate the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks in the restored republic.<sup>157</sup> Ultimately, the agreements defined the competences of the central institutions and the Slovak national authorities.<sup>158</sup> The KVP thus accepted the existence of Slovak national authorities – the Slovak National Council and the executive body, the Board of Commissioners.

Although the KVP was supposed to expire with the formation of a new government after regular elections, the communists long interpreted it as law. However, the Košice Government Program was only a declaratory public policy document expressing planned objectives. In order to fulfil it, it was necessary to adopt further legal norms, and the different ideas of political actors about their content led to struggles between political representatives in 1945–1948 over the direction of Czechoslovak politics.<sup>159</sup>

Despite the restoration of Czechoslovakia as a unified state after the Second World War, different legislative and executive powers were applied as a result of different developments in the years 1939–1945. President of the Republic, Edvard Beneš, issued nationwide laws on the basis of the London legislation. In its first decree of 1 September 1944 on the exercise of legislative, governmental, and executive power in Slovakia, the SNR declared itself the sole body authorised to speak and act on behalf of the Slovak nation and assumed all powers in the liberated Slovak territory of the Czechoslovak Republic. Not all decrees of President Beneš were valid in Slovakia. By Decree No. 30/1945 Coll. of the SNR of 21 April 1945 on legislative power in Slovakia, the SNR established a distinction between nationwide laws and other matters. Legislative power in matters of national importance was therefore exercised by the President in agreement with the SNR in the form of constitutional decrees of the President of the Republic and decrees of the President of the Republic, which had to state that they were issued in agreement with the SNR. Many measures in Slovakia were implemented on the basis of SNR regulations. Some provisions of these SNR regulations contained different solutions from the presidential decrees of Edvard

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<sup>157</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, pp. 426-427; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960....*, pp. 49-50, 197, 211.

<sup>158</sup> For more details on the Prague Agreements, see, for example: PEŠEK, J.: *Od oslobodenia po parlamentné voľby v máji 1946*. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 103-106.

<sup>159</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 23. For more details on the KVP, see PEŠEK, J.: *Jar 1945 a Slovensko*. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 53-58.

Beneš.<sup>160</sup> Of the 140 decrees issued by President Beneš in the territory of the Czechoslovak Republic, 44 presidential decrees were issued in agreement with the SNR and were therefore valid in Slovakia. They concerned various matters of society, such as the establishment of offices and institutions, the creation of the Provisional National Assembly, but also the nationalisation of mines and certain industrial enterprises. President Beneš's powers to issue decrees ended with the creation of the Provisional National Assembly on 28 October 1945.<sup>161</sup>

The situation in the judiciary was also unusual. People's courts were set up to punish traitors and collaborators. During this period, the security forces could intern foreign nationals without time limits, and the courts could impose retroactive penalties, i.e., penalties were imposed for certain crimes that were not crimes at the time they were committed. It was also unusual that there were two supreme courts in Czechoslovakia. The Supreme Court in Bratislava, established during the period of the independent Slovak State, was not abolished after the war and continued its operation.<sup>162</sup>

Political offenders, including officials of the Protectorate and the Slovak State, members of the Hlinka Guard, and others, were tried by retributive courts. In Slovakia, they fell under the jurisdiction of the National Court.<sup>163</sup>

Before the 1946 elections, two more political parties were formed in Slovakia. Attempts to revive social democracy led to the creation of the Labour Party. In the Democratic Party, attempts to create a Catholic political party were renewed. These resulted in the signing of the April Agreement in 1946, which strengthened the position of Catholics in the Democratic Party, and some of the founders of the new political party returned to the Democratic Party. Subsequently, the Freedom Party was formed.<sup>164</sup>

The elections in May 1946 brought a nationwide victory for the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). The election victory was aided by the general inclination of citizens towards left-wing political and economic concepts and the extensive and solid organisational structure of the KSČ. In Slovakia, however, the Democratic Party (DS) won the election (with 62% of the vote). Based on the election results, a **Constituent National Assembly** and a new **National Front government** were formed, headed by

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<sup>160</sup> For more details, see ŠUTAJ, Štefan – MOSNÝ, Peter – OLEJNÍK, Milan. *Prezidentské dekréty Edvarda Beneša...*

<sup>161</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 574; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 26-27.

<sup>162</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 422.

<sup>163</sup> PEŠEK, J.: Politický vývoj od leta 1946 do februára 1948. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 172-174.

<sup>164</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Národný front na Slovensku v rokoch 1945 – 1948. In: IVANIČKOVÁ, E. a kol.: *Z dejín demokratických a totalitných režimov*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV 2008, pp. 239-241; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960....*, p. 179.

KSČ chairman Klement Gottwald, which again included all political parties (except for the Labour Party and the Freedom Party). The KSČ and its chairman Gottwald had a decisive influence in the new Czechoslovak government. The communists also occupied key ministries (interior, agriculture). The position of the Czechoslovak communists in the government and subsequent events meant that, despite the DS's election victory in Slovakia, the party was unable to reap the benefits of its electoral success. The Third Prague Agreement (June 1946) was adopted, subordinating Slovak national authorities to the central authorities. The Board of Commissioners was subordinated to the Czechoslovak Government, and the SNR was subordinated to the Constituent National Assembly. After losing the elections, the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) launched a campaign aimed at discrediting the DS (Democratic Party). They used the trial of Jozef Tiso and the exposure of **the so-called anti-state conspiracy** in 1947 for this campaign. The Communist-controlled Ministry of the Interior exploited the existence of anti-Czechoslovak groups and attempted to use them to discredit DS officials. Since it had no evidence of contacts between émigrés and DS representatives, it fabricated manipulations to prove the connection between the leading representatives of the Democratic Party, especially the general secretaries Kempný and Bugár, and the anti-Czechoslovak émigré circles abroad. The aim of the campaign surrounding the anti-state conspiracy and the artificially provoked autumn political crisis was to change the political structure of Slovakia and, subsequently, the composition of the Board of Commissioners and national committees.<sup>165</sup> They were the result of the long-term activities and orientation of the Communist Party towards gaining power. *"The year 1947 was marked by the uncovering of anti-state conspiracies in countries under Soviet influence. 'Revelations' occurred in Hungary, Bulgaria, and Romania. The creation of enemies of people's democracy became a proven means of paving the way for the communists to take power in the countries of the emerging Eastern Bloc."*<sup>166</sup>

In foreign policy, Czechoslovakia increasingly gravitated toward the emerging Soviet power bloc. When the USA offered economic assistance to European countries that were rebuilding their economies after the Second World War (**the Marshall Plan**), the Soviet Union refused to participate in June 1947, and other Eastern Bloc countries, including Czechoslovakia, took the same stance, even though the government had originally seriously considered participating in the Marshall Plan.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 54-76; KRĚN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 599; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, p. 38; RYCHLÍK, J.: *Češi a Slováci ve 20 století. Česko-slovenské vzťahy 1945 – 1992...*, pp. 75-104; PEŠEK, J.: Politický vývoj od leta 1946 do februára 1948. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 181-187.

<sup>166</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 68.

<sup>167</sup> VESELÝ, Z.: *Mezinárodní vzťahy v zrcadle dějin*. Plzeň : Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, s.r.o. 2020, pp. 411-415; KRĚN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 598.

The struggle for power in Czechoslovakia culminated in **the events of February 1948**. The course of events and the overall outcome were determined by a combination of many long-term and short-term political, economic, and social causes. Communist Interior Minister Václav Nosek dismissed the last eight non-Communist commanders of the National Security Corps in Prague and refused to revoke this decision despite a majority vote by the government. On 20 February 1948, 12 ministers from the civil political parties (the National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party, and the Democratic Party) resigned in protest against Minister Nosek. Subsequently, Section 80 of the 1920 Constitutional Charter proved decisive, according to which the government was quorate if a majority of ministers (except for the prime minister or his deputy) were present, and even with the resignation of 12 ministers, the government remained quorate according to the Constitution. Under pressure from mass rallies organised by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and adhering to the Constitution, President Beneš accepted this resignation on 25 February and appointed new ministers according to the proposal of Prime Minister Gottwald.<sup>168</sup> The President then signed the decrees appointing the new members of the government. The expanded and reconstructed government no longer included any representatives of the National Socialist, the Czechoslovak People's Party, and Slovak Democratic parties who did not support the policies of the Communists. After the still unexplained death of Foreign Minister Jan Masaryk on 10 March 1948, the government consisted of 23 members, ten of whom were from the KSCĚ, three from the KSS, three Social Democrats (later, the KSCĚ, KSS and Social Democrats merged), two seats were occupied by National Socialists, two seats by Czechoslovak People's Party members, and one seat by the Slovak Democratic Party (renamed the Party of Slovak Revival – Ján Ševčík) and the Slovak Freedom Party (Vavro Šrobár). The last seat was taken by General Ludvík Svoboda, who had no party affiliation.<sup>169</sup> The plan is based on the person of President Beneš, who failed at a crucial moment for various reasons.

In Slovakia, the situation in February 1948 unfolded differently. Commissioners for the Democratic Party, unlike the ministers, did not resign, but nevertheless, on the initiative of the chairman of the Board of Commissioners, Gustáv Husák, the Board of Commissioners was reconstructed. With the consent of the government, the SNR appointed a new Board of Commissioners on 6 March 1948, and significant personnel changes took place in the SNR.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> PEŠEK, J.: Politický vývoj od leta 1946 do februára 1948. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 190-200; KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, pp. 600-601; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 424; RYCHLÍK, J.: *Češi a Slováci ve 20 století. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1945 – 1992....*, pp. 115-119.

<sup>169</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960....*, p. 285.

<sup>170</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960....*, pp. 285-286; BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Slovenské národné orgány v čase vyvrcholenia mocenskopolitických zápasov (jeseň

*“February was a coup d’état, a revolutionary change, and revolutions do not typically accept existing legislation or ask for permission. Those who still relied on the rule of law, political culture, and fair agreements were doomed to defeat. After February 1948, the non-communist political parties (the Freedom Party and the Party of Slovak Revival), whose most prominent representatives had emigrated, became assistants and collaborators of the communist regime. The regime began to rule with the help of the National Front’s action committees, which oversaw the purge of public life from representatives of civic political parties.”*<sup>171</sup> After 25 February 1948, an agreement was reached on a new Constitution. While in previous periods there had been disagreements concerning, for example, negotiations on national committees as a permanent basis for public administration, certain economic issues, and the constitutional order, after February 1948, of the three existing proposals, the one submitted by representatives of the Communist Party was eventually approved. Despite being strongly inspired by the Constitution of the Soviet Union, it largely preserved the status outlined in the 1920 Constitution with regard to the position of the highest constitutional officials. **The Constitution of 9 May** and the new electoral law were adopted in May 1948.<sup>172</sup> President Beneš refused to sign the Constitution. In June 1948, he resigned from the office of President and died later that year. Klement Gottwald was elected as the new President in June 1948.<sup>173</sup>

### 3.1 Political system

*“From the end of the war until February 1948, the political system was hybrid, combining both democratic and authoritarian elements. The communists called it a people’s democracy, emphasising that it differed from the “formal” pre-war democracy. Formally, the 1920 Constitution remained in force, but the political system of the post-war republic had little in common with the pre-Munich republic.... Czechoslovakia was a country with limited democracy. This is clear in relation to the policy of restricting the activities of political parties within the NF and banning certain political parties, the relationship with Slovakia and possible elements of self-government, its relationship with non-Slavic minorities who lost their Czechoslovak citizenship and related rights, its relationship with churches that lost their right to education and boarding schools. Religious youth associations were banned. Free political life was restricted by the presence of Soviet troops and the NKVD’s interference in political life after liberation. The right to vote and economic competition were restricted. Restrictions were*

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1947 – február 1948). In: PEKNÍK, M. (Ed.): *Slovenské národné rady*. Bratislava : Národné literárne centrum – Dom slovenskej literatúry 1998, p. 146.

<sup>171</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Dejiny verejnej správy na Slovensku*. Košice : UPJŠ 2003, p. 38.

<sup>172</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 423.

<sup>173</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 806.

*implemented through nationalisation, land reform, confiscation of property, retribution – people's courts, and affected national committees and community life.”<sup>174</sup>*

## **Legislative power**

### **Provisional National Assembly**

The President, who, according to the Constitutional Decree of 15 October 1940, had the right to amend the Constitution in necessary cases, issued Constitutional Decree of the President of the Republic No. 47/1945 of 25 August 1945 on the Provisional National Assembly. The decree also authorised the Provisional National Assembly to amend the Constitution to the extent necessary. This decree also introduced the principle of prohibition of majorisation, because in matters related to the constitutional-legal status of Slovakia, the consent of the majority of the members of the Provisional National Assembly from Slovakia was always required.<sup>175</sup> The first post-war legislative body met on 28 October 1945. Until the convening of the Provisional National Assembly, the President of the Republic exercised legislative power and had so-called decree power.<sup>176</sup>

**The Provisional National Assembly** was unicameral and exercised legislative power at the national level. The Senate was dissolved. The Assembly had 300 members, 100 of whom were from Slovakia. Its seat was in Prague. For technical and organisational, but probably also political reasons, it was not formed through regular parliamentary elections, but was elected by delegates from national committees, administrative commissions, and regional congresses. Electors selected by local national committees at district congresses elected delegates to the provincial congresses. Before the indirect elections, the political parties concluded an agreement on a fair procedure for selecting electors and a joint election program for all governing parties. This ensured equal representation of all political parties associated with the National Front (in Czechia – the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party, the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party; in Slovakia – the Communist Party of Slovakia, the Democratic Party) and also the election of representatives of various interest groups.<sup>177</sup> The elections were held based on Presidential Decree No. 47 Coll. of 25 August 1945, and the government adopted Regulation No. 48 Coll. for their

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<sup>174</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 21.

<sup>175</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960....*, pp. 113-114.

<sup>176</sup> PEŠEK, J.: *Od oslobodenia po parlamentné voľby v máji 1946*. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 99-100; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 422.

<sup>177</sup> The entry of these entities (a united trade union organisation, a youth organisation, and professional associations) into current political life is one of the most significant changes that took place in post-war Czechoslovakia. HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 423.

implementation on the same day. Subsequently, on 28 August 1945, a congress of delegates of national committees in Banská Bystrica elected a new SNR (Slovak National Council) and members of the DNZ (Provisional National Assembly). Based on a resolution of the National Front (NF), a joint list of candidates with proportional representation of political parties was applied. In the case of the elections to the DNZ, however, the communists gained an advantage over the others in that they had twice as many representatives there. Slovakia had 40 representatives for the DS (Democratic Party), 40 for the KSS (Communist Party of Slovakia), and 20 for mass organisations. (4 trade unions, 4 farmers, 2 youth, 2 women, 3 scientific and cultural institutions, and 5 for the Ukrainian minority).<sup>178</sup>

The Provisional National Assembly exercised its powers until 18 June 1946, when it was replaced by the Constituent National Assembly formed after the elections of May 1946.<sup>179</sup> The task of the Provisional National Assembly was to confirm the President of the Republic in office until the new election and to retroactively confirm (by ratification) his decrees.<sup>180</sup> This was done by the adoption of Constitutional Act No. 57/1946 Coll. of 28 March 1946, which approved and declared the decrees of the President of the Republic to have the force of law.<sup>181</sup> This completed the process of approving presidential decrees with the force of law and legalised them in terms of the legal continuity of the pre-Munich republic.

The Provisional National Assembly was also responsible for its own legislative activities under the 1920 Constitution and for preparing elections to the legislative body. According to Act No. 67/1946 Coll. on the election of the Constituent National Assembly, which was prepared by the Provisional National Assembly, the elections were to be held in accordance with the principles of universal, equal, direct, and secret suffrage and based on proportional representation. The right to vote was restricted to Czechoslovak citizens of Czech, Slovak, or other Slavic nationality who were registered on the electoral roll and were over 18 years of age. Members of German and Hungarian nationalities who had lost their Czechoslovak citizenship were therefore excluded. The right to vote was also denied to those Czechs and Slovaks who had been involved in fascist parties and organisations, who had been deprived of their legal capacity, and those serving prison sentences or in detention. On the other hand, soldiers were granted the right to vote. Citizens aged 21 and over had the right to stand for election. The Provisional National Assembly passed 80 laws, which were mainly concerned with the consolidation of the national economy and social economy. From

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<sup>178</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 27.

<sup>179</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960....*, p. 113-118.

<sup>180</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, pp. 422-423.

<sup>181</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 57/1946 Sb. ze dne 28. března 1946, kterým se schvalují a prohlašují za zákon dekrety presidenta republiky...., p. 172.

an administrative point of view, significant changes included a reduction in active and passive voting rights, the restriction of voting rights to citizens of Czech, Slovak, or other Slavic nationality, the abolition of the Senate, and the introduction of some new institutions, such as the Office of the Prime Minister.<sup>182</sup>

### **Constituent National Assembly**

Parliamentary elections in Czechoslovakia were held on 26 May 1946. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia won the elections in the Czech lands, while in Slovakia, the Democratic Party clearly defeated the Communist Party of Slovakia. The new parliament was named the Constituent National Assembly. Its main task was to draft a new Constitution, and its term of office was to end with the establishment of a legislative body that would be accountable to the new Constitution. The maximum length of the mandate of the Constituent National Assembly was two years. Constitutional Act No. 65/1946 Coll. of 11 April 1946 on the Constituent National Assembly also contained a provision prohibiting majorisation. It stipulated that the adoption of a constitutional act concerning the constitutional status of Slovakia required the consent of a majority of the members elected in Slovakia who were present.<sup>183</sup>

**The Constituent National Assembly** was unicameral and had 300 members. The KSČ and KSS won 114 seats, the National Socialists 55 seats, the Czechoslovak People's Party 46 seats, the DS 43 seats, the Social Democrats 37 seats, the Freedom Party three seats, and the Labour Party two seats. Slovakia was represented by 69 members.<sup>184</sup>

### **Slovak National Council**

The election method used for the Provisional National Assembly was also used in August 1945 for the elections to the 100-member **Slovak National Council (SNR)**. The Presidium of the SNR subsequently appointed a new **Board of Commissioners**. The NF meeting on 12 September 1945 decided that instead of two speakers (Jozef Lettrich and Karol Šmidke), the SNR would be headed by a single Speaker representing the Democratic Party, Jozef Lettrich. A new position was created – Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, filled by KSS representative Šmidke.<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Zákon č. 67/1946 Sb. ze dne 11. dubna 1946, o volbě ústavodárneho Národného shromáždění. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha : Karolinum 2006, pp. 179-196; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, pp. 422-423.

<sup>183</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 423.

<sup>184</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 575; PEHR, M.: KSČ a volby 1946. In: KÁRNÍK, Z. – KOPEČEK, M. (eds.): *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu. Svazek V*. Praha : Dokořán 2005, p. 183.

<sup>185</sup> PEŠEK, J.: Komunistická strana Slovenska v rokoch 1945 – 1948. In: KOCIAN, J. – PAŽOUR, J. – RÁKOSNÍK, J.: *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu. Svazek VII*. Praha : Dokořán 2010, p. 182.

Due to competence disputes and the need to organise relations between Czechs and Slovaks in the restored republic, it was necessary to adjust relations between the central authorities (the Provisional National Assembly, the President, the Government) and the Slovak national bodies (the SNR, the Board of Commissioners). This was accomplished through **the Prague Agreements**. The First Prague Agreement, concluded between the Czechoslovak government and the SNR Presidium in June 1945, confirmed the asymmetrical model in which Slovakia had the Slovak National Council as its highest legislative body and the Board of Commissioners as its executive body, while Bohemia and Moravia were administered by the central Czechoslovak government without any similar bodies. The agreement defined the competences of the national and Slovak authorities. However, as in the following periods until 1968, the agreement did not use terms such as autonomy or federation when addressing relations between the Czechs and Slovaks. Until the establishment of the Provisional National Assembly, legislative power in common matters was exercised by the President of the Republic through decrees proposed by the government and agreed upon with the SNR. Legislative power in Slovakia was to be exercised by the SNR, unless it was reserved for the centre. The agreement listed common matters that were to be managed jointly, such as foreign policy, defence, finance, transport, posts, and telegraphs.

The Second Prague Agreement, signed in April 1946, was significant mainly due to strengthening the powers of the President of the Republic. It confirmed the existing division of powers, but stipulated that a minister of the Czechoslovak government must first discuss draft laws and government regulations with the relevant Slovak commissioner before submitting them to the government, and that the commissioner must do the same.<sup>186</sup>

The Third Prague Agreement was concluded in June 1946, i.e., after the elections in 1946, mainly at the insistence of the communists. After the electoral success of the Democratic Party in Slovakia, it greatly strengthened the influence of the central state authorities at the expense of the Slovak national authorities. The Slovak National Council had to submit a draft regulation to the government at least two weeks before its meeting. The government, with the participation of Slovak members, then decided whether the Slovak National Council could decide on the matter at all and whether the matter was of a national nature. If the government did not agree, the draft could not be debated in the Slovak National Council. The government also gained the right to suspend the validity of regulations issued by the Slovak National Council and the Board of Commissioners. The Board was accountable to the government, which gained the right to exercise its authority in Slovakia directly with the knowledge of the

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<sup>186</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. - JANÁK, J. - DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, pp. 426-427; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 - 1960....*, pp. 49-50, 197, 211.

commissioner. The commissioners reported to the ministers on their activities and followed their decisions and directives. The ministers could reserve the right to approve decrees, orders, and directives issued by the commissioner. The central government thus succeeded in weakening the influence of Slovak national authorities and disrupting the establishment of an asymmetrical model of relations between Czechs and Slovaks.<sup>187</sup>

Elections to the SNR were not held in 1946. Individual political parties delegated their members based on the results of the elections to the Constituent National Assembly. The communists then occupied only 31 of the total 100 seats in the SNR. The Democratic Party occupied 63 seats in the SNR, including the position of speaker. The Freedom Party and the Labour Party occupied three seats each.<sup>188</sup>

After February 1948, changes also occurred in the SNR. On 26 February 1948, Jozef Lettrich resigned as Speaker. The presidium subsequently appointed this position to K. Šmidke. An SNR Action Committee was established to review the activities and political acceptability of SNR members. Some members resigned their mandates (four, three from the Democratic Party and one from the Social Democrats), and other members were dismissed by individual political parties (25 from the DS and one from the KSS). Of the original 100 members of the SNR, only 70 remained, followed by further personnel changes.<sup>189</sup>

## Executive power

### President

**The President of the Republic** exercised legislative power and possessed decree-making authority until the convening of the Provisional National Assembly. However, he did so in close cooperation with the government, which proposed, countersigned, and implemented the decrees. The first post-war legislative body met on 28 October 1945.<sup>190</sup> President Beneš's powers to issue decrees ended with the creation of the Provisional National Assembly on 28 October 1945. Between 1946 and 1948, the position of president returned to that of a president in a parliamentary form of

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<sup>187</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, pp. 426-427; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, pp. 49-50, 197, 211.

<sup>188</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Slovenské národné orgány v čase vyvrcholenia mocenskopolitických zápasov (jeseň 1947 – február 1948). In: PEKNÍK, M. (Ed.): *Slovenské národné rady*. Bratislava : Národné literárne centrum – Dom slovenskej literatúry 1998, p. 132; CHARVÁT, J.: Volby a komunistické Československo (v komparatívni perspektíve). In: KOCIAN, J. – PAŽOUR, J. – RÁKOSNÍK, J.: *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu. Svazek VII*. Praha : Dokořán 2010, p. 35.

<sup>189</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Slovenské národné orgány v čase vyvrcholenia mocenskopolitických zápasov (jeseň 1947 – február 1948)..., p. 146.

<sup>190</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 422.

government. He still had great authority, but due to his deteriorating health, he withdrew from day-to-day politics and adopted a restrained, non-partisan position.<sup>191</sup>

## Government

The London exile government resigned before entering the territory of Czechoslovakia (Slovakia), and a new government headed by Zdeněk Fierlinger was formed in accordance with the Moscow agreements in May 1945 in Košice.<sup>192</sup>

**The government** was organised in accordance with Presidential Decree No. 1/1945 Coll. of 2 April 1945 on the new organisation of the government and ministries during the transitional period. It made decisions collectively and was able to pass resolutions in the presence of a majority of its members. A new institution was introduced in the form of the Government Presidium, consisting of the Prime Minister and his deputies. The decree prescribed the existence of ministries of Foreign Affairs, National Defence, Foreign Trade, Interior, Finance, Education and Enlightenment, Justice, Information, Industry, Agriculture, Internal Trade, Transport, Posts, Labour Protection and Social Welfare, Health, and Nutrition. State secretaries were to serve alongside the ministers in those departments where there was no corresponding authority in Slovakia and which exercised state administration directly throughout the territory of the state. If the minister was Czech, the state secretary was Slovak, and vice versa. State secretaries were members of the government. In reality, however, they only functioned in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, National Defence, and Foreign Trade.<sup>193</sup>

After the 1946 elections, the new government was ultimately influenced by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) and its chairman, Klement Gottwald. The Communists occupied the position of Prime Minister and 10 ministries, including key government posts such as the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Agriculture. The National Socialists obtained four ministerial seats and the other political parties three ministerial seats each. There were also two non-party members in the government, Minister of Defence General Ludvík Svoboda and Minister of Foreign Affairs Jan Masaryk. In Gottwald's government, state secretaries were only active in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and National Defence. Despite the Democratic Party's election victory in Slovakia, the party was unable to reap the benefits of its electoral victory due to the positions of the Czechoslovak communists in the government and subsequent events. Under the Third Prague Agreement (June 1946), the Slovak national authorities were subordinated to the central authorities. The Board of

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<sup>191</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 574.

<sup>192</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha : Karolinum 2006, p. 21.

<sup>193</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 435.

Commissioners was subordinate to the Czechoslovak government and the SNR to the Constituent National Assembly.<sup>194</sup>

During the period when the so-called anti-state conspiracy was uncovered, Deputy Prime Minister Ursíny of the Democratic Party was forced to resign under pressure from his political opponents, who blamed him for the fact that O. Obuch, an employee of his office, had been in contact with the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party émigrés and had passed on secret information to their representatives. Another DS representative, Š. Kočvara took his place as Deputy Prime Minister.<sup>195</sup>

### Board of Commissioners

In the new **Board of Commissioners**, which was appointed on 18 September 1945, the principle of parity was applied until the 1946 elections. Even after the 1946 elections, where four political parties competed for votes in Slovakia, only the two strongest political parties – the Democratic Party and the Communist Party of Slovakia – had representatives in the Board of Commissioners. Of the 15 members of the Board of Commissioners, the Democratic Party had a majority of nine members. However, the Communist Party of Slovakia took the position of chairman of the Board of Commissioners. The Ministry of the Interior, which both political parties claimed, was taken by Mikuláš Ferjenčík, a commissioner without affiliation to any party.<sup>196</sup>

The results of the elections in Slovakia were also reflected in the composition of the new Board of Commissioners. After complex negotiations between representatives of the KSS and DS, the VII. The Board of Commissioners was formed on 16 August 1946. Despite losing the election, the communists secured the chairmanship of the Board of Commissioners (Gustáv Husák), while a new position of Vice-Chairman was created for a Democratic Party member. Smaller political parties also sought representation in the Board of Commissioners but were not accommodated. In a letter dated 8 August 1946, the General Secretary of the Labour Party, Ján Bečko, expressed his conviction that the representation of small parties in the Board of Commissioners would contribute to the consolidation of the political situation. If they were not represented, he requested that the SNR's draft regulations be discussed in the NF before being negotiated in the Board of Commissioners. The small political parties considered the fact that they were not represented in the Board of Commissioners to be a violation of NF policy.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 575; RYCHLÍK, J.: *Češi a Slováci ve 20 století. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1945 – 1992*. Bratislava : Academic Electronic Press 1998, p. 50.

<sup>195</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015.

<sup>196</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: *Slovenské národné orgány v čase vyvrcholenia mocenskopolitických zápasov (jeseň 1947 – február 1948)...*, p. 132.

<sup>197</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 62-63.

However, after their electoral defeat, the KSS launched a campaign aimed at discrediting the Democratic Party, with one of the goals of the campaign surrounding the anti-state conspiracy and the artificially provoked autumn political crisis being to change the composition of the Board of Commissioners and national committees. The campaign achieved only partial success, specifically in relation to the Board of Commissioners, where the Democratic Party lost three seats (the ministries of Post, Health, and Justice). The Freedom Party and the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party in Slovakia – formerly the Labour Party – each gained one ministry, and the Ministry of Justice was taken over by Andrej Búza, an expert with no political affiliation (but who was in fact a member of the Social Democratic Party). As a result, the Democratic Party lost its majority in the Board of Commissioners, but the KSS failed to increase its share of power even further.<sup>198</sup> The new Board of Commissioners was approved by the government on 18 November 1947. After the approval of the Board of Commissioners, the Central Committee of the KSS welcomed the fact that the principle of 62% representation of the DS had been broken, which effectively annulled the results of the May 1946 elections. The KSS leadership considered it a shortcoming of the solution of the political crisis that M. Kvetko, M. Josko and J. Styk remained in the Board of Commissioners, that trade unions and resistance associations were not represented in the new Board of Commissioners, that Czech political parties supported the DS, and that there was not enough internal pressure within the DS itself for a “*full resolution of the crisis*”. The aim of the Communist Party in the autumn political crisis was not to definitively remove the DS from the Board of Commissioners. This would have put the party in the position of an opposition party, which was not desirable. The aim was to get DS members who were willing to cooperate into the Board of Commissioners. Later, in February 1948, this tactic was applied on a national scale.<sup>199</sup>

The events of February 1948 also had an impact in Slovakia, but the situation in Slovakia in February 1948 was different in that the commissioners for the Democratic Party, unlike the ministers of the Czechoslovak government, did not resign. However, the chairman of the Board of Commissioners, Gustáv Husák, subsequently informed all DS commissioners in a letter that the Democratic Party’s withdrawal from the government must also have consequences in Slovakia and that the resignation of DS representatives in the government must also be considered as the resignation of DS representatives in the Board of Commissioners. Husák then entrusted the vacant positions to other commissioners and announced this change to the Prime Minister. On 6 March 1948, with the approval of the government, the SNR appointed a new

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<sup>198</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Slovenské národné orgány v čase vyvrcholenia mocenskopolitických zápasov (jeseň 1947 – február 1948)..., p. 136; For more details, see RYCHLÍK, J.: *Češi a Slováci ve 20 století. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1945 – 1992...*, pp. 75-104.

<sup>199</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 75-76.

Board of Commissioners. The Communists had eight seats in it, while the Social Democrats (formerly the Labour Party), the Freedom Party, the resistance groups, and the Slovak Trade Union Council had one representative each. The DS, which had disbanded in February and been replaced by the Slovak Revival Party, had two members on the Board of Commissioners.<sup>200</sup>

### **Party System and Electoral System**

The **National Front** system brought together four political parties in Slovakia (originally two, with two more joining later) and four political parties in the Czech lands. Its purpose was to coordinate individual political measures. All parties participated in the government, and there were no opposition parties or parties representing national minorities. Already during the negotiations on the government program in Moscow in March 1945, the representatives of the political parties agreed that opposition political parties would not be permitted within this system, i.e., that none of the parties would operate outside the NF and that the NF would decide on the formation of new political parties. The National Front system thus limited political competition to parties that were part of the National Front, and the possibility of establishing new political entities was subject to the consent of existing political parties.<sup>201</sup> In Slovakia, the Communist Party and the Democratic Party were initially active, while in Czechia and Moravia, there were four parties – the Communist, the Czechoslovak People’s Party, National Socialist, and Social Democratic parties. This meant that some of the political parties that had won over 60% of the vote in the 1935 elections and held 182 seats in parliament did not return to the political scene. These included the Agrarian Party and the HSL’S (Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party), the strongest party in Slovakia. The National Front, originally conceived primarily as a purposeful grouping of anti-fascist forces, later became a means of coercion to achieve power goals. As an institution that had no support in the constitutional system, the NF was de facto superior to the “constitutional institutions”, the Parliament, the Government, the SNR, and the Board of Commissioners (even though they too had no support in the Constitution that was in force).<sup>202</sup> Institutionally, the NF was never fully formed. There were a nationwide NF of Czechs and Slovaks, a Slovak NF, and a Czech NF. Proposals for the program were submitted by individual political parties. All

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<sup>200</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960....*, pp. 285-286.

<sup>201</sup> PEŠEK, J.: Od oslobodenia po parlamentné voľby v máji 1946. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 98-99; KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 572; DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 773.

<sup>202</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Národný front na Slovensku 1945 – 1948. In: IVANIČKOVÁ, E. a kol. *Z dejín demokratických a totalitných režimov na Slovensku a v Československu v 20. st.* Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV, 2008, pp. 231-245.

resolutions had to be adopted unanimously in the NF.<sup>203</sup> The long-term efforts of the communists to push representatives of mass organisations into the NF were only successful as a result of the autumn political crisis, and throughout the period until February 1948, they sought to strengthen the influence of mass organisations, which they systematically controlled and ultimately managed to use as pressure groups at decisive moments in post-war developments.<sup>204</sup>

Between 1945 and 1948, the development of the party-political structure in Slovakia underwent several changes. In the early stages, there were two political parties in Slovakia, **the Communist Party of Slovakia** and **the Democratic Party**, but very quickly, the conditions were created for the expansion of the number of political parties to include social democracy and a political party that would attract the former electorate of the HSLS (a Catholic political party). The example of Czech society, where four political parties operated after the Second World War, also had a significant influence.

The third political party in Slovakia was formed under the name **Labour Party**. The creation of a social democratic party with a name that would not cause a mass exodus of social democrats from the KSS was a compromise acceptable to the communists. The Democratic Party also agreed to the creation of the Labour Party because they assumed that the new political party would primarily attract voters of the KSS. Ivan Dérer was appointed honorary chairman of the Labour Party, providing the party with moral and ideological support. The only exception was his involvement in the preparation of the new Constitution, which Dérer understood more as a professional matter (in 1946–1948, he worked as president of the Supreme Court in Brno). Ivan Frlička was elected chairman of the party.<sup>205</sup>

The establishment of a fourth political party was more complicated. The Democratic Party was not interested in supporting its creation, because a party oriented towards Catholic voters could be a direct competitor to the DS. Another obstacle was that some DS deputies were directly involved in the preparation of the new political party. They began to consider the program of a new political party that would build on the Christian traditions of Slovak politics in the new social conditions. The name of the new political party was to be the Christian Republican Party.<sup>206</sup> *“Representatives of the*

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<sup>203</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 572; KAPLAN, K.: *Nekroavá revoluce*. Praha : Mladá fronta, 1993, pp. 17-28; KAPLAN, K.: *Národní fronta 1948 – 1960*. Praha : Academia, 2012, pp. 9-31.

<sup>204</sup> BARNOVSKÝ, M.: *Národný front na Slovensku 1945 – 1948*. In: IVANIČKOVÁ, E. a kol.: *Z dejín demokratických a totalitných režimov na Slovensku a v Československu v 20. st.* Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV, 2008, pp. 231-245.

<sup>205</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 35-41.

<sup>206</sup> For more details, see ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 41-52.

*Slovak Catholic episcopate and politicians who wanted to form a new political party, independent of existing structures, and the leadership of the DS, which had a keen interest in maintaining membership within a unified civic political party. This was not contrary to the interests of the Slovak bishops, whose aim was not to fragment the civic political movement, but to obtain an appropriate position for Catholics in the civic political party.”<sup>207</sup>*

On behalf of the leadership of the Christian Republican Party, on 5 March 1946, seven members of parliament with parliamentary immunity submitted an application and party program to the NF. In principle, the NF agreed to the foundation of a new party, but set several conditions. The party was not to use the designation Christian Republican and was to express a clearer position in its program on the Czechoslovak Republic and democracy, on the condemnation of Jozef Tiso, and on the nationalisation of education and industry. Negotiations on the admission of a new political party to the NF dragged on, and at the end of March, it was still unclear what would happen to the new party, even though elections were to be held in May. In this situation, an agreement was reached, strengthening the Catholic wing in the DS. To maintain the unity of the DS, the party leadership was willing to compromise. Miloš Bugár and Ján Kempný became general secretaries of the DS, and the position of Catholics in the party's presidium was strengthened. The agreement was also prompted by the communists' efforts to place people under their influence, especially Vavro Šrobár, in leading positions in the Christian Republican Party. After the signing of this April Agreement, most of the founding members of the Christian Republican Party returned to the DS. The agreement was implemented within the DS, not outside it, and was signed by DS members, although other groups were also involved in its preparation and the preparation of the program. From a formal point of view, the April Agreement secured the positions of Catholics in party bodies and in institutions influenced or occupied by the DS. The April Agreement provided the DS with an advantage in the 1946 elections. Later, however, the internal situation in the DS became complicated. The intentions adopted in the April Agreement on the proportional representation of Catholics in leading positions in state bodies or in the lower echelons of the party failed, as well as the plans to push through its plans in education policy, the judiciary, and economic policy, as presented during the pre-election period. The DS won the elections in Slovakia, though, and the electorate expected this to be reflected in Slovak politics. The failure to save Jozef Tiso from execution also had a negative impact on the relationship between some DS members and the party. In the autumn of 1947, the Democratic Party had to fight three serious struggles for its existence: accusations of anti-state conspiracy, resolving the autumn political crisis provoked by the communists with the help of trade unions and partisans, and, no less

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<sup>207</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 44.

important, resolving internal conflicts within the DS that were the result of the anticampaign.<sup>208</sup>

Some of the founders of the new political party continued their activities and established **the Freedom Party**. Vavro Šrobár, who was elected honorary chairman, played an important role in its creation. However, his influence on the party's politics was diminishing, and he participated very little in the party's organisation.<sup>209</sup>

Before the elections in May 1946, the electoral rolls were published in leaflets and in the press. Political parties were elected. Based on the election results, the parties submitted a list of candidates to the NF, which could raise objections to individual candidates. Candidates for the Constituent National Assembly were elected directly.<sup>210</sup> Based on the results of the elections to the Constituent National Assembly, political parties proposed their candidates for the Slovak National Council (Decree of the Slovak National Council No. 91 Coll. of the Slovak National Council) and for national, district, and local committees. (SNR Regulation No. 92 Coll. SNR) The elections were not to apply to areas with predominantly non-Slavic populations. Here, administrative commissions or administrative commissioners appointed by the Ministry of the Interior were at work. Voters could also cast blank ballots.<sup>211</sup>

The elections in May 1946 resulted in a nationwide victory for the KSČ (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia). In Slovakia, however, the DS (Democratic Party) won the 62% of the vote. The KSS (Communist Party of Slovakia) won 30.37%, the Freedom Party 3.73%, the Labour Party 3.11%, and 0.79% cast blank ballots.<sup>212</sup>

In the case of candidate lists for the SNR, even the candidate lists used by the political parties to enter the pre-election campaign were not binding. The finalised candidate lists were discussed by the Slovak National Council at its meeting on 30 July 1946, and then the general secretaries of the political parties returned to the disputed cases at a special meeting on 3 August 1946. The position of the DS in the national committees in Slovakia was significantly strengthened. The composition of the national committees was adjusted to the results of the elections to the Constituent National Assembly according to the proportion of votes cast for individual political parties in the jurisdiction of the national committee. Based on an agreement in the NF in September 1946, the position of chairman of the national committee was filled by the strongest political party, and the position of first vice-chairman by the party that

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<sup>208</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 47 – 51, 63-76.

<sup>209</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 51.

<sup>210</sup> See: RYCHLÍK, J.: *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Česko – slovenské vzťahy 1945 – 1992*. Bratislava : Academic Electronic Press – Ústav T. G. Masaryka, 1998, p. 118.

<sup>211</sup> RYCHLÍK, J.: *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století....* p. 42.

<sup>212</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 54.

had won a third of the votes. After the elections, the Communist Party was not interested in a rapid reorganisation of the national committees, so the process was prolonged until February 1947. Of the 79 District National Committees (ONV) chairmen in Slovakia, only 6 remained in the hands of the KSS after the reorganisation. Of the total number of 40,415 members of the national committees, the DS had 65.3%, the KSS 31.6%, the Freedom Party over 2%, and the Labour Party 1%.<sup>213</sup>

**Review questions:**

1. *Describe the political system of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1945–1948.*
2. *Who were the most important figures in post-war Czechoslovak politics?*
3. *Characterise the ethnic relations in Czechoslovakia between 1945 and 1948.*
4. *Name the most important political parties in Slovakia.*

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<sup>213</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 60-63.

#### **4 Political developments between 1948 and 1960**

The events of February 1948 brought the establishment of totalitarian rule by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. During the February coup, National Front action committees were formed, which, supported and encouraged by Communist politicians, gradually took the initiative in resolving the situation. Central committees were formed at the level of Slovakia and the republic, as well as at all levels of public administration on a local basis. Gradually, action committees were established in factories, companies, political parties, administrative units, and workplaces. They were created in a "revolutionary" manner and acted accordingly in their activities. They removed the leadership of national committees, enterprises, schools, and political parties under the guise of cleansing public life of enemies of "progress", traitors, and reactionaries. The NF action committees had no support in Czechoslovak legislation and posed a real threat to the activities of the central state authorities, Slovak national authorities, and national committees, which had been formed in Slovakia based on the results of the parliamentary elections and therefore had a majority of representatives from the DS. Even in this period, the Communist Party relied on repression and fearmongering among the representatives of civic political parties. After February 1948, a particularly vigorous "purge" began in the national committees. If at least 50% of the members of a national committee were expelled, temporary district or local administrative commissions were established. These commissions were modelled on the administrative commissions that existed after 1945 in southern Slovakia. By 1949, administrative commissions prevailed at the district and municipal levels, replacing district and local national committees wherever the action committees of the National Front deemed that the national committees that had been functioning until then, which had been created based on the results of the 1946 Constituent National Assembly elections, were reactionary.<sup>214</sup>

Extensive purges took place in the state apparatus, economic and social organisations, science, culture, and education. Although most of the political parties in the National Front were not formally dissolved, they were stripped of any influence in the following period and were led by officials who were willing to cooperate with and submit to the KSČ (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia). Social democracy was an exception, as it merged directly with the KSČ. Mass social organisations were also dissolved, purged, or subordinated to the KSČ. The National Assembly that emerged from the elections held in May 1948, approved laws that had been prepared and approved by the leadership of the Communist Party. In the May 1948 elections, a single National Front candidate list was presented, with the KSČ occupying 70% of the seats.

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<sup>214</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 104-114.

Subsequent elections were organised in the same manner until the fall of the communist regime in 1989.<sup>215</sup>

In May 1948, the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, also known as **the Constitution of 9 May**, was adopted at a ceremonial session of the Constituent National Assembly. It was adopted unanimously by all 246 members present, with each part being voted on separately. The first part was a Declaration containing political proclamations, the second part contained twelve basic articles characterising the main institutions of the political and economic system, and the third part contained ten chapters devoted to specific legal regulations in various areas. Despite the new political power situation, the Constitution was still influenced by the pre-February period. It retained some formal democratic features, such as the preservation of formal parliamentary democracy with the separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches, the accountability of the government to parliament and the independence of the courts, and the confirmation of citizens' rights and freedoms. De facto, however, the separation of powers in the state ceased to exist after 1948, and the contradiction was also evident in human and civil rights, which were enshrined only in name and were violated by the communist regime in political practice. A new feature of the Constitution was the establishment of national committees, Slovak national bodies (the Slovak National Council and the Board of Commissioners), and the inclusion of a separate chapter on the economic system, which also concerned the restriction of private ownership (to 50 employees in industrial enterprises and 50 hectares of land in agriculture) and the planned management of the national economy.<sup>216</sup> The Constitution of 9 May declared that the Czechoslovak state was a people's democratic republic in which "*the people are the sole source of all power in the state*".<sup>217</sup>

The first chapter of the Constitution dealt with the rights and obligations of citizens. In certain matters, it was based on the Constitutional Charter of 1920. Unlike the latter, however, the Constitution of 9 May did not enshrine minority rights due to the specific post-war situation. It was the only Constitution in Czechoslovakia that did not contain any specific provisions on the rights of national minorities and was based on the recognition of equal rights for all citizens regardless of their nationality. The

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<sup>215</sup> For more details, see, for example: RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 81-132; PEŠEK, J.: *Od februára 1948 do konca 50. rokov – politický vývoj*. In: LONDÁK, M. (Ed.): *Slovensko v obnovenom Československu 1945 – 1960*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2024, pp. 227-254.

<sup>216</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 424; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960....*, pp. 329, 363; VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost....*, p. 111.

<sup>217</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha : Karolinum 2006, pp. 329-369. [Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic. Constitutional Act No. 150/1948 Coll.]

Constitution thus did not guarantee any rights to minorities. The legal system effectively ignored the existence of minorities, and this legal situation made the position of minorities problematic, as their rights were not based on laws but on party decisions of the KSČ (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia) and national committees. These instructions were often inadequate and contained only general ideological recommendations that failed to provide local authorities with precise procedures for resolving minority issues. According to these instructions, the authorities sometimes provided the minorities, for example, with the possibility of using their own language in schools and offices, or the use of bilingual signs. The position of members of national minorities was further complicated by the fact that they were usually unaware of their rights, as the instructions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, circulars from the Ministry of the Interior, and other means of establishing the status of minorities were classified. When laws concerning minorities were passed, they only addressed specific issues, such as the restoration of citizenship to Germans and Hungarians.<sup>218</sup>

Nevertheless, the Constitution introduced a set of new social rights and obligations, such as compliance with legal regulations, protection of national property, proper performance of public functions, work according to one's abilities, and contribution to the common good, or the duty to defend the homeland. This chapter of the Constitution remained unchanged throughout its entire period of validity and became evidence of the contradiction between the wording of the Constitution and constitutional reality, because it was precisely during its validity that Czechoslovakia experienced a period of ignoring and suppressing fundamental civil and human rights and freedoms.<sup>219</sup>

*"Under the conditions of the emerging communist dictatorship, human and civil rights remained merely declaratory, with no possibility of enforcement. In particular, the judicial mechanisms for monitoring their observance were completely eliminated – there was no constitutional court, and the activities of the Supreme Administrative Court were gradually restricted, finally ending in 1950."*<sup>220</sup> In addition, in 1948, the National Assembly passed several laws, such as Act No. 231/1948 Coll. on the Protection of the People's Democratic Republic, the State Court Act No. 232/1948 Coll., and the Forced Labour

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<sup>218</sup> PETRÁŠ, R.: Tradice tzv. národnostního statutu a ústavní zákon č. 144/1968 Sb. o postavení národností. In: *Člověk a společnost*, 16, č.4, 2013; PETRÁŠ, R.: Menšinová otázka v prvé polovině komunistické éry. In: PETRÁŠ, R. - PETRŮV, H. - SCHEU, H. Ch. (Eds.): *Menšiny a právo v České republice*. Praha : Auditorium 2009, pp. 105-106.

<sup>219</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, p. 333; *Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948...*, pp. 329-369.

<sup>220</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. - JANÁK, J. - DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 425.

Camps Act No. 247/1948 Coll., which enabled political repression and clearly violated several civil rights and freedoms.<sup>221</sup>

The following chapters of the Constitution characterised the position of parliament, the President, the government, the Slovak national authorities, national committees, courts, the economic system, and general and final provisions. The sixth chapter on national committees and the eighth chapter on the economic system were new in Czechoslovak constitutional history. The seventh chapter on courts largely followed the provisions of the 1920 Constitutional Charter. It was later indirectly amended and supplemented by Constitutional Act No. 64/1952 on courts and the public prosecutor's office and subsequent laws. The Constitutional Court was not enshrined in the Constitution. Constitutional review was carried out by the Presidium of the National Assembly. The chapters concerning national committees were also amended. The chapter on the economic system was not formally amended, but a large number of legal regulations, in particular government and ministerial regulations and decrees, substantially changed and distorted its content.<sup>222</sup>

Overall, other significant changes also took place during this period. The mass media became instruments of propaganda, and culture and education also adapted to the new circumstances and the dominance of Marxist-Leninist ideology. Education was nationalised, and a new law was passed, introducing a unified system of primary and secondary schools. After February 1948, universities were subjected to extensive purges. The Law on the Protection of the People's Democratic Republic (No. 231/1948) allowed for harsh punishment of any resistance. Emigration to the West was a mass expression of resistance to the communist regime. Politicians, journalists, scientists, writers, and others left the country.<sup>223</sup>

The consolidation of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia and the establishment of absolute control were accompanied by widespread **persecution** of actual, alleged, or potential opponents of the regime. The most extensive repression occurred between 1948 and 1953. An atmosphere of fear prevailed, but at the same time, part of the population showed enthusiasm for building a new society. The repressive measures of the communist regime had several stages: from the initial stage immediately after February 1948, through attempts to impose a monopoly of power in all areas of social life from autumn 1948, to the peak stage associated with the years 1949–1950, when the regime sought to achieve a total restructuring of society

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<sup>221</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 425.

<sup>222</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, pp. 358-364.

<sup>223</sup> For more details, see RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socialismu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 81-132.

according to Soviet practice (industrialisation, collectivisation, cultural revolution, etc.).<sup>224</sup>

The regime focused primarily on political opponents and social groups it considered natural enemies of the communist regime. By 3 December 1948, 111 people had been arrested for political offences, and criminal charges had been filed against 395 people. The Constituent National Assembly subsequently legalised all measures taken by the Action Committees since 20 February 1948 by Act No. 213/48 Coll. of 21 July 1948, even though these were not in accordance with the laws in force at the time. Persons designated as unreliable by the regime were barred not only from working in the civil service, administrative commissions, and national committees, but also from employment in enterprises important for the defence of the state and in the management of national enterprises. The list of unreliable persons included not only offenders from the period of the Slovak State, but also former members of the DS, persons labelled as 'village rich', and others. Representatives of civil political parties were accused of criminal offences, creating special funds to finance political parties, illegal trade, profiteering, and even collaboration with foreign powers. The purges affected all areas of public life, including education and the security forces.<sup>225</sup>

Political persecution and repression were linked to political purges, exclusion from political or public life, and surveillance by the State Security Service (ŠtB). People in professions such as clergy, teachers, judges, civil servants, scientists, etc., were transferred to manual labour in industry. Another form of persecution involved economic measures. These included various forms of fines and penalties, increasing compulsory levies on farmers as part of recruitment into unified agricultural cooperatives, and so on. Economic persecution also included forced displacement from cities, confiscation of apartments, forced resettlement of persons deemed unsuitable to the regime from larger cities to the countryside, to the border areas, and even from the border areas, as well as the resettlement of "kulaks" and Hungarians to Bohemia. The most serious form of persecution was the restriction of personal freedom. The regime used a wide range of repressive methods, such as wiretapping, monitoring correspondence, surveillance by state security, and the aforementioned forced resettlement and isolation of, for example, Catholic bishops and priests. The highest form of persecution was imprisonment following political trials or even without trial.<sup>226</sup> A special form of repression was compulsory military service, assignment to auxiliary technical battalions, or internment and centralisation camps.

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<sup>224</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 115.

<sup>225</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 115-117.

<sup>226</sup> CUHRA, J.: Politické procesy. In: KOCIAN, J. et. al.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, pp. 689-692. Available at: [https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_dejiny\\_web\\_komplet.pdf](https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS_dejiny_web_komplet.pdf)

Following on from the concentration and labour camp systems of the previous period, forced labour camps were created in addition to the regular prison system, drawing on the experience of Soviet advisers. After the adoption of Act No. 247/1948 of 25 October 1948, the existing labour camps were renamed forced labour camps. Between 1948 and 1951, six forced labour camps were established in Slovakia, where prisoners were not placed based on court sentences, but based on decisions by classification commissions (idlers, political and economic subversives). In 1952, the entire prison system was transformed according to the Soviet model.<sup>227</sup>

**Political and judicial trials** began shortly after February 1948. Most of them were fabricated, and the defendants were often forced to give false confessions under severe psychological and physical pressure. Among the first to be charged were several officers of the Czechoslovak army, mainly those who had been active in the foreign resistance during the Second World War. Other victims of the political trials included former high-ranking officials of non-communist political parties. In 1950, the most notorious of these trials took place, involving the so-called “sabotage leadership of a conspiracy against the republic”. Four death sentences were handed down in this trial, including that of Milada Horáková, a leading figure of the National Socialist Party.

The Catholic Church also became a target of repression. In addition to the trials of some high-ranking church officials, actions in the early 1950s were also aimed at dissolving religious orders and banning the Greek Catholic Church.<sup>228</sup>

The atmosphere of general suspicion and the effort to uncover “enemies within our own ranks” turned repression inward toward the Communist Party itself. Paradoxically, even those who had previously participated in the creation of the totalitarian system became its victims. Political persecution affected both party officials and ordinary members. One of the most notorious “seditious groups” was the group around Rudolf Slánský, former general secretary of the Communist Party. In the **Slánský and others** trial<sup>229</sup>, fourteen officials of the Communist Party were convicted, including Vladimír Clementis, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Viliam Hajdu, Foreign Ministry official, Artur Simon, Communist journalist, Bedřich Geminder, prominent

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<sup>227</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 123-124.

<sup>228</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 117-120; CUHRA, J.: Politické procesy. In: KOCIAN, J. et. al.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, pp. 689-692; TOMEK, P.: Horáková a spol. In: KOCIAN, J. a kol.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, pp. 697-698; PEŠEK, J.: Církevní procesy. In: KOCIAN, J. a kol.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, pp. 575-576; BARNOVSKÝ, M.: Řeckokatolická církev. In: KOCIAN, J. a kol.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, p. 567. Available at: [https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_dejiny\\_web\\_komplet.pdf](https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS_dejiny_web_komplet.pdf)

<sup>229</sup> TOMEK, P.: Slánský a spol. In: KOCIAN, J. a kol.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, pp. 699-701. Available at: [https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_dejiny\\_web\\_komplet.pdf](https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS_dejiny_web_komplet.pdf)

party official, Eugen Löbl, Karel Šváb, and others. They were accused of attempting to create a second core within the leadership of the Communist Party. The trial began in November 1952 and resulted in 11 death sentences and 3 life sentences (Hajdu, Löbl, London). In the Valášek and others trial (Valášek, Viktorin, Sedmík, and others), prominent officials of the Slovak Ministry of the Interior, who had themselves participated in preparing compromising materials against other groups, were tried. They were accused of subversive and sabotage activities in connection with Rudolf Slánský's seditious conspiracy core and of attempting to subvert the people's democratic regime. They were accused of exploiting their position in the security apparatus and in connection with international Zionism by participating in the deportation of persons of Jewish origin to Israel after the war. They were also accused of collaborating with bourgeois nationalists (Husák and others). In December 1953, the Military College of the Supreme Court sentenced them to prison terms ranging from four to twenty-five years. Although their sentences were later reduced in 1958, they were still found guilty of sabotage.<sup>230</sup>

Leading representatives of the Slovak communists were accused in the trial of **bourgeois nationalists**. It was the culmination of a power-political dispute between two groups – the insurgent leadership of the KSS (especially Husák, Šmidke, and Novomeský) and the so-called Prague Slovaks (especially Široký, Ďuriš, and Bacílek). After February 1948 and the victory of the communists, there was room for the resolution of long-standing internal disputes within the KSS. Široký had the support of Gottwald and his associates (especially Antonín Zápotocký) and held the dominant position of chairman of the KSS. Together with Július Ďuriš, they also retained significant influence in the central party bodies (they remained members of the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia). However, Husák and Šmidke effectively controlled the legislative and executive bodies in Slovakia (Šmidke was chairman of the Slovak National Council and Husák was chairman of the Board of Commissioners) and consolidated their position in Slovakia by aggressively resolving the situation in February 1948. Široký gradually gained dominance, which he planned to use to gradually weaken the so-called rebel wing in the KSS and later to eliminate it. At the plenary session of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia on 27 and 28 September 1948, Široký gave a speech in which he expressed the idea of fighting against “petty-bourgeois nationalism” and suggested that it had already penetrated the highest bodies of the party. At that time, the ŠtB was already focusing on interrogating individuals who were supposed to prove the existence of groups inspired by the bourgeois-nationalist ideology of Yugoslavia. They also used the investigation of Hungarian Foreign

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<sup>230</sup> ŠTEFANSKÝ, M.: Proces s tzv. slovenskými buržoáznými nacionalisty. In: KOCIAN, J. et. al.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, p. 704. Available at: [https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_dejiny\\_web\\_komplet.pdf](https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS_dejiny_web_komplet.pdf)

Minister L. Rajk, who was convicted and executed in September 1949. Several names of Slovak communist officials (Clementis, Husák, Holdoš, Faltán, and others) appeared in the trial against Rajk, and Soviet advisers also became involved in the case.

By November 1949, the ŠtB was working with the premise that there was a group of bourgeois nationalists in the KSS, led by Clementis and his political friends Husák and Novomeský. Široký took advantage of this situation and, at the KSS congress in Bratislava on 24–27 May 1950, he completed his attack on this group. In his keynote speech, *“With Comrade Gottwald, bolder and faster forward to the construction of socialism in our homeland,”* he also criticised bourgeois nationalism in the KSS, and the group of Husák, Novomeský, and Šmidke was not re-elected to the Central Committee of the KSS. K. Šmidke was also dismissed from his position as chairman of the Slovak National Council. The accusations escalated to the criminal level in 1954, when a political trial was held against Gustáv Husák and others. The bourgeois nationalists (Husák, Clementis, Novomeský) were accused of subordinating the idea of a common class struggle to the national question (the Slovak question) and of joining forces with the Slovak bourgeoisie (the Democratic Party) in an effort to establish the powers of the Slovak national authorities. They, as well as others (Okáli, Valášek...), were accused of sabotaging the establishment of a security apparatus in Slovakia (especially in the first months after liberation). Due to Husák’s refusal to cooperate with investigators, the trial was postponed until a time when capital punishment was no longer demanded. Husák did not confess to seditious activities and demanded his acquittal in court. The trial took place in April 1954. Husák was sentenced to life imprisonment, Horváth to 22 years, Okáli to 18, Holdoš to 13, and Novomeský to 10 years in prison. Husák’s sentence was reduced to 25 years in 1955. Even the “exposure” of the cult of personality in the Soviet Union and the creation of the first Barák Commission to investigate injustice (also given that the members of the commission were people responsible for political trials) did not lead to fundamental changes (only Novomeský’s sentence was suspended).<sup>231</sup>

In the first half of the 1950s alone, 232 death sentences were carried out, and the number of political prisoners exceeded 200,000. Only a small proportion of the victims (mainly communists) were rehabilitated in the 1960s, while the rest were rehabilitated only after the fall of the communist regime in 1989.<sup>232</sup>

The foreign policy of Czechoslovakia was shaped by the fact that it had become an integral part of the Soviet power bloc. In 1949, Czechoslovakia became a member **of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA)**, which was intended to be an

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<sup>231</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 120-122; ŠTEFANSKÝ, M.: *Proces s tzv. slovenskými buržoáznymi nacionalistami*. In: KOCIAN, J. et. al.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, p. 704. Available at: [https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_dejiny\\_web\\_komplet.pdf](https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS_dejiny_web_komplet.pdf)

<sup>232</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 662.

instrument of economic integration within the Soviet bloc, and a member of the military-political **Warsaw Pact**, established in 1955.<sup>233</sup>

Economic development after February 1948 was characterised by structural transformation of industry, changes in the social stratification of society, and the introduction of a new school system (the so-called unified school system). The nationalisation of industry, the confiscation of businesses, and the collectivisation of agriculture completed the state takeover of the economy. The private sector was eliminated. The economy was managed from a single centre and according to a central plan, with political goals usually taking precedence over economic ones. The economy was managed by an extensive bureaucratic apparatus headed by the State Planning Office through five-year economic plans. Enterprises lost their autonomy and became mere executors of assigned tasks. Political purges were carried out in enterprises, and experts were replaced by politically reliable cadres, who, however, were often not sufficiently professionally prepared for their positions. Also in the economic matters, Czechoslovakia's orientation towards the USSR and other countries of the CMEA was dominant. Particular emphasis was placed on the development of heavy industry, primarily to meet the military needs of the entire Soviet bloc. Arms production quadrupled between 1950 and 1952.<sup>234</sup>

In February 1949, a law on unified agricultural cooperatives (JRD) was passed, initiating the first wave of collectivisation based on the Soviet model. The next phase of collectivisation in the early 1950s was accompanied by harsh political and economic pressure on farmers, such as the forced purchase of machinery, high state supply quotas at low prices, and penalties for non-compliance. The persecution mainly affected the "village rich", who, according to the communist regime, were the main obstacle to collectivisation. After the third phase of collectivisation, in the second half of the 1950s, agricultural cooperatives came to dominate agriculture in Czechoslovakia.<sup>235</sup>

In the spring of 1953, Stalinism was replaced by an initial wave of de-Stalinisation and a crisis of the regime. On 5 March 1953, J. V. Stalin died, followed shortly afterwards by Czechoslovak President **Klement Gottwald** on 14 March 1953. **Antonín Zápotocký** became the new President, and **Antonín Novotný** took up the newly created position of First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). Although the new leadership initially intended to continue with the established political course, under various pressures, the KSČ leadership finally announced a "new course" of economic policy in the autumn of 1953. The shift was related to the fact that the economy was on the verge of collapse, and there were the first mass public demonstrations of discontent. Another reason for the population's dissatisfaction was

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<sup>233</sup> VESELÝ, Z.: *Mezinárodní vztahy v zrcadle dějin*. Plzeň: Vydavatelství a nakladatelství Aleš Čeněk, s.r.o. 2020, pp. 434, 449-450.

<sup>234</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha: Argo, 2019, pp. 656-657.

<sup>235</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha: Argo, 2019, p. 659.

the currency reform of June 1953, which resulted in the exchange of cash at a ratio of 5:1 and the exchange of bank deposits at a ratio of up to 50:1. At the same time, the rationing system was abolished and uniform retail prices were introduced. For most of the population, the cost of living increased, and their savings were devalued.<sup>236</sup>

The “new course” of economic policy brought about an improvement in the standard of living in the following years. Greater attention was given to the production of consumer goods, wages increased, retail prices were reduced, and adjustments were made to agricultural policy. However, this policy ended at the turn of 1956–1957. Already in the spring of 1956, domestic political developments in Czechoslovakia were influenced by the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), at which N. S. Khrushchev condemned some of Stalin’s crimes in his speech. The upheavals that took place in Poland, but especially in Hungary, caused the Czechoslovak leadership to limit de-Stalinisation to minor political adjustments. On the contrary, from 1957 onwards, continuity with the developments of 1948–1953 was restored. After the death of Antonín Zápotocký at the end of 1957, Antonín Novotný strengthened his position, becoming President while remaining First Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.<sup>237</sup> *“The priority construction of heavy industry continued, a second wave of collectivisation followed, and a “hard line” was taken against the “wavering” intelligentsia. However, this was not a return to Stalinism, but rather neo-Stalinism... Fundamental changes in the economy, ownership, social relations, way of life, and culture were inconceivable without violence and terror, applied on a mass scale throughout society. They were accompanied by an ideology of social promises, but also by real social advancement for individuals and groups who had been most humiliated and wronged in the past (promotion of workers to leadership positions, preferential treatment of employees in heavy industry, manifestations of egalitarianism, etc.). According to the ideology and propaganda of the time, changes in ownership and the elimination of exploitative classes were a prerequisite for the creation of a prosperous economy and an optimally functioning society. It was a period of belief among the power elite in the omnipotent power of the “base” determining the “superstructure” and cadres who “decide everything”, a period of educating a “new, socialist intelligentsia”.*<sup>238</sup>

The adoption of a new socialist Constitution in 1960 formally confirmed the changes in Czechoslovakia. The new Constitution contained an article on the “leading role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in society” and a new name for the state, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (ČSSR).

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<sup>236</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 664.

<sup>237</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, pp. 664-665, 694; RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 135-161.

<sup>238</sup> PEŠEK, J.: *Československo a Slovensko roku 1968 – socializmus, politika, ekonomika. Politický vývoj na Slovensku: od prevratu 1948 do roku 1967/68*. In: LONDÁK, M. – SIKORA, S. a kol.: *Rok 1968 a jeho miesto v našich dejinách*. Bratislava : Veda, 2009, pp. 13-14.

#### 4.1 Political system

##### Legislative power

Legislative power belonged to **the National Assembly**, which, according to the 1948 Constitution, was unicameral and consisted of 300 members elected for six years. In the 1948 elections, 300 members were still elected to the National Assembly, and the elections were held based on a single National Front candidate list in the original electoral districts. However, under Constitutional Act No. 24/1954 Coll., the 1954 elections were held in single-member constituencies, with one member elected in each constituency under the absolute majority system. The constituencies were created on the basis of one seat per 35,000 inhabitants, increasing the total number of deputies in the National Assembly to 368 from that year onward.<sup>239</sup>

As regards the powers of the National Assembly, this chapter of the Constitution largely followed the 1920 Constitution. At their first meeting, the members of the National Assembly took an oath, the exact wording of which was set out in the Constitution. Refusal to take the oath resulted in the loss of the mandate. Members could resign their mandate at any time. They were accountable to the voters, who could recall them, although this never occurred. The consent of the National Assembly was required to prosecute a member. The President of the Republic convened regular sessions of the Assembly twice a year. The spring session was held in March and the autumn session in October. He could also convene extraordinary sessions as necessary if at least half of all members requested it through the Prime Minister and specified the subject of the meeting. In this case, the President had to convene the session within 14 days of the request being submitted. If he failed to do so, the Presidium would convene the meeting within a further 14 days. The President also declared the session closed and could also adjourn the session, but for no longer than one month and no more than once a year. The President also had the right to dissolve the National Assembly, although this power could not be exercised during the final six months of his term. The National Assembly had a quorum if at least one-third of its members were present, and a simple majority of those present was required to pass a law. In the event of a declaration of war, a constitutional amendment, or the adoption of a constitutional act, a three-fifths majority of all members of the National Assembly was required. The same majority was required for a resolution condemning the President of the Republic or a member of the government in criminal proceedings to be valid. According to the Constitution, the government and members of parliament had the right of legislative initiative.

The President could exercise the right of veto. He could do so within one month of the date on which the resolution of the National Assembly was submitted to the government. In order for the presidential veto to be overturned, a roll-call vote and the approval of a majority of all members of parliament were required. In the case of a law

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<sup>239</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, p. 331.

requiring a three-fifths majority of all members, the law had to be returned and approved by this three-fifths majority. Laws were signed by the President, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, and the minister responsible for their implementation.

The National Assembly could interpellate the Prime Minister and members of the government, who were obliged to respond to these questions. The powers of the National Assembly included, for example, deciding on the budget and examining the state's final accounts. Its powers also included the election of the President. The government was collectively and individually accountable to the National Assembly.

The National Assembly elected a 24-member Presidium from among its members. The Presidium was always elected for a term of one year. It assumed most of the powers between sessions. According to the Constitution, the Presidium could not elect the President or Vice-President, amend the Constitution or constitutional laws, extend compulsory military service or permanently burden state finances, or decide to declare war. If the National Assembly was unable to meet due to extraordinary events, the Presidium's restrictions were limited to the election of the President or Vice-President and constitutional amendments.

The presence of half of the members and the votes of a majority of all those present were sufficient for the Presidium to make decisions. Measures that would require the enactment of a law or the approval of extra-budgetary financing required the consent of a majority of all members of the Presidium. Urgent measures that would otherwise require a law were only permissible upon government proposal. Such measures were signed by the President of the Republic, the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, and at least half of the ministers. Measures that were rejected by the President or the Prime Minister could not be enacted. All such measures were subject to subsequent review by the Constitutional Court (which, however, was not established). The President had to report on the activities of the Presidium as soon as the National Assembly reconvened. The National Assembly then had to approve these measures. If it failed to do so within two months of reconvening, these measures lost their validity.<sup>240</sup>

In addition to the Presidium, there was also a more select presidium, comprising the Speaker and Vice-Speakers. Members of Parliament were organised into parliamentary clubs formed according to their political affiliation. From 1954, parliamentary clubs were replaced by regional associations of members, which grouped members according to their place of election, i.e., bringing together members elected in the constituency of a single regional national committee. The narrower

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<sup>240</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948..., pp. 329-369. [Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic. Constitutional Act No. 150/1948 Coll.]

presidium and representatives of these associations then formed a council of members.<sup>241</sup>

As for the position of the National Assembly, given the concentration of power in the closest leadership of the Communist Party, the National Assembly was losing its significance, as evidenced by the fact that not a single case of any other than unanimous voting was recorded.<sup>242</sup> *“The function of the National Assembly of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was no longer to regulate political conflicts in the process of political decision-making, as it had been in a parliamentary democracy, but only to transfer the political will of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia to state power through legislative activity.”*<sup>243</sup>

The change in the status of the legislative body is also evidenced by the fact that the number of laws passed by the National Assembly gradually decreased, while the number of legislative measures taken by the Presidium of the National Assembly increased. However, the most significant increase was in the number of government regulations and other secondary normative acts issued by ministries and other central state administration bodies.<sup>244</sup> The Speakers of the National Assembly were Oldřich John from 1948 to 1953 and Zdeněk Fierlinger from 1953 to 1964.<sup>245</sup>

## **Executive Power**

### **President**

The constitutional chapter devoted to the position of the **President** also followed on from the 1920 Constitution, meaning that the position and powers of the President were largely similar to those under the 1920 Constitutional Charter. Unlike the 1920 Constitution, however, the President was no longer referred to as the head of state, but only mentioned as *“the President of the Republic is the head of the state”*.

The President was elected by the National Assembly. Candidates had to be Czechoslovak citizens eligible for election to the National Assembly and had to be at least 35 years of age. For the election to be valid, a majority of all members of the National Assembly had to be present, and the candidate had to be approved by a three-fifths majority of those present. If none of the candidates received a sufficient number of votes, a second round of voting was held. If no candidate succeeded, a narrower election was held between the candidates who received the most votes in the second round. The candidate who received the most votes won. In the event of a tie, the decision was made by lot. The election was to take place in the last four weeks before the end of the term of office.

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<sup>241</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 424.

<sup>242</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, p. 340.

<sup>243</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, pp. 111-112.

<sup>244</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, p. 340.

<sup>245</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 126.

The President was elected for seven years, and a person could only be elected twice in a row. A third term was possible only after seven years had elapsed since the end of the second term. However, the Constitution explicitly stated that this provision did not apply to the second President of the Czechoslovak Republic.<sup>246</sup> This wording was taken from the 1920 Constitution, where it had referred to Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk.

According to the Constitution, the President could not be a member of parliament or a member of the government. For the first time, the Czechoslovak Constitution included the literal text of the presidential oath: *"I swear on my honour and conscience that I will perform my duties in the spirit of the people's democratic system, according to the will of the people and in the interests of the people, that I will look after the welfare of the republic and that I will abide by the Constitution and other laws."*<sup>247</sup>

If the President was busy, ill, or a new President had not been elected (e.g., in the event of death), the government replaced him in the exercise of his functions in accordance with the Constitution. If this situation lasted longer than six months and the government agreed, the National Assembly could elect a Vice-President to represent the President until the obstacles preventing him from performing his duties had been removed. If a member of the National Assembly was elected Vice-President, he could not exercise his mandate during this period.

The President represented the state externally, negotiated and ratified international treaties. The conclusion of political treaties and general economic treaties, and treaties requiring legislative implementation, needed the consent of the National Assembly before ratification. Treaties altering state territory were approved by the National Assembly in the form of a constitutional act. The President could delegate the negotiation of certain international treaties and agreements that did not require the consent of the National Assembly to the government or, with its approval, to individual ministers. The President received and appointed ambassadors, declared a state of war based on a government resolution, and, on the decision of the National Assembly, declared war, convened, adjourned, and dissolved the National Assembly and declared its session closed, signed laws approved by the National Assembly and measures taken by its Presidium. He also had the right of veto, with absolute veto power over decisions of the Presidium of the National Assembly.

The President did not have the right of legislative initiative, but he could report to the National Assembly orally or in writing on the state of the republic and could also recommend measures he considered necessary. He appointed the Prime Minister and ministers and determined their ministerial portfolios. He dismissed the government upon its resignation or individual resignations of members. He had the right to attend and chair government meetings, invite the government or its members to

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<sup>246</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948..., pp. 329-369.

<sup>247</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948..., pp. 329-369.

consultations, or request reports from the government or its ministers. He appointed all university professors and judges, officers, and high-ranking civil servants. He conferred honours, unless another body was authorised to do so, and permitted Czechoslovak citizens to accept foreign honours and titles. He could also grant amnesty, pardon, or commute sentences and legal consequences of convictions by criminal courts and order that criminal proceedings not be initiated or continued (except in private prosecutions). An exception applied if the President himself was indicted or convicted of treason. He was also the Commander-in-Chief of all armed forces. In terms of powers, there were no substantial differences compared to the 1920 Constitution.

According to the Constitution, the President was not responsible for the performance of his office. The government was responsible for all acts related to the presidential office. All acts of the President relating to governmental and executive power required the countersignature of the responsible member of the government to be valid. The President could only be prosecuted for treason. The President was indicted by the Presidium of the National Assembly and tried by the National Assembly. The only punishment applicable was loss of office and ineligibility to run for office again. All provisions relating to the President also applied to the Vice-President.<sup>248</sup> Thus, there were no significant changes in the Constitution compared to 1920.<sup>249</sup>

The real weight of the President of the Republic during this period stemmed primarily from the fact that the President also held one of the highest positions in the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. This was the case with Klement Gottwald in 1948–1953, Antonín Zápotocký in 1953–1957, and Antonín Novotný in 1957–1968.<sup>250</sup>

## Government

The position of the **Government** was regulated in Chapter IV of the Constitution. The government consisted of the Prime Minister, his deputies, and other members (ministers and state secretaries). The Prime Minister and members of the government were appointed and dismissed by the President. Members of the government took their oath of office before the President of the Republic. The text of the oath was part of the Constitution.

After its appointment, the government presented its programme to the National Assembly and requested a vote of confidence. The government was accountable only to the National Assembly, which could pass a vote of no confidence in it. A motion of

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<sup>248</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948..., pp. 329-369.

<sup>249</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, pp. 424-425.

<sup>250</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, p. 346; DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 1140.

no confidence had to be submitted by at least 100 members of Parliament, and the Presidium then had to submit a report within eight days. A majority of members of Parliament had to be present for a vote of no confidence, and a majority of them had to vote in favour of the motion. Voting was conducted by roll call. The same voting procedure applied if the government itself requested a vote of confidence. In that case, the motion was not submitted to the Presidium. If the National Assembly passed a vote of no confidence in the government or failed to pass a vote of confidence, the government submitted its resignation to the President. If, during the period when the government was to submit its resignation, the presidential office was being exercised by the government, the resignation was accepted by the Presidium of the National Assembly. A government that had resigned continued to perform its duties until the National Assembly expressed confidence in the newly appointed government. A vote of no confidence could also be expressed in individual members of the government.

Members of the government were criminally liable if they intentionally or through gross negligence violated constitutional or other laws within the scope of their official duties. Charges were brought by the Presidium of the National Assembly, and the criminal proceedings were conducted by the Assembly.

The government made decisions as a body and was quorate if a majority of ministers were present. The government decided in plenary session on all important matters of a political nature, on the appointment of judges, civil servants, and officers from the 5th salary scale upward, and on proposals for the appointment of officials appointed by the President of the Republic. It also decided on the appointment and dismissal of the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners and individual commissioners, on government proposals to the National Assembly, on government regulations, and on proposals for the President of the Republic to exercise his right to return an approved law with comments to the National Assembly. It also decided on laws of the Slovak National Council submitted to it by the Prime Minister if he believed that they contradicted the Constitution or a constitutional act, exceeded the powers of the SNR, or conflicted with the unified economic plan or budget law. The government could issue regulations to implement a particular law. Government regulations were signed by the Prime Minister or his deputy and the ministers responsible for their implementation. Ministries were established by law, which could delegate more detailed regulation, particularly of their powers, to government regulations. The same applied to other bodies responsible for public administration.<sup>251</sup>

The position of the government was significantly strengthened by Act No. 241/1948 Coll. of 27 October 1948 on the first five-year economic development plan of the Czechoslovak Republic, which authorised the government to issue regulations with the force of law. Since the act stated that it could issue “measures necessary to fulfil

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<sup>251</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948..., pp. 329-369.

the tasks of the five-year plan, which would otherwise require a law”, this was an exceptionally broad authorisation and not limited solely to economic matters. Such a regulation required the consent of the President and his countersignature. The authorisation did not extend to the adjustment of constitutional relations, the approval of the state budget, credit operations, and the adjustment of the state debt, the adjustment of taxes, customs duties, and other public levies in the field of state financial administration, or the adjustment of state financial monopolies. Nor could it apply to the adjustment of monetary matters. Within one month of its announcement, the government had to submit the decree to the National Assembly. The National Assembly had to approve it by a majority vote of all members, otherwise the decree would expire on the thirtieth day after the date of the resolution. The authorisation also had a long-term effect, which was regularly extended in subsequent laws on the following five-year plans.<sup>252</sup>

This period was also characterised by the creation of a large number of new central state administration bodies headed by a member of the government. Act No. 143/1949 Coll. granted the government the right to change and abolish the powers of public administration bodies and to abolish public administration bodies. Constitutional Act No. 47/1950 Coll. gave the government the power to establish and abolish ministries and to regulate their powers by government decree.<sup>253</sup> As a result, the number of ministries and other central state administration bodies increased significantly in the 1950s. In 1955, for example, there were 48.<sup>254</sup>

Until he was elected President, Klement Gottwald served as Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, replaced in 1948 by Antonín Zápotocký. After he was elected President following Gottwald’s death in 1953, Viliam Široký became Prime Minister from 1953 to 1963.<sup>255</sup>

### **Slovak national bodies**

The fifth chapter of the Constitution was devoted to Slovak national bodies, which were considered to be the executors of legislative, executive, and governmental power in Slovakia.<sup>256</sup> In reality, however, their activities were curtailed, and the centralisation of power that had begun with the Prague Agreements continued.<sup>257</sup> *“The strengthening of the position of the central authorities was justified by the victory of the working class and by*

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<sup>252</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, pp. 349, 413.

<sup>253</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, p. 352.

<sup>254</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 436.

<sup>255</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II.* Bratislava : VEDA 2014, pp. 1140, 1159.

<sup>256</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948..., pp. 329-369.

<sup>257</sup> For more on the curtailment of the powers of Slovak national authorities and the centralisation of power after February 1948, see: RYCHLÍK, J.: *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Česko-slovenské vztahy 1945 – 1992.* Bratislava : Academic Electronic Press 1998, pp. 119-130.

*the fact that Slovakia no longer had to fear the influence of the Czech bourgeoisie and Beneš's Czechoslovakism. There were also opinions that Slovak national authorities should be abolished and equality achieved through the industrialisation of Slovakia and economic equalisation.*"<sup>258</sup>

The ban on majority rule in the National Assembly was abolished, and the position of central institutions, especially the government, was strengthened vis-à-vis Slovak national bodies. The position of state secretaries in the most important ministries was also abolished; previously, if a minister was Czech, the state secretary had to be Slovak.

**The Slovak National Council** exercised legislative power in matters of a national or regional character, insofar as this was necessary to ensure the full development of the material and spiritual forces of the Slovak nation, if the matter in question required special regulation and if it did not concern matters requiring uniform legal regulation.

According to the Constitution of 9 May, the SNR had 100 members elected for six years in the same constituencies as those created in Slovakia for elections to the National Assembly. However, the first general and direct elections to the SNR since its establishment in 1943 were not held until 28 November 1954, based on SNR Act No. 7/1954, because during the elections to the National Assembly on 30 May 1948, elections to the SNR were not held and the SNR was only supplemented according to the results of the elections to the National Assembly.<sup>259</sup>

Representatives of political parties were therefore delegated to the SNR by individual political parties, which could also dismiss them. However, the 1954 elections were held in individual constituencies, with one SNR member elected per 35,000 inhabitants. As a result, the Slovak National Council had 104 deputies after the 1954 elections.<sup>260</sup>

The seat of the SNR was in Bratislava. Its sessions were convened by the Prime Minister. He also had the right to adjourn a meeting, but for a maximum of three months and no more than twice a year. However, if a majority of SNR members requested a meeting during this period, the Prime Minister was obliged to convene it within 14 days. The Slovak National Council was dissolved by the Prime Minister based on a government resolution. In such a case, or in the event of the expiry of the electoral term, new elections had to be held within 60 days. The Slovak National Council elected its Presidium from among its members. Meetings were chaired by the President or one of the Vice-Presidents. Meetings were generally public, except in cases specified in the rules of procedure. The Slovak National Council could deliberate if at least half of the members were present. The approval of a resolution required the consent of a majority of those present. The Prime Minister and other members of the government had the right to attend meetings of the SNR or its committees at any time.

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<sup>258</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 124.

<sup>259</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948..., pp. 329-369.

<sup>260</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960...*, p. 331.

The Chairman and other members of the Board of Commissioners had the same right. In their case, however, the SNR, its Presidium, or any committee could request the presence of a member of the Board of Commissioners, who was then obliged to attend the meeting in person. Otherwise, a member of the Board of Commissioners could be represented by officials from his office. The Slovak National Council was entitled to question the Chairman and other members of the Board of Commissioners on matters within their competence.

In the case of the SNR, the right of legislative initiative belonged to the government, the Board of Commissioners, or the deputies of the SNR. According to the Constitution, the laws of the Slovak National Council were to be signed by the Prime Minister, the President of the SNR, the President of the Board of Commissioners, and the Commissioner responsible for implementing the law. If the Prime Minister believed that a law of the Slovak National Council submitted to him for signature was contrary to the Constitution or a constitutional law, exceeded the powers of the SNR, or was contrary to the unified economic plan or budget law, he had the right to submit it to the government within 14 days, which then made a final decision within two months.

According to the Constitution of 9 May, the **Board of Commissioners** held all governmental and executive power in Slovakia, except in matters of national defence, foreign policy, and foreign trade. According to the Constitution, the Board of Commissioners had governmental and executive power not only in matters falling within the competence of the SNR, but also in matters of a national nature. It was therefore not only the executive body of the SNR, but also the executive body of the government in Prague. The Board of Commissioners was appointed and dismissed by the Prague government. It consisted of a Chairman and other Commissioners. Its seat was in Bratislava. The Board of Commissioners and its members were accountable to the government. In terms of the legislative powers of the SNR, the Board of Commissioners was also accountable to the Slovak National Council in matters specified in Section 96 (1).

The Board of Commissioners issued regulations and relevant measures in the form of decrees within the territory of Slovakia in the area of legislative power of the SNR. The Board of Commissioners made decisions in a body that was quorate if at least half of the commissioners were present. The Board could also submit proposals to the government for the appointment of university professors, judges, and other civil servants, who were to be appointed by the President on the recommendation of the government. In the case of other judges and civil servants, who were normally appointed by the government, in Slovakia, they were appointed by the Board of Commissioners, and it required the prior approval of the government. Employees who were normally appointed by a minister were appointed by a commissioner and required the prior consent of the relevant minister. However, this power did not apply

to the appointment of civil servants in the national security corps or in matters that did not fall within the competence of the Board of Commissioners (national defence, foreign policy, foreign trade). If a regulation, resolution, or measure of the Board of Commissioners or a Commissioner exceeded its powers or was contrary to the Constitution, law, law of the Slovak National Council, government regulation, ministerial regulation, or government resolution, the government could repeal it.<sup>261</sup> Concerning foreign policy, defence, and key sectors of the national economy, the government exercised its power directly in Slovakia.<sup>262</sup>

However, the activities of Slovak national bodies were restricted in the early 1950s. There were several reasons for this restriction. They were related to the restriction of the activities of legislative bodies in general, because during this period, the activities of the National Assembly were also restricted, and the legal norms issued by Parliament were replaced by government declarations and measures. However, it was also related to the campaign against so-called Slovak bourgeois nationalism, which was also directed against the President of the Board of Commissioners, Gustáv Husák, the Speaker of the Slovak National Council, Karol Šmidke, and the commissioners Ladislav Novomeský and Daniel Okáli. In 1950, the government dismissed Husák from his position as Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, amid fabricated accusations of bourgeois nationalism. As part of the centralisation of state administration, the ministries were reorganised several times, and their competences were changed and adjusted (e.g. in 1951–1953), which was made possible by the fact that, under Act No. 47/1950 of 18 May 1950 on the adjustment and organisation of public administration, the government could change the composition, number and scope of the ministries by its decrees.<sup>263</sup>

Between 1950 and 1953, the SNR passed only two laws and held only nine meetings, four of which were ceremonial.<sup>264</sup> As early as June 1948, only members of the satellite Party of Slovak Revival (three ministries) were represented in the new Board of Commissioners headed by Gustáv Husák. After the departure of its leading officials abroad, the Freedom Party had no representation in the Board of Commissioners until its dissolution in 1960. The chairmen of the Board of Commissioners were Husák until 1950, Bacílek from 1950 to 1951, Ďuriš from 1951 to 1953, and Strechaj from 1953 to 1960.<sup>265</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Ústava Československé republiky. Ústavní zákon č. 150/1948 Sb. ze dne 9. května 1948..., pp. 329-369.

<sup>262</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. - JANÁK, J. - DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 427.

<sup>263</sup> RÁKOŠ, E. - RUDOHRADSKÝ, Š.: *Slovenské národné orgány 1943 - 1968...*, p. 161.

<sup>264</sup> ŠTEFANSKÝ, M.: Postavenie SNR v rokoch 1948 - 1967. In: PEKNÍK, M. (Ed.): *Slovenské národné rady*. Bratislava : Národné literárne centrum - Dom slovenskej literatúry 1998, pp. 153-154.

<sup>265</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 - 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 125-127.

A change in the status of Slovak national bodies occurred in 1956. Constitutional Act No. 33/1956 Coll. of 31 July 1956 on Slovak national bodies was adopted. It replaced the entire fifth chapter of the Constitution of 9 May. It strengthened the powers of the Slovak National Council. From then on, it could adopt laws of the Slovak National Council, appoint and dismiss the Board of Commissioners and its individual members, determine their number and portfolios, discuss and approve the development plan for the national economy of Slovakia, discuss and approve the budget of Slovakia, discuss reports from the Board of Commissioners and individual commissioners on issues of socialist construction in Slovakia, and ensure favourable conditions for the economic and cultural life of citizens of Hungarian and Ukrainian nationality in the spirit of equality.

SNR members were elected for six years according to electoral districts, with one SNR member per 35,000 inhabitants. Thus, the proportional representation system was definitively changed to a system in which only one National Front candidate was elected in the district in general, equal, direct elections by secret ballot. The candidate who received a majority of all votes cast was elected. The principle of the imperative mandate remained in force, meaning that an elected member could be dismissed by a vote of the voters in the constituency and was also bound by party instructions. The Slovak National Council elected an eleven-member presidium from among its members. The right of legislative initiative belonged to the Board of Commissioners or the members of the SNR. Laws were signed by the Speaker of the SNR, the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, and the Commissioner responsible for implementing the law. Unlike under the previous arrangement, the Prime Minister no longer had the right to veto laws passed by the SNR. The Presidium of the National Assembly ensured the constitutionality of the SNR acts.<sup>266</sup>

According to the 1956 amendment, the Board of Commissioners was the national body of governmental and executive power in Slovakia. It consisted of a Chairman, Vice-chairmen, and other members (commissioners). The Board of Commissioners and its individual members were no longer appointed and dismissed by the government, but by the Slovak National Council.<sup>267</sup> The Board of Commissioners managed all branches and sections of state administration in Slovakia, including the system of national committees in Slovakia, except for matters that were administered directly by the government. However, some of the government's powers were abolished or restricted when the government defined a range of issues for which the state plan only set out the main tasks and principles of management, with the final decision resting

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<sup>266</sup> Ústavný zákon č. 33/1956 Sb. zo dňa 31. júla 1956, o slovenských národných orgánoch. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavným dejinám Československa II. 1945 – 1960*. Praha : Karolinum 2006, pp. 492-498; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 428.

<sup>267</sup> Ústavný zákon č. 33/1956 Zb. zo dňa 31. júla 1956, o slovenských národných orgánoch..., pp. 492-498.

with the Board of Commissioners. There were still disputes over competencies, mainly resulting from the interference of ministries in the sphere of the Board of Commissioners.<sup>268</sup>

Despite the strengthened position of the Slovak bodies, this was a purely formal change that did not alter the actual constitutional relations. In reality, their activities were negligible because, as before this change, all decision-making was concentrated in the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.<sup>269</sup> This was by no means a fundamental solution to the Czech-Slovak relationship, but only an unsuccessful attempt to reincarnate the autonomous position of the Slovak national bodies. The change in the law was not based on the need to change the status of Slovak national bodies, but rather to internally stabilise the state after criticism of Stalinism and to find other substitute problems whose solution could at least partially weaken the wave of criticism and discontent that arose in all so-called people's democracies after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, at which some of the crimes of Stalinism were revealed.<sup>270</sup> The 1960 Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic abolished the Board of Commissioners and created a unified law. The 1960 Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic abolished the Board of Commissioners and created a unified legislative, executive, and governmental body, the SNR.

### **Party system**

After February 1948, the **Communist Party of Czechoslovakia** took power in Czechoslovakia. The change in political power was immediately reflected in a sharp increase in Communist Party membership. As for the situation in the Communist Party in Slovakia, after February 1948, the position of the Prague Slovaks around Viliam Široký was further strengthened. After February 1948, the existence of two separate Communist parties was no longer politically advantageous, so in September 1948, the KSS ceased to exist as a separate political party and became a territorial organisational unit of the unified KSC. This officially confirmed the decisive role of Klement Gottwald and his Slovak supporters Široký, Ďuriš, and David, who were supported by other officials and loyal collaborators holding key party and state positions in Slovakia (Bašťovanský, Holdoš, Bacílek, and others).

After eliminating the influence of Husák's group, whose members were isolated in connection with the planned trials against Slovak bourgeois nationalists, Bacílek, David, and Strechaj established themselves in the leadership of the Communist Party in Slovakia, alongside Široký, who was mainly active in Prague. They controlled the

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<sup>268</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. - JANÁK, J. - DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 428.

<sup>269</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 - 1960...*, p. 492.

<sup>270</sup> ŠTEFANSKÝ, M.: *Postavenie SNR v rokoch 1948 - 1967...*, p. 156; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa II. 1945 - 1960...*, p. 492.

apparatus of the Communist Party in Slovakia and, through it, the security services. Until 1963, their positions remained unchallenged, and they thus thwarted any attempts at reform.<sup>271</sup>

There was also a merger between the Communist Party and the Social Democrats, which had been contemplated by the Social Democratic leadership in Prague shortly after February 1948, and in the “new era”, Zdeněk Fierlinger and Bohumil Laušmann returned to the old ideas of organisational unity between Communists and Social Democrats. The Slovak Social Democrats were also informed about the negotiations through I. Frlička. The leadership of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party in Slovakia declared in a response to the members of the ČSSDS that the establishment of the Labour Party had been a major mistake. They announced the dissolution of Social Democratic Party organisations and their entry into the KSČ, and called on all their members to join the KSS. Thus, the unification did not take the form of a merger of two political parties, but rather the de facto dissolution of one political entity.<sup>272</sup>

As for the civic political parties in Slovakia, those members of the DS who accepted the results of the communist coup and were willing to cooperate with the Communist Party formed the **Party of Slovak Revival** at the turn of February and March 1948, which was accepted into the National Front. The most prominent representatives of the DS emigrated abroad (Jozef Lettrich, Michal Kvetko, Ervín Böhm, Rudolf Fraštický, František Hodža, and others). Those who remained or were unable to flee were tried, imprisoned, and discriminated against (Ivan Pietor, Ján Ursíny, Mikuláš Bugár, Ján Kempný, Ján Lichner, Jozef Styk, and others). Many ordinary members and officials of the party defected to the Communist Party. Between 1948 and 1952, J. Ševčík, who was also deputy chairman of the National Assembly and Deputy Prime Minister, served as chairman of the Party of Slovak Revival. Despite his cooperation with the Communist Party, he was arrested in May 1952 after a provocation by the State Security (ŠtB). In 1954, after two years in custody, the Supreme Court in Prague sentenced him to 18 years in prison and confiscation of his property for treason and espionage. He was released under an amnesty in 1960 and rehabilitated in 1965. Jozef Kyselý was the chairman of the Party of Slovak Revival from 1952 to 1965, and Jozef Mjartan from 1966.<sup>273</sup>

After February 1948, the most prominent representatives of the **Freedom Party**, who were unable to cope with the new situation or feared repression by representatives of

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<sup>271</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 112-114; PEŠEK, J.: Československo a Slovensko roku 1968 – socializmus, politika, ekonomika. Politický vývoj na Slovensku: od prevratu 1948 do roku 1967/68. In: LONDÁK, M. – SIKORA, S. a kol.: *Rok 1968 a jeho miesto v našich dejinách*. Bratislava : Veda, 2009, pp. 12-42.

<sup>272</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 109-111.

<sup>273</sup> HLAVOVÁ, V.: Strana slovenskej obrody. In: KOCIAN, J. a kol.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, pp. 248-250. Available at: [https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_dejiny\\_web\\_komplet.pdf](https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS_dejiny_web_komplet.pdf)

the victorious political party, left Czechoslovakia. Between May and June 1948, leading party representatives Jozef Dieška, Pavol Blaho, and Ján Beharka left the republic. The Freedom Party Chairman Viliam Pokojný, Vice-Chairmen Vojtech Bohuš and Vladimír R. Bunda, and General Secretary Ladislav M. Čada attempted to stabilise the party's membership base and programme in the following period, but in the 1950s they too found themselves in prison. In July 1956, the Regional Court in Bratislava handed down severe sentences of 6 to 11 years in prison for treason to the "Pokojný group". Michal Žákovič became the new chairman of the Freedom Party and remained at the head of the party until he died in 1986. Throughout this period, the Freedom Party accepted the leading role of the Communist Party.<sup>274</sup>

After February 1948, the members of the National Front definitively included "*not only existing political parties that fully accepted the decisive role of the Communist Party, but also associations and interest (mass and social) organisations. In this way, the communist regime continued the regime of the People's Party from the war years, subordinating these associations and societies, placing them under the control and in the service of the state and the regime. It preyed not only on trade unions, but also on farmers' and youth organisations, as well as newly created organisations of minorities, resistance fighters, gardeners, and people cooperating with the army.*"<sup>275</sup>

There was a risk that a new constitution would not be signed during the electoral term of the Constituent National Assembly, which was coming to an end; therefore, even before Constitution was adopted, Constitutional Act No. 74/1948 Coll. of 16 April 1948 was adopted. It regulated the election and powers of the National Assembly and the activities of the Constituent National Assembly for a transitional period until the new Constitution came into force, followed by Act No. 75/1948 Coll. of 16 April 1948 on elections to the National Assembly, which changed the concept of electoral legislation. Although the electoral law retained a number of provisions from the 1946 electoral law, it introduced several fundamental changes. The system of proportional representation was retained, but in the existing political situation, it was impossible to put forward any candidate list other than that of the "revived National Front". The obligation to vote secretly was replaced by the "option" to use a separate area. The number of people who were deprived of the right to vote also increased. The elections were held on 30 May 1948. Communists accounted for 70% of the candidates. According to the official results, 84.9% of voters in Slovakia voted for the unified

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<sup>274</sup> HLAVOVÁ, V.: Strana svobody. In: KOCIAN, J. a kol.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, pp. 251-253. Available at: [https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_dejiny\\_web\\_komplet.pdf](https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS_dejiny_web_komplet.pdf)

<sup>275</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 114.

candidate list, 14% of voters cast blank ballots, thereby expressing their opposition, and 1.1% of ballots were invalid.<sup>276</sup>

However, based on Constitutional Act No. 24/1954 Coll., the 1954 elections were held in single-mandate constituencies, with one member elected in each constituency according to the absolute majority system. One seat was allocated per 35,000 inhabitants.<sup>277</sup>

**Review questions:**

1. *Describe the consequences of the February coup.*
2. *Which groups of the population were targeted for persecution in the 1950s?*
3. *Which Czechoslovak politicians held the most important political and party positions between 1948 and 1960?*

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<sup>276</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 124-126.

<sup>277</sup> For more details: OROSZ, L. (a kol.): *Volebné právo*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2015, pp. 192-196.

## 5 Political developments in 1960–1968

At the end of the 1950s, propaganda began to talk about a transition to a new phase of the regime. *“After laying the foundations of socialism, the stage of developed socialism was to follow.”* It was concluded that, after twelve years, it was necessary to adopt a new Constitution that would reflect this change. The final draft of the Constitution was approved by the national conference of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, held on 5–7 July 1960. A few days later, on 11 July 1960, the new Constitution was also unanimously approved by the National Assembly. The new Constitution explicitly declared that Czechoslovakia was a socialist state and changed the name of the state to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.<sup>278</sup> The decisions of state authorities always followed those of the KSČ and were identical with them.

The 1960 Constitution consisted of a preamble and nine chapters concerning the social system, the rights and obligations of citizens, the National Assembly, the President of the Republic, the government, the Slovak National Council, national committees, courts, and the public prosecutor’s office, and general and final provisions. Unlike the previous Constitution of 1948, it introduces fundamental changes from a formal point of view and a departure from the Constitution of pre-Munich Czechoslovakia.

The first chapter defined the social system. This concept was adopted from the Soviet Constitution of 1936. According to the new Constitution, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was a united state of two equal brotherly nations, the Czechs and the Slovaks. It declared that all power in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic belonged to the working people, who exercised state power through representative bodies they elected, controlled, and that were accountable to them.<sup>279</sup> The powers of all other state bodies were derived from the representative bodies, which were the National Assembly, the Slovak National Council, and the national committees. The Constitution thus abandoned the traditional principle of separation of powers for the Czechoslovak constitutional system, and all power was formally concentrated in the representative bodies. However, the formally key role of the representative bodies was in fact merely a façade, as the decisive role in the regime was played by the Communist Party.<sup>280</sup> *“By controlling the National Assembly, from which the powers of all other state bodies were derived, it held the key to controlling the entire state mechanism.”*<sup>281</sup> Article 4 of the Constitution guaranteed the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia a leading role in society. In addition to representative bodies and the leading role of the Communist Party, the

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<sup>278</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 425; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989*. Praha : Karolinum 2007, p. 16.

<sup>279</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.). In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989*. Praha : Karolinum 2007, pp. 20-52. [Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic]

<sup>280</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989...*, p. 23.

<sup>281</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, p. 112.

Constitution also declared voluntary social organisations and the National Front of Czechs and Slovaks to be the main pillars of state power.<sup>282</sup> *“The only relevant representative of the population was the Communist Party, which exercised political power through the NF. Other organisations were “allowed” to support the policies of the Communist Party within the political parties and organisations associated with the NF.”*<sup>283</sup>

The Constitution considered the socialist economic system, in which the means of production were socialised, and the entire national economy was managed in a planned manner, to be the economic foundation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, ensuring, with the conscious cooperation of all citizens, the massive development of production and the continuous improvement of the standard of living of the working people. The entire national economy was to be managed by a state plan for the development of the national economy, usually prepared for a period of five years, promulgated by law, and a binding basis for the planning of individual state bodies and economic organisations during that period.<sup>284</sup> *“The 1960 Constitution reclassified the various types of ownership (state, cooperative, personal) and placed clear emphasis on the primacy of the state in the economy. Some rights and freedoms, at least formally valid until then, were now also constitutionally restricted by a formulation according to which their exercise was possible only ‘in accordance with the interests of the working people’.”*<sup>285</sup> However, as it turned out, the centrally planned economy, based primarily on the development of heavy industry, did not allow for a flexible response to the needs of the population or for the necessary technological changes to be introduced quickly enough. The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic’s competitiveness in foreign markets declined, and individual economic indicators also deteriorated. Crises in international relations (the Caribbean crisis, the rift between the Soviet bloc countries and China) also had a negative impact on the Czechoslovak economy. The economic crisis and the failure of the third five-year plan (1961–1965), which ended in virtual collapse in its second year, forced the KSČ leadership to reconsider its approach to economic issues. The attempt at economic reform, which would combine socialist planning with market mechanisms, was associated with Oto Šik, director of the Economic Institute of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. However, the reform, approved in January 1965 and based on institutional and structural changes, faced major obstacles. From the very

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<sup>282</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 425.

<sup>283</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 139.

<sup>284</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52.

<sup>285</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 426.

first steps of the reform, it became clear that economic reform was not feasible without the simultaneous democratisation of the political system.<sup>286</sup>

The Constitution also addressed the rights and obligations of citizens. It stated that *“in a society of workers, where exploitation of man by man has been eliminated, the development and interests of each member of society are in harmony with the development and interests of society as a whole. The rights, freedoms, and duties of citizens thus serve the free and comprehensive development and fulfilment of the personality of citizens and, at the same time, the consolidation and development of socialist society; with its development, they further expand and deepen. In a society of workers, individuals can only achieve the full development of their abilities and the fulfilment of their legitimate interests through active participation in the development of society as a whole, above all through an appropriate share in social work. Therefore, work for the benefit of the whole is the primary duty, and the right to work is the primary right of every citizen.”*<sup>287</sup> Economic, social, and cultural rights, therefore, came to the fore, followed by political rights and individual rights of citizens. The Constitution emphasised socio-economic rights, such as the right to work and remuneration, the right to rest after work, the right to health protection and medical care, the right to material security in old age and in the event of incapacity for work, the right to education, and so on. With regard to civil rights and freedoms, some rights were omitted, and civil duties were expanded. Duties included the obligation to uphold the Constitution and other laws, to take into account the interests of the socialist state and working society in all actions, to protect and strengthen socialist property, conscientiously and honestly perform public functions, defend the homeland and its socialist system, and respect the rights of fellow citizens. The fundamental problem was that the framework enshrining the rights and duties of citizens left open the possibility of restricting fundamental rights and imposing duties through secondary legislation, including internal regulations.<sup>288</sup>

For the first time since the Second World War, the Constitution contained at least a brief mention of the rights of certain nationalities. It stipulates that the state shall provide all opportunities and means for education in the mother tongue and for the cultural development of citizens of Hungarian, Ukrainian, and Polish nationality.<sup>289</sup> The Constitution made no mention of the German national minority. Even after 1960, therefore, the legal regulation of national minorities remained minimal, and the regulation of the status of minorities continued to be based mainly on secret party

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<sup>286</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, pp. 749-750.

<sup>287</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52.

<sup>288</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989...*, p. 27.

<sup>289</sup> OROSZ, L.: Ústavná úprava práv osôb patriacich k národnostným menšinám a etnickým skupinám v Slovenskej republike a jej komparatívna analýza. In: ŠUTAJ, Š. (Ed.): *Národ a národnosti. Stav výskumu po roku 1989 a jeho perspektívy*. Prešov : Universum, 2004, pp. 46-47.

documents and internal guidelines. In practice, this led to numerous problems and considerable regional differences in the status of minorities.<sup>290</sup>

The following chapters of the Constitution characterised the National Assembly, the President, the government, the Slovak National Council, national committees, courts, and the public prosecutor's office, and general and final provisions.<sup>291</sup> The 1960 Constitution brought about the almost complete dissolution of the Slovak national authorities.

In 1960, a fundamental territorial reorganisation of the state also took place. After the Second World War, the traditions of the county system were not resumed, and Slovakia was divided into districts, with electoral regions being used only for election purposes. From 1 January 1949, 19 regions were created in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic under Act No. 280/1948 Coll. on regional administration, six of which were in Slovakia (Bratislava, Nitra, Banská Bystrica, Žilina, Košice, and Prešov regions). However, according to Act No. 36/1960 Coll. on the territorial division of the state, instead of six so-called small regions in Slovakia, three large regions were created - the West Slovak Region, the Central Slovak Region, and the East Slovak Region. The number of districts was also significantly reduced (from 89 to 33 districts). *"This territorial reorganisation of 1960 significantly affected districts with Hungarian and Ukrainian populations. Districts with a majority Hungarian population were incorporated into Slovak districts, disputes arose over the filling of positions, but from that time on, proposals for the creation of special national units and bodies began to increase. In the propaganda of the early 1960s, the abolition of small districts in which the Hungarian and Ukrainian nationalities were in the majority, and the creation of large districts with a higher proportion of Slovak nationals, was described as a positive step towards bringing the Slovak and other nationalities closer together."*<sup>292</sup>

In the 1960s, a new generation entered political and economic life, one that was more open to new approaches and ideas. The relaxation of the regime was also evident in science and culture, and manifested itself in the re-establishment of interrupted contacts with the West. However, the political relaxation of the 1960s also affected the situation of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. This led both to a strengthening of ethnic awareness among the Hungarian minority and fears among Slovak society that the Hungarian minority would become a source of separatism.<sup>293</sup> *"The communist doctrine for resolving the national question was based on the principles of proletarian internationalism and the Marxist-Leninist solution to the national question. In the 1960s, it*

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<sup>290</sup> KUKLÍK, J. - PETRÁŠ, R.: Právní systém ČSSR, menšiny a experimenty s právem v šedesátých letech. In: *Človek a spoločnosť*, 16, č.4, 2013.

<sup>291</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52.

<sup>292</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 142.

<sup>293</sup> For more details, see ŠUTAJ, Š.: Slovenskí Maďari a rok 1968. In: LONDÁK, M. – SIKORA, S. a kol.: *Rok 1968 a jeho miesto v našich dejinách*. Bratislava : Veda, 2009, pp. 227-246.

*was dominated by the idea that with the elimination of economic differences, nationalism would also disappear, and ethnic differences would no longer be relevant to the lives of the population. This postulate applied both to the relationship between Czechs and Slovaks and to the issue of the status of minorities. The issue of Czech-Slovak relations clearly played a dominant role in Slovak communist politics. It was presented as a nationwide, central, defining, and determining policy. It was linked to efforts to reform the system, democratise society, and to elements that were manifested in everyday life and politics, and significantly influenced the raising of issues related to ethnicity.”<sup>294</sup>*

The relaxation of the regime in the early 1960s in response to the results of the 20th Congress of the CPSU<sup>295</sup> was also reflected in the re-evaluation of some of the post-war policies of the Communist Party. Although the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) initially took rather formal steps to condemn the cult of personality surrounding communist officials (Stalin, Gottwald), conditions gradually allowed for a re-evaluation of the political trials of the 1950s. In 1960, Husák was released from prison under an amnesty, and a new commission, the Kolder Commission, was established. Based on its findings, the Supreme Court overturned the verdicts against the bourgeois nationalists. They were rehabilitated in civil law, but President Novotný did not agree to their rehabilitation within the party.

A new Barnabite commission to investigate the trials, led by J. Lenárt and later V. Koucký, concluded that the entire trial had been fabricated, and this conclusion was accepted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in December 1963. The change in circumstances is also evidenced by the fact that the Resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia of December 1963 also condemned the method of population exchange between Czechoslovakia and Hungary, the reslovakisation campaign and recruitment to the Czech lands, and attributed responsibility for these actions to the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.<sup>296</sup> In 1963–1964, other people convicted in political trials in 1949–1954 were also rehabilitated, including former members of intelligence groups and representatives of state security (Valášek, Viktorín, Baláž...), and partisan commanders. Other citizens were not significantly affected by the rehabilitation in the early 1960s.<sup>297</sup>

*“The issue of rehabilitation was a significant trigger for Czechoslovak reforms. As a member of the Communist Party apparatus, President Novotný participated in the preparation of*

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<sup>294</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 147-148.

<sup>295</sup> SIKORA, S.: Under the Banner of Socialism. In. ŠUTAJ, Š. et. al. *Key Issues of Slovak and Hungarian History (A View of Slovak Historians)*. Prešov : Universum, 2011, pp. 249-253.

<sup>296</sup> IRMANOVÁ, E.: *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku a její místo v zahraniční politice Slovenska po roce 1989*. Ústí nad Labem : Albis internacional, 2005, p. 236; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 140-141.

<sup>297</sup> For more details, see RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 176-183.

*purges and repressions in the 1950s. Slovak party officials (Viliam Široký – Prime Minister, Karol Bacílek – First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, Pavol David, Rudolf Strechaj, and others, who were supporters of Novotný’s policies and played a significant role in the repression of communists and non-communists alike, and their continued presence in important positions in the communist regime was an obstacle to any reforms.”*<sup>298</sup> The exposure of crimes committed by the communist regime shocked the public, undermined their confidence in leading officials, and forced some personnel changes. In 1963, after Bacílek was discredited, Alexander Dubček became the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia. Although he had originally belonged to Novotný’s broader circle of associates, he later came into conflict with Novotný due to their differing views on the powers of Slovak national authorities, investment projects in Slovakia, and the issue of rehabilitation. However, an open conflict between Slovak politicians and Novotný did not break out until 1967 as a result of Novotný’s insensitive behaviour towards representatives of Matica Slovenská. Novotný had a deep distrust of Slovaks, constantly fearing separatism, and saw centralisation as the guarantee of a strong state and socialist system. At a meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia in September 1967, Dubček openly criticised the impact of the new economic reform on Slovakia and demanded changes in the range of production in Slovakia and greater powers for Slovak national authorities. His speeches at subsequent meetings were also critical (criticism of party nominations for professional positions, disproportionate accumulation of positions in the hands of certain politicians). At party meetings in December 1967 and January 1968, Novotný attempted to accuse Dubček of nationalism. In a society expecting reforms, even the Czech political leadership was no longer interested in getting caught up in the anachronisms of bourgeois nationalism, and the conflict shifted to the reformists and dogmatists. Even Novotný’s close associates did not stand by him. Novotný relied on his last support, Leonid I. Brezhnev, who was primarily interested in calming the situation in Czechoslovakia and limiting or stopping the liberalisation of society and reforms. All of Novotný’s possible successors (Lenárt, Černík, and Dubček) were considered to be proven pro-Soviet communists, which is why he uttered the memorable words “*That’s your business*” (Eto vaše delo). Subsequently, Novotný was abandoned by other allies, and at the January meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in 1968, Novotný resigned, and Dubček was elected First Secretary of the Party at the meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in early January 1968. *The Prague Spring* began in Czechoslovakia.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>298</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 141.

<sup>299</sup> BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Rok 1968 na Slovensku a v Československu*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV, 2008; KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, pp. 697-698, 756.

## 5.1 Political system

### Legislative power

According to the 1960 Constitution, legislative power belonged to the National Assembly, which was the highest body of state power in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The number of deputies was reduced again to 300, and their term of office was shortened to four years. The National Assembly was the only national legislative body and, according to the concept that the powers of all other state bodies were derived from representative bodies, both the government and the President were accountable to it. However, the actual role of the National Assembly was very small, because all its decisions, whether they concerned the National Assembly resolutions, legislative changes, or personnel issues, were subject to the prior approval or disapproval of the Communist Party leadership. Another problem was that the National Assembly met only sporadically, and many of its legislative powers were transferred to the Presidium of the National Assembly or implemented through secondary normative acts of the executive bodies.<sup>300</sup>

The main tasks of the National Assembly still included electing the President, expressing confidence in the government, which was accountable to both collectively and individually, electing and dismissing members of the Supreme Court, and the Prosecutor General, who was appointed by the President and was also accountable to the National Assembly. The Constitution also retained the 30-member Presidium for the next term. Outside of National Assembly sessions, the Presidium exercised most of the powers of the National Assembly, except for the election of the President and the adoption of constitutional acts. It became even more independent because, whereas previously it could only adopt "urgent measures", under the new Constitution it could issue legal norms in the form of legislative measures. However, this Constitution no longer mentions the narrower Presidium of the National Assembly.<sup>301</sup>

Elections to the National Assembly continued to be held through unified candidate lists of the National Front. After Zdeněk Fierlinger, who headed the National Assembly from 1953 to 1964, Bohuslav Laštovička (1964–1968) was elected Speaker of the National Assembly, followed by Josef Smrkovský in 1968.<sup>302</sup> With the adoption of Constitutional Act No. 143/1968 Coll. on the Czechoslovak Federation, the National Assembly ceased its activities with effect from 1 January 1969, and its functions were taken over by the Federal Assembly.

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<sup>300</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989...*, p. 31.

<sup>301</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, pp. 425-426; VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, p. 112.

<sup>302</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 1194.

## Executive power

### President

In the 1960 Constitution, the President was not designated as the head of state; instead, the formulation "*the President of the Republic stands as the head of state*" was chosen. Although a collective head of state based on the Soviet model was considered during the drafting of the Constitution, the individual institution of the President was ultimately retained due to Czechoslovak traditions.<sup>303</sup>

The President was elected for five years by the National Assembly, to which he was also accountable in terms of the performance of his office. The age requirement for election to the presidency was significantly lowered from 35 to 21, which was the age limit set for election to the National Assembly. Another new provision required a three-fifths majority of all members of parliament for the President to be elected. Unlike previous Constitutions, this Constitution lacked several provisions relating to elections, such as the nomination of presidential candidates, and did not address the possibility that none of the candidates would obtain a three-fifths majority and a second round of elections would be necessary. The Constitution no longer contained a ban on re-election after two consecutive terms.

Under the Constitution, the President could not simultaneously be a member of the National Assembly, the SNR, the National Committee, or the government. He took an oath before the National Assembly, which was also adapted to the spirit of the Constitution: "*I pledge on my honour and conscience loyalty to the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and the cause of socialism. I will perform my duties according to the will of the people, and in the interests of the people, I will ensure the welfare of the Republic and uphold the Constitution and other laws of the socialist state.*"<sup>304</sup>

The President's term of office was shortened from seven to five years. The new Constitution of 1960 no longer included the office of Vice President. If the President was unable to perform his duties for serious reasons, or if the office became vacant and a new President had not yet been elected, the government assumed his functions. In such a case, supreme command of the armed forces was to pass to the Prime Minister. The authority to appoint and dismiss the government and its individual members and to entrust them with the management of ministries and other central state administration bodies was transferred to the Presidium of the National Assembly in such cases.

Some of the President's powers were also modified. He continued to represent the state externally, negotiating and ratifying international treaties. He could delegate the negotiation of international treaties and agreements that did not require the approval of the National Assembly to the government or, with its consent, to individual

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<sup>303</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989...*, p. 37.

<sup>304</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52.

members of the government. The President received and appointed ambassadors, convened and dissolved the National Assembly and declared its sessions closed, signed laws adopted by the National Assembly and measures taken by its Presidium. The provision on the adjournment of National Assembly sessions was deleted. He had the right to report to the National Assembly on the state of the Republic and on important political issues, and he could also submit proposals for necessary measures and participate in National Assembly meetings. He appointed the Prime Minister and ministers and entrusted them with the management of ministries and other central bodies. He had the right to participate in and chair government meetings, could request reports from the government or its members, and could discuss issues that needed to be resolved with the government or the ministers. He appointed senior state officials in cases specified by law and appointed and promoted generals. He conferred honours, unless another body was authorised to do so. He could also grant amnesties, pardon, and mitigate sentences imposed by criminal courts, and order that criminal proceedings not be initiated or continued. He was also the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces. Based on a government resolution, he declared a state of war and, by the decision of the National Assembly, declared war if Czechoslovakia was attacked or if it was necessary to fulfil international treaty obligations on joint defence against attack.

Another significant change was that the government was no longer responsible for presidential acts. The President was now constitutionally responsible to the National Assembly, and the validity of his legal acts did not require the countersignature of a government member. He no longer had the right to veto laws passed by the National Assembly or legal measures taken by its Presidium. He no longer had the right to dissolve parliament or adjourn its sessions. However, he gained the right of legislative initiative (in the section on the National Assembly). He was also stripped of the right to appoint judges.<sup>305</sup> Antonín Novotný held the office of President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic until March 1968.<sup>306</sup>

## **Government**

According to the 1960 Constitution, the government was the highest executive body of state power, and its members were accountable to the National Assembly for their activities. The Prime Minister and other members were appointed and dismissed by the President. The President also determined which ministers would head the individual ministries. Members of the government took their oath of office before the President of the Republic. The text of the oath was part of the Constitution. After its appointment, the government presented its programme to the National Assembly and requested a vote of confidence. The government was accountable only to the National

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<sup>305</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52.

<sup>306</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 1140.

Assembly. The National Assembly could pass a resolution proposing that the President dismiss the government or any of its members. In such a case, the President had to dismiss the government or one of its members. The Constitution, however, no longer contained details concerning a vote of no confidence, nor did it include provisions on quorum requirements or the criminal liability of the government.

The government was supposed to organise and ensure *“the fulfilment of the tasks of the socialist state in the field of economic and cultural development and the improvement of the standard of living of workers, as well as in the field of national security and the development of a peaceful foreign policy.”*<sup>307</sup> Therefore, it was supposed to unify, manage, and control the activities of ministries and other central state administration bodies, manage and control the work of national committees, prepare long-term plans for the development of the national economy and the state budget, and ensure and control their implementation. It was also supposed to ensure compliance with laws and state discipline, and protect the rights of citizens and the interests of the state. The government was to issue resolutions and regulations for their implementation on the basis of laws, and monitor and ensure their implementation. It had the right to submit draft laws to the National Assembly and draft legal measures to its Presidium. The government also appointed state officials and heads of economic organisations, where it was required by law, and submitted proposals for the appointment of officials where they were appointed by the President of the Republic.<sup>308</sup> Viliam Široký was the Prime Minister until September 1963. After he resigned from the post of Prime Minister, intended to demonstrate to critics of the regime that substantial personnel changes were taking place in the government, but he was replaced by Jozef Lenárt until 8 April 1968.<sup>309</sup>

### **Slovak national bodies**

Following the changes concerning Slovak national bodies in 1956, the 1960 Constitution further tightened centralisation. It reorganised the Slovak national bodies and significantly weakened them. The powers of the SNR were substantially reduced, mainly to issues of a national and regional nature, which, however, exceeded the scope of the regions in terms of their content and significance. The Board of Commissioners was abolished on 30 June 1960, and the SNR became the sole national body of state power and administration. The Presidium of the SNR became its executive body. However, this was only a formal weakening, since, regardless of the constitutional amendment, all real power in the state and society, both before and after the adoption

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<sup>307</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52.

<sup>308</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52.

<sup>309</sup> KRĚN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 698; DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, pp. 1171-1172.

of the Constitution, was concentrated in the hands of the highest bodies of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ).<sup>310</sup>

The Slovak National Council was composed of members elected by the people of Slovakia. The members were accountable to the people and could be dismissed by them. Their term of office was four years. The Slovak National Council was responsible for passing laws in accordance with national legislation on matters of a national or regional nature, if these required special regulation to ensure the comprehensive economic and cultural development of Slovakia, and for passing SNR laws in cases in which the National Assembly authorised it to do so by law. Draft laws of the SNR could be submitted by members, committees, and the Presidium of the SNR. The Slovak National Council no longer debated and approved the national economic development plan. It could only participate in the preparation of the state plan for the development of the national economy and, within that framework, discuss general issues of the development of the national economy and culture in Slovakia. Nor did it debate or approve the budget of Slovakia. It could only debate and approve the budget of the SNR, its bodies, and the institutions it directly managed. Unlike the previous amendment of 1956, the government also reserved the right to directly manage the national committees in Slovakia.<sup>311</sup>

However, the Slovak National Council could submit draft laws to the National Assembly and exercise control within the limits of its own competences. In the spirit of equality, it was also supposed to ensure favourable conditions for the comprehensive development of the lives of citizens of Hungarian and Ukrainian nationality. The SNR elected its 16-member Presidium for the entire electoral term. It consisted of the Speaker of the Slovak National Council, Vice Speakers, and other members of the Presidium. A member of the SNR Presidium could also be a member of the government. The Presidium was the executive body of the SNR within the scope of its powers. It ensured the implementation of laws and ensured that the tasks of the state plan were carried out evenly and in full accordance with the plan in Slovakia. It issued resolutions and regulations based on SNR laws. The Slovak National Council could elect SNR representatives from among the members of the Presidium, who worked in areas of state administration defined by law. Their task was to fulfil assigned duties within the limits of the SNR or other tasks in the economic and cultural development of Slovakia to the extent determined by the government.<sup>312</sup>

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<sup>310</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989...*, pp. 40-41; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 428.

<sup>311</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 428.

<sup>312</sup> Ústava Československé socialistické republiky ze dne 11. července 1960 (ústavní zákon č. 100/1960 Sb.)..., pp. 20-52.

At its plenary session, the SNR established commissions that served as initiative, supervisory, and executive bodies. There were eight commissions, and they replaced the former commissioners' offices. They were responsible for planning, finance and the budget, agriculture, construction, education and culture, and health care, and also included a legal commission and a mandate commission. They could make decisions and adopt necessary measures. The commissions consisted of SNR deputies and other political, economic, and cultural figures.<sup>313</sup> The Board of Commissioners was abolished in 1960.

**Review questions:**

1. *How did the name of the Czechoslovak state change in 1960?*
2. *What changes did the new Constitution bring to the Slovak national authorities?*
3. *Which Czechoslovak politicians held the most important political and party positions in 1960–1968?*

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<sup>313</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 428.

## 6 Political developments between 1968 and 1989

The year 1968 was a significant milestone in Czechoslovak history, with the attempt to reform socialism known as “socialism with a human face” and its suppression by the troops of the Warsaw Pact in August 1968. This was followed by a period known as “normalisation”, which was brought about by conservative politicians seeking to consolidate the regime through the “normalised” presence of Soviet troops.

Political developments in the second half of the 1960s led to the “restructuring” of socialism in Czechoslovakia. Even in the media, Czech and Slovak society began to discuss issues that had previously been off-limits, the activities of religious believers and churches were revived, space was opened up for international contacts (scientists, artists, etc.), and restrictions and obstacles related to travelling abroad were eased. At the end of February 1968, the Central Publishing Administration, a feared instrument of censorship, ceased its activities, although the actual abolition of censorship was not confirmed by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia until 4 March 1968.<sup>314</sup>

During the Prague Spring, civil society was also revived. From March 1968, the “old” political parties of the National Front and existing associations became active again, and traditional associations (e.g., *Matica slovenská*, student unions, religious associations, etc.) were also renewed. However, entirely new organisations were also founded, such as the Club of Committed Non-Party Members (*Klub angažovaných nestraničkov*), which also had political ambitions, and K 231 – the Association of Former Political Prisoners, which sought to rehabilitate its members. Other organisations were also established, although for many of these groups the goal was not the reform of socialism or socialism with a human face, but the removal of the communist dictatorship.<sup>315</sup>

Only gradually did the influence of conservatives in the leadership of the Communist Party at all levels begin to wane. The main demands of the reform communists included the general democratisation of the political system and public life, coming to terms with the past, such as repression and political trials, and economic reforms. While democratisation was the main concern in the Czech lands, in Slovakia, in addition to democratisation, the most important demands included strengthening the position of Slovak national bodies and a fairer solution to the constitutional problem. This was reflected in the resolution of the Slovak National Council of March 1968, in which members rejected the developments since the Third Prague Agreement, i.e., between 1946 and 1968, and declared a federal arrangement of Czechoslovakia as

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<sup>314</sup> SIKORA, S.: Charakteristika „socializmu s ľudskou tvárou“. In Londák, M. a kol.: *Rok 1968. Eto vaše delo*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV – Prodama, 2008, p. 88.

<sup>315</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 145-146.

their ultimate goal. Although this idea was accepted with hesitation and ambiguity in the Czech lands, the idea of a federation was later included in the Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and was taken into account by the expert bodies established by the government to prepare a new constitutional system.<sup>316</sup>

The situation in Czechoslovakia was closely monitored by neighbouring socialist countries led by conservative communists. Neighbouring leaders perceived the scope and extent of the reforms and democratisation efforts as a weakening of the entire socialist bloc and the existing economic and military-political groupings (CMEA, Warsaw Pact). At a meeting of Warsaw Pact representatives in Dresden on 23 March 1968, the only item on the agenda was the situation in Czechoslovakia. Leonid I. Brezhnev, Todor Zhivkov, Walter Ulbricht, János Kádár, and Władysław Gomułka criticised the Czechoslovak communists and warned that the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was heading towards a weakening of party leadership in the state and a counter-revolution. The Czechoslovak delegation (Dubček, Biľak, Černík, Lenárt, and Kolder) rejected this assessment, but it nevertheless appeared in the resolution from the Dresden meeting.<sup>317</sup>

It was the Dresden meeting that created the space for a split in the previously united anti-Novotný camp in Czechoslovakia. Influenced by the atmosphere at the Dresden meeting, some pro-Soviet neoconservative politicians (Indra, Kolder, Biľak, and others) began to realise that the reform measures were paving the way for criticism and weakening of the Communist Party.<sup>318</sup>

The goals and forms of transformation of Czechoslovak society were expressed in the Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ), adopted at the meeting of the Central Committee of the KSČ on 1–5 April 1968. The programme sought to humanise socialist society and promote democratic transformation. The leading role of the KSČ in society was to be preserved, but the KSČ Action Programme assumed that the relationship with other political parties in the NF would change to a partnership, similar to the period of 1945–1948.<sup>319</sup> Although other pillars of the communist regime were to be preserved, such as the socialisation of the means of production, the dominant position of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the class division of society with the leading position of the union of workers, peasants and the “working intelligentsia”, changes were planned in the management of the economy, in relations between Czechs and Slovaks, in relations between nationalities, in the observance of civil rights and political freedoms, but also in the area of spiritual life. The programme

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<sup>316</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. - JANÁK, J. - DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, pp. 428 - 429.

<sup>317</sup> SIKORA, S.: Charakteristika „socializmu s ľudskou tvárou“ ...; SIKORA, S.: *Rok 1968 a politický vývoj na Slovensku*. Bratislava : Pro História, 2008, pp. 76-77.

<sup>318</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 - 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 144.

<sup>319</sup> SIKORA, S.: Charakteristika „socializmu s ľudskou tvárou“ ..., p. 89.

also created conditions for a different, more critical view of the past, including the history of the Communist Party.<sup>320</sup>

Conservatives associated with Novotný had to leave the leadership of the KSČ, and only Dubček, Černík, and Kolder remained, considered at the time to be reformist communists. Conservatives also gradually lost their positions in the Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party and were replaced by reformist (or reformist at the time) communists (Klokoč, Biľak, etc.).<sup>321</sup> Even before that, on 22 March 1968, Novotný resigned from the office of President of the Republic and was replaced by General Ludvík Svoboda. In April 1968, Oldřich Černík was appointed Prime Minister and Josef Smrkovský was elected Speaker of the National Assembly. In its programme statement, Černík's government committed itself to implementing a federal structure for the state. Part of the preparation of the law on the Czechoslovak federation was also the preparation of a law on national minorities.<sup>322</sup>

The tasks associated with the preparation of the federal structure were carried out by the Czech National Council and the Slovak National Council. The Czech National Council, which had not existed until then, was established on the basis of Constitutional Act No. 77/1968 Coll. of June 1968 on the preparation of the federal structure of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic. It was established as a temporary body of constitutional political representation of the Czech nation. The law dealt with the creation of the Czech National Council as a counterpart to the Slovak National Council and re-established the ban on majority rule when it came to voting on the federal arrangement between the Czechs and Slovaks. The ČNR (Czech National Council) had 150 members and was elected by the National Assembly on 10 July 1968 from among the members of the National Assembly elected in the Czech lands and from among prominent representatives of the public life of the Czech nation who were not members of the National Assembly. It was headed by Čestmír Císař. Its main task was to express the national political position on the organisation of relations between the Czech and Slovak nations and to ensure the preparatory work associated with the establishment of the Czech national state authority.<sup>323</sup>

The main principles of the federal arrangement were approved by the government presidium in July 1968, and the government commission was tasked with drafting a final proposal based on these principles. It was summarised in 22 points on 7 August 1968. The basic principle of the federation was contained in point five, which stated that: "*Czechoslovakia consists of two equal national states – the Czech Socialist Republic and*

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<sup>320</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 144-145; KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, pp. 759-760.

<sup>321</sup> SIKORA, S.: *Rok 1968 a politický vývoj na Slovensku...*, p. 113.

<sup>322</sup> PETRÁŠ, R.: *Menšiny v komunistickém Československu* Praha : Eurolex Bohémia – VIP Books, 2007, p. 326.

<sup>323</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 77/1968 Sb. ze dne 24. června 1968, o přípravě federativního uspořádání Československé socialistické republiky. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989*. Praha : Karolinum 2007, pp. 102-104.

*the Slovak Socialist Republic. In their common interest, they entrust part of their sovereignty and the powers arising therefrom to a common federal state. The sovereignty of the national states and the sovereignty of the federal state exist and operate side by side.*"<sup>324</sup>

Negotiations on the federation were interrupted by military intervention on 21 August 1968. This also halted the renewal process led by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its General Secretary, Alexander Dubček. After the situation had calmed down somewhat, negotiations on the federation were resumed.

The reforms that had been launched, confirmed by the Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, were viewed with great concern by representatives of neighbouring communist regimes. At bilateral talks between the leaders of the USSR and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in Moscow on 4–5 May 1968, pressure to end the reforms continued. A meeting of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia at the end of May and beginning of June 1968 attempted to consolidate the reform of socialism in Czechoslovakia by accepting the fundamental demands of its allies.<sup>325</sup> However, attempts to moderate the reforms were considered unacceptable by civil society. In June 1968, a document entitled *2000 Words* was published in the press. In this document, Czech writer Ludvík Vaculík identified the mistakes of the past and the problems of the present and called for various forms of civic activity that would lead to deeper reforms and more thorough democratisation of the political system. The highest bodies of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Communist Party of Slovakia strongly condemned this call, but refused to take administrative or coercive action against the authors and signatories. The *2000 Words* document caused a great stir not only in the West but also in the Soviet Union, where discussions began on possible ways to resolve the situation in Czechoslovakia.<sup>326</sup>

In mid-July 1968, a meeting of the leaders of the Soviet bloc was held in Warsaw, without representatives of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The outcome was a *Letter from Five Communist and Workers' parties to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*, dated 15 July 1968, prepared in accordance with the Brezhnev Doctrine, stating that the defence of socialism in Czechoslovakia was a common concern of all socialist countries. The KSČ leadership expressed its conviction that Czechoslovakia was capable of handling the domestic political situation and diplomatically rejected the letter.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> RYCHLÍK, J.: Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Spolupráce a konflikty 1914 – 1992. Praha : Vyšehrad 2012, p. 495.

<sup>325</sup> SIKORA, S.: Charakteristika „socializmu s ľudskou tvárou“ ..., p. 96.

<sup>326</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, p. 761; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 146.

<sup>327</sup> SIKORA, S.: *Rok 1968 a politický vývoj na Slovensku...*, p. 135.

The escalation of Soviet pressure was evident at further meetings in Čierna nad Tisou on 29 July – 1 August 1968 and in Bratislava on 3 August 1968. Neither of these led to any change in political course. The Bratislava meeting was also linked to an “invitation letter” from a conservative pro-Soviet group within the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which was handed over to a KGB agent in a Bratislava restroom and became a symbol of the betrayal of the Czechoslovak revolution and one of the formal arguments used by the Soviet side to justify the occupation of Czechoslovakia.<sup>328</sup>

The armies of the USSR and other members of the Warsaw Pact invaded Czechoslovakia on 20–21 August 1968. According to various sources, around 60,000 soldiers entered Czechoslovakia. Some sources cite as many as 165,000 soldiers. The intervention had been planned for a long time. Immediate preparations for the invasion of Czechoslovakia began under the code name ‘Danube’ in April 1968.<sup>329</sup> The occupying forces eliminated the Czechoslovak army and security services, as well as the mass media. They isolated the leaders of the Czechoslovak state and party bodies and transported them to Moscow.<sup>330</sup> Due to the division of zones of influence after the Second World War, attempts to condemn the intervention and involve the UN in resolving the problem were ineffective.<sup>331</sup>

The intervention was condemned by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which had already adopted a statement on the occupation of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968, approved by a majority of the Presidium (Biľak, Kolder, Rigo, and Švestka voted against). The occupation was rejected by the National Assembly, the leadership of the National Front, and the Extraordinary 14th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The occupying forces’ attempt to establish a provisional revolutionary government was met with resistance from President Svoboda, who rejected any solution until the detained representatives of the state and the party were released. Svoboda declared that he could not accept any solution other than a constitutional one and travelled to Moscow to resolve the situation directly.<sup>332</sup> Since all relevant political representatives had spoken out against the invasion and the population did not perceive the troops as liberators, but as occupiers, the necessary cover for creating even a semblance of legitimacy for the occupation of Czechoslovakia was not established. After the failure of the political plan for the occupation, the Soviet leadership had to negotiate with official representatives of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the

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<sup>328</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 147.

<sup>329</sup> SIKORA, S.: *Rok 1968 a politický vývoj na Slovensku...*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>330</sup> ŠUTAĽ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 152-153.

<sup>331</sup> For more details, see MICHÁLEK, S.: *Rok 1968 a Československo. Postoj USA, Západu a OSN*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV – Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2008.

<sup>332</sup> SIKORA, S.: *Rok 1968 a politický vývoj na Slovensku...*, pp. 160-163

Czechoslovak state. Following the intervention of President Svoboda, another part of the Czechoslovak delegation (Svoboda, Biřák, Dzúr, Husák, Klusák, Kučera) and the last part of the delegation (Mlynář, Lenárt, Švestka, and Jakeš) arrived in Moscow on 24 August 1968.<sup>333</sup>

During the Moscow negotiations on 23–26 August 1968, the Czechoslovak delegation was divided; the reformists and conservatives were joined by the “realists” Husák and Svoboda, willing to accept most of the Soviet demands in the interests of maintaining peace and saving human lives.<sup>334</sup> Although the final Moscow Protocol did not describe the situation in Czechoslovakia as counter-revolutionary, nor did it mention the military intervention, and the KSČ Action Programme was not condemned as a revisionist document, the protocol did not recognise the validity of the legitimate decisions of a sovereign state, or the decisions of a political party (the KSČ), and created conditions for restricting the media and freedom of speech. The agreed limitation on the presence of Soviet troops ended with a vague formulation about their “temporary” presence. Only František Kriegel refused to sign the Moscow Protocol, arguing that a blackmailed hostage could not assume political responsibility for something he could not influence.<sup>335</sup> The Moscow Protocols reversed the reform process in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and led to the establishment of a normalisation regime.<sup>336</sup>

During the nationwide resistance to the occupation of Czechoslovakia, 108 people were killed between 21 August and 31 December 1968, with 37 deaths in Slovakia.<sup>337</sup>

In October 1968, the National Assembly legalised the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. According to the treaty and its secret addendum, 75,000 soldiers were to be stationed in Czechoslovakia. The “temporary” nature of the troops’ presence was not limited. After the treaty was signed, the troops of other countries, namely Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, and the GDR, were withdrawn from Czechoslovak territory.<sup>338</sup>

Gustáv Husák was elected First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, and significant changes took place in the composition of party and state bodies, which respected the results of the Moscow negotiations (removal of Kriegel, Foreign Minister Jiří Hájek, and Interior Minister Josef Pavel). However, the reform process was not completely halted, and the rehabilitation of victims from the 1950s continued, as did discussions on Czech-Slovak relations and

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<sup>333</sup> ŠTEFANSKÝ, M.: Moskovský protokol a rokovania o rozmiestnení sovietskych vojsk. In: LONDÁK, M. – SIKORA, S. a kol.: *Rok 1968 a jeho miesto v našich dejinách*. Bratislava : Veda, 2009, pp. 265-276.

<sup>334</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 152.

<sup>335</sup> SIKORA, S.: *Rok 1968 a politický vývoj na Slovensku...*, pp. 177-179.

<sup>336</sup> SIKORA, S.: Charakteristika „socializmu s ľudskou tvárou“ ..., pp. 97-98.

<sup>337</sup> Ústav pamäti národa [Nation’s Memory Institute]. Available at: <https://www.21august1968.sk/sk/obete/>

<sup>338</sup> SIKORA, S.: *Rok 1968 a politický vývoj na Slovensku...*, pp. 194-195.; The last Soviet soldiers left Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1991.

preparations for federalisation laws, including the law on the status of nationalities. This topic was likely also deliberately used as a diversion to avoid discussion of military aggression and the attitudes of Communist Party representatives and state officials towards it, as well as the beginning of reshuffles and purges in the party and executive apparatus.<sup>339</sup>

Negotiations continued in commissions and national councils, where differences emerged regarding the content, mechanisms, and effectiveness of the federalisation of the state. Although several disputed issues arose during the preparation process, such as the scope of the powers of federal bodies, the scope of the ban on majorisation, the method of electing the Chamber of Nations, and the name of the state, on 27 October 1968, Constitutional Act No. 143/1968 Coll. on the Czechoslovak Federation was adopted. The ceremonial meeting of the National Assembly was attended by the President of the Republic, the speakers of both national councils, and the government. For the first time in more than twenty years, the ban on majority voting was applied in the National Assembly. Thus, the proposal required approval by three-fifths of all members elected in the Czech lands and three-fifths of members elected in Slovakia. Subsequently, on 1 January 1969, two national states were established on the territory of Czechoslovakia – the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic.<sup>340</sup> At the same time as the law on the federalisation of the state, Act No. 144/1968 Coll. on nationalities was also adopted. The Act provided for the adoption of further acts (language act, act on national minorities, on representation in the National Council, on national commissions, etc.), which, however, were never enacted.<sup>341</sup>

*“In the original form of the federal state agreement, the primary sovereignty of the republics was generously defined, reflecting the political conditions of the Prague Spring period.”*<sup>342</sup> The adopted constitutional law contained a preamble and eight chapters. The first chapter declared that the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was a federal state of two equal brotherly nations, the Czechs and the Slovaks. Both republics were to have equal status in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. They were to grant their own citizenship, alongside federal citizenship. The Czechoslovak Federation was established from the bottom up, meaning that both republics transferred part of their powers to the federal state.<sup>343</sup> The second chapter focused on the division of powers between the federation

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<sup>339</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 155-156.

<sup>340</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989*. Praha : Karolinum 2007, pp. 167-214; GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989*. Praha : Karolinum 2007, p. 167.

<sup>341</sup> For more details, see ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku – snahy o štátoprávne zakotvenie menšinovej problematiky do augusta 1968*. In *Človek a spoločnosť*, 2013, roč. 16, č. 4, Available at: <http://www.saske.sk/cas/zoznam-rocnikov/2013/4/6062>; ŠUTAJOVÁ, J.: *Zákon o národnostiach a Rada vlády Slovenskej socialistickej republiky pre národnosti (predstavy a realita)*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2019.

<sup>342</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost....*, p. 87.

<sup>343</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci...., pp. 167-214.

and the republics. All competences were divided into three groups. The exclusive competence of the federation included foreign policy, defence, federal state material reserves, federal legislation, control of federal bodies, and control of federal constitutionality. Shared matters, which were managed and administered by both the federation and the republics, included planning, finance, prices, foreign economic relations, industry, agriculture, transport, post and telecommunications, science and technology, labour and wages, social policy, legal regulation of so-called socialist enterprise, standardisation, weights and measures, patents and inventions, internal order, state security, press and information. All other matters fell within the exclusive competence of the republics.<sup>344</sup>

Other chapters addressed the Federal Assembly, the President, the Czechoslovak government, the Constitutional Court, and the state bodies of the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic. The Constitutional Court was responsible for reviewing the constitutionality of laws and other legal regulations of the federation and the republics and for resolving disputes over jurisdiction between the federation and the republics or between the two republics. It was also responsible for protecting the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution. However, neither the Constitutional Court of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic nor the constitutional courts of the individual republics were ever established. Neither the Czech Socialist Republic nor the Slovak Socialist Republic adopted laws on constitutional courts, and no constitutional judges were elected. Similarly, the envisaged constitutions of the national republics were never created.<sup>345</sup>

Despite the normalisation policy of the communist regime and the increasing political persecution, the establishment of federal and national bodies brought about a significant shift in the resolution of constitutional relations between the Czech and Slovak nations. The republics were defined as state and administrative entities. There was some room for Slovak and Czech politics to formulate and implement their economic and social interests.

In disputes over the chairmanship of the Federal Assembly, the Slovak side (First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, Gustáv Husák) demanded proportional representation in the highest political and state positions (the President was Ludvík Svoboda and the Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was Oldřich Černík, and First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia Alexander Dubček). Subsequently, Peter Colotka, who was Slovak, became Chairman of the Federal Assembly, rather than Josef Smrkovský, who eventually became Deputy Speaker of Parliament and President of the House of People, even though he had been proposed

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<sup>344</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. - JANÁK, J. - DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 429.

<sup>345</sup> VODIČKA, K. - CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost....*, pp. 116-117, 119.

as Speaker of the Federal Assembly by Czech pro-reform groups and the public. In the background was the resolute position of Moscow, which declared Smrkovský a 'persona non grata'. Also in this case, Husák and Svoboda complied with Moscow's orders, acting in accordance with the so-called Moscow Protocol.<sup>346</sup>

The communist regime did not permit democratic elections, which had originally been planned for November 1968, and due to opposition from representatives of the Soviet Union, federalisation within the communist party did not take place either. The unified KSČ continued to exist, and all proposals and resolutions of the ÚV KSČ (Central Committee of the KSČ) were binding on the ÚV KSS, which served as a regional body subordinate to the ÚV KSČ. No such body was ever created for the Czechs.<sup>347</sup>

The situation in Czechoslovak society did not improve even at the beginning of 1969. The self-immolation of Jan Palach and his followers, demonstrations against the presence of Soviet troops on the anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic, on the anniversary of 17 November 1968, and the "hockey crisis" in March 1969, when, after two matches between Czechoslovak and Soviet hockey players, mass demonstrations of discontent erupted throughout the country during celebrations of the Czechoslovak victory, led to pressure from the Soviet leadership for changes in the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Dubček was forced to resign, and in April 1969, Husák assumed the highest political office.<sup>348</sup>

The democratisation process was halted. The remnants of pro-reform representatives were removed from political and party positions, and a course was set towards restoring the leading role of the Communist Party.

As for the establishment of a federal arrangement, this process also stalled due to normalisation measures. According to the original plan, the Czechoslovak federation was to be based on stronger republics, but the emerging process of normalisation was also reflected in the constitutional structure. In the communist political system, the creation of two national republics in a federal, i.e., equal and equitable union, did not mean an autonomous union. The system did not allow the republics to fulfil their statehood and achieve their attributes, because the principle of democratic centralism and the exercise of the leading role of the Communist Party in the governance were in direct contradiction with the democratic arrangement of relations between the Slovak and Czech nations on the platform of the federation. The Communist Party completely

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<sup>346</sup> ŠUTAĀ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 157.

<sup>347</sup> ŠUTAĀ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 157.

<sup>348</sup> FELCMAN, O.: Hokejový týden. In: KOCIAN, J. et. al.: *Slovníková příručka k československým dějinám 1948 – 1989*. Praha : ÚSD AV ČR, 2019, p. 1003. Available at: [https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS\\_dejiny\\_web\\_komplet.pdf](https://www.usd.cas.cz/wp-content/uploads/CS_dejiny_web_komplet.pdf)

subjugated the state. The August occupation prevented the Czechoslovak state from achieving political rights and freedom. Without them, the federation could not realistically function. The national bodies of both republics became mere executors of the Communist Party's instructions. At the same time, they were placed in a subordinate position vis-à-vis the federal bodies, which was emphasised by a series of deforming constitutional laws adopted in December 1970. Of the 22 chapters that divided powers between the federation and the republics, only two remained unchanged. All the others were reworded in favour of federal powers. Constitutional Act No. 125/1970 Coll., amending and supplementing the Constitutional Act on the Czechoslovak Federation, fundamentally changed the entire concept of the federation and the basic structure of relations between federal and national state bodies. The national republics lost a substantial part of their powers in favour of the federation. The Act contained 37 direct amendments and additions, primarily to the first chapter of the Constitutional Act. It gave the federation precedence over the republics, particularly in economic matters. It introduced a unified economic system and a unified state plan.<sup>349</sup> *“Constitutional Act No. 126/1970 Coll. established the State Planning Commission and six new federal ministries. The position of state secretaries in federal ministries was abolished. Based on Constitutional Act No. 133/1970 Coll., the powers of federal bodies were then adjusted. This situation then continued without significant changes until 1989.”*<sup>350</sup> It can be stated that *“Communist Czechoslovakia was federal only on constitutional paper. In political reality, however, it functioned as a unitary state.”*<sup>351</sup>

The domestic political situation was further complicated by the brutal intervention of the Czechoslovak security units against demonstrators on 21 August 1969. A day later, the Federal Assembly passed the so-called baton law, which legalised the intervention of the security forces and allowed similar actions to be suppressed by force in the future. The normalisation regime used this measure to persecute political and non-political opposition until its demise. Constitutional Act No. 117/1969 Coll. of October 1969 on the extension of the electoral term (elections had originally been scheduled for 17 November 1968) effectively enabled political purges in state bodies. The normalisers 'cleansed' federal and national bodies of many supporters and implementers of the social reforms of 1968. In January 1970, the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia also decided on 'party screening checks', which

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<sup>349</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 125/1970 Sb. ze dne 20. prosince 1970, kterým se mění a doplňuje ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb., o československé federaci. In: GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989*. Praha : Karolinum 2007, pp. 284-285; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, pp. 430-431; VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost....*, p. 88; ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, pp. 160-161.

<sup>350</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, pp. 430-431.

<sup>351</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost....*, p. 89.

became the main instrument for the so-called healthy core of the KSCĚ to remove reformist communists.<sup>352</sup> Normalisation manifested itself in all aspects of society, and the Communist Party generalised its experiences in a document entitled *Lessons from the Crisis Development...*, which became a basic handbook for 'orientation' on what could and could not be done when addressing any issue related to life in Czechoslovakia.<sup>353</sup>

The purges affected the entire Czech and Slovak society. They affected members of the Academy of Sciences, universities, theatres, radio and television, etc., who had expressed "counter-revolutionary" attitudes during 1968. The most common forms of persecution included loss of employment, removal from office, revocation of academic degrees, etc. Although purges also took place within the security forces, the number of their members, especially members of the State Security (ŠtB), increased. The invasion and persecution also led to another wave of emigration from Czechoslovakia.<sup>354</sup>

In November 1971, elections were held to both chambers of the Federal Assembly, the national councils of the republics, and the national committees at all levels. The National Front's candidate list won 99% of all votes cast. The National Front candidates also received 99% of all votes cast in all subsequent elections until 1989. Although participation was not compulsory by law, citizens took part in the elections, just as they took part in other public demonstrations of support for the regime, such as May Day parades, ideological training sessions, workplace meetings, and so on.<sup>355</sup> Travel to the countries of the Western Bloc was subject to approval; therefore, the majority of citizens could not travel freely.

At the end of May 1975, the Federal Assembly passed a constitutional act allowing the removal of a President who was unable to perform his duties for more than one year. Due to illness, President Ludvík Svoboda had been unable to actively participate in politics since April 1974. On 29 May 1975, the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic elected Gustáv Husák as President of the Republic, who thus held the two highest offices in the state (General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and President of the Republic).<sup>356</sup> In terms of foreign policy, Czechoslovakia adapted to and mirrored the foreign policy of the USSR.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> ŽATKULIAK, J.: Slovenská otázka v roku 1968 a po novembri 1989. In: ŠUTAJ, Š. (ed.): *Národ a národnosti na Slovensku. Stav výskumu po roku 1989 a jeho perspektívy*. Prešov : Universum, 2004, pp. 60-62.

<sup>353</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š.: *Slovenské dejiny po roku 1945 I. (Vybrané kapitoly k vývoju v rokoch 1945 – 1968)*. Košice : UPJŠ 2015, p. 163.

<sup>354</sup> For more details, see KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, pp. 867-870.

<sup>355</sup> RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 284-285.

<sup>356</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989...*, p. 192; RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 287-288.

<sup>357</sup> For more details, see RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 288-290.

In 1975, Czechoslovakia participated in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) in Helsinki. By signing the Final Act, Czechoslovakia committed itself to respecting all human and civil rights, which did not correspond to the reality within the state.<sup>358</sup> The Czechoslovak communist leadership considered the approval of the documents by the Federal Assembly as a purely formal act and had no intention of complying with them. In January 1977, the Charter 77 group issued a declaration calling upon the normalisation regime to respect human and civil rights, as it had committed to doing in the CSCE Final Act, and to allow open democratic debate in society. The signatories of the Charter 77 Declaration included Václav Havel, Pavel Landovský, František Kriegel, Jiří Hájek, Jiří Dienstbier, Václav Benda, Jan Patočka, and, from Slovakia, Dominik Tatarka, Miroslav Kusý, and others. Charter 77 became the most significant opposition movement in Czechoslovakia and, among other things, contributed to the spread of samizdat publications (banned by the regime). The regime persecuted the signatories of the Charter, which later led to the creation of the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted (VONS), which sought to help the families of those affected with legal assistance and the like, and to report on individual cases through radio broadcasts (Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, BBC). In November 1988, the Czechoslovak Helsinki Committee was established, another dissident organisation monitoring human rights compliance. It was headed by Jiří Hájek.<sup>359</sup> In Slovakia, dissent ranged from *“perhaps the oldest Christian (especially Catholic) dissent, with roots dating back to the 1950s, newly reformed after the Soviet occupation of the country, to civic political dissent (albeit small in number), linked to Prague’s Charter 77, parallel literary and artistic groups, Hungarian nationalist dissent, to the reviving activities of reformist communists from 1968, but also younger party members inspired by Gorbachev’s perestroika... However, activities in opposition, or rather parallel, structures in Slovakia expanded and became more visible from the spring of 1989 onwards, whether it was the gathering of citizens organised by the Movement for Civil Freedom at Bradlo on 7 May 1989 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the tragic death of General Štefánik, or the broader support from the Slovak side for the appeal “Několik věť” (A Few Sentences) of 29 June 1989 and after charges were brought against the so-called Bratislava Five (Miroslav Kusý, Ján Čarnogurský, Hana Ponická, Vladimír Maňák and A Selecký), the protest letter of 30 August 1989 signed by representatives of the intelligentsia from (originally) communist and confessional circles, as well as the protest letters of Slovak sociologists, writers and artists on the same matter.”*<sup>360</sup>

A new direction in politics came with the accession of Mikhail S. Gorbachev as General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet

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<sup>358</sup> RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 293-294.

<sup>359</sup> For more details, see KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha : Argo, 2019, pp. 877-879; RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 293-301.

<sup>360</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Slovensko na ceste k politickej a občianskej slobode (Od nástupu Michaila S. Gorbačova v marci 1985 po prvé slobodné voľby v júni 1990). In: ŽATKULIAK, J. a kol.: *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*. Bratislava : Prodama 2009, pp. 16-17.

Union in March 1985. The main features of the new policy were glasnost (openness) and perestroika (restructuring). The launch of economic and political reforms in the Soviet Union also influenced other countries of the Eastern Bloc. However, Czechoslovak politicians who had come to power after the reform process in Czechoslovakia was halted were not very willing to pursue reforms, and so Czechoslovak “restructuring” was to focus primarily on the economic matters. Even Mikhail Gorbachev’s visit to Prague did not bring about a change in this direction. On the contrary, in December 1987, when Husák was replaced as General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSCĚ) by the conservative Miloš Jakeš, it could be concluded that the KSCĚ was not planning any significant political reforms. The federal government led by Lubomír Štrougal resigned in October 1988, and Ladislav Adamec, a supporter of economic and political reforms and one of the critics of the conservative course of the KSCĚ, became the new Prime Minister. However, supporters of conservative policies around Jakeš and Biľak still predominated in the highest bodies of the KSCĚ. Adamec’s government was restructured in June 1989, and a new approach to centralised economic management was announced, strengthening the independence of enterprises.<sup>361</sup>

As of 1988, public dissatisfaction became increasingly evident. On 25 March 1988, Christian, primarily Catholic, dissidents organised a public gathering with lit candles in Bratislava’s Hviezdoslav Square to demand respect for human rights and religious freedoms. The police intervened against the gathering. “*After almost two decades (since the protests on the first anniversary of the occupation on 21 August 1969), this was the first public demonstration by citizens in Slovakia (apart from religious pilgrimages) for their civil and religious rights.*”<sup>362</sup> On the twentieth anniversary of the invasion, on 21 August 1988, the first major anti-regime demonstration since 1969 took place on Wenceslas Square (Václavské náměstí). Further demonstrations were held on 28 October 1988, the 70th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia, and on 10 December 1988, Human Rights Day (the first officially authorised demonstration). Other demonstrations took place from 15 to 22 January 1989 in Prague in connection with the 20th anniversary of the death of Jan Palach, and more than 800 people were arrested. With the participation of foreign activists from Hungary and Poland (where the regime was already loosening its grip), a demonstration was held on 21 August 1989. Further demonstrations followed on 28 September and 28 October 1989. After the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989, the change in Czechoslovakia was only a matter of

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<sup>361</sup> RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 301-307; ZEMKO, M.: Slovensko na ceste k politickej a občianskej slobode (Od nástupu Michaila S. Gorbačova v marci 1985 po prvé slobodné voľby v júni 1990. In: ŽATKULIAK, J. a kol.: *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*. Bratislava : Prodama 2009, pp. 13-14.

<sup>362</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Slovensko na ceste k politickej a občianskej slobode (Od nástupu Michaila S. Gorbačova v marci 1985 po prvé slobodné voľby v júni 1990. In: ŽATKULIAK, J. a kol.: *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*. Bratislava : Prodama 2009, p. 16.

time.<sup>363</sup> *“On the eve of International Students’ Day on 16 November, a peaceful march of Bratislava university students proceeded to the building of the Ministry of Education of the SSR, where it ended with a discussion about the problems of university students with the ideological secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, Gejza Šlapka, and the Minister of Education, Ľudovít Killár.”*<sup>364</sup> On 17 November 1989, the 50th anniversary of the closure of Czech universities by the Nazis, and on the occasion of International Students’ Day, an authorised student demonstration was held in Prague. The students then marched through the city, but on Národní třída they clashed with security forces, leaving 568 people injured. The crackdown on students provoked a strong reaction in society; university students went on strike, gradually joined by theatre actors, and the protests spread “uncontrollably” to other cities.<sup>365</sup>

*“17 November 1989 opened the way for systemic changes in Slovak and Czech society. Citizens were given the opportunity to embark on the path to democracy, political and economic plurality, and the restoration of property rights. The recognition of human rights and freedoms became part of public life. Democratic conditions were established for resolving constitutional relations between the Slovak and Czech nations. The spiritual and social matters, public life, culture, and education received new impetus. Extensive social reforms, including economic and property reforms, changed the entire social system. The rule of law and a new legal order were codified. The rehabilitation of entire social groups that had been affected by the political persecution of the communist regime was initiated. Application of the principles of parliamentarianism and a pluralistic political system began, with the possibility of linking to a new electoral system and the restoration of civil and local self-government. The formation of Slovak and Czech civil society became the foundation for the shaping of a democratic structure of the state and its new political system.”*<sup>366</sup>

## **6.1 Political system**

### **Legislative power**

The Federal Assembly exercised legislative power at the federal level. It had two chambers – the Chamber of People and the Chamber of Nations. The Chamber of People had 200 members, and the Chamber of Nations had 150 members. Half of them were to be elected in the Czech Socialist Republic and half in the Slovak Socialist Republic. According to the original wording of the law, they were to be elected for four years, but Constitutional Act No. 43/1971 Coll. extended their term of office to five years. However, elections were not held immediately. The former National Assembly

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<sup>363</sup> ŽATKULIAK, J. a kol.: *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*. Bratislava : Prodama 2009, pp. 41, 50, 56, 100, 112-114.

<sup>364</sup> ZEMKO, M.: Slovensko na ceste k politickej a občianskej slobode (Od nástupu Michaila S. Gorbačova v marci 1985 po prvé slobodné voľby v júni 1990. In: ŽATKULIAK, J. a kol.: *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*. Bratislava : Prodama 2009, p. 18.

<sup>365</sup> ŽATKULIAK, J. a kol.: *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*. Bratislava : Prodama 2009, p. 117.

<sup>366</sup> ŽATKULIAK, J. a kol.: *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*. Bratislava : Prodama 2009, p. 117.

was transformed into the Chamber of People. The Chamber of Nations was formed from those members of the national councils who were not also members of the National Assembly. The Czech National Council and the Slovak National Council were expanded to the specified number of members (200 and 150) through cooptation. Elections to the national councils, originally planned for 1968, were postponed until the following year and ultimately took place in 1971.

The Federal Assembly exercised legislative power in areas that fell within the jurisdiction of the federation and within the joint jurisdiction of the federation and the republics. It could also exercise power in matters that fell within the jurisdiction of the republics, provided that it was necessary to maintain a uniform approach through federal law.<sup>367</sup>

For example, the Federal Assembly elected the President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and discussed his reports; discussed the programme declaration of the government and monitored its activities; established federal ministries and federal committees, as well as other federal state administration bodies. The Federal Assembly also approved international treaties and was to appoint eight members and four substitutes (half Czechs and half Slovaks) to the Federal Constitutional Court, which was responsible for adjudicating disputes between the republics and the federation. All laws had to be debated and approved by both chambers, neither of which had a stronger position than the other. The Federal Assembly was thus an example of so-called perfect bicameralism. If the two chambers failed to reach an agreement, they could resort to conciliation proceedings. In that case, each chamber sent ten of its members to a joint committee for conciliation proceedings. Due to the balance of power at the time, conciliation proceedings did not take place even once during this period.<sup>368</sup>

For certain laws, such as the adoption of the federal Constitution, constitutional acts of the Federal Assembly and their amendments, the election of the President or the declaration of war, the constitutional law stipulated that a three-fifths majority of Czech and a three-fifths majority of Slovak members of the Chamber of Nations had to vote in favour.<sup>369</sup> The prohibition of majority rule also applied to all important decisions, but a simple majority was sufficient for voting.<sup>370</sup> The constitutional ban on majority rule did not cause any problems, as the proposals submitted were always

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<sup>367</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 430.

<sup>368</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci..., pp. 167-214; VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, p. 114.

<sup>369</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, pp. 429-430.

<sup>370</sup> For more details, see Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci..., pp. 167-214.

approved by members of both chambers. After 1989, however, it became one of the factors contributing to the dissolution of the Czechoslovak federation.<sup>371</sup>

The Federal Assembly was represented externally by its Chairman. He chaired joint meetings and signed laws. The Presidium of the Federal Assembly assumed the powers of the Federal Assembly between its plenary sessions or after the end of the electoral term until a new one convened. The Presidium had 40 members, 20 elected by the Chamber of People and 20 by the Chamber of Nations (ten from the Czech and ten from the Slovak members). However, at that time, the Presidium could not elect the President, amend constitutional acts, decide on the state budget, or pass a vote of no confidence in members of the government. If necessary, however, it could decide on legal measures that would otherwise require a law passed by the Federal Assembly. These legal measures then had to be approved at the next session of the Federal Assembly, otherwise they would lose their validity. However, there was never a case where such a legal measure by the Presidium of the Federal Assembly was not subsequently approved by the plenary session. Each chamber also had its own chairman and presidium. Their presidia consisted of three to six members.<sup>372</sup>

Due to the political purges that also affected the Federal Assembly, Constitutional Act No. 117/1969 Coll. was adopted. It extended the term of office of the Federal Assembly to nearly twice the original length, until the next elections, which were, however, postponed for several years. This act empowered the Federal Assembly to strip its members of their mandates and co-opt new members to fill the vacancies created by the withdrawal of mandates. This mechanism was used to remove 80 members of the Federal Assembly who did not want to submit to the new political situation during the normalisation period.<sup>373</sup>

Subsequent legislative changes strengthened the position of the Federal Assembly over that of the national councils. The bureaucratic-centralist system of government was reestablished. The Federal Assembly functioned until the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992.

Peter Colotka became the Chairman of the Federal Assembly, and in April 1969, he was replaced by Alexander Dubček. After Dubček was removed from office, Dalibor Hanes became the new Chairman of the Federal Assembly in October 1969. In 1971, Alois Indra was appointed Chairman of the Federal Assembly, a position he held until his resignation on 29 November 1989.<sup>374</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost....*, pp. 114-115.

<sup>372</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci..., pp. 167-214; VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost....*, p. 115.

<sup>373</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost....*, p. 113.

<sup>374</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 1194.

## Executive power

### President

There were no fundamental changes concerning the position of the President of the Republic. The changes mainly concerned the method of election, as it was held in the new bicameral Federal Assembly. The conditions for eligibility remained unchanged, but to be elected, a candidate had to obtain a three-fifths majority of all members of the Chamber of People, a three-fifths majority of all members of the Chamber of Nations elected in the Czech Socialist Republic, and a three-fifths majority of all members of the Chamber of Nations elected in the Slovak Socialist Republic.

The President's competences did not change significantly, but he regained the right that he had lost in the 1960 Constitution - to appoint professors and rectors to universities and to appoint and promote generals. The President also regained the power to dissolve parliament, although this power was limited to cases where there was no agreement between the two chambers of the federal legislature, and even after conciliation proceedings, the Chamber of People and the Chamber of Nations failed to reach a consensus. The President also gained absolute immunity for acts related to the performance of his office, and prosecution even for high treason was not permissible.<sup>375</sup>

One of the more significant amendments to this chapter was the adoption of Constitutional Act No. 50/1975 Coll., which introduced the possibility of electing a new President if the incumbent was unable to perform his office for serious reasons for more than one year. This constitutional amendment was prompted by the long-term illness of President Ludvík Svoboda.<sup>376</sup>

In 1975, Gustáv Husák was elected President and was re-elected in 1980 and 1985.<sup>377</sup> After the events of November, Husák resigned from the office on 10 December 1989, and the Federal Assembly elected Václav Havel as President on 29 December 1989.<sup>378</sup>

### Government

The federal government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was to consist of a Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, ministers, and state secretaries. However, the institution of state secretaries, which had its origins in the Košice Government Programme, was abolished by Constitutional Act No. 125/1970 Coll.<sup>379</sup>

The federal government was appointed and dismissed by the President. It was accountable to the Federal Assembly for its performance. The government ensured the fulfilment of the federation's tasks in matters of international defence, strengthening

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<sup>375</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci..., pp. 167-214.

<sup>376</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989...*, p. 192.

<sup>377</sup> RYCHLÍK, J.: *Československo v období socializmu 1945 – 1948*. Praha : Vyšehrad, 2020, pp. 287-288.

<sup>378</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, pp. 962-963.

<sup>379</sup> GRONSKÝ, J.: *Komentované dokumenty k ústavním dějinám Československa III. 1960 – 1989...*, p. 192.

the country's security, foreign policy, the economy, and other areas within federal competence. It unified, managed, and controlled the activities of federal ministries and other federal central bodies. To ensure the implementation of the Federal Assembly's laws, and within their limits, the government could issue regulations.<sup>380</sup> However, the government of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic issued government regulations practically at its own discretion, or rather according to the directives of the KSČ leadership. Nobody would draw attention to any unconstitutional practices.<sup>381</sup>

The powers of federal ministries and certain other federal central authorities were regulated by Act No. 133/1970 Coll., which, from a general point of view, strengthened federal authorities at the expense of the republics. It thoroughly listed the tasks of federal central state administration bodies in matters of joint competence of the federation and the republics, especially with regard to the economy. It concerned the bodies headed by a member of the federal government.<sup>382</sup> Government resolutions were binding on national governments. This was also due to the fact that their Prime Ministers also became Deputy Prime Ministers of the federal government.

Oldřich Černík became Prime Minister of the federal government on 1 January 1969. On 28 April 1969, a new federal government was appointed, headed by Černík, who was replaced a year later by the more reliable Lubomír Štrougal.<sup>383</sup> Štrougal remained in office for 18 years and was replaced by Ladislav Adamec in 1988. After Adamec's resignation on 6 December 1989, Marián Čalfa was entrusted with the management of the government. On 10 December 1989, the President appointed a new federal "government of national understanding" headed by Marián Čalfa.<sup>384</sup>

### **State authorities of the Czech Socialist Republic and the Slovak Socialist Republic**

The legislative bodies of the republics were the Czech and Slovak National Councils, which had legislative power in areas falling within the exclusive competence of the republics and within the joint competence of the federation and the republics. The executive bodies of the republics were the republican governments. The Prime Ministers and members of the republican governments were appointed and dismissed by the presidiums of the national councils. The Czech National Council had 200 members, the Slovak National Council 150 members. Like the Federal Assembly, they were originally to be elected for four years, but their term of office was extended to

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<sup>380</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci..., pp. 167-214; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 437.

<sup>381</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, p. 119.

<sup>382</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci..., pp. 167-214; HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 437.

<sup>383</sup> KŘEN, J.: *Dvě století střední Evropy*. Praha Argo, 2019, p. 759.

<sup>384</sup> DANGL, V. – BYSTRICKÝ, V. a kol.: *Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov II*. Bratislava : VEDA 2014, p. 961.

five years by Constitutional Act No. 43/1971 Coll. The national councils elected their own presidiums, which exercised most of their powers between sessions.

The task of the National Councils was to deliberate on constitutional and other laws of the republic and monitor how they were implemented by the republic's authorities, to give consent to international treaties whose implementation required a law of the National Council, to discuss fundamental issues of domestic policy, to approve the medium-term national economic plan and the state budget of the republic, verify their implementation and approve the final state accounts of the republic, elect and dismiss the Speaker of the National Council and other members of the Presidium, discuss the programme declaration of the republic's government and monitor its activities and those of its members, as well as vote on confidence in the government, establish ministries and other central bodies of state administration of the republic by law, elect and dismiss members of the Constitutional Court of the republic and establish a supervisory body of the National Council by law.<sup>385</sup>

Initially, the National Councils were quite active in their legislative work, which also reflected a certain degree of autonomy in their decision-making. However, after the amendment of the Constitutional Act in 1970, the legislative activity of both national councils was radically reduced and, as part of the re-centralisation, the laws of both councils were unified and became mere literal translations of Czech and Slovak laws. The laws adopted between 1968 and 1969 were repealed.<sup>386</sup>

The governments of the republics were the regulatory and executive bodies within the framework defined by the laws of the Federal Assembly and the National Councils. However, they also exercised certain powers in matters regulated by federal laws, provided that the enforcement of these laws fell within the remit of the republican governments. They were accountable to the National Councils.<sup>387</sup>

The tasks of the government included the governance and supervision over national committees (at the same time, however, the Czechoslovak Government Commission for National Committees was established at the federal level for this purpose). They could issue regulations to implement laws of the National Councils and, if authorised by law, also implement laws approved by the Federal Assembly. The republics were competent in all matters not expressly entrusted to the federation. There were no relations of superiority-subordination between the federal government and the republican governments. However, the federal government had the right to suspend the implementation of measures taken by a republican government if they

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<sup>385</sup> Ústavní zákon č. 143/1968 Sb. ze dne 27. října 1968, o československé federaci..., pp. 167-214.

<sup>386</sup> VODIČKA, K. – CABADA, L.: *Politický systém České republiky. Historie a současnost...*, pp. 88, 116.

<sup>387</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost...*, p. 430.

contradicted a measure issued by the federal government within the scope of its powers.<sup>388</sup>

**Review questions:**

1. *Which events sparked the so-called Prague Spring/Czechoslovak Spring?*
2. *Characterise the Action Programme of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia*
3. *Why did Warsaw Pact troops intervene in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, and which states participated in the intervention?*
4. *Which Czechoslovak politicians held the most important political and party positions in 1968–1969?*
5. *Name the most important opposition movements in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s.*

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<sup>388</sup> HLEDÍKOVÁ, Z. – JANÁK, J. – DOBEŠ, J.: *Dějiny správy v českých zemích od počátků státu po současnost....*, p. 437.

## 7 Political developments in Slovakia 1989-1992

With the establishment of democratisation processes, after four decades of totalitarianism, citizens of post-November Czechoslovakia and, since 1993, citizens of both successor states were finally able to make decisions and act freely according to their own judgement. The opportunities for engagement in the electoral process have expanded significantly.

While in the early 1990s, elections were only held for national parliaments and local government bodies, citizens of the Slovak Republic (SR) gradually gained the right to elect the President of the Slovak Republic (since 1999), bodies of higher territorial units (since 2001), and also representatives to the European Parliament (EP, since 2004).<sup>389</sup> It is also important to note the possibility of expressing opinions and positions through referenda.

The political events of November 1989 can thus be clearly considered a fundamental milestone in the political and social development of the Slovak Republic.

### 7.1 The Velvet Revolution

The period before November 1989 is referred to as **the period of totalitarianism or socialism**.<sup>390</sup> This period was characterised by the concentration of power in the hands of a single political party, the **Communist Party of Czechoslovakia** (Komunistická strana Českoslovenka - KSČ). Its exclusive position in the state was even codified in the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, adopted in 1960.<sup>391</sup>

The term **Velvet Revolution** (Nežná revolúcia in Slovak and Sametová revoluce in Czech) refers to the launch of the democratisation process beginning on 17 November 1989. At the same time, it is important to realise that this significant event was preceded by a whole series of other events, both in Czechoslovakia itself and abroad.<sup>392</sup>

In general, 17 November 1989 is considered the day of the Velvet Revolution, when mass demonstrations of young people – mainly students – took place in Prague. Security forces, including the (secret) **State Security Service** (ŠtB), were deployed against them.<sup>393</sup> However, the fact remains that the day before (16 November 1989), a

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<sup>389</sup> BARDOVIČ, J.: Volebný systém na Slovensku a jeho vybrané problémy v rokoch 1989 – 2019. In: ŠUTAJOVÁ, J. – EŠTOK, G. – ONUFRÁK, A. (eds.): *1989 – 2019: Dekády zmien. Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2021, pp. 63-64.

<sup>390</sup> Although the term communism, or the communist era, has become widely accepted in society, the fact remains that communism was never established in Czechoslovakia as the final stage of human development, as conceived, for example, by Marx in his work *The German Ideology*; BÉREŠ, M.: *K problematike deformít demokracie na Slovensku v rokoch 1990 – 1998. (Dizertačná práca)*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Filozofická fakulta, 2017, p. 11.

<sup>391</sup> Constitutional Act No. 100/1960 Coll.

<sup>392</sup> ŽATKULIAK, J. a kol.: *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*. Bratislava : Prodama, 2009, 247 p.

<sup>393</sup> ÚPN: Kalendárium k udalostiam pádu komunistického režimu v roku 1989. In: *17november1989.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/7/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.17november1989.sk/sk/kalendarium/>>; SME: Ako vyzerali dni revolúcie a čo im predchádzalo. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/7/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/ako-vyzerali-dni-revolucie-a-co-im-predchadzalo>>.

similar student demonstration took place in Bratislava.<sup>394</sup> Their spontaneous march through the city centre was intended to be a way of commemorating International Students' Day, which falls on 17 November. The procession moved toward the building of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Socialist Republic (ME SSR), where they met with the then secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia (ÚV KSS), Gejza Šlapka, and also with the director of the higher education department of the Ministry of Education of the SSR, Jan Porvazník.<sup>395</sup> Although members of the National Security Corps were present throughout the rally and acted intimidatingly, they did not intervene.

In contrast, in Prague the following day, the originally peaceful gathering of students who wanted to commemorate the events of 50 years ago with a candlelight demonstration<sup>396</sup> ended with a harsh intervention by the security forces. After these events were reported in the media at home and abroad, further mass demonstrations broke out across the territory of the **Czechoslovak Socialist Republic** (Československá socialistická republika - ČSSR) in the following days.

Two days later, 19 November 1989, representatives of opposition groups from non-communist parties of the National Front and even individuals from the ranks of the communists who disagreed with the policies of the time gathered at the Činoherní klub in Prague and established **the Civic Forum** (Občanské forum - OF).<sup>397</sup> It was a broad civic platform whose goal was to remove the leaders of the totalitarian regime from public life and establish democratic processes. In October 1990, Václav Klaus became the chairman of the OF. However, the most popular representative of the OF was Václav Havel.

On the same day, 19 November 1989, a revolutionary movement called **Public Against Violence** (Verejnosc' proti násiliu - VPN) was formed in Slovakia. It was also

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<sup>394</sup> KRÁĽOVIČ, T.: Prológ Nežnej revolúcie: Študentská demonštrácia 16. novembra 1989 v Bratislave. In: *Pamäť národa*. ÚPN, roč. XV, 3/2019, pp. 13-24. [online], [cit. 15/7/2025]. Available at: <[https://www.upn.gov.sk/publikacie\\_web/pamat-naroda/pamat-naroda-03-2019.pdf](https://www.upn.gov.sk/publikacie_web/pamat-naroda/pamat-naroda-03-2019.pdf)>.

<sup>395</sup> STVR: Nežná revolúcia v novembri 1989 sa začala v Bratislave o deň skôr ako v Prahe. In: *stvr.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/7/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.stvr.sk/novinky/zaujímavosti/308085/nezna-revolucia-v-novembri-1989-sa-zacala-v-bratislave-o-den-skor-ako-v-prahe>>.

<sup>396</sup> On the occasion of the 21st anniversary of the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic (28 October 1939), mass demonstrations against Nazi occupation took place in Prague. During clashes with the police, a worker named V. Sedláček was killed and a student of the Faculty of Medicine at Charles University, J. Opletal, was shot and died on 11 November 1939 as a result of his injuries. After the student's funeral, a student demonstration took place, which escalated into another protest against the Nazi occupation. In an effort to resolve the tense situation, members of the German police and SS units stormed university dormitories in Prague, Brno and Příbram and arrested university students studying at Czech universities. Nine of them – leaders of student organisations – were shot dead the very next day, ten Czech universities were closed, and 1,200 university students were deported to the Sachsenhausen-Oranienburg concentration camp. ÚPN: 17. november 1939. Nacistické represálie proti študentom a zatvorenie českých vysokých škôl. In: *upn.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/7/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.upn.gov.sk/sk/17-november-1939-nacisticke-represalie-proti-studentom-a-zatvorenie-ceskych-vysokych-skol/>>.

<sup>397</sup> RYCHLÍK, J.: *Rozpad Československa*. Bratislava : Academic Electronic Press, 2002, p. 71.

led by a **Coordination Centre** consisting of Fedor Gál, Milan Kňažko, Ján Budaj, Peter Zajac, Martin Bútora, and others. One of VPN activists at the time, Soňa Szomolányi, who later became a professor of political science, wrote: “...the founders and leaders of VPN mostly came from islands of positive deviation, i.e. from conservationist circles, from the ranks of social scientists, Catholic dissidents, Catholic activists and artists, especially visual artists, who were at the very beginning of the whole spontaneously organised movement.”<sup>398</sup> The primary goals of VPN were:

- Rejection of violence in political, cultural, and public life;
- The establishment of freedoms (including free elections);
- Abolishing Article 4 of Constitutional Act No. 100/1960 Coll. (Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic) on the leading role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia.

The first official meeting between representatives of the Czechoslovak government and the National Front of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic with representatives of the OF took place on 26 November 1989 in Prague. On the same day in Slovakia, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia (ÚV KSS) recognised at its extraordinary meeting the need to repeal Article 4 on the leading role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in society, thereby preceding the federal parliament in Prague.

At noon the following day, 27 November 1989, a two-hour general strike took place throughout the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

After the Chairman of **the Slovak National Council** (SNR), Viliam Šalgovič, resigned on 30 November 1989, Rudolf Schuster became the new Chairman of the SNR.<sup>399</sup>

On the same day, an announcement was made that **Christian Democratic clubs** would be established in Slovakia, backed by Christian dissidents led by Ján Čarnogurský.<sup>400</sup> He had been released from detention just five days earlier. With the establishment of **the Christian Democratic Movement** (Kresťaskodemokratické hnutie - KDH) on 17 February 1990, with Ján Čarnogurský as its chairman, it is possible to speak of the KDH, alongside VPN, as one of two relevant revolutionary movements in Slovakia that stood at the forefront of the early stages of the post-November events.<sup>401</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> S. Szomolányi at a panel discussion of participants in November 1989 and founders of the VPN movement. Modra, 13 December 1996. In: ANTALOVÁ, I. (ed.): *Verejnosc proti násiliu 1989 – 1991. Svedectvá a dokumenty*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 1998, p. 17.

<sup>399</sup> NR SR: Stenografická správa o 17. schôdzi Slovenskej národnej rady konanej 30. novembra 1989. In: *nrsr.sk* [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.nrsr.sk/dl/Browser/Document?documentId=10162>>.

<sup>400</sup> ČARNOGURSKÝ, J.: *Videné od Dunaja*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 1997, p. 218.

<sup>401</sup> BOBULA, P.: *História KDH - rok 1990 - ROK VZNIKU*. p. 1. [online], [cit. 18/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://kdh.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/historiaKDH.pdf>>.

On 10 December 1989, then-President Gustáv Husák appointed a new federal **government of national understanding**.<sup>402</sup> Marián Čalfa became the federal Prime Minister. This government consisted of 20 ministers, 9 of whom were communists, 7 were non-party members, and two members each from the **Czechoslovak People's Party** and the **Czechoslovak Socialist Party**. Immediately afterwards, President Husák resigned.<sup>403</sup> Essentially, this represented an agreement between the old communist elite and the new elite representing the spontaneously emerging civil society in the form of the OF and VPN.<sup>404</sup> From the very beginning, the activities of VPN in Slovakia and the OF in Czechia were marked by a considerable degree of amateurism, as no one had been prepared to assume power in the state. On that day, a march to Hainburg, Austria, took place in Bratislava under the name "**Hello Europe**" ("Ahoj Európa"), attended by approximately 50,000 citizens. This march is often described as the de facto **fall of the Iron Curtain** in Slovakia. The choice of date for the march was again symbolic, as 10 December has been considered International Human Rights Day since 1950.

Between 28 December 1989 and 31 March 1990, on the basis of Constitutional Act No. 183/1989 Coll. on the election of members of legislative bodies, VPN candidates were co-opted into the SNR and **the Federal Assembly** (Federálne zhromaždenie - FZ). Alexander Dubček was elected president of the FZ and was perceived, especially in Slovakia, as a suitable candidate for the future President of the Republic. The following day (29 December 1989), Václav Havel, who was promoted by the OF, was elected President of the ČSSR by the Federal Assembly, and his candidacy was later accepted by VPN. Unlike Dubček, who was the leader of the Prague Spring of 1968, Havel and his dissident past represented the embodiment of the Velvet Revolution of 1989.

### **The Government of National Understanding of the SSR, led by Milan Čič**

From 12 December 1989 until the parliamentary elections in 1990, Milan Čič, who had previously served as Minister of Justice of the Slovak Socialist Republic (MJ SSR), became Prime Minister of Slovakia. Several people (from among politically active individuals sympathetic to Dubček and his colleagues from 1968) recommended corporate lawyer Vladimír Mečiar to Milan Čič for the vacant post of Minister of the

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<sup>402</sup> PETROVIČOVÁ, E. – POLLAK, P.: Vláda národného porozumenia. In: PEKNÍK, M. a kolektív: *Pohľady na slovenskú politiku po roku 1989. I. časť*. Bratislava : ÚPV SAV a VEDA, 2016, pp. 389-427.

<sup>403</sup> ÚPN: 10. decembra 1989. Vymenovanie „vlády národného porozumenia“. In: *upn.gov.sk*. [online], [cit. 18/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.upn.gov.sk/sk/10-december-1989-vymenovanie-vlady-narodneho-porozumenia/>>; ÚPN: Kalendárium k udalostiam pádu komunistického režimu v roku 1989. In: *17november1989.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/7/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.17november1989.sk/sk/kalendarium/>>.

<sup>404</sup> SZOMOLÁNYI, S.: Tranzičná cesta Slovenska a voľby 1998. In: BÚTORA, M. – MESEŽNIKOV, G. – BÚTOROVA, Z. (eds.): *Kto? Prečo? Ako? Slovenské voľby '98*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1999, p. 10.

Interior and the Environment.<sup>405</sup> Of the three candidates for this position, Mečiar was rated as “*excellent*”, as the one “*who knew everything*”.<sup>406</sup>

The fact that this may not have been the best choice is suggested by indications that Mečiar had early access to the files of the State Security Service (ŠtB), thereby obtaining compromising information about his colleagues and political opponents. At the same time, he did not do the personnel restructuring in the state administration as envisaged by VPN leadership, but based on his own decisions. Quite often, he did not remove the managers of the previous regime from their positions, but simply transferred them to other positions, thereby effectively binding them to him.<sup>407</sup> His popularity skyrocketed, especially after his statement that “*there is enough room in prisons for all those who abused their position.*”<sup>408</sup>

The main task of Čič’s government was to manage and administer the state during this transitional period and to prepare for free elections. These were held on 8 and 9 June 1990. The elections were described as “**founding**” because they laid the foundations for a pluralistic system of political parties and parliamentary democracy.

In Slovakia (unlike in Czechia), these elections were more about competition between the broad civic movement VPN and the social-conservative KDH than revenge against the former communist establishment.<sup>409</sup> Although some communists remained loyal to the original KSCĽ, others continuously transitioned to VPN. In this context, the authors Lid’ák, Koganová, and Leška identified several political currents, at least two of which were left-wing:<sup>410</sup>

- Reformist communists – protagonists of the Prague Spring who were persecuted and came together in the Obroda club (Alexander Dubček, Hvezdoň Kočtúch, Augustín M. Húska);
- Christian dissidents (Ivan Čarnogurský, Ján Čarnogurský, Jozef Mikloško, František Mikloško, and others);
- Green and environmental movements (Ján Budaj, Peter Tatár);
- Civic dissidents – also referred to as islands of positive deviation (Ján Kučerák, Ivan Mikloš, Vladimír Ondruš, Peter Zajac);

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<sup>405</sup> BÉREŠ, M.: Začiatok vlády Vladimíra Mečiara. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Medzi jednotlivosťou a pospolitosťou: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2016, pp. 497-499.

<sup>406</sup> BÉREŠ, M.: *K problematike deformít demokracie na Slovensku v rokoch 1990 – 1998. (Dizertačná práca)*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Filozofická fakulta, 2017, p. 22.

<sup>407</sup> F. Gál at a panel discussion of participants in November 1989 and founders of the VPN movement. Modra, 14 December 1996. In: ANTALOVÁ, I. (ed.): *Verejnosc proti násiliu 1989 – 1991. Svedectvá a dokumenty*. Bratislava : Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 1998, p. 114.

<sup>408</sup> LEŠKO, M.: *Mečiar a mečiarizmus*. Bratislava : VMV, 1996, p. 27.

<sup>409</sup> SZOMOLÁNYI, S.: Tranzičná cesta Slovenska a voľby 1998. In: BÚTORA, M. – MESEŽNIKOV, G. – BÚTOROVA, Z. (eds.): *Kto? Prečo? Ako? Slovenské voľby '98*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>410</sup> LIĐÁK, J. – KOGANOVÁ, V. – LEŠKA, D.: *Politické strany a hnutia na Slovensku po roku 1989*. Bratislava : Ekonóm, 2001, p. 33.

- Artists (especially visual artists);
- Pragmatic communists (e.g., Milan Čič, Marián Čalfa, Rudolf Schuster).

In this context, it should be noted that on 1 February 1990, **the Social Democratic Party of Slovakia** (Sociálnodemokratická strana Slovenska - SDSS) was founded, with Ivan Paulička as the chairman, who was replaced by Boris Zala after two months in office.

### **The beginnings of electoral legislation**

The basic form of **the electoral laws** was formulated during the round table negotiations in 1990.<sup>411</sup> The participating political parties and movements (OF, VPN, KSC, ČSSS, ČSL, DS, and KSS) agreed that members of all legislative bodies would be elected **by proportional representation in 12 constituencies** (8 in Czechia and 4 in Slovakia). Admission into parliament was limited by a 5% electoral threshold. Voters had the option of casting preferential votes. Only political parties with at least 10,000 members or a petition supported by the same number of sympathisers could run in the elections. The political agreement also included the decision that the legislative bodies should be elected for only **a two-year term** in the first democratic elections.<sup>412</sup> Proportional representation was to apply to both elections to the Federal Assembly and the elections to the Czech National Council and the Slovak National Council (SNR).

Immediately after the aforementioned political negotiations, draft electoral laws were submitted to the federal and national parliaments and approved in February and March 1990. Specifically, these were:

- **Act No. 47/1990 Coll. on elections to the Federal Assembly of 27 February 1990;**
- **Act No. 54/1990 Coll. on elections to the Czech National Council of 6 March 1990;**
- **Act No. 80/1990 Coll. on elections to the Slovak National Council of 16 March 1990.**

Their adoption had to be preceded by the adoption of a) Constitutional Act No. 135/1989 Coll. of 29 November 1989, amending Constitutional Act No. 100/1960 Coll. Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and abolishing the leading role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia; b) Constitutional Act No. 46/1989 Coll. of 27 February 1990, amending and supplementing Constitutional Act No. 100/1960 Coll. Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and Constitutional Act No. 143/1968 Coll. on the Czechoslovak Federation, which abolished the imperative

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<sup>411</sup> OROSZ, L. (a kol.): *Volebné právo*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2015, p. 196.

<sup>412</sup> OROSZ, L. (a kol.): *Volebné právo*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2015, p. 197 based on SUK, J.: *Labyrintem revoluce. Aktéři, zápletky a křižovatky jedné politické krize*. Praha : Prostor, 2003, p. 271 et seq. and also JIRÁSKOVÁ, V.: *Změna volebního systému: Kdy?* In: OROSZ, L. – MAJERČÁK, T. (eds.): *Aktuálne problémy volebného práva a volebného zákonodarstva v Slovenskej republike – II. ústavné dni*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2014, p. 121 et seq.

mandate and replaced it with a free mandate based on the conscience and best convictions of the member of parliament; c) Act No. 15/1990 Coll. of 23 January 1990 on political parties.<sup>413</sup>

**Act No. 80/1990 Coll. on elections to the Slovak National Council** was in force from 16 March 1990 to 30 September 2004, when it was replaced by the new Electoral Act No. 333/2004 Coll. on elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic. According to Election Act No. 80/1990 Coll., five elections to the national parliament were held, namely in 1990 (to the SNR), 1992, 1994, 1998, and 2002 (to the NR SR).<sup>414</sup> Four electoral districts were established, namely the territory of the capital city of Bratislava, the West Slovak Region, the Central Slovak Region, and the East Slovak Region. A political party could list a maximum of 40 candidates on its candidate list within a single electoral district. The threshold for a political party to be elected to the SNR was set at 3% of the total number of valid votes. (In the case of elections to the FZ, it was 5%, and it was sufficient for this to happen in one of the national republics). Act No. 80/1990 Coll. was amended eight times, and in 1999, the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic (Ústavný súd Slovenskej republiky - ÚS SR) also commented on its wording in the Ruling of the Constitutional Court Ref. No. PL. ÚS 15/1998 of 11 March 1999.<sup>415</sup>

On the basis of Constitutional Act No. 81/1990 Coll., the name of the state was changed from **the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic** to **the Czech-Slovak Federal Republic**. Due to the so-called **hyphen war** (pomlčková vojna), Constitutional Act No. 101/1990 Coll. was subsequently adopted on 23 April 1990, changing the name of the state again to **the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (ČSFR) - Česká a Slovenská Federatívna Republika** in Slovak and **Česká a Slovenská Federativní Republika** in Czech, with both versions being equivalent.

One of the problems that arose shortly after the Velvet Revolution was growing discontent in prisons. Convicts demanded better conditions of housing and treatment; investigation of unjustified convictions; and so on. These issues were resolved through mutual agreement between the prisoners and prison staff. After President Havel granted an amnesty at the beginning of 1990, a significant number of prisoners were released, which subsequently led to a sharp increase in crime. Frustration and tension gradually grew among those who were not eligible for the amnesty (due to the

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<sup>413</sup> OROSZ, L. (a kol.): *Volebné právo*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2015, p 197; DOMIN, M.: *Volebné právo a volebné systémy: Druhé, aktualizované a prepracované vydanie*. Bratislava : Wolters Kluwer, 2021, p. 139.

<sup>414</sup> After the Constitution of the Slovak Republic was approved in 1992, the sole constitutional and legislative body of the Slovak Republic was renamed the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NR SR).

<sup>415</sup> ONUFRÁK, A.: Volebné právo v kontexte ústavodarných procesov. In: OROSZ, L. – HORŇÁKOVÁ, D. – ČERNÁNSKÝ, M. P. (eds.): *Ústava Slovenskej republiky a jej perspektívy. Skvalitňovanie ústavného textu a zvyšovanie autority slovenskej ústavy – reálna možnosť, alebo naivná ilúzia? Zborník príspevkov z vedeckého seminára Danišovoce 23. – 25. november*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Právnická fakulta: Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2022, pp. 202-241.

seriousness of their crimes), which initially led to a strike in the Leopoldov prison and gradually escalated into an armed clash between a group of prisoners and prison staff. The situation was only brought under control after a harsh intervention by special forces. The order for the intervention was signed by Vladimír Mečiar.

## 7.2 Electoral term 1990-1992

The first free elections were held on 8 and 9 June 1990. The elections were called **the founding elections**. A total of 16 political parties and movements ran for office in the 1990 elections. Of these, seven political parties exceeded the eligibility threshold, which was 3% at the time. Voter turnout reached 95.39% of the total number of eligible voters.<sup>416</sup>

The winner of the 1990 elections was VPN, which received 29.35% of the vote. From the outset, VPN's list of candidates included several individuals with a communist past (including Dubček, Čalfa, and Čič). The movement won 48 seats in the SNR in the elections. The second most successful party was the KDH, which received 19.21% of the vote, giving it 31 seats. **The Slovak National Party** (Slovenská národná strana - SNS), which won 13.94% of the vote, **the Communist Party of Slovakia** (Komunistická strana Slovenska - KSS), with 13.34% of the vote, **the Coexistence - Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement** (Együttélés-Spolužitie-Wspólnota-Soužití, Maďarské kresťansko-demokratické hnutie - ESWMK) coalition, with 8.66% of the vote, as well as **the Democratic Party** (Demokratická strana - DS), with 4.40% of the vote, and **the Green Party** (Strana zelených - SZ), with 3.49% of the vote, all got into SNR.<sup>417</sup>

With regard to the KSS, it should be noted that after the elections, the reformist wing led by Peter Weiss left the party. This group definitely rejected the party's orthodox Marxist orientation, preferring a social democratic direction. The result of this split was the formation (in November 1990) of a new political party called **the Party of the Democratic Left** (Strana demokratickej ľavice - SDL).<sup>418</sup>

The MPs were elected for a two-year term, as later proved, it was not the best solution.

### The first government of Vladimír Mečiar

Based on the election results, a Slovak government was formed consisting of VPN, KDH, DS, and MNI. Vladimír Mečiar became Prime Minister, Ján Čarnogurský (KDH)

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<sup>416</sup> ŠÚ SR: Výsledky volieb rok 1990. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/07/2025]. Available at: <[https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/snr1990/volby90\\_s/pph90.htm](https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/snr1990/volby90_s/pph90.htm)>.

<sup>417</sup> ŠÚ SR: Výsledky volieb rok 1990. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/07/2025]. Available at: <[https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/snr1990/volby90\\_s/pph90.htm](https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/snr1990/volby90_s/pph90.htm)>.

<sup>418</sup> KOPEČEK, L.: Výzkumná sonda do politickej existencie slovenských exkomunistú. Strana demokratickej ľavice 1991 - 2004. In: MURÁNSKY, M. (a kol.): *Vývoj a perspektívy sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku pohľad zvonútra a zvonku*. Bratislava : Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2006, p. 21; KRNO, M.: Peter Weiss: Išlo o myšlienky a solidaritu, nik nemyslel na kariéru. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 19/07/2025].

became First Deputy Prime Minister, and František Mikloško (VPN) became Speaker of the Slovak National Council.

The KDH demanded and obtained the post of Minister of the Interior in this government for two fundamental reasons:

- VPN already had the positions of Prime Minister and the Speaker of the SNR, and it was necessary to achieve a balance of power;
- By creating new structures of state power (state administration, local government, but also state security forces), the KDH wanted to transform the state in such a way that there could be no return to communism and a totalitarian regime.<sup>419</sup>

The result of this distribution of posts was the first conflict (at the end of October 1990) that arose between Prime Minister Mečiar and the then Minister of the Interior for the KDH, Anton Andráš. Prime Minister Mečiar labelled Interior Minister Andráš incompetent.<sup>420</sup> Mečiar made Andráš's continued tenure as Minister of the Interior conditional (for the first time) upon his own resignation. The entire leadership of VPN and DS stood behind Prime Minister Mečiar. After Andráš submitted his resignation, which was accepted by the SNR Presidium, Ladislav Pittner (KDH) was appointed Minister of the Interior.<sup>421</sup>

After the government was formed, so-called **competence negotiations** were held **between the Czech and Slovak governments concerning the arrangement of the ČSFR**.<sup>422</sup> The first such negotiations took place in Trenčianske Teplice on 8 and 9 August 1990. The Slovak delegation at the negotiations was led by Mečiar, while the Czech side was represented by the Czech Prime Minister Petr Pithart (OF). However, the outcome of the negotiations was interpreted differently. While Mečiar considered them binding, the representative of the Czech side, Petr Pithart, considered them to be merely a consultation.<sup>423</sup>

The events after November also triggered a whole series of socio-economic processes. The transformation from a centrally planned economy to a market economy brought not only a rapid rise in inflation and unemployment, but also the collapse of

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Available at: <<https://zurnal.pravda.sk/rozhovory/clanok/382019-peter-weiss-islo-o-myslienky-a-solidaritu-nik-nemyslel-na-karieru/>>.

<sup>419</sup> BÉREŠ, M.: *K problematike deformít demokracie na Slovensku v rokoch 1990 – 1998. (Dizertačná práca)*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Filozofická fakulta, 2017, p. 61.

<sup>420</sup> KRPELAN, R.: Andráš – prvý, koho Mečiar odstrelil. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/svet/c/andras-prvy-koho-meciar-odstrelil>>.

<sup>421</sup> BOBULA, P.: *História KDH - rok 1990 - ROK VZNIKU*. p. 7. [online], [cit. 18/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://kdh.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/historiaKDH.pdf>>.

<sup>422</sup> LALUHA, I.: Východiská a cesty k vzniku Slovenskej republiky v roku 1993. Od federácie k vzniku samostatných republík SR a ČR. In: PEKNÍK, M. a kolektív: *Pohľady na slovenskú politiku po roku 1989. I. časť*. Bratislava : ÚPV SAV a VEDA, 2016, pp. 427-547.

<sup>423</sup> AP ČR, f. ČNR: Stenografický protokol 4. schôdze ČNR 4. septembra 1990, exposé P. Pitharta. In: RYCHLÍK, J.: *Rozpad Československa*. Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2002, pp. 149-150.

existing markets, trade relations, and long-standing partnerships. While the popularity of VPN gradually declined, that of Mečiar only increased. By December 1990, he was already the second most popular politician in the CSFR.

Since VPN did not control any ministry and did not assume responsibility for running the state, but essentially only monitored developments from behind the scenes, Prime Minister Mečiar became increasingly independent in his decisions. In essence, this led to the establishment of a **dual power structure** between the then Prime Minister Mečiar and VPN leadership headed by Fedor Gál.<sup>424</sup> This development subsequently led to a split within VPN, the fall of Mečiar's first government, and, subsequently, the creation of the HZDS. The final, fatal blow by Mečiar against VPN leadership was a speech by the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Milan Kňažko, who accused the VPN coordination centre of attempting to censor Prime Minister Mečiar. After open criticism from VPN, in early March 1991, Mečiar and 16 other members of VPN left and formed **VPN - Za demokratické Slovensko** (VPN-ZDS) platform. The KDH thus became the strongest parliamentary club in the SNR.

The crisis culminated on 23 April 1991, when the SNR Presidium dismissed Mečiar from the post of Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic. In addition to Mečiar, several ministers of his government were also dismissed. Ján Čarnogurský (KDH) became the new Prime Minister.

On 22 June 1991, the founding congress of the **Movement for a Democratic Slovakia** (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko - HZDS) took place. The party was transformed from VPN-ZDS. The rest of VPN gradually lost influence, and most members formed the **Civic Democratic Union - VPN** (Občianska demokratická únia - VPN, only ODÚ since 1992).

### **The government of Ján Čarnogurský**

This government was formed on the basis of a coalition agreement between part of VPN, KDH, DS, and the **Hungarian Independent Initiative** (Maďarská nezávislá iniciatíva - MNI). In contrast, the SNS, KSS, and ESWMK remained in opposition. The greatest challenges facing this government included:

- Initiating numerous negotiations on constitutional issues;
- At the beginning of October 1991, the Federal Assembly adopted **Act No. 451/1991 Coll.**, known as the **lustration law**, which came into force on 5 November 1991. Its purpose was to restrict the participation of prominent figures of the communist regime - especially those who had knowingly collaborated with the ŠtB

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<sup>424</sup> GÁL, F.: *Mimořádné číslo deníku Smena*. [online], [cit. 11/03/2025]. Available at: <<http://www.fedorgal.cz/verejnost-proti-nasiliu/mimoradne-cislo-deniku-smena/>>.

– in high state and public functions in state administration, the judiciary, the army, the media, etc.;<sup>425</sup>

• Launching the so-called **small privatisation**, in which smaller enterprises and service companies were sold to private entrepreneurs, and a little later, **the first wave of large privatisation**, in which medium-sized and large state-owned enterprises were partly sold and partly transferred to citizens in the form of voucher privatisation.<sup>426</sup> Between 1991 and 1993, the assets of 678 companies were transferred, totalling 169 billion (Czech) Slovak crowns.<sup>427</sup>

The second amendment to the electoral law – Act No. 104/1992 Coll. of 12 March 1992 – was substantially more significant than the previous one. The changes did not only concern formal matters (such as changing the name of the state or renaming the local national committee to municipality), but also more fundamental changes such as increasing the threshold for eligibility for the national parliament from 3% to 5% for a political party running independently, 7% for coalitions of two or three political parties, and 10% for coalitions of four or more political parties. If no political party met the above criteria, the threshold was to be lowered.

### Review questions:

1. Describe the Velvet Revolution?
2. Describe the most significant revolutionary movements and name their most prominent leaders?
3. Describe the Government of National Understanding of the Slovak Socialist republic led by Milan Čič?
4. Describe the first government of Vladimír Mečiar?
5. Describe the dual government and name the governments involved?
6. Describe the government of Ján Čarnogurský?
7. Describe the lustration law?

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<sup>425</sup> BOBULA, P.: *História KDH - rok 1990 - ROK VZNIKU*. p. 10. [online], [cit. 18/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://kdh.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/historiaKDH.pdf>>.

<sup>426</sup> MIKLOŠ, I.: *Riziko konkurencie v procese privatizácie: /Analýza vývoja privatizácie v slovenskej republike s dôrazom na príčiny a súvislosti rizika korupcie v tomto procese/*. Bratislava : Klub Windsor, 1995, 45 p. [online], [cit. 20/07/2025]. Available at:

<[https://www.upms.sk/media/MESA10\\_RIZIKO\\_KORUPCIE\\_V\\_PROCESE\\_PRIVATIZCIE.pdf](https://www.upms.sk/media/MESA10_RIZIKO_KORUPCIE_V_PROCESE_PRIVATIZCIE.pdf)>.

<sup>427</sup> KOVÁČIK, M.: Privatizáciu sprevádzali divoké postupy. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/03/2025]. Available at: <<https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/ludia/clanok/253487-privatizaciu-sprevadzali-divoke-postupy/>>.

## 8 Political developments in Slovakia 1993-2025

### 8.1 Electoral term 1992-1994

While the 1990 parliamentary elections were referred to as the founding elections, the elections held on 5 and 6 June 1992 were referred to as the **concluding elections**. The main reason for this designation is the end of coexistence between Slovaks and Czechs in a common state and the preparation for the creation of two separate successor states.<sup>428</sup> The winners of these elections were behind the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. In Slovakia, it was the HZDS led by Vladimír Mečiar, and in the Czech Republic, it was a coalition of the **Civic Democratic Party** (Občianska demokratická strana - ODS) and **the Christian Democratic Party** (Kresťanskodemokratická strana - KDS) led by Václav Klaus.

Although turnout in the 1992 elections (84.20%) was more than 11% lower than in the previous elections in 1990 (95.39%), it can still be considered above average. Of the total number of 23 political parties, movements, and electoral coalitions running in the elections, only five managed to exceed the threshold, set at 5% at that time.

The winner of these elections in Slovakia was the HZDS with 37.26% of the vote. The second most successful party was SDĽ, which won 14.70% of the vote.<sup>429</sup> After the elections, SDĽ became the main left-wing political force in Slovakia. Another left-wing party, SDSS (led by A. Dubček), received only 4% of the vote, which was not enough to enter the SNR. On the other hand, it was successful in the elections to the Chamber of Nations, where it won 6.09% of the vote. Alexander Dubček died tragically in a car accident on 7 November 1992.<sup>430</sup> Jaroslav Volf became the party's chairman in November 1993.

The remaining three political parties (KDH, SNS, and MKM-EGY), which achieved the required threshold for entering parliament, received between 8.89% and 7.42% of the vote. KDH recorded the largest decline in voter support (compared to the previous elections), losing more than half of its voters.

As for ODÚ (4.04%), since it did not exceed the required 5% threshold for entry into the SNR, VPN ceased to exist de jure.<sup>431</sup> Another result of these elections was that 99

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<sup>428</sup> SZOMOLÁNYI, S.: Tranzičná cesta Slovenska a voľby 1998. In: BÚTORA, M. – MESEŽNIKOV, G. – BÚTOROVA, Z. (eds.): *Kto? Prečo? Ako? Slovenské voľby '98*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>429</sup> ŠÚ SR: Výsledky volieb rok 1992. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 12/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/snr1992/volby92s/uvod92.htm>>.

<sup>430</sup> HRABÁNKOVÁ, A.: Dubček zemfel na následky autonehody. In: *čt24.ceskatelevize.cz*. [online], [cit. 15/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/clanek/archiv/dubcek-zemrel-na-nasledky-autonehody-166169>>; TASR: Pred 30 rokmi havarovalo auto, v ktorom sedel Alexander Dubček. In: *aktuality.sk*. [online], [cit. 12/04/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/Plhdinr/pred-30-rokmi-havarovalo-auto-v-ktorom-sedel-alexander-dubcek/>>.

<sup>431</sup> JANCURA, V.: Voľby '90: Nový režim dostal smer. In: *Pravda*. [online], [cit. 08/08/2025]. Available at: <<http://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/166446-volby-90-novy-rezim-dostal-smer/>>.

of the 150 members of the SNR had been members of the KSCĽ under the previous regime.<sup>432</sup>

### **The second government of Vladimír Mečiar**

The government was formed by the victorious HZDS (74 seats), with the remaining two seats going to independent MPs Peter Brňák, who ran as an independent candidate of the SNS, and Ivan Hudec, who was elected to the SNR for the SDĽ but left the party a month after the elections.<sup>433</sup> HZDS was not interested in forming a broader coalition government. On the other hand, the government was also unofficially supported by the SNS, which is why it was given the name “**brown-red**”. In parliament, the government (at the beginning of the electoral term) could rely on the support of 89 MPs, which meant that it was only one parliamentary seat short of a constitutional majority. Mečiar became Prime Minister for the second time, and Ivan Gašparovič became Speaker of the SNR.

### **The dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the Slovak Republic**

The dissolution of Czechoslovakia was preceded by numerous negotiations between Czechoslovak, Czech, and Slovak politicians and representatives of various state institutions in 1990-1992. While the period until the elections in 1992 was dominated by efforts on both sides of the Morava River to find a compromise on the future structure of the common state, the situation changed dramatically after the elections.

Of the five alternatives – federation, confederation, real union, Benelux-style relations, creation of independent states – the last option, i.e., the division of the ČSFR and the creation of two independent states, appeared as the most likely. Statements about “who was subsidizing whom within the federation” were repeatedly exchanged back and forth without end. On 17 July 1992, the SNR adopted **the Declaration of Sovereignty of the Slovak Republic**. The reaction of Czechoslovak President Havel to this declaration was to resign on the same day. From that moment until the end of the federation’s existence, the office of President of the ČSFR remained vacant.

A joint agreement on the dissolution of the CSFR was reached on 26 August 1992 in Brno at Villa Tugendhat.<sup>434</sup> On 1 September 1992, the SNR approved **Constitutional Act No. 460/1992, i.e., the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (Ústava SR)**. After its adoption, the office of President of the Republic was transferred to the Government of

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<sup>432</sup> SZOMOLÁNYI, S.: Tranzičná cesta Slovenska a voľby 1998. In: BÚTORA, M. – MESEŽNIKOV, G. – BÚTOROVA, Z. (eds.): *Kto? Prečo? Ako? Slovenské voľby '98*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1999, p. 10.

<sup>433</sup> DOSTÁL, O.: Širokospektrálna záľuba V. Mečiara. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 28/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/nezaradene/c/sirokospektralna-zaluba-v-meciara>>.

<sup>434</sup> STVR: *Špeciál: 24 – Stretnutie Mečiar – Klaus po 30. rokoch*. In: *stvr.sk*. [online], [cit. 28/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.stvr.sk/televizia/archiv/19138>>.

the SR and its Prime Minister. On 25 November 1992, the Federal Assembly adopted **Constitutional Act No. 542/1992 on the dissolution of the ČSFR**, which declared: *“The Czech and Slovak Federal Republic shall cease to exist on 31 December 1992. The successor states to the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic are the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.”*<sup>435</sup> At the final meeting of the Federal Assembly of the ČSFR on 17 December 1992, a final resolution was adopted on the constitutionality of the process of the dissolution of the CSFR and the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic and the independent Czech Republic.

At midnight on 31 December 1992, the 74-year coexistence of Czechs and Slovaks (and other nationalities) living in the common Czechoslovak state came to an end. On 1 January 1993, two independent states were established: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. On the first day of independence, a joint meeting of the Slovak National Council (SNR) and the Slovak government was held. On the same day, Slovakia was recognised by 93 countries around the world.

After the division of the common state of the Czechs and Slovaks, SDĽ and SNS began to exert greater pressure to formalise a joint coalition and participate in the government. The government of Vladimír Mečiar continued its policy until part of SDĽ decided to express its distrust of this government. This was essentially a reaction to the ongoing privatisation of state property.

On 8 February 1993, the Slovak crown (SKK) came into circulation in the Slovak Republic, replacing the Czechoslovak crown (Kčs).

### **Presidential election 1993**

At a meeting of the political committee of HZDS on 21 December 1992, two HZDS candidates for the office of President of the Slovak Republic were selected. They were Deputy Prime Minister Roman Kováč and Deputy Chairman of HZDS and (outgoing) Chairman of the Chamber of People of the Federal Assembly, Michal Kováč. Based on the results of the vote in Jahodná near Košice, Roman Kováč became the first candidate for the office of President of the Slovak Republic. If he were not elected, Michal Kováč would have been the movement's alternative. A constitutional majority, i.e., at least 90 votes from members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic (NR SR), was required for the election of the president.

In the first round of the election, none of the four candidates<sup>436</sup> received the required number of votes. The same result was achieved in the repeated vote, with the two most successful candidates (Michal Kováč and Milan Ftáčnik) advancing. In the second

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<sup>435</sup> KRÁLOVÁ, V.: Ústavodarná činnosť Slovenskej národnej rady a Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky súvisiaca so zánikom Českej a Slovenskej Federatívnej Republiky a vznikom samostatného štátu. In: OROSZ, L. – LEŠKOVÁ, K. – RUMAN, J. (eds.): *Ústavodarná činnosť Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 1992-2020. (kvantitatívne ukazovatele, analýza, hodnotiace poznámky)*. Košice : UPJŠ/Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2021, pp. 23-39.

<sup>436</sup> R. Kováč (HZDS), M. Ftáčnik (SDĽ), A. Neuwirth (KDH) and J. Prokeš (SNS).

round of elections on 15 February 1993, Michal Kováč was elected the first president of the Slovak Republic by 106 MPs out of a total of 126.

Internal tensions gradually began to emerge within HZDS, which subsequently led to the secession of some of its members. Developments within HZDS gradually began to resemble the fragmentation and decline of VPN two years earlier.

Shortly after the inauguration of President Kováč on 9 March 1993, Prime Minister Mečiar asked the President to dismiss Foreign Minister Kňažko, threatening (for the third time) to resign if his demand was not met. Kňažko was dismissed on 19 March 1993. Together with him, the President of the Slovak Republic also dismissed Ľudovít Černák (SNS) from the post of Minister of Economy, at his own request. This was essentially a consequence of Prime Minister Mečiar's unwillingness **to conclude a proper coalition agreement with SNS**.<sup>437</sup> Kňažko was replaced as Minister of Foreign Affairs by Jozef Moravčík, and the post of Minister of Economy after Černák went to Jaroslav Kubečka (both HZDS). After unsuccessful party elections for the position of HZDS chairman, Kňažko and seven other MPs left the movement and founded the **Alliance of Democrats of Slovakia** (Aliancia demokratov Slovenska - ADS) party.

Despite losing some of its members in the NR SR, the government of HZDS continued smoothly, with the support of SNS and SDĽ. In return, both parties expected HZDS to fulfil their own demands, both personnel and programme-related, in the government. However, during the negotiations, internal tensions arose within the SNS.<sup>438</sup> At the end of September 1993, a coalition agreement was finally signed between HZDS and SNS, although the nationalists had to abandon some of their original demands. HZDS rejected cooperation with SDĽ.

On 15 December 1993, another HZDS MP, Marcela Gbúrová, left the party. This decision followed after the party leadership had the movement's MPs and members of the HZDS government in Horné Plachtince (23 October 1993) sign a declaration stating that "*...if they decide to leave the party's parliamentary club, they will have to reimburse the election costs...*"<sup>439</sup> As Prof. Gbúrová later stated, another reason for her departure from the HZDS was that "*...communication between MPs, the government and district bodies had stalled. I pointed out that if a member of parliament is elected for a certain*

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<sup>437</sup> PEKNÍK, M.: Premeny slovenskej politiky. In: PEKNÍK, M. a kolektív: *Pohľady na slovenskú politiku po roku 1989. I. časť*. Bratislava : ÚPV SAV a VEDA, 2016, pp. 158-172.

<sup>438</sup> A group around SNS chairman Ľ. Černák demanded a stronger position in the joint coalition government, i.e. more ministerial posts and more representatives in the executive at a lower level. Another group within the SNS was willing to agree to a coalition agreement even under less favourable terms.

<sup>439</sup> BÉREŠ, M.: *K problematike deformít demokracie na Slovensku v rokoch 1990 – 1998. (Dizertačná práca)*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Filozofická fakulta, 2017, p. 98.

region or city and his own organisation does not invite him to a single event for a year and a half, then that is more than just a mistake."<sup>440</sup>

In view of the above-mentioned event, it is also necessary to mention another meeting of leading representatives of the movement, which took place on 27 and 28 November 1993 at a recreation facility owned by VSŽ in Zlatá Idka near Košice. An original recording was released to the public in which the movement's chairman, Mečiar, called on those present to "do everything we can to win again in 1994. And if, God forbid, we have to go into early elections, let us be so strong that we can crush everything." Even then, the intention was to control the public prosecutor's office, the public media, and to gain the support of the church.<sup>441</sup>

President Kováč also drew attention to the growing political tension in Slovakia in his New Year's speech on 1 January 1994, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the establishment of the Slovak Republic. In his address to the nation, he pointed in particular to "the search for enemies and opponents instead of searching for allies, and the unwillingness to form a broader government coalition that could be beneficial in solving major problems and tasks."<sup>442</sup> These words were clearly aimed at Mečiar's style of politics. This effectively started a conflict between President Kováč and Prime Minister Mečiar.

On 15 January 1994, the Central Council of the SNS did not express confidence in party chairman Černák and the party's vice-chairmen at its meeting, demanding that they resign from their positions and return their mandates as members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. On 19 February 1994, at an extraordinary party congress in Žilina, Černák and the two vice-chairmen were expelled from the party, and Ján Slota was elected as the new party chairman.

Another split within HZDS occurred on 10 February 1994, when Foreign Minister Moravčík and First Deputy Prime Minister Roman Kováč announced the creation of a political platform (within the HZDS) called the **Alternative of Political Realism** (Alternatíva politického realizmu - APR). The platform declared that "they do not intend to leave the movement, but will vote according to their conscience at parliamentary sessions."<sup>443</sup> At the end of February 1994, both members of the government resigned. They justified their decision by citing Mečiar's leadership style and accumulation of power.

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<sup>440</sup> KRNO, M. - GBÚROVÁ, M.: Marcela Gbúrová sa lúči s Mečiarovým hnutím, pretože nemôže byť v rozpore so svedomím. In: *Pravda*. 1993, Vol. 3, No. 293, pp. 1-2.

<sup>441</sup> JANCURA, V.: Ako to bolo s parným valcom zo Zlatej Idky. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 28/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://zurnal.pravda.sk/neznama-historia/clanok/301185-ako-to-bolo-s-parnym-valcom-ze-zlatej-idky/>>; SCHMÖGNEROVÁ, B.: Zaslúbená zem: Európska únia (1). In: *slovo.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://noveslovo.eu/archiv/zaslubena-zem-europska-unia-1/>>.

<sup>442</sup> KOVÁČ, M.: Potrebujeme vládu širšej koalície. In: *Sme*. 1994, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 2.

<sup>443</sup> MELIŠ, F.: Zrodil sa nový prúd. In: *Práca*. 1994, Vol. 49, No. 34, p. 1.

These divisions resulted in the fall of the second government of Vladimír Mečiar and the subsequent formation of the **government of Jozef Moravčík**.<sup>444</sup> The vote of no confidence in the second government of Vladimír Mečiar (11 March 1994) was preceded by a speech by then-President Michal Kováč in the National Council of the Slovak Republic on 9 March 1994, in which the President delivered a report on the state of the republic. In his report, the President pointed to the tense relations between himself and Prime Minister Mečiar, as well as Mečiar's confrontational and forceful style of politics.<sup>445</sup> It is interesting to note that even though a vote of no confidence was passed against the Prime Minister on 11 March 1994, the government still managed to approve nine privatisation projects on the same day, including a 10% stake in VSŽ Košice for five top managers of the company, led by Alexander Rezeš, with the price per share being only about one-third of the market price. The Slovak Republic lost approximately 600 million Slovak crowns on this transaction alone.<sup>446</sup>

Mečiar attempted to reconstruct the government by inviting SDĽ to join, but the leaders of this party refused. On 15 March 1994, former Foreign Minister Moravčík became the new Prime Minister.

### **The government of Jozef Moravčík**

The temporary coalition government of Jozef Moravčík consisted of the **Democratic Union of Slovakia**<sup>447</sup> (Demokratická únia Slovenska - DEÚS), SDĽ, KDH, and the **National Democratic Party** led by Ľudovít Černák. This government thus consisted largely of former members of HZDS and SNS. The government was in power for only nine months. Although the election period was not due to end until 1996, SDĽ pushed for early parliamentary elections to be held at the turn of September/October 1994.<sup>448</sup> Former SDĽ chairman Peter Weiss (with the benefit of hindsight) commented on SDĽ's position by saying: "*...as it was a minority government, it was largely dependent on the support of the Spolužitie (Coexistence) movement, led by Miklós Duray, and the government could have fallen at any moment due to his unrealistic demands.*"<sup>449</sup> Moreover, many

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<sup>444</sup> SITA: *Chronológia: Vlády, ktoré panovali na Slovensku od roku 1993*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<http://www.webnoviny.sk/slovensko/clanok/485151-chronologia-vlady-ktore-panovali-na-slovensku-od-roku-1993/>>.

<sup>445</sup> NR SR: Stenografická správa o 27. schôdzi Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky konanej 9., 10., 16., 17., 18., 22., 23., 24., a 25. marca 1994. In: *nrsr.sk* [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.nrsr.sk/dl/Browser/Document?documentId=71575>>.

<sup>446</sup> ZASTAVME KORUPCIU: Privatizácia v období tretej Mečiarovej vlády. In: *zastavmekorupciu.sk* [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://zastavmekorupciu.sk/kauzy/privatizacia-v-obdobi-tretej-meciarovej-vlady/>>.

<sup>447</sup> The party was formed by the merger of ADS, led by M. Kňažko, and APR, led by J. Moravčík.

<sup>448</sup> Constitutional Act No. 70/1994 Coll. on the shortening of the electoral term.

<sup>449</sup> KRNO, M.: *Peter Weiss: Išlo o myšlienky a solidaritu, nik nemyslel na kariéru*. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 19/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://zurnal.pravda.sk/rozhovory/clanok/382019-peter-weiss-islo-o-myslienky-a-solidaritu-nik-nemyslel-na-karieru/>>.

supporters of this government were anti-communists, which, in the context of SDL's ideological and value orientation at the time, sounded quite antagonistic.

The most significant measures taken by the government of Jozef Moravčík included:<sup>450</sup>

- Stabilisation of the socio-political situation;
- Establishing the Slovak economy in international trade (including normalising relations with the Czech Republic);
- Reversal of 13 privatisation decisions made by the previous government;
- Approval and preparation of early parliamentary elections in 1994.

Before the next elections, an electoral coalition of four political parties, SDL, SDSS, the Green Party of Slovakia (Strana zelených na Slovensku - SZS), and the Farmers' Movement of the Slovak Republic (Hnutie poľnohospodárov Slovenskej republiky), was formed in the left-wing environment under the name **Common Choice** (Spoločná voľba - SP). De facto, this was a collaboration between several moderate left-wing movements, which cooperated at the republic level, but there was considerable animosity at the district level.<sup>451</sup>

Around the same time, a new workers' left-wing party called **the Association of Workers of Slovakia** (Združenie robotníkov Slovenska - ZRS) appeared in Slovakia. It was led by Ján Lupták, a former member of the KSS and SDL.

## 8.2 Electoral term 1994-1998

The early parliamentary elections of 1994 were held on 30 September and 1 October 1994. These elections were marked by a minor incident, but one that received significant media coverage, when HZDS chairman Mečiar was informed at the polling station that *he "could not vote because he was not on the electoral roll."*<sup>452</sup> Voter turnout reached 75.65%. Seventeen political entities ran in the elections, with seven of them exceeding the threshold for eligibility. The winner of the elections was the coalition of HZDS and the **Farmers' Party of Slovakia** (Roľnícka strana Slovenska - RSS), which received 34.96% of the votes. The second place – by a significant margin – went to the electoral coalition SP, consisting of four political parties (SDL, SDSS, SZS, and Hnutie poľnohospodárov SR), with 10.41% of the vote.<sup>453</sup> They were followed by: the

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<sup>450</sup> MAGVAŠI, P.: Štvrtstoročie od vymenovania Moravčíkovej vlády. In: *Nové slovo*. [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://noveslovo.eu/archiv/stvrtstorie-od-vymenovania-moravcikovej-vlady/>>.

<sup>451</sup> MAGVAŠI, P.: Štvrtstoročie od vymenovania Moravčíkovej vlády. In: *Nové slovo*. [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://noveslovo.eu/archiv/stvrtstorie-od-vymenovania-moravcikovej-vlady/>>.

<sup>452</sup> ŠTRELINGER, P.: Provokácia pripravená pre kamery – Vladimíra Mečiara nepustili voliť! In: *Slovenská republika*. 1994, Vol. 1, No. 119, p. 1.

<sup>453</sup> In the case of the Spoločná voľba (Common Choice - SP), it should be noted that, according to the legislation in force at the time, the four-party coalition needed to obtain at least 10% of the votes to enter the NR SR.

**Hungarian Coalition** with 10.18%; KDH 10.08%; DEÚS 8.57%; ZRS 7.34%, and SNS 5.40%.

Given the subsequent events during this electoral term, these elections were later labelled as **elections deviating from democratic principles**. The elections earned this label partly due to the so-called “**Night of the Long Knives**”, which took place on 3-4 November 1994 in the NR SR. The government coalition filled all positions in public institutions, including the media (the Slovak Television Council and the Radio Council), the Prosecutor General’s Office, the National Property Fund (Fond národného majetku - FNM), the Supreme Audit Office (Najvyšší kontrolný úrad - NKÚ), etc.<sup>454</sup> Among other things, an amendment to Act No. 369/1994 Coll., amending Act No. 92/1991 Coll. on privatisation, removed the Slovak government’s authority to decide on direct sales of state-owned enterprises and transferred it to the FNM.<sup>455</sup> The words of Mečiar himself are apt in this regard when he said: “*Get used to it, the elections are over!*”<sup>456</sup>

Most of the criticism from Mečiar was directed at the leading representatives of the DEÚS, who contributed significantly to the fall of his second government. The efforts to transition from a parliamentary democracy to a presidential democracy also indicated a departure from democratic principles.

At the end of 1994, **the second wave of voucher privatisation**, which had already been launched by the government of Jozef Moravčík, was cancelled. The registration of voucher books for the second wave of voucher privatisation took place from 5 September to 30 November 1994. During this period, slightly more than 3.4 million citizens registered for the second wave of voucher privatisation. An amendment to **Act No. 190/1995 Coll., amending Act No. 92/1991 Coll. on the conditions for the transferring state property to other persons** of 12 July 1995, voucher privatisation was replaced by the issuance of **government bonds** with a total value of SKK 30 billion. New buyers of companies paid less than SKK 31 billion for assets worth SKK 109 billion. State-owned enterprises were sold in direct sales, and, with only a few

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<sup>454</sup> LEBOVÍČ, P.: Zápas o udržanie demokracie: politické súvislosti novelizácie volebného zákona. In: BÚTORA, M. – MESEŽNIKOV, G. – BÚTOROVA, Z. (eds.): *Kto? Prečo? Ako? Slovenské voľby '98*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1999, p. 25; SCHMÖGNEROVÁ, B.: Zaslúbená zem: Európska únia (1). In: *slovo.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://noveslovo.eu/archiv/zaslubena-zem-europska-unia-1/>>.

<sup>455</sup> Two years after the transfer of privatisation powers from the government to the National Property Fund (FNM), the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic issued its ruling ref. no. PL. ÚS 1/96 of 14 November 1996, according to which the adoption of Act No. 369/1994 Coll., amending Act No. 92/1991 Coll. on the conditions for the transfer of state property to other persons, as amended, was contrary to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. During this period, the FNM transferred property worth tens of billions of Slovak crowns. ZASTAVME KORUPCIU: Privatizácia v období tretej Mečiarovej vlády. In: *zastavmekorupciu.sk* [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://zastavmekorupciu.sk/kauzy/privatizacia-v-obdobi-tretej-meciarovej-vlady/>>.

<sup>456</sup> LEŠKO, M.: *Mečiar a mečiarizmus*. Bratislava : VMV, 1996, p. 126; SCHMÖGNEROVÁ, B.: Zaslúbená zem: Európska únia (1). In: *slovo.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://noveslovo.eu/archiv/zaslubena-zem-europska-unia-1/>>.

exceptions, all sales were made to (affiliated and friendly) domestic buyers, and even below market price.<sup>457</sup> The result was non-transparent management of public finances on the one hand and a sharp increase in the wealth and assets of a few individuals on the other.

### **The third government of Vladimír Mečiar**

Based on the election results and post-election negotiations, on 13 December 1994, then President Michal Kováč appointed a government composed of HZDS, RSS, SNS, and ZRS. Mečiar became Prime Minister for the third time. The government was supported by 83 members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Ivan Gašparovič was re-elected as Speaker of the National Council.

Due to the number of scandals and controversies<sup>458</sup>, this period became known as **the era of Mečiarism**. The government's policies were criticised not only at home but also abroad. Slovakia thus found itself in increasing international political isolation. This period is best summed up by a statement made by Prime Minister Mečiar himself, who responded to criticism from Western countries, the EU, and NATO by saying that *"...if they don't want us in the West, we will turn to the East."* With this policy, Slovakia – unlike its neighbours (the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary) – distanced itself from European and North Atlantic integration.

Similarly, the distance between Prime Minister Mečiar and President Kováč continued to grow. The refusal to appoint Ivan Lexa first as director of the Slovak Intelligence Service and later as Minister of Privatisation, the New Year's speech, and the President's address on the state of the republic, as well as other events, were only the beginning of what was coming for President Kováč in the following months:

- On 5 May 1995, 80 members of the **National Council of the Slovak Republic** voted in favour of **Resolution No. 101, expressing no confidence in the President of the Republic**. However, this act had no legal relevance, as the consent of 90 members was required to remove the President;<sup>459</sup>

- **The kidnapping of Michal Kováč Jr.**, son of President Michal Kováč, which happened on 31 August 1995. The SIS, led by its director Ivan Lexa, who was appointed to this position by the Slovak government (after a change in the law), played a significant role in the kidnapping of the President's son to Hainburg

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<sup>457</sup> KOVÁČIK, M.: Privatizáciu sprevádzali divoké postupy. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/03/2025]. Available at: <<https://ekonomika.pravda.sk/ludia/clanok/253487-privatizaciu-sprevadzali-divoke-postupy/>>.

<sup>458</sup> In this context, we can mention: the expulsion of František Gaulieder, a member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic for HZDS, in 1996, after he left HZDS and became an independent member of parliament; wild privatisation; the failed referendum on the direct election of the president in 1997; and many other events.

<sup>459</sup> SME: Na návrh V. Morica 80 poslancov koalície schválilo uznesenie, ktorým vyslovilo nedôveru prezidentovi, čím podľa opozície porušilo ústavu. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/na-navrh-v-morica-80-poslancov-koalicie-schvalilo-uznesenie-ktorym-vyslovalo-nedoveru-prezidentovi-cim-podla-opozicie-porusilo-u>>.

(Austria). On 29 April 1996, there was a still unexplained explosion of the car of former police officer Róbert Remiáš, who was a close friend of former SIS member Oskar Fegyveres, the key witness in the kidnapping, and who, after his testimony, went into hiding in unknown locations in Slovakia and abroad. On 29 November 1995, President Kováč granted Fegyveres a presidential pardon;<sup>460</sup>

- Although the **Gaulieder affair** from November 1996 is not directly related to the conflict between the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, it cannot be ignored. The essence of this case was that after František Gaulieder, a member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic for the HZDS and one of the founding members of the movement, announced that he was dissatisfied with the direction of the movement and was therefore leaving it, a letter of resignation was delivered to the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Ivan Gašparovič, in which Gaulieder resigned his parliamentary seat. As it later transpired, the MPs had signed such a declaration (in Horné Plachtince) even before the elections themselves, thereby committing themselves de jure to the HZDS leadership;<sup>461</sup>

- On 23 and 24 May 1997, a **referendum** was **thwarted**. To the three questions concerning the Slovak Republic's accession to NATO and the deployment of nuclear weapons and military bases on Slovak territory, President Kováč decided to add a fourth question concerning the direct election of the president, based on a petition initiated by opposition political parties (except for SDL), which was signed by more than 500,000 citizens. The referendum was thwarted when the then Minister of the Interior, Gustáv Krajčí, had ballot papers printed and distributed with only three questions. As a result, while voters in some parts of Slovakia had ballot papers with four questions, in other parts of Slovakia, ballot papers with only three questions were distributed. As only 9.53% of voters participated in this referendum, it was invalid.<sup>462</sup> In this regard, Prof. Orosz et al. wrote: *"However, the idea of introducing direct elections for the head of state gained significant social support and played an important role in the election campaign before the parliamentary elections in September 1998, apparently influencing the results of the parliamentary elections to a considerable extent."*<sup>463</sup>

- From late September 1997, a **digital clock** was installed on the Hotel Forum building opposite the presidential palace, **counting down the days remaining until**

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<sup>460</sup> SME: Prezident Kováč udelil milosť bývalému príslušníkovi tajnej služby Oskarovi F. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/nezaradene/c/prezident-kovac-udelil-milost-byvalemu-prislusnikovi-tajnej-sluzby-oskarovi-f>>.

<sup>461</sup> FERENCEI, L.: Analýza slovenského politického režimu v rokoch 1994 až 1998 počas tretej vlády Vladimíra Meeiara. In: *Moderní dějiny*. Praha : Historický ústav AV ČR, 29/1, 2021, pp. 123-160. [online], [cit. 15/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://kramerius.lib.cas.cz/view/uuid:dacb28cf-25e3-4599-9155-0e0accfca5ef?article=uuid:25513566-791c-4293-a6e5-ed8a9b8ddc2a>>; LIĐÁK, J. - KOGANOVÁ, V. - LEŠKA, D.: *Politické strany a hnutia na Slovensku po roku 1989*. Bratislava : Ekonóm, 2001, p. 82.

<sup>462</sup> LÁŠTIC, E.: *V rukách politických strán: Referendum na Slovensku 1993-2010*. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, 2011, pp. 39-57.

<sup>463</sup> OROSZ, L. (a kol.): *Volebné právo*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2015, p. 210.

**the end of Michal Kováč's term of office.** This was done on the initiative of Fedor Flašík, then marketing expert for the HZDS.<sup>464</sup>

After the Slovak President's term ended in March 1998 and parliament failed to elect a new head of state, the powers of the President were transferred to the Prime Minister under Article 105(1) of the Slovak Constitution. The Prime Minister took advantage of this and granted **amnesties**, based on which he "...ordered that criminal proceedings for crimes committed in connection with the report of the abduction of Michal Kováč Jr. to a foreign country should not be initiated, and if they had been initiated, that they should be stopped."<sup>465</sup> In addition, 28 diplomats were dismissed from their posts as ambassadors and replaced by senior HZDS representatives.

### **Mečiar's amendment to the electoral law**

The adoption of the sixth amendment to the electoral law – **Act No. 187/1998 Coll.**<sup>466</sup> – can be considered a special chapter in Mečiar's third government. Its adoption was preceded by an amendment to the law on the territorial division of the Slovak Republic. From 1990, Act No. 517/1990 had been in force, dividing the territory of the Slovak Republic into 36 districts.<sup>467</sup> On 3 July 1996, the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted Act No. 221/1996 Coll. on the territorial and administrative organisation of the Slovak Republic, creating 8 regions and 79 districts. The original intention of the HZDS was to divide the territory of the Slovak Republic into several constituencies with the aim of modifying the electoral system by introducing a mixed (combined) or majority electoral system.<sup>468</sup> According to Gbúrová, "...the number of newly created districts (79, originally 75 districts were planned), which is close to half of the

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<sup>464</sup> After the death of M. Kováč in 2016, F. Flašík apologised to the former president for his actions (on his Facebook profile). TREND: Flašík sa ospravedlnil za hodiny pred Prezidentským palácom. In: *trend.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.trend.sk/spravy/flasik-ospravedlnil-hodiny-pred-prezidentskym-palacom>>.

<sup>465</sup> SLOV-LEX: *Rozhodnutie predsedu vlády Slovenskej republiky z 3. marca 1998 o amnestii*. [online], [cit. 06/01/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1998/55/20170406.html>>; SLOV-LEX: *Rozhodnutie predsedu vlády Slovenskej republiky zo 7. júla 1998 o amnestii*. [online], [cit. 06/01/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1998/214/19980707>>.

<sup>466</sup> ONUFRÁK, A.: Volebné právo v kontexte ústavodarných procesov. In: OROSZ, L. – HORŇÁKOVÁ, D. – ČERŇANSKÝ, M. P. (eds.): *Ústava Slovenskej republiky a jej perspektívy. Skoalitňovanie ústavného textu a zvyšovanie autority slovenskej ústavy – reálna možnosť, alebo naivná ilúzia? Zborník príspevkov z vedeckého seminára Danišovce 23. – 25. november*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Právnická fakulta: Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2022, pp. 202-241.

<sup>467</sup> SLOV-LEX: *Zákon č. 517/1990 Zb. o územnom a správnom členení Slovenskej republiky*. [online], [cit. 13/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1990/517/19901219.html>>.

<sup>468</sup> GBÚROVÁ, M.: Politický rozmer novelizácie volebného zákona v roku 1998. In: GBÚROVA, M. (ed.): *Voľby 1998 v Slovenskej republike (stav – kontexty – perspektíva)*. Prešov : Katedra sociálno-politologických vied Filozofickej fakulty Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, 1998, p. 33.

*150 seats in the National Council of the Slovak Republic, as well as the delimitation of the administrative boundaries of several districts, was not accidental.”<sup>469</sup>*

The amendment to the Electoral Act No. 187/1998 Coll. is still considered the most controversial amendment to electoral legislation. It is also referred to as the “**Mečiar Act**”. Professor of constitutional law Ladislav Orosz et al. described this amendment as “*the most significant manifestation of electoral engineering in the modern history of Slovakia.*”<sup>470</sup> Its creators fundamentally changed the electoral rules (in several respects) shortly before the 1998 parliamentary elections. Essentially, it was a reaction of the ruling parties to the newly formed joint electoral coalition of five opposition political parties, namely KDH, DS, DÚ, SDSS, and SZS.

Compared to previous amendments to the electoral law, this amendment was much more extensive. This is evidenced by the content and scope of the changes made:

- Detailed description of voter lists;
- Creation of a single electoral district (instead of the original four electoral districts);
- Modification of the format of the candidate list (including the possibility of including the graphic symbol of the political entity running for election);
- The maximum number of candidates increased to 150;
- Numbering of candidate lists;
- Format of ballot papers;
- Management and administration of elections and conditions for allocating seats;
- Allocation of seats (the total number of valid votes cast for the political parties that made it through was divided by 151);
- Publication of election results;
- Change in preferential voting.

The most controversial provisions include:

- The provision on the appointment of members of the district election commissions by the head of the district office;
- The provision concerning electoral coalitions. (In the case of the formation of a joint coalition of several political parties, the threshold for eligibility for the National Council of the Slovak Republic was set at a multiple of 5%, depending on the number of political parties forming the coalition. In other words, if the coalition consisted of three political parties, the threshold was 15%. If the coalition consisted of four parties, the threshold would be 20%, etc.). This was essentially a response by the governing parties to the newly formed electoral coalition of five political parties;

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<sup>469</sup> GBÚROVÁ, M.: Politický rozmer novelizácie volebného zákona v roku 1998. In: GBÚROVA, M. (ed.): *Volby 1998 v Slovenskej republike (stav – kontexty – perspektíva)*. Prešov : Katedra sociálno-politologických vied Filozofickej fakulty Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, 1998, p. 33.

<sup>470</sup> OROSZ, L. (a kol.): *Volebné právo*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2015, p. 201.

- Provision on the review of political parties' candidate lists by the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic without the participation of the political party concerned;
- The provision according to which election campaigning via radio and television broadcasting could only be conducted on Slovak Radio and Slovak Television. Election campaigning on private radio and television stations was prohibited;
- The provision according to which the political party for which the candidate ran was to decide on a replacement after the vacancy of a seat during the term of office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The number of preferential votes was not to be taken into account at all;
- The provision that **the territory of the Slovak Republic constitutes a single constituency**.

Immediately after the adoption of this amendment, a group of opposition MPs led by MP I. Šimko challenged several of the above provisions by filing a motion to initiate proceedings before the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic. In its *ruling ref. no. PL. ÚS 15/1998 of 11 March 1999*, the Constitutional Court upheld the substance of the motion filed by the group of MPs. In its *ruling ref. no. PL. ÚS 15/1998 of 18 March 1999*, the Constitutional Court ruled that:

- The provision on election campaigning was not in accordance with freedom of expression;
- The provision on the broadcasting of election speeches and election programmes as part of the election campaign was not in accordance with freedom of expression;
- The provision on the “appointment” of substitutes after a vacancy in the National Council of the Slovak Republic during the electoral term by a political party was not in accordance with Article 30(4) of the *Constitution of the Slovak Republic*. Citizens have equal access to electoral and other public functions under the same conditions;
- The provision that the participants in proceedings concerning the registration of candidate lists are the political party and the Central Election Commission was not in accordance with Article 48(2) of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.
- The provision on the “obligations” of the media in the event of a violation of the law was not in accordance with Article 13(1) in conjunction with Article 1 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

The proposal concerning electoral coalitions was not upheld.<sup>471</sup> What did not pass in the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic, passed in the National Council of the Slovak Republic after the 1998 elections, with the adoption of another amendment – the 7th amendment to the Electoral Act. Act No. 223/1999 Coll. reintroduced the possibility of forming electoral coalitions. A 5% threshold was set for political parties running independently to enter the National Council of the Slovak Republic. In the

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<sup>471</sup> OROSZ, L. (a kol.): *Volebné právo*. Košice : UPJŠ, 2015, p. 202.

case of two- and three-party coalitions, the threshold was 7%, and for coalitions of four or more parties, it was 10%.<sup>472</sup> In essence, this was a return to the original system. On the other hand, although several controversial articles of Act No. 187/1998 Coll. were subsequently removed or returned to their pre-amendment state, **the provision on a single constituency or electoral district** remains in force to this day.<sup>473</sup> The creation of multiple constituencies would have had the greatest impact on the central leadership of political parties.

In view of the aforementioned events and, in particular, the change in electoral legislation, a new political party called the **Slovak Democratic Coalition** (Slovenská demokratická koalícia - SDK) was formed in early July 1998, consisting of five political parties: KDH, DEÚS, DS, SDSS, and SZS. The party was formed after the adoption of a controversial amendment to the electoral law, under which the five-party coalition would have to obtain at least 25% of the total number of votes cast in the elections. Adoption of this **purpose-driven amendment** to the electoral law made the formation of electoral coalitions essentially irrelevant. HZDS filed a lawsuit with the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic against the registration of the SDK; however, the court dismissed the lawsuit.<sup>474</sup> Only candidates for parliament became members of the party, while their parent parties continued independently on the political scene. While KDH chairman Ján Čarnogurský and SZS chairwoman Zdenka Tóthová remained in their parties and did not run in the 1998 parliamentary elections, DEÚS, DS, and SDSS lost their chairmen (Eduard Kukan, Ján Langoš, and Jaroslav Volf) as a result of this shift. Mikuláš Dzurinda (previously active in KDH) became the chairman of SDK, with the party's priorities being Slovakia's pro-Western orientation, European integration, and the implementation of economic reforms.<sup>475</sup>

Three political parties representing ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia took a similar approach. The Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement, Coexistence and Hungarian Civic Party (Maďarské kresťanskodemokratické hnutie, Spoluzitie and Maďarská občianska strana) merged into the newly formed **Hungarian Coalition Party** (Strana maďarskej koalície - SMK). Unlike the SDK, where the original parties

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<sup>472</sup> In the event that none of the political parties or coalitions exceeded the above-mentioned electoral thresholds, the electoral threshold was to be reduced by 1% in all three cases. For more details, see: Section 41(3) of Act No. 223/1999 Coll.

<sup>473</sup> GBÚROVÁ, M.: Politický rozmer novelizácie volebného zákona v roku 1998. In: GBÚROVA, M. (ed.): *Volby 1998 v Slovenskej republike (stav – kontexty – perspektíva)*. Prešov : Katedra sociálno-politologických vied Filozofickej fakulty Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, 1998, pp. 30-39; GBÚROVÁ, M.: Partokracia po slovensky. In: *Nové slovo*, Roč. X, č. 19. apríl 2000, s. 1. [online], [cit. 08/08/2025]. Available at: <[https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/23091/Partokracia\\_po\\_slovensky](https://www.noveslovo.sk/c/23091/Partokracia_po_slovensky)>.

<sup>474</sup> LEBOVÍČ, P.: Zápas o udržanie demokracie: politické súvislosti novelizácie volebného zákona. In: BÚTORA, M. – MESEŽNIKOV, G. – BÚTOROVA, Z. (eds.): *Kto? Prečo? Ako? Slovenské voľby '98*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1999, p. 30.

<sup>475</sup> MAŤKO, M. – HOMOĽA, K. a kol.: *10 rokov vôle a cesty*. Bratislava : SDKÚ-DS, 2010, p. 7.

continued to operate in parallel, in the case of the SMK, the original parties were completely dissolved.<sup>476</sup>

Another new political party that emerged before the 1998 elections was the **Party of Civic Understanding** (Strana občianskeho porozumenia - SOP). The party leader was Rudolf Schuster, a former communist, the last chairman of the SNR, and mayor of the city of Košice. From the outset, the creation of this party was linked to the chairman's ambition to run for the office of President of the Slovak Republic in the future.

As for developments within **Common Choice** (Spoločná voľba), differences of opinion arose within the coalition during 1997, resulting in internal disintegration and eventual complete dissolution.<sup>477</sup> While SDL, led by Jozef Migaš, signed an agreement in June 1996 to support a minority government in the event of the collapse of the HZDS, SNS, and ZRS coalition government, the SDSS – as mentioned above – gradually moved towards pre-election cooperation with right-wing political parties.<sup>478</sup> Prof. Gbúrová, who was a member of the SDSS at the time, described the events (in her book) as follows: “...Although part of the political representation declares adherence to left-wing values, when it comes to the application of certain political principles, proposals for solutions, or statements, they tend to lean towards right-wing political parties or toward parties of the centre.”<sup>479</sup>

The last scandal that has significant impact on the results of the 1998 parliamentary elections was the **Gamatex affair** at the turn of August and September 1998.<sup>480</sup> Although the main dispute was between controversial businessman Marián Kočner, who was demanding his property rights, and the then director of TV Markíza, Pavol Rusko, at the height of the election campaign, when the future direction of Slovakia was being decided, the attack on the private television station represented another epicentre of resistance to the outgoing government of the Vladimír Mečiar. “While the government had STV, the opposition had TV Markíza.” After TV Markíza was occupied, not only viewers but also public opinion, led by several prominent opposition figures, including Dzurinda and Fico, sided with the station. On the other hand, people from

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<sup>476</sup> KRIŠTOFÍK, M.: Volebný systém do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky. In: *Středoevropské politické studie/Central European Political Studies Review*. Roč. 3, č. 4 (2001). [online], [cit. 15/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://journals.muni.cz/cepsr/article/view/3883>>.

<sup>477</sup> SME: Schôdza parlamentu bola po dohode koalície so SDL prerušená do pondelka. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/schodza-parlamentu-bola-po-dohode-koalicie-so-sdl-prerusena-do-pondelka>>.

<sup>478</sup> ÚT KA: SDL podporí menšinovú vládu HZDS, ak v nej budú ministri za SDL. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/sdl-podpori-mensinovu-vladu-hzds-ak-v-nej-budu-ministri-za-sdl-osobitna-sprava>>.

<sup>479</sup> GBUROVÁ, M.: *Na ceste k politike štandardu*. Prešov : Náuka, 2000, p. 15.

<sup>480</sup> ČULEN, R.: *Televízia Markíza: fakty, ktoré mali zostať utajené*. Praha : Ottovo nakladateľství, 1999, 104 p.

the then underworld, the SIS and people connected to the government were also involved in the affair.<sup>481</sup>

### 8.3 Electoral term 1998-2002

The 1998 parliamentary elections were held on 25 and 26 September 1998. A total of 17 political parties and movements ran in these elections. Six of them exceeded the threshold for entry into the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Voter turnout reached 84.24%<sup>482</sup>, which was higher than in the 1994 and 1992 elections.<sup>483</sup> These elections were described as **consolidating**, due to the events that took place before the elections themselves, including the thwarted referendum and the revision of the electoral law. The highest number of voters in the 1998 parliamentary elections cast their votes for HZDS, which obtained 27.00% of all votes cast. SDK came in a close second with 26.33% of the votes.<sup>484</sup> The difference between the first HZDS and the second SDK was just over 22,000 votes. SDĽ was supported by 14.66% of voters in the elections. **The Hungarian Coalition Party** (Strana Maďarskej koalície – Magyar Koalíció Pártja - SMK-MPK) won 9.12%, SNS (9.07%) and SOP (8.01%).<sup>485</sup>

On the days of the parliamentary elections, **a referendum** was also held **on the ban on the privatisation of six strategic companies** in the energy, gas, and oil supply sectors.<sup>486</sup> The referendum was initiated by HZDS, whose intention was to restrict the future government's decision-making power on the privatisation of these companies. As turnout in the referendum was 44.25%, this referendum was also invalid.<sup>487</sup>

Prof. S. Szomolányi commented on the elimination of HZDS and Mečiar as follows: *“When Mečiar was first removed from the post of Prime Minister in March 1991, it was decided by a small group of the political elite – the presidium of the Slovak parliament – against the will of the people. The second removal of Mečiar, in March 1994, was decided by the plenary session*

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<sup>481</sup> PRAVDA: Aj Markízu obsadili. Pred desiatimi rokmi. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/158689-aj-markizu-obsadili-pred-desiatimi-rokmi/>>.

<sup>482</sup> Ondria and Viselka saw Mečiar's influence on the masses, both in a positive and negative sense, as the reason for such high voter turnout. ONDRIA, P. – VISELKA, J.: Vplyv osobnosti politika na parlamentné voľby na Slovensku. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Medzi jednotlivosťou a pospolitosťou: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2016.

<sup>483</sup> ŠÚ SR: Súhrnné výsledky hlasovania vo voľbách do NR SR 1998. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr1998/results/tab1.jsp.htm>>.

<sup>484</sup> ŠÚ SR: Počet a podiel platných hlasov pre politické strany. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr1998/results/tab2.jsp.htm>>.

<sup>485</sup> ŠÚ SR: Počet a podiel platných hlasov pre politické strany. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr1998/results/tab2.jsp.htm>>.

<sup>486</sup> West Slovak Energy Works (Západoslovenské energetické závody, š.p.), state-owned enterprise; Central Slovak Energy Works, state-owned enterprise (Stredoslovenské energetické závody, š.p.); East Slovak Energy Works, state-owned enterprise (Východoslovenské energetické závody, š.p.); Slovak Gas Industry, state-owned enterprise (Slovenský plynárenský priemysel š.p.); Slovak Power Plants, joint-stock company (Slovenské elektrárne, a.s.); Transpetrol, joint-stock company (Transpetrol, a.s.).

<sup>487</sup> LÁŠTIC, E.: *V rukách politických strán: Referendum na Slovensku 1993-2010*. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského v Bratislave, 2011, pp. 66-77.

of parliament without any significant protests from the population. The third time, Mečiar was removed from government power in the 1998 elections by a majority of voters. He then relinquished his legislative power himself.”<sup>488</sup>

### **The first government of Mikuláš Dzurinda**

The 1998 elections resulted in the formation of a governing coalition between the SDK, SDL, SMK, and SOP, which had the support of 93 members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The SMK pledged not to raise the issue of the Beneš Decrees. The SDL, in turn, withdrew its demand for a referendum on NATO membership. However, the cooperation between the left-wing political parties SDL, SDSS, and SOP and the right-wing parties SDK and SMK was perceived as an ideological emptying of the left.

Nevertheless, all parties in the governing coalition were able to reach an agreement on economic, social, and international integration issues. The leader of SDK, Mikuláš Dzurinda, became Prime Minister. In his words, “...task No. 1 is the economic sphere – resolving the crisis in the country’s financial and economic situation; task No. 2 is to take decisive steps from day one to present Slovakia in the best light and to make it clear that a democratic government is being formed that wants to strengthen democracy and the rule of law and that it is serious about its Western orientation; task No. 3 is to declare war on corruption, mafias and organised crime.”<sup>489</sup> Migaš (SDL) was elected Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. HZDS and SNS remained in opposition.

Among the greatest achievements of the first government of Mikuláš Dzurinda were:

- **Two amendments to the Constitution of the Slovak Republic** (Constitutional Act No. 9/1999 Coll. and Constitutional Act No. 90/2001 Coll. – the so-called major amendment to the Constitution related to the integration of the Slovak Republic into the OECD, NATO, and the EU;<sup>490</sup>

- **Public administration reform**, including the decentralisation process. Similarly, the adoption of legislation and the creation of **8 higher territorial units** (VÚC). The form of this reform almost drove the coalition partner SMK out of the government;<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> SZOMOLÁNYI, S.: Tranzičná cesta Slovenska a voľby 1998. In: BÚTORA, M. – MESEŽNIKOV, G. – BÚTOROVA, Z. (eds.): *Kto? Prečo? Ako? Slovenské voľby '98*. Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1999, pp. 14-15.

<sup>489</sup> SURMÁNEK, Š.: Voľby 1998. Čo ďalej? In: GBÚROVA, M.: *Voľby 1998 v Slovenskej republike (stav – kontexty – perspektíva)*. Prešov : Katedra sociálno-politologických vied Filozofickej fakulty Prešovskej univerzity v Prešove, 1998, p. 144.

<sup>490</sup> LEŠKOVÁ, K.: II. volebné obdobie Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky (Veľká novela Ústavy ako ústavné východisko pre vstup do NATO a EÚ). In: OROSZ, L. – LEŠKOVÁ, K. – RUMAN, J. (eds.): *Ústavodarná činnosť Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 1992-2020. (kvantitatívne ukazovatele, analýza, hodnotiace poznámky)*. Košice : UPJŠ/Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2021, pp. 60-61 a 65-70.

<sup>491</sup> MESEŽNIKOV, G. – MAROŠI, V. (ed.): *20 rokov samosprávnych krajov na Slovensku 2001-2021*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 2022; CALETKA, S.: *Parlamentní diskuse ohledně vytvoření*

- **Commencing negotiations and processes for accession to NATO and the EU.**

In connection with the EU accession negotiations, on 14 September 1999, the government decided to shut down two blocks of the V1 nuclear power plant in Jaslovské Bohunice. The government committed to completely decommissioning the first unit by 31 December 2006 at the latest and the second unit two years later (31 December 2008);

- **A series of recovery measures by the NBS (National Bank of Slovakia) and the Slovak government** to address the decline of the Slovak crown (SKK) and stabilise the country's economy, including extensive budget cuts.

- **Restructuring of the national economy.** In this context, we can mention the sale of the (indebted) VSŽ (East Slovak Ironworks) to the American company U.S. Steel and the debt relief and privatisation of the banking sector in 2001-2002 (Slovenská sporiteľňa was bought by Austria's Erste Bank; Všeobecná úverová banka was bought by Italy's IntesaBci financial group; Investičná a rozvojová banka was bought by Hungary's OTP Bank);<sup>492</sup>

- Launching the process of preparing the pension system reform.<sup>493</sup> The reform itself did not take place until during Dzurinda's second government in 2004.<sup>494</sup>

On the other hand, it must also be said that a considerable part of the Slovak population perceived these reforms negatively.<sup>495</sup> Over time, the capabilities and possibilities of the SDK proved to be quite limited.

While SDK representatives pointed to the need for the full integration of the five original political parties into the SDK, representatives of the KDH and DS pushed for a completely different vision, insisting on maintaining their own legal status. The

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vyšších územných samosprávnych celku v Českej republike a na Slovensku. In: MACHYNIÁK, J.: *Dynamika regionálnej samosprávy na Slovensku – voľby 2017*. Trnava : Fakulta sociálnych vied, Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, 2018, pp. 5-18.

<sup>492</sup> NEMEC, M.: Pred 17 rokmi kúpili Američania od vtedajších akcionárov VSŽ oceliarsku výrobu v Košiciach. In: *hnonline.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/finweb/ekonomika/1035989-pred-17-rokmi-kupili-americiania-od-vtedajcich-akcionarov-vs-z-oceliarsku-vyrodu-v-kosciach>>; ONUFEROVÁ, M. – ČIKOVSKÝ, K.: Eichler po 12 rokoch: Podniková kultúra VSŽ bola kradnúť. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/index/c/eichler-po-12-rokoch-podnikova-kultura-vs-z-bola-kradnut>>.

<sup>493</sup> HNONLINE: Druhý pilier – najvýraznejší prvok dôchodkovej reformy. In: *hnonline.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/prakticke-hn/68199-druhy-pilier-najvyraznejssi-prvok-dochodkovej-reformy>>; JESEŇÁK, Š.: Exminister práce Kaník: Fico reformu dôchodkov nenávidel, ľuďom ukradol penzie. In: *týždeň.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.tyzden.sk/rozhovory/67845/exminister-prace-kanik-/>>.

<sup>494</sup> In January 2004, based on Act No. 43/2004 Coll. on old-age pension savings, **the second pillar** became part of the pension system in the Slovak Republic. ADSS: *15 rokov druhého piliera na Slovensku*. In: *adss.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.adss.sk/spravy/15-rokov-druheho-piliera-na-slovensku>>; NBS: Základná charakteristika II. piliera. In: *nbs.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://nbs.sk/dohlad-nad-financnym-trhom/dohlad/dochodkove-sporenie/starobne-dochodkove-sporenie-ii-pilier/zakladna-charakteristika/>>.

<sup>495</sup> ŠKOBLA, D.: Čo priniesli Dzurindove reformy. In: *advojka.cz*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://advojka.cz/a2-article/2007-17-co-priniesli-dzurindove-reformy/>>.

result of these opposed approaches was that on 16 January 2000, a political declaration was signed on the establishment of the **Slovak Democratic and Christian Union** (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia - SDKÚ). A month later (February 2000), the party was registered with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic (MI SR).

In June 2000, an agreement was signed on the merger with the **Union of Tradesmen, Entrepreneurs and Farmers** (Úniou živnostníkov, podnikateľov a roľníkov), led by Pavol Prokopovič, and a month later, the SDKÚ merged with the DEÚS, led by Ľ. Harach. The party's founding congress took place on 17 November 2000.

### **Presidential election 1999**

Since it had not been possible to elect the President of the Slovak Republic directly in the National Council of the Slovak Republic since January 1998, on 14 January 1999, the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted **Constitutional Act No. 9/1999 Coll.**, which amended the Constitution of the Slovak Republic to introduce direct presidential election and other issues concerning the position of president.<sup>496</sup> According to this constitutional amendment, supplemented by **Act No. 46/1999 Coll. on the method of electing the President of the Slovak Republic, on popular voting, dismissal, and amendments to certain other laws of 18 March 1999**, Rudolf Schuster was directly elected president by the citizens in May 1999.

The first round of the presidential election took place on 15 May 1999. Voter turnout was 73.89%. The winner of the first round of the election among 10 candidates was Schuster with 47.37% of the vote. The runner-up, Mečiar, received 37.23% of the vote. In the second round of the presidential election, which took place two weeks later, voter turnout increased by just under 1.5% to 75.45%, and Rudolf Schuster became president, receiving 57.18% of the vote.<sup>497</sup>

Political party **Direction** (SMER) was founded on 8 November 1999, when it was officially registered by the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. The party was founded by Robert Fico, an ambitious young lawyer and left-wing politician who, although he received the most preferential votes within SDĽ in the elections, did not hold any significant political office. His ambition to become the Prosecutor General of

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<sup>496</sup> LEŠKOVÁ, K.: II. volebné obdobie Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky (Veľká novela Ústavy ako ústavné východisko pre vstup do NATO a EÚ). In: OROSZ, L. - LEŠKOVÁ, K. - RUMAN, J. (eds.): *Ústavodarná činnosť Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 1992-2020. (kvantitatívne ukazovatele, analýza, hodnotiace poznámky)*. Košice : UPJŠ/Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2021, pp. 59-60.

<sup>497</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta '99. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 13/04/2025]. Available at: <<http://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez1999/prezid99/home.jsp.htm>>.

the Slovak Republic was not fulfilled because he did not meet the required age for the position at the time.<sup>498</sup>

The idea of establishing a political entity arose after the parliamentary elections in 1998. When the party was founded, its leader surrounded himself with a group of “intellectuals” such as Boris Zala and Dušan Čaplovič on the one hand, and a group of entrepreneurs such as Fedor Flašík, a marketing expert, who had played a significant role in HZDS campaigns in the past, Bohumil Hanzel, and later also Miroslav Výboh, Jozef Brhel, and Juraj Široký.<sup>499</sup> From the beginning, its representatives sought to distance themselves from the previous policies of Mečiar and Dzurinda. Thematically, the party focused on the wild privatisation of the 1990s, but also on the economic measures introduced by the Dzurinda government. In 2001, the party ideologically embraced **the third way**, following the example of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder.<sup>500</sup> With this vision, it entered the 2002 parliamentary elections. The party’s slogan at the time was, “*Just as there was theft under Mečiar, there is theft under Dzurinda, and we must stand up against it.*” According to founding party member Zala, “*At that time, Smer was created as an anti-corruption party.*”<sup>501</sup>

As for the development of the SDSS, on 1 April 2022, it terminated the agreement on the SDK.<sup>502</sup> The reason was to seek cooperation on the left side of the political spectrum. In the 2002 parliamentary elections, several SDSS members appeared on the SDA candidate list.

There was also a change in the SDK. While its leadership, headed by Dzurinda, demanded the merger of five political entities, from which the SDK emerged into a single political party in an effort to be a sufficiently strong alternative to the still

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<sup>498</sup> AKTUALITY: Ako prišiel mladý Fico o ilúzie. Vybabrali s ním starí komunisti. In: *aktuality.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/467212/ako-prisiel-mlady-fico-o-iluzie-vybabrali-s-nim-stari-komunisti/>>.

<sup>499</sup> VAGOVIČ, M. – KRPELAN R.: *Zakladateľ Smeru: Fico chápal sponzorov*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/zakladatel-smeru-fico-chapal-sponzorov>>; ODKLADAL, M.: „Chudobný oligarcha“ s veľkým vplyvom v Smere. To je Miroslav Výboh. In: *aktuality.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/275115/chudobny-oligarcha-s-velkym-vplyvom-v-smere-to-je-miroslav-vyboh/>>; TURČEK, M.: Obvinený oligarcha Brhel: Sponzor Smeru blízky Kaliňákovi aj Kažimírovi. In: *aktuality.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/860535/jozef-brhel-sponzor-smeru-blizky-kalinakovi-aj-kazimirovi/>>; JAMRICOVÁ, P.: Mecenáš Smeru či kontroverzný podnikateľ. Juraj Široký je opradený legendami. In: *hnonline.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/finweb/ekonomika/521404-mecenas-smeru-ci-kontroverzny-podnikatel-juraj-siroky-je-opradeny-legendami>>.

<sup>500</sup> HEYWOOD, A.: *Politické ideológie*. Praha : Victoria Publishing, 1994, p. 149.

<sup>501</sup> PIETOVÁ, M.: Zala: Dnes sa to môže zdať parodické, ale Smer vznikol ako protikorupčná strana – VIDEO. In: *sita.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://sita.sk/zala-dnes-sa-to-moze-zdat-parodicke-ale-smer-vznikol-ako-protikorupcna-strana/>>.

<sup>502</sup> TASR: SDSS vypovedá k dnešnému dňu dohodu o SDK. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/sdss-vypoveda-k-dnesnemu-dnu-dohodu-o-sdk>>.

powerful HZDS led by Mečiar, KDH and DS in particular had a fundamentally different view, rejecting this option entirely and demanding a return to the original state, i.e. the existence of the original parties. As a result, on 16 January 2000, a declaration was signed establishing **the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union** (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia - SDKÚ).<sup>503</sup> The declaration and founding political document of the SDKÚ were signed by representatives of the coalition political parties, with the exception of KDH and DS. The party was officially registered with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic on 18 February 2000.<sup>504</sup> In June and July of the same year, the SDKÚ expanded to include the political party **Union of Tradesmen, Entrepreneurs and Farmers** and **the Democratic Union of Slovakia**.

Before the 2002 parliamentary elections, Prime Minister and SDKÚ election leader Mikuláš Dzurinda called on other right-wing parties to form a so-called **Right-wing Bloc** (Pravicový blok), which was intended to signal joint action before the elections. Other right-wing parties rejected this intention due to concerns about repeating the situation that occurred after the 1998 parliamentary elections.

#### 8.4 Electoral term 2002-2006

The 2002 parliamentary elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic were held on 20 and 21 September 2002. Voter turnout was 70.01%, which was significantly lower than in the previous elections.<sup>505</sup> Of the 25 political parties, 7 entered the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The winner of the elections was HZDS, which received 19.50% of the vote. SDKÚ received 15.09% of the vote, closely followed by SMER (13.46%). They were then followed by SMK-MKP (11.16%), KDH (8.25%), ANO (8.01%), and the surprise of these elections, KSS (6.32%).<sup>506</sup> In contrast, SDĽ and SDA suffered a total defeat.

#### The second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda

The formation of the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda after the elections came as a major surprise, as according to several pre-election polls, the favourites were HZDS and the increasingly popular SMER. Voter support of 15% and second place in the election results for SDKÚ unexpectedly changed the situation and further post-election debates on the formation of a new government.

The governing coalition was formed relatively quickly by the SDKÚ together with SMK-MKP, KDH, and the newly formed **Alliance of New Citizens** (Aliancia nového

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<sup>503</sup> SDKÚ: *Politická deklarácia*. [online], [cit. 13/02/2014]. Available at: <<http://www.sdksk.sk/content/politicka-deklaracia>>.

<sup>504</sup> IVES: *Register strán*. In: *ives.sk*. [online], [cit. 17/02/2014]. Available at: <<http://www.ives.sk/registre/detailuplnyps.do?action=uplny&formular=&id=153099>>.

<sup>505</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby do NR SR 2002. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/02/2025]. Available at: <<http://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2002/webdata/vysledky.htm>>.

<sup>506</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby do NR SR 2002. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 22/02/2025]. Available at: <<http://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2002/webdata/vysledky.htm>>.

občana - ANO), led by former TV Markíza director Pavol Rusko. Dzurinda became Prime Minister again, relying on the support of 78 MPs at the beginning of the National Council's term. Pavol Hrušovský (KDH) was elected Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. HZDS, SMER-SD, and KSS remained in opposition.

Despite the shared interest in continuing with already established and new reforms in several areas, the first serious dispute during the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda occurred in early 2003 between ANO chairman Pavol Rusko, who sought to promote a more liberal policy, and Interior Minister Vladimír Palko (KDH), who represented Christian-conservative tendencies. After the departure of three ANO representatives, who left due to dissatisfaction within the party, but also because of increasing tension in the government, the governing coalition in the National Council of the Slovak Republic could only rely on the support of 75 MPs. From 2004, it was possible to call it a minority government. This government was only able to function thanks to the support of independent MPs. In the summer of 2005, the Rusko scandal concerning promissory notes came to light, leading to a split in ANO.

Concerning Dzurinda's tenure as Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, the prevailing opinion is that *"...he behaved more like a manager, and the potential for reform came from various other parties."*<sup>507</sup> Former DS chairman and Minister of Labour, Social Affairs and Family from 2002 to 2005, Ľudovít Kaník, said: *"Dzurinda did not allow any conflicts to be resolved during government meetings. If there were any, he demanded that the law be withdrawn and the dispute resolved either through negotiations between ministers or at the coalition council. Dzurinda himself did not intervene in the dispute, except at the coalition council."*<sup>508</sup>

The greatest achievements of Dzurinda's second government include:

- **Liberalisation of the economy and business environment;**
- **Continued reduction of the public finance deficit, including fiscal decentralisation;**
- **Introduction of a flat tax rate of 19%.** (The concept of a flat tax was originally proposed by the KDH at a rate of 14%.<sup>509</sup> SDKÚ, led by Finance Minister Ivan Mikloš, initially dismissed this proposal as *"tax populism"*.);<sup>510</sup>
- **Introduction of extensive reforms in the economy, healthcare, education, and social welfare.**<sup>511</sup> In the social policy, we can mention the reform of the labour market,

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<sup>507</sup> TÝŽDEŇ: 10 rokov s Dzurindom. In: *týždeň.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/3403/10-rokov-s-dzurindom/>>.

<sup>508</sup> TÝŽDEŇ: 10 rokov s Dzurindom. In: *týždeň.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/3403/10-rokov-s-dzurindom/>>.

<sup>509</sup> SITA: DS: Rovná daň sa nesmie stať predvolebným heslom. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/ds-rovna-dan-sa-nesmie-stat-predvolebnym-heslom>>.

<sup>510</sup> ČERVENÁ, K. – VARTAŠOVÁ, A.: *Základy zdaňovania (v interakcii ekonómie a práva)*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Právnická fakulta, 2021, 125 p.

<sup>511</sup> MIKLOŠ, I. a kolektív autorov: *Knihá reformiem: Ako si Slovensko získalo medzinárodné uznanie v ekonomickej oblasti*. Bratislava : Trend Visual spol. s r. o., 2005, 67 p.

changes in social assistance, the repeal of the tripartite law, the reduction of the direct tax burden, the simplification of the tax system, and the introduction of the state treasury;

- **Slovakia's accession to NATO (29 March 2004) and the European Union (1 May 2004).** Slovakia's accession to the EU was preceded by a referendum a year earlier (16 and 17 May 2003), in which 52.15% of eligible voters took part. Of these, 92.46% voted in favour of Slovakia's accession to the EU.<sup>512</sup> This was **the first and so far the only valid referendum in Slovakia.**

On the other hand, similarly to previous governments, the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda also faced several scandals, the most notable of which were: bribing journalists, the "little trains" scandal, Rusko's promissory notes, buying independent MPs, financing the SDKÚ, Gorila, and others.

Also in view of the above, on 3 April 2004, the day of the first round of the presidential election, President Schuster called **a referendum** based on a petition initiative **by the Confederation of Trade Unions** (Konfederácia odborových zväzov - KOZ) and supported by opposition parties - especially SMER - against the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda, **to shorten the third term of the National Council of the Slovak Republic so that elections would be held in 2004.**

On the part of the acting President Schuster, this was a calculated move. On one hand, it was supposed to help him get re-elected in the presidential election by winning support from trade unions and SMER sympathisers; on the other hand, by assuming that participation in the presidential election could also help increase participation in the referendum.<sup>513</sup> However, as only 35.86% of eligible voters participated in this referendum, it was invalid.<sup>514</sup>

With regard to party developments, on 16 November 2003, former Minister of Defence and SDKÚ MP Ivan Šimko, together with other party members, announced an internal party platform within the SDKÚ called **the SDKÚ Free Forum** (Slobodné fórum SDKÚ).<sup>515</sup> On 13 January 2004, a new political party called the **Free Forum** (Slobodné fórum - SF) was registered with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic. The former vice-chairwoman of the SDKÚ, Zuzana Martináková, became the first chairwoman of the party.

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<sup>512</sup> ŠÚ SR: Referendum o vstupe SR do Európskej únie 16. a 17. máj 2003. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 28/02/2025]. Available at: <<http://volby.statistics.sk/ref/ref2003/webdata/home.htm>>.

<sup>513</sup> KRIVÝ, V.: Volby v roku 2004. In: KOLLÁR, M. – MESEŽNIKOV, G.: *Slovensko 2004: Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 2004, pp. 150-155.

<sup>514</sup> ŠÚ SR: Referendum – 3. apríla 2004. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 03/03/2025]. Available at: <<http://volby.statistics.sk/ref/ref2004/slov/referendum.html>>.

<sup>515</sup> SITA: Šimko založil platformu Slobodné fórum SDKÚ. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 03/03/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/144753-simko-zalozil-platformu-slobodne-forum-sdku/>>.

On the left side of the political spectrum, 26 May 2002 saw the official dissolution of the **Democratic Centre Party**, also known as **STRED** (Strana demokratickeho streda). The party, founded in 1999 by Ivan Mjartan after leaving HZDS, recommended that its members join the SMER party.<sup>516</sup> In December 2004, a fundamental decision was made within SMER to **absorb and de facto engulf three other social democratic political parties** (SDL, SDSS, and SDA) **into its ranks**.<sup>517</sup> This was essentially a reaction by these parties to the results of the previous elections. The merger of these parties into SMER also led to the renaming of the party to **SMER – Social Democracy** (SMER – sociálna demokracia - SMER-SD).<sup>518</sup> In addition, in 2005, an agreement on strategic cooperation was signed between KOZ and SMER-SD, in which “*SMER-SD pledged to consult with the trade unions and promote their interests in line with social democratic values, and the trade unions in return pledged to support the party in the elections.*”<sup>519</sup> At the same time, the party gradually shifted from the centrist position towards the left, thereby attracting and taking over voters from KSS. Thanks to the gradual incorporation of various left-wing movements, SMER-SD had optimistic prospects for success in the 2006 parliamentary elections.

In December 2005, SDKÚ merged with DS, changing its name to **Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party** (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia – Demokratická strana – SDKÚ-DS).<sup>520</sup>

### Presidential election 2004

On 3 April 2004, the second direct presidential election were held. Among the 12 candidates, apart from the incumbent president Rudolf Schuster, other well-known candidates included Martin Bútora, Ivan Gašparovič, Eduard Kukan, Vladimír Mečiar, František Mikloško, Ľubo Roman, and others. In the first round of the election, voter turnout reached 47.94% of eligible voters. Mečiar (32.73%) and Gašparovič (22.28%)

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<sup>516</sup> TASR: Strana demokratickeho streda dnes oficiálne oznámila zánik. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 03/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/strana-demokratickeho-streda-dnes-oficialne-oznamila-zanik>>.

<sup>517</sup> JUST, P.: Vládnutí Roberta Fica: koalície stabilní, opozície v rozklade. In: *Acta Politologica*, 2009, Vol. 1, No. 2, p. 176; MARUŠIAK, J.: Fenomén strany Smer: medzi „pragmatizmom“ a sociálnou demokraciou. In: *Central European Political Studies Review*, 2006, Vol. VIII, No. 1, pp. 19-55; SITA: Smer sa zlúči so socialistami. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/07/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/147086-smer-sa-zluci-so-socialistami/>>.

<sup>518</sup> ŘÁDEK, M.: Sociálne demokracie na Slovensku vo voľbách 2024 a 2024 – súperia alebo partneri? In: ONUFRÁK, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – JAKABOVIČ, L. (eds.): *Voľby 2023/2024: výsledky-hodnotenia-dôsledky: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2025, pp. 253-287.

<sup>519</sup> KOŠČ, J.: Sociálna demokracia, odbory a vládne politiky v kontexte reálpolitiky. In: ONUFRÁK, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – JAKABOVIČ, L. (eds.): *Voľby 2023/2024: výsledky-hodnotenia-dôsledky: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2025, p. 553.

<sup>520</sup> MAŤKO, M. a kol.: *SDKÚ-DS Strana reforiem a modernizácie Slovenska*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre moderné Slovensko, 2012, p. 73.

advanced to the second round. Incumbent President Schuster came in fourth with 7.42% of the vote.<sup>521</sup>

In the second round of the election, voter turnout was 43.50%, with Ivan Gašparovič becoming the winner of the election and the new president, receiving 59.91% of the votes in the second round.<sup>522</sup> Mečiar thus failed to win the presidential election for the second time.

A significant factor in Gašparovič's victory in the second round of the presidential election was the support of many voters from the right side of the political spectrum, for whom Gašparovič was still a more acceptable option than Mečiar.

Shortly before the 2006 parliamentary elections, the KDH left the governing coalition. The main reason for its departure was the failure to approve the conscience clause agreement. This agreement was to be negotiated according to the government's programme statement after the 2002 elections. It was to be submitted by Foreign Minister Kukan, who, however, blocked it. The SDKÚ's negative stance was related to its interest in the potential votes of the SF, which was teetering on the edge of electability. With the departure of the KDH from the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda, Béla Bugár (SMK) became the acting Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

On 7 February 2006, the government collapsed, and an agreement was reached to call early parliamentary elections on 17 June 2006, three months earlier than the original plan for elections to the National Council.

Regardless of all the missteps, mistakes, and errors of the first and the second governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda, this does not change the fact that this period can be considered the most successful in the short history of the Slovak Republic, at least in terms of the economy, integration, and foreign policy.

### **Election Act No. 333/2004 Coll.**

*Act No. 333/2004 Coll. on elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, as amended*, underwent a total of six amendments during its existence (from 1 October 2004 to 30 June 2015), and, similarly to its predecessor – *Act No. 80/1990 Coll. on Elections to the Slovak National Council, as amended* – the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic also commented on the wording in this case. This was in *the Constitutional Court's ruling ref. no. PL. ÚS 6/08* of 11 February 2009.

Three parliamentary elections were held under this Act: in 2006, 2010, and 2012.

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<sup>521</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta SR. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<http://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2004/prezident/index.jsp.htm#i>>.

<sup>522</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta SR. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/07/2025]. Available at: <<http://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2004/prezident/index.jsp.htm#i>>.

## 8.5 Electoral term 2006-2010

Compared to previous parliamentary elections, these elections were different in three aspects:<sup>523</sup>

- The election moratorium was abolished;
- Political parties were allowed to advertise in commercial electronic media for the first time;
- The duration of the elections was shortened from two days to one day.

The 2006 parliamentary elections were held on 17 June 2006. Voter turnout was 54.67%, which was the lowest turnout in parliamentary elections to date.<sup>524</sup> Despite the significantly lower voter turnout, these parliamentary elections were described as **normal**.<sup>525</sup>

The winner of these elections was SMER-SD with 29.14% of the vote.<sup>526</sup> The integration of several left-wing parties into SMER-SD, as well as the shift of some voters from ĽS-HZDS, contributed significantly to this result. As a result, SMER-SD clearly outperformed the second-placed SDKÚ-DS, which won 18.35% of the vote.<sup>527</sup> The election result for SDKÚ-DS was largely a reflection of previous reforms and macroeconomic successes, which were highly positively evaluated abroad and in financial circles, but were criticised and rejected by a significant part of the population because of their impact on family budgets.<sup>528</sup> Compared to previous parliamentary elections, the conflict between Mečiarism and anti-Mečiarism receded into the background, and the socio-economic conflict line was strengthened.<sup>529</sup>

Although a post-election meeting took place between the election winners, SMER-SD and SDKÚ-DS, both parties agreed after the meeting that the differences in their programmes were so great that a joint government coalition was not possible.<sup>530</sup> And so SMER-SD formed a governing coalition with SNS and ĽS-HZDS. As both of these

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<sup>523</sup> CENKOVÁ, R.: Slovenský volič verzus poslucháč v analýze politickej marketingovej komunikácie parlamentných volieb. In: GBÚROVÁ, M. (ed.): *Voľby 2006 v štátoch V4*. Prešov : PhDr. Štefan Franko, PhD. – Slovacontact, 2006, p. 338.

<sup>524</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby NR SR 2006. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 01/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2006/slov/obvod/results/tab1.jsp.htm>>.

<sup>525</sup> BÚTOROVÁ, Z.: Nová vláda nemá podporu väčšiny verejnosti. In: *sme.sk*. 2006. [online], [cit. 03/08/2025]. Available at: <[https://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs/publicistika/subor/produkt\\_2351.pdf](https://www.ivo.sk/buxus/docs/publicistika/subor/produkt_2351.pdf)>.

<sup>526</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby NR SR 2006. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 01/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2006/slov/obvod/results/tab1.jsp.htm>>.

<sup>527</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby NR SR 2006. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 01/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2006/slov/obvod/results/tab1.jsp.htm>>.

<sup>528</sup> PEHE, J.: Extrémy plodia zasa len extrémny. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 01/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/komentare/c/extremy-plodia-zasa-len-extremy>>; SURMÁNEK, Š.: Na čo poukázali parlamente voľby na Slovensku v roku 2006. In: GBÚROVÁ, M. (ed.): *Voľby 2006 v štátoch V4*. Prešov : PhDr. Štefan Franko, PhD. – Slovacontact, 2006, p. 153.

<sup>529</sup> HYNČICA, P.: Voľby 2006 a zmena vlády na Slovensku. In: *Politologická revue*. 2007, 1, p. 137.

<sup>530</sup> ČTK: Smer nevyhlásil SMK ani KDH, s SDKÚ sa nedohodol. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 01/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/150977-smer-nevyhlasil-smk-ani-kdh-s-sdku-sa-nedohodol/>>.

parties were aware of their significantly limited coalition potential, they were willing to accept a submissive position in the government just to be part of it.<sup>531</sup> Together, the coalition parties held 85 parliamentary seats. On the other hand, the government formed in this way was heavily criticised not only in Slovakia but also abroad, particularly by the Party of European Socialists (PES). In October 2006, the PES suspended SMER-SD's membership for ten months until June 2007.<sup>532</sup>

Other parties that managed to cross the electoral threshold were the SNS (11.73%), SMK-MKP (11.69%), ĽS-HZDS (8.79%), and KDĽ (8.31%). Robert Fico thus became the first Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic from the left side of the political spectrum.<sup>533</sup> Pavol Paška became the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

At that time, ĽS-HZDS was already showing signs of leaning towards a nationalist orientation. At the same time, as the only political party in Slovakia without a clear ideological profile, it was becoming increasingly redundant on the political scene. Some of the 700,000 voters that the ĽS-HZDS had lost over the previous eight years shifted their allegiance to SMER-SD, and to a lesser extent to the SNS and KSS, while others became non-voters.<sup>534</sup>

### **The first government of Robert Fico**

In its programme statement, the first government of Robert Fico declared that it would adjust the state's economic policy to reflect the social market model. In this context, it focused on:<sup>535</sup>

- Changes in distribution in favour of lower-income groups;
- Strengthening the position of trade unions in the labour market;
- Shifting the focus of influence on socio-economic reforms from market regulators to the activities of state institutions;
- Continuing the integration of the Slovak Republic into the European Monetary Union (EMU), which was planned for 1 January 2009.

Following these priorities, several economic and social reforms of the previous two governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda were abolished or modified: abolition of regulatory fees in healthcare facilities; the halting of the transformation of hospitals into joint-

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<sup>531</sup> JUST, P.: Vládnutí Roberta Fica: koalice stabilní, opozice v rozkladu. In: *Acta Politologica*, 2009, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 160-181.

<sup>532</sup> SITA: Európski socialisti pozastavili Smeru členstvo. In: *topky.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/127991/Europski-socialisti-pozastavili-Smeru-clenstvo>>.

<sup>533</sup> BLAHA, L.: Historický úspech sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku: (Analýza koalíčných možností víťaznej strany po parlamentných voľbách 2006). In: GBUROVÁ, M. (a kol.): *Voľby 2006 v štátoch V4*. Prešov : Slovacontact, 2006, p. 152.

<sup>534</sup> BLAHA, L.: Historický úspech sociálnej demokracie na Slovensku: (Analýza koalíčných možností víťaznej strany po parlamentných voľbách 2006). In: GBUROVÁ, M. (a kol.): *Voľby 2006 v štátoch V4*. Prešov : Slovacontact, 2006, p. 153.

<sup>535</sup> OKÁLI, I. a kol.: *Hospodársky vývoj Slovenska v roku 2006. (Štúdia vypracovaná na požiadanie Európskej hospodárskej komisie OSN)*. Bratislava : Ekonomický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, 2007, p. 14.

stock companies; the weakening of the pluralistic health insurance system (including a ban on profits for health insurance companies); but also changes to the pension system (disadvantaging the second pension pillar); and amendments to the Labour Code in favour of employees.

Other important decisions of the first government of Robert Fico include:

- The halting of the privatisation of strategic enterprises (e.g., Bratislava Airport or energy companies);<sup>536</sup>
- Preparing the construction of motorways and expressways through PPP projects with a total value of €20 billion over 30 years of repayment.<sup>537</sup> As this was a significantly overpriced investment project, the following government – the government of Iveta Radičová – stopped this project;
- **Preparation and implementation of the project to extend the Košice – Bratislava – Vienna broad-gauge railway line** with the construction of a logistics centre with a total value of more than EUR 4 billion;<sup>538</sup>
- **On 21 December 2007, the Slovak Republic joined the Schengen area.** On that day, all border controls at the Slovak Republic's land borders with Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, and Hungary were abolished. The Slovak Republic's border with Ukraine became the external border of the Schengen area;
- **Ratification of the Lisbon Treaty** in May 2008, after lengthy negotiations between the coalition and the opposition. The opposition parties SDKÚ-DS, SMK-MKP, and KDH made their vote in favour of ratifying the Lisbon Treaty conditional on concessions regarding the new press law;<sup>539</sup>
- **On 1 January 2009, the Slovak Republic adopted the Euro as its currency,** becoming the 16th member of the Eurozone. The Slovak Republic thus became (and still is) the only country in the V4 to abandon its national currency and join the common European currency;<sup>540</sup>
- The **introduction of electronic toll collection** on 1 January 2010 was operated by the SkyToll consortium under conditions that were significantly disadvantageous for the state.

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<sup>536</sup> SVOZIL, K.: Fico: Zastavte predaj letiska Bratislava. In: *hnonline.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/dennik/192595-fico-zastavte-predaj-letiska-bratislava>>.

<sup>537</sup> KRAJANOVÁ, D.: Ficova diaľnica cez PPP nás vyjde na 275 miliárd korún. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/index/c/ficova-dialnica-cez-ppp-nas-vyjde-na-275-miliard-korun>>.

<sup>538</sup> SITA: Vláda odobrila širokorozchodnú. In: *trend.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.trend.sk/spravy/vlada-odobrila-sirokorozchodnu>>.

<sup>539</sup> ČTK: Slovensko ratifikovalo Lisabonskú zmluvu. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 03/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/157760-slovensko-ratifikovalo-lisabonsku-zmluvu/>>.

<sup>540</sup> NBS: Zavedenie eura na Slovensku. In: *nbs.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://nbs.sk/o-narodnej-banke/medzinarodne-vztahy/nbs-v-eurosysteme/euro-na-slovensku/>>.

On the other hand, **the significantly deteriorated relations with neighbouring Hungary** were perceived as particularly negative.<sup>541</sup> There were several reasons for this:

- Increased tension between the SNS and SMK-MKP – especially between Ján Slota and Miklós Duray;<sup>542</sup>
- Controversial statements by Slota about Hungarians living in Slovakia and Hungary;
- **The Hedviga Malinová case** in August 2006;
- On 1 November 2008, there was a (brutal) **intervention by the Slovak police during a football match between DAC Dunajská Streda and Slovan Bratislava** at the Dunajská Streda stadium;<sup>543</sup>
- **On 21 August 2009, the then-President of Hungary, László Sólyom, was denied entry to the territory of the Slovak Republic.** On that day, he was supposed to unveil a statue of St. Stephen in Komárno at the invitation of the mayor of the city, Tibor Bastrnák. No representatives of the Slovak Republic were invited to the event. The Slovak authorities called on President Sólyom not to make his visit on 21 August, given that it was the anniversary of the occupation of Czechoslovakia by Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 (Prague Spring). Among the invading armies of the Warsaw Pact were military units from Hungary.<sup>544</sup> In 2012, the Court of Justice of the European Union dismissed Hungary's action against the Slovak Republic in this case, stating that *“Slovakia acted lawfully under EU law, since, as a head of state on a private visit, he did not enjoy absolute immunity and his entry threatened public order.”*<sup>545</sup>
- Shortly before the parliamentary elections (26 May 2010), the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted **Act No. 250/2010 Coll. on the loss of Slovak citizenship** by citizens who voluntarily decided to acquire the citizenship of another country. Ninety members of parliament voted in favour of the law in the plenary

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<sup>541</sup> BLAŠKOVÁ, B. – KOŠTIAL, L. – NOVÁK, M.: *Voľby a referendá na území Slovenskej republiky od roku 1989 – 2020* (vysokoškolská učebnica). Trnava : Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, Fakulta sociálnych vied, 2020, p. 21.

<sup>542</sup> SME: SMK a Ján Slota sa navzájom žalujú. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/smk-a-jan-slota-sa-navzajom-zaluju>>.

<sup>543</sup> ČERVENÝ, M.: Bolo to ako vojna. Bitka policajtov s fanúšikmi Dunajskej Stredy, po ktorej sa zmenil zákon. In: *dennikn.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1380564/bolo-to-ako-vojna-bitka-policajtov-s-fanusikmi-dunajskej-stredy-po-ktorej-sa-zmenil-zakon/>>.

<sup>544</sup> TASR: Pred 10 rokmi nepustili maďarského prezidenta do SR. In: *teraz.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/pred-10-rokmi-nepustili-madarskeho-pre/413768-clanok.html>>; MIGAL, S. – HUSÁROVÁ, L.: Koniec kauzy Sólyom. Slovensko spor vyhralo. In: *noviny.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.noviny.sk/slovensko/108513-koniec-kauzy-solyom-slovensko-sudny-spor-vyhralo>>.

<sup>545</sup> CURIA: Rozsudok Súdneho dvora (veľká komora) zo 16. októbra 2012. Maďarsko proti Slovenskej republike. Právo na pohyb na území členských štátov – Prezident Maďarska – Odopretie vstupu na územie Slovenskej republiky – Diplomatické vzťahy medzi členskými štátmi. Vec C-364/10. In: *eur-lex.europa.eu*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/SK/TXT/?uri=celex%3A62010CJ0364>>.

session of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. In addition to the members of the coalition parties SMER-SD, SNS, and ĽS-HZDS, the KDH also voted in favour. This was Slovakia's retaliatory response to the Hungarian law simplifying the granting of dual citizenship to foreign Hungarians.<sup>546</sup>

The opposition at the time also went through a very turbulent period. At the end of March 2007, there was a change in the position of SMK-MKP chairman. Béla Bugár was replaced by Pál Csáky, the former Deputy Prime Minister for this party during both governments of Mikuláš Dzurinda. Subsequently, in June 2009, Bugár and other defectors founded a new political party called **MOST-HÍD**.<sup>547</sup> In February 2008, four MPs led by Vladimír Palko left KDH. In July 2008, the defectors founded a new political party called the **Conservative Democrats of Slovakia** (Konzervatívni demokrati Slovenska - KDS). Within the SDKÚ-DS, party delegates from the Bratislava region opposed party chairman Dzurinda and his style of politics. In March 2008, the rebels were expelled from the party (at the suggestion of the chairman).<sup>548</sup>

While the above-mentioned opposition parties were going through a period of multiple splits, the SMER-SD political party experienced the exact opposite trend - expanding by absorbing small centre-left political parties. In December 2007, the **Left Bloc** (Ľavicový blok - ĽB) joined SMER-SD, becoming the sixth political party to be absorbed by SMER-SD. ĽB was founded in 2002 by Jozef Kalman, former Deputy Prime Minister nominated by ZRS and later a member of HZDS.<sup>549</sup> There was also talk behind the scenes of other parties negotiating integration with SMER-SD at that time. Specifically, these were the **Green Party** (Strana zelených - SZ)<sup>550</sup> and the **Movement for Democracy** (Hnutie za Demokraciu - HZD), which was founded in 2002 by Ivan Gašparovič. The cooperation between SMER-SD and HZD was also strengthened by SMER-SD's support of Gašparovič's re-election as President.<sup>551</sup> However, the merger itself did not take place.<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>546</sup> TASR: Ficov zákon zrušil dvojaké občianstvo. In: *hnonline.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/slovensko/308394-ficov-zakon-zrusil-dvojake-obcianstvo>>.

<sup>547</sup> SITA: Bugár zakladá stranu Most - Híd. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 04/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/162083-bugar-zaklada-stranu-most-hid/>>.

<sup>548</sup> LEŠKO, J.: Prezídium vylúčilo zo strany viacerých členov z Bratislavy. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://korzar.sme.sk/vychod/c/prezidium-vylucilo-zo-strany-viacerych-clenov-z-bratislavy>>.

<sup>549</sup> SITA: Ľavicový blok: Integrácia so Smerom posilní Ľavicu na Slovensku. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/lavicovy-blok-integracia-so-smerom-posilni-lavicu-na-slovensku>>.

<sup>550</sup> ČTK: Smer bude spolupracovať so Stranou zelených. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/smer-bude-spolupracovat-so-stranou-zelenych>>.

<sup>551</sup> HABRMANOVÁ, S.: Smer nemá dosť. Ide po ďalších ministranách. In: *hnonline.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/dennik/ekonomika-a-firmy/211926-smer-nema-dost-ide-po-dalsich-ministranach>>.

<sup>552</sup> HZD: Strana I. Gašparoviča sa so Smerom-SD nezlúči. In: *aktuality.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/170906/hzd-strana-i-gasparovica-sa-so-smerom-sd-nezluci/>>.

In November 2007, the SDKÚ-DS presidium approved Iveta Radičová as its presidential candidate. In March and April, she also received support from SMK and KDH. Radičová thus became the official presidential candidate of three right-wing political parties.

### Presidential election 2009

The first round of the presidential election took place on 21 March 2009. Voter turnout was 43.63% of eligible voters.<sup>553</sup> Of the seven candidates, the following advanced to the second round, the incumbent president and winner of the first round, Ivan Gašparovič, who received 46.70% of the vote, and Iveta Radičová, who received 38.05% of the vote. In the second round of elections, voter turnout rose to 51.67%, and Gašparovič was re-elected president for the second time, receiving 55.53% of the vote.<sup>554</sup> Gašparovič's success was seen as confirmation of the success of SMER-SD.<sup>555</sup>

According to a 2010 report by **Transparency International Slovakia (TIS)**, *“the first government of Robert Fico failed in the fight against corruption and its priorities lay much more in social policy and the preparation of large investment projects. Of its three main promises – to strengthen the independence of the courts, prosecute major corrupt officials, and distribute subsidies and EU funds transparently – the coalition fulfilled none.”*<sup>556</sup>

### 8.6 Electoral term 2010-2012

The 2010 elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic were held on 12 June 2010. Voter turnout was 58.83%.<sup>557</sup> Compared to the previous parliamentary elections in 2006, there was a (slight) increase in turnout of just over 4%. The main dividing line was between the right and the left.

The clear winner of these elections was SMER-SD, which won 34.79% of valid votes. The second most successful political party was SDKÚ-DS with 15.42% of the votes. The new political party **Freedom and Solidarity** (Sloboda a solidarita - SaS) came in third place. In its case, the election gain was 12.14%. The fourth KDH received 8.52% of the votes. The newly formed political party MOST-HÍD finished just behind KDH (8.12%). The party was formed in the spring of 2009 when several politicians at various

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<sup>553</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta SR 2009. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2009/jsp/okres/tab2.jsp.htm>>.

<sup>554</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta SR 2009. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2009/jsp/okres/tab2.jsp.htm>>.

<sup>555</sup> SKYVOVÁ, B.: Gašparovič: Som akoby členom Smeru. In: *hnonline.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/dennik/prezidentske-volby/253946-gasparovic-som-akoby-clenom-smeru>>.

<sup>556</sup> TIS: Vláda R. Fica v boji proti korupcii zlyhala: V parlament za viac transparentnosti hlasovala najmä opozícia z KDH a SDKÚ, najmenej HZDS a SMER. In: *tis.sk*. [online], [cit. 02/08/2025]. Available at: <[https://transparency.sk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/TS\\_Hodnotenie-vlady-a-NR-SR.pdf](https://transparency.sk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/TS_Hodnotenie-vlady-a-NR-SR.pdf)>.

<sup>557</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby do NR SR 2010. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/03/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2010/sr/tab1.jsp@lang=sk.htm>>.

levels of the SMK hierarchy left the party.<sup>558</sup> It managed to appeal not only to voters of Hungarian nationality, but also to Slovaks, Roma, and Rusyns.<sup>559</sup> According to Jana Šutajová, referring to Grigorij Mesežnikov, “the success of Most-Híd may also have been aided by the fact that more than a third of the party’s candidates in the elections were Slovaks, including members of the Civic Conservative Party (Občianska konzervatívna strana - OKS).” As a result, “MOST-HÍD was able to gain electoral support even in constituencies where SMK had never been able to appeal to a large number of voters.”<sup>560</sup> In her study, Petra Hirtlová pointed out another peculiarity in connection with the MOST-HÍD. “MOST-HÍD became the first political party in the history of the Slovak parliament that did not have a single female MP.”<sup>561</sup> The sixth political party to (just barely) cross the 5% electoral threshold for entry into the National Council of the Slovak Republic was the SNS (5.07%).<sup>562</sup>

In addition to the significant decline in voter support for SNS mentioned above, it is also worth noting that ĽS-HZDS and SMK-MKP failed to cross the eligibility threshold.

Several political scientists identified the change in the form of political advertising and the course of the pre-election campaign as a novelty in these elections. **The 2010 election campaign was, for the first time, of a strongly confrontational character.** Instead of presenting their own election themes and plans for the coming term, political parties often used billboards and campaign messaging to attack and discredit their opponents.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>558</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š. – ŠUTAJOVÁ, J.: *Maďarská menšina a vybrané historické a politologické aspekty národnostnej politiky na Slovensku (2004 -2018)*. Prešov : Universum, 2020, pp. 171-173; ŠUTAJOVÁ, J.: *Integračný a dezintegračný vývoj maďarských politických strán na Slovensku*. In: ŠUTAJOVÁ, J. – EŠTOK, G. – ONUFRÁK, A. (eds.): *1989 – 2019: 30 rokov zmien. Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2021, pp. 168-170.

<sup>559</sup> ŠUTAJ, Š. – ŠUTAJOVÁ, J.: *Maďarská menšina a vybrané historické a politologické aspekty národnostnej politiky na Slovensku (2004 -2018)*. Prešov : Universum, 2020, p. 174.

<sup>560</sup> ŠUTAJOVÁ, J.: *Maďarské politické strany v parlamentných voľbách*. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 231.

<sup>561</sup> HIRTLOVÁ, P.: *Zastúpenie žien v Národnej rade Slovenskej republiky*. In: ŠUTAJOVÁ, J. – EŠTOK, G. – ONUFRÁK, A. (eds.): *1989 – 2019: 30 rokov zmien. Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2021, p. 305; LÖRINCOVÁ, K.: *Ženy v slovenskom parlamente po novembri 1989*. In: ŠUTAJOVÁ, J. – EŠTOK, G. – ONUFRÁK, A. (eds.): *1989 – 2019: 30 rokov zmien. Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2021, pp. 279-294.

<sup>562</sup> ŠÚ SR: *Voľby do NR SR 2010*. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 15/03/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2010/sr/tab1.jsp?lang=sk.htm>>.

<sup>563</sup> KRNO, S.: *Štiepne línie na Slovensku a parlamentné voľby v roku 2012*. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 66; LEŠKA, D.: *Systém politických strán na Slovensku a perspektívy prehlbovania demokracie po voľbách 2012*. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 173.

## The government of Iveta Radičová

Despite the fact that SMER-SD was the clear winner of these parliamentary elections, gaining more than twice as many votes as the second most successful party, SDKÚ-DS, SMER-SD remained excluded from government formation. **The governing coalition was formed by the centre-right SDKÚ-DS, SaS, KDH, and MOST-HÍD, and Iveta Radičová (SDKÚ-DS) became Prime Minister.** Richard Sulík (SaS) was elected Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The parliamentary opposition consisted of SMER-SD and SNS.

Although initially the centre-right governing coalition appeared to the public as a homogeneous entity (from an ideological point of view), in real politics, its members acted heterogeneously from the outset.<sup>564</sup> The dividing line was particularly pronounced between liberals and Christian democrats, especially on issues such as registered same-sex partnerships, gender, the decriminalisation of marijuana, abortion, euthanasia, and, later, attitudes towards the EU.<sup>565</sup>

The first disputes arose during the drafting of the government programme, when, besides the four aforementioned political parties of the governing coalition, there was increasing talk of a four-member group of **Ordinary People (Obyčajní ľudia)** led by Igor Matovič, who had “sneaked” into the National Council of the Slovak Republic on the SaS candidate list, and a group of four OKS members who had been added to the MOST-HÍD candidate list. Representatives of Ordinary People and, to a lesser extent, OKS soon began to behave as independent political entities, pushing their own agendas at all costs.<sup>566</sup> The original four-party coalition thus very quickly became a **six-party coalition, or a 4+2 coalition**, after the elections.<sup>567</sup> This number was not necessarily final, especially when we consider the existence of various factions within SDKÚ-DS and also KDH.

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<sup>564</sup> SLOBODNÍKOVÁ, M.: Dvadsať rokov vývoja slovenského a slovinského stranického systému v komparatívnej perspektíve. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 487.

<sup>565</sup> KRNO, S.: Štiepne línie na Slovensku a parlamentné voľby v roku 2012. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, pp. 61-66; LEŠKA, D.: Systém politických strán na Slovensku a perspektívy prehlbovania demokracie po voľbách 2012. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 172; KORPAŠOVÁ, L. – DENCI, M.: Legitimita volieb v roku 2012 z pohľadu národných, národnostných a občianskych strán. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 243; ŠTEFANČÍK, R.: Štát vs. cirkev. Tridsať rokov jednej konfliktnéj línie. In: ŠUTAJOVÁ, J. – EŠTOK, G. – ONUFRÁK, A. (eds.): *1989 – 2019: 30 rokov zmien. Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2021, pp. 142-143.

<sup>566</sup> LEŠKA, D.: Systém politických strán na Slovensku a perspektívy prehlbovania demokracie po voľbách 2012. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, pp. 172-173.

<sup>567</sup> KORPAŠOVÁ, L. – DENCI, M.: Legitimita volieb v roku 2012 z pohľadu národných, národnostných a občianskych strán. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 253.

The coalition thus formed continued to fragment in the following months, further weakening the government of Iveta Radičová. This development essentially foreshadowed its later collapse. The fragile 4+2 government coalition, relying on the support of 79 members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, meant that the loss of support from just four of them effectively blocked any government proposal and essentially threatened the stability of the government itself.<sup>568</sup> Part of the coalition – that is, some individuals within the governing coalition – often behaved as if they were in opposition on certain issues.<sup>569</sup>

Svetozár Krno described this government as “colourful and ineffective”, saying that it “was primarily occupied with itself.”<sup>570</sup> Daniel Dobiaš came to a similar conclusion, describing the government of Iveta Radičová as a “tragicomedy” which “could also be seen as a celebration of the self-destructive principle of competitive pluralism.”<sup>571</sup>

### **The battle over the European bailout fund – the beginning of the end of the government of Iveta Radičová**

The beginning of the end of the government of Iveta Radičová was triggered by a series of events related to the strengthening of the temporary European bailout fund (also known as European bailout fund 1).<sup>572</sup>

The SaS’s rejection of the permanent European bailout fund (i.e., European bailout 2) led to repeated delays in its approval in the Slovak parliament.<sup>573</sup> Slovakia thus

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<sup>568</sup> SLOBODNÍKOVÁ, M.: Dvadsať rokov vývoja slovenského a slovinského stranického systému v komparatívnej perspektíve. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 487.

<sup>569</sup> ŠKUTOVÁ, D.: *Smerovanie konzervativizmu*. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 307.

<sup>570</sup> KRNO, S.: Štiepne línie na Slovensku a parlamentné voľby v roku 2012. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 68.

<sup>571</sup> DOBIAŠ, D.: Je po voľbách, zvyknite si! (Kam kráčaš, demokracia?). In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 15.

<sup>572</sup> The official name of the temporary European bailout fund, or European bailout fund 1, is *the European Financial Stability Facility (EFSF)*. On 7 June 2010, the eurozone member states established a temporary intergovernmental facility based on loan guarantees from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) totalling EUR 440 billion. Essentially, it was a joint-stock company of 16 eurozone member states, which provided assistance to indebted eurozone countries whose economic situation threatened the stability of the single European currency, the euro. From the outset, it was considered only a temporary crisis solution. The temporary European bailout fund primarily addressed the economic crisis in Greece. SULÍK, R.: *Čo je to dočasný euroval (EFSF) alebo tzv. euroval 1*. [online], [cit. 03/06/2021]. Available at: <<http://europskaunia.oldweb-sulik.sk/euroval/co-je-to-docasny-euroval-1/>>; EP: *Vec: Európsky nástroj finančnej stability a európsky finančný stabilizačný mechanizmus a budúce akcie*. 2010. [online], [cit. 03/06/2021]. Available at: <[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/O-7-2010-0095\\_SK.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/O-7-2010-0095_SK.html)>; TUČNÍK, M.: *Európsky finančný stabilizačný nástroj verus Európsky stabilizačný mechanizmus*. In: *Finančné trhy*. Ročník VIII., 2011, 4 s. [online], [cit. 05/06/2025]. Available at: <<http://www.derivat.sk/files/casopis%202011/Europskyfinancny.pdf>>.

<sup>573</sup> The official name of the permanent European bailout fund, or European bailout fund 2, is *the European Stability Mechanism (ESM)*. In 2012, it replaced the temporary European bailout fund, or European

became the last Eurozone state to approve the permanent European bailout fund. As the deadline for its adoption was approaching and pressure from Brussels and other eurozone members was mounting due to the deteriorating economic and financial situation, Prime Minister Radičová decided to combine the vote on this issue with a vote of confidence in the government. The result of the vote at the 24th session on 11 October 2011 was that of the 124 members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic present, 55 voted in favour of Radičová's proposal (all members of the SDKÚ-DS, KDH, MOST-HÍD, as well as Martin Fecko from Ordinary People, František Šebej from OKS, and independent Andrej Ďurkovský).<sup>574</sup> Not all members of the SaS parliamentary club took part in the vote, nor did three members of Ordinary People (Igor Matovič, Erika Jurinová, and Jozef Viskupič) or three members of OKS (Ondrej Dostál, Peter Osuský, and Peter Zajac).

The economic crisis and the issue of the bailout sparked heated political disputes, which subsequently led **to the collapse of the government and early elections not only in Slovakia** but also in many other European countries. In this context, Gabriel Eštok also mentioned Ireland, Spain, Italy, Slovenia, Finland, and Greece in his study.<sup>575</sup>

About the strongest parliamentary party – albeit in the opposition – SMER-SD, its position was pure pragmatism. Leading representatives of SMER-SD had long publicly declared their support for the permanent bailout only if all members of the governing coalition voted in favour of it.<sup>576</sup>

When the government lost a vote of confidence on 11 October 2011, negotiations began between representatives of SDKÚ-DS, KDH, MOST-HÍD, and the opposition SMER-SD on how to proceed. The parties agreed to call new parliamentary elections, which were to be held on 10 March 2012.

Two days after the fall of Radičová's government (13 October 2011), the Speaker of the National Council, Richard Sulík, was dismissed from his post. **Pavol Hrušovský**

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bailout fund 1. It was established by a treaty signed by the eurozone member states on 11 July 2011, which was to be ratified by the member states by the end of 2012. The maximum lending capacity was EUR 500 billion. The capital base is EUR 700 billion. SULÍK, R.: *Čo je to trvalý euroval (ESM) alebo tzv. euroval 2*. [online], [cit. 03/06/2021]. Available at: <<http://europskaunia.oldweb-sulik.sk/euroval/co-je-to-trvaly-euroval-2/>>; TUČNÍK, M.: Európsky finančný stabilizačný nástroj verzus Európsky stabilizačný mechanizmus. In: *Finančné trhy*. Ročník VIII., 2011, 4 s. [online], [cit. 05/06/2025]. Available at:

<<http://www.derivat.sk/files/casopis%202011/Europskyfinancny.pdf>>.

<sup>574</sup> NR SR: Hlasovanie podľa klubov: Národná rada Slovenskej republiky – hlasovanie poslancov. Schôdza č. 24 zo dňa 11.10.2011, č. hlasovania 3, ČPT 531. 2011. [online], [cit. 31/01/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Default.aspx?sid=schodze/hlasovanie/hlasklub&ID=29245>>.

<sup>575</sup> EŠTOK, G.: Európska problematika vo volebných programoch politických strán vo voľbách 2012. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, pp. 139-140.

<sup>576</sup> TASR: Fico: Euroval podporíme, keď Radičová urobí poriadok so Sulíkom. In: *Hospodárske noviny*. 2011. [online], [cit. 04/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennik.hnonline.sk/ekonomika-a-firmy/476969-fico-euroval-podporime-ke-d-radicova-urobi-poriadok-so-sulikom>>.

(KDH) became the (old) new Speaker of the National Council, albeit only for a temporary period. At the end of October 2011, Iveta Radičová announced that she would not be running in the early parliamentary elections. Subsequently, in May 2012, she officially left not only the SDKÚ-DS, but politics entirely.<sup>577</sup>

### **Selected causes of inter-party and intra-party conflicts in the government of Iveta Radičová:**

- **The struggle between coalition parties for specific ministries for specific party nominees. Mutual friction between representatives of SDKÚ-DS, SaS, KDH, and, to some extent, MOST-HÍD during the formation of the government cabinet;**<sup>578</sup>
- **The establishment of dual leadership in Radičová's government.** As far as government decisions were concerned, Radičová, as Prime Minister, was superior to Foreign Minister Dzurinda based on the organisational structure of the government. However, when it came to party decisions, Radičová, as deputy chairwoman of SDKÚ-DS, was subordinate to SDKÚ-DS chair Dzurinda based on the party's organisational structure;
- **Radičová's "ineffective" or even "powerless" performance as Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic.** This was largely a consequence of the aforementioned dual leadership in the government, but also of the constant pressure on Radičová. This pressure came from the opposition SMER-SD, from coalition partners, and, even more frequently, from (some) members of her own party, SDKÚ-DS;
- **The fragmentation of the right-wing spectrum into many small, politically insignificant party fragments;**
- **The absence of critical self-reflection on the part of some of the right-wing politicians at the time, as well as the failure to create sufficient space for the education of young political leaders.**

In connection with the government of Iveta Radičová, it should also be mentioned that on 18 September 2010, a referendum (the seventh in a row) was held at the initiative of a citizens' petition organised by SaS. The referendum consisted of six - essentially opposed - questions concerning:

- The abolition of licence fees for public services provided by Slovak Television and Slovak Radio;
- The restriction of parliamentary immunity;

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<sup>577</sup> SITA: Radičová v politike končí, po voľbách odchádza z SDKÚ. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 03/03/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/radicova-v-politike-konci-po-volbach-odchadza-z-sdku>>.

<sup>578</sup> ONUFRÁK, A.: Personálne príčiny volebného neúspechu pravice na Slovensku v parlamentných voľbách 2012. In: DOBIAŠ, D. - EŠTOK, G. - BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Acta Facultatis Philosophicae Universitatis Šafarikianae, Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, pp. 73-87.

- Reducing the number of members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic to 100, effective from the next election period;
- The procurement of passenger cars for public authorities with a maximum purchase price of €40,000;
- Introduction of the possibility to vote for members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and members of the European Parliament via the internet;
- Amendment of the Press Act to abolish the right of politicians to an automatic response.

Given the turnout of 22.84%, this referendum was also invalid.<sup>579</sup>

The 2012 election campaign was influenced by protests over a dossier entitled **Gorila**, which was compiled by the SIS.<sup>580</sup> The file was leaked to the public at the end of 2011, revealing communications between several politicians and business figures in 2005 and 2006 during Dzurinda's second term in office. The conversations covered topics such as the financing of political parties, privatisation, commissions, and the like. The Gorila scandal subsequently drove thousands of dissatisfied and angry citizens onto the streets.<sup>581</sup> From a communication perspective, the Gorila scandal was best presented to the public by the SMER-SD party, even though its chairman, Robert Fico, was also mentioned in the file.<sup>582</sup>

At the end of January 2012, another scandal called **Sasanka** came to light. Transcripts of text messages and later video recordings of meetings between the chairman of SaS and the former chairman of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Richard Sulík (SaS), and the controversial businessman Marián Kočner (mentioned earlier) were leaked to the public.<sup>583</sup> The most pressing topic of their conversations was undoubtedly the election of the outgoing Prosecutor General of the Slovak Republic, Dobroslav Trnka, in December 2010 during the government of Iveta Radičová. SMER-SD party (then in opposition) supported Trnka in the election, and 74 MPs voted for him in a secret vote, which means that, in addition to SMER-SD MPs, MPs from the parties of the then coalition must have also voted for him. The paradox

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<sup>579</sup> ŠÚ SR: Referendum – 18. septembra 2010. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/ref/ref2010/menu/index08c7.html?lang=sk>>.

<sup>580</sup> TASR: Výberová chronológia udalostí spojených s kauzou Gorila. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/529436-vyberova-chronologia-udalosti-spojenych-s-kauzou-gorila/>>.

<sup>581</sup> CENKOVÁ, R.: Nastolovanie politickej agendy. In: PETRANOVÁ, D. – MAGÁL, S. – PLENCNER, A. (eds.): *Vrtieť psom: Metafora v médiách – megatrendy a médiá 2013*. Trnava : Fakulta masmediálnej komunikácie UCM, 2013, pp. 5-23.

<sup>582</sup> BLÁŠKOVÁ, B. – KOŠTIAL, L. – NOVÁK, M.: *Voľby a referendá na území Slovenskej republiky od roku 1989 – 2020 (vysokoškolská učebnica)*. Trnava : Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, Fakulta sociálnych vied, 2020, p. 23.

<sup>583</sup> PACHEROVÁ, S.: Čo bola kauza Sasanka. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/386415-co-bola-kauzasasanka/>>.

is that a single vote decided that Trnka would not be re-elected as Prosecutor General of the Slovak Republic for another term.<sup>584</sup>

### 8.7 Electoral term 2012-2016

In the early parliamentary elections of 2012, which were held on 10 March 2012, 26 political parties and movements ran for office. Voter turnout was 59.11%.<sup>585</sup>

The real consequence of **the governance of centre-right political parties** during the government of Iveta Radičová was their significant electoral decline in the 2012 parliamentary elections and the clear victory of SMER-SD.<sup>586</sup> The election result was a de jure official confirmation of the socio-political mood in society. The party received 44.41% of the votes cast in the elections. In absolute terms, this was 1.134 million voters.<sup>587</sup> Thanks to this, SMER-SD was able to form a single-party government. The largest share of voters switched to SMER-SD from ĽS-HZDS.

The second-place party, KDH, received 8.82% of the vote. Other centre-right political parties suffered significant losses. The third strongest party, with 8.55% of the vote, was Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (**Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti - OĽaNO**), led by Igor Matovič. Since its inception, this movement has been a non-standard political entity loosely associating independent individuals without any responsibility or loyalty to the movement. MOST-HÍD won 6.89%, SKDÚ-DS 6.09%, and SaS 5.88%.<sup>588</sup> SNS (4.55%) and SMK-MKP (4.28%) fell just

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<sup>584</sup> On 17 June 2011, Čentéš was elected Prosecutor General of the Slovak Republic in a secret ballot, with 79 out of 80 MPs voting for him, while SMER-SD MPs did not participate in the vote. However, Slovak President Gašparovič refused to appoint the newly elected Prosecutor General of the Slovak Republic, citing the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic. The final interpretation of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic in this matter (I. ÚS 397/2014 of 4 December 1994) in the Senate led by Orosz overturned Gašparovič's decision not to appoint him, stating that Gašparovič had violated Čentéš's fundamental rights of access to electoral and public office and awarding Čentéš compensation of EUR 60,000. MURCKOVÁ, E.: Prokurátora opäť nezvolili, Trnka mal o hlas viac. In: *noviny.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.noviny.sk/slovensko/85837-prva-sprava-parlament-prokuratora-nezvolil>>; NAJPRAVO: Prezident SR Ivan Gašparovič nevymenuje Jozefa Čentéša za generálneho prokurátora. In: *najpravo.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.najpravo.sk/clanky/prezident-sr-ivan-gasparovic-nevymenuje-jozefa-centesa-za-generalneho-prokuratora.html>>.

<sup>585</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 2012. In: *volby.statitics.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2012/menu/indexv.jsp@lang=sk.htm>>.

<sup>586</sup> GBÚROVÁ, M.: Smer-SD – šanca na politickú dlhovekosť. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, pp. 47-59; KMETÓNÝ GAZDOVÁ, V.: Voľby 2012 a jednofarebná vláda – mračno nad demokraciou? In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Voľby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, pp. 89-99.

<sup>587</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 2012. In: *volby.statitics.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2012/menu/indexv.jsp@lang=sk.htm>>.

<sup>588</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 2012. In: *volby.statitics.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2012/menu/indexv.jsp@lang=sk.htm>>.

short of the 5% threshold for entry into the National Council of the Slovak Republic. In the case of SNS, one of the reasons for its failure may have been the expulsion of its vice-chairwoman and one of its most prominent figures, Anna Belousová, after she criticised the party's chairman, Ján Slota. Her newly formed party, Nation and Justice – Our Party (**Národ a spravodlivosť – naša strana**), took away some of the votes that SNS later lacked in the elections. However, the greatest disappointment undoubtedly prevailed in ĽS-HZDS, which received only 0.93% of the vote.

### **The second government of Robert Fico**

The second government of Robert Fico is often referred to as a single-party government. The government had the support of 83 members of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Nevertheless, SMER-SD invited other political parties to negotiations on the formation of the government, but they refused to govern together with SMER-SD. Two groups were formed within the KDH. While the group around the former chairman of the movement, Pavol Hrušovský, toyed with the idea of entering into a coalition with SMER-SD, the other group, led by Daniel Lipšic, completely rejected any cooperation with SMER-SD.

A single-party government has countless advantages, as it does not need to share power with anyone or make compromises in negotiations. However, in the event of failure, there is no coalition partner to whom responsibility can be delegated.<sup>589</sup> The entire burden of responsibility thus rested on the winner of the elections – in this case, SMER-SD.

In general, the single-party SMER-SD government continued to govern in the same spirit as during Fico's first term in office from 2006 to 2010. Anything submitted by the opposition in the National Council of the Slovak Republic was rejected. In the best-case scenario, it was later resubmitted as a proposal by SMER-SD MPs. The only difference was that the ties between the highest representatives of the state and a narrow circle of individuals from the business environment deepened and became much more intense.

Within public administration, people close to the ruling party penetrated not only management positions, but increasingly also the lower-level civil service jobs. The criteria for filling such positions were often not qualifications, expertise, or previous work experience, but loyalty to the party or family, kinship, and friendship ties between the individuals concerned. The police and the public prosecutor's office also became politicised. In June 2013, SMER-SD Jaromír Čižnár was nominated and elected to the post of Prosecutor General of the Slovak Republic, even though Jozef Čenteš had

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<sup>589</sup> For more on the advantages and disadvantages of single-party government, see: GBÚROVÁ, M.: Smer-SD – šanca na politickú dlhovekosť. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Volby 2012: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2013, p. 47.

already been elected for this post in June 2011. However, Slovak President Ivan Gašparovič repeatedly refused to appoint Čenteš.

In May 2014, Dušan Kováčik (nominated by SMER-SD) was re-elected to head the Special Prosecutor's Office (Úrad špeciálnej prokuratúry - ÚŠP), which was supposed to investigate and prosecute the most serious forms of crime. He was known for his inactivity, especially when it came to serious political cases.<sup>590</sup>

Although several political scandals came to light during the second government of Robert Fico (the restructuring of Váhostav; Aunt Anka; overpriced IT services for the state; the cleaning services affair; Port Service; the masseur; and others), the scandal surrounding the purchase of a CT scanner for the Piešťany hospital had the greatest media and political repercussions, leading to the resignation of Health Minister Zuzana Zvolenská, Deputy Speaker of the National Council Renáta Zmajkovičová (SMER-SD) and Speaker of the National Council Pavol Paška (SMER-SD).<sup>591</sup> After P. Paška's resignation (in November 2014), Peter Pellegrini was elected as the new Speaker of the National Council.

The main achievements of the second government of Robert Fico include:

- Political and parliamentary stability;
- Fiscal consolidation (changes in taxes and contributions and reduction of the state deficit);
- Economic growth and declining unemployment. (These were largely the result of the inertia of reforms introduced under Dzurinda's governments, rather than a real result of the policies of the SMER-SD single-party government;
- The implementation of a series of social measures packages targeting specific population groups (reduction of contributions for low-income employees; increased

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<sup>590</sup> Kováčik's tenure as head of the ÚŠP ended prematurely on 10 November 2020, when he resigned after being arrested and charged with corruption. On 24 May 2022, he was legally sentenced to eight years' imprisonment and a fine of €100,000 for accepting bribes, conspiring with and supporting a criminal group, and for the continuing crime of abuse of public office in conjunction with the offence of endangering confidential information and classified information in the case known as **God's Mills** (Božie mlyny). In this context, I recommend: VAGOVIČ, M.: Prokurátor mocných. In: *týždeň.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.tyzden.sk/casopis/15531/prokur-tor-mocn-ch/>>; TÓDOVÁ, M.: Svet špeciálneho prokurátora Kováčika: Za osem rokov podal nula obžalôb. In: *dennikn.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/687259/svet-specialneho-prokuratora-kovacika-za-osem-rokov-podal-nula-obzalob/>>; KELLÖOVÁ, L.: Dušan Kováčik je vinný. Za úplatok od mafiánov a vynášanie citlivých informácií dostal 8 rokov. In: *aktuality.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/goihOen/dusan-kovacik-je-vinny-za-uplatok-od-mafianov-a-vynasanie-citlivych-informacii-dostal-8-rokov/>>.

<sup>591</sup> Zmajkovičová was a member of the supervisory board of the Piešťany Hospital at the time. Paška had previously been the managing director of Medical Group SK, which sold a new CT scanner to the Piešťany Hospital. FOLENTOVÁ, V.: Ako to bolo so súťažou na CT, pre ktorú zvažujú odobrať Bielu vranu Suchánkovi. In: *e.dennikn.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://e.dennikn.sk/481595/so-sutazou-ct-ktoru-zvazuju-odobrat-bielu-vranu-suchankovi/>>; DEMEŠOVÁ, B.: Kauza CT nekončí! Piešťany neboli jediný lukratívny kšeft firmy Medical Group. In: *tvnoviny.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <[https://tvnoviny.sk/domace/clanok/17180-kauza-ct-nekonci-piestany-neboli-jediny-lukrativny-kseft-firmy-medical-group](https://tvnoviny.sk/domace/clanok/17180-kauza-ct-nekonci-piestany-neboli-jediny-lukrativny-kseft-firmy-medical-group/)>.

Christmas bonuses; support for youth employment; increased minimum wage; reduced VAT on basic foodstuffs; gas subsidies; increased maternity benefits; allowance for school trips and ski courses, holiday stays for socially disadvantaged families; free travel on trains operated by the national carrier Železničná spoločnosť Slovensko (ZSSK) for children, young people (students) and senior citizens; allowance for first-time home buyers; insulation of family houses; etc.);<sup>592</sup>

- Decision on the completion of the 3rd and 4th blocks of the nuclear power plant in Mochovce.

During this election period, six constitutional laws out of a total of 44 proposals submitted were approved by the National Council of the Slovak Republic:<sup>593</sup>

- Constitutional Act No. 232/2012 Coll., abolishing the criminal immunity of members of parliament;

- Constitutional Act No. 161/2014 Coll., defining marriage as a unique union between a man and a woman and also introducing changes in the judiciary;

- Constitutional Act No. 306/2014 Coll., prohibiting the export of water abroad;

- The government's proposal to shorten the legislative process for the government's draft constitutional law amending the Constitution of the Slovak Republic and Constitutional Act No. 427/2015 Coll., extending the maximum detention period before a court decision in terrorism cases to 96 hours;

- Constitutional Act No. 344/2015 Coll., amending Constitutional Act No. 227/2002 Coll. on state security in times of war, martial law, a state of emergency, and a state of emergency.

During Fico's second term in office in 2015, Europe also experienced a migration crisis, which also affected Slovakia to some extent, as some migration flows from the Balkans to Western Europe transited through the territory of the Slovak Republic. The second Fico government's approach to the EU's solutions to the migration crisis

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<sup>592</sup> Dzurinda commented on this situation in *Rozhovory bez hraníc (Conversations Without Borders)* with Zeman saying: "The current Slovak government is spending a lot of money to purposefully buy groups of voters. Even at the cost of borrowing to pay for it. Smer-SD has very cynically opted for a simple policy: not to take a single unpopular measure. They don't want to give anyone a reason to be angry with the government. As long as the government can borrow money to spend and buy voters, it will continue to do so." Zeman commented on the state budget deficit saying: "...I wouldn't mind the deficit so much. I believe that the deficit should be reduced in times of economic prosperity and can be allowed in times of crisis. In times of prosperity, there should be a budget surplus. But what bothers me about the deficit is that it is for consumption, not for investment. It will be squandered. About three weeks ago, I had dinner with Honza Fischer, our Prime Minister, and I said to him: Honza, investments don't vote, dams don't vote, motorways don't vote. But pensions do, and that is our dilemma. I will also be in a desperate situation when I tell voters to forget about scrappage schemes, forget about the thirteenth pension, and let's build the Odra-Danube-Elbe canal, for example. That canal won't get me any votes either, but I know it's necessary." DZURINDA M. – ZEMAN, M.: *Rozhovory bez hraníc*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre moderné Slovensko, 2010, p. 117 and 188.

<sup>593</sup> OLEXOVÁ, Z.: Ústavodarná činnosť Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky v 6. volebnom období. In: OROSZ, L. – LEŠKOVÁ, K. – RUMAN, J. (eds.): *Ústavodarná činnosť Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 1992-2020. (kvantitatívne ukazovatele, analýza, hodnotiace poznámky)*. Košice : UPJŠ/Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2021, pp. 137-143.

(including migration quotas) was largely negative.<sup>594</sup> Prime Minister Fico repeatedly linked the wave of migration with security risks and terrorism, while also expressing criticism of Muslims.<sup>595</sup> The government emphasised the protection of external borders (Schengen) and the deepening of cooperation with neighbouring countries.<sup>596</sup>

At the turn of 2015 and 2016, the relatively peaceful governance was disrupted by widespread strikes of teachers and mass resignations of nurses.<sup>597</sup>

Because of the growing number of political and economic scandals, the second government of Robert Fico is often viewed as one that failed to take advantage of the opportunities offered by its “single-colour” composition. The government mostly addressed current issues. However, it did not come up with anything groundbreaking for the future in the medium or long term.

In terms of party politics, this period saw numerous party shifts and the creation of new political parties.

SDKÚ-DS's chairman, Mikuláš Dzurinda, took responsibility for the party's election defeat. This happened in May 2012, when Pavol Frešo was elected party chairman. His rival, Lucia Žitňanská, later joined Béla Bugár's party, MOST-HÍD. At the beginning of June 2014, former party leaders Dzurinda and Mikloš also left SDKÚ-DS. In November of the same year, another prominent party member, Viliam Novotný, left SDKÚ-DS and subsequently founded a new political party called Chance (Šanca).

In the case of KDH, Daniel Lipšic and Jana Žitňanská left the movement in May 2012 and founded a new political party called New Majority (Nová väčšina - NOVA) in October of the same year. Before the 2016 parliamentary elections, NOVA members joined the OĽaNO candidate list.

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<sup>594</sup> ŠTEFANČÍK, R.: Kam kráčaš demokracia, keď k tebe kráčajú migranti? Politizácia medzinárodnej migrácie vo výstupoch slovenských politických strán. In: DOBIAŠ, D. – EŠTOK, G. – BZDILOVÁ, R. (eds.): *Medzi jednotlivosťou a pospolitosťou: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2016, pp. 329-333.

<sup>595</sup> ŠTEFANČÍK, R.: Migračný diskurz na Slovensku v kontexte parlamentných volieb 2023. In: ONUFRÁK, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – JAKABOVIČ, L.; (eds.): *Voľby 2023/2024: výsledky-hodnotenia-dôsledky: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2025, pp. 153-169.

<sup>596</sup> LEZOVÁ, K.: Why Slovakia has become the focal point for opposition against EU refugee quotas. In: *blogs.lse.ac.uk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2015/10/08/why-slovakia-has-become-the-focal-point-for-opposition-against-eu-refugee-quotas/>>; STUPŇAN, I.: Rok 2015: Premiér Fico sa postavil EÚ. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/377894-rok-2015-premier-fico-sa-postavil-eu/>>.

<sup>597</sup> TREND: 300 škôl zatvorených, stovky v obmedzenej prevádzke. 11-tisíc učiteľov štrajkuje. In: *trend.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.trend.sk/spravy/300-skol-zatvorených-stovky-obmedzenej-prevádzke-11-tisíc-ucitelov-strajkuje>>; TASR: Sestry spustili akciu hromadných výpovedí, v Žiline ich podalo dvesto. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/sestry-spustili-akciu-hromadnych-vypovedi-v-ziline-ich-podalo-dvesto>>.

The last of the three young faces of the movement, the ambitious constitutional lawyer Radoslav Procházka, remained in the movement, but after his platform called Alfa was not accepted by KDH leadership, he also left the movement (in mid-February 2013). He subsequently announced his intention to run in the 2014 presidential election. His failure in the presidential election, but at the same time considerable voter support (21.20%), led him to found a new political party called the #NET (#SIEŤ) in June 2014.

In April 2013, SaS also experienced an internal split. Some members, led by Jozef Kollár, left the party. After a brief episode with Lipšic's NOVA, they founded a new political party called SKOK in November 2014, though it achieved little political success.

On 7 February 2015, a referendum initiated by the civic initiative Alliance for Family was held. The referendum contained three questions:

- *“Do you agree that no other cohabitation of persons other than the union between one man and one woman should be called marriage?”*
- *“Do you agree that same-sex couples or groups of persons should not be allowed to adopt children and raise them?”*
- *“Do you agree that schools should not be allowed to require children to attend classes on sexual behaviour or euthanasia if their parents or the children themselves disagree with the content of the lessons?”<sup>598</sup>*

Most parliamentary parties recommended participation in the referendum. However, only KDH recommended their voters to vote “yes” to all three questions. Participation in the referendum was 21.41%, which means that this referendum was also unsuccessful.

### **Presidential election 2014**

The first round of the (the fourth) presidential election was announced for 15 March 2014. At least half of the 14 candidates were well known to the Slovak public. In this context, we can mention: Gyula Bárdos, Ján Čarnogurský, Robert Fico, Viliam Fischer, Pavol Hrušovský, Milan Kňažko, Milan Melník, Peter Osuský, Radoslav Procházka, Ján Šimko, and others.

Although each candidate had a strong personal background, it was clear from the outset that the battle would be between the obvious representative of the left – the chairman of the strongest political party, SMER-SD, and a two-time Prime Minister and a right-wing candidate, capable of attracting the largest number of voters. The result was that, with a turnout of 43.40% of eligible voters, the winner of the first round of the 2014 presidential election was Fico, who received 28.00% of the vote. The second

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<sup>598</sup> ŠÚ SR: Referendum 2015. In: *volby.statitics.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/ref/ref2015/sk/>>.

candidate was Andrej Kiska, a virtually unknown businessman and philanthropist from Poprad, who received 24.00% of the vote.<sup>599</sup>

In the second round of this presidential election, voter turnout rose to 50.48%, with Kiska becoming the new president, receiving 59.38% of the vote.<sup>600</sup> The dominance of voter support for Kiska was primarily due to the desire to prevent Fico from becoming president of the Slovak Republic. In essence, it was the same scenario as in the two cases when Mečiar was not elected. The failure to elect Fico as president resulted in a confrontational style of politics and communication on the part of the Prime Minister towards the newly elected President, Andrej Kiska, in the following period.

### **Election Act No. 180/2014 Coll.**

In 2014, Election Act No. 333/2004 Coll. on elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic was replaced by **Act No. 180/2014 Coll. of 29 May 2014 on the conditions for exercising the right to vote and on amendments to certain acts.**<sup>601</sup>

According to the “new” electoral law of 2014, parliamentary elections have been held in 2016, 2020, and 2023. Previously, the electoral legislation was largely inconsistent in terms of form, content, and terminology, largely due to the timing and socio-political context in which the individual amendments were made. It was therefore necessary to harmonise it to reflect new trends and needs.<sup>602</sup>

This law has been in force since 1 July 2014 and applies to all types of elections. Essentially, it was a formal unification of electoral legislation (from six electoral laws into one). The law has been amended (at least) 15 times, and the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic has also commented on its wording. The Act itself consists of nine parts:

- **General provisions** (Part 1, Sections 1-41);
- **Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic** (Part 2, Sections 42-71);

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<sup>599</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta Slovenskej republiky 2014. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2014/>>.

<sup>600</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta Slovenskej republiky 2014. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2014/>>.

<sup>601</sup> DOMIN, M.: *Zákon č. 180/2014 Z. z. o podmienkach výkonu volebného práva: Komentár*. Bratislava : Wolters Kluwer, 2018, 681 p.; OROSZ, L.: Voľby v Slovenskej republike v minulom desaťročí ako zdroj podnetov pre skvalitňovanie slovenského volebného zákonodarstva. In: ONUFRÁK, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – JAKABOVIČ, L. (eds.): *Voľby 2023/2024: výsledky-hodnotenia-dôsledky: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2025, pp. 11-45.

<sup>602</sup> BARDOVIČ, J.: Volebný systém na Slovensku a jeho vybrané problémy v rokoch 1989 – 2019. In: ŠUTAJOVÁ, J. – EŠTOK, G. – ONUFRÁK, A. (eds.): *1989 – 2019: Dekády zmien. Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2021, pp. 63-64; ONUFRÁK, A.: Volebné právo v kontexte ústavodarných procesov. In: OROSZ, L. – HORNÁKOVÁ, D. – ČERNANSKÝ, M. P. (eds.): *Ústava Slovenskej republiky a jej perspektívy. Skvalitňovanie ústavného textu a zvyšovanie autority slovenskej ústavy – reálna možnosť, alebo naivná ilúzia? Zborník príspevkov z vedeckého seminára Danišovce 23. – 25. november*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Právnická fakulta: Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2022, pp. 202-241.

- **Elections to the European Parliament** (Part 3, Sections 72-97);
- **Elections to the Office of President of the Slovak Republic** (Part 4, Sections 98-115);
- **Referendum on the removal of the President** (Part 5, Sections 116-130);
- **Elections to regional self-government bodies** (Part 6, Sections 131-162);
- **Elections to municipal self-government bodies** (Part 7, Sections 163-195);
- **Referendum** (Part 8, Sections 196-215);
- **Common, transitional, and final provisions** (Part 9, Sections 216-250zd).

Positive aspects of the unified electoral legislation include:

- **The adoption of a separate legal regulation on election campaigns - Act No. 181/2014 Coll. on election campaigns and on amendments to Act No. 85/2005 Coll. on political parties and political movements, as amended, and within it, the setting of financial caps and the establishment of transparent accounts;**<sup>603</sup>

- **Introduction of measures and subsequent sanctions** in the event of ballot papers being taken out of polling stations and their possible further misuse;

- **Unification of legal regulations on the marking of candidates** (by circling).

In some cases, the adoption of new legislation has even worsened the legal situation.<sup>604</sup>

- **Retention of a single constituency within the Slovak Republic;**

- **The position of the (de jure independent) State Commission for Elections and Control of Political Party Financing**, which is, incidentally, dependent on political parties;

- **“Forgetting” single-member constituencies** in the election of representatives to regional councils.<sup>605</sup>

## 8.8 Electoral term 2016-2020

These elections were important mainly due to the fact that on 1 July 2016, the Slovak Republic assumed the Presidency of **the Council of the European Union** (Council or

<sup>603</sup> DOMIN, M.: *Zákon č. 181/2014 Z. z. o volebnej kampani: Komentár*. Bratislava : Wolters Kluwer, 2019, 225 p.

<sup>604</sup> BABUŠÍK ADAMČÍKOVÁ, L.: Parlamentné voľby na Slovensku v zjednotenom volebnom zákone. In: FEDOROČKO, P. (ed.): *Zborník príspevkov zo 4. ročníka Jarnej internacionalizovanej školy doktorandov UPJŠ 2017*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2017, pp. 48-55; BABUŠÍK ADAMČÍKOVÁ, L.: Volebné paradoxy v kontexte nových volebných kódexov. In: KOZIÁK, T. – EŠTOK, G. – ONUFRÁK, A. (eds.): *Kríza parlamentarizmu? Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2017, pp. 415-424; ADAMČÍKOVÁ, L.: *Voľby a volebné pravidlá na Slovensku (Diplomová práca)*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, 2016, 90 p.

<sup>605</sup> This shortcoming was resolved by an amendment to the Electoral Act – Act No. 69/2017 Coll., amending Act No. 180/2014 Coll. on the conditions for exercising the right to vote and on amendments to certain laws, as amended, and amending certain laws.

Council of Ministers) for the first time, for a period of six months. The Slovak Presidency of the Council of the EU focused on four priorities:<sup>606</sup>

- **Economically strong Europe;**
- **Modern single market;**
- **Sustainable migration and asylum policies;**
- **Globally engaged Europe.**

The 2016 parliamentary elections were held on 5 March 2016. Voter turnout was 59.82%. Twenty-three political parties ran in the elections. Eight political parties exceeded the 5% threshold for election to the National Council of the Slovak Republic, including three newcomers.

The winner of these elections was SMER-SD, with 28.28% of the vote.<sup>607</sup> Compared to the previous parliamentary elections, the party lost 16.13%. The winner was followed by: SaS (12.10%), OĽaNO (11.02%), SNS (8.64%), **Kotleba - ĽSNS** (8.04%), **Sme rodina** (6.62%), MOST-HÍD (6.50%), and #SIEŤ (5.60%).

The biggest surprises of these elections included:

- **A dramatic decline in voter support for #SIEŤ**, which had consistently appeared in second place in pre-election polls behind SMER-SD. Before the elections, the party aimed to gain ground and the electorate (previously) belonging to the SDKÚ-DS, which was gradually weakening. In August 2016, some of #SIEŤ MPs moved to the MOST-HÍD parliamentary club.<sup>608</sup> In the following months, the party was gradually dissolved;

- **The failure of KDH**, which received only 4.94% of the vote. Due to a shortfall of 0.06% of the vote, KDH found itself outside the parliament for the first time since 1990. The main reason for this was generally considered to be the lack of generational renewal within the party's leadership;

- **There was also considerable disappointment for MOST-HÍD**. Although it did make it into the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the voter support of 6.50% was significantly less than the expected double-digit election result. Another political party representing voters belonging to the Hungarian national minority – mainly from the southern districts on the border with Hungary – won 4.04% of the vote and failed to enter the National Council of the Slovak Republic;

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<sup>606</sup> EUCO: Priorities of the Slovak Presidency. In: *consilium.europa.eu*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/timeline-presidencies-of-the-council-of-the-eu/>>.

<sup>607</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby do Národnej rady SR 2016. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 06/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2016/sk/>>.

<sup>608</sup> FARKAŠOVÁ, Z.: Ústavnoprávne zhodnotenie ústavodarnej činnosti Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky v 7. volebnom období (2016-2020) s osobitným zreteľom na ústavnú iniciatívu opozičných poslancov. In: OROSZ, L. – LEŠKOVÁ, K. – RUMAN, J. (eds.): *Ústavodarná činnosť Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 1992-2020. (kvantitatívne ukazovatele, analýza, hodnotiace poznámky)*. Košice : UPJŠ/Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, pp. 144-174.

- **SDKÚ-DS suffered an absolute debacle**, receiving only 0.26% of the vote.

On the other hand, two new political parties achieved success: the far-right Kotleba - LSNS, which received 8.04% of the vote, and the elusive political party We Are Family (Sme rodina), which received 6.62% of the vote.

The governing coalition was formed by SMER-SD together with MOST-HÍD, SNS, and #SIEŤ. Robert Fico became Prime Minister for the third time. Andrej Danko (SNS) became the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic. The governing coalition could rely on the support of 82 MP's in the National Council. Three members of #SIEŤ refused to support this cooperation and left the party. The creation of such a governing coalition was perceived as a "double" **paradox**: firstly, because of the presence of MOST-HÍD and SNS in the coalition government, whereas a few years ago such cooperation would have been unimaginable; and secondly, because of the participation of #SIEŤ in the government, even though before the election it had presented itself as the "leader of the right-wing" and the only real alternative to SMER-SD.

After the total collapse of #SIEŤ, a new coalition agreement was signed between SMER-SD, MOST-HÍD, and SNS on 1 September 2016. **The four-party coalition thus became a three-party coalition.**

During this term, the constitutional activity of the National Council of the Slovak Republic was above average. Of a total of 70 constitutional initiatives, 8 were approved:<sup>609</sup>

- **Extension of the term of office of higher territorial units** (Constitutional Act No. 44/2017 Coll.);<sup>610</sup>
- **Repeal of Mečiar's amnesties** (Constitutional Act No. 71/2017 Coll.);
- **Ensuring food security and soil protection** (Constitutional Act No. 137/2017 Coll.);
- **Constitutional fixation of the retirement age and guarantee of the minimum wage for employees** (Constitutional Act No. 99/2019 Coll.);
- **Three amendments to the Constitutional Act No. 357/2004 Coll. on the protection of public interest in the performance of public functions;**
- **Constitutional Act No. 84/2017 Coll. on consent to changes in the state borders between the Slovak Republic and Hungary.**

<sup>609</sup> FARKAŠOVÁ, Z.: Ústavnoprávne zhodnotenie ústavodarnej činnosti Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky v 7. volebnom období (2016-2020) s osobitným zreteľom na ústavnú iniciatívu opozičných poslancov. In: OROSZ, L. - LEŠKOVÁ, K. - RUMAN, J. (eds.): *Ústavodarná činnosť Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 1992-2020. (kvantitatívne ukazovatele, analýza, hodnotiace poznámky)*. Košice : UPJŠ/Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, p. 152-163.

<sup>610</sup> KRUNKOVÁ, A. - KARAFOVÁ, S.: Vybrané ústavné zmeny vo volebných pravidlách: analýza a dôsledky. In: ONUFRÁK, A. - DUBÓCZI, P. - JAKABOVIČ, L. (eds.): *Voľby 2023/2024: výsledky-hodnotenia-dôsledky: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2025, pp. 45-63.

### The third government of Robert Fico

The third SMER-SD government, led by Robert Fico, continued in the spirit of the previous election period (including several political and economic scandals). **The network of mutual relationships between politicians, judges, prosecutors, and senior police officials with various financial groups that were “sucking” on the state budget reached such colossal proportions that it began undermining the principles of the separation of powers and the rule of law.**<sup>611</sup>

The first of these is generally considered to be the 2016 *Bonaparte* apartment complex case, connected to businessman Ladislav Bašternák. The case involved suspicions of tax fraud related to fictitious VAT refunds. The media and the public interest in this case intensified after information leaked to the public that one of the flats was rented by Prime Minister Fico himself, while another flat was owned by his then party colleague, Minister of Transport, Construction and Regional Development Ján Počiatek.<sup>612</sup>

On 21 February 2018, (not only) Slovakia was shaken by the brutal murder of investigative journalist Ján Kuciak and his fiancée Martina Kušnírová in their home in the village of Veľká Mača (60 km from the capital Bratislava). The public learned about the murder of the couple in their own home several days later.

From the outset, investigators considered the main motive for the murder to be the investigative work of journalist Kuciak, including his reporting on several corruption cases reaching to the highest levels of the government establishment. At the time, Kuciak was working primarily on an article about a group of “businessmen” (of Italian origin) in eastern Slovakia and their links to the Calabrian mafia group ‘Ndrangheta. These people were also linked to leading representatives of SMER-SD (including people close to Fico). **Ján Kuciak** also came under the scrutiny of the aforementioned businessman Marián Kočner, who had links to SMER-SD. Shortly before his death, Kočner had threatened journalist Kuciak over the phone, telling him to stop writing about him and his companies in his articles, otherwise “...I will start taking an interest in you, your mother, your father, your siblings...”<sup>613</sup>

This murder shocked Slovak society, resulting in a series of unrelenting protests – the largest since November 1989. The biggest protests took place on 9 and 16 March

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<sup>611</sup> VALČEK, A. – KOVÁČ, P. – CUPRIK, R.: Téma plus: Obvinenie ukazuje, ako Kočner manipuloval sudcami; Kto sú sudcovia, po ktorých si prišla polícia: Medzi zadržanými sú ľudia, ktorých stiahli Kočnerové kauzy; Zatknutí budú spravodlivosti chýbať: Policajná akcia Búrka ochromila najmä dva bratislavské sudy. Budú sa spamätávať mesiace; Obvinenia nestoja len na Sklenkovi: Aké dôkazy sú proti sudcom a čo bude s ich kúpenými rozsudkami – otázky a odpovede. In: *Sme*. 13.3.2020, pp. 15-21.

<sup>612</sup> PODSTUPKA, O.: Vysvetlenie kauzy Bašternák. Sedem základných otázok. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/kauza-basternak-vsetko-co-potrebujete-vediet>>.

<sup>613</sup> AKTUALITY: Telefonát Kuciak – Kočner. In: *youtube.com*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zZE5aMxpMSk>>.

2019, when 50-60,000 people took to the streets in Bratislava alone, with up to 120,000 people participating across Slovakia. Protests also took place in several cities outside Slovakia (e.g., Prague, Berlin, London, Copenhagen, Barcelona, Sydney).<sup>614</sup> The most common demands of the protesters were early parliamentary elections and a complete replacement of the government.

The strongest criticism, demanding immediate resignation, was directed at the then Minister of the Interior, Robert Kaliňák, and the President of the Police Force of the Slovak Republic, Tibor Gašpar, mainly because of their appearance at a press conference on 27 February 2018, when, together with Prime Minister Fico, they asked the public to provide detailed information about the potential perpetrators of the murder of the journalist and his fiancée. The reward for this information was to be €1 million in cash, which was laid out on a table in the room at the Office of the Government of the Slovak Republic, where the press conference was held.

Following the event itself, the disclosure of new facts and growing pressure from society, Roman Šipoš, director of the Office of the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, who was considered one of Prime Minister Fico's closest associates, resigned from his post, and Marek Maďarič immediately announced his resignation from the post of Minister of Culture to the public. Prime Minister Fico initially vehemently denied any responsibility for the situation.

As for the coalition partners SNS and MOST-HÍD, they initially toyed with the idea of early parliamentary elections, but gradually abandoned this idea and leaned towards a government reconstruction. **It was agreed that both the Prime Minister and the Interior Minister would be replaced.** SMER-SD deputy chairman Peter Pellegrini was tasked with forming a new government.

Of the three governments led by Fico to date, this was the least stable. The government focused on large investment projects, particularly in the automotive sector, while interest in (domestic) small and medium-sized enterprises was neglected. Despite the favourable global economic climate, the third government of Robert Fico failed to achieve a balanced budget, which is fully reflected in the continuing growth of public debt, which persists to this day.

In October 2019, two recordings between former prosecutor Dobroslav Trnka and Marián Kočner were released. While the audio recording contained vulgar criticism of Trnka by Kočner, **accusing him of attempting to blackmail businessman** and co-owner of the PENTA financial group Jaroslav Haščák, in connection with the Gorila case, the second recording – this time a video – showed them installing a hidden

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<sup>614</sup> SIVÝ, R.: *Za Jána Kuciaka idú ľudia do ulíc, univerzity dávajú študentom voľno*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/570448/za-jana-kuciaka-idu-ludia-do-ulic-univerzity-davaju-studentom-volno/>>.

camera together in the office of the Prosecutor General of the Slovak Republic. The recordings could have been used as compromising material.<sup>615</sup>

### **The government of Peter Pellegrini**

During his resignation on 15 March 2018, Robert Fico could not resist making a sarcastic remark toward President Kiska: “*Mr. President, don't worry, I'm not going anywhere. I want to be an active chairman of a political party.*”<sup>616</sup>

The new government led by Peter Pellegrini was appointed a week later, with changes in five ministerial posts (Deputy Prime Minister for Investment, Interior, Health, Culture, and Justice). Pellegrini made a significant effort to change the public perception of SMER-SD and its policies, especially after such a sensitive event as the murder of Ján Kuciak and his fiancée, and subsequently after the government reconstruction.

The government reconstruction shook the ruling SMER-SD to its foundations, with antagonisms and tensions within the party – especially between the new Prime Minister (Pellegrini) and the former Prime Minister and party leader (Fico) – beginning to grow.<sup>617</sup> On the other hand, reports of Pellegrini's ambitions to leave the party and form his own political party, together with other dissatisfied members of SMER-SD, were becoming increasingly vocal in public.<sup>618</sup> However, the official split in SMER-SD did not occur until after the 2020 parliamentary elections.

### **Presidential election 2019**

The first round of the 2019 presidential election took place on 16 March 2019. Voter turnout was 48.74%.<sup>619</sup> Among the 15 candidates – two of whom withdrew their candidacy (Menyhárt and Mistrík)<sup>620</sup> before the election – the obvious favourites in the

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<sup>615</sup> YOUTUBE: *Cela nahrávka rozhovoru kocner trnka*. In: *youtube.com*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bi2qVnA9b3M>>; LINHART, M.: *Skrytá kamera na prokuratúre*. In: *ta3.com*. [online], [cit. 05/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.ta3.com/clanok/162144/uniklo-video-na-ktorom-kocner-a-trnka-instaluju-skrytu-kameru>>.

<sup>616</sup> PRUŠOVÁ, V. – DUGOVIČ, M.: *Fico podal demisiu a odkázal, že nekončí, prezident poveril zostavením vlády Pellegriniho*. In: *dennikn.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1063689/fico-nekonci/>>.

<sup>617</sup> PRAUS, L.: *Hovorí sa o napätí medzi Ficom a Pellegrinim. Rozdelenie funkcií je náchylnejšie na spory*. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 08/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/aky-je-vztah-medzi-robortom-ficom-a-petrom-pellegrinim>>.

<sup>618</sup> TASR: *Odborníci hodnotia hádky v Smere: Štátnické gesto, rozkol v strane alebo hra na dobrého*. In: *topky.sk*. [online], [cit. 08/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.topky.sk/cl/1002077/1773067/Odbornici-hodnotia-hadky-v-Smere--Statnicke-gesto--rozkol-v-strane-alebo-hra-na-dobreho>>.

<sup>619</sup> ŠÚ SR: *Voľba prezidenta Slovenskej republiky 2019*. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 07/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2019/sk/>>.

<sup>620</sup> TASR: *József Menyhárt sa vzdal kandidatúry na post prezidenta*. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 07/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/prezidentske-volby-2019/clanok/502733-jozsef-menyhart-sa-vzdal-kandidaturny-na-post-prezidenta/>>; PRAUS, L.: *Mistrík odstúpil v prospech*

first round were: SMER-SD nominee Maroš Šefčovič, who (at that time) held the post of Vice-President of the European Commission (EC) for the Energy Union, and Zuzana Čaputová, a relatively unknown lawyer and environmental and civil activist involved in civil society, who was nominated by the newly formed political movement **Progressive Slovakia** (Progresívne Slovensko - PS). Other candidates who were relatively well known in socio-political circles and could theoretically have advanced to the second round of the election were: primarily Štefan Harabin and Marián Kotleba, and, at a considerable distance, Béla Bugár, Eduard Chmelár, and František Mikloško. As there were no surprises in the first round of the 2019 presidential election, Čaputová (40.57%) and Šefčovič (18.66%) advanced to the second round.

In the second round of the 2019 presidential election, voter turnout was 41.79%, which was approximately 7% less than in the first round of the election. Zuzana Čaputová was elected President of the Slovak Republic, receiving 58.40% of the votes cast. Maroš Šefčovič received 41.59% of the vote. In absolute numbers, the difference between Čaputová and Šefčovič was more than 331,000 votes in favour of Zuzana Čaputová.<sup>621</sup>

After the not very successful regional elections in 2017 and municipal elections in 2018, this presidential election was essentially the third unsuccessful election in a row for SMER-SD.<sup>622</sup>

## 8.9 Electoral term 2020-2023

The 2020 elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic were held on 29 February 2020. A specific feature of these elections was that the number of wasted votes exceeded 820,000, which represented 28.39%.

The election campaigns were not about the strength of arguments, but rather about personal attacks, insults, and invasions into the private lives of opponents. There was a lack of concrete solutions to specific problems. Instead of serious expert debates, only general phrases such as improving healthcare, education, increasing pensions and wages, reducing taxes and contributions for entrepreneurs, etc. dominated. Most of the political parties running for election only wanted to hand out money, yet none explained where they would get the financial coverage for these measures. Absolutely no one talked about medium- or long-term visions of what Slovakia might look like in 10, 20, or 50 years. All parties focused on a maximum of one four-year election term.

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Čaputovej, podporil ju aj prezident. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 07/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.sme.sk/domov/c/prezidentske-volby-2019-mistik-caputova>>.

<sup>621</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta Slovenskej republiky 2019. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 07/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2019/sk/>>.

<sup>622</sup> MACHYNIAK, J.: *Dynamika regionálnej samosprávy na Slovensku – voľby 2017*. Trnava : Fakulta sociálnych vied, Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave, 2018, 133 p.; ONDREJOVIČOVÁ, K.: Konflikt Fico – Pellegrini by bol fatálny, mieni analytik. In: *pravda.sk*. [online], [cit. 07/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/507446-vyhlasenie-kazimira-k-volbam-v-suvistlosti-stranou-smer-je-vyzvou-na-diskusiu-tvrdi-pellegrini/>>.

The biggest surprise of these elections was the clear victory of OĽaNO led by Igor Matovič. The 25.02% of the vote was (historically) the second-highest result ever achieved by a political entity on the right side of the political spectrum. Only the SDK received higher voter support (over 26%) in the 1998 parliamentary elections.

The total number of voters supporting OĽaNO exceeded 721,000, which represented an increase of more than 433,000 votes compared to the previous parliamentary elections held in 2016. This increase in voter support was in sharp contrast to the movement's weaker support in the May 2019 European Parliament elections. At that time, the movement was hovering on the verge of electability.<sup>623</sup>

**SMER-SD** also surprised observers – both positively and negatively. The voter support that this political party received can be considered a positive. The 18.29% share of votes was roughly the same as the election polls had predicted just before the elections.<sup>624</sup> According to several political scientists, commentators, journalists, and part of the opposition, **the adoption of Act No. 46/2020 Coll.** on the 13th pension during an extraordinary meeting of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, which took place only four days before the elections, could have played a significant role in this election result (and apparently did).<sup>625</sup> However, compared to the election results from four years ago (2016), there was a decline of almost 10% in voter support for this party. In absolute terms, this represented a decline of more than 210,000 votes. Since the 2012 parliamentary elections, when SMER-SD won more than 44% or 1.134 million votes, the party's support had fallen by more than half. The post-election map has thus changed significantly. For the first time, the party's election leader was not its long-time chairman, Robert Fico, but the party's vice-chairman and (at that time) Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Peter Pellegrini.<sup>626</sup>

After the parliamentary elections, several prominent party representatives, led by Peter Pellegrini, left the party and subsequently founded a new political entity called

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<sup>623</sup> In the 2019 EP elections, the movement received only 5.25% of the vote. Similar percentages of 5.1% for OĽaNO were also found in an election poll conducted by the Focus agency between 19 June and 25 June 2019. ŠÚ SR: *Definitívne výsledky hlasovania: Platné hlasy odovzdané pre politické subjekty podľa územného členenia: Výsledky za SR*. 2019. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/ep/ep2019/sk/data02.html>>; FOCUS: *Volebný prieskum agentúry FOCUS* (25.6.2019). 2019. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.sme.sk/pref/1/politicke-strany/p/focus/2019-06-25>>.

<sup>624</sup> FOCUS: *Volebný prieskum agentúry Focus* (13.2.2020). 2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.sme.sk/pref/1/politicke-strany/p/focus/2020-02-13>>.

<sup>625</sup> FOLENTOVÁ, V. – BARCÍKOVÁ, M.: Smer, SNS, Kotlebovci a Kollár schválili štyri dni pred voľbami 13. dôchodok. In: *Denník N*. 25.2.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://e.dennikn.sk/1772082/smer-sns-kotlebovci-a-kollar-schvalili-styri-dni-pred-voľbami-13-dochodok/>>; SITA: Penzisti dostanú trináste dôchodky, parlament schválil návrh Smeru. In: *Sme*. 25.2.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://ekonomika.sme.sk/c/22334440/parlament-schvalil-pred-voľbami-2020-trinasty-dochodok.html>>.

<sup>626</sup> KOVÁČOVÁ, V.: Je to oficiálne! Smer-SD pôjde do volieb bez Fica na čele. In: *regiony.zoznam.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://regiony.zoznam.sk/aktualne-smer-sd-pojde-dovolieb-bez-fica-na-cele-lidrom-je-pellegrini/>>.

**Voice – Social Democracy** (Hlas – sociálna demokracia – Hlas-SD) at the end of June 2020. Fico commented on this as “*plain betrayal*”.<sup>627</sup> The party was officially registered with the Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic on 11 September 2020.<sup>628</sup>

Two other coalition partners from the previous government, MOST-HÍD and SNS, also surprised everyone. Although the decline in voter support for both political parties was more or less expected, given their four years in government together with SMER-SD, the extent of the decline was surprising. While voter support for SNS exceeded the 3% threshold, securing at least partial financial coverage from the state budget (approximately €2 million) for the party’s future operations, in the case of MOST-HÍD, voter support was only 2%, meaning that it did not receive any financial contribution from the state budget. In absolute terms, the decline in SNS voters compared to the previous election period was approximately 134,000. In the case of MOST-HÍD, it was approximately 110,000.<sup>629</sup> The rapid decline in voter support reflected the four years of joint governance with SMER-SD.

Another surprise in these elections was the election result of **KDH**. Although the movement had long been hovering on the verge of electability, until the last moment, it was believed that this time KDH would manage to exceed the legally defined 5% electoral threshold required to enter the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Not only did this not happen. The party’s share of 4.65% of the total number of votes cast was almost 0.3 percentage points lower than in the 2016 elections. The paradox is that in absolute numbers, the movement gained additional 5,000 votes. Some of the missing votes could have been taken away from the movement after the departure of a long-time member of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the European Parliament, Anna Záborská, who left the movement at the beginning of 2019 after 30 years, taking her supporters with her.<sup>630</sup> Shortly after leaving KDH, Záborská founded a new political entity called the **Christian Union** (Kresťanská únia - KÚ).

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<sup>627</sup> TASR: Je to obyčajná zrada, reagoval Fico na odchod poslancov. Chystá veľké zmeny vo vedení Smeru. In: *hnonline.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://hnonline.sk/slovensko/2166562-je-to-obycajna-zrada-reagoval-fico-na-odchod-poslancov-chysta-velke-zmeny-vo-vedeni-smeru>>.

<sup>628</sup> MV SR: Výpis z registra politických strán a politických hnutí. In: *rez.vs.minv.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <[https://rez.vs.minv.sk/PolitickeStrany/detail?id\\_spolok=227017](https://rez.vs.minv.sk/PolitickeStrany/detail?id_spolok=227017)>.

<sup>629</sup> Just over 91,000 voters voted for SNS in the 2020 parliamentary elections. In the parliamentary elections four years before, 225,000 voters did so. In the case of MOST-HÍD, this was a drop of almost two-thirds. From 169,000 votes (2016) to 59,000 (2020). The main reason for her departure from the movement is considered to be the adoption of the “three times and a break” principle, according to which if a candidate of the movement is elected to office three times, they must take a break.

<sup>630</sup> The main reason for her departure from the movement is considered to be the adoption of the “three times and a break” principle, according to which if a candidate of the movement was elected to office three times in a row, they had to take a break for the next term. TASR: Anna Záborská odchádza z KDH. In: *Pravda*. 21.1.2019. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/499280-anna-zaborska-odchadza-z-kdh/>>; TASR: KDH bráni podľa Vašečku kandidovať Záborskej do Európskeho parlamentu. In: *Teraz.sk*. 21.1.2019. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.teraz.sk/import/kdh-brani-podla-rvasecku-kandidova/355856-clanok.html>>; BERCIK, P.: Alojz Hlina: Odídenci majú dvere v KDH otvorené.

The then chairman of KDĤ, Alojz Hlina, failed to successfully bring the movement into the National Council of the Slovak Republic and faced strong criticism after the elections, both from within his own ranks and from outside the party. Igor Matovič from OĽaNO also contributed significantly to the failure of the KDĤ with his long-term targeted attacks. Both political movements (in terms of values and ideology) targeted the same voters. On the part of Matovič, this was a serious political mistake in the sense that, in an effort to attract voters who shared his values and ideology, he “outmanoeuvred” KDĤ, which did not make it into the National Council after the elections, out of post-election cooperation. However, in doing so, he seriously complicated his subsequent governance. He had to create a governing coalition with parties that were left (SME RODINA, SaS, and ZA ĽUDÍ).

A similar situation to that of KDĤ mentioned above, where only a few hundred votes decided whether it would remain outside parliament, also occurred in the case of the joint electoral coalition of **Progressive Slovakia and Together** (Progresívne Slovensko and SPOLU - PS-SPOLU). Given the statutory 7% electoral threshold for electoral coalitions composed of two or three political parties, PS-SPOLU did not even manage to secure more than 200,000 votes. It fell 926 votes short of entering parliament, or 0.04%.<sup>631</sup> The main reasons for the failure of the PS-SPOLU electoral coalition include:

- **Ideological and value heterogeneity, an entity** consisting of social liberals (PS), liberal conservatives (SPOLU), and a third group that oscillated between the two previous groups;
- Relatively frequent **statements about “new politics” or “new politicians”** sounded ridiculous, especially in the context of such political veterans as Miroslav Beblavý, Jozef Mihál, Martin Poliačik, Martin Dubéci, and Jana Dubovcová;
- **Michal Truban and Miroslav Beblavý very often presented themselves in the media as “future election winners”**, and the formation of a new government was supposed to follow from that. On the one hand, there was Truban’s exaggerated self-confidence in his own exceptionality,<sup>632</sup> often publicly presenting himself as the “future prime minister”; on the other hand, there was his lacklustre performance in

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Záborská má u nás obývačku s televízorom a výhľadom. In: *Konzervativnyweb.sk*. 22.6.2019. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.konzervativnyweb.sk/c/22151529/alozj-hlina-odidenci-maju-dvere-v-kdh-otvorene-zaborska-ma-obyvacku-s-televizorom-a-vyhľadom.html>>.

<sup>631</sup> According to calculations, 926 votes were needed to enter the National Council of the Slovak Republic. However, several Slovak print media outlets reported 928 votes in their articles. In this context, see, for example: Truban a Beblavý dostali vo voľbách facku, oni sa nevzdávajú. Vyhrajú boj o parlament? In: *Pluska.sk*. 5.3.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www1.pluska.sk/spravy/z-domova/budu-nove-volby-ps-spolu-zvazuje-velmi-vazny-krok>>.

<sup>632</sup> This aspect was highlighted, for example, by: TOPKY: Cesta k Matovičovej vláde: Odborník prezradil, čo nás čaká počas najbližších dní. In: *Topky*. 3.3.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1865869/Cesta-k-Matovicovej-vlade--Odbornik-prezradil-co-nas-cka-pocas-najblizsich-dni>>.

several discussion programmes, both in terms of form and content. However, what resonated most with the Slovak public were his public statements about his personal experiences with drugs;<sup>633</sup>

- **A completely mismanaged election campaign** (including the topics chosen and the means used). The coalition focused primarily on fighting Kotleba's party.<sup>634</sup> The culmination of all this was a group of MPs led by Beblavý and Poliačik spending the night in their pyjamas in the National Council chamber<sup>635</sup> during an extraordinary session on the 13th pension proposal submitted by SMER-SD and SNS;<sup>636</sup>

- The **synergistic effect of the four reasons mentioned above** manifested itself at the most critical moment, namely in the last hours before the elections, if not on election day itself. At the last minute (for various reasons), some of the coalition's potential voters decided to vote for other centre-right political entities (OĽaNO, SaS, and ZA ĽUDÍ).<sup>637</sup>

After the election results were announced, the greatest disappointment was felt by the ZA ĽUDÍ political party led by former President Kiska. The party leader Kiska was the most disappointed with the election result of only 5.77%. His idea that he could become Prime Minister of the future government, given his previous popularity as President, was miles away from reality. The poll on the credibility of the politician in

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<sup>633</sup> FOLENTOVÁ, V. – ŠNÍDL, V.: Truban priznal LSD a viac ako joint marihuany a vraví, že pred študentmi tak o drogách hovoriť nemal. In: *Denník N*. 8.8.2019. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/1548987/truban-priznal-bsd-a-viac-ako-jeden-joint-marihuany-a-vravi-ze-pred-studentmi-tak-o-drogach-hovorit-nemal/>>; Drogové video šefa koalície PS/Spolu má dohru: Michala Trubana rieši polícia. In: *Nový čas*. 30.9.2019. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.cas.sk/clanok/890607/drogove-video-sefa-koalicie-ps-spolu-ma-dohru-michala-trubana-riesi-policia/>>.

<sup>634</sup> HANUS, M. – MAJCHRÁK, J.: Smer je mŕtva veľryba, ale z ĽSNS cítíme energiu. In: *Postoj*. 11.2.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.postoj.sk/51521/smer-je-mrtva-velryba-z-lsns-citime-energiu>>; BIHARIOVÁ, I.: Irena Bihariová z PS/Spolu chce navštíviť obce, kde ĽSNS získala najviac hlasov vo voľbách. In: *Denník N*. 13.12.2019. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/minuta/1686435/>>.

<sup>635</sup> The other four MPs who remained in the National Council chamber during the night were Suchánek, Dubačová, Petřík and Mihál. SITA: Nezaradení poslanci odmietajú opustiť rečnícky pult v parlamente, budú za ním aj v noci. In: *Nový čas*. 18.2.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.cas.sk/clanok/946328/nezaradeni-poslanci-odmietaju-opustit-recnickyy-pult-v-parlamente-budu-za-nim-aj-v-noci/>>.

<sup>636</sup> SITA – TASR: Poslanci z PS/Spolu zostávajú v parlamente do rána. Nerobte cirkus, reagoval Pellegrini. In: *Pravda*. 18.2.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.pravda.sk/domace/clanok/542886-poslanci-z-ps-spolu-odmietaju-opustit-recnickyy-pult-v-parlamente-budu-za-nim-aj-v-noci/>>; TOPKY: Mimoriadna schôdza sa zmenila na frašku! Poslanci opäť nocujú v sále, zúfalý Danko a prvé reakcie. In: *Topky*. 19.2.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.topky.sk/cl/10/1862393/Mimoriadna-schodza-sa-zmenila-na-frasku--Poslanci-opat-nocuju-v-sale--zufaly-Danko-a-prve-reakcie>>.

<sup>637</sup> Several political scientists pointed out this phenomenon. For example, Štefančík, Baboš, Mesežnikov, and many others. Beblavý also mentioned KDĽH in this context. However, we beg to differ with this opinion. In our view, there is a significant difference between voters of KDĽH and PS-Spolu. KOVÁČ, P.: Odmietol ich Kiska a potom aj voliči. In: *Sme*. 3.3.2020, s. 6; KREMPASKÝ, J.: Kiska bodoval slabo, lebo opustil imidž bojovníka proti Ficovi. In: *Sme*. 3.3.2020, p. 4; PRAUS, L.: Beblavý: Mali sme včas vyhlásiť stav núdze. In: *Sme*. 3.3.2020, s. 7.

the position of President was one thing, especially when his biggest opponent was the leader of the strongest political party and three-time Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Fico, but voter support in the parliamentary elections was something else entirely.

Another serious phenomenon emerged about ZA ĽUDÍ, the quicker the party grew (mainly) on the backs of people, it often took over from other parties, the quicker it began to disintegrate after the elections.

In the case of OĽaNO, it should be noted that it is not a political party in the traditional sense of the word. The movement has no organisational structure, network of local party organisations, internal party mechanisms, regular congresses, etc. Worst of all, it has no membership base or party headquarters. At that time, the membership base consisted of 45 members of the movement.<sup>638</sup>

The main reasons for OĽaNO's electoral success, in our opinion:

- **Igor Matovič's composed and cultivated performance in pre-election debates, especially in the last weeks before the elections.** Matovič handled the end of the campaign brilliantly. He did not draw unnecessary attention to himself with his statements, as was the case with Kiska, Truban, and Beblavý;
- Until the very last moment, **the number one issue for the movement was the fight against corruption.** Videos about former Finance Minister Počiatek's luxury villa on the French Riviera and his visit to Limassol, Cyprus, where the shell companies of the PENTA investment group were shown, resonated particularly well with the public;<sup>639</sup>
- **The use of political marketing tools to the maximum extent possible** (including aggressive campaigns and anti-campaigns) mobilised various groups of voters across Slovakia;
- **A well-designed election campaign and its escalation.** The campaign gradually escalated, reaching its peak on election day;
- **The symbolism of election day itself – 29 February – only occurs once every four years.**

On the other hand, from the outset, the greatest risks to the newly emerging establishment led by OĽaNO and Matovič were:

- **Excessive expectations from voters towards the election winner;**
- **The diversity and fragmentation of the movement – the movement consisted of several individuals who were associated, to a greater or lesser extent, with various**

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<sup>638</sup> FRANK, M.: Matovičov tieňový minister Fecko chce ukončiť vládu agrobarónov: Nikoho nebudeme priväzovať reťazami ani podpisovať krvou, tvrdí. In: *Korzář*. 3.3.2020, s. 7.

<sup>639</sup> OĽaNO: Matovič našiel Počiatkovu vilu v miliónárskej štvrti na Francúzskej riviére. In: *YouTube.com*. 20.1.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nZ1xy5Hdzyg>>; OĽaNO: Odkaz z Cypru: Korupcia zabíja! Pán Haščák, hody a beztretnosť sa skončili... In: *YouTube.com*. 16.2.2020. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xg9LtyGVXmc>>.

currents, factions, or groups, which later proved to be a serious problem in government;<sup>640</sup>

- **Igor Matovič himself** as well as his unpredictable personality.

### The government of Igor Matovič

The government of Igor Matovič was formed by an agreement between four centre-right political parties (OĽaNO, SME RODINA, SaS, ZA ĽUDÍ), which at the beginning of its term could rely on the support of 95 MPs in the National Council of the Slovak Republic. Boris Kollár (SME RODINA) became the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

The transfer of power and the inauguration of the new government were happening in parallel with the exponential spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, not only in Slovakia but worldwide.<sup>641</sup> In an effort to minimise the spatial mobility and personal contact of citizens, pre-school, school, and leisure facilities were gradually closed, with other sectors of the economy (retail, wholesale, services, industry, etc.) also gradually slowing down.<sup>642</sup> A significant part of personal, civic, and political life moved to the digital environment (including politics and political life).<sup>643</sup> The measures adopted had the greatest impact on the tertiary sector, particularly public catering, accommodation services, and the hotel industry. The introduction of anti-pandemic measures led to a 5.20% decline in GDP.<sup>644</sup>

Given the high morbidity rate, which also caused a high mortality rate, the new government was forced to adopt several unpopular measures (including restrictions on citizens' rights and freedoms).<sup>645</sup> The new government's measures, which often

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<sup>640</sup> TASR: OĽaNO suspendovalo Čepčeka za hlasovanie s ĽSNS. In: *sme.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://domov.sme.sk/c/22595981/poslanca-martina-cepceka-vylucili-z-klubu-olano.html>>.

<sup>641</sup> LINHARTOVÁ, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – GAJDOŠČÍK, D.; (eds.): *Pandémia & demokracia. Budúcnosť demokracie v post-covidovej dobe*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2022, 312 s.

<sup>642</sup> TEREM, P. a kol.: *Strategické zameranie zahraničnej a bezpečnostnej politiky SR ako členského štátu EÚ a NATO*. Banská Bystrica : Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov, UMB Banská Bystrica, 2023, pp. 68-69.

<sup>643</sup> ŠÁROVEC, D.: Digitalizace a stranické akce: případová studie české republiky. In: LINHARTOVÁ, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – GAJDOŠČÍK, D. (eds.): *Pandémia & demokracia. Budúcnosť demokracie v post-covidovej dobe*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2022, pp. 42-57.

<sup>644</sup> GALIS, F.: The Impact of Corona Crisis and Government Restriction Measures on the Financial Health of Entities in the Slovak Republic. In: *Ekonomické rozhľady – Economic Review*, 2022, 51 (4), pp. 351-381; MF SR: Inovatívna ekonomika, moderný štát, zdravá krajina. In: *mfsr.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.mfsr.sk/sk/financie/hodnota-za-peniaze/blogy-uhp/2021/inovativna-ekonomika-moderny-stat-zdrava-krajina/?forceBrowserDetector=blind>>; KLIMOVSKÝ, D. – NEMEC, J. – BOUCKAERT, G.: The COVID-19 Pandemic in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In: *SciPap – Scientific Papers of the University of Pardubice, Series D: Faculty of Economics and Administration*, 2021, 29 (1), pp. 1-12.

<sup>645</sup> KOVANIČ, M.: Boj proti koronavírusu a demokratické vládnutie: Plošné testovanie na Slovensku. In: LINHARTOVÁ, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – GAJDOŠČÍK, D. (eds.): *Pandémia & demokracia. Budúcnosť demokracie v post-covidovej dobe*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo

seemed contradictory, sometimes even chaotic, were received with considerable controversy and even rejection by the population. The truth is that this was an exceptional “crisis” period, the likes of which Europe (and not only Europe) had not seen since the end of the Second World War. On the other hand, Prime Minister Matovič will be remembered by citizens as the one who purchased Sputnik V vaccines from the Russian Federation despite the disapproval of other members of the government;<sup>646</sup> launched nationwide mandatory testing for almost €500 million;<sup>647</sup> launched a vaccination lottery and financially rewarded vaccinated people over the age of 60.<sup>648</sup>

Shortcomings in the management of the pandemic, conflicts within the coalition, but also tensions within OĽaNO and the unpredictability of its chairman, Igor Matovič, led to a government crisis, which culminated in the exchange of the posts of Prime Minister and Minister of Finance between Igor Matovič and Eduard Heger (both OĽaNO). On 1 April 2021, Eduard Heger became Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic.

### The government of Eduard Heger

The government of Eduard Heger largely mirrored the (previous) government of Igor Matovič. The same was true of anti-pandemic measures. Opposition parties also expressed criticism of social developments – in addition to Social Democrats (SMER-SD and HLAS-SD), Kotlebovci from ĽSNS also voiced their criticism.<sup>649</sup> At the end of

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ŠafárikPress, 2022, pp. 21-42; HURČALOVÁ, M. – ONUFRÁK, A.: Prezidentské voľby v Poľsku počas pandémie Covid-19 – poučenie pre Slovensko? Využívanie alternatívnych spôsobov hlasovania počas mimoriadnych situácií. In: *Central European Journal of Politics*, 2024, 10 (2), pp. 32-52.

<sup>646</sup> ŠÁNDOROVÁ, E.: Matovič si podal Za ľudí a SaS kvôli Sputniku: To nám fakt nezáleží na 300-tisíc ľuďoch?! In: *dnes24.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.dnes24.sk/matovic-si-podal-za-ludi-a-sas-kvoli-sputniku-to-nam-fakt-nezalezi-na-300-tisic-ludoch-383190>>; RTVS: Na Slovensko dorazilo lietadlo s vakcínou Sputnik V, Krajčí jej udelí výnimku. In: *spravy.stvr.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.stvr.sk/2021/03/na-slovensko-dorazilo-lietadlo-s-vakcinou-sputnik-v-krajci-jej-udeli-vynimku/>>.

<sup>647</sup> RTVS: Cena za celoplošné testovanie je známa. Slovensko minulo takmer pol miliardy eur. In: *spravy.stvr.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.stvr.sk/2021/04/cena-za-celoplosne-testovanie-je-znama-slovensko-minulo-takmer-pol-miliardy-eur/>>.

<sup>648</sup> JABURKOVÁ, N.: Lotéria, blackout aj plošné vytieranie nosa? Takto vyzerala vláda Igora Matoviča. In: *noviny.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://plus.noviny.sk/816987-loteria-blackout-aj-plosne-vytieranie-nosa-takto-vyzerala-vlada-igora-matovica>>; FOLENTOVÁ, V. – KERN, M.: Schválila odmenu 300 a 200 pre zaočkovaných ľudí vo veku 60+. Prvé peniaze štát pošle už v decembri (otázky a odpovede). In: *dennikn.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/2642354/schvalili-odmenu-300-a-200-eur-pre-zaockovanych-ludi-vo-veku-60-prve-peniaze-stat-posle-uz-v-decembri-otazky-a-odpovede/>>; TOPKY: Očkovacia lotéria. In: *topky.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.topky.sk/tag/496949/ockovacia-loteria>>.

<sup>649</sup> RÁDEK, M.: Sociálne demokracie na Slovensku vo voľbách 2024 a 2024 – súper i alebo partneri? In: ONUFRÁK, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – JAKABOVIČ, L. (eds.): *Voľby 2023/2024: výsledky-hodnotenia-dôsledky: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2025, pp. 277-278; SMOLÍK, J.: Covid-19 a skupinová polarizace. In: LINHARTOVÁ, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – GAJDOŠČÍK, D. (eds.): *Pandémia & demokracia. Budúcnosť demokracie v post-covidovej dobe*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2022, pp. 7-20.

July 2021, a protest rally of several hundred citizens against pandemic measures was even held in front of the National Council building, at which SMER-SD and ĽSNS MPs appeared together in front of the crowd.<sup>650</sup>

On 24 February 2022, neighbouring Ukraine was attacked by the Russian Federation. The government of Eduard Heger had to respond to the situation (protect the Slovak-Ukrainian state border; manage migration flows from Ukraine to the Slovak Republic; provide humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine, etc.). The donation of military equipment – in particular the S-300 air defence system and later MiG-29 fighter jets – drew strong criticism from opposition parties (SMER-SD, HLAS-SD, and ĽSNS) once again launched a strong wave of criticism against the government of Eduard Heger and labelled its leading representatives as “warmongers”.<sup>651</sup>

The gradual introduction of further sanctions against the Russian Federation by the EU, as well as the occupation of (mainly) the eastern regions of Ukraine, resulted in a sharp increase in commodity prices (oil, gas, electricity, minerals), but also agricultural products and, gradually, other goods and services. The highest price increases – by hundreds of per cent – were in gas and electricity supplies.<sup>652</sup> In 2022 and 2023, the inflation rate in Slovakia reached 12.80% and 10.50%, respectively.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>650</sup> MIKUŠOVIČ, D. – OSVALDOVÁ, L. – BARCÍKOVÁ, M.: Dav odporcov očkovania nasledoval Kotlebu a pokúsil sa vtrhnúť do parlamentu. Polícia použila slzný plyn. In: *dennikn.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/2478427/dav-odporcov-ockovania-nasledoval-kotlebu-a-pokusil-sa-vtrhnut-do-parlamentu-policia-pouzila-slzny-plyn/>>.

<sup>651</sup> LÖRINCOVÁ, K.: Hlas-SD kritizuje dodanie Migov na Ukrajinu, analýzu Naďa zotrelí pod čiernu zem (video). In: *sita.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://sita.sk/hlas-sd-kritizuje-dodanie-stihaciek-mig-29-na-ukrajinu-a-vyzyva-uradnicku-vladu-aby-poziadala-o-analyzu-ustavny-sud-video/>>; ŘÁDEK, M.: Sociálne demokracie na Slovensku vo voľbách 2024 a 2024 – súperi alebo partneri? In: ONUFRÁK, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – JAKABOVIČ, L. (eds.): *Voľby 2023/2024: výsledky-hodnotenia-dôsledky: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2025, pp. 279-280; SITA: Smer-SD chce pre systém S-300 odvolávať vládu, Fico hovorí o zradcovskej politike a Blaha o čistom šialenstve. In: *sita.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://sita.sk/smer-sd-chce-pre-system-s-300-odvolavat-vladu-fico-hovori-o-zradcovskej-politike-a-blaha-o-cistom-sialenstve/>>; TASR: ĽSNS a Republika neuspeli s trestným oznámením pre odovzdanie S-300 Ukrajine. Prokurátor ho odmietol. In: *tvnoviny.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://tvnoviny.sk/domace/clanok/710727-lsns-a-republika-neuspeli-s-trestnym-oznamenim-pre-odovzdanie-s-300-ukrajine-prokurator-ho-odmietol>>.

<sup>652</sup> Before the outbreak of war in Ukraine (21 February 2022), the exchange price of natural gas (TTF) was EUR 94/MWh. On 28 February 2022, it was already EUR 192/MWh. On 22 August 2022, the price of gas (TTF) shot up to EUR 339/MWh. At the end of 2025, the price of natural gas (TTF) was EUR 29/MWh. The price of electricity (Germany) was EUR 208/MWh on 21 February 2022. At the end of August 2022, it shot up to €658/MWh. In France at that time, electricity (France) briefly shot up to €1,130/MWh. At the end of 2025, the price of electricity (Germany) was €101/MWh. As for oil (BRENT), on 21 February 2022, its price was USD 92/bbl. The highest price of oil (BRENT) was on 6 June 2022, when it reached USD 119/bbl. At the end of 2025, the price of oil (BRENT) was USD 61/bbl. TRADING ECONOMICS: EU Natural Gas; Electricity (Germany); Brent crude oil. In: *tradingeconomics.com*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://tradingeconomics.com/commodity/eu-natural-gas>>; <<https://tradingeconomics.com/germany/electricity-price>>; <<https://tradingeconomics.com/commodity/brent-crude-oil>>.

<sup>653</sup> Higher inflation rates were only recorded in the first two years after the establishment of the Slovak Republic (1993 – 23.20% and 1994 – 13.40%). For more details, see: NBS: Vybrané ekonomické a menové

Disagreements, particularly between the leadership of OĽaNO and SaS, led to SaS submitting a motion of no confidence in Heger's government to the National Council of the Slovak Republic on 1 December 2022. On 15 December 2022, the government lost the vote of confidence in parliament. On the same day, President Čaputová dismissed the government and, at the same time, entrusted it with the temporary exercise of its functions with limited powers until a new government was appointed.

Despite several attempts to find a joint solution to prevent early parliamentary elections, the disputes between the coalition partners were so extensive that further cooperation was simply no longer possible. Thus, on 15 May 2022, President Čaputová appointed a technocratic government headed by the Deputy Governor of the National Bank of Slovakia (NBS), Ľudovít Ódor.

There are several parallels between the political developments in Slovakia after the 2010 and 2020 parliamentary elections:

In both election periods, coalitions composed of "four" centre-right political parties ruled, struggling with inter-party and intra-party conflicts;

In both cases, personal disputes between coalition partners contributed to the (non)functioning of the coalition governments. Inter-party and intra-party disputes were often based on personal animosity;

Every attempt at a "new start" only served to deepen and prolong the agony;

Fragmentation of politics on the right side of the linear political spectrum;

The only thing that held both governments together was the desire to retain power in the state at all costs and prevent the return of SMER-SD led by Robert Fico.

### **The (technocratic) government of Ľudovít Ódor**

**The government of Ľudovít Ódor was (to date) the first technocratic government in Slovakia composed of experts**, whose task was to ensure the proper functioning of the state (including the preparation of early parliamentary elections in 2023; the preparation of the state budget for 2024; continuing pro-European and Western foreign policy and also drawing on European Union funds) in the period from 15 May 2023 until the new government took office.<sup>654</sup>

Since, according to Article 113 of the Slovak Constitution, "*the government is obliged to appear before the National Council within 30 days of its appointment, present its programme*

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ukazovatele SR / Selected economic and monetary indicators of the Slovak Republic. In: *nbs.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://nbs.sk/publikacie/ostatne-publikacie/>>.

<sup>654</sup> TOMEČKOVÁ, N. – TASR: Viaceré strany vyjadrujú podporu úradníckej vláde. In: *stvr.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.stvr.sk/2023/05/viacere-strany-vyjadruju-podporu-uradnickej-vlade/>>; MIKUŠOVIČ, D. – FOLENTOVÁ, V. – ONUFEROVÁ, M. – a kol.: Program Ódorovej vlády: Pomôžeme chudobným aj Ukrajine, neúspech Rázsoch sa nemies opakovať. In: *dennikn.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/3420329/program-odorovej-vlady-pomozeme-chudobnym-aj-ukrajine-neuspech-razsoch-sa-nemies-opakovat/>>.

and ask for a vote of confidence”,<sup>655</sup> Prime Minister Ódor attempted to win the confidence of the National Council, even though it was generally assumed that the technocratic government would not be granted confidence.<sup>656</sup> On 15 June 2023, only 34 of the 136 MPs present voted in favour of the government’s programme statement. As the government of Ľudovít Ódor did not receive a vote of confidence, it was dismissed by President Čaputová and subsequently entrusted with limited powers until a new government was appointed.<sup>657</sup>

Despite the fact that this government was perceived as one that was only supposed to manage the state in a “maintenance mode”, as it did not obtain a mandate from the citizens to govern, the government managed, despite its very short term in office, to draw a significant portion of the money (700 out of 800 million euros) from European Union funds, which would otherwise have been forfeited (due to under-spending in previous periods). Other positive measures taken by this government include: maintaining energy price caps; setting up a new method of financing universities based on performance; launching a reform of the judicial system with an emphasis on larger districts and specialisation (**judicial map**); extending the ban on imports of wheat, corn, rapeseed and sunflower seeds from Ukraine in an effort to protect domestic producers and the local market; continuing to support Ukraine in its fight for freedom against Russian aggression.<sup>658</sup>

During this electoral term (of three governments), the following amendments to the Constitution were made:

- **Major reform of the judiciary and adjustment of the pension system** (Constitutional Act No. 422/2020 Coll.);
- **Adjustment of the term of office of the ombudsman even after its expiry until the new ombudsman takes the oath** (Constitutional Act No. 378/2022 Coll.);
- **Shortening of the term of office of the National Council of the Slovak Republic** (Constitutional Act No. 24/2023 Coll.);<sup>659</sup>

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<sup>655</sup> Article 113 of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic.

<sup>656</sup> LÖRINCOVÁ, K.: Politológ sa vyjadril k vysloveniu dôvery Ódorovej vláde, problém vníma najmä v prehnaných egách. In: *sita.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://sita.sk/politolog-sa-vyjadril-k-vysloveniu-dovery-odorovej-vlade-problem-vnima-najma-v-prehnanych-egach/>>.

<sup>657</sup> TASR: Prezidentka poverila kabinet Ľ. Ódora vládnutím do vzniku novej vlády. In: *topky.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.teraz.sk/slovensko/prezidentka-poveri-kabinet-l-odora-v/721646-clanok.html>>.

<sup>658</sup> BALOGH, B.: Epilóg vlády Ľudovíta Ódora. Prinášame zhrnutie jej vládnutia. In: *ta3.com*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.ta3.com/clanok/907479/epilog-vlady-ludovita-odora-prinasame-zhrnutie-jej-vladnutia>>; TASR: Vláda predĺžila zákaz dovozu štyroch komodít z Ukrajiny pšenice. In: *teraz.sk*. [online], [cit. 27/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.teraz.sk/spravy/vlada-predlzila-zakaz-dovozy-styroch-komodit-z-ukrajiny-psenice>>.

<sup>659</sup> KRUNKOVÁ, A. – KARAFOVÁ, S.: Vybrané ústavné zmeny vo volebných pravidlách: analýza a dôsledky. In: ONUFRÁK, A. – DUBÓCZI, P. – JAKABOVIČ, L. (eds.): *Voľby 2023/2024: výsledky-hodnotenia-dôsledky: Kam kráčaš demokracia*. Košice : Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika v Košiciach, Vydavateľstvo ŠafárikPress, 2025, pp. 56-60.

- **The right to pay in cash** (Constitutional Act No. 241/2023 Coll.).

At the end of the term, more than one-third of the members of the parliament were not affiliated with any parliamentary club. In connection with governance in 2023, it should also be noted that Slovakia achieved its best rating in the perception of corruption at that time. In Transparency International's ranking of 180 countries worldwide, Slovakia was ranked 47th.<sup>660</sup>

The closer the 2023 parliamentary elections got, the more often SMER-SD said that they saw HLAS-SD as a *"natural partner"*.<sup>661</sup> At the same time, SMER-SD increasingly shifted towards the positions of the so-called nationalist left, culminating in the redefining of the party's name to **SMER - Slovak Social Democracy** (SMER - slovenská sociálna demokracia - SMER-SSD). In April 2023, Dobrá voľba, led by Tomáš Drucker, merged with HLAS-SD.<sup>662</sup>

### 8.10 Electoral term 2023–now

Early parliamentary elections were held on 30 September 2023. Voter turnout was 68.51%. A total of 25 political parties and movements ran for parliamentary seats. Seven of them – SMER-SSD (22.94%); PS (17.96%); the newly formed HLAS-SD (14.70%); the broad coalition OĽANO and friends, KÚ, ZA ĽUDÍ (8.89%); KDH (6.82%); SaS (6.32%); SNS (5.62%) – obtained more than 5% of the votes for independent political parties and 7% for coalitions, which is necessary to enter the National Council of the Slovak Republic.<sup>663</sup>

### The fourth government of Robert Fico

Based on the election results and post-election negotiations, SMER-SSD, HLAS-SD, and SNS managed to form a governing coalition. However, European socialists associated in the Party of European Socialists also reacted to this coalition (especially) to its political actions (anti-immigration policy; criticism of military aid to Ukraine; departure from social democratic values and principles, etc.) and **suspended the membership of both social democratic parties in October 2023**.<sup>664</sup>

<sup>660</sup> TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL: Corruption Perceptions Index 2023. In: *transparency.org*. [online], [cit. 03/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2023>>.

<sup>661</sup> RTVS – TASR: Podľa Roberta Fica je Hlas-SD pre Smer-SD prirodzený partner. In: *spravy.stvr.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://spravy.stvr.sk/2021/09/podla-roberta-fica-je-hlas-sd-pre-smer-sd-prirodzeny-partner/>>.

<sup>662</sup> KERN, M.: Dobrá voľba končí, Druckerov projekt zanikne v Hlase za miesta na kandidátke. In: *dennikn.sk*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://dennikn.sk/3346664/dobra-volba-konci-druckerov-projekt-zanikne-v-hlase-za-miesta-na-kandidatke/>>.

<sup>663</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľby do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 2023: Hlasy pre politické subjekty. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 03/06/2025]. Available at: <[https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2023/sk/vysledky\\_hlasovania\\_strany.html](https://volby.statistics.sk/nrsr/nrsr2023/sk/vysledky_hlasovania_strany.html)>.

<sup>664</sup> DUBÓCZI, P. – ŠKRÍBOVÁ, S.: The decision of European socialists to suspend Slovak ruling parties sparks accusations of blackmailing and authoritarianism. In: *freiheit.org*. [online], [cit. 25/02/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.freiheit.org/central-europe-and-baltic-states/decision-european-socialists-suspend-slovak-ruling-parties-sparks>>.

In the National Council of the Slovak Republic, the governing coalition could rely on the support of 79 MPs. Fico became Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic for the fourth time. The post of Speaker of the National Council went to Peter Pellegrini (HLAS-SD). After Pellegrini was elected President of the Slovak Republic in early April 2024, Prime Minister Fico was in favour of Andrej Danko (SNS) becoming Speaker of the National Council.<sup>665</sup> As a result of this stance, the position of Speaker of the National Council remained vacant for almost a year<sup>666</sup> until the end of March 2025, when Richard Raši (HLAS-SD) was elected Speaker of the National Council. This particular situation also clearly shows that the fourth government of Robert Fico is not harmonious and that there are political tensions between the parties, especially between SNS and HLAS-SD. In 2024 and 2025, a series of protests swept across the entire territory of the Slovak Republic; the main slogan and driving force was to preserve the rule of law and democratic character of the state.

In September 2005, Constitutional Act No. 255/2005 Coll., also known as **the “ethical amendment”**, was adopted, defining **national identity through fundamental cultural and ethical issues** (recognition of two biological sexes (male and female); definition of parents as mother and father; adoption of children; consent of a legal representative to education of children about intimate life and sexual behaviour; guaranteeing equality between men and women in remuneration for work).

On 7 November 2025, just before the anniversary of 17 November, an incident occurred in Poprad in front of the local grammar school, where a local student was taken away by the police for writing a derogatory message in chalk on the pavement addressed to Prime Minister Fico, who was supposed to give a lecture on foreign policy to students that day.<sup>667</sup> This expression of immediate civic initiative (with reference to 17 November 1989) had a huge impact on society as a whole and across the entire territory of the Slovak Republic, and the public began to refer to it as **the Chalk Revolution**.<sup>668</sup> On 14 November 2025 (again) in Poprad, during a discussion with students, the Prime Minister Fico “*sent them to fight in Ukraine*”, whereupon the students stood up and demonstratively left the lecture, jingling their keys.<sup>669</sup>

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<sup>665</sup> BEHUL, M.: Andrej Danko by sa mal stať predsedom parlamentu, myslí si premiér Fico. Bez práva veta nemáme čo robiť v EÚ. In: *aktuality.sk*. [online], [cit. 03/06/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/e8XctmZ/andrej-danko-by-sa-mal-stat-predsedom-parlamentu-mysli-si-premier-fico-bez-prava-veta-nemame-co-robit-v-eu/>>.

<sup>666</sup> During this period, the leadership of the National Council of the Slovak Republic was entrusted to the Vice-Chairman of the National Council, Peter Žiga (HLAS-SD).

<sup>667</sup> JOJ: Polícia vypočúvala študenta pre nápisy proti Ficovi. In: *youtube.com*. [online], [cit. 20/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/shorts/915d3CukJu8>>.

<sup>668</sup> STARTITUP: Kriedová revolúcia: Fico dostáva spätnú väzbu od ľudí, čo si myslia. In: *youtube.com*. [online], [cit. 20/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qilPybQ8DAk>>.

<sup>669</sup> ROMANICA: Študenti odišli z diskusie – Robert Fico im odkázal: „Chod’te bojovať na Ukrajinu, budeme radi!“ In: *youtube.com*. [online], [cit. 20/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s5zyuVnl0a0>>.

The fourth government of Robert Fico differs from the previous three as it is forced to reduce the growing national debt. At the end of 2025, the state's public debt reached the psychological threshold of 60%, despite three consolidation packages totalling EUR 7.4 billion.<sup>670</sup> Entrepreneurs (45%) and households (35%) contributed the most to these packages through increased contributions and taxes. So far, the government has contributed only about 20% to the consolidation packages.<sup>671</sup> However, **for consolidation to be successful and sustainable, savings in public expenditure should account for 70%, with the remaining 30% coming from households and businesses.**<sup>672</sup>

According to a report by the Council for Budget Responsibility (Rada pre rozpočtovú zodpovednosť - RRZ), the consolidation packages in 2026 will impact mostly families of working age, especially those with at least one self-employed member. On the other hand, pensioner families and families without earned income will be least affected by the consolidation.<sup>673</sup> Several economists point to the fact that **further tax and contribution burdens on labour are no longer possible**, given that *"Slovakia already has the second highest burden in the European Union after France."*<sup>674</sup> At the same time, this would mean a reduction in employment, competitiveness, and economic growth in Slovakia in the future.<sup>675</sup> The Slovak government, led by Robert

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<sup>670</sup> NBS: Analýza Rozpočtu verejnej správy na roky 2024–2026. In: *nbs.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://nbs.sk/dokument/dc2cc840-b067-4d87-83d8-fdb39f34957c/stiahnut?force=false>>; RRZ: Hodnotenie rozpočtu verejnej správ na roky 2024 až 2026. In: *rrz.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.rrz.sk/hodnotenie-rozpocetu-verejnej-spravy-na-roky-2024-az-2026/>>; NKÚ: Reformy sú nedostatočné a konsolidácia je viac účtovná ako udržateľná. In: *nku.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.nku.gov.sk/-/reformy-su-nedostatocne-a-konsolidacia-je-viac-uctovna-ako-udrzatelna>>.

<sup>671</sup> RRZ: Trojročná konsolidácia sa realizovala najmä cez navýšenie príjmov štátu. In: *rrz.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.rrz.sk/trojrocna-konsolidacia-sa-realizovala-najma-cez-navysenie-prijmov-statu/>>.

<sup>672</sup> AZZZ: Konsolidačný balíček vlády: Firmy a živnostníci zaplatia viac, úspory na výdavkoch stále chýbajú. In: *azzz.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.azzz.sk/konsolidacny-balicek-vlady-firmy-a-zivnostnici-zaplatia-viac-uspory-na-vydavkoch-stale-chybaju-p1296.htm>>.

<sup>673</sup> RRZ: Balíček (konsolidačných) opatrení na rok 2026. In: *rrz.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.rrz.sk/balicek-konsolidacnych-opatreni-na-rok-2026/>>.

<sup>674</sup> KUNÍKOVÁ, L.: Konsolidácia 2026: dopady na podnikanie a zamestnanosť. In: *podnikajte.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.podnikajte.sk/zakonne-povinnosti-podnikatela/konsolidacia-2026-dopady-na-podnikanie-zamestnanost>>.

<sup>675</sup> KUNÍKOVÁ, L.: Konsolidácia 2026: dopady na podnikanie a zamestnanosť. In: *podnikajte.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.podnikajte.sk/zakonne-povinnosti-podnikatela/konsolidacia-2026-dopady-na-podnikanie-zamestnanost>>; MÚČKA, Z. – KANDRIČÁK, J.: Konsolidačný balíček utlmí ekonomiku nadlho. In: *rrz.sk*. [online], [cit. 21/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.rrz.sk/konsolidacny-balicek-utlmi-ekonomiku-nadlho/>>; ČERVENÁ, K. – ČAKOCI, K.: Daňová politika a jej vplyv na kreovanie podnikateľského prostredia (teoretické východiská). In: ŠRAMKOVÁ, D. – JANOVEC, M. – VALDHANS, J. (eds.): *Dny práva 2017 – Days of Law 2017. Část III. Stabilita a stabilizace podnikatelského prostředí*. Brno : Masarykova univerzita, 2018, pp. 106-120.

Fico, is clearly beginning to realise this fact, with Fico stating that *“in 2026, we will obtain resources in a different way. And we will do it differently than we have done so far.”*<sup>676</sup>

### **Presidential election 2024**

The first round of the 2024 presidential election took place on 23 March 2024. Voter turnout was 51.91%. Out of the original 10 candidates, two (Andrej Danko and Róbert Švec) withdrew their candidacies before the election took place. Of the remaining eight candidates, the following had the best chances of advancing to the second round of the election: Peter Pellegrini, chairman of HLAS-SD and, at the time, Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, who was officially, albeit in their own unique way, supported in his election campaign by two other coalition parties (SMER-SSD and SNS) and former long-time diplomat Ivan Korčok, who ran as an independent candidate but with significant support from the PS movement.

Although Peter Pellegrini came second in the first round of the presidential election with the support of 834,000 voters, or 37.02%, and the difference between him and the winner of the first round, Ivan Korčok (958,000), was more than 123,000 votes, or 5.49%, Pellegrini clearly dominated the second round of elections held on 6 April 2024. With a (relatively high) voter turnout of 61.14%, more than 1.409 million voters cast their votes for Peter Pellegrini, representing 53.12% of the vote, while 1.234 million voters, or 46.87%, voted for Ivan Korčok.<sup>677</sup>

The winner (of the 2024 presidential election), Peter Pellegrini, became the first and so far only politician in the Slovak political system to hold all three highest constitutional offices in the state (Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, and President of the Slovak Republic).

### **Review questions:**

1. Describe the second government of Vladimír Mečiar?
2. Describe the disintegration of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the Slovak Republic?
3. Describe the government of Jozef Moravčík?
4. Describe the course of privatization?
5. Describe the third government of Vladimír Mečiar?
6. Describe the „period of Mečiarism“?
7. Describe the relationship between the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic Vladimír Mečiar and the President of the Slovak Republic Michal Kováč?
8. Describe the „Night of Long Knives“ after the 1994 parliamentary elections?

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<sup>676</sup> STVR: Sobotné dialógy: Doc. JUDr. Robert Fico, CSc. (Smer-SDD) 13.12.2025. In: *youtube.com*. [online], [cit. 21/12/2025]. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AEW-dn70sPE>>.

<sup>677</sup> ŠÚ SR: Voľba prezidenta Slovenskej republiky 2024. In: *volby.statistics.sk*. [online], [cit. 20/08/2025]. Available at: <<https://volby.statistics.sk/prez/prez2024/sk/index.html>>.

9. Describe the „Mečiar Law“?
10. Describe the first government of Mikuláš Dzurinda?
11. Describe the second government of Mikuláš Dzurinda?
12. Describe the first government of Robert Fico?
13. Describe the government of Iveta Radičová?
14. Describe the second government of Robert Fico?
15. Describe the Electoral Act No. 180/2014 Coll.?
16. Describe the third government of Robert Fico?
17. Describe the government of Peter Pellegrini?
18. Describe the government of Igor Matovič?
19. Describe the government of Eduard Heger?
20. Describe the technocratic government of Ľudovít Ódor?
21. Describe the fourth government of Robert Fico?
22. Describe the presidential election in the years 1993-2025?
23. Describe the party system in Slovakia in the years 1993-2025?

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### **List of abbreviations**

- ADS - The Alliance of Democrats of Slovakia (Aliancia demokratov Slovenska)
- ANO - The Alliance of the New Citizen (Aliancia nového občana)
- APR - The Alternative of Political Realism (Alternatíva politického realizmu)
- CMEA - The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Rada vzájomnej hospodárskej pomoci)
- CPSU - the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
- CSCE - Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe
- ČNR - Czech National Council (Česká národní rada)
- ČSFR - The Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (Česká a Slovenská Federatívna Republika)
- ČSSR - The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Československá socialistická republika)
- DEÚS - The Democratic Union of Slovakia (Demokratická únia Slovenska)
- DNZ - Provisional National Assembly (Dočasné národné zhromaždenie)
- DS - The Democratic Party (Demokratická strana)
- EMU - The European Monetary Union (Hospodárska a menová únia)
- EU - The European Union (Európska únia)
- EP - The European Parliament (Európsky parlament)
- ESWMK - the Coexistence - Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement ((Együttélés-Spolužitie-Wspólnota-Soužití, Maďarské kresťansko-demokratické hnutie)
- FNM - The National Property Fund (Fond národného majetku)
- FZ - The Federal Assembly (Federálne zhromaždenie)
- GDR - German Democratic Republic
- HLAS-SD - Voice - Social Democracy (Hlas - sociálna demokracia)
- HSĽS - Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana)
- HZD - The Movement for Democracy (Hnutie za demokraciu)
- HZDS - The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko)
- JRD - The unified agricultural cooperatives (Jednotné roľnícke družstvo)
- Kčs - The Czechoslovak crown (československá koruna)

KDH - The Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie)

KDS - The Conservative Democrats of Slovakia (Konzervatívni demokrati Slovenska)

KDS - The Christian Democratic Party (Kresťanskodemokratická strana)

Kotleba ĽSNS - Kotlebists - People's Party Our Slovakia (Kotleba Ľudová strana Naše Slovensko)

KOZ - The Confederation of Trade Unions (Konfederácia odborových zväzov)

KSČ - The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Komunistická strana Československa)

KSS - The Communist Party of Slovakia (Komunistická strana Slovenska)

KÚ - The Christian Union (Kresťanská únia)

KVP - The Košice Government Program (Košický vládny program)

ĽS- HZDS - The People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Ľudová strana - Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko)

MNI - The Hungarian Independent Initiative (Maďarská nezávislá iniciatíva)

MOST-HÍD - Bridge-Bridge (Most-Híd)

NATO - The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (Organizácia Severoatlantickej zmluvy)

NBS - The National Bank of Slovakia (Národná banka Slovenska)

NF - National Front (Národný front)

NKÚ - The Supreme Audit Office (Najvyšší kontrolný úrad)

NKVD - The People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs

NOF - National Fascist Community (Národní obec fašistická)

NOVA - The New Majority (Nová väčšina)

NR SR - The National Council of the Slovak Republic (Národná rada Slovenskej republiky)

OF - The Civic Forum (Občanské fórum)

ODS - The Civic Democratic Party (Občianska demokratická strana)

ODÚ - The Civic Democratic Union - VPN (Občianska demokratická únia - VPN)

OKS - The Civic Conservative Party (Občianska konzervatívna strana)

OĽaNO - Ordinary People and Independent Personalities (Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti)

ONV - District National Committees (Okresný národný výbor)

PES - The Party of European Socialists

PS - Progressive Slovakia (Progresívne Slovensko)

PS-SPOLU - Progressive Slovakia and Together (Progresívne Slovensko a Spolu)

RRZ - The Council for Budget Responsibility (Rada pre rozpočtovú zodpovednosť)

RSS - The Farmers' Party of Slovakia (Roľnícka strana Slovenska)

SaS - The Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a solidarita)

SDA - The Social Democratic Alternative (Sociálnodemokratická alternatíva)

SDK - The Slovak Democratic Coalition (Slovenská demokratická koalícia)

SDKÚ - The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia)

SDKÚ-DS - The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union - Democratic Party (Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia - Demokratická strana)

SDĽ - The Party of the Democratic Left (Strana demokratickej ľavice)

SDSS - The Social Democratic Party of Slovakia (Sociálnodemokratická strana Slovenska)

SF - The Free Forum (Slobodné fórum)

#SIEŤ - The Net (Sieť)

SIS - The Slovak Information Service (Slovenská informačná služba)

SKK - The Slovak crown (slovenská koruna)

SME RODINA - We are family (Sme rodina)

SMER - Direction (Smer)

SMER-SD - Direction - Social democracy (Smer - sociálna demokracia)

SMER-SSD - Direction - Slovak Social Democracy (Smer - slovenská sociálna demokracia)

SMK - The Hungarian Coalition Party (Strana maďarskej koalície)

SMK-MPK - The Hungarian Coalition Party (Strana Maďarskej koalície - Magyar Koalíció Pártja)

SNP - the Slovak National Uprising (Slovenské národné povstanie)

SNR - The Slovak National Council (Slovenská národná rada)

SNS - The Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana)

SOP - The Party of Civic Understanding (Strana občianskeho porozumenia)

SP - The Common Choice (Spoločná voľba)

SR - The Slovak Republic (Slovenská republika)

STRED - The Democratic Centre Party (Strana demokratického streda)

SZ - The Green Party (Strana zelených)

SZS - The Green Party of Slovakia (Strana zelených na Slovensku)

ŠANCA - The Chance (Šanca)

ŠtB - The State Security Service (Štátna bezpečnosť)

TIS - Transparency International Slovakia (Transparency International Slovensko)

USSR - The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (Zväz sovietskych socialistických republík/Sovietsky zväz)

ÚS SR - The Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic (Ústavný súd Slovenskej republiky)

ÚŠP - The Special Prosecutor's Office (Úrad špeciálnej prokuratúry)

ÚV KSČ - The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Ústredný výbor Komunistickej strany Československa)

ÚV KSS - The Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia (Ústredný výbor Komunistickej strany Slovenska)

VONS - the Committee for the Defence of the Unjustly Prosecuted (Výbor na obranu nespravodlivo stíhaných)

VPN - The Public Against Violence (Verejnosc' proti násiliu)

VPN-ZDS - VPN-For a Democratic Slovakia (VPN - Za demokratické Slovensko)

VSŽ - The East Slovakian Steelworks

VÚC - The Higher Territorial Unit (Vyšší územný celok)

ZA ĽUDÍ - For the People (Za ľudí)

ZP - The Board of Commissioners (Zbor povereníkov)

ZRS - The Association of Workers of Slovakia (Združenie robotníkov Slovenska)

**Political System of the Slovak Republic for Foreign Students  
University Textbook**

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