



SLOVAKIA PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS SEPTEMBER 20 & 21, 2002

ELECTION REPORT

SUMMARY

On September 20 and 21, Slovak voters elected a new parliament, voting to stay the course with Slovakia's reform process and integration into transatlantic and European structures. The leading governing party, the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU), received an unexpected boost with 15.1% of the vote. Together with three other center-right parties (Party of the Hungarian Coalition, Christian Democratic Movement, and ANO), SDKU is poised to form a new government with a combined majority of 78 out of 150 parliamentary seats. Center-left Smer, which consistently had polled in the high teens, finished with 13.5% of the vote. The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HzDS), led by Vladimir Meciar, was the top vote-getter with 19.5% of the vote but is unable to attract other parties to form a coalition. This report presents the election results, speculates on the potential for various government coalitions, and summarizes the campaign period, including observations on political party campaigns, nongovernmental initiatives and the Election Day itself.

For more information on NDI's Slovakia programs, please contact Jeff Kovick in Washington, D.C. at 202-728-5668 or Nicolas Ruzskowski in Bratislava at nic_ruzskowski@hotmail.com. NDI's Slovakia programs are generously funded by the National Endowment for Democracy and the U.S. Agency for International Development.¹

ELECTION RESULTS

Turnout: 70%

Percentage of the Total Vote:

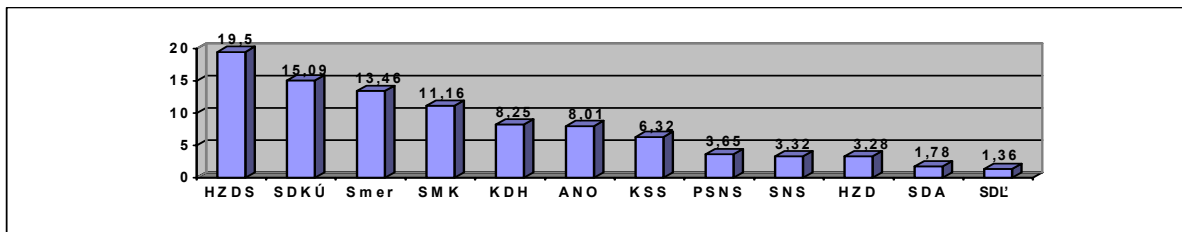
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HzDS)	19.50 %
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU)	15.09 %
Smer (Direction)	13.46 %
Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK)	11.16 %
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	8.25 %
Alliance of New Citizens (ANO)	8.01 %
Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)	6.32 %
Real Slovak National Party (PSNS)	3.65 %
Slovak National Party (SNS)	3.32 %
Movement for Democracy (HZD)	3.28 %
Social Democratic Alternative (SDA)	1.79 %
Party of the Democratic Left (SDL')	1.36 %

Seats in Parliament:

HzDS	36
SDKU	28
Smer	25
SMK	20
KDH	15
ANO	15
KSS	11

**Political parties must pass a 5% threshold to hold seats in parliament. Votes allocated to those parties that fail to reach this threshold are redistributed. A total of 25 parties contested the elections – an additional 13 parties placed under 1%.*

¹ All graphics referenced from Freedom House publications released throughout the election period.



Highlights:

- Moderate center-right parties gain parliamentary majority
- HZDS first in polls but at all-time low
- Communists in parliament/ Nationalists out of parliament
- Women voted substantially different from men – particularly in support of SDKU and moderate parties with less support for HZDS and the communists.

Political Outcomes

Dramatic shifts in the political fortunes of many of the various parties competing in these elections made predictions difficult. Following August negotiations on the HZDS candidate list, in which former parliamentary speaker Ivan Gasparovic and other prominent HZDS members were marginalized, Gasparovic announced the creation of a new party the Movement for Democracy (HZD). HZD had strong support in the east and this split caused HZDS to fall sharply in popularity from 27% in the 1998 elections to as low as 17% in weeks prior to the election. The HZD consistently secured between 5-7% in the campaign period but ended with low support in the end, failing to make it to parliament.

HZDS Chairman Vladimír Mečiar, absent from the public eye throughout much of the past four years, averted media attention through much of the pre-election period until the emergence of HZD forced him to take a more prominent role. He frequently criticized media inquiries into his personal finances, the government's use of "political terrorism" against the party, and "unfair prosecution" of former Interior Minister Ivan Lexa and other party members. Mečiar's increasingly violent and short-tempered attitude caused many to question his hold of politics and his sanity. In the final week of the campaign, Mečiar physically and verbally assaulted TV JOJ reporter Lubos Choluj in response to repeated questioning of the source of 100 million SKK for the restoration of his Elektra residence. All major papers ran the story. A week later, Mečiar walked out on a live televised debate with Pavol Rusko following further references to his personal finances.

Smer, formed by SDL deputy Robert Fico in the inter-election period, maintained consistent popularity and at one time even surpassed HZDS in the polls at 18.7%. The party was generally viewed to become the key negotiator in any government and many assumed that Fico would become the next Prime Minister. The placement of *Smer* in third and its probable place in opposition was a major upset.

SDKU relied on an emotional campaign using slogans such as "*Blue is Good*" and an appeal to support the continuation of reforms initiated by the incumbent government - portraying SDKU as the principle moderate party of the right, a party of experienced politicians, and the guarantor of accession to NATO and EU. Despite a relatively undeveloped regional organization, the SDKU displayed impressive energy and gained

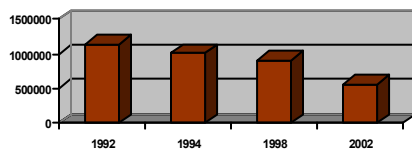
dramatic ground in final weeks – gaining support from DS-DU² members and many undecided who viewed the SDKU as the only moderate choice for continued reform.

Nationalist parties will not be represented in parliament for the first time in Slovak history. The split of the Slovak National Party (SNS) into two competing factions ensured their failure to reach the 5% threshold. In contrast, the Communist Party (KSS), which has never held seats in the Slovak parliament, emerged mid-summer as a major political force. Despite almost no political campaign, the KSS appealed to voters' nostalgia for better times. The moderate left (represented by SDA and SDL) failed to gain parliamentary representation.

Pre-election polls had indicated that Smer, not SDKU, would likely garner the second most votes, as Fico's party consistently polled as the second most popular party, even taking the top spot away from HzDS two weeks before the election. HzDS' 19.5% support on election day was approximately three percentage points higher than pre-election polling indicated.

The actual outcome favoring SDKU might be explained by several factors: women voters, it appears, came out in more numbers to support the governing coalition, suggesting a possible "gender gap" that deserves further evaluation; supporters of DS-DU may have switched to SDKU with the former's removal from the race; and SDA/SDL voters who favored a pro-reform government and were concerned their party would not surpass the 5% threshold; a concerted and energetic campaign by SDKU in the run-up to election day.; and NGO voter turnout campaigns may have also persuaded many undecided to overcome their frustrations with the government, participate in the elections, and lend their support to SDKU.

HzDS' rise may be explained in that the party almost always performs better than its polling numbers due to some supporters' hesitancy to admit their intention. Additionally many voters who had previously considered the HZD likely gave their support to HzDS in the ballot box – HZD supporters may have been concerned the party would not pass the 5% threshold. The rise of the KSS was likely a protest vote by those in economically destitute areas and voters favoring socialist platforms who do not see alternatives on the left.



Declining HZDS Support

Since 1992, the HZDS has lost votes in each subsequent election to parliament falling from 1,148,625 to 560,691 – 51% decline.

POTENTIAL GOVERNMENT COALITION

It is likely that SDKU will lead the next government with Mikulas Dzurinda retaining his role as Prime Minister. This marks the first instance in Central Europe of a pro-reform government being returned to office in consecutive terms and is a powerful reflection of the interests of the Slovak electorate to continue democratic, political and economic reforms and secure entry into European and transatlantic institutions. Such a result also marks the end of Vladimir Meciar as the dominant force in Slovak politics.

² In the final weeks of the campaign, the Democratic Party-Democratic Union withdrew their candidate list and endorsed the SDKU, securing financial returns and possible cabinet posts in the next government.

Four center-right parties – SDKU, SMK, KDH, and ANO – have the necessary seats and the political will to forge a governing coalition. These parties would have a majority in parliament with 78 out of 150 seats and party leaders have begun talks to form a coalition government. Such a clear mandate for a moderate right-wing government would allow for consistency in ideology absent from the current government, facilitate a more streamlined process of legislative reform, and ultimately provide space for the moderate left – which was entirely eliminated in these election – to rebuild. Slovak President Rudolf Schuster is empowered with the authority to appoint a political party to negotiate a government – and met with party leaders on Monday – but has allowed HzDS to try to forge a coalition, deferring his decision on a right-wing coalition until the end of the week.

Prior to the vote, few gave much credit to the possibility for such a mainstream coalition. Based on public opinion polls, it was expected that Smer and HzDS would be the leading parties in the polls with HZD also in parliament. A right-wing coalition with HZD was considered possible but unsavory. All other coalitions mandated the inclusion of *Smer* – with the HzDS-Smer-HZD coalition feared as the worst-case scenario. In press conferences prior to the elections, *Smer* President Robert Fico refused all speculation on possible governmental coalitions – stating that Smer could work with all political parties, but would keep Vladimir Mečiar (HzDS) and Mikulaš Dzurinda (SDKU) out of the next government. Public and media opinion is generally agreed that it would be constructive to engage Smer in some arrangement (perhaps with Fico as deputy chairman of the parliament) but it remains to be seen how negotiations will work out in coming days.

ELECTION DAY

Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic began at 2:00 PM on Friday September 20. Polls closed at 10:00PM and then reopened on Saturday, September 21 from 7:00AM-2:00PM. A total of 25 political parties competed for seats in parliament. Despite heavy rains on the first day of elections, turnout was a respectable 70% (84% in 1998). Election Day passed without major incidence of fraud or mishap.

ELECTION MONITORING

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) sent 10 long-term observers, representing six nations and led by Ambassador Michael Wygant (USA) to monitor the elections. The mission focused on the election law, the campaign, turnout, and media coverage, concluding that all was “*in compliance with international commitments and standards for the conduct of democratic elections.*” The preliminary findings commended the passage of a number of amendments to electoral legislation passed in the past four years, which improved the credibility, transparency, and accountability of the election process but noted shortfalls in the absence of provisions for domestic and international observers.

Civic Eye (Obcianske Oko)


Obcianske Oko conducted election monitoring of the election process in areas identified in past election cycles as prone to manipulation and fraud. In particular, Oko monitored voting in the regions of Slovakia with high concentrations of Roma. Oko employed 32 regular observers who monitored political party campaigns and election commission activities in these regions throughout the official campaign period. These activists regularly visited Roma settlements to monitor local media, observe political party events

and campaigns, and note the establishment of local election commissions and access of Roma to the commissions. During the two days of elections, Oko deployed 50 accredited³ short-term election observers, covering 300 polling stations.

National Democratic Institute

NDI received accreditation from the Central Election Commission and monitored in two groups, observing 15 polling stations and the counting process. Minor problems were noted related to the set-up of stations and voters unclear on the process – but no intentional wrongdoing transpired in areas monitored.

MEDIA COVERAGE AND MEDIA MONITORING

 As advertising by political parties was prohibited on private television and radio during the 30-day campaign period, all political parties were allotted set time on Slovak TV under the logo *Volby 2002*. Each political party was allowed two 30-second and twenty-two 60-second time slots, as well as participation in eight debates.

As in the 1998 election cycle and the inter-election period, NDI partner MEMO98 provided exhaustive reporting on the coverage of Slovakia politics and the election campaign in the print, broadcast, and electronic media. At the initiation of the campaign period, MEMO98 released a “Media Code of Conduct” stipulating quantitative and, more importantly, qualitative ethical standards encouraging parties to abide by the proper use of media and advertisements during the campaign period and for news agencies to adopt ethical standards for reporting. All political parties, including those in opposition, signed on to the accord and the code was provided to all media outlets. The main goal of this project was to initiate discussion among journalists about ethics and self-regulation and to determine which media outlets were open to internal debate and able to listen to an independent advisory board.

MEMO98 commended Slovak Radio and Slovak TV for high standards in balanced reporting but criticized other media outlets, especially private TV Markiza for breaking standards for ethical reporting. Markiza, owned by ANO Chairman Pavol Rusko, came under repeated criticism by MEMO98 for unambiguously positive coverage of ANO throughout the campaign and sophisticated methods to provide Rusko and ANO representatives additional positive news coverage as Markiza affiliates. Markiza was also found to be the most critical media outlet with regard to the Government, with all other monitored media collectively broadcasting as much criticism of the Government as Markiza alone. Generally, MEMO98 reported that the cabinet and the president were the most frequently featured entities in the broadcast media during the campaign period, while the cabinet was the most heavily criticized. The political party receiving the most media coverage was the HzDS, with highly negative publicity overall.

OVERVIEW OF CAMPAIGN PERIOD

In contrast to the campaign period in 1998, the 2002 parliamentary campaign was marked by a lack of major violations in campaign ethics and manipulation of the media. While

³ While in the 1998 election cycle, Obcianske Oko had been refused official accreditation, its activists were provided credentials to facilitate the observation of the voting and counting process at the polls this year. Largely due to Oko’s lobbying efforts, the Central Election Commission (CEC) ruled on September 10 to allow domestic poll watchers during the elections. This ruling, however, does not constitute a permanent provision for domestic monitors as should be established in the election law.

many parties ran rather dry campaigns, there was a proliferation of parties that emerged and others that withdrew during the election cycle, providing for a rather chaotic and unpredictable pre-election period. Civil society was quite active and some of their activities, along with the campaign highlights, are reported below.

The official campaign period for the 2002 parliamentary elections began at midnight August 20 and concluded on Wednesday, September 18 at 2:00 PM. All campaign activities were suspended under the 48-hour moratorium period leading into the opening of the polls on Friday, September 20.

VOTER TURNOUT CAMPAIGNS – (NDI Affiliated or Former NDI Programs)

It Matters to Us - *Nieje Nám To Jedno (Led by Civic Eye)*

Participating Organizations: Hlava 98, Občianske oko, Komplot

**N I E J E
N Á M T O
J E D N O** In May, Občianske Oko, Hlavna98, and Komplot began a voter mobilization campaign targeting first- and second- time voters under the slogan “Nijenamtojedno.” (It’s not all the same to me) The campaign fielded billboards and sponsored media advertisements and live rock concerts to reach its audience. Using striking black and white images, the campaign started with the message Niejemitojedno. Media advertisements featuring well-known Slovak artisans, philosophers, writers, poets, scholars, athletes, and musicians were shown throughout the country, encouraging youth to realize their right to vote and to do so in an educated and informed manner. In July, the campaign fielded large posters with the slogan Nijenamtojedno with space for individuals to mark their fingerprint and sign their name. An accompanying website archived the fingerprints of famous and influential Slovaks who supported the campaign. In the final month before the elections, the campaign sponsored a concert tour covering 14 major Slovak cities, concluding in Bratislava on September 18, with an audience of roughly 7,000 young people. Popular Slovak rock stars, including Puding pani Elvisovej, Ivan Tásler, I.M.T. Smile, Jana Kischner, and Hex performed and media spots were featured.

Citizens in Action - *Obciana v Akcii*

On September 4, Citizens in Action (OvA), launched a GOTV campaign entitled *Vidím, idem, volím – rozhodnem* (I See, I Go, I Vote, I Decide) in the cities of Bystrica, Nitra, Trnava, Zvolen and Žilina. A central message and strategy was developed and literature produced following a “Gathering of Leaders” of the various organizations in OvA; individual groups were tasked with developing independent plans to reach the maximum number of voters in their respective areas. The initiative capitalized on the group’s strong network of neighborhood organizations and community ties and deployed volunteer activists door-to-door and to community centers, encouraging citizens to vote and providing information on local polling sites. On Election Day, OvA activists provided *I Voted* stickers to those exiting the polls to raise consciousness of those citizens who had not yet participated in the elections. Well-known comedian Stefan Skrucany volunteered in support of the GOTV effort, speaking with voters on the street in Nitra.

Presov Civic Forum



The Presov Civic Forum conducted a project entitled *Spravna vol’ba 2002* (Right Choice 2002). Using the slogan “Don’t lose your head”, the campaign endeavored to increase voter awareness and turnout in eastern Slovakia, (particularly in Presov and the surrounding region) through the use of concerts, public discussions, and voter mobilization efforts.