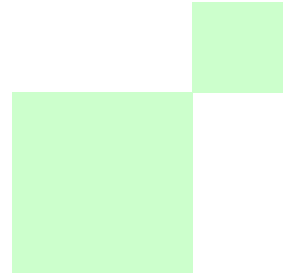




Slovakia



**Country Report based on Research and Dialogue with
Political Parties**



About this report:

Political parties are indispensable for making democracy work and deliver. Finding the proper conditions for better internal functioning and effective legal regulation of political parties is of key importance anywhere.

This report is a result of world-wide research and dialogue with political parties. Together with national and regional research partners, International IDEA is improving insight and comparative knowledge. The purpose is to provide for constructive public debate and reform actions helping political parties to develop.

For more about the Political Parties' programme, please visit www.idea.int/parties

Country researchers: **Grigorij Mesežnikov and Olga Gyárfášová**

Partner Organization: **Institute for Public Affairs (IVO)**

Interviewers: **Peter Horváth, Mária Ničová, Rastislav Havran, Viktor Maroši, and Jozef Lenč**

IDEA research coordinators: **Francesca Binda and Maja Tjernström**

Research period: **December 2004-January 2005**

Preliminary findings were presented in a Central European regional dialogue workshop with the political parties on 5-6 April 2005 in Bratislava, Slovakia

Contents

Methodology	1
Background	1
Electoral system and quotas	1
Party system	1
External Regulation and Environment	2
Legislation governing political parties	2
Internal party functions.....	2
Registration of parties and nomination of candidates	2
Election campaigns and observation.....	2
Internal Functioning and Structure	3
Founding of parties.....	3
Internal structure and election of leadership.....	3
Policy development.....	4
Membership	4
Electoral activity: candidates	5
Electoral activity: campaigns	6
The parties' external relations.....	7
Funding.....	7
Challenges and Opportunities	8

© International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance 2006

International IDEA publications are independent of specific national or political interests. Views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of IDEA, its Board, its Council members or other organizations involved in its production.

Printouts of this document for individual use are allowed without special permission from IDEA. For reproduction or translation of any part of this publication a request should be made to:

Publications Office
International IDEA
SE -103 34 Stockholm, Sweden
E-mail: publications@idea.int

Methodology

The Institute for Public Affairs contacted the Chairpersons of all parliamentary political parties by mail, to inform them of the project. The Chairs were asked to nominate three party representatives as interviewees and the interviewers contacted the nominated individuals to arrange meetings. Interviews were held with representatives of all parliamentary parties: Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ); Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK); Christian Democratic Movement (KDH); Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO); Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS); Smer (Direction); and Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS). Interviews were held in December 2004 and January 2005.

Background

In the years that have passed since the collapse of the Communist regime in the former Czechoslovak federation, Slovakia has undergone radical social change. In the initial stage of transformation between 1990 and 1992, the country laid the foundations of a democratic political regime and created favourable conditions for the proper functioning of a system of democratic institutions. Czechoslovakia split in 1993 and the Slovak Republic became an independent country. Since the Communist regime collapsed in 1989, Slovakia has held five parliamentary elections (in 1990, 1992, 1994, 1998 and 2002); four municipal elections (in 1990, 1994, 1998 and 2002); one regional election (in 2001); and two presidential elections (in 1999 and 2004). In June 2004, shortly after the Slovak Republic became a full member of the European Union (EU), the country held its first elections to the European Parliament (EP). International election observer missions, as well as independent domestic monitors, declared all of these elections to be free, fair and conducted by secret ballot. The constitution of the Slovak Republic was adopted in 1992 and extensively amended in 2001.

Electoral system and quotas

The country's electoral legislation comprises several laws: the Law on Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (the Parliament); the Law on Elections to Organs of Municipal and Local Self-governance (the municipal and local councils); the Law on Elections to Organs of Regional Self-governance (the regional parliaments); the Law on Elections of the President of the Slovak Republic; and the Law on Elections to the European Parliament. These laws provide a legislative framework for the free and democratic competition of political forces, equal opportunities for election campaigning, fair voting and transparent scrutiny of the votes. The electoral rules are clear and comprehensible.

Parliamentary elections are held on the basis of a proportional system that stipulates the following thresholds for qualifying to the Assembly: 5 per cent for single parties; 7 per cent for coalitions comprising two or three parties; and 10 per cent for coalitions consisting of four or more parties. Elections to the EP use a proportional system. The minimum threshold for election to the assembly is 5 per cent of the popular vote (that is, of all eligible voters participating) and applies both to individual parties and coalitions.

Party system

The Slovak party system can be described as a form of moderate pluralism with some elements of fragmentation and cartelization.

The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ) is a moderate conservative party that brings together moderate Christian democrats and liberals. The Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), a self-proclaimed people's party, exercised power in an authoritarian manner when it was the ruling party. Smer (Direction), a party of the left, describes itself as social democratic. The Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK) is a moderate conservative party representing ethnic Hungarians, the biggest ethnic minority in Slovakia. The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) is a conservative party with a strong Catholic background. The Alliance of a New Citizen (ANO) characterizes itself as a liberal party. Finally, the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) is a radical left Marxist-Leninist Party.

Table 1. Parliament situation after the September 2002 election

	No. of seats	% of seats	% of votes	No. of seats for women	% of seats for women
Ruling party					
Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ)	23	15.3	15.1	5	21.7
Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK)	20	13.3	11.2	2	10.0
Christian Democratic Movement (KDH)	15	10.0	8.3	3	20.0
Alliance of the New Citizen (ANO)	12	8.0	8.0	3	25.0
Opposition party					
Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS)	26	17.3	19.5	5	19.2
Smer (Direction)	25	16.7	13.5	4	16.0
Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS)	9	6.0	6.3	1	11.1
Independent deputies (splinters from SDKÚ, HZDS, ANO and KSS)	20	13.3	-	2	10.0
Total	150	100		25	16.7

External Regulation and Environment

Legislation governing political parties

Two main legislative measures govern political parties in Slovakia. The Law on Elections to the National Council of the Slovak Republic (No. 333/2004) was approved by the Council in March 2004. The Law on Political Parties (No. 85/2005) was approved by the National Council in February 2005.

Internal party functions

Internal party functions are regulated by the parties' internal documents as approved by the parties' supreme bodies (Congresses and Conventions). These documents provide the basic framework for democratic procedures within the parties.

Registration of parties and nomination of candidates

More than 110 political parties are registered in Slovakia. The basic requirement for registering a party is submission of a petition signed by at least 10,000 citizens. Parliamentary elections are open to every registered political party (or a coalition of registered parties) that submits a list of candidates and makes an election deposit of SKK 500,000 (about US\$17,000). The deposit is refunded to every party (or coalition) that receives at least 3 per cent of the popular vote. Those parties that fail to surpass that threshold forfeit the deposit to the state budget.

Election campaigns and observation

Election campaigning is regulated by the Law on Elections to National Council of the Slovak Republic, which states that, during election campaigns, all parties have equal entitlement to 30 minutes of political advertising on public television and public radio. The costs are met by the parties or coalitions and the same conditions on purchasing the broadcasting times apply to all of them.

Electoral advertising cannot be broadcast on television or radio at times reserved for commercial advertising. During the official election campaign (21 days before the elections), and apart from paid election

advertising and regular news programmes, television and radio stations cannot make broadcasts that might influence voting behaviour for or against the parties in contention. Opinion poll results cannot be published on election day.

The Central Election Commission (CEC) oversees parliamentary elections and is responsible for registering parties that field candidates. Each contending party designates a representative to the CEC. Law No. 333/2004 regulates the observation of the electoral process and covers the activities of both domestic and international observers.

Internal Functioning and Structure

Founding of parties

Parliamentary political parties may be categorized into two groups: (i) those that were founded shortly after the collapse of the Communist regime and that are still active (KDH, 1990; HZDS, 1991; KSS, 1992); and (ii) parties established in the period 1998-2001 (SMK, 1998; Smer, 1999; SDKÚ, 2000; and ANO, 2001).

As to the reasons for the parties' creation, the party representatives mentioned the following motivations: (i) a response to 'social demand' ('people's disagreement with how society was developing', 'the need to solve pressing problems') and an effort to create a political movement with a certain ideological line (this is the case for KDH, KSS, Smer and ANO); (ii) a split in an existing party and divergence from the policy of the predecessor (HZDS); (iii) an effort to continue the policy of some other movement that could not persist in its initial form, and to bring together representatives of two ideological trends (SDKÚ); and (iv) a merger of several parties under the pressure of election legislation (SMK), so as to avoid losing votes. Parties were founded as a result of the following circumstances: a personal project (ANO); a group activity (KDH, SDKÚ, HZDS and Smer; in the three latter cases there was a significant personal dimension); and a merger between independent parties (KSS and SMK).

Internal structure and election of leadership

Members of the highest party levels and the Chairpersons are elected by delegates to the party's supreme bodies (Congresses and Conventions). Stability of leadership is the norm in Slovak political parties, and the Chairpersons retain their positions for long periods. Among the parliamentary parties, only in KDH and KSS has one leader been replaced by another since the parties were founded.

Party organization is characterized by a combination of hierarchy and some decentralization. The hierarchical elements are dominant, and thus party structures tend to be very centralized. Clear levels of authority are apparent, especially in the formulation and implementation of party policies at the national level. Regional and local organizations have some autonomy in their approach to policies at their own levels of authority. The parties' central governing bodies are trying to strengthen the principle of hierarchy.

The parties' main governing bodies are instituted through a combination of elections and *ex-officio* appointments. In some parties, all the members of these bodies are elected by the parties' delegates to the Congresses. In the HZDS this is the National Managing Board; in the KSS it is the Central Committee. In other parties, these bodies are partly elected by the delegates to the Congresses and partly nominated by other party organizations (at the regional level, in Parliament and so on) as *ex-officio* officers. The latter is the case for the presidencies of Smer, the SDKU, KDH and ANO, as well as for the SMK National Council.

Smer lacks wings for youths and women; the KDH, SDKU and KSS have affiliated organizations for both groups; and the ANO and SMK have a wing for women but not for youths. Representatives of the HZDS did not mention an affiliated youth organization, although one exists.

With the single exception of the SMK, political parties in Slovakia lack formal procedures to regulate the ethical conduct of party officials. The SMK has a central and district-level ethical commissions, which operate under their own regulations.

Except for the Smer party, whose lowest level of local organization is the district, the lowest local branch for all parties is at the level of the community. Most parties (KDH, HZDS, ANO, KSS and SMK) set the minimum number of members of the local branch between three and ten. The highest party body authorizes

the founding of the branch and issues the corresponding licence. The local branches of individual parties are arranged as follows:

- KDH: party club, with a minimum of five members, whose licence is issued by the central secretariat following a proposal by the district centre presidency;
- HZDS: party club, with a minimum of five members;
- ANO: basic organization, five-member minimum, whose licence is issued by the party presidency;
- KSS: basic organization, minimum three members, whose licence is issued by secretariat of the central committee and registered by the district organization;
- SMK: basic organization, minimum ten members, registered by the party's national presidency;
- SDKU: political group (club) within the local union, the licence being issued by the chair of the regional organization; and
- Smer: district organization, approved by the party presidency following a proposal by a regional council.

In all the parties examined, the leadership of the local organizations is elected by members of those organizations, which are subordinate to the party headquarters. The parties' local and regional branches are free to select candidates and campaign at their own level. The parties' central bodies, however, influence the process of nominating candidates for the most important positions in regional and local government, such as regional governors and the mayors of the capital and large cities. Before regional elections, the highest bodies of some parties recommend to their regional organizations which parties they should negotiate with for the purposes of cooperation and coalition-building. Some parties prohibit cooperation with others. The regional party structures normally comply with these recommendations.

Policy development

The parties share many common features in determining their policy programme documents. In principle, the national Congress (for the ANO, HZDS, SDKÚ, Smer and SMK) is the main decision-making structure. In the Communist Party, particular programme documents are approved at the level for which they are designed. In formulating policies, the parties have access to various resources. Those used most often are public opinion polls and surveys conducted by other organizations. The SMK also carries out surveys among its own members. Parties tend to use external sources that are commonly accessible, rather than sources that they themselves have commissioned.

The parties differ as to how they hold the leadership accountable for failing to follow policy decisions. In some cases (ANO, HZDS and Smer), leaders may be removed from office at a party Congress. In the KDH, the procedure depends on the kind of elections, which means at the level of party representation. Since the Chair and Vice-chairs are elected by the Congress, they are answerable to it. The KDH presidency is accountable to the party's National Board, while the Chairs of the regional boards are accountable to their own boards. The Chair of a district centre answers to the district board, and the Chair of a club is accountable to a meeting of its members. Each political body decides on the sanctions applied in the event that party policy decisions are not followed. They can remove the offending member from office. As regards breaches of ethical and moral principles, sanctions are applied in line with party statutes.

Membership

There are three basic models of membership fees:

- the fee depends on a member's position in the party, and thus (often under informal rules) members at higher levels are expected to pay a higher fee (ANO, HZDS and SMK);
- the fee is a fixed amount covered by specific rules. In KDH the amount is SKK 100, depending on a member's position in the party, and the recommended amount is 0.5 per cent of total income. In the SDKU the amount is at least SKK 300, or SKK 100 for pensioners and students; and
- voluntary contributions (Smer).

Table 2. Number of party members

Party	Members	% of women	Trend
ANO	6,000	40%	Increasing
HZDS	No response.		
KSS	21,500. Paying members: 16,500.	The share among all party members is about 15%, and among newcomers it is 20%.	Constant increase.
KDH	20,000 (December 2004).	About 30%.	The number of members is rather stable and fluctuates between 20,000 and 25,000.
SDKÚ	In 2002, the party had about 6,000 members. It currently has about 5,000.	About 30%.	The bulk of members were excluded because they did not pay membership fees.
Smer	About 7,000 in Smer. About 15, 000 in Smer + affiliated organizations (SDL, SDSS and SDA.		

As regards members' rights, party representatives most often referred to voting rights. Their main responsibility is adherence to the party's statutes. If a member breaches party rules, the party may decide on expulsion.

Parties use a broad range of methods to communicate with their members, including personal correspondence, meetings and public websites. They do not have formal and written guidelines regulating how party members can express their views on party matters. The members usually voice their opinions at meetings of party bodies, the minutes of which are submitted to the higher bodies.

Electoral activity: candidates

The parties differ in their rules for recruiting and selecting candidates to Chamber 1 of the national legislature. In principle the process is bottom-up, from the district and local organizations to the upper level of the party organization. The Congress, presidency, nomination congress or other senior body has final approval of candidates for parliamentary elections. Only the SDKU holds primaries.

- ANO: the nomination and approval of candidates passes from the basic organizations through district and regional organizations to the Congress, which takes the final decision.
- HZDS: candidates are nominated by district structures. All party members can put forward a candidate. Candidates are finally approved by a regional nomination congress.
- KDH: candidates are nominated by delegates to the Congress. Usually, the presidency nominates a candidate who is subsequently approved by the Board and elected by the Congress.
- KSS: the selection process moves upwards from the lowest level of meetings of branch organizations, through district and regional committees, to the party's national-level body. The national conference makes a final selection of candidates.
- SDKU: parliamentary candidates are elected in party primaries. They and the leader on the candidates list are elected separately; the party leader does not necessarily have to be leader on the list.
- Smer: the party leadership decides on the parliamentary candidates.
- SMK: candidates are partly nominated by district conferences and partly by the party's national presidency. The National Board approves the nominations and decides on the order in which names appear on the list of candidates.

The parties use a plurality-majority electoral system to elect or select their candidates. There are no legally binding quotas but several parties use informal quotas, especially for the representation of women.

Table 3. Quotas voluntarily adopted by the parties

Party	Women	Youths	Other groups
ANO	Informal: one third.	No quota.	No quota.
HZDS	The party and all its bodies are required to ensure parity when placing candidates on a list.	About a third. Once a year, the Secretary General submits a report on the position of young people in the party, as well as in society, to the party's managing board.	
KSS	At least one woman must be placed among the eight leading candidates—that is, in an electable place on the list.	At least one young candidate (under 30) must be placed among the eight leading candidates—that is, in an electable place on the list.	
KDH	No quota, but the party tries to ensure that a third of its candidates are women.	No quota. Young members of the party are placed in electable positions on the list.	Customary law, regional quotas. (Other groups are taken into account).
SDKÚ	No quota.	Party youth organization (Young Generation) nominates a portion of the candidates.	No quota.
Smer	No quota.	Competition for a parliamentary position, 2001 and 2002.	
SMK	No quota.	No quota.	No quota.

Electoral activity: campaigns

The parties have different means of developing and approving their election manifestos. In many cases there is close cooperation between party headquarter and experts. In the ANO, the manifesto is developed on various levels. Individual expert groups prepare a draft that is subsequently examined by the party presidency and finally approved by the National Board and Congress. The campaign strategy is developed by an election team. The HZDS manifesto is drawn up in line with resolutions of the People's Party (PS)-HZDS bodies: the central election team, in conjunction with the PS-HZDS Board and structures, develops a draft manifesto that is approved by the Congress. A central election team develops the principles of the campaign strategy and operational plan.

In the KSS, the manifesto is prepared by a group of experts at party headquarters. The draft is sent in advance to branch organizations, which make comments and send them to district headquarters. The regional headquarters collect the input from the grassroots and channel it to the Central Committee, which includes representatives of all districts. The Committee discusses the comments and, by vote, agrees on the priorities and principles of the election programme with which the party will contest elections. Once a manifesto is adopted, it always defines a strategy. The strategy includes meetings with citizens, targeting certain groups and taking account of possible cooperation with other parties. Depending on its financial constraints, the party may later target other groups through propaganda using leaflets, billboards, and radio and television broadcasts.

The KDH board approves the principles of the manifesto, on which all party members can comment, and the manifesto is developed on that basis. It is often approved half a year before the elections. Subsequently, representatives of individual departments are invited to comment, as are individuals from outside the party. Normally the presidency appoints the electoral team (the only requirement for team membership is being a party member), which is entrusted with developing a strategy. Provided that the presidency approves the strategy, the election team manages the whole campaign.

In the SDKÚ, individual expert party sections develop a manifesto before parliamentary elections, and the draft is approved at the party programme conference. A central election team devises the campaign strategy.

The Smer manifesto is developed in the party's shadow cabinet and other expert sections. It is subsequently adopted by the party's political structures and finally approved by the Congress. The campaign strategy is developed by an election team and approved by the Congress.

The SMK's national presidency develops the main issues on the party's manifesto and the draft is prepared by expert commissions. Regional branches and party members are asked to comment on the draft, which is subsequently approved by the Congress. An election team prepares the operational schedule.

The parties' external relations

Table 4. International links

Party	International networks	Contacts with sister parties
ANO	The Liberal International; the European Liberal, Democratic and Reform Party (ELDR).	The party maintains contacts with European liberal parties such as Germany's Free Democratic Party (FDP), the Liberal Democrats of the Netherlands, Venstre in Denmark, Democraten 66 of the Netherlands, Libra of Croatia, Irad and the LDV of Italy.
HZDS	In 1999, the party submitted an application for membership of the European Democratic Union (EDU) but it is not yet a member.	The People's Party (Austria); the Civic Democrats (ODS) and Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (KDU-ČSL) (Czech Republic); Partido Popular (Spain); Forza Italia (Italy); Motherland Party (Turkey); Swedish People's Party (the party of the Swedish minority in Finland); Moderate Party (Sweden); Conservative and People's Parties (Denmark); Fine Gael (Ireland); the Polish Peasant Party (PSL); and the Christian Social Union (CSU) (Germany).
KSS	The United European Left, an association of Marxist political parties headquartered in Rome and Paris.	The KSS maintains contacts with 143 parties, and has concluded cooperation agreements with 21 of them. Its closest partner is the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM) in the Czech Republic.
KDH	The European People Party (EPP); the Christian Democratic International (CDI); the EDU; and the International Democratic Union (IDU).	With KDU-ČSL (Czech Republic); the Civic Democratic Party (ODS) of the Czech Republic; the Austrian People's Party (VPÖ); and the CSU/CDU of Germany.
SDKÚ	The CDI.	Maintains contacts with all parties associated with the Christian-Democratic International (EPP-CDI).
Smer	The Socialist International and the Party of European Socialists in the EP.	The Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD); the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPO); the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD); the Labour Party (UK); and the Hungarian Socialist Party (MSZP).
SMK	The EPP.	With parties associated with the EPP.

All political parties designate voting members of the Election Management Body.

Funding

Funding is one of the most sensitive issues for the parties. Several legal provisions are designed to make funding transparent, but some doubtful cases are evident. As regards the means used to make regular financial reports, the ANO publishes reports on the party's website. The HZDS does so in accordance with legal provisions. The KSS publishes reports on its website, in the internal party newsletter and, when possible, by means of public statements in the media. The KDH publishes its financial report on its website after the report has been delivered to Parliament and to the Financial Committee. The SDKÚ's financial reporting is done in accordance with the law on political parties, and is published on the party's website. Smer publishes its annual financial reports on its website at the same time as they are delivered to the Ministry of Finance and to the National Council. No information is available for the SMK.

Challenges and Opportunities

The most pressing issues facing the parties: are (i) overcoming the under-representation of some groups (especially women), probably by introducing special quotas; (ii) improving the currently insufficient regulation of party representatives' ethical behaviour by including codes of conduct in internal party regulations; and (iii) increasing the level of professionalism in the work of party structures.