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THE AMBIVALENT INFLUENCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION ON DEMOCRATIZATION IN SLOVAKIA

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During the 1998 parliamentary election campaign in Slovakia, an animated television commercial used by the leader of the country's governing coalition featured a scene of gold stars on a deep blue closely resembling the flag of the European Union. The image was not a positive one, however. In the animation, lines quickly appear between the stars, revealing the constellation of Leo the lion, which lashes out at passing Slovak children but fails to anticipate their clever evasion. Although the attitudes of Slovakia's population did not differ dramatically from those of neighboring democratic success stories such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, the behavior of Slovakia's institutions did differ sharply. The differences involved not only Slovakia's apparent turn away from democracy during the mid-1990's but also the tense relationship between the government and the EU. Thus, the EU's role in Slovakia's reluctant democratization deserves particularly close attention, as it offers insight into what the EU (and other international actors) can and cannot accomplish in their democratization efforts, and particularly into the unintended consequences of international factors on domestic political life.

This chapter looks briefly at the course of Slovakia's democratization and then at the public efforts made by the European Union during the same period. It then traces the connection between its efforts at the elite and mass levels and the response by the Slovak government. The analysis demonstrates that the EU faced significant barriers in its attempt to encourage the democratization of the 1994-1998 government of Vladimir Meciar. Despite its active presence–and claims made for the success of its efforts—the EU did not play an indispensable part in the electoral success of Slovakia's opposition in 1998. Nor, however, did its criticism of Slovakia's democratization prove ultimately counterproductive. There is little evidence to support charges that EU criticism actually helped the Meciar government gain support from those who were outraged by EU "meddling."

Political developments in Central and Eastern Europe during the era of Gorbachev in the Soviet Union provide ample evidence that democratization may depend heavily on what happens elsewhere. Once external barriers that inhibit democracy have disappeared, however, the question that remains is the effectiveness of external incentives for democracy that will actively encourage its formation. Without waiting for a rigorously tested answer, Western governments and international institutions made the plausible assumptions that such incentives would work without great difficulties and greeted the incipient democratization in Central and Eastern Europe with an outpouring of advice and, in some cases, money. Ten years later, it is possible to begin a more thorough and sober assessment and to draw certain conclusions.

The initial chapter in this volume offers a framework for analyzing the role of external actors–particularly the European Union–in promoting democratization. Kubicek focuses on two processes: convergence, defined as "the spread of international norms"; and conditionality, defined as "the linking of perceived benefits to the fulfillment of a certain program."[1] The first of these is a largely cultural mechanism and involves a shift in values, while the second is primarily structural and involves weighing of costs and benefits. The remainder of this chapter will analyze Slovakia's democratization in the context of these two processes, looking in particular at the domestic conditions faced by the EU in its attempts to promote democracy and the mixed success of its efforts. Before looking at the efforts of the EU, however, it is necessary to understand exactly how Slovakia's development between 1992 and the present and the extent to which internal factors can explain its unique course of development.

SLOVAKIA'S DEMOCRATIC ARC

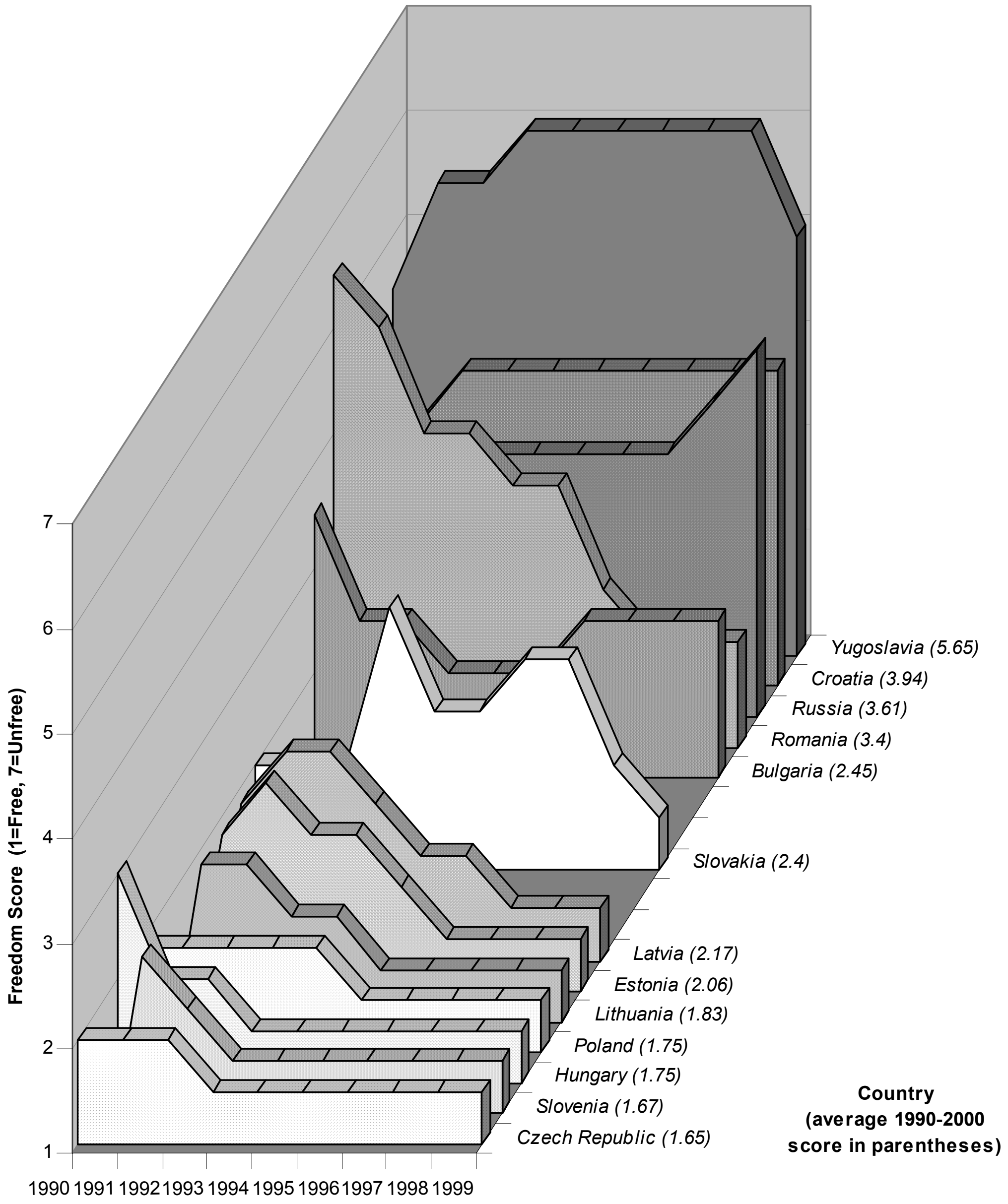
Slovakia is unique among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the pattern of its political development. During the period from 1990 through 2002, few countries experienced a decline in political freedom as significant and enduring as Slovakia, and none with that experience experienced such a rapid restoration. In Figure 1, which shows Freedom House scores for most countries in Central and Eastern Europe between 1990 and 2000, Slovakia literally stands out from its neighbors. Slovakia's Freedom House score shows a level of "unfreedom" for 1996 and 1997 greater than that of Romania and Bulgaria and surpassed only by countries such as Russia, Croatia and Yugoslavia. Yet by 1999 Slovakia's score had returned to the same level as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary. [2] What accounts for this arc?

The Institutional Answer

It is not a coincidence that the two periods of increasing threats to democratic freedoms coincide exactly with the 1992-1994 and 1994-1998 governments led by the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) chaired by Vladimir Meciar. A series of analyses of Meciar's governments in comparison to those that preceded and followed them indicate that Slovakia's problems with democracy stem almost entirely from systematic efforts to dismantle externally imposed restraints on the power of government and parliament. Furthermore, this destruction of what O'Donnell refers to as horizontal accountability can be traced almost entirely to the initiative of Meciar or one of his immediate subordinates.[3]

The first and second Meciar governments hinted at the possibility of institutional encroachment but did not take significant steps in that direction. In 1990 and 1991 Meciar fought for control within the anti-communist movement Public Against Violence (VPN), earning a reputation for aggressiveness[4] and ultimately provoking a split within the movement, but his intra-party struggles did not immediately threaten rival institutions. In his second government, which lasted from June 1992 until April 1994, Meciar raised concern among observers, but their comments focused on his "authoritarian style" rather than concrete encroachments and focused on *anticipated* rather than actual problems.[5] Actual institutional interference by the Meciar government remained confined largely to state-owned media, universities and privatization schemes.[6] Although occurring in sensitive areas, these encroachments remained limited, and Meciar's

Figure 3.1. Freedom House Civil Liberties Scores for Selected Central and Eastern European Countries, 1990-2000



Source: Freedom House, 'Freedom in the World Country Ratings 1972-73 to 2000-01' [Computer File], at http://www.freedomhouse.org/research/freeworld/FHSCORES.xls, last accessed 8 November 2002.

government lost as many conflicts as it won. Meciar's second government did extend its grasp in 1994, particularly in the realm of privatization, but by then the party had already lost its parliamentary majority and the strong possibility of a vote of no confidence.

Government encroachments on rival institutions in Slovakia ended almost immediately with the vote of no confidence that ended the second Meciar government in March 1994. The government that followed, a wide coalition including Christian Democrats, former Communists and former prominent politicians from Meciar's own party, reversed some of the decisions of its predecessor and did not pursue sustained attacks against its rivals.[7] This government, however, chose immediately to call new elections, and Meciar's party performed well, returning to parliament in October with a parliamentary delegation three times the size of its nearest rival. By November, Meciar had found two relatively docile coalition partners in the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS). It is this government, Meciar's third, from December 1994 until October 1998, that posed the greatest threat to Slovakia's democracy. Meciar's "siege" on Slovakia's democracy[8] did not happen all at once, however, and the way the accountability violations progressed through four distinct states offers vital insight into the mechanisms that made Meciar's encroachments possible and appropriate EU responses difficult.

Stage I: Maximum use of legislative and executive prerogative

Politics in Slovakia changed abruptly after the 1994 parliamentary elections. Just over a month after the election, deputies from Meciar's (HZDS) joined with deputies from the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS) to create an *ad hoc* majority and used it to solidify the position of those three parties within parliament and other political structures. During twenty-three hours of parliamentary sessions that began on 3 November 1994 and continued until the following morning, parliament took advantage of the full range of its legal powers—including legal loopholes—to place members of the HZDS, SNS and ZRS in the maximum number of legislative, executive and administrative positions. In the following two years, the third

Meciar government reinforced its gains with the occupation of virtually every position within its immediate purview.

In some respects the third Meciar government merely followed a pattern that is customary in democracies, placing trusted supporters in key legislative and executive positions. But its efforts went far beyond the still-weakly-defined precedent of its predecessors in office to deliberately eliminate the potential for independent monitoring and thereby sever ties of horizontal accountability. Although the changes did not in most cases violate Slovakia's still emerging legal structures, they altered the balance of political power within Slovakia's political system, and edged across the line between effective administration and accountability violation. With a stable majority in parliament and without the fear of obstruction from independent monitors, the coalition faced no immediate barriers against the use of executive agencies for its own benefit, particularly in the sensitive areas of privatization, broadcast media, and intelligence. Through its initial efforts in parliament and government the coalition acquired largely unchallenged access to substantial sums of money, to mass media and to the more shadowy advantages available through espionage.

Having acquired this access, the coalition did not hesitate to use it. Unencumbered by oversight mechanisms, the majority coalition used the Fund of National Property to take "unambiguous control over the privatization process" and to institute "a system of patronage in which the benefits flow to the politically connected."[9] Likewise, the absence of review allowed Slovakia's public broadcasting to tilt strongly in favor of the coalition[10] and gave free rein to the Slovak Information Service. In each of these cases and in the other changes detailed above, the elimination of accountability served not only immediate needs—the desire for retribution, rewards for supporters, increased cohesion and loyalty within the executive—but also established the conditions for further violations of accountability and a further tilting of the institutional balance. Control of privatization provided a source of funds for fending off future election challenges. Control of broadcast media provided a means for limiting criticism and reframing issues in ways that favored the coalition. Control of SIS provided a direct means for close observation opponents and, when necessary, for intimidation. Through these means and others at hand the coalition moved beyond its nearly complete control over parliament and government institutions to put pressure other institutions that were not formally within its reach.

Stage II: Attacks against institutions with accountability potential

Having taken strong control of those institutions closest at hand, the majority coalition in Slovakia sought to maximize its influence over institutions outside of its constitutional scope. The coalition devoted the largest share of these efforts toward institutions with the potential for demanding the rudiments of accountability: explanation, justification and punishment. The targeted institutions included the presidency, the parliamentary opposition, and the constitutional court.

Since a simple parliamentary majority did not suffice to free the majority coalition from the oversight of the president or from other constitutionally imposed limitations, the coalition faced a substantial barrier. Constitutional laws required the support of three fifths of parliament's deputies (90 of 150), and the coalition at its most disciplined fell well short. In response the coalition pursued a twin-pronged strategy, simultaneously striving for a constitutional majority by excluding rival parties while also pursuing alternative mechanisms outside of the constitutional realm and in some cases outside of the ordinary political realm.

The third Meciar government immediately set to work to remove Michal Kovac from the presidency. When it failed to attract a constitutional majority for Kovac's ouster, it used normal legislative means to limit sharply his powers and prerogatives. Furthermore, evidence strongly suggests that officials in the Meciar government sought to incapacitate Kovac—or even to force his resignation—by engineering the abduction of his son.[11]

Between early 1995 and the end of the parliamentary term in 1998 the coalition also took a series of steps to discredit and ultimately to expel its opponents in parliament. These efforts began with members of the opposition parties in parliament but expanded to include deputies who threatened to break away from the majority coalition. At the same time that it was fighting to free itself of constitutional limitations, the coalition was also fighting a rear-guard action to maintain its majority in parliament. The defections of parliamentary deputies from the ruling coalition produced a strong reaction that led to their exclusion by parliamentary fiat without regard for clear constitutional and legal protections for their positions.

The third Meciar government refrained from direct action against the Constitutional Court until late in its term. The question whether the defecting deputies should have their positions restored appears to have tipped the balance between the costs of defying the popular Constitutional Court and the cost of preventing deputies from defecting. In order to maintain party discipline and avoid accountability to their own deputies, the coalition parties accepted the risk of open rejection of their accountability to the court.

While all of the above institutional encroachments succeeded in releasing the majority coalition from certain important external restraints, they did not achieve the sweeping success that marked the earlier efforts. Despite the limitations and intimidation, Michal Kovac served out his full term as Slovakia's president, and the opposition remained coherent enough to deny the coalition a constitutional majority. Furthermore, the accountability violations began to incur costs of their own. Whereas the coalition's initial efforts within the parliamentary and governmental spheres did not provoke anger beyond the narrow range of staunch opposition supporters, attacks on the president and parliamentary deputies exposed the coalition to negative public scrutiny. The kidnapping and bombings aimed at coalition opponents raised awkward questions that required police investigation. The expulsions of disloyal deputies required increasingly obvious departures from parliamentary procedure and common sense and forced the coalition into serious conflict with the respected constitutional court.

Stage III: Limiting institutional accountability for the attacks of stage II

In subsequent stages, the attacks on accountability became almost exclusively defensive, as the coalition sought to avoid or undo the consequences of previous encroachments. The dramatic increase in politically related violence in Slovakia in 1995 and 1996 produced a series of investigations by police and prosecutors. The failure of these investigations to produce even a single formal indictment suggests glaring weaknesses in Slovakia's law enforcement, weaknesses that resulted from political interference rather than professional incompetence.

Rather than face responsibility for the kidnapping of the president's son, the coalition became increasingly involved in the previously inviolate sphere of criminal investigation and prosecution. Ministers and prosecutors appointed by the majority coalition removed investigators at the behest of fellow government appointees who were themselves under investigation. The process stopped only when the newly appointed investigators could not or would not perform a detailed investigation. In many cases the coalition did not even conceal the process of seeking out favorable investigators, though at other times it justified the changes on the basis of political bias, opportunism, lack of competence and other failings.[12] Attempts to block public revelation of details through non-official channels also apparently led to further involvement by Slovakia's intelligence service–including the car-bomb death of a key witness's associate–which in turn led to further politically influenced investigations.

In its fear of future changes in government, the coalition also sought to avoid accountability through the use of blanket grants of amnesty, a power that devolved to the prime minister at the end of Kovac's term in early 1998. All of these efforts proved successful to the extent that they prevented the indictment and trial of coalition employees, but they did not add to the coalition's political resources or release it from any restraints that were not of its own making. If anything, the need to avoid prosecution forced the coalition to show its hand and reveal that the absence of accountability mechanisms extended as far as the police and prosecutors.

Stage IV: Limiting accountability to voters

For the first two-thirds of its parliamentary term, the HZDS-led majority coalition in Slovakia confined its efforts to undermining horizontal and stayed clear of direct interference with electoral institutions. Earlier efforts to deputies of rival parties and its own defecting members had edged in this direction, but not until 1997 did the coalition look to undermine future elections. In the spring of that year the coalition illegally altered a referendum ballot to avoid losing an important vote. In the summer of the following year the coalition passed a revised electoral law. Although less questionable from a constitutional standpoint than the alteration of the referendum, the electoral law amendment created disproportionately high barriers for the opposition parties.

These coalition actions during its second two years in office demonstrate its increasing awareness that its limit extended beyond mere institutional checks and balances into the electorate. The coalition responded to falling popularity not only by engaging in public appeals but also by changing the rules that transform public opinion into political outcomes. By altering a referendum ballot on the thinnest of pretenses, the coalition admitted its impending defeat. By tailoring an election law to penalize the opposition, the coalition revealed its anxiety that coming elections might bring a change of government (and by granting amnesty in cases that had already been closed, the government further protected itself from such a change). In 1997 and 1998, Slovakia's majority coalition branched out from its encroachments on horizontal accountability to undercut vertical accountability as well.[13]

These violations of vertical accountability required prior violations of horizontal accountability. The referendum alteration depended on prior, unrestricted control of the Interior Ministry and confidence in its ability to avoid any subsequent attempts at prosecution. As with the abductions and other encroachments, the referendum alteration forced the Meciar government into a repetition of horizontal accountability violations described above including abrupt shifts in official responsibilities, neglect of Constitutional Court decisions, pressure on prosecutors and judges, and sweeping amnesties. These efforts and the electoral law changes both followed in the coalition's pattern of regarding external accountability as an obstacle to be avoided, whether through legislation or through more complicated use and misuse of other mechanisms under coalition control.

Reversal

Meciar's efforts to restrict voter choice had only limited effect in the parliamentary election of 1998, and thanks in part to a unified strategy by key opposition parties and a significant voter turnout drive by opposition parties and other organizations, HZDS found itself with only 29% of seats in parliament and without a realistic chance of finding coalition partners who would provided the remainder. The new government, led by Mikulas Dzurinda of the Slovak Democratic Coalition took immediate steps to restore most of the institutional barriers that had been eliminated by Meciar, reverting to proportionality in committee and oversight appointments, creating a directly elected presidency, and otherwise refraining from the sort of attacks on rival institutions that had been common in the previous government. Although certain coalition representatives proved susceptible to embezzlement and other forms of clientelism and corruption, the coalition did not over time renew Meciar's strategy of institutional encroachment.

THE CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

Vladimir Meciar played a central role in the course of Slovakia's political development, but political parties and their leaders do appear from nowhere or and do not stay in power without public support. Meciar, for his part, remained Slovakia's most popular politician for the entire decade of the 1990s. Analyses of Slovakia's democratic decline in the mid-1990s frequently explain see Meciar not as an explanation but as an "explanandum," the product of a "traditional"[14] and "nationalist-authoritarian" political culture.[15] Such claims broaden the explanation of Slovakia's democratic decline and recovery, linking the contingent decisions of particular leaders to deeper cultural and structural factors.

The role of such factors in creating the framework for political decisions is undeniable, yet the application of most cultural and structural factors to Slovakia has been unsatisfying. It is unlikely that the increasingly wide oscillations in accountability from one government to the next have resulted from corresponding shifts in Slovak values about democracy. Furthermore, even before the most recent shift toward accountable, democratic government, it had become apparent that overall levels of support for democracy in Slovakia differed little from levels in states such as the Czech Republic, Poland or Hungary that experienced far fewer difficulties with democratic consolidation.[16] To the extent that cultural and structural arguments do help to explain Slovakia's problematic democratization, the mechanisms are indirect and far more complicated.

Surveys of public opinion in Slovakia and the Czech Republic help to explain the relationship between culture and institutions. These surveys show that while the distribution of opinions of Slovaks and Czechs on questions of democracy remained nearly identical during the 1990s, the relationship between responses on such questions and political party preference increased more dramatically in Slovakia than in the Czech Republic, to the point that Slovakia's political party spectrum could be described almost exclusively in terms of the democratic values of party supporters.[17] Thus the institutional problems discussed above had their roots not in a fundamental difference between the average Slovak and the average Czech–or Hungarians or Poles–but rather in a fundamental difference in the types of values that determined Slovaks' political choices.

THE LIMITS OF CONVERGENCE

Of the factors affecting democracy promotion, the only ones that depend most heavily on the underlying values of the democratizing country are the aspects of democratic convergence that Kubicek identifies in the first chapter of this volume as novelty and proximity (or what he callas "cultural match"). Under the heading of novelty, Kubicek notes that the process of liberalization and democratic transition can produce new circumstances that may either favor or retard adoption of democratic norms from abroad.

On one hand, rapid or far reaching political change may produce an environment of uncertainty in which both new political elites and mass publics look abroad for new normative systems that make sense of their new circumstances. On the other hand, change that involves creation of altogether new states may lead to a search for national legitimacy that elevates domestic norms (e.g. nationalism) at the expense of those proffered by democracy promoters (e.g. political liberalization). Kubicek also notes the role of proximity, arguing that the more the norms of the democratizing state resemble those of the would-be democracy promoter, the fewer barriers will emerge to acceptance of democratic norms. Within the realm of political norms, this statement seems too obvious even to mention, but the notion extends as well to other realms. Thus significantly different norms in such areas as gender roles, wealth distribution, or national identity may hamper the democratizing country's reception of external norms about democracy as well.

In Slovakia novelty and proximity are closely related and play a significant, if not determining role in affecting the influence of the European Union. While abrupt change may leave populations and elites in democratizing countries in need of new frameworks for understanding and open to models imported from abroad, abrupt changes that include the creation of a new state may work in the opposite direction by compelling a reliance on homegrown models. Slovakia faced both impulses at the same time. Surveys of masses and elites in both republics of Czechoslovakia show an almost immediate and widespread embrace of western models of politics and economics.[18] Enthusiasm for such models subsided over time in both republics but only after both populations had internalized to a strong degree the messages they received early on about need for democracy and markets.[19]

Slovaks, however, differed from their Czech counterparts in one important respect: the cultural and political implications of national identity. Although the responses of Slovaks and Czechs on survey questions using generic references to nationalism, national pride, and patriotism show almost identical results, more specific questions about the meaning of those concepts reveals significant differences. Although Czechs endorse nationalism just as strongly as Slovaks, their understanding of the term shows significantly less connection to specific grievances and anxieties[20] and the same pattern appears in analysis of the differences in the rhetoric of public figures in the two countries.[21] The political success in Slovakia of leaders who emphasized the insecurity and injury aspects of nationhood had no significant analog in the Czech Republic. Among a particular segment of Slovakia's political leaders, both before and after independence, the emphasis on Slovak-ness became a dominant theme, first in distinction to Czech or Czechoslovak influences and later in distinction to influences from the West. In this respect the novelty and proximity factors of convergence become identical: while Slovaks overall were no less likely to value democracy than Czechs, Poles or Hungarians, perceived differences between Slovakia and the EU regarding the value and meaning of national identity may have caused some Slovaks to regard the EU as tainted by anti-national cosmopolitanism and therefore to disregard its other messages as well. It is quite clear from Slovakia's press that certain prominent figures in Slovakia's political elite came by the mid-1990s to regard Western support for specific efforts at democratization as sufficient reason to reject such ideas. Within the population as a whole, these notions have a faint reflection in the slightly stronger belief among Slovaks than Czechs that "We have a good sense of democracy and do not need outside help" and the stronger correlation between this belief and trust in the European Union.[22]

At their strongest, however, questions of proximity and state-building novelty can account for the beliefs of only a small segment of Slovakia's political elite and relatively minor differences in public opinion. Without the other more visible and institutional differences between Slovakia and democratizing countries within the range of EU efforts, such factors would scarcely be noticeable. It is important, therefore, to turn to those questions of convergence and conditionality where the form and content of EU efforts did play a significant role. To do so, however, requires a closer examination of EU democracy promotion in Slovakia during the 1990s.

THE DIPLOMATIC GAME

At the outset of the 1990s, the EU's efforts at democracy promotion in Slovakia did not differ meaningfully from its efforts in any other Central European country. Only as the course of Slovak politics changed did the EU policy toward Slovakia diverge from its efforts elsewhere in the region. As Slovakia fell short of EU democracy standards, EU officials became increasingly clear about the possibility of imposing its most severe sanction: exclusion from the Union. Even in the face of these threats, Slovakia's government offered little but reassurance and cosmetic change.

Responding to Meciar

Between Slovakia's independence and the final months of 1994, EU officials behaved toward Slovakia as they did toward the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, offering encouragement in the creation of a market economy and the consolidation of democracy, and funding various initiatives through funds such as PHARE and TACIS. EU representatives expressed occasional concern about the activities of the second Meciar government, but these remained muted. It was not until the first stage of accountability violations described above that EU efforts in Slovakia began to diverge from efforts in neighboring countries, but from November 1994, each new stage of institutional encroachments by the third Meciar government led to a wave of EU responses. In each new wave–each, coincidentally, beginning in the final months of the year—the rhetoric of EU officials became sharper and the conditional relationship between the call for political reforms and the offer of EU membership became more explicit.

The process of escalation began in November 1994 with an EU expression of concern about the direction of Slovakia's political direction in the form of a demarche delivered by the French and German ambassadors. The demarche expressed a series of hopes for the new Slovak government and alluded to concerns about the status of Slovakia's Hungarian minority and "alarm" about "political developments since elections,"[23] which later clarification revealed to mean the coalition's immediate and full use of all legislative prerogatives available to it.[24] The areas of concern defined in the demarche, however, did not prevent the EU from ratifying an Association Agreement with Slovakia and accepting

Slovakia as an Associate Member in early 1995. Nor did the EU refuse the application for full membership that Slovakia submitted in June 1995.

Yet by the time Slovakia submitted its application, EU officials had begun to express further concerns regarding the third Meciar government's use of its prerogatives to limit rival bodies. Tensions rose during summer and fall as such efforts expanded to include outright attacks on rival parliamentary parties and the president and, apparently, the abduction of the president's son. By November of 1995, range of the government's accountability violations were the subject of both a resolution by the European Parliament and demarches by both the EU and the United States. In this second round, the demarches presented a more specific set of concerns. Most of these related directly to the government's accountability violations, including: the "the possibility that actions could be taken against the president of the Republic that would not be in conformity with the Constitution" and "difficulties encountered by nongovernmental organizations and bodies in the performance of their work."[25] Reflecting the stronger sentiments of the new demarche were a series of strongly-worded follow-up comments by EU Commissioner for Foreign Relation Hans Van den Broek, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, EU Commission Chair Jacques Santer, and the Co-Chair of the Joint Parliamentary Committee between the EU Herbert Bosch. These statements included warnings that Slovakia could fall from its position among the prime candidates for integration and called a series of institutional changes including the scrapping of revisions to Slovakia's criminal code, the enactment of formal guidelines governing minority languages, and the introduction of opposition representatives on a variety of parliamentary committees and oversight bodies.[26]

In December 1996, the European Parliament reacted to the exclusion from Slovakia's parliament of an MP who had resigned from HZDS with rapid passage of a sharply worded resolution. The statement not only called for the reinstatement of the deputy and an investigation of an explosion at his house but also notified the Slovak Government "that respecting basic democratic principles, including exercising parliamentary mandates, is a precondition for EU entry and for preserving cooperation with the

European Union."[27] Six months later, in 1997 as the EU Commission finalized its report on EU membership applications, EU officials including Bosch and Van den Broek reiterated what appeared to be final warnings[28] about the steps that Slovakia would need to take in order to receive a positive recommendation. Slovakia's government did not pursue any of these suggestions and the EU Commission report issued in August 1997 recommended against Slovakia's admission.

The Commission's recommendations still required the vote of the European Council in its December 1997 Luxembourg Summit, and officials of the EU and its member states spent the last half of the year in repeated efforts to convince the Slovak government that an invitation to membership was still possible and that it required only the reversal of certain (not all) institutional encroachments made during the previous two years. Again, Bosch delivered the familiar set of conditions:

> Key changes which should be made by Slovakia, according to him, are to bolster the stability of the operations of democratic institutions and to allow the opposition to be represented on supervisory bodies and parliamentary committee boards, the resolution of the [expelled deputy] case, and the adoption of the act on the use of ethnic minority languages. Bosch reasserted that the European Parliament would highly value such positive changes and quickly respond. Time for changes is still here.[29]

Again a multitude of high level officials from the EU and its member states repeated the conditions with increasingly visible exasperation. Both the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Luxembourg, which at the time held the presidency of the European Council, offered Slovakia the chance of an invitation in exchange for political change. In personal visits EU commissioner Van den Broek, the Danish Foreign Minister, and the Chair of the Swedish Parliament delivered the same message. The Slovak government arranged a brief rapprochement between Prime Minister Meciar and President Kovac, who wrote a joint letter affirming Slovakia's commitment to integration, but Slovakia's parliament took no action in the specific areas of concern except to make matters worse. In November 1997 the European Parliament called on the European Council to reject Slovakia's membership bid, and in its December meeting the Council announced that formal membership talks would include only the Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary and Poland.

During the first half of 1998, EU officials repeated the calls for political change but with visibly reduced expectations about their effectiveness, and EU efforts in Slovakia shifted to the electoral arena, a realm discussed below. The September 1998 parliamentary elections made it impossible for Meciar to maintain a parliamentary majority and allowed the formation of a new government under the leadership of Mikulas Dzurinda, who began immediately to act upon the EU recommendations? EU officials reacted with cautious optimism. The European Parliament, which had been quick to criticize the Meciar government, proved equally quick to praise Dzurinda's efforts, and by December of 1998, Joint Parliamentary Committee Co-Chair Bosch announced that "The basic obstacles preventing Slovakia from integrating into the European Union (EU) have been removed."[30] By March of 1999 the more cautious EU commission also had noted "great progress"[31] and in July of 1999 the French Ambassador stated that Slovakia had removed met all political preconditions for accession.[32] In December of 1999, little more than a year after the Dzurinda government took office, the European Council in its Helsinki session voted to begin membership talks with Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and Slovakia.

Meciar's non-response

As the EU became increasingly insistent and specifically in its conditions for accepting Slovakia's membership bid, Slovakia's government became increasingly intransigent. The third Meciar government never demonstrated itself to be particularly responsive to EU concerns, but the level of its responsiveness clearly deteriorated over time. When the first EU demarche arrived in the wake of the first stage of encroachments, Meciar publicly rejected the notion that it required any political change:

> There is nothing to comment on. The demarche is positive. It recognizes the democratic results of elections in Slovakia, expresses the view that the course on which Slovakia has embarked will continue, and speaks about minority rights.

> That is all. Basically, all of the negative fuss about the EU's coming to the rescue of those who lost the elections or those who are now infamously leaving the government and begging us to let them go is nonsense. The contents of the demarche are not at all as they have been interpreted by the mass media. Nothing has happened.[33]

Yet within four months, the Meciar government had conducted a series of intense negotiations with Hungary that led to the signing of a treaty governing Slovakia-Hungary relations and the treatment of minorities that received praise from officials of EU-member states.[34] The second round of demarches produced a less conciliatory reaction from Meciar who sharply criticized the EU for threatening sanctions without seeking out both sides of the issue before again denying the existence of any problems:

> Naturally, we are interested in the integration into the European structures. We have declared our interest in it, and we are also meeting its requirements. Nobody, no resolution says that the Slovak Republic fails to fulfill anything or that we are lagging behind in the obligations we have accepted.[35]

The increasingly angry tone of Meciar's response had its counterpart in the unwillingness of his coalition to make political changes. Some pro-integration Slovak commentators praised the demarches for "positively influencing" Slovakia's parliament by dissuading the coalition from escalating its attacks on the president and the opposition, but even these observers noted that the changes were minor and, probably, temporary.[36] Indeed subsequent EU critiques proved strikingly ineffective. The increasingly specific lists of desired changes presented by Bosch and Van den Broek evoked a mix of indignation, denials and promises of change but resulted in no meaningful changes in policy. Nor did the awareness of EU oversight prevent further encroachments. Despite explicit warnings by EU officials that the conduct of the 1997 NATO referendum would influence the 1997 EU Commission report, the Meciar government nevertheless engaged in electoral manipulation. As EU officials were giving Slovakia final warnings before the 1997 Luxembourg summit, the government's parliamentary deputies voted in direct contravention of EU specific conditions to ignore the Constitutional Court. Even the government's last-minute promises to make appropriate changes eventually came to nothing, and even in its final days the it showed no signs of willingness to accommodate any outside demands.

THE LIMITS OF CONDITIONALITY

Explanations of obstinacy on the part of the Meciar government span a wide range, with some observers allowing for the possibility that the government misinterpreted signals and others suggesting that the government interpreted the signals only too correctly. The debate relates directly to the process of conditionality discussed by Kubicek in the first chapter of this volume. Kubicek argues that unlike convergence, conditionality concerns the provision of tangible incentives for the achievement of particular goals. Since the effectiveness of such conditions depends on clear standards, and since the "internalization of norms" does not lend itself to easy measurement, conditional efforts at democracy promotion most often focus on the creation of specific institutional structures and the achievement of other easily observable milestones. Kubicek notes that the effectiveness of conditionality in democracy promotion depends on three factors:

- *Benefit of the incentive*. Efforts that rely on a cost-benefit analysis by the democratizers must use incentives that have genuine value. In practical terms, the benefits (or the avoidance of sanction) must compensate adequately and within a reasonable time for the real costs of democratization faced by political leaders and their supporters. The size of benefit must also take into account the structure of opportunity costs faced by the democratizing country. The existence of alternative sources of international support that do not insist on political change may allow reluctant democratizers to reject the conditions of the democracy promoter at little cost.
- *Certainty of the incentive*. Promoters of democracy must offer reasonable have confidence that meeting its conditions will lead directly to the conferral of the promised benefit. Doubt about the ability or willingness of the democracy promoter to follow through on promises will undermine any incentive to meet conditions of democratization.
- *Clarity of the standards*. The conditions set for democratizing countries must be formulated in a manner that allows for a minimum of dispute regarding the

> success or failure of their efforts. The complexity of issues surrounding democratization makes this goal particularly difficult to achieve, and the question becomes particularly difficult in the case of "grey zone" democracies that exhibit some features of democracy but not others.

Officials in the third Meciar government argued implicitly that the failure of conditionality in the case of Slovakia must can be attributed to a lack of clarity in EU conditions for Slovakia that are alleged to have shifted over time and to have differed from those of other applicant countries.[37] Others suggest a possible lack of clarity regarding the likelihood of the sanctions. Samson argues that the leaders of the third Meciar government believed that Slovakia's geographical position made its inclusion inevitable and saw no credibility in threats that the country's acceptance depended on political reform.[38] As of 1997, this position even received support from Joint Parliamentary Commission Co-Chair Bosch who allowed that "The fact that [changes] have so far not been made may only show that the Slovak Cabinet had slightly underrated the message of the European Union's cautions and warnings on the need to carry them out."[39]

These arguments, however, hold greater explanatory value for the early years of the third Meciar government than they do for the period that followed. By mid-1997 the message of EU representatives was so specific and resolute that it is difficult to understand any misinterpretation. Not only did members of Slovakia's opposition correctly read the signals as early as 1995 (though the interpretation was also in their best political interest), but so also did at least one of the Meciar government's own foreign ministers, who explained his resignation as the result of government manipulation of the 1997 NATO referendum that "greatly limited" his ability to prepare Slovakia for EU and NATO accession.[40] To believe in the inevitability of Slovakia's accession even after the explicit 1997 report of the European Commission would have required a superhuman degree of faith (or incomprehension). If the lack of reform simply involved involuntary misunderstanding, then each successive demarche and EU exhortation should have had an ameliorative effect upon the government's behavior rather than the increasing hostility that actually emerged. Furthermore, these observations reflect upon the content of the EU's *public* messages to Slovakia. It is likely that in private discussions Van den Broek and Bosch were more rather than less explicit. Finally, Slovakia's eventual outright rejection by the 1997 Luxembourg council produced not an effort to recover lost ground but rather a series of additional accountability violations.

The clarity explanations thus require at least some additional points. In fact, a closer look at the value of incentives faced by the third Meciar government offers a sufficient explanation for its increasing hostility in the face of ever stronger and more specific EU conditions. Central to this supposition is the notion that Vladimir Meciar resolutely pursued the elimination of outside sources of accountability as his primary political goal. In-depth analysis indicates that although Meciar was capable of making tactical retreats, he never relinquished the goal of direct personal control of Slovakia's politics without restriction and was willing to take major–if not always well-considered–risks toward that end.[41] By the time the EU had become more insistent in its demands, the avoidance of accountability had gone beyond personal preference to political necessity. Meciar and his allies by then simply had too much to lose from permitting opposition representatives on oversight boards, from allowing party defection to go unpunished and from the loss of nationalist support that would result from passing a law on minority languages. EU membership still remained a government priority throughout this period, but the government was not willing to pursue it at the cost of the immediate political and economic rewards that resulted from Meciar's style of rule. As a result, the government first attempted to placate the EU with signs of good faith–such as the Slovak-Hungarian treaty–that did not interfere with the institutional encroachments at the core of its political livelihood. Over time, however, EU understanding of Slovakia's problems improved and its conditions zeroed in on precisely those accountability violations that lay at the heart of Meciar's political efforts. EU conditions ultimately failed to bring about political reform under the Meciar government, because its main incentive–membership–depended on the very condition–accountability–that Meciar sought most to avoid. The EU had nothing to offer Meciar to compensate for what it demanded from him. This is a key point, and one that the EU has run up against in other circumstances (e.g. Ukraine, Croatia). If the EU's objections go more to policies that can be amended (as in the case of Latvia) and less to personalities (or programs intrinsically associated with a personality), it may have more leverage. However, in the case of Slovakia the EU could offer Meciar little to push democratization ahead.

THE ELECTION GAME

In late 1997 an off-hand statement by Arie Oostlander, European Parliament Observer for the European Union Expansion, captured both the frustration of EU officials with Slovakia and the emergence of an alternative strategy. Oostlander told the Slovak Press Agency TASR that the EU resolution recommending against membership negotiations with Slovakia was a signal "that the current Government poses a barrier in the way to Europe," and added in a direct address to Slovakia's citizens, "Please, change either the opinion (that Slovakia seriously wants to join the EU) or change the government."[42] As early as 1995, EU institutions and EU member countries had begun to seek an alternative path to Slovakia's democratization, not by trying to overcome the overwhelming barriers raised by the third Meciar government, but rather by working with already receptive political forces within the opposition. As Slovakia's elections neared, these efforts became considerably more overt. During 1998, political leaders from EU member countries actively provided expertise and funding to opposition political parties. Official EU institutions, unwilling to completely abandon a position of formal neutrality, pursued the same goals through efforts at voter education, voter turnout, and electoral observation, using these ostensibly non-partisan themes in ways that benefited opposition parties.

Western Europeans and Slovakia's opposition were not the only ones to take EU issues into the electoral arena. The Meciar government long preceded them there. The two sides, however, faced significantly different challenges in their use of the EU as a political issue. The opposition and its EU supporters needed simply to make the case of that EU membership offered significant benefits and that the opposition had a better chance of leading Slovakia toward that end. In short, they needed only to convince voters of the degree of benefit and the certainty of its conferral according to clear standards. For the Meciar government in 1998 the task was far more difficult. Having taken the same position during the 1994 election campaign and in its governmental program statement, the government parties faced the prospect of reconciling a pro-EU stance with increasingly vocal criticism from the EU itself. Yet Meciar appears to have been so confident of his skill in the electoral realm that he would accept the risk of voter unhappiness over the EU rejection of Slovakia rather than introduce accountability into his mode of governing.

Sowing seeds of doubt

The party's strategy became increasingly complex as EU critiques of Slovakia became ever sharper and more detailed. At first the party took the position that there simply was no criticism, and that EU comments had been inadvertently or deliberately misunderstood,[43] but by 1996 such arguments were already difficult to sustain. Where EU criticism could not be dismissed, Meciar's government officials adopted a variety of strategies to shift the cost-benefit analysis of Slovak voters in such a way as to diminish the impact of the EU's rejection. Over time the mix of these arguments shifted from attacks on the clarity and certainty of conditions to attacks on the benefits of EU membership itself.

Clarity

One of the most frequent HZDS strategies for keeping–even attracting—voters despite EU criticism of Slovakia involved repeated questioning the basis of EU judgments about Slovakia. These claims took three forms:

- "The EU lacks information." Beginning during the second Meciar government and intensifying with the demarches of 1994, officials of the coalition parties noted that EU criticisms relied on sources that were "unsubstantiated" or even "not objective."[44] As EU criticisms intensified, this argument relied increasingly on the notion that the failure of the EU to understand Slovakia resulted from deliberate *mis*information provided by Slovakia's opposition.

- "The EU does not understand." Even where EU institutions might receive correct information, Meciar government officials argued that they did not necessarily possess the cultural context in which to interpret it. In a speech to the Joint EU-Slovakia Parliamentary Commission, the Chairman of Slovakia's Parliament, Ivan Gasparovic asked "Have Western diplomats and observes actually understood the sense of historical developments in Slovakia? Do they understand the essence of these changes? Do they understand Slovak national characteristics? Each nation, each state has some specific features, and these are in general respected."[45]
- "The EU has a double standard." Beginning in 1995, representatives of the Meciar government increasingly made the argument that regardless of its information or understanding, the EU would not judge Slovakia by the same criteria as everyone else.[46] After the 1997 decision of the Luxembourg council to reject Slovakia, Meciar attempted to give this argument an even more positive spin by explaining the double standard as the result of his "insistence on equality" in the face of countries that "see themselves as superior."[47]

Each appears designed to lower the cost of failure by making the argument that "If we are excluded, it is not our fault." At their most extreme, these statements go further to make the implicit claim that the fault lies with foreign or domestic actors who seek Slovakia's destruction.

Certainty

A second strategy for defusing EU criticism involved reassurances about the inevitability of Slovakia's accession regardless of any isolated EU statements. As Slovakia's rejection became more likely, however, certain HZDS officials modified these messages by also focusing on the certainty of delays in the process for *all* potential applicants. The claims thus took two forms:

- "The EU will indeed accept Slovakia." These statements began early, even before the third Meciar government and continued up through and even after Slovakia's rejection from the first group of countries. As Slovakia's accession became increasingly less likely, the claims became Slovakia's accession was merely "a matter of time"[48] became increasingly strained, culminating in Meciar's statement shortly before the 1998 elections that "In the back rooms they are speaking about a group of countries that could be first. It is an absolutely different group from the one which is now being spoken about publicly. We are first in that group," Meciar said."[49] A frequent element of such arguments was the notion 9made by leaders in other countries as well) that "Europe needs Slovakia" because of its "unique geostrategic importance."[50] As late as January 1998, for example, Meciar noted that logic dictated that the capital of a united Europe could be located in Slovakia.[51]
- "The EU will not accept anybody in the near future." In an apparent effort to reduce concerns over visible setbacks in Slovakia's position relative to other applicants, HZDS officials attempted to reassure voters by noting the ephemeral nature of any delay in the context of a slow accession process. In a 1997 interview, the Chair of Slovakia's Parliament, Ivan Gasparovic, "expressed his doubts that membership will be given to any of associated countries before 2005."[52] In an elaboration several weeks later, Gasparovic went further to raise doubts about whether expansion would occur at all:

> If anyone thinks that a state from Central and Eastern Europe will get into the European Union before 2005, then he is naive. At last year's meeting of the European banks, which was attended by representatives from the World Bank, it was even said that you (the states of Central and Eastern Europe) may perhaps enter the EU in 400 years. Some of them even proclaimed that it would be in 700.... It goes without saying that this is an exaggeration. The fact, however, is that this is not a question of one year; in my opinion, it is not even a question of 10 years.[53]

An article by a Meciar advisor makes an almost identical point: "Today, there is already official talk of the fact that it will be at least in the year 2002 or 2003. There is a Spanish variation which mentions the year 2025."[54]

In contrast to the previous group of claims that absolved blame for failing to meet the EU conditions, these rejected even the possibility of blame by denying that the conditions played any role in determining the outcome.

Benefit

A third HZDS strategy focused on the relative value of EU membership. Some statements pointed out hidden costs connected with integration while others suggested higher opportunity costs by pointing out the potential benefits of alter. As EU statements became increasingly sharp and Slovakia's acceptance increasingly unlikely, the mix of comments shifted away from mere caveats toward outright hostility. The claims took three basic forms:

- "Integration will be expensive." As early as 1995, Meciar began to discuss the costs of joining the EU, though he did not suggest that these outweighed the benefits. Over time, however, party leaders began to discuss a wide range of potential financial disadvantages, with one Meciar advisor reiterating, "The EU is not a charitable organization."[55] A variant of this argument, heard frequently after mid-1997 contended, "Early integration will be more expensive." In 1997 Ivan Gasparovic stated, "Experienced economists claim that the sooner a country gets into the EU, the more expensive it is for it"[56] and prominent HZDS deputy Augustin Marian Huska noted that delay in Slovakia's accession to the European Union would be beneficial because neither Slovakia nor the EU were prepared to handle the consequences.[57] A representative of one of HZDS's coalition partners, the Slovak National Party, even attempted to turn the Slovakia's rejection into a benefit, pointing out in 1998 that it is advantageous to Slovakia that is not in the first group of countries, since it will have a chance to monitor the effects on countries in the first group."[58]
- "There are viable alternatives to EU membership." In 1997, Slovak Foreign Minister Zdenka Kramplova reassured Slovaks that rejection by NATO and the

EU would not lead to "international isolation."[59] During late 1997 and 1998, Slovak diplomats also began to pursue more intensive bilateral relationships with individual countries[60] and to focus on the possibility of the Central European Free Trade Area (CEFTA) as a possible alternative. Furthermore, although HZDS officials publicly rejected any notion of special ties with Russia, its coalition partners, particularly Jan Luptak of the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS), indicated a willingness to consider security guarantees from Russia over those of Western countries.[61]

- "Integration threatens Slovakia's sovereignty." From the beginning of the third Meciar governments the chairs of both of the minor coalition partners expressed strong reservations about the trade-offs involved in European integration and warned of dangers to Slovakia's sovereignty.[62] HZDS chair Meciar generally avoided such statements. At times, in moments of apparent anger, he defended Slovakia against foreign interference, noting, "Slovakia is a sovereign country, so no one has the right to give us ultimate orders, not even MPs of the European Parliament who have no power of jurisdiction,"[63] but his statements usually remained ambiguous, often critical of the EU yet in support of Slovakia's membership. The same cannot be said of many who were close to Meciar. In late 1995 HZDS spokesman Stanislav Haber compared the EU with Nazi Germany in 1938 and the Soviet Union in 1968, both of which sent Czechoslovakia demarches followed by tanks (and resigned after an ambiguous reprimand from the party). Even stronger statements appeared throughout 1997 and 1998 on the pages of the HZDS weekly publication, *Slovensko do toho!* According to *Do Toho!* editor Igor Zvach, for example, for Slovakia to accept conditions imposed by the EU, such as a minority language law, "would border on treason."[64]

It is in the company of such statements that otherwise harmless advertising images–such as an aggressive lion emerging from gold stars on a blue field–take on additional and significant meaning. When the EU proved unwilling to confer benefits on HZDS, HZDS cast doubt on the ability of the EU to benefit Slovakia as a whole.

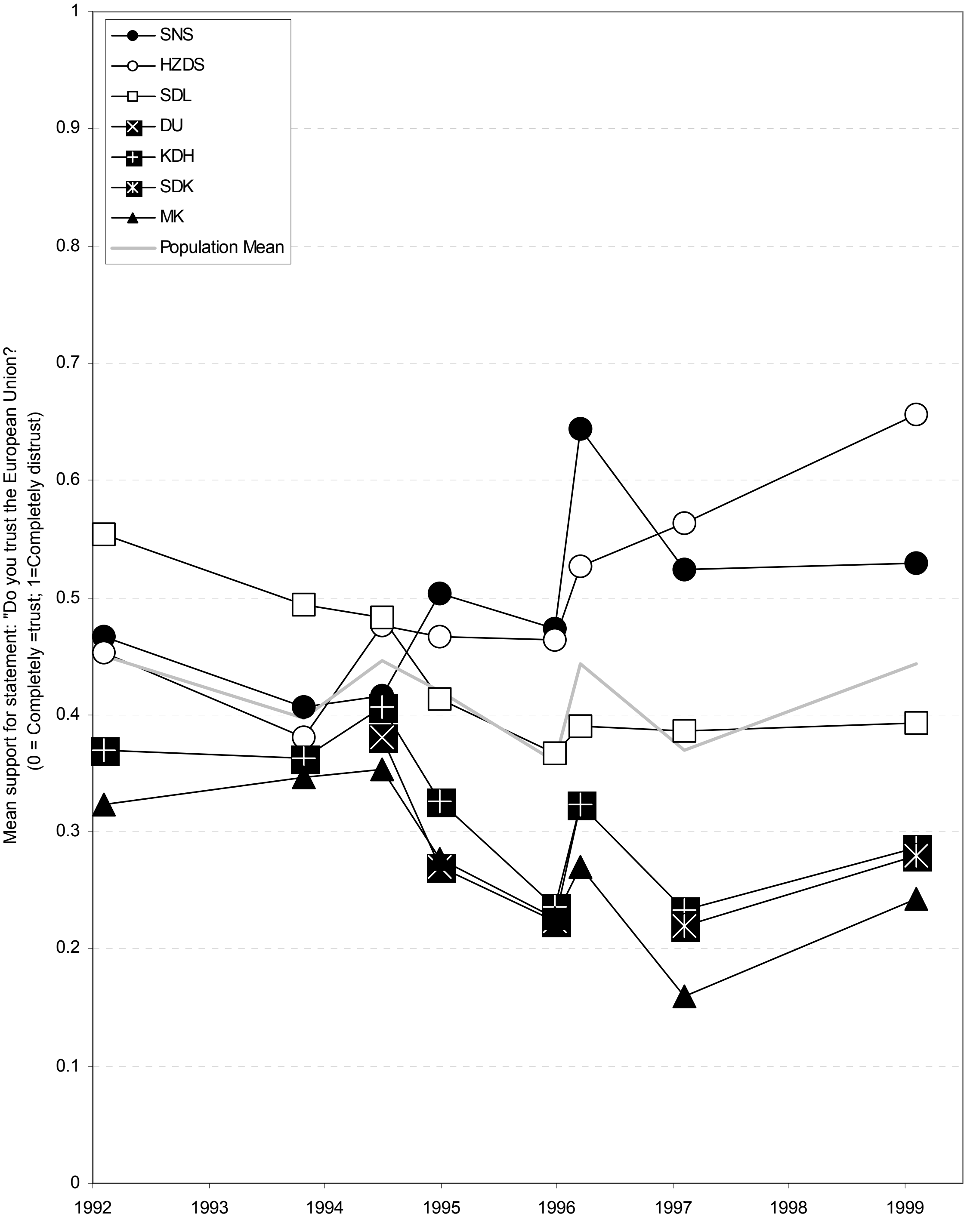
The eight strategies detailed here demonstrate the breadth HZDS rhetoric during the period. Statements by party leaders and party appointees occupied literally the full spectrum of possible positions toward the EU from the determined and deferential statements of Slovakia's foreign ministers to the fury of HZDS parliamentary deputies on the pages of *Slovensko do toho!* Avoiding inconsistencies and even outright contradictions did not appear to play a role in party strategy In fact, the presence of a full range of positions offered wide latitude to party leader Meciar. He rarely engaged in the debate himself except to express a Slovakia's readiness for membership and an indignation that the EU might think otherwise. This noncommittal position was possible precisely because he had at his disposal a party with representatives voicing a wide range of positions. Rather than commit himself abroad in a way that could offend some at home (or visa versa), he placed different party officials in front of different audiences (often the one best suited to their messages and methods) and led them as a conductor leads an orchestra.

A MIXED HARVEST

If Meciar thought that by this means he could shape the attitudes of party supporters in such a way as to minimize the damage of rejection by the EU, he was largely right. If he felt that he could use the same tactics actually to expand the electoral appeal of HZDS, he was wrong.

Few changes on Slovakia's electoral landscape are more striking than the shift in the relationship between party preference and attitudes toward the European Union over the years from 1993 until 1999. Figure 2. shows a distinct change over time in the mean assessment of the EU among the supporters of political parties: the support bases of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), the Democratic Union (DU) and the Hungarian Coalition parties (MK) shift from moderate trust toward much higher levels. The support base of the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) shifts in the same direction and at about the same rate but from an initial position of moderate distrust. The pattern for the Slovak National Party (SNS) and the HZDS is quite different. The support bases of both shift

Figure 3.2. Distrust toward the European Union by party preference in Slovakia, 1992 to 1999



Source: FOCUS, 'Public Opinion Surveys' [Computer File], Bratislava, 1992-1999.

from relative neutrality in 1992 and 1993 to extreme distrust by 1998. For SNS the shift occurred rapidly and then moderated. For HZDS the trend toward ever-higher levels of distrust continued through the most recent available FOCUS survey in 1999.[65] Eastern Eurobarometer conducted during the same period (shown in gray on the figure) exhibit an almost identical pattern.[66] In four years—the four years coinciding with the third Meciar government—the HZDS electorate shifted from a position indistinguishable from the population as a whole to become the most vehemently anti-EU electorate of any party in the country. The change thus corresponds precisely with the increasingly sharp EU criticism of the Meciar government and the increasingly distrustful tone of HZDS comments regarding the EU.[67]

As part of this differentiation process, questions related to the EU became sharply politicized. In fact, they came over time to be the most sharply politicized questions in the country's political life. Of particular note is the relationship between support for the EU and opinions of HZDS and its leader. In a battery of seventeen survey questions on religious, ethnic, economic and political issues asked in late 1993, responses to questions about EU membership and EU trust ranked ninth and twelfth, respectively in the strength of their relationship with respondents' trust of Vladimir Meciar. In 1999 the same two questions ranked first and second. In six regular focus surveys conducted between 1993 and 1999, the level of correlation between Meciar and trust in the EU rose by regular amounts in every successive survey, increasing from a barely significant correlation of 0.07 in 1993 to an extremely significant correlation of 0.42 in 1999.[68]

Such a politically charged question might be expected to produce a realignment of voters that could explain the shift in Slovakia's electoral balance between Meciar's 1994 victory and his 1998 defeat. In fact several factors limited the shift of party preference surrounding the EU issue. Shifts in the position of a party's electorate may reflect either a changes in the minds of party voters or changes in the composition of the party electorate. Data from FOCUS surveys that includes questions of previous voting behavior allows for a rough test of both hypotheses. Restricting the sample only to HZDS loyalists–those who voted for the party in the election preceding the survey and who still support the party–

shows an increase in EU distrust over time that closely parallels the change in the party as a whole. Thus, (if most survey respondents can be trusted to correctly report their previous vote) much of the attitude change that occurred over time happened *within* the minds of party loyalists. At the same time, the surveys show a parallel change in the composition of the party. Those who stopped supporting the party over time felt less distrust toward the EU than did party loyalists; those who began supporting the party felt more distrust than did the population as a whole. After 1994, however, this movement of persons played an ever-smaller role in comparison to change in the opinion of loyalists. The contours of this shift are important. Only about 15 per cent of those who claimed to have supported HZDS in 1994 shifted to other parties, and of those nearly half shifted to other parties within the coalition. Those who shifted to the party amounted to an even smaller share–about 4 per cent of HZDS support and nearly half of those shifted from another anti-EU party within the coalition. From these numbers it is possible to make certain broad conclusions:

- The combination of EU criticism and HZDS interpretations of that criticism were enough to change significantly the opinions of party loyalists in the direction of distrust of the EU;
- The party was thereby able to avoid losing significant numbers of voters to parties with more pro-EU positions. (Nearly half of the departing voters shifted to an equally anti-EU party within the coalition);
- The party was not able to use its new position on EU questions to attract voters.

It is possible, too, that the exclusion of Slovakia on the EU and the increasingly hostile response of HZDS drove previously undecided voters into the opposition ranks. Though this is difficult to measure, survey results offer some support. According to a 1999 FOCUS survey, those who did not vote in 1994 but went to the polls in 1998 were considerably more likely than the population as a whole to vote for opposition parties. According to a 1997 survey, non-voters who opted to support opposition parties expressed considerably more trust toward the EU than the population as a whole and almost as much as opposition loyalists. Thus while Meciar may have changed the opinions of his base enough to keep its loyalty, he may in the process have mobilized at least some who had previously remained outside of the political arena and in the process weakened his own chances for re-election.

THE EU IN SLOVAKIA'S ELECTION GAME

If HZDS was not able to use its public statements to do any more than slow the defection of party loyalists, neither was the EU able to use an outside game to achieve its own goals. Having correctly identified Meciar as an insurmountable obstacle to Slovakia's democratization and subsequent EU accession, officials from the EU and certain member states sought his replacement by a coalition of parties that expressed active support for the EU and had proven their willingness to accept institutional accountability. Toward that end, the EU and its member states provided well over a million Euros for a variety of direct democracy promotion efforts at mass and elite levels. The effects of most of these efforts at the elite level is difficult to ascertain and even more difficult to quantify. These programs undoubtedly taught policymakers important skills, but Slovakia's political polarization during the 1990s probably diminished the role that such programs actually played in the democratization. Slovakia's democratization occurred through a change from one governing coalition to another very different one, not from change within any particular party or coalition. Those elites who benefited from such programs were already well disposed toward democratization; those who were ill disposed rarely participated.

At the mass level, democracy promotion programs have claimed Slovakia as a success story.[69] According to these accounts, efforts at increased turnout, particularly among young people, helped lead Slovakia's opposition to the electoral victory that ousted the third Meciar government. EU programs played a sizeable role in such efforts and the EU might thus claim some credit for Slovakia's political change. A closer look at Slovakia's election results, however, suggest that while voter education and increased turnout did clearly help the opposition, they merely built upon a victory that it would have won in any case. Between the 1994 and 1998 elections, Slovakia's opposition parties gained just over 700,000 votes while its coalition parties lost just over 100,000. Overall turnout over this same period increased by just under 500,000. Even if every one of the new voters preferred the opposition and every one had stayed home on Election Day, opposition parties would still have still gained a clear majority of seats. A more elaborate model based on the retrospective claims of survey respondents in early 1999 indicates that increased turnout contributed only six seats to the opposition's 36-seat margin of victory in 1998.

Ultimately the reason for the opposition victory in 1998 lies less with outside help than with a variety of internal factors including the weariness with incumbents that is shared in all democracies, the emergence of a "middle" party with democratic leanings, and the newfound ability of the opposition to coordinate its efforts. That novelty resulted in no small part from the threat that Meciar posed to Slovakia's institutional accountability and the continuation of its electoral democracy, the same factor that brought rejection by the EU and EU electoral assistance.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

The account presented here suggests both a surprisingly small role for the EU in Slovakia's democratization process and few alternatives for EU officials. Slovakia's barriers to entry were political rather than cultural, and its political barriers depended on the decisions of a very small circle of political leaders. As EU officials discovered after repeated efforts, there is not much the EU can do to make democracy more attractive to leaders who have decided it is not otherwise in their best interest. They do not have the sort of financial resources to buy off such leaders (and if they did, there would certainly not be permitted by member states to use the funds for that purpose); nor do they have any tangible coercive mechanisms (and could not use them if it did). In essence the only thing the EU can do to such leaders is to threaten them with exclusion, but like Meciar, leaders such as Tudjman, Milosevic, Kuchma, or Lukasenka may be immune to such threats before they arrive. "Never," these leaders might note, "join a club that will have you as a member only if you become someone else."

The only short-run options left open, then, are indirect. They involve persuading those who in turn might persuade the reluctant democratizer. Depending on the circumstances, this can mean coalition partners or financial supporters. In almost all circumstances it means voters. But influencing voters is not an easy task for outsiders in any context and involvement in partisan politics is particularly risky for an organization that claims a degree of political neutrality. In Slovakia, the EU faced coalition partners who were equally resistant to persuasion and found that many of those financing the coalition had their own fears about the consequences of EU integration on their own less-than-transparent business practices.[70] Fortunately for EU efforts, however, Slovakia's opposition rose to the challenge of Meciar's institutional encroachments and managed to defeat him without requiring significant EU involvement. In other countries, the balance might be reversed and the coalition partners and supporters might provide the best path to political change.

In the long run, the EU's rewards become more powerful and its influence therefore greater. Membership becomes more appealing as it recedes, and the admission of some countries raises the stakes for others who must struggle to avoid the stigma of being left out. Meciar's mix of party positions, though sometimes uneven in its effects, demonstrates the ability of party leaders to survive the political impact of EU rejection, but only at a price. Such efforts may ultimately be self-defeating to the extent that they preserve the party electoral base by persuading it to accept opinions that become increasingly less palatable to outsiders and thereby limit its electoral potential. In this sense, perhaps, the designers of the HZDS advertisement were correct to see a threat to their party in the stars in the EU flag. Although an aggressive Leo makes for better television, a more appropriate symbol may be found in the constellation of Libra, the balance of which was eventually tipped in favor of the EU and democracy by the actions of *domestic* political leaders.

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[1] P. Kubicek, this volume, p. XXX.

[2] **Error! Main Document Only.**Although Freedom House scores raise significant methodological questions, they capture the general course of Slovakia's democratic development. The upward spike recorded for 1993 is almost certainly an over-estimate based more on potential than actual developments. Nor do these scores register the period between March and November of 1994 during which Slovakia experienced the same extent of political and civil rights as its Visegrad neighbors. The rise between 1994 and 1998, however, does correspond to a significant worsening of conditions under the government of Vladimir Meciar.

[3] **Error! Main Document Only.**G. O'Donnell, 'Delegative Democracy?', Kellogg Institute Working Paper; C. S. Leff, 'Dysfunctional democracy: Institutional conflict in post-communist Slovakia', *Problems of Post-Communism*, September/October 1996; M. S. Fish, 'The End of Meciarism', *East European Constitutional Review* 8(1-2) at http://www.law.nyu.edu/eecr/vol8num1-2/special/endofmec.html, accessed 20 June 1999; K. D. Krause, *Accountability and Political Party Competition in Slovakia and the Czech Republic*. Doctoral Dissertation, South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame, 2000.

[4] **Error! Main Document Only.**F. Gal, *Z prvej ruky*. Bratislava: Vydavatelstvo Archa, 1991.

[5] **Error! Main Document Only.**J. Obrman, 'The Czechoslovak Elections', *RFE/RL Research Report,* 1(26), 1992, pp. 12-19; S. Szomolanyi, 'Introduction: A Transition to Democracy?' *The Slovak Path of Transition - To Democracy?* Eds. S. Szomolanyi and G. Meseznikov. Bratislava: Slovak Political Science Association and Interlingua**,** 1994, pp. 5-12; S. Abraham, 'Early Elections in Slovakia: A State of Deadlock', *Government and Opposition*, 30(1), 1995, pp. 86-100.

[6] **Error! Main Document Only.**A. Kalniczky, "Academic Freedom in Slovakia: The Case of Trnava University", *RFE/RL Research Report* 2(11), 1993, pp. 53-65; S. Fisher, Slovak Television in Disarray. *RFE/RL Daily Reports*, 1994, pp. 29-33.

[7] Meciar partisans immediately assailed the new government as the product of a parliamentary putsch and the forerunner of an authoritarian regime, but these claims do not bear closer examination.

[8] **Error! Main Document Only.**N. King, 'Meciar's Power Plays in Slovakia Stir Fears of Democracy's Erosion', *The Wall Street Journal*, Bratislava, 11 January 1996, pp. 1, 8.

[9] **Error! Main Document Only.** J. Gould, 'Winners, Losers and the Institutional Effects of Privatization in the Czech and Slovak Republics', Working Paper, Robert Schuman Center, European University Institute, 1998.

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[10] **Error! Main Document Only.** A. Skolkay, ‘Slovak Government Tightens Its Grip on the Airwaves’, *Transition,* 19 April 1996, pp. 18-21.

[11] Legal controversy about the validity of an amnesty decree issued by Meciar in 1998 has to date prevented the prosecution of suspects involved in the case, but a variety of witnesses and other circumstantial evidence link the abduction closely to Slovakia’s intelligence service, at the time headed by Meciar appointee Ivan Lexa.

[12] *Slovenska Republika*, ‘Unfounded Objections’, Trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Bratislava, 6 December 1995, p. 1-2; *Slovenska Republika*, ‘Former Investigators Were Supposedly Changing Testimonies’, Trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Bratislava, 16 April 1996, pp. 1, 6; *Sme,* ‘Prime Ministers Promised Universities, Highways, and Theaters to Regional Capitals’, Trans. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, Bratislava, 2 September 1996, p. 3.

[13] It remains an open question whether HZDS planned to disrupt the 1998 parliamentary elections. In August 1998 the coalition challenged the status of the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK), a party created by members of then-opposition parties in an effort to circumvent the 1998 electoral law’s obstacles to coalition formation. A decision by Slovakia’s highest appeals court prevented the exclusion of SDK–at the time the only political formation that could rival HZDS–but it is unclear whether the court faced political pressure in the decision. HZDS also attempted to exclude the presence of election observers before finally accepting them as a condition of its membership in OSCE. Speculation suggests that the coalition did not take any further steps because it remained confident of victory until the final days of the campaign. Furthermore, HZDS may have lacked the personnel willing to engage in deliberate manipulation of a parliamentary election. Unlike the electoral law change or the referendum alteration (and other illegal activities undertaken by the third Meciar government), deliberate suppression of cast ballots would have required more than just a small core of party loyalists.

[14] **Error! Main Document Only.**J. Elster, C. Offe, and U . Preuss, *Institutional Design in Post-Communist Societies*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[15] **Error! Main Document Only.**M. Carpenter, ‘Slovakia and the Triumph of Nationalist Populism’, *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30(2), 1997, pp. 205-220.

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[67] The FOCUS survey conducted in late 1997 shows that HZDS supporters specifically doubted the transparency of EU conditionality and the benefits of EU membership. While few HZDS supporters expected that exclusion from EU structures would be positive for

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Slovakia, only 27% expected the results to be negative. In the population as a whole, the corresponding share exceeded 62% (and among supporters of opposition parties, it exceeded 80%). In addition, nearly 60% of HZDS supporters believed that Slovakia's exclusion resulted from the bias of EU members toward Slovakia rather than from any government action. In the population as a whole the corresponding share was only 23% (and among opposition parties less than 10%).

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