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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 5 (Jul., 2001), pp. 745-769

Published by: [Taylor & Francis, Ltd.](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/826368>

Accessed: 28/12/2012 15:32

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HZDS: The Ideology, Organisation and Support Base of Slovakia's Most Successful Party

TIM HAUGHTON

IN ELECTORAL TERMS the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) has been Slovakia's most successful party since its formation in 1991. The clear winner of the June 1992 elections in the Slovak part of Czechoslovakia with 37.26% of the vote, HZDS's founder and leader and three time Slovak Prime Minister, Vladimír Mečiar, led the final phase of negotiations with his Czech counterpart, Václav Klaus, that spelt the demise of the common state. Although a cluster of defections brought down independent Slovakia's first HZDS-led government in early 1994, the party won the largest share of the vote in the autumn 1994 elections (34.96%) and formed a coalition government with two smaller parties, which held power for the length of the four year electoral cycle. During the 1994–98 period Slovakia became the black sheep of Central Europe, excluded by both the European Union and NATO from their respective first wave applicant groups for eastern enlargement. Blame for both exclusions has been laid at the door of the HZDS-led governments.¹

Despite its central role in Slovak politics since its formation in 1991, HZDS has received scant attention from scholars. What attention it has received has tended to be superficial and heavily opinionated. Its fate is usually to be dismissed in a few disdainful words.² During their stints in power, particularly during the 1994–98 government, HZDS politicians hardly helped their cause by offering Western scholars and journalists a frosty reception. The distrust stemmed from highly critical accounts of the headline events of Slovak history since the country's independence in January 1993, most notably those surrounding the kidnapping/abduction of President Michal Kováč's son in August 1995 and the obstructed referendum on NATO and the direct election of the President in May 1997.³

Thanks in part to this atmosphere of distrust, the politicisation of the social sciences and the media in Slovakia and, as Williams has suggested, a fear of punitive lawsuits when HZDS was the leading party in government,⁴ no academic study on the organisation and ideology of HZDS has been published in English or Slovak. Based on a series of interviews with leading HZDS politicians, archival work conducted at the Slovak parliament and a close examination of HZDS publications, this article tries to begin filling the scholarly void by analysing the ideology, structure and support base of HZDS.

TABLE 1
SLOVAKIA: ELECTION RESULTS SINCE 1992 (% OF VOTE)

Party	1992	1994	1998
HZDS	37.3	35.0*	27.0
SNS	7.9	5.4	9.1
ZRS	–	7.3	1.3
SDL/SV/SDL	14.7	10.4**	14.7
MKDH/Spoluzitie/MK/SMK	7.4	10.2	9.1
SDK	–	–	26.3
SOP	–	–	8.0
KDH	8.9	10.1	–
DU	–	8.6	–
Others	23.8	13.0	4.5

Notes: HZDS: Movement for a Democratic Slovakia; SNS: Slovak National Party; ZRS: Workers' Association of Slovakia; SDL: Party of the Democratic Left; SV: Common Choice; MKDH: Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement; MK: Hungarian Coalition; SMK: Party of the Hungarian Coalition; SDK: Slovak Democratic Coalition; SOP: Party of Civic Understanding.

* in 1994 HZDS was in electoral coalition with the Agrarian Party of Slovakia (RSS).

** in 1994 SDL joined forces with Green Party of Slovakia (ZRS), Social Democratic Party of Slovakia (SDSS) and Farmers' Movement (HP), forming Common Choice (SV).

Sources: Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, *Vol'by do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky konané 30.9 a 1.10.94* (Bratislava, October 1994); Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky, *Výsledky hlasovania vo vol'bach do Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky 25.–26. septembra 1998* (Bratislava, 1998); Vladimír Krivý, *Čo prezrádzajú volebné výsledky: Parlamentné vol'by 1992–1998* (Bratislava, IVO, 1999), pp. 18 and 121.

TABLE 2
HZDS ELECTION RESULTS

Election	Nationwide total votes	% of vote	Seats	% of seats
1992	1 148 625	37.3	74	49.3
1994*	1 005 488	35.0	61	40.7
1998	907 103	27.0	43	28.7

Note: * in 1994 HZDS was in electoral coalition with the Agrarian Party of Slovakia (RSS).

Sources: as Table 1.

In order to assess the party's ideology, structure and support base, four questions will be examined:

1. How should we categorise HZDS?
2. Where does HZDS sit on the ideological spectrum?
3. How is HZDS organised? To what extent does its organisation differ from other parties in Slovakia?
4. From what sections of the Slovak electorate does HZDS derive its support? What does that tell us about HZDS?

Ideology and categorisation

From its creation in March 1991 until its 'transformation congress' held in Trnava in March 2000, HZDS was officially a 'movement' rather than a 'party'. HZDS hung on to the 'movement' label for two reasons. Firstly, the very word 'party' was tainted by its association with 40 years of (Communist) Party rule. Secondly, at HZDS's inception, when HZDS was projected as the true heir to the anti-communist umbrella organisation formed in autumn 1989, Public Against Violence (VPN), it was trying to project itself as not being narrow, divisive and scheming like a party, but rather inclusive and constructive. The new party platform, according to Mečiar, was simply a 'return to the original roots of VPN', the core ideas of 1989 and to a 'democratic Slovakia'.⁵

Given HZDS's projection of itself as not the representative of a sectional interest, Williams, building on Graham's study, postulated whether HZDS could be classified as a 'rally party'.⁶ A rally party is characterised by a strong leader appealing to the broad mass of society, the use of plebiscite, the subordination of parliament, the pursuit of collective goals valued above sectional interests, and national solidarity. Such broad-based movements are well suited to the fluid times immediately after regime collapse, with their appeals to 'abstract but powerful feelings of national well being and patriotic morality'.⁷

Graham's term, which he largely derived from the French experience, however does not fit HZDS. Few analysts would contest the attribution of the adjective *strong* to Mečiar,⁸ but did he appeal to a broad mass of society throughout the 1990s? The evidence suggests that initially HZDS cast its net widely in the electoral waters of the Slovak part of post-communist Czechoslovakia. From the inception of HZDS until the break-up of the common state, the dominant axis of competition was the national question.⁹ HZDS appealed to all Slovaks as the defender of Slovakia's interests.¹⁰ After Slovak independence in 1993 and, in particular, from the 1994 election onwards, when cleavage patterns and voter bases became more clearly defined, HZDS directed its appeal to a more narrowly defined section of the electorate.¹¹ Indeed, Mečiar and other leading HZDS lights concentrated on mobilising the party's core constituency rather than reaching out to newer voters. Nevertheless, all current HZDS politicians this author interviewed expressed the desire to represent and formulate policies for the benefit of all 'ordinary Slovaks'.¹²

The rhetoric of inclusion is in evidence in the party's statutes (*stanovy*) adopted in March 1996. HZDS projects itself as a party for all citizens of the Slovak Republic.¹³ Although most other Slovak parties, such as the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK), Party of Civic Understanding (SOP) and the Party of the Hungarian Coalition (SMK), project themselves in a similar way,¹⁴ one of HZDS's coalition partners in the 1994–98 government, the Workers' Association of Slovakia (ZRS), projected itself specifically as a party of workers, peasants and other socially weak groups in society, whilst HZDS's other 1994–98 coalition partner, the Slovak National Party (SNS), projects itself as the party of ethnic Slovaks.¹⁵ The Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) falls short of claiming to represent all Slovak citizens, preferring instead to describe itself as a party that articulates and defends the interests of working people, although the party's definition is broad,

including all citizens except big businessmen.¹⁶ HZDS's official language is therefore not as exclusionary as other parties in Slovakia, but neither is it unique in claiming to be a party for all Slovaks.

In order to assess HZDS ideology, three aspects will be examined: where HZDS should be placed on the left-right spectrum and what role(s) nationalism and Catholicism play in HZDS ideology.

HZDS and the left-right spectrum

Analysts have found it difficult to categorise HZDS. One noted expert on political parties in Central and Eastern Europe described HZDS as a party which 'consistently acted to sustain the rule and political dominance of its leader, but otherwise its political programme and ideological identity remained unclear', yet earlier in the same book he lists HZDS under the Christian Democrat/Conservative heading.¹⁷ HZDS, argued Szomolányi, does not fit neatly on a left-right continuum. Comparing Slovakia with its erstwhile federative partner, she wrote in 1994 that whilst in the Czech Republic parties with 'ambiguous' or 'fuzzy' programmes were marginalised, in Slovakia they took centre stage.¹⁸ Mesežnikov argues that from its inception HZDS has had an 'unclear ideological profile', without a discernible hint of evolution towards a known ideological paradigm.¹⁹ Two other analysts described HZDS in 1994 as a 'broad-spectral movement' which '... retained its amorphousness and indistinctiveness even after the elections'.²⁰ Indeed, HZDS does not appear to fit neatly into von Beyme's typology (*familles spirituelles*) of political parties.²¹ The analyst, however, should be wary of assuming post-communist countries can be fitted neatly into Western models. Just as post-communist party systems are different,²² so political parties in these countries are not carbon copies of Western European types. Nevertheless, categorisation is a useful exercise. Even if a perfect fit cannot be achieved, the process of categorisation should yield a better understanding of the specimen the analyst is studying.

The word 'centre' often appears in relation to HZDS. Indeed, that is where many of the leading players locate the party²³ and have done since its inception.²⁴ HZDS was created in the spring of 1991 purportedly in response to the rightward drift of the umbrella post-communist organisation VPN. After years of neglect, Reuven Hazan rescued the concept of the 'centre' from the heuristic dustbin. Hazan made a clear distinction between 'centre' and 'middle': 'In the simplest terms, the centre party is a fixed, party-inferred concept, whereas the middle is an intermediate, party-defined term'. A centre party can exist without another party to the left or right, but a middle party requires a party to both left and right. The centre party is an 'ideologically positioned party which occupies the metrical centre of an ideological continuum' applicable to all polities, 'or is near it'.²⁵ Hazan, however, does not spell out what 'the metrical centre of an ideological continuum' actually means. He relies heavily on the placement by experts of parties on the ideological spectrum. The analyst is left to assume that a centre party is one which, in the words of Williams, 'endorses a policy package akin to that of the West German social market in its heyday'.²⁶ Such a policy package is based on a belief in competition and the prosperity-generating properties

of the market, but balanced by a belief the state should provide a comprehensive system of social security.

In the early 1990s the Independent Association of Economists of Slovakia (NEZES) had the ear of the highest ranks of HZDS. In addition to noise referring to low-inflation growth and competitiveness, NEZES emphasised the importance of the social aspect of the market. Stress was laid on an integrated state administrative centre, privatised enterprises formulating strategy in response to both the market and the state, and banks existing primarily to service enterprises in accordance with government policy and objectives. The ideas of NEZES were developed in the writings of Peter Staněk and Jana Černá.²⁷ For Staněk (who became deputy finance minister in the 1994–98 government) and Černá, the role of the state was to act both as facilitator and protector. Finance minister and HZDS politician Sergei Kozlík expressed similar sentiments during his trip to London in 1996. He told officials he was aiming for 80% of industry to be privatised by the end of 1997. He reiterated the party's expressed desire to keep the commanding heights of the economy (energy, rail and telecommunications) in state hands,²⁸ although he gave officials the impression he was persuaded by the arguments of leading British ministers, Michael Heseltine and Malcolm Rifkind, to extend privatisation into these areas.²⁹

The government, in the Staněk and Černá model, was to provide advice, information, credit guarantees and energy price controls. The state was not an economic safety blanket but an enabler. The 1994 HZDS manifesto, for instance, declares its support for all those who *can* and *want* to work. Those who do not wish to work were condemned and described as being to the detriment of honourable people.³⁰ Central to the facilitator role of the state was the need to build infrastructure, particularly roads, not only to encourage east–west trade to travel through Slovakia but also to create a network designed for the needs of Slovakia, not Czechoslovakia, nor indeed the Austro-Hungarian empire.³¹ 'Our economic advancement, the development of our economy, rising living standards and a fall in unemployment are not possible', argued leading HZDS politician Roman Hofbauer in January 1997, 'without a fundamental modernisation of Slovakia's infrastructure'.³²

At the heart of HZDS economic policy has been a desire to construct and safeguard a Slovak economic identity for the newly independent state. The 1994 manifesto emphasised the benefits of privatisation, but stressed the need to see the emergence of strong domestic industry.³³ Foreign capital was welcomed, but it needed to be regulated and should be concentrated in new technologies, modernisation and reconstruction of industries.³⁴ Foreign participation was encouraged, therefore, 'where it was necessary to further Slovak economic development'.³⁵ The reality, however, was that only five out of 367 in 1995, dropping to two out of 400 in 1996, privatisation decisions went the way of foreign applicants.³⁶ HZDS politicians attacked foreign firms for not having the interests of Slovakia at heart. Roman Hofbauer, for example, used a column in *Slovenská republika* to criticise the sale of the state-run Prior department stores during the Čarnogurský government (1991–92). Originally sold to K-MART, the stores were subsequently bought by Tesco. The British firm had not promised low prices or to sell Slovak products, but then, argued Hofbauer, it was the owner and it could do as it wished even if that displayed indifference towards the 'interests' of Slovakia.³⁷

Party manifestoes may not be sparkling works of literature (although they might be described as great works of fiction), but '... the official policy programme of a party is much closer to being an independent and authoritative source of its policy than is anything else on offer'.³⁸ HZDS's 1994 manifesto is instructive for a number of reasons. The manifesto is divided into two sections. The first half lists 'what Slovakia needs' on the left-hand pages and 'what HZDS will do' on the right. The second half has quasi-religious overtones, outlining the *desatoro* (The Ten Commandments) in each policy area.³⁹ The long-term strategy of HZDS economic policy is to build a prosperous market economy and to integrate the Slovak economy into European structures.⁴⁰

It is not an ideological manifesto of the left or right, rather it is an eclectic *pick and mix* of policies, at times lauding the merits of the free market and expressing a desire to achieve a fully functioning free market as soon as possible. Such enthusiasm sits uncomfortably alongside the expressed desire for an active sectoral industrial policy, an expansive and more generous fiscal policy and the importance ascribed to corporatist bodies such as the tripartite body of government, unions and business. Such eclecticism has not been unique in the transition countries. The leftist and rightist elements do balance out to leave HZDS in the centre, but its centrism has been laced with a dose of national protectionism.

A good sense of where a party sees itself can be discerned from the list of foreign political parties with which links have been formed. Representatives from a number of foreign parties attended the sixth annual HZDS congress in 1996. The list, however, was made up of parties such as *Forza Italia*, Our Home—Russia, the Polish People's Party, the Socialist Party of Serbia and the Moravian National Party.⁴¹ These links were not strong and had more to do with personal contacts between individuals than any grand strategy.⁴² Nonetheless, the roll-call highlights HZDS's inability to join any of the large international party groupings. HZDS tried to join all three of the major groupings (Socialist, Liberal and Christian Democrat) in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe within a short space of time, but was rejected by all.⁴³ Applying for three different groupings fostered the impression that HZDS was desperate to join a group, any group, rather than one representing deeply held convictions, and would tailor its policies accordingly. Other Slovak parties, in contrast, have formed international links. The Slovak Social Democratic Party (SDSS), for instance, was accepted into the Socialist International before the 1992 elections. KDH has full membership of the European Democratic Union and the European Union of Christian Democrats. DU established links with the Liberal International (becoming a full member in 1996) and SDL became a member of the Socialist International in 1996.

HZDS wants to end its exclusion from the large cross-national party organisations. It signalled at its Trnava congress (and in the months running up to the congress) its desire to join the club of European centre-right parties, the European Democratic Union (EDU). The policy programme adopted at the congress was drawn up from the Kleinheim declaration accepted by EDU.⁴⁴ The German CDU and CSU were described as ideal partners, even the British Conservatives under William Hague were described as potential partners.⁴⁵ This desire to project a centre-right image, however, did not stop HZDS from holding a series of demonstrations in Slovakia's major towns

and cities on May Day 2000.⁴⁶ Although in European Union countries such as Finland non-left wing parties do organise meetings and rallies on 1 May, the use of a date so clearly associated with the left by a 'centre-right' party in the former communist bloc at the very least sends out confusing signals.

HZDS's failure to join any major European grouping has had much to do with lack of ideological clarity and the image of the Mečiar-led governments. HZDS has, on occasions, appeared to display a less than total commitment to the values of democracy and the rule of law which unite all the major European groupings mentioned above. A trip taken by leading HZDS politicians to Yugoslavia to meet Slobodan Milošević in November 1999, for example, suggested an affinity between HZDS and a man regarded as a war criminal and pariah in the European Union.⁴⁷ Some Slovak academics have argued that Slovak politics is divided into two camps of 'standard' and 'non-standard' parties, with HZDS and its partners in the 1994–98 governing coalition as non-standard.⁴⁸ 'Standard' parties were those that could be placed on the standard left–right spectrum of West European politics. 'Non-standard' parties, in contrast, owing to their populism, authoritarianism and anti-democratic nature, could not be placed on the spectrum. Use of the terms standard and non-standard, however, has tended to be value-laden (with standard parties as the good guys and non-standard parties as the bad guys), a manifestation of domestic political debate, with little heuristic value to the political scientist. Indeed, if one were to assess the ideology, structure, organisation and programme of Slovak parties, perhaps only KDĽ could be described as 'standard' in a West European sense.⁴⁹

Nationalism and its place in the ideology of HZDS

Nationalism, often with a juicy adjective tagged on the front, is often attributed to HZDS and its leader.⁵⁰ The place of nationalism, or what former agriculture minister and leading HZDS politician Peter Baco prefers to describe as 'the national accent', in HZDS ideology can be explained with reference to three issues: nationalism's role in the break-up of Czechoslovakia, attitudes towards the Slovak wartime puppet state under Tiso, and attitudes towards non-ethnic Slovaks. In all three of these cases the intensity of the HZDS' 'national accent' can be discerned by comparing the party with the Slovak National Party (SNS).

The *national question*, i.e. the constitutional place of Slovakia within Czechoslovakia, was at the heart of political debate when HZDS was formed in 1991.⁵¹ In contrast to SNS, however, HZDS did not advocate Slovak independence in the 1992 elections. Instead HZDS championed Slovak equality. Mečiar, argued Abby Innes, 'acted from the very beginning as an ideological property developer, garnering every available constituency with little regard for consistency'. In the Innes schema, Mečiar's 'nationalism was secondary, insofar as it was functional, to the aim of achieving power'.⁵² A purely functional view of Mečiar's nationalism is unhelpful. Political entrepreneurs seek to maximise political power and would do anything to achieve it. It is hard to image HZDS advocating the reverse position, i.e. less Slovak autonomy, if opinion polls had suggested that option was more popular. Nonetheless, the language of Mečiar and HZDS on the national question positioned the party's sails in such a way as to catch the strong nationalist winds and carry the party on towards

power. The functionalist view should not, therefore, be totally discounted. Slovak national identity has remained central to Mečiar and HZDS since Slovak independence. Indeed, Mečiar has been more than happy to project himself as the father of the nation.

The wartime Slovak state (1939–45) under the leadership of Jozef Tiso has been roundly condemned both within Slovakia and abroad owing to its complicity in the Holocaust.⁵³ Nonetheless, for some Slovaks, the Tiso regime is to be celebrated because it was the only time in the last thousand years prior to 1993 that Slovaks had their own state. In February 2000 former SNS leader and mayor of the northern Slovak city of Žilina Ján Slota proposed the erection of a commemorative plaque to Tiso in the town. Whilst SNS politicians supported Slota's proposal and all other major Slovak parties condemned the decision, HZDS seemed reluctant to express a party line (although its local representative along with one member of the SDL backed Slota's suggestion). When HZDS announced its opinion on the issue, it was keener to use the issue to attack Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda's weakness within his own government than to declare its own position.⁵⁴ Ten years earlier (before the creation of HZDS) Mečiar had been outspoken in his criticism of a Tiso plaque in Bánovce-nad-Bebravou in July 1990. Supporters of the plaque included SNS politicians and many from KDH. (Pavol Čarnogurský, father of the KDH leader, had been prominent in the wartime state.) 'Everyone who is serious about the protection of civil rights and liberties', Mečiar declared during his weekly TV address, 'must therefore stand up and resist this wave [of Tiso's rehabilitation] in the name of our democracy'.⁵⁵ Of the usable events of Slovak history, HZDS politicians have been keener to emphasise the Slovak National Rising (SNP) against the Nazis in 1944.⁵⁶ (There would be a logical inconsistency in elevating the 1944 rising to the status of a heroic event and simultaneously glorifying the wartime puppet state.) Although the SNP was used extensively by the Communists, the 1944 rising remains the historical event of which Slovaks are most proud.⁵⁷ A cynical popularity/power-driven view might suggest this fact explains HZDS' enthusiasm for the SNP, but there is no evidence to back up such an assertion.

In its 1994 manifesto HZDS devoted an entire section to the national minority question. Whilst stating its desire to uphold European standards in this field, the manifesto continued by stressing that collective rights for national minorities were 'not just for Slovakia, but for Europe as a whole'. Moreover, the manifesto was keen to emphasise the principle of reciprocity in neighbouring countries where ethnic Slovaks live.⁵⁸ Slovakia's largest ethnic minority, accounting for approximately 11% of the Slovak population, is the ethnic Hungarian population concentrated largely on Slovakia's southern border. The most vehement anti-Hungarian language tends to emanate from the mouths of SNS politicians (former SNS leader Ján Slota notoriously called for tanks to be sent to Budapest), but HZDS politicians have not been averse to tapping into anti-Hungarian sentiment. During the 1994 election campaign an HZDS leaflet declared unambiguously: 'Who does not vote for HZDS is voting for Hungarian autonomy'.⁵⁹ HZDS has not been alone in using the Hungarian issue to bolster popularity. Róbert Fico, for example, has used a fear of Hungarians to help bolster the poll ratings of both himself and his recently formed party, Smer.⁶⁰ Moreover, in the current governing coalition relations between the agriculture

minister, Pavol Koncoš (a member of SDL), and the leader of the ethnic Hungarians, Béla Bugár, have been tense, thanks to what Bugár describes as Koncoš' anti-Hungarian words and deeds.⁶¹

Dislike of the Romany population is widespread in Slovakia, even amongst those who would be classified as liberals. Some HZDS politicians have been open in their hostility. Health minister L'ubomír Javorský told a party rally in October 1995 that the government 'will do everything to ensure' more white than Romany children are born.⁶² In a vote of no confidence in Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda in spring 2000 Alojz Engliš, when attacking the Prime Minister, labeled him an 'obyčajný cigán' (ordinary/regular gypsy).⁶³ As with treatment of the ethnic Hungarians, the language of HZDS' politicians never reached the venom of SNS. Slota once remarked that the solution to the 'gypsy problem' was a 'long whip and a small yard'.⁶⁴ Indeed, interviews conducted by Peter Vermeersch suggest Romany politicians look upon SNS politicians in a much more negative light than those from HZDS. Roma activists are, and have been, divided on political strategy, 'but they are more or less united on one thing: SNS is anti-Roma'.⁶⁵ HZDS should be credited with the fact that two Roma, Ján Kompus and Jozef Ravasz, were on its candidate list for the 1998 elections. The agreement was, for both sides, little more than a marriage of convenience. For Kompus and Ravasz, who were active in small Romany parties, the decision to run on the HZDS ticket was motivated primarily by money. For HZDS, allowing the two well-known Romany politicians to benefit from the financial resources of the party was more than offset by the perceived electoral advantage.

Christianity and its place in HZDS ideology

Although not a specifically religious party, HZDS invokes Christianity on occasions. In the introduction to the 1994 HZDS manifesto, for example, Vladimír Mečiar lauded the 'Christian value system', before writing of a desire to provide 'work, prosperity, peace, security and opportunity for all'.⁶⁶ A loose Christian grouping centred around HZDS vice-chairman Augustín Marián Húska laced many of its pronouncements with references to Catholicism or, more commonly, the tradition of Cyril and Methodius (who brought Christianity to Slovakia and much of Central Europe). Whilst HZDS is described as an association of citizens from all nationalities and religious denominations in the first article of the party's *stanovy* adopted in March 1996, for example, the article continues by invoking the spirit of Cyril and Methodius as one of the movement's building blocks.⁶⁷ The emphasis throughout the party's literature is on Christianity rather than Catholicism. The 1994 manifesto, for example, declares not only the party's support for the creation of Roman Catholic archbishoprics in Bratislava and Košice but also a Greco-Catholic archbishopric in Prešov.⁶⁸

Christianity has never, however, been systematically incorporated into the party's ideology. For HZDS Catholicism appears to be little more than a popular ideological relish—not integral to the policy dish served up but added to bring the dish's taste closer into line with the consumer's wants. Given the number of electors who declare themselves to be believers,⁶⁹ it would be distinctly odd for a party claiming to

represent the interests of ordinary Slovaks not to put Catholicism somewhere into its proclamations. There are numerous genuine Christians within HZDS, not least Húska himself, and it would be incorrect to suggest the rhetoric of Catholicism was adopted purely for functional reasons. Nonetheless, HZDS has not been averse to tapping into the popularity of strong Christian symbols for political ends, most notably during the papal visit to Slovakia in 1995.

A measure of the fervency of HZDS's Catholicism can be made if we compare HZDS with another of Slovakia's parties, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH). Examining the speeches of Mečiar⁷⁰ and the KDH's Ján Čarnogurský, who led their respective parties throughout the 1990s, it is clear that the difference in the degree of their beliefs is more than just a superficial difference of names. From the founding congress of KDH in Nitra in February 1990 onwards, Čarnogurský began his conference speeches with a few minutes on a religious theme. Although stopping short of declaring KDH to be a party purely for Catholics, he left the party faithful in no doubt what was the importance of Christianity. Moreover, he told his collected troops at a congress in Žilina in November 1991 that Christianity was the 'source of our internal stability, the inspiration for our decisions and the source of our supporters'.⁷¹

Organisation

Mečiar

Since its formation in March 1991 the party has become, in the eyes of many, synonymous with its founder and leader, Vladimír Mečiar.⁷² One journalist declared unambiguously that '... his movement for a democratic Slovakia will break up the moment he leaves politics'.⁷³ There is a tendency to view HZDS as little more than a band of Mečiar-loving devotees and the leader as omnipotent.⁷⁴ Fish, for example, portrayed other HZDS politicians, including the party's cabinet ministers, as little more than hapless and obedient lap dogs.⁷⁵ Mečiar's absolute control of his party appeared to be confirmed at the Trnava congress in March 2000, when HZDS adopted new *stanovy* which gave the chairman (i.e. Mečiar himself) the exclusive right to nominate vice-chairmen—a power he then utilised to get the virtually unknown Jozef Božík elected as the party's vice-chairman for media. Mečiar himself was re-elected almost unanimously; just a single delegate abstained, one Vladimír Mečiar. Such an act may be a sign of a man in total control of his party, but it may also be a sign of an astute politician: strengthening his position whilst the going is good, aware that in the future he may be challenged for the leadership.

To a high-ranking official who had frequent contact with the former Prime Minister, 'Mečiar controlled his party totally'.⁷⁶ 'I will tell you unambiguously', stated HZDS defector, František Gaulieder, 'Mečiar decided everything'.⁷⁷ It is undeniably true that many rank-and-file HZDS members could be categorised as slavish supporters of their leader, but it would be incorrect to tar all HZDS members with the same brush. HZDS is not a monolithic organisation, although the party has become less diverse since its inception, most notably after the two waves of defectors left in March 1993 and February 1994. The issue of close cooperation with SNS has

highlighted differences within HZDS. Critics of close cooperation with SNS such as Vojtech Tkáč, Ol'ga Keltošová and Rudolf Žiak all openly criticised the proposed signing of an opposition agreement with SNS in February 2000, largely because cooperation with SNS would harm HZDS' image abroad and create extra barriers to the party joining international groupings such as EDU.⁷⁸

What is undeniable is that HZDS has increasingly (but not uniformly) become Mečiar's party. Given Mečiar's role as founder of the party, the history of HZDS appears to conform with Panebianco's thesis that the founding moments and the formative phase of a party are central to understanding how that party functions.⁷⁹ Indeed, HZDS accords well with Panebianco's notion of a 'charismatic party'.⁸⁰ In such a party the leader is the fount of policy and patronage and party power relations are unequivocally skewed towards him or her. Mečiar led the defectors from VPN and was the focal point of the movement in those crucial founding moments of HZDS.

A sense of where a particular politician figures in a party can be discerned from a party's publications. In a commemorative publication celebrating HZDS' fifth birthday the largest section is a montage of photos of Mečiar with a wide variety of notables, ranging from The Pope to Margaret Thatcher. His face also dominates throughout the remainder of the publication. No other HZDS member gets even a tenth of the coverage, although the former chairman of parliament and HZDS bigwig, Ivan Gašparovič, gets a significant amount. Other politicians, such as Tibor Cabaj, Ján Ducký, Ol'ga Keltošová, Augustín Marián Húška and Katarína Tóthová, also feature, but nowhere near the extent of HZDS' leader.⁸¹ A publication full of 'truths about Slovakia' given to the author of this article by the Head of HZDS' International Section contained no less than 13 photographs of Mečiar in the first 23 pages. Only one HZDS minister appears, Zdenka Kramplová, and her face graces the magazine just once.⁸²

The Slovak media help project an image of Mečiar's omnipotence. Mečiar accused the leading Slovak newspaper, *Sme* (a trenchant critic of HZDS), of being obsessed with him. He told them: 'Politics for you begins and ends with whether Mečiar will continue in politics'.⁸³ He had a point when he complained that everyone blamed him for everything: 'because in Slovakia it's this way: the bus is late, the hens aren't laying eggs—it must be my fault'.⁸⁴ The Slovak media are Mečiar-centric, but he hardly supports his argument by proclaiming in the same interview: 'All the changes in the country were a result of me. What politician in the world has done as much as me? Build a state, a currency, a stable market, security structures, international relationships'.⁸⁵

Caution should be the watchword before condemning HZDS for Mečiar's dominating position. Within government, for example, finance minister Sergej Kozlík was given plenty of latitude in the formulation of economic policy during the 1994–98 government.⁸⁶ More broadly, since independence the chairmen and vice-chairmen of all Slovak political parties have become increasingly identified with their party itself. To many voters Mečiar is HZDS, just as Ján Čarnogurský is the Christian Democrats, although it should be noted Čarnogurský stepped down from the leadership of his party in September 2000. Rivals to the party leadership in HZDS and many other Slovak parties have often taken the exit option and formed new parties. The

Democratic Union (DU), for instance, was formed in the spring of 1994 by defectors from both HZDS and SNS.

The party in parliament

HZDS has been accused of running a top-down parliamentary party with little room for the expression of individual opinion within the movement and of stamping down firmly on dissenters. Two examples are worth examining: the Long Parliamentary Night and the Gaulieder Affair.

After the autumn 1994 general election, but before the coalition agreement was signed, what has been dubbed The Long Parliamentary Night took place on 3–4 November: the session lasted 22 hours and 50 minutes. Amongst the decisions rushed through parliament were changes to the personnel overseeing privatisation, state radio and state TV. The new appointments were all supporters of, or members of, parties of the subsequently formed coalition. Reading the parliamentary transcripts, one is struck not just by the lack of parliamentary debate and the speed with which bills were passed, but the limited number of members who spoke. Those from HZDS who did speak were the big guns, most of whom became ministers when the coalition agreement was signed.⁸⁷ Ordinary members of the parliamentary party were not informed beforehand what was going to happen and were just given instructions as to how they should vote, suggesting the top-down nature of the parliamentary party.⁸⁸

Despite the 'letters of commitment', similar to those used by parties during the First Republic,⁸⁹ which HZDS had asked all its candidates in the June 1992 elections to sign in order to maintain cohesion, the second Mečiar-led government fell in February/March 1994 thanks to defections from both HZDS and its coalition partner, SNS. In response to the inability of HZDS to maintain cohesion in its parliamentary party,⁹⁰ the HZDS leadership imposed a requirement that all candidates sign a document pledging to pay five million crowns (equivalent to 10 times a deputy's salary) in the event they wanted to leave HZDS and remain in parliament for the duration of their mandate. This requirement was brought starkly into focus during the Gaulieder affair in October 1996 when deputy František Gaulieder announced his intention to resign from HZDS but remain an MP. The HZDS leadership, however, blocked his attempt to sit in parliament on the basis of a letter allegedly written by Gaulieder resigning as a member of parliament. Gaulieder denied writing the letter. Although the chairman of parliament's Mandate and Immunity Committee, Anton Poliak (a member of HZDS's coalition partner ZRS), agreed the letter was a fake, 77 of the 136 deputies present voted in early December to accept the resignation of Gaulieder and replace him with Ján Belan. The case was referred to the Constitutional Court, which found in Gaulieder's favour, ruling that the decision to strip him of his seat was unconstitutional. In the subsequent months the Mandate and Immunity Committee, dominated by the coalition parties, refused to restore his seat.⁹¹ In terms of party cohesion, the importance of the Gaulieder affair was that it 'sent a strong warning to any other HZDS member who might wish to follow suit'.⁹² No other HZDS deputy tried to follow in Gaulieder's footsteps.

It would be incorrect to single out HZDS for criticism for running a top-down parliamentary party. Not only did other parties ask their candidates to sign letters of

commitment in the 1992 elections, but many of the larger parties such as SDL and KDH established procedures for overseeing deputies and monitoring their performance in parliament on issues which result in party-line voting, general participation, work on committees and activity on the floor. The results of these reviews can serve as a social pressure mechanism and can be used as a clear internal standard influencing the future placement of a deputy on a party list with a high or low location on that list.⁹³ In terms of party discipline, HZDS demonstrated a high level of discipline during 1997.⁹⁴ Since moving into opposition at the end of 1998, in contrast, in terms of turning up for votes, HZDS had become the most undisciplined of all parliamentary parties by the end of 1999.⁹⁵

The party outside parliament

Outside parliament, HZDS has a formal structure similar to most other parties in the country, only better developed. The structure and organisation of political parties and movements in Slovakia are subject to one main law and three subsequent amendments.⁹⁶ All parties are required by law to have *stanovy* (statutes). Until the Trnava congress in March 2000 HZDS was governed by *stanovy* which were adopted by the republic level congress in March 1994, with modifications in March 1996 to conform with the re-organisation of public administration in Slovakia. Since the 1998 elections the issue of reform of public administration has been much discussed. It should be borne in mind, therefore, that the structure outlined below may prove to be temporary.

The vertical structures of Slovak parties, with the exception of SDK, are remarkably similar, based formally on the principle of building from below. There are four levels: (a) *miestná* (local) or *mestská* (town); (b) *okresná* (district, of which there are 79); (c) *krajská* (region, of which there are eight); and (d) national level. At each level there are constituent organs (meetings, conferences etc.), executive organs (committees, councils etc.), and organs of control and revision.⁹⁷ Following a meeting at the beginning of March 2000 between senior representatives of HZDS and EDU's general secretary, Alexis Wintoniak, to discuss the programme and structure of the party,⁹⁸ HZDS adopted new *stanovy* at the Trnava Congress in 2000, when the party rebranded itself as a centre-right entity, HZDS-people's party. These statutes were 90% congruous with the statutes of the centre-right Austrian People's Party and the German Christian Democratic Union, although the four-level geographical division remained (pending possible changes in the structure of public administration.)

Many parties in Slovakia, such as the Democratic Party (DS), have poorly developed regional structures, and in some cases they hardly exist at all. Many of these parties are internally created 'top-down parties' which originated from parliament or at the elite level.⁹⁹ Statistics from 1999 show that the majority of Slovakia's parliamentary parties, including HZDS, had at least one full-time official in each region that year. In addition, HZDS has one official with use of a party car in every one of Slovakia's 79 districts. HZDS also has the largest number of paid employees. The two other Slovak parties with well developed structures are SDL and KDH. The latter's structure has much to do with its links to the Catholic Church and the former benefited from the organisational structure built up during SDL's previous incarnation, the Communist Party.

TABLE 3
TOTAL NUMBER OF PAID EMPLOYEES (1998–99)

	<i>HZDS</i>	<i>SDL</i>	<i>SNS</i>	<i>KDH</i>
Party HQ	50–80	29	10	20–30
Region	7	0	7	0
District	79	0	0	25–35
Total	136–166	29	17	45–65

Sources: Marika Ondruchová, 'Faktory formovania organizácie politických strán a hnutí v SR', unpublished *diplomova práca*, Department of Political Science, Comenius University, Bratislava, 2000, pp. 65–67.

Party finance

HZDS is one of the wealthiest political parties in Slovakia. In 1998, for example, HZDS was the richest political party in terms of property. The party owned property worth 96 970 000 Slovak crowns, almost twice as much as second placed SDL (53 236 000 crowns). The value of other parties' property, such as SDK, SOP, SMK and KDH amounted to less than a 10th of the figure for HZDS. Equally, HZDS's income in 1998 far exceeded that of other political parties in Slovakia; HZDS received 111 104 000 crowns in 1998, compared with SDL's 58 772 000, SDK's 58 279 000 and SOP's 31 028 000 crowns.¹⁰⁰

Money pours into the coffers of Slovak political parties from four sources: state subvention, membership dues, individual donations and receipts from the party's own activity. Out of 52 registered parties in 1998, HZDS was one of eight parties (including SMK, KDH, DS, SNS, SDSS) to register anonymous contributions. HZDS's anonymous contributions totalled 39 807 000 crowns, far higher than any other party (the next highest was SDSS with 4 005 000 crowns).¹⁰¹

The identity and motivations of anonymous contributors to various Slovak political parties, including HZDS, remain unclear, although a fertile ground for speculation. The relationships between numerous Slovak political parties, including HZDS, and powerful interest groups, businesses and organised crime have been the subject of much discussion in the media.¹⁰² Rather than accuse Slovak parties of being controlled by undisclosed forces, for which there is no irrefutable evidence, we will merely state that many Slovak parties, including HZDS, have failed to provide a sufficiently open and transparent account of their finances to remove the cloud of suspicion from over their heads.

Membership

Since 1994 HZDS has had the largest membership of any political party in Slovakia. Party membership is important for a number of reasons. For many European parties, membership fees are still an important source of revenue.¹⁰³ In 1998, however, membership contributions accounted for less than 1% of HZDS's income, in comparison with 45% of KDH's and 5% of SDL's revenue. State subventions, in contrast, accounted for 63% of HZDS's income as opposed to 47% for KDH and 58% for

TABLE 4
MEMBERSHIP OF SLOVAKIA'S FOUR MOST POPULAR PARTIES SINCE INDEPENDENCE

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
HZDS	30 000	40 000	28 320	40 000	50 000	70 000	73 000
SDL	48 000	27 600	24 000	27 600	n.a.	22 482	21 223
SNS	7 000	2 000	3 800	4 900	8 900	11 500	13 000
KDH	26 352	27 888	26 386	28 265	30 106	29 541	27 348

Sources: Darina Malová, 'Slovakia's Contentious Politics in 1990–1994: Revolting Nation and Quiet Citizenry?', unpublished paper, Department of Political Science, Comenius University, Bratislava, 1997; Marika Ondruchová, 'Organizačná štruktúra politických strán a hnutí na Slovensku: Vybrané aspekty', unpublished, prepared for *Výberový vzdelávací spolk*, Bratislava, 2000 p. 89; and Rudolf Žiak, interview with the author, Bratislava, 21 March 2000.

SDL, due to each party's success at the ballot box.¹⁰⁴ Membership, therefore, does not raise relatively much money for HZDS. One could suggest that because of state subventions membership is degraded, because the central organs of the party are not dependent on membership; rather, the local bodies are dependent on handouts from the centre, putting another nail in the coffin of influence of the ordinary member. Over-emphasis on the pecuniary, however, is unhelpful. Members are important for parties in organisational and political terms. The fact that former HZDS vice-chairman Rudolf Žiak stressed that 'the number of members is not that important, what we want is *active* members'¹⁰⁵ seems to bear that out. Members are important for the '*image* of a mass party, and as proof that they are seen as viable channels for political representation. Members in this sense are also legitimisers'.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the fact that in the 1990s the basic annual HZDS membership fee was a mere 20 crowns (\$0.45), and some low-income groups such as students and the retired were often exempt, suggests that members were not seen as a financial resource. Parties like to boast of large and expanding memberships, particularly those such as HZDS which dabble in populism. A party projecting itself as the party of the people needs to have a large membership to distinguish it from the elite-run parties. Such a desire was part of the motivation for the membership drive within the workforce of the Slovak steel giant VSŽ in the run-up to the 1998 election, to get membership of HZDS up to 100 000.¹⁰⁷ Subscriptions appear to be low, therefore, mainly to foster an expansion of membership. HZDS politicians are very proud to inform all who care to listen of the size of their membership,¹⁰⁸ as a sign of the party's political virility.

Support

HZDS has been the most successful Slovak political party at the ballot box since its creation in 1991. Former agriculture minister and HZDS stalwart Peter Baco argues the party's support is built on three pillars: (a) those who have suffered (more) during economic transformation, particularly the rural population and the inhabitants of Northern and Central Slovakia; (b) the 'Christian aspect' and (c) HZDS' greater sensitivity to the voters' desire for a 'national aspect'.¹⁰⁹

Those who have suffered (more) during economic transformation

Although HZDS has garnered support from across the social spectrum and from all four corners of the country, the party has been less successful in attracting support from the *winners* (private entrepreneurs, white-collar workers, university educated) of economic reform, but more successful in attracting votes from the *losers* (the unemployed, the retired, blue-collar and agricultural workers).¹¹⁰ The latter group is concentrated in the rural areas, particularly in Northern and Central Slovakia.

There is a marked rural–urban divide in Slovak voting patterns. In the 1998 elections, for example, HZDS only won 17.3% of the vote in the urban areas with populations of over 100 000. Krivý's research has highlighted the fact that the more rural the region the higher the vote for HZDS.¹¹¹ In the 1992, 1994 and 1998 elections HZDS scored its best results in Central and Northern Slovakia. Towns such as Žiar nad Hronom, Zvolen, Topľčany, Považska Bystrica, Žilina and Čadca consistently deliver a proportionally larger share of their votes to HZDS than the national average.¹¹²

There is a tendency in the common parlance of Slovak intellectuals to dismiss HZDS supporters as old, stupid, rural peasants. Many of those who do vote HZDS, however, vote not because they are old or stupid or live in rural areas but rather because they have not been recipients of the fruits of marketisation. HZDS has garnered support by using 'language and rhetoric which people understand'. In order to explain policies, argued Baco, one needs to be able to formulate an explanation using words an average worker can understand, even though a university professor might find such a formulation simplistic.¹¹³ What is ironic is that HZDS has hung on the votes of those who lost out, even though HZDS ministers had their hands on the levers of power. It may be that the HZDS electorate has evolved over time, with a greater proportion of votes garnered from voters who feel insecure on other fronts such as ethnicity, identity, age and core–periphery issues, or that most other political parties have appeared to advocate even faster transformation. For former cabinet minister and HZDS deputy chairwoman Oľga Keltošová HZDS's success was built on a programme of 'economic transformation with a strong social dimension'. In response to Czechoslovak President Havel's peace plan in the early 1990s, which envisaged a drastic reduction in armaments production, HZDS's championing of the interests of the armament workers of Central and Eastern Slovakia was important in building up support in the region.¹¹⁴ In addition, Mečiar's tour around Slovakia after he was ejected from the Prime Ministership in 1991 helped project HZDS as the party which had the interests of non-Bratislava dwelling Slovaks at heart. Moreover, the desire to better represent the non-Bratislava based population was important for many who left VPN in 1991 to join HZDS.¹¹⁵

HZDS is in one sense a party of those who lost out and who see nothing in the project of modernising Slovakia. But its support base is also linked to the 'parallel worlds of Slovak politics, society and history'. Southern Slovakia is, in reality, the northern edge of the Great Hungarian Plain, a 'polyglot region with a European frame of reference'. The 'real' Slovakia is the valleys and mountains of Central and Northern Slovakia where Slovaks 'withdrew and kept their culture alive down the centuries, whenever danger threatened'. Their point of reference has tended to be inward, provincial, defensive and nationalist.¹¹⁶

TABLE 5

HZDS AND THE CATHOLIC VOTE: ELECTION RESULTS IN DISTRICTS WITH ABOVE AVERAGE REPRESENTATION OF DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS CONFESSIONS

(a) 1992 Election

Party	Districts with > 80% ethnic Slovaks	Roman Catholic	Evangelical	No religion	Greco-Catholic	Slovakia as a whole
HZDS	42.0	46.6	44.0	37.5	28.3	37.3
SNS	9.0	9.4	6.5	10.4	3.8	7.9
SDL	15.5	11.5	18.4	17.6	23.6	14.7
KDH	10.1	13.0	6.9	7.2	10.7	8.9

(b) 1994 Election

Party	Districts with > 80% ethnic Slovaks	Roman Catholic	Evangelical	No religion	Greco-Catholic	Slovakia as a whole
HZDS	39.6	46.2	38.6	32.0	29.3	35.0
SNS	6.1	6.9	4.8	6.4	2.6	5.4
SV (SDL)	10.8	7.8	13.2	13.6	13.8	10.4
KDH	11.5	13.5	7.9	9.9	12.1	10.1

(c) 1998 Election

Party	Districts with > 80% ethnic Slovaks	Roman Catholic	Evangelical	No religion	Greco-Catholic	Slovakia as a whole
HZDS	30.3	36.8	28.6	22.8	23.6	27.0
SNS	10.4	13.1	9.3	9.2	5.2	9.1
SDL	16.1	13.1	20.7	18.6	15.7	14.7
SDK*	28.0	24.5	24.4	33.4	27.8	26.3

Note: * in the 1998 elections KDH joined forces with four other parties and ran under the SDK banner.
Source: Vladimír Krivý, *Čo prezrádzajú volebné výsledky*, pp. 77–79.

The Christian aspect

The evidence for Baco's second explanation, religion, is inconclusive. In analysing the impact of religion on voting patterns, it is clear that ethnic Hungarians vote for ethnic parties because they are ethnic Hungarian parties, not because of religion. Of those areas with a population of over 80% ethnic Slovaks, there are marked differences between the levels of support in areas dominated by different confessional groupings. Table 5, drawing on the work of Krivý, distinguishes between districts with above average representation of various religious groupings (Roman Catholic, evangelical, no religion and Greco-Catholic).

In all three elections HZDS has picked up a proportionally larger share of the vote in Roman Catholic areas,¹¹⁷ although in areas dominated by other confessional groupings the party has still managed to win a significant share of the vote broadly in line with its national tally. Given the respective roles Christianity plays in the

ideologies of HZDS and KDH (as discussed above) it is no surprise to see KDH as the more successful party (proportionally) in terms of winning the Catholic vote.

The national aspect

The regional concentration of HZDS' support also has much to do with ethnicity. Support for HZDS has been at its lowest in the southern edge of Slovakia where most ethnic Hungarians live. In 1992, for example, in Dunajská Streda and Komarno just 3.3% and 7.0% respectively of their electorate who voted cast their vote for HZDS—figures which barely changed in 1994 (2.9% and 7.0%)¹¹⁸ It is not just HZDS which fails to capture the ethnic Hungarian vote. Indeed, ethnic Hungarians tend to vote *en masse* for ethnic Hungarian parties.¹¹⁹ HZDS has not been averse to tapping into anti-Hungarian sentiment. During the 1994 general election, for example, an HZDS election leaflet declared: 'Who does not vote for HZDS is voting for Hungarian autonomy'.¹²⁰ Undeniably there was a large dose of rhetoric appealing to nationalist Slovak sentiment. Mečiar often made disparaging references to the powers that be in Prague and Budapest, stressing the importance of solving 'our own problems'.¹²¹ The ethnic Slovaks who make their marks on the ballot paper for HZDS are overwhelmingly suspicious of ethnic Hungarians. An IVO poll conducted in January 1999 found that in response to the statement, 'Hungarians living in Slovakia are just as interested in the well-being of the country as are Slovaks', only 24% of HZDS voters strongly agreed or agreed, while 62% strongly disagreed or disagreed (the remaining 14% were don't knows).¹²² Peter Baco denied Slovaks were nationalist. He argued that they did not respond well to comments such as those uttered by the former SNS leader Ján Slota that Slovakia should send tanks to Budapest; rather, they responded well to parties with a 'national accent'.¹²³

Cliché, which compares Slovaks unfavourably with their erstwhile federation partners on such factors as nationalism and democracy, has been shown by Krause to be wide of the mark, or at least the subject of exaggeration. Krause, however, shows that the 'national question' explanation should not be discarded immediately. Whilst socioeconomic questions were the bases of Czech voters' evaluation of parties, 'nation and democracy' were the basis of evaluation for Slovak voters.¹²⁴ Slovak national identity, it should be remembered, was formed, at least in part, in opposition to Hungary and all things Hungarian. It is interesting to note that the strongest anti-Hungarian feelings are to be found amongst Slovaks who live in the parts of the country furthest away from the areas populated by ethnic Hungarians.¹²⁵

The above evidence suggests that Baco's analysis is broadly correct, although HZDS has not been unsuccessful in winning support (albeit in smaller numbers) from *winnings*, non-Christians and non-nationally inclined Slovak citizens. In addition to Baco's triadic explanation two other factors deserve mention. In contrast to the continual creation, merger and dissolution of other parties on the Slovak political scene, HZDS has been a constant, identifiable brand in the electoral market place. Secondly, the media have played an important role in Slovak politics. The issue of media influence in Slovak politics is complex and merits in-depth analysis in itself; nevertheless, in order to understand the support base of HZDS, it is important to note, for example, how the slavishly pro-HZDS newspaper *Slovenská republika* and the

markedly anti-Mečiar newspaper *Sme* have helped to engender entrenched animosity between HZDS and its supporters on the one hand and their critics on the other.¹²⁶

Conclusion

The four questions posed at the beginning of this article were intended to grapple with an underlying question: is HZDS different or not from other Slovak parties in terms of ideology, organisation and support base? In terms of organisation, HZDS appears to have a formal framework structure congruous with the majority of political parties in Slovakia. The similarity, however, owes much to the administrative reforms of 1996. The substance within the framework displays a much more developed and extensive party structure, not the least element of which is the large membership. Nonetheless, the formal structure belies the fact that the leader and founder of the HZDS appears to play more than just the leadership role played by other party leaders such as Peter Weiss and Jozef Migaš in SDL, Mikuláš Dzurinda in SDK or Ján Slota and Anna Malíková in SNS. Mečiar has become in many respects the physical embodiment of his party and all it stands for—a position similar to that of Václav Klaus, Mečiar's partner in the division of Czechoslovakia and head of the Czech Civic Democratic Party. Perhaps the only Slovak party leader who has played a similar role in his party is Ján Čarnogurský. Čarnogurský, however, stepped down from the leadership of KDH in September 2000.

Ideologically, HZDS is a party that has displayed a nebulous standpoint that does not appear to sit comfortably on the left–right spectrum. Until the end of Czechoslovakia it was difficult to categorise Slovak political parties on the economic left–right scale, because the national issue was to the fore. Since its establishment, HZDS has developed an ideology and support base grounded on managed economic reform, a rhetoric and concern for those who lost out from the process of marketisation, a national accent and the charisma and personality of its leader and founder, Vladimír Mečiar. The policy package offered by HZDS has often been incoherent and incongruous, with a touch of populism thrown in for good measure. That eclectic pick and mix was constructed in part in an attempt to bolster the support of Mečiar. Nonetheless, it has never been a solely office-driven party such as Rudolf Schuster's SOP, formed in 1999 with the express intention of catapulting Schuster into the presidency.

Krivý's research has shown that HZDS derives its support largely (but not exclusively) from the older, poorer, rural voters of Central and Northern Slovakia. As the statistics on HZDS support demonstrate, the party is extremely unlikely to form a government by itself. It needs coalition partners. HZDS, however, has found it difficult to attract such partners.¹²⁷ This fact is not primarily a function of the three aspects explored in this article. Ideologically, the programme of HZDS would be compatible with a number of mainstream Slovak political parties, notably SDL and KDH. (There are also notable similarities between the support bases of HZDS and KDH.) The whiff of anti-Hungarian sentiment, which is still prevalent in the official statements of the party, would make coalition with the ethnic Hungarian parties highly unlikely.

Two factors have generated a gulf between HZDS and potential coalition partners. Firstly, the actions of the Mečiar-led governments, particularly the 1994–98 govern-

ment, in breaking what the opposition and international bodies such as the European Commission saw as democratic norms.¹²⁸ After the 1994 elections the formation of the HZDS/SNS/ZRS coalition was by no means a foregone conclusion.¹²⁹ Both SDL and KDH held a series of meetings with HZDS over the formation of a government, but stumbling blocks emerged, particularly over the proposed constitutional changes to the role and election of the president and the inclusion of SNS in a coalition.¹³⁰ Secondly, Mečiar himself. Mečiar has offered conflicting signals since HZDS's defeat in the 1998 parliamentary elections. Soon after the elections he bade Slovakia farewell in song at the end of an infamous TV interview and relinquished his parliamentary seat, only to return as a candidate for president in May 1999. In an interview around the time of the Trnava congress he responded to critics calling for his resignation by stating: 'Why should HZDS get rid of a leader who has been successful in elections four times, three times leading the government and who in effect created this state?'¹³¹ Secondly, in attempting to gauge HZDS' popularity one cannot ignore Mečiar himself. In the eyes of the Slovak electorate, the charismatic personality of Mečiar is HZDS' greatest asset. In polls he was invariably voted (until late 1999 at least) the most popular and trusted politician in the country. (He also consistently topped the tables of the most unpopular and least trusted politician in the country.¹³²)

The adoration HZDS supporters hold for their leader, however, is not shared by potential coalition partners. Róbert Fico, who formed his own party, Smer, in December 1999, has declared that HZDS with Mečiar at the helm has 'no coalition potential'. Fico was keen to stress his new party would not be a springboard to power for Mečiar.¹³³ Given the lag between the writing and publishing of an academic article it would be unwise to speculate about future coalition partners for HZDS. Nonetheless, the role Vladimír Mečiar would play in any configuration appears to be a central issue.¹³⁴

HZDS is a living political entity and, as with almost all such creatures, it is constantly evolving. The Trnava congress in March 2000, when HZDS officially transformed itself from a movement into a 'party of the people's type', was regarded by senior HZDS politicians as a 'very significant' development.¹³⁵ Critics regarded the event as just a cosmetic exercise.¹³⁶ Whether the former or the latter proves to be true, few would deny that, during the first ten years of its existence, HZDS has played a starring role on Slovakia's political stage. Much of the credit and/or blame for what took place in Slovakia in the 1990s deserves to be laid at HZDS's door.

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Abbreviations of Slovak political parties

DS	Democratic Party
DU	Democratic Union
HZDS	Movement for a Democratic Slovakia
KDH	Christian Democratic Movement
MK	Hungarian Coalition

MKDH-Spolužitie	Coalition of Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement and Coexistence
SDK	Slovak Democratic Coalition
SDSS	Slovak Social Democratic Party
SDL	Party of the Democratic Left
SMK	Hungarian Coalition Party
SNS	Slovak National Party
SOP	Party of Civic Understanding
SV	Common Choice
ZRS	Workers' Association of Slovakia

The research for much of this article was conducted during the 1999–2000 academic year when the author was based at the Department of Political Science, Comenius University, Bratislava. The author wishes to express his thanks to all members of the department for providing such a friendly and congenial base for conducting research and to Karen Buerkle, Daniel Domanovský, Sharon Fisher, Andrea Földesová, Petronella Holečková, George Kolankiewicz, Marika Ondruchová, George Schöpflin, Peter Vermeersch and Kieran Williams for their assistance in producing this article. The author is also grateful for financial assistance accorded by the University of London's Academic Trust Fund Committee for the 2000–2001 academic year.

¹ See the European Union's *Agenda 2000* posted at http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg_1a/enlarge/agenda2000. Leading HZDS politicians responded by labelling the Commission's report a catalogue of lies. See Roman Hofbauer, 'Značne zdeformovaný obraz Slovenska', *Slovenská republika*, 18 September 1997, reprinted in Roman Hofbauer, *Slovensko na križovatke: články a prejavy 1997–1998* (Bratislava, JUGA, 1998), pp. 196–205. On NATO see Marián Leško, 'Príbeh sebadiskvalifikácie favorita', in Martin Bútorá & František Šebej (eds), *Slovensko v šedej zóne?: rozširovanie NATO, zlyhanie a perspektívy Slovenska* (Bratislava, IVO, 1998), pp. 15–85.

² M. Steven Fish, 'The End of Meciarism', *East European Constitutional Review*, 8, 1/2, 1999, pp. 47–55 at p. 48.

³ See Miroslav Beblavy & Andrej Salner, *Tvorcia obrazu a obraz tvorcov: vnímanie Slovenska v západných krajinách 1989–1999* (Bratislava, Centrum pre spoločenskú a mediálnu analýzu, 1999). For an alternative view see Johnathan [sic] Sunley, 'Slovakia: A faraway country of which we know what we choose', *Europa Vincet*, 1998, 5–6, pp. 12–18.

⁴ Kieran Williams, 'HZDS: Problems of Identification and Comparison', unpublished paper, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, 1997.

⁵ *Národná obroda*, 7 March 1991, p. 3.

⁶ Williams, 'HZDS: Problems of Identification and Comparison'; B. D. Graham, *Representation and Party Politics: A Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, Blackwell, 1993), pp. 83–87.

⁷ David M. Olson, 'Party Formation and Party System Consolidation in the New Democracies of Central Europe', in Richard Hofferbert (ed.), *Parties and Democracy: Party Structure and Party Performance in Old and New Democracies* (Oxford and Malden, Blackwell, 1998), pp. 10–42 at p. 24.

⁸ Meciar's role in HZDS is analysed below.

⁹ The pace of economic reform was also critical, but throughout Czechoslovakia this was more of a cumulative than a cross-cutting cleavage.

¹⁰ *Národná obroda*, 7 March 1991.

¹¹ The support base of HZDS is discussed below.

¹² Particularly Peter Baco, interviewed by the author, Bratislava, 15 March 2000, and Ivan Hudec, interviewed by the author, Bratislava, 5 April 2000.

¹³ *Stanovy Hnutia za demokratické Slovensko, Prvá Hlava*, article one, March 1996.

¹⁴ *Stanovy SOP*, adopted 26 June 1999; *Stanovy SDK*, adopted with amendments 15 June 1998; *Stanovy KDH*, adopted 10 April 1999; *Stanovy SMK*, adopted 13 November 1999.

¹⁵ *Stanovy a organizačná štruktúra ZRS 1996*; *Stanovy SNS*, adopted 30 May 1998.

¹⁶ *Organizačný poriadok SDL*, approved 24 October 1998.

¹⁷ Paul G. Lewis, *Political Parties in Post-Communist Eastern Europe* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000), pp. 57, 166.

¹⁸ Soňa Szomolányi, 'Does Slovakia Deviate from the Central European Variant of Transition?', in Soňa Szomolányi & Grigorij Mesežnikov (eds), *Slovakia Parliamentary Elections 1994: Causes—*

Consequences—Prospects (Bratislava, Slovak Political Science Association and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1994), pp. 8–39 at pp. 14–15.

¹⁹ Grigorij Mesežnikov, 'Vol'by 1998 a vývoj systému politických stran', in Martin Bútorá, Grigorij Mesežnikov & Zora Bútorová (eds), *Slovenské vol'by '98: Kto? Prečo? Ako?* (Bratislava, IVO, 1999), p. 44.

²⁰ Dušan Leška & Viera Koganová, 'The Elections 1994 and Crystallization of the Political Parties and Movements in Slovakia [sic]', in Soňa Szomolányi & Grigorij Mesežnikov (eds), *Slovakia Parliamentary Elections 1994: Causes—Consequences—Prospects* (Bratislava, Slovak Political Science Association and Friedrich Ebert Foundation, 1994), pp. 86–102 at p. 99.

²¹ Williams, 'HZDS: Problems of Identification and Comparison'; Klaus Von Beyme, *Political Parties in Western Democracies* (Aldershot, Gower, 1985).

²² Peter Mair, *What is Different About Post-Communist Party Systems?*, Studies in Public Policy No. 259 (Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Strathclyde, 1996).

²³ Miroslav Maxon, interviewed by the author, Bratislava, 3 April 2000, and Rudolf Žiak, interviewed by the author, Bratislava, 21 March 2000.

²⁴ See for example *Národná obroda*, 6 and 7 March 1991, p. 1; Augustín Marián Húska, 'Slovensko ide do stále lepších, aj keď' nie idyllických podmienok ...', *Slovensko do toho!*, 20 August 1998.

²⁵ Reuven Y. Hazan, *Centre Parties: Polarization and Competition in European Parliamentary Democracies* (London and Washington, Pinter, 1997), pp. 25–27.

²⁶ Kieran Williams, 'Introduction: What was Meciarism?', in Kieran Williams (ed.), *Slovakia After Communism and Meciarism* (London, SSEES, 2000), pp. 1–16.

²⁷ Peter Staněk & Jana Černá, *Prežije Slovensko rok 2000?* (Bratislava, UDVEM pri EU Klub ekonómov, 1995).

²⁸ HZDS, *Programové tézy HZDS na VOL'BY 1994* (HZDS, 1994), p. 26.

²⁹ For personal and professional reasons this source prefers to remain anonymous.

³⁰ HZDS, *Programové tézy HZDS na VOL'BY 1994*, pp. 7, 10.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37–42.

³² Roman Hofbauer, 'Vstup Slovenskej republiky do piateho roka svojej štatnej samostatnosti', *Parlamentný Kuriér*, 1 January 1997, reprinted in Hofbauer, *Slovensko na križovatke*, pp. 13–16 at p. 15.

³³ HZDS, *Programové tézy HZDS na VOL'BY 1994*, pp. 23–24.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Programové vyhlásenie vlády Slovenskej republiky*, 12 January 1995, p. 8. Reprinted in supplement to *Slovenská republika*, 13 January 1995.

³⁶ Ivan Mikloš, 'Pripojenie politickej a ekonomickej moci', in Soňa Szomolányi (ed.), *Slovensko: Problémy konsolidácie demokracie: spor o 'pravidla hry' pokračuje* (Bratislava: Slovenská združenie pre politické vedy a Nadácia Friedricha Eberta, 1997), pp. 47–84 at p. 53.

³⁷ Roman Hofbauer, 'Obchodné domy Prior-Kmart-Tesco ...?', *Slovenská republika*, 17 January 1997, reprinted in Hofbauer, *Slovensko na križovatke*, pp. 26–27.

³⁸ Michael Laver & Norman Schofield, *Multiparty Government: The Politics of Coalition in Europe* (Michigan, The University of Michigan Press Ann Arbor Paperback Edition, 1998), p. 45.

³⁹ HZDS, *Programové tézy HZDS na VOL'BY 1994* (HZDS, 1994).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴¹ *Slovenská republika*, 25 March 1996, p. 1.

⁴² Rudolf Žiak, interview.

⁴³ Geoffrey Pridham, 'Complying with the European Union's Democratic Conditionality: Transnational Party Linkages and Regime Change in Slovakia, 1993–1998', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 51, 7, 1999, pp. 1221–1244 at p. 1232.

⁴⁴ 'HZDS tuží byť' vládnou stranou a ponuka občanom alternatívu obnovy Slovenska', *Slovenská republika* 20 March 2000, p. 1.

⁴⁵ Rudolf Žiak, interview. To be fair to Rudolf Žiak, he suggested the British Conservative party whilst smiling, so he may not have intended that comment to be taken too seriously.

⁴⁶ 'I.mája na uliciach slovenských miest dominovalo HZDS', *Sme*, 2 May 2000.

⁴⁷ Peter Toth, 'HZDS v priazni "Slobovho" režimu', *Sme*, 11 November 1999, p. 4. The trip was publicly condemned by some HZDS politicians. See for example 'Ol'ga Keltošová priznala, že stretnutie so Slobodanom Miloševićom bola chyba', *Sme*, 19 November 1999.

⁴⁸ See for example Grigorij Mesežnikov, 'Vývoj stranického systému na Slovensku', *Politologická revue*, II, 1, 1996, pp. 27–49.

⁴⁹ Karen Henderson, 'The Slovak Party System', unpublished paper presented to the Slovak Political Science Association, Bratislava, 3 May 2000.

⁵⁰ For example, Timothy Garton Ash, *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches and Despatches from Europe in the 1990s* (London, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1999), p. 114.

⁵¹ *Národná obroda*, 7 March 1991.

⁵² Abby Innes, 'The Breakup of Czechoslovakia: The Impact of Party Development on the Separation of the State', *East European Politics and Societies*, 11, 3, 1997, pp. 393–435 at pp. 412–413 and p. 432. A similar view is expounded in Shari J. Cohen, *Politics Without a Past: The Absence of History in Postcommunist Nationalism* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵³ Yeshayahu Jelinek, *The Parish Republic: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party* (New York and London, East European Quarterly Monograph, 1976).

⁵⁴ See Igor Stupňaň & Andrea Harmanová, 'Tiso stále zamestnáva politikov', *Sme*, 4 March 2000, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Národná obroda*, 16 July 1990, p. 1.

⁵⁶ See for example Hofbauer, *Slovensko na križovatke*, p. 11.

⁵⁷ Zora Bútorová & Martin Bútor, 'Udalosti a osobnosti slovenských dejín', in Zora Bútorová (ed.), *Slovensko pred voľbami: l'udia-názory-súvislosti* (Bratislava, IVO, 1998), pp. 98–110 at p. 99.

⁵⁸ HZDS, *Programové tézy HZDS na VOL'BY 1994*, p. 83.

⁵⁹ Zuzana Hud'ová (ed.), *5 rokov HZDS v tlači* (Odbor verejnej mienky kancelárie HZDS, 1996), p. 79.

⁶⁰ Tim Haughton, 'Fico: une nouvelle direction pour la Slovaquie?', *Regards sur L'Est*, 21, May–June 2000, pp. 24–25.

⁶¹ For a fuller account see Marián Leško, 'Čo SDL' žiadá od koalície, potrebuje koalícia od SDL', *Sme*, 24 March 2000, p. 3.

⁶² Cited in Minton F. Goldman, *Slovakia Since Independence: A Struggle for Democracy* (Westpoint, CT and London, Praeger, 1999), p. 137.

⁶³ *Pravda*, 14 April 2000, p. 2. It should be noted that 'cigán' carries a stronger negative meaning in Slovak than 'gypsy' does in English.

⁶⁴ Quoted in *The Economist*, 7 November 1998.

⁶⁵ The author is grateful to Peter Vermeersch for sharing the fruits of his research.

⁶⁶ HZDS, *Programové tézy HZDS na VOL'BY 1994*, p. 1.

⁶⁷ *Stanovy Hnutia za demokratické Slovensko*, adopted March 1996; also SNS, *stanovy*.

⁶⁸ HZDS, *Programové tézy HZDS na VOL'BY 1994*, p. 87.

⁶⁹ Research conducted by SAV and MVK has shown that 83% of the population professes some form of religious faith. In 1998 68.7% professed to be Roman Catholic or Greco-Catholic. See Miroslav Kollar, 'Churches', in Grigorij Mesežnikov, Michal Ivantyšin & Tom Nicholson (eds), *Slovakia 1998–1999: A Global Report on the State of Society* (Bratislava, IVO, 1999), pp. 36–41 at p. 36.

⁷⁰ A good collection of Mečiar's speeches can be found in the pages of HZDS' official newspaper, *Slovensko do toho!*

⁷¹ Jan Čarnogurský, 'Prejav na sneme v Žiline 9 novembra 1991', in Jan Čarnogurský, *Videné od Dunaja* (Bratislava, Kalligram, 1997), pp. 234–244 at p. 234.

⁷² This section draws on two of the author's recent conference papers: 'Vladimír Mečiar's Impact on Democratic Development in Slovakia', presented at the 20th Anniversary World Congress of the Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences, Washington DC, 8–13 August 2000; and 'Modelling Mečiar: A Theoretical and Comparative Analysis of Vladimír Mečiar's Premiership', presented at 'Between the Bloc and a Hard Place' conference, SSEES, London, 5–7 November 1999.

⁷³ Karol Wolf, *Podruhé a naposled: aneb mírové dělení Československa* (Prague, GC, 1998), p. 128.

⁷⁴ See for example Juraj Marušiak, 'Verte strane, aj keby išlo o hnutie', *Pravda*, 31 March 2000.

⁷⁵ Fish, 'The End of Meciarism', p. 48.

⁷⁶ For personal and professional reasons this source prefers to remain anonymous.

⁷⁷ František Gaulieder, interview with the author, Galanta, 21 June 2000.

⁷⁸ Ol'ga Keltošová, interview; Rudolf Žiak, interview. See also Andrea Harmanová, 'Mečiar a Malíková včera na tretí raz podpísal opozičnú dohodu', *Sme*, 3 March 2000, p. 2, and 'Žiak naznačil problémy s podpisom opozičnej zmluvy HZDS s SNS', *Sme*, 25 February 2000, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Angelo Panebianco, *Political Parties: Organization and Power*, translated by Marc Silver (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 143–162.

⁸¹ Vladimír Hagara (ed.), *5 rokov HZDS vo fotografii* (Bratislava, Odbor verejnej mienky kancelárie HZDS, 1996).

⁸² *Europa Vincet*, 1998, 5–6.

⁸³ *Sme*, 20 March 2000, p. 1.

⁸⁴ *The Slovak Spectator*, 5, 46, 6–12 December 1999, p. 6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Interview with the former chairman of the 'Office for the Strategic Development of Society', Rastislav Tóth, Banská Bystrica, 10 February 2000.

⁸⁷ *Stenografická správa o 2 schôdzi Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky*, 4 November 1994.

⁸⁸ František Gaulieder, interview.

⁸⁹ Darina Malová, 'Slovakia', *European Journal of Political Research*, 26, 3/4, 1994, pp. 413–421.

⁹⁰ Darina Malová, 'Nel'ahká inštitucionalizácia parlamentnej demokracie na Slovensku', *Politologická revue*, 1, June 1998, pp. 47–49.

⁹¹ František Gaulieder, interview.

⁹² Darina Malová & Kevin Deegan Krause, 'Parliamentary Party Groups in Slovakia', in Knut Heidar & Ruud Koole (eds), *Parliamentary Party Groups in European Democracies: Political Parties Behind Closed Doors* (London and New York, Routledge, 2000), pp. 195–213 at p. 205.

⁹³ Malová, 'Slovakia'.

⁹⁴ Grigorij Mesežnikov, 'Vnútropolitický vývoj a systém politických strán', in Martin Bútorá & Michal Ivantýšyn (eds), *Slovensko 1997: Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti a trendoch na rok 1998* (Bratislava, IVO, 1998), pp. 19–98 at p. 62.

⁹⁵ 'Jozef Migaš: Najdisciplinovanejší sú poslanci z SMK, najhorší z HZDS', *Sme* 5 November 1999

⁹⁶ *Zákon o združovaní v politických stranách a v politických hnutiach č 424/1991 Zb a novelizované zákonmi č 468/1991Zb, 47/1993Z, 43/1994Z, 1991.*

⁹⁷ Marika Ondruchová, 'Faktory formovania organizácie politických strán a hnutí v SR', unpublished *diplomová práca*, Department of Political Science, Comenius University, Bratislava, 2000, pp. 55–63.

⁹⁸ 'HZDS chce byť európskou ľudovou stranou', *Sme*, 13 March 2000, p. 2.

⁹⁹ Peter Mair, *What is Different about Post-Communist Party Systems?*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁰ Národná rada Slovenskej republiky, *256 Informácia o predložení výročných finančných správ politických strán politických hnutí za rok 1998* (Bratislava, Národná rada Slovenskej republiky, 1999, supplement 7).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² See for example Marián Leško, 'Zaujmem štátu a strany alebo zaujmovej skupinovy?', *Sme*, 9 May 2000, p. 5. On alleged HZDS links with the underworld see Marián Leško, 'Čo robil Gustáv Krajčí v kauze M Černák', *Sme*, 28 January 2000, p. 9, and Peter Tóth, 'Je HZDS mafia alebo mafia je v ňom?', *Sme*, 1 March 2000, p. 6.

¹⁰³ Peter Mair, 'Party Organization: From Civil Society to the State', in Richard S. Katz & Peter Mair (eds), *How Parties Organize: Change and Adaptation in Party Organizations in Western Democracies* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi, Sage, 1994), pp. 1–22 at p. 14.

¹⁰⁴ Národná rada Slovenskej republiky, *256 Informácia o predložení výročných finančných správ politických strán politických hnutí za rok 1998.*

¹⁰⁵ Rudolf Žiak, interview.

¹⁰⁶ Mair, 'Party Organization: From Civil Society to the State', p. 15.

¹⁰⁷ HZDS politicians had long before bandied about the 100 000 figure. See for example *Slovenská republika*, 25 March 1996, p. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Ol'ga Keltošová, interview with the author, Bratislava, 18 April 2000.

¹⁰⁹ Peter Baco, interview.

¹¹⁰ Jan Fidrmuc, 'Economics of Voting in Post-communist Countries', *Electoral Studies*, 19, 2000, pp. 199–217; Vladimír Krivý, Viera Feglová & Daniel Balko, *Slovensko a jeho regióny: Sociokultúrne súvislosti volebného správania* (Bratislava, Nadacia Media, 1996), pp. 47–64 and pp. 93–111; Vladimír Krivý, *Čo prezrádzajú volebné výsledky? Parlamentné vol'by 1992–1998* (Bratislava, IVO, 1999).

¹¹¹ Krivý, *Čo prezrádzajú volebné výsledky*, pp. 52–59.

¹¹² Krivý et al., *Slovensko a jeho regióny*, pp. 47–64 and pp. 93–111, and Krivý, *Čo prezrádzajú volebné výsledky.*

¹¹³ Peter Baco, interview.

¹¹⁴ Ol'ga Keltošová, interview.

¹¹⁵ František Gaulieder, interview.

¹¹⁶ The author is drawing on communication with an official who prefers to remain anonymous.

¹¹⁷ These findings should not be overemphasised. A higher level of support for a party in a district with a greater than average proportion of a particular confessional group does not *prove* the increase in support is due to religious affiliation. Nonetheless, the statistics suggest a relationship.

¹¹⁸ Krivý *et al.*, *Slovensko a jeho regióny*, pp. 47–64 and pp. 93–111.

¹¹⁹ Krivý, *Čo prezrádzajú volebné výsledky*, p. 73.

¹²⁰ Zuzana Hud'ová (ed.), *5 rokov HZDS v tlači* (Bratislava, Odbor verejnej mienky kancelárie HZDS, 1996), p. 76.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹²² Zora Bútorová, Ol'ga Gyárfášová & Marián Velšic, 'Public Opinion', in Grigorij Mesežnikov, Michal Ivantyšin & Tom Nicholson (eds), *Slovakia 1998–1999: A Global Report on the State of Society* (Bratislava, IVO, 1999), pp. 137–166 at p. 159.

¹²³ Peter Baco, interview.

¹²⁴ Kevin Deegan Krause, 'Public Opinion and Party Choice in Slovakia and the Czech Republic', *Party Politics*, 6, 1, 2000, pp. 23–46 at pp. 24–25.

¹²⁵ Krivý, *Čo prezrádzajú volebné výsledky*, pp. 29–51.

¹²⁶ Andrej Školokay, 'The Role of the Media in Politics and Society in Slovakia after the Collapse of Communism', unpublished PhD thesis, Department of Political Science, Comenius University, Bratislava.

¹²⁷ Milan Žitny has suggested that Mečiar helped Jan L'upták set up and fund ZRS (part of the 1994–98 coalition); see Milan Žitny, 'Išiel od nás', *Domino forum*, 41/99, 17 September 1999, posted at www.dofa.sk/41-99/4.html. He provides no convincing evidence.

¹²⁸ HZDS politicians have been quick to label the current (1998–) government as anti-democratic, demonstrated, for example, by their month-long boycott of the Slovak parliament in May 2000. See 'Mečiarovci bojkotujú parlament, malíkovci nie', *Sme*, 10 May 2000, p. 1.

¹²⁹ For a good flavour of the protracted discussion and debate over possible coalition configurations see *Sme* and *Slovenská republika* from 3 October to 11 December 1994.

¹³⁰ Peter Weiss, leader of SDL in 1994, interviewed by the author, Bratislava, 25 February 2000.

¹³¹ 'Ak budú lepší, potom odídem', *Pravda*, 20 March 2000, p. 1.

¹³² Zora Bútorová, 'Public Opinion', in Martin Bútorá & Thomas W Skaldony (eds), *Slovakia 1996–7: A Global Report on the State of Society* (Bratislava, IVO, 1998), pp. 67–80 at p. 68. See also 'Najviac aj najmenej sympatický je Mečiar', *Sme*, 10 February 2000, p. 3.

¹³³ *Plus 7 dní*, 6 March 2000.

¹³⁴ For a fuller analysis of possible coalition partners, particularly Róbert Fico, see Marián Leško, 'Fico už nie je pre Mečiar a superom, ale nepriateľom', *Sme*, 22 May 2000, p. 3; Tim Haughton, 'Fico: une nouvelle direction pour la Slovaquie?', *Regards sur L'Est*, 21, May–June 2000, pp. 24–25; Tim Haughton, 'Leadership in Flux: Slovakia's HZDS Change their Tactics with Referendum Defeat', *Central Europe Review*, 2, 40, 20 November 2000, posted at www.ce-review.org.

¹³⁵ Ol'ga Keltošová, interview.

¹³⁶ Marián Leško, 'Čo nie je v hnutí nebude v strane', *Sme*, 7 March 2000.