



Language

Slovakia (part of Czechoslovakia since the Versailles settlement of 1919) broke away to form a separate state in 1992. Since this was motivated by a sense of a distinct historical and cultural identity and political difference, the new regime dominated by Vladimir Meciar was unsurprisingly nationalist in tone, and also relatively authoritarian. Its path towards EU membership was slowed down by its tendency to harass political opponents, ignore civil liberties and discriminate against ethnic minorities.

Meciar had won parliamentary elections in 1992 at the head of a new party, Movement for a Democratic Slovakia – he had broken with Public Against Violence (parallel to the Czech Civic Forum) associated with the 1989 'velvet revolution'. Although Meciar briefly lost office in 1994, during the parliamentary elections that year the opposition was divided and easily defeated by his party. But by 1996 opposition parties began to cooperate, for example to campaign for direct elections to the presidency, and also to work with a strong civil society sector. As a result by the 1998 parliamentary elections political parties from the Christian Democrats to the Social Democrats and the Greens and a party of the Hungarian minority came together in a coalition to defeat Meciar. Electoral tactics were backed by a strong public campaign to inform the public and get out the vote, including local meetings with candidates and rock concerts, and also to organize electoral monitoring. A coalition of civil society bodies 'Civic Campaign '98' (OK '98) was responsible for this campaign, building on earlier experiences of campaigns and demonstrations, and managed to involve trade unions in electoral activity.

OK '98 received advice from Romanian and Bulgarian activists – and was in turn to become an important model for subsequent civil society campaigns in Croatia and Serbia. The Slovak campaigners also received substantial financial aid and some technical advice from the US and other governments (including Bulgaria) and from unofficial external groups.

Meciar had assumed the office of President in 1998 (when the previous incumbent stepped down) as well as Prime Minister, initiated changes in electoral law and stepped up harassment of opponents, so it seemed likely that he would try to rig the elections – hence the emphasis on independent monitoring. The opposition did not expect that Meciar would try to retain power by force (despite his support within the police and security services) and in the event (unlike Milosevic in Serbia) he immediately accepted electoral defeat.

Butora, Martin ; Meseznikov, Grigorij ; Butrova, Zora ; Fisher, Sharon, [The 1998 Parliamentary Election and Democratic Rebirth in Slovakia](#) [1], Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs, 1999, pp. 215

Written by protagonists and supporters of the anti-Meciar campaign. Chapters on mobilization of trade unions, Slovak churches and other civil society bodies to turn out the vote for the anti-Meciar coalition, especially among the young (10% of the electorate were first time voters).

See also: Butora, Martin ; Butrova, Zora , [Slovakia's Democratic Awakening](#) [2] Journal of Democracy, 1999, pp. 80-93 ; and Butora, Martin , [OK'98: A Campaign of Slovak NGOs for Free and Fair Elections](#) [3] In Forbrig; Demes, [Reclaiming Democracy: Civil Society and Electoral Change in Central and Eastern Europe](#) [4] (D. II.1. Comparative Assessments [5]) Washington DC, German Marshall Fund of USA, 2007, pp. 21-52 . Butora was a founder member of Public Against Violence and a former Slovak ambassador to the USA.

Meseznikov, Grigorij ; Ivantysyn, Michal ; Nicholson, Tom, [Slovakia 1998-1999: A Global Report on the State of Society](#) [6], Bratislava, Institute for Public Affairs, 1999, pp. 439

Pridham, Geoffrey, [Complying with the European Union's Democratic Conditionality: Transnational Party Linkage and Regime Change in Slovakia, 1993-1998](#) [7], Europe-Asia Studies, Vol. 51, issue 7 (November), 1999, pp. 1221-1244



Reichardt, David, [Democracy Promotuion in Slovakia: An Import or an Export business?](#) [8], Perspectives: Central European Review of International Affairs, Vol. 18, issue Summer, 2002, pp. 5-20

Rhodes, Matthew, [Slovakia after Meciar: A Midterm Report](#) [9], Problems of Post-Communism, Vol. 48, issue 4 (summer), 2002, pp. 3-13

See also:

Sharon Fisher, [Political Change in Post-Communist Slovakia and Croatia: From Nationalist to Europeanist](#) [10], (D. II.2.e. Croatia 2000 [11])

Valerie J. Bunce; Sharon L. Wolchik, [Defeating Authoritarian Leaders in Post-Communist Countries](#) [12], (D. II.1. Comparative Assessments [13]), pp. 63-79.

NB. Materials on subsequent developments in Slovakia (in English as well as Slovak) can be found on the [Institute for Public Affairs \(Bratislava\) website](#) [14].

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