

"Old habits of inertia pose massive obstacles to change."¹

The Christmas of 1991 brought the unexpected collapse of USSR. The rejoicing, would however, be overshadowed by a socio-economic hangover throbbing in the former Soviet satellites of Eastern Europe.² After decades of imbibing on the lies of working towards socialism, the bottle had run dry. Many of the newly democratized states' populations had only known success in modern human development in the areas of education, industrialization, urbanization, and health care under the imposed Marxist-Leninist system. Democracy and liberal economic policies based on the individual were not only foreign but for decades labeled as detrimental to the working class. The expectations of what government's role in society was, though socialist, provided more for the people than the previous centuries of political systems in the region.

As each nation struggled to find a vector for the future, the choice in Western eyes seemed obvious- create democratic republics and a liberal free-market economies. Is it correct to expect

1 Zbigniew Brzezinski. New York Times. "Will The Soviet Empire Self-destruct?; Four Scenarios for Failure"; available from <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=950DE1DA113DF935A15751C0A96F948260&scp=1&sq=Zbigniew+Brzezinski+Old+habits+of+inertia+pose+massive+obstacles+to+change.&st=nyt>; Internet; accessed 10 April 2008.

2 In 1989, Slovakia (as part of Czechoslovakia, along with Bulgaria, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania, owed the West 100 billion US dollars. Leon Aron. The Heritage Foundation. "Gorbachev's Brest-Litovsk: The Kremlin's Grand Compromise in Eastern Europe"; available from <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Europe/bg724.cfm>; internet accessed; 16 April 2008.

such a change over without understanding the viewpoint of those under going this transition?

Without a variety of choices, the direction was set for the future. However, the determining at which velocity to pursue new policies became the complicating issue. Originally the goals were not if these new states planned to switch to a Western-style political, economic, and social system, but rather to what degree when considering how capable given the entirety resources available.

Once an anvil under the blows of European history, Slovakia now emerges declaring itself as the heart of Europe. The long standing and strong sense of national identity over a millennium worth of struggle finally place it in command of its future. Geographically and historically it has experienced both Eastern and Western European cultural influences. This current positioning in Europe has Forbes magazine bestowing the title, “The world's next Hong Kong or Ireland”.³ Unfortunately, neither sides influence has been an entirely beneficial experience for the Slovaks. Centuries over overseers have definitely honed the defiant nature of the national Slovak character.

Now on their own for 17 years, will Slovakia extract the best from what both the East and West have to offer in the path to prosperity? Or will this dichotomy of choice breed indecision leaving Slovakia unable to steer or stop on bumpy road of uncertainty? Always under the influence of outside political forces, one may begin to question how the Slovak Republic's government will behave on its own.

3 2006 Investment Climate Statement- Slovakia, Available from; <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/ifd/2006/62032.htm>; Internet accessed; 19 April 2008

Rapid change for a society can often lead to a collapse or rebirth. Big bang economic recovery theories to revive ex-Socialist economies has produced mixed results. Government officials often resisted such changes out of fear of losing their positions of power as the working classes had become complacent on the patronage of the state. Fifteen years have passed since the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia offering a unique case study. The separation into two halves was driven by more than nationalistic desires, but also on economic matters. The Czechs were interested in improving economic ties in from the West while the momentum of the Soviet collapse was still fresh. To the east, Slovakia opted for a slower rate of economic change under the guise of keeping state programs in place and lessening the overall burden on the nation's people. In reality, this reduced rate of change to a liberal economy in Slovakia kept in place state controlled social programs and economic policies was a ploy to keep the populace content while ruling elite remained in power. This choice of state sponsored stability promoted on moral grounds was a path to autocratic policies meeting the needs of a ruling party.

No matter which conclusion one arrives at from examining the continuities or changes that have occurred in Slovakia over the past 17 years, positioning ourselves in the Slovak point of view is necessary. Western political scientists did not plant the seeds of the Slovakian state. Therefore, they have to accept the taste of the fruit it bears. Throughout the 20th century, Czechoslovakia was tied together by the policies of outside forces. The Czech point of view has been passed over in this essay in favor of focusing on the evolution of the Slovak Republic. For

the researcher, this has not been detrimental to obtaining data and statistics on the two regions at the state was divided on the political administrative units and boundaries that existed.

Unfortunately these records have a down side. The small size of the Slovak nation, 5.4 million, it does not have the resources to convert the all of its data into the English. As the information age takes hold of Slovakia, one can hope the transference of such documents will occur.

At this time an obvious starting point would be an analysis of changes in the past (1960) and present (1993) Slovak constitutions. However, a unique political situation determined the creation of the document, so as a starting point will be the drama of the birth of this sovereign nation. Like a bride with newly imagined ideas of what freedom would be after a divorce, the egotistical nature of Slovakian political culture determined the nation's initial direction on its amicable split from its Bohemian brothers, the Czechs.

Political Culture: Inexperience Shows

The domestic political culture has always played second fiddle in the national song of destiny. For centuries the governmental policies have been written by either a Hungarian, Hapsburg, Czech, or Russian composer. This difficult position placed the traditional role of the ruling factions, not as leadership with a solid power base supported by the will of the people, but as compromising entity focused on its own need to survive. Political maneuvering evolved to keep a status quo of limited autonomy in internal affairs. After twelve centuries of this political

balancing act, Slovakia's ruling elite, in 1993 positioned itself for independence.⁴ A decade and a half later it has yet to be seen if the political culture has matured.

When comparing the domestic political culture from 1991 until today, basically it the same only different external factors have changed. Before the threat of Soviet interference was dismissed by Mikhail Gorbachev, Slovakia, as part of a soviet satellite had to appease Moscow. In 2008, Brussels the European Union's capital, doles out the regulations. A former member of COMECON and adapting to the European Union mechanism, again finds Slovakian leadership in a partnership as a lesser player in economic decision making. The economic directives and standards for the economy still have weight upon the decisions of the government of Slovakia.

The attitude and makeup of the leadership from the 1991 to today remains unchanged. Communists have been replaced by ex-communists. Most top leaders were educated in the field of law and the use of a popular referendum is not used in major decision making. Ideology for a national directive still thrives on the sense of the Slovakian proud national identity. The banner of “socialism with a human face” as a defiance to Soviet control has been substituted by “democracy our own autocratic way” to the displeasure of European Union members. The old communist style attitude of towing the popular party line, then denouncing an ally for political purposes is still a standard practice.

4 On 25 November 1992, the Members of the Federal Assembly approved the government bill of the Constitutional Act on the *Demise of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic* as of 31 December 1992. National Council of the Slovak Republic History. Available from; <http://www.nrsr.sk/default.aspx?sid=nrsr/historia>; Internet; accessed 18 April 2008.

Remarkably changes in the political culture have occurred. Going from a one party system that had a real silent majority, today has a system where any majority necessary to reach a consensus is done so by flirting with alliances. Coalitions are the de facto method of ruling Slovakia. This points to the traditional egotistical nature of Slovakian leadership following its own path. In 1991, a temporary sense of solidarity existed with the Czechs. It took two years for the Slovak leadership to evolve into a coalition of nationalist and ex-communists deciding to go it alone. Though this coalition led the nation to independence, political scientists have analyzed this separation and proposed the following competing reasons.⁵

- A two member federation is inherently unstable and stalemates on issues.
- Longstanding hostility.
- The breakdown of other ex-Communist federations created a model for the dissolution.
- Separation was everybody's second preference.
- Issue of market reforms.
- Czechs did not wish to go on subsidizing Slovakia.

The strange bedfellows, the nationalists and ex-communists, that pushed separation through in 1993 were just the tip of the iceberg for coalitions to come. Once this goal was reached, the convenient partnership evolved into today's continuous political promiscuity.

⁵ John Elster. European Journal of Sociology. "Conflict Resolution in an Emerging Multi Lateral World -Transition, constitution-making and separation in Czechoslovakia."; Available from; <http://www.tamilnation.org/conflictresolution/countrystudies/czech.htm>; Internet; accessed on 2 April 2008

Changing like the weather, slight disagreements and personal interests ignited party swapping, abandonment, and creation of new factions. A few times when a majority party controlled the National Council of the Slovak Republic (*Národná rada Slovenskej republiky*), party members soon defected. Parliamentary coalitions are formed out of need to have a majority in power not from common ideological policies benefiting the nation. Often it is not uncommon for a party's leader to leave over a simple disagreement and gather a new group of supporters. Overall the general interests of the country's leadership is self-serving leading to problems of corruption.⁶ The Velvet Divorce, the division of Czechoslovakia into two sovereign states, became the starting point for fragmentation and continuous flux of Slovak political unity.

Political Power: Plenty of Parties for the Players to Choose and Diffuse From

No Slovak president since its separation from the Czechoslovakian Republic has served two consecutive terms.⁷ Most elected officials in 1993 at the start of independence were ex-communists and played off the theme of autonomy for the nation.⁸ The decades before the break up, nationalism, if displayed by a politician, resulted in dismissal from the political arena and a

6 A survey of domestic companies publicized last year by Slovak daily *Hospodarske Noviny* mentioned the shady privatization of state companies and their politically motivated subsidizing as the main sources of corruption. IPS.SLOVAKIA: Corruption Haunts Governing Coalition. Available from; <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=41796>; Internet; accessed 19 April 2008.

7 As head of state the president of Slovakia office wields little executive power. The constitutional laws concerning the president have been modified in the past 17 years.

8 Vladimír Mečiar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) became the leading party on the concept of the fairness of demands for autonomy. Available from; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Slovakia#Independent_Slovakia; Internet; Accessed on 20 March 2008,

stint in prison. So as the nation took its first step forward, it did so following the lead of apparatus in the parliament. No great patriotic leader leaped to the forefront, no person of great vision inspired the nation. Soon this facade would evaporate as the reality of now pleasing society focused on those below not above the government.

The leading political power figure in the Slovak Republic is held in the office of the prime minister. This recent history does not displays the swing in policy direction but circus that had become coalition forming. One must keep in mind that these prime ministers were not elected by having their respective party in a parliamentary majority. The layout since 1991 is as follows:

Prime Minister	Party⁹	Platform	months	education / background
Vladimír Mečiar † ‡	HZDS*	reform, authoritarian	12	law
Ján Čarnogurský	CDS	autonomy	12	law
Vladimír Mečiar	ĽS-HZDS•	reform, authoritarian	22	law
Jozef Moravčík			9	diplomat
Vladimír Mečiar	ĽS-HZDS	reform, authoritarian	46	law
Mikuláš Dzurinda	KDH	pro-EU & trans-Atlantic	93	transportation, economics
Robert Fico †	SMER•	anti-reform	21	law

† ex-communist, ‡ expelled from the communist party,

*temporary majority but 4 members defected, • founder of party

9 List of Current Political Parties in the Slovak Republic located in Table 1 of the Appendix.

Political Punching: Exposing Dirty Laundry

Reading like a novel, an examination of the first chapter in the prime minister's office had its share of drama. Vladimír Mečiar election as prime minister was based on his popularity due to a being sentenced to prison for nationalistic tendencies under socialist rule. Winning with only 35% of his party in parliamentary seats his power was based on a coalition. He placed his ally and member of HZDS, Ivan Gašparovič, in the office of presidency which at that time was elected by 3/5 majority vote in the National Council. A scandal involving hidden microphones at the U.S. Embassy had Mečiar calling on Gašparovič to lead the investigation, though no real resolution of the situation took place. This apparently shows the trust the two had for each other, though they were both noted to be corrupt. Both believe in an autocratic state but the extreme levels of Mečiar's open corruption caused tensions between the two. President Gašparovič viewed the Prime Minister Mečiar moves in the economic sector under privatization of industries and public lands as blatant asset stripping and as detrimental in attracting foreign investors along with joining the European Union.

Verbal attacks developed into a permanent war between them. Mečiar went as far as having Gašparovič 's son abducted by Slovak security forces (SIS) then dropped off in Austria in a drunken state where he had a warrant on charges financial fraud. In and out three times, Mečiar also simultaneously held the position of president temporarily for 3 months while prime minister granting controversial pardons in that period. In 1999 he ran for the presidential office, which is

now based on direct elections, and lost. His HZDS had won the most parliamentary seats by receiving 27% of the votes (top for the 1998 elections). He then changed the name of the party to L'S-HZDS (People's Party - Movement for a Democratic Slovakia) attempting to change stripes and form a new coalition. In this same period, his former Economy Minister and government colleague Ján Ducký was murdered and the crime has not been solved. Closing this chapter, he lost his bid to again become prime minister to Mikuláš Dzurinda. Further discussion on the other prime ministers would only emphasize that political infighting is not geared to truly finding a direction for the nation but controlling the state and the benefits to those in power.

When interviewed in 2001, Mečiar, response to his autocratic style of governance, high-level corruption, and political flip-flopping on issues, and the displeasure it created in the EU and NATO, displays a rhetoric that only an professional politician could appreciate. “We have to ask ourselves why such a question arose in the first place. We, after all, were the ones who took a stand against totalitarian power in 1989. We demolished the old value system and established a new one.” It is as if he is taking credit for the collapse of the Soviet Empire in order to validate his behavior. He protested against NATO's bombing of Kosovo, yet says he is pro-NATO. Further he stated Kosovo independence was illegal and equivalent to Nazi Germany's seizure of the Sudetenland. Currently on energy issues he has been courting Russia, leading to accusations of Slovakia being a “trojan horse” in its relationship with NATO. Rather than being the heart of Europe and a part of the spirit of cooperation amongst a variety of nations, the Slovak Republic

plays a different role. The politic script reads like the a performance of “Greater Tuna”.¹⁰

Foreign Policy and Domestic Politics: Follow the Leaders

The past 17 years have been not only a pendulum between autocracy and democracy in the Slovakia's domestic politic scene, but also modulation in the international arena. Each attempt at reform, be it more liberal or conservative in nature, allows the opposition to place blame on the failures of the coalition in power and lead the next flock of parties. Going from a one party system to fifteen has not been easy going. Slovakian foreign policy has a tendency to ping pong in international affairs based on the conditions domestically. A unanimous long term policy for the country's direction is non-existent. At first in 1991, united with the Czechs in breaking away from the Soviet Union a vector was set. Two years later Slovakia changed course by separation into a sovereign state. Sovereignty based on populism gave way to autocratic rule under Vladimír Mečiar, open government corruption, and a stagnant economy lacking outside investment. This limited foreign policy options as Slovakia needed to please the West's developmental private and public sectors. Under, Mikuláš Dzurinda, the economy and anti-corruption measures improved but not enough. With Putin's reviving of the Russian federation from the ashes of Mikhail Gorbachev's policies, Slovakian politicians are shifting its eyes to the east. Slovakia is following the banner of Putin's “democracy in our own way” in justifying its

¹⁰ Greater Tuna is a world renown and popular modern comedy about Texas' third smallest town, where the Lion's Club is too liberal and Patsy Cline never dies. A satire on small town politics it is eye opening view to human nature. Available from; <http://www.greatertuna.com/gt/greater.htm> Interent; accessed on 20 April 2008.

behavior and of course will result in much friction with the European Union.

The domestic virus of political party promiscuity will remain a problem until a strong political leader emerges. The need is for a autocratic-flavored strong leader to eliminate the corruption. This open up its options in foreign policy. The West would likely look the other way on a reduction of democratic values in order to secure a better investment climate. To the east, a semi-autocratic leader would please the Russian Federation by both having less Western influence in the region in terms of political ideology and the ease of negotiating with a single political leader matching Russia historical ruling style. Is this choice for a a semi-dictatorial state desirable? In view of Slovakia's economic progress, though respectable, it is falling short of meeting expectations internationally as well as domestically. A turn to the past may be the only viable option. A climate that is more pro-business is a necessity for fertilizing domestically grown democracy. Anti-corruption attempts in their fragmented alliance system has not accomplished its goals.

To claim corruption is the main impediment to foreign policy in international affairs, one must first see not only the domestic levels but the attitude. Recent polls by Transparency International- Slovakia, shows citizens considering corruption as secondary problem.¹¹ Since 1991 this has been evident. Polls from then placed fears of domination by a foreign power high on the list, 56% stated this would come from the U.S., 30% by Russia. A remarkable amount

¹¹ Transparency International Slovakia. Available from; <http://www.transparency.sk/english/>; Internet accessed; 19 April 2008.

preferred communism (32%), and many hope for a continuation of intense state sponsored social programs (67%).¹² Economic growth needs adaptation to the global system, but unemployed or underpaid Slovakian citizen has different ideas on the how their lives should function.¹³

To justify stating domestic problems guide compound foreign policy one must understand just how wide spread this disease is prevalent in Slovakia?

Summary Indicators of Experiences with Corruption¹⁴

Households	Percent making unofficial payments in previous two months	14.4
	Percent making unofficial payments in previous three years	41.3
Enterprises	Percent making unofficial payments in the previous two months	17.6
	Percent making unofficial payments in the previous three years	41.4
Public Officials	Percent offered a small gift in the previous two years	42.3
	Percent offered money or an expensive gift in the previous two years	9.7

¹²David P. Forsythe, ed. , *Human Rights in the New Europe : Problems and Progress*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), 113.

¹³The history of 20 Century Slovakia human rights took a back seat to economics. Forsythe, *Human Rights in the New Europe:Problems and Progress.*, 86.

¹⁴Corruption in Slovakia - Results of Diagnostic Surveys. World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development. Available from; www.tur.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/2764.doc; (accessed April 19th 2008)

There are fifteen political parties registered with six in parliament. In the past two decades close to ten parties have dissolved, split, or absorbed one another. As in Russia's recent history, such a variety of parties causes not a stalemate, but more of a political wheel spin. Energy is wasted politically that could be focused on the nation's issues. Slovakia could become the Egypt of the 21st century, playing off the politics of the Russian Federation and the European Union. In the minds of Russians, one often hears the Great Patriotic War ended only yesterday. Overlaying this concept on the mental state of the Slovaks after centuries of Austro-Hungarian rule and decades of Soviet domination, sovereignty started only moments ago. The political maturity of Slovakia has not evolved enough, nor does it have the resources, to solving its problems. Until this can be overcome, factions will abuse the domestic political system as the momentum from the reemergence of the region evaporates after the Soviet collapse.

If the Slovak Republic cannot completely take command of its future on the world stage, will it prefer to relinquish more of its sovereignty to the European Union in obtaining solutions to its situation? Or will it continue to muddle about, playing with the West, rather than obtaining needed capital resources and expertise? When Eastern Europe and the Balkans were "liberated" under the Wilson Doctrine, the West had high hopes for its success. Slowly these new democracies backslid in not-so-democratic semi-corrupt rule, expecting the same a century later is not so implausible. A shift to a defiant and autocratic state would place the Slovak Republic in need of a patron. An obvious choice may be its last liberator, the Russians. However, many

changes have taken place in the Slovak Republic's governmental structure to provide assistance to a more politically open and transparent state. A side by side comparison displays the major change from a worker to citizen based society.

Changes in Governmental Structure: Federal Ministries

1991 ¹⁵	2008 ¹⁶
Agriculture and Food	Agriculture
-	Communication
-	Construction and Regional Development
-	Culture
-	Education
-	Economy
-	Employment
-	Environment
Electrotechnical Industry	-
Finance	Finance
Foreign affairs	Foreign Affairs
Foreign trade	-
Fuels and power	-
General engineering	-
-	Health Care
Interior	Interior
-	Justice
Labor and Social Affairs	Labor, Social Affairs & Family
Metallurgy and Heavy Engineering	-
National Defense	Defense
Transportation	Transport, Posts and Telecommunications

15 Government Structure of Communist Czechoslovakia. Available from; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Government_structure_of_Communist_Czechoslovakia; Internet; Accessed 17 April 2008.

16 National Council of the Slovak Republic. "List of Institutions". Available from; <http://www.nrsr.sk/default.aspx?sid=nrsr/historia> (accessed 18 April 2008)

The comparative list offers an insight to the modernization of Slovak society. The 1991 Ministries are Soviet standards from the 1930's during Stalin's implementation of 5-year economic plans. Today the expansion of services towards society demonstrate a major ideological shift. Under the influential policies of the former Soviet Union, Marxist-Leninism would easily resolve all of society's problems, freeing mankind to evolve. A Westerner would initially herald such a ministerial structure as a way forward. Unfortunately these services started from point zero and need funding. The challenge today for Slovakia is offering these services without incurring massive foreign debt. During the socialist era, oversight was done by organizations directed by the Supreme Party Organs. In the spirit of democracy the National Slovak Council has created many scrutinizing oversight committees to hopefully regulate the transparent operation of government bodies.¹⁷ Unfortunately, corruption is evident in these new departments as citizens have reported having to pay for services, such as health care, that are supposed to be free.¹⁸

Socio-Economics and Political Voices of Citizenry: A Tangled Umbilical Cord

Obviously the switch to a multi-party system is always for the better in regards to the citizens access to politics. With the bickering politicians playing a populist game of push-me-pull

¹⁷ A complete list of Slovak National council Oversight Committees is listed in table 2 of the Appendix.

¹⁸Corruption in Slovakia - Results of Diagnostic Surveys. World Bank and the United States Agency for International Development. Available from; www.tur.vlada.gov.sk/data/files/2764.doc; (accessed 19 April 2008)

for the nation's direction, are the citizens really better off than under socialist times? The general theme of changes in the economic sector have had political repercussions. Under Western recommendations a rapid change in the economy was the solution, but the harmful side effects of initial inflation and unemployment, does not put food on the table. Lacking transparency has also meant reduce foreign investment as compared to the bordering states (except the Ukraine). The leadership of Slovakia displayed outward empathy at keeping state control of industry and the economy. Again this was a ploy as they siphoned off the nation's wealth through illegal privatization deals. The average Slovakian probably never considered the future when celebrating the Velvet Revolution and not a clue to what life would be like after the Velvet Divorce.

In the socio-economic sectors there have been changes but also statistics that have remained unchanged.¹⁹ From 1991 to 2006 the population increased slightly from 5.24 million to 5.388 million, education spending as a percentage of GDP remains at 4%, and persons living below the poverty level, also unchanged at 2%. Overall leading economic indicators have also shown major improvements. To help analyze the relationship between socio-economic conditions the following chart has been created. The prime ministers office, which yields the most power in the government is placed in relationship to a major characteristic during that year to show when the country's direction changed and possibly why.

¹⁹ Examining the statistical changes affecting the the average Slovakian will be using the International Monetary Fund's Database, not for accuracy but consistency of methodology.

UNITS	National	Index number	Percent per	U.S. dollars	Percent per	Index number	Index
SCALE	Currency	Units	annum	Millions	annum	Units	number
DESCRIPTOR	SOCIAL	INDUSTRIAL	UNEMPLOYME	TRADE	DISCOUNT	CONSUMER	AVERAGE
	BENEFITS	OUTPUT	NT RATE	BALANCE	RATE	PRICE	MONTHLY
	SEAS.ADJ.	SEAS.ADJ.	SEAS.ADJ.	SEAS.ADJ.	SEAS.ADJ.	INDEX	WAGES
1991	n.a.	85.395	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1992	n.a.	77.154	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1993	n.a.	74.311	n.a.	-912.076	12.000	54.072	47.141
1994	n.a.	77.953	13.650	60.707	12.000	61.323	55.066
1995	n.a.	86.155	13.100	-229.220	9.750	67.386	62.948
1996	n.a.	88.394	11.330	-2282.700	8.800	71.301	71.339
1997	n.a.	89.485	13.000	-2084.480	8.800	75.657	80.717
1998	n.a.	94.259	13.700	-2350.730	8.800	80.724	87.522
1999	142637.000	92.312	17.300	-1109.020	8.800	89.257	93.858
2000	150443.000	100.000	18.200	-894.535	8.800	100.000	100.000
2001	164633.000	106.900	18.300	n.a.	7.750	107.330	108.180
2002	183591.000	113.727	17.800	-2165.610	6.500	110.897	118.206
2003	186923.000	119.553	15.200	-648.716	6.000	120.383	125.678
2004	208813.000	124.267	14.268	n.a.	4.000	129.470	138.451
2005	250427.000	129.070	11.700	n.a.	3.000	132.977	151.129
2006	270250.000	n.a.	10.383	n.a.	4.750	138.939	164.138
2007	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	4.250	142.769	176.177

Years & background color denotes Prime Ministers main characteristic or foreign policy:

gray=corrupt, blue= following the West, red= hinting to the East

Numerical data colors indicating change: *green= improvement , red= worsening*

Of interest to the average working citizen, unemployment decreased and wages kept ahead of the consumer price index. In regards to benefits for the business sector, industrial output is up and the prime bank lending rate down. The trade balance show significant variation. Further analysis would be necessary to locate the factors, be it political or economic, internal or external factors. During the years of a corrupt administration the trade deficit shot up, surely influencing a swing to the West for a solution. When a westward leaning pro-European Union prime minister held office, the unemployment is obviously high. After 6 years at or above 14% unemployment,

the swing to a prime minister who's rhetoric mimics his eastern neighbors. The difficulty of meeting EU standards on such a small nation are understandable. Possibly the same amount of economic benefits associating with the Russia Federation is possible sans the burden demands in political and socio-economic requirements imposed by the European Union. The increase in social benefits costs may have two causes, more efficient bureaucracy or old habits of borrowing. The new ministries involved providing social services may be better at identifying those at risk and attempting to assist those in need. On the other hand, as in the 1970s during oil shocks, many Soviet bloc nations borrowed heavily to keep inflation on consumer commodities low and the populace content. The level of corruption in the Slovak government would most likely support a “rob Peter to pay Paul” for short term funding of social programs.

The record for human rights improvement and political access for the citizens has been very good. From 2000 until 2004 the level of Voice and Accountability Scale- the ability to participate in political, social and economic processes, tripled. Comparatively in the Russian Federation ,as well as the United States, it has declined. Political prisoners and abuse as known under Communist rule has disappeared. Slovakia's government also reports no major human rights abuses.²⁰ However, there are a few blemishes to the record, as most cases involve the underpaid police forces and the prison system.²¹ Today your political and human rights are well

20 U.S. Department of State. "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2006."
<http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78838.htm> (accessed April 14th, 2008).

21 U.S. Congressional record. "Slovakia Deserves NATO Membership." 105th Congress, 1st Session.
<http://www.house.gov/mica/fs061197.htm> (accessed April 18th, 2008)

guaranteed by the Slovak Republic's constitution if: a) Your free speech does not say anything bad about the government. b) You are not of Romani descent.

A hold over from the Communist era, Romani women are still encouraged to be sterilized. This discrimination against the Romani population (1.8%) has been longstanding. The Communist offered financial compensation, today Romani women are assisted by medical authorities who apply pressure to have this procedure. A reduction in social benefits for the poor and underprivileged also affect them.²² Recent legislation reduces welfare benefits as only a temporary measure and designed as a motivational program to discourage people becoming dependent on the system.

Other poor treatment of minorities has occurred in Slovak history. As a Nazi protectorate two-thirds of the Jewish population were exported to Germany at a cost of five dollars each. Today abundant articles in the Slovak Republic's constitution aim to protect minority rights focus on eliminating this dark blemish from the past. The Jewish population in Slovakia today is numbered at 3,000. Unfortunately there are 500 active members Neo-Nazis with an estimated 4,000 sympathizers.²³

Education and the Economy: Slow Changes

Slovakia's higher education has shown some improvements but is still in the shadow of

²² Roma Press Agency, <http://www.rpa.sk/clanok.aspx?o=zc&n=1360&l=en>, (accessed April 14th, 2008)

²³ U.S. Department of State. "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices- 2006." <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78838.htm> (accessed April 14th, 2008).

Soviet mentality. Though university credits in Slovakia are now transferable to other European Union institutions, recent analysis has reported the need for change in several key areas. There has been an increase in fields offered but overall an mid-29th century style of education that is not preparing graduates for the modern job. The idea of focusing on the students needs still has not taken hold. The suggested improvements for the promoting creative thinking in college level students would be a needed change to overall Slovak thinking about government's role in society. Since gaining independence the spending of education has remained 4% of the GDP. In public schools a choice is offered between religion and ethics classes, a remarkable change over Communist times.

The economy, geared originally to fit into the Soviet COMECON model, now is booming with EU association.²⁴ Most Slovaks work in the service sector and the investment climate is promoted as positive, even from the US State Department.²⁵ But it is difficult to find a balanced review of the reality there. Being promoted as a safe and wise investment location, but is this for the best?²⁶ With a multi-party system of alliances can one predict the mood swing of policies to the left or right? Does investment under the current multi-party semi-corrupt government really promote democracy? Investors are motivated by profit but so it seems are Slovak government

24 Tamsin Smith, "Slovakia's economy enjoys EU boom". <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/4506109.stm>, BBC News, (accessed April 18th, 2008).

25 U.S. Department of State. "2006 Investment Climate Statement – Slovakia," <http://www.state.gov/e/eeb/ifd/2006/62032.htm> (accessed April 10th, 2008)

26 Index of Economic Freedoms. "The Slovak Republic." <http://www.heritage.org/index/country.cfm?id=SlovakRepublic>. (accessed April 12th, 2008)

officials.²⁷ Though it only takes 25 days to start a business there, most industries are still owned by the government (51% share holders), yet run by private management. Major industries still focus on 20th century production. The current government does not promote competition in sectors it controls, such as energy and telecommunications. The new Prime Minister Fico recently raised minimum wages by 10%, how soon before it leans for more control over private investment there?²⁸ The boom that the economy experienced was based on basic modern technological improvements introduced after the failed Soviet system. **Any** changes introduced would have improved the economy. Introducing normal missing elements into a crumbling system such as information technologies and a tourist industry are not fundamental changes towards improving an economy. There does exist a liberal labor market and an across the board 19% tax rate, but the government's intentions are short-term as to sneak over the bar meeting European Union requirements.

Constitution: A guiding light (but only when lit).

The 1960 and 1993 Constitutions both are designed to meet the government's overall needs. Political and human rights went from being labeled as those for a worker to those of a citizen. The 1960 edition was a cookie cutter Soviet model and the 1993 version was created

²⁷ Economist, "Poor government in Central Europe", http://www.economist.com/displayStory.cfm?Story_ID=E1_STJRRTS, (accessed April 22nd, 2008)

²⁸EU Buisness. "Slovak economic boom, 2009 Euro Entry Ontrack."

<http://www.eubusiness.com/Finance/slovakia-economy.62/> (accessed April 20th, 2008).

behind closed doors, does resemble a Western European parliamentary democratic republic. Its birth was assisted by parliamentary approval not by popular referendum. Voting, political rights, procedures, obligations, and power distribution, etc. in both constitutions have nothing that can be considered unique or gifts to the world. The election of the president went from parliamentary approval to popularly elected. The 3/5 majority to be voted in was mirrored the 3/5 needed for the president's removal. The conditions for removal were considered arbitrary and used as a political tool and were hence modified.²⁹

Conclusion

One begins to wonder if Eastern Europe is really European or a hybrid mixed with Asiatic influence. The trend to start with a democracy, drift in chaos, and stabilize under autocratic rule is a repetitive theme. Do the Slavs and other central Asian tribes who settled the region have a propensity for strong centralized leadership or when they individual have enough freedom that they do not care what happens outside their personal realms. The Slovaks existed as a nation for centuries under foreign rule and maybe their lives were content to an acceptable degree. When a region only knows one type of reality, how can they move forward towards our expectations? Their analysis of the United States may conclude that we are an anomaly , having developed oceans away in a land full of resources and opportunities. Placing ideology as a basic framework for a society seems logical, but as it was once said, “Human rights start at

²⁹ Article 106 . 1993 Slovak Republic Consitution.

breakfast”. The average Slovak tolerates what we do not find acceptable, less we forget we are not in their shoes. A recent art show at the U.S. Embassy in Bratislava, an author's book and the works of 17 Slovak artists from current and communists times were displayed. The book titles, “"Dreams Intersect Reality", would be a theme for life in today's Slovak Republic.³⁰

Predictions

A Slovak Republic citizen currently earns half of the European Union average. at the current rate of growth it will take approximately a decade to be equal. Disregarding inflation, this could be accomplished by the Slovaks on their. However, it will take the EU tugging on Slovakia's boot straps for them to grudgingly reach Euro-standards in other areas of society. So in the short term, things will be on the current path. Long term predictions will be based on how long the Europeans will tolerate Slovak obstinate to change. The rise of Russia will continue, though under a semi-autocratic condition. as a transparent democracy is not necessary for exponential growth. Histories old bonds and a balance of power between East and West may be a reason for Slovakia to leave the European Union. They are at a point where relinquishing their autonomy is near impossible, but by being more neutral will play on nationalistic tendencies to the delight of the ruling elite. Instead of the next Hong Kong, we one may see the Slovak Republic as the next Switzerland. The ability of the corrupt politicians to influence the private

³⁰Embassy of the United States- Bratislava, Slovakia. “*Embassy Supports Greater Exposure of Communist-era Slovak Art,*” Embassy Events, <http://slovakia.usembassy.gov/embassy-supports-greater-exposure-of-communist-era-slovak-art-september-19-2007.html> (accessed March 12th, 2008)

sector could offer a haven to escape European regulations. Switzerland was once associated with mysterious bank accounts and this could be an outlet for those Russians in the East needing a playground and a safe investment climate. Without the foreign direct investment needed by the Slovaks and ability to conform to transparency, the influx of petrol-rubles from the East could be a long term alternative. Though there is some moving forward on the overall scorecard of the Slovak Republic, there exists a major impediment to change, the partnership for society's development involving the some sort of intellectual class that is concerned with the people's needs. As under Communist control, the government is too involved with the choices in everyday society.

Diasporic Reactions

The total world population is 7.4 billion people, 2 billion of those living in North America. An effort was made to find interviews and American-based newspapers to analyze how Slovak descendants reacting to the changes that have occurred. Unfortunately, online and library sources yielded no usable material. Most North American Slovaks arrived here during the upheavals in the late 19th century for the region's burst of nationalism. Inclusion of the viewpoints of those who had not experienced Soviet oppression or the recent changes from inside Slovakia's could have been an interesting addition.

Appendixes

Table 1

List of Current Political Parties in the Slovak Republic

1. Hnutie za Demokratické Slovensko - HZDS Movement for a Democratic Slovakia
2. Strana Demokratickej L'avice - SDL Party of the Democratic Left
3. Magyar Koalíció Pártja - MK Hungarian Coalition Party
4. Együttélés- Coexistence
5. Magyar Polgári Párt - MPP Hungarian Civic Party
6. Kresťansko-demokratické hnutie na Slovensku - KDK Christian Democratic Movement
7. Slovenská demokratická a kresťanská únia- SDKÚ Slovak Democratic and Christian Union
8. Slovenská národná strana - SNS Slovak National Party
9. Aliancia Nového Občana - New Civic Alliance (Liberal Party of Slovakia)
10. Liberálna Mládež Slovenska - Youth Organization of Aliancia Nového Občana
11. Strana Smer - Direction Party
12. Komunistická strana Slovenska - KSS Communist party of Slovakia
13. Občianska konzervatívna strana - OKS Civic Conservative Party
14. Slobodne Forum - Free Forum
15. Slovenská Pospolitost

Table 2³¹

1. Mandate and Immunity Committee
2. Committee on the Incompatibility of Functions
3. Committee on European Affairs
4. Constitutional and Legal Affairs Committee
5. Committee on Finance, Budget and Currency
6. Committee on Economic Policy
7. Committee on Agriculture, Environment and Nature Protection
8. Committee on Public Administration and Regional Development
9. Committee on Social Affairs and Housing
10. Committee on Health Care
11. Committee on Defense and Security
12. Foreign Affairs Committee
13. Committee on Education, Youth, Science and Sports
14. Committee on Culture and Media
15. Committee on Human Rights, Minorities and the Status of Women
16. Special Control Committee for the Control of Activities of the National Security Authority
17. Special Control Committee for the Control of Activities of the Slovak Intelligence Service
18. Special Control Committee for the Control of the Activities of the Military Intelligence Service
19. Committee for the Review of Decisions of the National Security Authority

31 National Slovak Council. "Committees- Status and Powers: Available at: <http://www.nrsr.sk/default.aspx?sid=vybory/kompetencie>; Internet: Accessed 18 April 2008.