

## **Social-political and social-economic transformation of the Slovak Republic**

The way of the Slovak Republic (SK) towards democracy and market economy appeared to be very hard. Starting position for implementation of reforms objectively was less favorable in comparison with the neighboring countries. The fundamental law of the SK guaranteed political pluralism, civil rights and liberties for citizens. In 2004 the state became a full member of the EU and NATO. In 2005 main macroeconomic indices of the state reached a threshold level, established by the Maastricht Treaties, and as to the rate of GDP increase and direct foreign investment Slovakia joined the EU leaders. Along with the achievements in the political life of the country there are also serious continuous problems. Among them are: irredentist attitudes among the Hungarian minority which fuel conflict potential in the Slovak-Hungarian relationship; hardships of social integration of the Roma population. An acute problem is corruption, the level of which is higher than in other Visegrad countries. Aiming at formation of conditions for stable continuous growth Slovakia carries out a “reset” of the economic policy. Large-scale reforms of the social system and social policy in SK have been implemented.

*Keywords: the Slovak Republic, the EU, social-political changes, transformation, social policy, economic policy, reforms*

## **СУСПІЛЬНО-ПОЛІТИЧНА ТА СОЦІАЛЬНО-ЕКОНОМІЧНА ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ СЛОВАЦЬКОЇ РЕСПУБЛІКИ**

Шлях Словаччини до демократії і ринкової економіки виявився дуже важким. Стартові позиції для проведення реформ були об'єктивно менш сприятливими порівняно з сусідніми країнами. Основний закон СР гарантував політичний плюралізм, цивільні права та свободи громадянам. У 2004 р. держава здобула статус повноправного члена в НАТО і ЄС. У 2005 р. основні макроекономічні показники держави зросли до порогового значення, встановленого Маастрихтськими угодами, а за темпами росту ВВП і прямих іноземних інвестицій Словаччина ввійшла в число лідерів ЄС. Поряд з досягненнями в політичному житті країни є й серйозні тривалі проблеми. Серед них: ірредентистські настрої в середовищі угорської меншини, які підживлюють конфліктний потенціал у словацько-угорських відносинах; труднощі соціальної інтеграції ромського населення. Гострою проблемою залишається корупція, рівень якої вищий, ніж в інших країнах Вишеградської групи. З метою формування умов для сталого тривалого зростання

в Словаччині здійснюється «перезавантаження» економічної політики. Здійснені широкомасштабні реформи соціальної системи і соціальної політики в СР.

*Ключові слова:* Словачька Республіка, ЄС, суспільно-політичні зміни, трансформація, соціальна політика, економічна політика, реформи

The “Velvet” revolution in Czechoslovakia (1989) and further peaceful demise of the country (January 1, 1993) turned over a new page in the history of Slovakia: the republic which previously was a part of the federative state gained complete sovereignty and stepped on the path of radical social-political and social-economic transformation. Its foreign policy paradigm changed essentially: the Slovak society made a choice of preference for a civilization model, inherent to the countries of Western Europe. The Slovak Republic took a line at activation of relations with main international organizations, namely joining the EU and NATO and implementation of “pursuing” model of modernization by means of adopting western institutes of market and democracy<sup>1</sup>.

The way of SK towards democracy appeared to be winding and challenging. Starting position for implementation of reforms objectively was less favorable in comparison with the neighboring countries<sup>2</sup>. A shift to the market model of economy Slovakia started from scratch, having no experience in reforming a planned economy, which Slovenia had, as it started its transition from the “market socialism” to the market economy, or Hungary, which already had a 25-year-old experience of “cooperative socialism” and widely used market instruments, or Poland which stepped on the way of political democratization in the early 1980s.

Slovakia had to take more efforts than any other CEE country to overcome structural disproportions, formed during the socialist period, when the Slovak economy was developing under the influence of a more developed Czech Republic’s needs and intensive attraction of the republic to the processes of socialist economic integration. On the background of other Eastern European countries the SK’s economy stood out due to its over-pressured heavy industry and militarization, a little amount of finalizing industrial production (what indicates the function of Slovakia as a supplier of semi-finished products for the Czech Republic), excessive energy-, material-, import capacity<sup>3</sup>. Taking into account that only 15% of Slovak enterprises manufactured civil goods (others produced intermediate production and heavy military weapons), it was much more difficult for SK, than any other CEE country to cross over to new markets and come through the demise of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, shrinkage of the USSR market capacity due to the transition to convertible currency trade, discontinuing of military purchases after the end of the Warsaw Pact.

<sup>1</sup> *Vyshehradskaiia* Yevropa: otkuda i kuda, Dva desiatletiiia po puti reform v Venhrii, Polshe, Slovakkii i Chekhii / ed. L.N. Shishelina. Moscow: Ves mir, 2010. Pp. 179-180.

<sup>2</sup> *Prokop L.* Příprava a průběh měodluky v České republice v roce 1993. ČNB 1994. URL: <http://www.cnb.cz>.

<sup>3</sup> *Stein E.* Česko-Slovensko. Konflikt, roztržka, rozpad. Praha: Academia věd České republiky, 2000. S. 335; *Ryeblik J.* Rozpad Československa. Česko-slovenské vzťahy 1989-1992. Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2000. S. 305.

Along with an unfavorable start there were other “aggravating” circumstances. The process of democratic consolidation of the society were complicated by practically 10-year-old absence of political consensus as to Euro-Atlantic choice, collapse of Czechoslovakia, necessity to create Slovak statehood and formation of own “Slovak” identity<sup>4</sup>. Not easy were Slovak economic reforms, their course had many deviations, which were represented in alternating attempts to transform either in accordance with liberal-monetary or social-democratic formulations.

Over the first 5 years of independent development when the coalition headed by Vladimir Meciar (1994-1998) was in power, Slovakia noticeably deviated from the trajectory, presupposed by European integration. Euro-Atlantic choice which had already become a consensual strategic course for the neighboring countries, the authority in SK still had some doubts. The majority of the political elite and influential intellectuals criticized a unilateral foreign policy orientation, reckoning that only preservation of balance in relations between the West and East may guarantee SK geopolitical future, military security and economic flourishing.

State economic policy of the period ignored suggestions of the Washington consensus, shock therapy was alternated by a new strategy, which presupposed enhancement of state regulation of economy, evolutionary way of changes, formation of social market economy. Instead of recommended measures of financial stability there was implemented expansion of state investment for the sake of creation of new centers of growth, in place of relying on foreign investment they adhered to dynamic development at the cost of internal sources. The establishment of the country strived for preserving production and financial potential in the national ownership and thus put aside foreign investors from privatization processes. V. Meciar pursued independent internal political course and did not react to the growing international criticism of his authoritarian ruling, he neglected democratic principles and violated national minorities’ rights<sup>5</sup>. In a special report provided by the US State Department (1996) Slovakia was attacked for non-adherence of the human rights. Z. Brzezinski was quite frank in evaluating V. Meciar’s foreign policy line, stating that “perhaps Meciar is not a bad politician, but as a state strategist he is weak. In case if Slovakia does not become a member of NATO, the history will return him a strict verdict, as he enjoyed full confidence of the voters and this will simplify Slovak integration into NATO... This is a tragedy for all Slovak people and you are to bitterly repent of this”<sup>6</sup>.

Among the foreign policy alternatives to the EU and NATO membership politicians discussed acceptance by Slovakia neutrality or a Swiss solution, conception of geo-political and geo-economical role of the country as a bridge between the West and East, possibility to create in Europe a system of collective defense involving Russia. Balancing between the East and West, which “once will be evaluated by historians as a search for an individual Slovak way of post-socialist

<sup>4</sup> *Lukan B.* Osobnosti transformatsyonnoho protsesa v Slovakkii v 1993-2000 // *Mezhdunarodnyi dialoh.* 2001. № 1. P. 93.

<sup>5</sup> *Rzhevskii V.* Slovakiia: Politicheskie oponenty pomenialis roliami // *Kompas.* Moscow. 1994. № 46. P. 3.

<sup>6</sup> *Duleba A.* Konec súčasnej strednej Európy? Ukrajina a Slovensko po prvej vlnе rozšírenia NATO. Geopolitické scenáre budúceho vývinu neintegrovanej strednej Európy a alternatív pre Slovensko. Bratislava: Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 1998. S. 13.

transformation<sup>7</sup>, caused exclusion of Slovakia from a range of Eastern European countries, which were first in a line to join the EU and NATO<sup>8</sup> and removal of V. Meciar from power<sup>9</sup>.

Over a period when the coalition of right parties headed by M. Dzurinda (1998-2006) was in power, the country returned to the Eurointegration path<sup>10</sup>. At the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium there was a consensus of political elites as to strategic foreign policy course<sup>11</sup>. In 2000 Slovakia joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and in 2004 became a full member of the EU and NATO. The foreign policy of the Slovak Republic over these years was marked by loyal attitude towards NATO military actions (support of bombing in Yugoslavia and intervention to Iraq, Slovak military forces were sent to Iraq etc.) and demonstrative breaking ties with Russia (termination of political contracts, renunciation of the visa-free agreement, which was in advance of the European integration realia, break military-technical ties and so on)<sup>12</sup>.

During the period of M. Dzurinda ruling Slovakia experienced a new round of neo-liberal economic changes. There were conducted structural reforms (tax system, labor market, medical care and pension system), which were admitted by the World Bank as “the most radical reforms in the world”, actualized strict pattern of financial stabilization. In 2005 main macroeconomic indices of SK “fitted in” the threshold requirements, established by the Maastricht Treaties, and as to the rate of GDP increase and direct foreign investment Slovakia joined the EU leaders. The World Bank awarded SK with an honorable status “World leader in the sphere of reforms” and put it on the list of 20 states with the best conditions for doing business. Successes in reforms strengthened international authority of the country and contributed to rapid Euro-Atlantic integration<sup>13</sup>.

Besides, M. Dzurinda’s government commenced large-scale reforms of social system and social policy in Slovakia<sup>14</sup>. the reform of the social system in SK aimed at alternating a traditional way of redistribution of targeted aid and socially dysfunctional groups of people. New social policy included reformation of three crucial spheres of the social system: social welfare and family policy; a system of pension protection; labor market to increase the employment level. The law, which was in force till the end of 2003, presupposed provision of social welfare to financially disadvantaged people without any limitation in time and despite personal activity of welfare recipients. To the category of financially disadvantaged people in SK belonged citizens whose

<sup>7</sup> *Krejčí O. Slovensko, genius loci // Ekonom. 2007. 13.02.*

<sup>8</sup> *Vyshehradskaiia Yevropa: otkuda i kuda, Dva desiatiletiia po puti reform v Venhrii, Polshe, Slovaki i Chekhii / ed. L.N. Shishelina. Moscow: Ves mir, 2010. P. 257.*

<sup>9</sup> *Hárs G. Visegrad – A Personal Memoir of Cooperation // 15 Years of Visegrad. Bratislava: International Visegrad Fund., 2006. P. 51.*

<sup>10</sup> *Vyshehradskaiia Yevropa: otkuda i kuda, Dva desiatiletiia po puti reform v Venhrii, Polshe, Slovaki i Chekhii / ed. L.N. Shishelina. Moscow: Ves mir, 2010. P. 244.*

<sup>11</sup> *Opyt demokraticheskikh preobrazovani v Slovaki / Ed. M. Butor, H. Mesezhnikova, M. Koldara. Bratislava: Institut obshchestvennykh problem, 2007. P. 98.*

<sup>12</sup> *Rossiia i Tsentralno-Vostochnaia Yevropa: vzaimootnosheniia v 21 veke / Ed. N.V. Kulikova, I.I. Orlik, N.V. Feit. Moscow: IE RAN, 2012. Pp. 249–250.*

<sup>13</sup> *Strany Tsentralnoi i Yuho-Vostochnoi Yevropy: sistemnye transformatsyi, sotsialno-ekonomicheskoe i politicheskoe razvitie v 2006. Moscow: IE RAN, 2007. P. 170.*

<sup>14</sup> *Reforma socialneho systema a socialnej politiky na Slovensku. URL: www.noviny-mpsv.cz/*

monthly income was below the subsistence rate (4210 korunas). This category comprised 10.4% of SK population. People, who were financially disadvantaged under this law, got 1450 or 2900 korunas correspondingly, depending on fact whether the reasons of their poor financial state were objective or subjective. Social payments to financially disadvantaged people for the first half of 2003 equaled 4.9 billion korunas.

In November 2003, the SK parliament adopted a new law concerning benefits for financially disadvantaged people<sup>15</sup>, which introduced changes into the system of social payments. The law did not divide people in accordance with the objective or subjective reasons of their poverty. Since 2004 an amount of payment has been designated due to the composition of a family. To determine a month income into account were taken money earned by all members of a family living together. The sizes of payments were: for single people – 1450 korunas, for single people with children (no more than 4) – 2160 korunas; for single people with more than 4 children – 3160 korunas; for couples without children – 2530 korunas; for couples with children (no more than 4) – 3210 korunas; for couples with more than 4 children – 4210 korunas; for pregnant women – 350 korunas, starting with the 4<sup>th</sup> month of pregnancy and under condition of regular medical control. Also, the legislator determined the upper limit of social payment per one family – 10 500 korunas<sup>16</sup>.

The Slovaks carried out a new privatization, in the course of which infrastructural monopolies (transport, energy, communication), strategic industrial enterprises and system-forming banks, which had earlier been removed from privatization or had been held under the state's control due to a "golden share", were put up for sale for foreign strategic investors. Reforms gave impulse to stable economic development and took the country from worst to first in the region as to the rates of direct foreign investment growth and consequently export and GDP. Another side of success was lost of national control over strategic branches and bank sector, restriction of a social sphere (reduction of state assignment for development of social spheres, commercialization of socially-significant services), a level of social stratification grew.

Since 2006 a social-democratic party Smer-SD headed by Robert Fico came into power in Slovakia. R. Fico's activity as the prime-minister testified that he accepted succession of V. Meciar's foreign policy and economic course in a number of aspects. After the victory at the 2006 parliamentary elections R. Fico formed a coalitional government, which included the party Movement for Democratic Slovakia (MDS) headed by V. Meciar and Slovak National Party (SNP) headed by J. Slota<sup>17</sup>. Slovak diplomacy under R. Fico displayed the desire towards balanced and multi-vector nature. Over the last years the SK foreign policy has been characterized by a European accent, indisputable "Atlanticism" of the previous period was alternated by a more critical attitude towards the US policy and NATO military strategy, priority of the "Eastern" direction

<sup>15</sup> *Zákon z.26. novembra 2013 o pomoci v hmotnej núdzi a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov.* URL: [http://www.upsvar.sk/busos/docs/urady/GA/PvHN\\_c\\_417.pdf](http://www.upsvar.sk/busos/docs/urady/GA/PvHN_c_417.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> *Reforma socialneho system a socialnej politiky na Slovensku.* URL: [www.noviny-mpsv.cz/](http://www.noviny-mpsv.cz/)

<sup>17</sup> *Blaba L.* Analiza. URL: [www.inst-asa.sk](http://www.inst-asa.sk)

of the Slovak policy politicians declared development of comprehensive relations with Russia<sup>18</sup>. In the sphere of internal policy R. Fico actualized course on revival of the “European model of a social state”. Relating this tasks of first priority were struggle against unemployment, social support for financially disadvantaged people, restoration of state control over the economic sphere. In his program speech the prime-minister R. Fico declared that “on the one hand we want to add practical nature to the images of Slovakia as a social state, while on the other hand we strictly adhere to the Maastricht criteria, which limit us to a great extent”<sup>19</sup>.

Despite all difficulties Slovakia managed to adapt to all external crisis challenges with minimal losses and at year-end 2009 did not look like an outsider on the general European background: the scales of GDP recession and level of the budget deficit complied with average indices in the Eurozone; the state debt was held on more than a satisfactory level (the lowest but one index in the Eurozone); correlation between the gross external debt and GDP was rather lower than its partners from the monetary union had.

A number of specific “Slovak” circumstances contributed to easing of crisis phenomena in the economy. Thus, a low level of the state debt allowed Slovakia using instruments of budget-tax policy in counter-cyclical regulation of economy. Due to this the economic growth was supported (fiscal impulse in 2009 let it avoid the GDP contraction on “additional” 2.4%, and in 2010 – add it to the growth in 1.9%<sup>20</sup>), stability in the social sphere (growth of poverty risk was only 0.2%) and internal political stability were preserved. Slovakia made a well-timed step joining the Eurozone on January 1, 2009, which protected the country from cataclysms at the currency market and made it attractive for investors<sup>21</sup>.

Stabilizing influence on the economic situation in the midst of crisis had the banking system, which coped with difficulties, caused by recession in economy, without the state support and foreign funding. Since 2010 an average rate of the Slovak GDP growth returned to positive values. The crisis officially ended; and the state came to pre-crisis levels of production and since 2011 has come to growth. However, on the way out of crisis the economy determined a number of evident weaknesses: rates of increase were significantly lower than in the period of economic glut; the correlation between the sources of increase changed (the country was mainly obliged for it to the growth of foreign demand, whereas growth of internal demand both consumer and investment got behind); the situation on the labor market continued to worsen, as revival in a corporate sector did not bring growth of employment, but just detained its fall.

Therefore, having demonstrated quite high sustainability under conditions of global shocks, the Slovak economy failed to avoid some of its negative consequences, to which we may refer:

<sup>18</sup> Kopytina M. Rossiia – Slovakiia: ekonomicheskie sviazi v pervom desiatiletii 21 veka // Mir peremen. 2013. № 2. Pp. 125-140; Kobrinskaia I. Ya., Frumkin B. Ye. Rossiiskaia I tscentralno-vostochnoyevropeiskaia perspektivy. Moscow.: IMEMO RAN, 2010. P. 115.

<sup>19</sup> Fico R. Mame pred sebou diabolsky plan. URL: <http://spravy.pravda.sk/>.

<sup>20</sup> Program stability SR na roky 2009 až 2012. Bratislava, Januar 2010. Офіційний сайт Міністерства фінансів СР. URL: <http://www.finance.gov.sk>.

<sup>21</sup> *Vazhan A. I.* Ekonomicheskii rost v tscentralnoi i Vostochnoi Yevrope // Yevrointehratsiia: vliianie na ekonomicheskoe razvitie Tscentralnoi i Vostochnoi Yevropy. Moscow: IE RAN, 2014. P. 13.

break up of stable enlargement of investment and consumer demand, unfavorable changes in dynamics of employment and unemployment, loss of fiscal balance<sup>22</sup>. The crucial condition for accelerating economic growth in Slovakia is increase in internal demand. The foundation for investment growth is laid, but it will require several years to return to the pre-crisis level, not speaking of becoming a main trigger for growth.

It is evident, that there is no sense to depend on rapid growth of consumer activity, as an increase in personal consumption is limited by strict borders of budget economy, low level of Slovak salary, high level of unemployment, enhancement of population to savings. For instance, in the Czech Republic an average salary in 2014 was 332 euros, in Hungary – 333, in Slovakia – 360, in Poland – 410. Thus, in all these countries average salary is the lowest among the EU members. However, it should be mentioned, that comparison of changes in minimal salary from 2008 up to 2015 shows considerable increase in Slovakia – 58%<sup>23</sup>. But until internal factors and sources for development are not found, the economy will be in a zone of slow rates of increase: the Ministry of Finance of Slovakia does not expect to return to previous dynamics before 2020<sup>24</sup>. Due to the absence of prospects for rapid revival of internal demand there is a close interdependence of the Slovak economy on the situation in the European economy.

The risk of subsequent recession for Slovakia is growing, as under conditions of weak internal demand any external challenges will have a more destructive potential. At the same time, on the credit side of the country is its low debt load (43.6% of the GDP in 2016 against 87.2% on average across the Eurozone), favorable banking sector, which does not require any restructuring; also there is interest of international business to invest into the Slovak economy, what promises accelerated restoration of demand for labor resources. Having stable macroeconomic situation, favorable business climate and euro as a national currency Slovakia remains a lighthouse for investment flows. Surge of direct foreign investment since 2010 has been resuming: transnational corporations activate enlargement of their Slovak enterprises and get their manufacturing capacities from the neighboring countries to Slovakia with the goal to reduce operational costs and lower economic risks.

From its side, Slovakia steps up efforts aimed at attracting direct foreign investment, in competitive struggle for foreign investment again investment stimuli function, what helped the country to get many prestigious financial assets. Thus, it is possible that in future will realize expectations as to return to the “good old days” and former model of growth, based on a wide attraction of direct foreign investment. But now investment prospects of the Slovak economy look ambiguous and one of the reasons is euro. In the pre-crisis period, when labor productivity growth faster than salary, cost of labor was rather low, what made investment into the Slovak economy more cost efficient than in the neighboring countries.

<sup>22</sup> Kopytina M. Ekonomika Slovenska v usloviakh hlobalnykh potrasienii // Svobodnaia Mysl. 2012. № 9/10. Pp. 37-50.

<sup>23</sup> Shyshelina L. Vyshehradskaiia chetverka: 25 let na karte Yevropy. URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15211/soveurope620150926>

<sup>24</sup> Narodny program reformiem Slovenskej republiky 2011–2014. Bratislava: Slovenský republiky, April 2011. S 4-5.

The situation changed when national currency was changed for a single European one: due to a high conversion rate this change of a Slovak koruna, which is a history now, turned into an increase of an average salary at the level of 7.4 euro per hour. Nowadays, it is the highest number in Central and Eastern Europe after the Czech Republic, which can be a “two-edged sword”: euro as a national currency attracts to the country international investors, who focus their attention on lowering currency risks of investment, but will push off those who are oriented on minimization of manufacturing costs.

As in the nearest future due to preservation of uncertainty on currency markets in CEE, international investors will be afraid to invest money into economy of even such successful countries as Poland and the Czech Republic, Slovakia may be a winner in a struggle for post-crisis flows of direct foreign investment. But when currency markets stabilize and investment flows resume, than it won't be enough just to have an advantage of euro as a national currency to draw over direct foreign investment from the neighbors, who will offer much more favorable environment for creation and preservation of job places.

Aiming at formation of conditions for stable continuous growth Slovakia carries out a “reset” of the economic policy. In accordance with a national plan of recovery in economy adopted in 2010<sup>25</sup>, a period for boosting economic growth on the basis of enlarging budget costs is already finished. An adopted program of quite rapid budget consolidation presupposed lowering of budget deficit to the EU norms up to 2013 and stabilization of the size of the state debt to 2015. In medium- and long-term perspective to the foreground come tasks aimed at improving institutional environment and implementation of structural reforms, which in 2000s had top priority for the country. An essentially important emphasis is placed on increasing stability of state finances. Solution of the task is connected with strengthening of institutional boundaries of the budget policy and reformation of the social sphere, first of all pension and health care systems to make them correspond to demographic and financial realia of the country.

Budget consolidation in the interests of improvement of macroeconomic stability will be combined with implementation of structural reforms, aimed at promoting economic growth, employment and quality of life. The agenda includes issues connected with increasing the efficiency of the national system of education and scientific-research sphere. Such ambitious task must provide systematic improvement of investment climate, which would allow Slovakia to join a group of 15 countries with best conditions for doing business till 2020. In this regard, it is planned to remove main risks related to investing into the Slovak economy (corruption, imperfect justice system and non-sufficient protection of the ownership rights), to conduct tax reform, which will lower administrative pressure on tax payers, as well as modernize labor legislation, to enhance economic growth. Thus there will be applied new elements in the economic policy. The answer of the Slovak government to challenges of the post-crisis development must be transition to responsible, conservative budget policy, improvement of institutions and acceleration of structural reforms.

<sup>25</sup> *Narodny program reforiem Slovenskej republiky 2011–2014*. Bratislava: Slovenský republiky, April 2011. S 4–5.



The Constitution adopted in 1992 proclaimed Slovakia a democratic country with a parliamentary form of government; a single chamber parliament was formed and the institution of president introduced. The fundamental law of the country guaranteed political pluralism, civil rights and liberties. Imbalance of branches of power revealed in 1993-1998 in the form of “premier absolutism” (combination of parliamentarism with authoritarian role of the prime minister) was corrected. Constitutional changes which took place in 1998-1999 introduced direct presidential elections and in a new way determined presidential responsibilities, what strengthened position of the president while parliamentary responsibility was on the government. As a result Slovakia evolved from the parliamentary to parliamentary-presidential system of governing what preserves stability even under conditions if the president and government belong to different political forces. A party system of Slovakia is characterized by a high fragmentation (over 100 registered parties and movements) and polarization. The most influential player of the left wing is the party “SMER-SD” headed by R. Fico.

The leader of the right wing of political spectrum is the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ-DS) headed by M. Dzurinda. A peculiarity of the political field in Slovakia, a country with a complicated history and high political heterogeneity, is the presence of numerous formations with a marked nationalistic orientation. In this group the most active one is the Slovak National Party, which stands for protection of traditional Christian values and Slovaks’ national identity, as well as the Party of Hungarian Coalition, which represents interests of the Hungarian minority. The Communist party is left on the periphery of political process (communists only once in the history of independent Slovakia entered the parliament). Multiparty character of Slovakia presuppose such peculiarities of the country’s political process as coalitional character of governments (except the last one, formed in 2012 by social-democrats) and instability of executive power. Demise of interparty alliances repeatedly (1994, 2002, 2006, 2012) led to government resignations, dissolution of parliaments and calling elections.

In the 2000s changes towards consolidation of post-communist multi-party character have been commenced. Political polarization is lowering, as the reached consensus on the general strategic course determines non-antagonistic character of contradictions between key political forces. There appeared a tendency towards formation of two-party political system. The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union and SMER which in the 2000s became main rivals in the political struggle more and more evolve in the direction of “catch-all” parties, whose peculiarities are loss of ideological determination and orientation on maximal mobilization of electorate, despite their social status and ideological preferences.

Therefore, for over a quarter of the century of post-communist development Slovakia has experienced fundamental democratic changes. There took place transition from one-party autocratic system to multi-party system and democracy. If in 1997 in the ranking of countries according to the level of political rights and civil liberties, as the Freedom House reported, Slovakia was at the same level with Russia and was a bit in advance of Macedonia and Moldavia, than at the beginning

of the new century it appeared to be among the group of consolidated “new” democracies. An important role in democracy development was played by an external factor: a number of EU and US walkouts in protest (1994-1996) as to the internal political development of the country; Brussels actions as to “compel” Slovakia to implement political specifications of membership in the EU; political and financial support of the West provided to the opposition to V. Meciar’s government.

In a line with achievements in the political life of the country there are serious long-term problems. Among them we can name irredentist attitudes among the Hungarian minority which fuel conflict potential in the Slovak-Hungarian relationship and hardships of social integration of the Roma population. An acute problem is corruption the level of which, as Transparency International put it, in 2016 is higher than in other Visegrad countries. According to the data provided by Transparency International Slovakia is the 7<sup>th</sup> most corrupted country-member of the EU<sup>26</sup>. In professional circles there is critical attitude towards the ability of Slovak diplomacy to stand for national interests in the EU procedural and institutional sphere and influence the decisions concerning strategic issues of the European development. When Slovakia joined the EU and the Eurozone general European interests are more and more shifting to the periphery of the state policy and internal political life of the country. In relation to this it is illustrative that right opposition, which from the very beginning supported accession of Slovakia to the European Union in 2009 voted against ratification of the Lisbon Treaty to weaken ruling left-of-center coalition. In its turn, left opposition in 2011 for similar purposes blocked ratification of the legislation as to enlargement of the European Financial Stability Facility, which was a key provision of the Eurozone rescue plan offered by the EU. It is evident, that confrontation of government and opposition does not contribute to political stabilization of the country.

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<sup>26</sup> Corruption Perceptions Index 2016. URL: [https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption\\_perceptions\\_index\\_2016](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016)

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