

# ELECTIONS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA

JUNE 1992



**A Report Prepared by the Staff of the  
Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe**

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## **ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION (OSCE)**

The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki process, traces its origin to the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in Finland on August 1, 1975, by the leaders of 33 European countries, the United States and Canada. Since then, its membership has expanded to 55, reflecting the breakup of the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia. (The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Serbia and Montenegro, has been suspended since 1992, leaving the number of countries fully participating at 54.) As of January 1, 1995, the formal name of the Helsinki process was changed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

The OSCE is engaged in standard setting in fields including military security, economic and environmental cooperation, and human rights and humanitarian concerns. In addition, it undertakes a variety of preventive diplomacy initiatives designed to prevent, manage and resolve conflict within and among the participating States.

The OSCE has its main office in Vienna, Austria, where weekly meetings of permanent representatives are held. In addition, specialized seminars and meetings are convened in various locations and periodic consultations among Senior Officials, Ministers and Heads of State or Government are held.

## **ABOUT THE COMMISSION (CSCE)**

The Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), also known as the Helsinki Commission, is a U.S. Government agency created in 1976 to monitor and encourage compliance with the agreements of the OSCE.

The Commission consists of nine members from the U.S. House of Representatives, nine members from the U.S. Senate, and one member each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce. The positions of Chair and Co-Chair are shared by the House and Senate and rotate every two years, when a new Congress convenes. A professional staff assists the Commissioners in their work.

To fulfill its mandate, the Commission gathers and disseminates information on Helsinki-related topics both to the U.S. Congress and the public by convening hearings, issuing reports reflecting the views of the Commission and/or its staff, and providing information about the activities of the Helsinki process and events in OSCE participating States.

At the same time, the Commission contributes its views to the general formulation of U.S. policy on the OSCE and takes part in its execution, including through Member and staff participation on U.S. Delegations to OSCE meetings as well as on certain OSCE bodies. Members of the Commission have regular contact with parliamentarians, government officials, representatives of non-governmental organizations, and private individuals from OSCE participating States.

## **ELECTIONS IN CZECHOSLOVAKIA**

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### **OVERVIEW OF RESULTS**

Elections were held in the Czech and Slovak Republics on June 5 and 6, 1992. At stake were seats in the two-chamber Federal Assembly, consisting of the 150-member House of People, whose Deputies are elected in proportion to population (similar to the U.S. House of Representatives) and the House of Nations. The House of Nations consists of 75 Deputies from the Slovak Republic and 75 Deputies from the Czech Republic. In addition, elections were held for the two Republic-level parliaments, the Czech National Council and the Slovak National Council, with 200 and 150 seats respectively.

The election results hold few real surprises. In the Czech Lands, the pro-federation, pro-economic reform Civic Democratic Party (ODS) of Federal Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus won. In Slovakia, the leftist/nationalist Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, led by former communist Vladimir Meciar, came in first. In both Republics, the leading parties won roughly one-third of the vote, former communists came in second, and the remainder of the votes were split between parties gaining less than 10% of the ballots cast. The results are summarized below.

### **OBSERVERS**

There were reportedly over 120 election observers and 600 journalists accredited by the Central Election Commission. Among those taking part as election monitors were representatives of the U.S. Embassy in Prague and the Consulate in Bratislava as well as from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs. The pre-election campaigning and election process proceeded with no significant problems and may be considered free and fair within the context of a system of proportional representation that only allows voters to cast their ballots for parties and not for individual candidates.

Perhaps the most significant shortcoming of the elections was evident in the media. Journalists apparently interpreted the media laws narrowly and too few engaged in the kind of investigative reporting, in-depth interviews, face-to-face debates, or comparative analyses that might have better assisted voters in making informed decisions.

### **VOTER TURNOUT**

Voter turnout was approximately 85% in the Czech Republic and 84.2% in the Slovak Republic.

### **POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS:**

Vaclav Klaus, the leader of the ODS, is a highly popular leader often characterized in the press as "right-of-center"; in real terms, that means he supports the kind of economic reform called for by the United States and the IMF. He is regarded as President Havel's choice for Prime Minister. Perhaps most importantly, as Finance Minister he has overseen the sale of voucher books to 3.5 million Czechoslovaks, entitling them to shares in state-owned companies now being privatized. This process of privatization has

thus far been successful and may ultimately be a model for countries further east. The election of his party--with a total of 83 seats in the Federal Assembly--signifies strong support in the Czech Lands for continuing his pro-federation, pro-economic reform policies.

In contrast, Vladimir Meciar's success has been largely read as a sign of voter rebellion against economic policies emanating from Prague that have hit Slovakia disproportionately hard. Meciar calls for greater state intervention, financed by budget deficits if necessary. He has vowed that he will seek an immediate declaration of sovereignty for Slovakia; the rapid adoption of a Slovak constitution that will trump the existing federal constitution; and a referendum on Czech-Slovak relations by the end of the year. In addition, he has said he would advise legislators from his party not to support a second term for current President Vaclav Havel.<sup>(1)</sup>

The first problem likely to be generated in the face of the increasing polarization between the two Republics is parliamentary gridlock. Normal federal legislation requires a simple majority in each of the three parts of the Federal Assembly; constitutional amendments require a three-fifths majority in each chamber. Thus a minority of delegates--out of a total of 450 Deputies, 37 for regular legislation and 30 for constitutional amendments--can deadlock the parliament.

Beyond that immediate problem lies the question of Slovak separatism. Clearly, people in Slovakia are unhappy with the economic reform policies coming from "the Castle" in Prague, policies that have left unemployment rates three times higher in Slovakia than in the Czech Lands. That dissatisfaction was undoubtedly exploited by Vladimir Meciar's nationalist, anti-Prague rhetoric. But now that the voters have put the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia in office, will Meciar claim for himself a popular mandate in seeking the dissolution of the country, or will he merely use his support as negotiating leverage in trying to achieve enhanced political and economic status for Slovakia? Although it is too soon to be sure, Meciar has staked out a fairly extreme position, and it may be difficult for him to back off--even if he were inclined to do so--now.

If a dissolution of Czechoslovakia is in the cards, it is unlikely that it would be accompanied by the kind of ethnic violence seen in the former Yugoslavia. First, the borders between the two Republics are relatively well-defined and uncontested; unlike many parts of the former Yugoslavia, they are not subject to competing claims by different ethnic groups. Second, Czechs and Slovaks are not caught up in the legacy of historical violence, as Croats and Serbs seem to be as a result of their experiences in World War II. Nevertheless, the foreseeable economic costs for both Republics would be substantial. The transition to a market economy is difficult enough; the additional burdens of a national divorce would add considerably to existing hardships.

<u>CZECH REPUBLIC</u>	<u>ODS-KDS</u>	<u>Left Bloc</u>	<u>Others</u>
Federal Assembly:			
House of People	33.9%	14.3%	4 parties
House of Nations	33.4%	14.5%	4 parties
Czech National Council	29.7%	14.0%	6 parties

ODS-KDS = Civic Democratic Party-Christian Democratic Party

Left Bloc = Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and Democratic Left of the CSFR

SLOVAK REPUBLIC	HZDS	SDL	Others
Federal Assembly:			
House of People	33.5%	14.4%	3 parties
House of Nations	33.8%	14.0%	4 parties
Slovak National Council	37.3%	14.7%	3 parties

HZDS = Movement for a Democratic Slovakia

SDL = Party of the Democratic Left (former Communists)

### Endnotes

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1. The Presidential election is scheduled for July 3, two days before President Havel's current term expires. Under rules changed only in early April 1992, a president had to be elected by a three-fifths majority in all three parts of the federal parliament, leading President Havel to remark that "Jesus Christ combined with Winston Churchill would not be elected president in such an election. . . ." Under the new rules, if a presidential election results in a deadlock, the presiding president remains in office until a second election can be held. At that time, only a simple majority is required to win.