

Political science - Slovakia

Malová, Darina; Miháliková, Silvia

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Darina Malová and Silvia Miháliková

Political Science – Slovakia

Discussant: Andrej Školka

Introduction

The emergence of political science as an academic discipline in Slovakia has been long and difficult. For reasons of historic timing and institutional context, the process has been slower than in other Central and Eastern European countries. The development of this discipline after 1989 has been influenced by institutional and cultural legacies inherited from the past.

Since the collapse of the communist regime in the former Czechoslovakia, several simultaneous changes took place in Slovakia with respect to the establishment of political science. The very fundamental but preliminary findings presented in this report indicate that there are several general trends in the development of this social science discipline. First, we argue that the almost complete lack of political science traditions meant this discipline had to be built from scratch and that this has crucially shaped its present “state of the art”. Second, institutional development (the foundation of the political science association, university departments, and research institutes) is a precondition for the establishment of political science per se. Third, political science in Slovakia has depended and still partly depends on the potential (human and institutional) of other social science disciplines, such as sociology, history, psychology, philosophy, and law. In other words, the process of redefining boundaries between social sciences disciplines continues, and there are occasional discussions about the qualification and status of the political scientist in general and with respect to academia, politics, and the mass media. Fourth, political science research focuses almost exclusively on the study of Slovakia, including modern political history, the development of political institutions, the analysis of policy-making, foreign policy, and political culture and behavior. There is very little comparative political science research; a comparative approach is used more in teaching than in research. Finally, there is a journal of political science, but contributions are not reviewed and there is a general lack of academic debates. So it is difficult to talk about developed paradigms and methodological schools in Slovakia. Instead, political scientists in Slovakia are accustomed to presenting their interpretation of basic concepts, such as civil society, human rights, constitutionalism, or democracy, in newspapers and popular weeklies dealing with politics, culture, and economics. We try to explain all these general characteristics of political science in the country mostly on the basis of historical legacies and the continuing lack of qualified academic staff and institutions.

1. Analysis of the pre-1989 situation

The evolution and development of political science in Slovakia should be understood on two analytically separate but closely connected levels: the first conforms to the general trend observable in European and Western nations since the late 19th century and involves the gradual emancipation of systemic social and political inquiry from the tutelage of the legal sciences and its gradual transformation into discrete social science disciplines – political science being one of the last to claim its independence. The second level relates to the Slovak historical experience and to the ways in which delayed social and political development combined with the dynamics of nation- and state-building in this country to determine the particular trajectories the social sciences and especially political science traveled on their way to eventual emancipation.

Politics first became an object of intellectual interest thanks to the individual efforts of a few authors who distinguished the idea of political activity from the full range of social actions. We

can find ideas and activities related to political science in works by Štefan Osuský, Ján Papánek, and Milan Hodža, who were leading politicians and diplomats. The latter advocated in his writings the necessity to establish a School for Politics and Social Sciences; this was realized shortly after 1945 in Prague. Their special interest in the subject led these authors to separate politics from the fields in which it had traditionally been included: moral philosophy, history, or law. At the same time, the emergence of politics as a field of knowledge was opposed to, or at least differentiated from, the skill necessary to engage in politics, which continued to be considered an “art”, a subject of discussion, or a matter of opinion impervious to scientific treatment.

During the period of “building communism”, which lasted 41 years, neither politicians nor social scientists favored the theoretical approach to politics. Political science did not actually exist. Instead there was scientific communism, which dealt with particular events of politics, interpreting them within the framework of Marxism-Leninism. However, the pre-communist era in the first Czechoslovak Republic was remarkable for its various scientific institutions, including the Czechoslovak Institute of Public Opinion, which was founded early in 1946 in Prague and quickly achieved high professional standards. Gordon Wightman, for example, highly esteemed the work of this institute.¹ Surveys from that time are available that include preferences for historical political personalities who played important roles in the history of the Czech and Slovak nations.

Western social scientists’ intensified interest in political issues in the 1950s and 1960s was not echoed among scientists in Eastern Europe. The theoretical and empirical research (explanatory framework) of politics that stressed cross-national comparisons did not fit the requirements of Marx-Leninist ideology. The political and social atmosphere was more open and tolerant during the late 1960s, when the study of the humanities was strongly influenced by Western approaches in social sciences, for example new methods in quantitative analyses, behaviorism, and New Left ideology. The short period of “socialism with a human face” allowed the creation of research institutes dealing with components and attributes of Western concepts of politics. For example, at the Institute of Public Opinion (Inštitút pre výskum verejnej mienky) in Slovakia, there were attempts to undertake marketing analyses and political prognoses. During these years, several research programs were carried out that could be considered as falling within the theoretical and empirical framework of politics. Nevertheless, researchers did not use the label “political science” except briefly from 1968-69.

Political science in Slovakia is not one of the older-established university disciplines. The nonexistence of political science as a university subject is clear if we consider that the first attempt to introduce this discipline began in the late 1960s at Comenius University (Univerzita J.A. Komenského) in Bratislava. The first group of students who started to study political science in 1966 graduated with diplomas as scientific communists following the Soviet intervention in August 1968. Teachers there were mostly historians, philosophers, and lawyers who had studied before the communist regime at home or at Western universities, former teachers of historical and dialectical materialism, and enthusiasts coming from other departments. The so-called normalization period after August 1968 meant that the whole country was effectively centralized both economically and politically under the control of the Communist Party. Political science as an academic subject completely disappeared and was labeled “bourgeois pseudo-science”.

The most valuable works relevant to political research were books and essays written by dissidents – Milan Šimečka and Miroslav Kusý. These books were published abroad or as *Samizdat* accessible to very limited audience. As part of Czechoslovakia, Slovakia was one of the most rigid communist regimes, and access to the work of Western scholars was the exception. However, even the short-lived foundation of political science in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s stimulated the translation of Western literature to be used as textbooks, including *Pýcha moci* (*The Arrogance of Power*) by James William Fulbright, *Nervy vlády* (*Nerves of Government*) by Karl Deutsch, and many others. But later all these translations were denied the public and stored in the banned sections of libraries.

A number of journals and informative materials dealing with the Catholic religion were produced in the form of *Samizdat* since the mid-70s. At the end of the 1980s, Catholic dissent groups launched new activities; publications, the distribution of photos of arrested Catholics, and the organization of pilgrimages, the most visible and internationally known of which was the *Candle Demonstration*, which asked for religious freedom in March 1988. Catholic dissent in Slovakia was able to build and use its own printing house with a bookstore during the more than 20 years of the “normalization” period.

Civic and political opposition in Slovakia was weak and disorganized compared with Czech opposition – the only exceptions being a group of people publishing the journal *Fragment* (later called *Fragment K*, then only *K*) and a large series of book translations (Huxley, Guardini, Beckett, Orwell, etc.) and a small community of dissidents who produced a monthly journal *Kontakt* (Contact); only a few Slovaks signed Charter '77. Activities of environmental groups have focused on restoring devastated churches and monasteries in the countryside, renovating traditional architecture, publishing studies criticizing air and water pollution in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia, and rejecting the project of building the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam. These groups have collected and published several documents on the devastation of town districts, cemeteries, monuments, and environment; the print run was very low, almost in the form of minutes of their meetings. All these activities took place in what was called the *gray zone* – the societal space between official and underground life, a kind of parallel culture and society.

2. Redefinition of the discipline since 1990

The development of political science in Slovakia required first and foremost the establishment of an institutional framework – university departments and research centers – before any substantial theoretical and methodological change could take place. Thus, new institutional structure is a prerequisite for the search for a new paradigm.

The most significant change after the collapse of communism has been the establishment of basic education and research institutions in political science. The main obstacle in the process was a lack of teachers, scholars, and experts educated in the field. The former dissident and previously professor of philosophy at Comenius University, Miroslav Kusý, became a leading figure in the development of political science in Slovakia. He was elected the first Chairman of the refounded *Slovak Political Science Association* (Slovenské združenie pre politické vedy), as well as the Head of the *Political Science Department at Comenius University* (Katedra politológie Univerzity Komenského). Former departments of Marxism-Leninism or scientific communism at all universities were transformed in 1990/91 into institutes or departments of social and political sciences. These departments specialize in teaching basic courses in political science, and their main activity is the teaching process; their research projects and grants are concentrated in the pedagogical framework. Gradually, teachers and scholars from other social sciences – mainly converted Marxist-Leninists, philosophers, sociologists, historians, and lawyers – came to join education and research in the field of political science. A number of them completed their education in political science through Western scholarships and study trips abroad.

Institutional development, i.e., the foundation of various research and education institutes, was a prerequisite for the establishment and development of political science. So the theoretical and methodological orientation of political science in Slovakia has been influenced by the peculiarities of institutional, political, and personnel circumstances. We argue that there is no dominant paradigm beyond the general rejection of Marxism-Leninism, no clear orientation toward any other theoretical paradigm. Instead, there is only a partly manifested divergence in publications and research. The first current is driven by liberal and democratic values, while the second focuses on nationalist rhetoric and the protection of vaguely defined national interests. This split copies the pattern of party competition in Slovakia and in general undermines the development of political

science and the discussion of political science issues. Senior professors and researchers usually tend to manifest these differences publicly in newspapers and at conferences.

The Slovak Political Science Association (SPSA) was re-established in 1990. The Slovak Political Science Association existed for a short time between 1968-69 and was incorporated in the officially recognized Czechoslovak Political Science Association that worked during the communist period of so-called normalization from 1969 to 1989. The SPSA is the Slovakia-based successor association and was accepted as a collective member of International Political Science Association (IPSA) in 1994. Nevertheless, there are persistent problems with delayed payment of membership fees to IPSA. SPSA is a member of the East Central European Network in Political Science, which was officially established as a special body of IPSA in April 2000. The SPSA was established to help develop, support, and spread the understanding of political science in the Slovak Republic and abroad. Since political science has no tradition in Slovakia, it was necessary to start with education, retraining courses, and building a research network.

Today, the SPSA has more than 130 members, including scholars, researchers, and students in Political Science, Sociology, History, Law, Journalism, International Relations, Economics, and other disciplines and professions. Many members are active in subfields like comparative politics, modern history, social policy, political sociology, public administration, human rights, and conflict resolution. Interest in membership is increasing as political science continues to develop at Slovak universities and research institutes.

The SPSA collaborates with a number of institutions in the Slovak Republic and abroad to establish research and professional teams and groups; to organize lectures, seminars, conferences, workshops, retraining courses, and summer schools; to prepare joint research projects with other institutions and legislative, governmental, and public bodies; and to support and share in independent editorial activities. In the past four years, the SPSA organized a number of seminars and workshops for its members and the broad public comparing recent political developments in Slovakia with neighboring countries, as well as organizing discussions with representatives of the Slovak parliamentary political parties and arranging presentations by prominent foreign scholars.

Most political science activity takes place in the universities, where teaching and research are traditionally combined. A distinction must be drawn between universities that offer only basic courses in political science within the framework of a compulsory minimum in the humanities and social sciences and those that offer political science as a major with a diploma. At present, five universities offer a major and conduct research in political science. There are two so-called old universities (founded with the status of university before 1989) – the most internationally known Comenius University in Bratislava and the *Prešov University* (Univerzita v Prešove), formerly a faculty, which split from the *University of P. J. Šafárik in Košice* (Univerzita P. J. Šafárika v Košiciach). After 1989, three new universities were founded: first, *Trnava University* (Trnavská univerzita) in 1991, then *Matej Bel in Banská Bystrica* (Univerzita M. Béla v Banskej Bystrici) in 1995, then the *University of Constantinus Philosopher in Nitra* (Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre) in 1997, and then the second university based in Trnava, the *University of Cyril and Methodius*, (Univerzita Cyrila a Metoda v Trnave), in 1998. This proliferation of new universities is not a response to the relatively low number of people with higher education, but a consequence of struggles within the political and intellectual elite.

The composition of faculty members at the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University provides a good example of a gradual change of intellectual elite and of the mixed composition of academics coming from different social science disciplines. Some members of the current staff were hired from the previous Department of Scientific Communism, some came from various institutes of Marxism-Leninism, some from other university departments, and there are already also young academics returning to Slovakia after finishing their studies abroad or in Bratislava. Faculty members have a research agenda oriented toward specific theoretical concerns and research topics, especially those connected to the promotion of democracy and human rights and to security studies in our region. However, most of these research projects are

“supply-driven”, i.e., Slovak academics conduct research as members of international teams, usually collecting and interpreting data on specific aspects of politics and government in the country. Numerous research projects under way or recently completed at the Department include: “The Role of Political Culture in the Transition of Post-Communist Countries” (in cooperation with C.N.R.S. Paris), “Strategies of Collective Protest in Democratizing Countries” (Harvard University), “Local Candidate Recruitment and Party Formation in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia” (Strathclyde University), “The Process of Institutionalization of Parliamentary Democracy in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia” (Leiden University), “Socio-Economic Development and Regional Policy: Belgium and Slovak Experiences” (Leuven University), “Europe Agreements” (Institut für Europäische Politik, Bonn), and the curriculum development projects “Curriculum Development in the Field of Human Rights Education”, “Curriculum Development in the Field of Comparative Regional Studies” (Manchester Metropolitan University), “National Security Education” (Groningen University), and “Political Symbols in Post-Communist Europe” (University Leipzig). However, there are no clear theoretical and methodological orientations, only different research topics.

The *Department of Political Science at Prešov University* in eastern Slovakia exhibits a similar composition of academic staff – academics crossing from different social science disciplines to political science. There are six full-time lecturers along with one part-time and three external teachers. This department had to fulfill political science study’s academic guarantee in regard to faculty composition. Academic capacity concentrates first of all on logistics – the “Prešov’s Politological Days” conferences are organized yearly, and complete presentations are published afterward (in Slovak).

The *Faculty of Political Science and International Relations* (Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov) in Banská Bystrica is part of the wave of newly established university centers. Although the new Faculty did not completely fulfill the formal criteria of academic qualification for teaching staff, the Accreditation Committee of Ministry of Education entitled the Faculty in 1998 to award Master and Doctoral degrees in Political Science and International Relations. Research activities are quite limited and mainly based within the framework of the grant system offered by the Slovak Ministry of Education and concentrated in the field of education, writing basic textbooks, and dictionaries of political science. Researchers here prefer rather formal partnerships to concrete research projects. The Faculty publishes a quarterly journal *Politické vedy* (Political Sciences) in collaboration with the *Institute of Political Science at the Slovak Academy of Sciences* (Ústav politológie Slovenskej akadémie vied).

The *Department of Political Science and European Studies* (Katedra politológie a európskych štúdií) was established at the University in Nitra in 1998. The Department offers a Masters Degree in Political Science and European Studies. Most research activities are pedagogical, attention is paid to teaching methods in civic education at secondary schools, and the Department publishes the journal *CIVITAS* for civic education teachers twice a year.

There are two competing universities in the city of Trnava, both offering the study of Political Science. The first, the University of Trnava, was established in 1991 and has had a BA program in Political Science from the beginning. Later, in 1998, the Department was also accredited for the MA degree. The second university in Trnava, the University of Cyril and Methodius, was founded in 1998. Its Department of Political Science is located within the Faculty of Philosophy and offers an MA degree. In its research, the academic staff of the both departments deals mainly with international relations, comparative politics, and political sociology.

The Institute of Political Science was founded at the Academy of Sciences in 1990; it focuses on projects related to modern political history, geopolitics, and some selected topics on the party system and the electoral system. The core research is on political history, mainly the study of the former regime, since the leading founder of the Institute is a historian who was not allowed to work and publish in the field under the communist regime. Originally, a special commission for the investigation of political development during the Prague Spring was established at the Institute.

This commission collected valuable original documents, interviews, and other resources and has made them available to academics and the public. This Institute cooperates closely with departments of political science at a number of universities.

A small number of independent political research institutions have been established in addition to university-based political research. The *Institute for Public Affairs*, also known as IVO (the acronym of its Slovak name, Inštitút pre verejné otázky), is an independent public policy research institute founded in February 1997 and located in Bratislava. The Institute's mission is to analyze social, political, economic, foreign policy, legal, cultural, and other issues of public interest; to conduct research on public policies and their consequences, to publish and disseminate its findings widely, and to make practical recommendations for improved government policy; and to study, document, and help to promote Slovakia's transition to a free, democratic, and open society; to stimulate public debate on important issues through lectures, seminars, workshops, and round tables; and to promote the active involvement of informed citizens in public life. Although research fellows of the Institute have no regular teaching obligations, there is cooperation between research and academic institutes and universities. Prominent research fellows conspicuously accept time-limited, teaching positions at universities, often unpaid at financially strapped educational institutes.

The universities differ in the subjects taught as well as in their entire political science study design. There is a wide variety of courses, including History of Political Thought, Introduction to Politics, Theories of Politics, Comparative Politics, International Relations, International Politics, European Integration, Public Policy and Public Administration in Slovakia, Theories of Democracy and Democratization, and Methods in Political Science. In addition to core courses, departments offer a variety of courses in subfields and a series of optional courses: Human Rights, Women's Studies, Public Opinion Research, Demography, Political Geography, Regional Studies, History of Sociology, Political Sociology, and History of Slovak Political Thought.

3. Core theoretical and methodological orientations

Due to the focus on the study of Slovakia, we have not yet been able to identify any well-developed theoretical and methodological orientations. Articles in journals, chapters in edited volumes, and all other publications focus on gathering, presenting, and interpreting data on Slovakia. Research is highly fragmented; there is a lack of coordination and cooperation and limited human resources. Slovak scholars able to communicate in foreign languages participate in diverse research teams, and their research focuses mostly on collecting data, so they are rarely involved in theoretical and methodological debates. They are also often extremely busy, participating in several research projects, not to mention their further obligations in education and administration.

If any change of paradigm has occurred in Slovakia, it involved the departure from Marxism-Leninism to a rather eclectic and selective use of different concepts and methods, including rational choice (strategic and security studies), the qualitative method (research on national identity, symbols, political culture), content analysis (collective protest), quantitative studies (political orientations of the elite, party members, and citizens), and the institutional approach (study of the constitution, parliament, cabinet, constitutional court, electoral and party systems, etc.). All this enterprise has been marked by selection of the method that seemed the most "appropriate" to the topic (i.e., selected by team leaders), and this has not stimulated debate about methods or paradigms among the Slovak political scientists. Political science is in its first, beginning phase, in a period of collecting data in various areas subfields, without any vital discussion about fundamental approaches.

Slovakia has no library with a systematic collection of books on political science. One of the main reasons is the limited financial resources for buying new books, especially from abroad. There are very few departments or institutes building their own libraries through grant sources or

donations from individual colleagues abroad, or collecting copies of basic textbooks, studies, and teaching materials. The lack of scientific books and journals in Bratislava is often compensated by borrowing books from Viennese libraries.

The Internet has become a valuable source of academic information and a basic vehicle of network building, especially among the younger generation of scholars and students. It is quite obvious that an increasing number of students are using Internet references in their diploma theses and are utilizing Internet information on vacant jobs, PhD study, and summer school opportunities. No data archive of existing information sources from sociological and political surveys has been established in Slovakia yet. The most extensive databases are located at the *Institute of Sociology at the Slovak Academy of Science* (Sociologický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied) and at the Institute for Public Affairs.

4. Thematic orientation and funding

Researchers' choices of themes depend mainly on the availability of funding or focuses on the "hot" political issues in Slovakia. Most of the research projects deal with political institutions in Slovakia or provide an informative comparative overview of institutional arrangements available abroad. For example, before almost every national election, there has been a proliferation of conferences and publications on various electoral systems. Mainly lawyers took part in such enterprises, and only a few political scientists were "accepted" as partners for such debates. The second major thematic orientation is toward political actors and their opinions and behavior on both the elite and mass level. The third orientation is toward international relations, including Slovak foreign policy, security studies, and EU enlargement. Fourth, the recent public administration reform has led to an increase of interest in the study of public administration and public policy reforms. Further, several political scientists working at the Institute of Political Science at the Slovak Academy of Sciences have focused on the study of modern political history and political thought in Slovakia. Finally, there are a lot of studies and research projects dealing with human and minority rights. In general, political science in Slovakia is highly fragmented, and many political scientists have the "exclusive" position of being the country's only specialist in their respective field. This situation hinders academic debates on methodology and theoretical approaches.

Since the establishment of independent Slovakia in January 1993, most of the country's studies have focused on explaining this "problematic" case of post-communist democracy. The main streams of democratization scholarship include various attempts to explain the Slovak case. The first group of explanations links the problems of democratic consolidation to structural factors, such as the lower level of socio-economic development, rather late modernization and industrialization, authoritarian political culture, etc. (Szomolányi, 1995; Miháliková, 1997; Krivý, 1996). The second set of reasoning examines institutional design, including executive-legislative relations, the electoral system, the shape of parties and the party system (Kubín et al., 2000; Malová, 1998; Malová-Rybář, 2000; Malová, 2001; Učeň, 1999). The third type of research aims to account for Slovakia's deficit of democracy in terms of elite configuration (Szomolányi, 1997).

Slovak scholars have practiced two modes of the institutional approach. On the one hand, a group of lawyers (Barányi, 1996; Kresák, 1996; Zavacká, 1997) studied the constitution-drafting process and analyzed constitutional rules. On the other hand, political scientists focus on the study of the impact of Slovakia's hastily drafted constitution on the consolidation of democracy, arguing that the constitutional rules proved to be unsatisfactory in leading political actors, and thus aggravated many political conflicts over interpretation of the Slovak constitution. Several authors (Malová, 2001, Rybář, 2001, Láštík, 2000) studied the discrepancies between formal and informal rules, which latter include practices at variance with the constitution. Such studies suggest that the preponderance of informal rules has impeded the institutionalization of formal rules and thus undermined constitutional government in Slovakia.

Studies or reports using a broadly defined political-culture approach assume the proposition that not everything can be encompassed by conventional rationality. Various processes, ideas, values, mechanisms, and so on remain hidden from customary modes of scrutiny and yet have significant implications for the way in which individuals and collectivities live. In the search to diagnose Slovak political culture, the historical perspective plays a decisive role, and the main research topics are historical events, personalities, prejudices, and grievances connected with the absence of Slovak statehood. There are two major research questions: first, why was Slovakia regarded as the exception among the four Visegrad countries (at least until 1998/99), the anomaly in Central Europe with an uncertain path and an unpredictable future; and second, how can Slovakia catch up with Europe and modernize and overcome the traumatic character of nation-building after several centuries of stateless, survival-oriented existence under the Hungarians and further foreign interventions?

To understand current electoral behavior in Slovakia, traditional political patterns are explained on the basis of regional comparative quantitative data (e.g. Vladimír Krivý). As in other post-communist countries, it is still difficult to establish criteria for measuring the degree and intensity of democratic attitudes in the population. Research institutes (e.g. IVO) and opinion poll agencies, e.g. MVK, FOCUS, The Market Review Institute GfK, and Markant Agency, provide a number of mass survey data, using internationally standardized questionnaires with internationally comparable techniques of analysis. Despite a widespread search for deeper insights into the dynamics of change in political culture, the combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods is weak and undeveloped.

Nevertheless, it has become a habit of political scientists in Slovakia to measure domestic political developments by Western yardsticks. In this sense, anything that broadly approximates “the Western way” has come to be perceived as normal, standard, or systemic, while whatever deviates from Western norms and practices is seen as strange, unorthodox, or nonsystemic. Many political science reports and commentaries have been written in this spirit.

The problem with this conceptualization is that it is not only very vague, but also that it ignores the dynamic nature of the benchmark (i.e., the Western capitalist system in general). Furthermore, it embodies the ethnocentric notion that all countries diverging from the direct path towards political plurality and a free market economy are abnormal. This last tendency often results in a masochistic self-abasement in the face of nonconformity with the blueprint that Western neoliberal enthusiasts (and reformers in the East) drew at the dawn of the “post-communist” era – a blueprint completely rejecting communism and, with it, all social or planned arrangements. In this sense, the negative reflex reaction to anything perceived as non-Western stems from the deprivations of living on the “wrong” side of the Iron Curtain.

Political scientists focusing on the political-culture approach concluded that, several years after gaining independence, Slovakia finds itself locked in a paradox: while the transformation to a market economy has been relatively successful (despite problems), there is a far greater ambivalence and even dissatisfaction about democratization and the way power is exercised. There is less of this since the political changes in 1998, but the contrast remains. General hopes for a continuous and linear unfolding of democracy were certainly frustrated through the mid-1990s by chronic political instability, constant conflict among political elites, and tensions between the state institutions. This tale is told in the studies of Vladimír Krivý, Zora and Martin Bútora, Oľga Gyarfášová, Silvia Miháliková, Soňa Szomolányi, and others.

One of the main research questions remains: After sharing a common starting point with the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, why did Slovakia follow such a different path?

The simplest answer is that, in 1993, Slovakia had to start building state institutions from scratch. The new state was different in terms of economic development, ethnic homogeneity, and proximity to the West, and it definitely lacked the Poles', Czechs', and Hungarians' experience in governing and administering foreign and military affairs. While all these factors undoubtedly play a role, attention to the societal and political *culture* is perceived as necessary to understand the

tensions within Slovak society, as well as between Slovakia's representatives and international bodies. The conviction is strong that, in the post-communist countries and particularly in Slovakia, there are few traditions of pluralist democracy and that the rule of law is subject to the interpretations of party elites. In addition, most citizens of Slovakia who were 80 or older in 1993 had experienced seven state formations and eight constitutions without changing residence. Of five regimes in their lifetime, only two could be considered democratic.

Studies of contemporary Slovak political culture stress the need to identify its roots and describe its main features. This means, first, examining the country's undemocratic traditions. Like other post-communist states, Slovakia has a mixed tradition of democracy and authoritarianism with roots not only in the socialist period, but going back at least to the early 19th century and the Slovak emancipation movement. Researchers in this field combine quantitative and qualitative approaches to identify the dominant symbolic framework of the Slovak transition period and show how culture works in processes of social and political change. Times of regime changes or crisis are opportunities to reaffirm, rethink, and reformulate not only fundamental values but also myths and rituals in which those values are encoded. As a new state in the post-communist period, Slovakia is an excellent example demonstrating the way political symbols, myths, and rituals are invented, revived, and reconstructed.

Research activities are funded by several substantial grants from domestic and outside agencies and foundations. These grants have also provisioned new departmental libraries with computer resources (including e-mail) for students. The grant system of the Slovak Ministry of Education with its very limited financial sources, the British Council, and Slovak branches of several foreign foundations, (e.g. the Ford Foundation, the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Charter '77, the Jan Hus Foundation, etc.) have also supported developments in the political science community. The European Union with its TEMPUS program has played a very positive role, too, mainly with respect to teaching political science. A number of professors, academics, researchers, PhD students, and graduate and undergraduate students enjoyed the new opening of boundaries between West and East in academic life. Although the TEMPUS program was generally perceived as extremely bureaucratic, its provisions contributed to the widespread conviction that the academic community in particular could benefit from involvement in European integration. Diverse provisions in a wide variety of foreign grants allowed political science departments and research institutes to buy such basic technical facilities as PCs and copy and fax machines and to install e-mail.

The Slovak branch of Soros' Open Society Foundation (OSF) played a very positive role in such developments by providing both information and necessary financial resources for teachers, scholars, and students to attend courses, summer schools, seminars, workshops, and conferences around Europe, in the US, and in Canada. In addition, the OSF grant system allowed the purchase of a number of basic Western textbooks published in recent decades, as well as recent publications, periodicals, journals, and the necessary empirical databases from international comparative surveys. Individual and collective research grants awarded within the "Research Support Scheme" (later the Open Society Institute) were incentives to build international research teams, particularly in the field of comparative politics, and served also as an impetus to a domestic scientific competition unusual under the old regime. The possibility of receiving grants that would significantly improve one's individual or family budget attracted several young scholars and PhD students to join university departments and research institutes and stimulated interest in the study of political science among undergraduate university students. The variety of grant systems offered (library grants, travel grants, modern arts, social sciences, translation, PhD programs, curricula building, teaching) greatly contributed to teaching students how to write CVs and research grant applications and how to get research money through Western-style fundraising.

Increasing demand among international research networks competing for the latest data and first-hand information from the post-communist world meant that the majority of Slovak political scientists who speak foreign languages became members of those research teams. However, the

question remains whether political scientists from former communist countries merely serve as information sources and a formal fulfillment of a grant requirement or if Western scholars accept them as equal research partners.

5. Public space and academic debates

Political scientists in Slovakia have not yet institutionalized any regular space of their own to discuss development of research and teaching in the field. Although there is a journal *Politické vedy* (Political Sciences) published by the Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, it does not attract the participation of the whole Slovakian political science community. Nor do scientific referees review contributions published in the journal. Consequently, newspapers, weeklies, and journals dealing with other social science disciplines or published in the Czech Republic often substitute for a national political science journal in Slovakia.

There were three attempts to organize a public debate on the state of the art of political science in Slovakia. The first dealt with the status of a political scientist in Slovakia in relation to the mass media and politics. The second was the conference organized by the Department at Comenius University to celebrate the 10th anniversary of its foundation with the aim to map and reflect on the development of political science in Slovakia. Although not many political scientists participated in the conference, the published collection of the papers presented at the conference indicates that political science in Slovakia is indeed at the stage of the empirical collection of data and of testing different ways of interpreting that data.

The third attempt to spark debate was the seminar organized by the Slovak Political Science Association on November 23, 2001. Representatives of almost all Slovak educational and research institutions participated. The positive outcome seems to be an attempt to break down existing partisan barriers between political scientists and an expressed common will to improve the quality of the political science journal *Politické vedy* so that it can serve the whole political science community in Slovakia from year 2002 on. As a further positive step improving mutual communication among political science departments at the universities and research institutes, an address book will be prepared and an exchange of curricula and research plans has been promised.

Conclusion

As mentioned above, political science in Slovakia became fragmented very soon for various reasons. The most important was the political polarization of the whole society, which led to the existence of two sets of universities and political science departments – those that claimed to be politically independent (mostly in opposition to the former government of Prime Minister Mečiar – e.g. Comenius University, Trnava University) and those that were established directly by and were therefore loyal to the former government (Matej Bel University, Nitra University, University of Cyril and Methodius in Trnava). Moreover, the politics of the ruling coalition (1994-1998) led to the creation of universities in almost every provincial capital. With a population of about five million, Slovakia now has ten universities that teach political science, meaning small humanities departments that try, with inadequate funds and personnel, to cover at least basic knowledge in political science. The Slovak educational system's financial resources have traditionally been very limited, but recent fragmentation has led to even less efficient use of material and human resources.

Another consequence of fragmentation is a lack of contact between universities and limited communication among political scientists in different universities and research institutes. Nor does the discipline have a tradition of scientific discussion, although the Slovak Political Science Association is doing its best to serve as a forum for such a discussion. There is also a growing danger of inbreeding. Academics usually teach and conduct research at the university where they received their training and are not usually stimulated to acquire professional experience at other

universities or abroad. As a result, except for members of the Department of Political Science at Comenius University, Slovak political scientists often take only limited part in conferences, seminars, workshops, or similar events organized by the international political science community. One reason for this might be the generally bad command of foreign languages, especially among the older generation of teachers and scholars outside Bratislava.

Political Science as an academic discipline did not become a fully integrated part of Slovak academic teaching and research until after the end of communism. In recent years, political science studies have gone through a rapid expansion, following an increase in the number of universities and students. The majority in the academic community, among higher education authorities, and among the student population have welcomed this expansion, but its effects on the discipline and on teaching are at least ambiguous. In some, mostly the newly established universities, students see political science as a “second (or third) best” major, after law and economics. As for staff, the need to cope with expanding demand and teaching duties has led to improvisation and inadequate training of personnel, who are mainly converted former Marx-Leninist teachers. So the composition of the professional body in teaching is balanced between elderly lecturers and young, recently graduated students.

In spite of all these problems, some departments and research groups are already able to compete in the international arena, as evidenced by the exchange programs and international research projects in which they are involved.

Taking 1990 as the date of new start for political science in Slovakia, it appears that a first stage has been completed – official university degrees, discipline recognition, increased staff recruitment, the organization of departments and institutes, first steps in international collaboration, the organization of professional associations, etc. But there still remains much to be done; a solid foundation must be given to these recent developments and some problems caused by the country’s late development must be solved. Many tasks lie entirely in the hands of the academic community in Slovakia, other are more dependent on the good will and help of foreign colleagues and institutions and of international research networks. One of the most important questions is developing curricula to achieve compatibility with basic scientific standards in political science education in Europe. One cannot expect progress in this field without continuous staff and graduate training, since there is still a need to bring the Slovak political science community into the mainstream of political science.

¹ In the book edited by Archie Brown and Jack Gray (1979)

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