The Main Trends of the Internal Political Development of Slovakia in 2000 as One of the Factors of the Foreign Policy of Slovakia

Internal political aspects of the international position of the country

Beside the geographical location, economic and defence potential, position in the system of international relations and the quality of diplomatic service of a country, the character of its internal political development also belongs to those factors, which influence the foreign policy of a country. The relationship of a country with another ones, its cooperation with neighbouring countries, its participation in international organizations and groupings of countries depend on the type of its political regime, way of functioning of its institutions, level of political stability and the quality of its legislation and actual configuration of political forces. The importance of the interrelation of the internal and foreign policy of a country was proved during the short history of Slovakia in the nineties. The memberships in European and Trans Atlantic economic and defence groupings, including the OECD, were declared a priority in the field of foreign policy by all the Slovak governments until now. However, the progress of Slovakia in the integrational process has significantly slowed down mainly because of internal political reasons during 1994 -1998. As a result of democratic deficits and sharp internal political confrontation, which led to institutional instability, Slovakia was not accepted into the NATO in the first round of its enlargement, and it does not get also into the first group of associate members with which the EU started discussion about membership issues. The negotiations with the Slovak OECD about the membership in this grouping of the economic most developed countries of the world finished without any positive result for the former government.

Radical changes have happened in the internal political development of the Slovak Republic after the elections in 1998. The previously mentioned democratic deficits were eliminated within a short period of time, as the parliament adopted legislation increasing stability of the system of institutions and improving situation in the field of human rights. Stability and democratisation of the internal political development was positively reflected in the international position of the country, mainly its integrational chances have improve

The results of the EU summit in Helsinki in December 1999, when the Slovak Republic was officially invited to negotiations about entering the EU, were the practical proofs not only of the success of the diplomatic activity of the Slovak Government, but also of the trust towards the decisive European integrational grouping responsible for the orientation of the development of internal politics of the country.

Increasing support of the public in prior foreign political issues of the country was another favourable factor to continue with the pro-integrational policy of the Government of the Slovak Republic in 2000. The increased interest of the public in foreign policy was the one more positive phenomenon. According to the research of the
Institute for Public Issues made in March 2000, 44 a/o of the respondents were paying attention regularly or rather regularly to foreign policy (only 38 \%/o of the population was doing the same in January 1999). According to other researches of the IPI from August 2000, 72 \% of the population of Slovakia supported Slovakia's membership in the EU (in June 1999 it was only 66 \%) and 50 \% supported Slovakia's membership in the NATO (in June 1999 it was only 35 \%). The researches of different sociological agencies from 2000 have proved the mainly positive attitude of the population of the Slovak Republic towards the foreign policy of the Government of Mikulas Dzurinda.

**The significance of the stability in the development of internal policy**

The year 2000 was a period of stabilization of trends in the development of the internal policy of the Slovak Republic, which determined the development of the country after the parliamentary elections in 1998. The positive effects of co-operation and good relationship between the highest constitutional institutions (president, parliament, government, Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic) are indisputable, as well. Respecting principles of legal states and democratic "rules of game" by the dominant political forces have created favourable environment for the continuation of the democratic consolidation process. The government, formed by democratically oriented political formations, tried to implement some reform steps creating adequate conditions for the country to get closer to the integrational groupings. The membership of the Slovak Republic in the OECD in December 2000 is the tangible result of these steps on the international scene. The following steps were of key importance from the point of view of the development of internal policy stability and creation of more favourable conditions for the practical implementation of the foreign political priorities of the Slovak Republic in 2000:

- way of functioning of the system of institutions in the country; success of different constitutional institutions; process of creation and adoption of legal norms connected with the functioning of different bodies of the political system;
- situation in the government coalition; character of relations between subjects of the government; ability of the government to implement important reform measures; entire effectiveness of the policy of the government;
- relations between the government coalition and the parliamentary opposition; preparedness of the opposition to contribute to the development process, which would strengthen international position of the country and also its position in the integration process.

**The state and functioning of the institutional system**

The system of the parliamentary democracy has practically functioned without an breakdown in the year 2000 just as in the year 1999. The dominant political forces, which are in majority in the legislative organ, did not pass any measure, which would endanger the stability of the constitutional system. On the contrary they tried to reach procedural consensus or they tried to find a consensus in the case of conflict situations, which were solved afterwards within the existing constitutional-legal frames. The Parliament was functioning as the controller of the executive powers. Unlike the government coalition (HZDS-ZRS-SNS) during the years 1994-1998, the government
coalition (SDK-SDL-SMK-SOP) did not create any obstacle in the parliament for the opposition politics to control its functioning. The representatives of the executive powers have passed enactments concerning their control by the legislative body, and they did not create any obstacle against the demands of the parliament provide them with information concerning their activities. The Parliament respected all judgements of the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic concerning the decisions of the National Council of the Slovak Republic.

The parliament passed important legal norms creating more favourable conditions for democratisation trends. It was also about the law of free access to information, of which preparation and adoption in the parliament was followed by the supporting campaign of non-governmental organizations, which demanded the implementation of the principle "everything is public what is not a secret". The National Council of the Slovak Republic passed the law about judges and associates (the so-called Code of Judges) proposed by the government, which creates the legal basis for the reform of the Slovak judiciary. The proposal of the Amendment of the Constitution was prepared in 2000 and adopted by the National Council on 23 of February 2001. The Amendment strengthened the democratic character of the country and created more favourable conditions for the process of the Slovak Republic to join the EU.

The Constitutional Court of the SR, which is guarding the constitution of the country, was in a more favourable situation in the year 2000 because of more professional preparation and adoption of legal norms in the parliament. In the electoral period between 1994 and 1998, the government coalition DS-ZRS-SNS) adopted laws, which secured a bigger concentration of power in their hands even on the price of adopting legislature and amendments opposing the Constitution of the SR. It was proved also by the Constitutional Court of the SR. In contrast to this, the new government coalition (SDK-SDL-SMK-SOP) tried to keep the principles of a democratic and legal state. Unlike in the period between 1994-1998, after elections there were no unconstitutional legal norms adopted (with the exception of the amendment of the executive regulation from the year 1999, which was qualified by the Constitutional Court of the SR as unconstitutional).

**Dominant political forces: situation in the government coalition**

The global stability of the development of the internal policy has much depended on stability of the government coalition and abilities of the government cabinet. The effectiveness of adopting the resolutions of the government was adapted to the wide spectrum structure of the government coalition. Complicated internal relations, marked rivalry and conflict elements were typical for this government coalition. However, the deteriorated relations between the parties of the coalition was not on the level which would prevent them from the continuation in their common interest to realize the pro-reform, democratising and pro-integrational policy. The previously mentioned conflict elements were connected with different program priorities as a result of different ideological and political aims of the coalition parties, just as with factors of personal character. Steps not in compliance with previous political agreements worsened the trust between the coalition partners. Despite the efforts of the coalition subjects to strengthen their own position in the coalition (many times on the cost of the partners), internal relations of the government were relatively balanced; there was no unequivocal dominance of any of its subjects. The wide spectrum character of the government
coalition increased the difficulty of the negotiations within the coalition. The effectiveness of such a way of negotiation was shown at the adoption of different legal norms in the parliament and at the implementation of certain important steps in execution.

As a result of different programs (mainly in the field of socio-economics and divergent interest of the parties in some questions connected with control, the relations between the coalition partners were strained in 2000. This tension resulted many times in open conflicts within the coalition, though their intensity have never endangered the existence of the coalition.

Opponent ad hoc alliances were established amongst the parties at the preparation and adoption of proposed measures in the government:

- in issues of socio-economic character - "bloc of leftists" (SDL, SOP) versus "bloc of rightists" (SDK, SMK);
- in issues concerning the rights of minorities - the "Slovak" part of the government coalition (SDK, SDL, SOP) versus the Hungarian part (SMK);
- in issues concerning the cooperation within the coalition - the "lo al" part of the government preferring the stability of the government (SDK, SMK, SOP) versus the internal opposition demanding changes in the structure of the government including its wide-ranging reconstruction (SDL).

Tension was also characteristic in bilateral relations of the parties of the government, whereupon the SDL was the most frequent actor of conflicts within the government coalition. The unsolved internal relations within the SDK was another complicating factor for the activity of the government cabinet from the point of view of its internal effectiveness, just as from the point view of support of governmental proposals in the parliament.

The different standpoints of the coalition partners in some important political and socio-economic issues resulted in the way of adoption of governmental decrees as well. Many governmental decrees were a result of long-lasting discussions and compromises within the coalition. It concerned the measures connected with economic policy, reform of the public administration, Amendment of the Constitution and the Agreement of the Slovak Republic with Vatican. The Coalition Council was relatively effective in solving the problems within the coalition connected with different respectively with opponent standpoints of the coalition parties. The Council was more effective in finding compromises in issues concerning the adoption of concrete practical measures and solution of issues of personal character. It was obviously connected with the fact that the majority of professional arguments on issues of material character just as arguments on adoption of personal priorities of the coalition parties contributed to the formation of common compromises. The most critical situation in the relations of the coalition partners was not caused by the different character of the programs but by reaction of one of the coalition partners on personal changes which happened in the leadership of one of the so-called strategic firms (it was the reaction of the SDL, on the dismissal of the director of the Slovak Power Station, who was nominated by the SDL, at that time).

At first, one part of the club of MPs of the SDL, led by its chairman J. Migas (also the
chairman of the parliament), voted no confidence for the Prime Minister M. Dzurinda and afterwards, they insisted on a wide-ranging reconstruction of the government for weeks.

Level of intercoalition stability was decreased by efforts of certain economic groups in different ways connected with parties of the government coalition. These groups intended to put their interests through their connections with representatives of the coalition parties. Even though unlike the previous government, which created a crony system on the basis of the ideology “need to create a domestic capitalistic stratum”, the political program of the government of M. Dzurinda was not aimed at creation of a crony model where the political and economic powers are interrelated, functioning of the coalition (SDK-SDF,-SMK-SOP) was also marked with efforts to use the elements of cronyism to strengthen the position of the coalition parties. The model according to which the positions in the so-called strategic firms were divided on the basis of political agreements within the coalition also contributed to the adoption of such steps (in fact, it was about party nominations). Despite that it was impossible to find a more adequate and operational model for taking over the responsibility in the leadership of the mentioned firms after constituting the government in 1998, the system of party nominations was to risky from the point of view of destabilization of the relations within the coalition in the case of realization of any personal change in the leadership of monopoly. The party nominations to leading positions in strategic firms increased the risk of favouring certain economic groups and subjects with close tights to political parties, respectively to their representatives. It showed soon that the effectiveness of the system of party nominations was less important from the point of view of common control of the coalition partners than as a factor which supports the crony methods. However, it is important to note that despite the fact that the previously mentioned practices of using crony tights with the parties of the government coalition remained, they did not mean a real danger for the democratic process and did not cause any breakdown in the functioning of the system of democratic institutions. It was also connected with the loyalty of the parties of the government coalition towards the values of parliamentary democracy and principles of legal states. Unlike, in the period between 1994-1998 the free democratic competition of the political forces on the basis of practical usage of crony methods and authoritative practice was not limited in the SR. Increased effectiveness of the non-formal public control (influence of the media, pressure of the public opinion) and taking up political responsibility for irrefutable or unconvincingly confuted cases were elements which did not exist in the previous electoral period.

Character of relations between the government and actors of public life was an important factor of the stability of the internal political development. The government of M. Dzurinda initiated a dialogue with the representatives of ethnic minorities and ethnic groups, representatives of NGOs, trade unionists and representatives of church immediately after the government was set up. Though, in 2000, relations between the government (governmental institutions) and the already mentioned actors of public life were complicated, and the representatives of minorities, NGOs and trade unions were critical about certain aspects of the work of the government, the dialogue and the relation between the partners were not seriously interrupted. The unambiguous orientation of the government on negotiation, and not on confrontation, decreased the risk of creation of possible conflicts.
The closeness in understanding of priorities in democratic development of the internal policy and pro-integrational foreign policy, but also the effort to prevent the return of authoritative forces to power were factors which contributed to the continuation of the governmental co-operation of the parties SDK SDR, SMK, SOP. In fact, some of the representatives of the parties of the government presented their ideas about the need of co-operation of democratic forces even after the next parliamentary elections.

The character of relations between the government coalition and opposition

Confrontation was a typical phenomenon in relations of the government coalition and opposition in the year 2000. The most powerful opposition force (HZDS) has tried to reverse the trend that took place after the parliamentary elections in 1998. HZDS, with the aim to win a wider support of the public, has tried to organize mass protest actions (manifestations and rallies), though participation on these meetings was very low. HZDS organized a petition to announce a referendum about mid-term elections in 2000. Despite that a major part of citizens of the country were dissatisfied with the socio-economical situation in the country at the half time of the government period of the coalition (SDK-SDI-SMK-SOP), the efforts of HZDS to evoke civic unrests on the basis of this public dissatisfaction were futile. Refusing standpoint of the majority of citizens about the possible return of political forces, which, among others, caused the integrational failure of the Slovak Republic, was shown by the absolute low participation of citizens on the referendum about mid-term elections (only 20 % of registered voters went to the electoral rooms).

HZDS, the main oppositional force, continuously refused to participate on constituting the parliamentary committees (later on, this effort was supported by the representatives of SNS), at positions they were offered repeatedly by the government coalition after the elections of 1998. The proposal of the government was based on the principle of adequate participation of the opposition in the leadership of parliamentary committees, which was close to the principle of proportional participation. As a conclusion, we can state that in the year 2000 the dominant forces made no efforts to concentrate political power in their hands using made of purpose legal amendments or administrative measures, and the system of division of power functioned without any breakdown.

Evaluation of the development of internal policy in the SR by foreign subjects

The evaluation of main trends in the internal progress by groupings in which the country intends to gain membership is the most important index of a character of relations between the development of internal policy of the country, its perspectives of foreign policy and present international position. The trends in the development of internal policy in the year 2000 were positively evaluated by democratic foreign subjects as well. Following the positive evaluation of the progress, which took place in Slovakia after the elections in 1998, the representatives of the EU and other democratic countries openly supported the Slovak government to continue the reforms.

Issues of reform trend stability and development of internal policy were the main targets of the representatives of the EU. The inadequate partnerships within the government coalition, which culminated in the crisis in April and May 2000, and the efforts of the opposition to reverse the action of early elections by the help of petition to announce referendum, evoked uncertainty of the EU representatives about the sustainability of
reforms. Mr. Verheugen, the Commissioner of the EU, has also given voice about his uncertainty in his speech for the first time at the meeting with the MPs of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the European Parliament in Brussels at the end of February 2000. The following opinions of the representatives of the EU on the present situation in the Slovak Republic has proved that they unambiguously connected the successful continuation of positive trends with the present government remaining in power. The Co-Chairman of the Joint EU-SR Parliamentary Committee Hans-Peter Martin has announced in May 2000, that it is important for Slovakia to sustain the level of political stability of the present days. According to Hans-Peter Martin, the biggest fears of the EU concern the possibility of early elections. Furthermore, the JPC Co-Chairman added that it is hardly imaginable to start discussions about referendum and early elections in time when a big progress has been reached in the Slovak Republic: "The elections would certainly lead to the slow-down of the integrational process, or it may cause even bigger problems." At the end of March 2000, Jan Wiersma, MP of the European Parliament and rapporteur of the Slovak Republic announced that in the case of early elections in the Slovak Republic the reform process would slow down, just as the pace of negotiations about the membership in the EU. In the case the parties of the previous government coalition would seize the power in Slovakia, the reaction of the EU would be very critical according to J. M. Wiersma: "We have had very bad experiences with Mr. Meciar and we do not want them to happen again." G. Verheugen, the Commissioner of the EU announced at the beginning of April: "The present Slovak government should stay together as long as possible in order to implement its program." The EU, in relation to the progress in the SR, accentuated the need to sustain the political stability mainly after the effort of the HZDS MPs to pass a vote of no confidence for Prime Minister M. Dzurinda in the Parliament in April 2000. This proposal was suddenly supported by a certain group of representatives of SDI.: J. M. Wiersma, a Rapporateur of the EU for Slovakia, announced at the presentation of the proposal of Report of Tasks Implementation within the Frame of Preparation of Slovakia to Join the EU, that the political stability of the Slovak Republic is still the most important factor. According to J. M. Wiersma, early elections could endanger continuity of economic reforms and adoption of important laws. The Regular Report of the European Commission from November 2000 stated, that Slovakia made significant steps in the field of getting membership in the EU, though it is necessary for the country to sustain the stability of the government and improve the reforms in order to implement further necessary measures. G. Verheugen, the Commissioner of the EU challenged the democratic forces in Slovakia in the proposal of the evaluation committee to be aware of the fact that the political stability and consensus of democratic forces in the issue of foreign political priorities is the most important thing for the country. After the referendum about early elections in November 2000, G. Verheugen announced: "I would like to appraise the citizens of Slovakia for their very wise decision a few days ago, when they decided not to participate in the referendum evoked by the party of Meciar." According to the Commissioner of the EU, Slovakia is "an excellent example of how the perspectives of the European integration support the political and economic reforms".

Perspectives of the pro-integrational foreign policy of the Slovak Republic

The success of reaching the basic aims of foreign policy will depend on, among others, the ability of the government to solve problems of internal political character, which are complicating the integrational efforts of the country (e.g. the position of the Roma
national minority; inadequate pace in the adoption and implementation of legal norms within the frame of the National Program for the Adoption of Acquis Communautaire; delay of deadlines in putting through reform measures of systematic character).

Slovakia has had 10 negotiation chapters closed within the frame of accession process to the EU at the end of 2000, and we can expect the start of negotiations in 16 new chapters in the year 2001. Results of the parliamentary elections in 2002 will be of key importance for the integrational ambitions of Slovakia. Only the victory of democratic political forces and the continuation of positive trends in development of the country will create conditions for the completion of integration of the Slovak Republic into the EU and NATO.