The Communist Party of Slovakia: Electoral Performance, Parliamentary Experience and Policy Choice[1]

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The Communist Party of Slovakia: Electoral Performance, Parliamentary Experience and Policy Choice. Following the party's success in the 2002 elections, the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) became a parliamentary party. This article argues that although parliamentary status has strengthened the hand of the leadership and exacerbated tensions within the party, there has been little discernible change in the party's programme and policy prescriptions. Moreover, it argues that the party's seemingly contradictory stance on the EU can be explained by the role played by Europe in domestic Slovak politics over the past decade and the shift from accession to member state status. Furthermore, it argues that the party's support appears relatively solid, although it faces tough strategic choices.
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Communist and Communist-successor parties in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union have generated significant scholarly interest over the past decade (e.g. Bozóki, A. – Ishiyama, J., 2002; Curry, J. – Urban, J., 2003; Gryzmała-Busse, A., 2002). Much of the literature has concentrated on explaining the divergent paths taken by the communist-successor parties and on explaining the varied levels of electoral success they have achieved since 1989-1991. The 2002 Slovak parliamentary elections, however, produced a new phenomenon in Central Europe: a communist party which was organized out of existence in the early 1990s, but which then returned from oblivion to take its place in parliament a decade later. Many prominent commentators in Slovakia such as Grigorij Mesežnikov (2002a; 2002b) and Marián Leško (2002) were quick to lambast the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) as an antediluvian party, which lamented the 1989 revolution and whose values did not sit comfortably with the building of democracy in the country. Political opponents, such as Robert Fico, have also been keen to label KSS as an 'extremist' party (TASR, 10 May 2003), a charge KSS politicians have been quick to refute (Fajnor, K., 2003).

The re-emergence of KSS raises numerous questions about the structure and dynamics of party politics in Slovakia. After a brief survey of party politics in Slovakia, however, this article will focus on three specific questions:

1. In what ways has becoming a parliamentary party changed KSS?
2. How can the party's stance towards the EU be explained?
3. Who votes for KSS and how solid is the party's support base?

The article maintains that parliamentary status exacerbated tensions in the party between the more pragmatic leadership and more radical factions which provoked the departure of one of the party's leading figures in 2004. Nonetheless, the party's new found parliamentary status appears to have had less impact on the party's programme and policy prescriptions which have remained rooted in the communist past. Moreover, parliamentary status appears to have strengthened the power of the party leadership. Furthermore, we argue that the party's seemingly contradictory stance towards the European Union can be explained by the role played by *Europe* in domestic Slovak politics over the past decade and the shift from accession to member state status. The party's support base appears relatively solid and is concentrated in the less economically developed areas of the country and amongst those who are often described as being the so-called *losers of the transition*. The paper concludes by venturing a few thoughts of broader import.

KSS and Party Politics in Slovakia: a Brief Survey

Accusations levelled at KSS of being antediluvian and merely the repository of nostalgia for communist times have their roots in the establishment of KSS in 1992. KSS had existed during communist times as a constituent component of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, but in the aftermath of the events of 1989, under the leadership of the young reformists from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism in Bratislava, Peter Weiss and Pavol Kanis, the Slovak Communists distanced themselves from the hardline Czech Communists and set the party on a social-democratic path re-branding it as the Party of the Democratic Left (SDĽ) (Žiak, M., 1996). Keen to cement their position and minimize the chances of the hardliners regaining a powerful position in the party, Weiss and Kanis prevented their ideological opponents from organizing into intra-party platforms that could become the basis

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of a new party (Gryzmała-Busse, A., 2002, pp. 92-99). Unhappy with the new name and the 'undemocratic' coup engineered by Weiss at the party congress held in Prešov in 1991 (Ďaďo, V., 2003; Bobor, J., 2003), two groups of disaffected party members met independently, and without mutual coordination, to form break-away groupings: KSS '91 and the Union of Communists of Slovakia (ZKS), the former met in Sliač in Central Slovakia, the latter in Bratislava. Initially functioning as two separate entities, the two groupings began to co-operate and co-ordinate their activities, running in the 1992 elections with a joint party manifesto and agreeing to a division of labour: KSS'91 only contested elections to the Slovak National Council, while ZKS ran only for the Federal Assembly. (In 1992 Slovakia was still a part of the Czechoslovak federation, where elections were held simultaneously to the federal and Czech and Slovak parliaments.) Soon after both groups mustered fewer than one percent of the votes in those elections, they united in August 1992 to form KSS.

Table 1: **Electoral support for KSS, 1992-2002**

Year	Percentage of votes received	Number of votes received	Turnout	Number of MPs	Elections to
1992*	0.76	23 487	84.2	0	Federal Assembly (Lower House)
1992**	0.76	23 349	84.2	0	National Council
1994	2.72	78 419	75.65	0	National Council
1998	2.8	94 015	84.15	0	National Council
2002	6.33	181 872	69.99	11	National Council

* Results for the Union of Slovak Communists (ZKS),
** Results for the Communist Party of Slovakia'91
Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

Although a constant in the fluid world of Slovak political parties since 1992, KSS only managed to achieve 2.72% of the vote in the 1994 elections increasing its share marginally to 2.80% four years later. KSS struggled to make much headway thanks in no small part to the success, albeit limited, of SDĽ and the most popular party of the 1990s, the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), founded and led by the three-time Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. In part, as KSS officials are keen to highlight, the party's difficulty stemmed from a lack of funds. As the legal-successor, SDĽ inherited the assets accumulated during communist times, leaving the newly-formed KSS in the (albeit hyperbolic) words of the first chairman of KSS, without 'even a single pen', or 'a single piece of paper' (Ďaďo, V., 2003). Official figures suggest the party's income was at best around 5% of SDĽ's and less than 3% of HZDS's (NRSR, 1994; NRSR, 1999).

KSS's success at the ballot box in 2002 owed much to the collapse in support for SDĽ. SDĽ's failure was a product of the party's unhappy experience in the 1998-2002 government; poor leadership; the emergence of a new party, Smer, led by a former leading light in SDĽ and the most popular politician in the country, Róbert Fico; and tensions between the social democratic and the more traditional wing of the party (Haughton, T., 2003; 2004). These strains reached breaking-point in early 2002 when Weiss and his ideological soulmates broke away to form the Social Democratic Alternative (SDA). Neither SDA nor SDĽ were able to cross the 5% threshold in that autumn's elections.

Has becoming a parliamentary party changed KSS?

Although some polling agencies had suggested that KSS might be able to clear the five per cent electoral barrier, the fact that KSS secured parliamentary representation in the 2002 elections caught many observers as well as politicians by surprise. Even some of the party's top representatives seemed to be surprised that their party managed to achieve parliamentary representation for the first time since the reformists had taken the upper hand in the original (previous regime) communist party in late 1989. After its electoral success the party had to face a new and challenging reality: increased media attention, possession of an independent party faction able to submit draft proposals of the bills and vote on the government's proposals, and the need to take a public stance on various public policy issues.

Content analysis of KSS's general election manifestos from 1992 through to 2002 indicated the party remained wedded to communist orthodoxy throughout its extra-parliamentary experience (Haughton, T. – Rybář, M., 2003). In some of the manifestos there were no positive references to the 1989 revolution, to markets, capitalism and privatization, and no negative references to planning, state ownership and socialism. In the 2002 manifesto there is a degree of contrition for the pre-1989 past, acknowledging the 'mistakes' and 'non-democratic' practices of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSS, 2002, p. 4). Such admissions, however, were rare. Other party documents tend to play on the dominant motif of the party's manifestos, emphasizing the 'disastrous development' of society since the events of November 1989 (KSS, 1996). A similar picture emerges from the speeches of party leaders, editorials of the party's semi-official newspaper, *Úsvit* and the party's statutes. Both the 1996 and the 2000 party statutes, for instance, declare unambiguously that the party is a Marxist-Leninist party (KSS, 1996b, KSS, 2000).

There has been little change in the rhetoric since the 2002 elections. At a commemoration of the heroics of the 1944 Slovak Uprising the party leader Josef Ševc maintained that thanks to the return of capitalism in 1989 the country was suffering a 'political, economic, moral and ecological crisis' (Ševc, J., 2003). Moreover on May Day 2004 Ševc sent warm fraternal greetings to the to 'the friends of the building of socialism' in Cuba, Vietnam and China (TASR, 1 May 2004). At the party congress in July 2004 the party reiterated its Marxist-Leninist character (KSS, 2004) and stressed that its 'historic aim and mission' was the 'removal of the capitalist social order' (Úsvit, 2004).

Not all the policy prescriptions offered by KSS would fit neatly under the old-style communist heading. The party's solution to the economic woes of Slovakia, for example, lies in a mixture of old-style state control and a degree of self-management, the latter reminiscent of themes prevalent in the French Communist Party's agenda (Szarka, J., 1999, p. 27). The best means of arresting Slovakia's disastrous economic slide claims the party lies in socialism. 'Socialism', for the party's leading thinker, 'is when the state and government decide over economic matters' (Ondriaš, K., 2003). There is a clear acknowledgement that the state cannot run everything. Small service sector concerns can remain in private hands (Ďaďo, V., 2003; Fajnor, K., 2003; Ondriaš, K., 2003). Large-scale industry, what can be labelled in the Attlee government sense the 'commanding heights of the economy' (Yergin, D. and Stanislaw, J., 1998), should be controlled by the state. What is significant, however, is that such policies were advocated prior to KSS's entry into parliament (e.g. KSS, 2002), so they are not the product of the party's entry into parliament.

The party's declarations of economic intent are often laced with nationalist rhetoric. Although the party is avowedly internationalist, there are frequent denunciations of foreign capital, particularly the selling of Slovak property. One leading KSS official even talked of 'neo-colonialization' (Fajnor, K., 2003). In the eight page 2002 manifesto there are no fewer than six negative reference to foreign capital (KSS, 2002). Such sentiments, however, have been in evidence in party documents throughout the past decade (KSS '91 & ZKS, 1992; KSS, 1994; KSS, 1998). It is worth emphasizing, however, that the party's nationalist language, restricted as it is to the economic sphere, is less a hostile reaction to the forces of foreign capitalism and more an attempt to tap into the 'socialist value culture'(Mahr, A. – Nagel, J., 1995, p. 398). Indeed the party is keen to trumpet its links with similar-minded organizations from across the globe.

In terms of the party's organization, entry into parliament has forced KSS to clarify the balance of power. The previous party statutes were approved in 2000 at a time when the KSS was an extra-parliamentary party and thus they did not deal with questions of the relationship between the party in public office and the party in central office. The new statutes approved in July 2004 clearly indicate that the party in public office is subordinate to the party central office. This finding conforms to our preliminary findings (Haughton, T. – Rybář, M., 2003), so appears to show less of a substantive change and more of a clarification. Indeed prior to the passing of the new statutes, the KSS parliamentary party acted in a manner which would have been in accordance with the statutes. The party's position on 'important' bills, for example, was not decided by a meeting of the parliamentary party, but by the Central Committee Secretariat (Fajnor, K., 2003). Moreover, the Central Committee's insistence that its MPs donate 7000 crowns (175 euros) to sponsor seven local party organizations was another clear indication of the strength of the party central office over the party in public office.

Unlike virtually all other Slovak parliamentary parties, KSS parliamentary representatives are not *ex officio* represented in party organs such as the presidium, Central Committee or at the party congress. The reason is that most Slovak political parties were 'internally created' (Malová, D. – Krause, K., 2000) thus according those parties' members of parliament an important say in drafting party documents, KSS had long existed without a parliamentary faction interested in strengthening its own position within the party. However, a degree of caution here is required. While the Secretariat decides about what stance the parliamentary party shall take, all but two members of the Secretariat are KSS members of parliament. This implies a similar conclusion to the one drawn by van Biezen when she analysed other political parties in new democracies: while the party in central office is dominant over the party in public office, there is an important personnel overlap between the two up to the point where the party is controlled by a small circle of leaders located at the intersection between the two 'faces' of the party (van Biezen, I., 2000). Nonetheless, it is worth noting that in terms of the formal position of power in the party, the party congress held every four years remains the supreme body. Moreover, in the 2004 statutes article 31 was amended from the 2000 version which acknowledged 'democratic centralism' as the main organizational principle of the party, to one in which the principle of 'internal democracy' was trumpeted (KSS, 2000; KSS, 2004).

KSS's entry into parliament, however, has exacerbated tensions within the party causing a breakaway. Popular KSS MP Ivan Hopta from the east of Slovakia criticized the party over voting patterns in parliament, lack of campaigning on the referendum on early elections and bemoaning what he saw as the social democratic path of the leadership (Nový Čas, 18 May 2004). In June he was thrown out of the party's central committee and a few weeks later left the party with the intention of forming a new party in the autumn. Indeed the experience of KSS here is illustrative of a dilemma faced by political parties which hanker back to the past. Parliamentary existence forces

parties to confront the realities of the present rather than the certainties of the past which is tough when nostalgia for a bygone era is central to your appeal. (We will return to the party's support base below).

How can the party's stance towards the EU be explained?

Whereas on certain issues, such as privatization, KSS articulates an unambiguous position, the party's position on the European Union has been less clear and deserves particular attention in this article. The party leadership, for instance, advocated a 'yes' vote in the accession referendum held in May 2003, but voted against the ratification of the accession treaty a month later when it came before parliament even though in interviews in the week before the accession vote, KSS officials were keen to assert the party's support for membership, one even described it as 'unambiguous' (Ďaďo, V., 2003). KSS's apparently contradictory stance can be explained by examining the role *Europe* has played in domestic Slovak politics and by appreciating the debate has shifted from a discussion of gaining entry, through the terms of accession to the realities of membership.

Mapping the position of a political party towards the EU can be problematic. Parties can be broad churches whose positions change over time, as indeed does the EU itself (a point often ignored by writers on euroscepticism). Support and opposition to the European Union can be principled, strategic, contingent or opportunistic (Szczerbiak, A. – Taggart, P., 2003). Moreover, such support or opposition may be the product of a party's position towards the underlying principles of the European project or the current development of the Union (Kopecký, P. – Mudde, C., 2002). To that should be added an important caveat highly pertinent to the case of KSS: whether the raft of policy prescriptions advocated by the party are actually compatible with the requirements of EU membership.

KSS's position towards the EU has been driven by strategic considerations. The party did not want to be seen to be the cause of Slovakia's failure to join the EU. In spite of the fact that significant numbers of the party's supporters appeared less than enthusiastic about EU membership, the party backed entry in the accession referendum in 2003 largely because in the words of the party's General Secretary Ladislav Jača, there is 'no alternative' to EU membership (SITA, 6 May 2003). KSS's stance had been determined, in part, by the role which EU entry had played in domestic Slovak politics in the 1990s. Slovakia had not been invited to begin accession negotiations in 1997 at the Luxembourg European Council due to her failure to meet the political criterion laid down at Copenhagen four years earlier. The snubbing of Slovakia merely fuelled the bitter internal debate in the country between forces clustered around Vladimír Mečiar and those opposed to the three-time prime minister. In consequence, the debate became 'not whether Slovakia wanted to join the EU, and what sort of EU it wished to be a member of, but rather, whether the EU wanted Slovakia to join, and if not, whose fault this was' (Henderson, K., 2002; Henderson, K., 2004). This debate remained at the forefront of politics up until the 2002 EU summit in Copenhagen. Nonetheless, the snubbing of Slovakia at Luxembourg and the desire to catch-up with her neighbours meant Slovak politicians and much of the population put on a collective pair of blinkers allowing nothing to distract the horse as she made up for lost time.

With the luxury of the green light switched on in Copenhagen and with the passing of the accession referendum, KSS could afford to clarify its position to the electorate. In the debate surrounding the vote on the accession treaty in parliament, the KSS leadership knew a majority was assured in parliament, so the vote could be used to raise the profile of the party's dislike of the terms of entry, largely for electoral purposes. The party used the vote to highlight what it saw as the unfavourable deal struck by the government during the accession negotiations. Moreover, as the only party voting against the treaty, they could also claim to be the sole defender of Slovak national interests in the face of the bureaucrats of Brussels.

We would suggest the case of KSS may highlight a more widespread phenomenon in the new member states. Due to the historic step of joining the EU, parties in the region have masked their true positions towards the EU, or rather EU integration has been viewed almost exclusively through the prism of the accession negotiations and the kind of deal their country is being offered. Only with the luxury of membership in the bag can a party display its true colours. To that should be added a second luxury, that of being an opposition party. Being in opposition accords the party the chance to project itself as the authentic voice of working class Slovaks without having to make difficult and potentially unpopular governmental decisions. Indeed, as Henderson (2004) argues, KSS's economic programme is totally incompatible with the principles of the EU. As an opposition party with little chance of forming a government in the near future such inconsistencies can be conveniently swept under the carpet.

Who votes for KSS and how solid is the party's support base?

The explanation for KSS's electoral achievement in 2002 and an assessment of its prospects for continued success lie in both the party's own appeal and organization and in the successes and failures of other parties in the fluid world of party politics. Voters can be fickle, casting their ballots for one party at one election, only to desert that party at the next election, tempted away by the allure of another. In every general election in Slovakia since independence new parties, created during the course of the parliamentary term, have enjoyed electoral success and achieved parliamentary representation. There is clearly the potential for the emergence of new parties between now

and the next general election. Indeed it is wise to temper any discussion about a party's voter base and its solidity with a recognition that a currently unforeseen seismic event could disturb the terrain of Slovak politics at some point before the next parliamentary election.

At the heart of the electoral appeal of KSS is both a nostalgia for the pre-1989 existence and a lament at the current direction of Slovak society. The former was well demonstrated in a poll in October 2002 in which nearly a third of voters (31.4%) offered as their main reason for voting KSS that things were better under prior to 1989 (Gyárfášová, O., 2003, p. 122). Moreover, the fact that the party has largely been ignored by young voters and in 2002 it was virtually absent in the preferences of first-time voters only goes to bolster the argument stressing the importance of nostalgia (Velšic, M., 2003, p. 134).

Given the fact that the party's economic programme is based on a trenchant criticism of the process of marketization it is no surprise to find it has acquired support from those who feel they have lost out over the past decade and a half chief amongst whom are the old, the less educated and those who see themselves in the lower sections of society (Krivý, V., 2004). Indeed Krivý's on-going statistical analysis indicates that, in terms of the party's support base, KSS is a 'subcultural party' which appeals to a distinct segment of society with similar lifestyles, common norms and values (Enyedi, Z., 1996; Hanley, S., 2001).

Unsurprisingly for a party which criticizes the effects of capitalism, unemployment appears central to its appeal. Ten months before polling day, when voters were polled on why they had chosen to cast their ballot for a particular party, of those intending to vote KSS 63% considered the party's policy on unemployment to be amongst the two most important reasons (respondents had a choice of 11 policy areas) why they would vote for the communists (Gyárfášová, O., 2003, p. 123). Vladimír Krivý ran correlation tests between the level of unemployment and the election results for KSS in the 79 regions of Slovakia. His results suggested there is a significant relationship (see table 2).

Table 2: **Correlation Between Unemployment Levels and the Results of KSS in the 2002 Elections**

Correlation	Level of Unemployment in September 2002
Calculated from all 79 Districts of Slovakia	
KSS 2002 Vote	.4173**

1-tailed significance: ** -.001
Source: Krivý, unpublished

Krivý's statistical work on the unemployed and support for KSS may just be part of a larger phenomenon. Indeed, there appears to be a strong regional dimension to KSS's support. The party's support in 2002 was highest in regions in the east of the country such as Medzilaborce (24.9%), Svidník (15.5%), Snina (13.4%) and Humenné (13.0%) which have performed less well economically in the past decade and have much higher levels of unemployment. It should be noted, however, that KSS's support was not restricted to one geographical area. The party also scored notable successes in the central region of Turčianské Teplice (15.2%) and the south-central region of Poltár (15.2%). Nonetheless, the regional dimension is important and is deserving of further research.

Table 3: **Voting intentions (%) since 2002 elections**

	2002 elections	**2/2003 FOCUS**	**5/2003 MVK**	**9/2003 IVO**	**2/2004 FOCUS**	**5/2004 FOCUS**	**8/2004 UVVM**
KSS	**6.3**	**9.9**	**7.0**	**9.9**	**8.8**	**7.7**	**5.1**
Government:							
SDKU	15.1	13.2	12.0	6.5	5.6	5.8	8.7
ANO	8.0	7.6	7.1	6.8	6.5	6.0	4.4
KDH	8.3	7.7	8.7	7.6	7.8	8.9	10.3
SMK	11.2	10.7	11.9	10.5	10.5	11.9	11.2
Non-government Parties:							
SF	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	2.0	3.0	2.3
HZDS	19.5	16.5	18.4	17.3	14.9	19.0	18.7
Smer	13.5	17.6	19.8	25.6	30.6	22.8	28.6
HZD	3.3	2.8	2.1	2.7	2.7	4.2	4.0
SNS	3.3	4.3	2.1	7.3	6.1	4.1	4.9

(Sources: Z. Bútorová et al, 'Public Opinion' in G. Mesežnikov & M. Kollár, *Slovakia 2003: A Global Report on the State of Society*, Bratislava: IVO (2004), p. 199; *Sme* archive)

Speculation is a hazardous game for political scientists to play. Nonetheless, in order to assess the solidity of the KSS vote an assessment needs to be made of the party's ability not to lose support in the face of new challenges. Three factors appear central to KSS's future level of support and will determine whether it is a one-election wonder or not. Firstly, much will depend on the development of the centre-left. The 2002 election results were disastrous for the forces of the centre-left. A significant portion of KSS's vote came from those who cast their ballots for SDĽ in 1998. Since the 2002 election, Robert Fico's Smer has attempted to project itself increasingly as the centre-left alternative to a right-wing government (Smer, 2003), a strategy which has reaped rewards for the party (see table 3). Significantly, Fico has succeeded in gaining the support of the main trade union organization KOZ. Although Smer's programme is infused with criticism of the government's policies and is laced with more than a drop of nationalist rhetoric Fico's appeal is unlikely to tempt away hardcore KSS voters.

Secondly, linked in with the development of the centre-left is the position of KSS. Arguably the most important factor influencing the electoral fortunes of KSS is whether the party sticks closely to communism or whether it tries to moderate its position in an attempt to broaden its appeal. The party might then suffer from overreach, where the core support base is ignored in an attempt to branch out, much in the same way as a large business organization keen to expand neglects its core business activity at its peril. The tensions in the party between Ivan Hopta and the remainder of the leadership point to the dangers of straying too far from the core vote. Indeed KSS faces a dilemma linked to the trade-off between strength/weakness and isolation/acceptance of the party. The more the party criticises the mainstream, the more likely they are to *collect* protest votes, and the more they modify their ideology and rhetoric and cooperate with the others, the less attractive they may be for their current voters.

The third factor which could prove to be a boon for KSS is the EU. The political opportunity structure accorded by the EU issue may prove to be providential for the fortunes of KSS. The impact of membership, in particular the demands laid down in the Maastricht criteria are likely to require tough fiscal and monetary policies. KSS with its critical stance towards EU membership may be able to mop up the support of some disillusioned voters, although KSS is not the only possible home for voters disillusioned with the EU. Given the derisory turnout of below 17% at the 2004 European Parliamentary elections we would be wise not to read too much into KSS's disappointing result of 4.54%, but it seems reasonable to assert that KSS's poor showing is likely to have been affected by the tensions between Hopta and the party leadership. Also KSS voters (who are overwhelmingly Eurosceptic) may have decided to ignore elections to what they perceive to be a useless institution.

It is worth contrasting KSS to another left-leaning grouping which garnered support thanks to an economic programme based on a trenchant criticism of the market and accusations of betrayal of working class constituents: The Workers Association of Slovakia (ZRS). Indeed ZRS provides the closest precedent for the dramatic breakthrough of a hard left party in Slovakia. ZRS was created in the run-up to the 1994 elections by a popular figure in SDĽ, Ján Ľupták, who felt the party had become too intellectual and had lost its class base. He was particularly scornful of SDĽ's participation in the broad-based governing coalition led by Jozef Moravčík. After scoring an impressive 7.34% of the vote and following weeks of procrastination, the party entered into a coalition with HZDS and the Slovak National Party (SNS). The wheels, however, soon began to come off the hastily constructed bandwagon as the realities of government acted like an acid on the party causing it to virtually disintegrate by the time of the 1998 elections. In contrast to ZRS, the Communists appear less likely to be an electoral flash-in-the-pan thanks to the fact that the party existed for many years before entering parliament and secondly because the party did not go into government. Parliamentary opposition has accorded the party a high public profile and no blame for the travails of the government.

Concluding Remarks

This article has sought to shine a spotlight on the Communist Party of Slovakia. Building on the above analysis we conclude by placing the experience of KSS in comparative perspective and venturing a few thoughts of wider import.

The 2002 Slovak elections appeared to mark a significant dividing line between the previous era dominated by the polarized party politics associated with the Mečiar-era and the emergence of the dominance of more traditional left-right competition (Haughton, T., 2003). Although KSS's breakthrough owed much to the failings of SDĽ and its nostalgia towards a lost era, the party's economic appeal was central to its electoral success. Given the radical economic package pursued by the second Dzurinda-led government the party's economic programme is likely to be popular with a section of the electorate. The party, however, faces a dilemma common to many parties which rooted in a clear ideology, such as the Christian Democratic Movement, between trying to broaden its appeal and opting for purity (Haughton, T. – Rybář, M., 2004). The latter strategy might place the party in an electoral ghetto, but it might ensure continued parliamentary status.

KSS's parliamentary status has affected the party. The leadership have paid lip-service to the party statutes calling for 'internal democracy' and have used their new found status as national politicians in the limelight to strengthen their hold on the party. Indeed many delegates at the 2002 party congress complained that the congress was completely dominated by the party leadership with few chances for ordinary members to influence the debate.

In this sense, the situation resembles that in other Slovak parliamentary parties that were internally created: a small group of party leaders dominate the party, controlling crucial positions both within the party in public office and party in central office. Moreover, the case of KSS seems to suggest that the mode of party formation (extra-parliamentary vs. intra-parliamentary) matters little in terms of the internal distribution of power within the party. This finding contradicts the Duverger's (1954) prediction made half a century ago and suggests the mode of creation matters less in situations where increased media attention and weaker social identities of voters tend to strengthen the position of party leaders.

The case of KSS also shows how neo-communist parties in new EU member states in Central and Eastern Europe may be able to revitalize their political agenda. Neo-communist formations may benefit not only from rapid economic changes and the resultant disillusionment this may cause among a section of the electorate. Relatively new issues, like EU membership and foreign companies benefiting from privatization may be used to win support from voters. The electoral success of KSS in 2002 also shows how the electoral breakdown of leftist and nationalist parties (SDĽ and the Slovak National Party) opens up political opportunities for parties combining the two appeals.

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