



## Political Organizations Register for Elections

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*More than 20 political parties, coalitions, and movements have officially registered for Czechoslovakia's first free elections in more than 44 years. The registered parties are a diverse collection, ranging from the communist party that dominated Czechoslovak politics from 1948 until 1989 to a plethora of new, relatively unknown parties whose fate will be determined by their ability to make themselves known during the official 40-day election campaign that begins April 29.*

All political parties, coalitions, and movements intending to field candidates for seats in the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly and the Czech and Slovak National Councils were required to register by April 9, 1990, in the electoral districts where their candidates will run. To do so, these organizations had to gather at least 10,000 signatures from their supporters or prove that they had at least 10,000 members, even if they intended to run candidates only in one district. Three election commissions—one federal, one for the Czech Republic, and one for Slovakia—made up of two representatives from each of the registered organizations were required to determine by April 24 if those registering had the requisite number of followers and met the other conditions stipulated by the election law.

According to preliminary accounts, 28 political organizations had registered for the elections by April 9. On April 19 the Federal Election Commission announced that a total of 23 had met all prerequisites stipulated by the election law and will compete for Federal Assembly seats.<sup>1</sup> All the organizations applying to register had to meet the same prerequisites, most notably, evidence of the appropriate number of supporters. But not all of those registering submitted tickets for each of the 12 electoral districts into which Czechoslovakia has been divided for the elections. Only 11 of the registered organizations will compete in some districts, while in others there will be as many as 19. This discrepancy has been caused by the fact that some of these organizations either feel they do not have necessary support in all districts or have not

been able to build organizational structures capable of running an efficient nationwide election campaign. Some will run only in the Czech Republic and others only in Slovakia. About half will compete in both republics, although not in every electoral district. Some of them will field candidates for both houses of the Federal Assembly, some only for one house, and others for only the Czech or the Slovak National Council, the parliaments of the two republics.

On April 12 Prime Minister Marian Calfa called the first meeting of the Federal Election Commission. In addition to confirming that all registered parties have complied with election law requirements, the commission will supervise the elections. Following the commission's meeting, one party, the Slovak National Liberals, was barred from competing in the Western Slovakia region because it had proposed the same candidate for the Federal Assembly and the Slovak National Council and another candidate under the age of 18. The party also did not meet all the requirements for registering stipulated by the election law.<sup>2</sup> Later in April, facing other problems, the National Liberals merged with the Social Democrats and withdrew from the race as an independent party. At their first meetings, the Federal Election Commission and both the Czech and Slovak Election Commissions selected their chairmen by lottery. Representatives of the new liberal coalition Free Bloc became chairmen of the Federal and Czech Election Commissions, while a Green Party representative was chosen to head Slovakia's Election Commission.

### Coalitions

The registered organizations will have to win at least 5% of the popular vote in one of the two republics in order to gain Federal Assembly seats. Several small groups, either fearing they would not be able to command this percentage of the vote or unable to collect the necessary signatures, were forced to form coalitions with larger parties or other small parties. Some groups who formed coalitions before attempting to register collected signatures jointly, and each coalition submitted a joint ticket for all the groups it unites.

Some of the registered political organizations strong enough to compete individually plan to form coalitions with other organizations after the elections. Civic Forum in the Czech Republic and the Public Against Violence in the Slovak Republic, for

example, plan to form a coalition in the newly elected Federal Assembly.

One of the purposes of the legal hurdles set up by the election law was to prevent the fragmentation that would result from too many small parties winning seats in the Federal Assembly. But while the fear of not gaining the required 5% of the vote has forced some parties to form coalitions, the stipulation requiring proof of 10,000 members or supporters has failed to reduce significantly the number of competing parties. Reports in the Czechoslovak media described this failure as "disappointing."<sup>3</sup>

Below is an annotated list of the major coalitions and parties that have registered for the elections.

### Civic Forum and Public Against Violence

The Civic Forum will compete in all electoral districts in the Czech Republic, the Public Against Violence in all districts in the Slovak Republic. Both movements will have candidates for both houses of the Federal Assembly and the Czech and Slovak National Councils. While the Public Against Violence is a fairly homogeneous movement, Civic Forum is a loose coalition of small political parties, civic groups, and nonpartisan individuals. The number of the parties and groups running under Civic Forum's banner is currently unknown, as some parties that were originally part of Civic Forum broke away from it shortly before the registration deadline. Among those that will run in conjunction with Civic Forum are the Democratic Initiative, the Party of the Czech Countryside, and the Czechoslovak Republican—Agricultural Party of the Cities and Countryside.

While the popularity of Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence seemed to have declined in March because of internal tension, this trend is likely to be offset by the fact that some of the best-known and most popular personalities in Czechoslovakia, most of them currently holding high government office, will be featured on the two organizations' tickets.<sup>4</sup>

### The Christian and Democratic Union

The Christian and Democratic Union is considered one of the strongest political forces in Czechoslovakia, and it is likely that it will also be a driving force in the first freely elected parliament in over

42 years. The union consists of the relatively strong Czechoslovak People's Party, a former communist satellite party that has completely replaced its leadership and more than doubled its membership (from 40,000 before the November revolution to over 80,000); the small Christian Democratic Party, founded in December 1989; and the Free Peasant Party, another small group also established in December 1989.

Although the leadership of the Christian Democratic Party had repeatedly ruled out a coalition or even cooperation with the People's Party and the Christian Democratic Movement (the Christian Democratic Party's much stronger Slovak counterpart), on April 4 it changed its position and agreed to unite with the two parties. The People's Party congress approved the coalition on April 5. The new coalition has also agreed to form a postelection coalition with the Slovak Christian-Democratic Movement.

#### **Free Bloc**

Yet another coalition has been formed by parties with a liberal political and economic orientation. Called the Free Bloc, the coalition consists of the Republican Union, the Party of Constitutional Democracy, the Party of Free Democrats, and the Party of Czechoslovak Neutrality. The coalition will be running in both the Czech and Slovak Republics<sup>5</sup> but has not been able to field candidates in the Eastern Slovakia district.

#### **The Alliance of Agrarians and the Countryside**

Headed by the potentially powerful Czechoslovak Agrarian Party, this coalition also includes the Political Movement of Members of United Agricultural Cooperatives, the Party of the Moravian Countryside, the Republican Party of the Czechoslovak Countryside, and three smaller parties. Formed on March 25, the alliance is likely to win support from Czechoslovak cooperative farmers and food industry workers. It will run in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Other Coalitions**

Other alliances include the so-called Election Alliance of Interest Unions in the Czech Republic. Yet another coalition has been formed under the name the All-People Democratic Party—Association for

the Republic and the Republican Party of Czechoslovakia. This right-of-center coalition will field candidates in all electoral districts of the two republics. Two groups representing ethnic minorities have formed a coalition called Coexistence: The Hungarian Christian-Democratic Movement. The relatively strong Czechoslovak Gypsy community has also set up a coalition group, the Party of Gypsies. While these coalitions will compete in both national republics, they will not run in all districts.

#### **Major Parties**

Besides the 8 coalitions listed above, almost 20 individual political parties and movements will run in the elections. The major ones are the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak Communist Party, the Czechoslovak Social-Democratic Party, the Green Party, the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia, the Czechoslovak Democratic Forum, the [Slovak] Democratic Party, and the [Slovak] Party of Freedom.

The Czechoslovak Socialist Party has gained popularity since it severed its ties with the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS) in November 1989. Its congress, held March 16–17, approved a platform and voted in a new leadership. Until its congress, the Socialist Party had not been a federal party, as it had been active almost exclusively in the Czech Republic. But at the congress, a Slovak branch of the party was set up that will compete in all but one of Slovakia's electoral districts (Eastern Slovakia).

Although according to official reports the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia has lost more than 700,000 members in the past five months, the actual number of members the party has lost is probably much higher. Yet the CPCS still has the largest membership of any Czechoslovak political party. After setting up its Czech-Moravian organization in March, the CPCS now has a federal structure (branches in both republics). The party will compete in all Czechoslovak electoral districts. Its well-developed organizational structure, financial and technical assets, and large corps of professional workers give the party many advantages over the new political groups.

The Czechoslovak Social-Democratic Party was re-established in November 1989 and originally intended to run under the banner of the Civic Forum. But during its congress in March 1990, the party broke away from the Civic Forum and decided

to run independently. Having elected a new leadership and established a federal structure, the party will run in all regions of the Czech Republic and Slovakia.

The Green Party currently appears to be one of the strongest new political forces in Czechoslovakia. After overcoming the internal conflicts that plagued it during its initial stages, the party has been able to unite several ecological movements and set up a federal structure. The Green Party is likely to benefit from the disastrous environmental situation in the country. It will run in all election districts in both republics.

The Christian-Democratic Movement is currently believed to be the strongest political force in Slovakia. Its leadership claims a membership of over 300,000, and some opinion polls suggest that every second Slovak intends to vote for the Movement. The Christian-Democratic Movement has announced its intention to form a coalition with the Christian and Democratic Union after the elections. The movement will run in all Slovak districts.

The Czechoslovak Democratic Forum split from the communist party in January to form an independent leftist political party. Its membership is estimated at several thousand. Despite its small membership, the party may attract votes from many dissatisfied Communists and former party members. The forum will run in both republics but in Slovakia will field candidates only in the Central Slovakia district.

Two former communist satellite parties in Slovakia, the Democratic Party (formerly the Party of Renewal) and the Party of Freedom will run in all

Slovakia's electoral districts. Both parties' popularity has increased since they severed their ties with the Communists in late 1989 and elected new leaderships at the beginning of 1990. Neither of the two parties appears able to score a major victory in the elections, but both may become members of a future coalition government.

### Smaller Parties

A number of small parties and groups have also managed to attract enough support to register for the elections. As most of them are not well known, their fate will depend primarily on their ability to conduct high-profile election campaigns. Virtually none of them will run in all Czechoslovak electoral districts; rather, they will concentrate on regions where they can expect support. Among these parties and groups are the Movement for Czechoslovak Understanding, the Political Alliance of Members of the Slovak National Heritage Foundation, the Movement for Civil Liberties, the Slovak National Party, the Movement for Self-administrative Democracy—the Society for Moravia and Silesia, the Organization of Independent Romanians, and the Party of Beer-Lovers.

### Assessment

Despite the fact that 23 parties, movements, and coalitions have officially been registered for the elections, the majority of them are not likely to win the 5% of the vote required to gain seats in the Federal Assembly. In the elections, the organiza-

**TABLE**  
**OFFICIALLY REGISTERED PARTIES**

[Slovak] Party of Freedom	Coexistence: The Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement
[Slovak] Democratic Party	Czechoslovak Democratic Forum
Czechoslovak Socialist Party	Party of Gypsies
Movement for Civil Liberties	Organization of Independent Romanians
Public Against Violence	Slovak National Party
Free Bloc	[Slovak] Christian Democratic Movement
Civic Forum	Green Party
Coalition of All-People Democratic Party—	Movement for Czechoslovak Understanding
Association for the Republic and the	Movement for Self-Administrative Democracy—
Republican Party	Association for Moravia and Silesia
Election Alliance of Interest Unions in the Czech	Social Democracy
Republic	Party of Beer-lovers
Communist Party of Czechoslovakia	Christian and Democratic Union
Alliance of the Agrarians and the Countryside	

SOURCE: *Svobodne Slovo*, April 20, 1990, p. 1

tions running in both republics will enjoy some advantages, as they need to win 5% of the vote in only one of the two republics in order to have their candidates seated in the Federal Assembly. This means that a party that wins, for instance, 5% of the vote in the Czech Republic and only 2% of the vote in Slovakia will be granted a total of 7% of the popular vote. On the other hand, if a party gains only 4% in each of the two republics, it will not be given assembly seats. The votes for the organizations that fail to gain the required 5% of the vote in either of the two republics will be redistributed among those that have qualified for seats in the

Federal Assembly. Thus, the percentage of assembly seats a particular organization acquires could be higher than that mandated by its actual share of the popular vote. Given the large share of competitors and the possibility that many of them will not pass the 5% threshold, the difference between the percentage of the popular vote some organizations receive and the number of Federal Assembly seats they end up with could be considerable.

The table on the facing page lists the parties that have been officially registered for the elections to the Federal Assembly by the Federal Election Commission on April 19.

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### Notes:

1. *Mlada Fronta*, April 10, 1990, p. 4; Czechoslovak Television, April 19, 1990, 7:30 P.M. The Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence as well as the Christian and Democratic Union and the Christian-Democratic Movement have agreed to run independently but will be coalition partners in the future. Thus, the number of parties, movements, and coalitions that will compete in the elections comes to 26.
2. *Pravda* (Bratislava), April 11, 1990, p. 1
3. *Svobodne Slovo*, April 11, 1990, p. 1.
4. See Jiri Pehe, "The Civic Forum Before the Election Campaign Begins," *Report on Eastern Europe*, no. 14, April 6, 1990.
5. *Pravda*, April 11, 1990, p. 1.
6. See Jiri Pehe, "New Political Parties Maneuver Before Election Campaign," *Report on Eastern Europe*, no. 16, April 20, 1990.

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## New Challenges for the Czechoslovak Communist Party

Peter Martin

*Feeling pressure from many directions and burdened by its past, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia has been trying to re-establish its credibility and avoid defeat in the free election to be held in June. The party's leadership has changed the program to bring it in line with the democratic concepts evident in the other political parties. Despite its revamped image the party has so far been unable to gain popular support and will still have to make a concerted effort to achieve acceptable results in the June election.*

Since the birth of the "gentle revolution" on November 17, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS) has tried to revamp its image and preserve party unity to avoid a

possible disaster in the free election scheduled for June 8 and 9. For the first time in the party's 40-year history, communist candidates will have to compete against noncommunist ones.