



The Changing Configuration of Political Forces in the Federal Assembly

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In the parliamentary elections held on June 8 and 9, 1990, six political parties, movements, and coalitions qualified for seats in the Federal Assembly. Ten months later, the spectrum of political forces represented in the parliament looks very different, owing mainly to the disintegration of leading political movements and coalitions as well as the recent defection of some Civic Forum deputies to the Czechoslovak Social Democracy.

Recent political developments in Czechoslovakia, most notably the disintegration of the Civic Forum and the Public against Violence, the two movements that emerged victorious from the parliamentary elections held on June 8 and 9, 1990, have significantly changed the composition of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly. Only six parties, movements, and coalitions gained seats in the Federal Assembly in the parliamentary elections; currently, however, there are twelve major political parties and groups represented in the assembly, as well as a plethora of smaller groups and independent deputies who had been elected on the Civic Forum ticket. A similar process of political differentiation has occurred in the Czech and the Slovak National Councils; but the realignment of political forces in these two institutions has not been as marked as in the Federal Assembly, which has witnessed the disintegration of both Czech- and Slovak-based political parties.

Although most of the new groups that have emerged from the Civic Forum continue to work as political partners in the Civic Forum parliamentary caucus, which survived the disintegration of the movement, it is likely that in the next parliamentary elections, scheduled for mid-1992, some of the new groups will compete against each other. Some of them have begun forming their own parliamentary caucuses; but they, too, plan to continue cooperating through the Civic Forum caucus for the time being.

The Federal Assembly in June 1990

The electoral law, passed in February 1990 by the postrevolutionary parliament and used in the June 1990 elections, was formulated in such a way as to limit the number of parties that could be represented in the Federal Assembly. Parties had to clear two legal hurdles: first, they had to obtain the signatures of at least 10,000 supporters to register in the

elections; second, they had to win at least 5% of the popular vote to qualify for seats in the parliament. The authors of the law argued that these stipulations were necessary to ensure that the parliament was not too fragmented, a situation, they said, that would have made it impossible for the body to reach a consensus on important issues.¹

The law, however, did permit political groups to form coalitions for the purpose of the elections. Some smaller groups, fearing they would not meet the requirements stipulated by the law, decided to form electoral alliances. Others decided to run on the tickets of the Civic Forum or the Public against Violence. Moreover, the Civic Forum formed an alliance with the Public against Violence. The Christian democratic parties, namely, the People's Party, the Christian Democratic Party, and the Slovak Christian Democratic Movement, also formed an electoral coalition called the Christian and Democratic Union. These two coalitions won representation in the parliament, whereas most of the other coalitions, consisting largely of very small right-wing parties, failed to meet either one or both of the requirements of the electoral law. The elections produced the following parliamentary composition:

TABLE 1

COMPOSITION OF FEDERAL ASSEMBLY
AFTER JUNE 1990 ELECTIONS

Party	Seats
Civic Forum/Public against Violence	170
Communist Party of Czechoslovakia	47
Christian and Democratic Union	40
Association for Moravia and Silesia	16
Slovak National Party	15
Coexistence/Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement	12
Total	300

Source: *Lidove Noviny*, June 13, 1990.

The Civic Forum

Shortly after the elections, the Democratic Initiative, which had run on the Civic Forum's ticket in the elections, renamed itself the Liberal Democratic Party and broke away from the Civic Forum. In doing so, the party's leaders explained that joining

the coalition had been for mostly tactical reasons, since the party had not been strong enough before the elections to meet the requirements of the electoral law. (Owing to its electoral association with the Civic Forum, the group was able to gain two seats in the Federal Assembly and four in the Czech National Council.) Later, however, the leaders of the new party also criticized what they perceived as a "leftist bent" within the forum; as it turned out, serious differences of opinion between the leaderships of the Civic Forum and the Liberal Democratic Party had existed even before the elections, and the party's departure from the forum had been expected.

The pace of differentiation in the Civic Forum slowed down in the summer of 1990 but accelerated again in October when Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus was elected the forum's chairman. Also in October, a group of right-of-center deputies in the Civic Forum founded the Interparliamentary Club of the Democratic Right, prompting Civic Forum deputies with centrist and left-of-center views to found their own group, the Liberal Club of the Civic Forum. In January 1991 the congress of the Civic Forum voted to transform the movement into a right-wing political party, a change advocated by Klaus and his supporters but opposed by the Liberal Club. The congress also decided that all members of groups associated with the forum would have either to register individually as members of the new party or to leave the forum altogether. As a result, several groups previously associated with the forum, such as the Club for Socialist Restructuring (*Obroda*) and the Club of Engaged Nonpartisans, left the Civic Forum following the congress.

The Liberal Club continued to challenge the results of the congress, causing a split to develop within the forum in February. The club argued that the transformation of the Civic Forum into a party was illegal and would reduce the broad political support the forum had enjoyed. Klaus and his followers, on the other hand, argued that the forum's loose organizational structure and lack of "ideological discipline" had rendered the movement incapable of adopting and implementing important political decisions. Moreover, Klaus maintained, the government ministers and deputies belonging to the forum had often given the impression of pursuing personal policies rather than adhering to the forum's political line.

At the extraordinary congress of the Civic Forum on February 23, it was decided to divide the forum officially into two camps: the Liberal Club and the followers of Klaus. The Liberal Club decided to rename itself the Civic Movement; Klaus's group became the Civic Democratic Party. The Civic

Movement opted to retain a loose internal structure similar to that of the original Civic Forum and pursue a liberal political agenda. Klaus's Civic Democratic Party, however, declared itself bound by the decisions reached at the Civic Forum's congress in January; thus, it indicated that it would pursue a right-of-center political program, adopt a firm internal structure, and have its members register. Both new groups agreed to remain in the Civic Forum coalition until the next parliamentary elections. They also agreed that the Civic Forum itself would continue to exist only as an umbrella committee with the administrative function of coordinating the work of the two groups. Deputies representing the two groups in the Federal Assembly and the Czech National Council would continue to coordinate their work through the Civic Forum's caucuses in the two parliaments. Lastly, it was agreed that both the Civic Forum caucuses and the forum itself would be disbanded before the next parliamentary elections.²

Both groups will hold congresses in late April. In the meantime, some Civic Forum deputies in both the Federal Assembly and the Czech National Council have aligned themselves with one of the two groups. The Civic Movement claimed on March 20 that it had the support of 42 deputies in the Federal Assembly.³ On April 2 the Civic Democratic Party announced that 40 deputies previously representing the Civic Forum in the Federal Assembly had formed a parliamentary caucus representing the new party.⁴ The remaining deputies previously associated with the Civic Forum either decided to remain independent or supported one of the various smaller groups that had left the forum after the congress in January. Currently, there are no precise figures on the number of deputies who support each of these groups, which include the Left Alternative, the left-of-center group *Obroda*, the conservative Civic Democratic Alliance, and the Club of Social Democrats.

On April 2 the Czechoslovak Social Democracy, which, despite having a tradition in Czechoslovakia, had failed to win any seats in the parliament in the June 1990 elections, announced that six left-of-center deputies previously associated with the Civic Forum had joined its ranks. Among them was Valtr Komarek, a Deputy Prime Minister in the pre-election government. The party's chairman, Jiri Horak, also announced that four more Civic Forum deputies planned to join the Czechoslovak Social Democracy; but he gave no names. Although the deputies who had joined the Czechoslovak Social Democracy said that they would continue to work through the Civic Forum caucus in the Federal Assembly for the time being, their "defection" effectively ensured

that the party would be represented in the parliament.⁵

The Public against Violence

The Public against Violence, the Slovak counterpart of the Civic Forum, reacted to the disintegration of the Civic Forum by promising to cooperate, through the Civic Forum's parliamentary caucus, with all the groups formerly associated with the forum. But the disintegration of the forum also signaled that the movement would have to devote more attention and effort to its own parliamentary caucus.

The Public against Violence itself had not remained intact, however. In March, when the Slovak Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar and his followers formed a separate group called the Public against Violence—For a Democratic Slovakia, it split into two groups. The split occurred mainly because Meciar and his followers in the Public against Violence believed, in contrast to the rest of the movement's leadership, that, of the five "pillars" of the program adopted by the Public against Violence in September 1990, Slovak national issues should receive the highest priority. These "pillars" had been originally conceived as equal in importance. But Meciar and his group were apparently of the opinion that the Public against Violence needed to respond more vigorously to the rising tide of nationalist sentiment in Slovakia, which had contributed to the growing popularity of the movement's main political rival, the Christian Democratic Movement, whose program strongly emphasized Slovak national concerns. The Meciar camp also argued that the economic reforms proposed by the federal government and supported by the leadership of the Public against Violence had not taken into account conditions specific to Slovakia, particularly the fact that it is less industrialized than the Czech Republic. They maintained that privatization in Slovakia should proceed more slowly than in the Czech Republic and that the role of the state in managing the Slovak economy should not be reduced as much as the federal reform program had envisaged. At the congress of the Public against Violence on February 23, Meciar attempted to take over the leadership of the movement but was defeated by the incumbent, Fedor Gal. A bitter personal rivalry between the two politicians emerged after the congress, a development that was also responsible for the split in the movement.

The conflict between the two camps within the Public against Violence culminated on March 5, when Meciar announced the formation of his own group. Although he initially said that the group would remain within the Public against Violence, it gradually became apparent that a new political party had been formed and that it would soon leave

the Public against Violence completely. Some of the Public against Violence's deputies, both in the Federal Assembly and the Slovak National Council, declared their allegiance to Meciar and created new interparliamentary clubs in both parliaments. Both groups said they planned to run independently in the next elections.⁶

On March 22 it was announced that a new parliamentary caucus representing the Public against Violence had been set up in the Federal Assembly. Of the 58 deputies originally elected on the Public against Violence's ticket in June 1990, 32 joined the caucus. Alexander Dubcek, the Chairman of the Federal Assembly, and Milan Cic, a former Slovak Prime Minister, both of whom had run on the movement's ticket in June 1990, announced that they would remain independent. The same day, it was also announced that between 14 and 17 deputies planned to join the parliamentary caucus of the Public against Violence—For a Democratic Slovakia.⁷

Other Parties

The coalition of the Christian democratic parties, the Christian and Democratic Union, in effect disintegrated immediately after the elections when one of the coalition's members, the People's Party, failed to dissociate itself from its chairman, Josef Bartoncik, who had been accused of collaborating with the secret police under the previous regime. The People's Party and another coalition member, the Christian Democratic Party, also refused to participate in the federal coalition government, accusing the Civic Forum of having employed unfair practices during the election campaign and thereby damaging the reputation of the People's Party. Their Slovak counterpart, the Christian Democratic Movement, on the other hand, decided to join the coalition of the Civic Forum and the Public against Violence. In its present form, the Christian and Democratic Union consists solely of the People's Party and the Christian Democratic Party and has only 14 seats in the Federal Assembly; the Slovak Christian Democratic Movement is represented by 26 deputies.

Even the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia has disintegrated to a degree. Despite its monolithic image, the party is, in fact, officially considered a "coalition" of the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia and the Slovak Communist Party. The former has been slow to change its totalitarian image; the latter, on the other hand, has renamed itself the Party of the Democratic Left and instituted measures to transform itself into a modern leftist party by adopting a social-democratic program, denouncing its totalitarian past, and having its members reregister. In doing so, the leadership

hoped that most of the old communist hard-liners would disapprove of the party's new program and image and choose not to reregister. Although the alliance of the Communists from both republics has so far proved more cohesive than other alliances, the differences between the two parties have become increasingly pronounced, largely because the Slovak Communist Party has been far more active than its counterpart in the Czech Republic in seeking to establish ties with parties that have a social-democratic orientation. In the Federal Assembly, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia currently has 34 deputies and the Party of the Democratic Left 13.

The three groups representing ethnic, nationalist, or regional concerns (Coexistence, Slovak National Party, and the Association for Moravia and Silesia, respectively) have been able to avoid disintegration, despite the fact that Coexistence and the Association for Moravia and Silesia are also alliances of various groups. Although the realignment of political forces within the Federal Assembly and the republican parliaments will no doubt continue for some time, its most important phase seems to be over. As of April 2, the composition of the Federal Assembly was as follows:

TABLE 2

COMPOSITION OF FEDERAL ASSEMBLY IN APRIL 1991

Party	Seats
Communist Party of Czechoslovakia	47
-(Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia)	(34)
-(Party of the Democratic Left)	(13)
Civic Movement	42
Civic Democratic Party	40
Public against Violence	32
Christian Democratic Movement	26
Association for Moravia and Silesia	16
Slovak National Party	15
Christian and Democratic Union	14
Public against Violence—For a Democratic Slovakia	14
Coexistence	12
Czechoslovak Social Democracy	6
Liberal Democratic Party	2
Others (small groups and independents)	34
Total	300

Source: AP, March 20, 1991; CTK, March 22 and April 2, 1991.

Assessment

Although the communist party currently holds the largest number of seats in the Federal Assembly, it is a fragmented coalition. Moreover, most of the parties that have emerged from the Civic Forum continue to cooperate with one another through the Civic Forum caucus in the Federal Assembly, as well as with the Public against Violence. Together, they still hold a solid majority of seats in the assembly.

The current disintegration of some of the major political forces in the country was expected, not only because many electoral alliances were concluded for tactical reasons only but also because the large umbrella movements embraced a broad spectrum of political views that were bound to collide at some point. The internal structures of the large movements were loose, and their members were not bound by a well-defined political philosophy. Thus, the emergence of groups with clearer programs, usually reflecting traditional political philosophies, as well as with firmer structures, appears to be a natural process—in fact, a sign that

the political culture in Czechoslovakia is maturing. On the other hand, the emergence of new parties with nationalist agendas, particularly in Slovakia, is not generally viewed as a positive development. While these groups undoubtedly reflect the frequently justified national aspirations of the Slovaks, they also tend to give precedence to narrower national issues over broader, important political and economic ones.

As a result of the recent political developments, there is also a danger that the Federal Assembly, and perhaps the National Councils as well, could become fragmented to such an extent that reaching a consensus on important issues would become difficult or impossible. At present, the deputies representing the groups formerly associated with the Civic Forum can still find a common ground when discussing important issues. However, as the parliamentary elections draw nearer, consensus may give way to growing political tension.

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Notes:

- 1 See Jiri Pehe, "The Electoral Law," *Report on Eastern Europe*, no. 11, March 16, 1990.
- 2 See Jiri Pehe, "The Civic Forum Splits into Two Groups," *ibid.*, no. 10, March 8, 1991.
- 3 AP, March 20, 1991.
- 4 CTK, April 2, 1991.

- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 See Jiri Pehe, "Growing Slovak Demands Seen as Threat to Federation," *Report on Eastern Europe*, no. 12, March 22, 1991.
- 7 CTK, March 22, 1991.