

# Slovak Nationalism Splits Christian Democratic Ranks

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*The ruling Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia split into two groups at the beginning of March. The split was the result of growing disagreements between an increasingly nationalist wing of the party, led by Jan Klepac, the deputy chairman of the Slovak parliament, and the moderate followers of Slovak Prime Minister and party leader Jan Carnogursky. The split has strengthened nationalist forces in the Slovak National Council and increased their chances of a victory in the parliamentary elections in Slovakia in June 1992.*

The ruling Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia split into two groups at the beginning of March, thereby further jeopardizing the chances of Czechoslovakia's survival as a federal state unifying the Czech and the Slovak republics. One of the groups is led by Slovak Prime Minister Jan Carnogursky, and the other is led by Jan Klepac, the deputy chairman of the Slovak National Council. The split resulted from growing disagreements between the two groups over the future role of Slovakia within a unified federal state. In the months prior to the split Klepac's wing had grown increasingly dissatisfied with attempts by Carnogursky and his followers to preserve the federal state in some form, at least for the time being, and to achieve full independence for Slovakia only in the long run. There had also been disagreements between the two groups over the future economic policies of Slovakia. A statement issued by the movement explained that "increasing tension between the two factions" had made a common program for the

parliamentary elections in June "impossible."<sup>1</sup>

Because the split has further strengthened nationalist forces in Slovakia, it could have far-reaching consequences for the whole of Czechoslovakia. With the nationalist wing of the Christian Democratic Movement in their camp, nationalist parties are likely to win the Slovak parliamentary elections in June and gain a majority in the Slovak National Council. Ultimately, that body is likely to decide whether Slovakia should remain in union with the Czech Republic and, if so, on what terms.

## Background

The Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia was officially founded in February 1990 and quickly developed into the strongest competitor of the Public against Violence, the group that spearheaded the democratic revolution in Slovakia in November 1989. Jan Carnogursky, a religious activist and a leading dissident under the communist regime, was elected the movement's chairman. In its

initial statements, the movement expressed support for the Czechoslovak federation and a market economy.<sup>2</sup>

Prior to the parliamentary elections in June 1990, the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia joined in an informal coalition with two Christian democratic parties in the Czech Republic: the People's Party and the Christian Democratic Party. In the elections, the coalition won forty seats in the Federal Assembly and became the third strongest political force in Czechoslovakia after the Public against Violence/Civic Forum coalition and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Twenty-five of the forty seats were won by the Christian Democratic Movement. In Slovakia, the Christian Democratic Movement became the second strongest political force (after the Public against Violence), winning thirty-one seats in the 150-member Slovak National Council. Following the elections the Christian Democratic Movement, the Public against Violence, and the Democratic Party formed a coalition government in Slovakia. Vladimir Meciar of the Public against Violence was named Slovak prime minister. The Christian Democratic Movement also became a partner in the coalition federal government of the Civic Forum and the Public against Violence.

The coalition at the federal level has been troubled since the summer of 1990, when the Christian Democratic Movement began to change its attitude toward the idea of a

<sup>1</sup> CSTK, 7 March 1992.

<sup>2</sup> *Lud*, 19 February 1990.

federation. Even before the parliamentary elections in June 1990, Carnogursky had said that his party favored "far more autonomy for the Slovak Republic" and had proposed that a number of the federation's powers be abolished. He had also said that the Slovak Republic "should take part in the future process of European integration."<sup>3</sup> In July 1990 the leadership of the Christian Democratic Movement issued a statement in which some of Carnogursky's proposals were elaborated. The statement, which caused dismay in the Czech Republic, said that the Christian Democratic Movement wanted Czechoslovakia to become "a confederation" and that Slovakia should become part of European institutions as a "sovereign and equal" entity.<sup>4</sup>

During talks in the fall of 1990 between federal and republican leaders on a new division of powers between the federation and the republics, the movement actively pressed for more autonomy for Slovakia. In December 1990 the negotiations led to the adoption of a constitutional amendment that ceded many of the federation's powers to the republics. The Christian Democratic Movement was perceived by the Slovak public as an active defender of Slovak national interests at the talks. This perception came to be reflected in the movement's growing popularity; at the beginning of 1991 opinion polls indicated that the movement had become the most popular political force in Slovakia.

In February 1991 President Vaclav Havel took the chair at the first round of talks on a new federal constitution. While most political leaders present at the meeting agreed that Czechoslovakia should be a federal state consisting of two republics, the Christian Democratic Movement insisted that the country should become a confederation. Its stand, vigorously

opposed by Czech leaders and the leaders of the Public against Violence, blocked any progress at the talks for several months. In the spring of 1991 the Christian Democratic Movement also began to argue that the two republics should conclude the so-called state treaty before adopting a federal constitution. The idea of the state treaty immediately ran into strong opposition from leading figures active in federal and Czech politics, who argued that neither republic had the status of a sovereign state, necessary to sign such a document.

The political fortunes of the Christian Democratic Movement began to wane in March 1991, when the Public against Violence—the main coalition partner of the Christian Democratic Movement—split into two groups. The nationalist wing, led by Prime Minister Meciar decided to form a new party called the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia. The new party adopted many of the views previously espoused by the Christian Democratic Movement; it also capitalized on the public's high regard for its populist leader and so became, virtually overnight, the most popular political force in Slovakia.

As a result of the split, Meciar lost the support of what remained of the Public against Violence as well as that of the Christian Democratic Movement. In April 1991 he was removed from office. Jan Carnogursky became the new prime minister and formed a new coalition government from which Meciar and his followers were excluded. The split in the Public against Violence made the Christian Democratic Movement the strongest political party in the Slovak National Council, because the forty-six deputies who had originally represented the Public against Violence in the council split into two new parliamentary caucuses. The victory, however, was pyrrhic: having taken over the government, the Christian Democratic Movement found itself facing growing pressure from different quarters. First, it was subject to pressure from the federal

and the Czech governments to clarify Slovakia's stand on the future of the unified state. Second, the government led by the Christian Democrats had to face intensifying demands from nationalist forces in Slovakia, strengthened by the followers of Meciar, to defend Slovak national interests more vigorously. Third, the Christian Democratic Movement was under a degree of pressure from its coalition partners. Not having enough votes in the Slovak National Council and the Presidium to enforce its own policies, it had to rely on the support of the Public against Violence and the Democratic Party, both of which were strongly in favor of a federation.

Faced with this pressure, the Christian Democratic Movement opted to keep the coalition alive rather than to give in to nationalist pressure. Subsequently, it slightly modified its stands on the future of the common state and the state treaty. In the early summer of 1991 it abandoned its idea of a confederation in favor of a loose federation. It also agreed that the state treaty should be an intrastate rather than an interstate document. In return, Czech and federal politicians agreed to the idea of the treaty. Agreement was reached that a treaty outlining the basic constitutional principles of a common federal state would be drafted and adopted jointly by the Czech and Slovak National Councils.

These conciliatory gestures by the Christian Democratic Movement, however, did not increase the movement's popularity in Slovakia. The movement was seen not only as vacillating over the issue of Slovak autonomy but also as having been instrumental in removing the enormously popular Vladimir Meciar from his post. In the summer of 1991 the movement's popularity ratings dropped to some 12%, while that of Meciar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia rocketed to over 30%. The fact that Carnogursky's party made concessions was appreciated by Czech politicians. Many of them, however,

<sup>3</sup> CTK, 31 May 1990.

<sup>4</sup> *Slovensky denik*, 30 July 1990.

continued to view Carnogursky's group with suspicion, because statements made by its leaders on the future of the federation were often unclear. In an interview in July 1991 Carnogursky said that "the creation of an independent Slovakia was unavoidable" and that Slovakia should gain full independence around 2000, with such a step timed to coincide with the admission of Czechoslovakia to the EC. It was Carnogursky's opinion that Slovakia should become a member of the EC as "a sovereign" state.<sup>5</sup>

Carnogursky's statements dismayed Czech politicians, some of whom argued that it made no sense to strive for a unified state for a limited period only. In Slovakia, nationalist parties responded by intensifying their calls for the immediate establishment of a fully independent Slovakia or the creation of a confederation formed by two sovereign states. A degree of dissatisfaction with what were perceived as attempts to appease Czech politicians also became evident in Carnogursky's own party. In the summer of 1991 prominent politicians within the party, led by Klepac, issued statements that clearly contradicted Carnogursky in part. The deepening schism in the party helped explain why the party had taken some steps earlier in 1991 that were clearly contrary to its right-of-center image; for example, in early 1991 an alternative economic reform program for Slovakia that advocated state intervention in the economy was published by the party. It became clear that the publication of the program had been one of the concessions that the less nationalist, right-wing faction of the party had made to the nationalist, center-left forces within the party ranks.

Carnogursky repeatedly tried to play down the growing differences between these two factions, claiming that the Christian Democratic Movement was the only cohesive and

coherent political force in Slovakia. In the second half of 1991 he succeeded in keeping the growing internal party differences out of the public's view. In most cases, the deputies of the Christian Democratic Movement in both the Federal Assembly and the Slovak National Council voted *en bloc*. However, it was becoming obvious that the movement had no consistent policy and that in many cases its steps were dictated by what appeared to be compromises between its two factions.

An example of this was that, despite its official support for the idea of a federation, the Christian Democratic Movement allied itself with Slovak nationalist parties in the Federal Assembly to vote down measures aimed at breaking the constitutional deadlock that had developed owing to the growing Czech-Slovak disputes over the future of the country. Like other nationalist forces in Slovakia, the movement opposed the idea of holding a referendum on the future constitutional arrangement in Czechoslovakia. It also opposed a series of measures proposed by President Havel at the end of 1991 aimed at averting a constitutional crisis. On the other hand, the deputies of the Christian Democratic Movement successfully blocked attempts in the Slovak National Council to adopt the so-called Declaration of Sovereignty of Slovakia, a step that was certain to lead to the rapid disintegration of Czechoslovakia.

Carnogursky repeatedly urged other Slovak leaders to try to complete successfully the negotiations with their Czech counterparts on the state treaty before considering more radical steps. In the second half of 1991 talks between Czech and Slovak leaders ended in failure, and Carnogursky appeared to be increasingly isolated both on the Slovak political scene and within his own party. What appeared to be a political breakthrough for Carnogursky

came on 9 February 1992, when leaders of the Czech and the Slovak National Councils reached a tentative agreement on the text of the so-called state treaty. Agreement was made possible mainly by a number of concessions by the Slovak side.<sup>6</sup>

On 13 February 1992, however, the Presidium of the Slovak National Council rejected the draft agreement. Four members of the Christian Democratic Movement, including Klepac, voted against the draft treaty.<sup>7</sup> This step by representatives of the nationalist wing within the movement was a clear signal that the movement could no longer function as a single entity unless radical changes took place within its ranks. Carnogursky reacted to the vote by giving Klepac and his followers an ultimatum: either follow the party line or leave the movement. Klepac's faction responded by announcing that it would quit.

### The Split

On 7 March the council of the Christian Democratic Movement decided that the movement's two factions would formulate their own election programs and field their own candidates in the June elections. Although the council stopped short of endorsing a breakup of the movement, its decision had the same effect. Both factions agreed that they would continue to cooperate until the elections to avoid destabilizing the Slovak and federal governments. The faction led by Klepac decided to call itself the Slovak Christian Democratic Party, and Carnogursky's group opted to continue to call itself the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia.<sup>8</sup>

Following the meeting of the movement's council, seventy-three members of the Slovak Christian Democratic Movement met to discuss the new party's future. It was agreed that the founding congress of the

<sup>5</sup> *Liberation*, 22 July 1991

<sup>6</sup> CSTK, 9 February 1992.

<sup>7</sup> *MF Dnes*, 14 February 1992.

<sup>8</sup> *Lidove noviny*, 9 March 1992.

party should be held on 23 March. It was also announced that eleven of the thirty-one deputies representing the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia in the Slovak National Council had defected to the new party. Five out of twenty-five deputies in the Federal Assembly decided to do likewise. Four members of the Slovak government also defected to Klepac's party.<sup>9</sup>

Since the split both groups have explained their basic differences. The Slovak Christian Democratic Movement is opposed to some of the means used to privatize state property in Slovakia. It advocates a "social market economy." Most of the members of the so-called Economic Club of the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia, which drafted the movement's controversial economic program in early 1991, have joined Klepac's group. The most prominent member of the Economic Club, Forestry Minister Vilem Oberhauser, has become one of the leaders of the new party.<sup>10</sup> According to Klepac, the way in which Czech and Slovak parliamentary leaders reached agreement on the state treaty proved that "all possibilities to negotiate with the Czech side about the country's future constitutional arrangement have been exhausted."<sup>11</sup>

Officials associated with Carnogursky's group have welcomed the split, suggesting that the departure of Klepac and his followers will "cleanse" their movement of leftist and strongly nationalist elements. They have said that they would like the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia to project an image of a typical right-of-center Christian democratic party and, further, that the split should be seen as the departure from the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia of "a certain group of people" whose "intentions

vis-à-vis the common state were dishonest."<sup>12</sup> Other statements made by the leaders of Carnogursky's party suggest that, with the departure of Klepac and his followers, his group is ready to defend the idea of a federation much more vigorously than the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia did in the past. In fact, some officials associated with Carnogursky have suggested that the party is now prepared to support the idea of holding a referendum on Czechoslovakia's future.

On 10 March the party received a significant boost when Frantisek Miklosko, the popular chairman of the Slovak National Council and a member of the Public against Violence, announced that he would join Carnogursky's party. Miklosko suggested that the main objective of the Christian Democratic Movement in Slovakia should be to transform itself into "a modern conservative party" similar to other Christian democratic parties in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

#### Assessment

The split in the Christian Democratic Movement is likely to have serious consequences for both the Slovak political scene and the future of Czechoslovakia. The departure of Klepac and his followers from the movement means that the group of nationalist parties and other political formations in the Slovak National Council now has a majority of votes in the council. Following the split in the Christian Democratic Movement, some nationalist deputies associated with other parties suggested that they might resubmit the Declaration of Slovak Sovereignty to the Slovak National Council. The Czech National Council had warned that the adoption of the declaration could provoke the Czech side to initiate steps toward ensuring the independence of the Czech Republic. When

asked by reporters how his group would vote if the Declaration of Sovereignty were resubmitted to the Slovak parliament, Klepac declined to give a direct answer.<sup>14</sup>

Opinion polls suggest that nationalist parties, led by Meciar's Movement for a Democratic Slovakia, will win the June elections. Klepac's Slovak Christian Democratic Movement is likely to strengthen this group of nationalist parties. Although Carnogursky's movement may benefit from its new image, it is not likely to gain enough votes in the elections to be able to form a new government in Slovakia. In fact, it is almost certain that the nationalist parties, including Klepac's group, will have enough votes to form a government of their own.

Such a development would have important consequences for Czechoslovakia. First, nationalist forces in Slovakia would be able dictate to the Czech side under what conditions they would be willing to keep Slovakia in the unified state. Some Slovak politicians have suggested that such conditions could include slowing down the pace of economic reform or accepting the idea of a confederation. It is not likely that the right-wing parties, which according to various opinion polls are going to win the elections in the Czech Republic, will accept such conditions. The Slovak National Council dominated by nationalist parties could also simply declare Slovakia an independent state, despite the fact that such a step would be seen, and vigorously opposed, by federal bodies and Czech politicians as unconstitutional. While it is possible that none of these scenarios will become reality, the disintegration of the Christian Democratic Movement clearly reduces the probability that Czechoslovakia will survive as a federal state.

<sup>9</sup> CSTK, 7 March 1992.

<sup>10</sup> *MF Dnes*, 9 March 1992.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> CSTK, 12 March 1992.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 10 March 1992.

<sup>14</sup> *MF Dnes*, 9 March 1992.