

Recent Developments and Trends in Slovakia

The Political Situation

Political stability is the crucial factor in determining conditions for long-term human development. The reasons are quite simple. If the very maintenance of democracy has to be struggled for, this reduces the capacity to develop beneficial societal programs. The path to political stability is affected by the condition of the political parties system, such as the relationships within the coalition as well as those between the coalition and the opposition, the legitimacy of the governing political parties, the efficiency of the functioning of the government, and the quality of the institutional environment.

As we approach the mid-point of the electoral cycle, it is fair to state that the coalition still works. There have been problems in reaching consensus under the conditions of a broad coalition. The method of trial and error helped the coalition to master the policy of compromises and bargaining. In spite of the slower rates that would be needed to resolve problems inherited from the third Mečiar's government, it may be stated that the government coalition (SDK-SDE-SMK-SOP)¹ continues to advance in their efforts to resume the normal functioning of parliamentary democracy and to reinstate the rule of law. In spite of the opposition's reluctance to cooperate on issues related to economic reforms, a consensus could be achieved of all parliamentary entities with respect to the foreign-political orientation of Slovakia towards EU and NATO (with respect to NATO, SNS is an exception).

The various social groups' degree of involvement in the decision-making processes has been continuously increasing since the 1998 elections. The Hungarian Coalition Party has functioned constructively in the government. This behavior proves that the worries and suspicions of "anti-Slovakian or irredentist interests of the Hungarian ethnic minority" are unfounded. The aforementioned belief has been voiced by nationalists and also some coalition politicians. The new government has been successful in retrieving the social dialog with the Trade Unions; after intense and protracted negotiations, the General Agreement has been signed in March 2000. The office of the Vice-Prime Minister for Human Rights and Minorities has been established, and the government has been involved in talks with the Roma ethnic representatives. The government decided to establish the office of the plenipotentiary for the purpose of addressing issues of the Roma ethnic minority. Minorities have acquired a simple majority in the newly appointed Government Council for Ethnic Minorities. A Government Council for Non-Governmental Organizations has been established, comprised of government representatives and representatives of the Gremium of the Third Sector. Government participation with local government representatives has been intense in the preparation of the Public administration reform.

On the other hand, the relationships between the government coalition parties have been marked by conflicts arising from divergent program priorities as well as from continuous competition for votes in the forthcoming elections. Various economic groups have attempted to utilize their links to the government parties for the purpose of railroading their own interests. This has created a serious problem for the government and also has been an underlying problem in a majority of prior conflicts within the government coalition. Disputes within the government coalition, as well as within SDK, do not primarily represent ideological or value-related discrepancies. This is merely a convenient façade. What remains a hidden agenda are the *disputes of economic interest groups* that stand behind the individual parties. The most pronounced example of this type of conflict occurred in April 2000. Jozef Migaš, the Chairman of the Parliament and the leader of the government party SDE, cast his vote in support of the

¹ For abbreviations please see p. 9.

suggestion presented by the opposition to recall the Prime Minister and thus the entire government. Migaš's vote in favor of impeaching the Prime Minister can be explained in the context of the activities of such a special-purpose grouping. This group was devoted to pursuing its particular objectives, and had no reservations about threatening the political stability of State.

It is therefore not justified to consider people who fuel the public opinion against reforms as the major barrier to reforms. They see that such reforms would directly disfavor them (the unemployed, the pensioners, public servants jeopardized by dismissals), or they cannot visualize change. Although these people enabled the third Mečiar's government to seize the power and to leave a meager economic and institutional heritage, they no longer have a decisive influence to hinder the reforms.

Also part of this heritage are groups that initially benefited from the reforms: the new owners of privatized enterprises, managers of State banks and State enterprises, and some public servants. Not all who easily acquired property during the first wave of the reforms are able to thrive under conditions of open competition run according to transparent rules of game. That is why they are interested in keeping up the "clientelist" capitalism with all its non-transparency, and preventing open competition with other countries. It is in the interests of these groups to hinder some steps of the reform process. Loosing privileges and protection from the very patron that they supported during the election campaign is perceived as a violation of the "silent agreement". They are motivated to fight reform steps, even if this action might result in threatening the stability of the government coalition.

The System of Political Parties

A significant majority of the relevant political parties (with KDH being an exception) was born on parliament's soil, i.e. "from the top", and this also marked the nature of these political parties. The several years of HZDS participation in the parliament and in the government demonstrate a model of a shift in the party's leadership towards the parliament and the executive bodies of State. This supports the growing of government parties into the State and vice versa. A cartel of parties can be identified in Slovakia from the viewpoint of the nature of the political parties' organization. The cartel environment is created by guaranteed State contributions towards the activities of the parties, which are thus not forced to build a broader membership base.

The cartel environment is being formed by the legislative regulations. Examples of this can be seen in the mechanisms of State-provided financing, inter-party relationships at the elite level, and by the stronger position of parties in State compared to civil society. About 5 percent of the population is affiliated with a political party. This is given by the reluctance on the part of individuals to join political parties, and by the degradation of membership in electoral parties. The parties are no longer dependent on membership fees. On the contrary, the party of the rank and file is financially dependent on the headquarters, while the ordinary members have only minimal influence on the making of the party policy. Political ambition in local or central public service authorities remains one of the few incentives to join a political party. In this way, parties increasingly become part of the State and are less prone to voice the interests of the civil society.

Examining political parties through the optics of their intra-party organization leads us to conclude that there is a multiparty system in Slovakia as a precondition of a democratic political system, but not even parties considered democratic based on their program and profile, are democratic in nature as far as their organization is concerned.

A good law on the financing of political parties is crucial, and this belief has been accepted by the political parties. However, it still remains questionable as to whether or not the required raising of the State contribution represents the optimal solution. This method of financing will strengthen the cartel nature of political parties (i.e. their interlinking with the State, and restrict free competition, both within and between the political parties).

The weak connection between civil society and political parties is compensated for by problem-oriented civil initiatives that voice and pursue the interests of the interested public. A successful example of civil initiative can be seen in the efforts to railroad the free access to information act. The alliance of the Civil Initiative for a Good Law, independent media, leaders of the Democratic Party and a portion of the MPs, along with the support on the part of the Prime Minister, has overcome the resistance and brought about success. The act was adopted in its original form. This can be taken as a hopeful predictor of more intense citizen participation in the shaping of an institutional environment that creates guarantees for the consolidation of democracy in Slovakia.

Political Parties of the Government Coalition: Present Status

Internal splitting of the two strongest parties, SDK and SĎĽ, may be considered as the main source of the strain within the government coalition. This in turn complicates and inhibits cooperation between these parties in fulfilling the government program.

The lack of settled relationships within SDK (made up of representatives of five mother parties: KDH, DÚ, DS, SDSS and SZS) has resulted in a standstill between the so-called "coalition wing" (in particular KDH and DS that supported the return to five-coalition) and the Dzurinda's² "unionist" wing. In January 2000, Dzurinda's wing published a declaration offering SDK voters the "creation of a union of political streams, directions and personalities as an integration of the reform forces in Slovakia. This union may not be advantageous to small political parties and their representatives, but with certainty it will be advantageous to the citizen."

This declaration ended the futile negotiations between "unionists" and "coalitionists", however, it failed to reduce the tension in any aspect. This struggle for a share of power within the SDK contributed to the loss of the voters' support to this originally (and still) strongest government party. In spite of internal contradictions, the MP club of SDK proved its unity and stability at the parliament by supporting government suggestions. There is disproportion between the majority of MPs that support the platforms of the mother parties and the minority of those who declare themselves as SDK MPs but actually advocate the proclaimed SDKÚ. Also contributing to the problem is the significant share of SDKÚ members holding ministerial offices, which causes constant strains within the club.

Since 1998, the second strongest party of the government coalition, SĎĽ, has had a greater voter attrition rate than any other coalition party. Its supporters dropped from almost 15% to 5 percent (May 2000). The greatest drop was recorded after the former Vice-Chairman, Robert Fico, left the party and created a new one, Smer. SĎĽ voter dissatisfaction with the social and economic situation resulted in their supporting a politician who assumed the position of the "third" power and offered alternative policy. This drop in electoral preferences motivated a portion of the SĎĽ leadership to employ tactics of internal opposition within the government coalition. An example of such tactics was the request for reconstruction of the government, which was rejected by the other coalition partners. The aforementioned tactics of internal opposition could not improve the standing of the SĎĽ; it even caused the party much greater

² Mikuláš Dzurinda, Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic since November 1998.

problems. It destroyed the coalition partner's trust and did nothing to halt the drop of electoral preferences. The SDE situation is further complicated by the rivalry of two groups with differing attitudes to the way the party acts within the government.

The President

The president, directly elected by the public, represents a stabilizing element of the political system. Although he has failed in his efforts to reconcile the coalition with the opposition, Rudolf Schuster has achieved acceptance as a non-partisan head of State even by the leaders of the present opposition parties. Still, it may be stated that the relationship between the representatives of the supreme constitutional institutions is of consensual nature, and the president, along with the Prime Minister, pursues a joint foreign-political orientation both at home and abroad. The stabilizing role of the president became even more pronounced during the recent life-threatening illness of Rudolf Schuster. The people became aware of what might happen in such a crisis. The importance of the stability of the presidential office was reflected by the drop of the national currency in response to R. Schuster's health.

Political Support through the Glasses of the Polls

Naturally, support for the government coalition party at the mid-point of the electoral cycle is pronouncedly weaker than it was at the time of the elections. It is now showing a slightly decreasing trend. In addition to the aforementioned reasons, this also has been the result of the unpopular but unavoidable restrictive measures that have resulted in a soaring cost of living for a majority of the population. Another disappointing factor was the failure to address the establishment of fairness with respect to privatization. There is a lack of closure in the investigation of the abduction of M. Kováč jr., and the murder of R. Remiáš. The manifestations of clientelism that has become more apparent due to the many disputes within the SDK as well as through the activities of SDE has resulted in repugnance on the part of many original voters and led to the conclusion that "all politicians are alike".

HZDS has consistently ranked first in political preference polls. Its preferences oscillate around 27 percent. If, in any month, the respective polls' preferences approach 30 percent, the support to SNS drops. Since the reservoir of the potential support to the current opposition parties, HZDS and SNS does not exceed 37 percent, therefore increasing preferences to HZDS mean reduced preferences to SNS and vice versa. The support level to these parties has remained relatively the same since the last elections. This segment seems to represent some social and cultural constant within the distribution of the political and value-related orientations of the people in Slovakia. It also evokes worries in foreign observers who view it as a risk with respect to the stabilization of democracy in Slovakia. A specific explanation may be derived from a socio-demographic analysis of this segment. Statistically it is comprised of elderly people with a lower education level, from small settlements, i.e., from people whose perception of the world, attitudes and values were formed during the time of "socialism building". Political changes have caught them at an age where their flexibility to change is weak, both subjectively and objectively. Moreover, they represent that portion of the population that forms the majority of socio-economic "losers" after November 1989.

The only party of the government coalition (SDK, SMK, SDE and SOP) that could preserve its stable preferences of around 10 percent over long periods of time has been the Hungarian Coalition Party (SMK). SMK consistently represents the most stable entity, both internally and externally. Most problems relate to polarized parties of the broad-spectrum coalition – the right-center SDK and the SDE at the opposite poles. A portion of SDK announced the arrival of the new party, SDKÚ, with M. Dzurinda as its leader. This new entity, identified mainly through the persons of its signatories, has been witnessing varying preferences within the interval of

10-14 percent. The original mother parties that did not agree with the "union" model and wished to preserve their identity have lost support. The KDH dropped to around the eligibility limit (e.g., FOCUS agency reported 5.3 percent, ÚVVM 4.6 percent, June 2000). Also, small parties (DS, DÚ, SZS, SDSS) oscillate between zero and 2 percent. The polls suggest that the leaders of the mother parties of the original SDK defend the legitimacy of refusing the "unionist" model of the internal SDK relationships or of merging with SDKÚ; on the other hand, the original SDK voters prefer the existence of a larger political entity to a number of smaller parties to the right of the center. SDE has been slightly better off, with its preferences in recent months oscillating around 6 percent. Simultaneously, this party experienced the most pronounced drop of its potential electorate support.

Fico's "SMER" – a New Phenomenon in the Political Scene

The new party *Smer*, founded by R. Fico after he left SDE in November 1999, has consistently ranked second in political preference surveys, and has thus become an entity with a potentially strong coalition potential. After announcing the establishment of the new party, Fico refused to define its nature from the viewpoint of the known ideal and political models (social democracy, liberalism, conservatism). He stated that "rationalism and pragmatism will be the internal philosophy of the party". He presented the emerging entity as a non-standard formation, both with respect to its profile and the organizational structure.

The leader of Smer tries to approach the potential voters by accentuating topics that have traditionally attracted the interest of the public (unemployment, life standard, Roma issues, capital punishment). This approach allows him to take advantage of the politician without any governmental responsibilities who criticizes established parties. It resembles the "anti-establishment" of a party that focuses on the criticism of the system within which it operates. Criticism is directed toward both coalition and opposition parties. The analysis of the constituency of SMER suggests that this party acquires support from a portion of electorate of the former parties of the present government coalition, and from younger voters with higher education.

The major objective of this party is suggested by Fico's statement that "SMER must become part of the government", as well as by his claim that he is ready to talk to anybody who is open to collaboration. In this way, the "one-man" party builds its position of the "scale needle" and suggests that, in theory, it may make a contribution to the majority government and to both HZDS and the parties of the current government coalition.

Consolidation of democracy requires that the present opposition national-populist parties do not get into power at the next elections. This forces the present coalition parties to fuse on the anti-Mečiar platform, and gives them the unhealthy certainty that, in the absence of any other democratic alternative, the democratically oriented voters do not have any alternative choice. The existence of Fico's Smer is a warning for these parties that at least a change in the composition of the future government coalition is possible and that some of them may retire from it.

The Acting of the Opposition Parties within the Political System

The opposition parties (HZDS and SNS) refuse to admit any share in the responsibility for the socio-economic problems and subsequent distortions caused by their activities in the past. They use all legal, though not always legitimate, means to cause obstructions at negotiations, be it at the parliament or during the investigation of criminal cases from the times of their government. Nevertheless, these parties cannot be considered as clear-cut anti-systemic parties, in spite of their destructive rhetoric. At its "transformation" convention in March 2000, HZDS declared its

transformation to a party of popular type, however there have actually been no principal changes: HZDS has remained a nationally-authoritarian formation of the leader type. The convention approved the Statues, which even more strengthened the position of the chairman Vladimír Mečiar, and the position of the moderate wing advocates has become almost negligible. For several months, HZDS has been pursuing the idea of premature elections. With this objective in mind, it initiated a petition action for calling for a referendum on early elections; however, this idea has not met with a significant positive response in the public. Repeated polls suggest that the participation in the referendum would be rather low, about 30 percent only, which would render the referendum invalid (as of June 2000). Similarly, attempts to organize protest manifestations at district and regional towns evidently failed. V. Mečiar, the HZDS leader, apparently has enough energy to prevent opposition to form within the party, but he lacks the energy to lead the party. Due to his resignation of his MP's mandate, he does not have sufficient political space to make his activities visible. Therefore, he repeatedly and unsuccessfully has been inviting political parties to sit at a round table and suggesting the coalition give him a larger share on control powers. The coalition parties do not consider either of these efforts as legitimate.

The Slovak National Party remains the only party to accept HZDS as coalition partner. SNS and HZDS signed an agreement on cooperation some months ago. The agreement was more symbolic rather of any practical importance with respect to the activities of both parties.

Institution Building

Taken from the viewpoint of formal rules, the existing institutions, laws and standards may be considered as sufficient preconditions for the consolidation of democracy. Other problems concern the level of informal standards that are part of "the rules of the game" accepted in both political and public life. Such unwritten rules that represent barriers on the way towards socio-economic transformation including the traditional form of "immoral familism" or, more generally, the standard of the "immoral palship". This informal standard that is significantly widespread in Slovakia means preference of personal links over competence criteria in making decisions on personnel issues. The preference of the personal link criterion over the qualification criterion is a strong barrier to reforms and changes in all areas (accreditation of regional universities, public administration reform, State administration reorganization, etc.).

It will be the amendment to the Constitution, expected to be adopted in autumn 2000, that will show the actual effect of the efficiency of the cooperation of political parties. The purpose of the changes will be to make a contribution towards a better balancing of the regulations concerning the powers of the State authorities and to strengthen the democratic contents of the Constitution. The amendment to the basic law of the Slovak Republic introduces the office of the public protector of civil rights (ombudsman). It will adjust the powers of the president, the Constitutional Court, the Supreme Audit Authority, of other public power authorities. It will also regulate the immunity of MPs, and the compatibility of Slovakia's legal system with international legal standards, etc. The reform of the public administration will represent a significant element in further development, focusing on the establishment of the concept of a modern, democratic and decentralized State. In this respect, the most significant barriers are found within the ruling coalition itself. The process of the railroading of this concept is also an example of how consensus has to be sought from a variety of interests and how allies can be acquired, not only on the party basis, but also from NGOs.

The objective of decentralization and transfer of powers to the local and regional level based on a rational concept of reforms is not to weaken the functioning of the State. On the contrary, the objective is to manage public matters more efficiently and, in the end-effect, decrease expenditures. At the same time, it is desirable that the State takes the initiative when the market

forces alone or the private sector do not generate demand for the building of institutions necessary for a decent functioning of a market economy. The specific recommendation for Slovakia is: it is not the State's duty to control production enterprises, banks, insurance companies or public law enterprises. The State has to facilitate an efficient, qualified and well-financed judicial system and provide strong authorities capable of regulating financial markets and natural monopolies. A good system of social insurance and a modern system of educational support are also needed.

The analysis of the political conditions for sustainable human development shows that Slovakia needs a social agreement of relevant political stakeholders concerning the necessary reforms. No significant advancement or successful catching up with what has been missed in the process of the Euro-Atlantic integration can be expected unless politicians stop irresponsible hammering out of political capital by turning down necessary but unpopular measures.

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Economic Development and the Labor Market

Economic development is considered a basic prerequisite for long-term and good quality human development worldwide. Whenever an economic situation is analyzed, two levels have to be accounted for: first, quantitative parameters – statistical figures describing development and the status quo; and second, qualitative characteristics that determine future trends in the development of the economy. Frequently, optima arising from the monitoring of the above levels are time-shifted and it may be difficult for a lay person, or even an expert, to identify the corresponding causative relationships. Marked improvements in qualitative parameters frequently need several months or even years to appear after effective structural reforms have been implemented, and vice versa. No worsening may become immediately apparent even after a dramatic worsening of the quality of economic policies.

In the early 1990s, economic reform was launched relatively aggressively in Slovakia and this enabled completion of its key components within several years. Due to a variety of objective and subjective reasons, the economic and social reforms were slowed down or even brought to a halt in mid-90s. During the period following the "Velvet Revolution", economic policies made a contribution towards better stability and high rates of economic growth that were maintained for several years. However, the blocking of reforms resulted in a strongly imbalanced state and a slow-down of growth rates. The end of the decade therefore has been and is marked by attempts to stabilize the economy, to complete the principal reforms, and to start new, more demanding reforms. These efforts were clearly voiced in the government's program declaration and became evident in its first steps. This diminished towards the end of 1999, which was the new government's first whole year of functioning. The dynamics of reforms were gradually slowed down by the growing political strains between the coalition parties as well as by the growing problems associated with the implementation of reforms. Naturally, what should be seen behind the behavior of the political elites are effects of reforms on various social layers of the population, on the various regions, as well as responses of Trade Unions, associations of business people and other interest groups. These statements can be supported by figures showing the growth of gross domestic product (Table 1).

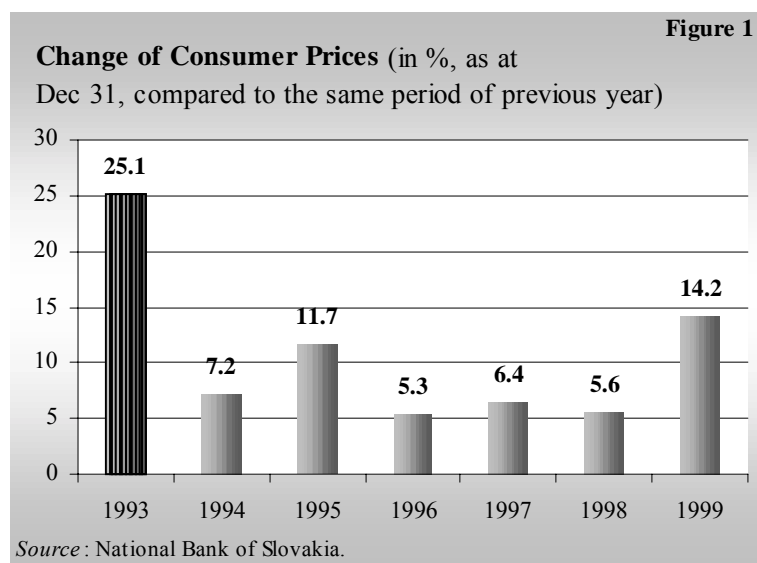
Table 1

Gross Domestic Product GDP^a (at constant prices)	
Year	GDP growth (%)
1994	4.9
1995	6.7
1996	6.2
1997	6.2
1998	4.1
1999	1.9

Note: a. GDP revised by ESA 95 methodology. Data for 1994-1996 are final; data for 1997-1999 are preliminary.

Source: Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.

A similar view can also be obtained by monitoring the development of inflation and unemployment rates, the State Budget deficit, gross foreign indebtedness, influx of foreign direct investments, or other parameters. The soaring of consumer prices in 1999 was mainly due to increases of some regulated prices that had been postponed for several years (e.g., the prices of electricity remained unchanged from 1993 to 1998). A moderate reduction of inflation rates can be realistically expected for 2000, with a naturally positive effect on the value of the population's savings and thus on development opportunities.



The development of *unemployment rates* has been unfavorable. They surprisingly showed a long-term growth despite relatively high economic growth rates. A more comprehensive analysis is required to determine the underlying causes of this phenomenon. Of particular interest is the strong negative impact of long-term high unemployment rates on the quality of human development. High unemployment rates and other characteristics became visible during the year and have raised worries.

Table 2

Basic Indicators of the Slovak Labor Market

Indicator	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Employment (% change in comparison to previous year)							
Registered (corporate reporting)	-2.6	-1.8	2.2	0.8	0.2	-0.4	-2.2
Labor force surveys	-	-	1.7	3.6	-0.9	-0.3	-3.0
Unemployment rate (%), annual average)							
Registered ^a	12.7	14.4	13.8	12.6	13.0	14.5	18.2
Labor force surveys	21.2	13.7	13.1	11.3	11.8	12.5	16.2
Average monthly wage							
Nominal (% change in comparison to previous year)	18.4	17.0	14.3	13.3	13.1	9.6	7.2
Real (index 1989 = 100)	72.8	75.0	78.2	83.8	89.2	91.8	88.2
Number of unemployed per 1 job vacancy							
	48.0	28.5	21.5	23.4	18.0	38.6	93.8

Note: Data include total numbers of registered unemployed. When considering unemployed who are able to take a job immediately, unemployment rates for 1997 and 1998 decrease to 13.7% and 17.3%, respectively.

Source: Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family of the Slovak Republic; Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic; National Labor Office.

The average number of working people in 1999 dropped 3 percent below 1998 numbers. The numbers of persons working in selected sectors (according to NACE) in the individual years within 1994-1999 reached the highest value in 1996. Between 1994 and the end of 1999, the number of persons working in the sector of agriculture decreased 26.7%; those working in the sector of mineral production dropped 13.1%. On the other hand, the most pronounced increase within the period of 1995-1999 concerned numbers of persons working in the financial sector (47.7%).

During the recent period, unemployment became the most vulnerable issue in economic development. The unemployment rate reached 14.5 percent (or 12.5 percent according to labor force surveys) as early as 1998. This unfavorable trend continued in 1999, with unemployment rates reaching 20.1% by the end of the year (or 19.2 percent if only those are considered who are able to take up a job immediately).

The average duration that the unemployed were registered with Labor Offices showed a marked growth from 11.6 months in 1998, to 14.2 months in 1999. By the end of 1999, the long-term unemployed made up 43 percent of all unemployed persons, the subgroup of those unemployed for more than two years representing 22 percent of all unemployed.

Table 3

Structure of Unemployed by Duration of Unemployment

	Number of Months in Registration					Total	Long-term Unemployed		
	-3	4-6	7-9	10-12	13+		13-18	19-24	25+
As at Dec 31, 1998									
Total	24.8	17.6	11.8	7.6	38.2	100.0	11.4	6.2	20.6
Males	28.5	17.4	11.3	7.8	35.0	100.0	11.4	5.9	17.7
Females	20.4	17.9	12.4	7.4	41.9	100.0	11.4	6.6	23.9
As at Dec 31, 1999									
Total	20.6	14.5	12.9	8.8	43.2	100.0	13.4	7.9	21.9
Males	22.8	14.0	12.3	9.4	41.5	100.0	14.1	7.7	19.7
Females	17.8	15.1	13.7	8.0	45.4	100.0	12.5	8.1	24.8

Source: Report on the Social..., (2000)

In 1999, the number of recipients receiving unemployment support reached 130,000. That was 27,000 more persons than in the preceding year, representing a 27 percent growth. Also, the average time during which unemployment support was paid increased from 5.6 months in 1998 to 6.0 months in 1999. In October 1999, an amendment to the Unemployment Act was adopted to reduce the maximum duration of support payments from 12 months down to 9 months. This amendment also reduced the maximum amount of support from SKK 5,400 to SKK 4,845. It also reduced the calculation of the support base from 60% to 50% for the first three months, and from 50% to 45% thereafter. The average amount of the support paid by the end of 1999 was SKK 3,496.

Table 4

Registered Unemployed Receiving Support in Unemployment (as % of total unemployed)

Indicator	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Total	34.8	24.9	21.9	26.3	24.9	27.0	26.9
of which: Males	18.5	13.2	11.0	13.6	13.2	15.2	16.1
Females	16.2	11.7	10.8	12.7	11.7	11.8	10.8

Note: The values are based on average monthly numbers of registered unemployed.

Source: Report on the Social..., (2000)

The increasing unemployment, and in particular long-term unemployment, represents a burden on resources of the National Labor Office and also on State Budget funds allocated for social assistance. This is due to the Social Assistance Act that guarantees basic conditions of life to all citizens. This means that an individual who has been de-registered from the records of job seekers will receive social assistance benefits if in material distress. Within 1993-1999, this benefit was paid to 37% to 48% of the registered unemployed, i.e., an average of 122,000 to 237,000 unemployed people in any month. For the time being, the unemployed have a share of

as much as 90% of the applicants for social assistance benefits due to what is referred to as material distress.

The average numbers of social assistance benefits recipients from among registered unemployed in any month in 1999 represented 237,000 people. This is an increase of 40.1% compared to the preceding year and it represents the steepest growth since 1994.

Table 5

Structure of Unemployed Individuals By Categories of Social Protection

Indicator	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
Unemployed in total	323,216	366,168	349,821	324,278	336,661	379,466	485,202
of which:							
Recipients of support in unemployment	112,409	91,143	76,590	85,241	83,939	102,491	130,339
Social assistance benefits recipients	121,835	158,329	157,570	141,762	143,386	169,039	236,811
Recipients of financial assistance in motherhood ^a	-	-	-	-	3,223	3,483	3,865
Temporarily unable to work ^a	-	-	-	-	11,311	16,045	19,537

Note: The values are based on monthly average numbers of registered unemployed. a. Only data for 1997-99 available.

Source: Report on the Social..., (2000)

Of the overall (average monthly) numbers of social assistance recipients due to material distress, the registered unemployed made up 71-91 percent in the individual years between 1993-1999, with the highest proportions being reached toward the end of the period analyzed.

Box 1

Public Works

Since July 2000, long-term unemployment has been dealt with through the *Institute of Public (Community) Works*. This institute of welfare services may be used by municipalities to offer work to unemployed individuals, e.g., cleaning of works in public areas, buildings administered by municipalities, etc. In this way, long-term unemployed get jobs and have the opportunity to regain working habits, though being aware that this is only for a limited period of time. In addition, a positive aspect for the unemployed is the fact that he/she will be entitled to apply for unemployment support as soon as the employment is terminated. There are many critics of these works who mainly argue that the job offered is just temporary. They compare it to a merry-go-round: the individual finds him/herself in the same environment eventually. What is being criticized is the volume of funds spent on these purposes – the critics call these work projects as the most expensive means of cleaning public areas. National Labor Office data from August 2000 suggests a drop in the share of long-term unemployed from 50 to 45.7 percent compared to the previous month. As of August 31, 2000, the overall number of unemployed dropped by 47,986 (17.51%) to 226,045 long-term unemployed.

The hitherto experience suggests that works in the public interest are more efficient in disclosing black market employment than Labor Office procedures. This is mainly the case in villages where people live in less anonymity. The Labor Office provides the mayors of the municipalities with lists of long-term unemployed people, and based on the interest of the unemployed in part time work, mayors can find out quickly who is working under the table. As an example, a district on the outskirts of Košice may be mentioned where 1,200 unemployed could have been de-registered on this basis (SME, September 14, 2000).

The benefits directly related to the social situation of the unemployed and/or their families represented the highest amount paid in the framework of social assistance. In 1999, registered unemployed were paid SKK 8.790 billion in this social assistance benefits from the State Budget funds, i.e., 92.2 percent of the overall volume of benefits paid to recipients in material

distress. Moreover, the unemployed received SKK 5.339 billion from Slovak National Labor Office in support in unemployment; in other words, SKK 14.129 billion were directly paid to the unemployed, with State contributing 62.2% towards this amount. The volume of financial means, paid directly to the unemployed increased 45% over the preceding year.

Unemployment rates also affected parameters that characterize the opportunities of the population to be materially secured. End-consumption by households grew only 0.5%. Real wages were 3.1% smaller in 1999 than the preceding year. Average real income per household member dropped 4.8%, while expenditures were 6.2% smaller.

1999 was expected to be the year of economic stabilization that would bring about conditions for the implementation of structural reforms. These, in turn, were expected to bring about both short-term and long-term economic growth. The 1998 autumn elections were expected to introduce additional changes. The new government was expected to generate potential by not only implementing more aggressive unpopular measures, but also by trying to improve the image of Slovakia abroad and by severing the tight links between politics and economics. This was expected to result in greater accessibility to foreign capital markets, as well as to strengthen the equal opportunities principle.

- As far as macroeconomic stabilization is concerned, it may be stated, with some reservations, that the economic policy did not fail. A so-called small package of remedial measures was adopted in May of 1999. These measures were expected to result first in stabilization and later in economic growth. The trade balance deficit could be reduced to approximately 50%, and public administration management could also demonstrate a better discipline.

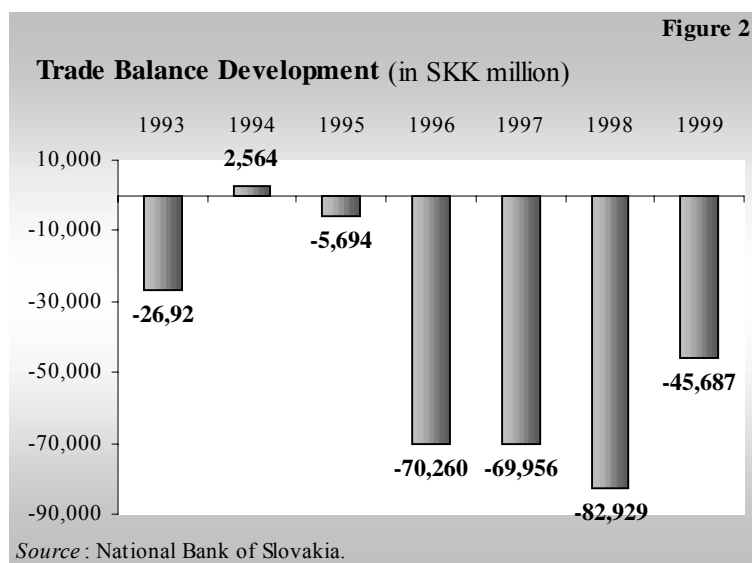
Table 6

Public Administration Balance (as % of GDP)

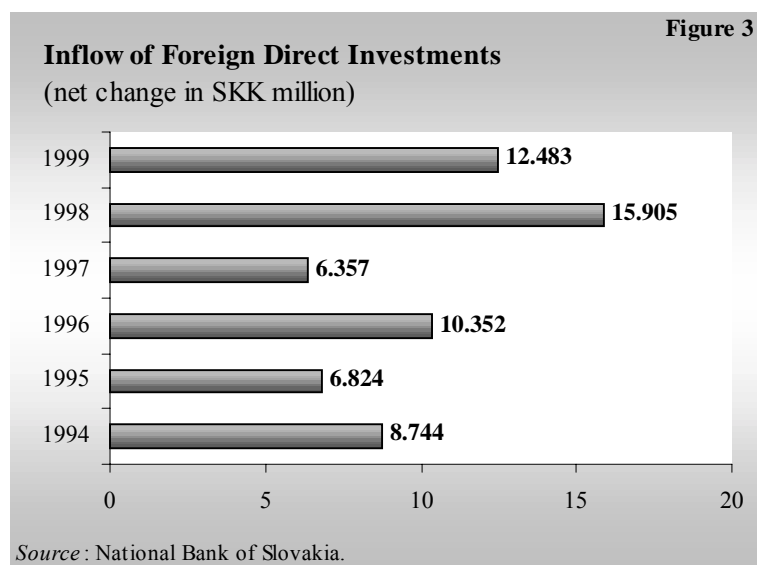
Year	Balance
1993	-6,4
1994	-1,6
1995	2,0
1996	-1,6
1997	-4,6
1998	-4,8
1999	-3,6

Source: Ministry of Finance of the SR (Pravda, April 11, 2000)

The trade balance deficit during the period of critical shortage of foreign direct investments illustrates the turn in the deepening destabilization of the economy (Figure 2).



- The rates, as well as the quality of structural reforms, were significantly slower in 1999 than expected by both lay people and the expert public. The government reduced corporate tax rates from 40 to 29 percent, with the expectation of producing higher economic growth rates, better employment rates, and consequently a better payment discipline. Also in 1999, the ambitious project of recovering Slovakia's enterprises, in particular banks, was launched. The so-called bad credits are being gradually centralized, and large State banks are becoming stronger with respect to their capital. The project will require about SKK 100 billion, thus becoming the largest reform step of the present government. The privatization of key Slovak banks is expected to be completed by 2001. Important changes in the legislative framework, with regard to business, were introduced in 1999 and 2000. Among them, accent was laid on mainly the amendment to the Bankruptcy and Settlement Act. Past restructuring of Slovakia's enterprises resulted in growing unemployment rates and, moreover, its pace was too slow (Johnson, 2000). In its May session, the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved the Freedom of Information Act. The act is expected to bring about (together with other steps such as privatization of some natural monopolies) a substantial reduction of corruption and improved transparency.
- The international image of Slovakia could be significantly improved. The numerous positive statements by prominent politicians from OECD Member States suggested this view. The substantial reduction of a so-called risk surcharge for trading in bonds of Slovakia (conditions were created for yields of Slovakia's Eurobonds dropping several times during the year) was also a positive sign. The improved international perception of Slovakia, however, could not be translated into an improved influx of foreign direct investments (although the fact should be accounted for that the growth of foreign investments in 1998 was evidently the result of property sales to foreigners due to worries about the outcome of the elections).



- The initial euphoria, which was based on promises concerning a draconian restriction of clientelism in the society, was followed by some disappointment. Polls have shown intensified corruption in Slovakia and public access to information did not improve. On one hand, there were police investigations of some business people suspected of engaging in an illegal practice. On the other hand, there was a growing accumulation of cases of suspected new political-economic associations. Again, the process of the creation of a society providing everybody with equal opportunities could not be satisfactorily launched in 1999.

It can be stated that "simple" reforms in Slovakia are basically completed. There are no significant differences in the economic performance of Slovakia and other Central European countries. Data on Slovakia's 1996 level of regional gross domestic product (GDP) can be derived from results presented by the Slovak Statistical Office.³ Per capita regional GDP for Slovakia, expressed in terms of the purchasing power, reached PPP\$ 8,100 in 1996, representing 45% of the average level achieved in the European Union (PPP\$ 18,100). The average level for Central European countries was PPP\$ 7,000. The per capita regional gross domestic product value for Slovakia ranks fourth among Central European countries, behind Slovenia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. The highest level of per capita GDP of all Central European countries was recorded for the region of Prague in the Czech Republic (PPP\$ 21,000), which is 120% of the European Union average and 311% of the average for Central European countries. This is followed by the region of Bratislava (PPP\$ 17,500), representing 97% of the European Union average, and 250% of the average for Central European countries. The performance of Slovakia's economy has exceeded its pre-transformation level by 1.5%⁴.

Slovakia stands at the beginning of a new stage of changes, characterized by more sophisticated politics, a slower course, and demands put on know-how. The most important changes include the restructuring of the banking sector, the reform of the business environment, changes in the education and health sectors, the public State administration, improvement of transparency, harmonization with the OECD system, and integration into the OECD and NATO. The year 1999 was a period during which unhealthy economic trends of the preceding period gradually faded away. It became the year of gradually decreasing hopes for an expedient restructuring of the economy. All reforms will apparently require a broader societal consensus that can be achieved in two ways. The first way is by creating a mechanism that will activate key entities

³ Data from 1996 were used to allow for comparison with the regions of Prague and Bratislava.

⁴ Okáli – Gabrielová – Hlavatý – Morvay - Outrata: *Overall Characterization of the Development of the Economy During the Preceding Year*. Hospodárske noviny, April 19, 2000.

outside of the government, such as associations of entrepreneurs, Trade Unions, and other non-governmental organizations. The second way is by waiting for the time when there will be no possibility other than a draconian change. 1999 did not eliminate any opportunity for implementation of the first variant. The year 2000 could become a positive breakthrough with respect to the trend analyzed.

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Training and Education

The National Human Development Report Slovak Republic 1999 concluded in the subchapter on education that the sector had been able to maintain the principal functionality despite rather painful financial and economic restrictions. It also concluded that this functionality would only survive for a short period of time for continuing the trend of providing for economic viability. The report also contained a rather imperative prediction that persistent societal disinterest in vital needs and the associated marginalization of seeking solutions would cause this area of human development to **collapse**.

This perspective characterizes the development during the previous year. The following preparatory activities have been launched: draft concept of training in educational development in Slovakia, the development of universities and colleges, draft law on the financing of schools, draft law on public service, suggestion to delegate powers in the education sector linked to the decentralization and upgrading of Slovakia's public service after 2001, etc., and the implementation of some partial measures. Possible measures included the rationalization of the secondary schools network as of the next school year and of the primary schools network as of the subsequent year, ongoing pedagogical verification of innovative trends concerning the contents, organization and forms of training and education as well as in the framework of international cooperation, a legal amendment extending the powers of self-governing school boards, etc. **There has been no principal breakthrough** in the critical area of financing. This has been suggested by a comparison of the budget for the education sector (except for colleges and universities) approved for 2000 with the data for 1999. Individual chapters of the budget for Slovakia's regions concern key parameters, such as current expenditures and wages and salaries of the employees.

Table 7

Financing of Pre-School Facilities, Primary Schools, Grammar Schools and Secondary Vocational Schools: Budgetary Data (in SKK thous.)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Wages and Salaries</i>	<i>Current Expenditures</i>	<i>of which Debt Reduction</i>
<i>Bratislava</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	1,003,001	1,761,524	58,362
	Approved for 2000	973,861	1,637,040	0
<i>Trnava</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	979,616	1,623,623	47,607
	Approved for 2000	939,410	1,525,404	0
<i>Trenčín</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	1,034,285	1,709,726	46,913
	Approved for 2000	990,603	1,628,592	0
<i>Nitra</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	1,213,120	2,059,069	79,866
	Approved for 2000	1,169,301	1,903,952	0
<i>Žilina</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	1,156,963	1,984,632	72,092
	Approved for 2000	1,076,917	1,692,319	0
<i>Banská Bystrica</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	1,170,825	1,958,233	110,905
	Approved for 2000	1,146,515	1,834,362	0
<i>Prešov</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	1,440,800	2,478,686	155,073
	Approved for 2000	1,440,754	2,369,646	0
<i>Košice</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	1,442,801	2,464,271	169,960
	Approved for 2000	1,320,600	2,134,097	0
<i>Slovakia</i>	<i>Is for 1999</i>	9,319,210	16,039,764	587,778
	Approved for 2000	9,057,961	14,725,412	0

Source: The Education Sector at Regional and District Level in Figures. In: *Teachers' Newspaper No. 21/2000 pp. 5-8*

It is evident from the above data that, according to the approved budget, the national average of expenditures on wages and current expenditures makes up SKK 10,092 and SKK 16,090 per learner respectively. After subtracting so-called fixed costs (rents, amenities) from the budget,

what remains is SKK 449 per learner for all other current expenditures, which the school or the teaching institution is expected to provide for.

Analysis of the Development and the Status Quo

Let us look at the actual status of the individual segments of the school system. The development of pre-school establishments in Slovakia could be stabilized. Recently, the unfavorable economic situation has resulted in a continuing reduction of public funds directed towards the training and education sector. The number of kindergartens and teachers has remained relatively constant. But, the number of children accepted (in absolute terms) has been reduced, albeit at a slower rate than the demographic trends. This is confirmed by the discretely growing proportions of pre-school children attending teaching institutions (78.67%, 82.66% and 85.39% respectively in 1997, 1998 and 1999), and – in particular – the proportions of children attending preschool establishments prior to the mandatory school attendance (84.25%, 87.82%, and 89.98% in respectively 1997, 1998 and 1999). In this respect, Slovakia ranks with other leading countries in Europe.

In 1999, a curious situation occurred in the primary schools. For almost 10 years, Slovakia had an Act that required nine years of school attendance that was enforced for the entire population of primary school children. The curious thing was that this happened during the final year specified by the Act. Since that time, an amendment to the Act extended mandatory school attendance to 10 years, effective in 2000. This requirement has affected the performance and thus the statistical parameters for both primary and secondary schools (increments and/or decrements of the corresponding subpopulations). A significant trend of the preceding period, "premature" separation of school-age youth, goes on through expansion of grammar schools to an 8-year study program. This program was originally intended for gifted learners. Approximately 23 percent of all grammar school students have already enrolled in this form of high school studies. Despite the demographic reduction within the primary school system, the trend of "opening shears" has prevailed. The number of learners drops. But, the number of primary schools increases. It is quite evident that this trend cannot last much longer, especially because of the currently unfavorable economic situation.

Secondary schools, in particular the system of vocational training, has been under unpleasant pressure. Legislation failed to standardize founder competencies under the umbrella of the education sector. But, the actual preparatory work for rationalization (read: reduction) of the secondary schools network has started. The unpleasant factor is that operation costs, rather than issues concerning the quality of school, have become the decision-making criterion.

A brief commentary is deserved on the Tables that provide an overview on the structure of Slovakia's education system. The Tables vividly illustrate the typical elements of Slovakia's education system:

- The prevailing dominance of the State system on education is reflected in the overall numbers of schools and educational establishments, as well as in the shares of learners attending the different types and kinds of schools;
- The high level of openness in all streams of secondary schools, colleges, and universities to the population of girls, suggesting that there has been no gender-based "educational" discrimination in Slovakia. The opposite is the case: we may speak of a growing feminization of some less traditional streams (e.g., besides nursing schools);
- The prevailing and increasing feminization of school faculties for both State and non-State schools that will not be stopped at the gates to universities and colleges. The most recent period of time is referred to as the "feminization decade" – with the smallest proportions of women being at secondary vocational establishments for apprentices (59.5%) and the highest ones at primary schools (83.5%);

- The prevailing success in the comparable numbers of both female and male students that graduate in all streams of secondary schools, universities, and colleges.

Table 8

The Network of Schools and Teaching Institutions in 1999/2000

Type of Institution	Number of Schools	Number of Students	of which Girls
Kindergartens	3,314	161,863	74,629
of which: state	3,294	161,173	74,227
private	11	336	165
church	9	354	187
Primary schools	2,482	672,042	327,756
of which: state	2,386	645,720	314,643
private	4	174	70
church	92	26,148	13,043
Grammar schools	209	76,662	43,062
of which: state	156	64,224	36,161
private	17	2,616	1,281
church	36	9,822	5,620
Vocational schools	348	89,542	52,906
of which: state	317	85,217	49,844
private	27	3,572	2,392
church	4	753	670
Apprenticeships	371	102,896	38,494
of which: state	356	100,453	37,431
private	10	1,549	785
church	5	894	278
Health care schools	31	9,528	8,475
of which: state	24	8,231	7,252
private	0	0	0
church	7	1,297	1,223
Special schools	381	30,736	13,279
of which: state	374	30,472	13,170
private	2	24	11
church	5	240	98
Universities^a	18	117,432	60,214
of which: full-time		88,192	42,859
part-time		29,240	17,355

Note: a. State universities and colleges only, without students-foreign nationals.

Source: Statistical Yearbook on Education of the Slovak Republic 1999, Institute of Information and Forecasting of Education, Bratislava, (2000).

The following Table 9 presents 1999 data for the key types of educational institutions. The data provides a clear-cut picture of the overall numbers of teachers and the feminization rates within Slovakia's mainstream system of education during 1999. It should be mentioned that there are also other pedagogical workers (educators, wardens, masters of vocational training, etc.) as well as non-pedagogical staff participating directly in the process of training and education besides the teachers in the school system.

Table 9

Teachers in the Network of Schools and Teaching Institutions in Slovakia in 1999

Type of Institution	State		Private		Church		Total	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
Kindergartens	15,743	-	30	-	34	-	15,807	-
<i>of which females</i>	15,743	-	30	-	34	-	15,807	-
Primary schools	39,173	2,326	29	15	1,748	175	40,950	2,516
<i>of which females</i>	32,698	1,011	23	8	1,434	83	34,155	1,102
Grammar schools	5,173	636	220	163	772	201	6,165	1,000
<i>of which females</i>	3,786	333	163	104	577	105	4,526	542
Vocational schools	8,916	1,605	295	339	89	52	9,300	1,996
<i>of which females</i>	5,907	837	221	221	74	30	6,202	1,088
Apprenticeships	5,749	956	88	56	45	22	5,882	1034
<i>of which females</i>	3,746	506	61	30	25	9	3,832	545
Special schools	4,276	128	5	-	56	-	4,337	128
<i>of which females</i>	3,594	93	4	-	52	-	3,650	93
Health care schools	747	973	-	-	137	100	884	1,037
<i>of which females</i>	659	621	-	-	121	58	780	679
Primary schools/arts	3,434	75	5	-	56	-	3,498	856
<i>of which females</i>	2,419	59	4	-	52	-	2,461	543
Universities	9,049	2,085	-	-	-	-	9,049	2,085
<i>of which females</i>	3,514	660	-	-	-	-	3,514	660

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic 1999, Institute of Information and Forecasting of Education, Bratislava, (2000).

Training, Graduates and Employment

Let us now look at the relationship between education and employment. One of the marked parameters of the efficiency of the educational system is how graduates of secondary schools are able to access and function in the labor market. On the other hand, new school graduates are known to be among those at highest risk for entry into the labor market. Unfortunately, Slovakia at present lacks any strategic "planning" to deal with preventive monitoring of employment needs in accordance with both present and future population development, the structure of regional economies, job structures by the individual sectors, expected needs of labor, retraining, etc. As a result, Slovakia's education system has little or no pressure to provide for feedback information on employment opportunities for school graduates. Most Regional Offices in Slovakia (the dominant founders of State secondary schools) do not monitor registries of unemployed graduates. The economy's sectors, agriculture, or associations of production and consumption cooperatives do not follow the fate of graduates. Even the National Labor Office and the Institute of Information and Forecasting of Education do not have the necessary comprehensive information available. The following tables provide a picture of the current situation.

Table 10

Secondary School Graduates, 1998/1999 (regular and evening courses together)

Type of Institution	State		Private		Church		Total	
	Total	Females	Total	Females	Total	Females	Total	Females
Grammar schools	13,791	8,010	548	310	1,297	780	15,636	9,100
Vocational schools	26,829	15,916	1,152	787	211	189	28,242	16,892
Health care schools	3,857	3,382	-	-	495	467	4,352	3,849
Special schools	1,111	437	-	-	-	-	1,111	437

Apprenticeships 44,659 17,710 915 421 344 128 45,918 18,259

Source: Statistical Yearbook of the Slovak Republic 1999, Institute of Information and Forecasting of Education, Bratislava, (2000).

Before going into details about employment of graduates, it would be appropriate to show data on secondary school graduates enrolling directly in colleges and universities.

Table 11

Fresh Secondary School Graduates Enrolling in Colleges and Universities

Institution	Graduates	Admitted	% of Graduates
Grammar schools	15,636	9,569	61%
Vocational schools	32,594	6,109	19%
Apprenticeships	45,918	1,002	2%

Source: Internal Documents of the Institute of Information and Forecasting of Education, Bratislava, January 2000.

If unemployment rates are considered to be the share of unemployed secondary school graduates on the overall numbers of secondary school graduates, the highest unemployment rates in the Slovak Republic appears to be for graduates of secondary vocational schools (47%), followed by graduates of secondary vocational establishments for apprentices (42%). The "best off" (relatively) are graduates of grammar schools with "only" 25.1% unemployment. This countrywide data is detailed by individual regions in Table 12.

Table 12

Comparison of Unemployment Rates of Secondary School Graduates (%), 1998/1999

Region	Unemployed Graduates of GrS	Unemployed Graduates of VoS	Unemployed Graduates of Ap	Unemployed Graduates of SeS
Bratislava	12.9	21.6	24.3	20.6
Trnava	24.3	42.8	51.6	42.8
Trenčín	25.9	36.5	46.7	38.3
Nitra	29.3	43.5	52.8	44.5
Žilina	29.1	45.4	48.8	44.1
Banská Bystrica	25.1	40.2	45.9	39.8
Prešov	29.4	51.4	57.3	49.9
Košice	29.9	49.9	51.9	46.9
Slovakia	25.1	42.0	47.0	40.9

Note: GrS - Grammar schools. VoS – Vocational schools. Ap – Apprenticeships. SeS – Secondary schools in total.

Source: Internal documents of the Institute of Information and Forecasting of Education, Bratislava, January 2000.

The Education System on the Background of the EU Integration Process

During 1999, Slovakia's process for EU integration intensified with respect to the education system. Various organizations are involved in the process. The SR/EU Association Council, the highest joint board of the Slovak Republic and the European Union, represents the institutional level of the EU relationship, in terms of the European Agreement. It is in charge of supervising the performance of the Agreement. Issues on implementation of the European Agreement are handled by The *Joint Parliamentary Committee of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and the European Parliament*, which includes the *SR/EU Association Committee*, *8 association subcommittees*, and *29 working groups of the negotiation team* with representatives of the central authorities of the State administration and professionals at the expert level.

Working Group No.18 – Education, Vocational Training, and Youth deals with specific tasks concerning the education system and the process of EU integration. All decisions of the Slovak Government under No.50 of January 20, 1999 (Schedule of Tasks Arising from the Regular Report of the European Commission on the Preparedness of Slovakia for EU Membership) concerning the sector of education have been fulfilled to meet the 1999 deadline. The decisions included a return to the issuance of bilingual report cards, adoption of legislation providing for use of languages of ethnic minorities, and rationalization of the integration structure. All this was positively assessed by the regular EC Report of October 13, 1999. A critical situation concerning the staff, however, puts at risk the fulfillment of the ongoing task to harmonize the generally binding legal regulations in the system of education with EU legislation. Standards for only 400 out of a total of 830 selected occupations have been drafted to enable comparison of qualifications acquired by vocational training, as adopted by the Resolution of the European Council. In Slovakia, 7 different ministries are responsible for vocational training and education, which makes inter-sector coordination and adjustment of the pedagogical documents difficult.

Box 2

EU Programs in the Area of Education

Slovakia's participation in community programs in the area of education and training of young people – including *Socrates*, *Leonardo da Vinci*, and *Youth for Europe III*, as well as their subprograms, made possible by resolution No. 1/98 of the SR/EU Association Council of 3 March, 1998 – have been assessed positively. The objective of these programs has been direct participation of Slovakia's teaching institutions and organizations for the youth, State administration and the social partners in international EU programs. Slovakia paid for these programs in 1999 as a contribution from the State Budget amounting to EUR 2,309,430, with a portion of the contribution (making up EUR 1,989,430) being covered from PHARE funds. Since the associated countries are not expected to have separate budgets for the individual programs for the second stage of the community programs for 2000-2006 as has been the case so far, criteria for the quality of the submitted projects shall have to be more stringent so that Slovakia will be able to draw down contributed funds.

Closely connected with the integration process is the comparison of expenditures in the sector of education and training by developed European countries and Slovakia. Since statistical data from other countries are time-shifted, total public expenditures by EU Member States at all levels can be compared based on average

shares on gross domestic product (GDP) for 1995 (EU) and for the period of 1995-98 (Slovakia). Table 13 confirms that Slovakia's flow of public funds into the education sector were constantly restricted. The table also confirms the deviation from the Slovak Government's declared program goals "...to gradually increase funds intended to secure the education sector to achieve a share on GDP comparable with EU Member States".

Table 13

Public Expenditures on Education in Slovakia 1995-1998 (as % of GDP)

Year	Total	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education	Other (pre-school)
1995	5.2	1.5	1.2	0.9	1.6 (0.5)
1996	5.0	1.5	1.2	0.8	1.5 (0.5)
1997	4.8	1.4	1.2	0.9	1.3 (0.4)
1998	4.6	1.3	1.1	0.9	1.3 (0.4)

Source: Internal document for the meeting of the Slovak Government, based on Resolution No. 671 of August 11, 1999.

Table 14

Public Expenditures on Education in Developed European Countries 1995 (as % of GDP)

Country	Total	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education
Belgium	5.7	1.2	2.7	1.2
Denmark	8.0	1.7	3.2	1.9
France	6.0	1.2	3.0	1.1
Netherlands	5.2	1.2	2.1	1.6
Austria	5.6	1.2	2.7	1.1
Finland	7.3	1.8	2.7	2.1
Sweden	7.8	2.0	3.1	2.2
Norway	7.5	2.3	1.7	2.0
EU	5.2	1.0	2.7	1.1

Source: Internal document for the meeting of the Slovak Government, based on Resolution No. 671 of August 11, 1999.

At the first glance, 1995 levels of total expenditures (percentages of GDP) were similar, but their internal structure was different. EU Member States spent 4.8 percent of their respective GDP on primary, secondary and tertiary education while Slovakia spent only 3.6 percent. Conversely, EU countries spent 0.4 percent of their GDP on other education-related areas, including pre-school education, while Slovakia spent 1.6 percent (which included 0.5 percent on pre-school education). This is attributable to the fact that Slovakia's other expenditures on education includes expenditures for catering, accommodation, and a portion of education sector expenditures for State administration.

Quality of Life and the System of Education

Worldwide, the young generation's quality of life is linked to the risk of *drug addiction*. Epidemiological data on the drug problem points to the fact that drugs are easily available and frequently offered to young people. The risk of drug addiction affects the entire population of children.

For years, Slovakia's sector of education has been making an effort, in the framework of the National Program of Fighting Drug Abuse, to reduce the risk of drug addiction. Preventive activities use a variety of strategies as an integral part of the process of education and training from kindergartens through secondary schools. In 1999, in accordance with the document "*Measures to Fight Drugs*" there were 25 centers of educational and psychological prevention operating in Slovakia. The mission has been to provide children at risk with special social, psychological and therapeutic/educational care. The centers run numerous preventative projects in the sector of education. These programs are intended for children and young people, teachers, parents, and the broader community.

Nevertheless, results of the European School Survey on the use of illicit drugs suggested increasing trends in the use of marijuana and synthetic drugs. Besides illicit drugs, young people continue to smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol. Comparative 1995 and 1999 data from representative European School Survey (ESPAD) showed a need for intensifying and expanding systematic preventive activities. Comparisons of ESPAD 95 and ESPAD 99 studies in Slovakia conducted among secondary school students are presented in Tables 15 and 16.

Table 15

Drugs Taken Once or Several Times Within 30 days (% of 15-18-year old individuals)

Drug	1995	1999
Tobacco	30.0	38.2
Alcohol	57.3	64.2
Marijuana	3.1	7.0

Note: ESPAD 95 included a sample of 7,975 students, ESPAD 99 a sample of 8,295 students.
Source: Institute for Health Education, National Health Promotion Center, State Health Institute of the Slovak Republic.

Table 16

Easily and Rather Easily Available Drugs (% of 15-18-year old individuals)

Drug	1995	1999
Ecstasy	4.7	17.6
LSD and hallucinogens	8.5	16.4
Amphetamines	8.0	14.1
Tranquilizers	12.3	19.5
Heroin	9.9	12.7
Marijuana	29.1	45.6
Volatile inhalation substances	32.4	39.5

Note: ESPAD 95 included a sample of 7,975 students, ESPAD 99 a sample of 8,295 students.
Source: Institute for Health Education, National Health Promotion Center, State Health Institute of the Slovak Republic.

Another significant indicator of the young generation's quality of life is the availability of *communication technologies*. Data from February 1999 shows that more than 90 percent of the households had a color TV, 44.1 percent had teletext, 34.4 percent had a cable TV connection, 37.3 percent had either common or private satellite dish, 45.4 percent had a videorecorder, 9.3 percent had a video camera, 38.1 percent had a CD player, 48.4 percent had a walkman, 75 percent had telephone, 21.7 percent had a PC, and 3.1 percent had Internet connectivity. The research data acquired by Bratislava's National Center of Media Communication also confirmed that household acquisitions of communication technologies is markedly dependent on the education level of the parents. Only 10.9 percent households of respondents with basic education have a PC, whereas the corresponding figure for respondents with tertiary education is as high as 49.5 percent. Internet access is available to 0.7 percent and 13.4 percent respondents with basic and tertiary education, respectively.

The data shows that entertainment electronics is available to secondary school students predominantly in their homes, whereas there are more opportunities to access computers and Internet at school. The opportunity to access communication technologies at other places (such as in parents' office, at friends, at the hostel, etc.) is important with respect to the Internet (almost 30 percent), video camera (31%), facsimile (30.2%), and multimedia computer (36.7%). These are appliances that are mostly not available at home or at school.

Table 17

Accessibility of Communication Technologies to Secondary School Generation (%)

Appliances	At home	At school	Elsewhere	Total
Color TV	93.2	58.6	49.9	201.7
Telephone	90.0	29.8	49.1	168.9
Video VCR	49.2	44.2	46.3	139.7
PC	38.5	46.4	37.7	122.6
Walkman	75.8	9.3	34.0	119.1
CD player	55.4	9.7	42.5	107.6
Music tower	55.4	4.8	45.9	106.1
Teletext	57.4	4.9	42.4	104.7
Cable TV	54.5	3.9	35.7	94.1
Multi PC	29.1	19.6	36.7	85.4
Mobile phone	31.2	2.8	36.0	70.0
Common satellite dish	34.2	3.2	26.1	63.5
Internet	5.7	21.6	29.1	56.4
Black&white TV	24.4	4.6	26.4	54.6
Individual satellite dish	28.6	1.6	24.4	54.6
Video camera	13.2	2.1	31.0	46.3
Fax	7.4	4.6	30.2	42.2

Source: Brečka, S.: *Accessibility of Communication Technologies to the Young Generation. (Dostupnosť komunikačnej techniky pre mládež)*. In: *Technology of Education 2/2000*, pp. 11-12.

Table 18

Accessibility of Communication Technologies at the Individual Types of Schools (%)

School	Color TV	VCR	PC	Multi PC	Internet
Grammar schools	82.1	69.0	58.9	22.0	37.8
Apprenticeships	31.7	14.5	24.9	7.7	2.4
Vocational schools	47.3	31.0	56.1	27.0	17.6
Business schools	47.3	40.4	62.4	24.9	37.1
School of arts	26.1	21.6	0.0	0.0	0.0
Health care schools	59.0	45.3	24.8	11.1	0.9
Hotel academies	63.9	45.5	46.1	29.8	16.8
Other schools	77.1	45.8	30.1	13.3	2.4
Total	58.6	44.2	46.4	19.6	21.6

Source: Brečka, S.: *Accessibility of Communication Technologies to the Young Generation. (Dostupnosť komunikačnej techniky pre mládež)*. In: *Technology of Education 2/2000*, pp. 11-12.

Table 19

Accessibility of Communication Technologies at Homes by Gender

Appliances	Boys	Girls	Total
<i>Video VCR</i>	48.0	50.1	49.2
<i>Music tower</i>	59.2	52.9	55.4
<i>CD player</i>	58.9	53.1	55.4
<i>Walkman</i>	74.2	76.8	75.8
<i>PC</i>	43.8	35.0	38.5
<i>Multi PC</i>	36.7	24.1	29.1
Internet	7.1	4.8	5.7

Source: Brečka, S.: *Accessibility of Communication Technologies to the Young Generation*, In: *Technology of Education 2/2000*, pp. 11-12.

The *quality of the education* provided also represents a significant factor that affects the quality of life for the young generation. The quality of education depends on human resources,

specifically on the qualification level and expertise of teachers. The situation in this area is far from optimistic. Young graduates avoid jobs within the education sector due to poor social conditions. The staff gradually ages and the average age of teachers keeps increasing. The share of teachers aged less than 40 decreases and the share of teachers aged above 51 increases. The proportions of teachers-pensioners is also growing: their share at primary and special schools is almost 11 percent, while being about 8 percent at primary schools of arts and secondary schools. The situation developing at tertiary teaching institutions is frightening, with the average age of professors approaching 60 years.

Table 20

Qualification Ranking (in ascending order by the shares of qualified teachers, in %)

Type of Institution	Qualified Teachers
Special schools	55.61
Primary schools	78.67
Secondary vocational schools	80.45
Primary schools of arts	81.25
Apprenticeships	84.43
Grammar schools	94.29
Kindergartens	96.58

Source: Internal materials.

The statistical averages shown in Table 20 will naturally have large deviations, depending on the specific territory of Slovakia.

Within the context of the quality of life, *programs to support special interest activities of children and the young people* may be generally assessed positively as prevention and protection from negative phenomena. Civil associations working with children and young people play an important role in this respect and they receive support from public funds via the budget of the education sector. To a significant extent, such entities provide for a broad range of activities within the area of culture, sports, international contacts, holidays and leisure, spreading of information concerning employment. They also address the negative phenomena that markedly affect children and young people. All this is done through the implementation of projects under protective, supporting, international, holiday and leisure time, training and creative programs. In 1999, SKK 18 million were allocated for sporting civil associations' programs and activities, and SKK 20 million for civil associations of children and young people (who have an 8 percent share on the total population of Slovakia aged below 26 years).

The schools and teaching institutions offer a broad range of special interest activities for gifted children and for children and young people with physical handicaps. In 1999, a total of 70,393 children participated in regular activities of 137 leisure time centers in 4,960 special interest groups (sports, culture, natural and social sciences). 1,548,248 participants attended occasional events (subject competitions, school Olympic games, discussions, trips, etc.). And, 29,170 young people spent time in 861 summer camps.

Conclusions

It is important to show how the system of schools responds (or should respond) to changing conditions, such as the information explosion, the rapid pace of innovations in technologies, the transition from the primary and secondary to the tertiary sphere of economy, and globalization of the world.

In this respect, the government's verbal declarations on the permanent priority of training and education should be materialized, and appropriate economic and personnel resources should be provided. The creation of a favorable legal and social climate by launching changes, primarily in the philosophy of education, training, and the contents of training, is inevitable. Changes are also planned in the methods of education and in the training of teachers, based on a broad public discussion oriented towards the drafting of the National Program on Education and Training. This will improve educational conditions that could create more favorable lifelong employment opportunities.

The outcome of primary, secondary and tertiary schools, as well as other teaching institutions in Slovakia having been involved in EU programs, have shown that these institutions are able to compete with and to be equal partners to institutions in EU Member States. The number of approved projects per capita demonstrates Slovakia's competitiveness, ranking among the most successful associated countries. Partnership-based cooperation allows comparison and harmonization of education systems. Although every country has its own specifics, mutual cooperation contributes to standardization of results of the training and education process, thus providing graduates with the ability to make their way in the single European labor market. Successful continuation of the integration trends will require the coordination of such programs. In this way, students, young people, teachers, and the general public become significantly aware of their European dimension.

To provide for the quality of life of the young generation, it will be necessary to strengthen prevention and protection of children and the young people from negative phenomena. There will need to be continuing support for special-interest programs so that children and youth will be encouraged to use their leisure time in a positive manner. This will require more pronounced financial, organizational, and legal support for these activities and the institutions involved in the implementation of such activities.

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Demographic Development and the Situation in Health

Major Demographic Developments

Birth rates are the demographic process that attracts most attention among all the demographic processes because it is a parameter most strongly linked to the future development of the society. In the 1990s, Slovakia could not avoid the media's dealing of the birth rates process. Attention focused mainly on the reduction of the birth rates that was made overly dramatic and frequently dealt with within some ideological frameworks, without any expert discussion. Focusing on gross quantitative parameters without confronting them with so-called "soft" data (surveys of the population climate, value preferences of the population, etc.) frequently results in simplified interpretations and crisis development scenarios. Disputes concern the issues of the reasons and impacts of the reducing birth rates.

It is true that birth rates in Slovakia have decreased throughout the 1990s, as suggested by all natality parameters monitored. This however has not been a homogenous decrease. In monitoring long-term development, approximately three different periods of birth rates reduction can be distinguished in the recent century:

- During the 1920s-1940s, when gross birth rates dropped from 35.3 (1921) to 22.8 live births per 1,000 inhabitants (1940);
- Towards the late 1950s and during the 1960s, with a decrease to the level of 17.0 live births per 1,000 inhabitants (1968);
- After 1976.

The latest reduction in birth rates is a long-term phenomenon that could not have been stopped during the most recent decade. It became even more intensive during the early 1990s and continued. In 1997, live births for the first time dropped below 60,000, and the 1999 gross birth rates reached 10.4 live births per 1,000. Rather than seeking opportunities to improve the conditions of life of children and to improve support of parenthood, these facts are frequently taken out of context and abused to promote political or ideological objectives. Nationalists argue that the nation is getting extinct and jeopardized by the Roma ethnic high birth rates (Slovak National Party, a portion of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia, and most recently also Smer). The most frequently cited religious position for decreasing birth rates is the "adoption of western models" and "orientation of young people towards consumption".

A comparison of European countries toward the end of the 20th century reveals that Slovakia has not at all been out of the general trend. It has even had the highest gross birth rates of all the Central European countries, higher than Poland where abortions are prohibited. By its birth rates level, it has even exceeded traditionally Catholic countries, such as Italy and Spain. Only northern countries have higher birth rates, including high percentages of children born outside of marriage (35-54 percent of all births).

In the past, Slovakia's birth rates had some specific characteristics. The age of women that delivered their first baby was among the lowest found in European countries. Another peculiarity was the high proportion of women that were pregnant at the time of wedding (estimated at almost 50 percent). These facts suggest the low level of freedom of men and women in partner selection and realization of parenthood.

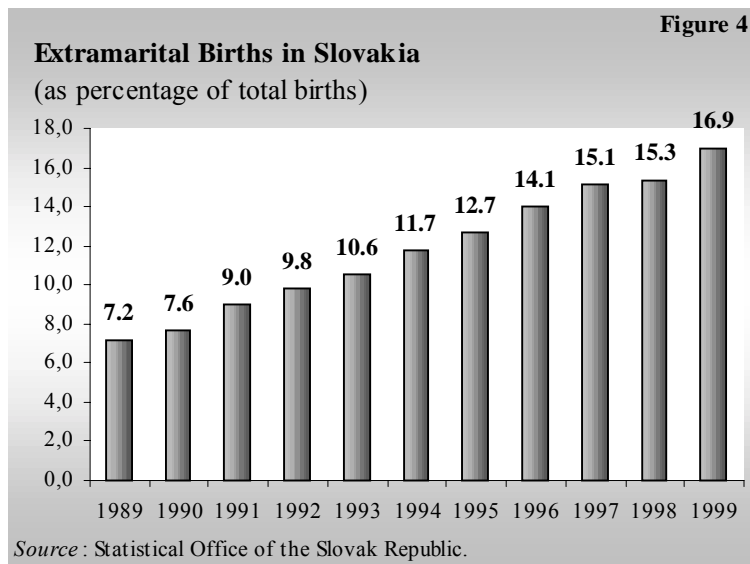
Slovak women's contraceptive methods were mostly the mechanical method of a so-called *intrauterine devices* (e.g., 11.7 percent of childbearing age women used them in 1987), while hormonal contraception was used by only 2.5 percent of childbearing age women. In most cases, prevention of pregnancy was a matter for the woman. Men would expect women to take care of this problem.

As a rule, the delivery of a first child would be quickly followed by the birth of a second baby, and less frequently by a third baby. Only rarely did a fourth and fifth child follow; higher numbers of children were most typical of Roma mothers. The two-child family model strengthened in Slovakia during the 1980s. More than one fourth of the families were families with two dependent children. There was a decrease in the percentages of families with more than two children and with only a single child.

Mothers would typically return to work when their children were still relatively young. Most children who were born in that period of time attended pre-school facilities, such as day-care centers and kindergartens. Young parents had to cope with changes associated with their working, as well as their marital and parental role starting at almost the same time. Most of them were unable to cope with the situation without receiving assistance from their parents.

After 1989, Slovakia experienced positive trends in the reproductive behavior of its population. The age of the mothers at delivery time gradually increased, shifting from the critical level of 21 years during the 1980s towards 23.6 for primiparas and 26 years for mothers in general during 1999. These age averages helped Slovakia reach the standard levels of Eastern European countries, but still at a level 3-4 years younger than Western European countries. Also, data concerning fertility of women by specific ages confirms this tendency of childbearing shifting towards higher ages. During the recent 5 years, the decrease of birth rates of women aged 25 years+ had stopped and even had a slight increase, as shown by the most recent data.

Compared to Western countries, the proportion of extramarital births in Slovakia is relatively small. They made up 16.9 percent of all births in 1999, i.e., 1.77 babies per thousand persons. Slovakia prevalingly takes a condemning position in this respect because of its low level of tolerance to coexistence forms other than life in marriage.



The main reason for the decreasing birth rates in Slovakia is that *young people postpone parenthood towards higher age* rather than being subjected to "decadence and engulfed by consumption". We should welcome this trend after having a period of immature people marrying, and of frequently pregnancy-enforced parenthood.

For many decades, Slovakia's *marriage rates* were characterized by a high rate of marriage and a low age at wedding time. Both factors have had deep cultural and historical roots, based upon the traditional rural family's values and way of life, and the strong influence of Christian faith for the raising of families. A marital family is considered the universal way for one's life career,

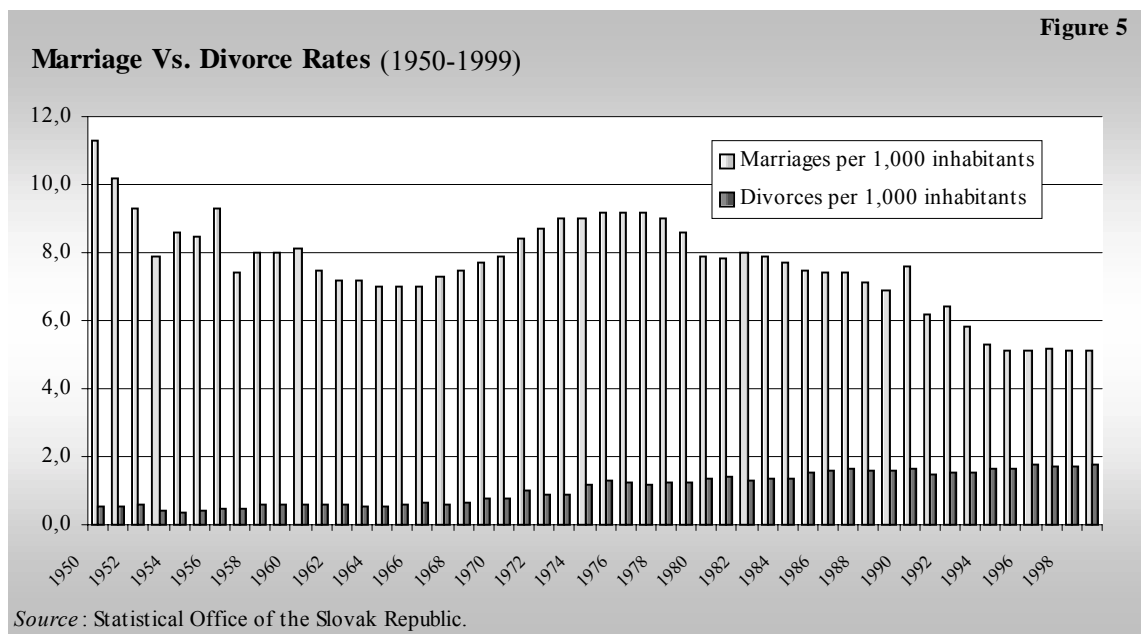
as shown by more than 90 percent of people marrying at least once in their lives. The institution of matrimony, supported by Christian tradition, has always had a high value for Slovakia's population. Several studies in recent years have confirmed that matrimony will remain highly appreciated, since only 6 percent of the population considers marriage as an outdated institution. (*European...*, 1991, Filadelfiová – Guráň 1997)

Under the communist establishment, marriage provided some advantages. It provided a "ticket" to acquire housing, and also provided young married couples an opportunity to obtain advantageous financial credit. These advantages were abolished in 1990, making conditions more difficult for establishment of a family. Setting up one's own household became more difficult for most of young people because housing construction stopped and intensified the shortage of housing. Housing has become financially unaffordable.

Over many years, Slovakia has been among the countries with highest marriage rates and smallest divorce rates. Prior to 1990, marriage rates ranged from 7 to 10 weddings per 1,000. The variations over time were due to changes in the number of people in various age groups, not to any significant behavior changes of young people. Since the end of the 1970s, the marriage rate had a gradual and slight decrease. With the exception of 1990 and 1992, these trends were maintained throughout the mid-1990s, when marriage rates stabilized at approximately 5 marriages per 1,000 inhabitants.

During this period, the average age of both men and women at the first wedding increased. For many prior years, it had been 22.5 for women and 24 years for men. In 1999, the average age of the bride had increased to 24.8 years with respect to all marriages, and to 23.1 years for previously unmarried women. For the bridegrooms, the average age increased to 27.7 years for all marriages, and to 25.6 years for previously unmarried men.

The rate of re-marriage also decreased with the decreasing in overall marriage rates. It was typically the rule in the past that the time between the divorce and the subsequent wedding would be rather short, especially for men. During 1999, 83.5 percent of all marriages were for previously unmarried people. There were also higher rates of re-marriage, with 6 percent of new marriages being between a divorced bridegroom and a previously unmarried bride, and 2 percent less for marriages between a divorced bride and a previously unmarried bridegroom. Less than 5 percent of marriages had both divorced fiancés.



Divorce rates are also an important (and discussed) demographic phenomena in Slovakia. However, the actual development with respect to divorce rates is less dramatic. Divorce rates kept increasing slowly and regularly decade after decade. The 1990s have not brought in any significant change to this trend. During the late 1980s, there were 1.6 divorces per every 1,000 people. This trend changed after the political events in 1989, when divorce rates dropped for 3

Box 3

Divorces in 1999

There were 1.79 divorces per 1,000 in 1999 in Slovakia. A total of 9,664 marriages ended in divorce, almost 80 percent were filed by women, representing about a 10 percent increase compared to preceding years. The average duration of marriage increased 12.3 years.

consecutive years. A similar situation occurred after 1996. People seem to avoid any radical breaking of family ties in unstable social conditions. These slight oscillations played an episodic role in divorce rates, resulting in no change in the trends.

In the past, only 25 percent of divorces were without children while 75 percent had dependent children. In 1999, it dropped to 70 percent. After a divorce, children mostly remain with their mothers. This long-term trend has influenced the structure of single-parent families. The mother headed almost 90 percent of 190,000 such families in 1991, and the remaining 10 percent were headed by the father. The term single-parent family in Slovakia has come to mean a lonely woman with a dependent child or children in 90 out of 100 cases (more than 60 percent with a single child, almost 30 percent with 2 children, and about 10 percent with three or more children).

In Slovakia's past, the most negative demographic development was **high rates of abortions** to terminate undesired pregnancies. Abortions, also referred to as artificial termination of pregnancy (ATP), have basically replaced contraception, even for women with higher education. This presumably is due to inadequate information on the method of planned parenthood and prevention of pregnancy. Many women have had repeated abortions. This situation has been typical for all communist countries, with Romania as the only exception where abortions had been prohibited before 1989.

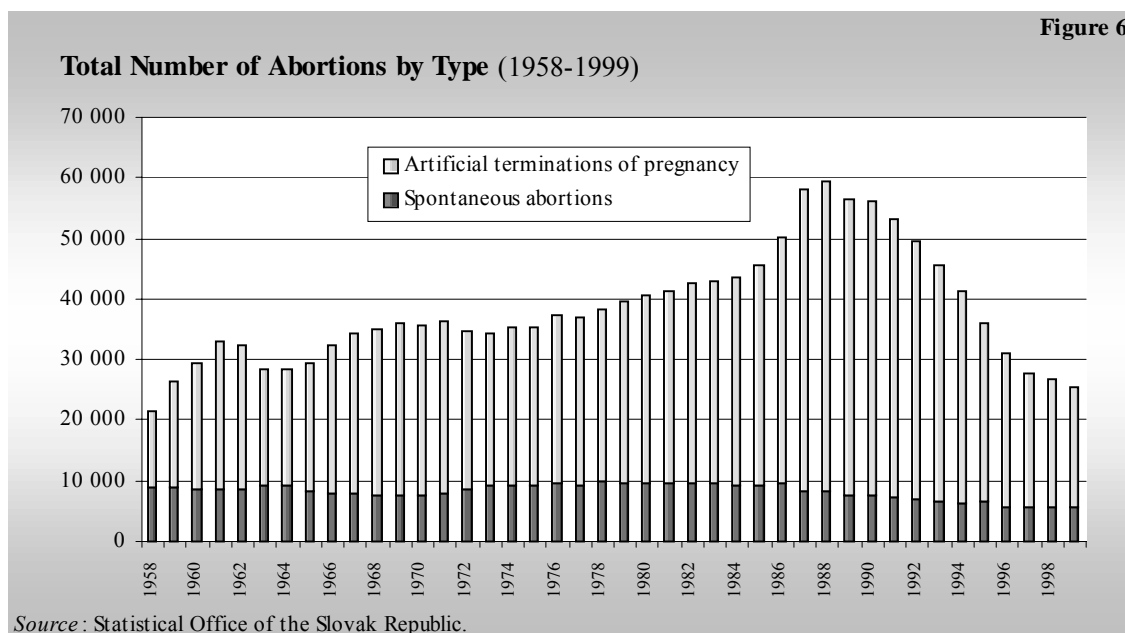
Official data on abortions have been recorded in Slovakia since 1953, and ATPs have been reported separately since 1958, i.e., one year after the adoption of the Abortion Act. During the communist era, abortions would be used instead of contraceptives. This is confirmed by the birth and abortion rates that show mutually opposite patterns, where abortion rates decline with increasing birth rates and vice versa. The overall numbers of pregnancies remained at an approximately constant level.

A sudden growth in the abortion rate resulted from a change in ethical approaches along with a lack of education and contraceptives. The abortion rate grew from the initial value of 13 abortions per 100 births in 1958 up to 61 abortions per 100 births in 1988. In absolute numbers, abortions grew from 12,383 in 1958 to 51,000 in 1988. The highest abortion rates over many years concerned older women, mostly those around 30 years of age. They resolved unwanted pregnancies through abortion, especially for those where it was their third or higher pregnancy.

Slovakia's abortion rate has decreased year after year since the early 1990s, a positive turn that is a unique phenomenon among the former Eastern block countries. The rate has dropped in recent years below the 1958 level, suggesting that the 30-year growth could be reversed. In absolute numbers, there has been an almost 60 percent reduction in the number of abortions (from 59,352 in 1958 to 25,557 in 1999). The gross abortion rates, i.e., abortions per 1,000, dropped by 3/5 (from 11.3 to 4.7).

Not infrequently, the public gets a distorted picture of abortion rates. Overall data on abortion rates are presented as artificial terminations of pregnancy (ATP). The internal structure of

abortion is not taken into account. From a legal aspect, abortions are classified as spontaneous abortions and as artificial (induced) abortions. Within the group of ATPs, demography and gynecology recognize ATPs due to health condition (when life or health of the mother is at risk) and so-called mini-abortions (up to 6 weeks of gestation). Spontaneous abortions make up 16 percent to 25 percent of the total numbers of abortions. Those numbers dropped below 6,000 in recent years. ATPs have been showing an even more pronounced decline than the overall number of abortions, dropping 61 percent since 1988. The 1999 gross ATP rate represents 3.7 ATP per 1,000.



The number of ATPs remains high despite its decreasing and gratifying trend. Experts recommend placing a stronger emphasis on prevention and on prevention incentives, i.e., to a more responsible approach to one's own reproductive health, as defined at the UN (WHO).

Due to differences in the legislation and reporting systems, it is difficult to make meaningful international comparisons of abortion rates. Available data indicates that a majority of Western European countries have relatively low levels of abortion rates, whereas the situation is opposite in the majority of the former Eastern block countries, where the abortion rates are high. There is almost no Western European country with more than 30 abortions per 100 births, whereas the numbers of abortions are much higher than numbers of births in many Eastern European countries (Romania, Russia, Ukraine, Estonia). In Slovakia, there were 38 abortions per 100 births in 1997 and only 35 per 100 in 1999. Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, and Croatia are on their way to reaching the levels for European Union Member States. The experience of Romania and Poland shows that legislation alone is unable to resolve this problem. Immediately after the liberalization of abortions in Romania, abortion rates soared to the highest level in Europe. As soon as abortions were banned in Poland, so-called "abortion tourism" started to intensify, i.e., people were "commuting" to the neighboring countries (Lithuania, Slovakia, Czech Republic) to have an abortion. The number of illicit abortions and gynecological diseases increased.

Slovakia's history suggests that ATPs were legalized because a high number of illicit abortions in the 1950s resulted in high death rates of mothers, murders of newborns, and a number of other health and social impacts. Therefore, a so-called Abortion Act was adopted in 1957 to enable free of charge ATPs based on the decision of Abortion Committees. Unlike Western Europe, where abortion-related legislation was preceded by promotion of contraception and sex

education, Slovakia went a different way. The absence of contraception and sex education resulted in ATP being perceived as a standard way to terminate undesired pregnancy, resulting in high numbers of ATPs. This development was typical for all communist countries.

The Abortion Act was liberalized in 1986. It cancelled Abortion Committees and made the ATP decision to be that of the woman alone. It was performed free of charge, under health insurance. This resulted in a further increase in the numbers of ATPs. Availability of contraceptives improved after 1989, as did information on issues concerning reproductive health and sexual behaviors. Public moral pressure against ATPs increased. Due to all these factors, the number of ATPs started to decrease dramatically. The legislation was made stricter in 1995. A law was adopted to introduce a fee for an ATP (ATPs were excluded from health insurance). In this way, Slovak legislation got to a level comparable with a majority of European countries.

The number of ATPs kept decreasing throughout the second half of the 1990s. The moral appeal against the liberal law of 1986 shifted during the second half of the 1990s to become anti-propaganda against the philosophy of reproductive health, against prenatal diagnosis, contraception and sterilization, against the use of condoms, as well as against the sexual revolution. The main reason for this argumentation has been the continuing reduction of birth rates.

Opinions and attitudes concerning contraception and ATPs are not consistent throughout Slovakia's population. Surveys indicate that a majority of the population takes a moderate

Box 4

Reproductive Health vs Legal and Ethical Norms

A relatively tough discussion started among advocates of various opinions concerning reproductive health issues. While complaining of insufficient legal protection, physicians – gynecologists took the worst position in this situation. The State obligates doctors to perform numerous activities whose performance relies on the respect of human ethical standards as well as on the signing of various international commitments. However, such commitments are sometimes incompatible with ethical religious positions. With respect to such conflicts, the State leaves doctors in legal uncertainty. There have been several cases of gynecologists refusing to perform abortions because of a "conflict of conscience." For example, all doctors in one hospital refused to perform the intervention. (Conference..., 2000)

position on issues of reproduction, with 86 percent supporting the opinion that *"responsible individuals use contraception and plan their parenthood"*. More than 80 percent of the population would accept abortion when the health of the mother is at risk, in cases of rape and when there is a probability of a handicapped child to be born. About a half of the respondents considers unwanted pregnancy to also be an acceptable reason for abortion. (*Reproductive Behaviors ...*, 1997) Abortion is a sensitive issue in any society. It frequently polarizes a society and becomes part of public and political discussions and struggles. It should therefore be handled very sensitively and should consider appropriate times to open the issue at the government level. The principal question concerning abortions is, "Should abortions be banned or not?". Experts conclude that restrictive interventions by legislation cannot reduce abortion rates or change birth rate reductions. On the one hand, this would be

against the internationally widely accepted human rights, in particular for the groups of the population that advocate such attitudes. On the other hand, such forced interventions will not resolve the situation and will shift it to other areas. Examples from many countries, such as Romania, Poland, and China, as well as Slovakia's past all confirm that illicit abortions cause a high mortality of women, adverse consequences for the health of women, abortion tourism, distortion of the population structure, etc. Abortion is a sensitive issue for any country. Every country tries its own approach, and it is uneasy to do so. The issue of abortion rates, and in particular ATPs, should not be assessed in isolation, without looking at the clarifying attitudes

and links to other issues of reproduction and reproductive health (birth rates, stillbirth rates, contraception, prevention, sex education, etc.).

After 1989, the abortion rate had the most favorable development of all demographic processes by dramatically decreasing. Other demographic processes have not shown such favorable developments. Mortality has remained relatively high, in particular for younger males. Birth rates have decreased. The natural population growth, the difference between live births and deaths, is minimal. The population has aged and become more feminized through increased proportions and numbers of elderly women in Slovakia's population. If there is anything in the demographic development of Slovakia that should be urgently tackled, it is this problem and the associated consequences.

The use of hormonal contraceptives keeps growing, with 13.1 percent of childbearing age women using such contraceptives in 1998. Yet, their level of use is still only one quarter of the usage level in other countries. Slovakia's low level of use is not caused by an insufficient supply of contraceptives; rather, it is mistrust and fears of adverse effects, or sometimes shyness in many women. Also, financial aspects play a role, especially in young and unemployed women. And, many women just hope that nothing will happen.

Compared to Western European countries, Slovakia's sterilization act is rather restrictive. It only allows sterilization in married women with 3 or more children. Men are allowed to undergo such an intervention only if such an intervention cannot for any reason be performed in their spouses, and otherwise must meet the legal requirements (Kliment, 1998). All conditions are imposed despite the fact that the intervention in males is much less demanding and is used more frequently worldwide.

There are some positive points regarding other issues of Slovakia's reproductive health. *Illicit abortions* and *maternal mortality* do not currently represent a problem. There are but occasional cases (2 –5 a year in recent years). *HIV/AIDS infections* first appeared in Slovakia as late as after 1989. There were 13 deaths and 88 HIV positive individuals recorded in 1998, with only 58 cases attributed to Slovak nationals, including approximately 17 percent of women. A majority of cases occurred in Bratislava and its surroundings. The occurrence of other *sexually transmitted diseases* has been relatively stabilized in recent years (4 cases per 100,000 for syphilis, about 25 cases per 100,000 for gonorrhoea).

The most important international event dealing with reproduction issues was the UN Conference on the Population and Development, held in Cairo in 1994. In its Action Program, it committed the signatory countries (including the Slovak Government) to "draw attention to issues of sexual and reproductive health of their citizens" (*Programme of Action...*, 1995). Rather little has been done at an official level in favor of the implementation of the Cairo

Box 5

Pregnant Women and Preventive Care

A new problem has emerged in recent years as signaled by gynecologists from Eastern Slovakia. The system of preventive care of the pregnant woman and the unborn child seems to be unknown to some. There are some regions where as many as 20 percent of women appear at medical facilities just to deliver their baby, without any previous medical check-ups or regular follow-ups. The reasons can be looked for in the abolishment of the institute of gynecological nurses, as well as in the new approach that leaves the entire responsibility for the health of the future mother and the unborn child with the women themselves (in the past, payment of maternal benefits was bound to the attendance of regular medical investigations of the future mother). However, some, in particular Roma mothers, have weakened personal responsibility for their own health (Bolfik, 1999). It has therefore been contemplated again to reintroduce the condition mentioned for the payment of benefits in pregnancy and motherhood. A similar system also operates in Sweden or France.

Conference during the subsequent years. Activities set forth in the Action Programme were, to a large extent, developed by some non-governmental organizations (Society for Planned Parenthood and Education to Parenthood, Special-Interest Association of Women, and others). The Slovak Government started to implement more consequentially the Action Program of the Cairo Conference in 1999, through its resolution No. 812/1999 item B.2 (workout of the Action Program for the conditions of the individual ministries and other central authorities of state administration), and through resolution No. 194/2000, item B advising the Minister of Labor, Welfare and Family to establish an inter-sector group for the implementation of the conclusions of the Cairo Conference. Further progress occurred in 2000, when the Regional Center of the UN Population Fund for Central and Eastern European Countries was established in Bratislava.

Mortality has been among Slovakia's most stable demographic processes for many years. For more than 20 years, the gross death rates have been stabilized around 10 deaths per 1,000 persons. They have been consistently below the 10 deaths level since 1993. Nevertheless, it is not possible to anticipate a greater reduction since Slovakia's mortality depends primarily on the size of groups at the highest risk.

Some mortality rates do not show a favorable direction. The biggest area of concern is that of death rate differences between males and females. All age groups of males show higher mortality rates, both in absolute and relative terms. About 3,500 males more than females die every year. Of all the mortality demographic factors, age has the greatest impact on the death rate difference between males and females. Female death rates are predictable, i.e., the numbers of deaths increase with the increasing age, and a majority of them die after reaching the age of 85. There is no such direct age relationship for males. Most males die around the age of 70, with the number of deaths decreasing thereafter. The number of male deaths per year exceeds the 1,000 level as early as the age of 45-49 years, while it takes 15 more years (60-64 years age) for the female population to reach that level. During the 1990s, Slovak males have died substantially younger and the numbers of male deaths have been substantially higher than female deaths.

Male and female mortality rates for common age groups have remained the most constant in marginal age groups, i.e., below 10 years and over 75 years of age. The age group of 20-29 years has had the greatest difference, with the male mortality rate being four times the rate for females. During the recent years, overall death rates for the female and male populations have had a difference of about 2 points (less than 9 deaths per 1,000 females, and almost 11 deaths per 1,000 males).

The major cause of death in Slovakia is disease of the heart and blood vessel system. This is the cause of death determined for about 15,000 females and 14,000 males every year. The second most frequent reason is tumor diseases, which cause the deaths of almost 5,000 females and more than 7,000 males yearly. The most frequently occurring tumors in males are those affecting the lungs, the digestive system and the prostate. Females die most frequently from malignancies of the breast, the digestive system, and the uterus. One in every 23 Slovak women is likely to suffer from breast cancer. There are 1,500 new breast cancers diagnosed every year in Slovakia, and only 75 percent of them are identified at an early stage. Women aged 40 or more should certainly have a mammography at least once every two years. Yet, the reality is far behind this requirement. Women themselves also contribute to this adverse result. They typically do not give enough attention to their own health in this respect. During the recent years, various associations and clubs have been trying to improve the situation through educational and promotional events (League Against the Cancer, Daffodil Day, etc). (*In Slovakia, sufferers ... 1999*).

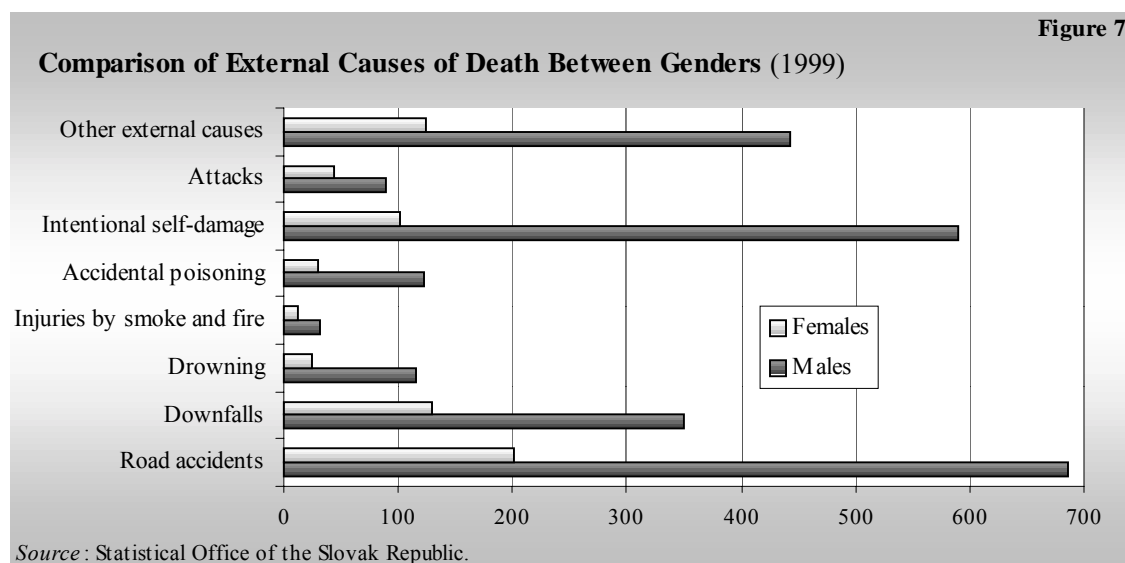
Table 21

Cause of Death for Women and Men (%)						
Cause of Death	1997		1998		1999	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
Infectious and parasitic diseases	0.39	0.34	0.22	0.23	0.31	0.23
Neoplasms	24.05	18.96	25.68	19.91	25.39	19.77
Diseases of blood and blood-forming organs	0.06	0.08	0.06	0.07	0.05	0.07
Endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases	1.00	1.54	1.09	1.94	1.67	2.50
Mental and behavioral disorder	0.08	0.04	0.07	0.04	0.03	0.01
Diseases of the nervous system	0.60	0.42	0.88	0.74	1.17	0.79
Diseases of the eye	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Diseases of the ear	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.00
Diseases of the circulatory system	49.39	60.80	49.33	63.63	48.23	62.20
Diseases of the respiratory system	6.80	7.63	4.74	4.22	5.31	4.63
Diseases of the digestive system	5.02	3.27	5.66	3.47	6.00	3.91
Diseases of the skin and tissue	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00
Diseases of the musculoskeletal system and connective tissue	0.01	0.03	0.07	0.17	0.06	0.15
Diseases of the genitourinary system	1.29	1.48	1.27	1.51	1.39	1.60
Pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium	0.00	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.00	0.02
Diseases of the perinatal period	0.49	0.40	0.49	0.43	0.48	0.35
Congenital malformations, deformations and abnormalities	0.31	0.30	0.29	0.33	0.28	0.38
Symptoms, signs and abnormal findings, not elsewhere classified	0.77	0.64	0.77	0.57	1.00	0.63
External causes of morbidity and mortality	9.75	4.05	9.37	2.71	8.64	2.74
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Source: Status and Movement of Population of the SR for 1998, 1999. Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (1999).

Other causes of death include relatively frequent pneumonia, liver conditions, hypertension, and some external factors. 9 percent to 10 percent of males who died in the past three years died of external factors. Most frequently, these included traffic accidents, deliberate self-injury, and falls. Such causes of death in females are three times less frequent. The most pronounced difference between males and females concern traffic accidents and deliberate self-injury (suicides) that are almost six times less frequent in females.

Figure 7



The higher male mortality results in a shorter male *life expectancy*. At birth, Slovak males have a life expectancy that is about 8 years less than for Slovak females. In 1999, life expectancy for males was 68.95 years and 77.03 years for females. Over the past 40 years, the male life expectancy has increased only one year, whereas female life expectancy has grown by four years. Slight deviations occurred in life expectancy during the 1990s. Slight reductions were observed in the early and mid-1990s for both males and females. However, Slovakia did not experience a dramatic drop in life expectancy, as was the case in countries of the former Soviet Union.

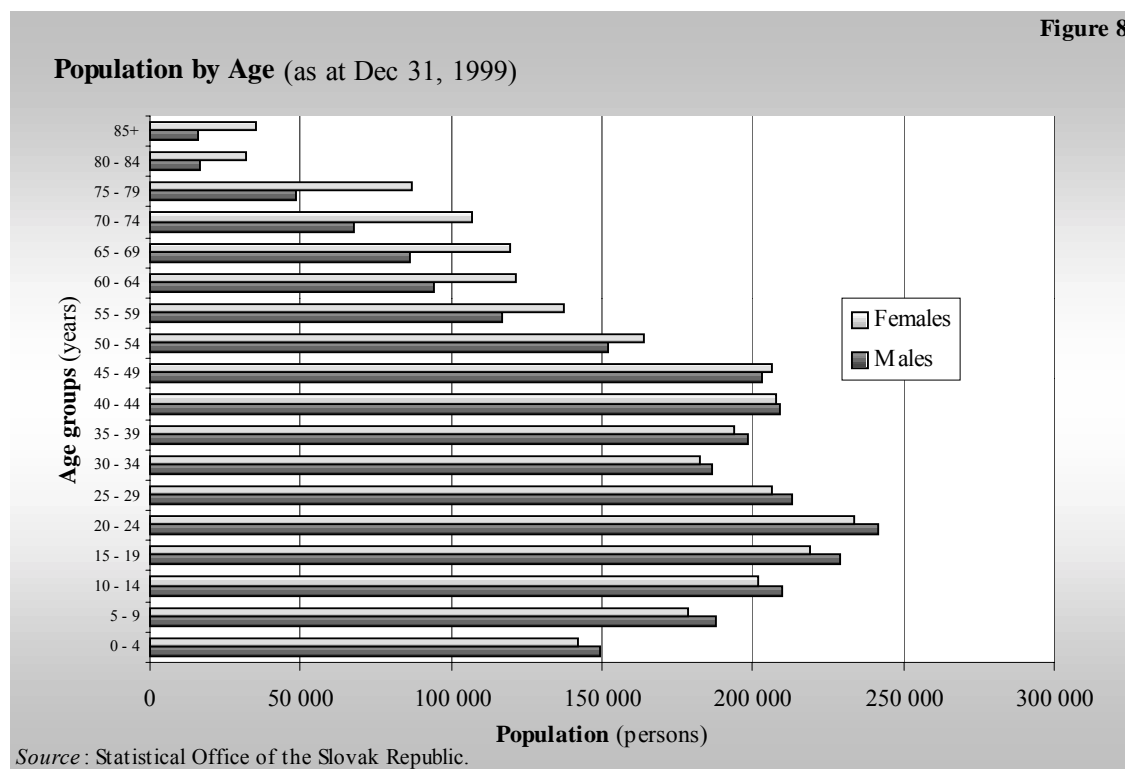
The birth rate and mortality rate trends resulted in a continuous reduction of *population increments* throughout the 1990s. Population growth kept slowing down. Every new year would bring an additional reduction of the natural and overall population increments. The natural increases of 4 individuals per 1,000 in the early 1990s dropped to only 0.7 in 1999. The overall population increment of Slovakia decreased from 20,000 in the early 1990s down to 5,275 in 1999.

Numbers and Age Structure of the Population

The most recent data available shows that there are more than 2.2 million women and about half a million girls living in Slovakia. They made up a total of 51.37 percent of Slovakia's 1999 population. The female share of the overall population has been consistently at the same level (i.e., around 51 percent) throughout the second half of the 20th century, with a slight increase during the most recent 30 years (by 0.7 percent since 1970). This ratio of the female subpopulation is characteristic for most European countries. One exception is Turkey where females make up less than a half of the population. Some countries of the former USSR are also an exception, where women exceed 53 percent of the total population.

As in any standard population, slightly more males than females are also born in Slovakia. Younger age groups therefore have a moderate prevalence of males. As populations age, this ratio shifts to the advantage of females. The ratio of both genders is equalized around the age of 45 years. Females then prevail in higher age groups and the prevalence increases with increasing age. For example, there are 1,008 females per 1,000 males in the population group of 40-49 years, 1,323 per 1,000 in the group of 60-69 years, and 2,022 per 1,000 over 80 years of age. Overall, there were 1,065 females per 1,000 males in the population in 1999.

Figure 8



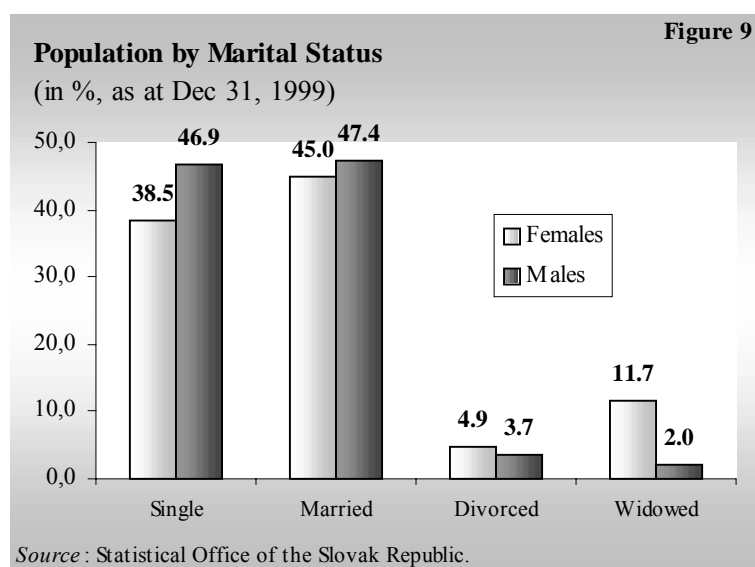
There is also a gender-based difference regarding the population's productive age. In recent years, women made up 48 percent of Slovakia's productive age population and over 65 percent of the post-productive population. This unusually big difference between productive-age males and females in Slovakia is mainly due to the lower retirement age of females. Women retire at 57 or less, depending on the number of children, while men retire at 60. In a majority of EU Member States, the basic retirement age is the same for both men and women, being 65 years of age. If Slovakia joins the Community, it will have to gradually become consistent with other EU countries in this area. Public opinion in Slovakia is not likely to accept this prolongation of the retirement age and its equalization for men and women. Only 9.7 percent of Slovakia's population have stated they would accept it. (*Assessment...*, 1999)

The ratio of females in the Slovak population is increasing in higher age groups. The share of males younger than 20 is 30.6 percent, whereas females are only 28.2 percent. The share of males and females older than 60 years is 12.6 percent for males and 17.8 percent for females. These facts show that the problem of the population aging concerns Slovak females more than males, and that there is a gradual increase of population feminization process with increases in age.

Structure by Marital Status

Gender based differences in the age structure are also reflected in shifts of the marital structure. The greatest impact shows up in the proportions of widows/widowers. There have been 5.5 times more widows than widowers in recent years, a 4 times ratio in the 1970s, and only a 3.7 times ratio in the 1950s. Each year, the number of widows has increased. For example, there were 321,606 widows in the population in 1993, and 328,386 by 1997. A small reduction of 1,500 widows occurred after 1997. The number of widowers has showed only slight changes (55,000-57,000). The increasing numbers of widows will feminize old age and increase their loneliness, as suggested by various inquiries and surveys in addition to statistical data. (*The current situation...*, 1998)

There are not any great gender based differences in other family statuses, as in the case of widowers/widows. Yet, there are also some disproportions visible. The overviews for the various years suggest that the proportions of unmarried and divorced individuals, both men and women, slightly decrease, as do numbers and proportions of individuals living in marriage. There were 23.6 percent unmarried, 56.0 percent married, 5.8 percent divorced women, and 14.6 percent widows older than 14 years in 1998. The structure for comparably aged males was substantially different. There were far less widowers (only 2.7 percent) and less divorced men (4.5 percent). Married men made up 60.5 percent of all men older than 14 years, while unmarried men made up 32.3 percent. In addition to the aforementioned fact that there are more males than females in younger age groups, the numbers of widowers/widows are impacted by the higher age of males at wedding, higher re-marriage rates of males, and males long-term higher mortality.



The Health Situation

Women are generally known to have a more responsible approach to health hazards, to the care for health in general, as well as accepting treatments. This gender difference becomes visible not just in mortality and life expectancy figures. Other health conditions show a similar gender based difference. There has been a higher prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases in men. In 1997, the incidence of tuberculosis per 100,000 persons was higher in men by 10 points. In absolute and relative terms, reports of malignancy cases were more numerous for men. There were 335.3 cases of malignancies per every 100,000 women, with a corresponding figure of 409.1 for men. Throughout the 1990s, men also had higher levels of newly recognized occupational diseases and of disability pensions awarded, in spite of the decreasing numbers of cases. Young men are also more frequently psychiatric care outpatients. Men also outnumber women three to one among the drug addicts.

On the other hand, women prevail among those who recover and regain the ability to work, and among those admitted to hospitals. The data available on the incidences of the individual diseases show a higher prevalence of women as diabetes mellitus patients. In almost all infectious diseases reported in 1997, the numbers of women were less than numbers of men. *The Health Care Yearbook of Slovakia* does not show other diseases broken down into male and female patients. It is therefore difficult to determine reasons why women have higher figures for inability to work and for hospitalizations. One possible reason might be that women

have a more responsible approach for their own health. Another possible reason might be that women have higher morbidities for other types of diseases.

There is evidence, based on some health-related parameters, that long-term investment for the health and education of women provide Slovakia some advantages. One form of evidence is a decreased mortality of women at delivery and of infants during the 1990s. These figures dropped far below levels set by the WHO. Other positive forms of evidence have been found in areas of delivery complications, health condition of newborns, and in proportions of low-birthweight live newborns.

Men's higher mortality and morbidity suggest they have worse health conditions than women. Men spend less time on prevention and more frequently develop "bad habits", such as excessive alcohol intake, smoking, preference for fat meals, etc. The number of regular male smokers has been estimated to be twice the number of female smokers. In recent years, the ratio of smokers among young people has been shifting more toward women. Young women have become more at risk of "social diseases". Adolescent girls in Eastern Europe are known to drink alcohol and smoke much more frequently than adolescent males both in their own countries as well as compared to their peers in Western Europe (*Women in Transition*, 1999).

Health risks have been shown to be more frequent in persons with a poor social background. Changes brought about by the transition from communism had both positive and negative implications for women and men. Health is influenced, within an economic perspective, by lower incomes, growing income inequalities, and reduced resources of the health care system. On the other hand, transition has produced new values and changes in the social environment because healthier lifestyles have started to appear.

These trends are also bringing new threats to Slovakia. There have been increases in the use of drugs, in HIV infection, and trade in women for the purposes of sexual exploitation. The development of a sex industry is a threat to women. Prostitution has a negative impact on the overall status of women in the society. It hurts the perception of women's role in society. It makes women vulnerable, both economically and physically. Moreover, there are risks of women's health problems and an increase in violence against women.

In recent years, there has been increasing numbers of Central and Eastern European women that walk the streets of Western European cities. Slovak women are no exception to this rule, although Slovakia has so far not been among the major "supplier countries". This problem frequently arises from forced migration and forced prostitution, based on fraud, abduction, and intimidation (*Trading in Women...*, 2000)

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