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ELECTIONS '92: A POST-MORTEM GUIDE

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Dear Peter and friends:

By the time you receive this, you'll know what happened in Czechoslovakia's 1992 parliamentary elections. The following information about the process and the players can serve as a historical artifact of sorts, as well as a guide to help you make sense of the continuing developments when they are reported in the press.

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**THE RULES:**

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**FOUR-YEAR TERMS:** Representatives to the federal and republican parliaments are elected for four-year terms. The outgoing representatives were in office for only two years, though. The first free elections here since 1946 were held in June 1990. At that time, government officials -- correctly -- predicted that the political scene would continue to change and crystallize. Based on that, it was thought that it would be fair and politically prudent to hold the next elections early -- in two years. President Havel called the 1990-92 government the government of "national sacrifice." The president's term, normally five years, also ends now.

**WHO VOTES:** Czechoslovak citizens 18 and over could cast votes. There were no absentee ballots. Everyone had to be in the country physically to cast his or her ballot.

**WHAT THEY VOTE FOR:** Voters elect political parties, not individual candidates, into the three parliaments. The newly elected deputies then elect the president, Cabinets (in the federal Parliament they do this with the president's help) and

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other officials. The number of seats parties receive in the parliaments corresponds with the number of votes cast for them. To get into office, a party/movement must have earned 5 percent of the total votes cast (with higher percentages needed for coalitions of two parties or more).

From envelopes containing the ballots of all the parties running, voters picked three -- one each for the two chambers of the federal Parliament (the House of Nations and the House of the People) and the third for either the Czech or Slovak National Council (the parliaments of the republics), depending on where they live.

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The parliaments' makeup:

1. The Czech National Council: 200 members.
2. The Slovak National Council: 150 members.
  
3. Federal Parliament has a total of 300 members:
  - a. House of Nations  
-75 seats from the Czech Republic  
-75 seats from the Slovak Republic
  
  - b. House of the People, 150 seats

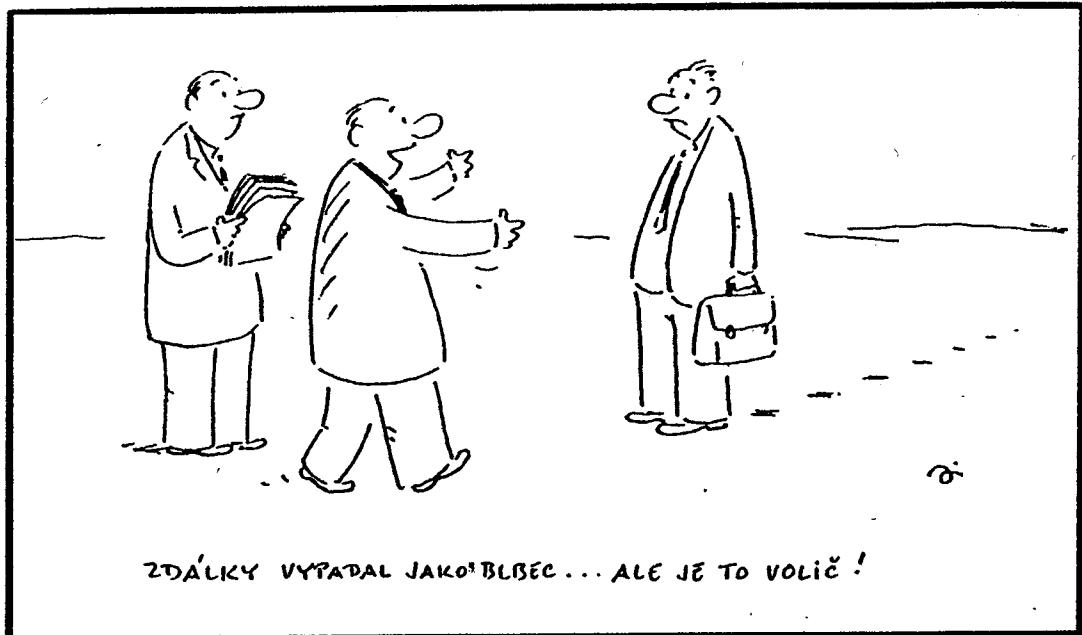
The Czech and Slovak republics are represented proportionally in this chamber, based on their populations (about 10 and 5 million, respectively). The Czech Republic has 99 seats, the Slovak Republic 51.

(NOTE: Important laws must pass by a three-fifths majority in the House of the People as well as in each of the House of Nations chambers. Slovaks in the House of Nations have used this rule for the past two years to block legislation.)

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PREFERENTIAL VOTES: Although people did not vote for individual candidates, they could circle up to four "preferential votes" for candidates on each of their three party ballots. Candidates with the most preferential votes (after meeting minimum percentage requirements to qualify for this category) are moved up on their party slates. When the votes are counted and seats doled out, the candidates at the top of their party's ticket are the first to be assigned seats. (If voters happened to circle more than four names on each ticket, all the preferential votes were ignored, but the overall party votes will count.)

Candidates do not necessarily run in the districts where they live. Parties assign candidates strategically -- putting popular personalities in areas where they stand to gain a large number of votes, or in problematic areas, for example.



Drawings by Vladimír Jiranek

*"From far away he looked like an idiot ... but he's a voter!"*

WHEN THEY VOTED: The polls were open June 5-6, a Friday and a Saturday. People brought their candidate lists to the polling place, where they received an envelope. They stepped behind a screen, circled their preferential votes, put their ballots in the envelope and sealed it. They then slipped it into a sealed box. Election workers brought ballot boxes to homes of handicapped and elderly voters unable to make it to the polls.

CAMPAIGN FINANCING: Parties financed their campaigns through membership dues, donations, bank loans, and money left over from the last elections. If they get more than 2 percent of the total votes cast in their republic, they receive 15 crowns (about 50 cents) from the federal budget for every vote received for the federal Parliament. Funds for reimbursements for National Council campaigns come from the republics' budgets.

THE ELECTION LAW: The election campaign ran for 21 days -- May 13 through June 3. All campaign activity had to end 48 hours before the polls opened. Releasing of results of public opinion polls had to cease a week before the elections. Each party was allotted an equal amount of advertising time on state television each day during the campaign. Television at first interpreted the new election law to mean it had to severely curtail its coverage of the campaign, not presenting any "election speeches or election programs" or publicizing anything with which the parties promoted themselves. Television anchors initially apologized to viewers and said they could not provide even coverage of debates, but as the campaign went on television became braver in its

interpretation of the law. (As a result, several complaints against television and its chief have been filed.)

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**THE CAMPAIGN:**

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**STRATEGIES:** The short campaign was short on substance. Most campaign activity consisted of "happenings" -- bands, balloons, children's days, free beer, free goulash. There was lots of campaign literature, buttons and pins, posters, plastic shopping bags and T-shirts. Candidates' faces were plastered on billboards, bus stop shelters, even the sides of escalator stairs in the Prague Metro. For parties' written campaign programs, voters usually had to go to the campaign headquarters, or to neighborhood campaign centers.

Most major newspapers with nationwide circulation did a good job, running pre-election public opinion polls, party and candidate profiles and other election-related stories every day. Most of the parties took advantage of their allotted TV time and ran promotional spots ranging from hokey cartoons to slick productions created by top advertising agencies. They included an endorsement by Margaret Thatcher for conservative economist Václav Klaus, who is the federal finance minister and the chairman of the right-wing Civic Democratic Party.

ODA (Civic Democratic Alliance) used an excerpt from the "Ode to Joy" for its campaign music. Miroslav Sládek, the eerie leader of the extremist Republican Party, held on to a struggling foal (named Republican) while he spoke to the camera; a commercial for the Friends of Beer party consisted of fellow with a guitar singing in a pub. Slovak nationalists used rousing folk music, pictures of their Tatra Mountains and fluttering Slovak flags. There were lots of scenic shots of Prague and its castle, with or without candidates in the foreground. And there were lots of kids -- kids with balloons, kids with candidates, kids with mothers worried about the environment. It seemed there would be no campaign debates at all, but then the newspaper Lidové Noviny managed to quickly organize two panel discussions. Most of the major parties were represented. This was the only major opportunity for voters to see the candidates face one another.

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**HOW IT TURNED OUT:**

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**PERCENTAGE WHO VOTED:** There are about 11.5 million registered voters in Czechoslovakia, about 7.7 million in the Czech Republic and 3.8 million in Slovakia. Of those, 85 percent (about 6.6 million) voted in the Czech Republic, 84 percent (3.1 million) in Slovakia -- a total of 9.7 million people. In 1990 there was 96 percent turnout nationwide.



*Vote thoughtfully and with deliberation...  
but above all vote for us!*

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NUMBER OF PARTIES, MOVEMENTS AND COALITIONS: 22 last time, 40 this year. (Not all were represented in the race for each parliament, however.)

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#### **THE BIG WINNERS:**

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Most of the votes in the Czech Republic went to the Civic Democratic Party-Christian Democratic Party coalition, and in the Slovak Republic the big winner was former Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar and his Movement for a Democratic Slovakia. The Communists, running with the Democratic Left as the Left Bloc, came in second in the Czech Republic. The Party of the Democratic Left finished second in Slovakia.

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#### **REMEMBER CIVIC FORUM?**

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The electorate was much more polarized in 1992. In 1990, the elections were a vote of confidence for Civic Forum and its Slovak sister organization, Public Against Violence. Those groups, represented by popular dissidents and other

personalities, formed an umbrella movement credited with wresting power away from the Communists. They embodied the Velvet Revolution. Civic Forum swept the 1990 elections with 53 percent of the vote for federal Parliament seats from the Czech Republic. Public Against Violence took 32.5 percent of the votes in its republic.

Civic Forum later split three ways, into the right-wing Civic Democratic Party (ODS) and Civic Democratic Alliance (ODA), and Civic Movement (OH), with a center to left orientation. Public Against Violence broke up too. Some of its members joined the nationalistic Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). Others formed the reform-minded, right-wing Civic Democratic Union (ODU).

(Note: right-wing in this country means believing in strength of the individual, minimal state intervention, a free market. Leftist parties favor a bigger role for the state and slower reform.)

You will not see most of the descendants of Civic Forum on the lists of winners below. With the exception of Klaus' ODS and, barely, ODA, they did not meet the 5 percent requirements to make it into office.

Here is a rundown on the winning parties, the percentage of votes they received and number of seats they captured in the '92 elections:

#### CZECH NATIONAL COUNCIL (200 seats)

1. Civic Democratic Party-Christian Democratic Party...29.7 percent, 76 seats
2. Left Bloc...14, 35
3. Czechoslovak Social Democracy...6.5, 16
4. Liberal Social Union\*...6.5, 16
5. Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party...6.3, 15
6. Association for the Republic-Republican Party of Czechoslovakia...5.9, 14
7. Civic Democratic Alliance...5.9, 14
8. Movement for Self-Governed Democracy-Society for Moravia and Silesia...5.8, 14

\* The Greens, Agrarian Party and the Czechoslovak Socialist Party. Classified as a movement for the elections.

#### SLOVAK NATIONAL COUNCIL (150 seats)

1. Movement for a Democratic Slovakia...37.3, 74
2. Party of the Democratic Left...14.7, 29
3. Christian Democratic Movement...8.8, 14
4. Slovak National Party...7.9, 18
5. Hungarian Coalition\*\*...7.4, 15

\*\*\* Coexistence, Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement,  
Hungarian People's Party.

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FEDERAL PARLIAMENT, HOUSE OF NATIONS

-CZECH REPUBLIC (75 seats)

1. Civic Democratic Party-Christian Democratic Party...33.4, 37
2. Left Bloc...14.5, 15
3. Czechoslovak Social Democracy...6.8, 6
4. Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party...6.1, 6
5. Association for the Republic-Republican Party of Czechoslovakia...6.4, 6
6. Liberal Social Union...6.1, 5

-SLOVAK REPUBLIC (75 seats)

1. Movement for a Democratic Slovakia...33.8, 33
2. Party of the Democratic Left...14, 13
3. Slovak National Party...9.4, 9
4. Christian Democratic Movement...8.8, 8
5. Hungarian Coalition...7.4, 7
6. Social Democratic Party in Slovakia...6.1, 5

FEDERAL PARLIAMENT, HOUSE OF THE PEOPLE

-CZECH REPUBLIC (99 seats)

1. Civic Democratic Party-Christian Democratic Party...33.9, 48
2. Left Bloc...14.3, 19
3. Czechoslovak Social Democracy...7.7, 10
4. Association for the Republic-Republican Party of Czechoslovakia...6.5, 8
5. Christian Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party...6, 7
6. Liberal Social Union...5.8, 7

-SLOVAK REPUBLIC (51 seats)

1. Movement for a Democratic Slovakia...33.5, 24
2. Party of the Democratic Left...14.4, 10
3. Slovak National Party...9.4, 6
4. Christian Democratic Movement...9, 6
5. Hungarian Coalition...7.5, 5

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**PARTY PROFILES:**

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Here are brief descriptions and my personal observations about the winners of the '92 elections:

**-CZECH REPUBLIC****\* CIVIC DEMOCRATIC PARTY (ODS)-CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY (KDS)**

The ODS, calling itself right-wing and conservative, is the main proponent of "radical" economic transformation to a market economy, including price liberalization and quick privatization. Emphasizes the individual as the source of economic activity. Favors gradual removal of wage controls in the public sector, now in place to curb inflation. Its chairman is the controversial Václav Klaus, the federal finance minister and one of the authors of the reform plan. Often called arrogant, intolerant and self-promoting, he is praised by economists around the world and cursed by those who don't like having to tighten their belts ("Klaus raised the prices.") KDS, the smaller partner, is a right-wing party with traditional Christian emphasis. This coalition was one of the few to campaign nationwide. ODS supports a "working" federation.

**\* LEFT BLOC (LB)**

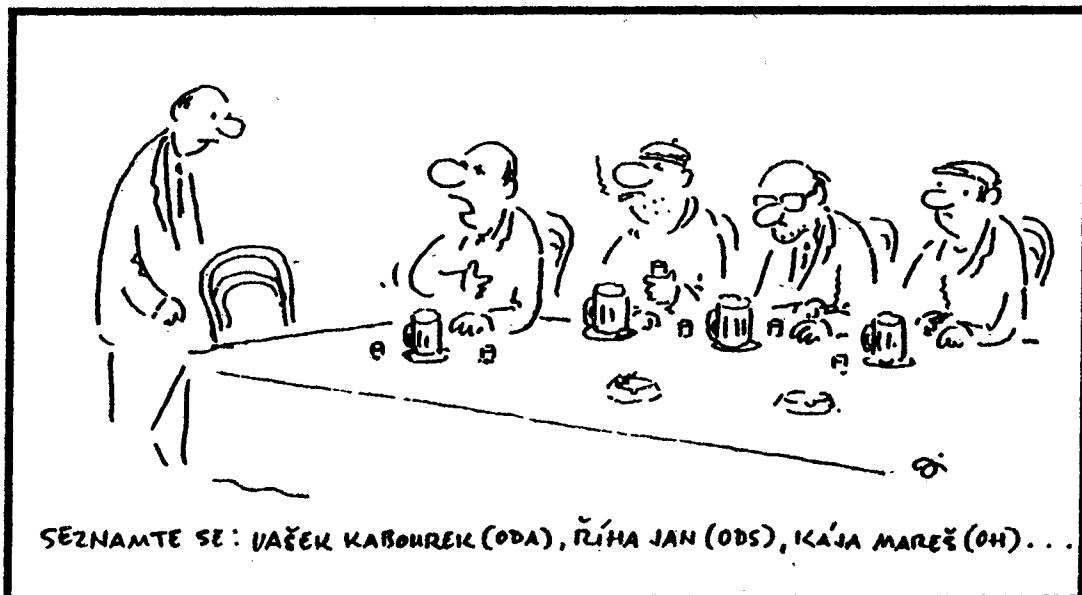
This is basically the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, which calls itself a modern leftist party that supports political pluralism. It promotes greater state involvement in the economy and in the general running of the country. (The state should "revive the market and renew investments.") During the campaign, it said that every day the current economic reform program continues is disastrous for the country. It said it would not stop coupon privatization (the method being used to transfer ownership of industry into private hands) but would act to protect investors. The Left Bloc says it favors various kinds of ownership, including ESOPs (employee stock ownership plans). It sees a budget deficit as a source of funding for its ambitious program (lower taxes, higher wages, help for industry, etc.), and is not afraid of "mild" inflation. In my view, it's trying to put a new face on an old ideology. Communist Party chairman Jíří Svoboda doesn't even blush when he says he wants "prosperity for all," instead of just a few, of which he accuses ODS.

**\* CZECHOSLOVAK SOCIAL DEMOCRACY (CSSD)**

Describes itself as left/center-left. Its campaign leader was former Communist economist Valtr Komárek, who like Klaus worked at the state Prognostic Institute before the revolution. Komárek joined Civic Forum and was coordinator of economic reform in late 1989, but he quickly broke with Klaus' vision, advocating a slower pace of reform and more state intervention. CSSD wants reform without "unnecessarily drastic" consequences. Like the Communists, it favors a variety of forms of privatization.

**\* CHRISTIAN AND DEMOCRATIC UNION-CZECHOSLOVAK PEOPLE'S PARTY (KDU-ČSL)**

Right-center. Advocates "social-market economics," which it says combines freedom of the individual and a market economy with



*"Introduce yourselves: Vašek Kabourek (ODA), Říha Jan (ODS), Kája Mareš (OH)...."*

social and moral responsibilities. Talks about a "social trampoline" -- social programs designed to keep bouncing people back into active life, with public works projects, etc. Backs a nation-state arrangement for the country, with one government, president and Parliament.

**\* ASSOCIATION FOR THE REPUBLIC-REPUBLICAN PARTY OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA (SPR-RSC)**

This party has made its mark by calling the 1989 revolution a pre-planned sham. It calls itself right-wing, but its strategy is to knock whoever is in power, playing on people's discontent and offering simplistic solutions to their problems. Party leader Miroslav Sládek, a former government censor, is a frightening demagogue. For the past two years he has waged war against all the "Communists" in power, saying they should be thrown into the Vltava River, but now he's ranting about the "new totalitarianism" of the right. His campaign speeches were peppered with cheap insults, not sparing even President, Havel. He calls the gypsies by the term they see as racist, "cikani," and compares them to children who should be ruled with an iron hand. His bodyguards attack journalists. His main supporters are young men with a secondary-school education. The Republicans' election program includes tax breaks for entrepreneurs and young families, higher wages and pensions, six-year maternity leaves, ending compulsory military service. He wants to get back Sub-Carpathian Ruthenia, establish a nation-state arrangement, remove all former Communists from politics, and lower salaries of ministers and parliament members by 60 percent.

**\* LIBERAL SOCIAL UNION (LSU)**

A coalition calling itself centrist. Wants a nation-state arrangement and state intervention to limit economic downturn (including state support of industry and limiting imports). Calls for gradual privatization of industry, with preference for workers sharing in the ownership.

**\* MOVEMENT FOR SELF-GOVERNED DEMOCRACY-SOCIETY FOR MORAVIA AND SILESIA (HSD-SMS)**

Centrist. Wants Czechoslovakia to consist of three equal and self-ruling subjects (Bohemia, Moravia and Slovakia). Supports a return of the death penalty, at least for the time being. Backs home rule to limit criminal activity and "uncontrolled migration of the gypsy population." Wants fast but "socially balanced" transition to a market economy, with varied forms of ownership.

**\* CIVIC DEMOCRATIC ALLIANCE (ODA)**

I will list this party as a "winner," although it only made it into the Czech parliament. ODA is a moderate right-wing party with several excellent politicians as its leaders, including federal Economics Minister Vladimír Dlouhý and Tomáš Ježek, the privatization minister. ODA did well with the intellectuals, but apparently did not connect with rural voters. ODA's chairman is Jan Kalvoda, outgoing deputy chairman of the Czech government. He was the only Czech politician who, after two years of frustrating and fruitless negotiations with the Slovaks over the future of the state, said flat out that things cannot go on this way, and that the Czechs cannot make concessions at any cost. For that he has been called a "Czech nationalist."

**-SLOVAK REPUBLIC****\* MOVEMENT FOR A DEMOCRATIC SLOVAKIA (HZDS)**

The leader of this party, which labels itself "left center," is Vladimír Mečiar. This burly former boxer is a charismatic leader whose manner ranges from smooth talk and charm to obscenities and threats of physical violence. Mečiar, a lawyer, entered politics through Public Against Violence. He became Slovakia's interior minister after the revolution, then its prime minister. When he was ousted from that post last year, he founded HZDS. He has been linked with the secret police and with the disappearance of secret police files on him. He also intervened to keep people associated with the secret police in top Interior posts. None of that has hurt his popularity. He is known for inconsistency and tailoring his talk to fit the audience. He favors a "sovereign" Slovakia. Sometimes this means with some ties to the Czech Republic, other times an independent country. Favors a "socially oriented market mechanism of a mixed-ownership type." This includes state interference in economic development. He doesn't like journalists who don't pander to him. (He threatened

one, refused to answer another's question at a press briefing, and recently held a news conference for invited journalists only.)

#### \* PARTY OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEFT (SDL)

Leftist. This is the revamped Slovak Communist Party, which says it's not Communist anymore. (It says its membership now comes from a number of parties all across the political spectrum, and that 50 percent of its voters are religious.) It wants to continue reform but halt steps that would lead to a "social explosion." Would advocate a "looser" federation but says Slovak voters must decide that in a referendum.

#### \* SLOVAK NATIONAL PARTY (SNS)

Separatist. Calls itself centrist. Pushing for an end of the federation and for the establishment of an independent Slovak state. Thinks the state should create conditions for economic development, including tax breaks and building up of infrastructure. Sees state debt as a way to pay for this.

#### \* CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT (KDH)

The right-wing party of Slovak Prime Minister Ján Čarnogurský (he replaced Mečiar), who spent time in prison for his Christian dissident activity in 1989. For months he pushed for Slovakia having its own star in the European Community and even called the country's federative arrangement temporary, but recently he has moved away from that and become more supportive of the federation.

#### \* HUNGARIAN COALITION (MEM)

A coalition working to protect the rights of the Hungarian minority living in southern Slovakia. (This part of the country had the lowest support for Meciar's party during the elections.) Supports radical economic reform.

#### \* SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTY IN SLOVAKIA (SDSS)

Left-center. This is Alexander Dubček's party. Although Dubček is the second most-liked politician in the Slovak Republic (behind Mečiar), SDSS was elected into only one chamber of the federal Parliament. It supports the federation.

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#### WHAT HAPPENS NEXT:

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**DESIGNING A NEW GOVERNMENT:** Within 30 days after the winning candidates are assigned seats, the two chambers of the new federal Parliament meet and elect their new presidia. Then, in a

joint meeting of the two chambers, the Parliament chairman (or chairwoman, but that won't be the case here) and his deputies are elected, as is the 40-member joint presidium.

After this first meeting of Parliament, the outgoing federal Cabinet resigns (but the president asks it to stay in office until a new government is formed). The new Cabinet must gain the support of more than half of the total Parliament representatives. The makeup of the new Cabinet is the result of negotiations and coalition agreements among the election winners. (The parties of Klaus and Mediar began talks to that end immediately after the elections.)

After the federal Parliament agrees on a Cabinet, it passes on its recommendation to the president, who formally appoints the new Cabinet. In the Czech and Slovak National Councils, the presidia name their respective Cabinets. Each Cabinet then presents its general program to its respective parliament for approval.

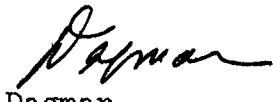
PICKING THE PRESIDENT: The election law was changed this year to try to avoid a deadlock in electing a new president. The process is to start by July 5, the end of President Havel's term. Only Parliament can make nominations. Two rounds of voting are possible. In the first, a candidate must receive the support of three-fifths of the total membership of both the Slovak and Czech parts of House of Nations, and the House of the People.

If that does not happen, a second round is held, in which the nominee needs to win only by a simple majority. If both rounds are unsuccessful, new candidates are chosen. Theoretically, the two-round series can go on indefinitely -- the law does not limit the number of attempts. Havel can stay in office only for three months after his term expires, until Oct. 5. If a new president is not elected by then, Parliament's presidium can take over some of his functions, including naming a new Cabinet.

WORST-CASE SCENARIO: If there is no new president and no Cabinet in place by the fall, new parliamentary elections could be considered.

The situation today is this: After two lengthy meetings, the Czech and Slovak negotiating teams report that they have made no progress. The talks have not even been about forming a new government. They have been about what form the country itself should have. ODS says its mandate is to support a federation. HZDS calls for a "looser" arrangement. The two sides are talking about a referendum in Slovakia or both republics to let the people decide.

All the best,



Dagmar

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