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BUREAU OF THE CONFERENCE

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE MISSION  
TO OBSERVE THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS  
IN THE CZECH AND SLOVAK FEDERATIVE REPUBLIC

(23/24 NOVEMBER 1990)

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The President of the Federal Assembly of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, Mr. Alexander DUBCEK, had invited a delegation of the Council of Europe to attend the municipal elections organised in the Czech and Slovak Republics on 23rd and 24th November last.

As the elections in the two Republics were organised separately in accordance with two different laws and under the respective responsibility of the Czech National Council and the Slovak National Council, the delegation of the Council of Europe was split into two groups, one based in Prague to observe the elections in the Czech Republic, one based in Bratislava to observe the elections in the Slovak Republic.

Accordingly, the two groups have prepared two separate reports on their observations.

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I. **REPORT OF THE OBSERVATION OF THE ELECTIONS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**  
24th November 1990

1. **Composition of the group**

The Council of Europe observers of the elections in the Czech Republic were:

- Mr. John MORGAN, First Vice-President of the CLRAE, England,
- Mrs. BENNETT, Ireland,
- Mr. ZAHN, Germany,
- Mr. SLUNGARD, Norway.

The group was accompanied by Mr. LAURENS, Counsellor in the Political Affairs Directorate of the Council of Europe.

The delegation wishes to express its very warm thanks to the Czech National Council for the arrangements made for the programme of their visit and for all the facilities which were put at their disposal to facilitate their mission.

## 2. Programme of the mission

The programme of the mission was organised as follows:

- Thursday 22nd November in the evening, briefing with the President of the National Electoral Commission, Mr. Jiri BARTON, and the Secretary of the Commission, Dr. Milosz SLAPAK.

- Friday 23rd November in the morning, meeting with the Vice-President of the Czech National Council and the President of the Parliamentary Committee for Science, Education and Culture, Mrs. MOSEROVA.

- Saturday 24th November, day of the election, visit to several polling stations in various parts of the Czech Republic.

- Sunday 25th November, meeting with the members of the delegation to discuss conclusions. In the evening, Mr. MORGAN and Mr. SLUNGARD took part in a TV programme on the Czech National television with the participation of the Czech Prime Minister. During their visit, the members of the missions had several interviews with the local and international media. The visit of the delegation of the Council of Europe was mentioned several times on local television and in newspapers.

## 3. The structure of local authorities in the Czech Republic

The new system of democratic local government communities in the Czech Republic is based on an act of the Czech National Council of 4th September 1990 concerning communities and community systems. This Act replaces the old system inherited from the communist regime. In particular all the structures, such as the regions, will disappear on 1st of January 1991.

The system is based on the 5,766 local authorities, reestablished on the basis of the entities which existed before the communist period. All of these 5,766 local authorities will elect a municipal council composed of a minimum of 7 members.

Five major towns (Prague, Pilsen, Ostrava, Brno and Ustinad-Labem) have been divided into a varying number of districts. Each district is organised like a local authority, with a district council. Elections for these district councils were organised on the same day as the municipal elections and under the same electoral law. It was possible to be a candidate at the same time for a district council and a municipal council. However, if elected to both positions, the person would have to resign from one of them because there is an incompatibility between the two functions. In these 5 towns the municipal elections were organised on the basis of the districts, each district electing a certain number of counsellors to compose the municipal council of the town.

The municipal councils were elected by universal suffrage; the mayor will be elected by the members of the council from among the members of the Council. The majority required to vote and to be a candidate to the elections was the same: 18 years old. The municipal councils were elected for a period of four years.

According to the September 1990 Act concerning community systems, the competences of the newly-elected municipalities are of two different kinds: those where they exercise exclusive jurisdiction, and those which are transferred from the state. The fields in which communities will exercise exclusive jurisdiction concern the economic, social and cultural development of the territory, the creation and protection of a sound living environment, and satisfaction of the needs of the community citizens. Examples of exclusive jurisdiction competences of the communities include: administering pre-school facilities, elementary schools, social welfare, health, local communication, lighting, etc.

Provisionally, the activities of the municipalities will be financed by a subvention from the national level. At the moment, the municipalities have no sufficient local income based on taxes. In the next two years the Czech National Council should adopt a law on local finance to secure self-financing of the local government. In the context of the preparation of this Czech law on local finance, co-operation with the Council of Europe would be welcome.

The mayors and members of the Council will receive a salary for their activities. This salary will be proportionate to the responsibilities of the various members.

#### 4. The electoral law system

The system adopted for the elections is very similar to the one applied in Bavaria. It is a combination of proportional law and majority law. The main idea of this system was to give the voters the possibility to choose their preferred candidate without any consideration for the lists, parties or coalitions. The electors were allowed to vote either for individual candidates and/or for lists. They had the possibility within the list to express their particular preferences, and thus to change the order of priority within the lists.

This system was organised in order to diminish the role of parties in the elections, and in this respect the result was very successful.

Proof has been given that this electoral system produces very limited divergences between the proportion of votes cast and the proportion of seats obtained. In this respect the system is very respectful of the wishes of the voters. But its negative aspect is that counting operations are lengthy and complicated. The elections took place on Saturday 24 November and the final results were to be proclaimed on Thursday 29 November. The elections were organised under the responsibility of the Czech National Council and under the control of a national electoral commission composed of representatives of all the different lists active in the circumscription. The members of the electoral commission could not be candidates for the elections. Individual candidates were not represented in the Commission. The President and the Bureau of the commission were chosen by ballots. Electoral commissions organised on the same basis were established at every level of the election system and in every community or polling station.

## 5. The candidates

There were a total number of 147,000 candidates registered, for 60,000 seats to be filled. The ratio of candidates to posts was roughly 2.5. Many of the lists registered were coalitions of different parties or movements. The Communist Party and the Civic Forum were represented in more than 60 % of the local authorities. The Popular Party (christian democrat) was present in 43 % of the local authorities. Four other movements were present in 10 % of the local authorities. Fifty other parties or movements took part in the election. It should be noted that more than 32,000 candidates (20 % of the total) were individual candidates or were on lists of individual candidates. Twenty per cent of the candidates were women, 12 % of the candidates were under 30 years old and 6 % of the candidates were above 60 years old.

## 6. Election day

For the election day the group of the CLRAE was divided into three:

- Mr. MORGAN visited polling stations in Prague and its suburbs.
- Mr. SLUNGARD and Mr. ZAHN visited polling stations in Brno (Moravia) and one polling station in the rural area on the way.
- Mrs. BENNETT and Mr. LAURENS visited Karlovy Vary and Pilsen and remote rural areas in Bohemia.

In total the delegation visited approximately 40 polling stations of all kinds : in the centre and the suburbs of Prague, in big cities like Brno and Pilsen, in small industrial cities around Prague, in rural towns in Bohemia and Moravia, and in very small settlements in the region of Karlovy Vary.

All polling stations visited by the delegation were chosen by the members of the delegation without any forewarning. Everywhere the members of the delegation received a very warm and open welcome from the Commissions in the polling stations, all of whom felt honoured to have been selected.

We can say that the group of polling stations visited by the delegation was reasonably representative of the situation in the whole Republic.

The polling stations were easy to find, all of them having the two flags of CSFR and of the Czech Republic on the door. Most of the elections took place in schools or in the headquarters of the local section of the so-called National Committee which will be replaced by the newly-elected local communities.

The voters had received their voting form a week before the elections. In most cases they came to the polling station with the form already filled in. After heaving their names checked against the local list of voters, they were given an envelope in which the ballot paper was placed and sealed. Using the voting booth was compulsory.

The delegation noticed very few complaints about the constitution of the voters list, which was based on the list of permanent residents. In the polling station, there was always a relatively large delegation of the electoral commission to oversee the regularity of the procedure.

The polling stations were open from 8 am to 8 pm, with the possibility of extending the duration of the voting procedure at local discretion. Elections did not take place in 59 local communities due to an insufficient number of candidates. In these 59 communities new elections should be organised in mid-December.

The delegation did not notice any police presence around the polling stations.

In the rural areas, the polling box was very often in a separate room which only the voters were allowed to enter. There was no possibility of voting by proxy or by mail, but sick people unable to go to the polling station could ask the Commission to send delegates to them at home or in hospital, with a ballot box, and vote on the spot. The delegation saw several of these ballot boxes used by sick people to deposit their vote.

The campaign for the elections was very quiet. Except in Prague there were hardly any posters in the streets. The campaign in the media was limited to round tables with the participation of representatives of all the presented lists. The reason for this was certainly the lack of funds for most of the lists. In the rural area meetings of different lists were organised, with a fair participation of voters.

The delegation did not notice any problem which might have influenced the regularity and the democratic nature of these elections.

## 7. Results

The most important result of the elections was the high level of participation, higher than expected. The total percentage of voters was around 73.55 %, very high compared with any other East European countries where elections have taken place recently, and with most West European countries as well. Participation was higher in the rural areas - very often over 90 % - than in Prague and other major cities, where the participation was never below 60 % <sup>(1)</sup>. These results testify to the high level of interest of the Czech people in these local elections, which will establish the democratic basis for the local structures.

Because of the fairly complicated electoral system the final results were not expected before Thursday 29th November, but according to the trends which were noted after the first countings, the Civic Forum confirmed its place as the leading political force in the Czech country with 35 % of the votes, and more than 42 % in Prague. Independent candidates and independent candidate lists achieved a very good result, winning more than 27 % of the seats in the Czech Republic (but a lower level in Prague and the major cities). This result is a major achievement, giving the possibility to individual citizens who are not members of political parties and movements to take responsibilities in the public life of their community. This was the objective when drafting the electoral system ; we can safely say that this aim was achieved. The Communist Party and the Popular Party are some distance behind, with 14.43 % and 12.14 % of the seats respectively. More detailed results can be found in the Appendix to the report.

(1) Participation in Prague was 64.32 %.

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In conclusion, the delegation was very satisfied with the way the elections took place, and can confirm that they were fully democratic elections giving a sound basis for the future of local government in the Czech country. They constitute a step forward in the democratisation of the whole country, and a good contribution to future participation in the work of the CLRAE, and more generally in the Council of Europe.

## ANNEX I

## Main Results / Principaux Résultats

	Czech Republic République Tchèque		Prague and major cities Prague et grandes villes	
	% votes % voix	% seats % sièges	% votes % voix	% seats % sièges
Civic Forum Forum Civique	35,57	31,72	42,44	43,09
Communist Party Parti Communiste	17,24	14,43	14,43	12,83
Popular Party Parti Populaire	11,50	12,14	7,88	8,26
Socialist Party Parti Socialiste	3,54	1,58	3,49	2,58
Social Democrat Party / Parti Social Démocratique	4,95	1,56	6,12	3,52
Farmers' Party Parti Agriculteurs	1,52	2,50	0,10	0,07
Christian Democrat Party / Parti Chrétien Démocrate	1,27	0,37	1,42	0,76
Greens / Verts	3,22	1,34	4,72	5,92
Moravian-Silesian Movement Mouvement autonomie Moravie-Silésie	4,16	2,56	5,38	5,54
Independents Indépendants	4,59	7,80	3,55	6,97
Lists of independents Listes d'indépendants	6,04	19,86	1,53	4,95

(1) Official results of the National Electoral Commission.  
Résultats officiels communiqués par la Commission électorale nationale.



Repartition of elected persons by age / Répartition des élus par âge

Years / Ans	Czech Republic République Tchèque		Prague and major cities Prague et grandes villes
	%		%
Under 20 years / Moins de 20 ans	0,06 ]		0,21 ]
20-24	1,72 ]		1,64 ]
25-29	7,25 ]	-40 - 39,76 %	6,59 ] -40 - 37,83 %
30-34	12,50 ]		10,95 ]
35-39	18,23 ]		18,44 ]
40-44	22,10		20,68
45-49	15,81		19,60
50-54	10,22		10,36
55-59	7,12		7,36
60 +	5,0		4,18
Average age / Age moyen	42		43

Repartition of elected persons by sex / Répartition des élus par sexe

	Czech Republic République Tchèque	Prague and major cities Prague et grandes villes
	%	%
Men / Hommes	83,47	78,31
Women / Femmes	16,52	21,68

II. REPORT OF THE VISIT BY THREE CLRAE OBSERVERS  
TO THE LOCAL ELECTIONS IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC  
(23-24 NOVEMBER 1990)

1. Composition of the delegation of observers

As the invitation to the Council of Europe to send observers to the two elections in the Czech Republic and Slovak Republic was sent on 14 November 1990, the delegation was formed very rapidly after consultation between the Secretariat and the Bureau and having regard to (a) the need to take advantage of certain members experience of this kind of assignment and (b) the desirability of inviting further members to ensure a geographical balance.

The delegation sent to the Republic of Slovakia was made up of the following:

Mr Bucci, Italy  
Mr Pramböck, Austria  
Mrs Lund, Denmark

accompanied by Mr Locatelli, Executive Secretary of the CLRAE.

2. Programme of the visit by the CLRAE observers

Thursday 22 November

- Early afternoon: arrival of delegation in Bratislava
- 4.30 pm: meeting with the representatives of the Slovak Association of Local Authorities, followed by an introductory meeting at the Ministry of the Interior on local structures and the electoral system
- 6.30 pm: dinner-debate with the Chairman of the National Commission responsible for preparing the elections and a number of representatives of the political parties and movements belonging to the Commission.

Friday 23 November

- 8.30 am: meeting with representatives of the "Coexistence" political movement (who had not taken part in the previous day's meeting)
- 9.30 am: meeting at the Ministry of the Interior for a briefing and question - and - answer session on electoral procedure and the organisation of the elections
- 11 am: meeting at the Slovak National Council (SNC) with the President of the SNC, two vice-presidents of the SNC and two SNC Committee, chairmen representing several government and opposition parties
- 12.30 pm: lunch at the Slovak National Council with the persons who took part in the 11 am meeting
- 2.30 pm: departure of three groups of observers from the Ministry of the Interior :
- Mrs Lund accompanied by Mr Locatelli, to visit the area south of Bratislava (Dunajska Streda and Samovin regions)
- Mr Bucci, to visit the city of Bratislava
- Mr Pramböck, to visit the central region of Slovakia (Piestany, Trencin, Bistrica, Martin, Banska Bistrica, Hornom) until the following day
- 10.30 pm: return of two of the groups to Bratislava

Saturday 24 November

7.30 am: departure of two groups :

Mr Bucci, accompanied by Mr Locatelli, to visit the area east of Bratislava (region of Galanta, Sala and Novi Zamky)  
Mrs Lund, to visit the city of Bratislava

2 pm: the three groups attended vote counting operations in three different polling stations

5 pm: return to Bratislava

6 pm: dinner at the head quarters of the National Electoral Commission

Sunday 25 November

11 am: meeting of the delegation to prepare the conclusions to be presented at the press conference and included in the report of the visit

2 pm: press conference of the Council of Europe delegation, followed at 3.35 pm by the press conference of the National Electoral Commission

Thanks are due to the Slovak authorities (government, parliament and Association of Slovak Local Authorities) for the very detailed information they supplied and for the perfect logistical back-up provided in the form of cars, interpreters and guides. The observers were able to carry out their task in the best possible manner.

### 3. Importance of local authorities

Leaving aside the local elections held in 1938 and 1946, which were not totally free, these were in fact the first free elections in the Slovak Republic.

The local authorities set up in the Republic are not identical to those in the Czech Republic. The difference lies in the structure of the Slovak Republic, which is made up of 2,700 small municipalities with a total population of approximately five million. Of these municipalities, 136 have the status of a town. They include two major cities, Bratislava and Kosice, divided into districts.

The Slovak municipalities (and the districts) have an executive headed by a directly-elected mayor, and a deliberative body, the municipal council, chaired by the mayor.

The municipal council is responsible for adopting the budget, buying and selling real estate, appointing the municipal secretaries, the financial controller and some other leading officials, as well as for approving the town development plan. To pursue its activities, it appoints committees made up of members from both inside and outside the local council. These committees do not have any decision-making powers.

The deputy mayors responsible for specific sectors are elected by the municipal council from amongst its members (and may therefore belong to a party or political movement other than that of the mayor).

The mayor can be obliged to resign if the council decides to dissolve itself and cause new elections. He can also be dismissed by the government if he commits an unlawful act.

The general law on local self-government has been adopted along with a series of specific laws, but local authority responsibilities and the system of local finance have not yet been finalised. Where schools are concerned for example, local authorities are responsible only for the premises of primary and nursery schools. They are also responsible for basic infrastructures (water pipes etc), but are not yet certain of acquiring enough real estate to conduct their policies. Receipts come from a local tax amounting to 1 Koruna per m<sup>2</sup> of inhabitable space, which accounts for only 2% of the municipal budget. The bulk of the budget consists of a general State subsidy of 1,000 Koruna per inhabitant (roughly FF 170 ). In the villages, the inhabitants participate voluntarily in community projects, and the value of this participation must account for 20% of construction costs to qualify for specific State subsidies.

Under the old regime, towns and centrally-located villages were provided with better facilities than outlying villages which were very ill-equipped. For this reason some of these villages decided to become full municipalities, which explains the growth in the number of municipalities in recent months.

#### 4. The election system and voting procedure

The voting system, the composition of the electoral boards and the voting procedure are undoubtedly important for judging whether an election is free and democratic.

The voting system used in the Slovak Republic is different than in the Czech Republic, since electors vote not for a list of candidates but for individual candidates both in the case of the election of mayor and in the case of the election of the municipal council. This "personalised" system, was chosen, according to the Deputy Minister of the Interior, because the parties are still ill-structured and poorly organised at local level, except in some towns.

The mayor and municipal councillors are elected by a simple majority in a single ballot. Councillors are elected on the basis of "multi-seat" constituencies. Generally, this meant electing between five and twelve councillors per constituency. The government had originally intended to require a majority of at least 50% of votes cast and a minimum participation of 50% of registered voters. This plan was subsequently dropped following the negative experience of the local elections in Hungary, according to the Deputy Minister of the Interior. Besides, the Council of Europe group of experts sent to Bratislava had expressed doubts as to the fairness of such a system in a country with problems of linguistic minorities. The plan was therefore modified in the end.

All the parties save one were in favour of the electoral system finally chosen, believing it to be fair both for the parties and for the independent candidates. Some parties (the Greens and the Slovak National Party) simply complained that there was little time to prepare for the elections, a fact acknowledged by the representative of the Ministry of the Interior and attributable to the slow passage of the relevant Bill through Parliament.

The only party which expressed reservations about the electoral system was the "Coexistence" movement, active particularly in the Hungarian-speaking regions. This movement would have preferred a system of proportional representation that would have enabled all the small minorities, be they Slovakian in areas with a large Hungarian majority or vice versa, to be represented on the local councils. The observers, while recognising that a system of proportional representation might have offered a more effective response to the specific problems, nevertheless concluded that the system chosen was fair for all the parties and minorities, presenting the same advantages and disadvantages for all.

The parties regarded the presence of independent candidates as a good thing in general, although some, in particular the Communist Party, would have preferred a list system in the towns, where individuals were not so well known. After visiting polling stations and conducting interviews, the observers noted that there was some truth in this remark as far as the election in Bratislava was concerned. However, in small towns and villages the voters appeared to adjust well to the personalised voting system.

The voters were therefore electing:

- the mayors of towns and municipalities;
- the local councils of towns and municipalities;
- the mayors and district councils in Bratislava and Kosice (in both these cities voters therefore had four ballot papers to fill in).

All citizens aged over 18 were entitled to vote. All citizens over 18 could stand for election if they had not had their civic rights suspended or were not under guardianship. For election to the office of mayor of a town the minimum age was 25. The electoral rolls were displayed in all the municipalities so that citizens could check them and, if necessary, lodge an appeal.

Candidates could be nominated either by a party or independently and needed 50 signatures for municipalities of less than 2,000 inhabitants and 100 signatures for municipalities of more than 2,000 inhabitants. Candidates had to indicate their name, age, address and occupation; if they desired they could also specify to which political party (or local coalition) they belonged. They were entitled to withdraw their candidature up to three days before the opening of the ballot (this was always notified at the entrance to polling stations). The list of candidates appeared on two separate ballot papers (one for the election of the mayor, the other one for the election of the local council), being placed in alphabetical order and numbered progressively.

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Voters showed their choice by circling the number preceding the name of the candidate (it was observed during the counting of the votes that this rule had been very strictly observed, since all ballot papers expressing a choice in any other way were regarded as spoiled). For the election of the mayor, voters had a single preferential vote, while for the election of the local council they had as many votes as there were seats to be filled in the constituency.

Ballot papers were sent to the homes of all electors, which the observers considered liable to place the secrecy of the vote in jeopardy. However, voters were obliged to go to the polling booth in order to cast their votes and place their ballot papers inside the official envelope which they received at the polling station only after their right to vote had been verified.

In response to the reservations expressed by the observers, particularly to the members of the Bureau of the Slovak Parliament, the observers were told that Parliament had hesitated for a long time but had finally opted for this solution since these were the first local elections in which totally new and unknown or little-known candidates were standing and it had been thought necessary to give electors an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the list of candidates, particularly as the election campaign was very short. It was also specified that this system would be dropped for the next elections. Given that the voting procedure had been strictly applied in the polling stations, the observers decided that this answer was satisfactory.

The National Electoral Commission was responsible for organising the elections. All the parties putting forward candidates in at least one-third of the municipalities were represented on the Commission. In each district (an area of approximately 150,000 inhabitants) a district electoral commission was set up in which all the parties (or coalitions) putting forward candidates in at least one-third of the district's municipalities were represented. The "electoral bureaux", comprising at least five members, were constituted on the same basis and could refer to the district electoral commission at any time. If in a given constituency fewer than five parties had put forward candidates, the remaining members of the Bureau were appointed by the National Electoral Commission.

Voters were required to vote at their place of permanent domicile, which sometimes differed from their place of residence (students, servicemen etc). No voting by correspondence or by proxy was allowed. However, mobile ballot boxes were provided for the sick or those unable to leave their homes.

For the counting of votes, the following arrangements were made in the event of a tie:

- where two candidates from the same party obtained the same number of votes, the candidate placed higher on the party's list of candidates was deemed elected;
- where of candidates from different parties obtained the same number of votes, lots were drawn.

The law provides for a second ballot only in the event of an appeal and a decision by the competent court that the procedure was unlawful.

5. The Political parties and movements participating in the elections (1)

The system of political parties and movements is still in a state of flux in the Slovak Republic. Thus 56 parties and 160 different local coalitions of these parties put forward candidates in the elections, along side the independent candidates.

First of all, there were the parties that had formed the governmental coalition of the Slovak Republic, namely:

- "The People against Violence" (the Slovak equivalent of Civic Forum)
  - . 46 seats in the Slovak National Council (SNC) (2);
  - . it has a reformist-centrist platform and includes reformist intellectuals who played a major part in the "velvet revolution;"
  - . in coalition with the party of Hungarian Initiatives (six SNC members).
- Christian Democrat Party
  - . 31 seats in the SNC (8 from the Hungarian branch of the party, the Hungarian Christian Democrat Party)
  - . Centrist and Christian platform
- Democrat Party
  - . 7 seats in the SNC
  - . Liberal and social-democratic platform

Opposition parties

- Communist Party
    - . 22 seats in the SNC (8 Hungarian-speaking)
    - Socialist policies but in favour of a democratic society
  - Slovak Nationalist Party
    - . 22 seats in the SNC
    - . Nationalist platform, advocating the assertion of Slovak independence within a Czechoslovak confederation as well as a single official language in the Slovak Republic
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- "Coexistence" movement
    - . 14 seats in the SNC (of which 13 Hungarian-speaking and one Ukrainian-speaking)
    - . Programme in favour of the protection of all minorities in the country and representing the Hungarian minority in particular (3)

(1) The names of the parties have been freely translated

(2) the SNC comprises 150 seats.

(3) This party is one of the main parties representing the Hungarian minority and has a more radical approach than the other Hungarian-speaking parties (Party for Hungarian Initiative, Hungarian Christian Democrats, Hungarian Communists).

- The Greens

- . 6 seats in the SNC
- . Ecological platform but giving a free rein to its representatives on other issues.

There are also some smaller parties, among which we were informed of the Social Democrat Party and the Party of Free Citizens.

Given the multitude of parties and the vast array of local coalitions, the parties themselves had difficulty in indicating their number of candidates. The following are rough indications:

- the Communist Party put forward candidates for approximately 50% of the seats to be filled;
  - the Slovak Nationalist Party put forward candidates for a approximately 40% of the seats;
  - approximately 25% of the candidates were independent.
- The other parties were unable to give accurate figures.

In reply to questions concerning the existence of programmes drawn up at national level and the issue of any instructions by the parties regarding local coalitions, the answers given generally suggested that locally-elected representatives were left free to deal with specific problems in application of the objectives laid down at national level.

6. The candidates

The number of candidates in relation to the number of seats to be filled and the availability of a multiple choice for voters are important criteria for a democratic election.

In newly-democratic countries which do not yet have firmly-established party structures at local level it is often hard to find candidates. Moreover, the very short notice at which the elections were held made the task of putting forward candidates even more difficult. In addition, in view of the change of regime, the number of outgoing mayors standing for re-election was necessarily limited. Even among the mayors that had already been co-opted after the revolution of 17 November 1989, only 20% stood for election again, since the majority no longer wanted the responsibility of such a tough and demanding job.

This explains the average numbers of candidates according to (figures supplied by the Ministry of the Interior):

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- In towns, an average of 4 candidates per seat
  - in medium-sized municipalities, an average of 2 candidates per seat;
  - in the very small municipalities, an average of 1 candidate per seat, through in 60 of these municipalities there were no candidates at all (in these cases a merger will be effected).



These figures are simply averages. In fact, during the visits to the district electoral commissions and the electoral bureaux, it was observed that in Bratislava and in the area South-East of the capital the average number of candidates was higher. For example, in the district of Dunajska Streda (110,000 inhabitants and 64 municipalities), an average of 2.5 candidates stood for each seat (both for the office of mayor and for election as local councillor, with in some cases 3 or 4 candidates standing for election as mayor). In the area south-east of Bratislava, there were relatively few independent candidates, since political motivation was probably stronger there than in other parts of the Republic. In this area and in all the other relevant instances, there was a very even balance between the proportions of Hungarian-speaking and Slovak-speaking candidates. Generally, the observers noted a pluralism of candidates representing a wide range of parties and local coalitions. For example, in the district of Dunajska Streda, 12 parties put forward candidates, and in the district of Nove Zamky 15 parties put forward candidates. In a single medium-sized town such as Samorin, 6 parties were represented.

As for women candidates, the group of observers noted that they were very few and far between and that the parties should step up their efforts in the area of equality.

#### 7. The election campaign

The election campaign was fairly brief, given the short period of time between the passing of the electoral law and the date of the elections. In addition, the resources available to parties and candidates were very limited.

Election campaigning consisted essentially of radio and television broadcasts by political leaders (240 minutes per party) and, at local level, the holding of election meetings attended to differing degrees. There was also some limited campaigning in the form of posters and the publication of a few election newspapers or periodicals by to the political parties.

The parties or candidates financed the campaign themselves.

#### 8. Visits to electoral bureaux and district electoral commissions

As indicated in the programme, the observers were able to carry out their task thanks to the facilities (cars, chauffeurs, interpreters and guides) provided by the Slovak authorities.

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Three groups were formed to visit Bratislava and the regions north-east, south-east and south of the capital, in accordance with the programme set out in section 2 above.

The observers were able to visit freely more than 30 polling stations and a dozen regional electoral commissions. They observed the functioning of the voting operations and talked to individuals representing several parties, both members of the regional electoral commissions and of the electoral bureaux, as well as with ordinary voters, making a total of 100 or so interviews.

Outside Bratislava, the polling stations were very well sign-posted and easy to get to. In the city, however, they were more difficult to find owing to inadequate signposting, with the result that several voters said they had problems in discovering in which polling station to vote, as they had not been told. This may partly explain in part why there was a lower turnout in Bratislava and in other regions of the Republic (see section 10).

The observers were able to visit the polling stations of their choice without giving prior notice and to carry out freely all forms of verification (ballot boxes, polling booths, ballot papers, posting up of names of withdrawn candidates etc). They were able to observe freely the voting operations, put questions to members of the electoral commissions and bureaux and ask any questions concerning the organisation and conduct of voting, security during voting and vote counting. The answers received were very satisfactory. Similarly, fully convincing answers were given to the questions on the composition of the electoral bureaux (from the point of view of both parties and nationalities), and on the use of different languages.

Voting operations proceeded smoothly everywhere and in accordance with the prescribed procedure, and, the voters questioned did not appear to have had any difficulty in understanding how to fill in their ballot paper. Often the ballot paper had been prepared in advance and, in accordance with the rules, placed in the official envelope in the polling booths. Both the men and the women questioned about the danger of violation of secrecy as a result of having their ballot papers sent to their homes did not appear to share these fears and said that it was both convenient and normal. In the villages and small towns voters knew the candidates personally and their vote was often inspired by personal trust. In contrast, in Bratislava it was difficult for voter to get to know the candidates, and their decision was primarily based on their political convictions. The Slovak authorities might bear this lesson in mind for the next elections.

The counting operations, as the observers were able to verify, were conducted in an orderly fashion and in strict accordance with the statutory rules. Furthermore, the counting was double-checked. In some cases, indeed, the rules were applied somewhat too strictly; for example some ballot papers were declared void despite the fact that the voter had clearly indicated his choice (for example, the name had been underlined, or the candidate's name had been circled instead of his or her number).

The general impression gained from these visits was excellent, without exception. Polling stations were very well run and organised, and voting and counting procedures were untainted by fraud and comparable to procedures in Western Europe, thus permitting a fully democratic election. Party representatives interviewed at the polling stations and in the regional electoral commissions were satisfied with the way in which voting had proceeded.

#### 9. Contacts with the press and other media

The observers and accompanying Secretariat representative them were interviewed several times at the beginning, during and at the end of the assignment. Newspaper and television reporters were present during some of the visits, which they either filmed or photographed.

Coincidentally, Mrs Lund visited a polling station in Bratislava at the same time as Mr Dubcek, President of the Federal Assembly, who was casting his vote. She was interviewed by television reporters along with the President.

A press conference was held at 2 pm on Sunday 25 November at which all members of the delegation were interviewed and answered journalists' questions. Initially the questions and answers focused on the way in which the elections had proceeded and on the observers' assignment, but subsequently they related to the political situation, particularly as far as the Hungarian minority was concerned, and the observations made by the delegation in the regions inhabited by the two nationalities side by side. The members of the delegation clearly indicated their unanimous findings (see section 15 below).

The number of journalists present at the press conference (on a Sunday at 2 pm) - more than 20 - and the number of questions asked and the subjects broached clearly reflected the almost exclusively Slovak press's interest in the delegation's findings. Slovak television conducted a further interview with the members of the delegation after the press conference.

#### 10. Election results

The turnout, although lower than government forecasts, may be regarded as good at 63.75% and even very good compared with participation in local elections in other democratic countries of Europe. Participation was higher in the east and south-east of the country (where the linguistic minorities live), viz 60%-70%, than in the western or central part (50-65%) and in Bratislava, where it was even lower at 44.5%.

This turnout must be viewed as even more positive when one considers that postal and proxy votes were not allowed and voters were required to vote at their permanent domicile which sometimes differed from their place of temporary residence. However, there is no doubt that some of the absenteeism was due to the disappointment at the delay in tackling economic and social problems.

The results obtained by the parties, calculated according to the number of seats obtained, were as follows (at 27 November):

- Christian Democratic Party (including Hungarian CD party)	27.4%
- People's Movement against Violence (civic forum)	20.4%
- Communists	13.6%
- Candidates without a party	8.4%
- Independent candidates	4.4%
- Movement for Coexistence	6.3%
- Slovak National Party	3.2%
- Democratic Party	2.3%

The government coalition clearly maintained its majority despite the presence of independent candidates (who account for 12.8% of the seats). The communists more or less held on to the position they had reached in the June 1990 national elections, whereas the Slovak National Party suffered a genuine defeat (with its share of seats dropping from 14% to 3.2%) except in the city and suburbs of Bratislava (see below).

The Coexistence Movement obtained fewer seats than in the national elections, with its share down from about 9.5% to 6.3%.

However, it is difficult to draw comparisons between the two elections because of the different nature of the elections and the different voting procedure.

In the city of Bratislava Mr Peter Kresanek, the government coalition candidate, was elected and the seats of the local council are distributed as follows:

- People's Movement against Violence	31
- Slovak National Party	18
- Christian Democrat Party	11
- Communist Party	2
- Greens	2
- Movement for Free Citizens	2
- Coexistence	1
- Independent candidates	4

In the districts in the suburbs of the capital the parties received the following number of seats in all:

- People's Movement against Violence	167
- Christian Democrats	123
- Slovak National party	62
- Democrat Party	43
- Greens	16
- Communists	11
- Movement for Free Citizens	8
- Coexistence	8
- Independent candidates	12

Although, within the government coalition, the Christian Democrat Party was the most successful party at national level, its victory was won in rural areas rather than in Bratislava, where the People's Movement against Violence triumphed. Similarly, the Communists were more successful in rural areas than in Bratislava. In contrast, the Slovak National Party owes its existence chiefly to its strength in the Bratislava conurbation.

## 11. Political problems and situation of the minorities

In the course of the many contacts established during such a visit, a number of issues were tackled. Two topical problems in particular were discussed : firstly, the place of the Slovak Republic in Czechoslovakia and in Europe and, secondly, the problems of the minorities and linguistic issues.

### 11.1 The place of the Slovak republic in Czechoslovakia and in Europe

This question was discussed exclusively at the meetings with representatives of the parties and the National Slovak Council.

The representatives of the Slovak National Party in the national electoral commission said that their party was in favour of an independent Slovakia and in favour of equality between citizens in all regions. The Vice-Chairmen of the Parliamentary Committee on Central and Local Government, describing himself as a member of the moderate wing of the Slovak National Party, said that his party and in any case the trend to which he belonged was not opposed to maintaining Czechoslovakia but objected to a useless bureaucracy of 17,000 civil servants at federal level, when the bulk of decisions should be taken within the two Republics.

The Communist Party representative in the national electoral commission was in favour of a redistribution of responsibilities between the Federation and the Slovak Republic.

The representative of the Party of Free Citizens favoured a confederation with a single chamber made up of the parliaments of the two republics, a single currency and a single central bank as well as an agreement between the two Republics on foreign policy.

The representative of the People's Movement against Violence (Civic Forum) said that his movement and the whole of the government coalition advocated a federation, but with fewer powers than at present, and a redistribution of responsibilities such as proposed by the National Slovak Council.

The Greens' representative, while stating that his movement did not have a fixed policy on this matter, nevertheless shared the view of the government coalition.

The president of the Slovak National Council, Mr Miklosko (~~People's Movement against Violence~~), ~~said that his country now needed~~ a period of peace and calm undisturbed by institutional upheavals in order to solve its real socio-economic problems and consolidate its democracy. He had the impression that the time of the radicals, currently present in some political movements, was coming to an end and that if the local elections confirmed the position of the coalition he would be optimistic for the future of his country in a Czech and Slovak federation (the results seem in fact to bear him out). He admitted that it was, of course, possible that an emerging democracy could make mistakes, but these would be rectified. He believed that what was important was the general direction taken.

As for relations with the Council of Europe, Mr Klepac, Vice-President of the Slovak National Council (Christian Democrat), said he was pleased to receive a second Council of Europe delegation after the delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Relations with European non-member countries, which he interpreted as European recognition of the Slovak republic. He nevertheless thought that the Council of Europe should review its co-operation arrangements to take account of current realities, on the one hand, the confederation and, on the other the Republics (1).

Later in the discussion the representatives of the Slovak National Party said: "We are in favour of a of Europe of United Nations", as opposed to a "Europe of United States". One member of the delegation said: "But we are concerned with the Europe of regions", to which the answer was : "The Europe of autonomous regions".

This dialogue is indicative of the still vague connotations of words "federation", "confederation" and "autonomous republics". In any case, the great majority of Slovaks do not seem in favour of secession, but rather wish to assert their identity and autonomy.

#### 11.2 The situation of the minorities

This matter was discussed with the representatives of the parties and with the official representatives and was also the subject of many discussions during the visits to the electoral bureaux, both with the members of the bureaux and with ordinary voters.

The delegation had been briefed beforehand on the latest development and on the new law concerning the use of the official language, Slovak. It was therefore able to form a fairly accurate picture of these problems and of the real situation as far as the Hungarian minority was concerned, though not the other minorities.

It is first necessary to recapitulate briefly the positions of the parties.

The representative of the Slovak National Party thought that the minorities should be treated equally throughout the Republic and that if the Czech Republic was prepared to respect the Slovak minorities in its territory, he saw no reason why the same rights should not be conferred on the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. However, a member of the SNC in the same party, but belonging to the moderate wing, thought that in the areas concerned the Hungarian-speaking and Slovak populations could happily live together in peace if extremists did not try to stir up trouble for political ends. He was confident that the new elected representatives would have enough wisdom to handle the situation in accordance with the rules of tolerance.

(1) The Christian Democrat Party tends to advocate a confederation.

The Communist Party representative thought that the minorities had been oppressed by the old regime, and his party advocated a society based on democratic principles.

The representative of the Party of Free Citizens also believed that there were no problems of tension between the populations except those created by agitators. He said that the Hungarian minority in Slovakia had many more rights than the Slovak minority in Hungary.

The representative of the People's Movement against Violence, speaking on behalf of the coalition parties, thought that, where minorities were concerned it was necessary to learn to live in a democratic society and bear the lessons of history in mind.

The Greens have given free rein to their members as far as policy on minorities is concerned.

The main political concern of the Coexistence Movement is the problem, of all minorities. Its representatives acknowledged that since 1968 the constitution had recognised the existence of four linguistic minorities, viz Hungarians, Ukrainians, Germans and Poles, but gave them no access to an arbitration court to assert their rights. The new federal constitution should rectify this.

A representative of the Party of Hungarian Initiatives (in coalition with the People's Movement against Violence) thought that between 1945 and 1948 the Hungarian minorities had been completely unrepresented politically, whereas after 1948, in the SNC, it had been easy for them to be represented proportionally on the list of the single party. In a democratic system it was theoretically more difficult to guarantee such proportional representation. He nevertheless regarded the situation as very satisfactory, as the Hungarian minority was represented through several parties. Thus, the Hungarian-speaking population, accounting for 11% of the total population, at present holds 17% of the seats in the SNC (28 seats out of 150), belonging to four parties, of which two belong to the government coalition (see the more detailed figures in section 5 above). On the subject of local elections, a bill guaranteeing the representation of minorities was not passed, but in fact the parties are concerned to ensure that the minorities are represented. The results will be assessed in due course and, if necessary, some ombudsmen for minorities appointed.

~~The President of the Slovak National Council said he was certain that the government was capable of guaranteeing peace between the nationalities despite politically-motivated agitation by certain extremists. It was important to achieve a "European standard" in the matter, on the basis of the current situation and the historical circumstances, with a view to moving towards greater democracy, even if mistakes were made along the way because of the difficult compromises that had to be reached. But it was important to observe actual developments and amend legislation if it proved unsatisfactory or outmoded. Even a poor compromise was better than none at all or back-tracking (1).~~

(1) He was clearly referring to the recent law on the official Slovak language.

The delegation of observers, thus informed, was anxious to make a thorough field study by conducting a large number of interviews with voters and with polling stations officers (they held more than 50 interviews and several detailed discussions).

Although these interviews and discussions were conducted separately by the three groups and in widely differing situations (areas with a big Hungarian majority, with a small Hungarian or Slovak majority, or with a Slovak majority), their findings were absolutely unanimous.

In all these regions the observers found the situation very satisfactory; there was a great spirit of tolerance, and bilingualism was very widespread. In most public and official places (town halls, cultural centres and so on) the use of the two languages was very common. Officials naturally answered in the language in which they had been addressed. Town hall documents were often in both languages, and in any event always in Slovak.

The education system (up to baccalaureate level and in the teacher training college offers a choice between the two languages, Slovak and Hungarian; in general, this choice means that the proportion of Slovak classes is greater than the proportion of Slovaks in the population. In order to guarantee this choice, classes are very small, with an average of 15 pupils per class, and in some cases (the town of Samorin) there are as few as 6 pupils in some classes, so as to obviate any criticism leading to the closure of classes (these were in fact Slovak classes). There were one or two reports of occasional problems caused by "trouble-makers of the kind you find everywhere". The Hungarian community has several regular newspapers and several hours of radio broadcasting time, but only 45 minutes a week of television time.

Many of those questioned expressed the view that there were no problems locally, adding that they hoped for an end to outside pressure (1) from people knowing nothing of the problems of the cohabitation of minorities and merely wishing "to make them say" that problems existed. Some stated quite categorically that the law recently promulgated by the SNC, although fairly vague, served no purpose in their view and in some respects was even undesirable. In particular, the obligation to translate the names of towns and villages has created an obvious problem.

The delegation of observers concluded that the use made of the two languages was very satisfactory and accepted by the local population; in some respects, particularly in education, the situation may be regarded as exemplary from the point of view of the draft European Charter on Regional and Minority Languages. The delegation was convinced that, if there were no external interferences in these regions from extremist elements, one could only be optimistic about the future. It is necessary, however, to avoid taking unpopular measures and to preserve the statu quo through positive discrimination.

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 (1) From both sides outside this bilingual area.  
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### 13. Conclusions

The delegation of observers found unanimously that the local elections had been pluralistic, democratic, free, fair and very well organised, a fact which, it also observed had been recognised by nearly all the parties and political movements, since they had objected neither to the voting system nor to the conduct of the elections.

In the light of its observations of the political situation in the Republic and particularly of the satisfactory minorities situation it was able to study, the delegation is convinced that the Slovak Republic, through these local elections, has taken a second fundamental step towards being a true democracy and establishing the climate of peace and tolerance that the country needs.