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THE MODERN STATE-MAKING OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC: HISTORICAL LESSONS OF V. MECIAR'S POLITICAL REGIME (1993–1998)

Новітнє державотворення Словацької Республіки: історичні уроки режиму В. Мечяра (1993–1998 рр.)

The article analyses the historical background, institutional and procedural features and consequences of the formation of the Slovak Republic's political system in 1993–1998. The particular emphasis is placed on the historical lessons of the implementation of V. Meciar's political course. The declarations of the European and Euro-Atlantic strategic choices accompanied the formation of a regime with restrictions on real democratic rights and freedoms of citizens.

The main problems in the formation of the Slovak Republic's foreign policy were, first of all, lack of relevant experience, lack of qualified personnel, and the lack of adequate assessment of the geopolitical location of the country. This led to the situation when the western vector of the state's foreign policy has become not an absolute alternative, but one of the alternatives. The political discourse

evolved around choosing between integration into the international structures (primarily NATO and the EU) and finding other solutions, such as neutrality or the realization of a concept that viewed the country as a «bridge between East and West». The government of V. Meciar considered these alternatives to be equivalent, not taking into account the realities of the foreign policy of the time. The Slovak state's relations with the EU and NATO during this period were largely determined by the Russian factor. Although the government has taken some steps towards the European integration, such steps were predominantly formal. Thus, the government of V. Meciar led to the country's exclusion in 1997 from the group of NATO and EU aspirants.

Keywords: Slovak Republic, state-making, political regime, V. Meciar's regime.

Аналізуються історичні передумови, інституційно-процедурні особливості та наслідки становлення політичної системи Словацької Республіки в 1993–1998 рр. Основна увага зосереджена на причинах виникнення, внутрішньому характері та історичній поразці гібридного політичного режиму прем'єр-міністра Словаччини В. Мечяра. Окремо акцентується на історичних уроках реалізації політичного курсу В. Мечяра, де декларації реалізації європейського та євроатлантичного стратегічного вибору супроводжували формування режиму з обмеженням реальних демократичних прав та свобод громадян.

Ключові слова: Словацька Республіка, державотворення, політичний режим, режим В. Мечяра.

The formation and development of the Slovak Republic as an independent state and an independent subject of international cooperation took place in the conditions of significant changes both at the regional and international levels. Following the declaration of independence, the Slovak Republic was first forced to determine its foreign policy priorities independently and to choose a conservative-state model of foreign policy. The main problems of its foreign policy development in the first stages of development were the lack of relevant experience, lack of qualified personnel, presence of some authoritarianism in the government, especially by Prime Minister V. Meciar, and adequate assessment of the geopolitical location of the country.

The study methodology is based on the application of a complex of political (comparative, structural-functional, systematic analysis, normative), historical (problem-historical, chronological, retrospective, synchronic) and general scientific (analytical and synthetic, inductive and deductive) methods.

An analysis of recent research and publications on this issue shows that it is the subject of research by many Ukrainian scholars. Among the national researchers of institutional foundations of national minority policy in the period

of post-communist transformation in the countries of Central-Eastern Europe and Slovakia, in particular, such scholars as E. Haydanka, A. Klyuchkovich, M. Lakhizha, O. Cherchaty, L. Yanchuk can be mentioned.

The specificity of Slovakia is that most publications are performed by experts from independent research centres and non-governmental organizations of the Slovak Republic. Among Slovak scientists, politicians and publicists, the work of scientists from the non-governmental scientific-analytical research centre — the Slovak Foreign Policy Association, O. Girfashova, A. Duleba, and Y. Mesezhnikov, occupy the main place.

Slovak scholars identified several stages of post-communist transformation in their country: 1993–1998 (independent republic, isolation); 1998–2006 (1998–2002; turn to Europe; 2002–2006; active reforms); nowadays (stabilization, EU reforms) (Лахижа, М. & Черчатий, О. 2016).

Thus, the purpose of the article is to analyse the historical background, institutional and procedural features and consequences of the formation of the political system of the Slovak Republic in 1993–1998.

In the period 1993–1998, there was a noticeable increase in centralism with a tendency towards authoritarianism, which led to the actual cessation of reforms and the weakening of European integration aspirations. The opposition lost power in parliament, the pro-governmental part of which consistently overthrew the president's «veto» on government-drafted laws. Prime Minister Vladimir Meciar has been accused of an authoritarian style of government, failure to liberalize public life, high levels of corruption, growing budget deficits and more.

According to Ukrainian authors, Vladimir Meciar activity cannot be evaluated only negatively. First, he had to take into account that the ruling coalition also included political forces that rejected the liberal path of modernization and denied the need for European integration.

Secondly, the combination of economic and administrative methods, tight budgetary policies, the devaluation of the Slovak koruna, which contributed to the cheapening of the labour force, enabled the government to stabilize the economy and achieve fairly high rates of economic growth (Лахижа, М. & Черчатий, О. 2016, с. 179).

V. Meciar's position was also undermined by the backlash from the European institutions, which accused the Slovak leadership of failing to comply with the Copenhagen requirements, including human rights violations, instability of institutions and lack of a proper level of democracy. In December 1997, the Luxembourg summit even decided to exclude Slovakia from the list of Central and Eastern European countries — potential participants in the first wave of European Union enlargement (Лахижа, М. & Черчатий, О. 2016, с. 180).

However, according to Larisa Yanchuk, we cannot categorically say that Slovakia has not made any positive step towards the European integration, but

its gradual integration into NATO structures is still unfolding (Янчук, Л. 2009, с. 161). The political processes that took place in Slovakia from 1993 to 1998, when the government of V. Meciar was in power, were contradicted the norms of Western democracies, which, in turn, precluded the SR from joining the transatlantic political and security structures in the near future.

In 1998, V. Meciar's party won the election but failed to form a government. A coalition of four right-wing and centre-left political forces came to power, initiating the transition from a confrontational model to a consensus and promoting public cohesion in support of reform. The Prime Minister of the Party of Public Understanding Mikulash Dzurinda received the post of prime minister. Amendments to the constitution in 1999 made it possible to form a semi-presidential republic which facilitated further reforms (Лахижа, М. & Черчатий, О. 2016, с. 180–181).

Summarizing the political development of Slovakia during the so-called 1994–1998 crisis (one can find an analogy with the development in Ukraine before the Orange Revolution in 2004), L. Yanchuk comes to the following conclusions:

- 1994–1998 was considered the definitive cessation of Slovakia's integration aspirations;
- at this time, a clear discrepancy between the foreign policy statements and the actual political speech manifested itself to such an extent that the Slovak government's promises to correct «democratic deficits» were no longer believed;
- in fact, the foreign policy activities of the Slovak Republic towards the EU (Association Agreement of 4 October 1993), as well as of NATO (Slovak official statement of 4 November 1993), in the following years, were prevented by sharp criticism of the EU (Council of Europe, Inter-Parliamentary Committee, the Slovak Republic and the European Parliament) and NATO (not represented directly by the United States). Official criticism from the West continued from November 1994 until the autumn 1998 elections (Янчук, Л. 2009, с. 167).

We can agree with L. Yanchuk that the period 1993-1997 is characterized by instability of state institutions of Slovakia, underdevelopment of the party system, economic crisis and acute contradictions in the domestic political life of the country. The first years of the independent existence of the Slovak Republic showed how limited their leaders' knowledge of European integration was, and with what illusory ease they imagined joining the EU. First and foremost, Slovak leaders paid close attention to the political aspect of integration and underestimated the complex institutional realities of the EU as well as the importance of sectoral integration, meaning that EU conditions had to be met in accordance with the content of the negotiation process (Янчук, Л. 2008, с. 318).

According to L. Yanchuk, elements of the authoritarian regime were established in the domestic political life of the Slovak Republic. Despite the 1995 General

Slovak-Hungarian Treaty on Neighbourhood and Cooperation signed in Paris in 1995, the Government increased nationalist pressure on the country's Hungarian minority and provoked tensions with Hungary (Янчук, Л. 2008, с. 320–321). In the international arena, V. Meciar's regime balanced between East and West and speculated on the contradictions between them. Slovakia was expanding its ties with Russia and considered the West to be the «Russian enclave» in Central Europe. As a result of such steps, Slovakia has actually found itself in foreign isolation from the West.

Slovakia, during the reign of V. Meciar in 1994–1998, did not comply with the principles and requirements of pan-European institutions in preparation for accession to the EU. This did not, however, prevent V. Meciar, as noted above, from submitting a formal application for an EU-related step on the EU Summit in Cannes on June 27, 1995, on behalf of Slovakia. At its meeting in Luxembourg in December 1997, the European Council, however, did not recommend the opening of negotiations for accession to the European Union with the Slovak Republic because of its failure to meet the political criteria for accession. From the point of view of Euro-Atlantic integration, for Slovakia the period 1994–1998 was almost completely wasted time. At the same time, the Meciar's regime was constantly stating its desire to become an EU member, but in fact did the opposite (Янчук, Л. 2008, с. 321).

The highest level of politicization and conflict was marked by the 1997 national referendum, which took place in the conditions of a fierce struggle for the nature of the political regime in Slovakia. Power and opposition parties, politicians and statesmen, public organizations and state institutions were involved in political confrontation. The content of the ballot, which was formed under the influence of both ruling and opposition forces, was a reflection of the opposition. Not limited to the manipulative content of individual issues (the deployment of nuclear weapons and military bases on the territory of Slovakia), ruling forces (represented by Interior Minister G. Kracci) essentially thwarted the referendum, removing the issue of direct presidential elections from the ballot papers ahead of the vote. In response, the opposition urged voters to ignore the referendum, which led to an extremely low turnout — 9.5%. In the end, the referendum was declared invalid by manipulation of the ballot papers (Ключкович, А. 2019, с. 20).

1998 was a turning point for Slovakia, in which dramatic changes took place. There have been parliamentary elections in the country. Prime Minister M. Dzurinda's coalition government, which won the parliamentary elections and united by a critical attitude to «swordsmanship», launched extremely tumultuous diplomatic activity, set out to expel the country from international isolation and overcome it as quickly as possible (Янчук, Л. 2008, с. 321).

The collapse of the 1997 referendum had far-reaching negative consequences for the ruling coalition led by the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS),

once again demonstrating the undemocratic nature of V. Meciar's regime. Other negative consequences included the increase of political polarization, degradation of Slovakia's international image, suspension of the integration process to the EU and the consolidation of opposition forces. This situation was also negatively affected by citizens' perception of the referendum institute as an effective instrument of direct democracy in Slovakia (Ключкович, А. 2018, с. 20).

Slovakia is among those post-socialist countries that have undergone authoritarian recoil. The development of Slovak civil society in 1993–1998 was burdened with relics of the socialist past: the semi-authoritarian rule of national populists destroyed the foundations of democracy by the practice of party «nepotism», patronage networks, fragmentation of political elites, radicalization. Privatization processes for «their own», persecution of independent journalists, violence against critics of the authorities have removed the prospect of Slovakia's Euro-Atlantic and Euro-integration integration. Because of the authoritarian style of President V. Meciar's government, this country was compared to Belarus under the rule of A. Lukashenko and Serbia in times of S. Milosevic (Кабанцева, І. 2018, с. 52).

Similar to other CEE countries, Slovakia has declared the development of multi-party politics. Influential political formations included the Slovak National Party (SNS), the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), Social Democratic Party of Slovakia (SDSS), and the Green Party of Slovakia (SZS). The new party system continued the existence of the Communist Party, as well as the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) (formerly the Slovak Revival Party) and the Freedom Party. Another pro-communist party appeared as the Party of Democratic Left (Пальшков, К. 2012).

The inertia of the new democratic institutions largely contributed to the fact that even authoritarian politicians were not able to pull Slovakia towards authoritarianism. The fact that in September 1995 Meciar proposed a constitutional amendment regarding the president's status indicates that only later he became aware of restraints of the preserved institutional framework. According to Meciar's plan, the president was to be elected directly by the people, and his powers were to merge with those of prime minister. It was a failed attempt due to the lack of support of the minor parties to achieve a three fifths majority in the parliament (Szomolanyi, S. 2004, p. 162).

If the constructive approach shown by political forces to form a coalition following the first and second parliamentary elections, and the emergence of the Public Against Violence (VPN) and the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), led to optimism about the realization of the approval of an effective multi-party system, the actions of the HZDS in the ruling coalition after the return to power in the 1994 parliamentary elections almost did not lead to the approval of authoritarian forms of government (Пальшков, К. 2012).

A clear example of the destructive politics of the HZDS was the political initiative started by this political force as well as the adopted law on elections of May 20, 1998. According to this law, the central electoral commission took over the leading role in the conduct of elections, and instead of four constituencies a single state was created. A ban on submitting a joint list of candidates from parties to the election coalitions was adopted. Moreover, each party had to overcome the five percent barrier. Meanwhile, the victory of opposition forces, among which the Slovak Democratic Coalition, occupied a special place in the 1998 parliamentary elections, the actual usurpation of power by the HZDS took place, and Slovak parliamentarianism moved to a new «free» stage of development (Пальшков, К. 2012).

However, it is more appropriate to assume that the process of consolidation started only after the 1998 elections. In general, this regression was labelled as «Meciarism» and may be characterised by pervasive clientelism (particularly in the privatisation process), delegative rule, and weak horizontal accountability, which allowed a number of authoritarian practices to reassert themselves under the cover of formally existing democratic institutions (Szomolanyi, S. 2004, p. 172).

According to Yevgeny Gaidanka, the stages of democratization of the political system of the Slovak Republic include the following directions:

- 1) democratic reform of the Constitution (1989–1999);
- 2) optimization of functioning of higher state bodies / establishment of a parliamentary republic with elements of parliamentary-presidential rule (1989–1999);
- 3) the establishment of an effective multi-party system / multi-party system of moderate pluralism (1989–2002);
- 4) the development of parliamentarism (1989–1998);
- 5) democratic type of institution of the presidency / election of the president by popular vote (1993–1999);
- 6) development of local self-government (1990–2001)¹.

The holding of the first elections in Czechoslovakia in 1990 confirmed the Czechs «and Slovaks» desire to live in a democratic society and led to changes in the election law. The latter provided for the possibility of winning any political party or movement if they gained 5% of the votes in one of the republics of the federation, an example being the victory of two ideologically similar forces in the 1992 elections — the Civic Forum (GF) in the Czech Republic and the Public against violence (GPN) in Slovakia. This piece of legislation subsequently became another factor that objectively contributed to the process of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia².

¹ Гайданка Є. І. Порівняльний аналіз моделей переходу до демократії країн Центрально-Східної Європи (на прикладі Польщі, Угорщини та Словаччини): автореферат дисертації ... кандидата політичних наук. Львів, 2011. С. 12.

² Юрійчук Ю. А. Національний фактор у суспільно-політичному розвитку Чехії та Словаччини (1989 — середина 1990-х рр.): автореферат дисертації ... кандидата історичних наук. Чернівці, 2000.

Among the peculiarities of the transformation of political institutions of post-authoritarian Slovakia, E. Haydanka rightly highlights the following:

- 1) long-term fragmentation of the opposition movement, which emerged in 1985, but was institutionalized only in 1989 (GPN);
- 2) the breakup of the Czechoslovak Federation into two sovereign states - the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, which became the standard of peaceful and legal division of the former communist empires, despite national contradictions;
- 3) a period of long-term deviation from the course of democracy-building (1993–1998) in independent Slovakia;
- 4) the general instability and differentiation of the political-party system, which took place until 2002¹.

After the 1992 elections, two of the most important movements — the GF in the Czech Republic and the GPN in Slovakia — split into several smaller parties and organizations. As a result of this split, the Movement for Democratic Slovakia was singled out from the GKN, which brought to the political arena a new Slovak leader, V. Meciar, who later became one of the initiators of the peaceful separation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia².

The first government of the independent Slovak Republic was headed by V. Meciar. In mid-February 1994, a division took place within V. Meciar's Movement for Democratic Slovakia. A group of MPs led by Deputy Prime Minister R. Kovach and Foreign Minister J. Moravcic formed the «Alternative to Political Realism» faction. The resignation of these ministers from government positions, which followed in response to their removal from the party, triggered a government crisis. The new coalition government was headed by J. Moravchuk, who was in power during March — September 1994. On September 28–29, 1994, parliamentary elections took place in Slovakia, with the Democratic Slovakia Movement winning 35% of the vote. The Government Cabinet again headed, for the third time, V. Meciar (Кріль, М. М. 1996, с. 40).

It has already become a kind of axiom that the decisive factor contributing to Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004 was the completion of the democratic transformation process and the creation of a functional liberal-democratic model (Месежніков, Г. 2015).

Alexander Duleba notes that Slovakia's relations with Russia represent yet another important topic, consuming considerable share of the foreign political dispute ever since 1993. However, it has to be said that in the post-accession

¹ Гайданка Є. І. Порівняльний аналіз моделей переходу до демократії країн Центрально-Східної Європи (на прикладі Польщі, Угорщини та Словаччини): автореферат дисертації ... кандидата політичних наук. Львів, 2011. С. 12.

² Юрійчук Ю. А. Національний фактор у суспільно-політичному розвитку Чехії та Словаччини (1989 — середина 1990-х рр.): автореферат дисертації ... кандидата історичних наук. Чернівці, 2000. С. 12.

era this topic has lost its domestic-political charge, which it had in the 90's, and especially during the third government of Vladimir Meciar (1994–1998). After Slovak Republic was disqualified from the first round of NATO and EU accession, Meciar's government presented relations with Russia as an alternative for Slovakia's foreign policy — i. e. an alternative to accession to NATO and EU (Duleba, A. 2011).

Slovakia's consolidation of democracy and participation in European integration were two sides of the same coin. The Slovak example was, however, special, since, unlike neighbouring Visegrad countries, Slovakia did not meet the criteria for democratic membership in the mid-1990s. The risk of losing the chance to become part of a family of democratic European states served, first of all, as a wake-up call for politicians and citizens, and secondly as a mobilization instrument that promoted the change of government in 1998 (Месежніков, Г. 2015).

Ukrainian experts argue that the synergy of adverse circumstances was so powerful in 1993–1998 that if the EU would not offer to independent Slovakia a real prospect of the membership, the struggle for democracy could end in a completely different way, and further development the state's prosperity could be headed in a different, less democratic direction.

The dynamics of the political process in 1994–1998 testified to the functioning of a hybrid political regime with a distinct transformational tendency to assert authoritarianism. Among the undemocratic features of the political regime in Slovakia, A. Klyuchkovich singled out the following: concentration of power in the state in the hands of a parliamentary-governmental coalition led by a charismatic leader; attempts to change the institutional rules of political development in order to concentrate power; transformation of the parliament (parliamentary majority) into an instrument of influence of the head of the executive power; neglect of the rights of the parliamentary opposition, obstruction of its activity; use of law enforcement agencies, special services for political struggle, harassment of opposition representatives; restrictions and violations of the rules of electoral competition and democratic expression of the will of citizens; increased control over the media; fomenting national intolerance and intensifying the value division in society; party-economic clientism, non-transparent privatization and corruption (Ключкович, А. 2019, с. 22).

European Union authorities expressed fears over the adoption of the Law on the Protection of the Republic, which seriously hampered the activities of the political opposition, infringed on freedom of speech and other democratic rights. But representatives of the authorities in the SR ignored the criticism and, trying to justify all their steps, used the myth of a «special Slovak way» for propaganda purposes. Prime Minister V. Meciar, in particular, stated: «Every state has the right to seek its own way ... The transformation process can be supported (or not supported) from the outside, but it cannot be dictated. After all, everything that

happens in our country is not something bad, it's just something new, different from another» (Савка, В. 2017).

The head of the Slovak government, judging by his statements, was convinced that the unlawful withdrawal of the mandate from MP M. Gaulider, the attack on the President of the SR, the abduction of his son and the forcible removal of him to the territory of neighbouring Austria with a view to further compromising the presidential power in the hands of his political movement, marginalizing the role of the opposition in society, granting privileges to his political supporters in conducting privatization, using intelligence and counterintelligence to implement his plans, and the other similar facts were fully invested in the concept of «special Slovak way» (Савка, В. 2017).

Strengthening the liberal-democratic regime and creating the conditions for its permanent reproduction may be considered as the most significant asset of Slovak EU membership. Integration has proved that it is the key to Slovakia's internal democratic development (Месежніков, Г. 2015). The political leadership of the SR did not cease to speak of its desire to make the country a full member of the EU (V. Meciar even drafted utopian plans for accession to the EU by the beginning of 2000) (Савка, В. 2017).

The first five years after the partition of Czechoslovakia and the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic (1993–1998) were held under the semi-authoritarian rule of national populists. This period was characterised by the destruction of the basic foundations of the democratic regime, the practice of party «nepotism», the violation of the principles of legality (Месежніков, Г. 2013, с. 31).

The Slovak political elite, led by Prime Minister V. Meciar's party — the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia — has faced a dilemma: on the one hand, changing the political course both domestically and internationally would mean recognizing one's own political collapse, and, on the other, the absence of any changes in the WP program would mean that, unlike its closest neighbours, Slovakia will remain an unstable country that does not participate in the integration process and therefore occupies much weaker international positions. The Movement for Democratic Slovakia put party ambitions first, and neglected the long-term interests of the Slovak Republic. The representatives of this party persuaded their political environment, and mainly voters, that Slovakia, in fact, does not need European integration at all, and that the Western model of development does not meet Slovakian needs (Савка, В. 2017).

According to A. Klyuchkovich, the complexity of Slovak transit in the first years of independence appeared because of the two groups of different factors. On the one hand, the driving force for further democratic transformations in Slovakia was the fact that the main institutional characteristics of the political regime were laid back in the so-called «federal» stage of transition. On the other

hand, the first years of independence did not contribute to democratization, and in some cases even led to the emergence of undemocratic trends in the country's development under the influence of a number of preconditions and factors (Ключкович, А. 2019, с. 19).

Slovakia, the only one in Central Europe, after the initial powerful democratization process in 1990–1992, created favourable conditions for creating the institutional foundations of a democratic regime, but after the achievement of the state sovereignty, there were clear signs of regression in the second half of the 1990s and led to the weakening of democratic achievements. The current situation had the following features:

- a long-term conflict within the country's top leadership (president and prime minister) has undermined the stability and functionality of the country's democratic institutions system and hampered effective cooperation in promoting the interests of the state. This conflict appeared due to the various political styles of authorities and was associated primarily with the ongoing efforts of the Prime Minister and the head of the RDS, V. Meciar, to oust the legitimately elected President, Michal Kovac, who, in turn, refused to «run the party», according to the ideas of the leader of the RDS;
- antagonistic confrontation between the ruling coalition (RDS, Association of Slovak Workers (ASR), SNP) and opposition parties. The ruling coalition tried to do its utmost to weaken opposition parties through the mechanisms of state (legislative and executive) power, using openly discriminatory measures against them. In the last year of its reign, a few months before the 1998 parliamentary elections, the ruling RDS-ACP-SNP coalition tried to complicate and, accordingly, to undermine the free competition of political forces underlying modern parliamentary democracy by deliberately changing the electoral law. The current position of the ruling party coalition was based on the monopolies of these parties in the executive branch, including power structures and media;
- preparation, adoption and practical application of legislative measures aimed at the excessive concentration of political power (Месенжников, Г. 2013, с. 73).

Since late 1996, as opposed to consolidated so-called «Meciar's camp», the «anti-Meciar's» camp begins to be structurally organized. Gradually, opposition politicians are convinced of the urgency of uniting efforts to preserve the institutional foundations of the democratic regime, so the importance of ideological distinctions in coalition formation has been sidelined (Ключкович, А. 2019, с. 21).

А. Klyuchkovich points out that in 1989–1992 a number of conflicting lines were in the Slovak society, which were in a «dormant» state during the communist regime. During this turbulent period, party-political structuring quickly absorbed a whole range of political, economic, national-ethnic, socio-religious and national-emancipation problems (Ключкович, А. 2019, с. 73).

The heterogeneity of the anti-communist camp led to the fact that the 1990 parliamentary elections were not only a plebiscite in relation to the previous regime, but also a clash of two strong (non-communist) political actors (Ключкович, А. 2019, с. 73–74).

In terms of the representation of socio-political divisions, A. Klyuchkovich emphasizes the uniqueness of the ideological profile of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (RZDS) led by V. Meciar. First, the RZDS became the main electoral heir to the GPN, which was the main driving force behind the anti-communist revolution in Slovakia. Second, RZDS positioned itself as the main defender of the interests of the Slovak periphery in the context of the discussion on reforming the Czechoslovak federation («Prague is the Center — Slovak is a Periphery»). Third, the RSDS «occupied» the socio-economic conflict line by criticizing radical economic reform, which was portrayed as discriminatory and instigated from Prague, and populist rhetoric about Slovakia's particular path of economic transformation. Finally, V. Meciar, as a prime minister, used the church-state conflict line to support the restitution of church property and the development of contractual relations with the Vatican, thus competing with the CDU in the Catholic electoral field (Ключкович, А. 2019, с. 74).

According to A. Klyuchkovich's conclusion, the presence of traditional and non-standard conflict social lines, their mutual stratification, situational actualization and unstable party-political representation confirm the complexity of Slovakia's post-communist socio-political development (Ключкович, А. 2019, с. 77).

The historical background, institutional and procedural features and consequences of the formation of the political system of the Slovak Republic in 1993/01/50/1998 are analysed. The main reasons for the emergence of a hybrid political regime of the Prime Minister of Slovakia V. Meciar are identified. Particular emphasis is placed on the historical lessons of the implementation of V. Meciar's political course, where declarations of the European and Euro-Atlantic strategic choices accompanied the formation of a regime with restrictions on real democratic rights and freedoms of citizens.

In the analysis, we divided that since late 1996, as opposed to consolidated so-called the «Meciars» camp begins to be structurally organized and the «anti-Meciars» camp. Gradually, opposition politicians are convinced of the urgency of uniting efforts to preserve the institutional foundations of the democratic regime, so the importance of ideological differences in coalition formation has been sidelined.

The dynamics of the political process in 1994–1998 testified to the functioning of a hybrid political regime with a distinct transformational tendency to assert authoritarianism. Among the undemocratic features of the political regime in Slovakia we can singled out the following: concentration of power in the state in the hands of a parliamentary-governmental coalition led by a charismatic leader;

attempts to change the institutional rules of political development in order to concentrate power; transformation of the parliament (parliamentary majority) into an instrument of influence of the head of the executive power; neglect of the rights of the parliamentary opposition, obstruction of its activity; use of law enforcement agencies, special services for political struggle, harassment of opposition representatives; restrictions and violations of the rules of electoral competition and democratic expression of the will of citizens; increased control over the media; fomenting national intolerance and intensifying the value divide in society; party-economic clientism, non-transparent privatization and corruption; to concentrate power, foreign policy goals were sacrificed by domestic policy.

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