

THE EUROPEAN UNION
AND THE QUESTION OF SLOVAK MEMBERSHIP:
VANISHING DREAM OR FORTHCOMING REALITY?

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(Abstract)

As the literature on democratization indicates, the international environment can play a significant role in the success or failure of a democratic transition. Since the collapse of communism, the European Union has represented a powerful and attractive magnet for Eastern European societies. Hoping for a "return to Europe," these various countries have expressed a strong desire to join the European Union. Beyond the internal debate fueled by these demands concerning the wisdom of deepening or enlarging the EU., member-states could not but reaffirm the procedure previously followed with countries such as Greece, Spain, and Portugal. While indicating that membership could not, and cannot take place without the completion of certain economic and political requirements, the European Union thus established external constraints on the democratic transition undertaken by Eastern European Countries.

In order to satisfy these EU requirements all prospective East Central European candidates are striving to consolidate their emerging democratic institutions and to establish a solid record with regard to the defense of fundamental human rights. Although the Visegrad countries (Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Poland) are expected to become the first states to join the European Union, this goal may not be achieved for everyone of them. Despite good economic results, the Slovak candidacy indeed is losing support, as the current government exhibits signs of authoritarianism.

Because Slovakia may be the only country of the Visegrad group to be left out of a future EU. enlargement, and because Slovakia has been quite too often neglected by the literature on democratic transition, this paper wants to analyze why the external constraints exerted by the EU. have been less effective in the Slovak case. In other words, this research paper will examine why national constraints have undermined the power of attraction of the European Union, and what are the reasons for the democratic shortcomings of the Slovak political system. Finally, this paper will assess the prospect for a Slovak full membership.

The European Union and the Question of Slovak Membership: Vanishing Dream or Forthcoming Reality?

As the literature on democratization indicates, the international environment can play a significant role in the success or failure of a democratic transition.¹ Since the collapse of communism, the European Union (EU) has represented a powerful and attractive magnet for Eastern European societies. Hoping for a “return to Europe,” these various countries have expressed a strong desire to join the European Union. This call to the West carries the hope that E. U. membership can firmly anchor these countries into the world of consolidated democracies, and contribute to the emergence and stabilization of thriving economies. In other words, the leaders of Eastern European countries believe that the EU can play as significant a role in their democratic transition and consolidation as it did for Spain, Portugal and Greece. After debating the wisdom of enlarging the EU, its member-states had to establish a procedure to welcome these former communist regimes. They decided to reaffirm the principles that had guided the southern enlargement. The EU thus stressed that membership could not, and cannot take place without the completion of certain economic and political requirements. In so doing, the

¹ See Ronald H. Linden, “The Price of a Bleacher Seat: Eastern Europe’s Entry in the World Political Economy,” in Michael Kraus and Ronald Liebowitz (eds.), *Russia and Eastern Europe after Communism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 315-336; Markus Rodlauer, “The Experience with IMF-Supported Reform Programs in Central and Eastern Europe,” *Journal of Comparative Economics* 20 (1995), 95-115; Adrian G. H. Hyde-Price, “Democratization in Eastern Europe,” in Geoffrey Pridham and Tatu Vanhanen (eds.), *Democratization in Eastern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 220-252; Geoffrey Pridham, Eric Herring and George Sanford, *Building Democracy? The International Dimension of Democratization in Eastern Europe* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1994); Charles Wolf, Jr. (ed.), *Promoting Democracy and Free Markets in Eastern Europe* (Santa Monica: Rand, 1991).

Union established external constraints on the democratic transition undertaken by Eastern European countries.

Following the precedent of Greece, for which associate membership had represented a preparatory phase to the goal of European membership,² Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary became associate members. These Associate agreements, also called Europe agreements, are crucial because they are aimed at helping these countries to adjust to a free market economy and to prepare for an eventual admission into the European Single Market. However, as the previous instances of Greece, Spain, and Portugal demonstrate, economic conditions are necessary but not sufficient to be a successful candidate. Political factors also play a significant role in assessing whether or not a country can partake into negotiations for full membership. Since the early 1970s, the European Court of Justice has affirmed that one of the defining principles of the European Union is the common adherence to a “philosophical, political and legal substratum”³ whose one essential attribute is the respect of fundamental human rights. Hence, hopeful candidates can only succeed in their bid to membership if they can agree to and abide by the democratic rule which defines the European Union.

In order to satisfy these requirements all prospective East Central European candidates are striving to consolidate their emerging democratic institutions and to establish a solid record with regard to the defense of fundamental rights. Until recently all Visegrad countries (Czech republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) were expected to

² Greece concluded an Associate Agreement on July 9, 1961, and eventually became a member of the European Economic Community on January 1, 1981.

³ Case 11/70: *International Handelsgesellschaft GmbH v Einfuhr-und Vorratsstelle fur Getreide Futtermittel* [1970] 2 ECR 1125 at 1146, [1972], *Common Market Law Review* 255 at 271.

become the first former communist states to join the European Union. However, this goal may not be achieved for every one of them. Despite good economic results, the Slovak candidacy indeed is losing support, as the current government exhibits increasing signs of authoritarianism.

Because Slovakia may be the only country of the original Visegrad group to be left out of a future eastern enlargement, and because Slovakia has been too often neglected by the literature on democratic transition, this paper analyzes why the external constraints exerted by the EU have been less effective in the Slovak case. In other words, this research paper will examine why national constraints have undermined the power of attraction of the European Union, and what are the reasons for the democratic shortcomings of the Slovak political system. Finally, this paper will try to assess the prospect for a Slovak full EU membership. However, before addressing these questions, it is necessary to understand the EU's policy toward enlargement, and more specifically, toward the case of Eastern European countries.

I. The European Union and the Eastern European Enlargement:

After forty-five years of communist rule and forced relationships with the Soviet Union, Eastern European countries turned their attention to the West. So eager to separate themselves from a traumatic past, these countries even rejected the very term "Eastern Europe." To these new regimes, which aspired to democratic stability and economic prosperity, the European Union represented the promised land. For the European Union, however, this new Eastern European geopolitical environment required

a reassessment of the long term goals of its member-states: Western European countries had to wrestle with the delicate issue of choosing between an enlargement or a deepening of the European Union. It also meant the definition of an eastern policy that would be responsive to the needs of countries undertaking challenging political and economic transformations. After some soul-searching and the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1991, the European Union officially agreed to an eastern enlargement at the 1993 Copenhagen Summit. From then on, any European associate member was free to apply to the European Union. In order to accept the application of those East Central European countries aspiring to full membership, though, the EU had to establish a set of clear conditions. The Maastricht Treaty already provided a framework upon which the European Union could develop more elaborated requirements. Whereas the 1991 Treaty spelled out the European (Article O) and democratic nature (Article F) of the Union, as well as the obligation to “maintain in full [and build] upon the *Acquis Communautaire*,” (Article B and C), the EU could not do less than reiterate and specify these high standards. To this end, the EU made a point to clearly enunciate the necessary requirements awaiting prospective candidates. Henceforth, any would be East Central European candidate was expected:

[to stabilize the] institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for the protection of minorities;
[to establish] a functioning market economy, as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union;
...to take on the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.⁴

⁴ See “Conclusions of the Presidency: European Council of Copenhagen, 21-22 June 1993,” *Europe Documents* June 24, 1993, 5.

However, in order to help these countries to reach these goals, the EU acknowledged the need to devise a “pre-accession strategy.”⁵ The latter was revealed during the 1994 Essen Summit.

The EU strategy toward the eastern enlargement basically relies upon three pillars. The first pillar is the institutional framework of bilateral cooperation between the EU and its associate members. It is established through a series of Europe Agreements. Although these treaties primarily aim at establishing free trade among their signatories, they also encompass a wide range of issues, such as regional development, culture, energy, social security, health, etc. In order to facilitate this process, regular consultations are established. The Europe Agreements provide an institutional setting in the form of Association Councils. These councils allow for separate bilateral discussions between the European Union and its East Central European associates. As previously noted, the bulk of these agreements deals with economic issues. In the area of trade, the major goal has been to abolish tariffs in the European Union for all industrial products by January 1, 1995, except steel and textile, while East Central European economies have been given a ten-year period to reciprocate. The two excluded domains represent sensitive areas for the Union, and thus demand more time. When these agreements were signed, it was expected that free trade could be achieved by January 1, 1996 for steel, and January 1, 1998 for textiles.⁶ As to the controversial agricultural sector, the EU and its East Central

⁵ “European Commission Suggestions on the Strategy to Prepare the Countries of Central and Eastern European Countries for Accession to the European Union,” *Europe Documents* September 14, 1994, 1.

⁶ “European Commission Suggestions,” *op cit.*, 3.

European partners are expected to negotiate a reduction of quotas within the system of generalized preferences (SGP). In addition, East Central European countries must develop their economic, financial and social structures so that they can embark on the challenging task of participating to the European Single Market.

The second pillar is based upon the development of a “multilateral dialogue” between the EU and prospective candidates. That multilateral framework offers a forum where the EU and its associate members can discuss substantive issues at a transnational level. More significantly, by interacting regularly with the EU and other candidates, East Central European countries not only learn to work out issues through open discussions, they also gain a greater knowledge of the inner functioning of European institutions. The dialogue with associate members follows the same format than regular meetings among full-fledged fellow members. The areas discussed by the representatives of EU member-states and East Central European countries offer the whole gamut of issues normally tackled by the EU: foreign policy, security, justice and home affairs, economy, agriculture, education, etc. While for sensitive areas, such as foreign policy and defense, these meetings take place twice a year, for other sectors, consultations only occur once a year. In other words, such a procedure gives them a taste of what it means to be a full EU member. It is expected that these multilateral consultations will help these countries to make a smoother transition to full- membership. Moreover, it can facilitate the admission for these countries as a group.

The third pillar covers the practical and financial aspects of the cooperation between the EU and East Central European countries. These are implemented through

the Phare Program. The latter was originally designed in 1989 to provide economic assistance to Poland and Hungary. Since then, it has been extended to all other countries in the region to help them in their transition from a planned to a free market economy. The Phare Program, in conjunction with other international financial institutions, such as the European Bank for reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank, guarantees loans, helps to promote investments, facilitates transfers of technology and technical assistance, and counsels countries on how to transform their economic infrastructures.

However, the Phare Program goes beyond the economic sphere. It is also expected to support initiatives that are aimed at fostering the reemergence of civil society. The Democracy Program, in particular, is devoted to the development of pluralism and the development of non-governmental organizations. NGOs, for instance, receive particular attention because they are deemed to represent an example of mediating institutions that are fundamental for a viable civil society. Finally, the framework provided by the Phare Program ambitions to encourage regional cooperation among East Central European countries. As the European Commission indicated: "Cooperation between neighbours is an integral part of Union membership. Close cooperation between the countries of Central and Eastern Europe will be economically beneficial and will help to accelerate accession."⁷ That process is also designed to deal with potential disputes among prospective candidates, and to ensure security and stability throughout the region.

⁷ European Commission Suggestions," *op cit.*, 3.

Although the EU has elaborated a rather ambitious plan to handle the possible eastern enlargement, it has failed to provide a precise timetable about future negotiations. Since the offer of Copenhagen, ten countries (Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, the Czech republic and Slovenia) have officially declared their intention to apply. Each country has been asked to fill out a questionnaire, and the European Commission is expected to review each application. At the end of that process, it will issue an opinion about each country. The announcement of the countries selected to be part of the next enlargement is expected to be made public at the European Council of June 1997. In the meantime, the member-states must grapple with the difficult issue of institutional reform which is necessary to accommodate the entry of new members. Although the debate surrounding this reform goes beyond the scope of this research, it is worth noting its significance because ultimately it can modify the possible date of entry of the first East Central European countries. Commissioner Hans van den Broek, who oversees relations with East Central Europe has remained cautious, only conceding during a trip to the Czech Republic, that most probably, the first group of East Central European countries to be admitted will not join effectively the EU until at least the year 2002. It is against this EU pre-accession policy that the prospect of a Slovak candidacy must be assessed and discussed.

II. Slovakia and EU Membership Requirements:

Similarly to the Czech Republic, Slovakia's preparation for EU accession has been complicated by the break-up of the Czechoslovak Federation on January 1, 1993.

Consequently, despite the conclusion of a Europe Agreement with Czechoslovakia in December 1991, Slovakia and the EU had to revisit the framework of their relationship following Slovakia's accession to sovereignty. A new Europe Agreement with Slovakia was concluded in October 1993. Following the invitation made at the 1993 Copenhagen Summit, Slovakia officially announced its candidacy at the Cannes European Council in June 1995. Slovakia was even the first country to turn in its questionnaire in the Summer of 1996. Within the framework of the Phare Program, Slovakia received 215 million ECU for the 1991-1995 period, and received an additional 176 Million ECU for the 1996-1999 period.⁸

Although Slovakia was one of the first countries to apply to EU membership, over the course of months, numerous reservations from various sources have been raised pertaining to the ability of Slovakia to be part of the first eastern enlargement. Leading a growing chorus of western concerns has been Commissioner van den Broek, which on numerous occasions, has indicated that Slovakia fell short of the democratic requirements. In June 1996, he affirmed that the Slovak candidacy was not automatic and could be in serious jeopardy. He simply warned the Slovak delegation in Brussels that "it would be a mistake for Slovakia, or any other candidate, to assume that enlargement [would] go ahead anyway regardless of shortcomings in their preparation for membership."⁹ He further stressed that "partial membership is not an option."¹⁰

⁸ See <European Commission, Directorate General 1A>
<<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg1a/cec/Slovakia/facts.htm>>.

⁹ See <European Commission, Directorate General 1A>
<<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg1a/newspage/news.91.html#10>>.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

So, Commissioner van den Broek urged Slovakia to take the necessary measures to conform to EU requirements. A similar advice was reiterated six months later by the EU Ambassador to Slovakia, Mr. Georgious Zavvos, when he stated: “there is much work to be done and in this task there can be no delay...The clock is ticking...Slovakia must seize the message and act.”¹¹ Warnings have not been the sole responsibility of EU representatives. Member-states, particularly Germany, which has been at the forefront of the enlargement debate, have not hidden their lack of enthusiasm for the Slovak application, preferring to push that of Slovenia or of the Baltic states. While visiting Austria in the Summer of 1996, for instance, Chancellor Kohl declared that “Slovakia’s internal development [was] very harmful” to its prospects for EU membership.”¹² He even affirmed that Slovakia was not ready to join the Union. These concerns are not confined to the Western European horizon, as the American Administration issued similar statements on the perspective of NATO enlargement.¹³

In view of this wave of criticisms, it is important to assess the Slovak situation. First, it will allow us to clarify whether or not concerns about Slovakia are justified; and second, it will lead us to examine what national circumstances have prevented this country from responding diligently to EU and other Western criticisms.

¹¹ See <European Commission, Directorate General 1A>
<<http://europa.eu.int/en/comm/dg1a/cec/Slovakia/Slovak1.htm>>.

¹² *F.B.I.S* (W.EU), July 17, 1996, 13; *OMRI*, July 16, 1996.

¹³ Although NATO and EU enlargement are not officially tied, these represent parallel processes. Many NATO countries are also EU members, therefore overall similar assessments should be expected. See report on the declaration of the US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright after the visit made on April 25, 1996 by the Slovak Foreign Minister, Pavol Hamzik, in Washington, DC on *Radio Free Europe*, April 25, 1997.

1/ Economic Conditions:

As heretofore indicated, both democratic consolidation and a functioning free market economy must be achieved in order to join the European Union. It is with the latter condition that Slovakia has been most successful. Despite wide-spread skepticism, Slovakia seems to have challenged the odds. Following the Velvet divorce, the Slovak economic horizon looked uncertain. Slovakia inherited from the former communist regime the bulk of the outdated industrial conglomerates of the Czechoslovak Federation, and thus faced a daunting task to restructure its economy. The specter of high unemployment and social hardship loomed large over the newly sovereign state. Going against the spirit of the time, Slovak leaders appeared reluctant to inflict the harsh medicine of shock therapy advocated by their Czech counterparts. Many observers then doubted Slovak economic future. However, so far, these predictions of doom have been a little premature. Indeed, the Slovak economy has shown some clear signs of improvement: inflation has declined steadily from 23% in 1993, to 13.4% in 1994, 7.9% in 1995, and 6% in 1996. Slovakia thus enjoys the lowest rate of inflation among East Central European states. Moreover, after three difficult economic years, the Slovak economy has recovered in a spectacular way and is now growing at a fast pace: from 4.8% in 1994, to 6.1% in 1995 and 7% in 1996. Estimations for 1997 even forecast a 6% economic growth. In the domain of budgetary policy, Slovakia has succeeded in reducing the budget deficit from 7.3% in 1994, to 4% in 1995 and 1.5% in 1996, bringing it within the 3% percent criterion for the European Monetary Union. Perhaps the only disappointing indicator is that of unemployment, which remains in the double digit (14.8

% in 1994 and 13.1 % in 1995).¹⁴ Overall, these figures have allowed the EBRD to hail the Slovak economic achievements.¹⁵

Despite this rosy picture, the conditions surrounding the Slovak economic transformation have not been exempt from criticisms. The process of privatization, for instance, has been mired with controversies. One major issue of contention has been the decision in late 1994 to interrupt the second wave of privatization. After the election of a new majority, the Prime Minister, Vladimir Meciar of the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), decided to shift from a voucher system of privatization open to all Slovaks to an insider privatization scheme, which favors managers and employees of the firms to be privatized. In the long run, such a decision may have significant consequences. First, it slows down the process of privatization, which sends and has sent negative signals to the EU. Second, this insider approach may hinder economic recovery insofar as inside players may not be committed to substantial structural changes within their companies. Third, it facilitates the ability of the state to retain close ties with the managers of the newly privatized enterprises. A good case in point is the requirement imposed upon the newly privatized companies, to advertise exclusively in the media controlled by the government.¹⁶ In addition to these changes, the government decided to transfer the authority to privatize from the Cabinet to the National Property Fund (NPF),

¹⁴ *US Department of State Report on Human Rights in 1996* released by the Bureau of Democracy, on January 1997.

See <http://www.state.gov/www/issues/human_rights/1996_hrp_report/Slovakre_html>.

¹⁵ *Radio Free Europe*, April 16, 1997.

¹⁶ *US Department of State Report on Human Rights in 1996*, *op cit*.

thereby excluding the representatives of the opposition from the process of decision-making.

Despite attempts to bring these issues before the Constitutional Court in February 1996, and to strike a compromise with the Prime Minister, privatizations resumed without the consultation of the opposition. No less than forty firms were transferred to the private sector following this process in mid-1996.¹⁷ Many of these privatizations were denounced by the opposition as they seemed to favor and reward the supporters of the coalition government. In this regard, one of the major concerns raised by the EU has been the lack of transparency in the new privatization scheme.¹⁸ In addition to these changes, the parties in power have emphasized that strategic sectors, such as defense, transportation, telecommunication, and energy should remain under state control. Again, such a posturing may be interpreted negatively by the EU, at a time when the objective of the Single market forces EU member states to deregulate and open to competition some of these same sectors.

However important these economic concerns may be, they have paled in comparison with the controversies stirred up by the political environment in Slovakia.

2/ Political Conditions:

It is unfortunately no exaggeration to declare that the Slovak government has revealed some authoritarian inclinations. Numerous events illustrate this point, from the

¹⁷ *Radio Free Europe*, August 6, 1996.

¹⁸ *Prague Post*, February 27, 1996, 4.

hostile campaign orchestrated against the President,¹⁹ to the questionable removal of a dissident of HZDS from parliament, through the deliberate firing of individuals suspected to be unfriendly to the coalition government.²⁰ Out of all of these issues, three of them have generated a concern about the ability of Slovakia to consolidate democratic institutions. The adoption of legislation on the Protection of the Republic, the treatment of minorities, non-governmental organizations and foundations seem to represent steps aimed at undermining the core foundation of democracy. Perhaps no other issue than the law on the Protection of the Republic illustrates better the authoritarian risk lurking in Slovakia. In March 1996, the government decided to introduce a bill to amend the criminal code. The provisions, which provoked loud domestic and international protests, aimed at curtailing nothing less than freedom of speech and assembly. That amendment, which was passed by the Parliament the same month provided that any person involved in the spreading of false information at home or abroad and endangering the security and the interests of the Republic would in effect commit a crime punishable by law. Those found guilty according to the text of the law would face a sentence of up to two years in prison for spreading false information (article 98), while those organizing meetings threatening the state could get from six months to five years (article 92).²¹ Many Human Rights observers were alarmed by the close resemblance between this amendment and a

¹⁹ Numerous issues have opposed the President and the government. However, the most disconcerting question has been the mysterious kidnapping of the President's son, which allegedly involved the Slovak Intelligence Services (SIS).

²⁰ *US Department of State 1995 Country Report on Economic Policy and Trade Practices* submitted to the Senate Committees on Foreign Relations and on Finance and to the House Committees on Foreign Affairs and Ways and Means in May 1996.
See <http://www.state.gov/www/issues/economic/trade_reports/europe_canada/Slovakia.html>

previous similar communist 1948 legislation, not to mention the severity of the punishments. Professor Vladimir Cecot of the Law Faculty at Comenius University pointed out that this amendment represented an attempt to return to a pre 1989 situation, by renewing provisions used under communism.²² There is little doubt that at that point the specter of authoritarianism loomed large over the Slovak political scene. The potential danger of that law was regarded as so serious that the leader of the Slovak Catholic Church, Cardinal Jan Korec, found himself compelled to publish a statement condemning the whole reform in addition to the statement already issued by the Slovak National Council of Bishops.²³

Abroad, similar concerns led the EU to issue overt warnings to Slovakia that this type of legislation contravened the democratic principle, and could undermine the Slovak application.²⁴ The threat of suspending the Associate agreement with Slovakia was agitated to convince the authorities of the unacceptable nature of this penal reform.²⁵ That amendment, vetoed by the president, Michal Kovac, was withdrawn in October 1996, although the authorities denied that this decision was influenced by the flow of negative western reactions. However, that withdrawal did not mean the end of this issue: the Prime Minister immediately promised that a revised bill on the Protection of the

²¹ *Radio Free Europe*, March 27, 1996; also see *SME* March 9, 1996, 1-2 for a detailed description of the Amendment.

²² *Narodna Obroda*, March 19, 1996, 5.

²³ See *Praca*, April 9, 1996, 5; See also, *OMRI*, March 26, 1996.

²⁴ *OMRI*, July 2, 1996; *Pravda*, June 4, 1996, 21.

²⁵ *Prague Post*, April 17-23, 1996, 4.

Republic would be submitted to the Slovak parliament. Despite attempts at toning down this amendment, Slovak MPs finally killed this highly controversial proposal.²⁶

Another disturbing political development has been the adoption of a legislation on NGOs and foundations on May 22, 1996. According to this bill, in order to function NGOs and foundations must register with the Interior Ministry, indicate the sources and origin of donations received, and most of all must possess at least 100 000 SL Crowns even before they can start their activities. The major consequence of this legislation, the US Department of State indicates, is that it will eliminate about 95 percent of the currently existing foundations.²⁷ By endangering the development of mediating institutions, and particularly secondary type of associations (i.e., trade unions, churches, sports clubs, literary societies, any type of association that provide for social interaction and interconnectedness) the government and majority parties in parliament are undermining the rooting of democratic values. As the work of Robert Putnam illustrates, the basis of a consolidated democracy and efficient institutions rests upon the vitality of its civic community. The latter is fostered by the existence of a network of cross-cutting organizations, whose major contribution is to allow horizontal linkages to develop within society. Participation in these various organizations enhances democracy because it encourages public involvement, trust, tolerance and solidarity.²⁸ Such a contribution is essential for the process of democratic consolidation, especially in Eastern Europe. As

²⁶ *Radio Free Europe*, February 12, 1997.

²⁷ *US Department of State Country Report on Human Right Practices for 1996*, *op cit*.

²⁸ Robert D. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy* 6 (January 1995) 1, 64-77; Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

the literature on democratic transition indicates, except for Poland and Hungary, post communist Eastern European societies have been characterized by weak civil societies.²⁹ It is the harsh legacy of the communist regimes, whose very nature led them to expand at the expense of the public sphere and of already historically weak civil societies.³⁰ Thus, in the post-communist environment, the role of mediating institutions, such as NGOs and foundations is essential, for they can participate in the rooting of a democratic culture; for they can supply the democratic seeds that are so desperately needed by an Eastern European soil devastated by a long and harsh communist winter. Following a similar line of reasoning, the EU once again found itself compelled to alert the Slovak authorities that this legislation on NGOs and foundations does not contribute to the consolidation of democracy.³¹

A third and contentious aspect of the Slovak policy has been the treatment of minorities. For Europe, that issue represents an important test of the level of democratic commitment of prospective candidates. The fair treatment of minorities indeed represents a good indicator of the acceptance of pluralism. It also contributes to the stability and security of Europe: it is a vital issue for Eastern Europe, because various minorities are

²⁹ Kristen Bill Maher, "The Role of Mass Values," in Robert D. Grey *Democratic Theory and Post-Communist Change* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1997), 79-110; Michael Bernhard, "Civil Society after the First Transition: Dilemmas of Post Communist Democratization in Poland and Beyond," *Communist and Post Communist Studies* 29 (1996) 3, 309-330; Richard Rose, "Rethinking Civil Society: Post-Communism and the Problem of Trust," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (July 1994) 3, 18-30; Kazimierz Z. Ponanski, *Constructing Capitalism: the Reemergence of Civil Society and Liberal Economy in the Post-Communist World* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992), especially Part three, 141-197.

³⁰ Ferenc Feher, Agnes Heller and Gyorgy Markus, *Dictatorship over Needs* (London: Blackwell, 1983); for a discussion on the weak nature of civil societies in Eastern Europe prior to communism, see George Schopflin, *Politics in Eastern Europe* (Blackwell: Cambridge, 1993).

³¹ *Narodna Obroda*, May 14, 1996, 2; Also *Pravda*, June 4, 1996, 21.

spread among several countries throughout the region. The mismanagement of these questions can contribute to tensions, and even in the worst case scenario to conflict and political destabilization. As the Yugoslav crisis indicated, the danger of ethnic conflicts spilling over into several countries is not too far-fetched a scenario in the post-Cold War environment. The development of a democratic culture also requires a just treatment of minorities. In that regard, the EU wants to avoid any situation that could fuel any ethnic and national tensions. The NATO precedent, namely the coexistence within its membership of two arch rivals, such as Greece and Turkey, is a reminder of potential problems. It has thus prompted the EU to pressure the Slovak government to settle these minority issues.³² Although Slovakia has various minorities (Czech, Ruthenian, Ukrainian, German, Polish, and Gypsy), it is the treatment of the largest group, the Hungarians, which has been most problematic. The Hungarian population represents about 10.75% of the total population, and tends to mostly be concentrated in the southern part of the country, near the Hungarian border. Actually, in eleven southern districts, the Slovak population constitutes less than half of the population.³³ The interests of the Hungarian minority so far have been represented fairly by various political parties, such as the Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (MKDH), Egyuttes, and the Hungarian Civic Party (MOS). However what has attracted the attention of the EU and Human Rights observers is the reluctance of the Meciar government to take the necessary measures to legally protect minorities. Although the long awaited Slovak Hungarian

³² *Pravda*, June 4, 1996, 21; *Pravda*, June 29, 1996, 1 and 20.

³³ *Regional Problems and Policies in the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic* (Paris: O.E.C.D., 1996), 47.

treaty finally was signed in the Spring of 1995, its ratification was delayed for months under various pretexts. In the end, it was ratified by the Slovak Parliament a year later in March 1996, and signed by the President in May 1996. Such delay attested of the Slovak ambivalent attitude towards its Hungarian minority. To be fair, it should be noted that at times the declarations or actions of Hungarians in Slovakia, or on the other side of the border have fueled the sense of insecurity of Slovaks. In the Summer of 1996, for instance, careless mention of autonomy made at a Budapest Summit revived Slovak anxiety about an hidden Hungarian agenda. Such a climate is not favorable to the building of trust between both communities. Of course these incidents would not deserve too much attention if they remained isolated. Unfortunately, there has been a trend of hostile actions taken against the Hungarian minority. And such a situation should call for concern both in EU and NATO circles.

Slovak authorities indeed have undertaken a series of action which have been interpreted as specifically targeting Hungarians. In his bid to redesign political institutions in favor of the current majority, the Meciar government decided to redraw administrative boundaries, thus consequently electoral districts. The new law replaced the old regional system, which included 38 okres or districts, with 8 new regions and 79 districts. In so doing the government raised suspicions that its real objective was to dilute the representation of the Hungarian minority. According to Hungarian sources, the reform main's intent was to reduce the number of districts in which Hungarians

constituted a majority group: out of 17 districts, the Hungarians would only retain a majority status in only two of them.³⁴

The law was adopted in July 1996 after a presidential veto was overridden. For members of the opposition, especially the Hungarian representatives, the adoption of this legislation set a dangerous precedent. The leaders of the Hungarian minority expressed their concerns in a letter addressed to the European Union and NATO.³⁵ Such fear could be easily disregarded, if the current government did not hide its desire to make other significant changes of electoral rules.³⁶ Vladimir Meciar has indicated that he is in favor of adopting a majoritarian electoral system, which would benefit his own party. The strong local implantation of HZDS, the strength of its political machine, and the populist charisma of its leader would allow Meciar's party to dominate the political system; such a development could eventually in time help the Prime Minister to undertake a constitutional reform that would fulfill his ambition for power. As a result, the conjunction of the redrawing of administrative districts and the possible adoption of a majoritarian system could feasibly hinder an active Hungarian representation within the Slovak Parliament and the stabilization of democratic institutions.

If these developments were not enough, the impact of a State Language law adopted in November 1995, heightened even further the fears of ethnic Hungarians. The legislation establishes that Slovak is the only language in which public affairs must be carried out. This measure could be legitimately interpreted as an effort to guarantee the

³⁴ *SME*, October 11, 1996, 4.

³⁵ For a copy of the Protest letter sent to the EU and NATO, See *SME*, October 11, 1996, 4.

³⁶ *OMRI*, April 11, 1996, and July 8, 1996.

integrity of Slovakia. However, what remains troublesome for the EU is the lack of a corollary legislation aimed at protecting minority languages- something that should be expected of a democracy. As long as negotiations with Hungarians on linguistic questions drag on without significant results, suspicions will remain.³⁷

This brief recounting of some of the most controversial debates that have been raging in Slovakia obviously demonstrate that this country is not politically ready according to EU standards. Actually some of the issues treated earlier tend to indicate that Slovakia is walking on the edge of an authoritarian abyss and is in virtual danger of falling into it at any time. Such a diagnosis logically calls for a prognostic concerning the chances of Slovakia of being nominated in the first round selection. Although it is always risky to make forecasts in social sciences, one can venture doing so in this particular case because of mounting political evidence. It should be widely acknowledged by now that the political climate in Slovakia is unstable. As a result, the image of Slovakia has dwindled among western circles and has raised serious doubts in the minds of Westerners about its possible selection in the first round by the EU and NATO.

III. The Vanishing Dream of EU Membership?

In order to assess the real prospects of Slovakia, it is thus necessary to understand why this country seems to be affected by a schizophrenic syndrome, declaring its firm intention to join the European Union to its western interlocutors, while undermining this

³⁷ *Pravda*, June 4, 1996, 21; *Narodna Obroda*, March 14, 1996, 1-2; *Prague Post*, February 27, 1996, 4.

very goal by its actions in the domestic arena. To address this point, and to discuss the potential impact of a possible delay of EU membership on democratic institution building, it is important to evaluate the position of the Slovak population and its leaders.

1/ Slovak Politics and the EU Question:

In the midst of the debate surrounding the Slovak candidacy, it is worth wondering at this point how the Slovak population feels about joining the European Union. A discussion based upon surveys, however, calls for a caveat. The interpretation of surveys gauging Eastern European public opinions on the issue of the EU or NATO should not be taken at face value. Rather, it should be handled carefully, because Eastern European may not necessarily have a high level of knowledge about these two organizations.³⁸ Therefore, the following analysis should be regarded as outlining trends.

First, it is important to note that Slovaks are more enthusiastic about the EU than they are about NATO. It is perhaps no coincidence if a referendum has been called upon the issue of NATO, and not on the EU. Although the idea of a referendum on European integration has been entertained, so far it has not concretized. According to Slovak rules, a referendum can be called by the President, if 350, 000 signatures are collected. So far no group has tried to campaign against the EU by using the referendum weapon, thereby suggesting the lack of a strong opposition to the idea of joining the Union. Further evidence of the good disposition of Slovaks toward the EU is attested by various polls. It

³⁸ Richard Rose and Christian Haerpfer, "Democracy and Enlarging the EU Eastwards," *Journal of Common Market Studies* 33 (September 1995) 3, 445-446.

is particularly noteworthy that despite fluctuations, more than half of the Slovak population supports the idea of becoming part of the Union.

Early on, the prospect of association with the EU and other Western institutions was highly supported. In 1993, for instance, 87% of the population viewed this rapprochement with the West positively. Nevertheless, overtime, support slightly declined to about 67% in 1994.³⁹ This decrease can be explained by several factors. First, the separation from the Czech republic, for which the Slovak population was not consulted, probably stirred up a sentiment of anxiety about Slovakia's future and helped many citizens to realize the significance of the European Union. After all one of the leaders who unleashed national forces in Slovakia, Jan Carnogursky, had argued that Slovakia could be a sovereign entity within the larger confine of the European Union. Second, perhaps as long as the concept of European Union remained vague and not so close, it remained a popular item. As the idea of a possible EU membership became a stronger a possibility, and the implications for Slovakia became more tangible, many Slovaks may have had to reevaluate their positions. Third, during the same period, Slovakia experimented with its new sovereignty. As might be expected of a newly established state, the passage to independence may have brought in its wake strong nationalist sentiments. These have pervaded the Slovak political system and have surfaced for instance in the 1994 election. Fourth, Slovakia basically has had to work out a dilemma, despite Carnogursky's optimistic vision: Slovaks have had to wrestle with the

³⁹ Martin Butora, "Some Foreign Policy Implications of Early Elections in Slovakia," in Sona Szomolanyi and Grigorij Meseznikov (eds.), *Slovakia Parliamentary Election 1994: Causes-Consequences-Prospect* (Bratislava: Interlingua, 1995), 62-63.

issue of EU membership, at the very time it finally gets a viable chance at sovereignty. Before a society can accept to weaken the sovereignty of its national institutions, it has to be secure with its own national identity. It is worth remembering here that for a thousand years Slovakia was under Hungarian rule, and then found itself part of the Czechoslovak Federation, which was not necessarily sensitive to Slovak national aspirations. Moreover, its brief experiment with independence was tarnished because of its association with fascism during World War II. At a time, when Slovaks are trying to understand who they are, they are confronted with a daunting choice. The latter is all the more difficult as nationalism and European integration entail two opposite logics. The latter implies progressively renouncing to pieces of sovereignty, while the former calls for the reaffirmation of independence and absolute sovereignty.

Thus, shortly after Slovakia turned its application in, it was hardly surprising when only 58.8% of those interviewed favored joining the European Union.⁴⁰ This downward trend was reversed in early 1996. As the process of enlargement became more precise, as the geopolitical and economic implications of non-accession for Slovakia became a more regular item in the Slovak political debate, the idea of EU membership gained ground. According to a survey conducted by the Slovak Statistical Office in March 1996, no less than 65% of respondents thought that entry into the EU was necessary, while 20% still remained undecided. By the end of 1996, a survey conducted by the Focus agency confirmed that increasing support for the EU. Out of 70% of eligible

⁴⁰ See results of the survey conducted by the Focus Agency in June 1995 in *Narodna Obroda*, July 10, 1995, 1.

voters that would actually participate to a ballot on this the EU question, 83 % claimed they would vote positively.⁴¹ This latter figure leaves room for improvement on the side of EU supporters.

Perhaps, the evolution of the Slovak public opinion and the still high numbers of undecided citizens reflect the contradictory signals sent by the political scene. As a matter of fact, there is no consensus with regard to the EU issue. The parties involved in the coalition government, for instance, are divided. The Slovak National Party (SNP) and the Association of Workers of Slovakia (ZRS), which respectively control 9 and 13 seats in the National Council (Slovak Parliament), represent the extreme of the Slovak political spectrum. They both share a suspicion of the outside world: They oppose NATO membership and remain defiant of EU and other Western pressures. Their participation in the Slovak government and their controversial actions⁴² not only contribute to the deterioration of the political climate, they also undermine the credibility of Slovakia on the European and international scene. Such unstable allies also make the life of Vladimir Meciar complicated. Officially his party and his government favor joining the EU and NATO. These two objectives are indeed part of the government's program.

However, under the pressure of its coalition partners-so it seems- the Prime Minister, who never shies away from using the nationalist card, has been forced at times

⁴¹ *SME*, December 7, 1996, 3.

⁴² The SNP, for instance, is the party which sponsored the infamous amendment on the Protection of the Republic. Furthermore, even after several months of ZRS presence in the Slovak government, its Chairman, Jan Luptak, indicated that his party opposed joining the EU. See *Narodna Obroda*, October 11, 1996, 2.

to make some compromise to ease relations within the government. There is reason to believe, for instance, that to ensure the ratification of the Slovak Hungarian treaty, Meciar and his government introduced a series of legislations targeting Hungarians in part to appease both the SNP and ZRS. These acts could be interpreted as mere political calculations, if the overall attitude of the government with regard to the EU was not totally disconcerting. Instead of responding to or articulating a rational explanation for Slovakia's faux pas, the Prime Minister and the members of the parties in government have accused the EU of being unfair and lacking accurate information. They mostly blame the President and the opposition for spreading false information and by painting a gloomy picture of Slovakia. According to Jan Cuper, HZDS deputy and member of the Constitutional and Legal Affairs Committee of the Slovak National Council, visits such as those made by Jan Carnogursky, Chairman of the Christian Democratic Party (KDH) and former dissident, to various Western leaders, particularly those to the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU), contribute to the negative image of Slovakia. Concurring with his leader, Vladimir Meciar, he basically argued that the opposition was feeding false information to Western Europe.⁴³ Such a statement gives a hint to the reader of what could have happened if the amendment on the Protection of the Republic had been enacted. It also illustrates the unwillingness of the current Slovak leadership to respond to EU warnings in a responsible manner. It questions the commitment of the government to realize the goal of EU membership as well. Such an impression is

⁴³ *Narodna Obroda*, July 19, 1996, 9; For a similar accusation of the opposition see remarks of Peter Janosik in *Slovenska Republika*, July 27, 1996, 3.

reinforced by the ambiguous policies of Slovakia. While going through the motion of the EU application process, Slovakia is also actively looking to the East and more specifically to Russia. It is noteworthy that leaders associated with the government have found their way to Moscow, while members of the opposition have favored American and Western European destinations. Although maintaining good relations with Russia should be expected from a geopolitical point of view, these actions may also indicate an attempt to find an alternative to the EU. In the face of such a situation, the main question becomes whether or not the opposition can sway the public opinion to support the EU and compel the government to act accordingly. At the end of 1995, a survey conducted by the Focus Agency revealed that no less than 39% of respondents believed that Slovakia was already moving away from the goal of joining the European Union.⁴⁴

The opposition is constituted of five major parties: the Christian Democratic Party (KDH), the Hungarian coalition, which includes the Hungarian Christian Democratic Party (MKDH), Egyutteleles, and the Hungarian Civic Party (MOS), the Democratic Union (DU), the Democratic Party (DS) and Common Choice (SV), made of two parties, the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) and the Social democratic Party of Slovakia (SDSS). All these various groups seem to favor joining both the EU and NATO. In fact, it is among the followers of these various parties that one can find the most ardent supporters of the EU.⁴⁵ However, the diversity of these parties represent a serious impediment to the development of a common action. In order to overcome this difficulty, right wing parties

⁴⁴ *SME*, January 22, 1996, 2.

⁴⁵ Survey conducted by the Focus Agency in October 1995, see *Narodna Obroda*, October 28, 1995, 2; for similar findings, see also *SME*, December 7, 1996, 3.

(KDH, DU and DS) have decided to cooperate within a “blue coalition.” Although they intend to unite their forces to defend the concept of integration into Western European institutions, it is too early to tell how effective that alliance can be. Moreover, within the Slovak Parliamentary system, the only means of action of the opposition is to publicly question and denounce the incoherence or inefficiency in the action of the majority. They can only raise a voice of concerns sometimes in very adverse circumstances. At times, speeches delivered or actions undertaken by leaders of the opposition are not broadcasted on the State controlled media. In an earlier incident, which was not related to EU issues, but is rather indicative of the political climate, the Chairman of the Slovak Parliament ordered electricity to be cut off to prevent the leader of KDH from speaking.⁴⁶

Members of the opposition, including the president, have not spared their criticism of the government. Peter Weiss, Chairman of the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) has warned that “if the coalition does not come to its senses, it will lose the chance to fulfill its own policy.”⁴⁷ Going even further, Carnogursky stressed that in view of Chancellor Kohl’s declaration it was clear that “as long as the policy implemented by Meciar’s government [would continue] the Slovak republic [would not get] into the EU; [that] Slovakia’s coming to a halt before the EU’s gate would have enforceable consequences.”⁴⁸ Indeed, the real question that the Slovak public opinion and the EU need to contemplate is what consequences would a rebuff of the Slovak application mean

⁴⁶ Interview with the International Secretary of KDH, Juraj Kohutiar, Bratislava, January 1995.

⁴⁷ Interview with Peter Weiss by Jan Skoda reported in Pravda, August 22, 1996, 12.

⁴⁸ *SME*, July 1996, 1-2.

in terms of its own political and economic development. In order to address this question, it is first important to consider what possible scenarii are available to Slovakia.

2/ The Vanishing Dream of EU Membership?

There are potentially three paths for Slovakia. The first one would be the acceptance of Slovakia into the first group of countries invited to participate in the first eastern enlargement. Of course, the advantage of the first scenario is that an eventual invitation to the table of negotiations would boost the legitimacy and confidence of Slovakia. It would indicate that this country would represent a worthy addition to the EU and would encourage Slovakia to stabilize its political institutions and to continue its successful economic policy. Such a rationale is supported by the evidence provided by Greece, Spain, and Portugal, which have benefited both politically and economically. Unfortunately, in view of the current Slovak political climate and the flow of Western criticism it has generated, that course of events appears quite unlikely.

The second scenario would be the sine die rejection of Slovakia. This option is even more unlikely, if not totally out of question. First, in the past, the European Union has always been really cautious to leave the door open to future developments. Even in the difficult case of Turkey, the EU has preferred talking of postponing the entry. The argument invoked in this case has been the unreadiness of Turkey, especially in matters of human rights. Second, in the case of Eastern Europe or even Turkey, an outright dismissal of a candidate's application could have disastrous consequences for the process

of democratic consolidation. It could contribute to the end of the democratic experiment. In other words, these countries might be tempted to revert to authoritarianism. In the current context of Slovak politics, such an outcome would not be too far fetched. Certainly, the member states do not want to take a decision that could have devastating effects for Slovakia, and even perhaps a demonstration effect on some of Southern Eastern European countries.

The third scenario, which becomes more and more likely, is one in which Slovakia would not be chosen during the first round, but would be invited to persevere in the hope of joining at a later stage. The main argument in favor of that approach is provided by the instance of the southern enlargement. All three countries, Greece, Spain and Portugal expressed a desire to join what was then called the Economic European Community early on in the sixties. Because none of them was economically ready, they were encouraged to modernize and develop their economy and were offered different trade agreements. The political condition laid out by the Community also contributed to the process of democratic transition and consolidation. Hence, according to this example, countries asked to wait their turn are expected to get energized by the prospect of entry, and to work harder to match the requirements of the European Union. In other words, this verdict would be salutary for a country like Slovakia, because it would create a new impetus for the political and economic transformation. Eventually, that country would be ready to join the ranks of the Union.

However, the southern model may not necessarily translate well in the East Central European environment. That approach neglects the possibility that instead of

being galvanized, rejection could drive Slovakia back into the arms of an authoritarian regime. The major question then becomes whether or not such an alternative can unravel. To answer that point, it is necessary to assess what could be the direct consequences of a negative answer on the part of the EU. The pessimistic interpretation stresses that Slovakia would suffer great losses economically. As other countries, possibly the Czech republic, Hungary and Poland, would join the Union and therefore develop closer economic ties with EU member states, trade with Slovakia and these countries would be curtailed. The severance from the Czech economy would probably be mostly felt.

Moreover, Slovakia would find itself geographically surrounded by EU and even potentially NATO countries. Slovakia would have no where to go. In the words of Carnogursky, "there exists... no alternative to EU membership in terms of the Slovak Republic international alignment. More precisely the alternative to EU membership would be a Slovakia that is put at a disadvantage economically and short of security guarantees."⁴⁹ Such a situation could lead toward to the isolation of Slovakia. Exclusion could then trigger a nationalist-authoritarian reaction, that so far has been contained. Opportunistic Slovak leaders could manipulate the disappointment caused by the EU decision and the perception of an hostile outside world to stir up nationalism. The example of Switzerland demonstrates that a country can continue to function, while being completely surrounded by the EU and NATO. Furthermore, that option appears credible, because part of the Slovak population entertains the idea that Slovakia could evolve into a unique status. In a survey conducted in late 1995, 27.1% of those interviewed thought

⁴⁹ *Op cit.*

that Slovakia should go its own way; and 19.7% believed that the country was already moving in that direction.⁵⁰

Yet, Slovakia would also have the recourse of turning East. After all, Slovakia has a border with Ukraine. As Russia seems to undertake a process of rapprochement with Belarus, and to a lesser extent with Ukraine, the eastern alternative could become a temptation. As noted earlier, the Meciar government has made a particular effort to nurture its relations with Russia. Looking to the East could also free Slovakia from Western democratic pressures, thereby affecting the process of democratic consolidation. That course of events is plausible because of the particular Slovak geopolitical conditions. In the case of the southern enlargement, geography and geopolitics dictated the terms of the evolution of Greece, Spain and Portugal: if they wanted to get out of their isolation, they did not have anywhere else to go than the European Economic Community. Europe served as a magnet and exercised external pressures on the domestic affairs of these countries, because they were ready to accept these, but also because geography and geopolitical conditions were ideal. This research asserts that Slovakia faces a totally different situation, that can potentially threaten its democratic transformation. The Slovak Republic has managed to maintain good relations with Russia. In fact, in recent months, Slovakia and Russia have negotiated a series of economic agreements. While other former communist countries in Eastern and Central Europe have tried to loosen their relations with Russia, Slovakia has decided to

⁵⁰ See the survey conducted by the Focus Agency from December 1 to 11, 1995, in *SME*, January 22, 1996, 2.

strengthen them. Even leaders in favor of European integration, such as Carnogursky, have defended the need to maintain good relations with Russia. However, these developments belittle the real danger for Slovakia. First, Slovakia may undermine even further its chances with the EU and NATO, as these two organizations may wonder about the real objectives of the Slovak foreign policy. The EU may also worry about possible Slovak-Russian economic cooperation that would contradict the objectives of the EU: the potential collaboration in the area of energy could indeed raise the concern that Slovakia would not meet proper standards in matter of safety. Second, counting too much on the Russian alternative could have grave consequences. Slovakia could be sacrificed on the altar of Russian's national interests. Russia may play the Slovak card to try to contain the expansion of NATO, but would probably not hesitate to abandon it for the sake of expediency. Furthermore, it is extremely doubtful that Russia could help Slovakia in its process of democratic consolidation. After all, Russia itself has very little experience with democracy and is undergoing major transformations as well. From the Slovak point of view, there is little doubt that the best hope to anchor Slovakia to the democratic world rests with the EU.

However, for the European Union, the Slovak candidacy represents a dilemma and thus must be carefully analyzed. The simple fact that an eventual exclusion of Slovakia could lead toward an authoritarian regime cannot be dismissed lightly: it could potentially snowball to Southeastern Europe, where democratic transition is much feeble, and thus lead to a reverse trend toward authoritarianism. At the same time, the EU, like NATO cannot take the risk of accepting a country, which could bring tension, if not

destabilization in its midst. The ongoing tensions between Slovakia and Hungary could represent a time bomb for the European Union. The lack of very friendly relations with its other neighbors also puts Slovakia in a difficult position. The still unresolved disputes between Greece and NATO offers a good reminder of the danger of letting unstable members join an organization. It can be argued that the structure of NATO may have prevented these countries from going at war against each other. However, the European Union cannot afford this type of situation as it is engaging into a process of increasingly complex transformations. At this critical juncture in its development, the European Union does not want to admit a state that could potentially destabilize its organization.

Furthermore, the EU does not have to lower its standard, just to please a would be candidate. However difficult that choice may be, the EU must take a high road, even if it means that Slovakia may fall into the traps of authoritarianism. Since the signing of the Treaty of Rome, it has embarked in a unique journey. Following the transformation of the EEC into the EC and later the EU, Europe has become an economic force to be reckoned with. As its member states enter in a new phase of development, they carry the hope that with economic power, Europe can also be entitled with a strong political voice. During the Cold War, the European Community had come to represent the sign of a promised land; the indication that after the dark era of world War II and Nazism, rebirth was and is possible. Western Europe embodied principles of human rights and what European civilization has best to offer. After the collapse of communism, it has represented a point of reference for Eastern Europe. Through the conclusions of European agreements which already contained political conditions, it has helped direct the

transformation of these countries and facilitated the first stage of democratic transition. However, external factors can only be effective to a point. Democratic consolidation also implies the presence of internal conditions. As Samuel Huntington has remarked,⁵¹ not all countries will succeed in this endeavor. Some may well revert back to an authoritarian regime. What external actors can do, is to promote a favorable environment for these countries. The latter still will need to work out internal issues on their own. The European Union can help, so long as conditions for success in Slovakia are present. Henceforth, to paraphrase Commissioner van den Broek, Slovakia should not make the mistake of assuming that its geopolitical position inevitably will compel the EU to accept its candidacy.⁵² Membership is neither automatic nor inevitable.

⁵¹ Samuel Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁵² *Supra* (ft.9), 9.