

PROVEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH DEVELOPMENT POTENTIAL

GERMANY'S RELATIONS WITH THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA

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Measuring 811 kilometers in length, the border with the Czech Republic is Germany's second-longest external border. For 40 years it separated the Federal Republic and the country formerly known as Czechoslovakia, not only in territorial terms, but also primarily with respect to politics, culture, the economy and ideology. The Czech Republic and Slovakia have since gone their separate ways. Meanwhile, the relations of both countries with Germany, have changed for the better, but there is room for improvement in several areas.

1. RELATIONS WITH THE CZECH REPUBLIC

40 years of Communist rule represent only a brief interlude in German/Czech relations, which began over 1000 years ago. Although Germany has traditionally held close ties with the Czech Republic, this common history was often experienced and indeed lived separately. The "Velvet Revolution" of 1989 opened a new chapter in relations between the two states. Following decades of separation, Germany and the Czech Republic again found common ground: democracy, freedom, a market economy and, most importantly, the desire to stabilize peace and prosperity in Europe. Prague, the capital of Czechoslovakia in the late fall of 1989, is symbolic of this change.



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THE CHEERS OF 30 SEPTEMBER 1989 HERALD A NEW ERA

Prague plays a special role in the story of German reunification. From August 1989, thousands of GDR citizens fled to the FRG embassy in Prague. On 30 September, refugees were promised a chance of passage to the Federal Republic. Even after this point, and even following the closure of the border between the GDR and Czechoslovakia, more and more GDR-refugees gathered. They too were allowed to travel to West Germany as a result of special negotiations. On November 3, 1989, six days after the opening of the West German/GDR border, it was possible to exit via the Czech/German border even without a special permit. An open border with the West was now a reality for the refugees. This lifting of the Iron Curtain marks an important step on the path to German reunification, since it practically forced the GDR to open its borders. As such, Czechoslovakia made an important contribution to subsequent developments and to the reunification of

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Germany. Prague remains symbolic of this not only for Germans and not least due to the negotiations between then-Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher and Rudolf Seiters, who at that time was Head of the Federal Chancellery. On the 20th anniversary of that historic event, many residents of Prague remembered the abandoned "trabis"¹ that had littered the streets. As the cheers of the GDR-citizens echoed from the Malá Strana to the city centre, it became clear to many that a new chapter in German/Czech relations was about to begin.

FROM 1992 ONWARDS, TREATIES BROUGHT REAL PROGRESS

At that time, however, the Czech Republic was still part of the Czechoslovak Federative Republic. The treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic on good neighborliness and friendly cooperation signed on 27 February 1992 repre-

1 | Translator's note: The 'Trabant', affectionately referred to as the "trabi" or "trabbi", is a car produced by former East German auto maker VEB Sachsenring Automobilwerke Zwickau in Zwickau, Saxony. It was the most common vehicle in East Germany.

sented a tentative step toward concrete communication between the neighboring states following the disintegration of the Eastern Block. This document constitutes a kind of framework agreement, which tackles a wide range of neighborly relations. However, the treaty made no specific statements relating to the past.

Territorial integrity and the determination of the borders are mentioned and in 1994 the treaty was supplemented with a border treaty. Two problems of the past that went unmentioned were compensation for the victims of National Socialism and the issue of displaced persons. The agreement of 1992 was therefore seen by many commentators to be imprecise and without meaningful results. Accordingly, a further supplementary declaration was signed in 1997.

Through the institutionalization of neighborly cooperation in the form of the German-Czech Fund for the Future and the German-Czech Discussion Forum platforms for cooperation and dialogue were created.

The German-Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development represented the first attempt to deal with the past. The document has symbolic importance for the Czech Republic and Germany particularly because it also deals with topics from the past. Following prolonged negotiations, representatives of both countries signed the groundbreaking document on 21 January 1997. Some of the players who were involved on the Czech side are today leaders in politics and society, including current president Václav Klaus, former Minister for Europe, Alexandr Vondrá, and the Czech Republic's ambassador in Berlin, Rudolf Jindrak.

The declaration that neither country "will ... encumber relations with political and legal issues that have their roots in the past", was an important step for mutual rapprochement and the easing of relations between the two states.

In the eyes of the critics, however, the declaration did not go far enough, specifically as regards the way it dealt with the past. Some representatives of the ethnic Germans in particular, saw the declaration as a missed opportunity. Nevertheless, in view of the great tensions of the past and the importance of a symbolic coming together, many experts from today's perspective consider the German-Czech Declaration a revolutionary element in mutual

relations. Through the institutionalization of neighborly cooperation in the form of the German-Czech Fund for the Future and the German-Czech Discussion Forum, the declaration created platforms for cooperation and dialogue that facilitate constructive debate.

NEIGHBORLINESS IN PRACTICE: THE GERMAN-CZECH FUND FOR THE FUTURE AND THE GERMAN-CZECH DISCUSSION FORUM 1997

The German-Czech Fund for the Future is an inter-state institution set up at the end of 1997 and arranged as an endowment fund. It is financed by both the Czech and German governments. Its goal is to promote understanding between Germans and Czechs in a wide variety of ways.

The Fund for the Future receives around 600 project applications annually for various amounts in either Euro or Koruna. A total annual budget of 75 million Koruna (approx. 3 million Euro) is available. The projects originate

from a whole variety of areas. For 2010 for example, a music festival "Mitte Europe" is planned in Bavaria, Bohemia and Saxony. Furthermore, in cooperation with the organization 'Tandem', there is a youth education program with work placements in Germany and the Czech Republic for young people who

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were not able to obtain a vocational training placement. There are also plans for scholarships for students with an interest in German/Czech relations. Funding is also provided for numerous small projects.

Since its creation in 1998, more than 5,000 German-Czech projects have been financed with more than 36 million Euro in total from the Fund for the Future. The Czech Republic and Germany agreed in 2007 to continue the Fund for the Future for a further decade.

The German-Czech Discussion Forum was also created at the end of 1997 on the basis of the Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development. This discussion forum is financed by the German-Czech Fund for the Future, which, in turn, is provided by the governments of the two countries. Initially, it was equipped with a 20-strong advisory board, to which the German and Czech

governments each appointed an equal number of members and which has the task of organizing regular meetings and an annual conference. Since 2004, it has developed to the extent that each government also appoints a chairperson. Relevant topics relating to German/Czech relations, as well as subjects relating to the two neighboring countries within the European Union are to be discussed here.

EU MEMBERSHIP 2004 – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CLOSE COOPERATION

Europe is a further dimension for the intensification of neighborly relations. The Czech Republic joined the EU in 2004, concluding a long process of association and convergence, during which Germany also provided support. While the 1990s were dominated by initial confusion in the newly democratic and market economy oriented Czech Republic, the country soon developed into the forerunner for reform policies and economic upswing among the candidates for EU accession in Central and Eastern Europe. Just a few years after joining, the Czech Republic took over the EU Council Presidency for the first time on January 1, 2009. The Federal Government under Angela Merkel guaranteed the Czech Republic its full support. The timing of the council presidency was tricky: the constitutional crisis was threatening to plunge the EU into an institutional conflict, as both Ireland and the Czech Republic were highly skeptical with regard to the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. The Russian-Ukrainian gas crisis meant discussions on European energy security were urgently needed. The newly rekindled Gaza conflict, meanwhile, meant there was a need for a united foreign policy. Last but not least, the global financial crisis posed a fundamental threat for all European states. Furthermore, the Czech Republic was facing internal problems. Czech president Václav Klaus repeatedly criticized the EU and blocked the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty with his refusal to sign it. In addition, the government under Mirek Topolánek, who chaired the Council of the European Union during the Czech presidency, was overthrown as a result of a vote of no confidence in March 2009. Topolánek temporarily remained in office until May, when Jan Fischer took over government business and with it the council presidency with a 'government of experts'.

**“For the Czech Republic it is better to kiss the German chancellor than to embrace the Russian bear.”
(Mirek Topolánek)**

Despite the problems and turbulent events, the council presidency was a success. The negotiations of the G20 and the European heads of state and finance ministers on the financial crisis continued. In addition, the EU established an Eastern Partnership (EaP), and concluded association agreements with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, the Ukraine and Belarus at a summit meeting in Prague. Germany also had a great interest in this project aimed at stabilizing the situation in the Eastern European neighbors and the Caucasus Region. For the Czech Republic this represented a new opportunity to highlight its profile as belonging to the West and the EU, and independent of Russia. Topolánek provocatively said at the beginning of the EU council presidency: "For the Czech Republic it is better to kiss the German chancellor than to embrace the Russian bear", thereby clarifying the orientation towards Germany. A great many former Euro-skeptics and politicians in the Czech Republic who were critical of Germany began to display a more pragmatic approach and praised the support for their country provided by Angela Merkel – which was particularly surprising in view of the fact that their own government had been overthrown, leading to strong criticism from other EU states of both the Czech Republic and the Czech presidency of the Council.

This kind of symbolic support, together with the ongoing integration of the Czech Republic into the EU and neighboring cooperation with Germany have led to the establishment of good mutual relations. Cooperation is now taking place in various areas, from the environment to food regulations to energy issues and, just five years after joining the EU, there are already the first joint projects between the Czech Republic and the EU. Now that all of the formal prerequisites have been fulfilled, the main task is to further strengthen cooperation at the EU level.

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THE CZECH REPUBLIC AS AN ECONOMIC PARTNER FOR GERMANY ON EQUAL FOOTING WITH JAPAN

The huge economic interlinkage between the Germany and the Czech Republic shows that there are joint interests here. In fact, the economic relations between both countries are

excellent. For years now, trade between Germany and the Czech Republic has been around 35 to 50 billion Euro, at times more than Germany makes trading with Japan or Latin America. Germany is considered to be the largest and most important trading partner of the Czech Republic. The German-Czech Chamber of Commerce sees considerably more potential. Nevertheless, it is liable to be difficult to find new investors from Germany due to the huge shortage of specially trained staff in the Czech Republic.

Particularly in the current economic crisis, the Czech Republic has shown that with a stable financial policy it is not one of the shaky candidates in Central and Eastern Europe, and that it is far removed from being purely a low-wage economy. If nothing else, due to the longstanding tradition of machine engineering, the raw materials available and its geographic position at the heart of Europe, the country has developed into an advanced technology development site. This means that it is even more important for the Czech Republic to continue to be attractive for foreign investors.

The Czech Koruna is healthy but some investors are considering investing in Euro country Slovakia rather than in the Czech Republic.

If the Czech Republic hopes to continue to impress with such excellent economic results in future, the government will have to implement urgently needed reforms and seriously discuss the introduction of the Euro, for which there is huge demand in economic circles. The single currency has been put on the back burner for the time being.

Although the former Republic of Slovakia introduced the European single currency on January 1, 2009, the outgoing head of the Central Bank Zdeněk Tůma specified 2019 as a realistic scenario for the Czech Republic.

This has angered economic circles in particular. While the Czech Koruna is healthy in comparison with other currencies in the region, the extreme currency exchange rate fluctuations mean that the Czech Republic is also becoming increasingly less attractive for German investors. In times in which transport distance can be effectively overcome, some investors are considering investing in Euro country Slovakia rather than the Czech Republic. This is becoming

ever more evident for the Czech economy and should motivate the new Czech government to begin serious talks on the Euro. For German-Czech economic cooperation this would be a pioneering step to strengthen and extend the already intensive trading relations in the future.

GERMANY AND THE CZECH REPUBLIC – TWO SOCIETIES BECOMING CLOSER

The impressive economic figures are not the only thing that makes the relationship between the neighboring states of Germany and the Czech Republic special. In addition to the Fund for the Future and the Discussion Forum project mentioned above, over the last 18 years countless German-Czech initiatives have been implemented to help build a joint future and to deal with the shadows of the past. In addition to the German-Czech Historians' Committee, numerous town-twinning projects have been set up. There has also been bi-national cooperation at the level of associations, between professional societies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as well as a popular school and student exchange program. Even Kindergartens in the border regions now have exchange programs, to dispel any fears of the "foreign" neighbors among even the smallest of citizens. In the border regions, in particular, there are model cooperation projects. One example of a school in Germany is the Friedrich-Schiller-Gymnasium in Pirna, which offers a bi-national, bilingual education. Cooperation programs between Kindergartens in the Czech Republic and Germany include the project "from the cradle – Odmalička". At the student level, the Association for Student Exchange in Central and Eastern Europe

Countless German-Czech initiatives implemented to help build a joint future unfortunately are rarely mentioned in politics and the media.

(Gemeinschaft für studentischen Austausch in Mittel- und Osteuropa e.V. – GFPS) runs scholarship programs for language courses and foreign study visits in both countries. Further outstanding examples

of the lively civil society cooperation between German and Czech organizations are the Brücke/Most-Stiftung, Antikomplex, the Prague House of Literature, the German-Czech youth forum, the Ackermann-society, the Collegium Bohemicum and various associations of ethnic Germans. All of these organizations attempt to improve relations in their own way, in the fields of culture, history and harmonization,

mutual respect and international understanding. While this kind of work at the very basic level is of huge importance for the common future, it is, unfortunately, rarely mentioned in politics and the media. However, it is precisely this kind of work that makes German/Czech relations so special.

Over the last few years, interplay between Czech and German initiatives has intensified, particularly direct contact without diversions through parliament or government. The cooperation is decentralized, de-politicized and has become more independent of state hierarchies. Cooperation in the "Euregions" in particular, which transcend the borders of the Czech Republic, Saxony and Bavaria, is excellent. A highly practical example of Bavarian-Czech cooperation are the joint border controls carried out by Czech and Bavarian officials, which took place even before joining the Schengen area, for example at the border-crossing Furth im Wald / Domažlice.

IS THE WALL STILL A MENTAL REALITY?

Despite the large number of projects on both sides, however, the image of the immediate neighbor as far as the population as a whole is concerned continues to be dominated by either a lack of interest or by prejudice. In Germany, there is often a lack of interest in investigating the eastern neighbor in any depth. Many Germans see the Czech Republic as a small country without any serious problems – and without any serious political points of commonality. This partially confirms the Czech people's self-image of coming from a small country without any major European political importance. Few people are aware that the population of the Czech Republic is larger for instance than that of Austria and that it covers an area twice the size of the Netherlands. In turn, from the Czech point of view, the image of Germany has to date largely been linked with the past. The common stereotypes regarding the Germans are, of course, still present, but since joining the EU, perceptions have been increasingly influenced by the actual contact between the neighbors.

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However, normalization holds particular risks. The less spectacular the news from the neighboring country, the less interest Germany has in Prague. Political rapprochement has taken place, but unfortunately has failed to fulfill its potential and today there are only a few German and Czech politicians who deal intensively with their respective neighbor. Today's convergence is to be found not in the parliaments, but in the NGO-sector and in the cultural field, where exchange, for instance in youth and cultural projects, is pushing the process forward.

Dealing with the past and bilateral projects can help foster trust and remove prejudice, laying the foundations for societal rapprochement. This will slowly but surely break down any residual mental walls.

A normal neighborhood policy, which is maintained even in less turbulent times, such as that between Germany and Poland or Germany and France has yet to be worked out and experienced.

Among the German population there are two different perceptions of the Czech Republic – a differentiated view, as found mainly in the Bundesländer directly bordering the Czech Republic (Bavaria and Saxony) and a non-differentiated cliché that views the Czech Republic as nothing more than a former Eastern Block State. While the wall separating Germany and the Czech Republic appears still to be standing in the minds of the older generation, it is first and foremost the younger generation that are able to transcend the European borders without any difficulty. The youth of today have grown up with open borders and freedom of movement. Many students use exchange programs such as Erasmus as an opportunity to live and learn in another country. In the university year 2008/2009, 349 German students went to the Czech Republic and 873 Czech students came to Germany as part of student exchange courses. Only 1.4 percent of the Germans, but as many as 16 percent of Czech Erasmus students chose the directly neighboring country.

Mobility is likely to increase further in future, with fast, inexpensive travel connections simplifying cross-border travel and a new generation for whom open borders and international networks are a matter of course. Dealing with the past and bilateral projects can help foster trust and remove prejudice, laying the foundations for societal rapprochement. This will slowly but surely break down any residual mental walls.

THE EUROPEAN UNION AS A CHANCE FOR THE FUTURE FOR GERMAN-CZECH COOPERATION

Europe is the keyword as far as the future of closer, more intensive cooperation between Germany and the Czech Republic on the political level is concerned. With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on December 1, 2009, new, more efficient voting procedures were put in place for institutional cooperation in the European Parliament and the Council. The European Parliament is to be more deeply involved in many decision-making processes and thus will have equal voting rights with the Council in the co-decision procedure.

Improvements in cooperation in the energy sector are urgently needed. The Czech Republic felt betrayed by Germany and Russia through the Baltic Sea Pipeline.

In future, additional policy areas will no longer require a unanimous vote of all 27 member states in the Council, but can be decided by qualified majority (from 2014 pursuant to the principle of double majority of member states and population). For Czech European policy this means parliamentary factions will become more important and that there is a growing need for allies among the member states. In future, a simple veto will no longer be sufficient to assert national issues at the European level. Thus, more stringent provisions in European policy could lead to new forms of cooperation and help to highlight the true Europe-related interests of the Czech Republic.

There are certainly points of common interest for potential cooperation with Germany e.g. in the field of energy, research and innovation, the Single Market and human rights issues. Improvements in cooperation in the energy sector are urgently needed since this topic, due primarily to the agreement concluded by Gerhard Schröder and Vladimir Putin on the construction of the Baltic Sea Pipeline, has to date placed a considerable strain on German/Czech relations. The Czech Republic felt betrayed by Germany and Russia through the agreement to transport gas to the Federal Republic via the sea-bed – a sentiment expressed in nearly all of the Central-Eastern European states. Thus, it appears even more important that the EU develops a joint strategy for energy security involving Germany and the Czech Republic.

The Czech Republic is generally seen as an innovative site for technological developments, as witnessed, if nothing else, by its automobile industry, which has enjoyed great global success. For this reason, German-Czech research and development cooperation in the energy sector, for instance, could be a potential area for new cooperation. The Czech government repeatedly emphasizes the great importance of technological innovations for the country. Accordingly, there is likely to be little standing in the way of joint research projects in high-tech sectors such as the growth market of renewable energies. While Czech head of state Klaus is a vehement critic of the theories regarding global warming, he is unlikely to be opposed to measures that support the energy policy independence of his country while simultaneously bringing the promise of increased income for the national budget, particularly as this would further strengthen the country's reputation as an innovative site for advanced technologies.

Both the Czech Republic and Germany traditionally have at their disposal outstanding scientists and research teams, and cooperation between them would greatly benefit both countries in the long term, not only in the energy sector. Greater solidarity between the two countries could also be achieved in other areas of public life in order to make work even more efficient.

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This symbiosis has already been put into practice and demonstrated to great effect for several years now in the automobile sector.

The cooperation between the neighboring states of Germany and the Czech Republic on the political stage of Europe could be intensified in the next few years in the field of human rights. The fight for the observance of human rights has a long tradition in the Czech Republic, which was subjected to the rule of totalitarian regimes for many years. Furthermore, the EU often pays too little attention to subjects such as the observance of human rights and humanitarian aid.

In order to recreate these kinds of success stories in other areas, and particularly within the European Union, the new Czech government will have to give considerable thought

to its own strategic position in Europe. To date, the Czech Republic has not been particularly active or constructive from a European political perspective. Five years into its membership, relevant expertise for its own European policy initiatives should have been established by now. Suggestions, clear opinions and the presentation of possible points of common interest for European partners, particularly Germany, are crucial cornerstones for the progression of “packages” with the Czech Republic, which, to date, has been a somewhat reluctant partner. Seeking out partners on the basis of specific subject areas ought to be the approach for the Czech government following the protracted theoretical Lisbon debate on general principles. Cooperation with neighbors and in particular with partners in the nearby region ought to be a priority for the Czech Republic and Germany in the near future. They share similar interests and there are cultural overlaps in lifestyle and philosophy. In economic terms, Germany and the Czech Republic have already achieved a great deal. The subject areas mentioned – environment, research and education – also hold potential for common positions in the EU.

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK FOLLOWING THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTION OF MAY 2010

“Relations between Germany and the Czech Republic have never been as good as they are now”, is a phrase frequently quoted in connection with these two neighbors. In fact, this statement is true in all respects. Despite the many shadows of the past, the relationship between the two states has never been as good as it is today: joint agreements have given the status and the relations between the countries a legal basis. Many organizations, projects and players contribute daily to the convergence of the two countries, far removed from issues of the past or politics. The youth sit side by side in the classroom in groundbreaking joint projects in the border regions, learning each other’s language – which demands a great deal of commitment and concentration given the difficulty of the two languages concerned. The economic interlinkage has reached depths within the space of twenty years that some of Germany’s Western partners have

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not been able to achieve in five decades, and not just in well-known large-scale projects such as the automobile industry. It is the small and medium-sized companies that are helping on both sides of the border to set trade between the two countries on a stable foundation even in times of a global financial and economic crisis. There are plenty of success stories!

However, relations could be even better still. The "normalization of relations", that is, the mutual perception as a partner on equal footing in place of stereotypes and preconceptions, has also resulted in a certain "de-emotionalization" of relations. While this is to be welcomed as far as dealing with the past is concerned, in political circles there appears, at times, to be a lack of heartfelt commitment and determination to lift the partnership to a new, positive emotional level. The planned visit by Bavarian minister president Horst Seehofer in the fall of 2010, involving representatives of ethnic Germans could perhaps represent a further step towards moving relations up a level. This will, after all, be the first official visit by a Bavarian minister president to the neighboring state. What is important in this context is a stable Czech government, supported not just by a slim majority of one or two MPs as in the last few years, leaving it open to instability and manipulation.

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The results of the parliamentary elections of May 2010 have at least provided clarity in this regard. Following the substantial instability of the previous government under Mirek Topolánek, greater stability can be expected of the newly-elected centre-right coalition. The election results of May 2010 are unlikely to have any effects, especially negative effects, on the bilateral German-Czech neighborhood policy. For instance, during the Czech presidency of the Council in 2009, the German role and support for the Czech Republic provided by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel was positively received, particularly among conservative circles, which tend, at times, to be extremely skeptical of Germany. If, however, the new Czech government comes under pressure at home, like Topolánek's ODS-led government did in spring 2009, the political agenda setting could suffer. Nevertheless, clear

political signals are precisely what are needed in order to move joint German/Czech relations forward on the path of détente and positive development.

The functioning mechanisms created thus far for the active promotion of cooperation on both sides of the border and the various examples of fruitful collaboration should also be sufficient incentive in the future for politicians to bring more warmth, openness and trust, in order to enable Germany and the Czech Republic to set out on new common paths in Europe, allowing old prejudices to fall by the wayside. Germany has already been able to do this with other neighbors, whose image of Germany was considerably more 'damaged' at that time than the current situation in the Czech Republic. So why not show some more love for German/Czech friendship?

Foreign Ministers Westerwelle and Lajčák also emphasized that, while Germany and Slovakia may not share any geographic borders, they nevertheless see themselves as neighbors in spirit.

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2. RELATIONS WITH SLOVAKIA

Relations between Germany and Slovakia are also friendly², for the most part low-key and attract little attention. This is probably due also to the fact that this bilateral relationship is not encumbered by historic conflicts. However, the extent to which one can speak of a "lack of community"³ as does Slovak historian and political scientist Pavol Lukáč, remains to be seen. Since the disintegration of the former Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (ČSFR) in 1993, both the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Slovakia were interested in building good relations from the outset. Thus, as former German Federal President Johannes Rau highlighted during a visit in 1999, he still sees Slovakia as one of Germany's neighbors. German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle and the Slovakian Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák also emphasized in February 2010 that, while Germany and Slovakia may not share any geographic borders, they nevertheless see themselves as neighbors in spirit.

POLITICAL RELATIONS

In February 1992, the Federal Republic of Germany and the ČSFR concluded a treaty on "good neighborliness and friendly cooperation". The treaty *inter alia* excluded mutual territorial claims, confirmed the existing border, defined the rights of the respective minorities and promised support from the Federal Republic of Germany for economic development in the ČSFR.⁴ This treaty, which was recognized by the Republic of Slovakia as a successor state of the ČSFR, still constitutes the legal basis of German-Slovakian relations to this day.

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2 | Cf. <http://auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/Laenderinformationen/Slovakia/Bilateral.html> (accessed June 15, 2010).

3 | Pavol Lukáč, *Dejiny a zahraničná politika v strednej Európe* (Bratislava: 2004), 106.

4 | Cf. Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic on Good Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation, <http://www.glasnost.de/db/DokAus/92csfr.html> (accessed June 16, 2010).

embassy in Bratislava since the very first day of independence. In general, German support for the political, economic and societal transformation in Central and Eastern Europe⁵ has also benefitted Slovakia. During Vladimir Mečiar's period in government, however, German-Slovakian relations temporarily cooled off until his electoral defeat in 1998. Federal Chancellor Helmut Kohl did not approve of Vladimir Mečiar and his style of government, which was, at times, almost authoritarian. Various attempts by the Slovakian Foreign Ministry to arrange a meeting between Helmut Kohl and Vladimir Mečiar were refused on the basis that there were no openings in the Federal Chancellor's busy diary. The Slovakian government, meanwhile, delayed the recognition of the official title of Germany as the Federal Republic of Germany (*Spolkova republika Nemecko*) until 1995, resorting instead to the term used during the cold war 'German Federal Republic' (*Nemecka spolkova republika*).⁶ Helmut Kohl visited the Republic of Slovakia in June 2007 on the occasion of the award of the International St. Adalbert Prize to former Polish Foreign Minister Władysław Bartoszewski.

German-Slovakian relations improved markedly when Mikuláš Dzurinda took up office in 1998. Gerhard Schröder was the first German Federal Chancellor to visit the Republic of Slovakia on invitation by the Slovakian Prime Minister in October 2000. Following talks between the two heads of government, Prime Minister Dzurinda highlighted the good economic relations between Germany and Slovakia, confirming his desire for Slovakia to join the EU soon. Gerhard Schröder for his part praised the economic reforms implemented by Dzurinda's government, confirming that Germany would support Slovakia in its efforts to become an EU member as quickly as possible. Chancellor Schröder visited the Republic of Slovakia twice, while Mikuláš Dzurinda visited Germany ten times over his two terms in office.⁷ During this phase, differences of opinion centered mainly on the Iraq conflict and the tax reforms put into

5 | Cf. Josefine Wallat, "Alte Lasten, neue Chancen. Deutschlands Blick auf Visegrád", in: *Osteuropa*, 10 (2006), 78.

6 | Cf. Stephen D. Collins, *German policy-making and eastern enlargement of the EU during the Kohl era. Managing the agenda?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 130 et seq.

7 | Conversation with Agáta Pešková, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Bratislava, June 2, 2010.

place during Dzurinda's second term in office. With regard to the Iraq conflict, Germany and Slovakia's views were diametrically opposed: while the USA's attacks on Iraq in spring 2003 met with a great deal of criticism from the German side, Slovakia supported America's position.⁸ Gerhard Schröder referred to the uniform rate of tax of 19 percent introduced in 2004 as "tax dumping"; it resulted in tax evasion by companies and the loss of jobs in the Western European states.⁹ These differences of opinion have not, however, detracted at all from the good economic contacts and extremely friendly German-Slovakian relations, as Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel and Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda reiterated in Bratislava in May 2006. At this juncture, Merkel specifically highlighted the bold reforms put into place by Dzurinda's government.¹⁰

Since joining the EU, the number of Slovakian visits to Germany has declined. But political contacts occur not only at the very highest state level – individual ministries, the Bundestag and the individual Länder also help to shape relations.

Robert Fico, Slovakian prime minister from 2006 until July 2010, also met Angela Merkel in Germany several times, always underlining the good relations between the two states. It can be assumed that this interest in maintaining friendly relations will continue given the results of the Slovakian parliamentary elections of 12 June, which were won by Iveta Radičová.

Looking at the visits by the heads of state, heads of government and foreign ministers since 1993, it is clear that there were many more visits from the Slovakian side to Germany than vice versa. Since joining the EU, the number of Slovakian visits to Germany has, however, declined,¹¹ which may be due to the fact that there are

8 | Cf. Josefine Wallat, "Alte Lasten, neue Chancen. Deutschlands Blick auf Visegrád", in: *Osteuropa*, 10 (2006), 81.

9 | Cf. Stefan Gehrold und Daniel Wolf, "Wirtschaftswunder Slowakei. Musterknabe oder neuer Bösewicht in der Europäischen Union?", in: *KAS-Auslandsinformationen* 11/2005, 63.

10 | Cf. German Embassy Pressburg, "Pressebegegnung von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel und dem Ministerpräsidenten der Slowakischen Republik Ing. Mikuláš Dzurinda" (2006), http://www.pressburg.diplo.de/Vertretung/pressburg/de/03/Bilaterale_Beziehungen/seite__pressekonferenz__bk_27in__dzurinda.html (accessed June 17, 2010).

11 | Cf. German Embassy Pressburg, "Gegenseitige Besuche der Staatsoberhäupter, Regierungschefs und Außenminister seit 1999", http://www.pressburg.diplo.de/Vertretung/pressburg/de/03/Bilaterale_Beziehungen/seite__gegenseitige__besuche__seit__1999.html (accessed June 18, 2010).

now regular meetings of heads of government and foreign ministers as part of the EU arrangements.

However, political contacts occur not only at the very highest state level – individual ministries, the German Bundestag and the individual Länder also help to shape relations: many members of the German Bundestag and members of government as well as several minister presidents of the Länder have visited the Republic of Slovakia over the last few years. In addition, a German-Slovak group of parliamentarians is active in the Bundestag, the aim of which is to encourage intensive exchange between the two parliaments. From the Slovakian side also, several ministers have made official visits to Germany, such as Ivan Mikloš in his former function as finance minister or Robert Kaliňák, secretary of state of the Republic of Slovakia.¹²

Cooperation between Slovakian and German authorities will now be outlined using the example of the Slovakian Institute of National Remembrance (*Ústav pamäti národa* – UPN): the office for Records of the National Security Service of the Former German Democratic Republic (*Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der ehemaligen Deutschen Demokratischen Republik* – BStU) and the UPN signed a declaration on mutual assistance. Pursuant to this declaration, the BStU supports UPN conferences in part through financial contributions or by providing speakers. Thus, the BStU provided the UPN with financial support for a conference on the Soviet secret service, the KGB, in 2008. In addition, a leading employee of the UPN was given the opportunity to complete a placement at the German authority's offices lasting several months.¹³

The remaining Carpathian Germans (also known as Slovak Germans), totaling around 5,000, who professed their German nationality in the 2001 census in Slovakia represent a further link between the two states. The Association of Carpathian Germans (KDV), which represents the German minority in Slovakia, however, assumes

12 | Conversation mit Agáta Pešková, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Bratislava, June 2, 2010.

13 | Conversation with Marta Košíková, Ústav pamäti národa – UPN, May 26, 2010.

that there are around twice as many ethnic Germans living in Slovakia. The Republic of Slovakia officially recognized the Carpathian Germans as one of a total of 13 minorities. With the exception of Ján Slota, the leader of the Slovakian National Party (*Slovenská národná strana* – SNS) who is well known for his nationalist views, the Slovak Germans have not had any problems to date with political representatives since the establishment of the Republic of Slovakia. Cooperation with the Slovakian presidents Rudolf Schuster (1999–2004) and Ivan Gašparovič (2004 to date) has been, and continues to be, excellent. Relations with other minorities in the Republic of Slovakia are also described as good. The Museum of Culture of Carpathian Germans in

Access to the German employment market is limited for Slovakian nationals until April 30, 2011 and requires an "EU work permit" from the German Federal Employment Agency.

Bratislava is part of the Slovakian National Museum and is financed to around 99 percent by the Slovakian Ministry for Culture. From there, additional funds are also provided for selected projects run by the association.

The German side also participates in the funding for the Carpathian German minority: the ministry for the interior grants loans, while various associations and charities, such as the Association of Carpathian Germans in Slovakia (*Karpatendeutsche Landsmannschaft Slovakia e.V.*) with its seat in Stuttgart or the Hermann Niermann-Stiftung in Düsseldorf, provide financial and organizational assistance.¹⁴

GERMANY AND SLOVAKIA IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

In June 1995, the Republic of Slovakia applied for membership in the European Union. The EU's decision to begin direct accession talks, however, did not come until the European Council meeting in December 1999 in Helsinki.¹⁵ During Vladimir Mečiar's time in government, direct membership negotiations would have been barely conceivable. The EU expressed deep concern in October 1995 in particular regarding the political and institutional tensions within the Republic of Slovakia.¹⁶ The government elected in 1998

14 | Conversation with Ondrej Pöss, Karpatendeutscher Verein, June 8, 2010.

15 | Conversation with Agáta Pešková, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Bratislava, June 2, 2010.

16 | European Commission, "Agenda 2000 – Commission. Opinion on Slovakia's Application for Membership of the European Union" (1997), 16 et sqq.

under the leadership of Dzurinda countered these negative developments with various reforms and endeavored to anchor the country in the Western community of states. It was supported in these efforts by Germany, which spoke out in favor of the Republic of Slovakia's membership in the EU and NATO.¹⁷ In the course of membership negotiations however, Schröder's government successfully pushed for the closure of the Slovakian nuclear power station V1 in Jaslovské Bohunice to be included as a condition of membership.¹⁸ Another point of conflict between Germany and Slovakia concerned transitional periods for freedom of movement of workers: access to the German employment market is limited for Slovakian nationals until April 30, 2011 and requires an "EU work permit" from the German Federal Employment Agency.¹⁹ With Slovakia's accession to NATO and the EU in 2004, the relationship between Germany and Slovakia reached a new level: the country had advanced from the status of "supplicant" to that of "partner".²⁰ Within the EU, however, Germany, as one of the most densely populated and most economically successful states, continues to be important for Slovakia.²¹ Germany, for its part, continued to support Slovakian issues, as Slovakian Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda highlighted during Angela Merkel's 2006 visit to Bratislava. He took this opportunity to thank Merkel for her huge contribution to the adoption of the financial forecast for 2007-2013, which was particularly important for the new EU member states.²² Differences of opinion between Germany and Slovakia within the EU dominated above all with regard to the possible EU-wide agreement of tax rates, the ongoing restriction of freedom of movement for Slovakian workers on the German employment market and with regard to the strict observance of the Maastricht criteria.²³

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty Germany must now also arrange majorities and could, in future, also be forced to rely on Slovakia's support.

17 | Cf. Kai-Olaf Lang (2006), 5.

18 | Cf. Council Regulation (Euratom) № 549/2007, May 14, 2007.

19 | Cf. EURES, "Freizügigkeit: Deutschland", <http://ec.europa.eu/eures/main.jsp?acro=free&lang=de&countryId=DE&fromCountryId=SK&accessing=0&content=1&restrictions=1&step=2> (accessed June 24, 2010).

20 | Cf. Josefine Wallat, (2006), 78.

21 | Cf. Vladimír Bilčík and Juraj Buzalka, "Die nicht-existent Gemeinschaft. Die Slowakei und Deutschland in der EU", in: *Osteuropa*, 10 (2006), 65.

22 | Cf. German Embassy in Pressburg (2006).

23 | Cf. Vladimír Bilčík and Juraj Buzalka (2006), 68.

Since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty on December 1, 2009, Germany must now also arrange majorities for its own position in all kinds of policy fields and could, in future, also be forced to rely on Slovakia's support.

ECONOMIC NETWORKS

On gaining independence in 1993, the Republic of Slovakia also assumed responsibility for the reorganization of its previously centralized economic system into market economy structures. The focus was first and foremost on the privatization of state companies, the liberalization of prices and export trade, as well as facilitating direct foreign investment.²⁴ Having overcome initial difficulties, the Slovakian economy began to grow rapidly. In the course of this growth, trade with Germany also gained momentum: Slovakian exports to the Federal Republic increased steadily from Euro 762 million in 1993 to Euro 8,962 million in 2007. Only in 2008 and 2009 was there a decline, attributable to the global economic and financial crisis. Trade

Germany was the Slovakia's most important trading partner in 2009. In contrast, Slovakia is considerably less important for German foreign trade.

also flourished in the opposite direction: in 1993, Slovakia imported German goods to the value of Euro 717 million, and by 2008 imports had increased more than tenfold to Euro 8,739 million in total.²⁵ While there was also a decrease here in 2009, Germany was the Slovakia's most important trading partner in this year also: German goods accounted for 25 percent of Slovakian imports, while 23.4 percent of Slovakian exports were made to Germany. The most important Slovakian export goods for the German market are transport equipment, chemical products, machinery and installations.²⁶ In contrast, Slovakia is considerably less important for German foreign trade: in 2009, 0.83 percent of German exports were supplied to Slovakia, placing it 23rd in terms of foreign trade.²⁷

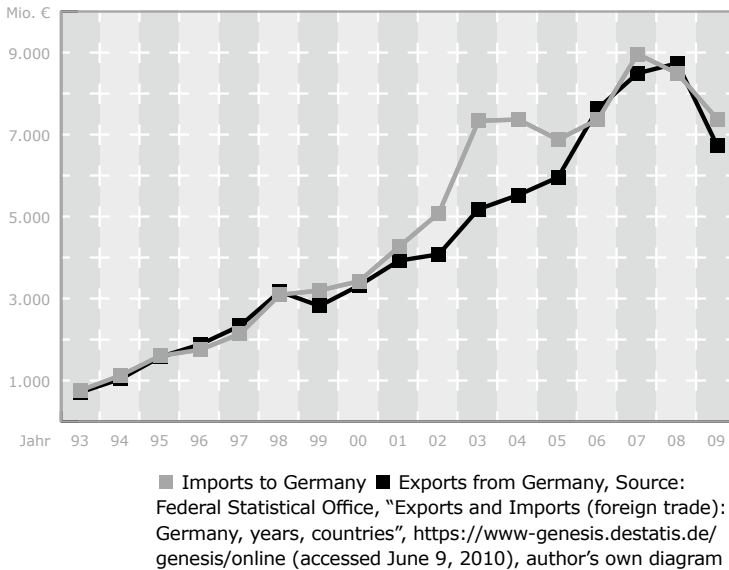
24 | Cf. Stefan Gehroid and Daniel Wolf (2005), 64.

25 | Cf. Federal Statistical Office, "Exports and Imports (foreign trade): Germany, years, countries", <https://www-genesis.destatis.de/genesis/online> (accessed June 9, 2010).

26 | Cf. Federal Foreign Office, "Slowakei. Wirtschaft", <http://auswaertiges-amt.de/diplo/de/Laenderinformationen/Slowakei/Wirtschaft.html> (accessed June 9, 2010).

27 | Cf. Federal Statistical Office, "Exports and Imports (foreign trade): Germany, years", <https://www-genesis.destatis.de/genesis/online> (accessed June 9, 2010).

Fig. 1
Foreign trade between Germany and Slovakia



Since the establishment of the Republic of Slovakia, economic cooperation between the two countries has been encouraged: as long ago as 1993 a German economic representation was opened in Bratislava, which was, however, run from Prague until the establishment of the independent German-Slovakian Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DSIHK) in 2005. The DSIHK sees itself as a forum for German and Slovakian companies and is focused on the development of economic and trade relations between Germany and Slovakia. Around 20 percent of its services are utilized by Slovakian companies hoping to establish themselves in the German market. Approximately 80 percent of services are requested by German companies. The German-Czech and German-Slovak Trade Association has also set itself the goal of providing "comprehensive support for economic relations between German, Czech and Slovakian companies, institutions and municipalities".²⁸ In addition, foreign investors in Germany are supported by Germany Trade & Invest Gesellschaft für Außenwirtschaft und Standortmarketing mbH (GTAI) and in Slovakia by the Agency for Investment and Trade Development (SARIO).

28 | German-Czech and German-Slovak Trade Association, http://dtsw.de/deutsch/dtsw_ziele.html (accessed June 16, 2010).

There were two main waves of German investment in Slovakia: at the beginning of the 1990s, many German companies made use of the opportunity to become involved in various privatization projects and viewed Slovakia as an extended workbench. Pre-machining work was carried out in Germany while the work-intensive tasks were outsourced to Slovakia. On completion, the product was then re-exported back to Germany.

From 2000 onwards, there were privatizations *inter alia* in the energy and telecommunications sectors, in which German energy providers and Deutsche Telekom invested huge sums. While Slovakia has now become too expensive

Many German companies in the automobile supplies industry in particular have relocated to Slovakia. Slovakia is also increasingly being seen as a sales market.

to make it a viable extended workbench, the investments in the 1990s strengthened the industrial structures and the country is beginning to be perceived as a high-quality corporate location. Many German companies in the automobile supplies industry in particular have relocated to Slovakia. Slovakia is also increasingly being seen as a sales market, which is reflected in the presence of major German chains such as Kaufland supermarkets, dm drugstores or Hornbach DIY stores.

Today, there are more than 400 German companies operating in Slovakia, including major undertakings like Volkswagen, Bosch, E.ON or Siemens. The majority, however, are small and medium-sized enterprises. To date, German companies have invested a total of around Euro 3.5 billion, mainly in the automobile manufacturing, machine engineering and electrical engineering sectors. The German investor's companies employ around 80,000 workers.²⁹

SOCIETAL COOPERATION

The German-Slovakian Agreement on Cultural Cooperation signed in May 1997 entered into force on May 28, 1998. The objective of this agreement is to improve knowledge of the German and Slovakian culture on both sides and to provide a legal basis for cultural cooperation between the two countries. In Bratislava, the Goethe Institute, as the

29 | Cf. Conversation with Markus Halt, German-Slovak Chamber of Industry and Commerce, May 19, 2010.

partner of the Federal Foreign Office, coordinates various activities as part of the foreign culture and education policy of the Federal Republic of Germany. One of the Institute's most important areas of work is promoting the German language in the educational system of the host country. To this end, teaching materials are prepared and programs run for students and teachers. Since 2008, foreign language teaching from an early age has been strongly encouraged in the Slovakian school system. In order to provide sufficient numbers of German teachers for this purpose, the Goethe Institute has been offering more teacher-training courses. The Institute works in close collaboration with the Central Agency for Schools Abroad (ZfA).³⁰ In Slovakia, the ZfA oversees *inter alia* the German Slovakian Contact School in Bratislava, a high school (*Gymnasium*) in Poprad, which offers both the German and the Slovakian school leaver's certificate (*Abitur*), as well as 26 language schools.³¹ German is currently the second most commonly learnt foreign language in Slovakia after English. A total of around 268,000 schoolchildren and students studied German in the school year 2009/10.³²

German is currently the second most commonly learnt foreign language in Slovakia after English.

In contrast, German interest in Slovakia, its language and culture, is less pronounced. Eastern and Central European studies in literature, ethnology and social sciences are far more popular than purely German-Slovakian courses of study. This is attributed to Slovakia's small size, as well as to the lack of institutions that promote relations between Germany and Slovakia. In addition, Slovakian studies have increasingly fallen prey to financial cutbacks at German universities. Relations between the individual German and Slovakian Institutes for Slovak studies are, however, good. The Comenius University in Bratislava and the Humboldt University Berlin, for instance, are working on a joint project on interwar-period literature. At the Collegium Carolinum in Munich, meanwhile, scientific

30 | Cf. Conversation with Wolfgang Franz, Goethe Institute Bratislava, June 10, 2010.

31 | Cf. Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen, "Das DSD II-Programm in der Slowakei", http://auslandsschulwesen.de/nn_1674788/Auslandsschulwesen/DASAN/Fachberater/Europa/Bratislava/DSD/node.html?__nnn=true (accessed June 22, 2010).

32 | Conversation with Wolfgang Franz, Goethe Institute Bratislava, June 10, 2010.

Relations between Germany and Slovakia are excellent as far as town-twinning projects are concerned.

experts from around the world are studying the history and current situation of the Czech Republic and the Republic of Slovakia. The scientific exchange between Slovakia and Germany is also supported by the Alexander-von-Humboldt Foundation and the German Academic Exchange Service.³³

Relations between Germany and Slovakia are excellent as far as town-twinning projects are concerned. With the exception of Nitra, Žilina and Trenčín, all major Slovakian towns are partnered with a German town. Bratislava has twinning projects with Bremen, Karlsruhe, Ulm and Regensburg. Košice, the second-largest city, maintains close ties with Wuppertal and Cottbus, while Banská Bystrica is twinned with Halberstadt, and Prešov with Remscheid.

Religious relations are also very good. Since its inception, the relief organization Renovabis, set up in 1993 by the Roman Catholic church, has been helping people in Slovakia. Support is provided both through projects and by promoting exchange between East and West. The projects tend to focus on social issues. For example, Renovabis supported the construction of a hospice in Nitra and various assisted living projects. Other areas of emphasis include social and pastoral integration of the Roma minority as well as promoting lay preachers.³⁴ The Forum for Christian Institutions (*Fórum kresťanských inštitúcií* – FKI), which unites various Christian Organizations under one roof, receives financial aid from Renovabis. The FKI serves as an information and cooperation platform for its members, it is responsible *inter alia* for contacts to government and public administration and for the deepening of international relations. Thus, FKI was, for example, also involved in the organization of the second Ecumenical church congress in May 2010 in Munich. Another link with Germany is the Slovakian Kolping Society, which, in turn, works closely with the International Kolping Society with its headquarters in Cologne and is also a member of the FKI. In addition to the links between various German and Slovakian Associations,

33 | Conversation with Prof. Dr. Peter Zajac, Institute of Slavistics at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, June 15, 2010.

34 | Cf. Renovabis, "Länderinformationen Slowakei", <http://renovabis.de/laender-projekte/laenderinformationen/slowakei> (accessed June 23, 2010).

there are also several German/Slovakian partnerships, such as that between the Diocese of Banská Bystrica and the Deanship Andernach or between the Catholic Youth Organization of the Diocesan Association of Limburg and the Slovakian Catholic Youth Movement 'eRko'.³⁵

SLOVAKIA AND GERMANY – NEIGHBORS IN EUROPE

If one asks Germans in Slovakia about the country and its inhabitants, the picture is for the most part positive. While the majority of German tourists knew very little about Slovakia prior to their trip, their first impressions are favorable. Many Germans visit Slovakia because their parents or grandparents originally came from the area that is now Slovakia, and they want to find out more about the living conditions and the home of their ancestors. For instance, the parents of one German tourist were from Hauerland in central Slovakia. After many visits to Slovakia, this particular tourist had gained a good insight into the economic developments there. She found the Slovakian people to be very friendly and likeable. Another tourist heard a radio program on radicalization within Slovakia and expressed his concern about the nationalistic SNS. Most German tourists, however, said that they knew too little about Slovakia, but reiterated their positive first impressions. Germans who live in Slovakia for a little longer find that the cultural differences are marginal. Apart from learning the language, problems of assimilation are minor. One German who lives in Bratislava noted that people in Slovakia are more prepared to improvise and work less strictly according to deadlines or protocols. Another's personal idea of happiness was to be able to be on the other side of what was once the Iron Curtain, and he saw many similarities with the German way of life.

Many Slovaks admire the way Germany rebuilt itself after World War II and could even imagine living in the Federal Republic.

The Germans, meanwhile, are often seen by Slovaks as being punctual, respectable and accurate. A Slovakian woman who was granted a travel permit to visit West Germany in 1989 mainly remembered her astonishment at the huge selection of foodstuffs available at German supermarkets. A Slovakian schoolgirl who visited Germany

35 | Conversation with Katarína Hulmanová, Fórum kresťanských inštitúcií, June 7, 2010.

praised the high quality of German products and left with the impression that the Germans have a lot of money. A Slovakian academic with German colleagues appreciates the German exactness and the clear-cut relationships. Many also admire the way Germany rebuilt itself after the Second World War and could even imagine living in the Federal Republic.³⁶

CONCLUSION AND OUTLOOK – SURPRISING RESULTS IN THE PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS OF JUNE 2010

A closer examination of German-Slovakian relations brings to light a hugely diverse range of political, economic and societal links. Thus, we cannot share the opinion expressed by Pavol Lukáč in 2004 that there is a lack of interests in common. The fact that many relations are maintained beyond the realm of public perception should not be used as a measure of their success.

However, in the political and economic spheres in particular, it is apparent that relations are somewhat asymmetrical: while Germany is of great importance for Slovakia, Germany attributes Slovakia less importance.³⁷

In order to pay tribute to the increased importance of the Republic of Slovakia, Germany ought to take better care of its “little” partner in the heart of Europe, this could take the form of more frequent visits by the most senior echelons in politics.

For several years now, however, a reduction in this asymmetry has been observed: on the political level, the Republic of Slovakia became a partner of the Federal Republic of Germany in the EU, NATO, the Schengen area and the Euro zone. In the economic field also, Slovakia is increasingly being seen as an equal partner, rather than merely an extended workbench. In order to pay tribute to the increased importance of the Republic of Slovakia, Germany ought to take better care of its “little” partner in the heart of Europe, especially in view of the future need to secure majorities in the EU Council of Ministers. This could take the form of more frequent visits by the most senior echelons in politics or the signature of a dedicated German-Slovakian Treaty of Friendship. Conversely, the Republic of Slovakia ought to boost its presence in Germany, in order to be more apparent to the Germans.

36 | Cf. various interviews carried out by the author in Bratislava in May and June 2010.

37 | Cf. Vladimír Bilčík and Juraj Buzalka (2006), 65.

Perhaps this will now happen following the parliamentary elections of June 12, 2010. Iveta Radičová, a 53-year-old Professor of sociology, was the first woman in the history of Slovakia to be appointed prime minister, after she and the four party leaders of the future centre-right coalition signed a coalition agreement in a public ceremony. "Slovakia should again be a good place to live", announced the new prime minister after the signature of the coalition agreement as the joint goal of her government. She promised "responsible and transparent government", in which, in addition to curbing the budget deficit, tackling corruption would have the highest priority. Hinting at the numerous corruption scandals of the previous governments, Radičová also threatened her governing partners with a "zero tolerance" policy at the first justified suspicion of corruption.

So how will relations between Slovakia, the EU and Germany develop? The former prime minister and newly-appointed Foreign Minister Mikulas Dzurinda will first need to appease angry EU partners. "Slovakia will not block approval of the EU stabilization fund", said Prime Minister Radičová, contradicting her own election slogans. However, some further negotiations are likely to be necessary. Radičová and her party in particular caused considerable unrest with their argument that poor Slovakia could not be called upon to bail out Greece, which is a much richer country, after Fico had already guaranteed Slovakia's solidarity: "We cannot simply enjoy the advantages of the European Union, but walk away when our solidarity is called for", Fico warned repeatedly. It remains to be seen whether these additional negotiations requested by Radicova will change anything. The other EU partners would hardly accept the exclusion of Slovakia from the principle of solidarity without this having further repercussions.

Relations with Germany are now liable to become somewhat livelier. Foreign Minister Dzurinda and Chancellor Merkel have known and thought highly of one another for many years.

Relations with Germany are now liable to become somewhat livelier. Mikulas Dzurinda and Angela Merkel have known and thought highly of one another for many years, and the new Slovakian head of government Iveta Radicova is also likely to find all doors open to her in Berlin as far as the further development of German-Slovakian relations is concerned. Perhaps Slovakia will intensify its presence in Germany instead of just waiting for German investors to find their own way to Slovakia.