Abstract

After long and fierce political disputes, the Slovak Parliament finalised a constitutional reform in 2001 as well as required special legislation for decentralisation and the establishment of eight self-administration regions and the election of their democratically legitimated organs. Therewith the basis was provided for the falling due regional elections. The regional elections that have been held in December 2001 were a big success of the opposition party HZDS of the former minister-president Vladimir Mečiar. In six of eight regions candidates of the HZDS won. During regional elections in November/December 2005, the parties in power of the centre-right coalition remained successful in the first round of the elections for the regional assembly. However, during runoff polls for direct elections of the regional Presidents all governing parties had to face a debacle. In all eight regions candidates of the opposition won, partly supported by governing parties.

Regional elections in Slovakia were characterised by the building of bizarre coalitions at regional level that often are completely in contrast to political coalitions on national level.

A second characteristic of those regional elections was the extremely low voter participation. If the voter turnout was already very low in 2001, with 26 and 22 percent respectively, it turned out to be a democratic catastrophe in 2005. During the first ballot only 18 percent of eligible voters voted, during the second ballot even eleven percent only. In both cases the question of democratic legitimacy arises.

Besides a general disillusionment with politics in Slovakia, reasons for the low voter turnout are mainly to be seen in the fact that the population did not identify with the new self-administrating regions and the benefit of this new administrative reform for the people could not be communicated.

Democratically alarming is also the fact that where the party of the Hungarian coalition (SMK) would have had chances to nominate the President of the region, all Slovak parties – no matter if governing or oppositional party – prevented that by a joint ethnical election campaign “Slovak people, vote for a Slovak”.