

## The Slovak Concepts of Integration

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### ABSTRACT

The first part of this chapter deals with the factors that determined Slovak national development; conflict between Catholics and Protestants played an important role in this process. Another important factor was the Czech-Slovak linguistic and cultural proximity, which allowed continuous interaction, but slowed independent Slovak identity-building processes. Slovaks lived for a long time on the northern periphery of the old Kingdom of Hungary, where, despite their relatively high number of people, they did not have autonomy. Slovak politics had to settle relations with the Czechs and Hungarians in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. The Slovaks also tried to geographically define the region they inhabited. An important role in this process was played by its proximity to the Danube and the mountainous character of the country under the Carpathians. In building cultural and political identity, however, the sense of Slavic unity, which Hungarian politics called Panslavism, has traditionally played an important role. Most Slovak political concepts dealt with achieving territorial autonomy and federalizing Hungary. Several concepts also touched on the idea of a wider Slavic federation. Russophilism was strong in Slovak politics for a long time, but at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Czech-Slovak cooperation seemed more realistic. Czechoslovakia was finally born as a result of the First World War. After 1918, the democratic Western orientation was strengthened, and several politicians considered cooperation along the Danube important. In the shadow of the Soviet and German threats, Central Europe concepts were born. The most famous is former Prime Minister Milan Hodža's concept, which was conceived during his US emigration. After the Second World War, all of Czechoslovakia became part of the Soviet Eastern Bloc. Some Slovak communists thought about joining the Soviet Union directly, but Moscow no longer needed them. Other orientations have long been taboo. Solidarity in Central Europe, on the other hand, has strengthened in anti-communist opposition circles. The country's Western integration began after 1989, but the pro-Russian political orientation was also strong. In these years, Central European solidarity and identity have promoted democratic orientation and European Union integration.

### KEYWORDS

assimilation, Carpathia, Danube-region, Europe, nationalism, slavism, Slovakia

## 1. The conditions for becoming a modern nation

Modern Slovak national identity, like that of other Central and Eastern European nations, was conceived in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century (1789–1918). During this pivotal period, Slovaks lived in the old Kingdom of Hungary, which in turn had been part of the mixed and multi-ethnic Habsburg Empire since 1526. In fact, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was the Slovak-inhabited areas that formed the northern backbone of royal Hungary, which was not invaded by the Turks, and for a time, Bratislava became the country's crown city and seat of its central administration. Slovakia's image was also influenced by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, which led to deep-rooted conflicts between Catholics and Protestants in the region. This had an impact even in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Most Slovaks initially became evangelicals, but the Counter-Reformation was able to convert most of them back to Catholicism. Protestants, however, remained a distinctive minority, spiritually and culturally significant. In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, therefore, two different concepts of nationhood coexisted among Slovaks—the idea of Czechoslovak national unity favored by Protestants and the Catholic concept of nationhood, which advocated Slovak cultural, linguistic, and spiritual independence. This concept was represented by Catholic priest and linguistic innovator Anton Bernolák (1762–1813). The contradiction was only bridged in the 1840s, when the young Lutheran intellectuals led by Ľudovít Štúr (1815–1856), who were more or less in line with Slovak literary romanticism, accepted the Catholic view of the national autonomy of Slovaks in Hungary. The Catholics, on the other hand, abandoned their literary language based on the West Slovak dialect and adopted the new literary language based on the Central Slovak dialect favored by the Evangelicals. The centuries-old Catholic-Protestant antagonism did not disappear completely, but like the Germans, Hungarians, Flemish, and Swiss, the Slovaks were elevated to the ranks of the multi-lingual European peoples.

The national movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Slovaks had to define itself essentially in relation to two neighboring peoples—the culturally and linguistically close Czechs on the one hand, and the powerfully and demographically dominant Hungarians on the other. For the Slovak evangelicals, who did not produce their own Bible translation in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the liturgical and literary language since the Reformation had been Czech, supplemented by local Slovak words. The nearby Czech provinces were also a strong educational and economic attraction for Slovaks. The successful Czech national modernization of the 19<sup>th</sup> century provided an attractive example for the weaker Slovaks, who after a while began to see in this orientation a potential counterweight to the growing Hungarian nationalist and assimilationist aspirations. While the latter were seriously hampered by the difference between the Hungarian and Slovak languages and the rural nature of a large part of the population, they were facilitated by the fact that the two peoples had lived for almost a thousand years in a state framework in which the Slovaks had never had public territorial autonomy. Moreover, the areas inhabited by Slovaks, mostly in mountainous areas, were quite

regionally fragmented and ethnically diverse. Almost a thousand years of Hungarian-Slovak coexistence and the similar denominational background of the two peoples naturally resulted in a similar mentality, which facilitated the Magyarisation of the higher social status urban Slovaks. The rapid assimilation of numerous northern minorities and the erosion of the Slovak educational and cultural infrastructure also contributed to the change in ethnic proportions. Slovaks made up about 10% of the population in Hungary, but their political and social weight was far below this proportion.

After 1918, however, Slovakia, which became part of Czechoslovakia, developed rapidly. Although Slovakia did not get the public autonomy it coveted, the Slovaks officially became a constituent nation, their language was made official, and a Slovak-language university and Slovak National Theatre were founded in Bratislava. High quality Czech-Slovak grammar schools were established in the cities. However, the weaker Slovak industry could not compete with the more advanced Czech industry, and Slovakia gradually became deindustrialized. The trend was only reversed on the eve of the Second World War, but it was too late; ethnic differences, combined with external pressure from the great powers, had split the first Czechoslovak Republic.

Born independent in 1939, Slovakia was a prisoner of Nazi Germany. In 1944, however, Slovakia experienced a serious anti-fascist uprising, the memory of which is still strong today. In Czechoslovakia, which was restored after 1945, Slovak politicians initially failed to achieve federalization, which did not take place until 1968, but objectively, the weight of Slovaks in the common state gradually increased. In the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Slovakia underwent a major industrialization process and the urbanization that went with it. In addition, during and immediately after the Second World War, the country underwent significant ethnic homogenization. Despite this, Slovakia is now the only truly multi-ethnic state in the Central European region, thanks to the presence of a Hungarian minority of around 9% and hundreds of thousands of Roma inhabitants. Before the regime change, Slovakia was in fact ready for state independence, both infrastructurally and economically. The latter was achieved in early 1993. Since 2004, Slovakia has been a member of the EU and NATO.

## **2. The territorial self-definition of Slovaks**

Before 1918, Slovakia had no clear public borders, as it was an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary. The need for legal demarcation of the Slavic/Slovak territories in the Highlands first appeared in the plans of the Jacobin conspirators in Hungary in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The symbolic demarcation of Slovak territories played a decisive role in 19<sup>th</sup> century literature; the Slovak self-image created by poets and writers became rather mountainous. The main symbolic significance was attached to the Tatras and the two fast-flowing long rivers, the Garam and the Váh, which originated in the mountains and eventually flowed into the Danube. Like many other stereotypes, the image was somewhat one-sided. This was pointed out by Ján Lajčiak (1875–1918), one

of the most original but rather marginalized Slovak evangelical intellectuals at the turn of the century, in his book *Slovakia and Culture*.<sup>1</sup> With doctorates from Leipzig and Paris, Lajčiak argued that Slovakia's image was far from being as clear-cut as many people thought, but he also acknowledged the dominance of the mountainous character. More important, he said, were the climatic conditions, which were home to a variety of agricultural crops and ranged from the 'oat' lands of the north to the 'date' areas of the south.<sup>2</sup>

The political and geographical delimitation of Slovak territorial claims began during the 1848/49 revolution and continued in the 1860s. It was then that the memoranda and drafts were drawn up that sought to define the exact boundaries of the Slovak territories.<sup>3</sup> The most famous attempt was made in 1861 at the Turcszentmárton Memorandum Assembly. The aim at that time was to create a legally autonomous Slovak District of Upper Hungary. The Upper-Hungarian Slovak District was to consist not only of pure Slovak counties, but also parts of ethnically mixed regions.

Dionýz Štúr (1827–1893), a Viennese geographer and brother of the Slovak language reformer, Ľudovít Štúr, was the first to formulate the geological-geographical concept of Slovakia. He delimited its territory by the Beskids to the west, north, and east, and by the Danube and Tisza to the south. In one of the more detailed versions, he divided this territory into the area below the Tatras and above the Tisza with the help of the Mátro. In Jozef Hložanský-Balej's draft, Slovakia, called White Hungary, would have stretched from the Morava River to the Tisza and from the Danube to the Carpathians. The Mátro Mountains would also have been included. The concept, which also seemed maximalist, already included German-majority Bratislava and the Slovak islands around Eger, Komárom, and Vác.

The administrative boundaries of present-day Slovakia were finally drawn after the First World War and, with minor changes, still exist today. In some respects, they are more modest; in others, they are broader than the (selected) concepts mentioned above. In any case, the Carpathians and the Danube and Tisza rivers have played a role in their definition. These concepts still resonate in Slovak public thinking and even in popular culture.<sup>4</sup> Thus, feelings of 'along the Danube' and 'under the Carpathians' are present in Slovak geographical identity, although—for understandable reasons—not in the same form as the Hungarian perception of the Carpathian Basin. Here, the 'Carpathian identity' is rather limited to the parts below the mountains and does not encompass the whole region. Sometimes 'Carpathian-ness' is explicitly associated with rurality; this is the case, for example, in the writings of ethnographer and political scientist Juraj Buzalka.<sup>5</sup> Nor does this form of identity give rise to any particular sense of kinship with other Carpathian peoples, with the possible exception of the Rusyns.

1 He wrote the work in 1910, but it was not published until after his death in 1921.

2 Lajčiak, 2007, pp. 54–55.

3 Szarka, 1995, pp. 48–77.

4 For example, one of the most famous Slovak rock bands has a hit song called 'From Tatra to Danube, the orphans sing.'

5 Buzalka, 2012, pp. 62–71. The author here prefers to speak of 'the Carpathian country'.

Since for many centuries, the Slovak territories formed the legally undefined inner periphery of larger state units, Slovak territorial self-definition was essentially intertwined with these state formations—that is, above all with Northern or rather Upper Hungary and, more broadly, with the Habsburg Empire.<sup>6</sup> For a long time the latter was the center of Europe. However, Slovak public thought was also influenced from further afield, whether by the German-inspired Reformation, the French Enlightenment, liberalism, or Slavic sentiments toward Russia. The latter were formulated among Central European intellectuals educated in German universities in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, but then reinforced the vector of Slavic thought in Eastern Europe.

The outcome of the First World War, however, put the Western orientation in the foreground, as Czechoslovakia owed its existence to the victory of the Western Entente allies. The views of Štefan Osuský (1889–1973), a top Czechoslovak diplomat, ambassador to Paris, and representative of the League of Nations, are interesting from the point of view of post-1918 positioning. In 1921, he was also the Secretary General of the Czechoslovak peace delegation. Returning from Slovak emigration to the United States, Osuský saw his nation's destiny as part of a mixed-ethnic Central Europe, which was, however, permanently linked to the culture of Western Europe by the events of the First World War. Somewhat optimistically, he saw his nation as having fled from the East to the West in 1918. He was aware that his homeland was a periphery within Czechoslovakia, but he also saw Slovakia as an indispensable periphery. He saw its importance mainly in its freedom from the Danube, which connected the new republic with Eastern and Southeastern Europe. This was a key factor for landlocked Czechoslovakia, which lacked a sea exit. In 1931, the diplomat, who was keen on geopolitics, did not rule out the reorganization and partial reintegration of Central Europe although not based on the Habsburg Empire or aristocratic conservatism, but on the platform of an equal democratic nation-state.<sup>7</sup>

Lubomír Lipták (1930–1999), one of the most distinguished Slovakian historians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, expressed interesting thoughts on Slovakia's 'in-between' or 'transitional' situation. According to him,

... nothing is so far removed from historical reality as the idea that Slovakia is connected to something, the idea that it is consciously exploiting its geographical location. On the contrary. It is astonishing that Slovakia's favorable location, well known and experienced both in the past and in the present, has not served as the basis for either a single concept or a myth. Slovakia appears mainly as a 'buffer', a point of conflict, a borderland, sometimes in slogans, lines of poetry, poems or, for example, in the background of some discussions of Slavicism.<sup>8</sup>

6 Štúr also placed the Slovaks among the Slavs here. Štúr, 1993, pp. 138–139.

7 Osuský, 1997, pp. 116–118.

8 Lipták, 2000, pp. 31–32.

Lipták saw Slovakia as a transitional territory.

It lags far behind the developed countries of Western and Central Europe, but it is far from being one of the most underdeveloped regions of Europe. While the Czech lands were a kind of easternmost vanguard of Western capitalist civilization, but always one step below the most advanced, Slovakia is the western outpost of the poorer half of Europe, and somewhat above its eastern neighbors in the industrial race.<sup>9</sup>

Lipták also dispelled the illusion that Slovakia is the heart of Europe or its most important crossroads, when

it is more like an island in the way of huge historical currents. These currents undercut its shores and sometimes overwhelm it [...] It is not so large, important, significant or insurmountable that it can act as a barrier to hold back the flow of history for even a moment or to set a substantially new course as a protective barrier.<sup>10</sup>

Lipták also saw ideas as arriving late in the region, whose fate is essentially determined by its frontier character, and thus as a frontline area even in apparent peacetime.

In a word, here is a front, even if there is no war, a battlefield even if there is no battle.... It is not a sword, but a shield, which must be strong enough to protect against the blow even if the arm of the defender of the true faith has been resisted in battle with the infidel, and even if the arm has been broken.<sup>11</sup>

Slovaks with memories of anti-Turkish battles see themselves, along with others, as having played their part in defending Christian European civilization. Osuský saw the Slovaks' place alongside the Hungarians, and Lipták as the main organizing force within Austria. For this reason, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation struggles here took place in the shadow of the Ottoman crescent.<sup>12</sup> In any case, most Slovak thinkers of the last 200 years saw the place of the Slovaks predominantly in Central Europe along the Danube and differed at most in whether they considered this good or bad luck, and in which direction they were looking outward.

9 Lipták, 2000, pp. 33–34.

10 Lipták, 2000, p. 36.

11 Lipták, 2000, p. 39.

12 Osuský, 1997, p. 114. and Lipták, 2000.

### 3. The integrationist ideas of Slovak thinkers in the long 19<sup>th</sup> century (1789–1918)

Obviously, it is not possible to cover all the Slovak integration ideas of the last two centuries in one chapter. For this reason, this chapter focuses only on the most influential, rather positive, and predominantly European ideas, and, within that, Central European concepts. Between 1789 and 1918, the Slovak nationalist intelligentsia first attempted to define itself in cultural-intellectual, linguistic, and territorial terms. This was also true of geopolitical self-definition, which, in the words of the literary scholar and Hungarianist Rudolf Chmel, was ‘always more of a labyrinth than a straight path.’<sup>13</sup> Incidentally, this is probably also true of the other Central European nations.

One of the serious problems of the emerging Slovak national identity was that while the religious affiliation, history, and social development of its population (i.e., Gothic, Renaissance, Reformation, Baroque, Enlightenment, etc.) made it part of a Central Europe close to the West, the dominant thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century preferred to see it in the Orthodox Slavic East. This was especially true of the dominant national conservatives, who soon enough began to see the West as the epitome of materialism and liberal immorality—influenced in no small part by Slavophile-oriented Russian nationalist ideologues. Anton Štefánek, as the first Slovak sociologist, saw Slovakia’s belonging as problematic: ‘Slovakia and Slovak culture are part of the area of Western European civilization, but historically and racially they belong to the East and the South.’<sup>14</sup> In fact, according to some, there was no tradition among Slovaks of thinking of Europe as the West. The Czech philosopher Jan Patočka and the Slovak liberal literary scholar Milan Šútovec also noted the anti-Western bias and lack of Western moorings.<sup>15</sup> In Slovak public thinking, westernism was often replaced by a more central Europeanism, but this was not always consciously so. According to Chmel, Slovaks have arrived at a Central European identity drawn cautiously to the West and in a latent rather than overt, transparent way.<sup>16</sup>

The Central European identity of the Slovaks, linked to their existence within the medieval multi-ethnic, and multicultural Kingdom of Hungary and the Habsburg Empire, was nevertheless a fact that most people did not even try to question, or at most, did not consider good. This attitude has now changed. This was best expressed in a 2003 speech by Pavol Hrušovský, a Christian Democrat politician and former Speaker of the Slovak Parliament, on the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independent Slovakia’s establishment: ‘Through Christianity, our face is similar to that of other European

13 Chmel, 2009, p. 323.

14 Chmel, 2013, p. 399. The work cited is Štefánek, Anton: *Základy sociografie Slovenska*. Bratislava, 1944.

15 Chmel, 2013, pp. 396–397.

16 Chmel, 2009, p. 324.

countries. Hungary has become Central European through its history. The national enlightenment has shaped our face in Central Europe.<sup>17</sup>

The Slovak territories were thus integrally combined into larger Central European entities and rarely saw beyond their horizons. Rather, they tried to find their own national place within them, which in turn required them to disintegrate their former frameworks. Given the supranational (non ethnic) Hungarian (*Hungarus*) political tradition based on the counties' autonomy, it is not surprising that the Slovak nationalists also saw the solution essentially in the autonomy of their territories in public law and territory and in the federalization of Hungary in the long term.<sup>18</sup> These ideas would mostly have respected Hungary's constitutional framework, but some of the concepts of 1849 envisaged the Slovak crown province to have been already created within Austria and did not consider Hungary's borders. Concepts after 1860 again returned to the Hungarian territorial platform. An exception was the plan for a federalized Greater Austria, developed by the Romanian Aurel Popovici and born in the Belveder circle of Crown Prince Franz Ferdinand. Among Slovak politicians, the later Czechoslovak prime minister and then young member of parliament Milan Hodža (1878–1944) belonged to this circle. Under the plan, Slovakia, with a smaller territory than today, would have been one of the 15 federal units, with 2 representatives in the 42-member central government.<sup>19</sup>

The most spectacular supranational integration plans, however, were born on a platform of Slavic solidarity and reciprocity. Indeed, the sense of Slavic belonging proved to be an important spiritual support for a national movement that was both outnumbered and one of the most integrated parts of contemporary Hungary. Consequently, the Slavic concepts of unity boosted the Slovaks' self-confidence, making them feel like the largest nation in the world, living from Elba to the Chinese borders. At the same time, another alternative that was rather dangerous for Hungarian state unity was presented during negotiations with the Hungarian majority elite. These ideas provoked a rather violent rejection reaction from the majority Hungarian nation, regardless of their reality and real strength.<sup>20</sup>

One of the first 'apostles' of the Slavic unification idea in Hungary was Ján Kollár (1793–1852), who, after his studies in Jena, spent most of his life in Pest, where he was the pastor of the Evangelicals. Kollár's concept was not yet explicitly political, as he himself was loyal to the Habsburgs all along. He saw the key to Slavic prosperity in cultural and literary cooperation and mutual support within the Slavic nation of four tribes (Czechoslovaks, Illyrians, Poles, and Russians). His concept, which started out as apolitical, eventually inspired a whole generation of Romantic writers and politicians, who went on to play a definite role in the events of 1848/49. It was then that the

17 Hrušovský, 2003, pp. 36–37.

18 It is characteristic that the main drafters of the concrete drafts almost always included two Slovak national activists from Gömör with law degrees—the nobleman Štefan Marko Daxner and Ján Francisci from a family of tailors.

19 Hodža, 2004, p. 61.

20 Szarka, 1995, p. 9.

plan for a Slavic-based—federalist—transformation of Austria was born among the Slavic peoples of Central Europe, and it was attempted to give it a new impetus at the First Slavic Congress in June 1848. The congress took place in Prague because Czech liberal politicians were one of the main driving forces behind the federalist transformation. Their leader was the historian František Palacký, an evangelical who had studied for a time in Slavic Protestant institutions in Upper Hungary. Palacký feared a unifying Germany and a despotic Russia; this is why he wanted to save Austria, which was able to unite the region. In his first draft for a federal reorganization, he largely considered the historical borders of the individual kingdoms and provinces that made up the Habsburg Monarchy. However, this was not the case in the second because he saw the future of the Czechs, Moravians, and Slovaks, whom he regarded as one nation, in a single territorial unit.<sup>21</sup>

Ludovít Štúr, one of the most influential Slovak thinkers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, attended the Slavic Congress, where together with Jozef Miloslav Hurban, he represented the Slovaks (1817–1888). At the time, he was also a supporter of Austro-Slavic ideas, and after a while, he even sided with the Habsburgs during the Hungarian War of Independence, which could be seen as a civil war. However, after the victory of the anti-revolutionary forces, he became disillusioned and spent the rest of his short life in Modor, where he wrote one of his most influential political works, a political analysis entitled *Das Slaventhum und die Welt der Zukunft* (Slavdom and the World of Future, 1853). Written in German and translated into Russian, it was not published in full in Slovak until after the fall of communism. The book became popular with Russian nationalist thinkers who wanted to unite the Slavs, and Štúr became one of the most widely quoted exponents of Russophile Pan-Slavism. In his work, he no longer predicted a great future for Austria, and he became increasingly skeptical about whether the Habsburgs could ever lead a Central European empire transformed to accommodate a Slav majority. Major nations such as the Germans, the Hungarians, and the Italians stood in the way of Slavic transformation. Other forms of a Slavic federation based on democracy were also not an option, he argued, because tsarist Russia would obviously never participate in republican and democratic attempts, and the demographic, religious, and mental differences between the Slavic nations were too great. Štúr therefore saw the only realistic solution in joining tsarist Russia, which was truly destined to unite and lead the Slavic peoples, who must abandon particularism. However, unification would require concessions on both sides. The Russians would first have to abolish the long-obsolete and scandalous serf system and establish village communities of free people and self-governing counties. At the central level, however, the author was not bothered by the denial of tsarist autocracy and the principle of separation of powers. He also rejected Western-style bureaucracy. The representatives of the counties would have formed only a kind of deliberative senate, which could not instruct government. The author did not specify the details of the accession of individual Slavic peoples, but only advocated autonomy for the Serbs. The

21 Romsics, 1997, pp. 29–30.

Russians were linked to the Serbs by the Orthodox religion, which, according to the Evangelical Štúr, was the true Slavic religion. The Slavic peoples who joined must look to this religion, for in it lies their future. He then wanted to create a common literary language, which could in fact be Russian, that would create the great literature. This did not mean that he wanted to completely abolish the individual Slavic languages, but rather to accept a kind of Russian primacy.<sup>22</sup>

These views have long influenced Slovak political thought, especially during the depression years under Austro-Hungarian dualism, when the vision of national death appeared in the minds of Slovak intellectuals. This attitude was particularly strong in Turócszentmárton, which was the seat of the Slovak National Party and the center of Slovak political journalism. The main exponent of conservative-based, rather anti-Semitic, and anti-Hungarian Slovak Russophile Pan-Slavism during these years was the writer Svetozár Hurban Vajanský (1847–1916). This is not to say that other ideas of integration and cooperation were not born, but they, too, revolved predominantly around Slavic cooperation.<sup>23</sup>

The most spectacular of these was the democratic Pan-Slavism of Ján Palárik (1822– 1870). A Catholic priest who was almost executed in 1848, Palárik was one of the leading figures of Slovak national liberalism (the New School) in the 1860s and a promoter of the Hungarian-Slovak reconciliation. In the conflicts between Russians and Poles, he was more sympathetic to the latter.<sup>24</sup> His concept of Slavic unity sought to be more than literary reciprocity, but he did not want to challenge the existing state framework or drown in pro-Russian messianism. Palárik did not want to unite the Slavs under one government at all, nor did he want a unified Slavic empire. He wanted all Slavic nations to have as much autonomy as possible, but he wanted them to cooperate more intensively. Accordingly, Palárik formulated three main principles: rejection of a centralized Pan-Slavic empire, the obligation of each Slavic nation to acquire as much autonomy as possible within the state in which it lived, and, in the long term, achievement of a federation of free and independent Slavic states. In no way did he want to sacrifice constitutionalism and democracy on the altar of national unity. He also wanted to cooperate with Hungarians and Romanians within Hungary.<sup>25</sup> Palárik considered internal strengthening of the Slovaks as important, which should have come mainly from within. Regarding Austro-Hungarian relations, he was more in favor of a personal union than a dualist realistic union. Although he still envisaged the fate of the Slovaks within a more just Hungary, he basically believed in a tripartite monarchy consisting of Hungary, Czech unity, and an Austrian (i.e., German-Slovenian) part based on the residual principle. The parts of Galicia and Bukovina inhabited by Poles, Ukrainians, and Ruthenians would have been annexed to the Kingdom of Hungary, while preserving national self-government. The Slovaks

22 Štúr, 1993, pp. 159–174.

23 Martinkovič, 2011, pp. 156–245.

24 Vavrovič, 1993, pp. 134–163.

25 Vavrovič, 1993, p. 142.

would also have had national self-government within Hungary. The Catholic priest Palárik considered it important to reorganize the Slovak territories into an independent ecclesiastical province. However, he did not consider the 1868 Nationality Act sufficient, and in the twilight of his life, he was greatly disturbed by the Hungarian press's campaigns against Pan-Slavism. It was from these and the denial of national equality that he feared most for the future of the Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>26</sup> In the long term, he too considered territorial autonomy the optimal solution, but, as a member of the New School, he could temporarily accept municipal autonomy, which he considered a good starting point.

The first decades of dualism, however, were spent in a rather lethargic state of frustrated Slovak politics; this favored the potential miracle of the Orthodox-Slavic East, whose main representative was the aforementioned Svetozár Hurban Vajanský. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, however, it was no longer the only option. The Slovak members of parliament within the Nationalities Club began to cooperate intensively with the Romanian and Serb members of parliament,<sup>27</sup> and the younger generation of intellectuals looked to Czech-Slovak cooperation for a solution. This group was mainly organized around the journal *Hlas* (Voice), and Vavro Šrobár (1867–1950), a doctor, was one of its leading figures. The pragmatic Czech policy, which produced gradual but steady economic and political growth, proved to be an attractive model for young Slovaks. The old nationalists rejected this line because, as the old Russophile Vajanský put it: 'it is better to dissolve in the Russian sea than in the Czech swamp.'<sup>28</sup>

This policy finally paid off after the First World War. During the war, relations between pragmatic Slovak politicians and the Czech parties intensified. Šrobár was present at the proclamation of Czechoslovak independence in Prague in October 1918, and Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880–1919), an astronomer and French army officer, was Minister of War in the Czechoslovak emigration government. In this capacity, he represented the Slovak member of the founding triumvirate and the more conservative wing of the government, which was still in favor of a constitutional monarchy even when most of the government had already adopted a republican position. During the First World War, however, he was clearly pro-Western, which is not surprising given that he spent much of his short life in France and its colonies.

Interestingly, the ideas of Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy, including his pacifism, were quite influential among the Slovak intellectuals at the end of dualism. One of the most colorful, but now almost forgotten, figures of this period was the evangelical pastor Ján Maliarik (1869–1946), who spent his life working for world peace and a world state, despite his secluded rural job. At the beginning of the First World War, he wrote a series of personal letters and memoranda to Woodrow Wilson, who referred to him as 'God's beloved child,' to Tsar Nicholas II, who called him 'my golden dove,' and to Franz

26 Vavrovič, 1993, pp. 160–162.

27 Szarka, 1995, pp. 87–89.

28 Chmel, 2009, pp. 325–326.

Joseph, who simply called him ‘My Father.’ It is typical that this local cosmopolitan also wanted to start constructing a United Slavic States with the Czechoslovak-Polish Union. However, for him it was not the end goal, only an intermediate step on the road to constructing a ‘universal world state.’ He did not abandon this idea even after the world war, when he discovered Mahatma Gandhi for himself. During this period, he sent further letters to the Hitler, MacDonald, Mussolini, and Stalin ‘brothers.’ His letters often brought Maliarik into the sights of the various authorities and services, which, however, ultimately found him not politically dangerous because of his state of mind. Everybody just smiled at him, even though his analyses and appeals were not as foolish as they seemed at the time.<sup>29</sup>

#### 4. The years between the two world wars

Between the two world wars, Slovak political life was essentially tripartite. At the center were the democratic forces based on the platform of the first Czechoslovakia of Masaryk, which were politicized in the various national parties (agrarian parties, social democrats, national democrats, etc.). The multi-ethnic communist movement initially had a much more reserved attitude toward Czechoslovakia as a product of Versailles, but this attitude changed in the 1930s. This was particularly the case among young intellectuals (Vladimír Clementis, Laco Novomeský, Gustáv Husák, and others), who were now interested in ‘not only the revolutionary character of Moscow but also the cultured character of Paris.’ However, in the tense circumstances of the Second World War, for some, joining the Soviet Union seemed a realistic option. ‘Why look to Beneš for a solution when Stalin has the tried and tested recipe,’ Gustáv Husák once said.<sup>30</sup> Fortunately, his suggestion did not materialize in this direct form. The third wing of Slovak politics was represented by the autonomist Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, which had grown out of the political Catholicism of the former Hungary. Its main leader was the parish priest Andrej Hlinka of Rossahegy. In 1918, they welcomed the creation of Czechoslovakia, but were disturbed by the lack of public autonomy for Slovaks and wanted to federalize the republic in the long term. It was not until 1938 that they achieved autonomy, and in 1939, the Slovak Provincial Assembly, which they ruled, declared an independent Slovakia, which then fought on the side of Nazi Germany in the Second World War. Within the party, there were always different tendencies. Although the majority basically accepted the Czechoslovak state framework and feared Hungarian revisionism, there was a strong presence of politicians—strongly Catholic—who would have liked to link the Slovak future with Catholic Poland. Obviously, they were also afraid of Polish predominance and of restoring a common Hungarian-Polish border, but they saw territorial autonomy as a suitable guarantee. Two of the main representatives of this wing were Karol Sidor and

29 Holec, 2001, pp. 210–220.

30 Chmel, 2009, p. 328.

Pavol Čarnogurský. Sidor was briefly head of the autonomous Slovak government in 1939 and later became ambassador to the Vatican. During the war, he and like-minded Polish colleagues considered creating a Polish-Slovak confederation or a larger Central European Catholic bloc. The Czechoslovak-Polish confederation was, incidentally, not far from official Czechoslovak anti-fascist emigration at the time, until Stalinist diplomacy signaled to the exiled President Edvard Beneš that it should not be pushed. Edvard Beneš, unpopular among Slovaks, was Czechoslovakia's hereditary foreign minister and then head of state between the two world wars. In these positions, he hoped for Czechoslovakia's security mainly from the Western powers and the states of the Axis. He was very much afraid of German and Hungarian revisionism. In the 1930s, he also tried to involve the Soviet Union in the collective security system, but his policy failed in 1938.

Within Czechoslovak governmental politics, one of Beneš's great opponents was Milan Hodža, prime minister from 1935 to 1938. A Slovakian pro-agricultural politician who spoke Hungarian well, he supported his country's foreign policy but considered it somewhat one-sided. As a representative of agrarian interests (mainly small and medium-sized farmers), from 1930 onward he sought a solution to the agrarian crisis in Central and Eastern Europe, which he saw mainly in internal cooperation and joint action along the Danube. To do this, however, he needed to improve relations with Czechoslovakia's southern neighbors, and to do that, he needed to build a bridge between the Entente and the states of the Rome Protocol, taking at least part of the interests of the Republic of Austria and Hungary into account. Hodža's Danube Plan was based on the need not to increase agricultural tariffs and to gradually eliminate quotas, regulate agricultural production considering geographical and market aspects, harmonize the communication network, simplify bureaucracy and payment methods, and improve the legal status of nationalities. He also wanted to set up a Central European Agricultural Committee to coordinate the policies of the states in the region, coordinate their interests, facilitate marketing, and dispose of surplus produce. The idea of a customs union was also mooted. This plan was ultimately abandoned due to internal differences and German disapproval, and further developments are well known.<sup>31</sup>

During the Second World War, Hodža emigrated and later organized first Slovak and then alternative Czechoslovak political circles in exile. His opposition to Beneš prevented him from being integrated into the London government-in-exile. Eventually he left for the US, where he drafted the famous Central European federation (1942), which would have provided a bulwark not only against a predominantly German Germany but also against the Soviet Union. Hodža was far more skeptical of Stalin than Beneš, who hoped to play the role of a bridge. While he tried to focus on economic interests, he also tried to consider the cultural interests of the small nations in the region. Although his author was politically Westernized, he saw Central Europe as

31 Hodža, 1997, pp. 190–192

a distinct cultural entity within European civilization.<sup>32</sup> He also drew up a draft constitution for a Central European Commonwealth, which would have achieved deeper integration than the British model. The federation he envisioned would need a federal president elected by a conference of national prime ministers and a federal congress. He would appoint the federal chancellor and members of the government, as well as the army commander. The federation of eight member states (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Yugoslavia, Hungary, Poland, and Romania) would form a customs union, have a common currency, and federal laws. It would have had not only defense and foreign policy, but also finance and trade policy. A common postal and telecommunications system would have been important, as would a justice minister. In his vision, each member state would have been represented in government by a minister without portfolio. The federal congress would control the common budget and legislation. Its members would be elected by national parliaments with a two-thirds majority, with at least one representative per million inhabitants. The mandate of the members would be linked to the terms of national parliaments. The common language would be decided by a two-thirds majority, but each member would be able to use his or her own language, which would be interpreted. The federation, which would only be dissolved in the event of a constitutional amendment, would have its own Supreme Court and a superstructure citizenship. Every citizen of the federation would have to learn at least one world language, preferably one on which the federation would agree.<sup>33</sup> Although the plan appealed to the Americans, it could not be implemented because of public developments. In the historical context of Slovakia, it was one of the most detailed integration ideas and seemed to have been devised by a former prime minister. In any case, its author wanted to go beyond the division of the Central and Eastern Europe peoples into winners and losers of the First World War.

## 5. The post-World War II period and the years of state socialism

For the post-1948 leadership, there was no doubt about the geopolitical position of Slovakia as part of Czechoslovakia. It was clear that the whole Czechoslovak state was part of the Soviet-led 'peace camp.' This was underlined by the presence of the Soviet army on the ground after 1968. Vladimír Mináč (1922–1996), a former partisan and writer, one of the most influential national communist intellectuals of the 1970s and 1980s, probably did not even broach this issue in his popular essays. Geopolitical affiliation was one of the taboo subjects. After the change of regime, Mináč, who became one of the ideologists of the national left camp, turned to East-West bridge theories of various orientations. In his view, Slovakia, with its traditional intellectual, geographical, and political 'cleavages,' was ideally suited to link the East with the West. In fact, Mináč's ideas took on a messianic tone: 'our country is the only one in

32 Hodža, 1997, p. 231.

33 Hodža, 1997, pp. 231–239.

the whole of Europe which, thanks to its history, culture, and culture, is ready to fulfil the historic task of becoming a center of pan-European understanding.<sup>34</sup> However, it was only in 1995 that he wrote these things down.

During the period of state socialism, alternative ideas were only very vaguely expressed, and more so in emigration and dissident circles at home. The question of Slovakia's civilizational belonging did not occupy a significant place in the thinking of Slovak oppositionists. Hungarian minority activists were perhaps the most Westernized, but the European orientation was not questioned by others. The defense lawyer Ján Čarnogurský (1944), a leading figure among Catholic dissidents, differed from the others only in his desire to overcome the old East-West divide in post-communist Europe and in his emphasis on Pan-European cooperation. The Russian civilization line was perhaps most sharply represented by Milan Šimečka (1930–1990), a highly influential opposition Marxist philosopher who was ousted after 1968 and considered the whole Soviet-style communism to be simply a Russian national ideology.<sup>35</sup> In fact, in 1968, Šimečka, who was one of the main intellectual representatives of reform communism in Slovakia, interpreted the reform process as a return to the European democratic socialist tradition.<sup>36</sup> These views were not far removed from those of the philosopher Miroslav Kusý (1913–2019), who was one of the signatories of the Charter '77 opposition declaration in Slovakia. The democratic opposition was becoming increasingly westernized—one of its emblematic figures was the writer Dominik Tatarka (1913–1989), also a 'Chartist,' who became disillusioned early on after flirting with communism. Hana Ponická (1922–2007), writer, journalist and 'Chartist,' was also a 'Westernized' oppositionist in the former bourgeois Czechoslovak tradition. No particular geopolitical concepts were developed in these small intellectual circles, but links were established with anti-establishment opposition groups in neighboring states. The events in Poland had the greatest impact on everyone. This also reinforced the 'Central Europeanism' of opposition circles.

## 6. The period after 1989

The 1989 regime change in Slovakia also led to the advance of Western ideas, and the new watchword was a return to a Europe of democracy and prosperity. This slogan was first put forward by the forces of regime change but was later adopted by some post-communist political circles and ultimately made Euro-Atlantic integration possible. The beginnings of the search for a foreign policy path in Slovakia were similar to those in other Central European countries, but there were obviously national specificities everywhere. In Slovakia, they stemmed from the traditional Eastern (Slavic) intellectual vector. Central European solidarity also played a major role, and one of its

34 Chmel, 2013, p. 405.

35 Marušiak, 2010, p. 219.

36 Marušiak, 2010, p. 218.

emblematic figures was the lawyer Ján Čarnogurský (1944), who before 1989 belonged to the Catholic-Christian wing of the anti-establishment opposition and helped found the Christian Democratic Movement in 1990, of which he was for a time President.

Čarnogurský repeatedly reflected on the future of Slovakia and Central Europe. At a summer conference in Warsaw in 1989, he spoke of Slovakia's central geographical location, which made it impossible to reorganize the Central European region without his country. He saw Christianity as the most important common ideal after the fall of communism.<sup>37</sup> As Slovak prime minister, he did not call for full independence in the short term during the Czech-Slovak state disputes, but in an integrated Europe, he called for Slovakia to have a 'separate chair and a separate star.' He envisioned a Europe in which the Slavic part would form a separate entity with Russia at its center. Without Russia, the Slavic peoples would be merely a peripheral appendage of Western Europe. Like the former national communist Mináč, he saw Slovakia as a potential bridge between the European West and East. It was a position he did not want to risk by joining NATO, which would obviously annoy Moscow.<sup>38</sup> He was not opposed to EU accession, but in 2005, he was already proposing that the Central European states form a bloc within the EU to counterbalance the predominance of the Franco-German tandem. However, the idea of a Central European bloc working closely together within the EU was not far removed from the more liberal and Western Slovak thinkers, although less ideologically motivated (Slavic, Catholic, anti-liberal, etc.).<sup>39</sup>

Čarnogurský later returned to the idea of unifying the European East and West. He saw Slovakia's main advantage in the fact that it was the Slovaks in the Visegrád region who had the least strained German and Russian relations. This could therefore be Slovakia's most authentic contribution to shaping the Visegrad bloc's external relations.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the Slovak ex-politician consistently criticized the policy of confrontation between the EU and Russia, which is harmful to both sides. He continued to believe that a Pan-European framework was more optimal for Slovakia than Euro-Atlantic integration.<sup>41</sup> Čarnogurský's views, however, were not a unanimous success within his own party, which positioned itself as a clear Western force and viewed with some disapproval the geopolitical proximity of its president, who had a reputation as an anti-communist fighter, to the views of the former national communist Mináč.<sup>42</sup> The threat to Slovakia in the 1990s was not that it would fail to fulfil its role as a bridge between East and West, but rather that it would end up outside Euro-Atlantic integration and in authoritarian-oligarchic-clientelistic Eastern Europe.

Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, who established Slovak state autonomy in 1993, has been increasingly resented in the West for his authoritarian actions, even though he did not openly deny his country's integration ambitions, and his Russian policy

37 Chmel, 2009, p. 329.

38 Čarnogurský, 1997, p. 291 and p. 360.

39 Lukáč, 2004, p. 231.

40 Chmel, 2009, p. 333.

41 Marušiak, 2010, p. 234.

42 Marušiak, 2010, p. 223.

initially appeared pragmatic in many respects.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the prime minister's policies were deeply divisive for Slovak society, which feared that it was missing a historic opportunity. An isolationist, Mečiar increasingly saw that if Europe did not want his country, it would have to turn to Russia. Russia and Slovakia signed and ratified a treaty of friendship and cooperation and a military cooperation agreement in 1993 and 1994, respectively. At that time, Slovak-Russian, Slovak-Belarusian, and Slovak-Serbian relations did improve, but this was not enough to compensate for the losses suffered in the West. Mečiar spoke Russian well, and the Russian side was happy to let him go in the knowledge that Slovakia would indeed be able to play the role of the East-West bridge, which was one of the Slovak politician's favorite ideas. Moreover, Moscow did not criticize his domestic political methods, and the Slovak political elite of the time was mentally close to its eastern counterparts.<sup>44</sup>

Slovakia's foreign policy orientation therefore became an important issue in the crucial 1998 parliamentary elections. The foreign policy fault line did not follow the left-right fault line, as there were pro-integrationist and pro-Russian or isolationist forces on both sides.<sup>45</sup> In 1998, the duel ended in a landslide victory for the pro-integration forces. The new center-left-center-right government, led by Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda, finally made up for Slovakia's integration deficit in 2004, not only by joining the EU but also by gaining NATO membership. The revitalized Visegrad cooperation played an important role in this process and has become very important in Slovak foreign policy.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, it is not surprising that the EU and the US have supported Central European cooperation. As early as 1989, former US National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski tried to breathe new life into the idea of a Czechoslovak-Polish federation, which had been born during the Second World War, but was clearly rejected by Czechoslovak diplomacy in 1990. The Polish-born American expert understood that a broader Central European framework might be a better solution.<sup>47</sup>

Slovak Central Europeanism was thus clearly subordinate and subservient to the country's integration with the West. It also improved the strained Hungarian-Slovak relations. Accordingly, there were no EU critics or skeptics at the time. However, the fact is that the Slovak Parliament adopted a declaration on January 30, 2002, stating that Slovakia intends to maintain its sovereignty in cultural-ethical matters after EU accession.<sup>48</sup> This seemed to reflect a fear of the liberal EU, which must be countered in Central Europe. Nevertheless, EU integration and Central Europeanism have become and remain important not only for Slovak liberals, but also for conservatives

43 In other words, it was aimed at guaranteeing Slovakia's energy security, recovering former Soviet debt, preserving Eastern markets, creating a common bank, and maintaining military-industrial cooperation. On this, see Žiak, 1998, pp. 236–239.

44 Žiak, 1998, pp.286–289.

45 Marušiak, 2010, p. 225.

46 Lukáč, 2004, p. 233.

47 Lukáč, 2004, pp. 208–209.

48 <https://www.nrsr.sk/web/?sid=nrsr/dokumenty/vyhlasenia>

and democratic leftists. Rudolf Chmel, a renowned Slovak Hungarianist and literary scholar, who also held government posts at certain times (Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Culture), became an important liberal representative of Slovak Central Europeanism. Among the younger generation, the historian and foreign policy expert Pavol Lukáč (1970–2004), who died young, did much to promote the idea and bring back the remains of former Prime Minister Milan Hodža. When the Slovak center-right camp led by Dzurinda looked to the pantheon of historical figures for EU and NATO-compatible role models, Hodža, who, in addition to the Czechoslovak state founder General Štefánik, had propagated the Central European federation project, became the ideal figure to underpin the foreign policy identity of the center-right liberal-conservative forces.<sup>49</sup>

The long period of Robert Fico's governments (2006–2018) began after the Dzurinda governments, interrupted only in 2010 for a short one-and-one-half-year period (2010–2012). The new government, initially closer to the Slavic identity and ideology of reciprocity and symbolic Russian friendliness, did not, however, break with the Visegrad identity of Slovak foreign policy, which gradually became a lasting and cross-camp value for Slovakia. This has taken on a new meaning in recent years (for example, during the migration crisis of 2015 and the subsequent refugee quota debates) but has not been significantly changed by the rejection of Kosovo's independence, the withdrawal of Slovak troops from Iraq, or pro-Russian gestures during the Russian-Georgian (2008) and Russian-Ukrainian (since 2014) conflicts. Even the Slovak National Party has started to embrace it. Indeed, one of the great advantages of the Visegrad idea is that, while it has many lukewarm supporters, it has few staunch opponents in Slovak politics. This moderate Visegrad consensus currently characterizes the whole political spectrum, from progressive liberals to certain populist and extreme nationalist forces. The latter prefer to attack EU and NATO membership and do not yet castigate Central European solidarity. Obviously, the situation would be different and the idea would be accepted if someone were to make a sustained and sincere attempt to oppose the Visegrad cooperation with the EU, but that would be a move that would be a mortal danger for the whole region.

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