

# ■ Introduction

## Early prerequisites for the national identity of the Slovaks

Tracing the historical development of a national identity<sup>1</sup> has in many cases proved to be a difficult task. The so-called dominant nations<sup>2</sup> in their respective nation-states almost without exception have their own national historiographies, which regularly tend to see their ethnic ancestors more aware of their ethnicity than they actually were. Yet in principle a history of a nation must have a starting point just like any other historical phenomenon. The problem with the organic histories of nations, however, is that an ethnic group or a proto-nation did not know where they were going. They were ignorant of the mission assigned to them by their descendants, and since conscious attempts to strengthen or weaken a nation and its national identity are only later, rather modern, enterprises, greater importance must be given to the widely differing historical conditions of nations. Famines, epidemics, wars etc. have wiped out numerous nations, while others have survived them. But the core of the problem remains clear; a coincidence plays a vital part in the history of nations.

Generally, it should be remembered that a national identity, like a personal identity, is at the same time both open to changes and resistant to them. Personal identities have a dynamic character<sup>3</sup> i.e. they are never fixed and as such, they must also be time-related. Basically, this means that nations and ethnic groups are all the time in the middle of continuous and active historical processes, which are capable of affecting the development of the national identity of the members of the nations and ethnic groups. These historical processes can vanish or grow stronger even before they reach a point where they are understood or interpreted as being relevant to that development. Therefore, one should be exceptionally cautious when tracing the origins of a national identity.

In case of the Slovaks, some historians have seen the glorious past of the Great Moravian empire in the ninth century as the starting point of the

- 1 While a person certainly has some kind of group identity, it is clear that a national identity is not so self-evident. A person's national identity must include a degree of national consciousness and a comprehension of the distinguishing characteristics of the nation that (s)he is a member of. Kemiläinen, Aira. *Kansallinen identiteetti (National Identity). Näkökulmia Suomen itsenäisyyteen 1917–77*. Jyväskylä 1980, p. 1.
- 2 For example, the Magyars formed a dominant nation vis-a-vis the Slovaks before 1918. The dominant nation is not necessarily the numerically dominant nation in a state. From the concept of dominant nation, see more in *Ethnic Groups and Language Rights. Comparative Studies on Governments and Non-dominant Ethnic Groups in Europe, 1850–1940*. Sergij Vilfan (ed.). Vol. III. New York 1993.
- 3 Bloom, William. *Personal Identity, National Identity and International Relations*. Cambridge 1990. Pref. X.

ethnogenesis of this nation.<sup>4</sup> But even if the predecessors of the Slovaks did have a Slavic state of their own before the arrival of the Magyars<sup>5</sup>, it is practically impossible to estimate what kind of impact, if any, it had on the national identity of later Slovak generations. The archeological findings from the period of the Great Moravian empire rather stress its multi-cultural nature than any Slavic distinctiveness.<sup>6</sup> It is equally difficult to judge whether being a part of Hungary was a bane or a blessing for the Slovaks. But even if the impact of these early state formations to the development of the Slovak national identity remain disputed and unprobable, it is possible to list at least some prerequisites which were undoubtedly important factors in the process that permitted a distinct Slovak national identity to emerge and survive.

First of all, the status of the Slovak language was not seriously threatened before nineteenth century. Its status was first strengthened in the Great Moravian Empire during the Prince Rastislav's reign, when the Byzantine missionaries Methodius and Cyrillos attempted to create a written Slavic language and even succeeded in doing so.<sup>7</sup> Their success was, however, only temporary as a new political-religious shift in international relations brought the Great Moravian Slavs closer to the influence of the Vatican and Latin became increasingly used as a literary language of the Church in the Czech lands<sup>8</sup> and in Hungary.

On the other hand, the problems in establishing a Slavic literary language did not arouse much interest among the Slovak majority, who used their own language for everyday intercourse. This practise was not interrupted by the Magyar invasion at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries. On the contrary, it has been claimed that the Magyar invasion was not a conquest but rather a fusion of two separate cultures<sup>9</sup> in which both proto-nations were beneficiaries. The warlike Magyars soon settled down just as the Slovaks had done earlier. But the Magyars were strong enough to defend their borders and protect the distinctive cultures behind them thus enabling people to pass on the heritage of their language, agriculture, Christianity and folk customs to the next generations. The same pattern was repeated among the other ethnic groups

4 Ďurica, Milan S. *Národná identita a jej historický profil v slovenskej skutočnosti*. Trnava 1991, p. 12.

Ďurica, Milan S. *Etnoným našich najstarších predkov*. Matica Slovenská. *Historický zborník* 7, 1997, p. 11–12.

5 The word “Magyar” is used to refer to the Magyars as distinct ethnic group and the word “Hungarian” as a citizen of the state of Hungary in the same way as the word Czechoslovak refers to citizen of Czechoslovak state.

6 Stoličná, Rastislava. *Ľudová kultúra slovenska ako súčasť európskej kultúrnej identity: Základné kontexty výrazu*. *Slovenský národopis*. Ročník 42, no.4. 1994, pp. 403–404.

7 Chropovský, Bohuslav. *The Slavs. Their Significant Political and Cultural History*. Prague 1989, pp. 327–328.

8 Historically the Bohemian crownlands; Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia (Čechy, Morava and Slezsko in Czech), here the Czech lands is used in present sense to refer to the Czech Republic.

9 Avenarius, Alexander. *Slovenská kultúra v ranostredovekom Uhorsku (K problému orientácie slovenských dejín)*. *Slovenské pohľady*, ročník 107, no.1, 1991, pp. 28–29.

inside Hungary, which was from its very beginning a multi-ethnic state.<sup>10</sup>

In the Middle Ages a few signs of a stronger Slovak national consciousness can be discerned, but only in a socially restricted form as the following example demonstrates. The Slavic (Slovak) craftsmen of the city of Žilina defended their economic and political equality against Magyar and German domination as a group,<sup>11</sup> but the Slavic (Slovak) peasants who belonged to the lower strata of the society and who lived outside the town were irrelevant to their interests. Despite such occasional and socially restricted examples indicating stronger national consciousness, Anthony D. Smith has rightfully claimed, that the Slovaks, though constituting ethnically a clearly distinct group from their neighbours, lacked a sense of national unity and consciousness in the late eighteenth century.<sup>12</sup> Although the Slovaks possessed a very rich folk culture and their own vernacular language(s) or rather dialects, it was not enough since a separate ethnic identity does not constitute a national identity.<sup>13</sup> This definition can be too restricted, since a nation can exist even if it does not have its own state, self-government or national movement. In some cases an individual's sense of belonging to a certain social group is a sufficient criterion to determine the existence of a nation,<sup>14</sup> but this was yet to come.

The end of eighteenth century saw the emergence of the Slovak national movement in the activities of the Slovak Catholic clergy. From their ranks came also Father Antonín Bernolák (1762-1813), who introduced his first version of a Slovak written language (often referred to as *berňoláčtina*) in 1787.<sup>15</sup> It was used by his followers for a few decades, but because it was still too far removed from the vernacular language spoken by the Slovak majority it did not answer the wider demand for a literary language expressed by the clergy and secular learned men as well. In the wake of the French Revolution and the dawning German romanticism, the first Slovak intellectual societies that took an interest in their national roots were established,<sup>16</sup> signalling the acceptance of the common people as full members of the nation.

The literary and linguistical aspirations of the Slovak learned men had not yet any considerable repercussions in the daily life of the Slovak majority. But even without the help of own literary language and own national intelligentsia, there

10 Varsík, Branislav. Národnostný profil Uhorska a národnostné aspekty protihabsburského odboja. Výber štúdií a článkov z rokov 1969–1992. SAV, Bratislava 1994, pp. 48–49.

11 Chorvathová, Ľubica. On factors, shaping social and ethnic/national identity in 19th and 20th century Slovakia. Slovenský národopis, ročník 43, 1/1995, p. 65.

12 Smith, Anthony D. The Ethnic Origins of Nations. New York 1986, pp. 29–30.

13 Brock, Peter. The Slovak National Awakening. An Essay in the Intellectual History of East Central Europe. Toronto 1976, p. 7.

14 Hroch, Miroslav. Social Preconditions of National Revival in Europe. A Comparative Analysis of the Social Composition of Patriotic Groups among the Smaller European Nations. Cambridge 1985, p. 4.

15 Of the meaning of language in Czech and Slovak national movement, see more in Hroch, Miroslav. Jazykový program národních hnutí v Evropě: Jeho skladba a sociální předpoklady. Český časopis historický, ročník 93, č. 3, 1995.

16 The Slovak Educated Brotherhood (Slovenské učené tovarišstvo) is often mentioned as the first association of its kind. It was founded in 1792.

were several factors that had contributed to national differentiation of the Slovaks. The inaccessible terrain and poor traffic connections especially in the mountainous areas enriched the cultural variegation of the Slovaks. The regional differences were evident for example in the richness of their dialects, which varied in Slovak populated areas so much that even in the late nineteenth century over thirty different dialects were listed. The different languages of the Magyars and Romanians, who were numerically the biggest nationalities in Hungary, underlined the Slavic affinity of the Slovaks, and it was the Slavic language indeed, which in the end made Slovaks differentiate themselves from the other ethnic groups of Hungary. This is particularly true, when it is borne in mind that living conditions<sup>17</sup> were the same for the majority of the peoples living in Hungary. On the other hand, the feudal society's division into strict social groups contributed to this end as well. Since the Magyar and German nobles were almost exclusively represented in the higher social strata in Slovakia, the idea of social justice became mingled with national emancipation. It was most clearly reflected in the Slovak folk stories, which often told about distant past where the social justice had been realized and the Slovaks had been free.<sup>18</sup> In the light of these observations, it is possible to assume that the Slovaks were on their way of developing into a nation by the end of 18th or early 19th century at the latest, and it has been claimed that the Slovaks had to have at least a common ethnic group identity already at this stage.<sup>19</sup>

## Slovak national awakening

During the first decades of the 19th century, the leading role in the Slovak national movement shifted from the minor Catholic clergy to the Slovak Lutherans (mainly students) who had traditionally favoured the Czecho-Slovak<sup>20</sup> mutualism and co-operation. Close ties with the neighbouring Slavic nation were partly due to the use of a Slovakized written Czech language (*Bibličtina*) in their religious publications. However, while this early period of the development of the Czechoslovak idea<sup>21</sup> was mainly the result of the efforts of

17 The majority of all largest nationalities (Magyars, Rumanians and Slovaks) living in Hungary were employed in agriculture which was characteristic for the whole country. In Slovakia, at the beginning of the 20th century, 61,8 % were employed in agriculture, forestry or fishing. *Dejiny Slovenska V (1918–1945)*. Bratislava 1985, p. 36.

18 Rychlík, Jan. National Consciousness and Social Justice. In *Roots of the Transplanted*. Vol. 2. Plebeian Culture, Class and Politics in the life of Labor Migrants. Ed. Dirk Hoerder, Horst Rössler and Inge Blank. New York 1994, p. 44–45.

19 Karpat, Jozef. The Transition of the Slovaks from a Non-dominant Ethnic Group to a Dominant Nation. In *Ethnic Groups and Language Rights*. Ed. Sergij Vilfan. Cambridge 1993, p. 135.

20 The form “Czecho-Slovak” with a hyphen is always used except in referring to the Czechoslovak state or Czechoslovaks as a state-nation vis-a-vis other nationalities in it.

21 In the 19th century this concept emphasized the cultural and linguistic similarities but it had a political dimension too. The Czech historian and politician František Palacký (1798–1876) summarized it in the Kroměříž Diet in 1848 when he proposed a common administrative unit for Czechs and Slovaks living in Austria and Hungary respectively.

Slovak Lutheran intellectuals in the Slovak national movement, it was also a Slovak Lutheran student who brought it to an end. This important watershed was reached in 1840's when Ľudovít Štúr (1815–1856) chose vernacular Slovak as the basis for the literary language in preference to the earlier versions which were closer to Czech.<sup>22</sup> In listening to his people's speech rather than continuing the intellectual literary tradition with the Czech language, Štúr made a decision that was to have far-reaching consequences. At the same time, the Slovak national movement pursued more independent policies from the Czechs. One reason for this was the unwillingness of the Czechs to adopt Slovak characters in the common Czechoslovak literary language planned by Ján Kollár (1793–1852) and Pavol Jozef Šafárik<sup>23</sup> (1795–1861).<sup>24</sup> Another reason was Hungarian nationalism, which had grown increasingly intolerant of the national movements of the ethnic minorities of Hungary and the Slovaks had to show to the Hungarian nationalists that they did not have any separatist intentions with the Czechs. All things considered, after some decades of finding its way, the Slovak national movement could be said to have represented a reasonable national political programme by the end of the first half of the nineteenth century. The aim of the programme was to create a wider national consciousness among Slovaks based more extensively on their own language and local distinctive culture, and to achieve gradually national autonomy within Hungary.<sup>25</sup> The Slovak language, folk culture and habits became a source of inspiration for artists, and they also aroused scholarly interest.

For a small group of Slovak national activists, however, the struggle for national equality in Hungary was proving to be a demanding task. Despite their earlier successes,<sup>26</sup> the Slovaks were forced to moderate their goals, especially after the Ausgleich of 1867. Hungarian nationalism, which promoted the pan-Hungarian identity and the idea of a common state for the ethnic groups living inside Hungary, was soon confronted by the Slovak national movement. As a result of this confrontation both programmes failed. The efforts of the Slovak national activists were almost doomed to failure from the beginning, if only for geopolitical reasons, with Slovakia so closely attached to Hungary proper.<sup>27</sup> The situation became worse as a specially designed programme of Magyarisation was launched which seriously hampered the work of the Slovak

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22 The proximity of the Czech and Slovak languages is so close that it did not create any considerable obstacles for mutual understanding in conversation.

23 Pavol Jozef Šafárik was Slovak-born, but he spent most of his life in Czech lands, where he also published his most important researches. In Czech lands he was called Pavel Josef Šafařík, the form he himself also used. Both versions are still in use today.

24 Brock, pp. 23 and 33.

25 Podrimavský, Milan. *The Idea of National Autonomy in Slovak Politics (1848–1914)*. Studia Historica Slovaca XIX. SAV Bratislava 1995, p. 121.

26 The number of Slovak gymnasiums (high schools) was increased to three. A cultural society Matica Slovenska collected, distributed and encouraged Slovak folk culture, established local libraries and so on.

27 Ďurica, Milan S. *The Historical Origins and Nature of Slovak Nationalism*. Slovak Studies XXIV. Cleveland-Rome 1984, p. 186.

national activists or even made it illegal.<sup>28</sup> In the end, however, the contradictions between Hungarian nationalism and the Slovak national activists were only one reason which slowed down the strengthening of a Slovak national consciousness and national identity.

In addition to the conflicting interests of the Slovak national movement and Hungarian nationalism, the Slovaks themselves were far from being united. Hungarian society was quite old-fashioned, especially when compared with the other central and western European states at the time. The hierarchical Hungarian society was still alive in the late nineteenth century, and there is no reason to doubt that this hierarchy also obtained in the relations between the different Slovak social groups. According to Jan Hajda, contemporary society was constituted by three social groups: Lords, Half-Lords (landed gentry or *zemanía* in Slovak) and the Common People, whatever their national origins or language.<sup>29</sup> It is no surprise then that Slovak national movement did not have mass support or a direct mandate from the bulk of the nation at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>30</sup>

The Slovak national movement had thus two fronts where to concentrate its efforts. Unfortunately there was little chance of this situation improving, at least in regard with Hungarian nationalism. On the contrary, it was about to deteriorate. The schooling system was gradually Magyarized after 1875,<sup>31</sup> leaving the younger Slovak generations who manned the barricades in the 1918 without a long-term national education, which is considered by many leading theoreticians of nationalism as an essential prerequisite for the emergence of national consciousness.<sup>32</sup> Slovakia's poor educational conditions were still seen in the early years of Czechoslovakia, when in some areas of Slovakia an illiteracy rate as high as 30% prevailed.<sup>33</sup> The mass media are also another

28 During the WW I, Hungary very efficiently controlled the activities of the Slovak national activists simply by imprisoning many of them. Even before the war, during the years 1898–1908 eighty-six trials were held in which 452 Slovaks were convicted for taking part in the Slovak national movement. Grečo, Martin. *Martinská Deklarácia*. Bratislava 1939, p. 26.

29 To the category of Lords belonged all those who did not earn their daily bread by manual labour. Half-Lords for their part were like the Lords but with a low income and occasionally engaging in manual work. To the lowest category belonged all those without education and those who were manually employed. Hajda, Jan. *The Development of the Intelligentsia between the Wars: The Case of Czechoslovakia*. In *Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals. Theory, Method and Case Study*. Ed. Aleksander Gella. New York 1976, pp. 211–213.

30 Mamatey, Victor S. *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic 1918-1948*. Princeton 1973, p. 8.

31 In the year 1876 the number of elementary schools teaching in Slovak was 2016. Twenty-five years later (1913) this number was reduced to 354 (of which 339 were church schools). At the same time number of schools teaching in Hungarian was increased from 1036 to 3478. Magdolenová, Anna. *Slovenské školstvo v prvých poprevratových rokoch*. HČ, ročník 29, č. 4. 1981, p. 482.

According to Alice Teichová, Slovaks had only 390 teachers and 276 elementary schools in 1918 although they numbered over two million. Teichová, Alice. *The Czechoslovak Economy 1918–1980*. London 1988, p. 15.

32 For example, Anderson, Benedikt. *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. London 1983, p. 104. For the case of the Slovaks see particularly Johnson, Owen V. *Slovakia 1918–1938. Education and the Making of the Nation*. New York 1985.

33 Pryor, Zora P. *Czechoslovak Economic Development in the Interwar Period*. In *History of the Czecho-Slovak Republic 1918–1948*, p. 210.

frequently mentioned prerequisite for strengthening of national consciousness, but the mass media were still relatively undeveloped in Slovakia.<sup>34</sup> In Hungary in 1910, the newspapers published in Slovak reached a respectable circulation figure of 48300.<sup>35</sup> For the sake of comparison, in the United States at the same time the twelve Slovak immigrant newspapers had a circulation of 112,500.<sup>36</sup> However, it is certain that the numbers the papers reached were higher in Slovakia than the circulation figures indicate, because many of the subscribers were teachers or priests who either read the news to a larger public or passed their paper on to others. Thus it seems that in case of the Slovaks the very basic prerequisites for a national identity were only barely satisfied.

It is no wonder then that many young Slovaks adopted the Hungarian language and the education provided in it. One exception to the rule was the clergy, who were relatively free to carry out their work in the Slovak language.<sup>37</sup> The same could be said of less educated Slovaks who were in no way threatened directly by the Magyarisation programme. Of course, in the longer run, without its own national intelligentsia, the risk of becoming merged with a dominant nation would have grown, especially since the degree of political organization among the Slovaks was modest. Even the largest political parties in Hungary, like the Social Democrats, could not claim a mass party status for itself in Slovakia as the party memberships did not exceed more than a few ten thousand.<sup>38</sup>

This undesired halt in Slovak national awakening gave birth to different ideas about how to proceed or rather how to proceed, or rather how to protect the common people from being Magyarized and preserve the gains already reached by the Slovak national movement. While most activists of the Slovak national movement opted for passive resistance or even emigration, a handful of younger generation Slovaks saw promising possibilities in co-operation with the Czechs.<sup>39</sup> Some of them had been educated at the Charles University in Prague, where they became acquainted with Tomáš G. Masaryk, who was one

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In 1910 in the counties with Slovak majorities, illiterates amounted to 34,90 %, and in Ruthenian areas 65,9 %. At the same time in Czech lands illiteracy among the Czechs was 2,34 % and among Germans 2,19%. Ten years later the Slovak illiteracy had come down to 15,03 %. Magdolenová, p. 483.

34 Anderson, p. 104.

35 Stolarík, Marián M. The Role of the American Slovaks in the Creation of Czecho-Slovakia, 1914–1918. *Slovak Studies VIII. Historica* 5, 1968, p. 16.

36 *ibidem*.

37 Berta, John Andrew. *The Matica Slovenska and Its Role in Slovak Cultural Development: 1919 to 1939*. New York 1983, p. 134.

38 The Hungarian Social Democratic party was established in 1878 in Budapest. Its programme was first founded on the ideas of a German socialist Ferdinand Lassalle (1825–1864). In 1903 the programme was altered in compliance with Erfurt programme of the German social democrats. In Slovakia it had branch offices in Bratislava, Košice, Komárno and Vrútky. *Politické strany na Slovensku 1860–1989*. Zostavil Eubomír Lipták. Bratislava 1992, pp. 81–82.

39 Basically the Slovak political field was formed around two poles. One was constitutional, aiming at the federation of the Austro-Hungarian empire, while the other stressed the importance of the cultural, economical and political co-operation with the Czechs. See Písch, Mikuláš. *Zahraničnopolitické reflexie Slovenského národného hnutia na prahu prvej svetovej vojny*. HČ, ročník 42, no 1/1994.

the leading figures<sup>40</sup> of the currently developing Czecho-Slovak political co-operation. Soon the supporters of his ideas in Slovakia were called “progressivists” or *hlasists* (from their periodical called *Hlas*, the Voice) by the more conservative activists in the Slovak national movement. The Czechoslovak idea certainly enjoyed a revival. But instead of helping the Slovak national movement out of its impasse, the *hlasists*’ open criticism of the Catholic Church<sup>41</sup> or rather of the political clericalism represented by the Catholic priests, divided opinions and even split the Slovak national movement itself. Another group that the *hlasists* were critical of was the conservative wing of the Slovak National Party (SNS).<sup>42</sup> For a wider Slovak public the Czecho-Slovak political co-operation thus remained only a theoretical option before the First World War.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, close and even warm cultural and linguistical ties were already well developed, and the work of the *hlasists* increased the contacts and relations over the Czech-Hungarian border even more and prepared so the way for a common state.

Despite the problems the Slovak national movement faced in late nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the development of a national awakening of the Slovaks differs only little from that of the other small European nations, at least in its earlier stage. Miroslav Hroch’s comparative study showed that first two phases (A and B) were reached in almost the same way as in other corners of Europe. In this study, the main problem of Slovak national movement was held to be the belated conversion into a mass movement,<sup>44</sup> which meant an unrealized transfer from patriotic agitation (Phase B) to the rise of a mass movement (Phase C). The lack of mass support of the Slovak national movement was also recognized in some of the most authoritative western studies of Slovak history. In the works of both Carlile Macartney<sup>45</sup> p. 94. and R.W. Seton-Watson,<sup>46</sup> predictions about the future of the Slovaks were gloomy. According to those predictions, the Slovaks would have been completely assimilated in a period of one or two generations if Magyarization had been allowed to continue any longer. If possible even more pessimistic interpretations were given by leading contemporary politicians such

40 At the same time in Prague there were numerous other persons less known outside the Czech Lands who worked for similar goals, for example, in the association called Czechoslovak Unity (Československá jednota). Personalities like Karel Kalál and Josef Rotnágl were among the best-known slovakophiles in the Czech lands at the time.

41 Daschke, John Wright. Nationalism, Communism and Federalism: The Politics of Ethnic Development in Czechoslovakia. Indiana University 1985, p. 56.

42 The SNS was practically the only politically active genuinely Slovak party before 1918. It was founded in 1871 (dissolved in 1938), the day that the 1861 Memorandum of the Slovak Nation was commemorated. In 1913 it had 613 registered members.

43 Marzik, Thomas D. The Slovakophile Relationship of T.G.Masaryk and Karel Kálal prior to 1914 in T.G.Masaryk (1850–1937). Volume I. Thinker and Politician. Ed. by Stanley B. Winters. London 1990. pp. 199–200.

44 Hroch 1985, p. 23 and pp. 98–99.

45 Macartney, Carlile. National States and National Minorities. London 1934,

46 Seton-Watson, Robert W. Czechoslovakia and the Slovak Problem. In Slovakia then and Now. London-Prague 1931, p. 26.

as Tomáš G. Masaryk<sup>47</sup>, Edvard Beneš<sup>48</sup> and Vavro Šrobár.<sup>49</sup> The assumption of the Slovaks' low national consciousness was shared by many other politicians and civil servants in the state institutions like the MPS<sup>50</sup> and the Czechoslovak army.

The actual situation was perhaps not so hopeless for the Slovak national movement as it often has been described, and the most recent scholarly re-evaluations admit that a consciousness of the Slovak individuality and an awareness of the national emancipatory process was shared by a considerable section of the Slovak nation even before 1918.<sup>51</sup> Several voluntary organizations and public societies certainly contributed to this realization. These societies and organisations enrolled more and more Slovak members from the late nineteenth century onwards. Co-operative societies, for example, drew many Slovaks from the lower groups of society.<sup>52</sup> Various kinds of clubs (sports, theatre, literary, women's, etc.) were also a popular alternative to the otherwise tightly controlled political parties. These clubs could offer a channel even for the national sentiment and in these societies it was possible to adopt ideas of democracy and national self-determination before the state was ready to admit such ideas.<sup>53</sup> The Slovak emigration movement to the United States of America represented another less tightly controlled channel of new ideas among the Slovak population in Hungary, especially in the eastern parts of present-day Slovakia.<sup>54</sup> The American-Slovak newspapers found their way to Slovakia, where they were circulated among the relatives of the emigrants, and those who returned from the New World told about political differences between the United States and Hungary.

47 For example: "...a plebiscite is suitable only for highly developed cultures... Slovaks were long politically suppressed and so they are not able to decide their destinies alone..." Masaryk, T.G. *Slovenský Denník*, no. 11, 15th January 1919.

48 For example see comments made at the Paris Peace Conference. Secretary's notes of a conversation held in M. Pichon's room at the Quai d'Orsay, February 5th, 1919. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS)*, 1919, Paris Peace Conference. Volume III, pp. 877–887.

49 Šrobár, Vavro. *Osvobedené Slovensko. Pámati z rokov 1918-1920*. Praha 1928, p. 219.

50 *Ministerstvo s plnou mocou pre správy Slovenska* (Ministry plenipotentiary for Slovakia in older literature, now Ministry with the Power of Attorney for the Administration of Slovakia). This special ministry for Slovakia was not wholly independent as it was rather an administrative sub-unit working under the respective ministries in Prague. It began working in Žilina on 12th December 1918. Its thirteen members, who were called referents, devoted their work to the consolidation of Slovakia, i.e. organizing a new administration, taking care of food distribution, etc. but it was also meant to suppress radical national, political and social movements. Vavro Šrobár was the first head of the ministry (1918–1920) and his followers functioned in their post as follows: Ivan Dérer 1920, Martin Mičura 1920–1922 and Jozef Kállay 1922–1927.

51 Kováč, Dušan. *Slováci & Česi. Dejiny*. Bratislava 1997, p. 69.

52 Martuliak, Pavol. *150 Years of Slovak Co-operatives 1845–1995*. Nitra 1995, p. 33.

53 Mannová, Elena. *Vereine im Adaptationsprozess der Immigranten in Ethnokulturelle Prozesse in Gross-Städten Mitteleuropas*. Bratislava 1992, p. 27 and Lipták, Lubomír. *Pripravenosť Slovenska na demokraciu. Slovensko v politickom systéme Československa. Materiály z vedeckého sympózia Časť 11.–13. novembra 1991*. Ed. Valerián Bystrický. HÚ SAV 1992, p. 9.

54 Stolarík, Marian M. *Slovak Migration from Europe to North America, 1870–1918*. *Slovak Studies*, XX, 1980, p. 110.

One should not exaggerate the real political importance of the above-mentioned channels of influence, but during the First World War Slovaks demonstrated political qualities they were not expected to have. Of course there were actual inspiring developments taking place as the neighbouring areas offered many encouraging examples about how to organize strikes and other socially or nationally motivated demonstrations. But it is interesting to notice that when the ideas of the October Revolution in Russia reached the Slovak working class, the theme that was most reiterated in the leftist newspapers was the self-determination of the nations and not the worker's revolution.<sup>55</sup> Strikes and public demonstrations against war in general and protests about the scarcity of food followed each other in quick succession during the last years of the war.<sup>56</sup> Some of the bigger public demonstrations also expressed Slovak national demands like the ones in Liptovský Sv. Mikuláš on 1st May and in Turčianský Sv. Martin (nowadays Martin) on 30th May in 1918.

When the Austro-Hungarian war machine and the state itself started to collapse just before the capitulation, war-weary soldiers started to return to their homes from the fronts in the summer and autumn of 1918. Many of them were disorderly and still armed, creating and launching unrest in many places.<sup>57</sup> In some places soldiers formed loose groups called "Green Guards" (*Zelené gardy*) and they were also joined by a number of civilians. It has been claimed that these groups started the revolts and riots against the old regime (Hungary) in the autumn of 1918. The old regime was represented in the minds of the Slovak rioters mostly as public notaries<sup>58</sup>, Jewish shopkeepers and publicans, and it was they who were targeted for violence and robbery. When these disturbances spread all over the country, the old regime lost its hold over Slovakia, mainly because there were too few Hungarian gendarmerie<sup>59</sup> and army units available.<sup>60</sup> In a word, widespread social and national unrest

55 Holotík, Ľudovít. Ohlas ve kej socialistickej revolúcie na Slovensku od konca roku 1917 do vzniku ČSR. *Historický časopis*, ročník V., č. 4, 1957, p. 432.

56 For example, Olivová, Věra. *The Doomed Democracy. Czechoslovakia in a Disrupted Europe 1914–1938*. Montreal 1972, p. 54.

57 Ježek, Zdeněk. *Boj o Slovensko v letech 1918–1919*. Praha 1928, p. 177.

58 The institution of public notaries (*notár* in Slovak) was introduced in the Hungarian kingdom in 1874. Before that the duties of a notary were executed by an official at the royal or a noble court or at other local offices which served as depositories of original documents. After 1874 their tasks included the preparation of public documents for legal proclamations and operations and the attestations of legal operations. Their role in Slovakia was to represent stately power in the locality (*zástupca štátnej správy v obci*) and they were quite hated among the Slovaks, since they controlled among other duties food confiscations during the war and took care of the recollection of the unpaid debts.

59 The Austrian gendarmerie resembled closely the French gendarmerie. In 1881, according to the example of the Austrian gendarmerie, an armed police force was established in Hungary. The Austro-Hungarian gendarmerie was subjected to the Ministry of National Defence. Czechoslovakia took over the organisation of the Austrian gendarmerie (*četnictvo* in Czech, *žandárstvo* in Slovak), which was introduced into Slovakia too. There were also state police and municipal police forces. The Czechoslovak gendarmerie organisation was dissolved in 1945.

60 Hronský, Marián. *Slovensko na rázcestí. Slovenské národné rady a gardy v roku 1918*. Košice 1976, pp. 52–53.

affecting the whole population of Slovakia was gathering strength well before the famous declarations for Czechoslovak independence and national self-determination were made in Prague and Turčianský Sv. Martin 28th October 1918 and 30th October 1918 respectively,<sup>61</sup> which were both coincidental independent events rather than co-ordinated.<sup>62</sup> In other words, there was no preceding agreement between the Czechs and Slovaks concerning the timing of the above-mentioned declarations.

The Slovak national activists had also organized themselves for action. Ferdinand Juriga (1874–1950), the only Slovak member in Hungarian parliament at the time, made his famous three-hour speech concerning the national rights of the Slovaks. After his speech he resigned and gave his mandate to the soon-to-be-established Slovak National Council. Matúš Dula (1846–1926), the leader of the SNS summoned an all-party meeting in Turčianský Sv. Martin, where the above-mentioned national council was established. While social and economical grievances undoubtedly provided a strong impulse for the poor to demonstrate their dissatisfaction in action the national and political leaders in Turčianský Sv. Martin for their part took national self-determination for the Slovaks as their imperative. Its actions were soon backed by the oaths of allegiance from its local sub-councils.

## Czechoslovak *realpolitik* and the Slovaks

During the First World War the Czechoslovak idea had matured and, most importantly, grown more realistic, since the Slovaks seemed to be hopelessly underpowered in their desire to gain national self-determination within Hungary, which was keenly opposed to such plans. The small group of adherents of the Czechoslovak idea, both Slovak and Czech, had tried to convince Slovak national leaders how important it was to co-operate with the Czechs. In addition, the First World War brought radical changes in international relations. As the World War had dragged on, the collapse of Austria-Hungary started to seem increasingly probable, and in this process the Slovaks became politically more and more valuable to the Czechs, as well as vice versa. With the support of the Great Powers to the Czechoslovak independence and the collapse of Austria-hungary in sight, completely new political conditions began to determine the destiny of Czechs and Slovaks, and the traditional cultural ties between these nations seemed to play only minor role in the following developments.

In Slovakia, it was indeed the success of the Czechoslovak independence movement abroad rather than political reasoning that made Slovak Catholic and conservative circles (the so-called the old Slovak school or the Memorandists in

61 Krajčovičová, Natália. Slovenská národná rada roku 1918. HČ, ročník XVII, č. 2, 1969, p. 177.

62 Stodola, Emil. Prelom. Spomienky, úvahy, štúdie. Praha 1933, p. 149.

SNS) look towards co-operation. Despite the fact that the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris<sup>63</sup> had taken the initiative in representing both nations in the international forum without consulting the Slovak political leadership, it succeeded in bringing Czechs and Slovaks to the consciousness of the triumphant Entente powers. An independent Czechoslovakia was made one of the war aims of the Entente during the late summer of 1918, and Czechoslovakia was recognized as an belligerent ally. Soon after that the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris was recognized as de jure government of the de-facto still non-existent state. This remarkable achievement was not least due to the supreme diplomatic skills and the relations with the top European politicians of Edvard Beneš, Tomáš G.Masaryk and Milan R. Štefánik.<sup>64</sup> Furthermore, United States and Great Britain were interested in using the Czecho-Slovak Legion<sup>65</sup> in Siberia to protect their interests in Russia and China.<sup>66</sup> The Czechoslovak National Council in Paris got also financial support and encouragement from the influential Czech and Slovak émigré groups in the United States. The agreements of Cleveland in 1915 and Pittsburgh in 1918 spoke on behalf of a common state but still in a federative sense.<sup>67</sup> Later the Czechoslovak delegation to the Paris Peace Conference had to give several generalisations concerning Slovaks' national and political plans<sup>68</sup> in order to convince the Entente powers of the credibility of the Czech and Slovak will to have a common state.<sup>69</sup> The misunderstandings proved hard to banish; already in the late thirties the Slovak nationalists had to repeat again and again that they were Slovaks and not Czechs.<sup>70</sup>

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- 63 At first it was established as the Czech Foreign Committee (Conseil national de Payes Tchèque) in 1915 and the name was changed to the Czechoslovak National Council in 1916. Kann, Robert & Zdeněk V.David. *The Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands, 1526–1918*. Washington 1984, p. 320.
- 64 In addition to those mentioned, there were more influential Slovaks in the independence movement abroad. One of them was Štefan Osuský (1889–1973), who later became a Czechoslovak minister in Great Britain (1918–1920) and France (1920–1940).
- 65 The legionnaires that are henceforth referred to were Czechs and Slovaks living abroad who joined the Entente armies voluntarily or their units were formed of the prisoners-of-war to fight for the Czechoslovak independence. It must not be mixed with the French Foreign Legion. After 28th October 1918 many of these legionnaires were served in the Czechoslovak Army. There were 66,000 legionnaires in Russia, 20,000 in Italy and 10,000 in France.
- 66 Unterberger, Betty Miller. *The United States, Revolutionary Russia and the Rise of Czechoslovakia*. North Carolina 1989, p. 77.
- 67 Hrušovský, František. *Die Gesichte der Slowakei*. Bratislava 1944, p. 146 and Masaryk, T.G. *The Making of a State. Memories and Observations 1914–1918*. New York 1969, pp. 208–209.
- 68 These generalisations included, for example, disputed interpretations of the history of the respective nations and that not a word was mentioned about the plans of a Czecho-Slovak federation in the agreements of Cleveland and Pittsburgh. Hungary and Germany were critical about the idea of a Czechoslovak nation and the Czechoslovak delegation in the PPC was afraid that if the Czechs and Slovaks would be understood as two separate nations, the existence of the Czechoslovakia would have been endangered.
- 69 See Secretary's notes of a conversation held in M. Pichon's room at the Quai d'Orsay. February 5th, 1919. *Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1919, Paris Peace Conference*. Volume III. pp. 877–887.
- 70 For example; *The Unsolved Slovak Problem. An Appeal by the Slovak Council*. Vienna 1933, p. 45.

After following the above-mentioned developments abroad, it is quite clear why Slovak national leadership in Turčianský Sv. Martin decided to agree with the pro-Czechoslovak stance and give their blessing to the Czechoslovak state. However, their consent must be seen as the only realistic alternative available and as a tactical solution to the impasse with Hungary.<sup>71</sup> Without Czech assistance, separation from Hungary would have been improbable.<sup>72</sup> Also it should be remembered that the decision in Turčianský Sv. Martin was made behind closed doors. It did not have a mandate from the Slovak majority.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, that majority had not yet any reasons to object to it. In other words, the mutual understanding of the Czech and Slovak leaders in the October 1918 was based not only on continuity but rather on political realism and international success of the Czechoslovak independence movement abroad.<sup>74</sup>

The public feelings that were expressed in Slovakia and even in the Czech lands were perhaps of minor importance for the independence of Czechoslovakia.<sup>75</sup> It was the international political support that was crucial for Czechoslovak independence. Especially the foreign policy of France played an important role, not just in recognizing Czechoslovakia's independence but in protecting it later by force at a vulnerable stage. Russia's and Germany's temporary weakness had led France to the idea of the Little Entente, which would have formed an alliance of small states consisting of Poland, Czechoslovakia, Byelorussia, Ukraine, Romania and later also Yugoslavia to check Germany's possible expansive policy towards the east (*le barrière de l'est*).<sup>76</sup> Soon enough the advantage of blocking the spread of bolshevism (*le cordon sanitaire*) was appreciated too, as Béla Kun's advancing troops threatened to cut land connections to Romania, which was an important ally of France in eastern Europe.<sup>77</sup> The Czechoslovak foreign policy successfully exploited these foreign policy fears and needs of France, and France gave considerable military support, sending military personnel and material to help Czechoslovakia against Hungary during the hostilities of late 1918 and the spring and summer of 1919. This gesture created a fateful image of French good will and might in the minds of the men responsible for foreign policy of

71 Kováč, Dušan. 30. október 1918 a jeho muži. In *Muži deklarácia*. Ed. Dušan Kováč, pp. 18–19 and Grečo, p. 193.

72 Kann, Robert A. & Zdeněk V. David. *The Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands 1526–1918*. Washington 1984, p. 390.

73 Hronský 1976, p. 47.

74 Pearson, Raymond. *National Minorities in Eastern Europe 1848–1945*. London/Hong Kong 1983, p. 149 and see also Szárka, Laszlo. *The Slovak Separation in 1918. An Indirect Form of Self-Determination*. *Danubian Historical Studies*. Vol. I. No. 3., 1987, p. 31.

75 Pearson, p. 151.

76 In the end Little Entente consisted only of Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. Hovi, Kalervo. *Cordon sanitaire or barriere de est? The Emergence of the New French Eastern European Alliance Policy 1917–1919*. Turku 1975, s. 75 and Perman, Dagmar. *The Shaping of the Czecho-Slovak State*. Leiden 1962, p. 1.

77 Hovi 1975, pp. 157–158.

Czechoslovakia during the inter-war period.<sup>78</sup> But before the Second World War, the well established relations with France also helped Czechoslovak delegation in the Paris Peace Conference to obtain influential support for Czechoslovakia in its border settlement with its neighbouring countries.<sup>79</sup>

In addition to the imperatives dictated by Czechoslovakia's foreign policy to incorporate Slovakia together with the Czech lands in the formation of the new state,<sup>80</sup> there was the question of the German minority.<sup>81</sup> The need for a more favourable balance for the Slavic population in the planned state was desperate, especially so when every third citizen would be of German nationality and since the Czech lands were three quarters surrounded by German populated areas.<sup>82</sup> Incautiously expressed Slovak hopes of a separate government or self-determination could have led to revisions of the peace treaties, and in that kind of situation the Germans in the Czech lands (the Sudeten and Silesian Germans) would have not left the opportunity used to demand wider national rights for themselves.<sup>83</sup> The Magyars in Slovakia would have probably followed suit. Nor should we forget economic and strategical questions. The joining of Slovakia with the Czech lands gave Czechoslovakia a passage to Danube and the possession of the important Komárno harbour at the confluence of the Váh and Danube. Slovakia also constituted a new market for Czech industry and capital.<sup>84</sup>

Slovaks and Czechs were thus politically and, quite significantly, internationally regarded as tied unseparably together even before the realization of Czechoslovak independence. Viewed without emotion, it is easy to see that the Czechoslovak State was founded more on political realism rather than a common cultural heritage or a sense of unity between the members of the respective nations. On the other hand, it opened promising prospects for Slovaks to develop their traditional political programme for autonomy.<sup>85</sup> As it is well known, the independence of Czechoslovakia gave the first example of a state in which the national demands of the Czechs and Slovaks were realised, at

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78 Beneš, Edvard. Une nouvelle phase de la lutte pour l'équilibre Européen. Exposé du ministre des affaires étrangères (fait devant la Chambre des Députés et le Sénat le 2 Juillet 1934. Sources et documents Tchécoslovaquies No. 25. Prague 1934, p. 51 and pp. 56–57.

79 Zacek, Joseph F. Nationalism in Czechoslovakia. In Nationalism in Eastern Europe. Peter F. Sugar (ed.). Seattle 1971, pp. 192–193.

80 Seibt, Ferdinand. Deutschland und die Tschechen. Geschichte einer Nachbarschaft in der Mitte Europas. München 1974, p. 232.

81 It formed "a minority" more than three million (3,123,568) people. Recensement de la population de la République Tchécoslovaquie le 15 Février 1921. Tome I. La statistique Tchécoslovaquie. 9e vol. Prague 1934. Tableau 79, pp. 86\*–87\*.

82 Kováč, p. 56.

83 See Les minorités dans la république Tchécoslovaques. Notes concernant le mémoire que les députés et sénateurs allemands, élus le 18 et le 25 avril 1920 et faisant partie de l'union parlementaire allemande de l'association des nationalités Tchécoslovaques ont présenté à la Ligue des Nations et qui traite de la violation des règlements sur la protection des minorités établis par la traité conclu le 10 septembre 1919 à Saint-Germain en Laye entre les puissances alliées et associées et la république Tchécoslovaque. Prague 1921 and Seton-Watson, R.W. 1931, p. 6.

84 Seton-Watson, R.W. Treaty Revision and the Hungarian Frontiers. London 1934, p. 38.

85 Kováč, p. 113.

least in principle. The origins of the common state of the respective nations has been a very popular and even more controversial subject for historians dealing with Eastern Europe. In rather stereotypical historical studies, which are today becoming somewhat dated, the emergence of this state has been described as a creation of the famous trio of Tomáš G. Masaryk, Edvard Beneš and Milan R. Štefánik.<sup>86</sup> Present-day interpretations are usually more critical and complex, but the older interpretations die hard, especially in the mass media and in popular concepts of history.

According to the varying emphasis given to Czech and Slovak co-operation or non co-operation during the First World War and especially before it, a number of different historical views can be presented. The Slovak political leadership, the so-called Martin circle, opted unanimously for Czechoslovakia and the establishment of Czechoslovakia came as a relief to the Slovaks in the situation of October 1918. This claim is nowadays widely accepted in a number of newer scholarly works in and outside Slovakia.<sup>87</sup> However, the view that there was a quick adoption of the Czechoslovak concept in all its complexity during the First World War is highly misleading, if the events that took place in Slovakia in late 1918 are explained only in that context.

It would be an overstatement to label national and social revolutionary movement in Slovakia as completely dedicated only to the Czechoslovak State. It would be as mistaken to assume that all Slovaks in every village and town were against Hungary and for Czechoslovakia, simply because of the fact that they were not well aware or well informed (censorship was tight in wartime Hungary) of the developments in Paris or in Prague. Only the political leadership in Slovakia could have claimed to have a proper view of the situation. The parallel, but to a certain degree also coincidental, development of separation of the Czech lands and Slovakia from their respective administrative units in the Czech Lands and Slovakia created an illusion of planned and organized co-operation. In reality, the separation of the Czech lands from Austria and the Slovakian attempt to separate from Hungary started quite independently despite political claims to the contrary.<sup>88</sup>

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86 Typical contemporary examples are; Borovička, Josef. *Zehn Jahre Tschechoslowakischer Politik*. Prag 1929, Krofta, Kamil. *Tjeckoslovenska historia*. Stockholm 1935 or Papoušek, Jaroslav. *The Czechoslovak Nation's Struggle for Independence*. Prague 1928.

87 See for example Hronský, Marián. *Slovensko pri zrode Československa*. Bratislava 1987 and Kirschbaum, Stanislav J. *A History of Slovakia. The Struggle for Survival*. New York 1995.

88 Cf. Stodola 1933, p. 149.