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1989 in Slovakia – Between Reform and Radical Change¹

Until the end of the 1980s, communism in Czechoslovakia retained the characteristics of a frozen post-totalitarian regime, one whose leaders refused to reflect on possible reforms, and though ideology was part of the practices it employed to legitimize itself, its interpretations of this ideology were, rather, carried out in a markedly pragmatic manner.² The extent of repression was also lesser in comparison with the 1950s, with its targets being individuals, there were not mass repressions. The fall of the communist regime was not preceded by a longer period of open conflict between the regime and society, which ultimately resulted in a period of the limited tolerance of independent structures such as was found in Poland in 1980s³, or the so-called “Kádárization”, which was seen as the gradual liberalization of the economy and an effort to avoid wider political repression, typical of Hungary from the second half of the 1960s.⁴ In terms of the form of the political system and the organization of the relations between its institutions, as well as in terms of its internal relations, the normalization regime remained the exact same totalitarian dictatorship it had been in the 1950s, though this was no longer the case concerning the expectations that formulated by the communist powers in relation to the citizenry.⁵

It differed from classic authoritarian dictatorships in that it required formal manifestations of support from the population, but, at the same time, realized that it was not capable of effectively mobilizing this population in the face of a real threat. When discussing the normalization version of communism, however, we cannot speak of the presence of totalitarian ideology, if we consider it to be a program for the rebuilding and re-direction of society. In its adoption of *Poučenie z krízového vývoja v strane a spoločnosti*⁶ (Lessons from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society) at the

1 This study was undertaken in connection with the grant project VEGA č. 2/0046/19 “The Image of the ‘Other’ in Post-1989 Slovak Politics”.

2 See KOPEČEK, Lubomír: *Demokracie, diktatury a politické stranictví na Slovensku*. CDK, Brno 2006; LINZ, Juan J. – STEPAN, Alfred: *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe*. John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore – London 1996.

3 See PACZKOWSKI, Andrzej: *Pół stuleti dějin Polska 1939–1989*. Academia, Prague 2000, pp. 288–360.

4 For more details see IRMANOVÁ, Eva: *Kádárismus. Vznik a pád jedné iluze*. Karolinum, Prague 1998.

5 LIPTÁK, Eubomír: Miesto novembra 1989 v moderných slovenských dejinách. In: PEŠEK, Jan – SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa (eds.): *November 1989 na Slovensku. Súvislosti, predpoklady a dôsledky*. Milan Šimečka Foundation, Bratislava, 2000, p. 28; BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew: *The Grand Failure. The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*. Scribners, London 1989.

6 *Poučenie z krízového vývoja v strane a spoločnosti po XIII. zjazde KSČ*. Pravda, Bratislava 1971. This ide-

turn of 1969–1970, the regime renounced not only any discussion of the form of socialism, but also any projections of the future. The regime identified itself with the concept of “real socialism” as conceived in the USSR during the Brezhnev era, wherein the social establishment that had been achieved was considered the highest possible stage of the development of society. Hardly an attempt to define the existing system ideologically and programmatically, it was merely trying to prevent any sort of repeat of the attempts at reform from 1968. The absence of any positive self-identification with the ruling regime took on an absurd form when the ruling Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Komunistická strana Československa, KSČ) managed to function for nearly 20 years without issuing any sort of programming document whatsoever. From this point of view, it is not possible to speak of a totalitarian regime in the form as we knew it in the case of Czechoslovakia in the years 1948–1953.

It was not until 1987–1988 that one could speak of the advent of communist authoritarianism in Czechoslovakia, or of independent initiatives having actually entered political life. According to Zbigniew Brzezinski, *the transition to the phase of the communism retreat takes place when the succession struggles are dividing the Communist Party and the societal pressure for socioeconomic concessions is increasing*.⁷ This was also reflected in the perception of independent initiatives by the communist regime. It was only from this period on that the Communist Party leadership began to devote more space to the activities of alternative groups than in its annual reports on the country's security situation. The problems Slovak and Czech societies were faced with at the end of the 1980s were very similar in view of the largely centralized nature of the state, which had taken on a nominally federal character after 1968.⁸ However, despite the centralized practices of the ruling elites before the turning point in power in November 1989, the dynamics of political and social processes in the Czech and Slovak societies differed in many aspects. Since, as follows from the work of the sociologist Jiří Musil among others, there were two different societies, there were also two different courses of events as well perceptions of the political, social, and economic processes that took place in the 1990s.⁹ For these reasons, it is justified to analyze the situation in both parts of Czechoslovakia separately.

ological document was passed at the 14th Congress of the KSČ, serving as the official, exclusive interpretation of the so-called Prague Spring, an attempt at the democratization of the communist regime in Czechoslovakia in 1968 which was repressed and dismantled by the Warsaw Pact armies under the leadership of the USSR on August 21, 1968. The occupiers overturned and destroyed the recent democratic changes and led the state into so-called normalization, the ruling of public life by the pro-Moscow wing of the KSČ and extensive purges in the KSČ as well as in administrative, media, cultural, and academic institutions.

- 7 BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew: *The Grand Failure. The Birth and Death of Communism in the Twentieth Century*. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York 1989, p. 255.
- 8 Even though the federalization of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (Československá socialistická republika, ČSSR) (on January 1, 1969) was the result of the democratic processes in 1968, the realization of this program was embarked upon in the atmosphere of the renewed repressive course of the KSČ.
- 9 MUSIL, Jiří: Czech and Slovak Society. In: MUSIL, Jiří (ed.): *The End of Czechoslovakia*. Budapest, CEU Press 1996, pp. 77–94.

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The aim of this paper is to identify the issues and dynamics of public discourse in Slovakia in the period in question. At the same time, I try to outline the ways in which the situation in both parts of the former common state were similar and in which ways the circumstances that led to the fall of communism in Slovakia and in the Czech lands differed. I will focus predominantly on the content of the political conflicts that took place in Slovak society in 1988–1989, setting them into the broader context of the developments of Slovakia or Czechoslovakia, respectively. Several different characteristics resulted from objective conditions such as the position of Slovakia within the common state. Formally, it was an equal part of a dualist federation which had a distinctly centralized character, while this centralist and asymmetrical character possessed a real center of power, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The Communist Party of Slovakia (Komunistická strana Slovenska, KSS) as a republic-level organization of the united party did not have a counterweight on the Czech side, and attempts in this direction were rejected and condemned after 1969.¹⁰ The relationship between the events in the Czech lands, which took place primarily in Prague as the capital of the common state, and Slovakia thus bears on one hand the characteristics of a relationship between the center and the periphery, while on the other there was a characteristic and separate dynamic at play in both parts of the former Czechoslovakia, one which stemmed from their varying reactions to different historical events and their varied effects on both societies. In the following sections, I will attempt to identify the extent to which developments in Slovakia at the end of the 1980s influenced political processes immediately after the fall of the communist regime, focusing primarily on the formation of the party system. Any analysis of the events of 1989 placed in a broader time frame requires a combination of historical and political science approaches, and thus I make more use of secondary literature devoted to the subject at hand than I do primary sources.

The Readiness of the Slovak Elites for Political Change

Some of the facts that follow could possibly illustrate the extent to which Slovak society was prepared for changes in power and how different the character of the situation in Slovakia was from that of the Czech lands. A report of the Ministry of the Interior (Ministerstvo vnútra, MV) of the Slovak Socialist Republic (Slovenská socialistická republika, SSR) from October 23, 1989 characterized the situation of the state security apparatus in Slovakia as relatively stabilized, although it allowed for the possibility of larger anti-state action.¹¹ However, reports from foreign diplomats residing in Prague were also carried out in a similar vein.¹² It may be stated that even the opposition, which had been considering utterly different timelines on the horizon

10 *Poučenie z krízového vývoja v strane a spoločnosti po XIII. zjazde KSČ.*

11 PEŠEK, Jan: Pohľad štátnej moci na disent na Slovensku v „ére prestavby”. In: PEŠEK, Jan – SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa (eds.): *November 1989 na Slovensku*, p. 53.

12 PREČAN, Vilém: Středoevropský kontext demokratického převratu v Československu v roce 1989. In: PEŠEK, Jan – SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa (eds.): *November 1989 na Slovensku*, p. 19.

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right before the outbreak of the revolution, did not count on the prospect of a change in power. The organization of public discussion forums involving representatives of official and unofficial structures were discussed at a seminar held in an apartment attended by sociologists, natural scientists, intellectuals, and ecologists from both parallel and official structures, which took place on November 18, 1989 in the apartment of the sociologist Soňa Szomolányi. When the participants heard the news that on Prague's Národní třída (Národní Street) the security forces had suppressed the student march from Albertov to the city center on November 17, 1989 to commemorate the imprisonment of students from several Czech universities in Prague in 1939, they agreed to organize an "individual-group protest" in the streets of Bratislava. They did not consider the possibility of a mass manifestation. Likewise, writers publishing in official journals and writers publishing in the samizdat magazine *Obsah* (Content) met for the first time that day in the house of the dissident writer Ivan Kadlečík in Pukanec (in Central Slovakia).¹³ At this meeting they agreed to organize a joint event to mark Human Rights Day on December 10, 1989. Neither of these meetings, at least according to surviving memories, was devoted to or interested in mass demonstration or any formation of an organized opposition against the regime, let alone in overthrowing it.¹⁴ This is how the Hungarian Independent Initiative became the first independent opposition group to have a clear political profile in Slovakia. It was created by 25 people. It was a pure coincidence that it was established on November 18, 1989, i.e. one day after the suppression of the student demonstration in Prague, in the apartment of Károly Tóth in Šafa.¹⁵

However, it is also true that November 1989 did not come like a bolt out from the blue. Although the reports of the communist secret police, the State Security (Štátna bezpečnosť, ŠtB), characterized the situation in Slovakia as stabilized or relatively stabilized in comparison with the Czech lands, from 1987 they had been repeating

- 13 This was one of the regular meetings that the authors from the *Obsah* magazine (the so-called kvartál /quarterly/) organized in their homes. The meeting in Pukanec was the first one that was also attended by officially publishing authors. A number of them met in Bratislava June 16, 1989 and took steps to set up the Slovak PEN club center. The founding meeting of the Slovak PEN club center took place on October 31, 1989 in Bratislava. 31 writers signed the Slovak translation of the PEN Charter (e.g. Ladislav Ballek, Martin Bútora, Ján Buzássy, Anton Hykisch, Andrej Ferko, László Dobos, Dušan Dušek, Lubomír Feldek, Lajos Grendel, Daniel Hevier, Rudolf Chmel, Klára Jarunková, Vincent Šikula, Ján Štrasser, Martin M. Šimečka, Pavel Vilikovský, Peter Zajac, Štefan Žáry and Miloš Žiak, among others). In October 1989 some of them took part in the symposium "Československo 1989. Dialóg alebo konfrontácia" ("Czechoslovakia 1989: Dialogue or Confrontation") in Franken (Germany), where the organizers of the Czech exile Catholic association Opus Bonum also invited a delegation from the official Czechoslovak Union of Writers. Representatives of exile and official writers discussed a number of controversial issues, such as the events of 1948 (the establishment of the power monopoly of the KSČ) and Charter 77. Z histórie SC PEN. *Slovak PEN Centre* – see <http://scpen.international/o-nas/historia/> (quoted version dated 28. 3. 2020); BEHRING, Eva et al.: *Grundbegriffe und Autoren ostmitteleuropäischer Exilliteraturen 1945–1989. Ein Beitrag zur Systematisierung und Typologisierung*. Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart 2004, p. 192.
- 14 SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa: *Kľukatá cesta Slovenska k demokracii*. Stilus, Bratislava 1999, p. 33–34; ŽIAK, Miloš: Spomínanie 3. In: *OS*, 1999, No. 8 (August), pp. 43–48.
- 15 MARUŠIAK, Juraj: The Nationalizing Processes in Slovakia 1969–1989. The Case Study of the Hungarian Minority. *Central European Papers*, 2015, Vol. III, No. 1, p. 96.

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claims about the opposition's activities being intensified or about attempts to create a common platform for the whole of Slovakia and the federal republic. The turning point was the entry of independent initiatives into the political discourse in 1987, which came about in such a way that the leadership of the Communist Party had to take their existence into account. Nonetheless, the development in Slovakia was slower and can be characterized as gradual. The milestones defining the particular stages of development are much less pronounced in Slovakia than in the Czech lands. When analyzing the course of political changes in Slovakia it is therefore necessary to speak of the entire period following 1987. In the second half of 1987 and in the first half of 1988, Slovak society was significantly activated in the political sense via public activities, which were also an impulse for actors from the scene of the independent initiatives in the Czech lands. They were mainly concerned with the document *Bratislava/nahlas* (Bratislava/Aloud) from autumn 1987, prepared by two main Bratislava organizations of the Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protection (Slovenský zväz ochrancov prírody a krajiny, SZOPK), No. 6 and 13, but also the petition by Augustin Navrátil *Podněty katolíků k řešení situace věřících občanů v ČSSR* (Catholic Suggestions to Address the Situation of Religious Citizens in Czechoslovak Socialist Republic/ČSSR) from November 29,¹⁶ and finally the Candlelight demonstration (sometimes called also Candle demonstration) of Catholic believers in Bratislava on March 25, 1988, attended by those demanding respect for religious freedom and the abolition of the state supervision of churches. On the other hand, after the so-called Candlelight demonstration in Bratislava, no similar protests took place that would provoke an irritated reaction from the Communist Party leadership as they did in Prague. Such activities of independent initiatives were also less present in the public discourse here than in Czech society.

One important question is the state the actors of political change were in during and directly before the events of November 1989. In the KSS leadership, similarly to the KSČ leadership, the decomposition of the existing unity could be observed. The first contradictions began to emerge on the surface, which concerned not only staffing issues, but also opinions about the tempo of further changes. At the central level in Czechoslovakia the disagreement between the General Secretary of the Central Committee (Ústřední výbor, ÚV) of the Communist Party Milos Jakeš and the Prime Minister of the ČSSR Ladislav Adamec concerning the need to introduce political changes began to escalate in the years 1988–1989. This dispute, at least superficially, did not relate to the views on action against political opponents, although during the course of 1989 Adamec's advisors (namely Oskár Krejčí) were in contact with the representatives of the Most ("Bridge") initiative.¹⁷ In Slovakia the decomposition of unity had become visible already in 1987, when the KSS leadership was not able to

16 ŠIMULČÍK, Ján: *Čas odvahy. Najväčšia podpisová akcia za náboženskú slobodu – 500000 občanov ČSSR*. ÚPN (The Nation's Memory Institute), Bratislava 2017.

17 HORÁČEK, Michael: *Jak pukaly ledy*. Ex libris, Prague 1990. The objective of the Most initiative, founded by the journalist Michael Horáček and the musician Michael Kocáb in summer 1989, was to intermediate dialogue between the leadership of the KSČ and the opposition.

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take a unified position, for example, in its attitude to the aforementioned document of the Bratislava environmental activists associated in the Bratislava organization of the Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protection *Bratislava/nahlas*. Several members of the KSS participated in the preparation of this document. One of its reviewers was, among others, the chairman of the cultural and scientific organization *Matica slovenská*, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia, and a member of the Slovak National Council (Slovenská národná rada, SNR), Vladimír Mináč. He defended its authorial team with interpellations in the Slovak legislature, regardless of their bullying and propaganda campaign in the central daily paper of the KSS, *Pravda*.¹⁸

In Slovakia, as in the Czech lands, however, the Communist Party was ideologically and programmatically rigid, and within the KSS there was no discussion of program issues and the nature of the ongoing changes. However, unlike in Poland, Hungary, some republics of the former Yugoslavia, and the former Baltic republics of the Soviet Union, there was no relevant reform wing to speak of.¹⁹ The frequent changes in the leadership of the KSČ and KSS did not signal changes in the political course, but were rather a sign of improvisation and powerlessness. Reform initiatives within the Communist Party were limited to individuals, with the result that the Communist Party was not able to initiate changes or respond to them in time.

On the other hand, however, the political elites in Slovakia were relatively younger than those in the Czech lands. While the average age of the leaders of the KSČ Central Committee was 65, the leaders of the KSS were 60.5 years old on average.²⁰ The KSS had weaker bonds in Slovak society before 1948 than in the Czech lands, as reflected in the results of the last partially competitive parliamentary elections before the Communist Party took power in 1946. Therefore, the KSS had to supplement its members and functionaries much more actively in the 1950s and 1960s, while during that period new members were motivated to enter the Communist Party no longer by their approval of the values it represented, but rather an attempt to gain better social standing through political activity. Hence, much more than in the Czech part of the country, new KSS members also had to be recruited from families with indifferent or non-communist pasts. Ideology played a lesser role in the everyday functioning of the KSS than in the Czech part of the KSČ. As a result of the different course taken by normalization in Slovakia and in the Czech lands the communist elites in Slovakia were less affected by purges. This being the case, the communist leaders in Slovakia made greater efforts to remain in political life and maintain their positions of power, especially after the leadership of the Central Committee of the KSS represented by Ignác Janák resigned on December 6, 1989. The motivation for joining the KSS was far more the desire to gain a better social standing than identification with

18 Bratislava/nahlas a Nič nového pod slnkom. In: HUBA, Mikuláš (ed.): *Ponovembrové Slovensko I–II*. EuroUniPress, Bratislava 1994, pp. 90–91.

19 BARNOVSKÝ, Michal: Vedenie KSČ a KSS – od nástupu Gorbačova po november 1989. In: PEŠEK, Jan –SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa (eds.): *November 1989 na Slovensku*, p. 42.

20 *Ibidem*, p. 32.

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communist ideology. The communist elites and the membership base in Slovakia were thus able to think much more pragmatically, as exemplified, for instance, in the formation of the KSS Action Committee (Akčný výbor) on December 6, 1989 as an ad hoc structure composed of mostly reform-oriented individuals, but also during the extraordinary KSS congress on December 17, 1989 when the reform course of the new KSS leadership, a relatively radical one compared to the period before November 1989, was accepted. The pragmatism of their behavior was also reflected in 1968 and later during the normalization period.

Thus, in the KSS, there were certain groups who were younger and sympathized with the reform process, at least to the extent of the Soviet perestroika. Additionally, the gerontocratic nature of the regime caused them to suffer from a kind of generational stopper. These groups were preparing to take over power and had the potential to reach a consensus with the reformist forces. However, these were isolated groups, or rather initiatives of individuals who did not have a broader political background among the members and officials of the KSS. The political atmosphere, which prevented any free horizontal exchange of information, did not allow for the creation of such a background. At the same time, these groups did not attempt to operate outside of the official structures. They wanted to initiate the reform process from above and from inside the existing political system.

The most important of these groups was made up of young researchers from the Institute of Marxism-Leninism (Ústav marxizmu-leninizmu) of the KSS Central Committee and other “ideological departments” of the KSS, in particular Peter Weiss and Pavol Kanis, who operated under the protection of Viliam Plevza, the head of this KSS ideological department and close collaborator of the General Secretary of the KSČ Central Committee, Gustav Husák (1969–1987).²¹ They published in the weekly magazine *Nové slovo* (The New Word), issued by the Central Committee of the KSS. They invited non-conformist intellectuals to seminars organized at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism and published translations of top foreign literature for the internal circle of readers, for example *Third Wave* by Alvin Toffler.²² Besides them, there were also other circuits that brought together former or current members of the KSS who sought political changes. One of these was the initiative of the Leninist Spark Club (Klub leninskej iskry), headed by the former journalist and ŠtB member Igor Cibula, who had to quit his job in the media and in the security forces as a result of the purges after the suppression of the Prague Spring. The club, which was established on the grounds of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship League (Zväz československo-sovietskeho priateľstva, ZČSSP), sought to gain support for its activities from the USSR. Its aim was to disseminate information about the reconstruction being undertaken in the USSR through lectures and discussions. However, the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship League and the KSS leadership rejected the attempts to legalize

21 In 1975–1989, Gustáv Husák (1913–1991) was also the president of Czechoslovakia. Due to the nature of the political system, this function was of secondary importance. After 1987 his influence on political decisions was radically reduced.

22 ŽIAK, Miloš: *Slovensko. Od komunizmu kam?* Archa, Bratislava 1996, p. 29.

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the club, and the club was thus closed down in 1987. In 1988, the Social Science Forum Dialogue (Spoločenskovedné fórum Dialóg), whose objectives were similar to those of the Leninist Spark Club, began to operate within the Municipal Council of the Czechoslovak Science and Technology Society (Mestská rada Československej vedeckotechnickej spoločnosti). Cibula was again involved here, and the chairmanship was held by Jozef Moravčík, a pedagogue at Comenius University's Faculty of Law.²³ When compared with the Czech lands, it is a unique Slovak phenomenon that the former members of the Communist Party who had been expelled after 1968 worked together in these structures with the then Communist Party members.

The writer and essayist Vladimír Mináč had great political authority. Although he was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, he increasingly criticized the policies of the then leadership. Be that as it may, these groups and the individuals failed to create a common platform within the KSS, i.e. a reform wing that might have become an alternative to the then KSS leadership before November 1989. The nascent intra-party opposition in the KSS was subjected to stress tests during the groundbreaking events of the summer and autumn of 1989, including its connection with the so-called Bratislava Five (Bratislavská päťka) trial.²⁴ Some of the protagonists of this non-institutionalized and unarticulated internal party opposition openly opposed the actions of the Communist Party leadership. It took part in a petition demanding the release of political prisoners and in November 1989 joined up with critically-minded intellectuals and protagonists of independent initiatives and participated in the establishment and further activities of the Public Against Violence (Verejnosť proti násiliu, VPN). The majority of the reform-oriented members of the KSS, especially from the circle of those working at the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the KSS Central Committee, did not, however, intend on entering into any open confrontation with the powers that be, as a result of which they lost their political initiative and found themselves on the sidelines of the political events in the spring of 1989. This part of the potential reform wing in the KSS stepped up only after decisive changes were made and thanks to the definitive dissolution of

23 Idem.: *Slovensko medzi napredovaním a úpadkom*. Self-published by the author, Bratislava 1998, pp. 21–26.

24 The trial against a group of Bratislava-based members of the Movement for Civic Freedom (Hnutí za občanskou svobodu, HOS) after notifying the Office of the Government of the USSR and the Editorial Office of *Literárny týždenník* (Literary Weekly) in August 1989 of their intention to lay flowers in front of the building of Komenský University in Bratislava, where, during the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968, Danka Košanová had been shot dead. The authorized letter was written on August 4, 1989. In connection with the planned action, a criminal trial was initiated against the representatives of the Christian dissent Čarnogurský, Anton Selecký, and members of the so-called civic dissent Miroslav Kusý, Vladimír Maňák, and Hana Ponická. The letter addressed to the Office of the Government of the USSR was signed by Andrej Strýček in lieu of Ján Čarnogurský. Moreover, on August 4, 1989 Hana Ponická, Katarína Lazarová, Ján Čarnogurský, Vladimír Maňák, and Anton Selecký sent a letter to the Municipal National Committee (Mestský národný výbor, MNV) in Zvolen, in which they announced their plan to commemorate the military commanders of the anti-fascist Slovak National Uprising (Slovenské národné povstanie, SNP) (1944), Rudolf Viest and Ján Golian, at the site where their monument stood. This was met with disapproval by the representatives of the city of Zvolen.

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the pre-November KSS leadership. The dissolution of the KSS leadership, headed by Ignác Janák, was not finalised until the KSS Action Committee was instated on December 6, 1989 i.e. 12 days after the fall of Miloš Jakeš.²⁵ The pragmatism of the younger ranks of the communist establishment and intellectuals allowed for a higher degree of the regime's personal continuity after 1990 with the pre-November regime when compared to the developments in Czech politics, but they too had their limits. They were concerned about the radical course of changes in which they were not involved, as they were often people who had gained prominent positions in the spheres of academic research, culture, and journalism as fresh university graduates in the early 1970s. They jumped at the chance to fill positions left empty by the victims of normalization. One reason they adopted a restrained stance on the political earthquake in November 1989 might be that such a sudden reversal could have worked against them.

After some partial changes in the leadership positions of the KSS, more extensive at the central level, less at the regional and local ones, younger functionaries connected with the sole youth organization, the Socialist Youth Union (Socialistický zväz mládeže, SZM), began to gain leverage. At the end of the 1980s, critical voices were being raised in the organization about former political practices, but the vast majority avoided any sort of systemic critique. Nevertheless, the reconstructed KSS elites were aware of the need to adopt a more pragmatic attitude toward the ongoing changes, which was reflected both in the factual organizational independence of the KSS at the extraordinary congress in December 1989 and in the attempt to transform the KSS into a social-democratic type of political party in the newly founded Democratic Left Party (Strana demokratickej ľavice, SDEĽ) in 1990. Whereas such an attempt had ended unsuccessfully in the Czech lands and its initiators were forced to leave the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, KSČM), in Slovakia, on the contrary, supporters of orthodox communist orientation found themselves in the minority.²⁶ Unlike in the Czech lands, non-communist parties under the auspices of the National Front played a minimal role in political debates before November 1989, and thus had only a minimal impact on the political changes themselves. Slovak political émigrés found themselves not only outside the mainstream of the political debates before 1989, but outside the course of the ongoing changes in Slovakia as well. Its only representative to acquire a more significant position in Slovak politics after 1989 was the head of the Democratic Party (Demokratická strana, DS), Martin Kvetko.²⁷ His relevance in Slovak political life after 1989 was, nevertheless, substantially less than that of Pavel Tigrid²⁸ in the Czech Republic, for example.

25 ŽIAK, Miloš: *Slovensko. Od komunizmu kam?*, pp. 45–48.

26 In 1991 they created two smaller successor entities – the KSS 91 and the Union of Slovak Communists (Zväz komunistov Slovenska), which merged into the Communist Party of Slovakia in 1992, registered as a new political entity.

27 KUBÍN, Ľuboš: *Rola politických elit pri zmene režimu na Slovensku*. Veda, Bratislava 2002, p. 67.

28 Pavel Tigrid (1917–2003) was a writer in exile and publicist. He published the periodical *Svědectví* (Testimony) in Paris during 1956–1989, which met with a significant response in exile as well as in

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Independent Initiatives in 1989

In terms of focus and form of activity we can divide the dissent operating in Slovakia into “Christian” and “civic.”²⁹ Moreover, a significant segment of the independent initiatives was represented by environmental activists, Hungarian minority activists, and the alternative culture scene. Civil dissent, grouped around the Charter 77 (Char- ta 77) signatories³⁰ and individuals who were not signatories but cooperated with them (e.g. the historian Jozef Jablonický and philosophers Milan Šimečka and Július Strinka), did not represent the strongest current of independent initiatives in Slovakia, either in terms of pure numbers or from the institutional points of view and publishing possibilities. Nevertheless, it had its foundation in the form of a dissident scene and a network for publishing samizdat works in Prague and Brno. Its intellectual potential and determination to take the communist regime head on represented the greatest political danger in the eyes of the ŠtB. The moral credit of Charter 77 had the effect of making the politically oriented part of the Christian dissent cooperate closely with activists of civic dissent in Slovakia, which favored this arrangement over the creation of a Christian democratic party as an independent political formation, which Ján Čarnogurský had been considering since the mid-1980s.³¹ This cooperation involved almost all major policy initiatives on the dissident scene, at least in the form of moral support.

Despite the presence of certain internal conflicts and tensions, the representatives of civic dissent were also respected on the so-called alternative culture scene, i.e. among the young members of the artistic underground, despite the fact that part of the younger generation of alternative culture viewed Charter 77 in a negative light for moral reasons. They blamed the expelled communists for having helped co-create the communist regime and *now it was too late to see that the project* (socialist society – author’s note) *had serious mistakes*.³² At the same time, however, this “second generation” pointed out that Charter 77 was insufficient because it lacked any positive agenda: *Rather, we see the importance of there being at least a trace of some sort of future here*.³³ Despite

Czechoslovakia. He was also an external collaborator with Radio Free Europe. After 1989 he acted as an influential publicist and in 1994–1996 he took on a post at the Ministry of Culture of the Czech Republic.

- 29 JABLONICKÝ, Jozef: O disente na Slovensku. *Dilema*, 1999, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 20–26; KUSÝ, Miroslav: Ľudské práva a slobody v období rokov 1968–1989. In: KOGANOVÁ, Viera (ed.): *Demokracia a ochrana ľudských práv. Teória, prax, medzinárodná úprava*. University of Economics – Slovak Association for the Political Sciences, Bratislava 1996, pp. 202–220.
- 30 Charter 77 (declared on January 1, 1977) was a Czechoslovak civic initiative during the years 1977–1992 which demanded that the communist authorities of Czechoslovakia uphold international laws on human rights. It was the most significant platform of democratic opposition in Czechoslovakia in the 1970s and 1980s.
- 31 ČARNOGURSKÝ, Ján: *Cestami KDH*. Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, Prešov 2007, p. 5.
- 32 KUSÝ, Miroslav – ŠIMEČKA, Milan: Prvý rozhovor s druhou generáciou. In: KUSÝ, Miroslav – ŠIMEČKA, Milan: *Veľký brat a veľká sestra. O strate skutočnosti v ideológii reálneho socializmu*. Milan Šimečka Foundation, Bratislava 2000, p. 11.
- 33 Ibidem, p. 195. “The second generation” would have meant the son of Milan Šimečka, Martin Milan Šimečka, but he was linked to the younger generation of members of the independent initiatives and

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these generational disputes, the Charter 77 signatories and supporters used space on the pages of alternative culture samizdat magazines, such as *Kontakt* (1980–1983), *Altamira* (1985–1987), *Fragment* (1987), and *K*, or *Fragment K* (1988–1989), as they had no access to independent publication space in Slovakia. Articles by Milan Šimečka, Hana Ponická, and Jozef Jablonický were also published by the Christian-oriented *Bratislavské listy* (Bratislava Letters) (1988–1989). Therefore, the division of dissent into “civic” and “Christian”,³⁴ or its separation from the scene of the so-called alternative culture, effectively illustrates the focus and form of activity of the individual components of independent initiatives, but it does not testify to the real relations in the world of dissent, as these were not strictly separate segments.

The institutional framework of Charter 77 and the close personal ties to the Czech dissident scene (specifically in Prague and Brno) places the so-called civic dissent in Slovakia into the unified context of Czechoslovak dissent. At the same time, however, in terms of its thematic scope, as well as the conditions and forms of its actions, it is possible to think of the civic dissent, which was most closely linked to the dissent taking place in the Czech lands, as a specifically Slovak phenomenon. Despite its low numbers, the Slovak “civic dissent” took up an independent position on issues sensitive to Slovakia, such as the stance of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia i.e. the construction of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros waterworks on the Danube.

For the opposition, the most important moment was its very entry into the political debate and breaking out of its marginal position in political life. In Slovakia, this was represented by the aforementioned Candlelight demonstration in March 1988. During and immediately after it, several facts were introduced that later influenced the course of events in 1989. It showed the presence of a strong worldview opposition to the normalization regime, while its supporters made clear their readiness to express their opinion publicly. It also demonstrated the organizational background that the Christian dissidents, thanks to the network of communities of the so-called secret church and religious samizdat, had at their disposal. Although the primary requirements of the organizers and participants were not of a political nature in terms of changing the political regime or the leaders of the state, their content discussed crucial elements of the prevailing political system.

In the eyes of the other segments of parallel structures, the Candlelight demonstration greatly increased the prestige of the Catholic dissent as an ideological alternative to the powers that be, and one capable of mobilizing a significant number of people. The response to this demonstration also played a part in bolstering the self-confidence of the protagonists of Catholic dissent and accelerated the process of its politicization. The ensuing dialogue between the protagonists of the “Chris-

alternative culture. At the same time, this “second generation” assumed an imaginary subject, the likes of which M. Kusý and M. Šimečka have addressed in their critical reflections of their own pasts. KUSÝ, Miroslav – ŠIMEČKA, Milan: Prvý rozhovor s druhou generáciou (excerpt). *Kritika & Kontext*, 2003, Vol. 8, No. 3, pp. 26–27.

34 JABLONICKÝ, Jozef: *O disente na Slovensku*, pp. 20–26; KUSÝ, Miroslav: *Ľudské práva a slobody*, pp. 213–218.

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tian” and “civic” dissent made it possible for the first openly political samizdat, officially unregistered magazine in Slovakia, with the address of the editorial office and publisher of *Bratislavské listy* to be open not only to members of the Christian dissent, but also to the civic opposition and artistic underground.³⁵ It was the first clearly politically oriented samizdat magazine in Slovakia. Nevertheless, arriving in 1988, it came much later compared to the Czech lands, or neighboring Poland or Hungary for that matter. It rejected communist ideology from the outset. Civil dissent support for the Candlelight demonstration helped to strengthen the dialogue of different channels in independent initiatives, and co-created the preconditions for their cooperation on the basis of the Movement for Civic Freedom, and later in the anti-totalitarian movements of the Civic Forum (Občanské forum, OF) and Public Against Violence.

After the shock caused by the declaration of so-called martial law in Poland in December 1981, the artistic underground and environmental initiatives began to pull together and revive themselves. Gradually, non-religious samizdat journals came to the fore (*Fragment* and *K* were created in 1987, which eventually merged into *Fragment K* magazine in 1989). The door to public life was opened up to the opposition by people who until recently had only operated in official structures, published in official periodicals, and who represented a certain moral and spiritual authority in Slovakia. This was done in two different ways. One way was that those interested began to get involved in actions initiated by the protagonists of independent initiatives (e.g. the *Vyhlásenie k deportácii Židov zo Slovenska* /Statement on the Deportation of Jews from Slovakia/) in October 1987,³⁶ or the signing of the petition *Několik vět*³⁷ (A Few Sentences), or petitions against repressions, especially in the case of the so-called Bratislava Five); or, the other way was the “co-option” of opponents of the regime to official or semi-official periodicals (the publication of texts by Dominik Tatarka in *Slovenské pohľady* (Slovak Views), the birthday wishes for Tatarka’s 76th birthday in *Literárny týždenník* (Literary Weekly), and the announcement of his death in the same periodical; the publication of Martin Milan Šimečka’s short story *Indiánske leto* (Indian Summer) in the magazine for young authors *Dotyky* (Touches); the occasional publication of texts by Ivan Hoffman, Marcel Strýko, as well as in the artistic press, and elsewhere); or at events, for example, the participation of the dissident writer

35 ŠIMULČÍK, Ján: *Čas svitania. Sviečková manifestácia – 25. marec 1988*. Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, Prešov 1998, p. 15.

36 *Vyhlásenie k deportácii Židov zo Slovenska*. Document No. 17. 10. 1987. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko. Chronológia a dokumenty (1985–1990)*. Milan Šimečka Foundation – Historical Institute, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava 1999, pp. 171–172. See also *Vyhlásenie k deportáciám Židov zo Slovenska*, October 1987. *Kritika & Kontext*, 1999, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 21–22.

37 The proclamation *Několik vět* was created in the context of Charter 77, calling for the end of political persecutions, freedom of speech and religion, as well the start of a dialogue between the ruling elites and the citizenry. It was published on June 29, 1989. The first 1,800 signatures also included prominent figures in official cultural and intellectual life. By November 17, 1989, nearly 40,000 people had signed it. SUK, Jiří: *Petice, kterou dějiny předběhly. Před patnácti lety bylo v Československu zveřejněno a podepisováno Několik vět. Mladá fronta dnes*, 26. 6. 2004, *příloha Kavárna*, pp. E-II–III.

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Martin Milan Šimečka at a gathering of writers convened as part of a conference on the situation in contemporary Slovak literature by the official Union of Slovak Writers in Budmerice in May 1989. The result of both methods was the blurring of the differences between the “official” and “unofficial” spheres. Incidentally, the aforementioned ecological document *Bratislava/nahlas* was the result of the intersection of the activities of independent initiatives and those functioning on the basis of official structures.

One specific case was that of the internal newsletter of the Bratislava municipal organization SZOPK, *Ochranca prírody* (Protector of Nature), particularly with regard to a part of the critically attuned public in Bratislava. Amongst other things, this magazine published an interview with the actor, Milan Kňažko,³⁸ in which he explained the reasons for signing the petition *Několik vět*, although its dissemination was subject to repression by the criminal justice authorities. After all, even the fact that the document *Bratislava/nahlas* was created in the guise of internal material of the officially operating Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protection in 1987 shows that the boundaries between the two spheres were no longer hermetically sealed by that time. As reported in Charter 77 in early February 1988, within a few months after its publication the number of people interested in joining the organization had grown by 400 and one hundred people were attending its public meetings.³⁹ However, the protagonists of the environmentalist movement, e.g. Juraj Podoba, recall from their memories the increasing politicization of the Bratislava environmentalists, as for many new members it was *the political ability of the movement that attracted them to it more than its original environmental activities*.⁴⁰

Although *Bratislava/nahlas* meant a great upheaval for the regime, it had not yet become a mass protest against the communist regime. The petition *Podněty katolíků k řešení situace věřících občanů v ČSSR*,⁴¹ which demanded the restoration of proper religious life in the country and respect for religious freedoms, elicited a great response in Slovakia. Although it was initiated by the Moravian Catholic activist Augustin Navrátil, a large proportion (approximately half) of its 600,000 signatories were from Slovakia.⁴² Unlike in the Czech lands, however, in Slovakia it was not until autumn 1989 that street demonstrations became a hallmark of the expression of disagreement. Notwithstanding, the activity of believers and participation in church ceremonies

38 TATÁR, Peter: Interview with Milan Kňažko. *Ochranca prírody. Spravodaj MV SZOPK Bratislava*, 1989, No. 3–4, p. 43.

39 Bratislavský SZOPK. *Infoch*, 1988, Vol. 11, No. 3 (7. 2. 1988), pp. 15–16.

40 PODOBA, Juraj: Polozabudnutá legenda. Bratislava/nahlas s dvadsaťročným odstupom. In: HUBA, Mikuláš – IRA, Vladimír – ŠUŠKA, Pavol (eds.): *Bratislava/nahlas ako výzva. Po dvadsiatich rokoch*. Geographical Institute, Slovak Academy of Sciences – Society for Lasting Sustainable Life of the Slovak Republic (STUŽ SR), Bratislava 2007, p. 23.

41 Podněty katolíků na řešení situácie veriach občanov v ČSSR. *Rodinné spoločenstvo*, 1988, Vol. 4, No. 2 (17), pp. 13–15 – see <http://samizdat.sk/system/files/rodinne-spolocenstvo/1988/rodinne-spolocenstvo-1988-2.pdf> (quoted version dated 28. 3. 2020).

42 OTÁHAL, Milan: *Opozice, moc, společnost 1969/1989*. ÚSD AV ČR (Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences) – Maxdorf, Prague 1994, p. 60; ŠIMULČÍK, Ján: *Katolícka cirkev a nežná revolúcia 1989*. Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška – Milan Šimečka Foundation, Prešov – Bratislava 1999, p. 14.

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nies and pilgrimages increased significantly, which, from the point of view of their participants, was also a way expressing their disagreement with the regime.

The weakness of the anti-regime opposition in Slovakia was its organizational underdevelopment. In contrast to the Czech dissent, which lacked numbers but was richly structured, the first organizational unit of civic dissent and the first known politically oriented group outside the official structures was established in November 1988. That was the Slovak group of the Movement for Civic Freedom.⁴³ The Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia (Výbor na ochranu práv maďarskej menšiny v Československu), established in March 1978, had limited influential potential due to its conspiratorial nature and its focus on the particular problems of the Hungarian minority. The presumed attempts by some of the former reform communists of 1968 to create their own political initiative (the Slovak Democratic Association /Slovenské demokratické združenie/, and *Príboj* /Breaking Wave/ magazine) from the early 1980s was also short-lived and of minimal impact. The opposition in Slovakia was thus much less prepared for political changes than its Czech counterparts, not to mention the political opposition in Poland, for example, which was a qualitatively different phenomenon compared to the whole of Czechoslovakia. This unpreparedness was caused not only by organizational weakness, but at least to the same extent by programmatic weakness. A characteristic feature of the anti-regime opposition in Slovakia was its “non-political” character. According to political scientist Soňa Szomolányi, it was the least visible among the countries of the Visegrad group. November 1989 caught the Slovak opposition in a state where it was only beginning to overcome its fragmentation.⁴⁴

For example, in the autumn of 1989, it was cultural and academic figures that had no ambitions of becoming politically active at the time, or representatives of a number of independent initiatives who also lacked any primary political character, who played a dominant role in shaping the political opposition to the regime, as well as the creation of the VPN. It was members of the so-called secret church, the artistic underground, non-conformist professional artists, theatre artists, parts of art associations, environmental activists, and others that took on the task of anti-government opposition because of the repressive and totalitarian nature of the communist regime. The opposition in Slovakia, far more so than the Czech one, was not prepared to take political responsibility for the fate of the country. The scarcity in the numbers of the so-called civic dissent multiplied with the persecutions of the Bratislava Five

43 Ján Čarnogurský's information on the first meeting of the HOS members in Bratislava on November 11, 1988. Document No. 35. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko*, p. 257. HOS was an independent initiative, formed mainly in the context of Charter 77. In October 1989, on the 70th anniversary of the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic (ČSR), it presented the manifesto *Demokracie pro všechny* (Democracy for All), the signatories of which demanded the establishment of a parliamentary democracy. Its main initiators were, amongst others, Rudolf Battěk and Václav Havel; from the Slovak side, it was Milan Šimečka who took part in preparing the manifesto.

44 *VPN 1989–1991. Svedectvá a dokumenty*. Milan Šimečka Foundation, Bratislava 1998, p. 15.

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in autumn 1989, and their lack of structure meant that the so-called old opposition, that is dissidents who were primarily focused on the protection of human rights, did not play a dominant role in the task of forming a counter-elite during the fall of communism and the emergence of the VPN. People from spheres that did not define their goals as primarily political became its core. These circles even offered the political opposition a publishing platform and an organizational foundation. Thus, for example, the VPN was able to carry out its activities thanks to the support of the Bratislava organization of the Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protection, or the Bratislava organization of the Slovak Union of Creative Artists (Zväz slovenských výtvarných umelcov); and leading up to November 1989, publishing platforms were to be found among opposition circles, for example the magazines *Ochranca prírody*, *Fragment K*, and, to a certain extent, the legal art journals.

1989 in Slovakia and Slovak-Hungarian Relations

The “Hungarian question” was one of the specific aspects of the entire political discourse in Slovakia. The common experience of dissidents remained an unexploited opportunity on both sides to reflect on Slovak-Hungarian relations both at the international (Slovak- or Czechoslovak-Hungarian) and at the national level, with regard to the relationship between the Hungarian minority and the majority. While the activities of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia were dominated by the minority rights agenda, Slovak dissidents took account of the activities of Miklós Duray only in connection with his re-arrest in 1984, when Miroslav Kusý, Milan Šimečka, Jozef Jablonický, and Ján Čarnogurský put together letters of protest demanding the prosecution be stopped. These protests were held primarily in the spirit of human rights, and despite the fact that M. Kusý and J. Jablonický did point out the need to discuss issues of mutual Slovak-Hungarian relations⁴⁵ more openly during them, there was no deeper reflection on mutual relations on either the Slovak or Hungarian sides. Representatives of the Slovak exile Imrich Kružliak and Martin Kvetko also sharply criticized Duray’s statements.⁴⁶

Under the influence of representatives of the Slovak dissent, Charter 77 took a cautious stance on the issue of the Hungarian minority in southern Slovakia and on issues related to the construction of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros waterworks on the Danube. This was also due to the opposition of the majority of the population to the engagement of Charter 77 in the activities of the Committee for the Protection of the Rights of the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia and in the issues of Slovak-Hungarian relations more generally.⁴⁷ The Charter 77 therefore only referred to certain cases of human rights violations. Controversial reactions in Slovak society to the

45 Solidarita s uvězněným Miklóšem Durayem. *Infoch*, 1984, Vol. 7, July–August, pp. 23–25.

46 HÜBL, Milan: *Češi, Slováci a jejich sousedé*. Naše vojsko, Prague 1990, pp. 126–129.

47 RYCHLÍK, Jan: Maďarský faktor v česko-slovenských vztazích 1948–1992. In: *Česko-slovenská historická ročenka 2002*. Masaryk University, Brno 2002, pp. 79–80.

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opinions of M. Duray generated a failed attempt to produce a joint Slovak-Hungarian study on the current issues of Slovak-Hungarian relations and the position of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. It was to be authored by M. Duray, M. Šimečka, M. Kusý, and J. Čarnogurský and to be published as part of the anthology collection of the Congress of the Society for Science and Art (Společnost pro vědy a umění, SVU), which was held in Boston (USA) in September 1986. The authors drew on a proposal stemming from the Hungarian political opposition in Budapest. Its author is unknown (though assumed to be the Hungarian writer György Konrád). Negotiations on the final version of the document were unsuccessful, and in the end separate, individual studies were published instead.⁴⁸ The opinions of Slovak and Hungarian dissidents found common ground only after M. Duray had left for the USA in 1988.

Despite this gradual convergence, however, the ethnic line of conflict in Slovak public discourse took on a new relevance, as the democratization processes in Hungary also raised the issue of Hungary's relations with Hungarian minorities abroad. Tensions arose in the bilateral relations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary in connection with Hungary's decision to stop work on the aforementioned joint project of a waterworks on the Danube, and, above all, regarding the progress of the democratization processes taking place in Hungary. The Czechoslovaks sympathized with the reforms as a successful example of the gradual easing of economic and political conditions. Hungary was a frequent leisure and shopping destination for tourists from Czechoslovakia, thanks to which the latter's population was quite familiar with the living conditions there.

In contrast to the environmentalists of Bratislava, some of the nationally oriented Slovak intellectuals connected with *Literárny týždenník* began to write about the waterworks on the Danube in a way reminiscent of the social realist novels of the 1950s,⁴⁹ and this project gradually started to become a symbol of Slovak national pride. In contrast to the official propaganda, the discourse on Slovak-Hungarian relations to be found in *Literárny týždenník* focused on minority issues rather than on the growth of opposition tendencies in Hungary. The weekly was the platform for a fiery debate about the status of the Slovak minority in Hungary.⁵⁰ However, in addition to the militant⁵¹ and less militant⁵² anti-Hungarian reactions, it also gave space (albeit with editorial commentary)⁵³ to the views of representatives of the Hungarian minority, such as Károly Tóth and Eleonóra Sándor.⁵⁴ However, in its first response to the

48 SCHÖPFLIN, George – WOOD, Nancy (eds.): *In Search of Central Europe*. Polity Press, Cambridge U.K. 1989.

49 MORAVČÍK, Štefan: Dunasaurus alebo rozprávanie o vodnom diele na Dunaji. *Literárny týždenník*, 1988, Vol. 1, No. 4 (14. 10. 1988), pp. 12–13; ŤAŽKÝ, Ladislav: *Pred potopou*. Slovenský spisovateľ, Bratislava 1988.

50 BOBÁK, Ján: Rozoznalo sa slovo. *Literárny týždenník*, 31. 3. 1989, No. 13; Zamlčaný protipól. Ohlas na reláciu MTV Panoráma. *Literárny týždenník*, 7. 7. 1989, No. 27, pp. 8–9; MARUŠIAK, Juraj: *The Nationalizing Processes in Slovakia 1969–1989*, pp. 100–102.

51 HÖRNY, Samuel: Len dereš? *Literárny týždenník*, 11. 8. 1989, No. 32, p. 16.

52 PLEVKÁ, Milan: O koexistencii. *Literárny týždenník*, 4. 8. 1989, No. 31, p. 16.

53 Od pólu k pólu. *Literárny týždenník*, 1. 9. 1989, No. 35, pp. 12–13.

54 TÓTH, Károly – SÁNDOR, Eleonóra: List zo Šale. *Literárny týždenník*, 1. 9. 1989, No. 35, pp. 12–13.

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arguments of K. Tóth and E. Sándor the magazine's editorial staff refused outright to discuss any issues concerning the oppression of members of the Hungarian minority after the Second World War,⁵⁵ though later on published an article by the historian Štefan Šutaj condemning these events.⁵⁶

Some representatives of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, who took part in the reform process in 1968, also criticized the nationality policies in Hungary regarding the rapid assimilation of the local Slovak minority.⁵⁷ With the exception of the extraordinary voices that allowed criticism of the Czechoslovak nationality policy not only towards the Hungarian minority, but also, for example, towards the German and Croatian minorities,⁵⁸ the Slovak-Hungarian discussion gradually took on a confrontational tone, which was sharpened by one of the main contributors to this issue, Ján Bobák.⁵⁹ In November 1989 he also called for the principle of "consistent reciprocity" to be applied in the minority policy. While the Slovaks from Hungary saw this as a step that would enable the extension of minority rights to the Slovak community, Bobák demanded that the principle of reciprocity be *enshrined in our political practice by law*.⁶⁰ Part of the break with communism in all the states of the Soviet Bloc was to open up discussions on problematic chapters of national history. So, too, in Slovak samizdat and later also in official magazines previously taboo topics were being opened up, among others the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1939) and the national revival in the 19th century, but also questions of the wartime Slovak state, national symbolism, and, gradually, the issue of the repressions after 1948. One example of a painful subject for members of the Hungarian minority was the issue of the widely applied repressions in the years 1945–1948 and the policy of so-called re-Slovakization.⁶¹

Especially at the end of the 1980s, in the context of the liberalization of political conditions, the question of the position of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia became part of the confrontation between two resurgent Slovak and Hungarian nationalisms. The legacy of totalitarian thinking was not evident only in the lack of dialogue or knowledge of the culture and arguments of others, but also in the unwillingness to become acquainted with these arguments. This was reflected in the discourse on

55 Compare TÓTH, Károly – SÁNDOR, Eleonóra: *List zo Šale; Od pólu k pólu*.

56 ŠUTAJ, Štefan: O reslovakizácii (a nielen o nej). *Literárny týždenník*, 13. 10. 1989, No. 41, pp. 12–13.

57 DOBOS, László: Otvorený list Imre Pozsgaymu. *Literárny týždenník*, 8. 9. 1989, No. 36, p. 2; SZABÓ, Rezső: Vlast je len tam, kde je aj právo. *Literárny týždenník*, 8. 9. 1989, No. 36, pp. 12–13; see: POZSGAY, Imre: Odpoveď Imre Pozsgayho na otvorený list László Dobosa. *Literárny týždenník*, 24. 11. 1989, No. 47, p. 13.

58 ŤAŽKÝ, P.: Slováci, Maďari, Nemci, Chorváti. *Literárny týždenník*, 15. 9. 1989, No. 37, p. 16.

59 SOBOTKOVÁ, M.: List z Bratislavy do Šale. *Literárny týždenník*, 27. 10. 1989, No. 43, p. 13; BOBÁK, Ján: Pól bez protipólu. *Literárny týždenník*, 13. 10. 1989, No. 41, pp. 12–13. Ján Bobák is a Slovak historian; after 1989 he became one of the prominent activists of *Matica slovenská*.

60 BOBÁK, Ján: K odpovedi I. Pozsgaya na otvorený list L. Dobosa. *Literárny týždenník*, 24. 11. 1989, p. 13.

61 See the Hungarian interpretation of the respective events: JANICS, Kálmán: *Roky bez domoviny. Maďarská menšina na Slovensku po druhej svetovej vojne 1945–1948*. Püski, Budapest 1994; FÁBRY, Zoltán: *Obžalovaný prehovori. Dokumenty z dejín Maďarov v Československu*. Kalligram, Bratislava 1994; VADKERTY, Katalin: *Maďarská otázka v Československu 1945–1948*. Kalligram, Bratislava 2002.

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the current status of minorities, as well as in the discussion of the painful problems of the common Slovak-Hungarian past. This is also the reason why, as Lajos Grendel, a Hungarian writer living in Slovakia, noted in 1989, *we are now standing with our backs to one another not out of anger but out of a deep disinterest in ourselves*.⁶² The exchange of opinions took place mainly on the pages of the *Literárny týždenník*, which at that time was characterized by a high degree of pluralism compared to the other official media, and showed that the issue of Slovak-Hungarian relations was a political matter, both internationally and at the level of relations between minorities and the majority population. This debate became increasingly more political and had the potential to influence future developments after the change of regime.

The Unfinished Politicization of Independent Initiatives

It was only isolated opposition circles who fully considered the political dimensions. One of these was a group of supporters of the former First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party in 1968–1969, Alexander Dubček, who, under the leadership of the economist Hvezdoň Kočtúch, prepared a project for a new version of the KSS Action Program. Its members expected the changes to be executed within the existing institutional framework. Dubček was a symbol of the attempt to establish socialism with a human face in Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Unlike in the Czech lands, Slovakia did not create a more stable organizational structure that would unite supporters of the 1968 “revival process”⁶³ who largely identified with the Charter 77 program in the Czech lands. At the end of the 1970s, a group of economists from this circle led by Kočtúch tried to create a so-called economic circle from the ranks of former pedagogues of the College of Economics in Bratislava.⁶⁴ Its aim was to initiate a discussion on the economic policy of the KSČ leadership. According to ŠtB reports, however, the attempt to organize similar discussions, which were to take place in Kočtúch’s summer house, was frustrated from the very start: *Due to its danger, this organized activity was prevented by appropriate disintegration measures before the first meeting and the interest in this activity remains under our agency’s control*.⁶⁵ Besides Kočtúch, those taking part in the discussions were Viktor Pavlenda, Ladislav Klinko, Jaroslav Husár,⁶⁶ and the former diplomat Juraj Králik. In the end, the advisory group

62 GRENDDEL, Lajos: *Triezva múdrosť. Hovoríme s prozaikom Lajosom Grendelom. Literárny týždenník*, 3. 3. 1989, No. 9, pp. 1, 11.

63 See AUTRATA, Oto: *Poznámky k vzniku Klubu Obroda Slovenska*. In: LALUHA, Ivan – UHER, Ján (eds.): *Cesty k novembriu 1989*. Spoločnosť Alexandra Dubčeka – Nová Práca, Bratislava 2000, pp. 87–92; KOKOŠKOVÁ, Zdeňka – KOKOŠKA, Stanislav: *Obroda. Klub za socialistickou preštvbu. Dokumenty. ÚSD AV ČR – Maxdorf, Prague 1996*.

64 In 1992, the College of Economics in Bratislava was renamed as the University of Economics in Bratislava.

65 8. 1. 1979, Bratislava. *Zhodnotenie výsledkov agentúrno-operatívnej činnosti XII. správy ZNB za rok 1978 po línií vnútorného nepriateľa*. Document No. 19. In: SIVOŠ, Jeruš (ed.): *XII. Správa ZNB. Dokumenty k činnosti Správy kontrarozviedky v Bratislave v rokoch 1974–1989*. ÚPN, Bratislava 2008, pp. 288, 296.

66 Jaroslav Husár (born May 31, 1936, registration number 20938) was entered into the registration protocols of the Administration of the Bratislava branch of the ŠtB on June 9, 1978 as an agent under

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considered by Dubček was not established. A different group of reform communists involved in the years 1968–1969 initiated the establishment of the Slovak Forum for Perestroika (Slovenské fórum prestavby e.g. Milan Strhan).⁶⁷

Although A. Dubček remained the most prominent symbol of disagreement with the regime and the most famous figure in 1989 to symbolize an alternative to the ruling elites, which was also exemplified in the motto *Dubček na Hrad* (*Dubček to the Castle*), which resounded in the streets of both Prague and Bratislava alike, and indicated the demonstrators' demand for his election as the president of Czechoslovakia. Paradoxically, Dubček's supporters had a weaker political base in his "motherland" Slovakia than in the Czech lands. Only a few reform communists who had been victims of the purges of 1969–1970 actively opposed the leadership of the Communist Party during the 1970s and 1980s, possibly also due to the fact that the oppression was less intense compared to the Czech lands. With the exception of sporadic appearances by A. Dubček, no former communist politicians who had been excluded from the KSS for participating in the so-called revitalization process in 1968 were actively involved in opposition activities against the normalization regime. In contrast to the Czech lands, no so-called Eurocommunist or socialist current was introduced in the first half of the 1970s. At the same time, such a current played an important role in the Czech lands in formulating political demands and the concepts of dissent.⁶⁸ This was evidently because the respective communist and socialist traditions were not deeply rooted in Slovak political culture. Even the spread of the left-wing and socialist samizdat was more down to individuals (e.g. Viliam Ciklamíni⁶⁹), and no significant political-samizdat activities were recorded in the reformist communist environment until 1988. A. Dubček was mainly involved at the individual level, did not participate in the preparation or signing of Charter 77, and had only sporadic contacts with dissidents.⁷⁰

A wealth of myths and speculations have been linked to the activities of the group of communist officials who were expelled from the Communist Party after 1969. I think that, on the one hand, it is necessary to refrain from questioning their oppositional positions, since, in their magazine *Myslienka a čin* (Thought and Action), despite its limited scope, they also called for free elections⁷¹ to be held during the debate on the future constitution of the ČSSR; while on the other hand, their role in political life after November 1989 tends to be exaggerated or even demonized. In contrast

the codename "Magister." His documentation was lodged in the archive until December 3, 1989. He was utilized in efforts to counter "the right." Registration protocols of State Security agency and operation unions, Bratislava – see <http://www.upn.gov.sk> (quoted version dated 28. 3. 2020).

67 LALUHA, Ivan: Alexander Dubček a november 1989. In: LALUHA, Ivan – UHER, Ján (eds.): *Cesty k novembru 1989*, pp. 28–29.

68 OTÁHAL, Milan: *Opozície, moc, spoločnosť 1969/1989*, pp. 20–30.

69 AUTRATA, Oto: *Poznámky k vzniku Klubu Obroda Slovenska*, p. 87.

70 See: KUSÝ, Miroslav: *Stretnutia s Alexandrom Dubčekom*. OS, 1998, Vol. 8, p. 71; LALUHA, Ivan – UHER, Ján (eds.): *Cesty k novembru 1989*.

71 *Pravdou práva k právu pravdy*. K pripravovanej Ústave ČSSR: In: *Myslienka a čin*, 1989, No. 21, samizdat. (Materials from the private archive of Ivan Lалуha, to whom the author extends his gratitude for providing access).

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to the Czech lands, in Slovakia the Club for the Revival of Slovakia (Klub Obroda Slovenska) was formed after the fall of the communist regime. Unlike the Czech Club for the Socialist Reconstruction Obroda (Klub za socialistickou přestavbu Obroda), the members of the Obroda club in Slovakia did not define their goals as political. With the exception of its chairman Ivan Laluha, who was the only member of the Club for the Revival of Slovakia in the Federal Assembly after the 1990 elections, and of course the chairman of the Federal Assembly, Alexander Dubček (1990–1992), the former prominent reform communists of the 1960s did not join this organization or identify themselves as its affiliates. This was also true of A. Dubček's closest associates, for example, Hvezdoň Kočtúch, who joined the VPN as an individual. The seemingly milder course of normalization in Slovakia meant that people persecuted for their beliefs by the normalization purges of the 1960s did not make up a compact generational group with a common feeling or similar fates, i.e. one able to formulate a common platform of opinion. It was as if this had somehow been confirmed by the fact that the translation of the Czech term “the 68ers” (osmašedesátníci) into Slovak as *šesťdesiatosmičkári* sounds rather violent and is not even used in the language. Nevertheless, it is possible that such a platform might not have had much of a chance even in different circumstances, as the KSS membership and functionary base had been recruited since the 1950s. This generation in Slovakia was not able to create a common opinion platform even after 1989. They were primarily linked together by group solidarity and efforts to rehabilitate themselves, which of course waned very rapidly. All of the members of the KSS expelled after 1968 ended up in all the relevant political factions, often ones completely opposed to each other. On the other hand, a large number of the Czech protagonists of the events of 1968 and representatives of the revival club in the early 1990s defined their political orientation as social democratic and strengthened the councils of the more formidable Czech Social Democratic Party (Česká strana sociálně demokratická, ČSSD). Although the former reform communists of 1968 were part of the opposition to the normalization regime, their mobilization came relatively late and they did not succeed in creating a political platform with any significant public impact until the regime fell in November 1989.

Among the alternative groups, Ján Čarnogurský was the second important figure to reflect on the political dimensions and to consider the creation of a Christian democratic formation.⁷² In 1988, he also announced his intentions of doing so in the samizdat publication *Bratislavské listy*. He began with a radical negation of communism when he declared that *communism historically arose from anti-Christian positions and still holds fast to them. Its practical application in Central and Eastern Europe has been disastrous. Not only has it left behind millions of dead, but also the relative decline of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe when compared to other parts of the world, including the so-called Third World [...] one day communism will die out, and with it the current division of Europe.*⁷³ Finally, the third important potential actor in the liberalization of the regime, which no longer considered civic but rather political dimensions, was the afore-

72 ČARNOGURSKÝ, Ján: Cestami KDH, p. 5.

73 ČARNOGURSKÝ, Ján: *Videné od Dunaja*. Kalligram, Bratislava 1997, p. 66.

mentioned group of young workers of the Institute for Marxism-Leninism and other reform-oriented members of the KSS. Opposition-oriented circles of the Hungarian minority were partially prepared for the political changes. This is evidenced by their political documents from 1988–1989, in particular the *Memorandum Maďarov žijúcich v Československu*⁷⁴ (Memorandum of Hungarians Living in Czechoslovakia) published to mark the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, which, in the Slovak context, was the first to openly mention the need to change the political system rather than reform it and to include Czechoslovakia in the processes of European integration.

There were attempts, however, to develop a common program of the emerging anti-regime opposition. These were made by people from unofficial structures and from the KSS establishment. The attempt to develop this program, which was to be based on the concept of the “Czechoslovak path to socialism based on the democratic and social traditions of our country,” was initiated by Boris Zala.⁷⁵ His political program entitled *Základy politickej reformy a humanizácie slovenskej spoločnosti (Minimálny program)* (Foundations of the Political Reform and Humanization of Slovak Society /A Minimal Program/) envisaged the National Front (Národný front, NF) as a possible platform for the pluralization of public life.⁷⁶ It presupposed that some opposition-oriented figures in the KSS would also cooperate with the individual components of the opposition. Work on this program lasted from August to early November 1989 and was actually shared by different representatives of the opposition or people in “official structures” who were gravitating toward the opposition (e.g. Jozef Kučerák, Vladimír Ondruš, František Mikloško, László Nagy). Zala consulted, amongst others, Fedor Gál, Ján Budaj, Ján Uher, Peter Zajac, Milan Šimečka Sr., Ján Langoš, as well as some members of the communist establishment, like Peter Weiss, Pavol Kanis, Milan Čič, Vladimír Mináč, and others. This attempt at prospective joint action with disgruntled representatives of the communist elites failed in mid-November 1989, i.e. on the eve of the political break.⁷⁷ Other attempts concerned the elaboration of a common position on the draft principles of the new constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which involved, among others, Ján Langoš.⁷⁸ Similar activities in Slovakia did not necessarily seem unrealistic, with regard to the

74 Memorandum Maďarov v Československu 1988, 20. 10. 1988. Document No. 34. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko*, pp. 254–256.

75 ZALA, Boris: *Čo sme to vlastne žili a ako z toho von*. In: ZALA, Boris: *Cesty k demokracii*. Print-Servis, Bratislava 1993, p. 12.

76 The National Front was established in 1945 as an association of all the legally functioning political parties in Czechoslovakia (the KSČ, KSS, the People’s Party, the Social Democratic Party, the National-Socialist Party, the Democratic Party, and from 1946 also the Freedom Party and the Work Party). After the communist coup in 1948, the main role in the National Front was gained by the KSČ and more social organizations became its members. After the fall of communism in February 1990, it ceased to exist.

77 See also ŽIAK, Miloš: *Slovensko: od komunizmu kam?*, pp. 20–28.

78 KUSÝ, Miroslav: *Ludské práva a slobody v období rokov 1968–1989*, p. 218; ZALA, Boris: *Čo sme to vlastne žili a ako z toho von*, pp. 9–13.

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SNR deputies' reservations concerning the draft of the common constitution for the federal Czechoslovakia and the national republics (the so-called *trojústava*⁷⁹) (tri-constitution). These attempts were neutralized, though, by the developments that followed the arrest of the so-called Bratislava Five in August 1989 and the inability of the critically oriented groups or individuals in the KSS to resist the leadership of the Party. Nevertheless, the sheer existence of this attempt and the communication between the progressive minds in the Party leadership and the representatives of the unofficial structures is remarkable. Zala apparently rightly believes that similar contacts between the opposition and the communist elites would not have been possible in the Czech lands.⁸⁰ This suggests that in 1989 Slovak society had the potential to achieve a broader political consensus on the need for political change. However, if this scenario had been successfully implemented, systemic changes would have been slower. Before November 1989, however, there had been no discussion either in the opposition or within the establishment about what steps needed to be taken in the context of the ongoing political changes, not to how to proceed the “day after” the political change. All the important players were counting on more or less gradual changes. Until August 1989, the circle of Dubček sympathizers relied on impulses from the processes in the official power structures.

The lack of program debates before November 1989 and the weakness of the clearly politically oriented forces in the Slovak opposition meant that the VPN was not perceived as a political party until the first months of spring 1990. It tried to proceed in acting as a citizens' initiative or conglomerate of such initiatives, without a solid membership base or a clear definition of responsibilities. This was also reflected in its contradictory steps in the process of taking power from the communists. On one hand, on December 12, 1989, when the Slovak Government for National Understanding (Slovenská vláda národného porozumenia) was established under the leadership of the then Minister of Justice Milan Čič⁸¹ (a member of the KSS), the VPN declared its support for the eleven new ministers, but it stated that the only person representing its Coordination Center (Koordinačné centrum) in the government was Vladimír Ondruš.⁸² At the same time, it gradually co-opted its deputies for the Slovak Parliament, although it was more welcoming to existing parties that had been active within the National Front and to newly formed parties in co-options than the

79 ŽÁTKULIAK, Jozef: Spory o novú ústavu česko-slovenskej federácie v druhej polovici 80. rokov XX. storočia. *Historický časopis*, 2008, Vol. 56, No. 1, pp. 161–190.

80 ZALA, Boris: *Čo sme to vlastne žili a ako z toho von*, p. 12.

81 Milan Čič (1932–2012) was a Slovak lawyer and politician. In 1988–1989 he served as Minister of Justice in the Government of the Slovak Socialist Republic, in 1989–1990 he was appointed Prime Minister of the Government of National Understanding of Slovakia. In 1990 he left the Communist Party of Slovakia; in 1990–1992 he was a deputy of the Federal Assembly of Czechoslovakia from Public Against Violence, in 1991 he joined the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko, HZDS) established by Vladimír Mečiar. In 1992, he coordinated the work of an expert team preparing the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. In 1993–2000, he served as Chairman of the Constitutional Court (Ústavní soud) of the Slovak Republic; in 2000 he participated in the foundation of the short-lived Party of the Democratic Centre (later only “Centre”).

82 KUBÍN, Ľuboš: *Rola politických elit pri zmene režimu*, p. 62.

Civic Forum in the Czech lands was. It was only after Ján Budaj's attempt to become chairman of the SNR in March 1990 that the VPN openly assumed the responsibility of the government and parliament. The "apolitical" character of the VPN, which was caused by the specific formation of the new Slovak elites in November 1989, had a clear impact on its future form. Some of its protagonists (e.g. Peter Zajac) admitted that until its end in November 1992 it remained halfway between being an NGO and a political party.⁸³ However, its unpreparedness to take political responsibility was not just a problem for the VPN. The non-communist parties of the National Front (the Freedom Party /Strana slobody/; the Party of Slovak Revival /Strana slovenskej obrody/, renamed the Democratic Party /Demokratická strana/) were unable to delegate their members to the Slovak government of "national understanding" for several weeks, even though they had ministerial posts reserved in it.

The programming deficit in the political opposition in Slovakia continued after November 1989. Until the pre-election campaign in June 1990, when the VPN adopted the *Šanca pre Slovensko* (Chance for Slovakia) program, the only counterpart to the rather large Civic Forum program *Co chceme* (What We Want)⁸⁴ was the resolution entitled *12 bodov spoločného programu VPN a štrajkujúcich vysokoškolákov* (Twelve Points of the Common Program of the VPN and the Striking Students).⁸⁵ Although, according to Czech historian Vilém Prečan, this document does not fall short of the Civic Forum documents in terms of the nature of its defined political objectives,⁸⁶ the difference in the degree of sophistication of the two documents, which were published around the same time, is visible to the naked eye. A comparison of the two confirms the opinion of Slovak political scientist Soňa Szomolányi on *the lack of a systemic concept of change*.⁸⁷ According to Slovak historian Lubomír Lipták, the *content of the democratic revolution* was realized in an improvised way, not as the result of a dispute of concepts, but only as the result of a dispute of opinions.⁸⁸ This also explains the views of some of the key players of November 1989, who in their first statements declared themselves to be supporters of left-wing values, ordinary communists or social democrats, but who later became anchored in conservative or liberal oriented formations (e.g. Soňa

83 *VPN 1989–1991. Svedectvá a dokumenty*, p. 88. From the summer of 1991 the VPN had acted under the name of the Civic Democratic Union – Public Against Violence (Občianska demokratická únia – Verejnosť proti násiliu), and following 1992 simply as the Civic Democratic Union.

84 *Co chceme*. Programové zásady Občianskeho fóra, 26. listopad 1989, 18.00 hod., Praha; Programové prohlášení Občianskeho fóra *Co chceme*. In: *Demokratická revoluce 1989. Dokumenty OF z listopadu a prosince 1989*, Document No. 18; see <http://www.89.usd.cas.cz/cs/dokumenty/26.html> (quoted version dated 28. 3. 2020).

85 Programové vyhlásenie občianskej iniciatívy VPN a Koordinačného výboru slovenských vysokých škôl, 25. 11. 1989. Document No. 87. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko*, p. 358.

86 Like the Civic Forum, the VPN defined its primary goals in November 1989 as the balancing out of all forms of ownership, instating free elections, protecting the freedoms of press, public demonstration, assembly, movement, and conducting business, as well as eliminating the leading roles of the KSČ, ensuring a free and independent justice system, and ridding the school system and world of culture of ideology. *Ibidem*.

87 *VPN 1989–1991. Svedectvá a dokumenty*, p. 17.

88 LIPTÁK, Eubomír: *Miesto novembra 1989 v moderných slovenských dejinách*, p. 27.

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Szomolányi, Peter Zajac, Vladimír Ondruš).⁸⁹ However, Slovak politics of the 1990s or the first years of the 21st century also remained at this level, which is particularly reflected in the character of the political party system in Slovakia. It is typified by the fact that political parties do not form on the basis of the associated voters and their values or support for particular agendas, but rather based on personnel, specificity, or a devotion to certain symbols.

Socialism, and then What?

In the years 1988–1989 the word “socialism” was consistently phased out of the vocabularies of independent initiatives, or rather it was treated with skepticism. Neither Ján Čarnogurský with his non-socialist program nor Miroslav Kusý, who at the end of the 1980s still advocated Marxism as a tool for thought⁹⁰ and a model of self-governing socialism,⁹¹ any longer assumed the communist system to be reformable: *The currents of opposition no longer function here within the establishment, but outside of it* (1988).⁹² Socialism was perceived as an empty phenomenon. In the minds of dissidents, real socialism was synonymous with absurdity, a dead end in which the original socialist postulates were impossible to develop.⁹³ The system of real socialism was seen as a system that must be rejected at its very foundations. Thus, according to Kusý, for example, when one is resigned to error and deformation, *what [...] remains for us more or less intact is only the original socialist dream*, albeit a devalued one. Neither Stalinist nor real socialism was the way to achieve this; *the question is only whether the original noble socialist dream is worth anything to anyone at all*.⁹⁴ Milan Šimečka argued in a similar vein that *any deeper reform ultimately always raises the question of the basis of the entire political system, which means the question of what the leading role of the [communist] party is to be in this form, in which it is anchored in Soviet practice*.⁹⁵

Milan Šimečka also mulled over the term “socialism” in a polemic with Peter Uhl when founding the Movement for Civic Freedom. He refused to use this term because, in his words, *it was written into the history of our century first and foremost by means of the Russian Revolution. Its entire role in our century derives from its realization, from the one we have had here, for so far there has been no other*. Šimečka argued for doing away with terms like right or left, but also the impossibility of returning to the concept of a hybrid of two different European experiences. On the contrary, he posited the collapse of com-

89 ZALA, Boris: Lavý disent. Mocenské pomery v kontexte novembra 1989. In: LALUHA, Ivan – UHER, Ján (eds.): *Cesty k novembru 1989*, p. 131.

90 KUSÝ, Miroslav: Byť marxistom v Československu. In: KUSÝ, Miroslav (ed): *Eseje*. Archa, Bratislava 1991, pp. 136–143.

91 KUSÝ, Miroslav: Etatický či samosprávny socializmus? In: KUSÝ, Miroslav (ed): *Eseje*, pp. 210–219.

92 KUSÝ, Miroslav: Inštitucionálna revolúcia po dvadsiatich rokoch. In: KUSÝ, Miroslav (ed): *Eseje*, p. 227.

93 KUSÝ, Miroslav: Veľký brat a veľká sestra. In: KUSÝ, Miroslav (ed): *Eseje*, p. 86.

94 KUSÝ, Miroslav: Kozoturiáda. In: KUSÝ, Miroslav – ŠIMEČKA, Milan: *Veľký brat a veľká sestra*, pp. 107–198.

95 ŠIMEČKA, Milan: Ztráta skutočnosti. In: KUSÝ, Miroslav – ŠIMEČKA, Milan: *Veľký brat a veľká sestra*, p. 178.

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munism and defined European integration as a central challenge that Czechoslovakia could not face without the support of the West.⁹⁶ These already older reflections by M. Kusý and M. Šimečka in the context of the so-called civic dissent in Slovakia did not, however, lead to the formulation of any political program of its own.

At the same time, neither the openly anti-communist program of Ján Čarnogurský, nor the relevant anti-communist opposition documents prior to November 1989, not to mention the first program documents of the Civic Forum and Public Against Violence, contained a program for the privatization or liquidation of the welfare state. The opinion of the Canadian historian James Krapfl that *most of the popular statements on devotion to socialism were sincere*, supported by several citations from statements by students and VPN actors,⁹⁷ is also confirmed by the opinion polls conducted in November (23–24) and December (9–12) 1989 by the Prague Institute for Public Opinion Research (Ústav pro výzkum veřejného mínění, ÚVVM). In both polls, only three percent of the respondents voted for the capitalist path of development, while the socialist path was favored by 45 or 41 percent of respondents, respectively. The dominant segment of society supported the alternative of a “third way” (i.e. a model combining the characteristics of socialism and capitalism) – 47 and 52 percent.⁹⁸ Thus, democratic demands were not automatically linked to the establishment of a market economy.

The Linking of “Islands of Positive Deviation”⁹⁹

Before November 1989, the individual opponents of the regime communicated with each other only minimally. The first major meeting of people from unofficial structures and critically oriented intellectuals who had not previously been involved in dissent took place on November 10, 1989 at the initiative of the Bratislava environmental activists. In 1988 and 1989 unsuccessful attempts were made to create a common platform between the Slovak dissent and the oppositional Hungarian minority. The first “official” Slovak-Hungarian meeting on the common approach of the opposition circles in Slovakia and ideas for further political development in Czechoslovakia did not take place until October 1989, after the release of Miroslav Kusý from prison. This was due to the emergence of the younger, liberally oriented generation grouped around Károly Tóth and László Öllös in the Hungarian minority environment, when some of the Hungarian minority activists joined protests against the imprisonment of the so-called Bratislava Five.¹⁰⁰

96 Document No. 40. The polemical essay by Milan Šimečka titled “Matoucí socialismus (Odpověď Petrovi Uhlívi)” (Confusing Socialism /An Answer to Petr Uhl/), in which he responds to criticism of the manifesto of the Movement for Civic Freedom. Prague, April 1989. In: HLUŠIČKOVÁ, Růžena – CÍSAŘOVSKÁ, Blanka (eds.): *Hnutí za občanskou svobodu. Dokumenty*. ÚSD AV ČR – Maxdorf, Prague 1994, p. 120.

97 KRAPFL, James: *Revolúcia s ľudskou tvárou. Politika, kultúra a spoločnosť v Československu po 17. novembri 1989*. Kalligram, Bratislava 2009, pp. 130–131.

98 VANĚK, Miroslav: *Veřejné mínění o socialismu před 17. listopadem 1989*. ÚSD AV ČR – Maxdorf, Prague 1994, p. 56

99 BŮTORA, Martin: *Vyzdorúvanie alebo každodennosť pozitívnych deviantov*. In: BŮTORA, Martin (ed.): *Odklíňanie*. Kalligram, Bratislava 2004, pp. 181–193.

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In Slovakia, as in the Czech lands, the opposition was united and transformed into a counter-elite by linking different currents and groups, so-called “islands of positive deviation” in an unexpected way: “at one go”,¹⁰¹ so to speak, by exploiting the “emotionally charged moment”.¹⁰² What was different from the situation in the Czech lands, however, was that similar first attempts had already taken place there and communication within the opposition was much stronger. One of the first such attempts was the foundation of the Movement for Civic Freedom in October 1988, which was not only an attempt to unify the democratic opposition organizationally, but also set out the basic principles of a pluralistic democratic society in its *Demokracia pro všechny* (Democracy for All) manifesto.

Unlike in the Czech lands, we cannot talk about the acceleration of political development in Slovakia in connection with the establishment of the Movement for Civic Freedom and its *Democracy for All* manifesto. A mere 15 people attended the first meeting of the supporters of the Movement for Civic Freedom in Bratislava on November 11, 1988,¹⁰³ which certainly did not signify the overcoming of the political stagnation in Slovakia that followed the suppression of the so-called Candlelight demonstration in March 1988. Even in spring (April–May) 1989 the petition among academics for the release of Václav Havel from prison did not meet with any significant success in Slovakia. Only 24 signatures were collected. None of the employees of the historical institutes of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (Slovenská akadémia vied, SAV) or at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the SAV joined the petition.¹⁰⁴

The impetus to speed up the unification processes in the fragmented Slovak opposition was the arrest and trial of members of the so-called Bratislava Five. This triggered the activation of intellectuals, but also other people from the so-called grey zone, i.e. people who were critical of the ruling regime but who were not yet prepared to actively oppose it. In September 1989, a group of 14 sociologists, including SAV employees, sent a letter to the President of Czechoslovakia, Gustav Husák, asking him to release the five Slovak dissidents arrested in August.¹⁰⁵ The trial of the Bratislava Five led to the emancipation of the emerging civil society from the official structures

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- 100 The Trial of the So-called Bratislava Five. Documents and recordings from Radio Free Europe. *Personal archive of Vladimír Maňák Jr.* See also JAŠEK, Peter: Posledný politický proces komunistického režimu na Slovensku. Perzekúcie členov bratislavskej päťky na jeseň 1989. *Pamäť národa*, 2014, Vol. 10., No. 3, pp. 33–59; MARUŠIAK, Juraj: Bratislavská päťka. Prejav agónie komunistického režimu. In: BYSTRICKÝ, Valerián – ROGUELOVÁ, Jaroslava et al: *Storočie procesov. Súdy, politika a spoločnosť v moderných dejinách Slovenska*. Veda, Bratislava 2013, pp. 241–258.
- 101 SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa: November 1989 – otvorenie kľukatej cesty k demokracii. In: PEŠEK, Jan – SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa (eds.): *November 1989 na Slovensku*, p. 102
- 102 *VPN 1989–1991. Svedectvá a dokumenty*, p. 36, presentation of S. Szomolányi.
- 103 Ján Čarnogurský's information on the first meeting of the Movement for Civic Freedom's members in Bratislava. Document No. 35, following November 11, 1988. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko*, p. 257.
- 104 OTÁHAL, Milan: *Podíl tvůrčí inteligence na pádu komunismu. Krub nezávislé inteligence*. Doplněk, Brno 1999, p. 75.
- 105 Letter to the President of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from Slovak sociologists. Document No. 53, 7. 9. 1989. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko*, pp. 302–303.

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of the communist regime and its integration regardless of political convictions. With a certain degree of hyperbole, this process can be compared to the importance of the trial against The Plastic People of the Universe¹⁰⁶ for the independent initiatives in the Czech lands, as it integrated various, often contradictory currents of the opposition, which was the origin of the *Declaration of Charter 77* (Prohlášení Charty 77).

Although in this respect the petition was somewhat analogous to the publication of the original *Declaration of Charter 77*, unlike in the Czech lands, this process had still not been completed in the autumn of 1989. At that time, M. Šimečka said *now we have to go up against the communists, not along with them*¹⁰⁷; however, the very day after the declaration of the VPN was first announced, the *Vyhlasenie radových komunistov*¹⁰⁸ (Statement of Ordinary Communists) was made public, with the aim of attracting or at least neutralizing KSS members. However, unlike in Slovakia, there was no need to issue a similar special declaration in the Czech lands. In fact, by then the KSČ members participating in the Civic Forum no longer felt connected to their party.

Historical and Social Expectations of Change in 1989

In addition to the power elites and opposition forces, the third actor – the public itself – cannot be overlooked. The rise of communism caught Slovakia at a time when civil society and its institutions were not consolidated. Society's ability to organize itself was far weaker than in the Czech lands, which enabled the communist party to take control relatively quickly, although there was much less spontaneous support for communism in Slovakia in the 1940s than in its Czech counterpart. This was also confirmed by the results of the last free parliamentary elections before the rise of communism in 1946. More than fifty years of undemocratic development (from 1938), even after brief pauses of political thaw, only exacerbated the atomization of society. As in 1968, in the 1980s and 1990s public pressure to respect human rights and carry out democratic reforms was much weaker than in the Czech lands. On the other hand, Slovak society benefited from the positive consequences of the social measures of the normalization regime in a much more extensive and beneficial way, due to its different economic development (the predominant rural character of the country, the industrialization processes after 1948) and demographic situation (higher birth rate, lower average age of the population). Due to the way the com-

106 The Plastic People of the Universe is a Czech underground band. Formed in 1968, starting in 1970 its performances began to be increasingly restricted. In 1976 all of its members were arrested and faced charges of disorderly conduct. In September 1976 the artistic heads of the band, Ivan Martin Jirous and saxophonist Vlastislav Brabeneč, had criminal charges brought against them. The trial against the band's members contributed to the integration of the hitherto fragmented circles of Czech independent intellectuals and led to the preparation of the introduction to the declaration of Charter 77. For more details see BOLTON, Jonathan: *Worlds of Dissent. Charter 77, The Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture Under Communism*. Cambridge – London, Harvard University Press 2012, pp. 115–151.

107 SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa: *Klukatá cesta Slovenska k demokracii*, p. 30.

108 *Vyhlasenie radových komunistov*. Document No. 74, 21. 11. 1989. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko*, p. 336.

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munist elites after 1948 were constituted, the communist regime was able to rely far more on strong social ties created on the basis of familial, regional, professional, interpersonal, and religious affiliation than in the Czech lands. It was these ties that made it possible to attenuate the adverse impact of the communist regime's repressive policies while alleviating the population's dissatisfaction with the regime. Therefore, they ultimately acted as a stabilizing factor and their presence was tolerated by the normalization regime.

The younger character of the Slovak communist elites, a significant part of which, especially at the middle and lower levels, was instated after the installation of the monopoly of power, only added to the growth of cynicism in Slovak society, though they exhibited a more pragmatic and less ideological attitude, for example, during the normalization purges. The existence of these social networks¹⁰⁹ was not only an important element of the pre-1989 Slovak political system, but also played an important role in shaping the elites after November. Their existence was often a more important factor in the formation of important political parties than the values and orientation of their founders. This was the case, for example, with the VPN, during the creation of which the personal friendships of its founders from the past undoubtedly played a sizable role and vice versa; many intellectuals later became opposed to the movement due to past personal and other grudges that they held against its members.

The beginning of normalization, which coincided with the establishment of the Czechoslovak Federation, offered the Slovak elites the prospect of power and social advancement, as well as the creation of new opportunities to work in state administration, education, culture, academia, etc.¹¹⁰ A unique phenomenon of the normalization regime in the ideological sphere was a specific defensive and conservative, strongly anti-West oriented nationalism. Its aim was to reconcile modernization processes with communist ideology and national traditions and thus legitimize the communist regime.

The ideology of this practically ahistorical nationalism was formulated by Vladimír Mináč foremost in his essays *Tu žije národ* (Here Lives the Nation) and *Dúchanie do pahrieb* (Fanning the Embers). The communist regime placed great emphasis on rural and anti-Western moments in Slovak history, culture, and art, as well as on Slavic and Russophile traditions, which led to the paradoxical symbiosis of communist ideology and the tradition of conservative currents in Slovak thought. This peculiar symbiosis also influenced the form of Slovak nationalism after 1989. Mináč's work deserves attention for his thesis on the Slovak nation as a plebeian nation,¹¹¹ one with no history of its own, and on the basis of which phenomena found not to be in line with the communist interpretation of history could be classified as not Slovak or

109 KUSÁ, Zuzana: Buržoázny pôvod – neprekonateľná stigma? OS, 1998, No. 10, pp. 32–36.

110 For closer analysis see MARUŠIAK, Juraj: Slovenská spoločnosť a normalizácia. OS, January–February 2002, No. 1–2, pp. 11–24; KALINOVÁ, Lenka: *K sociálnym dejinám Československa v letech 1968–1989*. VŠE, Prague 1999; KAPLAN, Karel: *Sociální souvislosti krizí komunistického režimu 1953–1957 a 1968–1975*. ÚSD AV ČR, Prague 1993.

111 MINÁČ, Vladimír: *Dúchanie do pahrieb*. Smena, Bratislava 1970.

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even outright anti-Slovak. This made it possible to identify and bring together the terms “Slovak” and “communist”.

Especially in its normalization phase, the communist regime strove to take advantage of conservative positions, e.g. skepticism towards change, but also the emphasis on the family, which is common for a large part of Slovak society. Slovak society of the “normalization” and post-communist years was characterised by a decidedly ambivalent attitude towards the normalization regime and the weak anchoring of democratic traditions in the political consciousness of the population on the one hand, and a strong rooting of the tradition of political collectivism, statism, and paternalism, on the other.¹¹² This tradition in Slovak society dates back as far as the 19th century, but communism was able to effectively exploit this for its own benefit and become part of the Slovak political tradition.

Concerns about the changes were reinforced by Slovakia’s unsatisfactory economic structure, which was based on a preference for heavy industry and armaments, but also guaranteed the significant material growth of Slovak society in the 1970s and 1980s. Awareness of the vulnerability of this economic structure was already evident in connection with the implementation of the agreements adopted during the Third Follow-up Meeting of representatives of the states participating at the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (1986–1989) in Vienna, which counted on a reduction in arms production, following which the Federal Government of Czechoslovakia issued Resolution 84/88 dated June 26, 1988 to phase down the production of arms and transform the facilities to civil production. Last but not least, the specific course of normalization with milder repression in Slovakia led to far broader segments of society being integrated into the communist regime in Slovakia than in the Czech lands. As a result, the opposition in Slovakia did not have such a social background or such a broad spectrum of potential supporters as in the Czech lands, which is why opposition activities were, in reality, limited to an individual basis until 1988.

Another challenge of 1989 was the unfinished process of Slovak national emancipation and national integration.¹¹³ This was hindered by a lack of the free exchange of information. In fact, in many respects, Slovak society had just entered the phase of modern society and was characterized by considerable fragmentation and regional differentiation. There was no communication between the individual regions of Slovakia. In this way, the Košice and the Bratislava artistic underground came to know of each other’s activities by staying in contact with the centers of alternative culture in the Czech lands, especially Prague. This lack of communication was responsible for the fact that in the first days of the Velvet Revolution (*Sametová revoluce*) the Civic Forum was established in Košice and in several cities in eastern Slovakia instead of the VPN. The regional principle continued to play an important role in political differentiation also after 1989, as evidenced by the results of the parliamentary elections, which show that several political parties had a stable background in particular

112 SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa: *Kľukatá cesta Slovenska k demokracii*, p. 46.

113 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

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regions. Although the issues of human rights and democracy were some of the important topics in the internal political discourse of Slovak society in 1989, they were neither the only, or, at the beginning, the key issue.

An important question that partially united the official elite and the opposition, in addition to the aforementioned Slovak-Hungarian relations, was the question of Slovakia's position in the federation. This issue came to life especially after the official celebration of the anniversary of the establishment of the first Czechoslovakia in autumn 1988, but also in connection with the publication of the draft of the new constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. At the meeting of the Slovak Parliament on October 31, 1989, SNR deputies expressed their opposition to a constitutional law on the process of adopting a new constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, which was devised to regulate all the basic relations between the federation and the national republics in a single constitutional document. The MPs adopted the law under threat of party sanctions.¹¹⁴ The adoption of the constitutions of the national republics was one of the unfulfilled ambitions of the Slovak representatives from the period of the federalization of Czechoslovakia in 1968. Although the Constitutional Act of the Czechoslovak Federation No. 143/1968 Coll. assumed this step would be taken, it was not fulfilled until 1989. For the Czech public, the issue of the republics' constitutions was not pressing because it considered the establishment of the Czechoslovak state in 1918 to be the fulfillment of its constitutional ambitions, whereas it was an important issue for the Slovak public. Therefore, the adoption of a so-called tri-constitution (trojjediná ústava), which would also regulate the situation of the national republics, was considered to be a repeated withdrawal from the original principles of the Czechoslovak Federation in 1968 by the Slovak communists as well.

When the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party Miloš Jakeš presented a draft of the principles of the new Czechoslovak constitution, he did not forgo a change in state symbolism; several articles were published in the Slovak press, especially in *Literárny týždenník* and *Nové slovo*, requiring the restoration of Slovak national symbols. Dissatisfaction with Slovakia's position in the federation was also manifested to some extent in the official press. In January 1989, in a discussion held in the *Literárny týždenník* devoted to the 70th anniversary of the establishment of Czechoslovakia, Pavol Kanis did not rule out the future establishment of an independent Slovakia and he claimed the right to a state as "a nation's natural right". The other participants in the discussion did not oppose this argument. The link between the reform of the Czechoslovak federation and democratization was also stressed by Vladimír Mináč (*There will be no democratic Czechoslovakia without the exact functioning of the federation*) and Ľubomír Feldek (*There is no democracy without federation or federation without democracy*)¹¹⁵. Nevertheless, the increasing political diversity of Slovak intellectuals was reflected in this debate. When Ľ. Feldek, who was a member

114 ŽATKULIAK, Jozef: *Spory o novú ústavu*.

115 Slováci vo federácii. Beseda Literárneho týždenníka k 20. výročiu vzniku federácie. *Literárny týždenník*, 1989, Vol. 2, No. 3 (20. 1. 1989), pp. 12–14.

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of the Communist Party until 1989, but who had gradually fallen into conflict with its leadership and published several statements criticizing it, openly linked the deformation of the federation with the events of August 1968, the supporter of the uncompromising national line Mináč rejected his thesis. On the other hand, the historian Plevza raised the issue of the national constitutions; another writer, Peter Jaroš, also a member of the Communist Party, not only criticized the lack of constitutions of the national republics, but also spoke about the need to legalize informal groups: *We, too, should overcome in ourselves not only the fear of Stalin but also the fear of Novotný's time and perhaps of later eras.*¹¹⁶

On the other hand, the oppositional circles, but also the democratically oriented intellectuals operating within the “official” structures, were discussing the link between the struggle for national rights and democratic demands. Ján Čarnogurský and Hana Ponická contributed to this discourse during the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the death of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik¹¹⁷ on May 7, 1989.¹¹⁸ Likewise, however, the signatories of the *Vyhlásenie k deportáciám Židov zo Slovenska* during the Second World War had previously stated that *anti-Jewish measures and especially the displacement of the Jews from Slovakia were against the principles that we would like to think necessary for the creation of the Slovak future: equality of all regardless of race, tolerance, religious freedom, democracy, legitimacy, love between people.*¹¹⁹ The declaration did not, however, mention the existence of Czechoslovakia.

Ecology was also a subject of public debate, which resulted from the role played by the environmental movement in uniting the political opposition. Questions about the democratic changes themselves began to emerge later than in the Czech lands. After members of the so-called Bratislava Five were arrested in August 1989, they came to the fore. A comparison of the student demonstration in Bratislava on November 16, and the demonstration that took place the day after in Prague might serve to illustrate the different forms of public discourse in Slovakia and the Czech lands. While the students from Prague clearly called for the “end of the one-party government” on their banners, their counterparts in Bratislava were found hesitant to formulate clear political demands. Incidentally, the fact that the unauthorized

116 Slováci vo federácii. Beseda Literárneho týždenníka k 20. výročiu vzniku federácie – pokračovanie. *Literárny týždenník*, 1989, Vol. 2, No. 4 (27. 1. 1989), pp. 12–13. Antonín Novotný (1904–1975) was the first secretary of the Central Committee of the KSČ (1953–1968) and the President of Czechoslovakia (1957–1968). Before 1963 he had rejected the politics of de-Stalinization and enforced repressive politics. Public life was later liberalized, but meanwhile Novotný tried to strengthen his personal power, which was the reason for his departure from the highest position in the KSČ in January 1968.

117 Milan Rastislav Štefánik (1880–1919) was a Slovak astronomer and politician. During the First World War, together with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk (1850–1937), he participated in the creation of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance and Czechoslovak Legions. He was deputy chairman of the exiled Czechoslovak National Council and Minister of War in the first Czechoslovak government (1918–1919).

118 „Vodné delá pod Bradlom. Document No. 44, 7. 5. 1989. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko*, pp. 285–286.

119 *Vyhlásenie podpísaných občanov Slovenska k deportáciám Židov. Document No. 17, October 1987. In: ŽATKULIAK, Jozef – HLAVOVÁ, Viera – SEDLIAKOVÁ, Alžbeta – ŠTEFANSKÝ, Michal (eds.): *November 1989 a Slovensko*, pp. 142–143.*

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demonstration by Bratislava students was not suppressed by the forces of law and order, while the police were seen repeating their ritual from previous gatherings in the case of the authorized one in Prague, may serve as an argument to support the claim that there was greater potential for consensual political change in Slovakia. The fact that communism as an undemocratic system in Slovakia was rejected far less than in the Czech lands is evidenced by the structure of topics in the internal political debate in the late 1980s. The issue of human rights was not foremost in Slovakia in the first half of 1968, or even in 1998, before the elections that marked the departure of Vladimír Mečiar as Prime Minister.¹²⁰

In this way, there is a relatively high continuity of topics in the political discourse before and after 1989. The new subject of discussions about the past before 1989 became questions related to the existence of Slovak and Czech statehood; lesser heard were questions about the communist past, although this was partly also due to the general lack of political freedom. This topic, however, after peaking briefly at the beginning of the 1990s, again faded into the background; in public discourse, attention was devoted far more often to the issues of Czech-Slovak, or Slovak-Hungarian relationships and national statehoods.

Between Internal and External Impulses

One important task is to assess the character of the change that occurred in November 1989, and to identify similarities and differences in both parts of the former common state. As I have already mentioned, the events in Slovakia unfolded more gradually than in the Czech lands and it is here where less radical ruptures and reversals are evident, with the opposition steadily rising up from the underground. There are even discussions to be found as to whether there was a separate revolution in Slovakia or whether it was part of the common Czechoslovakian revolution.¹²¹ However, the truth of the matter is that in the weeks immediately after the suppression of the student demonstration on November 17, 1989 no one was asking this question; it reared its head a few years after the fall of communism. It is true that different subjects resonated in Slovakia than in the Czech lands; Slovak society had to deal with specific problems and had a different structure. Slovak political representation was also different, both for the communist elite and for the emerging (or potential) opposition. Moreover, it must be taken into account that Slovakia was part of a federalized, but at the same time strictly centralized, state. In the conditions of this type of so-called democratic centralism, leading Slovak politicians had only limited impact not only

120 BŮTOROVÁ, Zora – GYÁRFÁŠOVÁ, Oľga – VELŠIČ, Marián: Verejná mienka. In: MESEŽNIKOV, Grigorij – IVANTYŠYN, Michal (eds.): *Slovensko 1998–1999. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti*. IVO, Bratislava 1999, pp. 233–272. Vladimír Mečiar (born 1942) served as Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic (1990) and the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic in the years 1990–1991, 1992–1994, and 1994–1998. Although he started out as being nominated for a function in the VPN movement, as Prime Minister he exhibited authoritarian tendencies.

121 For more details, see ŠŤOVEC, Milan: *Smióza ako politikum alebo „pomlčková vojna“*. Kalligram, Bratislava 1999.

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on events in Czechoslovakia, but also those in Slovakia. The public was aware of this in Slovakia and the Czech lands, as they were too the need for cooperation, and this cooperation as a rule usually worked in November and December 1989. Questions about the organization of Czech-Slovak relations and the completion of the constitutional system were present in the public debate more or less from its very beginning, though they did not play a dominant role. On the other hand, due to the centralist nature of the common state, the changes in Slovakia were to a large extent a response to the course of events in Prague, i.e. the Czech lands. As for the unfinished process of national integration, the question arose as to whether the inhabitants of Slovakia would identify themselves more as citizens of the Czechoslovak Federation, i.e. the common state, or as citizens of Slovakia. However, in the first months after November 17, 1989 the attention of the majority of the Slovak population was undoubtedly focused on the place where the key decisions concerning the future of all of Czechoslovakia (and thus Slovakia), were being made, i.e. Prague and the federal organs.

Ultimately, this was not a new phenomenon in Slovak history. Perhaps in all the modernization processes in the 19th and 20th centuries, or if we go as far back as the Industrial Revolution and up to the construction of the pre-war democratic Czechoslovakia or “socialism with a human face”, but also in the case of the communists’ selective modernization and the advent of two totalitarian regimes in 1938 and 1948, a certain external factor played a significant role. As a rule this was the result of the direct influence of Budapest in the Hungarian state, or the influence of events in Prague, i.e. in the center of Czechoslovakia. In connection with this historian Eubomír Lipták stated that *although Slovakia had never been at the center of the creation of any new social system, and was not the initiator of any major movements that shaped history, it was as a rule very quickly “drawn into” them; however, here, these movements never ripened to the full potential of their classical form (feudalism, the Reformation, free-market capitalism, the dictatorship of the proletariat).*¹²² Hence, in November 1989, instead of a negotiated transformation operating on a consensus between the moderate forces of the camp of power and the moderate components of the opposition (others were not even visible in Slovakia at the time), for which there were realistic expectations in Slovakia, the path of change was laid by a rupture, which was most likely unavoidable in the case of the Czech lands.¹²³ On the other hand, the democratic forces in Slovakia were overall logically oriented mainly towards appropriating the Czech experience. Soon, however, in as early as 1990, it had started to become clear that *the transfer of the Czech political systems, ideals, and goals to Slovak society* sped up the development of Slovakia in some respects, but at the same time it introduced elements of discontinuity and defined it. As in 1968, it could be said that contact with world affairs through the federal center of Slovakia did make many things easier and quicker, but this too meant the

122 LIPTÁK, Eubomír: Niektoré historické aspekty slovenskej otázky (tęzy). *Historický časopis*, 1993, Vol. 41, No. 4, pp. 452–461. Cited according to CHMEL, Rudolf: (ed.): *Slovenská otázka v 20. storočí*. Kalligram, Bratislava 1997, p. 448.

123 SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa: *November 1989 – otvorenie klukatej cesty k demokracii*, p.106.

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*impoverishment of the Prague filter plus an option that might not suit Slovakia's basic needs.*¹²⁴ However, this external factor continued to play an important role as a catalyst for the internal political processes taking place in Slovakia. The refusal to attempt a resurgence of authoritarianism in the 1998 parliamentary elections was also largely influenced by concerns about the possibility of Slovakia finally ceasing to be part of the integration processes in Europe and its international isolation.

Given the situation the Slovak democratic opposition found itself in during the period of normalization, it was only natural that, as in 1968 and during the First Czechoslovak Republic, the reform forces declared in November 1989 were much more supportive of the idea of maintaining a common state and cooperation with the Czech, i.e. federal elites that opposed them. However, it is also true that in the end this orientation hampered their maneuverability and caused their failure after 1992. As in the 1960s, there was dissatisfaction with the “constitutional stopper”, which meant that the Slovak national elites’ ability to satisfy their ambitions was limited. In 1968 the federalization of Czechoslovakia initially alleviated this pressure, but paradoxically this led to the issue of Slovakia’s political emancipation being revived with much greater intensity after the loosening up of the political conditions. During the two decades of “Normalization” (1969–1989) of society relatively viable, national political elites were formed in Slovakia, ones awaiting their chance for self-fulfillment. Unlike in the 1950s and 1960s, they had much better institutional facilities through which to start seeking such opportunities. Unlike in the 1960s, nationalism and the demands for an independent Slovakia were supported by the technological and economic intelligence, not human intelligence. This is not only related to the humanist intellectuals’ conviction of the need for the cooperation of democratic forces, their resistance to nationalism, the manifestations of which were abused at the end of the 1960s to facilitate the beginning of normalization, or the positive perception of Czech culture in Slovakia, and vice versa, but also to the fact that the federalization of the state created such favorable conditions for the development of Slovak national culture that humanist intelligentsia did not perceive the relationship between the Czech and Slovak nations as a relationship between a dominant and a submissive nation. On the other hand, some elites operating in the economic sphere and state administration had completely different practical experience of the functioning of the common state, which did not meet its needs or ambitions. This may explain why nationalist forces showed such intense support for this part of the Slovak intellectual elite. In the period before 1989 a nationalist orientation had been present in the Slovak opposition to the regime and it deliberated in political terms. This applies not only to Ján Čarnogurský, but also to Alexander Dubček’s associates (Hvezdoň Kočtúch, Ivan Laluha) and the emerging opposition within the KSS (e.g. the aforementioned speech by Pavol Kanis in the discussion in *Literárny týždenník*¹²⁵).

124 LIPTÁK, Eubomír: *Niektoré historické aspekty slovenskej otázky*, p. 452.

125 *Slováci vo federácii*, pp. 12–14.

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In the 1990s Slovak nationalism followed the traditions of Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana, HSĽS) to a limited extent.¹²⁶ Concerns about their resurgence, in which the communist authorities, as well as an influential part of the post-November Slovak and Czechoslovak elites, justified their opposition to the opening of the national issue, did not prove to be fully justified. The political forces that had openly declared their intention to continue the tradition of the Slovak People's Party and even the war-time Slovak regime did not become engaged in November 1989 and remained in a marginal position thereafter.

Conclusion: The Nature of the Political Change in Slovakia

The political breakthrough that took place in November 1989 can be described as a revolution, a *coup d'état*, an implosion of the old regime, but also as an evolutionary change, which in its time resembled the so-called negotiated transition in Hungary. Testimony to this assertion about the revolution can be seen not only in the demonstrations in the streets of large cities, but also the size and depth of the changes introduced in November 1989. The consequences of November 1989 were comprehensive changes in ownership relations, the division of power, the individual's status in society, and the international status of the country; from both the point of view of the political system, and ultimately the existence of the state, it was one of the greatest twists in Slovak and Czech history.¹²⁷ However, there are journalists and publicists who claim that November 1989 was the result of an attempt by some of the communist structures (parts of the KSČ and the ŠtB) to remove the then Communist Party leadership. The existence of such attempts could not be credibly proven, but could not be credibly disproven either. Even if we accept the *coup d'état* hypothesis, regardless of the certain staffing continuity of the political elite, which was greater in Slovakia than in the Czech lands, or despite the ability of parts of the old elite operating mainly in the national economy to *transform political capital into economic capital*,¹²⁸ it must be admitted that this attempt got out of hand. Equally acceptable is the paradigm of the implosion of a normalization regime, since there was no real force that could defend a power that was no longer capable of its own reproduction. The legitimacy of the regime was low even in the eyes of a large part of its bearers, the members of the KSČ nomenklatura.¹²⁹ This was due both to the public's rapidly

126 Hlinka's Slovak People's Party was a Slovak conservative Catholic party. It started to form in 1905–1913. Its founder and first leader was the Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka (1864–1938); after his death the Catholic priest Jozef Tiso (1887–1947) became the new party leader. It supported the establishment of Czechoslovakia, but it promoted Slovakia's autonomy, which it gained in 1938. In Slovakia it gained a monopoly, which it strengthened after the creation of the Slovak state (the Slovak Republic) on March 14, 1939. The first Prime Minister of the autonomous Slovakia was the party leader Jozef Tiso, who, subsequently, in 1939–1945 became the President of the Slovak Republic. After 1938, authoritative and fascist tendencies reigned within the ranks of the party, and until the end of the Second World War this party advocated an alliance between Slovakia and Nazi Germany.

127 LIPTÁK, Eubomír: *Miesto novembra 1989 v moderných slovenských dejinách*, p. 64.

128 KUBÍN, Euboš: *Rola politických elit pri zmene režimu*, p. 64.

129 *Ibidem*, pp. 57–58.

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waning social acceptance of the representatives of the communist nomenklatura and the spontaneous revival of market relations in society.¹³⁰ The possibilities of implementation provided by the grey economy or the prospects of the legalization and development of a market economy turned out to be more attractive than working in the communist nomenklatura. This was particularly true for the younger generation of the KSČ nomenklatura. It is worth noting that the change in Slovakia resembled a so-called negotiated transition.¹³¹ Although preconditions for this kind of transformation of the communist system did exist in Slovakia with regard to the presence of reform-oriented individuals in the KSS establishment, it was not carried out, at least in the early stages of the break in November 1989. Instead, a radical rupture occurred. The Round Table in Czechoslovakia was not an impulse to initiate political changes, but the result of the acceptance of the political reality by the more pragmatic part of the Communist Party's leadership. This did not mean, though, the communist regime becoming transparent – for it was opened up from below. Certain elements of the negotiated transaction can only be discussed in the context of Slovakia after the resignation of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the accession of Rudolf Schuster¹³² (chairman of the SNR from November 30, 1989) and Milan Čič (Prime Minister of the Slovak Socialist Republic from December 12, 1989) to leading posts at the end of 1989. The leadership of the KSS, led by Ignác Janák, and Prime Minister Pavol Hrivnák were unable to accept the negotiated transition. Finally, elements of the “negotiated transition” were also present at the federal level, for example in Marián Čalfa's accession to the position of federal Prime Minister and the very existence of the federal “government of national understanding”. This model was reproduced at the level of the national republics. However, Marián Čalfa, originally a Communist Party candidate, soon had to completely break off contacts with the communist sphere if he wanted to stay in political life.

One factor in favor of the negotiated transformation was the pragmatic attitude of some elites of the KSS, the presence of reform-oriented individuals centered especially around the publication *Nové slovo*, and the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the Central Committee of the KSS, but also, when compared to the Czech lands, the greater permeability of the boundaries between “official” and the “unofficial” discourse, especially in the late 1980s. On the other hand, the reform-oriented approach only concerned people who, without external pressures, were unable to reverse power in the leadership of the KSS, which remained in rigidly set until November 1989. The reformed and pragmatically oriented part of the KSS was able to take a strategic initiative inside the party in 1989 and promote the adoption of the reform agenda. In the second half of 1990, unlike in the Czech lands, most members of the KSS were able to be convinced to identify with the nominal break with the communist ideology

130 KALINOVÁ, Lenka: *K sociálním dějinám Československa*, pp. 59–60.

131 SZOMOLÁNYI, Soňa: *November 1989 – otvorenie kľukatej cesty k demokracii*, pp. 92–110.

132 Rudolf Schuster (born 1934) was the mayor of Košice in 1983–1986 and 1994–1999, in 1986–1989 the Chairman of the Regional National Committee of the East Slovak Region. In 1989–1990 he was the Chairman of the SNR; he was later elected President of the Slovak Republic (1999–2004).

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and political heritage of the KSS and to join the social democratic program of the Party of the Democratic Left, which became the successor of the KSS. The revived KSS remained a marginal entity, unlike in the Czech Republic, where the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia has not changed its name and a significant part of its members and some representatives today still adhere to the legacy of the political system from 1948 to 1989.

A characteristic feature of the political reversal in Slovakia was the fact that the “civic” opposition was less involved in implementing changes. This was mainly due to scarcity of numbers, since in Slovakia “civic opposition” implied a history of individuals rather than the history of an independent community. The lack of numbers also made it organizationally weak, lacking a relevant independent organizational structure, which only intensified after the arrest and indictment of five members of the Bratislava Movement for Civic Freedom (the so-called Bratislava Five) in August 1989. In the formation of the civic movement Public Against Violence, which integrated forces dissatisfied with the normalization regime in November 1989, a key role was played by forces such as the sphere of alternative culture, the Bratislava circle of ecologists, and intellectuals who, despite working in official institutions, began to be active in the late 1980s. The protests against the prosecution of the members of the aforementioned Bratislava Five in August and September 1989 were a catalyst which accelerated the integration of the various opposing currents and individuals. The politicization of the Bratislava environmentalist movement and the role of the Bratislava environmentalists in the creation of the VPN in November 1989 caused the ecological agenda to become marginalized in the public debate. Although the Green Party (Strana zelených) had been established in Slovakia and had been elected onto the Slovak National Council in the first free elections, the environmental movement did not regain its previous political strength and its main protagonists before 1989 were no longer involved in the “green” agenda (e.g. Ján Budaj, Peter Tatár, and others), or, after a short stint in politics, they returned to their academic work or work in non-governmental organizations (e.g. Mikuláš Huba), respectively.

The response to the petition *Podněty katolíků k řešení situace věřících občanů v ČSSR*, the so-called Candlelight demonstration in March 1988 and the launch of the samizdat political magazine *Bratislavské listy* displayed the strong organizational and mobilizing potential of the “Christian opposition”. This potential became a crucial factor in the first division of the VPN. By the end of 1989 the Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie, KDH) was starting to formulate itself, though its main initiator and first chairman Ján Čarnogurský became deputy Prime Minister of the federal government of the ČSSR on December 10, 1989, nominated by the VPN. It was the KDH that became the main challenge for the VPN in the June 1990 parliamentary elections, unlike on the Czech side, where the main line of conflict before the elections ran between the Civic Forum and the Communist Party, as the coalition of the Christian Democratic Union, which grouped together the Christian Democratic Union and the post-dissident Christian Democratic Party, made for a drastically weaker opponent.

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Another characteristic element distinguishing the course of socio-political changes in Slovakia from the conditions prevailing in the Czech Republic was the presence of lines of ethnic division. The factor of Slovak-Hungarian relations significantly determined the nature of political discourse in Slovakia and influenced the behavior of the KSČ as well as the opposition. At the same time, the situation of the Hungarian minority was a matter for discussion in several of its aspects, in relation to the status of national minorities, and in terms of the bilateral relations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. These aspects also played an important role in the discussion on the construction of the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros waterworks. At the same time, the involvement of Charter 77 in these issues was widely viewed in a negative light in Slovak society. On the other hand, the process of the political convergence of the Hungarian minority opposition activists and independent initiatives operating within the Slovak mainstream progressed slowly, and cannot be said to have accelerated until the second half of 1989. Be that as it may, the Hungarian minority did not present itself as a homogeneous community between 1988 and 1989, or in the years that followed. Whereas many representatives of the Hungarian minority worked and held high positions in the KSČ, on the other hand, after 1988 its opposition activists were already clearly starting to split into the national oriented followers of Miklós Duray and the liberal oriented ones gathered around K. Tóth and L. Öllös. The latter group was involved in the establishment of the liberal Hungarian Independent Initiative in November 1989, while M. Duray's supporters established two entities in 1990: the nation-oriented *Spoluzitie/Együttélés* (Coexistence) Party and the conservative Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (*Magyar Kereszténydemokrata Mozgalom, MKDM*).

Although Alexander Dubček was a moral and political authority in Slovakia, as was reflected in the support his candidacy for president of the ČSSR received from numerous Slovak political entities in autumn 1989, he and his supporters were unable to generate any relevant political formation. Unlike in Slovakia, the non-communist left-wing parties in the Czech lands were part of the opposition in the early 1970s; the so-called Eurocommunists or former reform communists from 1968 were an important component of Charter 77; some of its signatories signed up for the Independent Socialists' agenda and in early 1989 an independent political organization, the Club for the Socialist Reconstruction "Obroda" was established. The Society for the Study of Democratic Socialism (*Společnost pro studium demokratického socialismu*) was formed in Prague at the beginning of 1989, and already by November 19, 1989, i.e. the beginning of the protests following the suppression of a student demonstration in Prague on November 17, 1989, a renewed Czechoslovak Social Democracy was established on their grounds, one which became part of the Civic Forum. There was no Slovak equivalent of the Czech version of this movement of the so-called New Left, represented by Peter Uhl and his Program of Social Self-Management,¹³³ and no reflection on similar ideas is to be found in the

133 UHL, Petr, et al.: *Program společenské samosprávy*. Index, Köln 1982. For more details on the ideas of Petr Uhl see DALBERG, Dirk Mathias: From class-society to a democracy in permanence. Petr Uhl's "Program of social self-management". *Studia Politica Slovaca*, 2016, Vol. 9, No. 2, pp. 5–23.

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Slovak independent discourse of the 1970s and 1980s. The circle of A. Dubček's supporters along with their ideas failed to exert any strong influence on society, as did the samizdat magazine *Myslienka a čin* (Thought and action), perhaps because of its strong orientation towards the past; the Party of Democratic Socialism (after a few months renamed to the Democratic Socialists' Party /Strana demokratickeho socializmu, later Strana demokratických socialistov/) founded by previous reform communists in 1968 under the leadership of the journalist and former ŠtB officer, Igor Cibula, was short-lived and did not even participate in the first parliamentary elections in June 1990.

The issue of Slovak-Czech coexistence in the dissident discourse was not meaningfully resolved, although it did begin to be revived in connection with the drafting of the new constitution of the ČSSR, which included matters of state symbols and the constitutional structure. However, Slovak-Czech tensions had been present in a latent form throughout the 1980s, owing to the different internal development dynamic in Slovakia and the Czech lands. This was, furthermore, also reflected in the fact that in November 1989, the VPN was established as an independent political force in Bratislava, although in some cities, especially in eastern Slovakia, groups were formed that professed ties to the Civic Forum. Closer contact with the dissident scene in Prague over the one in Bratislava was also typical for Slovakia's second largest city, Košice. It was a matter of course, however, that during the so-called Velvet Revolution two organizationally separate, though closely cooperating, anti-totalitarian movements were formed. It can therefore be stated that at the end of the 1980s, dividing lines were formed in Slovak society, also referred to as lines of conflict, i.e. cleavages, which became fully apparent after the political changes. These divisions also corresponded to the character of the party system in the Slovak Republic and the structure of the first freely elected Slovak National Council and the Federal Assembly of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (Česká a slovenská federatívni republika, ČSFR). It can be stated that the political changes in November 1989 were the result of the Slovak public's reaction to events at the countrywide level, but also to the specific internal dynamics of the political and socio-economic development of Slovakia.

In addition to the civic and nationalist considerations of the political events in Central and Eastern Europe in the late 1980s, social factors also played an important role. The revolutionary discourse and placards on the squares also included slogans demanding a more socially just society. A significant part of people's dissatisfaction, and not only in Poland where the independent anti-communist trade union Solidarity had become the most important opposition force, was due, for example, to the privileges enjoyed by representatives of the ideological and power apparatus of the communist regime, the so-called nomenklatura. This social aspect was also present in Czechoslovakia, where a major role in the decomposition of the structures of the communist regime and its ideological de-legitimization was played not only by mass demonstrations in large cities, but perhaps also to the same extent by the political activation of workers and employees in state enterprises, which was responsible for the inarguable success of the general strike of November 27, 1989. It follows that, in addition to attributes such as "democratic", "civic", and "national", we can also apply

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the attribute “social” to the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989. Along with the demand for freedom and the attempt to redefine the principles of belonging, the requirement of equality was an integral part of the social movements in 1989.

The 1989 revolution rejected the communist system and the government of the KSČ. It was anti-communist, though not anti-socialist or pro-capitalist. Its reinterpretation, which became the *dominant right-wing interpretation of the concepts of freedom, democracy, and human rights*¹³⁴ first in the Czech lands and later in Slovakia in the period of mid-1990 and early 1991, at the same time disqualified and delegitimized leftist values by equating them with authoritarian nationalism or as defending the former regime. It was extremely successful and implemented with the aim of creating a political justification for the realization of the neoliberal socio-economic and political model and the widespread privatization of state-owned enterprises. This meant the demise of the pro-socialist consensus which had prevailed at the end of 1989¹³⁵. On the other hand, in view of the anti-communist nature of the revolution in November 1989, expressions of dissatisfaction with the consequences of the 1991–1992 economic transformation did not reinstate the political forces that identified with the legacy of the pre-November regime.

In November 1989, as in 1968, we can discern the interaction of two factors: the qualitatively different character of Slovak society and the peripheral, secondary position of Slovakia within the common state. Therefore, the events in Slovakia, in comparison with those in the center, occurred with a certain phase shift, and some attempts to implant Czech models into Slovakia even had an inhibitory effect. Meanwhile, however, the attitude of much of the Slovak population towards the reforms in 1968, the perception of normalization in Slovakia, and the attitude toward the changes in 1989 testify to the words of the Slovak sociologist Robert Roško that while *the Soviet model of socialism in the 1960s presents itself as a suit that scratches unbearably and smothers the Czech body, it still somehow fits the Slovak one, i.e. he still extracts some real or supposed benefit from wearing it*.¹³⁶ Although this statement concerned the state of Slovak society at the end of the 1960s, it might also be applicable to the period two decades later.

The inherited elements of Slovak political culture, its conservatism, expressed by a skeptical approach to change, the persistence of rural stereotypes in the political dealings of its mostly urbanized or newly urbanized population, the residue of the authoritarian manner of thinking that the communist regime managed to use to its benefit in Slovakia, but also the unfinished national emancipation, have thus prevented the economic and political transformation from becoming a main topic of internal political discourse in Slovakia. And the same is true for anti-communism,

134 ŠIMEČKA, Martin M.: Intelektuáli neprevzali zodpovednosť, tak musel niekto iný. *Denník N*, November 16, 2014 – see <https://dennikn.sk/3268/intelektuali-neprevzali-zodpovednost-tak-musel-niekto-iny/> (quoted version dated 28. 3. 2020).

135 See KRAPFL, James: *Revolúcia s ľudskou tvárou*; PULLMANN, Michal: *Konec experimentu. Prestavba a pád komunizmu v Československu*. Scriptorium, Praha 2011.

136 ROŠKO, Robert: *Dominantné charakteristiky sociálnej štruktúry Slovenska v 60. rokoch*. Archive of the Institute of Political Science, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava, undated, p. 11.

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and coping with the communist past, although these topics were an integral part of the agenda of the majority of national-democratic and nationalist movements in Central and Eastern Europe, e.g. in the former Yugoslavia and the USSR. However, in the case of Slovakia, nation oriented forces have mostly been defined not as being against communists but rather against the bearers of the liberal-democratic concept of change instead.