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## The Image of the Treaty of Trianon in Slovak Historiography\*

*Obraz traktatu z Trianon w słowackiej historiografii*

### ABSTRACT

The past used to be evaluated differently. The victors usually point out positive sides of the events and the losers typically the negative sides. The peace treaties of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought huge territorial changes. In the age of centralized national states to become a citizen of another state means more considerable changes in life of people than ever before.

The peace treaties after World War I rewrote the map of Central Europe. They created new states which had never existed before. During those stormy times, Hungary suffered the greatest losses. The territory of the country was reduced from 282,870 km<sup>2</sup> to 92,952 km<sup>2</sup>, of which Czechoslovakia gained 61,646 km<sup>2</sup>. The number of inhabitants fell from 18,264,533 to 7,615,117 of which Czechoslovakia gained 3,517,568 persons including 1,066,685 Hungarians. The historical Upper Hungary was renamed to Slovakia and became the part of Czechoslovakia. The process of peacemaking reminded war, even so after the armistice between the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the Czechoslovak Legion Army broke out a war.

These events the Hungarian and Slovak historians estimate completely different. While the Hungarian side focuses mainly on losses, contradictions inside the Czechoslovak diplomatic argument as well as the incorrect interpretation of facts, the Slovak historians are doing the same but from their own point of view: they accuse the Hungarian policy about national minorities, denied the truth of data of census about national minorities, and also criticise the Hungarian efforts to maintain the borders. The general aim of all historical oeuvres is to justify the Czech political acts during the formation of Czechoslovakia with the current frontiers.

This paper constitutes an attempt to present the actual view on the Peace Treaty of Trianon by Slovak historians included in recently published books. I attempted to summarize the main group of opinions represented by the academics; books written by authors

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who are widely acknowledged historians as well as by historians representing the “nationalistic” approach. The paper primarily deals with the Slovak opinion. The Hungarian view is resumed in the last part of the article.

**Key words:** Peace Treaty of Trianon, Slovak historiography, Hungarian historiography

## INTRODUCTION

There are several events which are judged differently by Slovak and by Hungarian historiography, but the subject matter of the Treaty of Trianon is especially prominent even among them. One of the parties talks about a fair peace treaty which enabled it to create the “Czechoslovak Nation State” within the historical and ethnic boundaries which were its due. The other party, however, perceives it as a dictate which resulted in the thousand-year-old Hungarian state losing a significant part of its population and land. The treaty and its consequences have influenced all aspects of Hungarian public life and public thinking ever since, and the event can justly be compared to the division of Poland<sup>1</sup>. With respect to the fact that all these affected the reformed Poland as well, we feel that the Polish public might also be interested in this subject.

The aim of this study is to present the image of Trianon in Slovak historiography with the use of authoritative historiographic writings which have influenced public opinion. The publications have been selected according to the following criteria:

- the year the book was published should not be earlier than 1980,
- its author(s) should be acknowledged specialist(s),
- the publication should have been written for the general public,
- the list should contain works written during the era of socialism as well as after the transition.

Based on the above criteria, we have consulted the following works:

1. Volumes prepared by the Slovak Academy of Sciences:
  - a. *Dejiny Slovenska IV, od konca 19. storočia do roku 1918* [*History of Slovakia IV, from the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century to 1918*]. Veda, Bratislava 1986, 535 pages. The writers of the subchapters on the respective era are Pavel Hapák, Dušan Kováč, Jozef Butvin and Elena Jakešová;

<sup>1</sup> Due to the treaty, the area of the country was reduced from 282,870 km<sup>2</sup> to 92,952 km<sup>2</sup>. From among the successor states, Romania gained 102,813; Czechoslovakia 61,646; the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (from 1926 – Yugoslavia) 20,829; Austria 4,020; and Poland 589 km<sup>2</sup>. The population of Hungary was reduced from 18,264,533 to 7,615,117. 3,727,205 Hungarians found themselves on the other side of the borders.

b. *Dejiny Slovenska V, 1918–1945* [*History of Slovakia V, 1918–1945*]. Veda, Bratislava 1985, 607 pages. The editor-in-chief was M. Kropilák. The names of the writers of the subchapters are not indicated;

2. A book written by a single author:

a. Dušan Kováč: *Dejiny Slovenska* [*History of Slovakia*]. Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Prague 2000, 401 pages. The author is the ex-President of the Slovak Academy of Sciences;

b. Milan S. Ďurica: *Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov* [*The History of Slovakia and the Slovaks*]. Lúč, Bratislava 2003, 831 pages. This book is a readable chronological summary. The writer is a prominent figure of the national side and a university professor. The major part of his activities were performed in Western Europe and America. His book received grave criticism from Dušan Kováč;

3. A monograph: Marian Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko a Trianon* [*The Battle for Slovakia and Trianon*], Národné literárne centrum, Bratislava 1998, 327 pages. The writer was an employee of the Institute of Military History and then of the Institute of Political Science of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

This study aims at presenting the Slovak opinion. It has to be noted, however, that Hungarian historiography is often of a different opinion.

#### THE ACADEMIC HISTORY OF THE STATE

Volume IV of the *History of Slovakia* (*Dejiny Slovenska IV. od konca 19. storočia do roku 1918*) casts the era of the Slovaks spent in the Kingdom of Hungary in a negative light, which was the usual case in Slovak historiography. Its basic idea is national oppression, which escalated even more after the outbreak of World War I (pp. 402–417). The volume presents that, from 1914, there emerged politicians who saw friends in the Russians, and trusted in the czar who promised liberty to Central European Slavs. Czech-Slovak relationships and efforts for unity also strengthened (pp. 420–426).

The idea of the Slovaks' separation from Hungary emerged already at the outbreak of the world war. Its representatives were Slovaks living outside Hungary. The desire for political, cultural and economic self-determination first emerged in the 1914 memorandum of the Slovak League of Pittsburgh (p. 427). In the territory of the Russian Empire, the idea first appeared in the columns of *Echo Słowiańskie* published on 30 August 1914, written by Slovaks residing there (p. 428).

Czech and Slovak immigrants first formulated the plan of an independent Czech Republic and Slovakia in the Cleveland Agreement (22–23

October 1915) (p. 429). Later, the idea gained momentum in France, in the USA, in Russia, and even in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

Slovak politicians in Hungary declared the necessity to form an independent country, composed of Slovakia, Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, at their meeting in Martin (Hung. *Turócszentmárton*) on 24 May 1918 (pp. 457–459). The book does not mention any movement which would have been opposed to this process. It highlights exclusively the antirevolutionary standpoint of the Slovak national party (p. 472). It considers the federalist plans of Mihály Károlyi<sup>2</sup> and Oszkár Jászi<sup>3</sup>, in which they recognized maintaining the territorial integrity of Hungary, being the remnants of oppressive politics, and their Central European plans to be outdated ideas (pp. 473–475).

The Slovak political elite reached a decision about the establishment of the Slovak National Council (SNC), the separation of Slovaks and the formation of Czechoslovakia in a declaration passed at their meeting in Martin on 30 October. Its text contains the term *Slovak nation*, as well as the terms *Czech-Slovak nation* and *the Slovak branch of the unified Czech-Slovak nation*, which “were included with respect to political and foreign policy agreements” (p. 486). “According to unsigned and unverified minutes, at the end of the negotiation [...] the participants declared that after a transitional period, but within ten years at the latest, they would settle the constitutional status of our common nation’s branch which had lived in Hungary from the legitimate Slovak side on the one hand, and, on the other hand, with the participation of Czech, Moravian and Silesian representatives”<sup>4</sup>.

Volume V of the *History of Slovakia (Dejiny Slovenska V, 1918–1945)* deals with the inception of the new state. According to this, movements at the end of the war helped the oppressed nations, including the national movements of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (p. 20). The aim of Czechoslovakia’s foreign policy was to stabilize the power of the bourgeoisie, and act against Central European revolutionary movements. At the end of April 1919, Czechoslovakia launched an attack against the Hungarian Soviet Republic<sup>5</sup> (p. 20).

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<sup>2</sup> Károlyi, Mihály (1875–1955). Liberal-democratic politician, Prime Minister of Hungary between October 1918 and January 1919, then, until March 1919, President of Hungary. From July 1919 he lived in exile.

<sup>3</sup> Jászi, Oszkár (1875–1957). Liberal politician, sociologist, professor. Minister for Minority Affairs in the Károlyi government. From March 1919 he lived in exile.

<sup>4</sup> *Dejiny Slovenska*, vol. 4, p. 487.

<sup>5</sup> The Hungarian Soviet Republic, 21 March – 1 August 1919.

The Slovak-Hungarian demarcation line was drawn on 21 December 1918 taking into account ethnic, economic and geographical principles (pp. 21–22). Nevertheless, there were separatist-irredentist attempts in Hungary and in Slovakia, pointing to the unsolved state of the *question of the Slovaks*. Among these, the book includes Andrej Hlinka's<sup>6</sup> trip to the peace negotiations in Paris (pp. 23–25). It notes that the representatives of the SNC had no clear ideas about the legal system of the country being formed, and they were not familiar with the results of the Pittsburgh and Cleveland meetings, either. The fact that the Czechoslovak Declaration of 28 October<sup>7</sup> and the Declaration in Martin on 30 October<sup>8</sup> were born independently of each other, also points to the unpreparedness of the Slovak political representation (p. 26).

With regard to the economic conditions, the book observes that “industry in Slovakia was in the hands of the Hungarian, Jewish and Austro-Hungarian bourgeois capital. [...] Slovak bourgeoisie held some positions only in the leather, wood and paper industry, and in the banking sector”<sup>9</sup>.

The declaration of the Hungarian Soviet Republic is viewed positively in this book. It suggests that the socialist party in Budapest had a Czech and a Slovak section. Numerous labourers set off to Hungary to help their comrades. The Czechoslovak attack of 16 April was launched to gain, in line with the interests of the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie, the industry of Miskolc and Salgótarján (both these towns remained in Hungary), and to push the border further south by 40 km. The book regards positively also the occupation of some parts of southern and eastern Slovakia by the Hungarian Red Army and the subsequent establishment of the working class's power there. “It considers it brotherly help” that the Slovak Soviet Republic<sup>10</sup> could be born with the aid of the Hungarian Red Army (pp. 43–47).

From a cultural point of view, it perceives the birth of the new state definitely positively. Opportunities for the development of modern cul-

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<sup>6</sup> Hlinka, Andrej (1863–1938). Slovak catholic priest, politician, leader of the populist wing. Gained recognition after the Černová massacre of 1907 when his followers wanted him to consecrate their church but the bishop prevented it, and the police opened fire into the crowd. From the very beginning of the birth of Czechoslovakia, he fought for Slovak autonomy, which evoked the antipathy of centralist Czechoslovak circles.

<sup>7</sup> On 28 October 1918, the National Committee declared the birth of Czechoslovakia in Prague.

<sup>8</sup> On 30 October 1918, the separation of Slovakia from Hungary was declared in a document called the Declaration of the Slovak Nation and, after the news of the events in Prague, also its annexation to Czechoslovakia.

<sup>9</sup> *Dejiny Slovenska*, vol. 5, p. 33.

<sup>10</sup> The Slovak Soviet Republic, 16 June – 7 July 1919, established by the Hungarian example and with help of the Hungarian Red Army.

ture were provided in Slovakia. The state administration and the education system ceased to be the tools of nationalization and, for the first time in history, began to raise intelligentsia that was Slovak in sentiment. The entire society set off on the road of democratization but, due to the bourgeois centralist arrangement of the state, Slovak economic and cultural backwardness lingered on. "The effect of the prolonged, fictive Czechoslovak national unity, and centralist politics gave rise to an autonomist movement, by which it strengthened the ideal and political polarization of the Slovak society"<sup>11</sup>.

#### AN INDEPENDENT AUTHOR'S OPINION

Dušan Kováč's (*Dejiny Slovenska*, Prague 2000) independent history of the country does not principally differ from the main line of Slovak historiography, but he mentions details which escaped the attention of others. He begins his discussion of the events with a description of the national sentiment flaring up, and continues to establish that the war launched against Slavic Serbia and Russia was unpopular among the Slovaks. Although politicians chose passivity, they could feel that it was a decisive moment for the fate of the country (p. 162).

According to Kováč, since opposition could not be formed at home, it was formed abroad, by the memorandum issued by the American Slovak League. Kováč's synthesis, just like the rest of the country's history, emphasizes the Russian offensive at the turn of 1914/15, the establishment of contact between Tomáš G. Masaryk<sup>12</sup> and Robert W. Seton-Watson<sup>13</sup>, Masaryk's memorandum called *Independent Bohemia*, the spread of the idea of Czechoslovakism and the plan of forming a common state. Already in 1915, Masaryk proposed building a Czechoslovak-Serbian corridor<sup>14</sup> to prevent German expansion in the Balkans and to cut them off from their outpost, the Hungarians. Since the first idea was meant for the western allies, the latter

<sup>11</sup> *Dejiny Slovenska*, vol. 5, p. 345.

<sup>12</sup> Masaryk, Tomáš Garrigue (1850–1937). Czech politician, professor, Austrian member of the parliament. Emigrated in 1914, began to fight for the disintegration of the Empire. Member of the Czechoslovak National Council in Paris from 1916. President of the Republic from 1918 to 1935.

<sup>13</sup> Seton-Watson, Robert William, also known as Scotus Viator (1879–1951). Scottish historian and publicist. Turned his attention to Hungary and became a major critic of Hungarian ethnic politics after the Černová massacre. Published several publications in English on this subject.

<sup>14</sup> A band designed for the connection of Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, and for the separation of Hungary from Austria.



communicated a plan of Czechoslovakia led by Romanov to the Russians, although Masaryk "was a Republican Democrat" (pp. 163–166). One of the most important efforts of foreign resistance was to set up a legion. Although by 1917, an army of 70,000 was set up, the western states still did not consider the creation of a Czechoslovak state realistic. Their view changed from the summer of 1918. The breakthrough came about at a conference of oppressed nations in Rome in April 1918 (pp. 166–170).

Kováč starts the description of the domestic opposition with the revolts of soldiers of Slovak origin, who were among the most rebelling ones at the end of the war. Political opposition was complicated by the absence of a natural Slovak national centre.

The plan of the unity of the two nations was first proposed officially by the Czech members of the Austrian imperial parliament in May 1917, joined by Slovak politicians as well. Vavro Šrobár<sup>15</sup>, with his then still federalist ideas, was the most prominent among them (pp. 170–173).

From among the books discussed so far, only Kováč mentions the existence of the Maffia, the secret intelligence agency of the Czech-Slovak National Council (CSNC) (p. 171, 173).

Slovak resistance began only in the spring of 1918, after the Czech resistance movement gained momentum. He cites a passage from the Czechoslovak declaration of independence, known as the Washington Declaration, issued on 18 October. "We demand the right for the Czechs to unite with their Slovak brethren from Slovakia, who were once part of a common country, then torn off from the body of the nation 50 years ago, and the Hungarian's Hungary annexed them to itself, who, due to the indescribably violent and brutal oppression of the conquered races, lost all their rights to rule over anyone but themselves". Then he goes on: "This was the set of arguments regularly used by the Czech-Slovak National Council. Although historically incorrect, but comprehensible for the politicians of the Entente in this form"<sup>16</sup>.

The capitulation of the Monarchy gave impetus for the CSNC to take over power on 28 October in Prague. The participants of the meeting held in Martin two days later were not aware of the fact that the creation of Czech-Slovakia had already been announced. In the accepted Declaration, they demanded unlimited self-determination based on complete indepen-

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<sup>15</sup> Šrobár, Vavro (1867–1950). Physician, professor, Czechoslovak politician. During the winter of 1918/19, plenipotentiary minister of Slovakia.

<sup>16</sup> D. Kováč, *Dejiny Slovenska*, pp. 177–178. The mentioned 50 years relate to the establishment of Dual Monarchy in 1867. The change was only constitutional not territorial.

dence. In the evening, Milan Hodža<sup>17</sup> came from Prague, and informed the remaining representatives at the venue about the events in Prague. The participants procured two changes in the text: they renounced having an independent Slovak representation at the peace negotiations, and expressed their consent with the actual situation (pp. 178–179).

In Prague and in the towns, power could be taken over smoothly. However, military force had to be employed in the Sudetes region. In Slovakia, “the Slovaks joined the Czech-Slovak state spontaneously”. The formulators of the Declaration in Martin dispersed and agitated for the new state. National councils and armed guards were formed all over Slovakia. The autonomy offered by Károlyi was rejected by the SNC. Hungarian armed forces did not respect the state authorities of the new country. In mid-November, the Hungarian army occupied Martin. As part of the Hungarian propaganda, the Eastern Slovak Republic was declared on 11 December (pp. 181–182).

Where Károlyi failed, the Bolsheviks did not. By the summer of 1919, they occupied one third of Slovakia and formed the Slovak Soviet Republic which, however, lasted only for a short time (p. 184).

As for the borders, the northern one was more or less accepted, although several villages came under Poland’s rule. The eastern border in the case of Subcarpathia was an inner border, just like the western one. The Austrian border was determined in the Peace Treaty of Saint Germain also without problems. The question of the Hungarian border, however, was more complex, and negotiations went on for a long time in this respect. “The main problem was that, due to a long-term migration, there was no ethnic border in Hungary, and, due to strong centralization, there was no border at all”. The Peace Treaty of Trianon of 4 June 1920 took into account ethnic, strategic and economic aspects, and created a border which is basically valid even today<sup>18</sup>.

As for the evaluation of the new state, the Czech and the Slovak idea stood in confrontation with each other. While the first one saw a wider realization of Czech statehood in Czechoslovakia, the latter regarded it as a unity of two parts. The constitution speaks of a Czechoslovak nation and a Czechoslovak language. However, the centralist liberal principle did not support the more backward Slovakia, although a wide-range cultural development began (pp. 187–188, 195–200).

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<sup>17</sup> Hodža, Milan (1878–1944). Slovak politician, publicist, professor. From 1905 to 1910, Hungarian member of the parliament. Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia between 1935 and 1938.

<sup>18</sup> D. Kováč, *op. cit.*, p. 185.



## THE OPINION OF A NATIONALLY COMMITTED HISTORIAN

Milan Stanislav Ďurica's (*Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov*, Bratislava 2003) contradictory but straightforward book, full of information, is a summary of the events. It mentions several 19th-century events which had been pre-ludes to the inception of Czechoslovakia. One of the first of these was an article published on 16 March 1870 in *Národné noviny* in Martin, which states: "Our primary goal is our independence" (p. 229). From the 1880s, Slovaks living in the United States started to pursue regular propaganda to expose the conditions in Hungary. On 8 January 1902, the Hungarian Prime Minister submitted a request to the American Embassy to gather information about the state of the "pan-Slavic agitation" in America (p. 257). In a newspaper called *Jednota*, published thereof, the same idea appeared on 3 February 1909 that the goal of the Slovaks was an independent Slovakia (p. 267). During the war, this idea was first written down in the newspaper *Echo Słowiańskie* in Warsaw, then in the memorandum of the American Slovak League (p. 275). From the beginning of 1915, however, different manifestos and meetings expressing an ambition of gaining independence or creating a Czechoslovak state, became more and more frequent. On 15 February in Paris, Masaryk promised a completely independent Slovakia with its centre in Nitra (p. 276). On 11 March, the Czech and Slovak alliance of Moscow supported Czechoslovakism in a manifesto. On 11 April, an independent Slovakia figured in the manifesto of the Slovaks of Saint Petersburg (p. 277). Later, such demands became even more frequent.

Practically, each work on history touches on the revolts and suppression of soldiers of Slovak nationality. It is only Ďurica who mentions that eighteen or maybe more soldiers deserted the Czechoslovak legion formed at the Italian front on 12 June 1918 at Barbarano. Eight of them were captured and executed on that very day (p. 285).

It presents the events of the 30 October Declaration in Martin in a somewhat different light. The loss of the minutes later lead to legal disputes. Since out of the 101 participants, 95 were Evangelical (84% of the Slovaks were Catholics) and 31 were local, the "meeting can hardly be called representative". He calls the modifications effected by Hodža in the evening peremptory. According to the secretary of the SNC, the text disclosed to the public was a forgery. He also mentions that on 30 October Károlyi sent a greeting telegram to the SNC (pp. 288–289).

Ďurica cites the statement of G. Habrman, member of the Czech delegation in Geneva, made on 5 November in the National Committee in Prague. "We were told that we can occupy as much of Slovakia as we want. We were suggested to march until the Danube. As for the borders,

the allies of the Czechoslovak nation are of the opinion that it is up to our own free judgement and decision what borders we want, and our own interest has to be the only decisive circumstance"<sup>19</sup>.

On 13 November, the Czech National Committee co-opted 14 "Slovak representatives" to its 256 members, and transformed itself into a national assembly (p. 292). On 25 December, Jászi welcomed the representatives of the Eastern Slovak Committee (ESC) formed on 4 November. They expressed their wish to create Slovakia independent from the Czech Republic as well as from Hungary. The next day, Hodža signed the agreement about a "temporary demarcation line". On 11 November, in Košice (Hung. *Kassa*), the ESC announced the Slovak Public Republic. Supportive demonstrations took place in several towns. By the end of December, the Czech army eliminated "these desires to express independence" (p. 294).

When Šrobár transferred his seat to Bratislava (Hung. *Pozsony*, Germ. *Pressburg*, historical Slov. *Prešporok*) on 4 February 1919, Ďurica cites an unnamed Czech historian: "It resembled an entry into an occupied, hostile town" (p. 297). Ďurica is one of those who mention "the strike against Šrobár's government", in which labourers "of not only Hungarian nationality" participated, and also the fact that the Czech army opened fire into the crowd. Eight people were killed, more than 22 injured (p. 298).

Ďurica continues as follows: "It soon became evident that the intention to reconstitute Great Hungary was also behind the mottos of the Hungarian Bolsheviks, [...]"<sup>20</sup>. He cites a document issued by the Council of State in Prague in 1919, according to which "Slovakia was annexed to the Czechoslovak state as a consequence of the occupation of the Czech defence forces"<sup>21</sup>. He views the northern military campaign of the Hungarian Soviet Republic negatively. He lists several cases of casualties, but he cites a Czech officer's recollections of the occupation of Košice, when "The proletariat and the Jews welcomed the Red Army with delirious cheers and enthusiasm"<sup>22</sup>. Milan S. Ďurica's image of Czechoslovakia also differs from that of the above authors'. In the first period, he mentions several complaints with respect to the despotism of Czech officials, negation of the separateness of the Slovak nation and language, Czech atheism and the establishment of an independent Czechoslovak church. He mentions, for example, Hlinka's open, unanswered letter of 22 August 1919 to the Prime Minister, in which he states that, in his opinion, the Czech government uses colonial methods in Slovakia (pp. 306–307). An article in the

<sup>19</sup> M.S. Ďurica, *Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov*, p. 291.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 299.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 301.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 303.

above mentioned American *Jednota* on 22 October notes that “the current Slovak autonomy is not only not useful, but is even harmful” (p. 309).

After the modification of the constitution in February 1920, Czechoslovak became the official language (p. 312). On 10 June, the House of Representatives unanimously rejected the proposal according to which the Pittsburgh Agreement should form part of the constitution (p. 314).

Đurica mentions several times that, during labourers’ unrests, the police opened fire into the crowd at several places, which resulted in several casualties. On 10 October 1920, Czech soldiers opened fire at the meeting of the Slovak National Party in Námestovo (Hung. *Námesztó*), which left two people dead (p. 315).

The few events of economic character mentioned include: in spite of Czechoslovakia “having inherited” 70% of the Empire’s industry, the new state fell into a crisis, which was felt especially in Slovakia (pp. 321–322).

#### A VOLUMINOUS MONOGRAPH

Marian Hronský’s monograph (*Boj o Slovensko a Trianon*, Bratislava 1998) deals exclusively with the events of 1918 to 1920, not with earlier events which led to the peace treaty, nor with the assessment of the situation in Czechoslovakia. Already in the introduction, he states: even in today’s Hungarian historiographical works, it is a frequent opinion that Hungary has lost regions and population, and that *Hungary has been wronged*. “On the contrary, Trianon is the consequence of the purposeful denationalizing policy of the Hungarian governments during the era of dualism, which led not only to national liberation fights of the oppressed nations and ethnicities of the semifeudal and antidemocratic state, but also to the disintegration of the entire Hungary”<sup>23</sup>.

With the outbreak of the war, the ruling circles in Hungary wanted to materialize their ambitions of dominating and strengthening their internal reign. Although they welcomed the death of the heir to the throne, the Hungarian press incited anti-Serbian sentiments, and the ruling class called for revenge. “István Tisza<sup>24</sup> was not a pacifist”. As soon as he became certain of Germany’s support and of the neutrality of the Romanians, he plunged into a military adventure with all his might. It was at this time that Hungarian chauvinism was at its height (pp. 15–16).

<sup>23</sup> M. Hronský, *Boj o Slovensko a Trianon*, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> Tisza, István (1861–1918). Politician, member of the Hungarian Academy of Science, member of the board of trustees of several companies. Two-time Prime Minister of Hungary (1903–1905, 1913–1917).

For the Slovaks, the death of the heir to the throne meant an end to their hopes to improve their own fate within the Empire. Polish orientation had little chance, and the events of 1917 ruled out the traditional ally, Russia. The only alternative was Czech-Slovak union (p. 17, 21). Nevertheless, the official Slovak politicians waited (p. 24). They decided to act only in October 1918 (pp. 36–51).

The subsequent events are described in detail by Hronský. In October–November 1918, spontaneous riots broke out, initiated partly by the population, partly by the soldiers having arrived home. The latter often acted under the influence of alcohol, and often looted. All this was primarily directed against the “direct exploiters”. “Attacks against the upper class and the wealthy classes were, in the disastrous social situation of the time, logical, direct and very concrete consequences of the illusory idea of absolute freedom”<sup>25</sup>.

The development of the Czech and the Slovak relations, as seen above, meant a fundamental problem. Based on the minutes of its 31 October meeting, the SNC was committed to the union, but it contained that the relations should be settled “in ten years, at the latest” (pp. 66–68).

Czech-Slovak relations were not free of problems even in the beginning. Although Prague welcomed the Martin Declaration, it only wanted a power centre and was against forming dualism, even from foreign policy aspects (pp. 82–83). On 14 November, the revolutionary national assembly was formed with 256 members, joined by 41 (later 53) Slovak representatives. Decision was made about them in Prague, and the majority of them included Czechoslovakist Slovaks, or even persons of Czech nationality. Already on 16 November, the National Assembly decided that all the competences of the SNC would be transferred on them (pp. 84–86). “It is evident that Czech politics needed Slovakia primarily for the reason that they could present a project of a viable *Czechoslovak* nation state to the world with an artificially created, fictive Czechoslovak nation of nine million against the 3.5 million Sudete Germans”<sup>26</sup>. Power positions were cleared on 20 January 1919 when Šrobár dissolved the SNC (p. 94).

Károlyi’s government was trying to preserve the territorial unity of Hungary to the very end. Based on Point 17 of the Ceasefire of Belgrade (7 November), according to which the Entente did not interfere with the internal affairs of the country, he still saw a chance. Hungarian national councils were formed in the so-called *Upper Hungary*<sup>27</sup> and, on 13 Novem-

<sup>25</sup> M. Hronský, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 92–93.

<sup>27</sup> The historical designation of Slovakia.

ber, mobilization was ordered there too, against which the SNC strongly protested. Károlyi trusted in the opposing interests of the great powers, and in the possibility that the ceasefire agreement would not draw a demarcation line in the north. Budapest could rely on the half-assimilated Slovak proletariat and on the ESC. It launched an enormous propaganda in the region for the interests of the Hungarians against the Czechs. It reasoned to the other countries that it could keep revolutions under control. The goal was a referendum (pp. 103–108).

He cites the reasons for Hodža's negotiations in Budapest on 1 December by a participant, according to whom Hodža wanted to achieve "that the Hungarian soldiers would leave Slovakia". The border would have corresponded to the earlier border of the Slovak Region, which would have ensured limited autonomy. Hodža regarded the specified borderline as a "temporary" one, while Károlyi regarded it as "final". One of the points of the agreement was the first emergence of *reciprocity*: the SNC would guarantee the same rights to the Hungarian minority as Hungary would to the Slovak one. Šrobár criticized Hodža for the negotiations (pp. 113–121).

On 3 December in Switzerland, the Czechoslovak delegation managed to achieve a borderline which was more suitable for them, and which followed the flow of the Danube and the Ipoly rivers. Although Hodža's negotiations were criticized by Prague as well as by Paris because he developed diplomatic contacts with a conquered country, they still helped a rapid evacuation of Slovakia (pp. 122–126). The Czech-Slovak military occupation of Slovakia lasted from the first days of November to 20 January 1919. In spite of several gunfights, fought at times even with the intruding Polish forces, "the whole mission took place more smoothly than planned" (p. 147).

Marian Hronský admits that the new state inherited 70% of the Monarchy's industry, of which Slovakia gained 20%, and Slovakia was one of the most industrialized regions of Hungary. Nevertheless, while the Czech part of the country was industrial-agricultural, Slovakia had an agricultural-industrial, in several places exclusively agricultural, character. Czechoslovakia's "industry fell apart during 1918/19, the industry had lost its receiving markets, raw material deposits, a huge duty-free area, access to the sea and to the countries of southern and south-eastern Europe"<sup>28</sup>.

The population of Bratislava and the Hungarian population did not want to put up with the new state power. Due to the Hungarian nationalist demonstration of 12 February 1919, fire was opened into the crowd,

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<sup>28</sup> M. Hronský, *op cit.*, p. 152.

and six people were killed. A general anti-Czechoslovak strike organized by German-Hungarian social democrats soon expanded. That is when several Hungarian public servants were dismissed. "The turn after the war took the Hungarian-nationality population of Slovakia by surprise, for till then, it regarded themselves as a privileged nation. It did not agree with the inception of the new state which it had to become part of. A very tense situation developed among the population of Hungarian nationality in southern Slovakia, who had previously taken the Czechoslovak army apathetically or even with relief. It was because they regarded the Czechoslovak legionaries led by Italian officers in Italian uniform as Entente forces. However, they soon realized the actual state of affairs, and they were reluctant to admit the fact, and to put up with it, that they had become citizens of Czechoslovakia and were to remain ones. In spite of the fact that the Hungarian society was layered socially as well as ideologically, at that moment all of them were permeated with the feeling that the world had fallen apart and they were losing their age-long traditions, values and privileges. Mainly due to their deep-rooted feeling of superiority over the Slovaks, they could not imagine at all that the management of public affairs was to be in someone else's hand from then on. The Hungarians' hatred, kindled also by propaganda in Budapest, was directed first against the Czechs and the Czechoslovak army, in whom they saw occupiers, oppressors and enemy. [...] Hungarian resistance, which had been passive till then, turned into active resistance almost overnight, whirling not only the south but also a significant part of Eastern Slovakia"<sup>29</sup>. What Hronský meant by 'active resistance', he did not specify.

The government of Hungary did not give up its intention to regain Slovakia even then. It introduced Article XXX about the autonomy of Slovakia as an obvious *provocation* (p. 156).

As for the question of the borders, "the apparent goal of the Czech political representation was the achievement of the Bohemian and Moravian historical borders [...]". Šrobár announced already on 18 November 1918 that Czech expectations had to be justified from "geographical, ethnic, economic, strategic and political" points of view. At this negotiation, a statement was voiced that the Entente promised the Danube to Czechoslovakia up to Vác (p. 157).

The Czechoslovak delegation also tried to prepare for the peace negotiations with the best documentation possible. The starting point was that Slovakia was *an integral part* of Czechoslovakia; to retain the *historical*

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 156.



*Hungarian border* in the north, and to supplement the *natural right to self-determination by geographical, ethnic, transportation and strategic* demands in the south. They had to argue as follows: 1. Due to aggressive Hungarianization, they had to let, especially the Hungarians living in town centres, be absorbed by the Slovak environment; 2. When occupying certain areas with a Hungarian majority, they had to argue that the same number of Slovaks remained in Hungary; 3. The demanded area formed a single geographical region; 4. Czech-Slovakia would be a democratic state, ensuring ethnic rights to Hungarians and Germans (pp. 159–160).

At this time, the question of the demarcation line was still open. Based on the Czechoslovak arguments, important west-east railway hubs remained on the Hungarian side. The requested area was the side of the Danube until the town of Vác, then the mountains of Nógrád, the highest points of the Mátra and the Bükk mountains. Based on this border, 500,000 of the three million Slovaks would still remain in Hungary<sup>30</sup>. Against the offset for the eventual loss of the Great Rye Island (Hung. *Csallóköz*, Slov. *Žitný ostrov*)<sup>31</sup> they argued that the Danube formed a natural boundary; the Little Danube dried up; the Great Rye Island was a natural and single economic background of Bratislava and Komárno (Hung. *Komárom*); it was a fertile area; its population would rather belong where Bratislava and Komárno did. Masaryk was one of those who wanted fewer Hungarians, but recognized the Yugoslav corridor from 1915 itself (pp. 160–162).

European powers took a decision about the new demarcation line around 15–16 February, approving the maximal Czech-Slovak demands. The rivalry of the Italian-French leaders of the Czech-Slovak army also played a role in its determination. In spite of the new state having been born with the aid of the French, its army was led by an Italian general until mid-February. When it came directly under the Entente supreme command of Foch, they managed to achieve a more favourable demarcation line (pp. 163–165).

In March, “the *new direction* of Hungary’s regional integrity became the solution to Hungary’s regional integrity with the Soviet alternative”<sup>32</sup>. Czechoslovakia faced a serious challenge, for “with respect to the number of soldiers, the Czech-Slovak army outnumbered the Hungarian Red Army at the Slovak front, but in terms of their equipment, it fell behind

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<sup>30</sup> Based on the 1920 resp. 1921 census, there were 141,877 people of Slovak nationality in Hungary and 650,597 people of Hungarian nationality in Slovakia.

<sup>31</sup> Even today, the area between Bratislava and Komárno is inhabited mostly by Hungarians. Its area is 1,615 km<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> M. Hronský, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

the latter which was armed with the latest equipment"<sup>33</sup>. By 10 May, they managed to reach the demarcation line, and pass it at some places. On 19 May, the Red Army started a counter-attack. The reason behind its success was *the demoralization of the Czechoslovak army, a lack of military spirit and the hostile behaviour of the Hungarian population*. Moreover, an anti-war attitude, antimilitarism, the lack of discipline, the low authority of the former Austro-Hungarian officers, and the close ties of the Italian officers leading the army with the Hungarian nobility, also played their role (pp. 170–172).

In connection with the inception of the Hungarian Soviet Republic and the Red Army, Hronský emphasizes national feeling. The Bolshevik leadership "decided for aggression against Czech-Slovakia, the pretext was that the Czech-Slovak army had passed the [...] demarcation line"<sup>34</sup>. "The Red soldiers, along with the local nationalists, started to persecute the Slovak population who had attained national awareness, but also the simple farmers and labourers". "On 16 June 1919, a Slovak Soviet Republic was declared in Prešov (Hung. *Eperjes*), which was understood as an obvious denial of the Czech-Slovak sovereignty of Slovakia"<sup>35</sup>. He evaluates the final phase also from this aspect: after the list calling for pullout, "a turn came about in the army, since mostly only one single reason connected the soldiers to the Red Army: the materialization of their national goals, the acquisition of Slovakia, the so-called Upper Hungary". Hronský admits that "the Red Army was pulled out to the line determined by the Entente in complete peace..." (pp. 182–183).

The author compares the peace negotiations in Paris to the congresses in Vienna and Berlin. He describes the conflict between the European powers, but also the personal differences in the opinions of the Czechoslovak delegation. "E. Beneš became [...] the brain and head of the preparations for the peace negotiations"<sup>36</sup>. Retention of the Czech historical borders and the acquisition of Subcarpathia were no longer a problem, but the question of the Teschen, the corridor and the Hungarian border were. The Czech as well as the Polish politicians wanted to achieve a referendum. With respect to Orava (Hung. *Árva*) and Spiš (Hung. *Szepes*), the American Slovaks wanted to "retain the regional integrity of Slovakia" (pp. 210–211).

In the question of the borders, besides the demand for the southern banks of the Danube and the Ipoly, he calls attention to the acquisition of the railways (p. 215). The council of the allies made a decision that the

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 168.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 173.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 180.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 204.

“border stretched to the east of the Danube, approximately in the centre of the region inhabited by both Slovaks and Hungarians”<sup>37</sup>.

Before the negotiations about a direct Hungarian peace agreement, the Hungarians had, in Hronský’s words, rosy ideas. The Hungarian earls tried to astonish the peace conference with their language skills, eloquence and diplomatic self-control (p. 238). The Hungarian delegation was led by Pál Teleki<sup>38</sup> who, in spite of being an aristocrat, had immense energy for work, and was fluent in three to four Western European languages. He offered his talents “to the service of the notion of the Hungarian state” (p. 239). The spiritual leader of the delegation was Albert Apponyi<sup>39</sup>, an enthusiastic fan of Hungarianization, who was one of the aristocrats who raised a geographical demand against Serbia (pp. 240–241).

The Hungarians drew up 346 drafts on 4,000 pages with 100 maps. The contents of these contradicted reality at several instances. How can one argue with the exceptionality of the ethnic law when it is not implemented in practice? How can it be that out of the 419 representatives only 5 were ethnic? Hungarian memoirs can be summarized in four points: 1. Retention of complete integrity; 2. Referendum in the regions to be detached; 3. Modification of the borders without a referendum; 4. Cultural, economic and transport concessions in the regions to be detached. Hungarian arguments were based on the thousand-year-long historical-cultural tradition, and Great Moravia was only an “episode”. However, Hungarian materials kept quiet about one important fact which figured among the accusations of the Entente as well: the Hungarians’ role in the outbreak of the war. The delegation raised such arguments in spite of the fact that the Supreme Council made a decision about the integrity of Hungary already on 5 February 1919 and about the final Slovak-Hungarian border on 12 June. The decision was based on the principle of balance: the same number of Slovaks should remain in Hungarian territory as the number of Hungarians in the Slovak one; the border was determined and supported not exclusively by ethnic or geographical, but also by economic, natural legal, historical, transport and other geopolitical arguments (pp. 241–248).

Hronský considers it to be an unfortunate decision that Apponyi, known for his school laws and pro-Germanism, became the leader of the

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 217.

<sup>38</sup> Teleki, Pál (1879–1941). Politician, geographer, professor, member of the Hungarian Academy of Science. Two-time Prime Minister of Hungary (1920–1921, 1939–1941).

<sup>39</sup> Apponyi, Albert (1846–1933). Landlord, conservative politician, minister, member of Hungarian Academy of Science also well-known about his rhetorical and language skills. Introduced of the school law named after him. During the peace treaty, the leader of the Hungarian delegation.

Hungarian delegation to Paris. The earl wanted to prove the complexity of the ethnic question by Teleki's tendentious maps, and he distributed further 98 memorandums, which surprised even the Slovak delegation.

Hronský evaluates it as follows: the written information must have definitely astonished the participants of the conference when they saw the audaciousness and absurdity of the Hungarian fictions. That is how his contemporaries felt as well. Today's historians see the explanation in the Hungarians' awareness of their mission in world history (pp. 253–259).

The Slovak delegation was also well prepared for the Hungarian counterarguments. To Hungary's thousand-year-old history, it replied that, during this period, the country was divided several times<sup>40</sup>, and that law could not be based on unlawfulness. To the principle of geographical unity, they replied that, if it was to be true, why did they want to annex part of Serbia to Hungary, and why could the Carpathians not be the natural northern border of Slovakia? Finally, if the river Lajta could be a natural border, why the river Tisza was not? As for economic unity, the Slovak party denied it by saying that the seasonal jobs of the Slovaks in the Great Hungarian Plains<sup>41</sup> were only evidence to the fact that they could not find work at home. To cultural superiority, they reacted by observing that it was because of Apponyi's school laws that only a few Slovaks were literate. The borderline proposed by the Hungarian delegation was rejected by the other party by saying that Hungarian statistics were not accurate, "Hungarians had colonized southern and eastern Slovakia gradually."

The Hungarian delegation tried hard to earn France's goodwill by economic agreements, than tried to retain at least the Great Rye Island. Without that, however, Slovakia "would not have been viable". Until April 1920, the peace conference examined each Hungarian argument, so Hungarian views which do not admit their own mistakes are not justified. Hronský repeats that the peace treaty applied the principle of "balance", half a million Hungarians and four hundred thousand Slovaks remained on the other side of the border (pp. 260–262). One of the positive outcomes of the Trianon Treaty was that Hungary could finally become independent of Austria, and the Hungarians' great dream of a nation state could become materialized (p. 276).

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<sup>40</sup> The central Hungary was occupied by Osman Turks for a century and half, the southern border line and from the Turkish times administratively independent Transylvania were reunite to the state during the 1870s.

<sup>41</sup> Slovaks used to regularly go and take part in harvest in southern Hungary.

## CONCLUSION

As we have pointed out in the introduction, Slovak and Hungarian historiography conveys a principally different image of the Treaty of Trianon. The Slovak viewpoint, in confrontation with the Hungarian one, can be summarized as follows:

It regards the disintegration of multiethnic historical Hungary as a historical necessity. When justifying separation, practically all literature points to national oppression and the nations' right to self-determination. Even the Hungarian historians admit that there really was national oppression at the turn of the century.

Slovak historiography and public opinion do not connect the formation of the borders to the time of signing the Treaty of Trianon, but regard them as fixed generally from around December 1918. Since the acquisition of the region and the transfer of state administration took months, it already presents this period as that of fights against Hungarian irredentism. While Hungarian public is of the opinion that, before signing the peace agreement on 4 June 1920, a better borderline could have been achieved by employing military force or more tactful diplomacy, the possibility of a modification does not even occur to other party.

The Slovak party regards the borders not only as given, but as ones beyond dispute, and also the best possible ones. However, it admits that not only ethnic, but also strategic, economic and transport purposes played a role in their determination. On the contrary, it is still a painful fact even today on the other side of the border that millions of Hungarians have faced the fate of a minority.

In Hungarian public opinion, Mihály Károlyi is remembered as a pacifist politician. Contrarily, Slovak post-1989 publications emphasize that Károlyi's government also took military action against Czechoslovakia. Likewise contradictory are views on the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Hungarian public opinion regards republican rule as a period suppressing national sentiments. On the other hand, publications after the transition see, instead of the previous, laxer Marxist viewpoint, unambiguously conquering and irredentist intentions in the Soviet Republic's fights. There is a significant difference also in the judgement of joining the war. In Slovak historiography, Hungary is seen as attending to the German interests, István Tisza as one of the leading figures of military incitement, and the country raised geographical demands to Serbia. Hungarian historiography denies all these.

With the birth of Czechoslovakia, a state was formed which had never existed before. Instinctive protests against it are generally described as

a demonstration of Hungarian chauvinism. Interestingly, it is the “national” historiographical party which reports the existence of Slovak opposition, and sees it as a fight against Czechoslovakism.

Slovak historiography mentions certain events and facts only briefly, or keeps silent about them. These include, for instance, the existence of the Maffia, the Czechoslovak intelligence agency, during the war. This applies also to the Hungarian and Slovak cases of protests in Upper Hungary/Slovakia.

Czechoslovak propaganda, just like the Hungarian one, tried to win the politicians of the Entente countries, and public opinion therein, for their cause. However, while Slovak historiography condemns the Hungarian efforts, it supports the identical Czechoslovak ones.

Czechoslovak arguments for the creation of Czechoslovakia, and Hungarian ones for retaining the integrity of Hungary, are identical in some points. They often refer to historical traditions. The Czech delegation does it with the Great Moravian Empire which existed between 833 and 907, while it regards the Hungarian reference to a thousand-year-old borders to be anachronistic. However, it is sympathetic to the fact that Czech politicians, also referring to thousand-year-old Czech borders, were not willing to give any concessions in the case of German population. This was valid also in Slovakia when determining the Czechoslovak-Polish borderline. It presents the temporary occupations and legal changes of state in the history of Hungary as breaks in its historical continuity. It accepts the incidentally incorrect Czechoslovak arguments sympathetically.

In the given historical situation, it accepts the argument of the Czech delegation based on a unified Czechoslovak nation and their denial of the separateness of the Slovaks.

Finally, the comparison of the economic possibilities of the successor states also differs. While the Hungarian side naturally focuses on the losses, the Slovak side regrets losing the receiving markets of the Czech industry.

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## STRESZCZENIE

Przeszłość zwykle się oceniać w różny sposób. Zwycięzcy zazwyczaj wskazują pozytywne strony zdarzeń, a przegrani z reguły skupiają się na ich negatywnych aspektach. XX-wieczne traktaty pokojowe niosły za sobą ogromne zmiany terytorialne. W czasach scentralizowanych państw narodowych uzyskanie obywatelstwa innego państwa oznaczało bardziej znaczące zmiany w życiu ludzi, niż miało to miejsce kiedykolwiek wcześniej.

Traktaty pokojowe kończące I wojnę światową na nowo nakreśliły mapę Europy Środkowej. Doprowadziły do powstania nowych państw, które nie istniały nigdy wcześniej. W tym burzliwym okresie Węgry poniosły największe straty. Terytorium państwa uległo zmniejszeniu z 282 870 km<sup>2</sup> do 92 952 km<sup>2</sup>, z czego Czechosłowacja pozyskała 61 646 km<sup>2</sup>. Liczba mieszkańców spadła z 18 264 533 do 7 615 117, przy czym na terytorium Czechosłowacji przeszło 3 517 568 osób (wliczając w to 1 066 685 Węgrów). Historyczne Górne Węgry (węg. Felvidék) zostały przemianowane na Słowację i stały się częścią Czechosłowacji. Proces pokojowy przypominał stan wojny, bo nawet po wprowadzeniu zawieszenia broni doszło do wybuchu walk między Węgierską Republiką Rad a Legionem Czechosłowackim (Československé legie).

Powyższe wydarzenia są oceniane w zupełnie odmienny sposób przez historyków węgierskich i słowackich. Podczas gdy strona węgierska skupia się głównie na poniesionych stratach, wskazywaniu sprzeczności w czechosłowackiej argumentacji praktykowanej w dyplomacji, jak i niepoprawnej interpretacji faktów, historycy słowaccy robią to samo, tyle że z ich perspektywy: oskarżają węgierską politykę w sprawie mniejszości narodowych, negującą prawdziwość danych ze spisów mniejszości narodowych, jak również krytykują węgierskie wysiłki zmierzające do utrzymania granic (*status quo ante*). Zasadniczym celem ich historiografii jest uzasadnienie czeskich działań politycznych w czasie powstawania Czechosłowacji w (do niedawna) aktualnych granicach.

W artykule podjęto próbę przedstawienia współczesnych poglądów na traktat pokojowy w Trianon, wyrażanych przez słowackich historyków w ostatnio opublikowanych syntezach. Starłem się podsumować główne poglądy prezentowane zarówno przez poszczególnych historyków akademickich, których opinie są szeroko akceptowane, jak i badaczy o nastawieniu „nacjonalistycznym”. Publikacja w pierwszej kolejności dotyczy poglądów historiografii słowackiej. Węgierski punkt widzenia został streszczony w ostatniej części artykułu.

**Słowa kluczowe:** traktat w Trianon, słowacka historiografia, węgierska historiografia

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Zsolt Horbulák (1972) – Slovak historian and economist of Hungarian nationality. He graduated from Comenius University with a degree in history and Hungarian language (1996), and later from the University of Economics (2003), both in Bratislava, Slovakia. He finished the doctoral studies in history at Comenius University (2006). Zsolt Horbulák has already published two monographs and co-authored two other books. At present time, he works as an assistant professor at the University of Alexander Dubček in Trenčín, Slovakia.