

# **Slovakia: Young Nation State**

# Problems of Slovak nation-building before 1918

- Slovakia part of Hungary.
- Starting point of nation-building in 19th century: response to Magyarization.
- Slow codification of Slovak language.
- Religious heterogeneity – approx. 1/3 of Slovaks were Lutherans and 2/3 Catholics.
- Unclear south border of Slovakia.



# Different situation of Slovaks in Hungary: comparison with Czechs in Austria

- In 1848 (Springtime nations) Slovaks political elite adopted „Demands of the Slovak nation“ calling for the establishment of Slovak public schools and some symbols of autonomy. The Slovaks leaders decided to support the Habsburg monarchy against the Magyars. Magyars revolted against Vienna and Slovaks were welcome as an ally of Vienna.
- Slovaks got only small concession after the defeat of Magyars (three public Slovak secondary schools and *Matica slovenská*).
- Big critical juncture: 1867 „Ausgleich“ (Austro-Hungarian Compromise) – revitalisation of Magyarization.
- Officially state doctrine: **unified Hungarian nation**.
- Hungarian government supported linguistic and cultural Magyarization – politics of assimilation of minorities. Hungarian became the only official language in all institutions and offices.

# Impact of Magyarization

- Large impact on the educated classes of Slovak population.
- 1918: approx. 2 million ethnic Slovaks BUT the number of nationally strongly conscious Slovaks was only between five hundred and one thousand people.
- Magyarization was relatively less successful among peasants – majority of peasants were illiterate (peasants: more than 60 % of the population in the Slovakia).
- Hungarians (or Germans) were the majority in almost all bigger towns in the area of contemporary Slovakia; the impact: Slovak business was weak.
- Underdeveloped Slovak nation movement.

# Impact of undemocratic character before 1918

- Austrian political system was liberal (positive environment for the Czech national revival).
- Hungary: aristocracy kept their political and economical privileges.
- Majority of the population was excluded from political life: less than 7 % of the people were allowed to vote before 1918 - high property census and literacy qualification.
- The Hungarian elections: falsifying and frauds practices (through state administration), corruption of voters was also frequent.
- Hungary before 1918: competitive oligarchy (term of Robert Dahl).
- Unfavourable conditions for creation of democratic tradition and political culture after 1918 > impact mainly in the period of Slovak state after 1939, and even after 1989.

# Slovakia in the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938)

- The Czechoslovak Republic introduced universal suffrage for men and women, open possibilities for political participation, fully competitive elections etc.
- Strong positive effect of the First Republic: education and culture sphera:

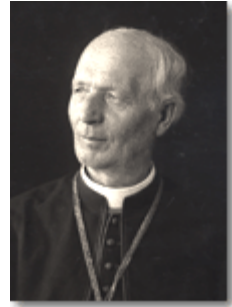
1918: Slovakia had only 429 Slovak primary schools (40 000 children, rest attending Hungarian schools) and no secondary schools and universities.

1933: Slovakia had approx. 4 160 Slovak primary schools (with approx. 560 000 children), more than 200 secondary schools and three universities (official teaching language was „Czechoslovak“ language).

- Literacy increased to 94 %.
- Negative impact: stagnation of Slovak indrustry and Slovakia remained predominantly agricultural country.



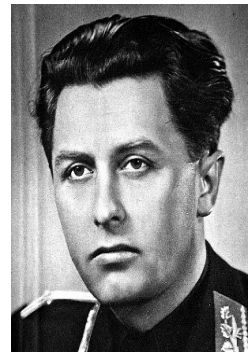
# Autonomists



- Key political question - autonomy.
- Slovak People's Party was founded before War I. (catholic and conservative background).
- The leader: charismatic Andrej Hlinka (change of the party name: Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSL'S)).
- HSL'S was main component of the autonomist camp of Slovak politics; full political, legislative, administrative autonomy for Slovakia.
- Rejected idea of "Czechoslovak nation".
- HSL'S - the most successful party in elections.
- HSL'S in permanent opposition (small exception of the years 1927 – 1929).



Two party wings during 1930s: radical wing which was close to Italian and later Germans fascism (Vojtech Tuka and Alexander Mach), and conservative-catholic wing which was based on traditional values.





# Centralists

- Also so-called centralist parties were active in Slovakia; the most important were Slovak agrarians and social democrats - branches of Czech agrarians and social democrats in Slovakia.
- However, many "centralists" moved to autonomist visions during time.
- Main leader of Slovak agrarians Milan Hodža: at the end of First Czechoslovak Republic prime minister of the Czechoslovakia.



# Second Republic (1938-1939)

- Representatives of HSL'S pushed strongly on territorial autonomy after Munich agreement.
- October 1938: autonomy of Slovakia was announced.
- New leader of HSL'S Jozef Tiso became Slovak premier (Hlinka died in August 1938).
- HSL'S absorbed all other parties; social democracy and communists were banned.
- Elections into the Slovak parliament (*snem*) took place in December 1938 – only one party ran (non-competitive elections).
  
- March 1939: „independent“ state - the „less evil“
- Paradox of new state form (Republic?).
- President Tiso.



# Slovak "war" state

Two big problems of Slovak state:

- first – **close collaboration with Hitler's Germany** (and dependence of Slovakia on Germany), many spheres of collaboration, Slovak army fought against Poland and later Soviet Union (from 1941).
- second – **character of the political regime** – non-democratic regime, HSL'S was state-monopoly party.

# Undemocratic character changed over time (breaking point July 1940)

- **Until July 1940:** Slovakia was authoritarian regime which did not use classical totalitarian ideological indoctrination of society, political appeal was based on Christian conservatism, nationalism, anticommunism and (partly) corporativism.
- "...that everyone was well".
- Strong features of limited pluralism (not totalitarian monism): semi-autonomy of army, state administration and police (cadres were people who served to Czechoslovakia until 1939, loyalty to new regime was limited), the Slovak state did not eliminate former social and economical structures.
- The regime did not use intensive political mobilization of people.

- **July 1940:** Hitler criticised politics of Tiso (too „moderate” and weak support of Germany).
- Character of the regime was changed and Slovakia **moved** towards totalitarian regime.
- The *Führer principe* was adopted, Tiso became *Vodca* (Slovak *führer*), ideologically specific synthesis of (German) national socialism and Christianity.
- Rise of political (totalitarian) activism and strong political mobilization.
- Deportations of Slovak Jews into the concentration camps and arization of their property.
- Pre-totalitarian regime: between authoritarian and totalitarian form.



# Last period of Slovak state since 1943

- Erosion of the regime, German defeats and shift of east front line towards Slovakia territory.
- Slovak National Uprising (August 1944): crucial point of this period, follow collapse of the régime and German occupation.



# Slovakia during the communist regime (1948-1989)

- Episodic post-war semi-democratic Czechoslovak Republic: a certain difference to the Czech part of the state.
- Democratic Party victory in semi-competitive elections 1946 (but communists seizure of power in 1948).
- A similar form of totalitarian regime like in the Czech lands in the 1950s (liquidation of the remnants of pluralism, terror, collectivisation etc.).
- But also modernizing role of the communist regime in Slovakia and the resulting consequences for the perception of this regime before and after 1989.
- 1968: The Prague Spring - federalisation of the state; partial satisfaction of Slovaks - unitary state was transformed; but federation only nominal - center of power Central Committee of Communist party.
- General Secretary of Communist party (and the President from mid 1970s) Gustáv Husák (Slovak).



## 1989 – 1992 and national question

- Hot issue Czech and Slovaks relationships revitalized after Velvet Revolution (1989).
- First big problem was a new name of the state at the beginning of 1990 (hyphen war).
- The federation arrangement functioned with many problems (old constitution did not work well in new conditions).
- Slovak politicians wanted more competences.
- Future form of state: the federation? The confederation?
- Problems of history: First Czechoslovak Republic and time of Communism - different views.
- Negative effect of the creation of two separate party systems (Czech and Slovak parties unconnected).
- Revitalization of the Slovak nationalism: Slovak National Party aimed for independence, the Christian Democratic Movement (the leader Ján Čarnogurský) - confederation, later same stance of the Movement of Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) headed by Vladimír Mečiar.
- Czech priority of quick economic transformation: Slovakia was seen as a brake (the view not only of Václav Klaus).





# Elections 1992 and Velvet Divorce

- Slovak winner: the HZDS vision of transformation Czechoslovakia into confederation.
- Czech winner: the ODS strongly rejected confederation.
- After 1992 election both parties decided for "Velvet Divorce" and separation of Czechoslovakia (independent Czech Republic and Slovak Republic).
- Referendum?



# The conflict of mečiarism vs. antimečiarism (key cleavage after 1992)

- Hybrid regime of Vladimír Mečiar (illiberal democracy), e.g. the Gaulieder case, the kidnapping of the president's son (abuse of the secret service), de facto state public television and radio, anti-opposition changes of electoral law before the 1998 elections etc.
- Sharp political confrontation accompanied by the failure to elect a new president in 1998.
- International isolation of Slovakia - blocking the country's integration into the EU and NATO.
- Elections 1998: HZDS victory, but big losses ("only" 27% of the vote), Mečiar's inability to form a government, the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK) leader (a close second) Mikuláš Dzurinda prime minister: broad left-right government coalition, after 2002 a more ideologically homogeneous centre-right coalition.





## Smer (Direction) – social democracy?

- The most most important party of last two decades.
- Founder Robert Fico, formerly of the ex-Communist Democratic Left Party (SDL'), the most preferential votes of the party's politicians in the 1998 elections, but without an executive position, leaving the party and founding Smer in 1999.
- Identity: criticism of the establishment, the limited success of Smer in the 2002 elections ("only" 13.5% of the vote), then a revision of its identity - defining itself as a left-wing party, absorption of older extra-parliamentary left-wing parties, including SDL', 2006 - winning the elections (29%).
- But ideologically "national socialism" (expansion of welfare state and nationalism), pro-Russian stances (2006 - temporarily excluded from the structures of the Party of European Socialists due to the formation of a government coalition with the far right, after elections 2023 - the same story).
- Exceptional result in 2012 (after short time in opposition) - 44% of votes; last elections 2023 – 23% of votes (winner).

## Typical features of contemporary Slovak party politics

- Party competition strongly influenced by defining for and against Robert Fico's Smer (two competing camps).
- Corruption cases are a big political issue (especially debated during the Směr's governments), as well as the fusion of politics, the criminal sphere, the police and the judiciary (extreme case of the fall of the third Fico government after the murder of one journalist and his fiancée in 2018).
- An unstable party system and a very low degree of institutionalisation (structuring), huge volatility, often changes of party actors.
- The ideological profile of some parties is therefore unclear.
- Many parties based on leaders and strong degree of personalisation (a single constituency helps that a lot).
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BNSpbSekVGE>
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6-wc\\_J8SZc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6-wc_J8SZc)