

rights activists and experts, however, consider regional influences to be one of the important factors that have an impact on the way of perceiving the LGBTI agenda within the Slovak society.

In general, activists and experts respond positively to the current state of addressing LGBTI issues in Slovakia, especially with regard to the pressures by the European Union for the adoption of relevant directives, which seems to be just a question of time. Hence, the current opposition by the conservative part of the public and of the political spectrum is considered rather unsustainable. There are, however, fears that the regulations that could come from the EU would not correspond to what the activists want to achieve with their efforts.

In spite of the positive development of Slovak human rights activism mainly in relation to the establishment of the LGBTI Committee at the Government Council for Human Rights, Ethnic Minorities and Gender Equality, the present context is still perceived as strongly polarised. In this situation, we should also observe the media influence which, given the context of this topic and the interests of all stakeholders, seeks to keep a conflict between the two sides. Too much attention paid to a topic raises resistance among those disagreeing with such development.

According to the statements of LGBTI activists, the Catholic Church also has a substantial influence on maintaining tension, as it has a strong position not only in the public, but also in politics. Though it is not that apparent at first sight, the influence of the Vatican towards which Slovakia is liable for compliance with concrete treaties is significant within the political context. The Catholic Church is regarded by the activists' network as more conservative and, hence, more problematic in respect of the LGBTI agenda than, for example, some other churches. It is therefore not only an issue of LGBTI topics vs. religion/faith, but rather an ideological issue and an issue of values, represented by particular churches and influencing the way their representatives approach the LGBTI agenda.

This study aimed to contextualise the current positions to the LGBTI agenda in Slovakia from the point of view of LGBTI activists with regard to the ongoing socio-political changes and influences. These efforts should be constantly reflected in connection with the changes happening at the EU and global levels, as mentioned in the introduction, but also in respect of changes in social values which have an impact on the public opinion in the form of more positive attitudes to LGBTI issues in the media, politics and society, and also on the way of accentuating and grasping "interventions" into the system of values as part of a strategy by civic associations in their efforts to obtain grant support. As highlighted in this study, the current situation is largely influenced by the mass media which, in the representation of individual cases, do not aim to present particular values, but rather promote their own interests that go hand in hand with the needs of the market society which should be reflected in the given context of the present situation.

THE HOLOCAUST IN SLOVAKIA: PERSPECTIVE OF OBSERVERS. COPING WITH THE PAST?

Monika Vrzgulová

The social and political changes in Slovakia after 1989 opened many new challenges, tasks, and issues. One of the consequences of these changes was the fact that the public and expert discourse started to raise topics on the modern history of Slovakia – before taboo, overlooked, or ideologically interpreted by the Communist regime. A request and interest suddenly emerged to explore our own history without the dictate of ideology, independently and openly. The history topics which were previously taboo referred to the period of the wartime Slovak state (1939–1945) and its totalitarian regime,¹ and the forms of the Holocaust in Slovakia. Historians and social scientists started to explore these topics from the perspective of their science disciplines.

In order to contribute to a critical re-assessment of the ideologically burdened images of the past and to the overcoming of historic stereotypes surviving in our societies, the oral history method is primarily used in my ethnological research. It represents an appropriate tool for the capturing of subjective testimonies of experienced events at a certain historic period. Thanks to this method, it is possible to obtain an interpretation of historic events from the perspective of individuals who are part of the society. My research is based on the assumption that the affiliation of a witness to a certain social group or groups determines his/her testimony, and the memory processes depend not only on external stimuli, but also on the particular social context (Halbwachs 1980; Assman 1992; Ferencová – Nosková 2009: 21-31).

People's memories captured by the oral history method are examined as individual pictures of historic events or as their mental representations which can be, according to the theory of the epidemiology of representations (Sperber 1996), communicated and subsequently shared by a certain segment of a social group as cultural or public representations. A social group and its environment – in this particular case the group of non-Jewish citizens of Slovakia – are filled with representations of the past. Each member of the group has many own mental representations in his/her head which create his/her individual knowledge. Through the communication of such knowledge to the outside – disclosure – mental representations become public. But only a small part of mental representations, repeatedly communicated and disseminated within a group, becomes part of commonly shared cultural representations. Hence, cultural

¹ The slogan of the Slovak State (1939–1945) was: One country, one party, one leader! There was a single ruling party – Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSLS).

representations constitute a subset of an aggregate of mental and public representations which have long existed within the given social group (Sperber 1996: 32-33).

This work is based on the material obtained from a two-year-long oral history research which focused on non-Jewish witnesses of the period of the wartime Slovak state, and analyses the contents of their recorded testimonies. My research observes what representations of the life of the Jewish community in the territory of the former Slovak state in the period 1938–1945 have been disseminated through a sample of the oldest generation of the non-Jewish population of Slovakia at present.

ETHNOLOGICAL RESEARCH OF THE HOLOCAUST IN SLOVAKIA

The first oral history research conducted after 1989 and sponsored by Milan Šimečka Foundation (in 1995–1997) was of key importance for the ethnological research of the Holocaust in Slovakia. This research focused on the memories of the victims of the Holocaust – Jews. The results of this research were analysed and interpreted by several researches (Bumová 2010; Salner 1997; 2000, 2005; Vrzgulová 2000, 2005, 2011, 2013). Relevant knowledge about how the Holocaust events were lived, evaluated and interpreted by those who were not their victims but observers or executors were long absent.² This asymmetry has been poorly balanced by the biographic literature about, for example, the fates of the official representatives of the wartime Slovak state, or the representatives of the majority in the given period. The published texts represent materials of differing professional quality. The publishing of three volumes of Jozef Tiso's speeches and articles was an exceptional achievement in this regard.

The “silent majority” of the Slovak society, the population of Slovak villages and towns constituting the environment in which the individual stages of the Holocaust in Slovakia took place, remained unexplored for a long time.³ The international documentary project of oral history “Crimes against Civilian Populations during WW2: Victims, Witnesses, Collaborators and Perpetrators”⁴ with non-Jewish witnesses from Slovakia represents a qualitative move forward.

² This classification is based on R. Hilberg's work (2002).

³ Partial results were brought by, for example, researches of tradesmen in the period 1918–1948, (Vrzgulová 2000).

⁴ The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum <http://www.ushmm.org/> in Washington is the sponsor of this research project. The project aims to collect and make video-recordings of the testimonies of non-Jewish witnesses of World War II. The research has already been conducted in France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Moldova, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and in the countries of the former Yugoslav territories. A total of around 1,400 interviews have been recorded in these countries.

RESEARCH FOCUSED ON THE MAJORITY

In 2011, the Slovak Republic joined the countries of Central and Eastern Europe which launched this kind of research back to 1996.⁵ This research records the recollections of eye-witnesses of persecutions, bad treatment, humiliation, thefts, deportations, and murdering of civilians and of the Jewish population of the given country. It captures the testimonies about local aggressors and collaborators who helped perpetrators in committing crimes against humanity. In Slovakia, we mainly focused on documenting the fates of local Jewish people from the perspective of their non-Jewish neighbours – how they saw and remember their discrimination, imprisonment, deportation, and the fate of their property after deportation from Slovakia.

The research in Slovakia has taken two years so far. In the preparatory stage, a meeting with local researchers were held, informing them about the project objectives, research methods, and implementation. The people we visited and interviewed do not constitute a representative sample of Slovakia. The composition of the group of respondents was primarily dependent on the interest and initiative of local researchers. The project's success also depended on the fact whether the identified witnesses were willing to cooperate.

The principal pre-condition the respondents were supposed to meet was that they were eye-witnesses of the situation that can be designated as “implementation of anti-Jewish measures in practice”. Another condition was respondent's age at the time the described event was observed and lived. The minimum age of ten years was determined on the basis of practical experience in researches conducted in other European countries.

The implementation stage of the research ran at two levels. The local researchers identified forty-two persons during two years. The first round of meetings and preliminary interviews was attended by thirty-seven of them.⁶

The first level was a pre-interview which served for getting acquainted with the respondent, for detailed explanation of the research objectives, and for finding out whether the witness met the conditions of the research and whether he/she was willing to attend the interview. The pre-interview was audio-recorded (2011), or was recorded with a handy digital camera (2012), and represented a crucial moment on the basis of which we included or excluded respondents into/from further research.

⁵ The chief coordinator is the Israeli historian and documentalist Nathan Beyrak who also conducted the oral history research “The Fates of Those Who Survived the Holocaust” in 1995–97. On behalf of Slovakia, the research was coordinated by Monika Vrzgulová who managed the Slovak team composed of ethnologist Eva Riečanská and local researchers from all over Slovakia. The project record can be found on the website of the USHMM in Washington: <http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn50682>.

⁶ Two meetings did not take place because the respondents changed their mind and refused to meet with us. This happened upon intervention by their family members who did not wish their parents to give an interview on the wartime Slovak state. Other two meetings were not held due to a sudden deterioration of the health condition of respondents, and one witness died.

In principle, the structure of the interview was identical for all respondents, and depending on the age it contained four basic issues:

- Life in the first Czechoslovak Republic (CSR): the quality of relationships between Jews and non-Jews within the area; personal and family experience and relations with the Jewish community; the place, importance, and activities of the Jewish community, and its location;
- Disintegration of the CSR; birth of the independent Slovak state, and the impact of these events on the relationship between Jew and non-Jew people, and on the Jewish community; implementation of anti-Jew regulations within the area (wearing of yellow stars, prohibitions restricting movement, taking away of property, deportations, help provided to Jews, the fate of Jewish property after deportations);
- The situation after liberation: the return of Jewish neighbours home; the reactions of the majority population;
- The reflection of lived and observed events in the post-war period and at present, their communication and evaluation.

Before the next meeting, the pre-interviews were compiled in the form of a summary, designating the parts where it was necessary to complete or explain the information. Together with biographical information about respondents, the pre-interview served as a tool for the second interview.

During the second interview and its video recording by a professional team, the chronology and the structure of the first interview were followed. Each respondent had enough time to formulate his/her testimony, and could return to the events already described, provide further explanations, or complete his/her first version. The researchers intervened in the testimonies with additional, more detailed questions.

FIRST FINDINGS

The study of testimonies is at its beginning. The first findings concern the circumstances and the course of the research, description of the group of respondents, and responses to two questions: *why* they were willing to take part in the research, and *what* they remembered, what information their testimonies contained. Naturally, the contents and the extent of witnesses' memories, knowledge, and experience depended on their age.

With regard to age, the respondents formed three basic groups: 1. Adults in the reference period (single or married); 2. Teenagers at the age of 12–17 years; and 3. Children under 12 years. The group of respondents with whom we recorded the second interview consisted of twelve men and thirteen women born between 1920 and 1937. Fourteen of them came from towns, and the rest lived in the countryside. It is by coincidence that this group is balanced in terms of gender. On the other hand, *religion* seemed to be a serious reason why respondents decided to take part in the research, which was manifested in their statements during the interview and in the overall contents of their testimonies.

None of the respondents provided an explicit explanation *why* he/she decided to become part of our research. This information resulted from their narration. All respondents declared their close or even friendly contacts with their Jewish neighbours. Their co-existence was characterised by everyday contacts, help, spending of spare time, children playing together, or work relations.

The quality of co-existence with Jewish neighbours was the reason why they decided to provide testimony. They wanted to present information about people who do not live in their locality anymore. The decisive factor for their participation in the research was their religion. The majority of respondents claim affiliation to non-Catholic churches: evangelical, orthodox, and Greek-Catholic ones. This fact determined their lives in the wartime Slovak state, and motivated them to give testimonies. As members of religious minorities, they were the target of discrimination and intimidation by local political authorities, local organisations of the Hlinka Guards (HG),⁷ and by the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and part of their fellow citizens. The narrations contained formulations, such as: "...guardsmen told us: you'll be next after the Jews", memories of deceit by teachers and classmates at school, intimidation of parents by guardsmen, warnings against helping Jews, etc.

TESTIMONIES OF WITNESSES

Thanks to their friendly relationships with the local Jews, respondents provided detailed information on their co-existence, on the way of life of their Jewish neighbours, on their family ties and overall activities within the locality. The description of the situations depends not only on the age of the witnesses, but also on their personal dispositions. We can learn from their narrations about the names of Jewish families, the individual members of these families, their position within the area, professions. The memories vary according to the size of the settlement, size of the Jewish community, and also according to the confession of the majority. They bring a picture of villages where several Jewish families usually lived and were often relatives. Their economic situation was usually similar to the one of non-Jewish inhabitants – they earned money for living as farmers, door-to-door salesmen, or owners of often the only shop within the area. They differed from their non-Jewish neighbours by their attitude towards education and the way of life which was determined by their religion. The contemporary picture of towns presented in the testimonies highlights the importance of the Jewish middle class in Slovakia at the turn of the 1930s and 1940s.

The witnesses also remembered expressions of anti-Jew sentiments (the marking of Jews, taking away of their property, deportations, and auctions of Jewish property) at the local level. The characteristics of local guardsmen and their behaviour towards Jewish and also non-Catholic citizens were ambivalent. The members of the local HG,

⁷ Hlinka Guards were a semi-military armed organisation of the HSLS, legalised in Autumn 1938. It was the power authority of the totalitarian regime.

designated as “local aggressors” by E. Nižňanský (2005), were direct executors of the anti-Jew state policy in Slovak villages and towns. They guarded public order, publicly demonstrated their power, were involved in the taking away of Jewish non-movable property, took Jews to transports, and assisted in the public sale of Jewish movable property after deportations. In some cases, the witnesses emphasise that it were new-comer guardsmen who behaved negatively, not the local ones. The picture of local guardsmen is quite ambiguous: on one hand, they are described as people from poorer Catholic families, or as people without scruples who were not hiding their interest in obtaining Jewish property. What we frequently hear is that thanks to their position in the HG the guardsmen received Jewish shops and houses. On the other hand, there are mentions of various forms of help by local guardsmen or state officers to persecuted Jews: on the way they organised escapes of Jews, supported resistance playing a double game, or left for the mountains and joined the Slovak National Uprising.

All recorded memories prove that the members of the local community *were aware* of who were active guardsmen, who took Jewish property, who executed deportations, who organised auctions of Jewish property, and who bought it. Respondents from smaller towns and villages mention the names of local guardsmen and their concrete acts. Deportations represent an important topic of witnesses’ recollections – the period before deportations, the last meetings with their Jewish neighbours, what they said, what were their ideas about their further fates. The parents of many witnesses provided friendly services to their Jewish friends – took into custody part of their property, or bought it so that they had money for travelling. Some testimonies contain information on helping Jewish neighbours to escape from the town or village, on providing them shelter in the village or outside of it, on getting false documents or certificates of baptism. The course of deportations was the turning point of the interview in many respondents. They personally saw how guardsmen (local or foreign) took their neighbours, classmates and friends away – by foot, on horse carriages belonging to local farmers, on trucks or buses – to the gathering point or to the closest railway station. Information about the direction of the route varied, and it is hard to figure out whether it was knowledge only obtained after the war.

The witnesses provide very detailed descriptions: the gathering of Jews at squares, and their escorting by armed guardsmen and also civilians from their homes. Many witnesses tell the names of the deported and deporting persons, but most of them refused the names of the guardsmen because their children and grandchildren still lived in their village or town.

The descriptions of the confiscation of Jewish property and of the robbing of Jewish houses and farms, as well as the descriptions of the auctions of Jewish property after deportations constitute an important part of respondents’ recollections. When asked about the confiscation of Jewish houses, businesses, or shops, the witnesses more or less agree that such property was in the majority of cases taken away by guardsmen and active pro-regime officers.

In their testimonies, the respondents sometimes state that they do not remember what happened with Jewish shops. With additional questions we found out that the respondents differentiated between “party” confiscation of property carried out by guardsmen of merit and confiscation of the property of “common” people. As stated in the interview by a son of a confiscator, Jewish shops were closed after deportations. At a later stage, Christians willing to run them could apply for obtaining such shops. His father did the same, at the initiative of the Jewish owner himself. It is evident that he did not consider such agreed procedure as actual confiscation. He fails to think about the relationship between the confiscation of property and the deportation of former owners. Other testimonies also suggest that the confiscation of property is fixed in witnesses’ memories as political games, and in their minds it frequently followed deportations, though in reality they preceded them.

The situation after deportations is remembered more often. Jewish homes and shops were sealed, but became the target of looting. This happened usually at night, and we therefore received only mediated information: what the inhabitants of the area told to each other.

The descriptions of the public sale of Jewish property are numerous. The auctions were called publicly, and happened at public places directly in front of Jewish houses. Employees of the tax office, with the assistance of local guardsmen, auctioned furniture, cloths, or kitchenware at plain sight. Respondents could see who was selling and who was buying the goods. They described and commented upon these situations in different ways, with smaller or greater understanding of those who were buying the items. According to some testimonies, the auctions were not attended by local people, but by people from the surroundings or socially weaker groups of people.

The period of return of Jewish inhabitants to their town or village after the end of the war is in most cases referred to with a statement that nobody from the local Jewish inhabitants returned to their homes after the war. According to some other witnesses, if anybody returned at all, they did not stay there for long. Jewish neighbours who survived the Holocaust usually started their new lives after the war in larger cities. Some respondents say that the Jews from their villages/towns emigrated to the United States or to Israel. Those who had had friendly relations with their Jewish neighbours before the war maintained contacts with them also after the war, mainly by correspondence. The fate of the confiscated property of local Jews remained unknown to our respondents. It was obscured by Communist nationalisation after February 1948.

The final part of every interview concerned the post-war fates of local guardsmen. The most frequent replies stated that “the guardsmen threw away their uniforms” and continued living in the same town or village.

According to the witnesses, some guardsmen joined the Communist Party and became active Communists. The respondents often state that the guardsmen – actors

of confiscations and deportations – were not punished for their acts and for their behaviour towards Jews and other citizens during the existence of the Slovak state.

The replies to the question on handing over the lived experience and events during the wartime Slovak state were more or less identical. Most respondents talk about their experience only with their contemporaries who lived in that period. A small number of respondents affirmed that they talk about their experience with their younger family members.

SUMMARY

The first research of the representations of the Holocaust in Slovakia among the oldest generation of the non-Jewish population by means of oral history method was launched in 2011. Partial results are brought by the contents presented by this generation – not in the form of spontaneous inter-generational communication, but through information about contemporaries or as part of the research; the eye-witnesses of the given period formulated their memories for the first time after decades.

An important finding of the research is the reason why the witnesses decided to give testimony. The group of interviewed people does not constitute a representative sample, but has something else in common – affiliation to non-Catholic churches (evangelical, Greek-Catholic, and orthodox). It is also people declaring their positive or even friendly relationships with their Jewish neighbours in the respective historic period. The following topics can be extracted from the testimonies as those described in a more comprehensive manner:

- Personal and family relationships with Jewish neighbours (including a comparison with the situation before 1939 in the case of the oldest age category);
- The expressions of anti-Jewish sentiments and the execution of anti-Jewish regulations at the local level (confiscation and auctions of Jewish property, deportations);
- Acts of the representatives of the state and political power and local elites;
- Situation after the end of the war – the return of Jewish neighbours, the fates of guardsmen;
- The communication of lived experience in the post-war period and at present.

The contents of the obtained responses undermine certain stereotypes concerning the period of the wartime Slovak state and the Holocaust in Slovakia.

Stereotype 1: The independent Slovak state represented an opportunity for a “Slovak becoming the master in Slovakia”. The recollections of non-Catholic people tell about intolerance, intimidation, and social discrimination. They often mention the unequal status of Catholics and non-Catholics in the Slovak society of that period.

Stereotype 2: Rich Jews impoverished Slovaks. Most witnesses present the pictures of Jews as small and middle peasants or as traders who played an important economic role in the local economy. The reflections of everyday communication highlight a higher literacy rate in Jews and their positive attitudes towards education.

Stereotype 3: The fates of Jews during the Holocaust were unknown to the general population; Slovaks did not know what was done to Jews and by whom.

The testimonies provide descriptions of the execution of anti-Jew regulations (the wearing of yellow stars, marking of shops, confiscation, deportations, and auctions of Jewish property after deportations) at the local level, i.e. detailed depictions of situations, actors, including dialogues between actors. Some of these situations could be observed at public spaces of towns and villages by actively or passively involved local non-Jew inhabitants. The local inhabitants were actors and executors – as local guardsmen, notaries, or state employees. The picture of local political authorities and top representatives of the state power and of common guardsmen is ambivalent; on one hand, there are cruel guardsmen confiscating and looting Jewish property; on the other hand, there were guardsmen warning against raids and transports, collaborating with the resistance. The age of the witnesses showed to be a handicap in this regard: as children or young people they watched the different situation as observers; they did not know the background of events in real time and the primary objectives of their actors.

The period after the end of the war and the return of Jewish neighbours home is described in an abrupt manner. The witnesses state that nobody or just a few persons returned. And those who returned did not stay long, and left the village or town after the Communist takeover (1948). Almost all of them agree that they did not stay at home, left for a larger city outside of the territory of Slovakia, and started to return to their home village or town with their descendants after the fall of the Communist regime. Only one respondent affirmed that he was in contact with the local representatives of the Jewish community.

The way of dealing with those who conducted confiscations and deportations by the successor Czechoslovak state after the war was not tackled in the recollections. The witnesses do not remember whether the local guardsmen or confiscators were punished. Apart from some exceptions, they make no spontaneous evaluations or judgements. From the overall group of respondents, only three explicitly and strongly condemned the acts of concrete guardsmen with a statement that they had not been punished for their crimes. The majority of witnesses did not name the guardsmen, though they knew them, respecting their descendants living in the given areas in two or even three generations.

The captured memories and the public representations of Holocaust events in Slovakia are characterised by ambivalent evaluation of the events and by symptoms of silence or even disinterest and elimination of memories. They also bring much evidence on active or passive involvement of non-Jewish inhabitants of Slovakia in these events. The nature of interviews, their course, and the formulation of sentences suggested that it was “hard recollections”. The respondents rarely admitted explicitly that what happened to their Jewish neighbours contradicted their own morale and values. The fact that they are aware (at present) that they were part of inhumane

processes leading to the genocide of Jews is apparent from the context of their testimonies and non-verbal expressions. Though the respondents involved in the research represent only one (very specific) part of the “silent majority” which formed the “Holocaust environment” (Nižňanský 2005: 7), these circumstances highlight the fact that also non-Jewish witnesses of the wartime Slovak state and the Holocaust in Slovakia are traumatised by this experience. Their memories of the period of the totalitarian regime of the Slovak state are also influenced by their experience with another – Communist – totalitarian regime, and by the present patterns and policies of remembering this historic period in our country.

If we base our assumptions on the psychological understanding of collective memory (where the past predestines the presence), the key role is played by the analogy between collective trauma and the trauma of an individual. A traumatic event – in our case confrontation with one’s own life at times of a totalitarian regime involved in the genocide of its Jewish population – shook the cognitive and moral frameworks which constitute part of the respondents’ identity and culture.

M. Halbwachs (Halbwachs 1992) remarks that collective memory always consists of concrete acts of individuals’ recollections which are defined by the social networks of memory. American sociologist Neil J. Smelser also affirms that the bearers of cultural (collective) trauma are individuals who form it with the language of commonly shared culture. If such trauma were to become public, it must become the subject of “public narrative work of authorities” wishing that such shared trauma acquire public importance. Hence, the transformation of private trauma to a public one is a long process full of conflicts where various groups fight for meanings attributed to the traumatic event. Such struggles are a natural part of what is called “the policy of memory” or “the policy of recollections” (Smelser 2004: 31-59).

When I observe the contemporary society of Slovakia from the perspective of the concept of collective/cultural trauma, I can affirm that the public discourse entails formalised procedures – policies of remembering the observed historic period of our history.⁸ They affect the current form and contents of the representations of the wartime Slovak state and of the relationships between Jews and non-Jews in the testimonies captured by our research. It is evident that the coping with the past is a long process influenced by several factors. The change of the socio-political conditions in Slovakia after 1989 was just the beginning.

⁸ Throughout the year, there are several historic dates in our calendar which represent an opportunity for the implementation of the “policy of memory” – dates related to the existence of the wartime Slovak state, Holocaust Remembrance Days – international (27 January) and national (09 September), etc. The reflection and representations of this historic period are not unambiguous, but are ambivalent (Vrzgulová 2013: 173-181). This fact also affects the contents of the recollections of non-Jewish witnesses captured in our research.

ADAPTATION OF FAMILIES FORCIBLY DISPLACED UNDER THE ACTION B: THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Jolana Darulová

The central topic of the paper is Action B which was aimed to implement the Communist idea of changing the social structure of the society and adapting it to the needs of the new regime. Action B was supposed to definitely cleanse towns from enemies, and help to solve the housing problem. It was carried out by means of violent displacement of whole groups of inhabitants from both big and smaller Czech and Slovak towns. Action B was carried out from 1952 to 1953, and formed part of controlled activities in the period of the dictatorship of the proletariat when the foundations of the Communist regime were laid down (1948–1953). “The new regime was born with the denial, disruption, and liquidation of the principles on which it was built... the destruction of the society entered all fields of social life” (Kaplan 1991: 146). At the same time, it was a period which forced individuals to adapt to the new reality and seek their place in it.

According to Babál (2009: 22), “the displacements of people in the post-war period was nothing uncommon in the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSR), and were executed back to 1938 (displacement of citizens of Czech nationality shortly after the birth of the Slovak State, or Slovak Republic; later displacement of the Jewish population, and of Germans and Hungarians after the re-birth of the CSR). After the regime change in February 1948, the displacement of persons smoothly followed the previous development, and targeted other groups of inhabitants. We could say that, in a certain way, the population ‘got used’ to displacements executed in the period 1938–1948. It affected farmers, churches (especially the Catholic Church), inhabitants of bordering areas, and others – individuals and their families.”

The atmosphere of fear was enhanced by police arbitrariness, lawlessness, and political processes against individuals or entire groups of people. It was manifested, for example, by the persecution of churches, or was targeted against all believers, and its diverse forms affected the middle class. Private entrepreneurs, owners of factories, and small tradesmen were all liquidated. Those designated as “enemies of the regime” became the target of persecutions. Similar actions were undertaken against private farmers. Collectivisation was the means to re-group the society in rural areas. Cleansing also affected the intelligentsia, called “old or bourgeois intelligentsia”; many officers and teachers lost their jobs, and were moved to remote villages. Action B was preceded or accompanied by three persecution measures: purge of big towns from reactionary forces (from 09 September 1948 to 29 October 1949), Action T-43 (from 03 October 1949, halted after several days; it was supposed to keep people in forced labour camps), and Action “Kulaks” (from November 1952 to September 1953), (Babál 2010: 72).