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Perceptions of the Holocaust in Slovak Historiography and Among the General Public after the Establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993

This text and study presents a brief overview of the most important trends in the Slovak historiography of the Holocaust within recent three decades. Prior to 1989, the Holocaust was a topic marginalized in the country's historical research. The most important finding that emerges from the analysis of Slovak literature on the Holocaust is that, besides its obvious historiographic dimension, it was frequently meant to serve political purposes (including in the area of education). The works published after 1989 can be categorized as follows: collections of documents; memoirs; the perspective of the minority; the problem of local aggressors; the social background of the Holocaust; legal analysis of anti-Jewish legislation; oral history; the so-called Slovak revisionism; and connection between the historiographic and political levels. In this text, we analyze the link between historiography and politics in the example of Vladimír Mečiar's cabinet and revisionist publications. We also consider the impact of revisionism on the formation of national symbols (the case of a memorial of Ferdinand Ďurčanský) as well as the historiography situated between science and the Catholic Church's interpretation of history (of the Slovak state and the beatification of bishop Ján Vojtaššák).

Historical Review: Politics of Antisemitism and the Holocaust in Slovakia 1939–1945

In March 1939 Nazi Germany decided to take advantage of its geopolitical dominance in Central Europe and intervene against the Second Czechoslovak Republic. The result was the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia and the establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, as well as the establishment of the Slovak State.¹

¹ By the Constitution adopted on July 21, 1939 the state was officially called the Slovak Republic, the name used in official documentation. Slovak politicians and print media would commonly refer to it as the Slovak State.

The HSPP² leadership was able to implement its political agenda: “(...) One nation, one party, one leader for a united advance in the service of the nation.”³ The regime of the dictatorship of one political party, the HSPP, was created.

The foundation of the state subsequently defined its entire existence. The Slovak Republic was a satellite state of Nazi Germany. The Slovak Republic signed a “Treaty of Protection” with Nazi Germany, in which it allowed pledged German troops into Slovakian territory, to coordinate its foreign and military policy with Nazi Germany.⁴

The antisemitic policy of the Slovak Republic between 1939 and 1945 was based on the inherent antisemitism of the HSPP representatives who came to power after the Munich Agreement in 1938. This type of antisemitism has several levels.

The first level was the Christian level that emerged from earlier anti-Jewish stereotypes, such as the deicide myth or the Jews’ refusal to accept Jesus as the Messiah, etc. Slovakia was a Catholic country,⁵ so these stereotypes used by HSPP politicians, based on Christian anti-Judaism, greatly affected the population.

2 Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (HSPP) (Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana; HSLS), established in the year 1913 as the Slovak People’s Party (Slovenská ľudová strana, SLS) by Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka. HSPP was a far-right clerical-fascist political party with a strong Catholic fundamentalist, nationalist, and authoritarian ideology. HSPP was antisocialist, anti-communist, and against the influence of liberalism. After the formation of the Czechoslovak Republic (1918), the party preserved its conservative ideology, opposing Czechoslovakism and demanding Slovak autonomy. In the second half of the 1930s, the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe and the party’s inability to achieve long-term political objectives caused a loss of the party’s faith in democratic procedures and saw the party turn towards more radical and extremist ideologies such as fascism. The HSPP never won more than a third of the electoral votes during the parliamentary elections in the democratic Czechoslovak Republic. At the time of Slovakia’s autonomy (October 6, 1938–March 14, 1939), it created a system of dictatorship of one political party (HSPP). During the existence of the Slovak state (1939–1945) it was the only Slovak political party allowed, which was also confirmed in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (1939). After World War II its activities were banned.

3 See Eduard Nižňanský, “Die Machtübernahme von Hlinkas Slowakischer Volkspartei in der Slowakei im Jahre 1938/39 mit einem Vergleich zur nationalsozialistischen Machtergreifung 1933/34 in Deutschland,” in *Geteilt, besetzt, beherrscht*, ed. Monika Gletter et al. (Essen: Klartext Verl, 2004), 249–287.

4 Eduard Nižňanský et al. (eds.), *Slowakisch-deutsche Beziehungen 1938–1941 in Dokumenten I. Von München bis zum Krieg gegen die UdSSR* (Prešov: Univerzum, 2009), 304–309 (Vertrag über das Schutzverhältnis zwischen dem Deutschen Reich und dem Slowakischen Staat – 18. März Wien, 23. März Berlin).

5 According to A. Štefánek, the religious composition in Slovakia in 1940 was as follows: 1,956,233 Catholics (73.64 percent), 183,736 Greek Catholics (6.91 percent), 403,073 Protestants of all denominations (15.13 percent), and 9,994 non-denominational (0.37 percent). Anton Štefánek, *Základy sociografie Slovenska* [Foundations of the Sociography of Slovakia] (Bratislava, 1944), 179–180.

There were also national, economic, and political stereotypes. The national-linguistic stereotypes argued that “the Jews are not Slovaks” (or that the Jews spoke Hungarian, German, Yiddish), which was representative of the magyarization of Slovaks during the Austro-Hungarian Empire. *The New York Times* commented on the difficult position of Jews in Slovakia in Autumn 1938 as follows: “The Slovaks accuse them (Jews) of supporting Czech centralism and also of being pro-Hungarian and for using the Hungarian language. Hungarians accuse them of having betrayed Hungary.”⁶

The economic (social) stereotypes included beliefs such as that the Jews exploited and exploit the Slovaks, living off their manual labour and at their expense, and that Jewish pub owners made alcoholic beverages out of the Slovaks. President Jozef Tiso⁷ said in September 1940: “Concerns are raised, for instance, that what is done to the Jews is unchristian. But I say: Matters will have become most Christian after they have been thoroughly dealt with. Furthermore, they reproach us for violating the right to private property. They say we seize the Jews’ radios. They say we seize Jewish stores, businesses, and that is allegedly unchristian. But I say: it is

6 *New York Times*, November 6, 1938.

7 Jozef Tiso (1887–1947) was a Roman Catholic priest and Slovak politician who acted as the Prime Minister of the Slovak Autonomous Region (from October 6, 1938 until March 14, 1939), the Prime Minister of the Slovak State (from March 14, 1939 until October 26, 1939), President of the Slovak Republic (1939–1945), and Chairman of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, the only Slovak political party legalized during the Nazi occupation (1938–1945). After 1942, Tiso was styled as “Vodca” (Leader), a Slovak imitation of Führer. He eradicated democracy, replacing it with a totalitarian clerical-fascist regime embodied by the “One God, one nation, one organization” slogan. Tiso collaborated with Nazi Germany during WWII. Under Tiso and Prime Minister Tuka (from 1939 until 1944), the Slovak leadership aligned itself with Nazi policy by implementing anti-Semitic legislation. In 1942, Slovakia deported approximately 58,000 Jews to Nazi concentration camps and ghettos. After WWII, Tiso was sentenced to death. See: Milan Ďurica, *Jozef Tiso (1887–1947), Životopisný profil* [Jozef Tiso 1887–1947. A biographical profile] (Bratislava: Lúč, 2006); Miroslav Fabricius and Ladislav Suško (eds.), *Jozef Tiso: Prejavy a články 1913–1938* [Jozef Tiso: Speeches and Articles 1913–1938] (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2002); Miroslav Fabricius and Katarína Hradská (eds.), *Jozef Tiso: Prejavy a články 1939–1944* [Jozef Tiso: Speeches and Articles 1939–1944] (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2007); Ivan Kamenec, *Tragédia politika, kňaza a človeka* [Jozef Tiso: The Tragedy of a Politician, Priest and Man] (Bratislava: Premedia, 2013); James Mace Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013); Eduard Nižňanský, “Die Vorstellungen Jozef Tiso über Religion, Volk und Staat und ihre Folgen für seine Politik während des Zweiten Weltkriegs,” in *Religion und Nation: Tschechen, Deutsche und Slowaken im 20. Jahrhundert*, ed. Kristina Kaiserová et al. (Essen: Klartext, 2015), 39–83; Eduard Nižňanský, “Anti-Semitic Policies of Jozef Tiso during the War and before the National Court,” in *Policy of Anti-Semitism and Holocaust in Post – War Retribution Trials in European States*, ed. Stanislav Mičev et al. (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP, 2019), 113–148.

indeed Christian, for we only seize what they had seized from our people since long ago.”⁸

Political stereotypes saw Jews as “liberal,” leftist (or “Jewish-Bolshevik”), capitalist, and Marxist. From the perspective of the conservative, nationalist, clerical, and Catholic HSPP, Jews stood for liberal or left-wing ideologies. In this respect, the statements and practice of HSPP were based on the notion of “Jewish Bolshevism,” the idea that essentially all Jews are adherents to radical communism. This claim has no rational basis because the Jews in Slovakia, in fact, belong to the traditional middle class and supported a large variety of political parties (including a Jewish one). In contrast, president Tiso called for a struggle against “all evildoers of the Slovak people, against Jewish Bolshevism.”⁹

Such autochthonous antisemitism combined with the image of the Jew as the enemy of the Slovaks and the Slovak state.¹⁰ This formed the basic intention of the Slovak antisemitism policy.¹¹ There were two political wings in the HSPP: “moderate” (Jozef Tiso) and radicals (Vojtech Tuka,¹² Alexander Mach¹³).

The “moderate” approach is reflected in a speech in January 1939 by Tiso: “The Jewish question will be resolved such that Jews in Slovakia will be left only as much influence as corresponds to their number in proportion to the entire population of Slovakia. Slovaks will be educated as such that they will be able to fully

8 *Slovák*, September 9, 1940, 4.

9 *Slovák*, June 6, 1939, 1.

10 Eduard Nižňanský, *Obraz nepriateľa v propagande počas II. svetovej vojny na Slovensku* [Image of the enemy in propaganda during World War II in Slovakia] (Banská Bystrica: Múzeum SNP, 2016).

11 For a chronology and phases of the Holocaust in Slovakia, see Eduard Nižňanský, “Der Holocaust in der Slowakei,” in *Unterrichtsbeispiele zu den Verbrechen im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Ulrich Habermann, Jörg Kayser, and Henrich Scheller (Berlin: Cultus e.v., 2005), 7–17.

12 Vojtech “Béla” Tuka (1880–1946) was a Slovak politician of the HSPP who served as Prime Minister (1939–1940) and Minister of Foreign Affairs (1940–1944), as well as a collaborator with Nazi Germany. Tuka was one of the main forces behind the deportation of the Jews from Slovakia to Nazi concentration camps in German occupied Poland. He was the leader of the radical wing of the HSPP. He was executed after WWII.

13 Alexander Mach (1902–1980) was associated with the far right wing of HSSP. Mach came to the fore in 1938 after the Munich Agreement and subsequent upsurge in Slovak nationalism as a close associate of Vojtech Tuka and Ferdinand Ďurčanský. He was the head of the Slovak Office of Propaganda (1938–1939). Mach was a member of the Slovak parliament from 1938 to 1945. He was an important representative of the paramilitary organization Hlinka Guard. In the years 1939–1944 he was its main commander. Hlinka Guard organized violent actions against the “enemies of Slovakia,” including Jews. From July 1940 he was also Minister of the Interior. As a minister, he organized the creation of Jewish labour camps in Slovakia. As a minister, he was responsible for organizing the deportation of Jews in 1942. After WWII he was sentenced to 30 years in jail.

enjoy economic control and be able to gradually take over all positions heretofore occupied by Jews.”¹⁴

The “moderate” promoted antisemitic policies were based on a quota that limited Jews in the social, economic, and other spheres of life to about four percent. This was implemented from the onset of Slovakia autonomy in Autumn 1938 to the Salzburg negotiations in 1940. However, after antisemitic policy became radicalized, the moderates did not express themselves or protest against the deportations of Jews in 1942.

In 1939, the radical Alexander Mach declared: “They’ve dealt with the Jews who have gold, wealth everywhere, and we will take care of them as well (...) he who does not work will not ever eat. He who has stolen something will have it taken from him! This is the practical solution to the entire Jewish question!”¹⁵

This was socio-economic antisemitism. Radicals wanted to exclude the Jewish community from society at all costs, despite the consequences for the majority of the community.

From the beginning of its existence, the Hlinka Guard¹⁶ was also radically antisemitic.

With the intervention of Nazi Germany in Slovak state politics, political radicals rose to power in the summer of 1940. However, the “moderates” were not opposed to the radicals’ attitude to “solving” the Jewish question. The politics of radical antisemitism resulted in a radical pauperization of the Jewish community in the wake of the liquidation and Aryanization of Jewish companies and businesses, as well as a continuous ban on issuing various licenses. The political program culminated with the organizing of Jewish deportations in 1942.

If it was aimed at Jews, the Slovak State first defined “who a Jew was” and then adopted legislation that infringed on Jewish property rights or professional activity.

On 18 April 1939, the Slovak government headed by Tiso passed Act no. 63/1939 Coll. regarding the definition of the term Jews and the limitation of Jewish activity in some professions. The definition of “Jew” covered all individuals professing a Jewish religion (unless they were christened before 30 October 1918), individuals without the sacrament of confession who had Jewish parents, as well as the children of such individuals. According to the historian Ivan Kamenec, this definition is based on religious (confessional) criteria.¹⁷ The definition of “Jew” according to

¹⁴ *Slovenská politika*, January 27, 1939, 2.

¹⁵ *Slovák*, February 7, 1939, 4.

¹⁶ The Hlinka Guard (Hlinkova Garda) was a militia (fighting organization of non-professional soldiers, citizens of the Slovak State) maintained by the Hlinka’s Slovak People Party.

¹⁷ Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie* [On the trail of tragedy] (Bratislava: Archa, 1991), 48.

Act no. 63/1939 Coll. was later specified by Regulation no. 102/1939 Coll. of the Office of the National Ministry of Justice and Internal Affairs from 26 April 1939. The regulation stated that the term “Jew” was defined till the end of the rearranging of social, economic, and political circumstances in the Slovak State, as well as in accordance with national tradition and in view of national subsistence, so that the Slovak nation could take over all public, economic and cultural positions crucial for its continued existence. The term “Jew,” defined in social and economic terms, was not intended to sort people by confession. The legislative body purported to move from a confessional definition toward a national one. The government made leeway for exceptions. This model was symptomatic for Slovak State politicians, including Tiso: on the one hand, there were sanctions (restrictions, disqualifications); on the other hand, there was the handing out of exceptions to those whom they chose at their own whim because, for instance, their profession made them necessary for the majority of society to properly function (doctors, veterinaries, engineers, etc.).

The Slovak State, in fact, aimed to regulate every aspect of life of the Jewish community. The Jews, as pariahs, could only stand by and watch what the state authorities would come up with next in an attempt to persecute them. The process of excluding Jews from public life began with the adoption of several government decrees between April and July 1939. The number of Jews active in some liberal professions (advocacy, medicine, pharmacy, journalism, public employees) was also regulated, and the method was supposed to reduce Jewish participation within each profession to the above-mentioned four percent (*numerus clausus*). The situation became even worse when German armed troops arrived in Slovakia in late August 1939.¹⁸

In July 1940, the radicals gained a footing within the country, which had a catalyzing effect of the implementation of antisemitic politics. The Interior Ministry issued a series of discriminatory regulations. Jewish citizens were denied the right to own inns, hunting and fishing licenses, guns, passports, driving licenses, radios, and optical apparatuses. Jewish persecution intensified, and punishments for officials and Slovak citizens who attempted to help them were made more severe. The wave of discriminatory measures continued with the expulsion of Jewish students from schools, in accordance with Regulation no. 208/1940 Coll. from 30 August 1940. This method of intervention against Jewish citizens was also approved by president Tiso. On the topic of limiting educational opportunities to the Jewish

¹⁸ It was in preparation for the war against Poland. The arrival of the Wehrmacht in Slovakia was based on the “Protection Treaty, March 1939.”

community, he made the following extreme nationalist (perhaps even Judeophobic) remarks:

Do not let them into schools, do not give Jews an opportunity for education. I say: if I want to protect my people so it is never despoiled by the Jew again, I must prevent him from doing so. I do not want our townsman to go to a Jewish innkeeper who sells on credit, then to sign a note and go to a Jewish banker, from the banker to an advocate, from him to court, and so, without violence, without theft, without blood they seize the property of the Slovak man. If I want to protect the Slovak, I must sever this Jewish chain. We must prevent Jews, armed with every sort of scholarly knowledge, from being able to pounce at the Slovak man in the future.¹⁹

Jews were expelled from all schools except public schools, where they were taught in separate classes.

In the autumn of 1940, Dieter Wisliceny, a German adviser (in German – *Betrater*) on the Jewish question, came to Slovakia.

In September 1940, Constitutional Law 210/1940 Coll. was adopted, which enabled the government to “solve” the Jewish question in one year. It was a classic Enabling Act.²⁰ Thus, from September 1940 until September 1941, we can only find government regulations “solving” the Jewish question. Subsequently, the government adopted Regulation no. 222/1940 Coll. which created the Central Economic Office (CEO, in Slovak “*Ústredný hospodársky úrad*”) which had: “performed everything that was necessary for the exclusion of Jews from Slovak economic life and for the transfer of Jewish property into Christian ownership, according to specific instruction.”²¹ Its first chairman was Augustín Morávek.²² The CEO functioned side by side with the Cabinet Office.

All Jewish organizations besides the official Jewish religious communities were disbanded after September 1940. A single authorized organization was established by the state – the Jewish Central (JC, in Slovak “*Ústredňa Židov*,” Regulation

¹⁹ *Slovák*, September 25, 1940, 4.

²⁰ Constitutional Act No. 210/1940 Coll. adopted on September 3, 1940: “Section 1 (1) The Government is authorised to take all the measures necessary in order to: a) exclude Jews from the Slovak economic and social life, b) transfer the Jewish assets into the Christian property, (2) Authorisation according to Sec. 1 shall be valid for one year since the date this Act entered into force.” Slovak Law Code 1940, Constitutional Act No. 210/1940 Coll.

²¹ Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie* [On the trial of the tragedy], 95.

²² Augustín Morávek (1901–?) was a Slovak politician and head of the Central Economic Office (CEO; *Ústredný hospodársky úrad*) from 1940 to 1942. Morávek actively participated in anti-Jewish measures and anti-Semitic legislation. Through the CEO, he managed the process of aryanization and liquidation of Jewish businesses. However, during the war, in connection with the investigation of the corruption of the CEO, he escaped (probably abroad) and thus avoided the post-war trials.

no. 234/1940 Coll.) – of which every Jew was required to be a member. The JC basically imposed state orders on the Jewish community.

Another anti-Jewish measure concerned Slovak housemaids employed in Jewish households: “On the basis of Art. 2 § 2 of Act no. 190/1939 Coll., the interior Ministry prohibits the employment of Aryan women under 40 years of age in Jewish households from 15 September 1940.” This affected many Slovaks who subsequently could not find another source of income.

Anti-Jewish measures enacted in 1941 also concerned Jewish immovable property. Jews in Slovakia were forbidden to live on streets and squares named after Anton Hlinka or Adolf Hitler. Apparently, Jews were not forced to move house for this reason.

On 9 September 1941, the Slovak government passed Regulation no. 198/1941 Coll. (the so-called Jewish Codex) on the legal status of Jews. With 270 articles, it was the most extensive legal norm ratified during the entire existence of the Slovak Republic. Similar to the Nazi Nuremberg laws, it determined Jewish identity on the basis of a racial principle. Whoever was descended from at least three ethnically Jewish grandparents was considered Jewish, and whoever was descended from at least one was considered a Jewish mixed-blood.²³ The Codex was opposed by Catholic bishops, and the Vatican diplomatically protested.²⁴ President Tiso was entitled to grant an exemption to certain individuals.²⁵

Provisions on the mandatory marking of Jews under Regulation no. 198/1941 Coll. came into being on 18 September 1941 with the publication of a decree of the Interior Ministry that specified the marking method. Jewish individuals were required to sew a visible Jewish mark on the left side of their outer garment, a yellow star made of felt, linen or other material, with a diameter of six cm and a light blue border 0.5 cm wide. Mandatory marking did not apply to children under six years of age, Jewish spouses of non-Jews, Jews retained in state services, Jews possessing a valid employment permit, and Jews baptized prior to 10 September 1941.²⁶

23 See Slovak Law Code 1941, Govt. Reg. 198/1941 Coll.

24 Ivan Kamenec, Vilém Prečan, and Stanislav Škorvánek (eds.), *Vatikán a Slovenská republika (1939–1945) Dokumenty*: [Vatican and Slovak Republic 1939–1945. Documents] (Bratislava: SAP, 1992), 56–66.

25 This discretion followed from § 255 and § 256 of Regulation 198/1941 Coll.

26 *Úradné noviny*, September 9, 1941, 1573.

Aryanization

From the very beginning of the existence of the Slovak Republic, its leading politicians promised that they would take Jewish businesses into “Aryan” hands by means of Aryanization and liquidation. These claims were based on the aforementioned socio-economic antisemitism. A state-guaranteed mechanism intended to despoil Jews of entrepreneurial, immovable, and movable property was systematically prepared – effectively, an encroachment on Jewish property rights. As the state legitimized Aryanization, its occurrence always fell within the confines of law, as well as the actions of Aryanizers. The regime created conditions under which Aryanization was considered permitted, commonplace, without risk of punishment, and, of course, backed by leading political figures. Aryanization was supported even by the president and Catholic priest Tiso. They cast away all moral principles, and the majority of the community, who took part in the process, gradually sunk into immorality, where everyone’s desire was simply to “hoard” as much as possible. The practical consequences of Aryanization and liquidation of Jewish property was the impoverishment of the Jewish community, which was then ghettoized and, in the end, deported to the concentration camps.

The Slovak Republic’s encroachments on Jewish property concerned: a) agricultural property (Act. no. 46/1940 Coll., and subsequent decrees of the State Land Office); b) Jewish companies and businesses (Act no. 113/1940 Coll., Government regulation no. 303/1940 Coll., a.o.); c) the Jewish housing fund (Government decree no. 238/1941 Coll. from 1 November 1941, a.o.); d) Jewish bank accounts (Regulation no. 271/1940, 272/1940, 186/1941, 199/1941, a.o.); e) Jewish movable property (a large number of regulations encroaching upon property rights, up to and including regulations from 1942, when tax offices auctioned the deportees property).

Other severe restrictions covered professional activity in certain fields (e.g., doctors, pharmacists, lawyers, etc.), which debarred Jews from earning a living on their own.

Of approximately 12,000 Jewish businesses and business licenses, about 2,000 were aryanized and the rest were liquidated.²⁷ The Slovak Republic aryanized agricultural property, bank deposits, real estate, and movable property, which it then sold off in various ways. If the Slovak Republic instrumentalized and institutional-

²⁷ Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie* [On the trial of the tragedy], 111–112; Jean-Marc Dreyfus and Eduard Nižňanský, “Jews and non-Jews in the aryanization process comparison of France and the Slovak State, 1939–1945,” in *Facing the catastrophe: Jews and non-Jews in Europe during World War II* (Oxford: Berg, 2011), 13–39.

ized economic antisemitism, then it is not surprising that the majority of the population participated in the confiscation of Jewish property.

The aryanization and liquidation of Jewish companies and businesses, as well as bans on certain professions, meant that Jews were pauperized by their own state and by fellow citizens.²⁸ These results of Slovak antisemitic politics, put into practice by the executive and the legislative bodies of state, had the consequence that the “Jewish question” became a social problem across the state from autumn 1941.²⁹ The results of Slovak antisemitic politics crossed paths with the Nazi Holocaust plan in autumn 1941, and the outcome were the deportations of Jews from Slovakia under mutual cooperation of both sides.³⁰ After all, Nazi Germany did not expect any complications in Slovakia, as one can judge by the protocols from the Wannsee conference.³¹ In 1942, the words of the German adviser Wisliceny were fulfilled: “Ridding 90,000 Jews of property will give rise to a problem that can only be solved by deportation.”³²

28 Eduard Nižňanský, “On relations between the Slovak majority and Jewish minority during World War II,” *Yad vashem studies* 42, no. 2 (2014): 47–89.

29 To support this historical construction, we quote an explanatory report from the Interior Ministry on April 1, 1942. According to this report, out of 88,951 Jews (Government regulation no. 198/1941 Coll. cited a number of 89,053 Jews) that made for approximately 22,000 households, 32,527 (36.3 percent) were initially gainfully employed. Another 4,000 Jews lived off income gained from their property without active employment (altogether 41 percent). Aryanizations and liquidations of companies and businesses, as well as rejections of work permits and various other anti-Jewish measures, led to the exclusion of 22,267 individuals, and 2,500 individuals (out of 4,000) lost the opportunity to live off income from their property (24,767 – meaning 71.7 percent). The explanatory report noted that about two thirds of these individuals were heads of families or households. The report concluded that 16,000 households (that is to say 72 percent of the original 22,000) lost the opportunity to earn a living. It also estimated the cost of supporting 16,000 pauperized Jewish households at 160 million Slovak Kron per year (10,000 per household) – comprising about 64,000 Jews. If we compare this number with the number of deportees – approximately 58,000 – and add an approximate number of 4,500 Jews interned in Jewish labour camps and Jewish labour centers, we may conclude that deportations allowed the government to deal with the Jewish social problem successfully. See Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec (eds.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939–1945). Dokumenty* [Holocaust in Slovakia 2. President, government, parliament SR and State Council about Jewish question (1939–1945). Documents] (Bratislava: NMŠ, 2003), 180–181.

30 Eduard Nižňanský, “Expropriation and deportation of Jews in Slovakia,” in *Facing the Nazi genocide: non-Jews and Jews in Europe* (Berlin: Metropol, 2004), 205–230.

31 ADAP Serie E, Tom 1, p. 272 (Document no. 150); Eduard Nižňanský, “The discussions of Nazi Germany on the deportation of Jews in 1942 – the examples of Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary,” *Historický časopis* 59 (suppl. 2011): 111–136.

32 Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie* [On the trial of the tragedy], 141.

Deportations of Jews from Slovakia 1942

Despite extensive research, we still cannot determine if the Slovak side first offered its pauperized Jews to Nazi Germany or if it only reacted promptly and positively to a German offer.³³ Slovak documents show that Prime Minister Tuka and Interior Minister Mach detailed the planned deportations at a government meeting on 3 March 1942.³⁴ We believe that the 1942 deportations represent the climax of the antisemitic politics of the Slovak Republic. The technical aspect of deportations from Slovak territories was ensured by the Slovak Republic authorities themselves.

From March 25 to October 20, 1942, 57 transport trains left Slovakia, of which 19 went to Auschwitz and 38 to the Lublin region. According to a report of the Slovak Ministry of Transportation and Public Works on January 14, 1943, the trains carried 57,752 Jews: 39,006 to the Lublin area and 18,746 Jews to Auschwitz.³⁵ Documents from the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs refer to 57,628 deported Jews.³⁶

Before the final transports left Slovakia in August 1942, President Tiso declared the following at a harvest home celebration in Holíč:

I would like to bring up one more question. Whether what is being done is Christian. Is it humane? Is not it robbery? But I ask: is it Christian for the Slovak nation to want to eliminate its eternal enemy the Jews? Is it Christian? Love of self is a commandment of God, and that love of self compels me to get rid of everything that harms me, that threatens my life. I do not think anyone needs to be convinced that the Jews element threatens the life of a Slovak. (...) Slovak throw them off, get rid of the bad one!³⁷

The standpoints of the radical and conservative wings of HSPP thus drew surprisingly close. Political responsibility for organizing deportations remained with the

33 Eduard Nižňanský (ed.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 4, Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie. 1939–1945* [Holocaust in Slovakia 4. The documents of German origins. (1939–1945)] (Bratislava: NMŠ, 2005), 113, 114, 207–212.

34 Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec (eds.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939–1945). Dokumenty* [Holocaust in Slovakia 2. President, government, parliament SR and State Council about Jewish question (1939–1945). Documents], 142.

35 Eduard Nižňanský (ed.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 4, Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie. 1939–1945* [Holocaust in Slovakia 4. The documents of German origins. (1939–1945)], 487–488, 532–533.

36 Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec (eds.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939–1945). Dokumenty* [Holocaust in Slovakia 2. President, government, parliament SR and State Council about Jewish question (1939–1945). Documents], 234–235.

37 *Slovák*, August 18, 1942, 4.

Slovak political representation, which during the war agreed to deport (but not to murder) its citizens of Jewish origin to an uncertain fate, where they could come to bodily, familial, and human harm and where they could certainly not fare as well as in Slovakia. The Slovak Republic even paid 500 RM to Nazi Germany for each deported Jew.³⁸

The German Ambassador H. Ludin had already wrote to Berlin in April 1942: “The Slovak government agreed to transport all Jews from Slovakia without any pressure from the German side. The President himself personally agreed with transportation, despite the intercession of the Slovak episcopate.”³⁹

The literature is rife with speculations and discussions on who stopped the deportations. A social analysis of the remaining Jewish community reveals that most of those who held exceptions were professionally indispensable (e.g., doctors, veterinarians, engineers, etc.), or were employed at Aryanized businesses as “economic Jews,” because the new owners were either uninterested or incapable of running the company. Some Jews were stationed in Jewish labour camps (Nováky, Sereď, Vyhne), where they worked for the benefit of the state.⁴⁰ After the deportations in 1942 20,000 Jews lived in Slovakia.

The “Peaceful Years”: 1943–1944

In February 1943, Interior Minister and HG Commander Alexander Mach spoke at a county meeting of the Hlinka Guard in the town of Ružomberok and declared: “But March will come, April will come, and transports will leave.”⁴¹

In 1943, an attempt was made to recommence deportations of Jews in Slovakia, but these did not ultimately take place. The attempt came after the defeat of the German Wehrmacht by Stalingrad and the defeat of Nazi Germany and fascist Italy in Africa. The situation on the front slowly began turning to the advantage of the anti-Hitler coalition (USA – Great Britain – USSR).

38 Eduard Nižňanský, “Payment for the deportations of Jews from Slovakia in 1942,” in *Discourses – diskurse* (Praha, 2008), 317–331.

39 Eduard Nižňanský (ed.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 4, Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie. 1939–1945* [Holocaust in Slovakia 4. The documents of German origins. (1939–1945)], 127–128.

40 See Igor Baka, *Židovský tábor v Novákoch 1941–1944*. [The Jewish Camp in Nováky 1941–1944] (Bratislava: Zing Print, 2001); Ján Hlavinka and Eduard Nižňanský, *Pracovný a koncentračný tábor v Sereďi 1941–1945* [The Labor and Concentration camp in Sereď 1941–1945] (Bratislava: DSH, 2009); Eduard Nižňanský, “Die Aktion Nisko, das Lager Sosnowiec (Oberschlesien) und die Anfänge des “Judenlagers”” in Vyhne (Slowakei), *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 11 (Berlin: Metropol, 2002), 325–335.

41 *Gardista*, February 9, 1943, 2.

Slovak National Uprising and Jews

In the autumn of 1944, the situation changed. The Slovak National Uprising⁴² broke out on August 29, facing Waffen-SS, Wehrmacht, and Einsatzgruppe H under the command of the SS-Obergruppenführer Gottlob Berger.⁴³ At a meeting on September 1 that included Berger, German Ambassador H. Ludin,⁴⁴ and other Embassy staff, as well as other German officials, it was decided to radically resolve the “Jewish question.” Einsatzgruppe H (head Jozef Witiska)⁴⁵ would imprison the Jews in camps, which would be guarded by the Hlinka Guard. The fate of Jews and the “rebels” thus “overlapped” and often resembled each other.

Witiska’s report of Einsatzgruppe H activities by December 9, 1944 mentions that the number of people arrested had reached 18,937, of whom 9,653 were Jews and 3,409 partisans (others included deserters and a variety of other people). Some 8,975 Jews and 530 “others” (in German “sonstige”) were deported to German concentration camps, while 2,257 of those arrested were murdered (in German “Sonderbehandlung”). Jews, Slovaks, Roma, soldiers, partisans, “rebels,” and civilians were found in mass graves. According to historian Mičev, there were 211 mass graves with 5,306 victims in Slovakia.

Sometime at the end of September 1944, one of Adolf Eichmann’s trusted subordinates, SS-Hauptsturmführer Alois Brunner,⁴⁶ came to Slovakia, took command of Camp Sereď, and organized the renewed deportations of Jews. According to the last research, 11,719 Jews were deported from Sereď on 11 transport trains (Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Oranienburg, Ravensbrück, Mauthausen, Theresienstadt).

42 The Slovak National Uprising was an anti-fascist political and military uprising (August 29–October 26, 1944). Slovak political leaders (communists and democrats) who were in opposition to the regime of Jozef Tiso prepared the uprising, by which they declared themselves to the anti-Hitler coalition. The military action was carried out by part of the Slovak army in conjunction with the partisans. The uprising was mainly concentrated in central Slovakia. It was defeated by the military forces of Nazi Germany.

43 Gottlob Christian Berger (1896–1975) was a senior German Nazi official who held the rank of SS-Obergruppenführer und General der Waffen-SS (lieutenant general) and was the chief of the SS Main Office responsible for Schutzstaffel (SS) recruiting during World War II.

44 Hanns Elard Ludin (1905–1947) was a German diplomat and German ambassador in Bratislava in 1941–1945. After World War II he was convicted and executed by the National Court in 1947.

45 Josef Witiska (1894–1945), SS-Obergruppenführer, who from September 1944 was Chief of Einsatzgruppe H in Slovakia (paramilitary death squads of Nazi Germany).

46 Alois Brunner (1912–?), joined Eichmann in 1939 in the Zentrallstelle für jüdische Auswanderung in Vienna. He organized deportations from Vienna, Berlin, Salonica, Paris, and Slovakia.

Apostolic Delegate Giuseppe Burzio⁴⁷ discussed the tragic situation of Jews in a telegram on October 26, 1944:

Steps to save the Jews before the occupation were ineffective; deportations is [sic] ongoing and the search for Jews in hiding continues. As a result of the occupation, the remnants of Slovak independence have also disappeared. The government and the President of the Republic servilely carry out the orders of the occupation forces' administrative offices. Good Catholics are dismayed by the president's attitude and are asking what he is waiting for, why does he not submit his resignation.⁴⁸

Burzio's comment reflects Tiso's personal and political failure. As quoted above, Burzio had earlier commented that Tiso has "no understanding and not even one word of sympathy for the persecuted: he sees the Jews as the source of all evil." Clearly, the Italian and Slovak Catholic priests judged the tragedy of the Jews completely differently.

The policy of antisemitism, deportations, and the Holocaust in Slovakia meant the end of the existence of an organized Jewish community in Slovakia. After World War II, most of the surviving Jews emigrated from Slovakia (for example to Israel).

Introduction: The Relations Between History and Politics

The mutual influence of historiography and politics (or even national memory) is a phenomenon that occurs in every state. It affects more than just interpretations of contemporary history. The pursuit of monuments, busts, and street names – elements that aspire to be the symbols of a state or nation – is a tendency that we may encounter throughout the age of ideology, i. e. in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, as well as in earlier periods (secular or ecclesiastical monuments). We are confronted with it. When it comes to Slovakia, the interpretation of antisemitism and the Holocaust as well as their perception in historiography and in relation to actual politics are also linked to the fall of communism in 1989. Until that point, the Holocaust had been a marginal topic, both for the historiographical community and society (i. e. in school education). The fall of communism meant not only the

⁴⁷ Giuseppe Burzio (1901–1966), Vatican diplomat, *Chargé d'affaires* in Slovakia in 1940–1945. He repeatedly intervened with the Slovak government to stop deportations of the Jews.

⁴⁸ Ivan Kamenec, Vilém Prečan, and Stanislav Škorvánek (eds.), *Vatikán a Slovenská republika (1939–1945) Dokumenty* [Vatican and Slovak Republic 1939–1945. Documents], 202–203.

formation of new political institutions and the creation of parliamentary democracy in Czechoslovakia (and from 1993 onwards, in Slovakia itself, as the two countries separated), but also – importantly for this analysis – a brief ideological vacuum which was then gradually filled with the ideas of nationalism and Christianity.⁴⁹ Slovakia had essentially no liberal tradition to follow, even going back to the interwar period. From the perspective of forming and developing a sovereign state after a period of de facto dependence on USSR, it seemed logical that after the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993, Vladimír Mečiar's⁵⁰ cabinet actually tapped into the latent nationalism.

The Holocaust in Slovak Historiography

In general, it can be said that prior to 1989 the Holocaust was among several topics marginalized by Slovak historiography. While the seminal Slovak work on the Holocaust was written by Ivan Kamenec⁵¹ back in the early 1970s as a doctoral dissertation, it was only published as a monograph in 1991. The most important finding that emerges from the analysis of Slovak literature on the Holocaust is that, besides its obvious historiographic dimension, it was frequently meant to serve political purposes (including in the area of education).

After 30 years of research, it can be acknowledged that the basic facts of the Holocaust in Slovakia are already reliably established and reconstructed, both in domestic and foreign historiography. They are being further elaborated, with a

⁴⁹ Timothy Byrnes, *Transnational Catholicism in Postcommunist Europe* (Landham; Boulder; NY; Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2001); Pedro Ramet, "Christianity and National Heritage among the Czechs and Slovaks," in *Religion and Nationalism in East European Politics*, ed. Pedro Ramet (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1989), 264–285; Agáta Šústová Drellová, "Čo znamená národ pre katolíkov na Slovensku?" [What does the "nation" mean to Catholics in Slovakia?], *Historický časopis* 67 (2019): 385–412.

⁵⁰ Vladimír Mečiar (1942) is a Slovak politician who served as Prime Minister of Slovakia three times, from 1990 to 1991, from 1992 to 1994, and from 1994 to 1998. He was the leader of the People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (Ludová Strana – Hnutie za demokratické Slovensko/ HZDS). Mečiar led Slovakia during the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1992–1993.

⁵¹ Ivan Kamenec, *Po stopách tragédie* [On the Trial of Tragedy]; see: Nina Paulovičová, "Pokus o komparáciu monografie Ivana Kamenca "Po stopách tragédie" s niektorými významnými dielami o holokauste v zahraničí" ["An attempt to compare Ivan Kamenec's monograph On the Trial of Tragedy with some important works on the Holocaust abroad"] in Edita Ivaničková et al., *Z dejín demokratických a totalitných režimov na Slovensku a v Československu v 20. Storočí* (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2008), 18–29.

focus on the chronological, regional, or thematic perspective.⁵² Works of Slovak historiography published after 1989 can be categorized in the following way.

Collections of Documents

A five-volume edition, “Riešenie židovskej otázky na Slovensku” (“The Solution of the Jewish Question in Slovakia”), was published by the Museum of Jewish Culture in Bratislava.⁵³ This collection does not meet the basic criteria for the editing of scientific sources. In the case of the first three volumes, the author misrepresented the content of the documents and did not inform the readers of the changes made. There are also issues with document signatures as well as missing names and geographical and nominal entries in local registers.

The Milan Šimečka Foundation (Nádácia Milana Šimečku, Bratislava), with support from the Holocaust Documentation Centre (Dokumentáčné stredisko holokaustu – DSH, Bratislava), has already published eight volumes in the thematically arranged “Holokaust na Slovensku” [*Holocaust in Slovakia*] series. Given the fact it was co-authored by one of the authors of this chapter, we will refrain from evaluating it here, but merely make a brief note of its existence. A German publication, “Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalistiche Deutschland 1933–1945, volume 13 (Slowakei, Rumänien und Bulgarien),”

52 On the historiography of the Holocaust in Slovakia, see Ivan Kamenec, “Phenomenon of the Holocaust in Historiography, Art and the Consciousness of Slovak Society,” in *Holocaust as a Historical and Moral Problem of the Past and the Present*, ed. Monika Vrzgulova and Daniela Richterová (Bratislava: DSH, 2008), 331–339; Eduard Nižňanský, “Der Holocaust in der Slowakei in der slowakischen Historiography der neunziger Jahre,” *Bohemia* 44 (2003): 370–388; Nina Paulovičová, “The Unmasterable Past? Slovaks and the Holocaust: The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-communist Slovakia,” in *Bringing the Dark Past to Light. The Reception of the Holocaust in Post-Communist Europe*, ed. John-Paul Himka and Joanna Michlic (Lincoln/London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), 549–590; Nina Paulovičová, “Mapping the Historiography of the Holocaust in Slovakia in the Past Decade (2008–2018). Focus on the Analytical Category of Victims,” *Judaica et Holocaustica* 10, no. 1 (2019): 46–71; Tomas Sniegón, *Vanished History: The Holocaust in Czech and Slovak Historical Culture* (Berghahn Books, 2017); Milošlav Szabó, “Zwischen Geschichtswissenschaft und Wissenschaft. Der Holocaust in der slowakischen Historiographie nach 1999,” *Einsicht* 11 (2014): 16–23.

53 L. Hubená, ed. *Solution of the Jewish Question in Slovakia 1938–1945*. 5 volumes (Bratislava, n.d.).

makes extensive references to the aforementioned series, using it as a source of more than seventy percent of analyzed documents on Slovakia.⁵⁴

Another publication of historical and, unusually, political significance is a collection of documents entitled “Vatikán a Slovenská republika” [“Vatican and the Slovak Republic”].⁵⁵ It gives Slovak readers access to the Vatican’s diplomatic documents (“Actes and Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale”) which show the Holy See’s approach to the “solution” of the Jewish question in Slovakia. However, materials regarding Vatican’s internal matters, such as instructions issued to Slovak bishops during their visits to Rome, remain uncovered.

Memoirs

Memoirs provide insight into the perspective of the victims. Their publication throughout the post-World War II period played an important role for the development of historiography of this subject. Among the most notable positions were books co-authored by Alfred Wetzler⁵⁶ and Rudolf Vrba.⁵⁷ The authors of this memoir successfully escaped from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in 1944. Their testimony about the situation in the camp and the mass killings there played an important role and was published as the “Auschwitz-Report.”⁵⁸ After 1989, more of such accounts were published, coming from people who stood at different levels of hierarchy among concentration camp prisoners, from “ordinary häftlings” (Hilda Hrabovecká⁵⁹) to individuals positioned much higher

54 Mariana Hausleitner and Souzana Hazan and Barbara Hutzelmann (Hg.), *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung der europäischen Juden durch das nationalsozialistische Deutschland 1933–1945*. Band 13 Slowakei, Rumänien und Bulgarien (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter GmbH, 2018).
55 Ivan Kamenec, Vilém Prečan, and Stanislav Škorvánek, *Vatikán a Slovenská republika /1939–1945/*. *Dokumenty* [Vatican and the Slovak Republic 1939–1945].

56 Alfred Wetzler, *Čo Dante nevidel*. [What Dante Did not See] (Bratislava, 1964).

57 Rudolf Vrba, *I Cannot Forgive* (Vancouver, 1997).

58 Eduard Nižňanský, “The history of the escape of Arnošt Rosin and Czeslaw Mordowicz from the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp to Slovakia in 1944,” in *Uncovering the shoah:*

resistance of Jews and their efforts to inform the world on genocide [Odhalovanie Šoa : odpor a úsilie

Židov informovať svet o genocide], ed. Ján Hlavinka and Hana Kubátová (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2016), 113–134; Ivan Kamenec, “The Escape of Rudolf Vrba and Alfréd Wetzler from Auschwitz and the Fate of Their Report,” in Ján Hlavinka and Hana Kubátová (eds.), *Uncovering the shoah: resistance of Jews and their efforts to inform the world on genocide* [Odhalovanie Šoa: odpor a úsilie Židov informovať svet o genocide] (Bratislava: HÚ SAV, 2016), 101–112.

59 Hilda Hrabovecká. *Ruka s vytetovaným číslom* [Hand with a Tattooed Number] (Bratislava: Mar- enčin PT, 1998).

(Manca Schwalbová⁶⁰). There have also been several memoirs authored by politicians of the war-time Slovak republic. Most of them, however, sidestep the subject of the Holocaust. We learn most about the “solution” of the Jewish issue from the works of Gejza Medrický⁶¹ (Minister of Economy) and Imrich Karvaš⁶² (Chairman of the National Bank).

Minority Perspectives

Most of the scholarly and popular literature on the Holocaust in Slovakia published after 1989 analyzes Jews in Slovakia⁶³ as a minority and an object of antisemitic policies of the Slovak leadership represented in the parliament (1939–1945) by Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party [HSL’S – Hlinková slovenská ľudová strana].⁶⁴ The authors describe, in chronological or thematic order, the systematic elimination of Jews in that period – their exclusion from civic, political, and economic life, all the way to the tragic culmination in the shape of deportations to extermination camps. Most writers analyze history by looking at three main groups: victims (Jews), perpetrators (across the broader spectrum of the HSL’S ruling elite), and the silent majority. In doing so, they adopt a well-known scheme proposed by R. Hilberg: victims – murderers – bystanders.⁶⁵ In terms of attributing responsibility for the events, they tend to see the majority of Slovak population as something of a background element, a difficult-to-describe silent majority. Some present specific examples of violence (or the organization of violence) on the part of said majority, such as the Hlinka Guard (HG) or the paramilitary offshoot of the Deutsche Partei (DP),⁶⁶ the Freiwillige Schutzstaffeln (FS).⁶⁷ Sometimes, they focus on the role of

60 Schwalbová Manca, *Vyhasnuté oči* [Quiescent Eyes] (Bratislava, 1964).

61 Gejza Medrický, *Minister spomína* [The Minister’s Reminiscence] (Bratislava: Litera, 1993).

62 Imrich Karvaš, *Moje pamäti (V pazúroch Gestapa)* [My Memories (In the Clasp of the Gestapo)] (Bratislava: NKV International, 1994).

63 The reference is to Jews in Slovakia, or the Jewish community in Slovakia, and not to Slovak Jews, since only a small minority of Jews declared themselves to be Slovaks. See: Livia Rothkirchen, “The Situation of Jews in Slovakia between 1939 and 1945,” *Jahrbuch für Antisemitismusforschung* 7 (1998): 46–71.

64 The only legalized Slovak political party during the existence of the Slovak state in 1939–1945.

65 Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992); idem: *The Destruction of the European Jewry*, third edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).

66 The Deutsche Partei (DP) was a political party of the German minority (Volksdeutsch) in Slovakia, which had become fascist.

67 Freiwillige Schutzstaffeln (FS), Engl.: Voluntary Protection Corps.

individuals, e.g. Jozef Tiso (Prime Minister and, later, President of the Slovak Republic), Vojtech Tuka (Prime Minister) or Alexander Mach (Minister of the Interior). Although many works take their roots from or are influenced by the perspective of the Jewish minority, one should also take note of numerous studies, monographs as well as master and doctoral dissertations about particular Jewish communities (Bratislava – Petra Lárišová; Igor Baka, Zuzana Ševčíková, and Eduard Nižňanský; Banská Bystrica – Eduard Nižňanský and Michala Lônčíková; Dolný Kubín – Barbora Jakobyová and Eduard Nižňanský; Dunajská Streda – Atilla Simon; Komárno – Miroslav Michela; Medzilaborce – Ján Hlavinka, etc.). Some books have also been written in English. The Israeli Chamber of Commerce supports the publication of local monographs under its “Lost City” project. A special place within this thematic category is held by works about the system of forced labor and Jewish work camps in Slovakia (Nováky – published by Baka⁶⁸; Sereď – published by Jan Hlavinka and Eduard Nižňanský⁶⁹).

Local Aggressors

To fully reflect the trends in the historiography of the Holocaust, we have to mention the work of Katarína Hradská, who wrote a book about Dieter Wisliceny,⁷⁰ who acted as a Nazi advisor (“Berater”) for the “solution” of the Jewish issue in Slovakia.

Social Background of the Holocaust

The first works capturing the social environment and, specifically, the relations between the Jewish minority and the Slovak majority population appeared after 2000. They present changes and processes that led to the exclusion of Jews from the Slovak economy: Aryanization, liquidation of Jewish businesses and the craft industry as well as deportations. They also describe a shift in the stratification of the Slovak majority which occurred as the proponents of Aryanization benefited from taking over Jewish property and used it to reap new profits. It seems that the above-mentioned phenomena provide a more fitting basis for the analysis of

⁶⁸ Igor Baka, *Židovský tábor v Novákoch 1941–1944* [The Jewish Camp in Novák 1941–1944].

⁶⁹ Ján Hlavinka and Eduard Nižňanský, *Pracovný a koncentračný tábor v Sereďi 1941–1945* [The Labour and Concentration camp in Sereď 1941–1945].

⁷⁰ Katarína Hradská, *Prípád Wisliceny. Nacistickí poradcovia a židovská otázka na Slovensku* [The Wisliceny Case: Nazi Advisors and the Jewish Question in Slovakia] (Bratislava: AEPRESS, 1999).

the minority-majority relations than Hilberg's classification. One also needs to identify which exact groups within the Slovak majority actually replaced the Jews after their elimination from economic, professional, and social life. This question is linked to another topic: the formation of a middle class. This is because, in terms of their economic and social position as well as their representation in free-lance professions, Jews in Slovakia represented a typical middle class. Here, the analysis necessarily enters the realm of politics, as the group which became the new middle class owed their status to the help from the country's only legal party, HSLS, and its connection to the regime. This is why more attention needs to be paid to local aggressors and perpetrators, primarily the lower-level representatives of the public administration and party structures, including the Hlinka Guard (HG). We can examine the upward mobility of these local groups which used their political connections and exploited the circumstances by coming into the possession of wealth and property removed from Jews.⁷¹ The results of such research done to date show that it is best to analyze these events locally, with a focus on a particular town or city.

Legal Analysis of Anti-Jewish Legislation

Historians of law (e.g. Katarína Zavacká, Ladislav Hubenák) have published several volumes on this subject. We can only remark that the first of such works was published as early as the 1960s.

Oral History

A separate part of research on the Holocaust is the work done by ethnologists (Peter Salner, Monika Vrzgulová) rather than historians. The Milan Šimečka Foundation, with the support of Yale University, recorded 150 spoken accounts from Holocaust victims. The Holocaust Museum in Sereď and the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising in Banská Bystrica have also made similar efforts worthy of attention.

⁷¹ For more detail, see: Eduard Nižňanský and Ján Hlavinka, *Arizácie* [The Aryanzation] (Bratislava, 2010); Eduard Nižňanský and Ján Hlavinka, *Arizácie v regiónoch Slovenska* [The Aryanzation in the regions of Slovakia] (Bratislava, 2010).

Generally About the Works of the Holocaust

Historians (Ivan Kamenec, Ladislav Lipscher)

So far, only three monographs have attempted to capture the Slovak antisemitic policy and the Holocaust in Slovakia in its entirety.

With his interest in the persecution and elimination of the Jewish population in Slovakia, Ivan Kamenec has essentially been a lone crusader in Slovak historiography since the 1960s. His classic work “Po stopách tragédie” [“On the Trail of Tragedy”] to this day constitutes a seminal piece of research on the Holocaust in Slovakia. We see Kamenec’s work, influenced by Marxism, as analysis of not only the Holocaust but also the war-time Slovak Republic. He pointed to the problem of autochthonous antisemitism in Slovakia and its implications for the formulation of antisemitic policies – whether among the moderates⁷² or the radicals.⁷³ He also examined how the authorities of the Slovak Republic defined Jews as an enemy and what consequences that attitude had for the Jewish community. He presented, in chronological order, the institutionalization and implementation of antisemitic policies by the war-time state. From a broader perspective, he also showed the solution of the Jewish question as part of a domestic power struggle between the so-called moderates and radicals, as both groups sought to gain the support of Nazi Germany and secure their political power. He wanted to distinguish genuinely autochthonous antisemitic policies of the war-time Slovak Republic from those that emerged as a result of Nazi pressure (e.g. deportations). Naturally, political realities of the times prevented Kamenec from researching foreign archives (e.g. Politisches Archiv des Auswärtiges Amt, Berlin). Prior to 1989, he had only been allowed to publish some of the results of his extensive work.

For similar reasons, Ladislav Lipscher’s book *Židia v slovenskom štáte* [Jews in the Slovak State] was only published in Slovakia after 1989. After the author’s emigration, the book was also translated into German and English editions. After leaving Slovakia, Lipscher himself ceased his work as a historian and abandoned his research on the Holocaust.

⁷² For example, President Jozef Tiso.

⁷³ Specifically, Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka and Minister of the Interior Alexander Mach.

The Problem of the So-called Slovak Revisionism

Even in the case of a subject such as the Holocaust, there have been attempts at politicizing it. After Slovakia's democratic transition, a group of nationalist-minded historians returned to Slovakia. In principle, there have been no revisionist works published in Slovakia – no publications fundamentally question the existence of the Holocaust. The “revisionism” that one might encounter is a certain defense mechanism adopted by some within the historiographic community, whereby the responsibility for the deportation of Jews is attributed to Nazi Germany or, possibly, individual figures among the radicals (Prime Minister V. Tuka or Minister of the Interior, A. Mach). According to this line of thought, President Tiso supposedly helped many Jews through “thousands of exemptions” and bore no responsibility for antisemitic policies adopted in Slovakia. Examples of such perception include a collection entitled “Zamlčaná pravda o Slovensku” [“The Concealed Truth about Slovakia”] and Milan Stanislav Ďurica's⁷⁴ book *Slovenský podiel na európskej tragédii Židov* [The Slovak Share in the European Tragedy of Jews]. Ďurica exclusively used sources that suited his line of argument, ascribing the responsibility for the “solution of the Jewish question” to Nazi Germany and presenting Tiso as well as most of the Slovak ministers (with the exception of Tuka and Mach) as champions of Slovak independence in the face of Nazi pressure. The author frequently replaced the term “deportation” with “evacuation” and interpreted the Constitutional Act No. 68/1942 Coll. as a form of “resistance,” while it was this exact legal document that, by means of retroactivity, legalized the deportation of Jews (about 58,000 Jews were deported between March and October 1942). The Act reflected the supposed pursuit of the so-called lesser evil – a trend that so often manifested itself during the times of the Slovak Republic. By adopting it, the country's politicians wanted to at least partially save their faces by showing that Slovakia was not deporting all Jews. A political dimension can also be recognized in another book by Ďurica, *Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov* [The History of Slovakia and Slovaks], published in 1995 as a supplementary school textbook, in which one finds antisemitic sentiment.

Similar notions were voiced by František Vnuk. In his biography of Alexander Mach (Minister of the Interior), Vnuk devotes merely 25 pages to antisemitic policies and the Holocaust, while almost entirely avoiding mentions of Mach's radical

⁷⁴ Milan Stanislav Ďurica (1925) is a Slovak historian and theologian, professor of theology at the Salesian Theological College in Abano Terme (Italian), and since 1993 professor of scholastic history at the Cyril and Methodius Theological Faculty of the Comenius University in Bratislava (Slovakia). He retired from teaching in 1997. He has been criticized as an “ultranationalist.”

antisemitic rhetoric and statements. There are barely a few lines on the 1942 deportations, with no specific numbers of affected people.⁷⁵

As was already mentioned, the entire topic is connected with a broader discussion about the character of the war-time Slovak Republic's regime and the responsibility of Slovak politicians for the events of that time. In this context, the aforementioned works represent the defensive line of the argument whereby President Tiso, the government, and the parliament saved the Slovak nation, even if "other" things also happened as a consequence. It is also stressed that the situation of the Jews in the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, or in Poland, was much worse.

The So-called Slovak Revisionism and its Impact on Historical Literature Abroad

It is worth noting how the Slovak version of revisionism has influenced historiography outside of Slovakia. In this context, one should consider, for instance, a book written by Walter Brandmüller⁷⁶ called *Holocaust in der Slowakei und die katholische Kirche* [Holocaust in Slovakia and the Catholic Church], published in 2003.⁷⁷ Interestingly, Brandmüller is a German medieval scholar and a cardinal of the Catholic Church, with close ties to the Vatican. The list of sources cited in the book makes it more or less evident that he does not have command of the Slovak language, while his advisers (Emília Hrabovec and the aforementioned Milan Ďurica, among others) only provided him with selected works on the topic. In all likelihood, this explains the conspicuous absence of well-known publications by Ivan Kamenec, Katarína Hradská, Eduard Nižňanský or Peter Salner. Brandmüller's book draws heavily on a selection of Vatican documents, "Actes et Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale,"⁷⁸ which the author supplements with several other documents. It must be pointed out that the book does not mention the fact that some of the documents regarding Slovakia were originally presented to the Slovak audience by Ivan Kamenec, Viliam Prečan, and Stanislav Škorvánek in a volume of documents entitled "Vatikán a Slovenská republika"

⁷⁵ František Vnuk, *Mať svoj štát znamená život* [Having own state means life] (Bratislava: Ozveny, 1991).

⁷⁶ Walter Brandmüller (1929) is a German prelate of the Catholic Church, a cardinal since 2010. He was the president of the Pontifical Committee for Historical Sciences from 1998 to 2009.

⁷⁷ Walter Brandmüller, *Holocaust in der Slowakei und die katholische Kirche* [The Holocaust in Slovakia and the Catholic Church] (Ph. C. M. Schmidt, 2003).

⁷⁸ P. Blet, R.A. Graham, A. Martini, and B. Schneider (eds.), *Actes and Documents du Saint Siège relatifs à la Seconde Guerre Mondiale. Ed. I – XI* (Cita del Vaticano, 1970–1981).

[“The Vatican and the Slovak Republic 1939–1945. Documents”]. Brandmüller comprehensively fails to refer to post-Munich political changes in Slovakia. The book’s title suggests it should contain information on the number and role of Catholic priests active in Slovak politics (e.g. in the Parliament, State Council or Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party) or spiritual leaders of the Hlinka Guard in the times of the Slovak Republic. However, such data is simply absent. In a similar fashion, the author does not analyze the relations between Nazi Germany and the Slovak state. In fact, the book may leave readers with an impression that until 1940 there were essentially no developments regarding Slovak Jewry that warrant any discussion. Brandmüller adopts certain nationalist stereotypes by implying that in the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Jews were pro-Hungarian and anti-Slovak, while later, during the times of the interwar Czechoslovakia, they favored the Protestant Czechs over Slovaks. He also claims that Slovak Catholics’ resentment towards the Jews was socially (or economically) motivated, rather than religiously. However, anti-Judaist sentiments can be heard in many statements made by Catholic theologians, such as Jesuit Provincial, Jozef Mikuš, a professor of theology, Štefan Zlatoš, and President Jozef Tiso himself. The only element acknowledged in the German cardinal’s analysis is the dramatic episode from 1942. Brandmüller refers to a letter supposedly written by bishop Ján Vojtaššák⁷⁹ to stop deportations. It is not clear from the text, however, whether the bishop wrote the letter in 1942 or 1943. The author’s glosses that in fact the author of the letter from March 1943 was an unnamed Jewish citizen and that Bishop Vojtaššák was only its intended addressee. This issue will be dealt with in more detail in the following text. With regard to the Constitutional Act 68/1942 Coll., the author uses Ďurica’s thesis that the law was an act of resistance, since it allowed exceptions on religious grounds (e.g. for converts). He closes his analysis with a reference to a documented statement from Hanns Elard Ludin (German ambassador), dated June 1942, in which it is claimed the deportations have ceased. The information, however, is false, as four more transports are known to have left Slovakia in July, while further instances occurred throughout September and October. Brandmüller mentions neither the number of post-June transport nor the number of deported people. He states that President Tiso stopped the deportations in 1942 after protests from the Vatican, yet cites no documents to support such a claim. He describes in detail interventions made by Giuseppe Burzio, Holy See’s chargé d’affaires in Bratislava from 1940 to 1945, who took up the issue with President Tiso.

79 Ján Vojtaššák (1877–1965) was a Roman Catholic bishop of the Spiš Diocese. From 1940 to 1945 he was a Vice-President of the State Council, which at the time was understood as the second chamber of parliament.

He proceeds to dissect Tiso's letter to Pope Pius XII, dated November 1944, in which the President attempted to exculpate himself from personal responsibility. Brandmüller concludes that the contents of the letter were shaped by Tiso's powerlessness, blindness, or even cynicism. In the final parts of his book, he ponders over whether excommunicating Tiso could have been an effective disciplinary measure, adding that even in medieval times such acts did not fulfil their purpose. In doing so, he calls into question his aptitude as a medieval scholar and cardinal.

The Relationship Between Governmental Power and Historiography. The Case of M. S. Ďurica's book: "History of Slovakia and Slovaks"

To illustrate the links between historiography and politics, we will present three examples of how political power has been used to endorse a certain historiographic approach or how the government has used an interpretation of history to not only strengthen its position, but also attempt to reshape the national memory and influence the school education process. Naturally, one may also ponder whether this type of approach was not a throwback to the practices of the previous regime.

M. S. Ďurica is among the representatives of the revisionist approach in Slovak historiography. Ďurica returned from exile in Italy after 1989 and acted from a national-Christian position. In doing so, he primarily tried to reinterpret the history of the Slovak Republic (1939–1945). When Slovakia was re-established as an independent country in 1993, its ruling elite scrambled to look for ways to strengthen the country's legitimacy. In that pursuit, it sought historical symbols, figures, and episodes that could be used to justify the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the existence of a new state. The government's desire was even more understandable given the fact that during the 1992 election campaign, none of the competing political parties openly advocated independence. Hence, the burden of legitimizing Vladimír Mečiar's cabinet and Slovakia's rebirth as a sovereign entity was shifted onto the interpretation of the history of the Slovaks. It is in this context that the "Old nation – young state" slogan emerged into the public discourse, which implies that Slovaks have been present as a nation in European history since approximately the ninth century, but were constantly under someone else's rule: first, the Hungarians (for roughly 1,000 years) and later, for much of the twentieth century, by the Czechs (with parallel pressure from the USSR) under the Czechoslovak state. Once the independent Slovak Republic was established in 1993, its political elites were looking for symbols that would help vindicate that decision. They hence at-

tempted to reinterpret the history of the war-time Slovak Republic (1939–1945) as a positive model for the 1990s.

It is important to note that, in general, the existence of various historiographical approaches is not wrong *per se*, as it helps push our knowledge and understanding of history forward. Our view of Ďurica's book does not stem from our unwillingness to engage with a different interpretive model or methodology. Ďurica's story is connected to the question of education. It is understandable that after the fall of communism it was necessary to write new history textbooks – the previous regime had distorted interpretations of history, especially the twentieth century. After 1993, the Slovak government was primarily influenced by Vladimír Mečiar's nationalist vision. Its implementation could be seen, for instance, in the battle for national symbols. Even though the Slovaks became a political nation thanks to the existence of the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), the anniversary of its establishment (October 28, 1918) was not set as a memorial day in independent Slovakia.

From 1993 onwards, the ideological vacuum was gradually filled with nationalism and Christian theology. Prime Minister Mečiar's cabinet was formed in cooperation with the Slovak National Party (SNS). SNS representative Eva Slavkovská⁸⁰ served as the Minister of Education and Science from 1994 to 1998. In 1995, the Ministry commissioned Ďurica to develop an auxiliary history textbook for schools. Once again, it needs to be emphasized that we do not question the need to replace the previous textbooks which had clearly been ideologically influenced by the previous regime. Given Slovakia's gradual opening towards the EU, the European Commission decided to assist in the effort by providing funds for the creation of new teaching aids, using the PHARE Education Support scheme.

As it turned out, Ďurica's book, entitled *History of Slovakia and Slovaks*, is problematic in nearly all respects. It was prepared as an annotated chronological manual. It contains factual errors and imbalances. Its ethical dimension is also questionable, as it presents a biased, manipulated interpretation of historical events. Ďurica tries to prove the thousand-year-existence of the "Slovak ethnic group" and the long-standing provenance of the Slovak nation – a spirit that permeates the entire textbook. In relation to antisemitism and the Holocaust, the author glorifies the totalitarian regime of the Slovak Republic in 1939–1945 and its President, Jozef Tiso, as a Catholic leader at the head of a Christian state. Ďurica even tries to cynically distort the persecution of the Jewish minority by disregarding the repressive nature of those measures. He claims the deportation of Jews

⁸⁰ Eva Slavkovská (1942); member of Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana/SNS); Ministry of Education and Science 1994–1998.

from Slovakia was exclusively initiated by the German side. He tries to put the blame for antisemitic policies adopted in Slovakia (including the aforementioned deportations) on the Nazis. He presents Slovak politicians as “the good guys” of that story, as opposed to the Nazi figures, whom he casts as villains. There are several examples of this bias. In relation to a Government Decree no. 198/1941 (the so-called “Jewish Code,” Decree no. 198 Sl. Coll. from September 9, 1940), which introduced racial prejudice as a foundation for antisemitic legislation, Ďurica argues that Tiso did not sign the Decree. He tries to create an impression that the President was somehow defiant and did not approve of antisemitic policies. However, he does not mention that under the 1939 Constitution a presidential signature was simply not required on governmental regulations (such as decrees) – only on acts adopted by the parliament. Ďurica also omits the fact that Tiso did sign the Constitutional Act no. No. 210 Sl. Coll., dated September 3 1940, which enabled the cabinet to use governmental regulations (rather than parliamentary acts) to shape policy towards Jews. A direct consequence of this constitutional law was the adoption of Government Decree no. 198/1941 Sl. Coll. The political responsibility that both Tiso and the Assembly of the Slovak Republic bore for these legal moves simply cannot be ignored. Moreover, Tiso signed Constitutional Act no. 68 Sl. Coll., dated May 15 1942, legalizing the deportations that took place that year. The book makes no mention of Tiso’s anti-Jewish statements or the propaganda spread by Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party (HSL’S). Another highly questionable portion of content refers to the conditions in labor camps set up throughout Slovakia (Nováky, Sereď, Vyhne). Ďurica goes so far as to present the Jewish inmates’ experience almost in terms of having a normal life. He also refers to an insidious argument made by the Minister of Interior, Alexander Mach, and Prime Minister Vojtech Tuka, who suggested the transports to concentration camps that took place in April 1942 were made with the purpose of “keeping families together.” At the beginning of 1997, the Ministry of Education distributed Ďurica’s book through district offices to individual primary schools. The existence of this book and its use in the educational process was basically supported by all political parties (HZDS, SNS, Christian Democratic Movement – KDĽ). The only parties to openly oppose it were SDL (Party of the Democratic Left) and the communists. The textbook and its use in schools was also endorsed by *Matica slovenská*, or the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia.

The Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences published an analysis of Ďurica’s book,⁸¹ in which they pointed out the conceptual and factual errors of this publication. Further criticism can also be found in other sources.

81 Kolektív Historického ústavu SAV, “Stanovisko ku knihe M. S. Ďuricu: Dejiny Slovenska a Slová-

Even though Slovakia was not yet an EU member state, the fact that the contentious textbook was co-funded by Brussels drove three members of the European Parliament to submit written interpellations.

In his interpellation, Hedy d'Ancona⁸² asked: "Is the Commission aware of the existence of a textbook on Slovakian history for Slovakian primary schools which glosses over the mass deportation of Jews to the extermination camps?"⁸³

Elsewhere, Leonie van Bladel⁸⁴ asked the European Commission: "Has the Commission considered how it can prevent PHARE programme subsidies from being misused in the future for the publication of xenophobic views, as has happened in Slovakia with the publication of a history book for primary schools?"⁸⁵

Otto Bardong's⁸⁶ questions were: "Is it [the Commission – E.N.] aware that this book seeks to create a national mythology out of Slovakian history since prehistoric times, constructs a hostile image towards neighbouring countries, particularly the Czechs, and emphasizes antisemitic tendencies? In particular, is it aware

kov [Expert opinion on the book by M. S. Ďurica: History of Slovakia and Slovaks]," *Studia historica Nitriensia* 5 (1996): 285–291.

⁸² Hedwig "Hedy" d'Ancona (1937) is a retired Dutch politician of the Labour Party (PvdA) and political activist. From 1994 to 1999 she served as a Member of the European Parliament.

⁸³ Hedy d'Ancona wrote question no. E-2343/97 to the European Commission on July 10, 1997: "Subject: Anti-Semitism in a Slovakian school textbook: 1. Is the Commission aware of the existence of a textbook on Slovakian history for Slovakian primary schools which glosses over the mass deportation of Jews to the extermination camps? 2. Can the Commission confirm that this textbook, written by Milan Ďurica, a Catholic priest, has been published with money from the European Union? 3. If so, can the Commission indicate the programme under which these funds were provided? Can it also indicate how it monitors the use of such funds? 4. Does the Commission see any prospect of withdrawing the funding, and can it ensure that the book is taken out of circulation? 5. Does the Commission share the view that the message of this controversial textbook runs counter to the objectives of the European Year Against Racism? 6. What action is the Commission intending to take to ensure that in future aid to third countries is not misused for purposes which are at variance with the criteria for accession to the European Union in respect of democracy and civil rights?" See: website of Members of the European Parliament, accessed October 2021, https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-1997_2343+0+DOC+XML+V0//DE.

⁸⁴ Leonie van Bladel (1939) is a Dutch politician; from 1994 to 1999 she served as Member of the European Parliament.

⁸⁵ Question no. E-2469/97, subject: "Misuse of a PHARE programme subsidy by Slovakia." See: website of Members of the European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=WQ&reference=E-1997-2469&language=EN>, accessed October 31, 2021.

⁸⁶ Otto Bardong (1935–2003) was a German politician and historian who from 1994 to 1999 he served as a Member of the European Parliament in the ranks of PPE – Group of the European People's Party (Christian-Democratic Group).

that the Tiso Regime (1939–1945), a satellite state of national socialism, is described in altogether favourable terms?”⁸⁷

From our point of view, the problem touches on at least two important levels. The first one is the questioning of Ďurica’s textbook, written on the basis of a revisionist concept. The second one is the reaction that it evoked from the European Commission. Brussels not only forced Mečiar’s cabinet to withdraw the book from schools, but also stated that

When the Commission was informed that the book contained negative anti-Semitic material also by defending the activities of the Tiso’s regime, they implemented immediate measures and achieved the withdrawal of the book. The Commission does not intend to finance educational programs such as the “Education Support Program” in Slovakia in the future. Similar programs in other Central and Eastern European countries ended in 1996.⁸⁸

87 Otto Bardong, question no. E-2644/97 to the Commission, dated September 1, 1997. Subject: “Subsidy from PHARE funds for a book on the history of Slovakia and the Slovaks. The Commission has subsidized with PHARE funds publication of the book by M. S. Ďurica: “History of Slovakia and the Slovaks” (Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov), Bratislava, 2/1996 (Ministry of Education), which contains materials for teaching history in primary, secondary and upper secondary schools. The Commission is asked to state: 1. What was the size of this subsidy and in which year was it granted? 2. Is it aware that this book seeks to create a national mythology out of Slovakian history since pre-historic times, constructs a hostile image towards neighbouring countries, particularly the Czechs, and emphasizes anti-Semitic tendencies? 3. In particular, is it aware that the Tiso Regime (1939–1945), a satellite state of national socialism, is described in altogether favourable terms? 4. Has it since received international reviews of this book? 5. Can subsidies for such publications intended for use in schools be scrutinized more thoroughly in future?” See: website of Members of the European Parliament, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-1997-2644+0+DOC+XML+V0//DE>, accessed October 31, 2021.

88 Answer given by Hans van der Broek on behalf of the European Commission on September 4, 1997: “Under the Phare “Renewal of education programe” for Slovakia, funding was provided for curriculum development. The Slovak ministry of education requested funding for the printing of a schoolbook on Slovak history, described as a chronological description of historical events to be used as a supplementary teaching aid. The request letter contained three recommendations of the book by historians teaching in Canada, Germany, and Slovakia, all of Slovak origin. The Commission relied on the recommendations and approved funding (ECU 80,000) for the printing of the book. When the Commission was made aware that the book contained offensive material of an antisemitic nature which misrepresented Slovakia’s wartime role, it took immediate action. The responsible member of the Commission in a meeting with the Slovak Foreign Minister on 25 June 1991 requested urgently the withdrawal of the books from Slovak schools. Replying to this request the Slovak Prime Minister announced on 27 June 1997 in Amsterdam that the book would be withdrawn. On 1 July 1997 the Slovak ministry of education published a statement, saying that the book “will not be used in the educational process.” On 2 July 1997, the Foreign Minister informed the Commission in a letter about this decision of the Ministry of education after the issue had been raised at a regular government meeting. The Commission has focused its efforts on having the book withdrawn rather than having the funds reimbursed. The Commission agrees that the con-

SNS Chairman Ján Slota⁸⁹ described the Commission's approach as a "method of burning books." A spokesperson for the HZDS described the decision as an insult to the work of a renowned historian. The Slovak Ministry of Education also vigorously protested the Commission's statements. At the beginning of July, during a meeting in Amsterdam, Prime Minister Mečiar had to promise to withdraw Ďurica's book from schools.⁹⁰

The Statements of Revisionist Historians and their Consequences in Relation to the Actions of Representatives of Regional Self-government. The Case of Ferdinand Ďurčanský

One example of a connection between revisionist historiography and regional-level politics is the problem of installing a monument to Ferdinand Ďurčanský⁹¹ in the town of Rajec. Ďurčanský was the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Interior of the Slovak Republic from 1939 to 1940. He actively cooperated with Nazi Germany in the autumn of 1938. His signature can be found on all antisemitic regulations and laws adopted between 1939 and 1940. After World War II, he fled Slovakia. The National Court sentenced him to death *in absentia*, as capital punishment was not yet abolished at that time and Ďurčanský was not rehabilitated.

In 2009, the council of Ďurčanský's hometown, Rajec, approved a proposal for the construction of a monument to commemorate the former Minister – a decision

tents of this book run counter to the objectives and principles embodied in the "year against racism." The Commission stresses the importance of compliance with the democracy criterion set out at the Copenhagen Council in all its contacts and co-operation initiatives with applicant countries. Every effort is being made to support Slovakia in its objective to comply fully with this criterion." See: website of Members of European Parliament: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getAllAnswers.do?reference=E-1997-2343&language=EN>. accessed October 31, 2021.

⁸⁹ Ján Slota (1953) is the co-founder and former president of the Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana; SNS), a nationalist formation. Slota was the leader of SNS from 1994 to 1999 and from 2003 to 2013. He was the mayor of the city of Žilina from 1990 to 2006.

⁹⁰ Grigorij Mesežnikov, "Prezentácia vzťahu Európska únia – Slovensko hlavnými politickými aktérmi" [Presentation of the European Union – Slovakia relations by the main political actors], *Medzinárodné otázky* 8, no. 1 (1999): 17–51.

⁹¹ Ferdinand Ďurčanský (1906–1974) was a Slovak nationalist leader who for a certain time served as a minister in the government of the Axis-aligned Slovak State in 1939 and 1940. He was known for spreading virulent anti-Semitic propaganda, although he left the government before the Holocaust in Slovakia was fully implemented.

that allows us to legitimately consider the societal impact of Slovak revisionist historiography and its influence on regional-level policy.

As we indicate earlier in this study, since the 1990s the historiographic community in Slovakia has been divided (in a somewhat simplified view) into the “national movement” which defended the record of the 1939–1945 Slovak Republic and “other” historians. This polarization is still, to this day, visible in the field of art. In 1996, the History Department of *Matica slovenská*⁹² organized a conference to commemorate an anniversary of Ďurčanský’s birth. Only historians grouped in the revisionist movement were invited to the event. After the conference, the organizers published what is practically a hagiographic collection on Ďurčanský’s life and a staunch defense of his actions as the official of the war-time Slovak Republic, including justifications of his antisemitic policies.⁹³

Subsequently, in 2009, the municipal council in the town of Rajec unanimously decided to place a monument in honor of Ďurčanský in front of the building of the local Municipal Museum. When explaining the decision, the mayor of Rajec, Ján Rybárik, referred to the above-mentioned conference publication, which only sees contributions from the revisionists. He went on to comment: “Given the information I have, I try to look at it objectively. For being a Rajec citizen, I see more positives in that person than negatives. My opinion is that Mr. Ďurčanský can have a bust displayed in Rajec.”⁹⁴

In Slovakia, municipalities decide on the installation of local monuments as self-governing bodies/institutions. The decision of authorities in Rajec brought forth both protests and positive reactions. State, religious, and academic institutions joined citizen-led initiatives (including by residents of Rajec) in objection to Ďurčanský’s monument. The decision was protested, for instance, by the Central Union of Jewish Religious Communities, the Slovak Union of Anti-Fascist Fighters, the Tilia Civic Association, and the Human Movement. The Institute of History (IH) of the Slovak Academy of Sciences issued an official statement, endorsed by the

92 *Matica slovenská* is Slovakia’s scientific and cultural institution focusing on topics around the Slovak nation. This all-nation cultural institution was established in 1863 as a result of the Slovak national efforts to lay the foundations of Slovak science, libraries, and museums. Nowadays, it is governed by the “Act on *Matica slovenská*” of 1997.

93 Štefan Baranovič (ed.), *Ferdinand Ďurčanský (1906–1974)*. Zborník zo seminára o Dr. Ferdinandovi Ďurčanskom, ktorý sa konal pri príležitosti jeho nedožitéj deväťdesiatych narodenín v Rajci 8.12.1996 [The yearbook from seminar about Dr. Ferdinand Ďurčanský, which was held on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday in Rajec on December 8, 1996] (Martin: Matica Slovenská, 1998).

94 “Ďurčanského sochu zatiaľ neodstránia. Mesto chce stanovisko od historikov” [The monument of Ferdinand Ďurčanský will not be removed yet. The city wants an expert opinion from historians], *Denník Sme*, February 24, 2011, accessed October 2021, <https://myzilina.sme.sk/c/5781369/durcanskeho-sochu-zatial-neodstrania-mesto-chce-stanovisko-od-historikov.html>.

Military Historical Institute (Bratislava), the Slovak National Uprising Museum (Banská Bystrica) as well as several professional historians. The Human Movement initiated dialogue with representatives of the region and later sought to reach out to state-level and European legislative and judicial authorities.

After the 2010 municipal election, the newly chosen members of the city council buckled under the pressure and requested expert opinion from IH, the Nation's Memory Institute (ÚPN), and Matica Slovenská. March 2011 saw a symposium devoted to Ferdinand Ďurčanský's issue, attended by historians from IH, ÚPN, the Comenius University (Bratislava), and Matica Slovenská.

IH and other historians stated that, in their opinion, commemorating Ďurčanský with a statue constituted a denial of modern Slovakia's democratic principles and humanist values. They further claimed the act was an attempt to justify the war-time regime:

The principles to which F. Ďurčanský subscribed and which he embodied in practical politics are in sharp conflict with the democratic principles of today's Slovak Republic. We are convinced that this dispute is not only about the person of F. Ďurčanský, or his bust, but for a sophisticated attempt to justify the totalitarian regime of the war-torn Slovak Republic. We state that the report by Peter Mulík from the Slovak Historical Institute of Matica slovenská does not correspond to the content of the colloquium, where there were many more critical objections about the public and political activities of F. Ďurčanský than about his positives. Revealing the bust will be a denial of the principles on which our democratic society is based today.⁹⁵

At that time, historian Martin Lacko, who now openly supports the Tiso regime, spoke on behalf of the *UPN*. He commented on Ďurčanský's antisemitism in only one sentence: "As Minister of the Interior, however, he was enforcing restrictive anti-Jewish measures, especially in the economic field." He highlighted Ďurčanský's further political activities and did not comment on the issue of the politician's proposed bust.⁹⁶

Mayor Ján Rybárik refused to change his position on the matter. He continued to refer to the conference publication authored by revisionist historians in 1998. In June 2011, the city council, now with a new line-up of deputies, upheld the 2009 decision. Only one of 13 deputies voted in favor of removing Ďurčanský's bust.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ An expert opinion of the Institute of History the Slovak Academy of Sciences to the Ferdinand Ďurčanský: <http://www.history.sav.sk/index.php?id=durcansky>, accessed October 31, 2021.

⁹⁶ An expert opinion of the Nation Memory Institute: <https://www.upn.gov.sk/data/pdf/historicke-hodnotenie-FD.pdf>, accessed October 31, 2021.

⁹⁷ The summary from the meeting of the Municipal Council in Rajec, held on May 19, 2011: <http://www.rajec.info/files/16995-ZAPIS20110609.pdf>, accessed October 31, 2021.

In response, the Human Movement reported a suspected crime – an act that prompted Slovak police to launch an investigation into the offence of “supporting and promoting groups aimed at suppressing fundamental rights and freedoms.” However, the criminal proceedings were dropped in August 2011.⁹⁸

Even Prime Minister Iveta Radičová’s⁹⁹ liberal cabinet could not remove the monument, having no executive powers in this respect. It took the government several months to issue an official statement, “Government Declaration on the Placement of a Bust of F. Ďurčanský in Rajec.” The document reads:

Pursuant to the Act on Municipal Establishment, the decision on the location of historical monuments on the territory of a town or municipality is within the competence of the local self-government. In this case, the city council of Rajec. The Government of the Slovak Republic cannot change the decision of self-government bodies. In the discussion on the person of Ferdinand Ďurčanský, the members of the Government of the Slovak Republic consider as decisive the statement of the Historical Institute¹⁰⁰ of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, which states, among other things, that ‘F. Ďurčanský acted as a supporter of the German Empire (...) and in his state functions he cooperated in consolidating the undemocratic regime, as well as in the preparation, adoption and implementation of anti-Semitic legal norms’. The Government of the Slovak Republic condemns any attempts to downplay responsibility, or even indirectly rehabilitate the symbols or ruling elites of any totalitarian system that have participated in crimes and gross violations of human rights.¹⁰¹

At this point, we would like to repeat what several other historians have also pointed out. Building monuments to the figures who were directly involved in the political persecution of the Jewish community and other members of society is something we consider unacceptable. As an added element of the tragic irony of Ďurčanský’s case, his bust sits in a square named after the Slovak National Uprising – an act he, a former minister collaborating with Nazi Germany, explicitly condemned at the time of its outbreak in 1944. We see attempts at honoring and commemorating such people as an effort to rehabilitate the totalitarian regime of the war-time Slovak Republic, of which Ďurčanský was a representative – an effort

98 “Odhalenie busty Ďurčanského spustilo policajné vyšetrovanie” [“The unveiling of a bust of Ferdinand Ďurčanský started a police investigation”], *Denník Pravda*, June 14, 2011, accessed October 31, 2021: <https://spravy.pravda.sk/regiony/clanok/210914-odhalenie-busty-durcanskeho-spustilo-policajne-vysetrovanie/>.

99 Iveta Radičová (1956) is Slovak sociologist who served as the Prime Minister of Slovakia from 2010 to 2012. In 2012 she also briefly held the post of Minister of Defence. Previously she served as Minister of Labour from 2005 to 2006.

100 The official English version of its name used by the institution itself is “Institute of History.”

101 See also Statement by the Slovak government: <https://www.vlada.gov.sk/vyhlasenie-vlady-sr-k-umiestneniu-busty-f-durcanskeho-v-rajci/>, accessed October 31, 2021.

which, in this case, is made by local- and regional-level politicians. Political actors always seek to legitimize their intentions and actions through “historical logic.” Here, revisionist historiography became a launch pad for specific political steps by the mayor and the city council. Their efforts were motivated by the desire to find stronger national and state-building continuity by linking the history of the war-time republic to the contemporary state, established in 1993. We also consider this an attempt to create new symbols that distort historical memory and national awareness – at the very least among the residents of Rajec.

As a counterbalance to the actions of the local politicians, we have a government statement which refers to professional analysis of critical historiography, represented by the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (or other academic institutions). However, these two standpoints on the same historical episode have had completely different impacts and only one of them is actually reflected in reality. The Ďurčanský Memorial stands in the town of Rajec to this day. It might be worth adding that the government continues to financially support both IH and *Matica slovenská*.

In conclusion, we would like to quote an opinion from a Slovak sociologist, Michal Vašečka. In 2018, he highlighted the phenomenon of relativization of values that may emerge as a result of the society’s struggles to cope with national history – construction of monuments to controversial figures being one example of this. Vašečka claims that, as such tendency continues and civil society is not able to set sufficient boundaries, we can expect even more of such monuments in the future:

Unless there is a nationwide consensus that Ďurčanský on the one hand and Biľak on the other are problematic personalities and have – albeit perhaps indirectly – blood on their hands, such busts will continue to be built. Unfortunately, people have taken different values from past times, they try to preserve the best of everything, but it also brings relativization of values. And in some cases it is simply necessary to set a limit.¹⁰²

The year 2020 saw a change in law, as the National Council of the Slovak Republic attempted to reconcile the country’s collective conscience with its troubled history under communist rule (1948–1989), but also with the 1939–1945 episode. According

102 Miroslav Kern, “Sociológ Vašečka o 70 rokoch od nástupu komunizmu: Chýba nám tu múzeum totality” [Sociologist Vašečka on 70 years since the start of the communist rule: we lack a museum of totalitarianism], *Denník N*, February 23, 2018, accessed October 31, 2021, <https://dennikn.sk/1034803/sociolog-vasecka-o-70-rokoch-od-nastupu-komunizmu-chyba-nam-tu-muzeum-totality/>.

to the new regulations, monuments and streets cannot be named after the representatives of both these totalitarian regimes.¹⁰³

The Links Between Historiography and the Position of the Catholic Church in Slovak Society

In order to further discuss the relationship between historiography and politics, we shall consider a dispute that erupted around the activities of bishop Ján Vojtaššák. This particular example not only illustrates potential implications of how we form our knowledge of the history of Slovakia's statehood and its nation, but also the position of the Catholic Church. Under communist rule, the Church was suppressed by the regime. After 1989, it emerged from decades of oppression in a position of great authority, commenting on various social and state-related problems. According to the 2001 and 2011 censuses, more than sixty percent of citizens specifically identified as members of the Catholic Church. This number made Slovakia, in statistical terms, a denominational country.¹⁰⁴ The preamble to the 1992 Constitution of the Slovak Republic explicitly refers to the "spiritual bequest of Cyril"¹⁰⁵

103 Act No 338/2020 Coll. of November 4, 2020 amending Act No. 125/1996 Coll. on the immorality and illegality of the communist system and amending and supplementing certain acts. See: <https://www.slov-lex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/2020/338/> [quot. 2022–05–05], accessed May 31, 2022.

104 "The Slovak Republic is religiously neutral, that is, there is no official religion existing in it. Freedom of religious denomination is ensured under law. The degree of the population religiosity is high. At the population census of 2011, 75.97% of people ranked among the believers, 13.44% were declared as persons with no religion and 10.59% did not show any religion. Majority of believers are of Roman-Catholic denomination." "Slovakia. Population: Demographic Situation, Languages and Religions" website of the European Education and Culture Executive Agency: https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/population-demographic-situation-languages-and-religions-72_en [quot. 2021–10–08], accessed October 31, 2021.

105 Saints Cyril (also called Constantine, 829–869) and Methodius (815–885) were brothers from Solun and theological missionaries, who were sent to Great Moravia by byzantine Emperor Michael III in the ninth century, at the request of Rastislav, the Prince of Great Moravia. They were key figures who evangelised the Slavs. Constantine created the Glagolitic script, an early form of Slavic alphabet, and was the first to translate parts of The Bible as well as liturgic texts to Slavic languages. Methodius, in turn, founded a school that became a centre of Slavic education, culture, and literature. He was appointed as archbishop of Pannonia and Great Moravia. In 1980, Pope John Paul II declared the two brothers co-patrons of Europe. See: Gyula Moravcsik (ed.), *Constantine Porphyrogenitus: De Administrando Imperio* (2nd revised ed.) (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1967); Francis Dvorník, *Byzantine Mission among the Slavs: SS. Constantine-Cyril and Methodius* (Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1970), 484.

and Methodius.”¹⁰⁶ However, the same document states that the Slovak Republic is a secular state.¹⁰⁷

When the President of Slovakia Zuzana Čaputová¹⁰⁸ spoke on the occasion of Pope Francis I’s visit in September 2021, she mentioned the country’s democratic and European character, but also its Christian tradition: “Slovakia is an integral part of a large family of democratic states of the European Union, which provides us with important international guarantees of our security and prosperity. Christianity and the Catholic Church have been an integral part of our cultural identity for centuries.”¹⁰⁹

The President’s remarks included references to Pope Francis’ encyclicals and his rejection of all forms of antisemitism as well as other religiously motivated hatred which, in his opinion, are in direct contradiction with Christian values.¹¹⁰

We are of the view that, up until now, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church has not expressed a direct criticism of the historical record of the war-time Slovak Republic (1939–1945). Such reluctance is likely motivated by the fact that it was a Catholic priest, Jozef Tiso, who headed the state. Furthermore, other representatives of the Church held several important positions (including at the regional level, i.e. in cities, districts, and counties) within the ruling political formation, Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party. Thus, they were directly involved in governance processes, effectively representing a single-party dictatorship. In that sense, they also influenced or partook in certain forms of antisemitic policies and the Holo-

106 The Preamble to the Constitution of The Slovak Republic, “We, the Slovak Nation, Bearing in mind the political and cultural heritage of our predecessors and the experience gained through centuries of struggle for our national existence and statehood, Mindful of the spiritual bequest of Cyril and Methodius and the historical legacy of Great Moravia, Recognizing the natural right of nations to self-determination, Together with members of national minorities and ethnic groups living on the territory of the Slovak Republic, In the interest of continuous peaceful cooperation with other democratic countries, Endeavouring to implement democratic form of government, to guarantee a life of freedom, and to promote spiritual culture and economic prosperity, Thus we, the citizens of the Slovak Republic, have, herewith and through our representatives, adopted this Constitution.” See website of President of Slovak Republic, <https://www.prezident.sk/upload-files/46422.pdf>, accessed October 31, 2021.

107 “Title one: Article 1 (1) The Slovak Republic is a sovereign, democratic state governed by the rule of law. It is not bound to any ideology or religion.” <https://www.prezident.sk/upload-files/46422.pdf>, accessed October 31, 2021.

108 Zuzana Čaputová (1973) is a Slovak politician, lawyer, and environmental activist. She has served as the President of Slovakia since 2019.

109 See website of The President of the Slovak Republic: <https://www.prezident.sk/en/article/papez-frantisek-vidi-slovensko-ako-posla-pokoja-v-srdci-europy/>, accessed October 31, 2021.

110 The statements of The President of the Slovak Republic: <https://www.prezident.sk/page/prejav/>, accessed October 31, 2021.

caust in Slovakia – regardless of whether they were acting as state officials or from the position of spiritual authority.

In 2012, the Conference of Bishops of Slovakia¹¹¹ issued a statement on the deportation of Jews from Slovakia in 1942:

(...) The then-responsible politicians espoused Christianity and its values, but some of them violated them by persecuting Jews in practice. They either completely succumbed to the idea of the correctness of their radical approach, or they remained more or less passive. What strikes, in particular, is the indifference with which they approached the fate of people who left for more than precarious conditions. As it turned out soon after the deportations, it was not about settling Jews in the reserved areas – although many were convinced it was – but about their systematic liquidation.¹¹²

It is worth pointing out the bishops failed to specifically mention Tiso – the man who, after all, headed the war-time Republic – by name. In light of all these facts, we can only remind readers that some historians have described the 1939–1945 regime as clero-fascist.¹¹³

The dispute we wish to present in the following paragraphs concerns controversy among historians who have written in critical terms about a representative of the war-time Catholic hierarchy in Slovakia, bishop Ján Vojtaššák. In addition to being a member of the ruling Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, he also held the position of Vice-President of the State Council, which at the time was understood as the second chamber of parliament, but only had advisory functions.¹¹⁴ In relation

111 The Conference of Bishops of Slovakia (Konferencia biskupov Slovenska, abbreviation: KBS) was established on March 23, 1993 and is composed of the Catholic Bishops, both Latin Catholic and Greek Catholic, in the Slovak Republic.

112 See the statement on the website of the Conference of Bishop of Slovakia: <https://www.tkkbs.sk/view.php?cislocianku=20210913093>, accessed October 31 2021.

113 Miloslav Szabó, *Klérofašisti. Slovenskí kňazi a pokušenie radikálnej politiky (1935–1945)* [Clerofascists. Slovak priests and the temptation of radical politics] (Bratislava: Slovart, 2019); Miloslav Szabó, “Clerical Fascism? Catholicism and the Far-Right in the Central European Context (1918–1945),” *Historický časopis* (Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2018) 66, no. 5, 885–900; Eduard Nižňanský and Barbora Jakobyová, “Lokálni aktéri počas holokaustu. Prípád dvoch katolíckych kňazov z Dolného Kubína: Ignác Grebáč-Orlov a Viktor Trstenský” [The local actors during the Holocaust. The case of two catholic priests from Dolný Kubín: Ignác Grebáč-Orlov and Viktor Trstenský], in *Historik a dejiny: v československom storočí osudových dátumov* (Bratislava: Veda, 2018), 59–86.

114 Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec (eds.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939–1945). Dokumenty* [Holocaust in Slovakia 2. President, government, parliament of the SR and State Council on the Jewish question (1939–1945). Documents]; Ivan Kamenec, *Štátna rada v politickom systéme Slovenského štátu v rokoch 1939–1945* [The State Council in political system of the Slovak state from 1939 to 1945] *Historický časopis* (Bra-

to Bishop Vojtaššák, we would like to present the four most common lines of argument in the dispute.

The first issue are his statements as a member of the State Council on the subject of Jews and the “solution” of the Jewish question. Several documents published in the *Vatican and the Slovak Republic*¹¹⁵ volume hint at the Vatican’s position on the persecution of Jews in Slovakia and describe the Holy See’s interventions in this regard. Among them are reports from the Vatican’s charge d’affaires in Bratislava, Giuseppe Burzio, who reflected on the situation in Slovakia and criticized Vojtaššák’s actions. Another volume, *The Holocaust in Slovakia*, includes a collection of Vojtaššák’s speeches in the State Council.¹¹⁶ Historians Ján Hlavinka and Ivan Kamenec published a monograph on Vojtaššák’s activities in the years 1938–1945, pointing to particularly serious problems in the interpretations of his work in the period.¹¹⁷

There are certain facts that have been uncovered and verified by historians. The authenticity of Vojtaššák’s statements as a State Council member is unquestionable. Moreover, research has revealed documents proving that the Bishop was responsible for the Aryanization of the village of Baldovce and the lands in Betlanovce. Hlavinka and Kamenec consider Vojtaššák as an essential figure behind the fate of Alexander Lörinc, a Jew from Spišské Podhradie who was transported to a labor camp. The Catholic hierarchy directly spoke out against Lörinc at a State Council meeting in 1943 to draw the attention of Anton Vašek,¹¹⁸ the head of the fourteenth Department of the Ministry of the Interior. Since deportations were no longer taking place at this point in time, Lörinc was placed in a labor camp instead.

tislava: Slovac Academic Press, 1996) 44, no. 2, 221–242; Igor Baka, *Politický systém a režim Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 1939–1940* [The political system and regime of the Slovak Republic in 1939–1940] 9Bratislava: VHU, 2010), 322 s.

115 Ivan Kamenec and Vilém Prečan and Stanislav Škorvánek (eds.), *Vatikán a Slovenská republika /1939–1945/. Dokumenty* [Vatican and Slovak republic /1939–1945/. Documents].

116 Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec (eds.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939–1945). Dokumenty* [Holocaust in Slovakia 2. President, government, parliament SR and State Council about Jewish question (1939–1945). Documents].

117 Ján Hlavinka, Ivan Kamenec, and Martin Styan, *The Burden of the Past. Catholic Bishop Ján Vojtaššák and the Regime in Slovakia (1918–1945)* [English translation] Prepracované vydanie v angličtine (Bratislava: Dokumentačné stredisko holokaustu, 2014).

118 Anton Vašek (1905–1946) was a Slovak journalist and politician. From 1942, he headed the fourteenth Department of the Ministry of the Interior – the so-called “Jewish Department” which was responsible for technical and administrative organisation of the “solution” to the Jewish issue, including deportations.

In reaction to the above-mentioned revelations, several historians of the Catholic Church, nationalist-leaning researchers, and representatives of the Church itself decided to defend not only Vojtaššák's reputation and actions, but also the Slovak Church's effort to beatify him. According to Vatican's procedures, the beatification process calls for a collection of biographical data on the candidate. The first monograph about Vojtaššák was penned by another Catholic priest, Viktor Trstenský.¹¹⁹ After World War II, Vojtaššák was persecuted by the communist regime. In a staged trial that took place in 1951, he was sentenced to 24 years in prison, while his co-defendants – two other bishops, Michal Buzalka¹²⁰ and Pavel Gojdič¹²¹ – were handed life imprisonment.

The impulse for Vojtaššák's beatification came from Pope John Paul II, who during his 1995 visit to Slovakia praised him in a sermon delivered in Levoča: "The older amongst you certainly remember the venerable figure of Bishop Ján Vojtaššák, while the Greek Catholic brothers the figure of Bishop Pavel Gojdič. Both were imprisoned after pseudo-trials. Today, they deserve the process of beatification, as they gave a testament to the faithful service of the Church in Slovakia."¹²² In order for the process to start, all diocesan bishops of Slovakia had to give their consent. The beatification proceedings were launched in 1996 by the Bishop of Spiš, František Tondra, with the approval of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints in Rome.¹²³ In November 2001, the diocesan phase of the process was concluded and the matter was handed over to the Congregation in Rome. In 2003, the State Secretariat of the Holy See sent a letter to František Tondra, stating

119 Viktor Trstenský, *Sila viery, sila pravdy: Život a dielo najdôstojnejšieho biskupa Jána Vojtaššáka, mučeníka cirkvi a národa* [The power of faith, the power of truth: The life and work of the most dignified Bishop Ján Vojtaššák, a martyr of the Church and the nation] (Bratislava: Senefeld-R, 1990).

120 Michal Buzalka (1885–1961) was an assistant bishop of the Trnava Archdiocese. From 1940 to 1945 he was the military vicar of the Slovak Army. He was persecuted by the communist regime and imprisoned. 2000 saw the start of his beatification process.

121 Pavel Gojdič (1888–1960) was a Rusyn Basilian monk and the eparch of the Slovak Catholic Eparchy of Prešov. In 1940, the Pope appointed him the Bishop of Prešov. Prior to that, in 1939, he served in Mukachevo. He was imprisoned by the communist regime in Czechoslovakia. In 2001, he was beatified by Pope John Paul II. In 2007, he was recognized as Righteous Among the Nations by Yad Vashem.

122 Pope John Paul II in Slovakia and his speech: <https://www.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/dokumenty-a-vyhlasenia/p/dokumenty-papezov/c/navsteva-svateho-otca-v-sr-1995> (accessed October 31, 2021).

123 In the Catholic Church, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints (Latin: Congregatio de Causis Sanctorum) is the congregation of the Roman Curia that oversees the complex process that leads to the canonization of saints, passing through the steps of a declaration of "heroic virtues" and beatification.

that “the Holy See respects Bishop Vojtaššák, but so far does not consider his beatification to be appropriate.”

At the same time, historians with nationalist or Christian leanings¹²⁴ as well as certain representatives of the Catholic hierarchy¹²⁵ jumped to Vojtaššák’s defence by questioning the findings and conclusions from the research and documents mentioned earlier. At first, they tried to cast doubts over the events that took place in Baldovce. However, after Hlavinka and Kamenec published their two books, they were forced to admit Vojtaššák’s role and culpability. At the same time, they failed to respond to the findings about the Aryanization of Betlanovce, even though other historians published documents that revealed how President Tiso intervened with the chairman of the State Land Office, Karol Klínovský, in order to enable Vojtaššák to acquire that land. In a similar fashion, they either did not comment or denied that the Bishop was involved in the persecution of Lörinc.

It should also be said that Vojtaššák’s defenders published what was supposedly a letter penned by the Bishop and sent to the Minister of the Interior, Alexander Mach, to stop deportations or prevent further ones from happening in 1943. In reality, the author of the letter was an unnamed Jewish citizen who escaped from a concentration camp, while Vojtaššák was an intended recipient whom the victim tried to inform about the atrocities occurring in the camp. The supposed letter from the Bishop was merely a cover letter Vojtaššák added when forwarding the Jew’s testimony to Mach. It is, therefore, impossible to verify whether Vojtaššák himself wrote anything about the suffering of Slovak Jews.

Any attempt to provide a monocausal explanation of the developments regarding the preparations for further deportations in 1943 is, in our opinion, bound to be a gross oversimplification. The argument that deportations did not take place because Vojtaššák had supposedly pleaded with Mach is also highly questionable. There are several other factors and elements that one should take into account. Firstly, there are several documents which reveal the Vatican’s intervention in the matter.¹²⁶ There is also the pastoral letter from March 8 1943, in which the authors defended not only Jewish converts (those who converted to Christianity), but also other Jews living in Slovakia. One should also consider political and military

124 For example, František Dluhoš, Ján Duda, Milan S. Ďurica, Emilia Hrabovec, Ivan Chalupecký, Stanislav Májek, Peter Mulík, Ivan Petranský, and František Vnuk.

125 For example, Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, Bishop of Nitra Mons., Viliam Judák, Mons. Ján Kuboš – the administrator of the Spiš Diocese, Mons. Cyril Vasiľ – Bishop of Košice eparchy, Peter Jurčaga, the postulator for the cause of beatification of the Servant of God, Bishop Ján Vojtaššák.

126 Ivan Kamenec, Vilém Prečan, and Stanislav Škorvánek (eds.), *Vatikán a Slovenská republika /1939–1945/. Dokumenty* [Vatican and Slovak Republic /1939–1945/. Documents].

developments of that time, as the tide of war was turning against the Axis. The defeats in the battles of Stalingrad and Kursk forced Wehrmacht into the defensive on the Eastern front. Italian and German armies were also defeated in North Africa (Tunis, May 1943). The Allies landed in Sicily and pressed north, prompting the fall of Mussolini's regime. When Churchill and Roosevelt met in Casablanca earlier that year (January), they determined "the war will be fought until the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany and its allies."¹²⁷ All these direct and indirect pressures led Mach to state at a cabinet meeting in August that no further deportations of Jews would take place.¹²⁸ Finally, there have not been any identified documents of German provenance that would confirm that Nazi Germany pressed Slovakia to resume deportations.¹²⁹

A final controversy emerged after the publication of a book entitled *Pio XII e gli Ebrei. L'archivista del Vaticano rivela finalmente il ruolo del Papa Pacelli durante la seconda guerra mondiale*,¹³⁰ authored by Johan Ickx, the Director of Historical Archives in the Section for Relations with States at the Holy See's Secretariat of State. Ickx's book contains some revelations and claims regarding Vojtaššák's actions. In response, historians defending the Bishop penned a text entitled *For the true image of Bishop Vojtaššák*¹³¹ in which they criticized the Vatican historian's work. In their effort to counter Ickx, they focused on the role and position of the State Council. They attempted to downplay both the importance of the institution of which he was a member and the statements he made in this capacity. For instance, they did not bother with analyzing his remarks at the State Council meeting on March 26 1942. Indeed, they selected only those of Vojtaššák's speeches that suited their arguments. They failed to comment on the episodes of Aryanization or the Bishop's role in the persecution of Alexander Lörinc. From our point of view, the purpose behind the rebuke of Ickx's book is to further the case for Vojtaššák's beatification. In the interest of fairness, it should be noted that their argumenta-

127 The conclusion of the Casablanca Conference: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Casablanca-Conference> (accessed October 31, 2021).

128 Eduard Nižňanský and Ivan Kamenec (eds.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 2. Prezident, vláda, Snem SR a Štátna rada o židovskej otázke (1939–1945). Dokumenty* [Holocaust in Slovakia 2. President, government, parliament of the SR and State Council on the Jewish question (1939–1945). Documents].

129 Eduard Nižňanský (ed.), *Holokaust na Slovensku 4, Dokumenty nemeckej proveniencie. 1939–1945* [Holocaust in Slovakia 4. The documents of German origins. (1939–1945)].

130 Pius XII and the Jews. Vatican archivist finally reveals Pope Pacelli's role during the Second World War.

131 The text signed: Mons. Ján Kuboš, the administrator of diocese in Spiš, Mons. Viliam Judák, Bishop of Nitra, Mons. Cyril Vasil, apostolic administrator of the Košice eparchy, Peter Jurčaga, the postulator for the cause of beatification of the Servant of God Bishop Ján Vojtaššák.

tion with regard to certain errors and inaccuracies in the book may, indeed, be considered relevant. However, they consistently failed to admit and discuss the antisemitic (or anti-Judaic) sentiments in Vojtaššák's statements and actions.

Vojtaššák's case is about more than just his beatification. It is a window that shows society's understanding of the relationship between religion and politics – in this case, the antisemitic policy that led to the Holocaust. Members of the Catholic clergy who were politically involved in the functioning of the Slovak Republic (1939–1945) are co-responsible for the situation and developments that took place at that time. As a Deputy Chairman of the State Council, Bishop Vojtaššák certainly belonged to that group. We believe the Slovak Church's efforts to defend him amount to an attempted rehabilitation of a totalitarian regime and its leading figures.

In our view, the significance of the situation is further emphasized by the fact that in 2002 the Slovak Republic and the Holy See concluded an agreement which regulates, among other issues, public holidays. The treaty clearly states that both parties recognize “the contribution of the citizens of the Slovak Republic to the Catholic Church.”¹³²

During his visit to Slovakia, Pope Francis I said: “Here, in front of the history of the Jewish nation, marked by this tragic and indescribable confrontation, we are ashamed to admit it: how many times the (...) Lord's name was used for indescribable acts of inhumanity! How many oppressors declared: ‘God is with us’; but they were not with God.”¹³³ While Francis did not specifically name any of the politically involved Catholic priests (such as Tiso or Vojtaššák), the Vatican's future decisions as to the continuation of the beatification process will show the Slovak society how we can (both now and in the future) perceive the historical record of such controversial figures and its evaluation by the Catholic hierarchy.

Conclusion

After the fall of communism, historiography, enjoying a newly-found freedom, began to fill some of the blank pages in Slovakia's history. Specifically, it began to deal with previously marginalized topics such as antisemitism and the Holocaust. In particular, the dissolution of Czechoslovakia made it possible for nation-

¹³² Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Holy See. <http://spcp.prf.cuni.cz/dokument/kon-sr.htm> (accessed October 31, 2021).

¹³³ Pope Francis's statement: <https://www.kbs.sk/obsah/sekcia/h/dokumenty-a-vyhlasenia/p/dokumenty-papezov/c/sk2021-prihovor-papeza-frantiska-pri-stretnuti-so-zidovskou-komunitou> (accessed October 31, 2021).

alist-oriented historiography, represented by M. S. Ďurica and F. Vnuk, to establish itself very quickly. From there on, historiography dealing with the war-time Slovak Republic (1939–1945) became divided into two approaches. Later, it became apparent that the nationalist-clerical narrative could also be used for political purposes. The three examples discussed above show various possible interpretations of certain historical episodes. Naturally, they also show how we might be able to prevent such a distorted take on history from becoming a norm in a civic society. In the 1990s, the dangerous interference of revisionism was only stopped with the help of the European Commission.

In the case of a monument to F. Ďurčanský, it became apparent that a local-level decision to honor a figure obviously linked with antisemitic policies could be stopped neither by a civic movement nor by the opinions of scientific institutions, nor even by the position of the central government. It seems that the only way to prevent similar situations in the future is to change the law so as to make it impossible for regional politicians and decision-makers to affect the collective national memory in such a way or create symbols and commemorative spaces for radical political movements.

The example of Bishop Vojtaššák reveals how historiography overlaps and/or collides with the views of the Catholic hierarchy. In our opinion, this particular issue largely stems from the fact that the Church has so far not denounced the actions of the authorities of the war-time Slovak Republic and its totalitarian regime headed by Jozef Tiso, a member of the Catholic clergy. While the Church has frequently distanced itself from antisemitism and the Holocaust, it did not do the same with regard to Tiso's regime. Even the latest speeches from the Catholic hierarchy show that the Church is unwilling to stop the Bishop's beatification process. In this case, only the future may show to what extent the dispute around Vojtaššák's role will resonate with Slovak society which is, at least formally, very religious (predominantly Catholic).

Overall, all three examples discussed throughout the chapter indicate that Slovakia's struggle with the interpretation of its twentieth-century history is bound to continue, as will the effort to build a civil society. Efforts to rehabilitate the war-time Slovak Republic are associated with a hidden form of antisemitism, still present in Slovakia. Historiography, as it turns out, is also a part of this conflict.

