

## CONCLUSION

Czech historian Michal Kopeček began one of his lectures on the historical memory with a quote which fits very well into the conclusion of this book: “*Someone once said that happier nations do not have to worry so much about history, and, therefore, their national culture can be based on philosophy and art. Less fortunate nations, meaning those who lose more often, must pay more attention to their history. As a result, basis for their national culture and often also national obsession is the history.*”<sup>580</sup> Being obsessed with history and its interpretation is typical of all the countries in Central Europe. Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, close links were established in this region between the historiography and the political developments of the nations, which led not only to “politisation of history” but also to “historisation of the politics”. How else could the situation have developed in the area where the borders, forms of government and state configurations changed every few years? A joke about a man who was a citizen four different states without leaving Mukacheve, in fact accurately describes the tragic absurdity of the Central European historical developments. However, it did not concern individuals only, but whole groups. As Michal Schvarc writes in his study: “*Who would have predicted it at the beginning of 1918 that the city of Bratislava would become a part of four different state establishments, that in such a relatively short time it would go through six different regimes, and that just a torso would be left of the 30-thousand German community by early 1949 which will fear to claim allegiance to its roots?*”

The 20<sup>th</sup> century in this region is typical for radical changes of state borders, ruling regimes and ideologies. Each of these events usually brought the politically motivated need for the reconstruction and revaluation of national histories according to the actual demands of new ruling power. The propaganda was often merging with the interpretation of the past in order to enable the politicians “to usurp” the useful parts of the history for themselves and negate the rest. The current state was presented as a “logical outcome of the national history”. There are whole generations who had a first-hand experience of several re-interpretations of the official version of history. “*These generations could legitimately get the impression that the official interpretation of history changes more often than those who interpret it.*”<sup>581</sup>

The frequent changes in the official interpretation of history and the need to adapt the national narratives to ideological schemes took a lot of energy from the Slovak historical science and constantly forced it to operate within narrow ethnocentric borders.<sup>582</sup> In the case of Slovakia, these borders were even getting smaller and smaller. The construction

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580 KOPEČEK, Michal. *Spory o „dědictví“ demokratické opozice ve střední Evropě, autenticita a dějinná paměť* [Disputes over the “Legacy” of the Democratic Opposition in Central Europe, Authenticity and Historical Memory]. [online] Available at: <http://www.cz.boell.org/downloads/kopecek.pdf>.

581 MARUŠIAK, Juraj. Sloboda (nielen) pre históriu [Freedom (not only) for History]. In *Forum Historiae*, 2009, Vol. 3, Issue 1, p. 2 [online]. Available at: [http://www.forumhistoriae.sk/forum/vyzva\\_z\\_blois/marusiak.pdf](http://www.forumhistoriae.sk/forum/vyzva_z_blois/marusiak.pdf).

582 PECH, Stanley Z. Ferment in Czechoslovak Marxist Historiography. In *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 1968, Vol. 10, Issue 4, pp. 502-522; BARTOŠEK, Karel. Czechoslovakia: The State of Historiography. In *Journal of Contemporary History*, 1967, Vol. 2, Issue 1, pp. 143-155.

of the Czechoslovak history after 1918 was, among other things, focused on detachment of the Slovak national story from the Hungarian context, and its attachment to the Czech context. In this light the representations of Hungarians as “hereditary enemies” and “oppressors of Slovaks” were further strengthened. After the division of the Czechoslovak state, the Czech context disappeared too and the territory of today’s Slovakia remained to be studied only in terms of the Slovak nationality. This development resulted in the existence of several parallel or competing stories. However, in the context of the Slovak historiography the nationalist paradigm remains to be constantly present and reproduced. The nationalist canon is also one of the most influential societal determinants.<sup>583</sup> The Slovak intellectual and cultural elites have long been deeply divided concerning the choice “folk vs. citizens” - there is an unresolved tension between demands for national liberation and the advancement of personal liberties. However, this situation is typical for many younger nation states, which have an “*especially strong tendency to project their national histories back in time in order to legitimate their striving for a nation state or their recently acquired status as a new nation state. The construction of a centuries-old continuous and uninterrupted development of the nation state depends on such backward projections.*”<sup>584</sup> Even in the historic community opinions exist, that there is necessary to take the national perspective into account when “writing history”: “*The existence of the sovereign Slovak Republic naturally requires to perceive its own history in accordance with the positive assessment of the entire nation’s ethnogenesis.*”<sup>585</sup>

This points to the fact that the Slovak historiography makes an imperfect use of the opportunities that have arisen after the political changes in 1989. The rapid increase in demand for new research topics was not accompanied by acceptance of the latest methodological approaches in the historical science: “*Thus, the “liberalization” of historical studies after 1989 brought about the restoration of old conceptual models rather than the introduction of the new ones.*”<sup>586</sup> The general trend is pointing more towards rehabilitation of the traditional empirical-positivist historiography and the nation-centred narrative. The new methodological approaches to historical research are still very often viewed with considerable scepticism, rejected as useless, or even harmful.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, however, a visible shift occurred in the Slovak historiography, both thematic and methodological, away from the political history and the nation-centred paradigm of history. The aim of this publication is to document this shift and also to analyse the historical roots of ideas and patterns of thought present in the Slovak (and Central European) space today.

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583 MICHELA, Miroslav. Pripomínanie a kanonizovanie minulosti. Úvaha na margo niektorých diskusií o dejinách Slovenska. [Commemoration and Canonised Past. Commenting on the Some Discussions on the History of Slovakia.] In MERVART, Jan - ŠTEPÁN, Jiří (eds.). *České, slovenské a československé dějiny 20. století*. Hradec Králové : OFTIS, 2008, p. 14.

584 BERGER, Stefan. National historiographies in transnational perspective: Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In *Storia della Storiografia*, 2006, Issue 50, pp. 13-14.

585 Opinion of Slovak historians, archaeologists and linguists. [online] Available at: <http://komentare.sme.sk/c/3670575/ad-vlada-a-premier-sme-3-1.html>.

586 KOPEČEK, Michal. In search of „National Memory“ The Politics of history, Nostalgia and the Historiography of Communism in the Czech Republic and East Central Europe. In KOPEČEK, Michal (ed.). *Past in the Making, Historical Revisionism in Central Europe after 1989*. Budapešť, New York : CEU Press, 2008, p. 81.

The research into the Slovak history represents an analysis of the society in which, despite the continuing industrialisation and modernisation, the elements typical of pre-industrial communities of the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (religiosity, rural society, the emphasis on broad family ties) survived, and still persist.<sup>587</sup> As stated by anthropologist Juraj Buzalka, the changes during the 20<sup>th</sup> century were of short duration to bring a complete cultural transformation, but long enough for the society to change structurally.<sup>588</sup> The rapid modernisation of Slovakia led to increasing divergence between economic and technical modernisation factors on the one hand and the cultural and social processes on the other.<sup>589</sup> This situation was also reflected in the process of democratic political socialisation in Slovakia, which had to face the deeply rooted patterns of behaviour especially in small peasant communities. Slovak political scientist, Miroslav Kusý, argues that Slovaks are still not a nation, but a group of compatriots; that the local identities are stronger than the national one.<sup>590</sup>

The research of Slovak history is an analysis of a culturally, ethnically and socially heterogeneous community. Different concepts of identities competed in this territory, which were interlaced and combined with each other. The concept of national identity was strongly competed by religious and local identities. Even at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were complaints from Slovak elites that a Slovak Protestant feels closer to his Hungarian counterpart than to a Slovak Catholic. In this regard, the Jews with no clearly defined boundaries between religious and ethnic identity were a characteristic group.

The process of nationalisation, supported by the political and intellectual elites, led to increasingly conflicting situations in the heterogeneous society. Although not everybody endorsed the policy of confrontation, such voices were drowned in a sea of ultra-nationalism of the rivalling parties. The first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was also the time of new, radical ideological lines, proclaiming radical remodelling of the then societies. Fascism and communism created their own interpretations of history. In particular, the communist regime set the “inevitability of historical development” as the basis for its legitimacy, which was the reason why its officials strictly controlled the official national narrative. Both ideologies mentioned became the opportunity to implement their visions of a “new society”, with the inevitable tragic consequences that changed the face of the region forever.

The fall of communist regimes in the East Central Europe in 1989 started a radical reconstruction of the national narratives. The building of the liberal democracies needed to be based on the “coping” with the “non-democratic past”, especially, but not exclusively, with the communist era. The anti-communist struggle is one of the most important legitimisation aspects of the Central European democracies. Their legitimacy is to a substantial extent based on the rejection of fascist and communist regimes. Therefore, the opinion prevailed in Central Europe after 1989 that it is necessary to somehow “come to terms” with the “totalitarian past”, to incorporate it into a new, post-communist master narrative.

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587 MUSIL, Jiří. Czech and Slovak society. In MUSIL, Jiří (ed.). *The end of Czechoslovakia*. Budapest, London, New York: CEU Press, 1995, p. 90.

588 BUZALKA, Juraj. *Slovenská ideológia a kríza*. [Slovak ideology and Crisis.] Bratislava : Veda, 2012, pp. 67-68.

589 MUSIL, Czech, p. 90.

590 KUSÝ, Miroslav. *Eseje*. [Essays.] Bratislava : Argo, 1991, p. 59.

However, it turned out very quickly that the call for a very unclear and often controversial “coping with the past” in Central Europe would necessarily be affected by that period’s political agenda. Here emerges the question about the role and goals of the professional historical science in this process. To what extent is the work of historians relevant to the formation of knowledge and opinions of the society? To what extent can it compete with the other means and instruments influencing the image of the past and present?

After more than 20 years after the fall of the communist regime the community of Slovak historians heads toward a more autonomous position of history whose role is not defined by the political commitments but academic inquiry and critical discussion. New approaches and methods enter into historiography even if slowly and warily. Nevertheless, the so called “islands of positive deviations” are growing stronger, thanks to increasing international exchange and interdisciplinary cooperation. There is a hope that this process will progress into a pluralist, open-minded historical culture.