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СЛОВАЦКОЕ НАЦИОНАЛЬНОЕ ВОССТАНИЕ 1944 г.

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Описывается Словацкое национальное восстание и его роль в разгроме нацистской Германии. Показано, что после так называемого Мюнхенского договора и создания (Первой) Словацкой Республики большинство населения было удовлетворено положением дел. Бомбардировки Братиславы военно-воздушными силами США в июне 1944 г. привели к увеличению числа местных групп Сопротивления. Эта ситуация спровоцировала решение Германии оккупировать Словакию. Подробно описывается ход восстания. Автор предлагает разделить его на три этапа в зависимости от активности и успешности действий обеих сторон. Обращается внимание на роль поддержки СССР повстанцев и усиление Коммунистической партии Словакии и других левых партий. Несмотря на поражение восстания, это событие имело положительные последствия в политике, экономике и культуре Словакии. Автор приходит к выводу, что Словацкое национальное восстание было политической победой, которая дала стране возможность занять приемлемую позицию в отношениях президента Э. Бенеша с Москвой.

Ключевые слова: Словацкое национальное восстание; Вторая мировая война; Эдвард Бенеш; Словацкая народная партия (Ludaks); Рождественское соглашение; Ян Голиан.

СЛАВАЦКАЕ НАЦЫЯНАЛЬНАЕ ПАЎСТААННЕ 1944 г.

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Апісваецца Славацкае нацыянальнае паўстанне і яго роля ў разгроме нацысцкай Германіі. Паказана, што пасля так званага Мюнхенскага дагавора і стварэння (Першай) Славацкай Рэспублікі большасць насельніцтва была задаволена становішчам. Бамбардзіроўкі Браціславы ваенна-паветранымі сіламі ЗША ў чэрвені 1944 г. прывялі да павелічэння колькасці мясцовых груп Супраціўлення. Гэта сітуацыя справакавала рашэнне Германіі акупіраваць Славакію. Падрабязна апісваецца ход паўстання. Аўтар прапануе падзяліць яго на тры этапы ў залежнасці ад актыўнасці і паспяховасці дзеянняў абодвух бакоў. Звяртаецца ўвага на ролю падтрымкі СССР паўстанцаў і ўзмацненне Камуністычнай партыі Славакіі і іншых левых партый. Нягледзячы на паражэнне паўстання, гэта падзея мела станоўчыя вынікі ў палітыцы, эканоміцы і культуры Славакіі. Аўтар прыходзіць да высновы, што Славацкае нацыянальнае паўстанне было палітычнай перамогай, якая дала краіне магчымасць заняць прымальную пазіцыю ў адносінах прэзідэнта Э. Бенеша з Масквой.

Ключавыя словы: Славацкае нацыянальнае паўстанне; Другая сусветная вайна; Эдвард Бенеш; Славацкая народная партыя (Ludaks); Каляднае пагадненне; Ян Галіян.

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THE SLOVAK NATIONAL UPRISING 1944

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The article describes the Slovak National Uprising and its role in defeat of nazi Germany. It is shown that after the so-called Munich Treaty and creation of (First) Slovak Republic the majority of population was satisfied with state of affairs. The bombings of Bratislava by US Air Force in June 1944 caused increasing of local Resistance groups. This situation triggered off the decision of the Germans to occupy Slovakia. It is spoken in detail about course of the uprising. Author proposes the division of uprising into three phases depends on activities from both sides. Attention is given to the role of the USSR support to insurgents and reinforcing of Slovak Communist Party and other left parties. Despite of defeat of uprising this movement had positive consequences in politics, economy and culture of Slovakian territory. The author comes to conclusion that Slovak National Uprising was political victory which gave acceptable position towards President E. Beneš and Moscow.

Keywords: Slovak National Uprising; World War II; Edvard Beneš; Slovak People's Party (Ľudaks); Christmas Agreement; Ján Golian.

Military Slovakia and the Resistance to the year 1944

After big turbulence in the Czechoslovak political situation in the autumn of 1938, after the so-called Munich Treaty (cession to Germany of the Sudeten German territory of Czechoslovakia), the government led by President E. Beneš resigned from their positions. In the Czech lands there is created the bipartite system with authoritarian features trying to keep the remainder of Czechoslovak statehood under the German pressure. But in Slovakia that gained autonomy after the Munich Treaty the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party arose and it gradually changed an authoritarian regime to its totalitarian one, so-called Ľudácky (Ľudaks) [1, s. 182].

Radicalism of the then dominant party with the help of A. Hitler resulted in separation from Czechoslovakia in March 1939 when the Slovak state, collaborating with the nazis was created. Berlin made capital out of separation of Slovakia to solve the Czech question so it created the occupied Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Until the summer of 1944 Slovakia, officially the (First) Slovak Republic seemed to be the reliable ally of nazi Germany.

Since its creation the Slovak state was totally ruled by the Ľudaks (members of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party), the means of the A. Hitler's superpower policy within the region of Central Europe. Pretending to defend Slovak independence (mainly against Hungarian revisionism) Slovak military politics willingly supported fulfilling the nazi vision of «New Europe» by participating in attacking Poland¹ and the Soviet Union [2, s. 39–130], subordinating the politics and economy to German interests [3, s. 197–199] or «solving» the Jewish question².

During the first years of the Ľudaks' government the majority of population did not consider this politics as a threat against Slovak future. Nazi Germany as a «protector» of the Slovak Republic won almost all

military campaigns it started. Slovakia, unlike neighbouring countries directly occupied by Germany or client ones, was relatively stable and trouble-free, without excessive misery of war other countries were exposed to.

Participation of Slovak soldiers in German aggression did not burden the Slovak society so much because Slovak soldiers fought abroad and casualties were not so high³. In the first half of the war the Slovak state basked in glory of A. Hitler's Europe and we could really talk with a bit of cynicism and generalization – in the style of period Ľudaks' propaganda – about «smiling Slovakia» [4, s. 31–35, 49–53].

The Ľudaks' policy based on nationalism, state paternalism and conservative ideas was still supported by a considerable part of the society. The Resistance movement was not numerous because of a smaller amount of radicalism of the regime (willingly or unwillingly influenced by democratism and liberalism of Czechoslovakia in pre-Munich Treaty era) and a stable state status within Europe fighting in the war. Gradually, mainly due to a worsening of the military status of Germany and its allies, a home situation in constituent states of the Axis got worsen, including Slovakia.

The situation was getting changed mainly from the year 1943 which started with the great Germany defeat at Stalingrad, continued with subversiveness of fascism in Italy and finishing its fighting on the side of Germany and ended with the triumph of the foreign politics of the Czechoslovak government in exile led by President E. Beneš who signed the allied treaty with the I. Stalin's Soviet Union in December. It meant the acceptance of the restoration of pre-Munich Treaty Czechoslovakia and its exile representation by the power that was supposed to play the most important role within Central Europe.

¹See more in: *Baka I.* Slovenská republika a nacistická agresia proti Poľsku. Bratislava : Vojenský historický ústav, 2006. S. 71–105.

²See more in: *Nižňanský E.* Nacizmus, holokaust, slovenský štát. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2010. S. 104–181.

³In 1943, they were registered only 293 missing soldiers of the «Reinsurance Division», with unambiguous direct deserters // Vojenský historický arch. Bratisl. F. Zaisťovacia divízia. Sign. I/114.

Observing the relationship development within the camp of allies, especially the Western Czechoslovak exile with the Czechoslovak Communist exile and Soviet authorities in Moscow forced resistance politicians in Slovakia mainly consisting of communists and civil democrats to come together. Political talks in the autumn of 1943 resulted in signing of the so-called Christmas Agreement as the mutual Resistance programme of the representatives of the illegal Communist Party (K. Šmidke, G. Husák, L. Novomeský) and representatives of non-communists (J. Ursíny, J. Lettrich, M. Josko).

The Christmas Agreement declared creation of the common central resistance body – the Slovak National Council (SNR) aimed at performing great general uprising against the Ludaks' regime and the nazi regime. The uprising should bring Slovakia to the post-war era as a part of anti-Hitler's coalition and as a self-confident part of the Czechoslovak state «nationally and socially» reformed⁴.

Soon political, military and economic preparations of the planned uprising involving not only illegal SNR but also other Resistance groups started. The most important precondition for future armed performances was winning the Slovak Army over. In the end, the so-called Central Military Headquarters organizing military preparations of the Slovak National Uprising was

formed around Lieutenant colonel J. Golian, Chief of Staff of the Ground Forces Headquarters in Banská Bystrica. He, on the grounds of his position, together with his close colleagues in the army appealed for Slovak officers sympathizing with the resistance to be involved in the uprising⁵.

Gradually, the net of the officers who were involved in the preparatory phase of the uprising and provided with the instructions followed in the case the uprising would be proclaimed was created. Ideally, the uprising was supposed to break out after penetration of the Soviet Red Army deeply into the territory of Poland or Hungary to enable Slovak units defending together with Germans north-east borders of Slovakia to release the Carpathian passes for the crucial attack of the Soviets. In another, less advantageous variant the uprising was supposed to break out in any other conditions after the Germans would occupy Slovakia. The occupation by the Germans would bury any hopes for the change of the Slovak politics in that time as well as its place by the A. Hitler's side. Both variants needed a union of insurgent Slovakia with the proceeding Red Army to be successful. Otherwise the uprising would not have a chance within the German surrounding. The efforts to coordinate military activities of the insurgents with the Red Army offensive quickly met the fast changing reality of summer months in the year 1944 [6, s. 261–292].

Summer 1944

On the 16 June 1944 the Slovak society was shocked by the news of bombing the Apollo refinery and the Winter port in Bratislava by the 15th US Air Force that called for (except 80 % of the refinery destruction) about 200 casualties. For the first time the Slovak Republic faced a horror of the war in its war era [7, s. 23–25]. The war approaching Slovakia disturbed the belief of the majority of the society in the stability of the state. In July and August 1944 the US air intervention in Slovakia was followed by landing of more smaller organizational groups of the partisan movement from the USSR.

In the summer 1944 by the help of local insurgent and resistance groups the partisan movement was increasing. In the summer 1944 it influenced the resistance and preparations for the uprising in two ways. Activation of the opposing mood against the regime and arousing resistance revolutionary behaviour were its indisputable pluses⁶. On the other

side – due to some Soviet commanders – for the first time in Slovakia we experienced expressions of severe violence against civilians, mainly German citizens [8, s. 207–219].

Similar anti-German feelings were found also among soldiers of the garrison in Martin. They were influenced by partisans and led by Major C. Kuchta shot dead the German military and diplomatic group of Lieutenant colonel P. Otto while trying to disarm them. From the 21 August to the outbreak of the uprising partisans remoulded their radicalism and too revolutionary ideas into seizing of Sklabina, Ružomberok (26 August), Liptovský Mikuláš (28 August), impetuous blocking of train tunnels in the Turiec region or detention of Ludaks' representatives in Brezno (27 August) [5, s. 165–181]. This naked anti-regime aggression expedited the decision of the Germans to occupy Slovakia to avoid experiencing similar anti-German revolts as they did in Romania or Warsaw.

The declaration of the uprising and its military course

During the morning of the 29 August 1944 when soldiers of the Žilina garrison got the news about occupa-

tion German units approaching from the Protectorate, Major J. Dobrovodský, involved in preparations of the

⁴Vianočná dohoda // *Pravda*. 12 Sept. 1944. S. 1.

⁵See more in [5, s. 11–21].

⁶From the newer publications focus on the partisan movement in Slovakia see: *Uhrin M.* II slovenská partizánska brigáda M. R. Štefánika. Banská Bystrica : Múzeum SNP, 2009. 182 s.; *Vimmer P.* Partizáni Sečanského. Banská Bystrica : Múz. SNP, 2016. 276 s.; *Krištofik J.* «Javorinu Nemci nikdy nedostanú». Banská Bystrica : Múz. SNP, 2017. 212 s.; *Pažurová H.* Jegorovova partizánska brigáda. Banská Bystrica : Múz. SNP, 2017. 158 s.

uprising, started to organize the first insurgent battalions offering resistance to the Wehrmacht before Žilina [9, s. 109–111]. After the evening speech of Minister of Defence F. Čatloš in which he announced the arrival of the German Army invited by the Slovak Government to pacify the partisan movement, the Headquarters were made sure of the start of the German occupation. So J. Golian decided to send the code name «Start evacuation» to garrisons which should be brought into force from 10:00 p. m. It meant the beginning of the active defence executed by some military units against the German occupation army and the official beginning of the uprising. During following hours and days the majority of military garrisons in central Slovakia followed the appeal for Resistance spontaneously or by seizing command of units by insurgent officers. However, due to lack of information, hesitation and German activity (mainly disarmament of two divisions in East Slovakia) almost the whole territory of West and East Slovakia, with minor exceptions, remained out of the insurgent area and did not join the uprising⁷.

During the first days of the uprising the insurgent area of 20 000 km² was created, where as the territory of the then Slovak Republic (without southern parts seized by Hungary in November 1938) covered approximately 38 000 km². In the east «the insurgent state» extended to Levoča, Spišská Nová Ves and Dobšiná, in the west to Žilina, Bánovce and Bebravou and included a part of the Zlaté Moravce district, in the north and the south met the then state border. So at the beginning the insurgent area covered the territory more than 30 districts but was getting smaller with growing pressure and advance of the German units day by day [10, s. 92].

The military command of the uprising led by J. Golian faced a difficult task. It was supposed to organize the insurgent army formed from soldiers of the garrisons within the insurgent area and coming soldiers from the east and west part of Slovakia, to execute mobilization and ensure the rear of defending insurgent units. All these tasks were executed during constant fights, great German pressure and enforced and also unthoughtful retreat and loss of territories, military technology and supplies. During the first days of the uprising the German occupation army faced strength of 18 000 insurgent soldiers and officers. After the first official mobilization on the 5 September 1944 the number increased to 47 000 and after the second one at the end of September 1944 to 60 000 soldiers, however most of them were not sufficiently equipped and armed. Both fighting sides were equipped with more than 100 tanks or, more precisely self-propelled guns but on the side of the insurgents only a part of them was fully functional and combat-ready (that's why they decided to use later ineffective tanks while constructing improvised armoured trains). The insurgent artillery was more numerous but the quality lagged behind the German one. During September the

German air force (Luftwaffe) took control of the airspace over Slovakia. After bombing out the airport Malacky and landing of the fighter regiment from the USSR the situation changed and air superiority was gained by insurgent pilots [11, s. 79–171].

Taking a military aspect of the uprising into consideration it might be divided into three phases. Till the 9 September 1944 the first phase of defending insurgent fights that was at the beginning affected by a fast and unexpected advance of the German occupation army finished. Also thanks to indecisiveness of more commanders and garrisons, or after initial retreats, the insurgent army suffered considerable losses of supplies of military material which was missing later. The insurgent army lost territories of Spiš and Liptov. Heavy fights in retreat in which the insurgents suffered considerable losses took place in the Horná Nitra region. Gradually, the insurgent army supported by partisan units and also gendarme units succeeded in stabilizing the front.

During the second phase from the 10 September till the beginning of the German general offensive on the 18 October the insurgent army (officially the First Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia) was reinforced by Czechoslovak units fighting in the Soviet Union – the 2nd Czechoslovak Airborne Brigade and the 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Regiment [10, s. 102–106]. Both units represented the elite insurgent units and noticeably helped the insurgents to face the German pressure. Considering Soviet help to the insurgents, the Battle of the Dukla Pass at the beginning of September with the aim to join the Red Army to the insurgent one was the most helpful activity for the uprising. Although it failed, this Soviet offensive bounded a considerable part of the German units otherwise used against the uprising that would have been suppressed sooner.

The last phase of the defense of the insurgent territory is the period from the beginning of the German general offensive on the 18 October to the military defeat of the uprising at the end of October 1944. The general offensive of the German occupation forces and the uprising defeat was enabled by an unsuccessful attempt of M. Horthy, the Regent of Hungary to withdraw Hungary from the alliance with the Germany on the 15 September [12, s. 113]. The establishment of the Szalási regime in Hungary allowed the German occupation units to create there the base for a crucial attack against poorly secured and passive southern parts of the insurgent defence. In ten days the insurgent territory besieged from all sides was defeated. On the 27 October 1944 General R. Viest (sent by the Czechoslovak exile in London to lead the insurgent army from October) commanded the insurgent army to withdraw from Banská Bystrica to Donovaly. Here, realizing the no-win situation in direct fighting against the German occupation units he agreed with moving the insurgent fight into the partisan one [13, s. 138].

⁷See more in [5, s. 210–276].

Politics, economy and culture in the insurgent territory

Military activities during the Slovak National Uprising influenced the existence of the uprising most of all but it was not the only sphere which filled the effort of insurgents and the life within the insurgent territory. On the contrary, inside the insurgent territory, particularly in its centre, the dynamic political progress and relatively lively social activities took place. Since the 1 September 1944 the Slovak National Council (which was established after V. Šrobár, his supporters and the representatives of other Resistance groups joined then illegal National Council) became the highest insurgent body. It also became the highest legislative and governmental body of the uprising with its own executive body which is the Board of Commissioners⁸.

As the first political party the Slovak Communist Party (KSS) was entrenched in the insurgent territory. As early as on the 2 September the party issued their own proclamation to Slovak people [14, s. 17–19]. At the same time they continued to present themselves the only left wing representatives. These activities were supported by the social democrats left wing continuous intention of repeated unification of the Marxist political parties. That tendencies finally led to the unification congress which took place on 17 September 1944 in Banská Bystrica [15, s. 300–301; 16, s. 576]⁹. The programme of the KSS was based mainly on socialization and equality of Slovaks within the renewed Czechoslovakia. After unification of the left-oriented political parties the Congress of the Revolutionary Factory Committees took place on 15 October 1944 in Podbrezová with participation of labour unions of the aforementioned political parties – i. e. unions inclined towards socialism and communism [17, s. 26–27, 97–98; 18, s. 242–243].

The unification process inside the left wing camp invoked similar tendencies among the representatives of a citizen-democratic group whose intention was to create a vital alternative to KSS. On 17 September 1944 this accelerated effort led to the establishment of their own newspaper called «Čas»¹⁰. They tried to catch up with the Communists who had at disposal newspaper «Pravda» since the first days of their illegal political activities. Gradually, the highest framework of a new political subject (Democratic Party) was established. This party became the representative of all other then left-wing oriented insurgent groups. Their political programme was based on the ideas of humanity, Masaryk type of democracy, nacionalism, Slavophilia and indirectly followed up the pre-war Agrarians¹¹.

The uprising once again brought to life the question of legislative and constitutional role of Slovakia within the renewed Czechoslovak Republic. The Slovak National Council fully recognized the Czechoslovak exile government as the internationally accepted representative of the Czechoslovak resistance movement. But the council expressed an uncompromising attitude towards any tendency for repeated establishment of centralized Czechoslovakia and requested Slovak self-governing role within a federal state [19, s. 158–159].

Political and military questions were not the only matters of the uprising. Economic and social spheres were of the same importance as well. It was necessary to provide smooth payment of workers' salaries, pensions, allowances to families of soldiers as well as to secure smooth supply of food and basic life needs to citizens and provide accommodation and working opportunities for the refugees from the occupied territories.

In this course, under the threat of war and with gradually decreasing insurgent territories and available resources the insurgent governing bodies reached an exceptional success. That success was also based on preceding financial and economic preparations. For example the governor of the Slovak National Bank I. Karvaš contributed significantly to the uprising. He redistributed the financial and commodity reserves of the state to the chosen center of the uprising [20, s. 28–29].

Another aspect of vital importance to the uprising success was to secure smooth supply of goods, mainly food. Supply of basic needs to front and rear territories was of equal importance. For that purpose the insurgents used the existing chain of supply of the first Slovak Republic and different cooperative associations with brave members connected to the resistance movement.

The long-lasting war, current fightings within the Slovak territory and flow of refugees from the occupied territories brought up the problems of social life. The revolutionary national committees responsible for insurgent local administration spontaneously and successfully organized collections to help refugees, injured soldiers and partisans. Citizens contributed within their limits which are money, food, clothing or other needed items.

In spite of difficulties concerning security, economy and social issues the cultural life within the insurgent territory was not neglected. A front-line theatre under the lead of A. Bagar and local cinemas performed for

⁸Deklarácia Slovenskej národnej rady z 1. septembra 1944 // Arch. Múz. Slov. národného povstania. Zbierka fotografií ; *Lettrich J.* O Slovenskej národnej rade. Bratislava : Poverníctvo SNR pre informácie, 1945. S. 24.

⁹Husáková výpoveď 19. 11. 1963 // Národní arch. Praha. F. ÚV KSČ – barnabitská komise. Sv. 2, A. j. 25.

¹⁰See more in: *Syrný M.* Slovenskí demokrati '44–48. Banská Bystrica : Múz. SNP, 2010. S. 17–28.

¹¹Compare: Programové zásady // Slov. národný arch. Bratisl. F. Demokratická strana. K. 5.

soldiers as well as for civilians. Besides few party, military or other newspapers the public got the latest news through the broadcast of the Free Slovak Transmitter

which gradually offered more and more classic radio culture in the form of songs, poems, prose and drama [10, s. 121–141].

The importance of the uprising

The Slovak National Uprising, not just because of the number of participants, is considered one of the greatest anti-fascist uprisings during World War II. Tens of thousands soldiers, partisans and civilians who actively participated in it ranges it to the most important events in Slovakia not only in the 20th century but also in its whole modern history. Apart from the Slovaks, thousands of representatives of other thirty nations and ethnics (mainly citizens of the then Soviet Union, or citizens of neighbouring nations, but also the French) who lived in the territory of Slovakia or came there because of the war participated in it. All three powers of the anti-Hitler coalition offered help to Slovakia [21, s. 16–76].

All of them were bound by the idea to contribute to defeat nazi Germany. Although military goals of the uprising were not fulfilled i.e. to enable the Red Army to liberate Slovakia quickly and so to contribute to sooner defeat of Germany and to avoid longer fights in the territory of Slovakia also the Slovak insurgents contributed to the defeat of Germany by their two-month lasted fights, an engagement with German forces necessary at the front as well as direct losses or

losses in logistics suffered by the Wehrmacht. Politically the uprising was more successful.

Not only did the Slovak political scene get rid of remainder of collaboration with war aggressors and participation in their crimes but the representatives of the uprising won (although only temporarily) for Slovakia and the Slovaks more acceptable position not only towards President E. Beneš and the Czech post-war politics but also towards Moscow. For some time the Slovak National Uprising and the Slovak representatives emerged from it took control over the Slovak politics and were respected as the equivalent to the Czechs. A few years there was kept the democratic system of government that openly shifted to the communist totalitarianism in the year 1948. Direct losses in the uprising reached several thousands casualties and the subsequent partisan fights and post-uprising repression took 5000 lives of Slovaks, Jews and other members of neighbouring or allied nations fighting in the uprising¹². The Uprising militarily failed but politically it was a matter of the great importance to post-war Slovakia fully appreciated also by the Slovaks in 1960s.

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¹²See more in [3, s. 242–260; 5 s. s. 59–91; 13, s. 39–80].