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THE BEGINNINGS OF A COLLECTIVE IDENTITY OF SLOVAKS IN THE CENTRAL EUROPEAN CONTEXT

Зарождение коллективной идентичности словаков в центральноевропейском контексте

Аннотация

Настоящая статья исследует взаимосвязи при формировании словацкой национальной идентичности в период Просвещения и раннего национального движения. Интеллектуальная элита словацкого происхождения идентифицировала и определяла словаков и словацкий народ в рамках современной австрийской государственности, традиционного венгерского патриотизма и культурного «славизма». Результаты нашей работы однозначно показывают, что современный словацкий национализм с самых ранних времен своего формирования богато расслаивался, впитывал в себя новые идейные побуждения и образовал взаимные связи с соседними славянскими и неславянскими культурами.

Ключевые слова: *просвещение, народность, язык, литература, венгерский культурный ареал, «славизм»*

Priorities and key issues in the formation of the Slovak collective identity included the necessity of linguistic and ethnic identification and the unification of communities with similar customs, folk habits, cultural traditions, and historical memory. These long-term and complex processes created new communication systems where Slovak nationality was developed as a specific ontological feature, ensuring and guaranteeing collective rights to members of the ethnic community. The nationally oriented intellectual elite necessarily had to organize its relations with geographically close neighbors (e.g. Hungarians, Czechs, and Germans) as well as with linguistically related Slavic ethnicities, both politically and culturally. It is true that Slovakia was for eight centuries only a geographic and cultural region of Hungary without transparent legal legitimacy. While Slovaks did not have their own institutional representation like monarchs and nobility, their ethnic elite was consistently a natural and important part of the official Hungarian social elites and power institutions. The processes leading to the formation of the collective identity of Slovaks have many non-standard elements in the Central European and Slavic cultural context. While national elites in neighboring ethnic communities (Poles, Czechs, and Hungarians) declared evident and continuous (although temporarily interrupted) developmental unity of "nation and state", improvisation was necessary in the Slovak environment in terms of seeking alternative arguments for creating national unity. Slovakia (a Slovak land, country, or homeland) existed for centuries only virtually in the form of constructed images [ANDERSON 2006] or ideas as a natural and integral part of historically and culturally respected Hungary

[SZARKA 2022: 7-10]. Since the Slovak elite lacked an institutionalized and generally accepted political platform, alternative bases were created by "fictitious facts" such as Slovak-Slavic legends and myths from the earliest history, about the Principality of Nitra and the Great Moravian Empire. Stories of great glory, a tragic decline, a millennia-long sleep, and an expected resurrection had a symbolic and mobilizing function for the Slovak ethnic community. Although this national chiliasm was not solely a Slovak specificity, it continuously deformed historical memory and limited the real image of Slovak history to a considerable extent.

The Czech historian of nationalism Miroslav Hroch classifies Slovaks (the Slovak community) into the third subgroup of non-governing ethnic groups, which never knew statehood and where for many centuries literary language and creation in this language were completely or almost completely absent [HROCH 1999: 14]. The Slovak national movement as a process of gradual presentation or revelation of hidden social structure can be provisionally delimited by the years 1780–1850 and internally divided into three periods: (i) 1780–1820, Enlightenment and education of the ethnic group within the fading Hungarian patriotism (Hungarism); (ii) 1820–1840, the emergence of the idea of Slavic mutualism (Slavism) and consolidation of Czech–Slovak unity in the Lutheran environment; and (iii) 1840–1850, a symbolic unification of Catholics and Lutherans and the formation of collective consciousness (Slovakness). During the entire period, the national elites advocated for the autochthony of the Slovak ethnicity, its own traditions, culture, and language, but at the same time, they also respected traditional and functional imperial laws and the Hungarian legal system. The change occurred in the 1840 sand 1850s, when the educational activities of Slovak national awakening (the codification of the language, the establishment of national associations, and the publication of newspapers and magazines) precisely defined the demarcation of the Slovak nation vis-à-vis state institutions and began a political struggle for collective rights (the establishment of the Slovak National Council and the formation of the Slovak army). Three groups of demands gradually emerged in declarations, aimed at changing the status of the hitherto subordinate and hidden nation: (i) overcoming cultural and linguistic inferiority through the development and cultivation of their own literary language and building of national culture, (ii) overcoming the political incapacity of the members of the ethnic group and the right to political decision-making, and (iii) eliminating the subordinate social status of members of the ethnic group [HROCH 1999: 14].

Collective identity: History, confessionalism, and language

Some historians in the past and present have proceeded from the assumption that Slovak ethnic identity can be clearly identified as early as the early Middle Ages, in the 9th and 10th centuries. They recall that the political turn associated with the emergence of the Kingdom of Hungary in the 11th century weakened the possibilities of further presence of Slovakness or the Slovak ethnicity. The revitalization of the "golden age" could thus begin only in the Enlightenment era, when not only public and civil life was modernized, but a new layer of Slovak intellectuals

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was also formed, who, within a universal civil life, elevated a narrower ethnic identity mainly associated with language and historical memory, etc. The history of Slovakia and Slovaks was influenced by all the turning points of what is usually called great Central European history. During the two centuries after the Battle of Mohács (in 1526), not only political borders but also ethnic and confessional maps changed in Hungary. The territory of present-day Slovakia came under the strong religious influence of the German Reformation of Martin Luther, and in the 16th century, it became almost entirely Lutheran. The character of society was influenced by are catholicization, anti-Habsburg uprisings, and last but not least, the migration of Hungarian nobility from the south to the north, Czech Protestants from the west to the east, and Slovak peasants from the north to the south, to the Great Plain. Thus, the Slovak community was deeply fragmented not only socially but also in religion, language, geography, education, and world view. In the 17th century, during the intense religious wars, in Hungary as well, there was a successful return to Catholicism (recatholicization), where the secular power, represented by the Habsburgs, also adopted Catholic symbols and transformed the state into a "Catholic Marian Empire and Kingdom." This was also associated with various forms of discrimination against the Slovak Lutheran elite, which lived in covert and later overt tensions with the Catholic Hungarian state. Lutherans developed active alternative communities. Contacts with Czech ecclesiastical circles were particularly popular and active. Czech was the core of the church- and literary language of Slovak Lutherans for four centuries. Based on the Czech–Slovak linguistic and religious unity, a bilingual Czechoslovak collective identity was also built, which was the core of the future broader Slavic ideology of Slavism. Naturally, many Slovak Lutherans did not give up their Hungarian identity either, as they associated it with nobility privileges and a common resistance of the nobility against the Habsburg and Ottoman empires. The early period of the Slovak national movement is defined precisely by this ambivalence, that is, a different and internally differentiated understanding of Hungarism and Slavism in Catholic and Lutheran circles [BANÍK 2000: 93]. Until the 19th century, the concept of "nation" did not take into account the ethnic principle. This means that even the Hungarian ethnic group in Hungary did not have any privileges for many centuries. During the reign of Empress Maria Theresa in the 18th century, the Slovak ethnic consciousness of the nobility strengthened, but Slovak–Hungarian bilingualism was also widespread. Subsequently, during the reign of Emperor Joseph II, the centralization of power and state institutions took place, which included the introduction of German as the official language of the Habsburg Empire and the disruption of noble privileges in Hungary. This met with a strong resistance, and a strong opposition and anti-German Hungarian patriotism arose. An important element of the Slovak national movement and the formation of collective identity was that Slovak national educators (priests and teachers) were unable to win over many nobles of Slovak roots from the Slovak ethnic territory to their side, who maintained conservative attitudes and, above all, for rational and pragmatic reasons, did not trust illusions and new social concepts but leaned not only towards political but also

linguistic Hungarism, which gradually grew into Hungarian ethnic nationalism [MRVA 2014: 210].

Enlightenment: Homeland and nation

The question of ethnicity and ethnic differentiation was a peripheral issue throughout the Middle Ages and the early modern period. In the consciousness of the social elite, ethnicity was obscured by privileged social status and kinship with the nobility, from which a multiethnic community of *natio hungarica* was formed. Hungarian linguistic and ethnic consciousness was gradually formed and strengthened in this political structure during the anti-Habsburg uprisings. The first dispute that publicly and openly declared the ethnic contradictions between Hungarians and Slovaks arose in 1722, when a book was published by a professor of the University of Trnava, Michal Bencsik, entitled *Novissima diaeta* ("To the Supreme Council"), in which he wrote that the inhabitants of Trenčín County were descendants of Slavs who had sold their land for a white horse and were, therefore, forever subjects of the Hungarians. With various arguments he wanted to support the superiority of Hungarians over Slovaks in Hungary. The book drew wide publicity and spurred polemical discussions, which resulted in another polemical book, which was a defence of the Slovaks. The author was a Catholic priest, Ján Baltazár Magin, who thus opposed the ethnic humiliation of the majesty of the famous county of Trenčín.

The Jesuit priest Sámuel Timon (1675–1736), who was one of the founders of modern Hungarian "critical" historiography, also continued in this line of defence. In his works, he mainly used authentic historical sources and polemicised with the views that presented a picture of history based on "legends and stories" from medieval chronicles. This method of his was most strikingly presented in *Imago antiquae Hungariae* ("Images of Old Hungary"), published in Košice in 1733. The book develops the popular thesis of the so-called "hospitable reception of Hungarians" and the equal status of Slovaks and Hungarians in Hungary. The equality of Slovaks and Hungarians as well as the continuity of Great Moravia in the Kingdom of Hungary was also emphasised by other Slovak historians of the Enlightenment, Juraj Papánek, Juraj Sklenár, and Juraj Fándly.

During the Enlightenment, two dominant secular ideological concepts were concurrently generated: Hungarianism and Slavism, which are directly related to the development of the future Slovak national community. The Hungarian patriotism of the Enlightenment, as embraced by numerous Slovak intellectuals of the time (such as Matej Bel, Adam František Kollár, Samuel Tešedík, Anton Bernolák etc.), had little in common with the traditional conservative territorial patriotism practiced by the Hungarian nobility as a whole. During the Enlightenment, the Viennese court modified this social and estate hierarchy. The policies of Empress Maria Theresa and Emperor Joseph II liberalized the relations between the noble and non-noble estates, the center and the periphery, universal Latin education, and modern education in native languages. Many intellectuals of Slavic ethnicity presented their own ethnic identity for the first time, and thereby the community with which they were associated through language and tradition. As non-noble citizens

of the liberal Habsburg Empire, they crossed the boundaries of the conservatively closed Hungarian noble nation. At the same time, new opportunities for education and individual career development were opening up for them. Slovaks from lower non-noble Catholic and Protestant social strata entered public life. It can be said that this Enlightenment civic principle first defined and legitimized Slovaks and Slovakness as a specific entity, which was further refined and strengthened by subsequent historical developments. Educators naturally declared their multi-ethnic or supra-ethnic identity as well. For example, the Enlightenment polymath Matej Bel (1684–1749) declared himself as "lingua Slavus, natione Hungarus, eruditione Germanus". Similarly, the primate of the Hungarian church of Slovak roots, Alexander Rudnay (1760–1831), emphasized that "Slavus sum, et si in cathedra Petri forem, Slavus ero." Ján Čaplovič (1780–1847), who proclaimed the thesis that Hungary is Europe in miniature, presented himself as "Slavus sum natis et educatus". A key ideologue of reforms during the reign of Maria Theresa was the Slovak Adam František Kollár (1718–1783), also known as the "Slovak Socrates." His activities were wide-ranging. He was one of the authors of the new educational system Ratio Educationis (1777), as well as the founder of the first liberal scientific bi-weekly "Anzeigen" (1771–1776), where members of various confessions, ethnicities, and social strata expressed their views on professional and public matters in dialogue. This influential educator did not belong to the Hungarian nobility: he openly emphasized his Slavic (Sclavus), and thus indirectly Slovak, identity and shaped Habsburg "enlightenment policy." In 1749, he published in Latin the book *Humilium promemoria de ortu, progressu et in Hungaria icolatu gentis Ruthenicae* ("Homily reminding of the origin, progress, and life of Ruthenians in Hungary"), and thanks to this book, "Carpathian Ruthenians become a historical nation" [MAGOCSI 2016: 137]. In 1763, a new edition of the first history of Hungary by the Renaissance scholar Miklós Oláh, *Hungária* was published, and A. F. Kollár wrote in the prologue about the Slavs of the Austrian Empire and the relationship between their languages and mentalities. He also hinted at the possibility of the gradual decline of the Hungarian language, which was surrounded by Slavic languages. This idea was quoted by the German historian August Ludwig Schlözer in the work *Allgemeine nordische Geschichte* [HALLE 1771] and adopted by J.G. Herder in the work *Ideas for the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (1784 – 1791), which also contains a popular section on the "glorious future" of Slavic nations and the "gradual decline" of Hungarians and Germans [KÓSA 2006: 420]. These and other manifestations of ethnic presentations sparked discussions, polemics, and signaled potential disputes and conflicts. Nevertheless, it can be said that after sharp religious conflicts, the Enlightenment of the 18th century brought gradual stabilization in secular and religious spheres. Through language, kinship was declared as a form of modern collective identity. This trend was long-standing and readable, but despite this, a large dominant part of the educated elite still identified with traditional Hungarian or Austrian patriotism for a long time. The smooth transition line from the Enlightenment to the first phase of the national movement is traceable mainly in the language question. In the Enlightenment, language was a means of

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communication. It defined ethnic belonging, but it did not have an existential value or a differentiating function, and several languages served their function alongside each other in parallel and in mutual tolerance. It was one of the identification signs of the richly layered social structure (similar to tradition, religion, region, state, and territory). Languages were instruments of the civic freedom and tolerance of the Enlightenment.

Language: Dialogue and unity

During the Enlightenment, the question of universal and general education became a topic of discussion in educated circles, as did the cultivation of new national languages. This process of generating new specific ethnic cultures and collective identities can be considered a pan-European change in cultural code. The precondition for the modernization of society is the exchange of languages in public communication. Universal languages in Hungary, such as Latin, Church Slavonic, and Greek, could no longer effectively distribute the ideas of the Enlightenment and fulfill the pragmatic function of more effective communication in broader social circles in the intentions of Enlightenment era rationalism. This was recognized not only by Protestants but also by reformers of the Catholic Church and Jesuit educators. A key moment for the modernization of society was the turn in the sphere of education and Enlightenment, which reoriented from the church to the state. The Ratio Educationis project (1777) was created, a document legitimizing the division of functions between the church and the state in favor of secular institutions. This modern educational system served all citizens of the Austrian Empire, so it was also a progressive manifestation of modern national policy in narrower Hungary. The central state authorities thus created a mechanism for members of the seven Hungarian ethnicities (nations, nationalities) to be educated in their native languages. In Pest and Buda, central Hungarian state educational institutions were established (from 1777, the University and the printing house), which were to guarantee the spread of universal enlightenment and education through new, often not yet codified, national languages to all, even the most remote and backward regions.

The natural and dynamic development of individual national languages in their own ethnic environment was hindered by traditionally established "foreign languages." For example, the Hungarian language had to establish itself against Latin and later German. The qualitative revitalization of Slavic vernacular languages was mainly realized in the initial phase against traditional Slavic church languages. For example, Slovaks delineated themselves from biblical Czech for almost two centuries. Especially Slovak Protestant educators used understandable and close Czech in both religious and secular literature. Similarly, Ruthenians, Serbs, and Bulgarians modernized their languages and sought more effective forms, and delineated themselves from the traditional Church Slavonic language, etc.

Anton Bernolák (1762–1813) was an important figure of Slovak Enlightenment who, already as a student of Catholic theology during the Josephinian reforms in Pressburg/Pozsony, wrote and published in 1787 a grammar entitled *Critical Philological Discourse on Slavic Letters* (*Dissertatio philologico-critica de literis*

Slavorum in the original). It was a symbolic event that represented the first scientific declaration of the linguistic and ethnic autonomy of Slovaks. Another work, *Slovak Grammar* (*Grammatica Slavica*), was the first normative grammar of the Slovak language, which was also published in German translation in 1817. Bernolák was a Slovak Catholic priest, but his conception of language reform transcended the one-way confessional line of what was called Jesuit Slovak. In his introductory remarks on grammatical writings, he repeatedly spoke of establishing "civil society for the unification of people and nations on the principles of tolerance and the law of humanity (*humanitas lex*)." He could distinguish between a natural affinity for the nation and national animosity, which he, as one of the first in our region, referred to as nationalism [HAMADA 1995: 260]. Bernolák's concept of language respected and developed Enlightenment era ideas anchored in *Ratio educationis*. During his lifetime, new languages were primarily intended to streamline communication in multilingual communities (in the Habsburg Empire and Hungary etc.) and spread education, enlightenment, and the ideas of a peaceful and tolerant civil society. Bernolák also prepared a five-language dictionary called *Slowár*, which, however, was published after his death, in 1825–1827. The purpose of this monumental and unique work was for modern Slovak to enter into an equal dialogue with other languages, in the order of Czech, Latin, German, and Hungarian. The significance of Bernolák's work can be summarized in two points: (i) his orthographic and grammatical works were aimed at cultivating the language of Slovaks, developing a logical and rationally structured system of language elevated to an international level, and (ii) in the grammar, he emphasized that the norm for correct pronunciation should not be the vernacular but the language of the educated and literate (*cultorum, literatorumque*), which should be as different as possible from Czech. He considered it of primary importance to build a specific cultural national language for Slovaks. Through this language, which was to be accepted "both within and outside" – in narrower (national) and broader (supranational, especially Hungarian) social structures.

From 1791, a law came into effect in the Habsburg Empire guaranteeing Hungary a higher degree of autonomy and independence. In the following decade, the Diet also passed several language laws, elevating Hungarian to the position of adominant state language, which gradually penetrated state administration and education. From the perspective of the Hungarian aristocratic political elite, this was a necessary step towards building a strong, independent, and unified Hungary. This new model of state governance diversified the community into rulers and subordinates, not only in the social but also in the ethnic sphere. New disputes and polemics arose over the use of languages, and the harmonious nature of coexistence among ethnicities also changed. In Hungarian, the terms *Magyar/Hungarian* and *Hungarian* traditionally did not have distinct meanings, so they automatically transferred into the new nationalist discourse. Words like *Hungarianness* and *Hungarian* naturally referred to the traditional ties to the multiethnic state of Hungary. In Slovak, from the beginning of the 19th century, the word *Hungarian* began to strictly differentiate natural ethnicity (Hungarian, Magyar) from political-

administrative nationality (Hungarian, Hungary). This meant that every Magyar was also a Hungarian, but not every Hungarian was also a Magyar. In Slovak romantic discourse, the word *Hungarian* had neutral connotations (traditional patriotism, patriotism), but *Hungarianness* became increasingly associated with current tendencies towards Hungarian linguistic supremacy. Being an ethnic Magyar was considered a privilege. However, a large group of Slovak, especially Protestant, educators rejected the new state governance policy, Jan Kollár, Pavel Jozef Šafárik, and Ľudovít Štúr among them.

In the 1820s, there was a "twilight of the Enlightenment" in the Habsburg Empire and in Hungary. In the Slovak and Hungarian environments, thanks to the works of Šafárik, Kollár, and Štúr, a new ideological concept of Slavic nations' unity – Slavism – was born. The function of individual languages changed significantly during the times of national movements. Already from the 1830s, we can talk about a transition from dialogue between cultures and ethnicities to a monological emphasis on national unity and exclusivity. Language no longer served the function of more effective dialogue between ethnic communities but rather atomized, differentiated, and defined ethnic communities according to the principle of "Us (our own) and Them (foreign)". A common and codified language created collective norms and transformed into a symbol of national unity, collective self-definition, and self-awareness.

Slovaks, who had presented themselves for centuries as *Sclavus Hungariensis* or *Slovak Hungarians*, had to seek and define their new collective identity both internally and externally throughout the first half of the 19th century. The trauma of the absence of consciousness of Slovak collective identity was partially softened by a sense of stability in a larger confessional Czech-Slovak-Protestant community as well as in virtual Slavdom, i.e. in the community of Slavic ethnicities. These were two alternatives of Slovak collective identity to traditional Hungarian patriotism.

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