National and Regional Consciousness in Western Slavic Essay-Writing during the Anti-Communist Movement

Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková

Preface

This study examines three western Slavonic, Central European nationalities: the Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles. They are related to each other by language, origins and culture. Presently, each of them has its own independent nation-state, but from 1945 to 1989, these nations were incorporated into the so-called "socialist camp" under Russian domination.*

The Polish, Slovak and Czech nations also share more than a thousand-year history of close geographic proximity during which their interests intersected, especially with regard to their two greatest historical enemies, Russia and Germany.

Czech and Polish national consciousness has its origins in the medieval era. The Slovak's ethnic consciousness allegedly has old Slavonic origins, but their national consciousness is younger because Slovaks lacked political independence for one thousand years (Slovakia was a part of Hungary until 1918). The revival and conservative orientation of Slovak nationalism is linked to Ľudovít Štúr in 1843.

The following factors helped shape the regional identity of these three nations: common geographic borders; one thousand years of shared history; a consciousness, Slavonic in origin, that is affiliated with either West or East European culture (depending on the nation's relationship to the concept of so-called "Panslavism"); a historical sense of feeling threatened by Germans and Russians; a postwar affiliation with the "socialist camp," which promised to secure them from the Germans, but in reality placed them in the clutches of another ancient enemy, Russia.

The Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968 (formally an invasion by the Warsaw Pact) and the oppressive years of Gustav Husak's normalization forced Czechs to rethink their historical existence (especially their passive behavior in 1938 and in 1968) and their relationship with neighbouring Western Slavonic nations, particularly the Poles, who at the time were fighting against communism. The Poles also had to rethink their relationship with Slavs and with Western Europe. The Slovaks, who separated from the Czechs and formed

---

* This study omits the Lusatians, who have lived for many centuries as a minority in Germany and are the smallest of all western Slavonic nations.

an independent state reluctant to collaborate with Western Europe, have been compelled to formulate reasons for this reluctance.

This study examines changes in the national identity of these peoples from 1968 to the present. It looks at those changes by investigating the written essay, which has the flexibility as well as the ability to express sophisticated and delicate national feelings better than any other literary form. It is picturesque and filled with metaphors, intertextuality, and numerous rhetorical constructions: for that reason, it has an emotional content much greater than that of an arid scientific treatise. Because of its "innate subjectivism," which is one of the prime characteristics of this genre, the essay penetrates collective dreams, illusions, and phobias better than any other discursive statement; the same holds true for national affinities and animosities. Because of its characteristic liberty and boundless spiritual loftiness, the essay topples old myths and creates new ones, and, as a rule, does not claim that the views it expresses are final. By tackling the most essential questions, it retains the essence of an essay in the truest sense of the word, i.e., a true endeavor.

I

The first serious attempt made by the Czech underground to evaluate the entire history of the Czechs in light of a historical misfortune - the so-called Husak "normalisation" - was in the form of an essay.

During the 1970s, Jan Patočka, a prominent Czech philosopher persecuted by the authorities, published the essay *Was sind die Tschechen* [*Who are the Czechs*], which was originally written in an "epistolary" style (according to an exegesis by Jacek Baluch, the Polish translator, and former ambassador to Czechoslovakia).[1] The letter was addressed to a female resident of West Germany, for whom the Czech philosopher tried to analyze the fate of the Czechs by referring to Kant's category of sublimity. He inquired whether, when and under what conditions the small Czech nation would have the opportunity to achieve moral greatness, and asked when and why it had wasted that chance. All of his reflections, nostalgic and elegiac with regard to the distant medieval past and bitter with regard to modern history, are based on a single fundamental question, already formulated in the 1887 article *Naše dve otázky* [*Our two questions*] by Hubert Gordon Schauer, a Czech man of letters. Is there any sense belonging to a small nation, or would it be better for small nations to belong to larger ones?

From that moment on, the issue was regularly raised in periods that were especially unpropitious for the Czechs. During the favourable interwar years, Karel Čapek ridiculed the query: "This question appears to be posed by some

---

1 Jacek Baluch's "Nota tłumacza" ["Translator's Note"] attached to Jan Patočka, *Kim są Czesi* (Kraków, 1997). This is a discussion of assorted versions of the Patočka text as well as its later publisher version (the incomplete text is from 1975, the complete one from 1981; the German original publication was in 1991, and the translation into Czech in 1985).

melancholy beaver that wonders whether it is worthwhile being a beaver in light of the fact that mice or horses are much more numerous. The true beaver does not ask whether it makes sense being one, but rather about the manner in which it is to confirm its existence, since it already is a beaver."[2]

Schauer's question was indirectly answered by Patočka in an introduction to a study looking at the conception of "small" and "great" Czech history: "great" history denotes the blessed Middle Ages, when Bohemia was a vassal of the German Empire and constituted the most easterly Slavonic wing of universal Western European civilization, which was based on the classical tradition and Christianity. Patočka linked "small" history with the shaping of the modern Czech nation, an eighteenth-century process based on linguistic nationalism, when the nation was devoid of elites, insufficiently appreciative of the significance of statehood. The legacy of "small" Czech awareness explained why, "when the time of trial tolled in Munich in 1938," President Edvard Beneš "pitifully broke down instead of recognizing the historical chance presented by the situation," and declared the Republic's capitulation; by doing so, he ultimately eliminated any opportunity for Czech moral greatness.[3] This lost opportunity would never again be reversed, Patočka claimed, as the events of 1968 demonstrated.

Patočka presented his theories at underground self-education courses; a much more radical version of his ideas was outlined by Peter Příhoda, Peter Pithart and Milan Otahal, authors of the 700 page *Češi v dějinách nové doby* [*The Czechs in New History*], which they described as an essay. Of the three authors, only Otahla is a professional historian; Přihoda is a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst with a Catholic bent; Pithart a lawyer, political scientist, and "conservative liberal" who was appointed Czech Prime Minister after the so-called Velvet Revolution; he has been a president of the Czech Senate since 1996. *The Czechs in New History* was issued in 1991 under the pseudonym Podiven (from *divit se* - "to be astounded"). Selected by the authors, the name is associated with the "astonishment regarded by Aristotle as the motive of cognition."[4]

The authors compare their work to a multi-layered symphony containing distinct motifs.[5] In other words, they are concerned with capturing and reinterpreting key moments in Czech history in an attempt to explain how it was possible for the once magnificent land of Bohemia, the easterly arm of the Roman Empire and then of the German *Reich*, to become incapable of finding sufficient political and moral strength to resist the onslaught of fascist Germany in 1939 - and then, in the wake of the Warsaw Pact invasion of 1968, to transform itself into a cultural desert where everything that was authentic was ousted or banished to the underground, as official public life became ruled by omnipo-

---

2 Karel Čapek, *Místo pro Jonathana* [*A Place for Jonathan*] (Praha, 1970), p.27.
3 Patočka, op.cit., p.90.
4 Podiven, *Češi v dějinách nové doby. Pokus o zrcadlo* [*An Attempted View*] (Praha, 1991), p.9.
5 Ibid., p.11.

tent lies that stifled the spirit. Václav Havel's *Moc bezmocných* [*The Power of the Powerless*] offers an excellent analysis of this process.[6]

The concept of polyphony brings to mind music, order and harmony. Nonetheless, the authors depict the development of the Czech nation as a disharmonious one full of violent turns and sudden defeats.

The method used in *The Czechs in New History* - a decided rejection of accepted stereotypes as well as of entrenched Czech phobias, accomplished by resorting to a radical form of irony - makes it possible to attain something that Western postmodernists have described as the "dedoxification" of culture, a term derived from *doxa* ("opinion"): it denotes the rejection of all generally accepted opinions, and makes it possible to emphasize the antinomies and ambivalence of Czech national policy, to trace historical paradoxes, and to point out new roads.

The plebeian nature of the modern Czech nation is strongly attacked by Podiven (the term "plebeian" is not explained in this work, but it refers to the population in the countryside, village teachers as well small tradesmen and intellectuals); for many years it was highly regarded by Czech historians and literary figures, and outright apotheosized under communism. Podiven regards plebeian qualities in an entirely different light: as a synonym for the pettiness of the Czech national spirit, as an expression of limited horizons and the absence of great endeavours, and as an self-enclosure within the apparent idyll of the Czech village and small town; it also denotes hostility towards everything that exists beyond their borders.

> "For a long time to come, this absence of a spontaneous openness towards culture, this peasant distrust, which ultimately turns into distrust and disrespect of oneself, defined the Czech spirit; even two centuries later, it is still proper to complain about the plebeian character of the Czechs."[7]

This process of undermining the role played by plebians in history is connected with a reevaluation of the part played by the so-called Czech national renaissance, whose origins date back to the turn of the eighteenth century. This incomplete and immature rebirth concentrated primarily on the revival of the Czech language, which had been ousted by the German language, and on the replacement of true literature with folklore; these same features distinguish a nation deprived of its gentry and aristocracy, and thus of political experience, international connections, and chivalric virtues. By basing itself predominantly on a thin stratum of impoverished intelligentsia, composed of village teachers and patriotic clergy, the Czech nation was unable to digest properly any of the great spiritual currents of the era or to immerse itself in the European Enlightenment; instead, it merely adopted shallow utilitarianism instead of rationalism, and practical instead of rational and pure Kantian intellect.[8] As a re-

---

6 Václav Havel, *Moc bezmocných* (samizdat, 1978).

7 Podiven, op.cit, p.25.

8 Ibid., p.27.

sult, the Czechs slowly started to part ways with the rest of Europe, i.e., with the great classical Greco-Roman heritage, even though they remained in the geographical heart of the Continent. This paradoxical marginalization was the outcome not so much of spatial distance from the geographic centre but rather of proximity. The Czechs were unable to avoid the powerful blows dealt by the Germans. Although they wished to keep their distance, they unskillfully imitated the Germans, unlike those living in countries located farther from the heart of Europe, such as Poland and Hungary, which remained less dependent on foreign influence but did not cease being thoroughly and authenticly European.

After the brief Great Moravian episode, the legal situation of *Česká Koruna* (the Bohemian Crown) was defined for centuries by dependence on the Holy Roman Empire, an international state that had been created by German tribes: hence the iconoclastic thesis proposed by Podiven, which turns the cultivated Czech self-image on its head.

> "From time immemorial, the Germans were the co-founders of Bohemia because the Bohemian *ethnicum* alone - and this has to be admitted - was not powerful enough to create a different Bohemia; this hypothesis is also useless: the former and present-day Bohemia was created by the Czechs together with the Germans."[9]

Subsequent German colonization fortified the medieval process of establishing a joint German-Czech Bohemian state. The Germans arrived at the invitation of Bohemian rulers and obtained the rights of full-fledged citizens. The authors see the subsequent questioning of those rights as the reason for problems with the *Sudeten* Germans in the twentieth century. On the other hand, they do not attach greater significance to that factor which has, up to now, comprised the greatest stumbling block in Czech history: the Germanization of Czechs within the Habsburg monarchy. This process is explained by referring to "technical reasons rather than tribal egoism"[10]; in an absolutist monarchy, those "technical reasons" are understood to be necessary for introducing uniform administration and legal regulations in a single, universally understood language. According to Podiven, the Czech gentry and towns accepted those developments of their own volition, while "the people opposed [them] not so much because of patriotism but because of plebeian inertia." Although the last part of this general statement should be recognized as correct (an opinion I am inclined to share based on my observations of an analogous process in Slovakia), the views regarding German innocence in this process are much too extreme.

Regardless, as Podiven correctly ascertained, the Czech renaissance, marked by plebeian nationalism, restricted itself to the defense of language

---

9 Ibid., p.38.
10 Ibid., p.40.

and folklore without facing the greatest challenge of the epoch; in short, the policy of "small steps" did not pass the test.

Podiven substantially breaks with orthodox Czech opinion by contrasting narrow Czech utilitarianism with a positive model based on the often criticized bravery, Romanticism, and chivalric spirit of the Poles, "wise in their frenzy" - characteristics that won them respect throughout Europe, including Germany.[11]

> "In contrast to the Czechs, the Poles possessed a mature political imagination and a livelier comprehension of power-politics. Their political thought developed not only at home but also in exile, a phenomenon completely unknown to the Czechs."[12]
>
> "At times, the Czech proved successful at realizing obtainable aims, but did not take into consideration more far-reaching perspectives. Any acknowledgement of the latter ended in proclamations and sheer dilettantism."[13]

This assessment reflected feelings of Czechs' disenchantment. From the time of God's Warriors led by Žižka and the heroic deeds of Jan Hus, who let himself be burned at the stake for the sake of truth, the Czechs did not mount any sort of armed resistance to defend their country in the face of the grave threats posed by the Germans in 1938 or the Russians in 1968; instead, they remained imbued with a paralyzing sense of their own helplessness and inability.

True, the Czech awakeners[14] tried, though extremely unsuccessfully, to expand ideas about Czech qualities and to endow them with a wider meaning through the concept of Panslavism. According to the premises of this movement, whose founder was Jan Kollár, a Slovak, the Czechs were merely one tribe within a great Slavonic nation reaching from the Elbe to the Ural Mountains and from the northern and southern seas to the Asian oceans. Affiliation with this great nation, headed by the Russians and with other Slavonic tribes seen as mere members of a body linked by brotherly love, guaranteed the Slavs (and thus the Czechs as well) a leading position.

The idea of mutual Slavonic love had no place in the struggle waged by the Poles against the tsarist Empire. "The Czechs," the authors add with characteristic irony, "solved this question simply by recognizing the Poles as insufficiently Slavonic. The misunderstood Poles were largely ignored by the Czechs, resulting in mutual losses for both sides. There only remained Czech coquetry, which employed Slavonic mutuality (slovanská vzájemnost) in an attempt to seduce Russian imperialism. The seed of self-deception was planted, and sub-

---

11 Ibid., p.176.

12 Ibid., p.177.

13 Ibid., p.178.

14 In Czech "buditelé," which conscious activists who attempted to stir the people by reviving national culture and patriotism.

sequently, even a hundred years later, it became convenient to water it from time to time."[15]

This last sentence is a clear allusion to the expansion of pro-Russian feelings linked to Panslavism during a situation in which, according to German opinion, the Czechs "became the carrier of Bolshevism in the very centre of Europe (*letadlová lod bolševismu uprostřed Evropy*)."[16]

Podiven does not mince words when addressing the Czech national renaissance. This period, which, in Czech historiography (especially during the communist era), was a time of flourishing growth for the plebeian strata of the nation, is treated as an era of "Czech smallness" (*česká malost*), mediocrity (*prostřednost*), self-deception (*sebeklam*) and deceit (*podvod*). The last two epithets refer not only to the infamous Hanka forgeries but also to the non-authenticity of Czech culture in general. Even the National Theatre, venerated by the Czechs as a temple of national rebirth erected through dues paid by the poorest social strata, appears to be nothing more than a "petty copy of the Vienna Opera,"[17] while all Czech writing is reduced to folklore with plebeian qualities and Slavonic features - a veritable grave for the classical, chivalric and aristocratic concepts associated with European culture.

The literary appearance of Karel Hynek Macha (1810-1836), a Romantic poet and rebel, and of Karel Havliček-Borovský (1821-1865), a rationalistic scoffer who had been cured of Panslavonic dreams by a sojourn in tsarist Russia, represented two important exceptions to the universal inertia of the renaissance, even though they also proved unable to achieve a real breakthrough. The Czech soul remained unsullied by great ideas, and Czech politics continued to be affected by the impact of the opportunistic stands and stealth inherited from the forefather awakeners. Podiven sarcastically delineates this policy meandering, starting with the fall of the Bourbon dynasty and the defeat of the Polish anti-Russian November Uprising (once again completely misunderstood by the Czechs), the Slav convention held in Prague in 1848 (an undemocratic event based on Panslavism), up to the policies pursued by Czech "realists" and "Young Czechs."

The servile character of that policy did not change until the 1880s with the appearance of T.S. Masaryk, a thinker as well as a man of action, molded by study abroad and foreign contacts, which enabled him to transcend the limited range of Czech "small history."

> "Masaryk acted as a purifying agent. He drew back the curtains and revealed the embarrassing backstage of pretence, self-deception, and pettiness, the lack of education, and the empty slogans and gestures."[18]

---

15 Podiven, op.cit, p.69.

16 Ibid., p.421.

17 Ibid., p.152.

18 Ibid., p.15.

Together with Gebaur, Masaryk began a celebrated battle to unveil the Hanka forgeries, and, at the same time, launched a struggle for a true renaissance of Czech national culture and the creation of democratic foundations and ideals. He was assisted by the so-called Hrad group (whose members included Ferdinand Peroutka and Karel Čapek), which tried to acquaint the Czechs with British parliamentarianism and common sense.

This process was favoured by an opening towards Europe, a farreaching pro-Western orientation, which encompassed not only traditional literature but also politics, law and culture. The positive outcome of this orientation proved unable to protect the developing country from its ultimate downfall and capitulation to the Nazis. An analysis of the myriad reasons for this fall, and an answer to the painful question why Czechoslovakia succumbed to the Germans without firing a single shot - despite the enormous arsenal at her disposal, which could have, according to Podiven, halted the invasion and even altered the course of wartime events - occupies several hundred pages, and involves questions of key importance to Czech history:

1) the attitude towards national minorities (including the largest group, the *Sudeten* Germans) in Bohemia, and then in Czechoslovakia,

2) the revision of attitudes toward Germans in general, starting with the Holy Roman Empire and up to more recent times, including the expulsion of the *Sudeten* Germans from the borderland regions,

3) the role played by communists and socialists in toppling the First Republic, and complete postwar subjugation to Moscow, especially after 1968, when the country was turned into a cultural wasteland.

It is impossible to discuss all three themes in detail. The third, though essential, ends, like the entire book, in 1938, and contains statements similar to those in other publications on communist activity.

The first two themes involve a radical revision of the appraisal of Czech attitudes towards various ethnic minorities (Germans, Slovaks, Hungarians, Poles, Jews, Ukrainians, and others). Podiven accuses the Czechs of striving for absolute hegemony instead of trying to organize a state, primarily with the Germans (sic), along the lines of a federation; the other charge relates to following in the steps of the renaissance forefathers, i.e., the attempt to seek refuge in deceit, evasion, and legal tricks. This was the case, for example, in Tešin Silesia, where the results of elections held after the First World War were falsified to ensure that a considerable part of the territory, populated by a Polish majority, would be handed over to the Czechs. The idea of protectionism, ruthlessly imposed on younger Slavonic brothers, i.e., the Slovaks, did not take into consideration their linguistic and cultural distinctness.

Protectionism in the realm of culture was accompanied by an old, shortsighted proclivity for economic utilitarianism. Adhering to its principles, the Czechs liquidated Slovak industry, claiming that it was unprofitable, and ignored the fact that such a decision would completely undermine the Slovak economy and that its social consequences would ultimately lead to a parting of

ways with the Czechs. The gravest sin was committed towards the Germans, who, since a series of incidents in 1882 at the Charles University, lived in a state of permanent threat. Hitler was capable of exploiting those feelings by turning the *Sudeten* Germans into a fifth column and then transferring that fear from the Germans to the Czechs.

Podiven did not see the "reasons for Czech capitulation" only in the decision by national minorities to leave the Czechoslovak community on the eve of the Second World War (the establishment of Slovak autonomy in 1938, the seizure of the so-called Zaolzie territory by the Poles, the secession of the Hungarians, or the taking over of the Sudeten Mountains by the Germans). The real cause was first and foremost the wretched, post-renaissance state of the national spirit. The twenty-year history of a democratic Czechoslovakia was much too brief to create a stand based on true freedom. In the wake of defeat, the Czechs were incapable of revival - of "rising again as the followers of Mickiewicz had after the Polish defeat of 1830." They also lacked outstanding leaders, for Masaryk was no longer alive at the time of greatest peril, and his friends from the Hrad group, Karel Čapek and Ferdinand Peroutka - who, in contrast to other Czech intellectuals and politicians, "did not lack a sense of decency" - remained helpless.[19]

In this particular case, Podiven is very much mistaken: Peroutka declared that "harakiri can be performed only by an individual and not by a nation," and thus encouraged a defeatist outlook in favor of capitulation, while Čapek, elsewhere incorrectly charged by Podiven of mean-spiritedness, continued to cultivate chivalric feelings and called for armed resistance against the fascist threat (e.g., his play *Mother*).[20] Unfortunately, he was not the head of state, a post held by Edvard Beneš, Masaryk's clever but pusillanimous successor, who doggedly followed the well-trodden route of Czech *Realpolitik*, which was inclined toward compromise and opportunism. He ultimately capitulated and handed over to the Germans a well-armed country. Czech arsenals served Hitler in his attack on Poland, which, though much worse equipped than its Czech neighbour, opted for armed resistance, and, during of German occupation, created a strong underground state.

This attitude helped Poland cultivate a spirit of resistance despite numerous defeats, including those inflicted by Soviet communism in a sophisticated manner with regard to ideals, or by the Nazis, who crudely announced the annihilation of Slavic nations. The spirit of resistance revealed itself most distinctly during the 1980s in the Solidarity movement - which, it should be noted, was opposed by the Czechs with a level of miscomprehension equal to that shown toward Polish resistance against the Panslavism of the Czechs and Slovaks a century and a half earlier.

---

19 Ibid., p.493.

20 Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, *Karel Čapek czyli dramat humanisty* [*Karel Čapek, or the Drama of a Humanist*] (Warszawa, 1962), pp.220-255.

*

Similar to the writings of František Xaver Šalda, the truly inspired book of essays by Podiven, which contains a shattering and unforgiving critique of Czech attitudes and policies, finds no excuse for mean-spiritedness; the demands of heroism, greatness, and Romantic spirit they make of the Czechs bring to mind two questions about the correctness of their critique and the manner in which it was received by the Czechs.

As long as Pithart remained Prime Minister, the Podiven publication enjoyed favourable though cautious reviews, which confirmed his thesis about the prevailing "dependence of cultural creativity upon the political mood."[21] Once the Pithart government fell, the authors were exposed to a wave of accusations. The Czech tabloid press even insinuated that Podiven, and Pithart in particular, were paid lackeys of the Germans. Such views were also exported to Poland and voiced at Polish-Czech conferences by Czech professors who slung mud at the book's authors; they ignored the sympathy expressed by many Polish scholars, whose feelings were, to a considerable extent, affected by the book's opinions about Poland and Poles as well as by values held by Mickiewicz' spiritual progeny.

Such attacks testified to the impact made by Podiven as well as to the difficulty involved in accepting a relentless critique stereotypical Czech thought and accepted ways of conduct whose outcome, according to the authors, assumed the form of the two great capitulations of the Czechs. The image of national rebirth appears to be excessively one-sided, however, and negates the value of what other Slavic nationalities, including the Poles, found enviable among the Czechs. These features, criticized by Podiven, include "down-to-earthiness," practicality, premeditation, as well as freedom from emotion. This proved to be decisive during the Second World War: Hradčany and Prague remained untouched while Warsaw was reduced to rubble.

Still greater objections were made by the Czechs regarding the attitudes of Pithart and his colleagues towards the German question. The wounds inflicted by the Nazis remain unhealed: as a result, the tendency to emphasize the inadequacies of Czech culture when compared to its German counterpart, Czech particularism, and the creative force of the German state could not meet with the approval of Czech readers. The last factor in particular was painfully experienced by Slavs during the Second World War. The Czechs also found it difficult to come to terms with an event carefully concealed from public opinion by the communists: the brutal and deceitful murder of thousands of *Sudeten* Germans by Czech police during the resettlement campaign.

Another obstacle is Podiven's "dedoxification" of Czech attitudes towards the Poles during the entire period of postwar co-existence within the so-called socialist camp. The Poles were accused of revisionist departure from the prin-

---

21 Podiven, op.cit., p.487.

ciples of Marxism-Leninism and, during the wave of Solidarity strikes in the 1980s, charged with idleness and anarchy - despite the fact that they were involved in helping pave the way for the greatest breakthrough in postwar history: the downfall of communism, which was achieved in Poland in June 1989.

Regardless of our understanding of dedoxification and the role it plays in Podiven's essays, one thing is beyond any doubt: we are dealing with a work characteristic of a new trajectory in Czech national thought on the eve of and following 1989, when it turned its back (at least in theory) on petty political games, shallow utilitarianism, and Party opportunism, instead opting for universal virtues such as truth, valour, honour, broader horizons, and imagination.

This development suggests a return to the values of what is commonly known as European culture, which cannot be reduced to a single class or stratum, as the case had been in Bohemia and Slovakia. The Podiven essays have another dimension as well: by delving deeply into conflicts between the hegemonic nation and national minorities, they prepared the ground for a redefinition of roles in the postmodern state. This fact is of enormous significance in view of the present-day efforts by the European Union to create a new regionalization of the Continent, and, more specifically, a regionalization of its borderlands; this would allow their component parts - nations and nationalities at war for centuries - to concentrate on joint efforts aimed at common and mutually beneficial industrial and cultural undertakings.

The organization of harmonious cooperation among nations and national minorities in post-communist states is a *conditio sine qua non* for the inclusion of new members in the European Union, which is greatly desired by the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia.[22] Such regions are already coming into being along the Czech-Polish-German or Polish-Slovak borderlands, for example, as well as in localities that had developed a wide variety of anxieties, phobias, and mutually antagonistic claims for centuries. The establishment of centres of borderland cooperation aims to dispel age-old fears and traumas by means of regional co-operation that would help carry out shared tasks profitable to all.

For the moment, the cooperation of borderland regions is exclusively oriented toward pragmatic and utilitarian goals. Although it often produces favourable results, it constantly comes up against negative feelings about the past. This new and beneficial regionalization of Central Europe has little in common with the regionalism of Central and Eastern Europe prior to the Second World War, a time in which many regions were populated by a variety of multi-linguistic communities that shared a common landscape as well as local customs and a similar lifestyle. Such regionalism had its proponents and essayists, such as Stanisław Vinzenz for the Hucul highlands, Andrzej Kuśniewicz for the Pol-

---

22 Włodzimierz Malendowski, Małgorzata Ratajczak, *Eurogiony. Pierwszy krok do integracji europejskiej* [*Euro-Regions. The First Step towards European Integration*] (Wrocław, 1998), pp.19-24 and 179-209.

ish Eastern Borderlands, Czesław Miłosz and Tadeusz Konwicki for Lithuania, the Čapek brothers, Max Brod, and Franz Kafka for Prague, to name only a few.

Although the emerging regions have no celebrated writers as of yet, they are nevertheless inhabited by pragmatists. Hoped-for regionalization has not yet been realized, but remains a task to be completed.

II

At the time Podiven published the collection of essays in Prague slighting the plebeian and reductionist nature of Czech national rebirth and its pitiful effect upon the further development of Czech political thought, Bratislava witnessed a third phase of national reconstitution; this was connected with a project that would forsake the Czechs and establish an independent Slovakia, crowned by a decision passed by the Slovak Diet in November 1992 and the creation of the Republic of Slovakia on 1 January 1993. The euphoria expressed at the time by the majority of Slovaks was boundless, for this was the fulfillment of emancipatory dreams cherished by most. Part of Slovak society still cultivates feelings of nostalgia for former Czechoslovak unity, however, and regrets that the division of the state had not been based on the results of a national referendum.

National Slovak thought naturally turns toward a tradition which, in the history of Slovakia, had had great impact on the idea of national emancipation: the tradition of a national renaissance, whose most outstanding proponents were Ľudovít Štúr (1815-1856) and his followers. Štúr was the creator of the Slovak national language (and thus responsible for the linguistic rift with the Czechs), the leader of the 1848 Slovak uprising against revolutionary Hungary (the latter did not recognize the rights of Slavonic nations), as well as a Panslavist who carried out Kollar's ideas *ad absurdum*. In his last work, *Slovanstvo a svet budúcnosti* (Slavdom and the Future World), Štúr called for all Slavic nations to immerse themselves in a single Russian sea by accepting a common script (the *azbuka*), tongue (Russian), religion (Eastern Orthodoxy) and system (tsarist autocracy). Correctly anticipating resistance on the part of the Poles, he cursed them as Slavonic traitors (even though Štúr had, as a young man, worshipped Mickiewicz and even distributed copies of his *Oda do młodości* [*Ode to Youth*] throughout Slovakia).

Štúr's attitude towards tsarist Russia represented a quest for final salvation from Magyarization and was based on an illusory hope for Russian assistance; at the same time, it also reflected Štúr's attachment to the tradition of Great Moravia, the only one the Slovaks could have, for, after the collapse of Great Moravia, the Hungarians seized the area of present-day Slovakia, where they remained in control for the next thousand years (to 1918).

An essential element of the Great Moravian tradition was the acceptance of Byzantian Christianity, a rite performed in Old Orthodox Slavonic (which was regarded in Slovakia as *staroslovenčina* - Old Slovak) and not in Latin. The Štúr myth about the messianic tasks of the Slovaks during the renaissance of

mankind granted them a special place as a superior Slavonic nation (this was also true with regard to their language); the reverse of that myth involved a profound hostility toward "Others," Foreigners, the Different, the Masters and, above all, the non-Slavs or those Slavs who, according to Štúr, failed to corresponded to the criterion of Slavdom (such as the Poles, who had an exaggerated affinity for Europe). The characteristic feature of the Štúr vision was a profound idiosyncrasy regarding the democratic and parliamentarian tradition of the West, above all in France (which he described as "*la synagogue des encyclopedistes*").

The basic trait of Slovak national rebirth resembled its Czech counterpart in that it was plebeian - with the same social and political consequences. It venerated language, viewed as the prime determinant of nationality and the yardstick of superior values, even more than the Czech tradition had; the same holds true for folklore, folk songs and Slavdom. At the same time, the Slovak current contained a large dose of Romanticism, which was alien to the Czechs, and referred to the tradition of the "brigand rebellion," which it elevated to the rank of a national rising against the "lords" (always synonymous with foreigners).[23]

The communists found it difficult to accept the Štúr heritage, because of, among other things, the fact that both Marx and Engels held unfavourable - and at the time highly regarded opinions - about the so-called Slavonic counterrevolution.[24] Nonetheless, the Štúr tradition remained sacrosanct and of crucial significance for the Slovaks, forcing the communists to grant it the value of universality.

This was done during Prague Spring (which assumed a primarily nationalist form in Slovakia) by Vladimír Mináč, a talented man of letters who had sympathy for the belittled and hatred for those who ignored the Slovaks or held them in contempt.

Mináč accomplished this in a series of philosophic and historical essays that were full of bile and blood; they were loaded with metaphors and contrasted the language of high and low literature, the vernacular and the great stylistic periods, the pathos of national feelings and the sarcastic laughter caused by the twisting paths of history. In his 1970 essay *dilogy*, summarizing his reflections about the Štúr era (*Dúchanie do pahrieb* [*The Kindling of Embers*]), and the 1974 *Zobrané spory Jozefa Miloslava Hurbana* [Collected Disputes of Jozef Miloslav Hurban], Mináč proved to be a great demagogue, playing on Slovak fears and phobias (with which he was intimately familiar and which he essentially shared), and referring to Marx and Hegel and their theories on the meaning of history. This was, at the time, an ingenious undertaking that made it possible

---

23 See: Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, *Kochanek Sławy. Studium o Ľudovície Šťúrze* [*Lover of Slavonic Glory: A Study on Ľudovit Stur*] (Katowice, 1978).

24 Karol Marks and Fryderyk Engels, "Panslawizm slawistyczny" ["Slavonic Pan-Slavism"], *Dzieł*a [*Works*], Volume 2 (Warszawa, 1963), pp.323-329.

to reject Marx's prejudices by quoting Marx himself, and to introduce the Štúr narrative into the communist grand meta-narrative (an expression coined by Lyotard) - a step which helped him achieve certain political targets.

At first glance, the essay *dilogy* is extremely iconoclastic; its attacks the very foundations of the Štúr myth: its historicism and, moreover, its nationalist nature. Mináč declares *expressis verbis* that "Slav nationalism (its Slovak variant was an integral part of the overall phenomenon - H.J.-I.) did not differ from other nationalisms and was just as perilous. One could say in its defense that it was never fully achieved and never realized all of its potential."[25]

Mináč also did not see the need to justify the right to national existence by referring to Great Moravia or to other eras taken from the Romantic philosophy of history; he treats the murky and uncertain beginnings of Slovakia's status as a power like a fairy tale. The political history of Slovakia, he claims, began with the appearance of Štúr and his followers on the political stage, and is therefore only a hundred years old. It was preceded by the existence of a Slovak nation (a pure "existence for the sake of existence"), as well as by passive resistance against everything foreign: the Mongol hordes that swept across Europe, the German colonization of towns, the Magyarization campaign (which tried to deprive the Slovaks of their most precious treasure, their native tongue), up to the Czech "elder brothers," who treated the Slovaks in an excessively "protectionist manner."

The Slovak nation, Mináč declares in his second iconoclastic thesis, has no history, at least in terms of the meaning usually associated with this concept. In other words, it has no history of kings, ruling dynasties, plunder and conquests, for it was always the object and never the subject of history. At the same time, however, it does possess a history in an unconventional meaning of the term, one that is closest to the one suggested by Marx and Engels, i.e., a history of the masses and their effort to construct European civilization.

> "If history is the history of monarchs, emperors, leaders and dukes, victories and seized territories, if it is the history of plunder, violence and exploitation, then we have no history, or at least are not its subject. But if the history of civilization is the history of labour, the history of often interrupted but always victorious construction, then that is our history. We are a nation of builders, not only in the metaphorical but also in the real meaning of that term: as masons, craftsmen, and day workers, we erected Vienna and Pest, and assisted in the construction of many foreign cities. We did not reduce a single one to ruins."[26]

The Slovak nation is thoroughly plebeian; there is no other like it in all of Europe, according to Mináč's thesis. Many Slovak leaders, even during the

---

25 Vladimír Mináč, *Zobrané spory J.M. Hurbana* [*Collected Disputes of J.M. Hurban*] (Bratislava, 1974), p.11.

26 Vladimír Mináč, *Dúchanie do pahrieb* (Bratislava, 1970), p.17.

Štúr period, boasted of gentry origin, while those of peasant descent entered the ranks of the elite through education at Western universities, primarily in Germany or in Hungangury Pešt, a town exposed to the winds of European history. This large group of intelligentsia took shape within range of European cultural models before it was forced by Štúr into folkloric costume and philo-Slavic trends.

Nonetheless, the elevation of the Slovaks into the rank of an ultra-plebeian nation among other European nations had certain merit during the communist era. Who else but the plebians were the salt of the earth, in light of Marxist teaching? The status of a plebeian nation was tantamount to that of a chosen people, subject to greater hardships but endowed with greater nobility. "It is a misdeed to have a master but an even greater one to be a master."[27] This old Slovak proverb appeared to be extremely typical of those acquainted with Hegel and who had been brought up on existentialism: it signified a reversal of the classical Hegelian dependence between the master and the slave in favour of the latter.

Referring to this main thesis, the author builds an equally effective argument concerning two nations: the subjugated natives, plebeians, unblemished by the destruction of foreign cities ("a virtue generated by necessity," as he honestly admits), and the Hungarian invaders, dominated by the gentry and contemptuous towards the vanquished.

In this context, the armed Slovak rising against revolutionary Hungary during the Spring of Nations takes on a different dimension: it becomes a slave revolt, morally justifiable and acceptable for people brought up on Marx and Hegel.

When describing the meanderings of Slovak politics under the leadership of Štúr during the Spring of Nations, which involved shifts from one camp to another and restless oscillation between revolution and counterrevolution, betrayal and loyalty, Mináč admits that the slaves' struggle for freedom and their attempt to regain of human dignity involved certain acts contrary to that dignity, a fact stemming from the situation in which a repressed and solitary nation found itself. Yet politics as such represent another point of view regarded by Mináč as justification for the rejection of the ideological and ethical principles cherished by the Slovaks, not only in the Štúr era but also later; its correctness is measured by actual effects and not by the methods used to obtain them: "even a superficial examination reveals the accomplishments of Slovak politics."[28]

"Only lyric poets have pure souls, but politicians always have soiled hands," he declares, adding that "clean houses are erected with dirty hands. A lofty spirit is incapable of producing a single brick."[29]

These quotes from the *dilogy* essay unambiguously show that Mináč's interpretation of Slovak history is completely different from the one proposed by

---

27 Ibid., p.12.
28 Mináč , *Zobrané spory*, p.90.
29 Ibid.

Podiven. In contrast to the latter, Mináč worships the plebeian nature of his nation. At the same time, Mináč is an apologist for the extreme utilitarianism and pragmatism of the Štúr endeavours and treats all imponderables with contempt. Mináč does not even consider the possibility of demanding that politicians observe moral principles. It is certain that Mináč knew what he was writing about: for years he held high functions in the Central Committee of the Czechoslovak and then the Slovak Communist Party.

The highly emotional essays published by Mináč in the periodical *Slovenské pohľady* in the 1960s made an important contribution to the outbreak of Slovak national feelings, which were directed by Mináč towards a struggle for a so-called "symmetrical federation" - in other words, the winning of equal rights for the Slovaks.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Warsaw Pact on 21 August 1968 called into question further struggle for a federation, at least for those who believed that national freedom could not be built under conditions of universal enslavement. In the wake of Czechoslovakia's annexation, such a view was published in the monthly *Slovenské pohľady* by Dominik Tatarka, who, as a result, became the most repressed Slovak author after 1968.[30]

A symmetric federation was eventually introduced with the support of the occupying power, but it yielded bitter fruit for both sides, the Czechs as well as the Slovaks. In the opinion of many domestic and foreign observers, the preference for national issues over civil liberties is a constant feature of Slovak politics. The oppositional political scientist Miroslav Kusý wrote: "The paradox and tragic moment of August 1968 consists, therefore, in the fact that the Slovaks were given a federation by Soviet tanks, and that they received it 'as a gift' at the price of democratic socialism with a human face. History repeats itself: the first events (of the Spring of Nations in 1848) were enacted as a tragedy, then ('the independent Slovak state') assumed the form of tragic comedy, and became pure farce the third time."[31]

After the downfall of communism, Mináč was dismissed from many of his posts and relieved of many functions, but he did not abandon political life altogether. He continues working as an essayist, and regularly publishes his reflections on Slovak history and current events in the government-supported periodical *Literárny týždenník*. He is also the author of a fervent and demagogic proclamation addressed to the Slovak National Council, in which he declared that the "bell of liberty" that chimed for the nations of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union (in the throes of liberating themselves from imposed community) also tolls for the Slovak nation; he also calls for the severance of ties with Czechoslo-

---

30 Dominik Tatarka, "Po vpáde cudzích vojsk" ["After the Invasion of Foreign Troops"] in his *Kultúra jako obcovanie. Výber z úvah* [*Culture as Association. Selected Reflections*] (Bratislava, 1996), pp.242-243.

31 Miroslav Kusý, "Slovenský fenomén" ["The Slovak Phenomenon"], *Slovenská otázka v 20. storočí* [*The Slovak Question in the Twentieth Century*] edited by Rudolf Chmel (Bratislava, 1997), pp.473-474; Csaba Kiss, "Byť Slovákom" ["To be a Slovak"], *Slovenská otázka*, p.564.

vakia and the creation of an independent Slovak state.[32] In his reflections, *Sub tegmine* [*Under the Plum Tree Crown*], Mináč offers a passionate commentary on the events and transformations taking place in Slovakia after 1989. Although he rejects Marxism, expressing a probably genuine disillusionment,[33] he spews hatred towards the West and the Czechs, and regards freedom introduced from the West as a new form of subjugation. In doing so, Mináč enters the well-trodden path followed by Štúr, who viewed the West as an eternal land of evil and debauchery, and the Slavonic East as a haven of goodness.

In 1993, Mináč issued his program in the book *Odkiaľ a kam, Slováci?* [*Whence and Whither, Slovaks?*], which contains, among other things, a reprint of *The Kindling of Embers* essays and concludes with an obscure Panslavonic message borrowed from Dostoyevsky: "Yes, the mission of the Russian is certainly trans-European and worldwide. Becoming a true Russian means becoming the brother of all people or, if you will, everyman."[34] This is to be the historical mission of the Slovaks as well.

Mináč is one of the chief architects of both Slovak independence and the current national consciousness of most Slovaks, many of whom would be ready to sacrifice their lives for the sake of autonomy; the same attitude is prevalent with regard to the intellectual legacy of Ľudovít Štúr, the father and legislator of Slovak independence. At present, this heritage is considered truly sacred, even at academic conferences, which are concerned not so much with a new interpretation of the Štúr writings in light of the challenges of the twentieth-century as with their sanctification through apologetics.[35]

This phenomenon is by no means a novelty in Slovakia. Already in his lifetime, Štúr witnessed the burgeoning of a personal cult. Although the Štúrr movement opposed undemocratic forms of activity from the outset, it advocated use of the "whip," underestimated the West, promoted an uncritical cult of the folk song, and belittled high literature, which it considered "insufficiently Slavonic."[36]

For more than ten years, Slovakia continues to oppose Mináč's totalitarian meta-narratives, which are contrasted with a vision of Slovak culture, democratic and civic politics, and, more broadly, a vision of a postmodern state. The most outstanding forerunner of this orientation was Dominik Tatarka (who died in May 1989), a writer hailing from the same generation of Slovak partisans as Mináč. Originally a communist, Tatarka voiced growing doubt since 1956 about Marxism and Leninism and, moreover, about belief in a collective

---

32 Vladimír Mináč, "Sub tegmine," *Odkiaľ a kam, Slováci?* (Bratislava, 1993), pp.99-100.

33 See Ibid., p.47.

34 Mináč, *Dúchanie do pahrieb*, p.238.

35 Imrich Sedlák (ed.), *Ľudovít Štúr v súradniciach minulosti a súčasnosti* [*Ľudovít Štúr in the Coordinates of the Past and Present*] (Martin, 1997).

36 Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, "Demokraticheskaia oppozitsiya v shturovskom dvizhenii," Irina Svirida, ed., *Kul'tura narodov Tsentryal'noi i Yugovostochnoi Evropy 18 i 19 vv.* (Moscow, 1990), pp.273-284.

Intellect of the Party (as well as about a people possessed by that belief); his ideas are captured in the brilliant grotesque novel *Démon súhlasu* [*Demon of Conciliation*], a philosophical treatise about the intellectual enslavement of Party members.

The peak period of Tatarka's anti-dogmatic essays, which aimed at a democratic reconstruction of the state and nation, coincided with the struggle waged in Czechoslovakia for socialism with a so-called human face. This period saw the publication of a large number of essays in a volume entitled *Proti démonom* [*Against Demons*] (the limited number of copies of this book were swiftly removed from circulation). At the same time, Tatarka wrote the essay "Obec božia, obec človečia" ["Divine commune, Human Commune"], which contrasted the moloch of the state, both communist and religious, with a conception of a democratic, communal rule of the people; the latter resembled self-governing associations developing at the very bottom of the social ladder within communes. They assume the form of free and creative people's associations whose driving force is culture writ large.[37] This somewhat visionary essay also foresaw the unavoidable end of the Party system.

After 1968, Tatarka was subject to police surveillance. He was interrogated and his books were removed from libraries and burned. Relegated to the literary underground, he wrote works shattered into fragments as well as collages imbued with subjectivism that were sometimes vividly autobiographical and composed of assorted intellectual discourses. Such postmodern decentration is characteristic for a period which lacked ontological and epistemological certainty, a time of chaos and confusion, and, like every chaotic period, open to a new order. At the basis of this new order lies Tatarka's rejection of old communist narratives and their belief in the rational nature of history and the correctness of collective ideals; the latter revealed a brutal desire for power and a manipulation of the masses, who would place their trust in those ideals.

"We became disillusioned because we were disillusioned," Tatarka wrote in *Navrávačky* [Patter]. "The concept of the cooperative movement was understood as nationalization and expropriation for the sake of a single power, the one which they held firmly in their grip."[38] Tatarka used " we" and not "I," for the disillusionment noted above was of a group and not of an individual nature. "They" refers to communist authorities.

The invasion of Czechoslovakia by foreign armies revived the problem of so-called proletarian internationalism, which was completely compromised by this intervention (as it had been during the Hungary episode of 1956). It prompt-

---

37 Dominik Tatarka, "Obec božia, obec človečia," *Kultúra ako obcovanie*, pp.143-150; See also: Halina Janaszek-Ivaničková, "Utopia Dominika Tatarki. Aktywizacja rzeczywistości potencjalnej czy marzycielska wizja przyszłości" ["The Utopia of Dominik Tatarka. The Activating of Potential Reality or a Cherished Vision of the Future"], *Utopia w językach i kulturach Słowian* [*Utopia in Slavonic Languages and Culture*] (Katowice, 1997), pp.116-126.

38 Dominik Tatarka, *Navrávačky* (Köln, 1988), p.95.

ed protests by Western communists (including Louis Aragon), many of whom eventually withdrew from communist parties. For Jean-François Lyotard, author of *La condition postmoderne*, this moment was a reversal, a reason for abandoning all meta-narratives and future-oriented myths of the modern era, which had born out of the spirit of rationalism, a belief in progress, the ideas of the French Revolution, etc.[39] The same holds true for Tatarka.

Tatarka, who spoke out unambiguously against invasion by foreign armies, also rejected the concept of proletarian internationalism, which he denounced as a false idea. In his *trilogy Písačky* [*Scribbling*], he contrasted it unfavorably with the idea of brotherhood, which assumed the stylized form of a Carpathian shepherd, a "friend of all people, beloved by free nations."[40]

Although this stylization is partly rooted in Tatarka's origins (he was a descendant of Carpathian highlanders from the Slovak-Polish borderland), it comes above all from France and the theories expounded by Levi-Straus and André Malraux in their contemporary anthropology of culture, which posits so-called cultural relativism. This concept makes it impossible to divide nations into higher and lower, less or more developed categories, a procedure doggedly pursued by Štúr and his successors.

With his conception of the Slovak as a "friend to all people," a shepherd and nomad travelling from place to place, a brigand, a contester and dissenter all in one, Tatarka based his ideas on a conception of an open society, a society of free people open towards both the East and the West (especially toward France, his second spiritual homeland).

The Tatarka vision of Slovak origin and destiny treats tribal purity differently from the one expounded by Štúr and Mináč. This extremely dangerous concept, embedded in the works of Štúr and Mináč, is completely absent in Tatarka's writings. In his memoirs, he described himself as a mixture: "I am born of Slav protoplasm, Carpathian-Polish-Hungarian-Mongol-Valachian permeation, rape and love,"[41] he proudly declared. Tatarka focuses on communities of ethnic combinations, as well as on national, cultural (dissidents, feminists), and sexual (lesbian) minorities and their problems.

Mináč also acknowledges cultural intermingling in Slovakia, in contrast to Štúr's tales about the tribal purity of the Slovaks. He believes, however, that Slovak culture is capable of digesting all foreign elements, a dubious claim.

Tatarka, a fervent patriot enamoured of his "Tatrania," did not maintain that there was no life outside of Slovakia; paraphrasing the title of his book, *Človek na cestách*, he was a "man on his way." Travelling to Paris and Ulan Bator, London, Moscow and Poland, he continued to hold an extremely favourable attitude toward Others, the Different; he looked for a way to become ac-

---

39 Jean-François Lyotard, *Le postmoderne expliqué aux enfants* (Paris, 1986), pp.101-103.

40 Dominik Tatarka, *Sám proti noci* [*Alone against the Night*] - the first part of the Písačky trilogy (Köln, 1988), p.95.

41 Ibid., p.36.

quainted with new things in the differences he encountered, and wished to befriend every person he met on his way.[42]

Štúr and Mináč believed in the state, regardless of its nature, as long as it was their own. Society was to be built by those at the top and based on authority. The Štúr ideal was the patriarchal *obshchina* (commune), and its Mináč version involved strong party authority. Tatarka proposed a new model for society: a self-governed one built on the grass-roots principle. Its foundation was to be based on individual initiative developed within the communes, with culture as the primary force of development.

As envisaged by Tatarka, culture denotes diversity as well as loyalty to local household deities. It springs from native soil but strives towards Europe and the world. The link with the homeland did not mean restricting oneself to folklore. Tatarka feared that the same folksongs which the "father of the nation" and his followers had found so moving would relegate the Slovak nation to a "folklore *ethnicum.*"

After 1989, the writings of the deceased Tatarka, the leading Slovak dissident and forerunner of postmodernism in Slovakia, became a main focal point for the democratic opposition, which was institutionally connected with such organizations as the Soros Open Society, Charta 77, the Institute of Literature at the Slovak Academy of Sciences (headed by Peter Zajac), the Milan Šímečka Foundation (which specialized in publishing Tatarka's books), the European Culture Club in Slovakia, and many other groups that rebelled against a monolithic conception of the nation and state as a besieged fortress.

This milieu favours popular concepts proposed by postmodernists advocating the organization of an open, pluralist society. These ideas are proclaimed, among others, by Wolfgang Welsch, author of studies such as *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (1987, Our Postmodern Modernity) and *Postmoderne-Pluralität als ethischer und politischer Wert* (1987, *Postmodernism: Pluralism as an Ethical and Political Value*). Lectures that he delivered in Bratislava in November 1995 at the invitation of several of the organizations mentioned above led to a sharp polemical debate; the extreme positions in this debate were presented in an interview conducted with Welsch by Peter Zajac and later published in the opposition newspaper *Sme* with the provocative title "A starý model sa volá jednota" ["The old model is called unity"],[43] and in an article by Emilia Boldišová (published in *Slovenské pohľady*, one of the bastions of anti-postmodernism

---

42 Dominik Tatarka, *Človek na cestách* [*Man on His Way*](Bratislava,1957).

43 Peter Zajac, "A starý model sa volá jednota," *Sme* (January 25, 1996). Peter Zajac is also the author of a volume of sketches and scientific reflections *Sen o krajine* [*Dream about the Country*] (Bratislava, 1996) which contains his views about the need to transform Slovakia, a country with limited democratic tradition, into a pluralist civic state. To support his contentions, the author makes frequent reference to postmodernist theorists, including Jean-François Lyotard, Richard Rorty, and Wolfgang Welsch.

under an equally characteristic title: "Postmoderna - nádej, či skôr apokalipsa?" ["Postmodernism - hope or rather an apocalypse?"]).[44]

It would be difficult today to speculate about which of those models will emerge victorious. During the rule of the Mečiar government, the idea of a postmodern society had no chance of succeeding. However, after the parliamentary election of 1998 won by the democratic opposition radically changed the situation and it is entirely possible that a new approach to the Slovak national tradition as well a process of rethinking Slovakia's national way will eventually emerge.

III

In metaphorical terms, the victory of Solidarity in Poland ushered in the era of post-communism, announced by the media as 4 June 1989. This was accompanied by fluttering cavalry wings, which had always accompanied triumphant Polish knights centuries ago when the country still enjoyed the status of a power.

To the astonishment of many people, Poland entered the post-communist and post-atheist era bearing the Catholic cross, with portraits of the Pope publicly displayed in many Polish households and with altars embellished with national emblems: the crowned eagle and white-and-red flags. These were indispensable symbols at the great worker meetings held by Solidarity. The trade union's aspirations were not limited to Poland alone, however. As suggested by its *Message to the Peoples of Eastern Europe*, Solidarity embarked on an international mission in its battle against communism.

The happiness experienced by the Poles in 1989 also reflected the fact that their country had managed to topple communism by pacific means alone; it was also a product of the universally held conviction (frequently shared by the Russians as well) that Soviet intervention would almost certainly lead to armed resistance, and that the Poles, regardless of the tragic possibilities of armed struggle, would opt for the familiar course of failed Polish uprisings: losing their lives and livelihood but protecting their dignity. Russia, for its part, would become embroiled in a new Afghanistan, with unpredictable international consequences.

In the late 1970s, the dilemma "to fight or not fight" became a question of special concern. This was expressed in a volume of essays by Tomasz Łubieński, whose title posed the same question with regard to previous Polish risings. This subtle and profound analysis of the reasons why the desire for freedom and independence, whose price had always been so high for the Poles (especially when "dependence" and conformity held many tempting promises), had

---

44 Emilia Boldišová, "Postmoderna - nádej či skôr apokalipsa," *Slovenské pohľady* 3 (1996), pp.28-48.

managed to seduce the entire nation, even the common man unconcerned with patriotic imponderable values. All Poles acted under the pressure of the memory of those who fell in struggle, of those whose wounds and tragic fate had constantly stirred Polish national consciousness, making it impossible to succumb to the blessed conviction that everything was just as it should be and that servility offered comfort.[45]

At the beginning of the 1980s, these sentiments were bolstered by a choir of professors of Polish studies, who, under the guise of analyzing the tradition of Romantic literature (always regarded as crucial in Poland), offered an apology for the Romantic upsurge; this was a veiled call to take up arms.

A 1997 revised edition of a volume of essays by Łubieński was equally well received, chiefly as a classic of the genre.

The outburst of national feelings in 1989 would never repeat itself, and no great essay would appear either - no statement whose force of intuition, depth of emotion, or loftiness of intellect would reveal new perspectives for Poland and undermine old intellectual habits. This absence is understandable: Poland had achieved her main target, emancipation from Soviet domination, and did not face challenges as difficult as those experienced by Czechoslovakia, i.e., the collapse of the state, the creation of two separate state structures, and the need to solve urgent national problems (as was the case in Slovakia).

Hence, the nation's entire attention was focused on the new tasks facing all post-communist countries: the need to delineate political and social identity, to face the challenges of democracy and the free market, and to settle accounts with the legacy of totalitarianism. The desire of those countries to be included in the European Union also produced a problem concerning the so-called "return to Europe" as well as their transformation into an "open society."

One of the most ardent supporters of a union of Slavonic and non-Slavonic nations within a joint Europe is Pope John Paul II, who hopes this process will take place on the basis of evangelization as well as a classical Judeo-Christian heritage. The Pope is correct in maintaining that there is no need for Poland to "return" to Europe since it has always been part and parcel of the Continent.

The European Act, announced in Santiago de Compostela on 9 November 1982, places emphasis on the significance of European tradition for the development of humanistic ideas; it also calls for strong bonds with Poland. The Pope declared *urbi et orbi* that he had delivered his pro-European proclamation in his capacity as "the son of the Polish nation, which always regarded itself to be European because of its origins, traditions and culture, and as a *Latynos* (a

---

45 Tomasz Łubieński, *Bić się czy nie bić. O polskich powstaniach* [*To Fight or not to Fight: On Polish Uprisings*] (Kraków, 1978), p.9.

man of Latin culture) among the Slavs."[46] For those familiar with the history of Poland and its culture, this statement requires no further explanation.[47]

The Pope's thoughts are followed by Maria Bobrownicka, Professor at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow and author of a volume of essays entitled *Narkotyk mitu* [*The Narcotic of a Myth*]. The latter aims to rebuild an awareness on the part of Western Slavs of their century-old, profound connection with the West, which had been interrupted by Kollár and Štúr or concealed during the communist era. Her views reveal a certain affinity with those of Podiven, stemming more from the so-called *Zeitgeist* than from direct influence by the latter.

Similarly to Podiven, Bobrownicka opposes the reduction of national culture to a single class, an uncritical veneration of plebians at the cost of other social strata, as well as a restriction of national tradition to folklore and language.

> "Even the loss of the upper strata and their 'denationalization,' which took place in certain Slavonic nations, do not automatically eliminate a historical national culture, which, after all, always retains its multifaceted shape. The identification of national culture with folk culture (the result of an identification of the nation with the people) inflicts wounds upon one's own national tradition and history with extremely dangerous consequences - suggesting some sort of underdevelopment, lacking, and backwardness of that culture, its monotony and stagnation within primitive forms that can obviously have their own merit but cannot replace the diversity of neglected components and are simply insufficient to be representative for a given national culture."[48]

The philo-Slavonic fascination with folklore and with the masses has appeared in various cultures at different times. It was merely an incidental phenomenon among the Poles, while among the Czechs, it was incapable (if only because of links with the Germans) of undermining their affiliation with Western culture, despite efforts by the philo-Slavs. In this instance, Bobrownicka's opinion differs from Podiven's. The latter treats Czech Panslavism with contempt and scorn, as a comical, instrumental bogeyman devised by the Czechs as a weapon to be used against the Germans, but does not attach greater importance to it. In her discussion of Panslavism, presented against a Slavonic background (including Russia), Bobrownicka sees "political trickery... exploited by

---

46 Quoted from Maria Bobrownicka, *Jana Pawła II wizja jedności kultury* [*John Paul II's Vision of the Unity of European Culture*] (Hamburg, 1988), pp.15 and 16.

47 Jerzy Axer, "Latinitas w historii i w pamięci historycznej Europy" in aforementioned *Symbioza kultur słowiańskich i niesłowiańskich w Europie Środkowej*. See also John Paul II's inauguration speech in Maria Bobrownicka, Lucjan Suchanek, and Franciszek Ziejka, eds., *Współcześni Słowianie wobec własnych tradycji i mitów* [*Contemporary Slavs and Their Traditions and Myths*]: *Symposium in Castel Gandolfo, 9-20 August 1996* (Kraków, 1997), pp.10-11.

48 Maria Bobrownicka, *Narkotyk mitu. Szkice o świadomości kulturowej Słowian Zachodnich i Południowych* [*The Narcotic of the Myth. Sketches on the Cultural Consciousness of Western and Southern Slavs*] (Kraków, 1995), pp.16-17.

Russia to justify its imperial claims in Europe."[49] She also notices its fatal impact on the shaping of an ethnic-tribal and totalitarian mentality, which is "not connected with the rights of the individual" and therefore becomes the source of various "conflicts." Bobrownicka associates Philo-Slavism and Pan-Slavism with "programmatic anti-Europeanism, or at least a feeling of strangeness." Slavonic culture should instead be discussed in categories of a "local cultural variant of a supreme European community."[50] Bobrownicka not only noted the need to rethink Slavonic myths in the context of the idea of European universalism (based on classical, Mediterranean, and Christian traditions) in the study mentioned above, but also in a series of conferences she organized with suggestive titles such as "National Myths in Slavonic Cultures," "The Symbiosis of Slavonic and Non-Slavonic Cultures in Central Europe" (where, it should be emphasized, she tried, in the name of a future unified Europe, to convince the Slovaks of the joint Slovak-Hungarian legacy of the Crown of St. Stephen in order to make the Serbs understand that for Orthodox Serbia, Hungary remained a window on the world), and "Contemporary Slavs and their Traditions and Myths" (the most important meeting of all, organized in Castel Gandolfo under the patronage of Pope John Paul II). The original subtitle of the conference, "The Unification of Europe and Slavonic Problems," was omitted in the published material, even though the Pope praised it twice in his inaugural speech.[51]

Bobrownicka's reflections devote a great deal of space to the role played by classical Mediterranean culture in Slavonic culture, as well as its importance in opposition to totalitarian thought. She has a rather traditional understanding of classical culture, as a culture of elites with characteristic traits such as "rationalism," order, moderation, harmony, and discipline.[52]

Totalitarianism in the realm of culture is also a point of departure for the extremely poetic and dramatic essays contained in the 1998 volume *Brewiarz Europejczyka* [*Breviary of an European*] by Zygmunt Kubiak, a prominent expert on antiquity. The message of this work seems to correspond more to the experiences of the postmodern era. Order and harmony, Kubiak claims, never existed in European culture, and the Greek spirit was full of murky shadows, well aware of the abyss existing in each person. The Romans tried to overcome the transcendental fear of an existence full of suffering by cultivating the virtue of heroism, the truly Roman *virtus*. The Greeks, on the other hand, wished to offset the horror created by existence, as well as the murders committed at the very beginning of civilization, through the method of catharsis in their dramas. Both, however, had a foreboding of an apocalypse brought about by the human inability to come to terms with other people, a tendency confirmed by twenti-

---

49 Ibid., p.95.

50 Ibid., p.9.

51 John Paul II, Inauguration Speech, *Współcześni Słowianie wobec własnych tradycji i mitów,* pp.10-11.

52 Maria Bobrownicka, ed., *Symbioza kultur słowiańskich*, pp.23-25.

eth-century totalitarianism - a new variant of tyranny. The vision of rationalism as a force capable of saving the world from annihilation proved to be a failure. "Possibly the last flash of that vision was the celebrated theory about the end of history proclaimed by Fukuyama, an American of Japanese descent, who announced the beginning of a motionless epoch of rational order. Now we know that he was completely wrong."[53]

Kubiak portrayed Greece and Italy not only as gloomy but also as imbued with light, or, rather, the luminescence of the landscape in both countries; he turned to descriptions of the beauty of Italian vistas, the "sweet and honeyed" darkened skies of Greece, as well as the radiance and beauty of literature, wise compassion for man, acute humanistic thought, skepticism and resistance against totalitarianism, drawing attention to the individual, whose suffering cannot be concealed by any great purpose, for *Anthropos panton merton* (man is the yardstick of all things). The culture of the Greeks and Romans was also sanctified by Polish presence on Italian and Greek soil, e.g., in the works of Kochanowski, Krasiński and many other poets and men of letters who had sought inspiration there. The Collegium Nobilium, founded by King Stanisław August Poniatowski, taught the young gentry how to "carry the burden of solitary activity" by referring to Plutarch and Nepos' *Parallel Lives*.[54] The same lessons were drawn from contacts with Greek tragedy. "This school of wisdom originates from the shores of the Mediterranean," concludes Kubiak, "as well as from Poland because our ancestors accepted it; spiritually speaking, Poland lies not only on the Baltic but simultaneously on the Mediterranean."[55]

It would be difficult to find a more profound expression of identification of one's own national culture with the cradle of European culture. This identification is carried out with the full approval of literary critics, testifying to the fact that Kubiak not only represented his own option, but also that his vision of Mediterranean culture refers to elements of the collective Polish subconsciousness. Pro-European sympathies, deeply rooted in Polish society, include many other aspects as well, such as admiration for the force of European civilization, its technological potential, and democratic culture.

Poland's access to Europe is tied to numerous areas of interest to us here, such as fears, formulated most frequently by Catholics, concerning loss of national identity (even though the crux of the matter is the secularization of society), submission to Western dictates with regard to morals (pornography and sexual permissiveness), law (abortion, euthanasia, and equal rights for sexual minorities), the cult of consumption, and the impact of the supposedly proleftist traditions of Western Europe. Those anxieties are presented at different levels and in various forms.

---

53 Zygmunt Kubiak, *Brewiarz Europejczyka* (Warszawa, 1998), p.15.
54 Ibid., p.175.
55 Ibid., p.174.

They are expressed in an intellectually sophisticated manner by the well-educated elite of Polish bishops, who are capable of embarking upon a sensible, unsimplified polemic (of course only within the range of accepted premises, i.e., according to the level of revealed faith and Platonian transcendent truth) against postmodern philosophy, especially its American pragmatic branch, with Francis Fukuyama and Richard Rorty once again receiving the brunt of most criticism. This elite speaks unambiguously in favour of Polish integration with the West, but requires the fulfilment of certain conditions: respect for the traditions of those nations that are to enter the European Union, as well as an acknowledgement of the accomplishments of European evangelization. This view is expressed by Archbishop Józef Życiński in his book *Europejska wspólnota ducha* [*The European Community of the Spirit*], published in Warsaw in May 1998.[56]

Reservations regarding the existence of transcendent and revealed truths are formulated in an aggressive, demagogic, and journalistic language by rightist politicians such as Jan Maria Jackowski, who wrote in *Bitwa o Polskę* [*Battle for Poland*]: "Despite the statements of their opponents, the Catholics do refer to Europe. But not to the tradition of the Old Continent, whose roots are embedded in the French Revolution, but rather to the Europe of two millennia, a Europe which, thanks to Christianity, has been familiar with the concept of freedom for twenty and not two centuries; a Europe of homelands, not devised by the leftist miasma of a phantom Europe with blurred contours managed by Eurocrats [...], but rather a Europe of immutable values (sic), a modern Europe in which everyone has the right to live, a civilization of love and not of death."[57]

There is also a third category of Catholic attitudes towards Europe: parochial, populist, and sometimes Gothic. It is on this level that we hear the opinions of the lower clergy, who perceive Western Europe in the categories of sin. It is also this level which expresses the greatest fears of the poorest strata, whose members are frequently unemployed, and of the petty farmers: it protests against those who fail to pay attention to the poverty of the masses while governing and increasing their own wealth. Whatever we think about the negative aspects of this viewpoint and its black-and-white divisions, this is the level that expresses the religious feelings and patriotism of the common people, brought up on Sienkiewicz and the Bible, i.e., the guardians of simple and elementary truths.

Adam Michnik, editor-in-chief of *Gazeta Wyborcza* (one of the largest and most influential dailies to appear after 1989) and a dissident from the group of so-called Polish "Commandos," was a Marxist revisionist and, after 1968, a determined adversary of communist ideology; he was connected with the opposition associated with the Committee for the Defence of Workers and then

---

56 Józef Życimski, *Europejska wspólnota ducha. Zjednoczona Europa w nauczaniu Jana Pawła II* [*The European Unity of the Spirit. United Europe in the Teachings of John Paul II*] (Warszawa, 1993).

57 Jan Maria Jackowski, *Bitwa o Polskę* (Warsaw, 1993), pp.134-135.

Solidarity, and today writes as a spokesman for an "open society," i.e., a liberal society in motion that is constantly changing just like the entire world. Oppositional activities led to Michnik's imprisonment during the mid-1980s, and after 1989, helped elevate him to a top position in the all-powerful media. For more than a decade, his views affected the opinions of a considerable part of the Polish intelligentsia, not only those who share them but also those who "bounce back from them as if hitting against a wall."

Michnik's writings include political journalism (editorials and *feuilleton* articles) as well as the essay. The boundary between these genres is thin but distinct. The essay is characterized by the style of statement, an avoidance of propaganda (indispensable, for example, in editorials), an unhampered transition of thought from one theme to another (which is greater in the essay than in journalism *sensu stricto*), a personal and emotional tone, as well as a reference in its conclusions to codes of Polish culture and history. Like Mináč, Michnik is an expert on national prejudices and phobias, well aware of the wounds inflicted on the Poles by history as well as their psychological wavering between feelings of their own worth as freedom fighters and their underestimation as victims of geopolitics. Michnik remains sensitive to all novelties, and describes himself and his comrades-in-arms as "neither leftist nor rightist but new."[58] This self-characterization is only partially true, since, like everyone else, he had also been connected with communism (originally in its extreme version) - though, from the very start of his oppositional activity, he tried to reinterpret the meaning of a history born amidst chaotic events.

Michnik finds the Poland emerging from the torrent of changes introduced in 1989 to be *sui generis*: "a mutant, a type of nonexistent political species" whose definition calls for new cognitive categories. He persistently seeks such categories in his battle against conventional views, and also tries to "dedoxificate" the language of description. This is why Michnik is dissatisfied with ready-made stereotypes and rejects customary divisions of the Poles into right-wing and left-wing, Romantics and realists, advocates of conciliation and desperados, communists and conservatives. Under the impact of a situation in which he found himself a prisoner of conscience, he rejects these existing categories of division and opts instead for a binary division between those who are incarcerated for their political convictions and those who issue verdicts; anti-totalitarian supporters of democracy and pluralism, and ideologues and executors of totalitarian principles; people who created a closed society surrounded by the Berlin and Chinese Walls and by the barbed wire fences along the Danube and the Iron Curtain, and those who toppled those walls and now hope to create an open society.

While imprisoned, Michnik both demonstrated and praised the power and glory of an independent Polish society which, though relegated to the un-

---

58 Adam Michnik, *Diabeł naszego czasu. Publicystyka z lat 1985-1994* [*The Devil of Our Times. Political Journalism from the Years 1985 to 1994*] (Warszawa, 1995), p.143.

dergrounnd after the proclamation of martial law, survived in order to develop a subjective, civic and pluralist society. As a free man, he would defend such principles much more consistently than others, constantly warning against a recurrence of totalitarianism - this time created in the crucible of a struggle against ex-communists, which could only lead to an escalation of intolerance and violence. Historical experience in Europe teaches us that "by resorting to violence in a battle against the old Bastilles, we immediately and, as if *nolens volens*, erect new ones."[59]

Michnik always praised tolerance and expressed the need to reject animosity, cherishing a vision of Poland as a unique "ecumenical society" battling against nationalism. He considers the latter to be a life within a closed society, a form of tribal blindness that ignores the role played by national minorities.

National Polish issues are viewed within the broader context of the post-communist countries in central Eastern Europe (an area with which Michnik is intimately familiar), and especially with regard to dissidents. Central Europe does not appear as a charmingly devised, Kundera-like myth, and Eastern Europe not merely as a region of ossified Byzantinism, but rather as a region in transformation. Michnik fears the Balkanization of post-communist Europe; he supports its democratic forces, especially those which he describes as originating in "the concentration camp" (Sakharov, Bukovsky). As a rule, Michnik avoids simple answers to complicated questions and sees the good and bad sides of every phenomenon; his statements are never unambiguous simply because all our experiences are ambiguous. In his assessments of phenomena and of people, he remains closer to the type of thought represented by Canadian female postmodernists, i.e., the logic of "both - and," not of "either - or."[60] Paraphrasing the title of a collection of Michnik's writings published in Japan, one could say that he places himself in the role of an "angel of democracy"; those are certainly his aspirations.

Michnik nonetheless acts in a certain context, European as well as domestic and predominantly defined by the Freedom Union, a party with which he identifies himself.

The editors of *Gazeta Wyborcza* do not always act as peacemakers, and the newspaper's polemical games and commitments are not clear to all; hence the growing polemics against *Gazeta Wyborcza* and its orientation, which is frequently described as "cosmopolitan," as well as against Michnik himself.[61]

A separate issue that has recently prompted emotional reactions is the attitude represented by Michnik and his newspaper towards the Catholic Church in Poland. Despite the fact that Michnik comes from an extremely atheistic and

---

59 Ibid., p.25.

60 Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism History. Theory. Fiction* (London, 1988), p.49 and passim.

61 The last one in the series is Zbigniew Żmigrodzki, *Meandry nowej wiary czyli inwazja katolewicy* [*The Invasion of a New Faith, or Meanderings of the Catholic Left*] (Komorów, 1998).

anti-Church milieu, he showed great concern for the Church during the 1980s, seeing it as the "defender of human rights and the rights of the nation [...] an asylum for questions about transcendence [...] and ultimate truths, the foundation of morality which orders us to reject the status of a slave." This stand is reflected in Michnik's book *Kosciół, Lewica, Dialog* (1976, *The Church, the Left Wing, Dialogue*). But as the Church became stronger, Michnik began to accuse it of fundamentalism and "integrism," as well as of efforts to create a model of an ideal Pole depicted as a servant of the Catholic Church. He is disturbed by the so-called "populist" version of the Church, and believes that this offshoot of Church thought, which is represented by the lower clergy (in contrast to the Catholic elites with whom he cooperates, e.g. Archbishop Józef Życiński, Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, and Rev. Józef Tischner, co-author, along with Michnik and Jacek Żakowski, of the humorous book *Rozmowa między Panem i Plebanem* (1995, *A Talk between a Lord and a Parish Priest*)), is anti-European and particularist, Sarmatian in its attachment to every scrap of Polish land, incapable of embarking upon dialogue with Europe, and populist. The latter term is a type of a multiheaded hydra, which, for all practical purposes, only means contempt for the common man fighting for his rights as well as for those assisting him in his efforts.

In connection with the emergence of the supposed phantom of Church integrism, Michnik once again refutes the old division of Poles into communists and non-communists, a division that sows much unrest in Poland. Echoing the French philosopher Andre Glucksmann, he also compares the battle against communism to the whipping of a dead horse; instead, Michnik refers to a new line of demarcation separating Polish Europeans from the "wise men" of national Gotham, those who wish to find themselves in Europe and those who prefer to remain in the parochial backyard. On this point he is very much wrong, for neither the "backward" camp is as limited and unenlightened as its opponents suggest, nor is the so-called European camp as clear, transparent, and enlightened as its own proponents claim. Poland is a country in which such extremities never survive for long; even during communist rule, Polish schisms and revisionism shattered the dynamic fetters of communist fundamentalism in the entire socialist camp.

At present, the life of newly emergent fundamentalism is reduced by the democratic and pluralistic model of society legally established after 1989. I believe that despite the processes of Europeanization and globalization, the feeling of Polish national identity will not simply fade away in the near future. No one in Poland would dare pose the question formulated by Schauer.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows many shifts in the national consciousness of western Slavonic nations in the years following the anti-communist breakthrough:
  – the shift from the Czech appropriation of the concept of Panslavism to

its repudiation in favour of Bohemian affiliation with a West European tradition (namely German);

– the shift away from the traditional disdain felt by many Czechs toward Poles, whom they considered to be unrealistic politicians and not sufficiently "Slavonic," instead joining the Polish fight for liberty and independence and admiring their courage and openness;

– the repudiation of a cult celebrating the plebeian ethos of the Czech nation during the Communist era, and the rehabilitation of another strata of society: the ancient aristocracy with its connections to the West, its moral values, and its intellectual horizons as well the elite of true intellectuals.

– the traditional Polish hatred of Panslavism, which was subdued or at least partially subdued during the Communist era, exploded after 1989; the consciousness of deep Polish roots in Mediterranean culture was revived, in part because of the proclamation by Pope John Paul II, who always recalls Poland's cultural and historical legacy in Europe;

– hand in hand with Polish hatred toward Pan-Slavism is a cult celebrating sophisticated European culture and moral values. For that reason, the Czechs, who now underline their affiliation with Western culture, are, according to the authors analysed above, closer to the Poles than the Slovaks, formerly adherents of the heritage of Ľudovít Štúr who turned away from Europe and who, unlike the Czechs, supported a cult of Slavonic and plebeian tradition. When considering the general attitude of Slovak nationalist thinkers, we cannot forget that the democratic opposition against them during Mečiar's rule had proposed another vision of a Slovak future: a vision of a postmodern open state and open society. After a shift in power in Slovakia, it is possible that political and historical thinking in that country will move in a way similar to that in Poland and Bohemia.