

Final Report to the Visegrad scholarship at the Vera & Donald Blinken Open Society

Archives

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Project Title: "The Voice of Freedom", that helped to bring Freedom. The Last Years and the Fall of the Communist Regime in (Czecho)Slovakia through the perspective of Radio Free Europe

Research Period: 2 - 28 April 2017

The approved project dealt with the activities of the dissent movement in Slovakia during the final period of the communist regime and its fall in 1989 from the historical and terminological point of view. The project's aim was to analyze the activities of the dissent movement during the 1985-1989, mainly the specific situation in Slovakia within the broader international context. Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives included the collections of the Radio Free Europe Materials (especially Czechoslovak Unit) and documentation of the Human rights violation and abuses, and thus became the important source for the research of the topic.

The topic

Discussing the topic, one needs to take into account, that Slovak historiography missing the comprehensive monograph about the topic, although some interesting and important papers and texts were published.¹ During the late 80's, the largest and best organized part of the dissent in Slovakia was the clandestine church. The largest public protest against the violation of religious and human rights during the normalization period in Slovakia – the Candle Manifestation – was born in this environment in March 1988. Also other activities of the clandestine church draw the public attention, most notably petition for the religious freedom in 1988 and mass pilgrimages attended by the thousands of believers. An important role in the dissent played the liberal and leftist intellectuals, acting in

¹ See especially work of the historians and political scientists Dr. Juraj Marušiak and Dr. Norbert Kmeť from the Institute of Political Science of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, and my colleague Dr. Jerguš Sivoš from the Nation's Memory Institute.

defense of the civil and human rights. The most prominent representatives of this group were the Slovak signatories of Charter 77 such as Miroslav Kusý, Hana Ponická and Dominik Tatarka, and also those who cooperated with Charter, but didn't sign it, such as a historian Jozef Jablonický or journalist Milan Šimečka. The Slovak dissent also included a group of former communists excluded from the Communist Party after purges following the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops in August 1968. The members of this group were known as "Sixty-eighters", and were supporters of Dubček's policy of "socialism with a human face". In Slovakia, the most known member of this group was Alexander Dubček, who lived under the severe surveillance of the State Security. Environmental initiatives and initiatives for preserving the cultural heritage also played an important role within the Slovak dissent. The collective work *Bratislava/nahlas (Bratislava/Outloud)* published in 1987, which dealt with a broad array of issues such as air pollution, qualities of the groundwater, cultural heritage and disadvantaged social groups in Bratislava, was the most salient achievement of this movement. It reflected the actual status of the society and it was an outspoken criticism of the communist regime. The very specific part of the dissent in Slovakia were members of the Hungarian minority, who criticized the regime for the violation of the minority rights. Several underground artists and performers, creating outside of the officially recognized artist's societies, also represented unique groups of the dissent.

Previous research

My previous research was carried out in the Czech² and Slovak³ archives, with the focus on the Archive of the Nation's Memory Institute, in which are located materials of the former State Security – probably the most important source⁴ of the information about the activities of the Slovak dissent due to the infamous role that State Security played as a most feared tool of repressions of the communist regime in Slovakia. I have been using also the Oral history method, and realized several interviews with the representatives of the Slovak

² National Archives in Prague, Chodovec; and Security Services Archive in Prague.

³ Slovak National Archive, several regional archives and the personal collection.

⁴ Archive of the Nation's Memory Institute is located in Bratislava. The broad context of its activities against so-called internal enemies means that this archive is a necessity for everyone dealing with the opposition against the communist regime in Slovakia. One can research there key materials as annual, monthly and weekly reports about the situation in Slovakia (including dissent activities), personal and investigation files and many other valuable documents. The using of these materials needs careful approach as well as consistent and comprehensive research in the archive.

dissent.⁵ I've also published some papers⁶ and articles on this topic, dealing mostly with the political trials in Slovakia during late 80's. In general, my research is still work in progress due the amount of the relevant materials, located in the various archives in Czech republic, Slovakia, private collections and also archives abroad.

The Slovak archives reflected activities with all the above mentioned groups of the Slovak dissent. But the language of those archival materials (both the communist party and security units) used the communist party and propaganda terminology when describing its activities. Thus, an analysis of Radio Free Europe's collections is important neither as a source for historical research, but also from the terminological point of view. Records of Radio Free Europe represent an unique source of materials about activities of dissent in Slovakia. It brought the reflection of the Slovak dissent into the free Western world as well as Soviet bloc countries. The archival sources in Slovakia were made by the state authorities (especially the State Security and Communist Party apparatus) and used their own, and frankly specific language. Therefore, it is necessary to compare them with other views, which is made possible thanks to the records of Radio Free Europe.

Research at the Vera and Donald Blinken Open Society Archives

During the one month scholarship (2 - 28 April 2017; as a part of my general research of the topic) my research was focused on the materials at the OSA collections, especially in the materials of Czechoslovak Desk of Radio Free Europe (see list below the Final report). This collection represents rich source of information about the topic and covered the large scale of the activities of Slovak dissent. The core of my research was dedicated to the materials under the folders dealing with the demonstrations, religion and resistance (information about the clandestine church), opposition (information about the civic dissent), minorities in Slovakia (information about the dissent within the Hungarian minority), ecology and environmental issues (information about the environmental dissent), year 1968 (information about the Alexander Dubček) and also materials about the human rights abuses such were political trials in late 80's. I've researched also the biographical files and found

⁵ See several interviews at the volume Nations Memory Institute named *Memory of Nation* with the representatives of the Slovak dissent like were Prof. Ivan Lалуha (2013, no. 3), Mr. Ján Budaj (2014, no. 3), Mr. Rudolf Sikora (2016, no. 2) and Mr. Vladimír Oktavec (2016, no. 4).

⁶ Majority of them were published at the volume *Memory of Nation* in Slovakia, some of them also abroad.

materials to the well-known representatives of the Slovak dissent. I've checked also the boxes that contains record of the telephone calls to the Czechoslovak desk.

Majority of the researched materials were the copies of the newspaper and magazine articles regarding the topic from the Eastern bloc (especially from the Czechoslovakia) and also from the Western journals (especially from West Germany, Austria, France, USA and Great Britain). Very important materials were especially the analyzes of the RFE commentators which brought the light into their opinion about dissent activities and their influence to the general situation in (Czecho)Slovakia, and included also the evaluation part.

From the terminological point of view, it seems very interest to compare the communist propaganda language with the language of the RFE materials. Based on the research within the OSA archive, such comparison can be realized at least on two levels:

1) Comparison of the language used by the communist propaganda at the materials from the Czechoslovak journals with the Western journals when discussing the same topic, like Candle manifestation, petition for the religious freedom (which clearly reveals the different approach to the religious freedom by the West and in the Soviet bloc), minority issues, Dubček's speeches and interviews in Hungary and Italy during 1988 and 1989, violation of the human rights by the suppressing of the demonstrations or imprisonment of the dissidents (which underline the different approach to the human rights in the late 80's by the West and Soviet bloc);

2) Comparison of the language used in the analyzes made by RFE commentators/journalists on the one hand and communist party information or State Security reports on the other hand. I would like to introduce one example for all: Communist language describes the activities of the dissent in general as a "activities of the internal enemies", while the RFE commentators used various terms like opposition, resistance or dissent. In fact, each of the groups in the Slovak dissent had the own terminology in the State Security or Communist Party materials - clear example is the term "right-wing opportunists" describing the followers of the Alexander Dubček and his policy of the "socialism with the human face".

The extent of the RFE materials dealing with the dissent in Slovakia shows, that the clandestine church activities prevailed over the other groups of the Slovak dissent. In that sense, especially the Candle manifestation from March 1988 and the Petition for the religious freedom in the same year draw great attention of the Czechoslovak Desk. Still, the attention of the Czechoslovak Desk was drawn mostly by the development and situation in

the Czech part of the former Czechoslovakia. In fact, under the term of resistance, dissent or opposition, only activities of the clandestine church and civic dissent in Slovakia were recorded. The materials regarded to the other groups of the Slovak dissent were recorded as a 1968 (group of Alexander Dubček) and minority issues (Hungarian dissent in Slovakia). The importance of several groups are underline by the analyzes of RFE – I found several analyzes dealing with the situation of church (including clandestine) in Slovakia and also many analyzes dealing with the activities (and potential rehabilitation) of Alexander Dubček. Unfortunately, I found only few documents related to the civic dissent (and especially Charter 77) in Slovakia. The reason is that majority of the Charter 77 activities took place in Prague and didn't covered the Slovakia.

Outputs of my research

The documents and information from my research in the OSA shall be used in various publications I have been working on. Most notably, several materials dealing with the Candle manifestation will be part of the edition of documents (preparing in cooperation with my colleagues from Nation's Memory Institute) dedicated to this most important protest against the communist regime in the Slovakia during the normalization. Some materials will be also important for my study about the dissent in Slovakia during the normalization. In this paper, which will be part of the monograph about the anti-communist resistance in Slovakia, I would like to analyze the terminology used by the description of the Slovak dissent in the 70's and 80's. In October 2017, Nations Memory Institute will commemorate the 30th anniversary of the publication of the Bratislava/out load and a scientific conference with the round table discussion took place in Bratislava. On this event I would like to present my paper about the environmental dissent in Slovakia and I would like to incorporate also materials gathered during my scholarship. In the future, my aim is to publish several articles and monograph about the dissent and also the fall of the communist regime in Slovakia. In such works I will materials from the OSA collections couldn't be ignored due to its relevance to the topic.

Materials Researched during the Scholarship:

Czechoslovak unit (300-30)

- ▶ 300-30-7 Subject Files (30 boxes)

- ▶ 300-30-9 New Code Subject Files (9 boxes)
- ▶ 300-30-15 Documents related to the Czechoslovak Opposition and Protests (11 boxes)
- ▶ 300-30-19 Personal Files (10 boxes)
- ▶ 300-30-29 Telephone calls to the Czechoslovak Desk (2 boxes)

International Helsinki Federation (318)

- ▶ 318-0-5 Country files Czechoslovakia (5 boxes)

Conclusion

My research at the OSA archives helped me to add very interesting materials that definitely bolster my knowledge about the topic, particularly about the terminology issues and conceptualization of the Slovak dissent into the broader international context. Scholarship at the OSA archives was a great opportunity for me to carry out the comprehensive research in the important foreign archive and compare my previous research with the newly discovered materials. I would especially like to thank the OSA staff for creating the great conditions and friendly environment for the research, and for their general support. In particular I would like to thank Mr. Csaba Szilágyi for his advice, Mrs. Katalin Gadoros for her administrative support and staff in the archive for their helpfulness and advice.