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The Banned, the Controlled, the Shifted, and the Compulsory. National Holidays and the Hungarians in Slovakia in 1919

Abstract: The aim of the paper is to discuss the possibilities that the Hungarian minority in Slovakia had to celebrate public holidays during the first year of the Czechoslovak Republic. The paper examines four holidays, out of which two (March 15, the day commemorating of the 1848–1849 Revolution and War of Independence and August 20, St. Stephen's Day) are of national significance for the Hungarians. The other two holidays are October 28, the national holiday of Czechoslovakia, and May 1, International Workers' Day. Through these examples of public holidays, we describe the Hungarian population's relationship to the Czechoslovak state on the one hand; on the other hand, we paint a nuanced picture of the Czechoslovak state's minority policy towards the Hungarian minority that refines previous academic approaches in the topic.[1]

Keywords: Hungarian minority in Slovakia; 1919; public holidays; first Czechoslovak Republic.

When the army of the Kingdom of Hungary occupied about 80% of the Hungarian-inhabited area of southern Slovakia in the first days of November 1938 as the result of the First Vienna Award, the vast majority of the Hungarian population welcomed the incoming Hungarian soldiers and administration with sincere joy and great enthusiasm. Although this Hungarian population strongly opposed becoming part of Czechoslovakia via the border changes in 1918–1919, they would nevertheless be loyal citizens of the Czechoslovak state for the next 20 years. They paid their taxes, served in the Czechoslovak army, and obeyed the law. In fact, the Czechoslovak law created a more favorable legal environment for them in many respects compared to that of the period before 1918, as the Czechoslovak law guaranteed universal suffrage, freedom of the press, and the right to assemble, and eliminated harmful social disparities. In addition, the Czechoslovak state was able to provide economic and social security, relatively fair living standards, and a predictable future for its Hungarian population.

Despite the Czechoslovak liberal democracy, Hungarians, as a minority group, obviously suffered from a number of disadvantages. For example, they were restricted in the official use of their mother tongue, were not able to pursue studies in their mo-

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ther tongue in higher education, and were clearly underrepresented in the public sector, such as among the employees of state offices and large national companies.

Still, their behavior of welcoming the returning Hungarian administration in 1938 was mainly the result of their strong national consciousness and lack of identification with the Czechoslovak state.[2] As a matter of fact, Czechoslovakia was not only foreign to them in 1918–1919, but also remained so after 20 years. The memory politics of the Czechoslovak state played a decisive role in the alienation of the Hungarian population, as Hungarians were not only denied the freedom to cultivate their national history and traditions, but also had foreign traditions, such as Hussiteism or Czechoslovakism, forced upon them. In addition, the Czechoslovak memory politics also affected public education, the names of public places, statues, monuments, and national holidays. This paper is dedicated to the issue of public holidays during the Czechoslovak era from the Hungarian population's point of view; it scrutinizes how the Hungarian minority celebrated Hungarian national holidays (e.g., Saint Stephen's Day and the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848–1849), international holidays (e.g., Labour Day on May 1), and October 28 (i.e., the anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak state).

Memory politics and the theoretical approach to holidays have been frequently discussed in historical, ethnographic, and sociological academic works. While Assmann believes that holidays are the primary forms of the organization of cultural memory (Assmann 2004: 57), Lars Deile simply yet aptly defines a holiday as a community's attempt to justify its own significance (cited by Mannova 2019: 129). Building on Maurer's work, academic literature usually classifies holidays into three groups: holidays of the cycle of life (birth, death, marriage, etc.), the celebrations of annual cycles (Christmas solstices, harvest, etc.), and so-called public holidays. (Mannova 2019: 129)

While the significance of these three types of holidays has varied from era to era, the social significance of public holidays, especially commemorations of events related to national history, increased strongly in the 19th and 20th centuries. Public holidays simultaneously facilitated and motivated the individual's identification with the nation. At the same time, participating in holidays was, to some extent, a measurement of how much the citizen identified with the state's expectations. (Kodajová 2012: 71) Therefore, public holidays continued to be the focus of controversy in the years following the First World War, and in them all the conflicts of the era were condensed. This was also the case for the Hungarian population in Czechoslovakia, for whom the public holidays of 1919 were important indications of what it could expect from its new country.

When Thomas G. Masaryk—who served as the president of the Paris-based Czechoslovak National Council of émigrés during the First World War—set out the principles for the functioning of the future Czechoslovak state in the so-called Czechoslovak

2 For the behavior of the Hungarian population in 1938, see Simon 2012.

Declaration of Independence in the autumn of 1918, he outlined the program of a democratic parliamentary republic based on the principle of popular sovereignty.[3] He described a state that guarantees its citizens the freedoms of conscience, speech, press, and assembly, and in which national minorities enjoy equal rights. The circumstances surrounding the formation of the Czechoslovak state played a significant role in the fact that many elements of the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence remained unfulfilled, including the section on the equality of national minorities. First of all, this process was essentially a project of the Czech political elite that at the time was firmly rejected by the national minorities bordering Czechoslovakia, especially the Germans living in the Czech Republic and the Hungarians living in the northern counties of the historic Kigdom of Hungary. Thus, the Czechoslovak elite was only able to force its will on the minorities at the cost of violence and with many victims. This caused wounds that were difficult to heal on both sides for many years, and also fundamentally determined the subsequent policy of the Czechoslovak governments. As a result, a governmental policy towards national minorities was enforced that was not based on the equality declared in the Czechoslovak Declaration of Independence, but rather on the principle that the Czechoslovak state is owned by Czechs and Slovaks and that national minorities cannot claim full equality in the Czechoslovak nation state.[4]

The events of 1919 instilled in the Czechoslovak elite not only a strong suspicion towards the aspirations of national minorities, but also a kind of permanent fear of the collapse of Czechoslovakia as a multinational state. Moreover, this fear not only restricted Czechoslovak minority policy, but also hindered the fulfillment of Czechoslovak democracy. Indeed, the Czechoslovak governments rejected all forms of autonomy, and they saw the spirit of irredentism in the manifestation of national self-consciousness of minorities.

Based on this logic, wearing the Hungarian national colors, displaying the national flag, singing or even listening to the Hungarian national anthem, commemorating significant events and figures of the Hungarian national history, and wreathing monuments and sculptures symbolizing the idea of historical Hungary were interpreted as attacks against the Czechoslovak state. This attitude created a completely new situation also for public holidays, which was already evident in 1919, in the first year of the Czechoslovak state's existence.

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3 The original English text of the Declaration: *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation by its Provisional Government.* New York, Printed for the Czechoslovak Arts Club by the Marchbanks Press, 1918. (https://archive.org/details/declarationofind00czec/page/n5/mode/2up; last accessed April 20, 2021).

4 See the order of the Czechoslovak Supreme Administrative Court, which stated that "minorities cannot claim the same rights as the members of the Czechoslovak nation from a national and especially from a linguistic point of view." Cited by Kučera 1999: 604.

On the afternoon of May 24, 1919, turmoil broke out in Deák Ferencz Street in Košice (Kassa, Kaschau) caused by a Hungarian flag hanging in one of the windows. At that time, Košice was mostly inhabited by Hungarians but had been under Czechoslovak rule for about five months. In those days, the Red Army of the Hungarian Soviet Republic was approaching Košice; thus the Hungarian flag in the window carried different meanings to Hungarians and Czechoslovaks: for the Hungarians, it was a forbidden symbol that anticipated their liberation from the Czechoslovak rule, while for the Czechoslovak soldiers it was an unacceptable provocation.

As the situation threatened to develop into a serious conflict, a military police patrol disbanded the crowd. The patrol also discovered that the flag was not a red-white-green Hungarian, but a green-white-red Italian flag, and that Major Benzoni, a member of the Košice-based Italian officer corps had hung it to celebrate the anniversary of Italy's entering the war four years prior. Still, as the Czechoslovak authorities were disturbed by the flag hanging in the window, in the evening a military police patrol broke into the apartment of the major (who was not in Košice at the time), and took down the flag.[5] The incident worsened the already tense relationship between the Italian military delegation and the Slovak political elite, and it reached the highest circles: Sekáč, the county sheriff, had to apologize to Castle Commander Gaston Rossi, and Minister Vavro Šrobár had to apologize to General Luigi Piccione.

This incident clearly demonstrates how much significance symbolic matters carried in the years of the regime change, and how the new power reacted with a panic-laden fear to everything that reminded the population of the historic Hungary. This is not surprising, considering that from the first day of the proclamation of the Czechoslovak state, the country defined itself against the traditions of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and its symbols. As Miroslav Michela points out, the old and the new world appeared in a highly polarized way in the contemporary Czechoslovak national discourse: historical Hungary as a symbol of slavery and Czechoslovakia as a symbol of freedom. (Michela 2018: 432) This involved not only the creation of a new system of national holidays and symbols (including the national anthem and flag), but also the banning of the use of symbols associated with historical Hungary and the celebration of Hungarian national holidays.

The legal background of the symbolic occupation was laid down by Minister Vavro Šrobár's decree No. 39/1919 issued on February 28, 1919, which stipulated that in the territory of Slovakia only red-white and white-blue-red flags and cockades could be used.[6] On the same day, the use of names of members of the Habsburg monarchy or events that were adverse to the Czechoslovak state on public buildings and public spaces (e.g., streets and squares) was made forbidden.[7]

5 Vojenský ústředný archiv, Praha (VÚA), fond Ministerstvo národní obrany – prezídium, 1918–1923 (f. MNO. prez.), k. 155, 6314.; Národní archiv ČR, Praha (NA ČR), fond Presídium ministerstva vnitra, AMV 225 (f. AMV-PMV 225), k. 1401, 225-1401-4.

6 *Úradné noviny*, September 28, 1919. 14.

However, all this was preceded by the arbitrary act of the soldiers of the Czechoslovak army in mid-January, fueled by nationalist impulses, of removing statues, plaques, and inscriptions reminiscent of the Hungarian national past. On January 15, 1919, statue of Lajos Kossuth was demolished in Lučenec (Losonc). On the night of February 18, 1919, in Košice Czech-Slovak patrols on the main streets of the city, led by their commanders, smashed signs with Hungarian inscriptions, and as soon as they were warned about the illegality of their actions by the police staff, they acted so threateningly and violently that the guards were forced to leave their posts. (Molnár/3 1942: 83)

March 15, the Banned Holiday

After the Czechoslovak legions occupied the regions north of the demarcation line in January 1919 (including Hungarian-populated cities such as Košice, Komárno (Komárom), Rožňava (Rozsnyó), Rimavská Sobota (Rimaszombat), Levice (Léva), and Lučenec), the first few weeks passed without major conflicts between the local population and the new power. Thus, Vavro Šrobár, the full-fledged (plenipotentiary) minister for the administration of Slovakia, was correct in hoping that the position of the Czechoslovak state in the region could be consolidated.

However, Šrobár misjudged the situation and did not anticipate that the Hungarian-speaking population of the occupied territories would not only be unable to accept the change in the constitutional law, but also would feel that the Czechoslovak occupation had led to a decline in their democratic and social rights. In February 1919, the intertwining of national and social grievances triggered railway and postal strikes and in a few cities (e.g., Komárno, Lučenec, and Košice) even general strikes, which simultaneously expressed the population's protest against their deprivation of democratic rights and against the new state. The strike wave lasted throughout February, and when it finally subsided, there were just a little over two weeks left until March 15, the most important Hungarian national holiday, the anniversary of the 1848–1849 Revolution and War of Independence.

The Revolution and War of Independence of 1848–1849 undoubtedly played an important role in Hungarian national memory, although the commemorations held on this day could not have been given an official overtone in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy ruled by the Habsburgs. At the same time, in the first years of the 20th century, in almost every major Hungarian city, including the areas that were attached to Czechoslovakia after 1918, a statue was inaugurated that provided a place for remembering 1848–1849 and played an important role in strengthening the traditions of historical Hungary. Thus, Hungarians gathered every year on March 15 by the statue to

7 Štátny archív v Banskej Bystrici, pobočka Lučenec (ŠA BB, PoLc), fond Magistrát mesta Lučenec (f. MMLc), k. 50, 357/1919.

commemorate the heroic soldiers of the Battle of Branyiszko in Košice, by the statues of Lajos Kossuth in Lučenec, Rožňava, and Nové Zámky (Érsekújvár), by the statue of Sándor Petőfi in Bratislava (Pozsony, Pressburg) and by the statue of György Klapka in Komárno.

Šrobár, still under the influence of the recent experience of the general strike, wanted to prevent exactly these scenarios, as he was afraid that the commemorations of 1848 would be used by the Hungarian population to express their commitment to Hungary and their rejection of the new state. Moreover, since he did not want to allow this anyway, the plenipotentiary minister, in his decree of March 3, prohibited the celebration of March 15.[8] In his letter to the sheriffs governing the counties ("county heads"), he specifically emphasized the importance of preventing schools, churches, or other institutions from organizing any kind of ceremony, and he threatened to dismiss teachers, priests, and officials from their jobs if they were to violate the prohibition. An important part of government communication about the ban was the criminalization of 1848 and the intention to make the commemoration of the ideals of the revolution an anti-state, irredentist activity. Therefore, the ban on the holiday was justified by declaring the 1848–1849 Revolution and War of Independence a chauvinist and imperialist (sic!) event. Furthermore, it was also argued several times that Budapest wanted to flood Slovakia with agitators during the holiday so that they could organize demonstrations against Czechoslovakia. The Police Captain of Košice Jozef V. Kohout went even further and stated that the purpose of the Hungarian commemorations scheduled for March 15 was to provoke chaos and a general uprising so that the peace conference would see that those living there did not accept Czechoslovakia.[9]

The result of the government's propaganda was that it intensified the anti-Hungarian sentiment of the Czechoslovak public and the army, and promoted the spread of rumors that the Hungarian population was preparing for some kind of action against Czechoslovakia. The authorities were therefore greatly preparing for March 15.

The orders of the Commander in Chief of the Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia General Luigi Piccione were primarily aimed at avoiding a violent confrontation between the population and the army while maintaining public security. This was served by the provision that on March 14th, starting at noon, the soldiers had to wait in retreat in the barracks. They were allowed to patrol with loaded guns and bayonets, but without hand grenades, while they were forbidden to mix with the local population. They had to avoid, as much as possible, all provocations and situations that could lead to violent outcomes.[10]

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8 Slovenský národný archív, Bratislava (SNA), fond Ministerstvo plnou mocou pre správu Slovenska (f. MPS), k. 270, 1131/1919.

9 SNA, f. Jozef Kohout (f. Kohout), k. 11.

10 VUA, f. MNO. prez., k. 155, 6314.; SNA, f. MPS, k. 270, 1131/1919.

As a result of the ban on the holiday as well as Piccione's measures, March 15 was marked by a low-key celebration in the Hungarian-inhabited areas of Czechoslovakia without major conflicts. The strict prohibition was effective: there were no public mass events. However, the celebration was not cancelled; it was only pushed back behind the closed doors of churches and community halls, and it was limited to visiting memorial sites on an individual, unorganized basis.

Public events that mobilized a significant number of people took place mostly where the Social Democrats, who were at the time the only organized political force among the Hungarian population, held strong positions: in Komárno, Bratislava, and Košice.

The Social Democrats in Komárno, lacking any other option, expressed with leaflets their relation to the ideals of the 1848–1849 Revolution and to the Hungarian state: "while even just a drop of blood flows in our veins we will never give up the freedom of our Hungarian nation, and we will never agree to be broken away from the free Hungary."[11] At the same time, the city's population was called upon to stop working, which it did; on the morning of March 15, work in the factories stopped, and stores and offices closed. In the afternoon, commemorations took place in the interiors of city and church buildings, i.e. inside municipal and ecclesiastical buildings.

In Bratislava, it was the Labour Council, also led by the Hungarian-German Social Democrats, that condemned the ban on the commemorations, calling it a „depriving and terroristic" measure. At the same time, just like in Komárno, they announced a one-hour general strike for the morning of March 15.[12]

On March 15, Bratislava was a rainy and quiet, almost deserted city. The strike began at 9 a.m., and all the factories, banks, shops, and trams shut down. The silence of the streets was disturbed by the noises of infantry and cavalry patrols, whose main task was to remove the wreaths and flowers deposited at the statue of Sándor Petőfi on the Sétatér, since despite the ban, the pedestal of the statue had already been covered with flowers by noon.[13]

While the holiday passed in tense silence but without open conflicts in Komárno and Bratislava, the events of March 15 in Košice turned out differently. It is impossible to determine why exactly the events turned violent and why two innocent civilians paid with their lives, but the frustration of the Hungarians in Košice with strong national self-awareness certainly contributed to it, as did the anti-Hungarian nationalist atmosphere in the Czechoslovak army that was fueled even more by Šrobár's policies. In Košice, the decree prohibiting the celebration of March 15 was promulgated on March 5th. (Molnár / 3 1942: 460–461) Nevertheless, it had already been perceivable in the days before

11 *Komáromi Ujság*, March 20, 1919. 1.

12 *Híradó*, March 15, 1919. 4.

13 *Híradó*, March 16, 1919. 3.

March 15 that the ban would not be accepted by everyone, especially students. Therefore, Police Captain Kohout made a special appeal to them, urging them not to wear national colors and not to try to express their national feelings externally, but to be content to celebrate in their hearts. (Molnár/3 1942: 487)

Following Piccione's orders, the troops stationed in Košice remained in their quarters on March 15. The enforcement of the order was the responsibility of a city police force consisting of 70 members, which was reinforced by 14 military police officers and a further 110 soldiers.[14] According to the *Kassai Napló*, Police Captain Kohout, who expected that young people would not fully comply with the prohibition decrees, ordered patrols to have some tolerance for people displaying Hungarian national colors on their outfits, and to intervene only if provoked.[15]

Kohout was right in his expectation that the Hungarians in Košice would not cancel the commemoration. It could also be anticipated that the military statute on Fő utca (High Street) would be the focal point of the events. Indeed, groups gathered and placed flowers and wreaths by the statue starting early in the morning. The city police tolerated these activities, just as they tolerated that many people were walking down the street with a bouquet of flowers tied with a cockade of Hungarian national colors or with red ribbon, even though they removed the wreaths placed on the statue and dissolved the gatherings. However, as the crowd on Fő utca began to grow, military patrols started to appear. They were no longer so tolerant, and began to tear off badges and cockades of passers-by, which almost lead to minor conflicts. On the whole, however, despite the tension, March 15 passed without major incidents in Košice.

Two days later, however, at dawn, when the streets were still empty, a group of soldiers from the 71st Infantry Regiment of the Czechoslovak Army marched to the Hungarian military memorial and knocked it down after a short and unequal fight. First they cut its head off; then they knocked over the 15-ton statue with steel bars. The news of the barbaric act travelled quickly, and the Hungarian population began to gather by the demolished statue. In the morning, a crowd of about 2000–3000 people sang the Hungarian anthem and the "Kossuth song" (a well known military tune) several times. Meanwhile, the troops marched out onto the streets with increased reiforcements, but they were unable to handle the situation and eventually fired into the crowd. Two people were shot and killed: Ilona Ördögh, a 37-year-old maid, and Aranka Hervacsics, a 13-year-old newsgirl. While the victims' bodies were taken to the parish courtyard, the soldiers proceed to march in a line along Fő utca ("High Street") and dissolve the crowd with a series of warning shots. The streets became empty, trams

14 SNA, f. MPS, k. 271, 1286/1919.; NA ČR, f. AMV-PMV 225, 225-243-3.

15 *Kassai Napló*, March 16, 1919. 2.

stopped, and only the sound of patrols could be heard. Košice was transformed into a besieged city.[16]

The next day, a commemoration and funeral were held. The Social Democrats announced a strike in Košice: factories shut down, traffic stopped, and church bells tolled on March 18th. About 6,000 people appeared at the funeral ceremony, which turned into a silent demonstration. Troops remained in their barracks, and only six officers of the local police ("city gendarmes") kept patrolling. Apart from during the church ceremony, no speeches were made at the tomb, but the crowd sang the national anthem.[17]

There seemed to be agreement on what had occurred, as the demolition of the military statue was described by both County Sheriff ("County Head") Sekáč and the city's military commander, Colonel František Schöbl, as a barbaric and unfortunate act. Similarly, not only the Hungarian newspapers in Košice but also the pro-government *Slovenský východ* condemned the events, even though it blamed the militaristic of the Austro-Hungarian Army for the vandalism and bestiality.[18] The county sheriff ("County Head") promised to take the responsible people to court and to rebuild the military statue. In retrospect, however, it is clear that none of the promises were fulfilled: the soldiers were not punished, and the military statue was never rebuilt, just as nobody was ever held accountable for the unnecessary deaths of the two victims.

May 1, the Controlled Holiday

Although the government of Czechoslovakia declared the International Workers' Day (also known as International Labour Day) both a national and public holiday as early as March 27, 1919, which was uncommon, in fact a rarity in contemporary Europe (Horák 2018: 222-223), the first Czechoslovak May 1 was not characterized by the atmosphere of picnics and parades as it was in other countries, especially not in the Slovak part of the country, where the Workers' Day was a holiday directed and controlled by the authorities. The reasons are found primarily in the political and military situation of the time.

After the Bolsheviks seized power in Hungary on March 21, 1919, and the 133-day period of the Soviet Republic of Hungary began, relations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary became even more tense. Fearing the spread of Bolshevik ideas in Slovakia, Minister Šrobár introduced martial law, an important element of which, among other restrictions on freedoms, was the internment of Hungarian and German workers' leaders (See more in Simon 2020). At the same time, Czechoslovakia had

16 See the reports of the events in Košice from various aspects NA ČR, f. AMV-PMV 225, 225-243-3.; VUA, MNO prez., k. 155. sign. 6314.; *Felvidéki Magyar Hírlap*, March 19, 1939. 23.

17 *Kassai Újság*, March 19, 1919. 2.

18 *Slovenský východ,* March 18, 1919. 1.

begun preparations for a military action against Hungary, aimed at the occupation of the so-called second demarcation line, that is, pushing the future Czechoslovak-Hungarian state border even further south. The Czechoslovak attack eventually began on April 27, and the subsequent war created a negative context for the upcoming holiday of May 1. In addition, during the days just before the Czechoslovak attack, the martial law, introduced earlier, was extended to include further measures.[19]

After such antecedents, it was not surprising that Minister Šrobár, referring to the martial law, only allowed the celebration of Labour Day behind closed doors, and only if the commemoration would not disturb the law and order. (Horák 2018: 226) As a consequence, whether or not a festive event could be held was decided by the authorities, with the result that while they were for the most part allowed in the Slovak ethnic region, public events were banned in the Hungarian ones.

In Košice, where the local Social Democrats were organizing events to mobilize large crowds, everything was banned, and ceremonies were held only in two military barracks in the city.[20] In Bratislava, where the Social Democrats had traditionally been strong, Labour/Labour Day had been a holiday with an established set of traditions from before World War I, an important part of which was the parade through the city center and the subsequent picnic. (Benko 2020: 39) In 1919, however, the usual celebration was not possible at all. Yet, what made the situation unusual was that on the right bank of the Danube, which still belonged to Hungary at the time, the Bolshevik authorities held spectacular ceremonies: the Danube bank was flagged and a parade proceeded along the Danube bank. Thus, the people of Bratislava on the left bank could see the celebration on the other side, and they could even read the inscriptions on the banners there. However, in Bratislava itself, May 1 was spent in silence, almost in a mournful mood. The journal *Híradó* even commented, referring to the mood and weather prevailing in the city, that „it looked more like All Saints' Day rather than Labour Day."[21]

On May 1 in Komárno there were even several deaths, in fact. On the night of May 1, workers from Győr and Tata, together with some red soldiers, inspired by the Bolshevik Hungarian authorities wishing to export the communist revolution to the entire Carpathian Basin, and thus launched an attack on Komárno. The attack failed, but the Czechoslovak military retaliation was harsh: the attackers were trapped on Elizabeth Island, where the Czechoslovak soldiers brutally slaughtered them, and several of the city's civilians were also killed in the streets. The number of victims of the tragic May 1 incident is still not known for certain, but probably exceeded 300. As a result, a military dictatorship was declared in Komárno on May 1, and a curfew was

19 *Slovenský denník*, May 1, 1919. 3.

20 *Slovenský východ*, May 3, 1919. 1.

21 *Híradó,* May 3, 1919. 3.

introduced. Instead of there being a festive parade, only armed soldiers walked the streets, and the city experienced some of the most difficult hours in its history.

August 20, the Shifted Holiday

St. Stephen's Day, celebrated on August 20, is the oldest Hungarian holiday. The day of the canonization of King Stephen I of Hungary became a legal holiday as early as 1083, during the reign of King St. Ladislaus. (Gyarmati 1995: 87) At that time the holiday primarily aimed to strengthen Christianity and legitimize the ruling power, but it has undergone several transformations over the centuries, both in appearance and message.

During the period of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, August 20, while retaining its ecclesiastical appearance, was gaining an increasingly secular and social character. At that time, through featuring the symbols of the Hungarian state and the Hungarian nation, August 20 did not only serve as a manifestation of Hungarian statehood, but also the supremacy of Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. However, changes in the holiday's status over time did not change the fact that August 20 had deep roots among the Catholic population (and not only among the Hungarians). People expressed their devotion by attending worships, refraining from work, and wearing festive costumes on that day.

While March 15 had already been filled with some kind of opposition and rebellious content already during the Austro-Hungarian times, and thus it was obvious to the average person that it carried a political message, August 20 was more like a personal/intimate holiday that was distanced from politics. Thus, the Hungarians who were ceded to Czechoslovakia could hope that, unlike on March 15, it would be possible to celebrate more freely. This hope was probably strengthened by the fact that by the summer of 1919, the peace conference had already determined the final Czechoslovak-Hungarian state border, and the military conflict between the two countries had ended. This entailed the promise of a less troubled and more peaceful period than the previous one, as well as the chance that some kind of compromise could be reached between the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia and the authorities. Indeed, the domestic political and economic situations seemed to be consolidating, but the situation in the field of memory politics remained tense.

In the previous months, although the culprits were never officially caught, allegedly Czechoslovak legionaries had demolished several Hungarian-related monuments in the southern Slovak region, including the statue of Lajos Kossuth in Nové Zámky and Rožňava. In addition, on June 24th, the minister issued another decree prohibiting the inclusion of the names of the former monarchy or of persons who had or have been hostile to the "Czechoslovak nation or state" on public institutions, companies, buildings, and public spaces (e.g., streets and squares).[22] The latter definition was meant to

22 Archív Mesta Košice (AMKo), fond Magistrát Mesta Košíc (f. MMKo), Rada mesta Košíc, k. 2339, 8650/1919.

refer to the great personalities of Hungarian national history, including not only politicians, but also writers and artists who had nothing to do with politics.

Furthermore, the power sought to fill the symbolic space and strengthen its legitimacy by introducing new holidays and rites, such as the celebration of July 14th, the national holiday of the "great ally" France, which was immeasurably foreign and distant to the Hungarian population. Hungarians did not understand why they had to celebrate the national holiday of the France but were not allowed to celebrate the day of their first king, St. Stephen. Ultimately, however, as a result of the minister's decree Nr. 1415/1919, festive masses on August 20 were banned,[23] and in the case of the churches that were consecrated on August 20, the celebratory mass had to held a week later.[24] At the same time, it was ordered that August 20 should not be a public holiday and stores should be open as well.

The church, which was Slovakized within a few weeks of the regime change, assisted the state-introduced ban on festive masses: decree No. 3385 of the Archbishop's Office of Nagyszombat, dated August 4, forbade the holding of festive masses in the churches on August 20.[25] Their reason for the ban was that St. Stephen's Day is actually not August 20, but rather September 2. Thus, the ordinance claimed that priests who hold a festive mass service on August 20 would be violating church regulations.[26] All this meant that while any ecclesiastical or secular remembrance was banned on August 20, an attempt was made to shift the ecclesiastical part of St. Stephen's Day to another date: September 2, a day that was not burdened by the idea of Hungarian statehood.

Due to the lack of relevant sources, it is difficult to paint an accurate picture of how the celebration of August 20 took place in 1919. In newspapers, albeit carefully and by avoiding the mention of historical Hungary, the first king of Hungary could be commemorated. In churches, however, neither festive masses nor sermons were held, at least not in locations with a strong presence of authorities. As a result, Hungarians in Bratislava and in other cities could celebrate only in their hearts. Thus August 20 (falling on a Wednesday in 1919) was just a weekday like any other, somewhat similar to August 20, 1920, about which the Bratislava *Híradó* wrote: "The exterior of the city, of course, did not undress its mundaneness as the factories were running and the stores were open. Yet we all felt that it was a holiday, and the old beautiful memories were renewed in us... painfully, never ceasing!"[27]

In rural areas, however, the situation was different, especially in Catholic villages. The villagers did not work and dressed in celebratory attire. As former Chief Sheriff

23 SNA, fond Krajinský úrad Bratislava (f. KÚ Ba), k. 268, 1504/30. prez.

24 Štátny archív Bratislava (ŠA Ba), f. Bratislavská župa I. (f. BŽ I.), k. 6, 2711/1919.

25 *Híradó*, 17. August 1919. 3.

26 On Czechoslovakia's relation to the St. Stephen's Day see Michela: 2018: 431–468.

27 *Híradó*, August 21, 1920. 3.

("County Head") Dénes Bittó pointed out at the General Assembly of the Bratislava County Legislative Committee, held on October 6, although the authorities forbade the celebration and the masses were cancelled, in the countryside people stopped working for a day and still celebrated.[28] The ban on the celebration of St. Stephen's Day triggered strong emotions in many regions. For many, it signaled more clearly than before the expected direction of the Czechoslovak government's ethnic policy, and made cooperation with Prague unacceptable. The ban was discussed, for example, at the meeting of the Komárno County Legislative Committee, where the Hungarian members of the committee asked the county sheriff ("County Head"), "Why can't we commemorate our first holy king? Singing the national anthem has also been banned. Why are we banned from singing 'God bless the Hungarian'?"[29]

The resignation of the chief judge of the Párkány district, Elemér Reviczky, was another consequence of the banned (or shifted) holiday. Reviczky was a popular public servant who resigned not long before August 20 and moved to Esztergom, Hungary, which was on the other side of the demarcation line. He explained his resignation in a statement on September 1 as follows: "I will never issue, sign, or enforce decrees that prohibit the use of the national color and cancel patriotic holidays."[30]

October 28, the Compulsory Holiday

In contemporary Czechoslovak public discourse, the formation of the Czechoslovak state was interpreted as a historical necessity, as was the liberation of the Czechs and Slovaks and the reunification of the Czechoslovak nation. Accordingly, the commemoration of October 28 was seen as an important element of Czechoslovak identity, social cohesion, and loyalty to the state. (Hájková 2018: 83) The idea to declare October 28 as a public holiday arose as early as March 1919, but it was not until October 14, 1919, that the Prague National Assembly declared the day of the proclamation of the Czechoslovak Republic a public and national holiday. (Hájková 2018: 85)

The traditions of the holiday itself, of course, developed but gradually in the early 1920s, but strong emphasis was put from the outset on ensuring that the holiday had a calm and dignified atmosphere and was not defined by various official restrictions. At the same time, it was ensured that the patriotic nature of the holiday was not to be disturbed by statements or protests motivated by national or political motives.

The first October 28 was celebrated in all of Czechoslovakia with great splendor, although there was a noticeable difference between the celebrations in the Czech

28 *Híradó*, October 7, 1919. 3.

29 *Komáromi Ujság*, August 28, 1919. 2-3.

30 VUA, f. Velitelství západní skupiny (f. ZS-Slov), k. 5, 620/pol.; *Esztergom és vidéke*, September 5, 1919. 1-2.

Republic and Slovakia, and the difference between the Slovak and Hungarian areas was even more obvious. Although October 28 was also celebrated in southern Slovakia, where, unlike in the Czech and Slovak regions, the emphasis was not on mass events; instead, the central elements of festivities in those parts were the festive church services, the ceremonial speeches in the presence of state officials and soldiers, and the parade of garrison soldiers.

In Košice, for example, the ceremony had been planned to last for two days, beginning on October 27. On the afternoon of the October 27, there was a requiem mass in the public cemetery, a festive concert at the National Theater, and a lantern parade in the evening streets. The main programs of the next day were festive services, a military parade, and sports games. (Molnár 1942/6: 449–450)

Although the authorities were concerned that the Hungarian population would try to undermine the dignity of the holiday, according to reports submitted to the office of the president, this did not happen, and October 28 passed without any conflict. The local Hungarians „behaved loyally, all day long there was a dignified Sunday-like peace," notes a report from Komárno.[31] A summary sent to Košice also reported that although the Hungarians became discouraged by the magnificent holiday celebrations, they still behaved in a restrained and correct manner.[32]

However, what this behavior really meant is revealed by the report on the Rimavská Sobota ceremony, which, in detailing the success and splendor of the holiday, succinctly noted that "there were no Hungarians. Neither the courthouse nor the grammar school displayed the state flag." In other words, the calmness was rooted in the fact that the Hungarian population expressed their emotions by their absence. The Hungarians essentially ignored the holiday, which is also indicated by the fact that the Hungarian press in Slovakia did not provide any information about the holiday.

Híradó of Bratislava merely issued, on the same day, a brief piece of news that the paper would not be published the next day due to the holidays.[33] The two Komárno-based weekly newspapers, the *Komáromi Lapok* and the *Komáromi Újság*, did not report, not even in later editions, that there had been any celebration in the city during the previous days. Instead, the November 1 issue of the *Komáromi Lapok* devoted a long editorial to what came to be known as the Aster Revolution with the title *October 31*, in which Mihály Károlyi and the revolution were blamed for the fact that one-third of the Hungarians were attached to foreign countries.[34]

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31 Archív kanceláře prezidenta republiky, Praha (AKPR), fond Kancelář prezidenta republiky (f. KPR), kart. 71, D 824/18.

32 AKPR, f. KPR, k. 71, D 824/15

33 *Híradó*, October 28, 1919. 2.

34 *Komáromi Lapok*, November 1, 1919. 1

Although the reports did not evaluate, and did not comment on the Hungarians' absence from the state holiday, the requirement that they take part in the ceremonies, thereby expressing their loyalty to the Czechoslovak state, appeared from time to time. An example was Košice, where Mayor Mutňanský made it compulsory for all employees of the town hall to attend the festive church service. (Molnár 6/19/1942: 451-452) When Councilor Kálmán Varga did not attend the mass, the mayor told him to provide an appropriate excuse, and described his absence as an anti-state demonstration.

Scrutinizing the four public holidays of 1919 does not only make it clear that the authorities interfered in how the holidays were celebrated, but also that the interference through the prohibition or support of certain holidays was so significant that it restricted the freedoms of expression and religion to some extent. The ban on holidays related to the Hungarian national past and the legalization of holidays strengthening the legitimacy of the Czechoslovak state in the context of 1919 may seem to be logical and understandable measures, as Slovakia spent the year essentially in a war situation. However, the bans on celebrating March 15 and August 20 were in force throughout the existence of the first Czechoslovak Republic, and in the following years a whole series of lawsuits was filed against those who had placed a wrath of Hungarian national colors at a memorial site on March 15 and those who had sung the Hungarian national anthem.

Moreover, the authorities increasingly expected Hungarians to take part in the Czechoslovak holidays. On President Masaryk's birthday, just as on the national holidays of France and the members states of the allience known as Little Entente, commemorations had to be held in Hungarian schools. Attending the celebrations on October 28 had increasingly become an expectation; it was considered not only as a sign of loyalty to the Czechoslovak state, but also as proof of commitment to the republican ideas of statehood and to democracy. The authorities tried to persuade the Hungarians to take part in the festivities by various means. This provoked particularly heated debates on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the foundation of the Czechoslovak state in 1928, when there was much debate in the National Assembly and in the press about the participation of Hungarians in the ceremonies.[35]

According to Maurer, a democratic state gives its citizens the freedom to not participate in celebrations (cited by Mannova 2019: 131), just as, in my opinion, the right to commemorate their own holidays. In the case of Czechoslovakia, however, this freedom was limited. When we evaluate the democracy of the first Czechoslovak Republic, we should not forget about this aspect.

35 See e.g. the Hungarian MPs' resolution in the House of Representatives of the National Assembly. *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*, October 27, 1928. 3

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