

## TRYING TO BREAK FREE FROM THE OCCUPIERS

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### Abstract

75 years ago, on August 29, 1944, we made a significant contribution to European history. Active resistance to the established regime and the desire for the reconstruction of the Czechoslovak Republic led the Slovak nation to participate in an armed conflict. The present article illustrates how the situation in the Slovak State developed (before, during and after the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising). We will focus not only on individual events, but also on changes in the organization of public administration. The methods used in his work were mainly analysis, synthesis, literature search and study of historical sources, which as a basis of research contributed to achieving the set goal.

**Keywords:** Czechoslovak Republic, Guerrillas, Occupiers, Slovak National Uprising, World War.

### 1 Introduction

Europe and Europeans have been marked by a number of major and minor conflicts, which have also been reflected in the size, structure and organization of public administration. Some of these changes and conflicts have been resolved in a peaceful way, others have not. One of the greatest and most serious conflicts in modern history is undoubtedly an armed conflict, whose aim was to establish a Nazi regime - World War 2. We will try to illustrate how the environment, form and nature of our state, public administration and citizens have changed in the framework of this article. With this in mind, and through the use of several scientific methods, we also want to pay tribute to those who were direct participants in the Slovak National Uprising (individuals, groups and the whole nation). We will therefore focus our attention on the 61-day resistance, during which we openly opposed the fascist regime.

### 2 Situation before the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising

Since September 1, 1939 (the beginning of World War II - the invasion of Poland), Europe began to change in a way unparalleled in human history. However, by its nature and cruelty, it has changed the system of life throughout the world. In a brutal way, it signed on the collectivist and vulnerable states. Unfortunately, we can find Slovakia on the list of those vulnerable. Therefore, it is appropriate to come to these sad years of our history.

The journey to independence and all that belongs to it has never been easy. The Slovak and Czech people know about it (Czechoslovak Republic 1918; Czech Republic, Slovak Republic 1993). Thus, they know how to speak of a common miserable way for freedom and democracy. However, we focus our attention on a period that many would erase from historical annals. We will come back in time until 1938 - year of break. It was in 1938 that the political crisis culminated and the world was in a state of anticipation of a war conflict. The grand plans of Germany, led by A. Hitler, were getting more and more specific contours, which were cruelly reflected in the fate of Czechoslovakia. The urgent need to consolidate the population and expand the territory of Germany has become a priority that had to be addressed immediately. It is for this reason that the question of the existence of the Czechoslovak Republic (Czechoslovakia) began to be resolved in this period.

The greatest attention was paid to Czechoslovakia in September 1938, when, thanks to A. Hitler and high representatives of Italy, Great Britain and France, it was decided on its fate [1]. Czechoslovakia "Toy of the mighty" was based on a written agreement by A. Hitler, B. Mussolini, N. Chamberlain and É. Daladier forced to surrender to the border area of Germany and thereby yield to the "strong four". However, the betrayal committed by this act on Czechoslovakia and its inhabitants in the sense of E. Beneš himself "will not save them (Italy, Great Britain, France) from war or revolution" [2]. On the basis of the amendment to the Munich Agreement [3], Czechoslovakia was also forced to address issues relating to other territories. At the same time it receives a green Agreement on Slovak Autonomy (October 6, 1938), which makes Slovakia independent in the leadership of the state (Prime Minister J. Tiso). Subsequently, however, Slovakia (Figure 1) is deprived of a large part of the territory due to arbitration and its outcome (Vienna, 2.11.1938). At the same time, we can regard this serious fact as a keystone of the growth of preferences and the strengthening of radicals seeking to establish an independent state [4].



Figure 1 Slovak state after the Vienna Arbitration [5]

They came closest to this dream on March 14, 1939. The dream of freedom, independence or life was, however, only a fiction. It is definitely buried on March 18, 1939. The reasons for these claims are two. The first reason is the declaration of the Slovak Land itself as an independent Slovak State [6]. This act took place in not too friendly neighborhoods. However, the threat and pressure faced by the representatives at that time were so severe that the most viable way was to accept the offer. The second reason is the fact that the independent Slovak State lost this status 4 days after the declaration of independence. On March 18, 1939, the Treaty on the Protection Relationship between the German Empire and the Slovak State was signed. By signing the treaty, Nazi Germany was given the green light in deciding the fate of a State. We can therefore talk about farce, tragicomedy or grotesque, which the Slovak state involuntarily became for the second time. Thus, the Slovak State could do independently only those acts and policies that did not jeopardize the plans and interests of the German Reich. Otherwise, prompt interventions by the German side took place.

In connection with changes in the character of the State, at the end of 1939, changes were made to the administrative structure (6 districts, 61 counties) and the structure of the state authorities. The functions of the Regional Office were taken over by the Ministry of the Interior together with the county offices. Self-governing tasks in the county were performed by the district councils, the district committee (appointed by the Minister of the Interior), the district commissions and the district lord [7]. The post of President (7 years) was performed by priest J. Tiso (formerly Prime Minister). The supreme legislative body was the Slovak Parliament, which lost its powers. Most legal norms were in the nature of government regulations. The government at that time consisted of 8 members and a chairman (V. Tuka).

As for the growth of the political scene, it was dual-stream. Moderate block with Tiso, HSLS and Catholic clergy. Block of radicals with Tuka, Mach and HG. Several new bodies were also created - the Propaganda Office, the State Security Central and others.

However, August 1944 gave the definitive stop of relatively independent decision-making. We have become an occupied country. Virtually all aspects of the country's life and work were influenced by the German authorities. These and many other activities (Table 1) carried out under the auspices of Nazi Germany have thus become the driving forces of the nation's resentment and resistance. The entry of German Wehrmacht units into the territory of the Slovak State resulted in an uprising, which with national and Slovak attributes is forever part of our national history. This act has activated domestic radical forces.

### 3 Situation during the Slovak National Uprising

The first mention of the preparation of the Slovak National Uprising dates back to May 1944. Not only during the preparations, but also during the uprising, the nation clearly spoke on the issue of the renewal of the common Czechoslovak Republic [11]. In this statement we can also rely on several political and legal documents from this period, e.g. Christmas deal. Under this agreement an illegal Slovak National Council was established. Its primary task was to restore the common Czechoslovak statehood [12]. Therefore, this document can be called the basic document of the Slovak national front. We can also speak of the opportunity brought by the series of military failures of Nazi Germany. This, together with the deplorable situation in Slovakia, led to an unprecedented and surprising act - The uprising.

The initiative of the opposition society led to the creation of illegal bodies - the Slovak National Council (SNR) and the Military Headquarters of the SNR. These authorities were the main initiators of the military resistance. On the mandate of the SNR, the preparation of the military site took place in May 1944 by J. Golian. He was responsible for organizing and ensuring the necessary actions, ie. Planned Armed Rebellion. According to the

prepared scenario, the uprising should start in coordination with the Soviet party or with declaration of military resistance in case the Germans try to occupy Slovakia [13]. However, the cards were shuffled - guerrillas, local activists and allies. From the memories of the direct participant Rašla: “there was an explosive mood among the partisans. Some guerrilla troops began to invade and wanted to start fighting immediately on their own” [14]. Golian, however, needed time to implement the uprising plan and coordinate all units. For this reason, they appealed to the commanders of the guerrilla groups to take no action without the approval of the military headquarters.

**Table 1** Sequence of events preceding the Slovak National Uprising [8,9,10,7]

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
May 21, 1938	Partial mobilization of Czechoslovakia
May 30, 1938	Order - military action to break Czechoslovakia (A. Hitler)
June 6, 1938	Manifesto for "Czechoslovak Unity"
September 22, 1938	Demise of the Government of M. Hodža
September 23, 1938	J. Syrový Government, general mobilization of Czechoslovakia
September 29-30, 1938	Munich Agreement - resignation of part of Czechoslovakia (Sudetenland) territory to Germany
November 2, 1938	Vienna Arbitration - resignation of part of Czechoslovakia territory to Hungary and Poland
October 1, 1938	Entry of Wehrmacht units to Czechoslovakia
October 5, 1938	Resignation of E. Beneš as President of Czechoslovakia
October 6, 1938	"Žilina Agreement" - Declaration of Autonomy of the Slovak Republic, Appointment of J. Tiso as Minister of Administration of Slovakia
October 7, 1938	Establishment of the Autonomous Government of Slovakia, adoption of the "Žilina Agreement"
October 21, 1938	Liquidation of the rest of Czechoslovakia
November 30, 1938	Election of President of Czecho-Slovakia - E. Hácha
March 6, 1939	Rejection of the declaration by the Slovak Government of an independent state
March 10, 1939	Declaration of state of emergency in Slovakia, appeal of the Slovak Government
March 11, 1939	Appointment of K. Sidor as Prime Minister of the Slovak Government, request for declaration of independence of Slovakia (Hitler)
March 12, 1939	Denial of Declaration of Independence of Slovakia, Direct Action (Hitler)
March 13, 1939	Ultimatum for Slovakia (Hitler)
March 14, 1939	Declaration of an independent Slovak state, occupation of Bohemia, resignation of Sidor's government, accession of J. Tiso
March 15, 1939	Establishment of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, invasion of the Wehrmacht in Slovakia
March 18, 1939	Treaty on the Protection Relationship between the German Empire and the Slovak State
March 23-24, 1939	Little War - withdrawal of the southern part of the Slovak State
July 21, 1939	State name change - Slovak Republic
October 17, 1939	Return of territory occupied by Poland
October 26, 1939	First Slovak President - J. Tiso
October 27, 1939	New government - V. Tuka
January 28, 1940	Czech-Slovak National Council (Paris)
June 23, 1941	Joining Germany in a campaign against the USSR
March 6, 1942	Agreement on the Displacement of Jews to Work in Former Poland
April 1, 1942	Establishment of the first labor camps (Nováky, Sered', Vyhne)
December 30, 1943	Christmas Agreement, Slovak National Council (Illegal Body)
March 23, 1944	Preparing for the Uprising (J. Golian)
August 11, 1944	Martial law, the first anti-partisan actions
August 29, 1944	Occupation of the SR by German troops

On Friday, August 25, 1944, the guerrillas launched an action named Hotel Sláva (Vrútky). Three days later, they were back again - Martin massacre. The answer from fascist Germany, which did not wait long, was the entry of the occupying troops into our territory (August 29, 1944). The German Wehrmacht entered Slovakia and began

to take control. The response not only to this act was to issue the order of J. Golian: "start moving out". It was heard from the radio ether only an hour after the Minister of Defense of the Slovak Republic F. Čaltoš in his speech took the side of the Germans [15].

The uprising, regardless of the result, could no longer be stopped (Figure 2). According to Jablonický, "The leaders of the anti-fascist resistance could no longer postpone the armed resistance" [16]. At the same time, historian Prečan stresses that "Slovakia needed an uprising mainly because of itself" [17]. And despite the fact that at the beginning of the uprising there were several misconducts, which complicated the starting position (disobeying the challenge of most Western Slovak garrisons, disarmament of the Eastern Slovak Army), nothing prevented the determination to fight. According to Bárta [18], these weaknesses in the armed conflict were "replaced by insurgents with enormous enthusiasm, spontaneous toughness and efforts not to allow Slovakia to occupy".



Figure 2 Situation in the first days of the uprising [19]

Nevertheless, the uprising defense forces were stabilized in the first days of September - so called first phase of the fighting. (Table 2). This resulted in the fact that the German troops had to involuntarily withdraw itself from battlefield. City of Banská Bystrica became the center of the uprising and "automatically" came under the control of the insurgents (1st Guerrilla Brigade J.V. Stalin). The political power was taken over by the revolutionary national committees (also the administration of municipalities), legislative and executive power based on the SNR declaration [20]. The main component of the armed forces was the rebel army - the 1st Czech-Slovak Army in Slovakia. An excellent service to the uprising was also done by the radio station Free Slovak Transmitter, who reported mainly news from the front and in the first days of the uprising also the so-called proclamations to the Slovak people. Challenges aroused the fight, gaining reinforcements and sympathy through them. On the other hand, it should not be forgotten that there was a loss in our areas (Spis, Liptov and Horna Nitra).

Table 2 Sequence of events taking place during the Slovak National Uprising [21,9, 22]

Date	Event
August 29, 1944	Counter-insurgency speech (F. Čaltoš), opening of insurgent actions (J. Golian), occupation of Banská Bystrica by insurgents
August 30, 1944	Broadcasting of the Slovak Free Transmitter, General Mobilization
September 1, 1944	SNR Declaration
September 2, 1944	Demise of the Government (V. Tuka), the hardest insurgent fighting (Strecno)
September 5, 1944	Rebel and partisan units retreat (B. Bystrica - Zvolen - Brezno)
September 8, 1944	Carpathian-Dukla operation (Svidník - Prešov)
September 18, 1944	General attack by German occupation troops
September 29, 1944	Armed resistance of the Slovak army against the German occupation forces
October 22, 1944	The last organized action before the uprising was liquidated, the beginning of the surrender of the insurgents
October 27, 1944	German troops occupied B. Bystrica and destroyed the uprising
October 28, 1944	Stopping resistance and dissolving the army (R. Viest), guerrilla way of fighting
November 3, 1944	Captivity of Rebel Generals - J.Golian, R. Viest

Shortly afterwards, German troops lifted out of shock and resumed fights with victories. Nevertheless, we managed to slow down the German progress (Telgárt, Dolná and Horná Štubňa, etc.), so-called the second phase of the fighting.

In the second half of October 1944, however, the rebel command failed to face the intensified pressure of the Germans. The rebel territory began to shrink rapidly. The offensive fight of the German occupation troops proved fully in areas Detva, Zvolen, Banská Bystrica, this is the so-called the third phase of the fighting.

After the occupation of Banská Bystrica by German troops (October 27, 1944) the fight changed to guerilla way of fighting (dissolution of the rebel army). A lot of rebel soldiers were captured or voluntarily decided to give up.

On August 30, 1944, a military ceremony was organized in which the highest Slovak fascist leaders, including Tiso, celebrated the victory over the insurgents. According to Bárta [18], it was a day of humiliation of Banská Bystrica and a rebellious society.

#### 4. Situation after the end of the Slovak National Uprising

However, the break-up of the rebel army and the humiliating occupation of Banská Bystrica did not mean the end of the resistance in Slovakia. The occupation army and regime prevented the existence of a legally democratic administration that existed in the rebel territory. Although the uprising claimed tens of thousands of victims in the lives of Slovak citizens (an estimated 20,000 victims), as well as hundreds of Soviet soldiers, Czechs, Hungarians, French, Germans, Poles, Bulgarians, etc., German troops failed to extinguish combat activity in Slovakia. The task of destroying guerrilla groups, guerrilla movement and civilian population supporting the activities of guerrilla groups (burning dozens of villages - Kľak, Tokajik, Ostrý Grúň and others; executions without a court) reinforced the unwillingness to submit. The inadequate implementation of the decomposition of the idea has therefore become fatal to them. This was also greatly helped by the environment where the guerrillas were pressed. The mountains provided them with sufficient shelter and so had the opportunity to deploy in Slovakia so that they dominated all mountain areas and carry out combat operations. Those at the end of 1944 and early 1945 fought for liberation and peace along with liberation troops. Whether it was Košice, Šahy, Levice or Liptovský Mikuláš, resistance and defeat of the occupiers marked the end of the fascist power and the establishment of a new system in post-war Europe. The Slovak nation thus joined the queue of nations eliminating the rule of fascism.

By building a new state system - the People's Democratic Republic, power was exercised through national committees (local, district, provincial). The Slovak National Council began to politically manage the liberated territory, and the Communist Party of Slovakia, which had a noticeable effect on the further development of the liberated territory, became prominent in the foreground.

#### 4 Conclusion

Despite the intentions and plans that the Slovak State had to pursue during the World War II, we managed to put the side of the anti-Hitler coalition and correct the image of ourselves. Thanks to the Slovak National Uprising, Slovakia can be what it is today. The atrocities that have been carried out directly or indirectly on our nation are redeemed by the lives of the victims of an unprecedented regime. Courage and determination to fight not for ourselves, but for us, is perhaps the greatest gift we have received. And despite the fact that the fight of Slovak soldiers with German troops did not happen according to our ideas, we can still be considered the winners. We can rightly be proud of the tens of thousands of insurgents or guerrillas who have chosen to face a terrible enemy. An enemy who far outnumbered his victim. We can also regard the Uprising as a test of the democratic forces or power of the common people. And even if we want to de-host these acts, however, this rebellion will always remain the longest in Europe. Let us therefore recall these facts so that we do not have to face similar evil once. Let us pay tribute to both known and less-known fighters, respect for freedom and participate in improving the country we deserve.

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