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TWENTY YEARS OF THE INDEPENDENT SLOVAK REPUBLIC – UNIQUENESS AND DISCONTINUITY OF HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

Jozef Špilka*

On the 1st January 2013 exactly twenty years passed since the establishment the Slovak Republic. To mark this important anniversary of independent Slovak statehood, an international conference was held in the premises of the historical building of the National Council of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava on 16th and 17th January 2013. This event has been planned well in advance, and organised by the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences together with the Pan-European University. The conference, which was held under the auspices of the President of the National Council, hosted many personalities of political and social life, experts and scientists from several institutions, not only from Slovakia but also from abroad.

The main subject of the conference was the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, constitutional and international legal aspects of establishment of the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic, as well as economical, political and social development in Slovakia and integration of the newly established states to international structures. Two-day conference was opened by the Minister of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, **Dušan Čaplovič**. Subsequently, the Head of the Office of the President **Ján Šoň** read to the participants the greeting letter from President **Ivan Gašparovič**. The program of the conference was divided into several panels and each panel dealt with particular topics or questions, and consisted of mutually related contributions. After each individual part of the conference a short discussion followed, focusing on the resented contributions.

The introductory panel of the conference consisted of several interesting and stimulating presentation. The first one was presentation of historian **Milan Zemko** from Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. In his contribution he talked about “long or short way” to independent Slovak

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statehood and he outlined brief characteristics of historical development leading to the establishment of the Slovak Republic. His contribution was followed by presentation of **Valerián Bystrický** and **Tomáš Gábriš** about continuity and discontinuity of the Slovak Republic established in 1939 and the Slovak Republic established in 1993. They dedicated their attention to conditions for Slovak's statehood during Second World War, then again in situation after 1989, and, to conclude, they focused on their comparison. The next remarkable lecture, entitled "*Ambitions and failures of progressive development in the 1960s – Slovakia in "early spring" and in 1968*" was delivered by historian **Elena Londáková**. The author in her contribution charted development in Czechoslovakia in the 1960s and drew attention to this interesting period in wider historical contexts. The last discourse of introductory panel was presentation of **Adam Hudek** about historiography related to the division of Czechoslovakia. He analysed selected foreign contributions to this topic in the English language. He concluded that the views on the dissolution of Czechoslovakia beyond our borders are often shaped through the lens of these and similar works. In his lecture the author pointed out the frequent distortion of the views on break-up of Czechoslovakia, or a poor understanding of these issues abroad.

After concluding the introductory panel, the conference proceeded with the second panel focusing on the political and economic development, transformation of the economy to a market economy, the formation of civil society and the issue of the status of nationalities in the Czechoslovak society. The first two contributions of the second panel were a short excursion into different political and constitutional attitude of political parties in Slovakia and in Czech part of Czechoslovakia before its break-up. Another two lectures by **Jozef Žatkuliak** and **Jiří Suk** were focused on Slovak National Council in the context of national status in the years 1990 – 1992 and personality of **Vaclav Havel** and his relationship with the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Federative Republic. Next part of conference focused attention to particular economic situation, further economic development and the problems of minorities in Czechoslovakia. This part of conference consisted of contributions of such professional and esteemed scientists as **Miroslav Londák**, **Jan Štaigl** and **Štefan Šutaj**.

When this part of conference ended, the third conference panel commenced, focusing on international and constitutional aspects of the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and integration of the newly established states –

Slovak Republic and Czech Republic – into international structures. Among many interesting contributions presented during the third panel the audience had the opportunity to attend also the contribution of **Ludovít Hallon** and **Miroslav Sabol** entitled “*Inclusion of Slovakia into global economic structures after 1993*”. This lecture was based on comparison of international position of Slovak Republic with other post-communist countries, especially with the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Slovenia.

The fourth panel was devoted to foreign policy contexts. Presentations at this conference panel included several major foreign experts, such as **Etienne Boisserie**, **Pawel Ukielski**, **Ella Zadorozhnyuk**, and **Miklos Mitrovics**. Very interesting was also the contribution of historian **Slavomir Michalek** about relations between Bratislava, Prague and Washington in 1991 – 1993. The United States were considered as hostile power by Czechoslovakia for more than forty years, but after 1989 in a very short time they became an important ally. Author in his contribution spoke about the U.S. view on Czechoslovakia and its progressive distribution. After the last presentation of the fourth panel delivered by **Zuzana Poláčková**, “*The attitude of Austria to the division of Czechs and Slovaks*”, the program of the conference continued with the fifth panel.

The theme of the last panel was the political, economic, social and societal development in the Slovak Republic during 1993 – 2012. Forasmuch as it was a wide theme which included several topics, the fifth panel was divided into three parts. The first part of the fifth conference panel was devoted to Slovak society and politics after 1993, the problem of economic transformation of Slovakia and the Slovak agriculture. Specifically the contribution of **Stanislav Morong** closely examined the situation of Slovak agriculture after twenty years of existence of the independent Slovak Republic, as well as the issue of food self-sufficiency of the country. The second part of the fifth conference panel charted the relations of churches and the Slovak Republic, the existence or leverage of major churches in Slovakia after 1989 and their relationship with society. Specifically, the attention focused on the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession and the Greek Catholic Church. The third part of the fifth panel dealt with the development of social structure, demographic characteristics of the Slovak Republic or view of Slovakia's population on key events that happened between 1989 and 1992, as well as on the problem of the overall transformation of the society.

After concluding the last fifth panel of the conference the general discussion

was opened, providing floor for the in-depth discussion of some previous topics. During this final discussion several inspiring and remarkable remarks were voiced. The official concluding speech ended the rich program of this exciting two-day conference, which was held on the 20th anniversary of establishment of the independent Slovak Republic.