

A Chance for Slovakia? The Depictions of War and the European New Order in Slovak Press between September 1939 and the German Invasion of the USSR

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Abstract

The aim of the present article is to take a closer look at the war and the new European order as depicted in selected articles from Slovak press. On the outbreak of the Second World War, Slovakia was a young authoritarian state, which was still in the process of developing its internal and foreign policies. The war was a new beginning, which could be, and indeed was, taken advantage of by Slovak propaganda. Slovakia was effectively a place of relative stability in times of war trouble, which also affected how press propaganda operated. Relative peace could serve to validate the political choices of Slovak authorities. The article also analyzes the depictions of the Germans and Adolf Hitler in Slovak press, the rivalry between the Nazi and conservative wings in the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party, as well as the narrative about national socialism as appearing in press articles. My sources are selected Slovak papers ("Slovák", "Slovák Pondelník", and "Gardista"). The Slovaks experienced the war in different fashion than the Poles and many other European nations did, which makes this subject unique and means that it lends itself to extensive further study.

During the wartime (especially until 1944, when the Slovak national uprising erupted), the situation in Slovakia was very different from that in Poland, where the Germans and the Soviets used brutal terror. Another striking difference was the outlook of the Slovak society: what they witnessed was not just the absence of major manifestations of war, but also the unprecedented existence of an independent state (although one which was strongly dependent on the Third Reich), which ushered in a period of the development of Slovak culture and art. To be sure, the war was noticeable, but it was not at the core of everyday life in Slovakia, or at least not to the extent to which it was experienced in Poland.

Said reasons made me take a closer look at the “chance for Slovakia,” that is, the country’s chance to capitalize on this new situation in the history of the Slovak nation, Europe, and the world. The very complex history of this state prior to the Second World War cannot be disregarded. It is true that it included independence, but this was not fully founded on the will of the Slovaks, but rather on the German dictate. The insolubility of state ties with the Czechs was underlined by Andrej Hlinka, who was the spiritual leader of the Slovaks even after his death. The general sentiment was that a strong Czechoslovakia insured protection against Hungary. The fear of the latter was actually not baseless. Back in 1938, the Slovaks lost their southern lands to Hungary, and soon after the country gained independence, the Slovak-Hungarian War broke out, which eventually resulted in the cessation of other territories. The Germans also acquired small portions of land near Bratislava and established a zone in western Slovakia which they effectively controlled. All these blows were landed at Slovakia by countries which were theoretically supposed to be its allies, and this could only result in growing fear among the people, who were now becoming aware that the independence of their country was just an illusion.

The background sketched indicates that a new war, and the resulting new order, could be a chance for a fresh start. The transition period of 1938 and 1939 could be now consigned to the past and a new reality could be created, which must have appeared to represent a chance for Slovakia. Such a depiction of current affairs was the job of domestic press, which had strong ties to the Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party – Party of Slovak National Unity (*Hlinkova slovenská ľudová strana – Strana slovenskej národnej jednoty, HSĽS-SSNJ*), as the fraction was referred to in full.¹

HSĽS was a party whose program was based on the social teaching of the Catholic Church, which was its founding principle, as it was supposed to represent the Slovak Catholics. Its people-oriented profile meant strong focus on social aspects, which was barely surprising in a poor, agrarian country that Slovakia was. In the interwar period, the party also

1 Henceforward HSĽS.

made a name for itself fighting for Slovakia's autonomy within Czechoslovakia, but this aspect was no longer of any importance when Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. The party thus identified as conservative, nationalist, and Christian (it also absorbed the evangelical Slovak National Party, which made it nationwide, not just Catholic). It was also pigeonholed as "clerical," or even "clerical-fascist," but these labels have negative connotations. It is also a fact that operating within the party was a radical wing, fascinated by national socialism, whose influence I will closely inspect in this article. Jerzy Tomaszewski points out that the Slovak constitution was modeled on similar acts in Italy, Portugal, and the pre-Anschluss Austria (Tomaszewski, 2011, p. 113).

I took a closer look at such papers as "Slovák" and "Slovák Pondelník," as well as "Gardista," a press outlet of Hlinka's Guard. They served as my subject and sources for studying Slovak press of the 1939–1941 period, since they were representative because of their strong ties to the Slovak authorities. My aim is not to present the frequency of coverage of the issues of interest to me; instead, I would like to show that some subjects were taken up in the first place, and the very idea of the new order built on national socialism, which accommodated independent Slovakia, recurred in the press as part of intra-party polemics. Slovakia's most popular dailies of that time which I selected are clearly the best-suited for this purpose. They include both texts of strong pro-German nature and those displaying different political alignment (Kamenec, 2015, p. 167).

I selected the timespan in a way I deemed most natural for the Second World War Slovakia: marking its beginning is obviously the September Campaign, in which this state took an active part, while the end is Germany's invasion of the USSR. This latter event was significant in that the military focus of the Third Reich, Slovakia's ally, shifted, and additionally, it was a subsequent stage of a war in which Slovakia itself participated.

Publications on Slovakia, including those on the history of this state during the Second World War period, are still rather scarce in Polish research, even if this subject was obviously discussed in Lech Kościelak's *Historia Słowacji* (Kościelak, 2010) and Jerzy Tomaszewski's *Słowacja* (Tomaszewski, 2011). These books are indispensable to Polish historians studying Slovakia, seeing as they are brilliant syntheses in their field, although they by no means exhaust the topic. Slovak historical studies also leave room for further research, although subjects pertaining to the Slovak State attract considerable interest from local readers and scholars. Of importance here is also the issue of the authors' political involvement, and thus of their impartiality, since the subject lives on in Slovak society.²

2 For example, Martin Schwarc accuses Martin Lacko of trying to rehabilitate the Slovak State and its representatives (Schwarc, 2014, p. 9).

I decided to touch upon the following: the Polish Campaign and how Slovak press depicted and justified Germany and Slovakia's joint invasion of Poland; another issue is Slovak press' stance on the war, i.e. why it broke out, who waged it, who is to blame, and whether it was perceived as something bad at all; then, I discuss national socialism, and in particular if there were at least individual articles extolling this ideology. Addressing these different problems will be instructive of the perception of the Germans, who were not just Slovakia's allies, but also a sizeable national minority in Slovakia. These issues alone should paint a detailed enough picture of the war and the new order depicted in the articles selected, and thus say something about the chance for Slovakia, which was part of the order based on the Third Reich and national socialism.

Polish Campaign

Slovakia's participation in the invasion of Poland was not just about fulfilling the state's obligations toward the Third Reich: it was also a reflection of the public sentiment in favor of taking revenge on the Polish Second Republic for the occupation of Spiš and Orava. Poland's aggressive politics in these lands were a huge blow for those circles in Hlinka's party which sympathized with Poland (Tomaszewski, 2011, pp. 99–100). But this desire for revenge only went as far as reclaiming what the Slovaks considered as their property. They had no aspirations to win new lands, but they were very sensitive about any attempts which they considered to be aimed at what they saw as their natural living space and national domain. On 3 September 1939, Ferdinand Ďurčanský, foreign minister of the Slovak State, used this justification to explain why the country was going to war. He did not believe that this was an action against Poland, but merely fair and just reclamation of what Poland had previously taken away ("Slovák Pondelník", 4.09.1939, p. 2).

Others, however, offered less balanced statements. "Slovák" published an article which drew upon historical arguments to prove that the Polish-Slovak border apparently reached as far north as Nowy Targ and Nowy Sącz, but I would personally interpret such claims as consistent with the earlier narrative. Slovakia's "leniency" was emphasized in the process, since, despite providing grounds for claiming more Polish lands, such aspirations were dismissed, as evidenced in the article's final paragraph, where it is clearly stated that the Slovaks only wanted the return of the territories lost in the interwar period ("Slovák", 9.09.1939, p. 4).

Still, the fact remains that the military presence of the Slovaks was not limited to the lands which they considered their own, although this aspect was downplayed as being out of the hands of the Slovak State. While reclaiming Spiš and Orava was an effort toward the perceived justice, the greater military involvement during the September Campaign

was a result of the German pressure. This fact, however, was to be kept from the Slovak people (Šimunič, 2000, p. 187).

Alexander Mach, leader of Hlinka's Guard, made very clear references to what the Slovaks thought about the Poles in September 1939. He thought they were duplicitous and tried to extort the Slovaks. He accused them of Hungarian sympathies and colluding with Hungary against Slovakia, which he juxtaposed with the true Slovak-German friendship. Interestingly, he was brushing aside the fact that Hungary was also an ally of Germany. But this would have been at odds with the promoted pro-German sentiments ("Slovák", 2.09.1939, p. 4).

The fate of the Polish Second Republic served as a cautionary tale for Slovakia. The outbreak of the war was put down to Poland's recklessness, as it had refused to settle matters peacefully with Germany. Interestingly, a reference was made to the pope and his calls for peaceful resolution. In this view, it was Poland and its decisions that brought about the war. At the same time, this line of reasoning validated the methods adopted by Slovakia: they were characterized by prudence, compromise, and Catholic principles ("Slovák", 2.09.1939, p. 2). In this interpretation, it was Poland itself that went against its Catholic foundations. The title page of "Slovák" dated 16 September 1939 was devoted to massacres perpetrated by the Poles against German civilians. This was supposed to serve as evidence of the superficial nature of Poland's professed veneration for the Catholic faith and prove that the Poles were not a civilized nation. It was also mentioned that the Slovaks could empathize with the Germans since their people living in the Second Polish Republic had also borne the brunt of Polish hatred ("Slovák", 16.09.1939, p. 1).

The blame for this state of affairs was pinned on the Jews, especially those involved with the freemasonry, who were opposing the Third Reich's policies, which the author believed were right. But this attitude was not peculiar to the Poles, instead reflecting the beliefs of the Jews from all over the world. The aforesaid article from September 1939 used the phrase "the Aryan nation," which had been borrowed from the Nazi narrative concerning the erosion of the strong Aryan nation caused by Jewish influences. This was supposed to be clearly visible in the case of the Second Polish Republic, which the author himself emphasized referring to the economic prowess of the Polish Jews and their immense numerical strength ("Slovák", 16.09.1939, p. 10). The Poland ruled by the Jews, freemasons, and feudalists had to suffer a defeat ("Slovák", 7.09.1939, p. 1).

The attitude toward the war

The very way of depicting the Polish Campaign speaks volumes about the Slovak press' attitude toward the war, even if the conflict lasted longer and Slovakia's contribution to it was later less prominent. Still, the war, too,

could be used for propaganda purposes in many ways, be it with respect to the allies' involvement or the relative peace prevailing in the Slovak State.

The discussion of this topic should once again commence with a reference to the Polish-German War, but in a broader perspective including more than just Slovakia's attitude to Poland. "Slovák Pondelník" of 4 September 1939 reprinted Hitler's justification of the invasion. First and foremost, the Second Polish Republic was the most important ally of the British, whose politics were very aggressive, and this was precisely what Poland was to be forced to disavow. The Germans saw Great Britain as the world's biggest warmonger, and this perspective was also adopted by Slovakia ("Slovák Pondelník", 4.09.1939, p. 3). The title page of "Slovák" dated 20 July 1940 read, "Hitler wants peace." This is how the press presented the Third Reich leader's attitude to the war, which the Slovaks did not officially countenance for religious and moral reasons. Because of that, they painted the picture of a just war. From this perspective, Adolf Hitler's hand was forced by the incendiary politics of Great Britain when he invaded other countries. Slovakia, in turn, was in favor of this response, wishing the Reich a prompt victory and God's blessing and invoking the fight for justice and the war's quick resolution to justify its stance ("Slovák", 20.07.1940, pp. 1-2).

Slovak press went as far as describing the German invasion of Denmark and Norway in terms of protecting Northern Europe against the outspread of war. The rhetoric was unchanged throughout: the Germans had to defend themselves against the aggressive British policies. The weak defiance of the Danish was seen as a reflection of sagacity, while the resistance mounted by the Norwegians was considered as deliberate provocation of war. Through this narrative, the Slovak authorities reinforced the popular sentiment that a right strategy had been adopted, since those who stood up to the Germans were bringing military conflict to their doorsteps. The author again used Norway as an example of a wrong choice of dealing with Germany, and the results were in sharp contrast to the situation in those parts of Europe which were free from such tribulations. One such place was Slovakia ("Slovák", 10.04.1940, p. 1).

The press accounted for London's aversion to the Third Reich by the fact that it was precisely the British capital that was the seat of the old Europe, firmly entrenched in the previous order. The new order came with the war fought by Germany and its allies. In the narrative adopted, the new order was espoused by all nations of Europe (and beyond), aside from the British, who just refused to accept that from that point onward someone else would be deciding the fate of the continent. This huge oversimplification, which ignored, among others, the geopolitical situation of Poland, implied that the nations of Europe advocated the order introduced by the Germans by means of their military conquests and as such it warranted claiming that this global conflict is a manifestation of their will. It was only the British tyrants that opposed it, supported by a handful of

mercenaries, a label likely applied to all those standing on the other side of the barricade, including numerous citizens of former Czechoslovakia (“Gardista”, 14.06.1941, p. 1).

Presenting some opportunity for Slovakia was also the fact that the conflict progressed without its major military involvement. Faith was placed in Hitler’s victory and his new European order. The war found the Slovak State at its very inception, and it was argued that this could only solidify its liberty and independence. To an extent, parallels could be drawn to the enthusiasm of scores of Poles on the outbreak of the First World War, when any change of the adverse *status quo* could only be a change for the better. Similarly, the new order may not have guaranteed full independence for Slovakia (it was independence *de iure*, but no *de facto*), but at least it created its statehood and could further cement it (“Slovák”, 16.07.1940, p. 1). An outlook was promoted that the Slovak Republic was the first country born from the principles of the new Europe. The spirit of this Europe – thanks to the war and German triumphs – could pervade the entire continent, or maybe even the whole world, but the Slovaks would know that they were the first to welcome it. That way, the Slovak State could be presented almost as the precursor of the new order, and not merely as its beneficiary (“Slovák”, 17.07.1940, p. 1).

A perfect finishing touch to the picture of the war is the description of the German invasion of the USSR. Obviously, the event fit perfectly in the Slovak propaganda, which was extremely critical of communism and praised the Third Reich’s progress and the resulting expansion of the new order. According to “Gardista,” the invasion of the USSR marked the beginning of “the decisive battle against Jewish bolshevism.” Here, too, Hitler had been allegedly provoked by the Soviets, who had set their sights on Eastern Prussia, so he was not the aggressor (“Gardista”, 22.06.1941, pp. 1-2).

The attitude toward national socialism

Nazism as the Third Reich’s ideology would obviously affect the Slovak society.³ Of importance here was the German protectorate of Slovakia and the alliance of these two states. Slovak press reflected the increased importance of national socialism and the fascination for all which underlay its fortitude in Germany. These tendencies were particularly visible from August 1940, when the radical (Nazi) wing of the Hlinka’s Party grew in strength at the expense of the party conservatives. Among the foremost advocates of national socialism in Slovakia were Vojtech Tuka, prime minister and minister of foreign affairs, and Alexander Mach, who favored the

3 Even if the ideology itself never won over the people (Lacko, 2012, p. 80).

implementation of the Nazi Germany model in Slovakia, which was more extensively described with the use of particular examples (Šimunič, 2000, p. 187; Kościelak, 2010, p. 345; Lacko, 2012, p. 78; Kamenec, 2015, p. 160).

Even before the war, the Catholic Church spoke unfavorably about Nazism, so one of the aims of the propaganda was to convince the people that in truth, national socialism was not at odds with the teaching of the Church.⁴ Tuka had undertaken this venture, and his vision proposed the creation of a domestic version of Nazism, which, as he suggested, would be rooted precisely in the religiousness of the Slovaks. This aspect was supposed to guard this incarnation of national socialism against any elements of anti-Catholicism. That way, Tuka was taking on a problem which was fundamental from the perspective of a Catholic country, that is, Nazism's well-known aversion to the Catholic Church in Germany, although, in a sense, such interpretation was itself exaggerated to him. His opinion was that the general situation in the Third Reich did not indicate that the Catholics living there experienced any problems practicing faith. This was an extremely superficial treatment of the subject of the relations between Nazism and Catholicism, but a more thorough approach would have barely lent plausibility to Tuka's hypothesis ("Slovák Pondelník", 26.08.1940, p. 1; "Slovák", 27.08.1940, p. 2).

The Party's conservatives used similar arguments, anyway, but in their case, this was not in order to whitewash Nazism. After the Slovak-German negotiations of 27–28 July 1940 in Salzburg, they were on the backfoot, as the Reich's representatives pointed out numerous instances of negligence on the part of the Slovak State, such as insufficient loyalty, as well as issues in Slovakia's internal policies which were problematic from the German perspective. This was testimony to the true extent of Slovakia's independence and a signal to the Nazi wing of the HSLs to take initiative. The conservatives defended their positions by expressing some interest in national socialism, although they made it clear that they would rather it was in the people's, Christian, and Hlinka's spirit (Kamenec, 2015, pp. 168–167; Lacko, 2012, pp. 80–82).

Minister of justice Gejza Fritz believed that national socialism was a response to liberal egoism and unhealthy individualism. To him, the "socialism" part meant something completely different than in the case of Marxist socialism, since the focus of Nazism was not on material things, but on the sense of national community of hearts and minds. Fritz spoke about common equality of the Slovaks, also in terms of origins, which is why he found the national socialism ideas particularly suitable. He made no secret of the fact that it was the German model that was his beacon,

4 The issue of reconciling Pius XI's *Mit brennender Sorge* encyclical with the policies of the Slovak State is discussed by Jerzy Tomaszewski (Tomaszewski, 2011, p. 120).

and being in the German political camp only served to strengthen his desire for Slovakia's convergence with the Third Reich. Interestingly, Fritz glossed over whatever could raise suspicion from the Catholic point of view, at the same time accentuating all those elements of Nazism which were in line with the teaching of the Church, hence the criticism of egoism and Marxism and the emphasizing of the system's communal nature, which was particularly in tune with solidarity which the Church promoted. All this was premeditated, since Fritz intended to present Nazism as remaining in perfect harmony with Christianity and, as such, with the views of the Slovaks. Slovak national socialism was to be modeled on the German version and at the same time to naturally reflect the beliefs of the people ("Slovák Pondelník", 26.08.1940, p. 3).

Vojtech Tuka saw three options for Slovakia and perhaps for the whole contemporary world: following the path of liberal democracy and capitalism, which had so far carried the day in Czechoslovakia, or shifting to one of the two regimes – national socialism or communism. At the same time, he was obviously in favor of developing a Slovak version of national socialism. In his opinion, liberalism and democracy had already become obsolete and there was no room for them in the emergent world, as evidenced by the military outcomes. He believed that national socialism was the future and taking its side would insure general prosperity for Slovakia ("Slovák", 27.08.1940, pp. 1, 3).

"Gardista" triumphantly announced "a new era for Slovakia." The old Europe, which was dying as the war progressed, was a Europe which thwarted the less powerful nations, including Slovakia. The new Europe was a continent of just and fair national socialism. The Slovaks aspired to be at the forefront of the incoming change. They wanted to be trusted friends of the Third Reich, on which the new hope of the Slovaks rested. The war was an opportunity to create a new order in Europe, and Slovakia believed it could play a role. The condition was to stand side by side with Nazi Germany, but apparently not just political- or military-wise. Clearly, there was a desire to emulate the Third Reich in every respect, and particularly in terms of ideology ("Gardista", 2.08.1940, pp. 1-2).

The press wrote that Nazism was also winning in countries which were seen as the staunchest defenders of democracy. Great Britain was mentioned in this context, whose authorities, for fear of losing power, had allegedly renounced democracy in favor of Nazi Germany methods. But this could never have worked, since national socialism is not just words and actions, but also the good will of the whole society. This supposedly proved that even the most ardent advocates of democracy had lost faith in this system. Mentioned on top of that was the greed of British rulers (also those labeled "Jewish barons"), who had compromised on their ideals just to stay in power. All this was in contrast to what their enemies were doing in Germany, where the people were the *de facto* rulers and national socialism had grassroot underpinnings ("Gardista", 1.02.1941, p. 1). In view

of this, the politicians believed that national socialism was also natural for the Slovaks. Obviously, it required some adjustments, which was the reason for emphasizing the “Slovak” part (that way, the system would become fully adjusted for the Slovak society). From this perspective, the German character of Nazism was not an obstacle. It may not have been readily transplantable into the Slovak context, but it was still a good tried-and-tested model.

János Esterházy, leader of the Hungarian minority in the Slovak State, believed, in turn, that Nazism was a German product which was out of keeping with the nature of Hungarians. In his opinion, it was impossible to reconcile the two. He was clearly an outlier, seeing as the opposite stance enjoyed strong support from a considerable number of Slovak political leaders. But Esterházy perhaps wanted to be oblivious to the fact that some Slovakian Hungarians were fascinated with Nazism and an idea had been even floated to form a Nazi party representing the interests of this minority. Hence, while Esterházy’s stance was at odds with Tuka’s and Fritz’s, it is known that many Hungarians did not subscribe to his point of view on this issue, which only goes to prove the power of Nazi propaganda back then (Simon, 2016, p. 97).

This did not help the Slovak Nazi circles lay down social and ideological foundations firm enough to realistically threaten the moderate (or conservative) wing of the HSEs. But another reason may have also been the fact that father Tiso and his allies did not quite shy away from cooperating with the Third Reich, so the situation in Slovakia was very much in the Germans’ favor: not only did they enjoy ideological support there, but their policies were also implemented by those who did not necessarily nail national socialism to their masts (Hrnko, 1988, p. 75).

Adolf Hitler was described not just as the leader of a friendly country, but also as the true father of the Slovak State, which was said to be particularly close to his heart. Slovak papers wrote that he had to win, in no small part because his ingenuity was unrivaled in history. It was further argued that he protected Slovakia not just for tactical reasons, but also because he loved it. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that it was hoped he would enjoy a long life and carry on his mission, which could not be thus seen as inconsistent with the will of the Slovak people (“Slovak”, 20.04.1941, p. 1). However, the Führer did not actually give preferential treatment to Slovakia and the Slovaks. He may well have been grateful to them for standing by the Germans, but it has to be remembered that the Slovak State was founded on his threat, which, if ignored, would have seen the territory partitioned between Poland and Hungary (Gábriš, 2014, p. 59).

Franz Karmasin, leader of the German party in Slovakia, praised this country’s role in creating a new European order, which is barely surprising. He called for the Slovak Germans to cooperate with the authorities of the Slovak State toward that end. He was also mindful of the hope for the radical solution of the Jewish question, which the Slovaks

and the Germans supposedly shared (“Slovák”, 1.08.1940, p. 3). The Slovaks were said to feel that the German minority wanted to cooperate with them, which made for the sense of security and trust in the Third Reich. A separate issue was that the party of the Slovak Germans rather openly supported the Nazi wing of the HŤSĽS. Josef Tiso himself spoke about cooperating with the German minority, which enjoyed a special position in the Slovak State. It resulted not just from the significant dwindling of the previous most numerous minority, that is, the Hungarians, who in 1938 mostly found themselves within the Kingdom of Hungary. But Tiso claimed that it was the Germans that wanted to walk side by side with the Slovaks (Simon, 2016, p. 93).

The Slovak authorities’ favorable narrative about the Germans was necessary because of the actual developments in Slovakia, a country which did not really experience any Slovak-German brotherhood. The Germans were effectively occupying a part of the country, or at least their troops stationed there. They also did not help the Slovaks in their conflict with Hungary, but at the same time forced their increased involvement in the Polish campaign. Citizens must have also been increasingly aware of how the Germans were introducing the Nazi order in the occupied lands (Šimunič, 2000, p. 187). All this required multiple efforts to fabricate the sense of mutual trust and the feeling that the Third Reich was acting in the name of common good.

Conclusions

The selected examples of articles from Slovak press first and foremost confirm the presence of a clearly pro-German narrative. The war against Poland was evidently presented through the prism of German propaganda, as were the Second World War’s subsequent developments. It is apparent that Germany and national socialism were the forces of good, while the defenders of the old order were evil incarnate. This was a black-and-white picture, which did not allow for any shades of grey. Slovakia was supposed to come over as a country which may indeed have been in the area of German influence, but was still a truly independent state. It has to be borne in mind that the texts analyzed did not reflect the actual mood of not just ordinary Slovaks, but also of certain echelons of Slovak authorities. However, this is a direction for further study.

It should not come as a surprise that the press in Slovakia was pro-German and readily copied Nazi propaganda. Slovakia came into being at the behest of Germany; it was a young and weak country in need of a strong ally. The Slovaks themselves knew that and made no secret of it. Comparing the degree of the independence of the prewar and the war-period Slovakia is beyond the scope of this article, but it is a fact that many citizens of the country welcomed the change as a change for the better.

The war itself, seen as a chance for Slovakia, was mostly absent from Slovakia, and the triumphs of the Third Reich, its protector and friend, guaranteed that the state would remain independent, all the more that following Germany's success was the expansion of national socialism to other countries. Slovakia played a special part in this system, having entered the orbit of German influence of its own volition (it was not necessary to conquer it). A result was a situation which the authorities, as well as large portions of the society, had hoped for, that is, being in a position to have a say in what the future Europe would look like. For a nation which still felt the effects of more than a thousand-year-long subjugation, the prospect was incredibly attractive. It cannot be denied that the war and German victories opened up true opportunities for a state such as Slovakia, and from this perspective, 1939 was not a year of defeat and imminent demise, but quite the opposite: it marked the beginning of a new world, which compared favorably to the old one.

It is also of significance that the people in the country felt secure. It appears that the war was not the most important issue for an average Slovak. These were not the days of constant fear, uncertainty, mass murders, or the occupant's atrocities, all of which the war-period history of Poland abounds in. For Slovakia, the 1939–1941 period (or even up to 1944) was a peaceful time. The supporters of father Tiso's rule and of the Nazi wing of the HŤSĽS could feel contentment, while those who did not share the views of the authorities could at least feel safe, because this is what the contemporary Slovakia looked like compared to the rest of Europe: during the wartime, in Bratislava, the capital city of the Slovak State, people led largely normal lives (Vašš, 2018, p. 102).

(transl. by Maciej Grabski)

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“Gardista”
“Slovák”
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