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Act of Federalisation of Czechoslovakia

The federalisation of the Czech-Slovak state was one of the main objectives of Slovak political representation post-1944. Political compromises and the importance placed on the centralisation of state power had buried this vision based on the equal position of both nations – the Slovaks and the Czechs – and on both parts of the state. The issue of Slovakia’s position was urgently opened even in the communist regime whenever the situation was at least partially democratised, and in contrast, when democratisation declined and state centralism won through. In 1956 a law strengthening Slovak national bodies’ authority was passed, but after the return to a hard-line Stalinist course from 1957, these changes were removed and resulted in the adoption of the 1960 constitution, whereby the Slovak Board of Commissioners’ executive component of power was cancelled. The move towards the federalisation of a centralistic administered state was one of the important signs of the renewal process in 1968. However, due to the demanding preparations for federalisation, this important state-legal act could only be implemented after the arrival of intervention troops in Czechoslovakia. The following was written in the explanatory report on the adoption of the constitutional law: ‘The voluntary union of equal state units of the Czech and Slovak nation based on their right to self-determination must become the basis for the new state-legal arrangement of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on a federative basis. For this objective, a Czech national body needs to be created as soon as possible, which would become the body of constitutional political representation of the Czech nation until the implementation of federalization. The establishment of an equal partner in the form of Slovak national bodies is the basic prerequisite of a democratic procedure to resolve all issues associated with federalization. On this occasion, it’s also necessary to constitutionally anchorage the principle arising from the substance of federalization, excluding the defeat of Slovak members of the national Assembly during the approval of new state-legal relations between the Czech and Slovak nations.’ Prague’s parliament adopted the constitutional Law of Federation on 27 October 1968. Three days later it was ceremonially signed by the president, prime minister and chairman of the parliament at reconstructed Bratislava Castle, during which they planted three symbolic lime-trees. The law entered into force on New Year’s Day 1969. The federation removed long-term centralistic state management. The Slovak Socialist Republic and the Czech Socialist Republic were established. Joint federal bodies started to function – government, federal parliament (a people’s parliament with two-thirds majority of members from Bohemia and the parliament of nations with a parity of members of the parliament of Slovakia and Bohemia) and the president. For the first time in the modern history of Czechoslovakia, a separate Czech parliament and government were created. However, subsequent years showed that this process of

..... normalisation was signalling the end of the federation. The Communist Party
..... controlled by dogmatic conservatives again became the most important power
..... centre to control state bodies. Under these conditions, the federation was not
completed but was rather gradually reduced. This was justified by its leading role
as well as the principle of 'democratic centralism' and the need to strengthen the
socialist state. Since the 1970s 'compensation laws' had been adopted, which
changed federation law to increase the competence of federal bodies at the
expense of republic bodies. The constitution of the federation or constitutions of
individual republics were not adopted - a status that endured until the end of the
communist regime in November 1989.



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References: