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Establishment of the Slovak State

The Czechoslovak Republic's fate was decided at the Munich conference in 1938. Wanting to avoid needless panic caused by military action during the liquidation of the country, Hitler modified his secret directives in December 1938: it would now only involve 'police activity.' The disintegration of Czech-Slovakia internally, i.e. without any noticeable external German intervention, was the most suitable result for Hitler. When pursuing this tactic, he encouraged Slovak politicians to declare independence while also assuring Czech politicians that Germany only required that the Czechoslovak Republic adapt to the new situation. While the autonomy of Slovakia clarified relationships with the Czechs, new misunderstandings also appeared. These included personnel issues in the army, the division of financial resources, the lack of investment in Slovakia, as well as the deteriorating position of Czechs in Slovakia. Distrust and conflicts were increasing, which created a good substratum for Hitler's plans. Czech ministers considered Tiso's government to be very radical and to be a start towards declaring Slovak independence.



In this situation a radical group led by V. Tuka appeared in the HSL'S, demanding the creation of an independent Slovak state. Tuka had no political function because influential HSL'S politicians gave him no credence. In 1929 he had been sentenced to fifteen-years imprisonment for military betrayal and espionage in favour of Hungary. After the declaration of Slovak autonomy, Tuka was able to return to Slovakia. In December 1938, at an event in Bratislava he publicly spoke about the need to create an independent Slovak state. On 12 February 1939, Tuka was the first Slovak politician to be received by Hitler, who assured Tuka of his support for an independent Slovakia. Interestingly, on the same day a secret meeting of Czech ministers was held under the leadership of Alois Eliáš, where they concluded that military intervention was necessary in Slovakia and the autonomous government should be deposed. On the basis of assurances from Berlin, they argued that Slovakian efforts for independence were not sufficiently supported by Germany. The military intervention by the Prague government took place on the night of 9 March 1939. President Hácha recalled Prime Minister Jozef Tiso and the entire Slovak government except for two ministers. He then gave Karol Sidor the leadership of the office, which he accepted on the condition that Czech troops leave Slovakia and release the approximately 250 people who had been arrested. The inaccurate term 'Homola's coup d'état' is usually used for the military intervention in Slovakia, and named after the Czech General Bedřich Homola, who resided in Banská Bystrica, and who according to opinions at that



time acted very vigorously.



Mmilitary intervention in Slovakia was regarded by most Slovaks with outrage, since they saw their autonomy being attacked. This was a suitable signal for Nazi policy-makers to ask for the declaration of the Slovak State. German policy-makers pressed Sidor in Bratislava to declare Slovak independence. But Sidor refused this way of establishing an independent Slovakia and so did not fulfil the hopes that had been placed on him. Slovakia experienced difficult moments. They expected a German military strike. Timed charges exploded in Bratislava and unhappy residents demonstrated in some towns. In this situation, German attention was turned to the withdrawn Prime Minister J. Tiso. He travelled to Berlin only after the recommendation of the Slovak government leadership and parliament. In Berlin on 13 March 1939 Hitler exerted strong pressure on him during their meeting. Hitler resolutely stated that Slovakia must immediately decide whether it wanted to declare independence under German protection or 'be left to its own fate.' German minister of foreign affairs Joachim von Ribbentrop then reported that the Hungarian army was moving towards the Slovak border. Tiso stated that only the Slovak parliament could take a legitimate decision with regard to Slovak independence, so he telephoned Prague and Bratislava. President E. Hácha convened the Slovak parliament on 14 March 1939.

Members of the Slovak parliament gathered in Bratislava in a tense atmosphere. All attending members of parliament voted on the issue of 'Who agrees with a declaration of independent by the Slovak State?' by standing to show support. This decision was adopted by parliament under pressure, at a time when the Czech-Slovak Republic's days were numbered and Slovakia had to face the danger of military threat and loss of territory, which could not be effectively prevented. In this situation the establishment of a Slovak state appeared to be the only realistic outcome and to solve the long-term political crisis and resolve an ambiguous situation. The first government of the new state led by Jozef Tiso, who was elected president on 26 October 1939, was appointed the day independence was declared. After passing the constitution in July 1939, the Slovak state was officially called the Slovak Republic. Slovakia developed into an authoritative system in which two groups competed - radicals led by Prime Minister V. Tuka, and moderates led by President J. Tiso. This struggle ended with the moderate group winning and introducing a leadership system in 1942. President J. Tiso became the leader and chairman of HSL'S.

After tense negotiations and threats to bomb Prague, Hitler achieved consent with the occupation of Bohemia at a meeting with President of the Czechoslovak Republic, Emil Hácha. The German army entered Bohemia on 15 March 1939 and Hitler arrived in Prague. Bohemia had become an integral part of the German Reich as the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. The Czechs lost their statehood and faced terror and Germanisation.

According to 1940 data, Slovakia covered 30,002 km² and had a population of 2,655,596, of which 2,591,366 were state citizens and 64,230 foreigners. 2,254,394 (84.89 percent) of residents reported themselves as Slovak, 136,297 (5.13 percent) German, 87,314 (3.29 percent) Jewish, 64,308 (2.42 percent) Ukrainian, 53,128 (2 percent) Hungarian, 38,333 (1.44 percent) Romany, 17,443 (0.66 percent) Czech and 2,063 (0.08 percent) Polish. The dominance of Slovaks was confirmed, which further increased after the occupation of Southern Slovakia by Hungary. In 1940 84.9 percent of Slovaks lived on the reduced

territory of Slovakia, while in 1939 it was only 68.4 percent.

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References: