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The Martin Declaration

In Autumn 1918, the situation on the fronts of the First World War was clear – Germany and its ally, Austria-Hungary, were inevitably inching towards defeat. Slovak political actors sought a solution to this situation. They announced a meeting of the Slovak National Party committee in Martin, the well-known centre of Slovak life. Its objective was to establish a Slovak National Council to represent all Slovak policy. The Hungarian government allowed this meeting because it believed that the assembly would express loyalty to the government. Slovak figures started to arrive in Martin on 29 October 1918, while they were confidentially discussing their next steps. The following morning a meeting led by a lawyer, Matúš Dula, started in the Tatrabanka building in Martin. This declaration meeting elected twenty members of the Slovak National Council (SNC), of which there was a twelve-member executive committee (Matúš Dula, Metod M. Bella, Vladimír Makovický, Andrej Hlinka, Vavro Šrobár, Ján Ružiak, Ferdiš Juriga, Kornel Stodola, Emanuel Lehocký, Samuel Zoch, Emil Stodola and Ľudovít Bazovský). It was understood that its members would intervene across Slovakia and in the entire kingdom. The number of SNC members reached up to 100. Zoch read the Declaration of the Slovak Nation to the assembly. Those present listened carefully, and speakers could then address the assembly at the end. The Národné Noviny newspaper, recognising the historical significance of this moment, emotionally underlined the course of the declaration meeting as follows: ‘The crowd gathered from various places, right arms were raised to the sky as they prepared to swear on the national credo, and they cried: Glory! – We swear! – We will stand or fall with it! And this merged into a thunderstorm and applause lasting minutes. This sound of soaring voices surely reached far away – even beyond borders, into the entire educated world.’



The Declaration of the Slovak Nation is significant because it represented the unification of all Slovak political forces into the SNC. The sovereign SNC openly declared itself the only body authorised to speak and act on behalf of the Slovak nation, while it rejected the authority of the Hungarian government and parliament. This happened without the declaration of the Czech-Slovak State in Prague being known. The Czech-Slovak State is not directly mentioned in the Declaration, but its right to establishment is expressed in principle as the right for Czech-Slovak nation self-determination in Hungarian Lands. As such it publicly opened the path to this solution in Slovakia. In addition to the term ‘Czech-Slovak nation,’ the term ‘Slovak nation’ is also stated in the Declaration. SNC Chairman Dula sent a telegram to the Czechoslovak National Committee immediately after



the declaration assembly, in which he clearly declared the unconditional self-determining right of the Slovak nation and its participation in the creation of a Czech-Slovak state arising therefrom. The text of the Declaration was brought to Prague by the SNC delegation on 1 November 1918. The Czech-Slovak state had been declared in Prague four days earlier on 28 October 1918, a fact unknown during the passing of the Declaration of the Slovak Nation in Martin. So the Czech-Slovak state would be created even without passing the Declaration of the Slovak Nation, but instead it would be as if Slovakia was joining the Czech state, for which the expression of the will of Slovak nation representatives would not be necessary. Such a solution, whereby Slovakia would become only the object of interest of stronger neighbouring nations was not acceptable for present or future Slovaks. In this way, a Hungarian argument could be made for some of the Hungarian territory (Slovakia) being annexed by the Czechs.



In a certain sense, 30 October was a happy date for the declaration meeting. For on this date, mass demonstrations in Budapest turned into a revolution. The fighting power of the government apparatus was paralysed, and nobody intervened against the Martin meeting. The situation in Slovakia continued to be chaotic after the declaration meeting, stabilising only after the clear definition of the demarcation line in Paris, and the arrival of the Czechoslovak army - that would occupy all of Slovakia by 20 January 1919.

Translated from Slovak to English by Darren Chastney, Proofread by Dr Ian Copestake



Prof. Mária Tonková, Prof. Róbert Letz, Prof. Anna Bocková



References: