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## *1956 and Resistance in East Central Europe*

Péter Apor, Sándor Horváth  
Special Editors of the Thematic Issue

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## Unspectacular Destalinization: The Case of Slovak Writers after 1956

Juraj Marušiak

*Institute of Political Science, Slovak Academy of Sciences, Bratislava*

On the basis of archival sources, in this essay I examine the debates that took place among Slovak writers in the spring of 1956 and afterwards. I focus on the clashes between the Union of Slovak Writers and the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCz) that began at the time, and also on the internal discussions among the pro-Communist intellectuals concerning the interpretation of de-Stalinization process. The CPCz leadership essentially brought an end to the “political discussion” which temporarily had been allowed during the “thaw” following the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Research shows that the relatively weak persecutions allowed the gradual development of reformist thinking and the pluralization of the literary life in Slovakia in the second half of the 1950s and, later, in the 1960s. The political clashes between writers and Communist Party took place in both parts of Czechoslovakia in different ways.

Keywords: de-Stalinization; Union of Czechoslovak Writers, Union of Slovak Writers, liberalization, Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Communist Party of Slovakia

### *Introduction*

On the eve of the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the process of reconstructing the communist regime in Czechoslovakia after the crisis in 1953 had come to an end, both in terms of the establishment of a new balance of power within the narrow leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and in terms of setting the political and socio-economic priorities of the communist power. In this essay, I examine the cultural ferment in Slovakia in the spring of 1956 and its aftermath. I focus in particular on the attempts of Slovak writers, mainly those who were members or supporters of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, to liberalize ideological control over literature, which included censorship in practice and an insistence on the principles of so-called Socialist Realism. My aim is to discuss the extent to which the rebellion on the part of the Slovak writers was a predominantly autonomous process in the context of the community of writers in Czechoslovakia. I will also seek an answer to the question as to why Slovak intellectuals, who were

struggling for the liberalization of the regime, were not able to exert stronger influence on Slovak society.

### *The Early Phase of Criticism*

In Czechoslovakia, Poland, and Hungary, the process of the gradual “de-canonization” of so-called Socialist Realism as an obligatory and exclusively allowed style of art had begun before 1956. In 1954, literary texts began to appear disputing the heroic pathos of the “construction of Socialism,” abandoning “Manichean worldviews” and didactic approaches, and seeking to “inform, inculcate, and inspire”<sup>1</sup> readers. The return to individual reflections and emotions, instead of the officially required glorification of the official ideology and policies, was significant for the novel *Sklený vrch* [The glass hill] by Slovak writer Alfonz Bednár<sup>2</sup> and the book of poetry by Ivan Kupec entitled *Nížinami výšinami* [Through the lowlands, through the uplands].<sup>3</sup> However, the first open argument broke out at the end of 1955, when Kupec and novelist Dominik Tatarka (a man who, in 1948–55, had been an active supporter of Socialist Realism and Stalinism) started to criticize the official concept of art and literature openly. Kupec,<sup>4</sup> together with Ján Brezina and other poets, sought the separation of art from political propaganda.

The issue of the autonomy of culture and, in particular, literature from state control was openly raised by Tatarka, when he criticized the novel *Drevená dedina* [Wooden village]<sup>5</sup> by František Hečko, which at that time was considered the most outstanding Slovak “socialist” novel and was praised by the state propaganda. According to Tatarka, the novel was an example of “artificial, scholastic literature.”<sup>6</sup> Tatarka criticized the growing role of the apparatus of the Union of Slovak Writers, and he claimed to create literary groups outside the structures of the Union, i.e. he claimed to seek to change the mission of the Union as a tool that was used to exert control over writers to further the Party’s ideological control over literature. His article met with a negative reaction. Novelist Vladimír Mináč accused Tatarka and Kupec of having made “attempts

1 Shore, “Engineering in the Age of Innocence,” 399, 407.

2 Bednár, *Sklený vrch*.

3 Kupec, *Nížinami výšinami*.

4 Kupec, “Na obranu poézie,” 4–5.

5 Hečko, *Drevená dedina*.

6 Tatarka, “Slovo k súčasníkom o literatúre,” 6–7.

to reconcile idealist esthetics with the esthetics of dialectic materialism.”<sup>7</sup> Hečko, the author of the novel that Tatarka and Kupec had criticized, merged the ideological and political arguments in order to stifle Tatarka. According to him, both Kupec and Tatarka were ready to “sell all our socialism for a cherrystone.”<sup>8</sup> No restrictive measures were taken against Tatarka or Kupec, which would have been unimaginable in the first half of the decade. But during the first months of 1956, the discussion in the weekly *Kultúrny život* [Cultural life]<sup>9</sup> continued. Subsequently, Tatarka criticized not only the abovementioned novel “Wooden Village” as a “tragic mistake of the Slovak literature,” but also the entire official concept of literature, which according to him was “non-realistic, non-scientific, [and] misleading.” He raised the following questions: “[does] our contemporary [literature] express the truth of our life and the feeling of our life? [Does it express our feelings as people] who went through World War II, [and] who fight against the next war?”<sup>10</sup> In his reports, which were published after he had taken trips in Western Europe, he stated, “we don’t want the division of the world, which was invented by the enemy.”<sup>11</sup> This statement prompted a negative response on the part of the First Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS) Karol Bacílek.<sup>12</sup> The dispute between Tatarka on the one hand and Mináč and Hečko on the other is an example of the “differentiation of the political languages of Marxism.”<sup>13</sup> However, it began before the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU. In fact, Tatarka disavowed one of the key aims of Socialist Realism when he stressed that he never wanted to “construct a new type of human.”<sup>14</sup>

The pace of discussions in *Kultúrny život* accelerated after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPSU, as the condemnation of Joseph Stalin by the first secretary of the Soviet Communists Nikita Khrushchev caused an “essential crisis of identity,” in particular among members of the younger generation of the communist intelligentsia.<sup>15</sup> Former CPS official and writer Juraj Špitzer, referring to the Polish

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7 Mináč, “Kríza kritérií,” 6–7.

8 Hečko, “To je to, v čom sa rozchádzame,” 6.

9 *Kultúrny život* – weekly newspaper issued by the Union of Slovak Writers.

10 Tatarka, “Diskusný príspevok Dominika Tatarku,” 4.

11 Ibid.

12 Slovak National Archive (SNA), A ÚV KSS [Archive of the Central Committee of Communist Party of Slovakia], f. [fond] PÚV KSS [Presidium of Central Committee of CPS], kr. [box] 931, Zasadnutie BÚV KSS October 18, 1956. Niektoré ideologické problémy práce strany na Slovensku.

13 Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce*, 114.

14 Matejovič, *Vladimír Mináč a podoby literárneho diskurzu druhej polovice 20. storočia*, 280.

15 Kopeček, *Hledání ztraceného smyslu revoluce*, 114.

literary scientist Stefan Žólkiewski, made the following contention: “discussion of art is political discussion... discussion of the all of life, all social issues, the direction of their development.”<sup>16</sup> In opposition to the Secretary of the Union of Slovak Writers Ľubor Štítnický, Špitzer tried to publish texts by authors who had been the main representatives of Slovak literature before World War II, but these writings had been put on the “black list” since the Communist coup in February 1948 (works by authors such as Milo Urban, Emil Boleslav Lukáč, Ján Smrek, and Valentín Beniak). Špitzer called for a rehabilitation of Slovak surrealist (so-called “nadrealizmus”) poetry.<sup>17</sup> Literary scientist Branislav Choma criticized the prevailing understanding of socialism as “too politicized, narrow, and inhumanly egoistic.” According to him, socialism had to be a “path to greater humanity, greater freedom, and a life that is actually nicer.”<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, only two staunchly Social Realist poets, Andrej Plávka and Milan Lajčiak, openly defended the official cultural policy of the regime. According to Lajčiak, the discussion had to be stopped because it was becoming a “crossroad.” According to him, the freedom of writing was the freedom to write in an irresponsible manner.<sup>19</sup> However, until April 1956, the discussion in *Kultúrny život* was focused on the issues strictly connected with the literature, and it did not affect the broader political and socio-economic context.

### *The 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Czechoslovak Writers and its Aftermath*

The open conflict with the power center emerged during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Czechoslovak Writers (April 22–29, 1956). *Kultúrny život* adopted a pro-reform stance before reforms had even begun, and it declared its open support for Tatarka and his criticism of *Drevená dedina*. More and more articles were printed focusing on intellectual life in Poland, Hungary, and Yugoslavia, i.e. in the Soviet bloc countries in which people enjoyed a larger degree of freedom of speech. Initially, the leadership of the CPCz was anxious about the congress of writers, and it even considered postponing it, because party leaders expected that critics would begin to find a voice. The congress took place in the spring of 1956, when the “discussion” within the CPCz raised by the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU and the process of de-Stalinization reached its peak. About 425

16 “Treba posilniť podiel tvorcov pri formovaní nášho života,” 3.

17 Štítnický, “Za úspech II. Sjazdu čs. Spisovateľov, za ďalší rozkvet slovenskej literatúry,” 3–4.

18 Choma, “Literatúra a naša doba,” 4.

19 Lajčiak, “Diskusný príspevok Milana Lajčiaka,” 6.



basic Party organizations in Czechoslovakia demanded the convocation of an extraordinary Party congress, which would threaten the positions of the CPCz leadership. Among the Slovak writers, Stalinist methods were criticized mainly by Tatarka, Mináč, Ladislav Mňačko and Kupec. On the other hand, the CPCz party leadership appreciated the statements of Hečko and Štítnický, because they defended the “party-spirit of literature against the manifestations of liberalism.”<sup>20</sup>

During the congress, the most famous speeches were held by two Czech poets: Jaroslav Seifert and František Hrubín. Seifert proposed demanding the release of all imprisoned writers and inviting all silenced authors to cooperate.<sup>21</sup> Hrubín required the independence of art from ideology.<sup>22</sup> However, the Slovak writers were actively involved in the congress as well. The novelist Katarína Lazarová criticized the practices of the censors, although people were officially forbidden to speak about the existence of the main authority of press control.<sup>23</sup> She said: “We were in the service of evil headlong. We simply believed that we served the people in the best way.”<sup>24</sup> The Congress condemned “any authoritarian solution of the issues of creativity.” However, the statement according to which the processes which had begun at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPSU had been the “beginning of the new revolutionary process in our life” were not included in the congress’ final resolution.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, the Congress, together with the protests led by university students (mainly in Prague and Bratislava), was the first open confrontation between the Communist power and society after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of CPSU. All speeches held at the congress were published in the extraordinary issues of the writers’ weekly newspaper *Literární noviny* [Literary newspaper] in Czech lands and *Kultúrny život* in Slovakia. At the same time, *Démon súhlasu* [Demon of agreement] by Tatarka was published in *Kultúrny život* in serial form.<sup>26</sup> His prose belongs to the works of alignment with the period of Stalinism

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20 National Archive in Prague (NA), A ÚV KSČ [Archive of Central Committee of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia], fond (f.) 02/2 – Presidium of Central Committee of CPCz, box (sv.) 88, archival unit (a. j.) 106, point (bod) 3.

21 Seifert, “Z diskusie na II. sjazdu československých spisovateľov,” 3.

22 II. sjezd Svazu československých spisovatelů 22–29. 4. 1956, vol. I. (protokol), 243–49.

23 The official name of this institution in Slovak is Hlavná správa tlačového dozoru (HSTD). The name of its Slovak branch was Authority of Press Control (Správa tlačového dozoru, STD).

24 Lazarová, “Z diskusie na II. sjazdu československých spisovateľov,” 3–4.

25 Archive of the Association of the Organizations of Writers of Slovakia (Archív Asociácie organizácií spisovateľov Slovenska), fond (f.) II. zjazd Zväzu československých spisovateľov, box (kr.) B/1.

26 Tatarka, “Démon súhlasu,” 15, 16, 17.

in Central and Eastern Europe, like the prosaic works by Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Vladimir Dudintsev in Russia, and Jerzy Andrzejewski, Kazimierz Brandys, and Adam Ważyk in Poland. The main message of the prose is a call for a return to human individuality and a thorough deconstruction of the mechanisms of hypocrisy among the people, who “lost their personality”<sup>27</sup> in the period of Stalinism.

The first reactions of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of CPCz to the Congress, which was discussed during the session on April 25, 1956, were negative. According to the Bureau, the congress had become a “palace revolution against the Party leadership.” But they were mostly concerned with the speeches that had been held by Czech writers. Subsequently, the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPCz discussed the work and results of writer’s congress on May 21, 1956. According to Jiří Hendrych, the Party Secretary responsible for ideological affairs, “most of the writers remained unconvinced, and they oscillated.” He stressed the expression of “wrong opinions” and “hostile invectives.” According to the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPCz, the congress became an “extraordinary valuable... big political verification of our writers.” Among the Slovak writers, only Mináč and Lazarová won recognition. Hela Volanská was characterized in a negative way.<sup>28</sup>

The position of the pro-reform intellectuals within the Union of Slovak Writers was strengthened after its Plenary Session on June 1, 1956. The first secretary of the Slovak branch of the Union, Štítnický, who supported the official politics of the CPCz, suddenly adopted the pro-reform stance after the Congress. In his speech, he demanded the rehabilitation of the Slovak communist intellectuals who were associated with *DAV*, a left-leaning journal published between 1924 and 1937. At the beginning of the 1950s, they were accused of being “Slovak bourgeois nationalists,” and they were even sentenced in the political trials in 1954. Štítnický condemned censorship.<sup>29</sup> Tatarka demanded the ideological differentiation of the literary journals.<sup>30</sup> The result of the plenary session was the appointment of Špitzer as the new editor-in-chief of *Kultúrny život*. At the time, Špitzer gave voice to criticism of the Stalinist cultural policy, and he advocated a principle of plurality of views published in the journal,

27 Bátorová, *Dominik Tatarka: Slovenský Don Quijote*, 107.

28 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 123, zasadnutie BÚV KSS April 25, 1956. Hodnotenie II. zjazdu československých spisovateľov.

29 Štítnický, “Úlohy slovenských spisovateľov po II. sjazde československých spisovateľov,” 1, 3–4.

30 Tatarka, “Malé vysvetlenie,” 3.

although in 1950–51 he was one of the main promoters of Stalinism in Slovak art, and he actively participated in the Stalinist purges among the writers.<sup>31</sup> The most important outcome of the plenary session was the decision to establish a new literary journal entitled *Mladá tvorba* [Young creation], focusing on the younger generation of writers. Poet and journalist Milan Ferko was appointed as the first editor-in-chief of the new journal.

On May 2, 1956, the Political Bureau of the CPCz, due to the intervention of the Embassy of the USSR in Prague, decided to stop the “discussion,” i.e. the short-term liberalization. Already the General Party Conference, which had been held on June 11–15, 1956 instead of the extraordinary congress of the CPCz, condemned any demands for substantial changes of the official course in order to avoid any requirements for personnel changes. Only the “ideological front” had been identified as a crucial point in the struggle against the “class enemy.” One of the most sharply criticized members of the Political Bureau of the CPCz, Václav Kopecký, the most emphatic representative of the rigid ideological stance, described the writers’ congress as “passionate exaltations in the spirit of pure liberalism.” He equated *Literární noviny* with Radio Free Europe, and he appealed to writers “to clarify their attitude to the speeches presented at the congress,” i.e. to disavow the congress. Subsequently, he stressed that only the Union of Writers would be held responsible for it.<sup>32</sup> In fact, Kopecký was the first party official who publicly condemned the congress and the student revolts, along with Antonín Zápotocký (who had been serving President of the Czechoslovak Republic since Stalin’s death in 1953) and Zdeněk Fierlinger (Speaker of the National Assembly of Czechoslovakia), who attacked the discontented writers immediately during the congress debates. Kopecký held his speech without having consulted with other members of the Party leadership. Therefore, initially, at the first session of the Political Bureau since the General Party Conference on June 30, 1956, he was criticized not only by A. Zápotocký, but also by Antonín Novotný, the First Secretary of CPCz. On the other hand, another member of the Political Bureau, Czechoslovak Minister of Interior Rudolf Barák, backed Kopecký up. Finally, the Czechoslovak Party leadership gave its support to Kopecký.<sup>33</sup>

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31 Drug, “Premeny umeleckého života po roku 1948,” 32–37.

32 Kopecký, Václav. “Povzniesť na vyššiu úroveň ideologickú prácu celej strany” [Enhance the ideological work of the entire Party to a higher level]. *Pravda*, June 16, 1956, 5–6.

33 NA, AÚV KSČ, f. 02/2, sv. 108, a. j. 126, b. 1.

In the summer and autumn of 1956, *Kultúrny život* published editorials written by the former Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPS (1944) and the President of the Slovak Academy of Sciences Ondrej Pavlík, who criticized the Party policy towards intellectuals and reform of education system in 1953 prepared by the Commissioner for Education and Culture Ernest Sýkora, representative of the hard-liners within the CPS.<sup>34</sup> However, Pavlík was known not only as the author of some of the abovementioned articles indirectly attacking the members of the Slovak Party leadership. Several times, he had expressed his support of the rehabilitation of the communist victims of Stalinist political trials, namely in the case of Gustáv Husák and Ladislav Novomeský, who had been accused of “Slovak bourgeois nationalism” and sentenced in 1954.<sup>35</sup> The resistance of the group of writers connected with *Kultúrny život* would probably have been impossible without close informal contacts with some of the members of Central Committee of the CPS apparatus, such as Ladislav Ťažký (who was also a writer), Ján Komiňár (instructor of the Central Committee of the CPS for literature), and philosopher Ján Uher (assistant to Augustín Michalička), who supported the pro-reform initiatives.<sup>36</sup> Uher was the author of a noticeable article in which he inspired intellectuals to communicate with other social strata.<sup>37</sup> However, the activities of these intellectuals and their informal meetings and discussions were monitored by the state security forces, and the state security officers sent regular information about them to the CPS leadership.

The leadership of the CPS discussed the activities of Slovak writers only in autumn 1956, on the eve of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. The report of the state security forces from September 1956 characterized Špitzer as a “saboteur.” According to the document, Špitzer and his collaborators “fight consciously, but in a sophisticated way, not only against certain party officials,<sup>38</sup> but against the party leadership in general.”<sup>39</sup> Novotný put pressure on Bacílek as well. He participated in the session of the Bureau of CPS on October 18, 1956, at which he stressed the “uneven development of the understanding of results of 20<sup>th</sup> Congress in Slovakia and in Czech lands.” According to him, there had been no

34 “O problémoch a úlohách našej inteligencie,” 3.

35 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 945, BÚV March 27, 1957. Stenografický záznam zo zasadnutia komisie ÚV KSS so spisovateľmi.

36 Interview with Ján Uher, by the author of this article.

37 Uher, “Problémy a úlohy našej inteligencie,” 9.

38 Karol Bacílek, Augustín Michalička and Ernest Sýkora.

39 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2248, a. j. 320. Poznátky o Jurajovi Špitzerovi a spol. (1956).

open attacks against the party leadership in the Czech lands, but “[they] continue in Slovakia.” At the same time, he appealed to the leadership of the CPS to solve the “shortcomings in *Kultúrny život*.” Bacílek preferred a successive approach to a frontal attack. He considered removing Špitzer from *Kultúrny život*, strengthening censorship, and organizing a talk with Kupec. If they wouldn’t renounce their views, disciplinary measures would be taken. However, Novotný accused Bacílek of adopting a defensive approach. As a consequence of his intervention the report focusing on the ideological issues in Slovakia, which had been prepared by Bacílek, was rejected by the Bureau, which meant the weakening of the position of the First Secretary of the CPS. Subsequently, the so-called “Slovak bourgeois nationalism” was proclaimed the main political threat, and the campaign against it was resumed. Špitzer, according to Bacílek, was the “elder statesman,” i.e. an informal leader among the writers. As he said, Kupec was perceived by the CPS leadership as a man with “anti-Marxist” views, together with some other former interwar surrealist poets (Vladimír Reisel, Štefan Žáry, Pavol Bunčák) and novelist Bednár. The alliance of the rebelling intellectuals with some former Communist politicians (Špitzer, Plávka) was perceived by Bacílek and Pavol David as a threat to their power. According to Michalička, the Union of Slovak Writers became a “center of revisionist ideas,” and he stressed that not Špitzer, but the Secretary of Union Štítnický was the main source of their inspiration.<sup>40</sup>

### *Events in Hungary and Poland in October 1956 and the Suppression of the Writers’ Resistance*

The uprising in Hungary in October 1956 postponed a prepared intervention against the Union of Slovak Writers. Although the so-called “Polish October,” i.e. the appointment of the former victim of Stalinist persecutions Władysław Gomułka to the position of First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the consequent liberalization of public life, was perceived by the CPCz leadership in a negative way, many Slovak intellectuals sympathized with the changes taking place in Poland. Tough censorship, however, did not allow them to publish any articles opposing the anti-intellectual stance of the CPCz leadership or the speech of Kopecký. Not only Mňačko, but also Mináč were not

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40 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 931, BÚV KSS October 18, 1956. Niektóre ideologické problémy práce strany na Slovensku; Kaplan, *Mocní a bezmocní*, 317.

allowed to publish their articles or open letters reacting to Kopecký's speech at the Party Conference in June 1956.<sup>41</sup>

At its session on October 24, 1956, the Party Group within the Union of Slovak Writers did not accept the interpretation of "Polish October" presented by Bacílek. According to its members, the "slowness of democratization, not the democratization itself, caused the events." Špitzer considered preparing a protest against the dissolution of the Union of Hungarian Writers, but poet Ján Kostra, playwright Peter Karvaš, and Štítnický were against such a step.<sup>42</sup> Finally, on October 26, 1956, the leadership of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers decided to condemn the Hungarian uprising "after the intervention of the Party." Even writers who presented critical attitudes towards the official politics of CPCz before October 1956 participated in the discussions with the citizens living in southern Slovakia, organized by the CPS leadership, including Štítnický, Špitzer, Mináč, Ferko, and others. The aim of these discussions was to prevent the anti-communist mobilization of the members of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia in support of the Hungarian revolution.<sup>43</sup>

In spite of these intentions, *Kultúrny život* was criticized by the head of the Board of Commissioners Rudolf Strechaj because of the alleged misguidedness of the Hungarian revolution. In November 1956, similar statements were made during the informal meeting of Bacílek, Michalička, and other Party officials with writers at the premises of the Central Committee of the CPS. The criticism of some Czechoslovak writers to the official policy of CPCz didn't mean their support to the Hungarian revolution. Therefore, Mňačko in March 1957 joined the delegation of Czechoslovak writers, together with Bohumil Říha, Jiří Marek (from Czech lands) and Viktor Egri (Hungarian writer from South Slovakia)<sup>44</sup> to Hungary to conduct a meeting with Hungarian writers Pál Szabó and Péter Véres. Their mission was to persuade Hungarian writers to support the regime of the new head of Hungarian Socialist Worker's Party János Kádár.<sup>45</sup>

In December 1956, the CPS leadership started to use tougher language addressing the Slovak writers. This was in line with the new campaign against

41 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2267, a. j. 43. Uznesenie Sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 9. novembra 1956 o kultúre; Leikert, *Taký bol Ladislav Mňačko*, 144.

42 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2248, a. j. 319 Správa o slovenských spisovateľoch (1956).

43 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2267, a. j. 40. Maďarsko, Poľsko.

44 In 1956 and in the later period writers Říha, Marek, and Egri were loyal to the official politics of the CPCz.

45 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 947. Zasadnutie BÚV KSS December 4, 1957. Informatívna správa o práci delegácie československých spisovateľov v Budapešti.

“revisionism,” i.e. attempts at political liberalization in the Soviet bloc. On December 15, 1956, Bacílek threatened to prohibit the insubordinate from publishing. David, as the main hardliner within the CPS leadership, quoted the slogan pronounced by Klement Gottwald: “We will not allow subversion of the republic,” which meant the direct threat of violent persecutions.<sup>46</sup> Hečko, who by this time was the chairman of the Union of Slovak Writers and remained committed to the official stance of the CPS, fell into full isolation within organization. He was no longer able to control it, although the party leaders expressed appreciation for his loyalist positions several times. This was the reason for his resignation. In the letter addressed to the CPS leadership on 31 December 1956, he stressed that his resignation was a “protest against the ideological distortions and revisionist tendencies within the Union of Slovak Writers and in all their facilities.” He announced his withdrawal from the Union as well. Lazarová followed Hečko, and she withdrew from all duties within the Union of Slovak Writers as well, but she remained a member of organization.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of the increasingly open threats to the writers and the intervention of the official censorship, *Kultúrny život* pushed to continue its previous course. The editorial in the New Year issue in January 1957 confirmed the commitment of the journal to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Czechoslovak Writers. *Kultúrny život* was sharply attacked by the pro-regime writers, such as Miloš Krno<sup>48</sup> and poetess Krista Bendová.<sup>49</sup> Ideological Secretary of the Central Committee of the CPS Michalička was entrusted with the task of preparing a report on the situation in *Kultúrny život* and suggesting appropriate personnel measures. On the grounds of the reports of the state security forces, a new “categorization” of the Slovak writers and intellectuals was prepared. Hečko, Plávka, Mňačko, Lajčiak, Lazarová, Krno, and Bendová, along with philosophers Ladislav Szántó, Andrej Sirácky, and Michal Topoľský, literary scientist Andrej Mráz, historian Miloš

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46 Pavel David, “Proti zvyškom buržoáznej ideológie” [Against the remains of bourgeois ideology], *Pravda*, December 18, 1956, 4.

47 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 963, Zasadnutie BÚV KSS November 1, 1957. List s. Františka Hečku Byru ÚV KSS zo 17. 10. 1957. Since the spring of 1956, Hečko had not taken part in the activities of the Union of Writers, because of his isolation from other writers and because of his health. Hečko and Jančová, *Denníky 1938–1960*.

48 Miloš Krno, “So zvýšenou zodpovednosťou do nového roku” [With increasing responsibility to the new year], *Pravda*, December 29, 1956, 5; Idem, “Zastieraním nesprávnych názorov nepomôžeme literatúre,” 6.

49 Bendová, Krista. “Na okraj jednej polemiky” [Incidental remark to one polemic], *Pravda*, November 1, 1957, 7.

Gosiorovský, and actor Andrej Bagar were evaluated in a positive way as loyal and committed to the Party. The second group of writers, who were not “on the platform of Socialism and Socialist Realism,” was, according to respective reports, represented by Špitzer, Tatarka, Kupec, Smrek, Reisel, Pavlík, Štítnický, poet Pavol Horov, literary scientist Alexander Matuška, etc. The third group, represented by poets Kostra and Vojtech Mihálik and novelist Ferdinand Gabaj, was characterized as “neutral.”<sup>50</sup> However, the division of writers and intellectuals was more complicated. Some members of the first group were people who had joined the Communist Party before World War II or before the communist coup in February 1948, such as Szántó, Július J. Šefránek, Krno, Lajčiak, Sirácky, Plávka and Bagar, but some of them joined the Communist Party only after 1948, either out of fear (Matuška) or for reasons of professional ambition, as in the case of Hečko, Gosiorovský, Mráz, Mihálik, Kostra, and others. Some of the intellectuals, who were mentioned in the category of “loyal” party members, already adopted a more critical stance with regards to the official course of CPCz, namely Mňačko and Lazarová. However, Mňačko, in spite of his critical remarks concerning official politics, maintained a close personal friendship with Bacílek,<sup>51</sup> and Lazarová was a secret informant of the state security forces. Some writers (Horov, Matuška) manifested their critical stance towards the politics of the CPCz only in private conversations, but the state security forces were well informed about these conversations. By that time, Smrek and Lukáč had been sent into “internal exile”. Before the establishment of communist rule, they had been prominent poets, but due to their political engagement or non-Marxist ideological orientations they were essentially not allowed to publish their works.<sup>52</sup>

Bednár, who was not a member of the Communist Party and expressed his critical stance towards Stalinism, had been assumed to be the exemplary victim of the planned repressive measures, announced by David. His book *Hodiny a minúty* [Hours and Minutes], (1956) contained critical reflections on the moral failures of some active participants in the anti-fascist resistance after World War II and during the period of Stalinism. He wrote about misuses of power,

50 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. P. David, kr. 2248, a. j. 319 Správa o slovenských spisovateľoch (1956); SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 946, BÚV KSS April 5–6, 1957 Návrh téz na rezolúciu ÚV KSS k aktuálnym otázkam medzi inteligenciou.

51 Matejovič, *Vladimír Mináč a podoby literárneho diskurzu druhej polovice 20. storočia*, 122–24.

52 At least Smrek enjoyed high standing among Slovak intellectuals, and he spread some of his poems, which often were anti-communist, among his friends without official permission. Some of his poetry from the pre-war period was published only in 1954. His new poems, written after 1945, were officially published only in 1958, although they had been prepared for publication in 1957.



careerism, etc. The book was published during the short period of political “thaw” in 1956, when censorship was more relaxed. The official daily of the CPS, *Pravda* [Truth], published a review by an official of the Central Committee of the CPS apparatus Viliam Šalgovič (who was a former officer of the state security forces). According to him, Bednár was on the same platform as the people “we had fought against in the past,” i.e. on the platform of the fascists and enemies of Socialism.<sup>53</sup> The state security forces considered imprisoning him, but the Party group in the Union of Slovak Writers in autumn 1956 refused to persecute Bednár. His book was reviewed in a positive way by many other writers and literary scientists, including Mňačko, Michal Chorváth, Ján Rozner, and others. In fact, none of the intellectuals was willing to publish a negative review, which would have contributed to his eventual imprisonment. On the other hand, the Commissioner of Interior Oskár Jeleň stated that the content of Bednár’s book was “scary” and aimed “against our regime.” He pointed out that the editors of *Kultúrny život* regularly submitted articles with “doubtful content,” and they tried to persuade the officials of the STD to allow them to be published. Other members of the Bureau of the CPS urged the adoption of rigorous measures. David stressed that the conflict with *Kultúrny život* had to be solved at least before the CPS congress, scheduled for April 1957.<sup>54</sup> The Slovak leadership put economic pressure on the Union of Slovak Writers as well. They reduced the circulation of the literary journals *Kultúrny život*, *Mladá tvorba*, and *Slovenské pohľady* [Slovak views], all of which were published by the Union, allegedly because of a “shortage of paper.”<sup>55</sup> Whereas Bednár managed to publish his book in the short period of thaw, the publication of a volume of short stories by Mináč entitled *Z nedávnych čias* [From the recent past],<sup>56</sup> which was prepared for release in 1957, was forbidden.

The presidium of the Union of Slovak Writers initiated an informal meeting with Zápotocký. The head of the Union’s delegation was the chair of the Party group within the Union, translator Zora Jesenská. Špitzer was also a member of the delegation. He tried to explain to the president the arguments of the discontented writers. He rejected the notion that there was any connection

53 Viliam Šalgovič, “Slovo čitateľa spisovateľovi Alfonzovi Bednárovi” [Reader’s word to the writer Alfonz Bednár], *Pravda*, April 25, 1957, 6

54 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 942, BÚV KSS March 8, 1957 Informácia s. Jeleňa o nepriaznivých zjavoch v Kultúrnom živote - ústne.

55 SNA, A ÚV KSS, f. PÚV KSS, kr. 940, BÚV KSS February 1, 1957 List Zväzu slovenských spisovateľov BÚV KSS vo veci rozpočtu na rok 1957.

56 Matejovič, “Mináč ako záhadný autor,” 9–18.

between the “discussion” in Czechoslovakia and the Hungarian revolution, but he also disputed the official interpretation of the events in Hungary. According to him, the mere lack of the free exchange of ideas was the reason for the conflict. Zápotocký, however, did not make any changes to the hardline cultural policy. He stressed that the Party would not allow any discussion “aimed to destroy the target: socialism.” “You can discuss at the closed meetings, we can admit even heretical views there, but not in public.”<sup>57</sup>

The Slovak Party leadership decided on March 22, 1957 to establish a special commission at the Bureau led by Jeleň. At the same time, before the establishment of the commission, the members of the Bureau of the CPS decided to indicate Pavlík as an “ideological leader” of the “group” around the *Kultúrny život*, Kupec and Tatarka were indicated to be the main representatives of the “wrong views.” Špitzer was accused of being responsible for the publication of their works, and Štítnický was blamed for alleged “dodging and temporizing” within the leadership of the Union of Slovak Writers. Although Tatarka was criticized several times by the high-ranking party official, at least he was not identified as a member of this “group.” The purpose of the commission was to force the abovementioned intellectuals to deliver “self-criticism.”

The target of criticism was not only the Union of Writers and the literary journals *Kultúrny život* and *Mladá tvorba*, but also the Section of the Social Sciences in the Slovak Academy of Sciences, some other publishing houses, the Faculty of Arts of the Comenius University in Bratislava, and the journal *Slovenské pohľady*.<sup>58</sup> David suggested accusing the “group” consisting of Pavlík, Špitzer, Kupec and Štítnický of “bourgeois nationalism.” “We didn’t fight against them enough,” he contended.

The members of the commission established by the Bureau of the Central Committee of the CPS accused Pavlík and his colleagues of being the Slovak version of the “Petöfi circle,” the Hungarian forum of intellectual dissent in 1956. Jeleň compared the activities of *Kultúrny život* with the attempts to create a “second ideological center,” and the head of the Board of Commissioners accused Pavlík of ambitions to play the role of Imre Nagy in Slovakia. Initially, the Bureau of the CPS did not intend to expel the discontented intellectuals from the Party. However, the Czechoslovak Party leadership decided on April 9, 1957 to expel Pavlík from the Communist Party. Other members of the so-called

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57 Juraj Špitzer, “Diskusia u Zápotockého” [Discussion with Antonín Zápotocký – notes] (1957), manuscript. Inheritance of Juraj Špitzer, personal archive of Dalma Špitzerová (wife of Špitzer).

“group,” i.e. Špitzer, Kupec, and Štítnický, were removed from their positions within the Union of Slovak Writers. Pro-regime poet Plávka was appointed as the new secretary of the Union of Slovak Writers. However, in his reply to a question of Novotný regarding the scope of the “group,” Bacílek insisted that Tatarka and Mináč were involved, in part. He stressed the existence of the close ties with other former Slovak high-ranking Communist politicians, namely Edo Friš, Samuel Falt’an, and Anton Rašla.

In spite of the political and economic pressure put on the Union of Slovak Writers by the CPS leadership, the Party organization at the Union did not accept the resolution against Pavlík and *Kultúrny život*. Ján Proháčka became the new editor-in-chief of the journal. The campaign against the writers continued in June 1956, after the plenary session of the Central Committee of CPCz, which focused on ideological issues. Secretary of the Central Committee of CPCz Hendrych stressed that the CPCz leadership would not allow a “hostile crusade as a token of the struggle against so-called Stalinism, that is, an attempt to destroy the revolutionary foundations of our Marxist-Leninist doctrine.” He refused any manifestations of so-called “revisionism,” and he identified the major task as “discovering and disarming” all of its expressions permanently.<sup>58</sup> Kopecký addressed his speech directly to the Union of Czechoslovak Writers. He demanded explicit distancing from the speeches that had been given by Hrubín and Seifert at the Congress in April 1956. He accused Mináč and Tatarka of “liberalism.”<sup>59</sup> Subsequently, at the plenary session of Czech writers on June 26, 1957, the leaders of the Union of Czechoslovak Writers delivered a self-critical report, in which they rejected all “wrong tendencies.”<sup>60</sup> The resolution of the plenary session contained a condemnation of the statements made at the Congress in 1956. Although the Slovak Union of Writers was only the regional branch of the single centralized writers’ union in Czechoslovakia, its reactions to Hendrych’s and Kopecký’s speeches were different. The leadership of the Slovak organization unanimously approved the thesis of Hendrych’s report, but they did not adopt any resolution condemning the writers’ congress or the activities of *Kultúrny život*. The enlarged session of the Party group at the Union of Slovak Writers convoked on September 18–19, 1957 in the presence of Bacílek, Jeleň, and Michalička with the aim of condemning the congress did not meet the expectations of the organizers. In fact, only Krno, Hečko, and the representative

58 NA, A ÚV KSČ, f. 01, sv. 55, a. j. 57.

59 Ibid.

60 “Zo snemovania Sväzu čs. Spisovateľov,” 1, 3, 6.

of the group of Ukrainian writers living in Slovakia supported the speeches of the official representatives of the Communist Party. The rest of writers present either did not say anything or rejected the persecutions against *Kultúrny život*, for instance Špitzer, Kupec, Mňačko, Štítnický, Mináč, Karvaš, and even the writers considered loyal pillars of the official cultural policy, such as Kostra. Some members of the Bureau of the Central Committee of CPS analyzing the results of the session said that the CPS did not have any “core” within the writers’ organization. The Slovak Party leadership considered the results of the meeting with the writers a clear failure. Therefore, the plenary session of the entire Union of Slovak Writers took place only on December 19–20, 1957, but the issue of the writers’ congress in April 1956 was not discussed.<sup>61</sup> In February 1958, Tatarka was forced to withdraw from the Committee of the Union of Writers as well. The reasons were his articles published in *Kultúrny život*.

### *Conclusions*

The rebellion conducted by some of the Czechoslovak intellectuals in 1956 was suppressed. However, whereas in the Czech lands the Czechoslovak Party leadership successfully managed to compel or persuade writers to capitulate, i.e. to distance themselves from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of Czechoslovak Writers in April 1956, in Slovakia they did not enjoy the same success. Although the Slovak writers were not more radical in their requirements than their Czech colleagues, they resisted more efficaciously. The leadership of CPS was forced to restore control over the writers’ union and literary journals through administrative measures, although they tried to avoid it. One of the very important results of the short-term liberalization of cultural policy in Slovakia in the spring of 1956 was the establishment of the new literary journal *Mladá tvorba*. The new journal provided a forum for the publication of several “generation layers”<sup>62</sup> of younger poets and writers who had not been able to or had not wanted to publish their works after 1948, because the works in question had not conformed to the obligatory style of “Socialist Realism.” From this perspective, the new milestones in Slovak literature were not only the novels and short stories by Bednár or “Demon of Agreement” by Tatarka, but also the publication of the first collection of poetry by Milan Rúfus (*Až dozrieme*, or “When We Grow Mature,” 1956), which became

61 Chrováth, “Pred plenárkou slovenských spisovateľov,” 1, 4.

62 Petrik, *Hodnoty a podnety*, 274.

a signal of the comeback of lyrical poetry based on the individual's reflections on the surrounding world. At the same time, the poetry of Kupec (*Nížinami, výšinami*, 1955) was a signal of the return to the sensualist poetry characteristic of the interwar avant-garde movements. The “thaw” in 1956 brought the first attempts to return to literature by non-communist authors, which had been forbidden since 1948. However, the process of the “rehabilitation” of the Slovak non-communist literary heritage took a long time, and it continued well into the second half of 1960s. In spite of the strengthening of censorship, which began in the summer of 1956, the volume of the new poetry of Smrek was published in 1958 (*Obraz sveta*, “Image of the World”), which contained several allegorical allusions to communist ideology and politics.

The most significant change was a discreet, unspectacular change in the relations between intellectuals and power. This process had already begun in 1955, thus, the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU was not so much a new spark as it was an event that catalyzed and accelerated discussions among the Slovak writers. Very strong informal ties persisted between pro-communist intellectuals, who remained committed to the official ideology in spite of having criticized the cultural policy of the regime and the lack of the freedom of speech. This was true of writers such as Mňačko, Štítnický, Mináč and Špitzer. On the other hand, if the ruling elites wanted to restore their control over the Union of Writers and the journal *Kultúrny život*, they could not rely on the loyal writers within the union and the literary community. They were forced to take administrative measures. Due to the low support among intellectuals, but also due to the exhaustion of the rigid style known as Socialist Realism, it was impossible to restore the esthetics and power relations in the field of culture that had prevailed in the period before 1956. The mechanisms of direct control and censorship were still applied, but to a lesser extent than in the first half of 1950s. In addition to these mechanisms, mechanisms of “negotiation” were often applied, especially in terms of censorship. The lack of any direct confrontation between the communist power and intellectuals in 1956 contributed to the gradual liberalization of cultural policy during the second wave of de-Stalinization in Czechoslovakia, which began in 1963. Although the “cultural ferment” in Czechoslovakia and, in particular, in Slovakia was in many ways connected with the processes underway at the time in Poland and Hungary, it was an autonomous movement. In the case of postwar Czechoslovakia, it is significant that even the clashes between the intellectuals and power took place, to a large extent, separately in the Czech lands and Slovakia.

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*1956 and Resistance in East Central Europe*

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