
Ethnic Polarisation in an Ethnically Homogenous Town*

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Abstract: The study analyses ethnic relations and ethnic identity based on the example of Bratislava in the 20th century. The obtained ethnological material allows the author to conclude that the change of political system had affected the ethnic structure of the studied town. This was due to the migration of population as well as to elements of social engineering, which accompanied practically any change of the regime, but also due to so-called 'migration on the spot', i.e. a declared adjustment to political winners. In the first half of the past century, Bratislava was a tri-lingual city located at the borders of (Czecho)Slovakia, Hungary and Austria. After WWII, the city changed (at least statistically) into an ethnically homogenous environment, in which the Slovak ethnic group made up more than 90 percent of the whole population. In spite of this, the individual's identity and relations among citizens continued to be influenced by their ethnic affiliation. Its significance was already manifested during the first days of November 1989, but particularly in the following years. The identification with an ethnic group again became a differentiating factor (or even a polarising one) in urban population. It seems that ethnicity is likely to affect the character of the studied town in the nearest future too.

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This article will summarise the problems of ethnic relationships among the residents of Bratislava during the 20th century. The lives of the citizens in this period have been repeatedly and significantly influenced by political twists that changed the society. They also affected their personal integrity (and ethnic identity). The analysis is based on documents drawn from ethnological research and data from archives and period newspapers.

The town we will talk about is situated on the borders of three countries, and hence also three languages. It had several names. The German name, Pressburg, was its official name until the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, but it was also known under the Hungarian equivalent Pozsony, or Slovak, Prešporok. (This detail itself signals the ethnic plurality characteristic of this place up to the year 1938.) The change of the historical name was among the first steps of the newly established Czechoslovak Republic (1918). The name Bratislava refers to its historical roots in the Great Moravian Empire and it illustrates the government's systematic intention to eradicate the non-Slavonic character of the town. This was the first step towards its future ethnic homogeneity. The residents responded by forming two informal ideological groups, known as the 'Prešporok' and the 'Czechoslovak' societies. They differed in their attitudes toward the present or former governments and also in their approach to the past and future of the place in which they lived. Although the regime tried to diminish the use of the former Hungarian names of the town and the institutions, old German and Hungarian residents (but also some newcom-

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ers) are proud even today to call themselves 'Pressburgers' or 'Prešporaks'. They, traditionally, speak all three town languages, often favouring the 'traditional' German or Hungarian languages. Also, this makes them different from 'Bratislavers' (Slovaks or Czechs) coming mostly from the Slovak countryside. The differences were not only formal, they were also manifested in their approaches to the modernisation of the old town quarters: "Some did not like what recalled the past, and some did not want any changes even if they were for the benefit of Bratislava" [Kočí and Dvořák 1991: 20]. The press of the period shows both views: official enthusiasm for building (and destroying the past) and disagreement with the replacement of historical objects with modern ones: "Old buildings are demolished and new, modern, hygienic ones are built to replace the small, unhealthy, wet flats. The old spirit of Bratislava, the former county town, disappears and it becomes the real capital of our country. The newspapers of the old Bratislava residents do not favour such development, therefore they express their fear" (*Slovenský denník*, 29 April 1937).

During the 20th century the ethnic phenomenon now and again played a decisive role in shaping the town structure. It seems that the presence of several ethnic groups softened the ideological polarisation of the residents and enabled them more often to express tolerance in solving conflict situations. Conversely, when as a result of social processes one ethnic group gained hegemony due to government pressure (at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries it was the Hungarian ethnic group, after 1938 the Slovak population), the position of members of different nationalities deteriorated and intolerance increased. The tendency of the development was clear: the pluralist society (also due to forced migration) was changing (at least in the view of statistics) into an ethnically homogenous one. According to the census after World War II, over 90% of the population declared Slovak nationality. In spite of this, ethnic tensions survived silently (especially aimed at the Roma people and Jews, to a lesser extent the Czechs) and came into view after November 1989.

From the middle of the 19th century Bratislava was an important centre of state institutions. This resulted not only in an increase in population, but also in an expansion of administrative institutions, industry and ideology. Bratislava became the destination of newcomers drawn by new job openings and cultural opportunities, but many of them were attracted by the vision of power and functions. Satisfying the demands of the loyal supporters of each new system was inevitably detrimental to the 'former' ones, who had to leave their posts, usually gained not so long ago (under the previous regime). Therefore, with each change, the representatives of the new power perceived the often ethnically defined groups of Bratislava residents as their enemies. Their posts, flats, and properties were offered to those who were expected to support the new regime. Such lures and sanctions enforced not only the real movement of the population, but also a 'migration in place', that is, a declarative assimilation into an ethnic, social or other politically preferred identity of the actually protected status. Ethnological research shows that such shifts were not rare: "If the main required qualification for a function is a certain confessional, social or ethnic (political) identity, which, in the given society, can be also acquired in a different way than by birth only (e.g. by accepting christening/converting, marriage policy, declaration of national or class identification), usually nothing encumbers the acceptance of such a function." [Chorváthová 1993: 93-94]

The multicultural character of Bratislava survived until World War II, although its ethnic character, at least statistically, changed greatly. From its origins until the middle of

the 19th century it was mainly German. The Austro-Hungarian compromise (1867) and the ensuing legislature brought about increasing Magyarisation. Table 1 shows that in the given place this process was most detrimental to the Germans, the most numerous population till then. The establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic prompted another change in the ethnic structure. The number of members of the (Czecho)Slovak nationality increased in a short time because of people who had declared themselves of German or, most of them, Hungarian nationality till then. Jews constituted about 12% and they declared themselves German, Hungarian and to a lesser extent Slovak [Hromádka 1933: 80]. According to Elena Mannová, the turning points in the ethnic development of Bratislava were mainly the 1890s, and the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic. To support her statement she quotes the memoirs of Ivan Dérer, who came to study in Bratislava in 1893. He says that the prevailing population was German, and only state administration was already mostly Hungarian. In the 1890s "the growing Hungarisation, the deliberate state policy of Hungarian governments, ousted the Germans from their leading positions and in the first decade of the 20th century the proportion rapidly changed in favour of Hungarians". The Jewish population contributed to the changes, because "the older Jews declared themselves of German nationality, while the younger generation was swimming in Hungarian rivers." [Mannová 1999: 55] However, I think that the turning point in changing the ethnic structure and the production of polarity in the town was the decade 1938-1948, when new tendencies in the development were established, and they function until today.

There were two main elements in forming the structure of Bratislava: the natural attraction of the administrative, political and industrial centre and the pressure of governments, including principles of social engineering. All regimes and state forms that followed until 1989, used such pressure (not with the same force). The arrival of members of certain ethnic groups, and after 1948 social groups, were motivated by promises of privilege, and their loyalty was expected. On the other hand, those who were seen by the new power as a potential threat, left the town 'willingly', or more often by force. Such contrary movements were permanent; however, their intensity grew from the end of 1938, when on Slovak territory "...totalitarian political culture was established with all its malpractice, only its types and manners changed" [Kučera 1993: 57]. The climax of social engineering was in 1938-1953, during the fascist regime and the outbreak of communist totality. We can speak of an exchange of populations. During one and half decades a forced departure of Czechs, the deportation of Jews, the expulsion of Germans, and the drift of a part of the Hungarian population took place. Members of the 'bourgeoisie' had to leave the town because of so-called 'Action B'. In the first place, they were representatives of a town creating urban middle classes. As a natural result, all official statistical data from the beginning of the 1950s have confirmed the domination of the Slovak population. It might be useful to define this borderline also in terminology, and from this date to distinguish between pluralistic Prešporok and monoethnic Bratislava.

In spite of political pressure and the ensuing changes, research and memoir literature, memories of citizens and the period press, all without any difference, characterise interpersonal relationships at the end of the monarchy and especially during the Czechoslovak Republic, as tolerant. Such an evaluation is not restricted to official sources only, but concurrent testimonies are also expressed by the representatives of minorities (Czechs, Hungarians, Germans, Jews). Ethnic tolerance is symbolically expressed in the official tri-lingual names of streets, and for example in the informal atmosphere of wine

vaults: "One table was Hungarian, the other one German or Czech or Slovak – and all sing in all languages, because here everything is equal (...) a Czech talks to a German, a Slovak to a Hungarian and a Slovak to a German and there is no animosity, no anger." [Přibík 1930: 24-25] The situation can be indirectly illustrated through the town promenade. In Prague and Brno there were two town promenades, distinguished along ethnic principle – a Czech and a German one [Torberg 1975, Bočková 1993: 30]. In Bratislava, the difference was social: the "Gentlemen's promenade was intended for middle classes and students, and the so-called 'Anča promenade' was a walking place of soldiers and servants [Luther 1991: 155 et seq.]. The shift from liberal to totalitarian systems was accompanied by the onset of until then only marginal elements. According to the historian Ivan Kamenec: "The element of fear literally irrigated the fate of Slovakia and Slovak policy at the end of the thirties of the twentieth century and stayed there firmly rooted for over fifty years. It is clearly demonstrated in official state policy and in the attitudes of the whole society and individual persons." [Kamenec 1992: 38] Our knowledge of Bratislava confirms the adaptation of the population to the changes in the situation. The actual attitude might not always reflect their personal beliefs, but the response of individuals is also influenced by their surroundings, tradition and their social culture. In undemocratic countries this works in addition to legislature, which can define a certain ethnic group as an enemy or even publicly condemn it to liquidation.

Actual attitudes of different generations and groups of the Bratislava society were united by a common denominator: *the similarity of human adaptation processes in culture, the way of life and morale in an existing, although always different political situation*. Tolerance in interpersonal relationships prevailed in democracy and it seemed that any other solution to a situation would be 'bad' or 'foolish'. However, the change in regime very quickly influenced the behaviour of the citizens. Under totalitarian conditions intolerance prevailed, and again (within the context of the period, with no comparison to other periods) models of behaviour, based on mistrust and hiding identity, seemed to be a 'natural' and generally accepted response to the situation. This trivial, logical explanation suggests that the differences between historically different periods, though very close in time, resulted from migration processes following each social change. It seemed that the different response was caused by different people, newcomers, and the young generation. However, the analysis of statistical data showed that such an explanation was not satisfactory. A part of Bratislava society manifested the above-mentioned 'migration in place', and a formal declaration of the 'suitable' identity. The pressure of social engineering has changed not only the structure of the town as a whole, but also the individuals living there.

Such changes were present also in democratic society, but they became prominent in authoritarian regimes, which were in power in the period 1938-1989. When studying the models of interpersonal relationships until 1948, possible conflicts seem to have ethnic origins: Slovak-Czech; Slovak-Czechoslovak; Slovak-Hungarian or German. The attitudes to the numerous Jewish minority (14,900 citizens according to the 1930 census) were not always positive. Hungarian and German 'old' inhabitants sometimes had conflicts among themselves or with the representatives of the Czechoslovak government. Bratislava gradually changed into an ethnically, culturally and politically homogenous, but socially intolerant city. Political changes within one decade reached different social groups, which resulted in general conformity: After 1950 more than 90% of citizens declared Slovak nationality (although in private some of them declared Hungarian, German

or Jewish origin); socially (at least according to the official data) the working class and its culture prevailed; 99% of the citizens voted for the candidates of the National Front etc.

Already towards the end of the monarchy and during the First Czechoslovak Republic the enemies had been defined on an ethnic basis. The repressive measures of the government in 1938-1945 threatened not only property or social positions but even lives. Sanctions were aimed especially at 'Non-Slovaks' – Czechs, the Roma people, Hungarians. (Jews were in a special position. As Petra Lárišová [2000] illustrates, in the 1940 census it was obligatory for them to declare themselves Jewish, regardless of the ethnic or religious identity they declared in the past.) The government was less strict with Slovak ideological enemies. Attempts to hide an 'inconvenient' personal identity from the official bodies, but often also from the neighbourhood or one's own family, belonged among the basic conditions of survival. The same guideline was applied in 1945-1948, but this time Germans and Hungarians were labelled as the 'enemies'. Only those who could prove their anti-fascist attitudes were exempted [Palečková 1946: 42].

According to the historian Dušan Kováč "one generation went through so many radical changes that it made their attitudes to the state and the regime relative" [Vagovič 2001: 11]. Such relativity was reflected also in the attitude to one's own personality. Threatened people chose various alternatives to defend themselves. They changed their ethnic origin (sincerely or shamming), they were baptised or they declared themselves atheist, they 'updated' their surnames, later they concealed their bourgeois ancestry and manifested their proletarian origin. Different groups (till then 'safe' or 'positive' ones) found themselves in similar situations after World War II and this was reflected in the (similar) responses of their members. Fear, inspired by historical experience, forced them to conceal their 'dangerous' identity from the authorities, the neighbourhood and often even from their children. They wore the masque of loyalty to the regime even in the privacy of their families. However, such a disguise was usually accepted as a temporary arrangement. Among confidential friends they often stressed the values of their 'true' identity and they planned the return to the original ('real') status as soon as possible. According to some authors, there were many who could not remove the masque even when the changed situation not only allowed it but even promised benefits. Marián Leško believes that "each human act has feedback on the person who has done it. If somebody wears a masque to disguise himself in the neighbourhood for a long time, he cannot be surprised if the masque grows into his/her face" [Leško 1993: 84]. We observe adaptation to the new regime more often than maintaining as 'uncomfortable' values. Such behaviour continues in various forms in the lives of threatened groups after 1938 or 1945, after February 1948 and in the period of 'normalisation' after August 1968. Havel's 'life in a lie' is not a specific feature of a socialist regime, but a common model of survival under totalitarian conditions [see Možný 1991].

I have already noted that the borderline dividing the 'loyal' and 'former' people ran mostly along the ethnic lines, after February 1948 it was formed by class criteria, though when needed ethnic criteria were applied, too (the struggle against bourgeois nationalism, Hungarian irredentism, 'German fascists', Zionists etc.). This means that, for example, the events in the periods 1914-1918, 1938-1945, after 1948, 1968, 1989, in spite of apparent diversity, had for entire groups of Bratislava residents comparable effects:

1. They always brought a restructuring of the population according to certain criteria, given by the governments;

2. They started the adaptation of the individual to new conditions;
3. The system of values gradually changed. The 'limits of social tolerance' modified as well. What had seemed not so long ago as improbable or even impossible, became a reality in new circumstances [Salner 1998: 111].

A global view of the twentieth century allows us to summarise that in spite of formal differences we can always differentiate between two groups of town residents: the active minority represented by those whose ambition (as parts of social movements) is to lead the society. It does not matter if they try to stabilise or change the existing situation. A quantitatively decisive element of the Bratislava (and Slovak) population is the passive and changing 'silent majority'. Alongside historically determined differences, in retrospect they are united by a single fact: *At first only through external manifestations, later through forms of everyday life and a system of values, they as a whole adapt to the winner* [ibid.: 112]. We find such attitudes in all studied periods. It results from the experience shared by generations. Folklore ('high spikes are the first to be cut', 'to piss against the wind does not pay') corresponds with the conclusions of the political scientist who states that Central Europe (including Slovakia and Bratislava) represents a very unfavourable environment for heroic acts [Šimečka 1990: 191].

A brief analysis of the town society at the end of the monarchy signals its pluralist character. Intensive Hungarisation after the Austro-Hungarian compromise in 1867 could not change the existing situation. Although statistically the number of Hungarians more than doubled in two decades, the ethnic diversity survived, because German, Slovak and Jewish residents retained an important footing in society. In a simplified way, shifts in the first two rows of data in Table 1 could be interpreted as only the result of government pressure and fears of the discriminative effects of the policy of Magyarisation. This explanation is out of the question if we take into account the results of the 1930 census. It shows that adaptation to the 'winner' continued under democratic conditions and the ethnic tolerance of the First Czechoslovak Republic as well: in a short time the number of Slovaks doubled (and the number of Czechs increased, too), while the proportion of Germans and especially Hungarians fell considerably. Fear was not the only reason, it became prominent only later [see Kamenec 1992]. The fact that people were not afraid of declaring their nationality openly is evident in the wide range of activities of various associations in which not only the 'state building' nationalities participated, but also minorities. According to Elena Mannová, after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, "Hungarian and German associations watched for the development of the state policy and their activities sparked only after 1920. An association boom burst in the twenties in Bratislava, too, there was a vast increase mainly in the number of Slovak but also German, Hungarian, Jewish... associations." This is illustrated by the fact that in 1931 there were almost ten times as many associations in the town as in 1900, although the population only doubled [Mannová 1991: 69]. To understand these changes, we must take into account not only social processes but also subjective factors:

Table 1. The development of ethnic structure in Bratislava (%)

Year	Slovaks	Hungarians	Germans	Other	Total
1890	16.6	19.9	59.9	3.6	50,546
1910	14.9	40.5	41.9	2.7	78,223
1930	29.8	16.2	28.1	25.9	123,844
1950	90.2	3.5	0.6	5.7	170,000
1970	91.5	3.5	0.4	4.6	290,000
1990	90.4	5.3	0.2	4.1	442,000

Note: The various censuses were not conducted in a uniform manner. Therefore, I use their results to illustrate different trends.

At first sight, there are striking changes between the different regimes. Data on the First Czechoslovak Republic show an increase in Slovak nationality and a decrease in formerly prominent nationalities. This development was undoubtedly influenced by mass immigration, which largely changed the character and structure of the town. The more so as a part of the Hungarian speaking and associated citizens responded to the change of regime in 1918 through their departure. It is difficult to say to what extent their decision was influenced by propaganda and the dramatic circumstances accompanying the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic [see Luther 1993]. The days following the take-over after the 1919 New Year's Day remained in the memories of contemporaries as "days of unleashed passions, threatening especially the safety of property" (*Slovenský denník*, 14 February 1937). It took several years before the political situation in Bratislava settled. Increasingly, Slovak and Czech languages could be heard in an until then mostly German-Hungarian town. Many 'Pressburgers' conformed to the changed situation (at least outwardly). Moreover, nobody discouraged them from identifying more with the pluralist (three-language and multiethnic) town than with their ethnic or state nationality. This is indirectly proved by the fact that in spite of the seeming majority of Czechoslovak citizens there were complaints in the local newspaper that Hungarian was more common in public than Slovak. A certain polarity within the Bratislava population is shown through their division in 'Pressburger' and 'Czechoslovak' societies. They both had their own associations, social centres, cafes, sports clubs etc.

It is not clear to what extent the migration, fear, indifference to ethnicity or expedient expectations of 'reward' for identifying with the coming regime caused the increase in the number of citizens of 'Czechoslovak' nationality. It seems that in the period of the 1930 census, the officially declared tolerance became a legitimate and social norm. Public activities formed an essential part of everyday life in Bratislava and they showed that the citizens conformed to the (democratic) winner. However, the coming years proved that such a model of behaviour was not 'inbred'. I have already mentioned that tolerance follows not only from common moral or other principles, but also from the general social atmosphere, determined mostly by governing forces. This is manifested in the wave of violence immediately after the establishment of autonomy, which practically in one day replaced the until then peaceful co-existence of different groups. In the beginning, it functioned especially on the official level, but citizens joined in very quickly and changed their interpersonal relationships.

Signals that fascist ideas had become established in Slovakia could be seen already some time before they were officially codified through the constitution of Slovak autonomy (6 October 1938). They were clearly manifested in the platform of Hlinka's Slovak

People's Party, and in a short time they became a part of the views of the 'silent majority'. Political conflicts moved to the until then neutral and apolitical pubs, cafes, and wine cellars. Already in the spring of 1938, Slovak and Czech guests responded to the growing nationalism of wine-cellar owners by "straying to German wine cellars only by mistake or unfamiliarity with the local situation" (*Slovenský denník*, 1 July 1938). A contemporary (1910) described the tense atmosphere with the example of the Štefánka café: "When a Hungarian ordered a song, Slovaks started booing at their tables, and when a Slovak ordered a national song, the Germans started booing..." The rising authoritarian regime systematically suppressed the plurality of the society. Implementation of the slogan 'one nation, one party', a ban on most of the associations, attacks against different ethnic or religious groups caused Bratislava to soon become a monolithic environment. People's behaviour was largely determined by fear.

The effect of the totalitarian way of thinking manifested itself already in the period of autonomy through aggression against Czech and primarily against Jewish minorities. A newspaper, which not long before was democratically oriented, now claimed that "88,000 Jews have to be expedited from their warm posts as businessmen, doctors, lawyers etc. and given jobs in the healthy open air" (*Slovenský denník*, 4 November 1938). The next day the newspaper reported on 'spontaneous' attacks on Jewish shops in Bratislava. The citizens conformed to official opinion. Some of them in the hope of a better future, others in an attempt to save their lives, manifested loyalty to the regime, documented their Aryan descent, and looked for their German ancestors. Utilitarian behaviour was prominent, but not the only response to the period. More rarely there were people who at risk to their own existence tried to help those who were threatened. However, it was more often that fear or the attraction of power overwhelmed even those who were not exposed to direct pressure. The official ideology became a part of everyday life; sometimes only through formal manifestations in public, but often also by accepting the morals of the ideology and aggression against citizens who found themselves on the 'wrong side' of society (usually not of their own will). The aryanisation of Jewish properties played a special role, which incited a chain reaction of corruption and denunciation [Kamenec 1991: 56 et seq.].

This tendency became even more apparent after World War II. Attempts to adapt to political changes accompanied the situation after the liberation of Bratislava on 4 April 1945. The newly restored Czechoslovak Republic imposed sanctions against all Hungarians and Germans in Bratislava on the presumption of guilt. One part of them was forced to Bratislava. As in the past, a part of the 'silent majority' actively attacked the persecuted group. The recollections of Czech, Jewish, Hungarian and German citizens reveal a thankfulness, but more often they are embittered by the unfriendly acts of their neighbours and friends. Complex and painful events were until recently suppressed or simplified and the processes determining the lives of individuals and whole groups were characterised by a few words or even anecdotes. Janko Alexy's opinions are significant from the future point of view. According to him "in 1945 wine cellars disappeared from Bratislava, when their German owners left the territory of Slovakia" [Alexy 1957: 173]. Andrej Plávka characterised the expulsion of German viticulturists with the statement that their fears were baseless and "some of them stayed in Bratislava and most of them peacefully and lawfully left the country" [Plávka 1976: 33]. The threatened persons chose the same stereotypes of self-defence as their forerunners in distress: departure, adaptation to the new situation, efforts to hide a 'dangerous' identity.

The official approaches mentioned until now had common characteristics. The enemies of the regimes were defined ethnically: at first as non-Hungarians, later as Czechs, Gypsies, and Jews, after World War II as Hungarians or Germans. Various ideological conflicts resulted in the ethnic unification of Bratislava, culminating in the events after 1945. However, this was not the end of social engineering. After February 1948 'the government of workers and peasants' changed the criteria for selecting enemies and persecuted persons who had felt safe under the until then valid (ethnic) criteria, because they belonged to Slovak or Czech nationality. (Later the situation became even more complicated through lawsuits with 'bourgeois nationalists'.) Bratislava was badly affected by so-called Action B, the government's decision on the 'relocation of reactionary people out of big cities', which affected thousands of families. The town became more proletarian, at first formally, later also really. The former manifold character of Bratislava was disappearing faster than ever before, on the other hand the behaviour of people was overwhelmed by double-dealing. Internationalism represented the officially announced policy of the 1950s and ethnicity allegedly lost its former place in the lives of people and society. (The return of the ideas of Slovak nationalism in the 1960s was only a short-term interruption in the given status.) The subjective declaration of non-Slavonic nationality almost did not exist. In 1990, one of my old friends proudly declared his Hungarian origin. When it surprised me, he answered that he had always been a Hungarian, but it was good that nobody knew about it. A similar approach was common also in German or Jewish families.

The 'velvet revolution' in November 1989 meant for the majority of ordinary citizens a psychological shift. It was no mere coincidence that Martin Bútorá and other speakers so often used words like 'fear' and 'breaking the spell'. Even at the first meetings, there were tendencies to vindicate the Slovak State and calls for independence emerged later. Immigrants from the USA and Canada expressed such views (for example the famous ice-hockey player and representative of the World Congress of Slovaks Peter Šťastný or the Protestant priest Dušan Tóth). Matica Slovenská and the Slovak National Party were especially active in this field. There was a tendency to call attention to the significance of Slovak history, to identify the enemies of the idea of independence and to find somebody to be blamed for the present situation. (The situation had a response in the political and cultural initiatives of Hungarian citizens and the revival of German and Jewish activities). A double-paradox situation arose:

- a) People, who in the years of the totalitarian regime had hidden their ethnic background, started to manifest it openly as a basic part of their identity;
- b) National conflicts entered the town, which until then appeared to be ethnically homogenous. Political parties, individuals, and informal associations took an active part in them. In 1990-1992, they were apparent on the political scene, but most often, they were presented in the form of various street demonstrations, which were given special significance at that time. Emphasising Slovak nationalism, and blaming the 'Czech colonisers', 'Hungarian irredentists', and the members of Roma and Jewish communities became a constituent part of the period.

The 'demonstration identity' was a part of people who allowed themselves to be convinced that they were right, they were numerous and influential until they came to the conclusion (they persuaded themselves) that the street (this means the participants in ideologically homogenous demonstrations) represented the whole. It means they had the

right (and means) to establish their ideas as generally valid and correct norms. Bratislava, the capital city, is the seat of major government bodies so it was natural that people gathered here more often and in greater numbers to pronounce their attitudes toward the thematic event. The quantity and diversity of these activities was reinforced by the fact that its population (also due to its multitude) was politically more differentiated than in other parts of Slovakia. German, Hungarian or Jewish associations and institutions revived or enlarged their activities, as did the representatives of Slovak nationalism, associated mainly with the years 1938-1945. Such activities resulted in growing tensions. The revived ethnic differentiation of the supposedly homogenous town became an integral part of the period.

The image of Bratislava in 1990-1992 is inevitably connected with public demonstrations. Activities that were originally anti-communist, acquired an ethnic (anti-Czechoslovak, practically anti-Czech) character. The ideological explicitness of such actions is significant. Even the place where the gatherings took place reflected the ideology. SNP Square, the scene of revolutionary demonstrations in November 1989, 'belonged' as of March 1990 to the supporters of an independent state. In their speeches 'for' an independent Slovak State, they often used ethnic arguments (for example, cases of injustice committed by Czechs, Hungarians, Jews etc.) The supporters of an undivided republic gathered on the embankment of the Danube under the statue of the Lion, the symbol of the Czechoslovak Republic. The conflicts in the ethnically homogenous and at the same time ethnically divided town culminated on 1 January 1993. A boisterous celebration of the establishment of the Slovak Republic was held on SNP Square, while under the statue of the Lion a nostalgic farewell to the extinct federation took place.

A more detailed analysis shows that the conflicts proceeded according to a consistent model or scheme. Both the 'nationalists' and the 'federalists' organised their gatherings on their own 'territories'. Aggression erupted when one of the groups (usually the supporters of independent Slovakia) had the feeling that their 'territorial borders' were violated. This happened especially when the 'federalists' organised their gatherings for various reasons at SNP Square and not 'under the Lion', or when the representatives and symbols (Václav Havel, Czechoslovak flags) of the enemy appeared by chance or consciously at nationalist meetings. Such events illustrate that the tensions of Bratislava (Slovak) society in the 1990s were based on ethnic factors. Their strengthening led to a polarisation, which sometimes grew from differences in opinion to physical conflicts.

Identification with an ethnic group became again an important public element of an individual's identity and an expression of the differentiation (in some moments even the polarity) of the town's population even during the demonstrations in November 1989 and especially in the following years. After 1993, it seemed that Slovak-Czech conflicts would become the subject of academic discussion rather than a part of everyday life. Ethnicity as an element of one's own identification or the means of defining the enemy (directed especially against Hungarians and Roma citizens; sometimes also against Czechs) does not lose its meaning. It works as the factor in the differentiation of the whole (and also in forming and uniting smaller groups). It may be assumed that in the near future also ethnicity will influence the mutual relationships of the Bratislava population; it is difficult to estimate whether tolerance or polarity will prevail. I believe that the 'silent majority' will again conform to the winner, so political and economic factors will play the decisive role.

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