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“The Truth Wins”: Interpretations of World War I in School History Education in Slovakia from 1918 until Present

(A History Textbook Narratives Analysis)

The article seeks to explore the ways of interpreting World War I in school history textbooks used since 1918 until today in Slovakia, during different political regimes. School textbooks, which are reflecting official historiography, are powerful tools. The narratives presented in them contribute, next to family, media and public spaces and ceremonies, to forming the way students perceive the world around themselves. History education and school history textbooks are instrumental in creating collective identity and collective memory. Undoubtedly, the meaning of history education, as perceived by the state authorities, does not lie only in presenting “how it really is or was”; but its aim is also to culturally integrate the students within their society. In the following text, the patterns of constructing historical narratives on World War I in Czechoslovak and Slovak history textbooks published within changing political regimes will be analysed and presented. The article is divided into four parts, and each section deals with history textbooks for primary and secondary schools published in different political regimes: history textbooks employed in school education in the interwar Czechoslovak Republic in 1918-1939; history textbooks used in schools during the times of World War II in the Slovak Republic in 1939-1945; history textbooks issued in Czechoslovakia during the times when it was ruled by the Communist Party in 1948-1989; and history textbooks distributed to schools after 1989, and especially after 1993, when the Slovak Republic was

established. The main research questions are: which events from World War I were presented as the main themes in national history in different political regimes, and who were the in-group (us) and who were the out-groups (Others) in national history master narratives in different socio-political contexts? How did the interpretations of World War I develop throughout time and how did the images of us and the Others change in different political contexts?

World War I, one of the most crucial events in the history of the twentieth century, has been a contested subject of memory and memorialization. Competing master narratives were produced by different national historiographies depending on the current political situation and on the character of political regimes in particular countries, as well as on contemporary international relations. However, as time was passing by, the remembrance of World War I gradually faded away from official memory. It became less present at the ceremonies held in public space, it slowly became less targeted by historiography – and it was substituted by commemorating other politically loaded events and processes of the twentieth century such as World War II, the Holocaust, the Cold War, Communism and Post-Communism. And World War I also slipped away, bit by bit, from family memory, because there has been a large time gap since it took place a century ago, and there is not anymore the possibility for the transfer of testimonies and memories from the generation of survivors to the younger age groups. However, the last two decades have been marked by an increased political and public interest in war commemorations and thus the academia has responded by producing a significant number of studies on history and memory, including also case studies on commemorating World War I. Two main streams have developed within the research on war memory and commemoration in general, one focusing on the politics of memory (referring to identity construction theories) and the other one being connected with psychology and memory (referring to collective

and individual mourning processes).¹ The presented research emphasizes the changing politics of memory in Slovakia and, therefore, it will be developed within the framework focusing on official commemorative practices (the article specifically deals with official school history textbooks narratives) aiming at constructing the collective memory and collective identity of citizens. The psychological aspect of the mourning processes connected with the war remembrance will not be taken into consideration in this study.

The narratives presented in school history textbooks have quite often been influenced by stereotypes—generally shared impressions, images, or thoughts existing within certain groups of people about the character of a particular group of people and their representations. Stereotypes are common social phenomena; they help us orient ourselves in the society in which we live, and they save our time and energy when trying to establish the mental map of the world around us. In times of conflict, however, stereotyping and labelling the Other can become especially prevalent and harmful.² The scientific research of stereotypes boomed mainly in the periods following the two major conflicts of the twentieth century—WWI and WWII. The aim of the research on stereotypes was to uncover biased views some groups of people had towards other groups of people. Researchers have proved that stereotypes are spread in society through families, school education, mass media, and public ceremonies as well as through contact with members of other groups. These biased views were to be, consequently, modified through education. The Georg Eckert Institute in Braunschweig was founded in 1975 with the aim of promoting international scientific research on textbooks which are one of the media of transmitting the images of the self and the Other. During the Cold War, the study of stereotypes flourished

¹T.G Ashplant, Graham Dawson and Michael Roper, eds., *The Politics of War Memory and Commemoration*. (London, New York: Routledge, 2000).

² Daniel Bar-Tal, *Intractable Conflicts: Socio-Psychological Foundations and Dynamics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

again. Urie Bronfenbrenner's *mirror-image hypothesis*³ was the dominant concept at that time, according to which the important factors that influence the creation of the content of stereotypes about other groups of people (about the members of other nations or states) are mutual political and economic relations existing between different groups of people. Though the politics of the Eastern and the Western bloc were characterized by principally different ideologies, the members of both blocs had similar positive perceptions of themselves (the in-group) and similar negative perceptions of the members of other bloc (the out-group). The population of allied countries was perceived as friendly and supportive. On the other hand, the inhabitants of the countries that were in conflict with the country of observers were perceived as aggressive and immoral. At the end of the 1960s, focus in the research of stereotypes shifted from the content of stereotypes to the process of their creation. Today, there are several theoretical explanations for the production of negative stereotypes. Mutually conflicting interests of particular groups and competition between the groups are some of the motivational factors. According to the *social identity theory*,⁴ negative stereotypes about the Other are the outcome of efforts to present one's own group as the exceptional one. *Realistic group conflict theory*⁵ emphasizes the fact that negative stereotypes are the outcome of the competition between particular social groups. *Scapegoating theory*⁶ explains the process of the formation of negative stereotypes about other groups of people as based on economic or social instability. *Frustration-aggression-*

³ Urie Bronfenbrenner, "The Mirror Image in Soviet-American Relations: A Social Psychologist's Report," in *Journal of Social Sciences*, no. 17 (1961): 45–46.

⁴ Henry Tajfel and John Turner, "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Conflict," in *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, ed. Stephen Worchel and W. Austen (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1986), 7–24.

⁵ Muzafer Sherif, *Group Conflict and Co-Operation: Their Social Psychology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); Robert A. LeVine and Donald T. Campbell, *Ethnocentrism: Theories and Conflict, Ethnic Attitudes and Group Behaviour* (New York: Wiley, 1972).

⁶ John Duckitt, *The Social Psychology of Prejudice* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994).

*displacement theory*⁷ highlights the idea that frustration (which can be caused for example by worsening economic conditions) leads to aggression. However, this aggression cannot react to the real source of the tension (for example on the international economic situation). Instead, it is directed against other social groups (for example against the members of other nations). In other words, if we identify some other group of people as the cause of a worsening situation, our own social identity will not suffer. As noted above, the dissemination of stereotypes can be politically motivated and one of the ways of spreading auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes is through public state education. In this respect, history education and history textbooks are instrumental in creating the image of the us/self (in-group) and the Others (out-group). Therefore, all of the above-mentioned theoretical concepts will be taken into account when analysing the narratives and discussing the problems of images and interpretations of World War I in school history textbooks.

Interwar History Textbooks (1918-1938)

World War I brought immense changes into the Slovak national development. Prior to its beginning, Slovaks within Austria-Hungary lacked their own administration; and their cultural and political elites had to fight against the massive Magyarisation in order to maintain the essential attributes of the nation: the language and the culture. This had a significant impact on the situation of Slovaks within Czechoslovakia after 1918 as well. The absent tradition of continuous national schooling, institutions or administration emasculated their entrance to the newly-formed state where they held from the very beginning the position of the “younger brother” of the Czech nation. After a rather thorough removal of the staff labelled as Hungarian or pro-Hungarian from the state administration,

⁷ John Dollard, ed., *Frustration and Aggression* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1939).

public service and official education positions, there was a serious shortage of these professionals in Slovakia which was solved by transferring personnel from the Czech Lands. The mission of these “imported” professionals was to fulfil, at least for the first couple of years following the establishment of the republic, the gaps that occurred after eliminating professionals suspected of pro-Hungarian feelings from the public life. It was also believed that Czechs would contribute to the formation and strengthening of the collective Czechoslovak identity among Slovaks.⁸ Concerning the new Czechoslovak identity, Czechs identified generally more readily with the official centralist state ideology than Slovaks. The so-called *Czechoslovakism* promoted the idea that Czechs and Slovaks were one nation composed of two tribes. The more exaggerated form of this conception claimed that Slovaks were actually Czechs, just historically less developed. There was almost no opposition to this concept from the Czech side.⁹ Slovak response to this idea was not unanimous. Representatives of the liberal wing, supported mainly by the Slovak Lutherans, were in their views most consistent with the ideas of the Czech founders of the state, which also guaranteed them an easier access to the leading positions in the country. Regardless of how strong the centralist inclinations among the Slovak liberal intelligentsia were, since the establishment of Czechoslovakia they had had to face a growing opposition in the autonomist movement whose representatives showed increasing dissatisfaction with the imposition of Czech political and cultural superiority on the Slovaks, and this movement was getting more prominent during the 1930s. The political reason lying behind the promotion of the concept of Czechoslovakism was to numerically strengthen the state-forming nation and to

⁸ For more on life of Czech teachers in interwar Slovakia see Pavol Matula, *Čechoslovakizmus na slovenských stredných školách 1918 – 1938* [Czechoslovakism in Slovak high schools 1918–1938] (Bratislava: Goralinga, 2013).

⁹ Bakke, Elizabeth, “Čechoslovakizmus v školských učebniciach, 1918 – 1938“ [Czechoslovakism in history textbooks, 1918–1938], *Historický časopis* 47 (1999): 250–266.

counterbalance the two largest national minorities in the new country – Germans and Hungarians.

World War I brought about significant geo-political changes. The dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy and the establishment of the successor states after its end was the key moment in the interpretation of the war in both Czech and Slovak historiographies. Since the very first moment of the existence of Czechoslovakia, the narrative of World War I has been officially presented as a story of victory – as a significant landmark in the history of both Czechs and Slovaks when they finally reached independence in their own democratic nation-state.¹⁰ The need to present the establishment of Czechoslovakia, a joint state of Czechs and Slovaks, as the overall desire of both nations was widely pursued by the Czech and some Slovak political elites, and the contemporary interpretations of World War I were also used for these purposes. Historical narratives were produced at the time mainly as the testimonies of heroic deeds of Czech and Slovak politicians who had merit in the establishment of the new state.¹¹ Significant attention was paid to the activities of volunteer armed forces composed of Czechs and Slovaks operating together with the Entente powers during World War I (later, after the end of WWI, they were named *Czechoslovak legions*).

¹⁰ Gabriela Dudeková, “Stratégie prežitia v mimoriadnej situácii. Vplyv Veľkej vojny na rodinu na území Slovenska” [Survival strategies in the extraordinary situation: Impact of the Great War upon Family in Slovakia], *Forum Historiae* 1 (2009): 1, accessed 17th November 2015, URL http://www.forumhistoriae.sk/FH1_2009/texty_1_2009/dudekova.pdf

¹¹ For example: Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Světová revoluce* [World revolution] (Praha 1925); Karol Anton Medvecký, *Slovenský prevrat I-IV* [Slovak revolution I-IV] (Trnava 1929-31); Edvard Beneš, *Světová válka a naše revoluce. Vzpomínky a úvahy z bojů za svobodu národa, I-III* [World war and our revolution. Memories and reflections from the fights for the freedom of the nation] (Praha 1927-1928); Milan Hodža, *Články, reči, štúdie I-III* [Papers, speeches, essays I-III] (Praha 1930-31, 1934); Štefan Osuský, *Služba národu* [A service for the nation] (Liptovský sv. Mikuláš 1938); Vavro Šrobár, *Boj o nový život* [Fight for a new life] (Ružomberok 1920); Anton Štefánek, *Slovensko pred prevratom a počas prevratu* [Slovakia before and after the coup] (Praha 1923).

All these tendencies were also present in the school history education in the given period. Regarding the politics of textbook production, it has to be mentioned at this place that during the interwar period, a number of different history textbooks were available for usage at schools, and generally we can distinguish three types used in Slovakia: textbooks written by Czech authors, the so-called *Slovakized* textbooks (i.e. textbooks written by Czech authors with some passages added to reflect Slovak national history), and the textbooks written by Slovak authors. WWI was represented in the interwar history textbooks published in Czechoslovakia as a clash of civilizations, as a fight between us (the in-group) where in a narrow sense Czechs and Slovaks belonged, and all the Triple Entente powers and their supporters in a broader sense – i.e. “*all of the educated world*”;¹² described as superior in civilizational, cultural and moral sense; and the Others (the out-group) composed of Germans and Hungarians who were depicted as villainous, sophisticated, immoral and wrongful: “*Austria-Hungary and Germany were later aided also by Turkey and Bulgaria. Otherwise, almost all the world stood up against them, against the German lust for the control of the world... The truth wins. Germany had big successes in the battlefields, since it had been long preparing for the war. But justice was not on its side.*”¹³

The narratives about the beginning of the war in the analysed textbooks attributed the origins of the conflict to German imperialism and Austro-Hungarian sycophancy, while significant attention was devoted to portraying the hopeless situation and persecution of non-German and non-Hungarian nations in Austria-Hungary prior to and during WWI: “*Hungarian and German expansionism, linked with hatred to anything Slavic... was manifested not only in the domestic*

¹² Karol Hlavinka, *Stručné dejiny národa československého pre nižšie triedy slovenských stredných škôl* [A concise history of Czechoslovak nation for lower grades of secondary schools] (Košice: Tlačou Slovenskej knihtačiarne, 1922), 100.

¹³ Antonín Reitler and J. S. Touc, *Dejepis pre meštianske školy. Diel I* [History for civic schools. Part I] (Praha: Komenium, 1933), 40–41.

*policy of the Monarchy – by oppressing Slavic (and Romanic) nations – but also in its foreign policy...This approach caused that Slavs were internally more and more growing apart from the Habsburg Monarchy. The situation, though, did not allow for their overt break-up with the Monarchy. It was only the World War, caused mainly by Germans and Hungarians, which put the nations of the Habsburg Lands into new conditions.*¹⁴ Similarly: *”Austria-Hungary was more and more becoming just a pendant to Germany, carrying out the wishes of Germany, though half of its 52 million population were Slavs – and they felt on their shoulders German and Hungarian burden and in vain were calling for the equality in the empire they themselves supported by their work and blood (as soldiers).*¹⁵ Apart from the clear identification of the two war sides with *us* and *Others* based on the winners and the defeated (i.e. the moral and rightful vs. the vicious and abusive), the analysed textbook also subtly elaborated an image of the in-group based on belonging to a larger Slavic ethnic group: *“Our state is Slavic, Slavs are our closest brothers, we want to know them and maintain solidarity with them, and we also want to live with other nations in peace and harmony.*¹⁶

Political and social reasons of the war were not explained in the analysed textbooks thoroughly, as the main point of the narratives was to represent the whole issue as the triumphant historical victory of Czechs and Slovaks, their path from the “prison of the nations” to their righteously deserved independent and democratic state. The break-up of Austria-Hungary was represented as the key result of the war: *“The World War became the right moment for Czechs and Slovaks to accomplish their independence. For that, they worked at home as well as abroad. In Prague, a secret society named Maffia was established at the beginning of the war, the aim of which was to liberate the nation.*

¹⁴ Josef Pekař, *Dějiny československé. Pro nejvyšší třídy škol středních* [Czechoslovak history. For the highest classes of secondary schools] (Praha: Historický Klub, 1921), 145.

¹⁵ Hlavinka, *Stručné dějiny národa československého*, 96–97.

¹⁶ Hlavinka, *Stručné dějiny národa československého*, 108.

*Austria-Hungary cruelly persecuted Czechs and Slovaks already from the beginning of the war, mainly their national leaders.*¹⁷... *“The National Council was the highest authority and the official representative of all Czechoslovaks living abroad. Its aim was to direct coherently all the actions aiming for convincing the Triple Entente statesmen about the idea of dissolving Austria-Hungary and establishing nation-states. An effective tool of the Council’s propaganda was the fact that it could point to the ideological affinity between the Czechoslovak efforts and the proclamations of the Western democracies and to the identical visions of the future organization of the world order, endangered by the imperialism of Germany and its allies.”*¹⁸ ... *“Our new state is called Czechoslovak, which means that Czechs and Slovaks, two branches of one nation, have after a long period of separation again unified in this state and they wish to be together forever; so that neither Germans nor Hungarians could again split them in two, or oppress them. Czechs and Slovaks are one and the same, and who imagines separating them would need to divide their common independent home, the Czechoslovak state.”*¹⁹

The image of the in-group in a narrower sense, i.e. the image of Czechs and Slovaks, was created also through descriptions of the character of their newly established state, referring to it as an extraordinary achievement. The interwar Czechoslovak republic was depicted as a personification of its citizens (Czechs and Slovaks), reflecting their moral qualities and pioneering spirit: *“Our state is democratic. All its citizens are equal; all have the same rights and the same duties, there are no privileges based on origin or wealth; and everybody, according to their own talents and skills, can achieve the highest positions... The head of the state is not a hereditary king, but a democratically elected president, chosen because of his deeds and skills. The state is us, the citizens, old and young, poor and rich; the state looks like we do. Our state is a peaceful state; our army serves to defend*

¹⁷ Reitler and Touc, *Dejepis pre meštianske školy*, 40.

¹⁸ Pekař, *Dějiny československé*, 148.

¹⁹ Hlavinka, *Stručné dejiny národa československého*, 107–108.

*our country... our army will never attack others and usurp from them, but it will not allow others to take from ours. Our state is fair and impartial towards the rich and the poor alike, towards the small and the big, towards Germans and Hungarians; it protects the rights of everybody, but it deserves their loyalty”.*²⁰

Main topics presented in the textbooks were, similarly to the official historiography, themes from political and military history. The deeds of the great men, the triumvirate of Masaryk, Beneš and Štefánik who were described as the founders of the state, were an important part of the history textbook narratives. Especially when considering Masaryk’s role in the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak state, the textbook authors would write in line with the contemporary Masaryk cult which was massively produced and spread by a group of intellectuals, writers, journalists and publishers in order to promote “the vision of the Castle” in Czechoslovakia as well as abroad.²¹ In their narratives, the textbook authors would not hesitate to employ even Biblical tone when presenting his profile to students, such as: *“Masaryk was given to us by Providence itself to compensate for our past losses and he led us into our promised land”*²²; and they promoted a sort of messianic image of his deeds: *“Professor Masaryk was the leader and the head of our revolutionary resistance movement...When he saw how repulsed our soldiers went to the war and when he saw what kind of persecution was initiated against the great-hearted Czech people, he left on 20th December abroad, so that there he could in person start the fight against the Germans and the Habsburgs. And for this work, Masaryk was ready as no one else; and no one else could have done it as Masaryk did... Since his youth, Masaryk was devoted to work and great ideals, to humanity: truth, godliness, and knowledge... Apart from that, Masaryk is the ideal character – he is a direct, fearless, truthful*

²⁰ Hlavinka, *Stručné dejiny národa československého*, 107–108.

²¹ Andrea Orzoff, *Battle for the Castle: The Myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe 1914 – 1948* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

²² Hlavinka, *Stručné dejiny národa československého*, 104.

*and brave man, persistent in his work and extremely selfless (the embodiment of Comenius and Hus in one person). He never sought for profit or wealth, all he wanted was to serve his nation and justice.*²³ Similar comparison of Masaryk to other great men – heroes from the Czech past – was present in different history textbooks as well: *“In December 1914, the professor of the Prague University T. G. Masaryk left for abroad, so that he could work there for our freedom. He wanted to persuade foreign countries that Austria-Hungary was an unfair state and that it had to be destroyed. Masaryk will always belong to the greatest sons of our nation... He really wanted to have from us the nation of Hus and Comenius, and he worked for this idea tirelessly and fearlessly.”*²⁴

From military history, the achievements of the Czechoslovak Legions – units made up of Czech and Slovak prisoners of war or deserters from the Austro-Hungarian army – and their impact during WWI were paid the most attention in the textbooks. This was a particularly important aspect since the interpretation of these activities would help create the image that Czechs and Slovaks actually stood in the conflict on the right side (i.e. the winning one): *“From the beginning, the foreign operatives showed that Czechoslovaks wanted to fight for their freedom, and they devoted a lot of energy into building their own military units which could support these efforts by the concrete acts.”*²⁵ When describing the acts of these armed forces, the authors of the textbooks would often employ references to the heroic Czech Hussite past and draw parallels between the two movements as the two rightful fights for freedom against foreign oppressors: *“The World War made it clear that Germans had decided to conquer the world with arms and to forever silence our resistance and our calls for freedom and equality. Thus, we had no other chance than taking the guns and fighting against the violence with violence. Our common soldiers were the first to understand*

²³ Hlavinka, *Stručné dejiny národa československého*, 104.

²⁴ Reitler and Touc, *Dejepis pre meštianske školy*, 40.

²⁵ Pekař, *Dějiny československé*, 149.

this when they deserted the Austrian army in the battlefield and they let Russians, in whom they saw their Slavic brothers, to capture them... However, the prisoners of war were not allowed by the Russian government to join the army and to fight against the enemy. Only after the fall of the Tsar's reign they achieved more freedom, and a number of Czechoslovak regiments were established, bearing the names of famous men from our past: Jan Hus, John Zizka of Trocnov, Prokop the Great, George of Poděbrady.²⁶ An independent Czechoslovak army was formed, famous legions, which achieved a great victory on 2nd July 1917 in the Battle of Zborov, and they drew the attention of the whole world to their valour. Old Czech Brethren spirit and Hussite discipline ruled the legions.²⁷

History textbooks published in interwar Czechoslovakia were utilized mainly to provide such an interpretation of World War I which would portray it as a step of Czechs and Slovaks towards their joint nation-state. Thus, those aspects of the war were highlighted which proved that Czechs and Slovaks were standing on the right side in this battle of civilizations: here belonged the deeds of the émigré intellectuals and the efforts of the volunteer armed forces. The in-group was pictured in a narrow sense as Czechs and Slovaks²⁸, described as wrongfully

²⁶ John Zizka of Trocnov, Prokop the Great and George of Poděbrady were leading figures in the Hussite movement, a 15th century political, social and military campaign based on the teachings of Czech reformer Jan Hus, often described as a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation. Apart from its religious aspects (challenging the papal authority and asserting of national autonomy in ecclesiastical affairs), Hussitism has been often interpreted as a Czech national movement, and it acquired anti-imperial and anti-German associations (for example in the works of Palacký), and became an important symbol frequently employed during the times of Czech nation-building.

²⁷ Hlavinka, *Stručné dějiny národa československého*, 101–102.

²⁸ Interwar history textbooks were concurrently developing Czech, Slovak and Czechoslovak identity. Czechoslovak identity was constructed mainly through presenting the medieval principality of Great Moravia as the first Czechoslovak state. Some textbooks would even employ such concepts as the Czechoslovak tribes in prehistoric times or the Czechoslovak language in the Middle Ages. Generally, the relations between Czechs and Slovaks were portrayed as the relation between the older and the younger brother, or the two nations were presented as two branches of one stem, which was

oppressed martyrs, yet people of strong morals and pioneering spirit; and in a broader sense, the in-group was composed of all Entente powers, characterised as the civilized world. On the other hand, the out-groups were represented by the Germans and Hungarians, depicted as wrongful expansionists and aggressors which was the reflection of both the international diplomatic relations Czechoslovakia pursued during the interwar period, as well as its internal domestic situation where it needed to cope with high numbers of national minorities of Germans and Hungarians.

History Textbooks Produced During WWII (1939-1945)

On the eve of World War II, Czechoslovakia was dissolved. The so-called Sudetenland was annexed by Germany, the Czech and Moravian regions became a part of Germany in the form of the Protectorate; while Slovakia, which lost its Southern strip to Hungary (that also annexed Ruthenia) became a country under a strong German political influence. A significant internal change occurred on the Slovak political scene: previously dominant Slovak Lutheran and pro-Czech oriented intelligentsia leading the state was replaced by a rival political elite, partly coming from the Catholic clergy and promoting a radical, communitarian nationalism, easily reconciled with Fascist or Nazi ideas, too.²⁹ Within this political context, the

the continuation of the early 19th century conception developed by Ján Kollár. For a more detailed discussion, see Slávka Otčenášová, *Schválená minulosť: kolektívna identita v československých a slovenských učebniciach dejepisu (1918-1989)* [Approved past: Collective identity in Czechoslovak and Slovak history textbooks (1918-1989)] (Košice : UPJŠ, 2010). For other discussions on developing Czechoslovak identity through interwar school education, see Elisabeth Bakke, “Čechoslovakizmus v školských učebniciach (1918-1938)” [The Czechoslovak nation project in the textbooks (1918-1938)], in *Historický časopis*, no. 2 (1999): 233-253 and Július Alberty, “Nad prvou učebnicou československých dejín [On the first textbook about Czechoslovak history], in *Acta historica neosoliensia*, no. 1-2 (2015): 286-325.

²⁹ See James Mace Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

official historiography took a new course, and new history textbooks were written, reflecting the current political agenda of the newly-formed state, dominantly promoting independent Slovak statehood and Catholicism as opposed to the atheism and anticlericalism of the Czechs. Important aspects in this political and social context that influenced the development of history education policies were the *Slovakization* of the official schooling (i.e. removal of Czech teachers and professors from Slovak schools, withdrawal of Czech history textbooks that were previously used in Slovak schools along with the Slovak ones, and publishing new textbooks which would "reflect and apply in the best possible manner the Slovak attitudes"³⁰), as well as the creation of stronger links between official education and the Church (there was an increase of schools founded by the Church, and the religious aspect of secondary education was formally embedded in the characteristics of the function of the schooling: "*The role of secondary schooling is to educate a moral student on a religious basis, who will be a loyal citizen of the Slovak state*"³¹, while teachers were encouraged to "*actively participate in national and religious associations*".³²

Historian František Hrušovský, a graduate of the Jagellonian University, professor at the Slovak University in Bratislava and Member of the Parliament, became the leading representative of the official historiography. His monograph and concurrently a high school textbook on Slovak history entitled *Slovenské dejiny* (Slovak history)³³ was a sort of summarizing overview of the Slovak national history. Six consecutive editions of the monograph in two years (1939–1940) showed how vigorously

³⁰ František Neupauer, "Školská politika v období Slovenskej republiky 1939 – 1945" [School politics in the times of the Slovak republic 1939–1945], in *Slovenská republika 1939 – 1945 očami mladých historikov IV* [Slovak Republic 1939–1945 as seen by young historians IV], ed. Michal Šmigel' and Peter Mičko (Banská Bystrica: Katedra histórie FHV UMB – Ústav vedy a výskumu, 2005), 74–88.

³¹ Neupauer, "Školská politika", 77.

³² Law no. 244/1941 Sl., § 32. See Neupauer, "Školská politika", 84.

³³ František Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny* [Slovak history] (Martin: Matica slovenská, 1939).

this book was promoted among the public and the widespread popularity it achieved during WWII. The textbook departed, due to new political circumstances, from the interwar ideas promoting the Czech–Slovak unity, centralisation and Czechoslovakism, and it fully supported the contemporary inclinations of the political elites – Slovak nationalism, Catholicism and political subordination to Germany.

And these values were fairly reflected in the narratives interpreting WWI. Contrary to the interwar history textbooks which openly described German imperialism as the reason of the conflict, the origins of the war in the textbook of Hrušovský were addressed only very generally and vaguely, considering the contemporary international relations and strong dependence of Slovakia on Germany, thus avoiding any negative references to German politics whether in the past or in the present: *“The World War was the outcome of a general international tension which had been already for a couple of decades dividing big European states into two hostile blocks that were competing for political power in Europe and for economic superiority in the whole world. This tension, accompanied by feverish arms race on both sides, was growing every year, so only a tiny spark was needed to cause a huge fire. This spark was the assassination of Franz Ferdinand, heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne on 28th June 1914 in Sarajevo.”*³⁴

The analysed textbook did not employ narratives on the progress of WWI or on its outcomes and consequences in the international context, but focused on using WWI exclusively for framing the national master narrative, emphasizing the Slovak political and military activities leading towards the independence from Austria-Hungary. Hrušovský highlighted the role of the Slovak diaspora in the United States in their state-building efforts aiming at the establishment of the future Czechoslovakia: *“But in the times when the World War rammed down all Slovak national life and made it impossible for the Slovak patriots to raise their voices for their nation at home, an*

³⁴ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 354–355.

opportunity came for the Slovaks living abroad, out of Hungary. These Slovaks living abroad became conscious of their Slovak nationhood and far away from home they did not give up loving their Slovak homeland; they understood that the time came so that they would fulfil their historical role. Being overseas, untouched by the power of the Hungarian government, they many times remembered how Budapest had been refusing all of the rightful demands of the Slovak nation, and how it ruled out any Slovak attempts for a fair agreement with the Hungarians, and therefore, they now openly declared war against Hungary, so that they could liberate their nation from the Hungarian rule.”³⁵

A great importance was ascribed in the textbook to Milan Rastislav Štefánik, Slovak politician, diplomat and a General of the French army during WWI, in the fight for Slovak independence during WWI, thus replacing Tomáš Masaryk who was the most celebrated hero in the interwar history textbooks, but almost completely disappeared from Hrušovský’s narrative: “[Slovaks] had only two MPs in the Hungarian Parliament, so they did not have any means to demand their national rights. Slovaks wanted to separate from Hungary in order to secure all of these rights. The cooperation of Slovaks and Czechs in the resistance movement abroad was aiming at securing an independent Slovak national development... In February 1916, the Czech–Slovak National Council was established, which organized the revolutionary activities, and was firmly directing the resistance movement. This National Council was established because of the insistency of a young Slovak scholar, Dr Milan Rastislav Štefánik, who had lived in France from before the war and had excellent contacts with the representatives of public life.”³⁶... “To support the diplomatic and political activities of the National Council, it was necessary to organize a Czech–Slovak army, which would stand behind the programme of the revolution abroad. Štefánik had a significant role in this revolutionary work since he had connections, possessed a distinguished social

³⁵ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 357–358.

³⁶ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 359.

culture, and his whole great personality made it possible for the other representatives of the National Council to approach the statesmen who were deciding about the new order of Europe.³⁷

There was also a shift in the in-group and out-group representation paradigm. Now the in-group was exclusively made up of Slovaks who had retained the qualities of martyrs and heroes: *“The Slovak nation whose only aim was to live freely and in peace under the Tatra Mountains became involved in the whirl of war. Slovaks were leaving their families so that they would fight in the Austro-Hungarian army for a king who did not recognize them. Tens of thousands of healthy Slovak men went to the front to fight and die for the interests of others, for the power interests of their persecutors. And they fought and died bravely, since their oath of enlistment bound them and they did not want to break it; and because they were convinced that they were fighting mainly for their villages and for their Slovak families who were praying for their homecoming.”*³⁸... *“Slovaks fought in all battlefields and thousands of them were dying far away from their homeland. The Austro-Hungarian regiments which consisted mainly of Slovak soldiers were known for their heroic bravery, but Slovak soldiers, under the burden of wartime hardships, started to realize the pointlessness of the fight for the interests of others and they decided to revolt. And so Slovak soldiers of the 71st Austro-Hungarian infantry regiment (from Trenčín) rioted in Serbian Kragujevac and 44 of them paid for their courage with their lives.”*³⁹

On the other hand, changes also occurred in the construction of the out-group which was the outcome of contemporary political demands and promoted values. As it was mentioned before, Germans and German politics were treated with great respect in history narratives produced during WWII. Hungarians and Hungary remained depicted, as before in the interwar textbooks, as wrongful powers preventing Slovaks from exercising their

³⁷ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 360.

³⁸ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 354–355.

³⁹ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 366.

right for an independent national life. A new interpretative approach was applied in the representation of the Czechs who from the previously “fraternal nation” became also an out-group. This was the reflection of the formerly accumulated frustration of (mainly Catholic) Slovak political elites stemming from the interwar centralism and Czechoslovakism. Thus, the narratives regarding the Czech–Slovak relations were marked by emphasizing the images of mutual mistrust existing between Slovaks and Czechs in their joint efforts during WWI, and the representations of Czechs in Hrušovský’s textbook employed the messages showing them as acting with a sense of superiority towards Slovaks and preventing them from achieving and fully exercising their nation-building efforts. It was important to depict Czechs as the opponents of Catholicism, which was interpreted as a clear breach with Slovak worldview and values: *“American Slovaks were ready for any sacrifice in order to win their fight for our Slovak language. However, the collaboration between the Czechs and Slovaks was difficult, and Slovaks were doubtful, because they did not believe that Czechs would keep their promises, and Czechs only aided this mistrust by their performance. Czechs, not only in America but also in France and Russia, spoke about the great Czech state; they called the emerging legions the Czech army; they did not want to allow the creation of independent Slovak regiments; they regarded Slovaks to be less competent people and they applied everywhere only the Czech language at the expense of the Slovak one. This approach raised resistance among the Slovaks, their national pride was offended and it aroused the concerns that Slovaks would be in the future Czech–Slovak state, for which they had worked so hard, offering their properties and lives, again only second-grade citizens and that Czechs would be superior to them. These misunderstandings boomed also because Czechs would connect their fight for the national freedom with the fight against Rome, they would revive the Hussite traditions and*

*offend religious feelings of Slovaks who did not correspond with the Czech hatred of the Church.*⁴⁰

Similarly as it was in the interwar textbooks, the meaning of the war was explained as the efforts of the nation (but now concentrating exclusively on the role of the Slovaks) to achieve the independent state: *“Slovaks were fulfilling their national commitments in each sense; in huge numbers they entered the legions in which they excelled due to their valour, and they were helping in financing all the actions of the fights for the liberation, so that they would be able to consider the future state as the outcome of their sacrifice. In October 1917, the Slovak League in America decided to collect one million dollars for the liberation activities... this project united all the American Slovaks in their fight for the Slovak freedom.”*⁴¹... *“The war was lasting already for three years, and the resistance activities of Czechs and Slovaks abroad led towards the significant accomplishments both in diplomatic and military fields; however, the question of the mutual relations of Czech Lands and Slovakia in the future Czech–Slovak state was raising mutual mistrust and arguments. American Slovaks... demanded that the relation between the two nations was to be clear and that it was to be solved in order to achieve a successful resistance movement; and that the constitutional position of Slovakia in the future state was to be guaranteed in advance. All the Slovak patriots who were caring for the secure future of the nation and for the independent political, economic and cultural development of Slovakia agreed with this necessity. All these Slovak rights could be guaranteed by the chair of the National Council T. G. Masaryk who ... assured Slovaks that in Slovakia everything will be Slovak, because Slovakia will not be ruled from Prague, but from Slovakia itself.. Crowds of thousands of American Slovaks accepted this assurance as a guarantee that it would be Slovaks themselves who would be in charge of deciding about Slovakia. However, far-seeing Slovak patriots were not satisfied*

⁴⁰ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 364–365.

⁴¹ Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 365–366.

with such a pledge and they demanded a written confirmation that Slovakia will have a full autonomy with its own parliament in Czechoslovakia.”⁴²

Narratives on WWI presented to students in Slovak schools during the period of 1939-1945 were fulfilling the same social tasks as it was the case in the history textbooks presented in the interwar period. The international context of the war was not explored almost at all, and all the attention was paid to presenting it as a milestone in the historical development of Slovaks on their way towards reaching their own independent state. The apologetic narratives on the unfortunate fate of Slovaks in Austria-Hungary remained a frequently repeated topos. The Czech–Slovak relations during WWI were depicted as damaging for the Slovak national identity. This caused certain shifts in the representations of historical events: great men and their deeds remained important; however, only the Slovak émigré intellectuals were celebrated in the textbooks (apart from Milan Rastislav Štefánik, Hrušovský significantly propagated Slovak Catholic intelligentsia in the United States who were rather unrepresented in the textbooks published in the interwar period), while WWI Czech leaders were depicted as untrustworthy. The in-group (exclusively Slovaks and preferably those of Catholic denomination) was represented as stout-hearted, loyal, determined people fighting for their historical right for independent political development. The out-group was constructed of the forces preventing them from accomplishing their historical rights: Hungarians and Czechs.

History Textbooks Issued During the Rule of the Communist Party (1948-1989)

History education as well as historical research and historiography were in the period between 1948 and 1989 under the control of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia. There

⁴² Hrušovský, *Slovenské dejiny*, 367–368.

was no public debate questioning the interpretation of the past, and no public discussions took place on the content or form of history education. The forty years of communist rule were marked by strong ideological pressure, party censorship, and self-censorship in each sphere of public life, including historical research and historiographical production. Closed borders prevented access to western historiographies for decades.

In 1948, the school system in Czechoslovakia became fully centralized, all the alternative forms of education were forbidden, and the state took over all the schools as their exclusive founder. The state monopoly over the institutional schooling was characterised by the unified and uniform education – this meant introducing singular curricula and ideological indoctrination in all spheres of public education. At the beginning of the 1950s, a number of history textbooks were translated from the originals used in the Soviet Union, as historical science was generally not yet prepared to react quickly and prepare the ideologically satisfactory sources for school history education.⁴³ Later on, history textbooks were produced, usually in collaboration by Czech and Slovak historians from the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences and the Slovak Academy of Sciences, didacticians and teachers. There was always one textbook for each particular grade of a particular school type, and one edition was published in the Czech language and one in the Slovak language.

The construction of narratives on WWI in history textbooks produced during the rule of the Communist Party in Czechoslovakia was fully in line with the Marxist approach to the interpretation of historical development. The authors of the textbooks centred the WWI narratives around the revolution and class conflicts as the moving forces in history, and they employed a romanticising concept of a rightful fight of the oppressed nationalities against the aggressors: “*In this period,*

⁴³ Marek Havrila, *Vybrané kapitoly zo vzťahov slovenskej historiografie k inonárodným historiografiám v rokoch 1945 – 1968* [Selected chapters on the relation of Slovak historiography to foreign historiographies in the years 1945–1968] (Košice: Univerzita Pavla Jozefa Šafárika, 2009).

*the conflicts sharpened especially regarding the two political-military blocs, the class struggle of the workers against the ruling classes, and the nation liberation struggles of enslaved nations against their oppressors. It was the German imperialist and military circles that had the biggest interest in starting the war, since they believed it would bring them power all over the world. Except for the self-defending Serbia, all the other participating countries were leading an unjust imperialist war.*⁴⁴

One of the most elaborated topics in the textbooks was the critique of the contemporary reactionary imperialistic and colonial policies of the countries in general which were described as the main cause of the war: *“colonialism and imperialism of everybody (of small and big, of those who had enough as well as of those who did not have anything)”*⁴⁵, with an accent on the German guilt in the whole issue, specifically designating German aristocracy and bourgeoisie (the out-group) and German nationalism as the principal culprits of the war: *“The most aggressive imperialism was the German one. German imperialists planned to capture all the colonies, to annex Belgium and the Netherlands and border zones of France. They even wanted to attach Austria-Hungary to the German Empire. Even more daring plans it had in the East. Germany wanted to divide Russia, seize the Baltic region, Ukraine and the Caucasus, and from there, it wanted to expand through Iran to India. In collaboration with the Junkers (aristocratic class that was mainly winning recognition in army and high offices), the German capitalists and their monopolies were the main initiators of these aggressive plans. They would spread them through*

⁴⁴ Vratislav Čapek, Jozef Butvin, Miloň Dohnal, Ján Hučko and Anna Kováčová, *Dějepis II. Pro druhý ročník gymnázia* [History II. For the second grade of grammar schools] (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1986), 317.

⁴⁵ Jaroslav Joza, Jozef Butvin, František Červinka, *Dejepis pre 8. ročník základnej deväťročnej školy* [History for the 8th grade of elementary schools] (Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 1963), 217.

*press, army, schools and they tried to educate the whole nation in line with this spirit.*⁴⁶

Contrary to history textbooks used in the schools during the interwar period and during WWII, textbooks published after 1948 paid a lot of attention to the history of the everyday life of the masses and unprivileged segments of society during the war, thus fulfilling the Marxist demand for interpreting the past as the “history of the masses”. These narratives would cover mainly the economic aspects of the war and their impact on the everyday lives of common people, as well as war hardships, poverty, and material shortage which enhanced the revolutionary potential of societies. Their main purpose, however, was to develop and maintain the image of the dialectical nature of relation between the in-group and the out-group: “*World War I was from its very beginnings imperialistic and wrongful. It brought immense profit for Capitalists, and to working people it gave nothing but poverty and misery.*”⁴⁷ Thus, it is possible to track a shift in the in-group/out-group representation in the analysed history textbooks: in the narratives produced after 1948, they were constructed not exclusively on national (or partially on religious) basis as it was in the textbooks published earlier, but predominantly on the class division of the society.

The pro-Soviet orientation of the Czechoslovak politics penetrated also into the official interpretations of the past which often adopted such optics of the history as those that were spread in the mainstream Soviet historiography. This was manifested in the official Czechoslovak historiography, and thus also in school history textbooks, and the interpretations of WWI were no exemption to this trend: “*The Bolshevik Party in Russia led by V. I. Lenin was the only workers’ party in European*

⁴⁶ Jaroslav Kopáč, Miroslav Kropilák, Alois Sosík, Emil Stračár and Alice Teichová, *Dějiny doby nové a nejnovější. Dějepis pro 8. postupný ročník všeobecně vzdělávacích škol* [Modern and contemporary history. History for 8th grade of general schools] (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1955), 46–47.

⁴⁷ Miloň Dohnal, *Dějepis pro 9. ročník základní devítileté školy* [History for 9th grade of elementary schools] (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1975), 12.

*countries which remained during the World War I loyal to the idea of the socialist revolution. It did not betray the revolutionary programme, and it did not subordinate the revolutionary interests of workers to the imperialist war adventure as did the right-wing leaders of social-democratic parties in Austria and Germany.*⁴⁸

The Great October Socialist Revolution of 1917 was portrayed in all the history textbooks published between 1948 and 1989 as an important event and a milestone in the development of WWI, and it often overshadowed the history of the war itself which was a novelty in comparison to interpretations of WWI in history textbooks published in previous regimes, and was the outcome of changed political conditions and international relations of Czechoslovakia after 1948.

The textbooks published between 1948 and 1989 also interpreted WWI in connection with the establishment of Czechoslovakia as it was the case during the previous regimes. Some narratives remained similar to the narratives constructed before 1948; namely, the representations of WWI related to the image of Czechs and Slovaks as oppressed nationalities in the monarchy: *“The First World War affected the population of the Czech Lands and Slovakia very heavily. When the general mobilization was declared on 28 July 1914, hundreds of thousands of men were forced to take part in the war, where they were supposed to fight for the Austro-Hungarian emperor. Immediately after the beginning of the war, the government introduced censorship in the Czech Lands, it restricted personal freedom and each manifestation of national sentiments of non-German nations was punished as high treason.”*⁴⁹ Similarly: *“Brutal persecution was commenced against the Czech and Slovak nation, connected with the national oppression.”*⁵⁰

However, significant changes occurred in constructing the narratives on Czech and Slovak political elites and emigration representatives active in the resistance movement abroad

⁴⁸ Dohnal, *Dějepis pro 9. ročník*, 17.

⁴⁹ Dohnal, *Dějepis pro 9. ročník*, 25–26.

⁵⁰ Čapek et al, *Dějepis II*, 317.

during WWI who were portrayed as the heroes, “*the fathers of the nation*” in the interwar and WWII textbooks, and in their relation to the Allied Powers, previously described as “*all the civilized world*”: “*Only a small portion of [Czechoslovak – S.O.] bourgeoisie politicians questioned the future victory of the Central Powers... These started to consider, after the break-out of WWI, how to use the possible defeat of the Central Powers and the victory of the Allied Powers to disintegrate Austria-Hungary and to create an independent state of Czechs and Slovaks... However, the efforts aiming at receiving the support of the Western powers for the nation-liberating fight of Czechs and Slovaks were not successful. The representatives of the imperialist Allied Powers wanted to solve only their own interests through the war and they had no understanding for the national liberation struggle of Czechs and Slovaks. Therefore, they did not consider the break-up of Austria-Hungary even in case of their victory. It was possible to attract the Allied Powers statesmen to this idea only by involving Czechs and Slovaks in the frontline fights against the Central Powers, as since 1916, a growing shortage of soldiers was felt. With this in mind, Czechoslovak emigration started to build army units called the legions. These were supposed to actively participate in the fights against Austria-Hungary and act as the army of the future Czechoslovak state. By their active participation in the fights, they were supposed to create a prerequisite for the future establishment of the state...*”⁵¹

Similarly, the acts of the Czechoslovak legions that were portrayed as the flagship of the Czechoslovak resistance movement prior to 1948 turned to be interpreted as following: “*And so the legions were from the very beginnings of their existence incorporated into the fights for the interests of the imperialist powers. The misuse of the legions was fully visible after the Great October Socialist Revolution when the representatives of the foreign resistance movement agreed that the legions would*

⁵¹ Dohnal, *Dějepis pro 9. ročník*, 27.

be used in the intervention war against the Soviet Russia and its Red Army.”⁵²

In line with the formerly established tradition of representing WWI within the framework of national history, the textbooks published after 1948 interpreted the war as an important milestone in achieving the independence of Czechs and Slovaks. However, the national aspect was combined with the concept of the class struggle which made a significant shift in the interpretation of the establishment of Czechoslovakia as a product of WWI: *“The importance of the establishment of Czechoslovakia: Gaining their independence, Czech and Slovak nations made a significant leap forward in their historical development. After several hundreds of years of enslavement, an independent state of Czechs and Slovaks was established. Both brotherly nations had their natural base of development in it. The fall of monarchy and the establishment of a democratic republic meant the fulfilment of one of the significant demands of bourgeoisie democratic revolution. However, capitalists remained in power. The representatives of Czech and Slovak bourgeoisie claimed the private property to be untouchable... The working people of our lands were able by their vital movement to subvert the Habsburg monarchy; however, they did not succeed – without the leadership of a revolutionary Marxist party – to take over the power in the new state.”*⁵³

Unlike school history textbooks used during the interwar period and WWI, textbooks published in Czechoslovakia in 1948–1989 significantly centred their narratives on economic history. The second difference to the formerly published textbooks was emphasizing the dialectical relation between the classes (the in-group: working people vs. the out-group: the bourgeoisie) as moving forces in the events of World War I. Another in-group/out-group construction was based on juxtaposing imperialist countries described as wrongful capitalist expansionists and virtuous Soviet Russia, depicted as the only moral bastion not

⁵² Dohnal, *Dějepis pro 9. ročník*, 27.

⁵³ Dohnal, *Dějepis pro 9. ročník*, 36.

only as a general supporter of values and ideals of working people, but also as a patron of Slavic nations in Austria-Hungary. There was a removal of great men from the narratives of WWI, as promoting “bourgeoisie” politicians was not in accord with the Marxist demand of representing the history “from below”. One more changed paradigm in the interpretation of WWI was related to the activities of Czechoslovak legions that were portrayed as a misguided venture.

History Textbooks Published after 1989 and 1993

The years 1989 and 1993 brought significant changes to Slovak society. The transition from one political regime to another which started in 1989 and the dissolution of Czechoslovakia followed by the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993 encouraged the reassessment of the past and opened space for new interpretations of history. The fall of the Eastern block at the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s brought new challenges for Slovak historiography. For historians, it meant distancing themselves from the ideological constraints of the previous era as well as redefining the new concept, the “essence” of Slovak history, overcoming the limitations exerted on the historical sciences in the past, and exploring and interpreting the national past in new social and political conditions.

Changed political context brought also numerous challenges for history teachers. Although primary schools had been gradually provided with newly written teaching materials and history textbooks since the beginning of the 1990s, it took a long time for historians to produce new textbooks for secondary schools, and teachers were required, in some cases until as late as the beginning of the 2000s when a whole set of new textbooks was finally published, to use the textbooks produced during communism in Czechoslovakia. These old textbooks published in the 1980s in line with the communist interpretation of the past

remained in use in secondary schools in Slovakia throughout the entire 1990s as there were no new textbooks for this type of schools produced during that time. The parts of the texts that were seen as most problematic in terms of Marxist propaganda were simply crossed out and students were expected to learn from the remaining texts.

The mainstream trend of the development in historiography in the changed social and political context after 1989/1993 has been focusing on the implementation of new methods and theories in historical research, and thus trying to overcome long-term isolation from worldwide developments in historical writing which had caused serious deficiencies in the application of current theories and methodological approaches to historical writing, as well as in history teaching. When coming to the history textbook narratives regarding WWI, the authors representing this stream would opt for creating a rather neutral narrative, focusing on political, diplomatic and military history, as well as social history and history of everyday life.⁵⁴ There was undoubtedly a certain impact of narratives that were produced in previous regimes: emphasis on political,

⁵⁴ For example: Dušan Kováč and Lubomír Lipták, *Kapitoly z dejín pre stredné školy* [Chapters from history for secondary schools] (Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo, 1990); Dušan Kováč, Herta Tkadlečková and Viliam Kratochvíl, *Dejepis 4. Svet v novom tisícročí* [History 4. World in the new millennium] (Bratislava: Orbis Pictus Istropolitana, 1995); Ivan Kamenec, Dušan Kováč and Viliam Kratochvíl, *Dejepis 4. Slovensko v novom storočí* [History 4. Slovakia in the new century] (Bratislava: Orbis Pictus Istropolitana, 1997); Dušan Kováč, *Dejepis 4. Svet v 20. storočí* [History 4. World in the 20th century] (Bratislava: Orbis Pictus Istropolitana, 2001); Eva Chylová, Pavol Martuliak, Valéria Chromeková, Vladimír Varinský and Štefan Folkman, *Dejepis pre stredné odborné školy a stredné odborné učilištia III. Slovensko a svet v rokoch 1849 – 1939* [History for vocational secondary schools and for vocational training institutions III. Slovakia and world in the years of 1849–1939] (Bratislava: Orbis Pictus Istropolitana, 2003); Marcela Bednářová, Branislav Krasnovský, Barbora Ulrichová, *Dejepis pre 8. ročník základnej školy a 3. ročník gymnázia s osemročným štúdiom* [History for 8th grades of elementary schools and 3rd grade of 8-year grammar schools] (Martin: Vydavateľstvo Matice slovenskej, 2011); Bohuslav Hlava and Viliam Kratochvíl, *Dejepis 4. Pohrajme sa s históriou. Pracovný zošit* [History 4. Let's play with history. Working sheets] (Bratislava: Orbis Pictus Istropolitana, 2002); Alena Bartlová and Róbert Letz, *Dejepis pre 3. ročník gymnázií –*

military and economic history, focus on the achievements of the Czechoslovak legions, and presentation of narratives on great men. A novel approach was a gradual introduction of more segments from the history of everyday life. Yet, comparing these textbooks to the textbooks produced in previous regimes, it is possible to see the trend signaling that WWI narratives in school history textbooks have been becoming less instrumental in constructing collective identities of students. The stories on WWI presented to students in history textbooks published after 1989 have been less utilized in creating the image of us (the ethical bearers of civilization) and the Others (the immoral traitors) as it was the rule in the textbooks published in different political regimes before 1989, although it is still possible to trace negative connotations in regard to the image of the monarchy and Hungarians in these textbooks.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the establishment of Czechoslovakia lost its previous role of the funding myth of Slovakia in textbooks published after the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993. However, there has been a general trend of a gradual marginalization and disappearance of WWI from the public memory, historiography and school history education as it has been largely overshadowed by topics such as the Second World War, the Shoah, the Cold War or the overthrow of Communism.

* * *

For a long time, the history of World War I has been interpreted in school history education primarily from the national perspective. This went hand in hand with representing it within the framework of sentimentality and war propaganda, patriotic certainties such as battle, glory, hallowed dead,

národné dejiny [History for the third grades of grammar schools – national history] (Bratislava: Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo 2005).

⁵⁵ See Barnabás Vajda, “Az első világháború a szlovákiai történelem-tankönyvekben” [World War I in Slovak history textbooks], ed. Tamás Peregi, *Az első világháború a szomszédos országok és hazánk történelem-tankönyveiben* [World War I in history textbooks in neighboring countries and at home] (Budapest : Oktatóskutató és -Fejlesztő Intézet, 2015), 96–113.

great men and conventional romanticism. However, in case of history textbooks used in Slovakia since 1918 until the present, WWI has not been depicted solely by the language of grief, mourning and bereavement, but it has always included also a significant positive aspect: it has been depicted as a milestone in the historical development of the nation (be it Czechoslovak or Slovak), as a transition which helped achieve a sort of independence from the others (or at least as a step towards it). As such, it has been interpreted in terms of a system of international relations in which the national and imperial levels of conflict and cooperation were important and the in-group vs. out-group relations were the most significant parts of the WWI narratives.

However, this approach has been significantly challenged, since the process of European integration has rendered nationalist perspectives less relevant, and the recent trends toward global history have influenced the perception and interpretation of World War I as well. The emotional intensity of earlier interpretations has declined due to the greater temporal distance, and the focus of contemporary history has been directed to more recent issues. It is necessary to develop such an approach to interpreting WWI which would take into consideration multiple levels of historical experience, levels which are both below and above the national level. The globalization or at least the “Europeanization” of World War I history still remains a challenging project for both historians and educators.