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Slovakness in the Making: The Concept of “Nation” and “National Literature” in the Works of 1930s Literary Critics

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Abstract

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The study outlines the opinions on and sources of the so-called Slovak question in the interwar Czechoslovak republic amongst the writings of three Slovak literary critics: Stanislav Mečiar, Andrej Kostolný and Michal Chorváth. Each author stood for a different contemporary ideology; nationalist/autonomist, Czechoslovakist and communist, respectively. The current article details the ways and reasons these critics legitimised national self-determination, whether by invoking the legacy of the national awakening and those stereotypical historical narratives of Slovak oppression, equality and fulfilment within a common Czechoslovak state, or through the idea of social revolution and stark opposition to tradition deriving from modernist distrust and a general fragmentation of the world and society. Opinions on the problem with the Slovakness of national literature are also illustrated, as well as its place within the context of world literature, including an analysis of how these ideological rivals shared certain attitudes towards the national self-determination of Slovaks, yet differed greatly in their ideas on its manifestation. On the one hand, cooperation among literary intelligentsia may be seen as an effort to remain internally united while facing an impending world war; on the other hand, it could be interpreted as another part of the ideological struggle, as the case of the famous Congress of Slovak Writers seems to demonstrate.

Slovak literature of the interwar period is often considered incomplete, seen as lacking certain artistic forms that undoubtedly existed elsewhere, perhaps even missing a specific narrative or defining superstructure.¹ Slovak culture—and thus literature—after 1918 can be defined mostly by such absences and by a life granted sudden freedom to pursue artistic visions. Although literature and art were finally decoupled from overarching national interests, the situation also furthered the national emancipation movement that permeated the Slovak political scene from 1918, intensifying until the eventual dissolution of the Czechoslovak republic and founding of the so-called war-time Slovak republic (1939–1945). This question of national self-determination became an integral part of Slovak politics, ranging in form from seeking the practical acknowledgment of Slovaks as equal partners in the common state,

1 ČEPAN, Oskár. Literárny vývin v rokoch 1918–1945. In *Slovenská literatúra*, 1973, vol. 20, no. 3, p. 268.

to demanding full, political autonomy. Concerning the ideological spectrum of Slovak culture, every group's agenda had a certain degree of nationalism, whether represented by traditionally leaning nationalist authors, their socially conscious internationalist communist counterparts who were opposed to tradition, or advocates of Czechoslovak unity. These are surely rough definitions; closer descriptions will be provided using the cases of three people one might consider contemporary intellectuals, literary intelligentsia and certainly, people active in shaping the Slovak literary culture of the time. All of them belong to approximately the same generation; born in the early 20th century in Austria-Hungary and entering their formative years and adulthood after World War I in Czechoslovakia. The goal of this paper is to illustrate, via three case studies, how national and nationalist agenda manifested itself in Slovak literary culture.

Slovak Literary Intelligentsia

Much has been written on the shape of Slovak culture after Slovakia came into existence as part of the Czechoslovak republic. The main themes seem to be: a developmental delay in comparison to Czech part of the republic or Europe, particularism, incompleteness, unpreparedness and uncertain progress towards a newfound democracy and cultural openness.² The situation in the 1920s, often metaphorically described as "opening windows to Europe," is characterised by processes of renewed self-recognition, social and national differentiation, economic and industrial transformation, internationalisation, "cosmopolitisation" and pluralisation. These processes continued into the 1930s as artistic and political programmes in Slovakia began to become more pragmatic and radical. The tumultuous events of the 1930s included economic instability following the Great Depression, Hitler's rise to power in Germany and related expansive politics, the Spanish civil war, as well as inadequate social policies of the Czechoslovak state, the issue of the Czechoslovak nation, a crisis of industry, a lack of workforce due to immigration, economic inequality and the differing economic structure of the Czech and Slovak regions of the new republic.³ These concerns were mirrored in Slovakia by rising dissatisfaction, nationalism and calls for regionalism, federalism or the autonomy of Slovakia, a trend that continued until the founding of the Slovak Republic in 1939.⁴ Regarding literature, the 1920s were abundant with individualistic, subjective works of the post-1918 generation that struggled to articulate a new, modernist mode of writing, while in the 1930s, it became gradually radicalised and more avant-garde. It is important to note that despite the given differences, there were attempts by the literary community to symbolically unite from the mid-1930s, exemplified by the Congress of Slovak Writers in 1936.

2 See, for example ČEPAN 1973; ŠMATLÁK, Stanislav. *Dejiny slovenskej literatúry II*. Bratislava : Literárne informačné centrum, 2001, pp. 283–314; JAKSICSOVÁ, Vlasta. *Kultúra v dejinách. Dejiny v kultúre. Moderna a slovenský intelektuál v siločiach prvej polovice 20. storočia*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2012, pp. 31–61.

3 OLIVOVÁ, Věra. *Dějiny první republiky*. Praha : Karolinum, 2000, p. 172.

4 KOVÁČ, Dušan. *Dejiny Slovenska*. Praha : Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2007, pp. 200–204.

A good amount of young literary professionals born after 1900 entered the scene at the beginning of the 1930s armed with an entirely different perspective than the previous generation; with no apparent need for a united front of national interests, opinions were more differentiated in regard to national, social and artistic questions. Moreover, Slovakia only knew a handful of personalities that might be considered intellectuals. Intellectualisation and urbanity were indivisible after the First World War. When Slovaks started traveling and relocating to cities, a new generation of intelligentsia coming from villages and towns found itself actually having to adapt to being intelligentsia, often with limited results.⁵ In the 1930s, the next generation of intellectuals operated either in Prague, continuing the line of the first generation, or in Bratislava, which had already foregone transformation towards a Slovak metropole—it was nationalised, giving the impression of a purely Slovak city. As Peter Zajac asserts, Slovak literary intelligentsia in the interwar period set itself certain criteria; truthfulness and critical thinking, coupled with an energy of intellectual morality and a willingness to go against the majority.⁶ Although Zajac speaks about secular and urban intellectuals, it is applicable to young Slovak intelligentsia as a whole. In the Central and Eastern European geopolitical space, writers and literary critics were an integral part of intelligentsia, often fulfilling programmes of national awakening and education.⁷

Now let us introduce the personalities who in some ways reflected the Slovak position in the Czechoslovak republic and in the specifics of Slovak literature.⁸ Stanislav Mečiar (1910–1971) was a literary critic and historian who became prominent in the early 1930s, publishing reviews mostly in journals *Elán*, *Slovenské pohľady* (editor-in-chief 1939–1944) and *Slovensko* (editor-in-chief 1934–1938), and later in the autonomist *Slovák* or *Nástup*. In 1934, he began working in Matica slovenská, continuing on as a secretary from 1940. Mečiar, like many other literary professionals who supported the idea of autonomous Slovakia during the interwar period, has been forgotten for the most part due to the fact that he immigrated to Argentina in 1945 and subsequently became a banned author. Some attempts were made to rehabilitate his memory after 1989 largely coming from new nationalist circles, though often uncritically, problematically or in a downright unscholarly manner.⁹

5 ZAJAC, Peter. Slovenskí intelektuáli dvadsiateho storočia. In ZAJAC, Peter. *Krajina bez sna*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2004, pp. 36–37.

6 ZAJAC 2004, p. 44.

7 WACHTEL, Andrew Baruch. *Po komunismu stále dôležití? Role spisovatelů ve východní Evropě*. Praha : Academia, 2017, pp. 30–31.

8 These three critics were chosen for several reasons: 1. They belong to roughly the same generation and were most productive in the crucial 1930s; 2. Each represents a different point on the contemporary ideological spectrum; 3. Although they were vocal about their worldview and had certain connections to political institutions, they themselves were not politicians; 4. After 1918, a number of literary critics rose in struggle to become a legitimate part of the cultural intelligentsia. For a brief overview of some other literary professionals' (mostly writers) opinions on the national question in Czechoslovakia see VAŠŠ, Martin. *Slovenská otázka v 1. ČSR (1918–1938)*. Martin : Vydavateľstvo Matice slovenskej, 2011, pp. 221–234, 243–267. For a more thorough analysis of the political opinions of four influential interwar Slovak writers, see CSIBA, Karol. *Privátne – verejné – autobiografické*. Bratislava : Ústav slovenskej literatúry SAV, 2014.

9 For an example, see PARENÍČKA, Pavol (ed.) *Stanislav Mečiar: zborník štúdií o Stanislavovi Mečiarovi*. Martin : Matica slovenská, 1996. The book has since been reprinted (2010) with only

Michal Chorváth (1910–1982) was a literary critic, essayist and occasional poet, who, like Mečiar, became a prominent critical voice in the 1930s. Prior to the Second World War, Chorváth was best known for writing two long essays, *Otrávená generácia* (The Upset Generation) (1932), articulating the pessimism, angst and discontent of his generation, which had lived in the new Czechoslovak state for most of their lives, and *Romantická tvár Slovenska* (The Romantic Face of Slovakia) (1939), outlining a variety of alleged "Romantic images" of Slovaks, which Slovak political and cultural personalities identified with and took advantage of to legitimise their efforts. Although Chorváth was closely affiliated with the communist journal *DAV*, he was never considered a member of the eponymous group. However, he is often tied together with several other congenial authors and artists into a loose group dubbed R-10.

Last of the critics for study is Andrej Kostolný (1903–1984), a representative of political Czechoslovakism. He was a prolific literary and theatre critic, French translator, cultural commentator and editor of the cultural section of *Politika*, a self-proclaimed politically neutral newspaper, but with an editorial staff that aligned with predominantly agrarian views built upon the pre-1914 liberal conservative and Czechoslovakist ideas of the "Hlas generation" and their eponymous journal, as well as the successor journal *Prúdy*. A devoted former student of Czech professor Albert Pražák, Kostolný was vocal about his opinions on the cultural space in Czechoslovakia, yet he often commented on national issues related to the position of Slovaks and the culture and language within the common state.

Reflections on the National Issue in the 1930s

The "Slovak question" was discussed fiercely among politicians and intellectuals in the 1930s, including writers and literary critics. Traditionally belonging to intelligentsia that shaped national consciousness, they continued discussions under different, democratic circumstances in the new republic. The term "nationalism" is not used with inherently negative connotations,¹⁰ but with respect to the contemporary Slovak idea of "nation" and the cultural atmosphere of the 1930s when most writers viewed national self-determination through art as a necessity, mostly consisting of attempts to define sources, goals and forms of Slovak literature and its criticism, and drawing on the role of Slovak Romantic generation and cementing its legacy as a formative tradition. It is also worth noting that issues of modernity and tradition, or nationalism and cosmopolitanism, often went hand in hand with the struggles to outline the Slovakness of art.

slight alterations, still full of highly problematic passages that relativize Mečiar's opinions and actions and counter how he was perceived, or ignored, by Marxist-Leninist literary historiography with a different extreme.

- 10 This term has often shifted in meaning towards patriotism or chauvinism depending on the social and political situation. For a historical and situational distinction between the three terms in Slovak context, see VÖRÖS, László. Vlastenectvo aj šovinizmus, alebo len nacionalizmus? Terminologické a definičné problémy skúmania nacionalizmov a historická komparácia. In KOVÁČ, Dušan et al. *Slovenské dejiny v dejinách Európy. Vybrané kapitoly*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2015, pp. 336–371.

Stanislav Mečiar provides a fitting example of an engaged nationalist and autonomist literary intellectual, one of the more exposed and prolific after Tido Jozef Gašpar, Martin Rázus and Milo Urban, and surely one of the best known literary critics on this side of the ideological spectrum. He began publishing reviews and essays in 1930 as 20-year-old student of Slovak and German studies with penchant for literature, but also interested in Polish and Croatian works. Although he began as a literary critic of both poetry and prose, by the mid-1930s, Mečiar's scope broadened, turning him into a figure one might consider a cultural critic. Later in the decade as the pressure for Slovak autonomy intensified, his articles carried a more distinguishable political overtone and rhetorical pathos.

Mečiar asserted that Slovaks are a small nation, constrained before it could fulfil its historical role, but all the more destined for a greatness that could only be achieved by working hard in the everyday cultivation of national culture.¹¹ He would often invoke the legacy of the national awakening and Ľudovít Štúr, connecting it to the Slovak position in the Czechoslovak Republic. He called for an increase in organised education towards a greater national consciousness, criticised the general indifference of Slovaks to their history and culture, and expressed hope for unity in regard to the Slovak interest in national self-determination.¹² A constant reiteration of the "historical role" of Slovaks was especially significant, a narrative that had pervaded Slovak culture and society since the early 19th century and would become integral to Slovak autonomist rhetoric, and later also to the Slovak part of Czechoslovak communism. From 1936, Mečiar's writing radicalised and openly explored the notion of what is usually called "historical injustices against the Slovak nation." He drew parallels between the Slovak situation before the First World War and the struggle for self-determination within the Czechoslovak Republic, going so far as anticipating a need for the "revolution and liberation of the Slovak word, to transform it with the fire of enthusiasm into a word of steel, of hard work and victory, where the existence of the Slovak nation, with all of its spiritual dispositions, strengths and attributes, would unite productively to create, ensure and build confidence for our life, our national growth, our freedom."¹³

As Mečiar became editor-in-chief of *Slovenské pohľady*, ceding the same position in *Slovensko* to writer Jozef Ciger Hronský, the increasing nationalist overtones would eventually culminate in a series of programmatic articles that affirmed his positive relationship with the newly founded Slovak state. In one of them, augmented by photographs of several Slovak politicians who were also members of the Matica slovenská committee, including Jozef Tiso and Ferdinand Ďurčanský, he anticipated a change of great proportions and a transformation of Slovak society that would draw on the efforts for national self-determination by Ľudovít Štúr or Andrej Hlinka. In the end, Mečiar urged "reckless and intransigent elimination of every obstacle to our development,"

11 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Národná povinnosť nestačí... In *Slovensko*, 1936, vol. 2, March, pp. 106–107.

12 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Štúrovo jubileum. In *Slovensko*, 1935, vol. 2, September–October, pp. 4–6.

13 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Slovo kovové – slovo víťazné! In *Slovensko*, 1936, vol. 3, September, pp. 2–4.

refusal of foreign influences from “unfavourable people,” and specifically pointed out the role of Slovak intellectuals in these events. According to him, the new intelligentsia must be dedicated to “the awakening work, and this is why it should transform first” to “create presupposition for new life” and to participate “in the struggle for a better destiny and fortune for those to whom intellectuals must show the way.”¹⁴ This was not an opinion that Mečiar would impose on himself under influence or outside pressure—he wrote about Slovak writers and intellectuals in 1934 with similar conclusions, seeing them as redundant if they did not actively cultivate national culture in the time of global chaos and spiritual crises.¹⁵

The central theme in Mečiar’s cultural writing touching upon the issue of nationalism was that Slovak literature, culture and society should conform to certain values that he universally connected to nation-ness, or idiosyncratic Slovakness, which, in a roundabout way, translates to national identity. These values and attributes were, however, either very vague or stereotypical and basically correlated with a set of auto-stereotypes about Slovaks that Rudolf Chmel poignantly described as the Slovak emotional, rebellious, religious and plebeian nature; a strenuousness, rurality, sense of justice and inclination towards great leaders, as well as myths of Slovaks no longer being dominated or slaving on their own soil.¹⁶ This is paradoxical, as Mečiar himself was a vocal critic of superficiality and shallowness, the uncritical evaluation of history, mechanical acceptance of phrases and foreign influences and vagueness, for example, connected to the term “tradition.” He criticised those who used “tradition” as a mere figure of speech, instead calling it “power that propels spiritual development”, “faith in something powerful” and “a tool of will.” He also argued that it is the intellectuals who should be in close contact with tradition and the future tasks that derive from it,¹⁷ echoing an opinion he had expressed previously encouraging Slovak intellectuals and artists to participate in all branches of culture and to express their artistic visions and goals with regards to the national future and its spiritual past.¹⁸ If the Czechoslovak image of Slovak history included the notion of Slovaks as “people without history” and the myth of a thousand-year-long oppression,¹⁹ Mečiar opposed such an ahistorical view, yet at the same time, legitimised the myth as foundational for Slovak nation-ness.

14 In the same issue, Mečiar published a short article, *Slovensko nadovšetko* (Slovakia Above All), praising Slovak unity and integrity and stating that the Slovak nation has finally been liberated after many years of systematic efforts. MEČIAR, Stanislav. V novom živote nové ideály a noví ľudia. In *Slovensko*, 1939, vol. 5, no. 1–2, pp. 7–11.

15 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Charakter a kultúra. In *Elán*, 1934, vol. 4, no. 8, pp. 1–2.

16 Chmel alleges a longevity and viability of this position by adding that such a cocktail of stereotypes and myths has been utilised by different ideologies in different historical situations. See CHMEL, Rudolf. Slováci v zajatí stereotypov. In CHMEL, Rudolf. *Moje slovenské pochybnosti*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2004, p. 13.

17 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Slovenské tradície. In *Slovensko*, 1937, vol. 3, July–August, pp. 198–201.

18 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Sochár Štefanko. In *Slovensko*, 1936, vol. 2, January–February, pp. 79–81.

19 ŠKVARNA, Dušan. Koncepty slovenských dejín a deformácie historickej pamäti. In BYSTRZAK, Magdalena – PASSIA, Radoslav – TARANENKOVÁ, Ivana (eds.) *Kontakty literatúry. Modely identity, reprezentácie*. Bratislava : VEDA, pp. 212–213.

Andrej Kostolný openly admired personalities that in one way or another, spearheaded the idea of a single Czechoslovak nation, most notably Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Ivan Dérer, Albert Pražák or Pavel Bujnák. Among literary intelligentsia, Kostolný was one of the best-known proponents of single Czechoslovak culture. As Ján Smrek described him, he was one of “three musketeers somehow oriented towards the new Hlas-ism” along with literary critic Milan Pišút and poet Emil Boleslav Lukáč.²⁰ Kostolný wrote extensively on contemporary cultural life, with a special interest in the specifics of Slovak culture and language amongst the broader Czechoslovak context. Kostolný saw the so-called Czechoslovak reciprocity and closeness as a moral ideal, fundamental to the common democratic republic.²¹ He considered Slovak nationalism compatible with Czechoslovak nationalism, as long as it was subordinate to the idea of common culture and language of the Czechs and Slovaks.²²

The concept of the Slovak language as one of many dialects of the Czechoslovak language constantly shaped Kostolný’s political views. He promoted the distinct Czech and Slovak cultures and languages as equal within the idea of the Czechoslovak nation, yet he strove to distinguish Slovak language from Czech, for example, calling for an easier legal process in obtaining Slovak translation rights from world literature.²³ He rejected any suggestion to eliminate the codification of Slovak, stating that the language has proven itself as vital and functional without shattering Czechoslovak spiritual unity.²⁴ He also engaged in a controversy that surrounded Matica slovenská and codification of the new rules of Slovak orthography²⁵ in 1931–1932, after which fourteen Czechoslovakist officials allegedly resigned due to an “unhealthy nationalist agenda in the institution.” Kostolný argued that Slovak codification should not be guided by the political principles—a visible delimitation against Czechs or downright autonomy—of the Ľudáks, either members or, loosely speaking, sympathisers of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, and an anti-Czech purism that would sacrifice any chance of Czechoslovak unity.²⁶

Kostolný provided his most in-depth opinion on the relationship between Czechoslovakism and the specifics of Slovak cultural life in two texts. The first was based on a speech that he gave at the Congress of the Young Slovak Generation (25–26 June 1932 in Trenčianske Teplice) in the panel *Status of Slovakia in the Czechoslovak Republic from the Cultural Side*²⁷ jointly with Ladislav Novomeský and later, autonomist politician Matúš Černák. He spoke

20 SMREK, Ján. Kosa na kameň. Druhá etapa polemie so Slovenskými smermi. In *Elán*, 1935, vol. 5, no. 7, p. 1.

21 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. Ďalšia práca v agrárnom seminári. Nacionálny problém v Československu: slovenským nacionalizmom k nacionalizmu československému. In *Slovenský denník*, 7 February 1933, p. 4.

22 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. Generačne nadväzujeme. In *Politika*, 1932, vol. 2, no. 13–14, pp. 179–180.

23 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. Autorské právo prekladu pre ČSR. In *Politika*, 1932, vol. 2, no. 11, p. 176.

24 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. Povedzme si to jasne a úprimne! In *Politika*, 1932, vol. 2, no. 21, p. 274.

25 *Pravidlá slovenského pravopisu s abecedným pravopisným slovníkom*. Praha : Štátne nakladateľstvo, 1931.

26 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. Matica slovenská a čo ďalej. In *Politika*, 1932, vol. 2, no. 10, pp. 113–115.

27 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. Postavenie Slovenska v ČSR po stránke kultúrnej. In *Politika*, 1932, vol. 2, no. 11, pp. 147–151.

of Czechoslovak unity despite seemingly unsurmountable differences, invoking the importance of pre-1914 Czechoslovak cooperation that paved the way to national freedom found in the common state. He favoured professionalism and a rational approach, proposed solutions—though overly optimistic and vague—to language teaching in high schools, problems in the Slovak National Theatre and diversification in literature, and reflected on Slovak scientific efforts in comparison to Czech university research. As for the question that had eventually led to the Congress—the codification issue in *Matica slovenská*—Kostolný did not see the need to further dissect it as, according to him, Slovak language was well-established by national literature, and professional and scientific terminology—with both Slovak and Czech etymology—had already crystallised. The results of the Congress are often seen as expression of general dissatisfaction with the political system, a crisis of Czechoslovak unity and a rejection of Prague centralism.²⁸ As a representative of the journal *Politika*, which organised the event, Kostolný remained one of the few participants to defend the official Czechoslovakist state policy, or at least attempt to reach a compromise with the Slovak voices rejecting it.²⁹

The second work was a booklet entitled *Polemika s dr. L. Novákom, autorom „Jazykovedných glos k československej otázke“* (A Polemic with Dr. L. Novák, the Author of “Linguistic Commentary on the Czechoslovak Question”) published separately in 1937. It was a polemical answer to a work by Slovak linguist Ľudovít Novák that advocated for the practical equality of Czech and Slovak languages, employing a linguistic analysis of Slovak to prove it as an independent language. Kostolný declared that he will not try to refute these claims on linguistic grounds, but rather focused on the moments in which he provided “dangerous and confusing excursions into non-linguistics.” Aside from deeming the book unscholarly, Kostolný accused Novák of delving into indirect advocacy of Slovak autonomism and outdated “Hungarism”, or as he explains through Ivan Dérer, perceiving the issue of Slovak self-determination as akin to traditionally described relationships between Slovak and Magyars in the old Hungarian Kingdom.³⁰ Kostolný concluded his work with a chapter titled *Czechoslovak National Problem*, in which he repeatedly assured readers that the Slovak language was sufficiently independent, and that Czechoslovak culture alone would not lead to uniformity.³¹ In the end, the booklet demonstrated how Kostolný, by adhering to official state policies—albeit under the guise of political unity—ignored the core of the Czechoslovak language problem: most Slovaks who opposed the idea of two “dialects” saw it as a patronising way of denying the chance for national self-determination.³² As Rudolf

28 ARPÁŠ, Róbert. Zjazd mladej slovenskej generácie. In HANULA, Matej – KŠIŇAN, Michal (eds.) *Slovensko a Európa medzi demokraciou a totalitou: kapitoly z dejín 20. storočia k jubileu Bohumily Ferenčuhovej*. Bratislava : Historický ústav SAV; Veda, 2017, p. 128.

29 According to an article in *Slovák*, his speech, which followed that of Černák, was met with loud laughter from spectators. See *Sjazd mladej slovenskej generácie jednohlasne: Proti centralizmu a za autonomiu Slovenska*. In *Slovák*, 28 June 1932, p. 2.

30 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. *Polemika s dr. L. Novákom, autorom „Jazykovedných glos k československej otázke.“* Bratislava : Universum, 1937, pp. 6–9.

31 KOSTOLNÝ 1937, *Polemika*, pp. 26–27.

32 RYCHLÍK, Jan. *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Spolupráce a konflikty 1914–1992*. Praha : Ústav pro

Chmel describes this paradox, Czechoslovakist intellectuals who argued for Slovak and Czech unity asserted that in essence there were no major differences to consider Czechs and Slovaks unique nationalities, yet at the same time they admitted that both nations had different customs, laws, history and levels of civilizational, spiritual and material progress.³³

Kostolný's politically charged writing and activities intensified by the late-1930s, at a time when "Czechoslovak unity" had largely become an artificial phrase used in the public space and media, holding only the superficial function of official, festive, state-loyal rhetoric.³⁴ Even in a 1938 article lauding Milan Hodža, Kostolný maintained that Czechoslovak unity was against centralism and spiritual uniformity, and that it allowed for healthy national life.³⁵ He was also very active in the restored Luhačovice meetings, whose original iteration (1908–1913) organised by the Československá Jednota (Czechoslovak Unity) association played a key role in bringing the pre-1914 Czech and Slovak political and ideological avant-garde together.³⁶ At one meeting in July 1938, Kostolný and Milan Pišút debated what hinders the convergence of Czech and Slovak cultures as well as plans on how to cultivate Czechoslovak ideology in schools.³⁷ Kostolný also co-authored *Dvacať rokov slobody. Príručka k jubilejným oslavám 20. výročia našej samostatnosti* (Twenty Years of Freedom. A Handbook for Celebrations of the 20th Anniversary of Our Independence),³⁸ a booklet intended for the celebrations of the founding of the First Czechoslovak Republic, including articles, speeches, quotes, poems and excerpts from theatre plays by famous politicians and writers, as well as statistics connected to the social situation in Slovakia and references for further reading.

Michal Chorváth rarely wrote solely on nationalism and politics before 1939. However, his literature reviews and essays often discussed the national and religious aspects of art and the social impact of literature. His seminal essay, *The Upset Generation*,³⁹ outlined the position of Slovaks from the young generation's perspective, articulating the conflict between the anti-modernist revivalism and modernism of the 20th century.⁴⁰ Chorváth detailed a previous generation of inactivity and servility towards the Czechoslovak state and the

studium totalitních režimů, 2012, pp. 89–96.

- 33 CHMEL, Rudolf. Slovenská otázka v 20. storočí. In CHMEL, Rudolf. *Romantizmus v globalizme. Malé národy – veľké mýty*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2009, p. 236.
- 34 DUCHÁČEK, Milan. Českoslovakismus v prvním poločase ČSR: státotvorný koncept nebo floskule? In HUDEK, Adam – KOPEČEK, Michal – MERVART, Jan (eds.) *Čecho/slovakismus*. Praha : Nakladatelství Lidové noviny; Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, v. v. i., 2019, pp. 180.
- 35 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. Jeden z receptov dr. Milana Hodžu. In *Politika*, 1938, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 22–23.
- 36 JURČIŠINOVÁ, Nadežda. *Česko-slovenské porady v Luhačoviciach (1908–1913)*. Bratislava : Ústav politických vied SAV, 2015.
- 37 Kultúrne problémy na luhačovských poradách. In *Slovenský denník*, 5 July 1938, p. 3.
- 38 DAFČÍK, Ján – KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej – ZÚBEK, Ludo (eds.) *Dvacať rokov slobody. Príručka k jubilejným oslavám 20. výročia našej samostatnosti*. Bratislava : Slovenský jubilárny výbor v Bratislave, 1938.
- 39 CHORVÁTH, Michal. Otrávená generácia. In CHORVÁTH, Michal. *Cestami literatúry. Články, kritiky, recenzie 1932–1944*. Edited by Branislav Choma. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1960, pp. 19–29.
- 40 ZAJAC, Peter. Slovenské kargo. In ZAJAC, Peter. *Slovenské kargo*. Bratislava : Kalligram, 2015, p. 90.

idea of unity, blaming them for the hardships of his generation and encouraging the destruction of the system operated by Czechs and any ideas of Czechoslovak unity, which to him was most vividly represented by the situation in public schools. He also pointed out crucial differences between Czechs and Slovaks that substantiated coexistence within one state—the unity of Czechs exceeded the fragmentation of Slovaks, who had only recently experienced what becoming a nation really yields. In this respect, Chorváth asked, “What was the nation? Could those villages, scattered across our mountains be called a nation?” However, he criticised the idea of Czechoslovak unity as a mere phrase covering cold official relations. Chorváth’s tone was sharply confrontational, accusing contemporary society of aimlessness and doubtfulness as he provocatively invoked the narrative of a thousand-year oppression of Slovaks by the Hungarians, hinting that the Czech colonisation of Slovaks was just a different form of national oppression.

Chorváth later shifted his aggressive tone to a more constructive one, yet still sharply critical and vehemently opposing political nationalism. In a scathing review of Martin Rázus’s historical novel *Odkaz mŕtvych* (Legacy of the Dead) (1936), set in the protestant central Slovak town of Brezno in the years of the counter-reformation, Chorváth derided the work and its author for spreading dangerous nationalism and fascism, attributing it to the author’s lack of knowledge and his ignorance, with the book promoting brutality, stupidity, intolerance and spiritual vileness.⁴¹ Using the term fascism was not random as at the time, the majority of writers and literary professionals were aware of the Nazi threat to Europe and Czechoslovakia. Following the First Vienna Award, Chorváth returned to the idea of Slavic unity as a possible defence against German expansion. He argued that this type of harmony had been impossible in the previous decade due to rising nationalism and the need for national self-determination. Although—in accordance with much of leftist intelligentsia—he criticised the Czechoslovak republic, it was seen as a useful model for the future but with a much broader Slavic presence, a “consensus omnium” that would stand above ideological differences.⁴²

In 1939, Chorváth voiced similar views in the essay *The Romantic Face of Slovakia*.⁴³ Of all his pre-war texts, this best mirrored his interest in the theory and praxis of Czechoslovakism, a topic central to the Slovak leftist intelligentsia in 1930s.⁴⁴ He viewed Romanticism not as an event, but as a way of thinking that pervaded the Slovak mind set as some relic of national revivalism, and which prevented Slovakia from advancing into modernity. He saw the notion

41 CHORVÁTH, Michal. Odkaz pre mŕtvych (Nad Rázusovým Odkazom mŕtvych). In CHORVÁTH, Michal. *Cestami literatúry*. Edited by Branislav Choma. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1979, p. 211. Originally published in *DAV*, 1937, vol. 9, no. 1, pp. 12–14.

42 m. ch. [Michal Chorváth]. „...nech sa ti ozve človek“. In *Slovenský hlas*, 30 December 1938, p. 6.

43 CHORVÁTH, Michal. Romantická tvár Slovenska. In CHORVÁTH, Michal. *Cestami literatúry. Články, kritiky, recenzie 1932–1944*. Edited by Branislav Choma. Bratislava : Slovenský spisovateľ, 1960, pp. 30–54.

44 BENKO, Juraj. Miesto a funkcia inteligencie v slovenskom komunistickom hnutí v medzivojnovom období. In MICHÁLEK, Slavomír – LONDÁK, Miroslav et al. *Gustáv Husák. Moc politiky – politik moci*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2013, p. 80.

of a “romantic soul” as a foundational myth for the Slovak nation that was used to legitimise its history and could only be overcome with modern critical rationalism. Within the context of the Czechoslovak republic, Chorváth deemed it important to explain that Czechs had passed through the phase of national self-determination earlier and yet showed no understanding for Slovaks during the same process much later, ignoring their efforts to become an independent, productive and creative force within the common republic. Will to participate in Czechoslovak unity was, to him, a symptom of Czechoslovak romanticism that would be overcome once the Slovak political and national romanticism was overcome. Nevertheless, Chorváth criticised clinging to national myths—especially the legend of the hot-headed, sanguine nature of Slovaks—and narratives that justified political and historical passiveness.

Slovakness vs Worldliness in Literature

Attempts to define what makes a literature Slovak were not strictly products of rising nationalist tendencies in the 1930s. Well before 1918, literary intellectuals of differing ideologies were interested in defining the character of Slovak literature as a part of the natural process of self-determination. In the context of art history, the identification of specific national art was categorized by the Slovak myth; bluntly put, a programmatic focus on the Slovak countryside, its inhabitants and the use of folklore influences with a modernist approach to art. These features are generally associated with the depiction of Slovakness, of one’s face and one’s own form.⁴⁵ Literature fought its own similar struggle to define national works in between the wars.

There are several ways of defining “a literature”, one more complicated than the other. From today’s point of view, to speak of “national literatures” is walking on thin ice. It is a notion complicated by a plethora of issues, starting with “simple” things such as the nationality of an author or the language of a work, and culminating with historical circumstances and inter-literary processes. For the sake of simplicity, literatures can be defined as “techniques or practices of reading texts, and specifically of linking texts together, through a series of relationships that usually begins with language and/or the polity, but which also include questions of genre and influence, among other criteria.”⁴⁶ It is reasonable to assume that literature is “one and unequal” since the times of Johann Wolfgang Goethe, as Franco Moretti asserts.⁴⁷ Regarding the case of Slovak literature in the interwar period, the issue is underlined by a visible struggle to define what constitutes the specifics of Slovak literature and the number of influences acting on it. Despite attempts to identify the idiosyncrasy of Slovak art, there were many influences on Slovak literature, most

45 KVOČÁKOVÁ, Lucia. *Cesta ke slovenskému mýtu. Konstrukce identity slovenské moderny v kontextu ideje čechoslovakismu*. Translated by Martin Lukáč. Praha : Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2020, p. 10.

46 BEECROFT, Alexander. *An Ecology of Literature from Antiquity to the Present Day*. London; New York : Verso, 2015, p. 16.

47 MORETTI, Franco. Conjectures on World Literature. In *New Left Review*, 2000, vol. 1, no. 238, p. 56.

transparently Czech, French, Hungarian, German, Russian, or Polish, but also English, Italian, or south Slavic, as is evidenced even in the case of the three critics of this study. These men had first-hand, cosmopolitan experience with world literature; Mečiar was well-versed in German and Polish, translating numerous works, Kostolný was fluent in Hungarian and French and Chorváth belonged to a group of Slovak Prague students who were in touch with the latest artistic movements. To elaborate on Moretti's claim, Slovak writers mainly struggled to rightfully become "one" with world literature, while simultaneously feeling "unequal" to it. Authors differed in the way Slovak literature should be legitimised, which inherently related to the issue of its function, form and content. The oft-repeated term "worldliness" was frequently applied to the evaluation of Slovak literature in these discussions.

The relationship between tradition and modernity became a focal point for defining Slovak literature. Mečiar favoured a form of Slovak writing that would share both; he called the best post-1918 literary works a conscious syntheses of *l'art pour l'art* tendencies and a humanistic approach to national issues.⁴⁸ A reconstruction of Mečiar's publishing history indicates what he considered a canon, a guiding line for modern Slovak literature; on the one hand, he considered Janko Jesenský, Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav or Ivan Krasko canonical authors, but on the other, he was positively aware of contemporary modern artistic movements. Seeing literature as a "reservoir of values that outlast individuals and generations,"⁴⁹ he reconstructed the narrative of Slovak literature as truly beginning with Štúr's Romantic generation, even explicitly stating that "producers of spiritual values" should consciously utilise their legacy and complement it with modern world influences in a way that would ultimately be distinctly Slovak and only then, modern.⁵⁰ From 1934 to 1938, Mečiar published a series of articles in *Elán* that commented on the state of Slovak literature and culture. He championed the view of universality and equality with other European and world literatures,⁵¹ but also repeatedly criticised Slovak authors for their lack of values,⁵² overt focus on fashionable slogans⁵³ and the reluctance or inability to find a common ground in cultural work for the sake of national progress.⁵⁴ There are some key points to be found in Mečiar's thinking. Although receptive to modern trends in literature, he cautioned against their mechanical use, and though he insisted on worldly qualities for Slovak literature, he was critical of most authors for not creating works with such character. To sum up, Mečiar did not reject modernity, but considered it in relation to national art as a return to a purely Slovak literary form, to its folk roots and legacy of previous generations,⁵⁵ evoking the long-time attitude

48 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Slovenská literatúra a tradícia. In *Slovenské smery*, 1936, vol. 3, no. 8–9, p. 302.

49 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Nesmrteľný hlas. In *Elán*, 1938, vol. 8, no. 10, pp. 1–3.

50 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Nad duchovným dedičstvom Štúrovým. In *Slovenské pohľady*, 1936, vol. 52, no. 1, p. 31.

51 MEČIAR, Stanislav. My a takzvaná európska úroveň. In *Elán*, 1934, vol. 4, no. 6, p. 1.

52 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Sine nobilitate. In *Elán*, 1936, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 1–3.

53 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Bezideovosť v literatúre. In *Elán*, 1937, vol. 8, no. 1, pp. 5–6.

54 MEČIAR, Stanislav. Niet ľudí. In *Elán*, 1937, vol. 7, no. 10, pp. 1–2.

55 MEČIAR 1936, Sine nobilitate.

towards “national revivalist” and educational art⁵⁶ that can be traced back to Ľ. Štúr. To Mečiar, historical national values that largely corresponded to the aforementioned stereotypical set of “Slovak” attributes described by Chmel and traditional literary forms of both sophisticated and folk art were evidence of the legitimacy of Slovak literature and assured its future progress.

As explained above, Kostolný maintained that the Slovak language was not under threat from Czechoslovakist policies. To him, as in Mečiar’s case, the biggest merit Slovak literature should have headed towards was worldliness. In addition, he mentioned professionalism and a scholarly approach that would thoroughly analyse and uncover the specifics of Slovak culture, thus anticipating its future needs.⁵⁷ Generally, Kostolný opposed nationalist tendencies in literature as remnants of the pre-1918 national and political situation. In fact, he was more interested in outlining its relationship to Czech literature as a certain sign of worldliness. Like with language, which he saw politically as united but distinct in practice, Kostolný spoke of one Czechoslovak culture⁵⁸ that should only be evaluated in context of world literature.⁵⁹ Yet he felt it necessary to discuss the cultural transfer and distinctions between Czech and Slovak culture. He repeatedly criticised the Czech side for not particularly caring for Slovak literature, despite the best Slovak efforts to export their national literature.⁶⁰ He also criticised Slovak writers for their close-mindedness, regionalism and overrating of national values.⁶¹ To put it simply, worldliness was Kostolný’s way of justifying Slovak literature as a specific national literature, though still subordinate to the political unity of Czechoslovak culture. At the core, one might consider him a light version of a Czechoslovak nationalist.

Chorváth approached the issue of national literature in terms of both its history and function. Like Mečiar, he deemed the legacy of Slovak Romanticism important to modern Slovak literature, but he saw greater value in contemporary poetry developing on Romanticism in conjunction with new literary forms and expressions.⁶² The notion of a romantic Slovak nature pervaded Czechoslovak art reception; Czech art being high and sophisticated, and Slovak low and “rustic”⁶³—which Chorváth sharply opposed. However, he did see the Slovakness of literature in its connection to the people. Not only was Romantic art inspirational to contemporary artists due to its folk sources, but among international art as well, offering jazz as an example of a modern art form with folk roots. Chorváth’s solution was to resume the tradition of Slovak art for the masses, with its distinctively sad, painful and defiant tone,

56 KVOČÁKOVÁ 2020, p. 58.

57 KOSTOLNÝ 1932, *Postavenie Slovenska*, p. 151.

58 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. *Mladá generácia slovenská (Pokračovanie)*. In *Luk*, 1930, vol. 1, no. 7, pp. 100–102.

59 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. *Tiene diletantizmu*. In *Slovenský denník*, 28 October 1933, p. 13.

60 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. *Cesty slovenskej kultúry namierené do českých zemí*. In *Politika*, 1937, vol. 7, no. 6, p. 68.

61 KOSTOLNÝ, Andrej. *Poznámky k Rázusovej prednáške v Bratislave*. In *Politika*, 1931, vol. 1, no. 9, pp. 102–103.

62 CHORVÁTH 1960, *Romantická tvár*, p. 48.

63 KVOČÁKOVÁ 2020, p. 90.

but eschewing superficial folklore traits.⁶⁴ Chorváth attributed the issues with Slovak art—obsolescence, isolation, marginality—to the tradition of testing the formal side of literary production that led to misunderstandings by the general readership, and expressed hope that writers will realise their new mission to speak to the masses.⁶⁵ Although Chorváth was critical of the Czech relationship to Slovak art, he nevertheless admitted that Slovak poetry was closely connected to the Czech tradition, providing international influence. Besides this, he insisted that Slovak poetry is independent and only explicable through a characteristically Slovak experience and environment.⁶⁶ Chorváth thus found the legitimacy of national literature in its historical function; to critically mirror the world of the masses, speak to them and to establish enduring truths and values by overcoming the distance between nationalism and universalism, intelligentsia and the people.⁶⁷ Chorváth understood interwar modernity more socially than nationally and was more receptive to avant-garde—revolutionary—aesthetics.

When trying to define Slovakness, one would have to admit sooner or later that it is impossible, as literature exists in complicated relationships with and under important influence from other literatures, which is especially true of a smaller nation's one. Elaborating on Beecroft's definition, one might say that the three critics of this study were concerned with techniques on reading literary works, which is clear. However, oftentimes they delved into thoughts on creating texts from the perspective of national literature—which is an uncertain territory—and inter-literary connections—which they did inconsistently and vaguely. As Beecroft suggests, national literatures emerge from vernacular ones.⁶⁸ This is also what the three considered, indirectly and linguistically, in their evaluation of Slovak national literature. It is clear, however, that despite general political programmes, the critics expressed a certain will to compromise between the national characteristic of literary production and a degree of international influence, one way or another.⁶⁹

The Congress of Slovak Writers

In the 1930s, ideological differences among Slovak intellectuals became gradually more palpable. Still, there were moments of cooperation on cer-

64 L. H [Michal Chorváth]. Cesty slovenskej literatúry. In *Ludový denník*, 3 May 1935, vol. 2, no. 5, p. 3.

65 –m. ch. – [Michal Chorváth]. Slovenské umenie v boji o tvar. In *Slovenský hlas*, 1938, vol. 1, no. 150, p. 9.

66 CHORVÁTH, Michal. Dvadsať rokov slovenskej poézie. In *Kritický mesačník*, 1938, vol. 1, no. 5, p. 204.

67 CHORVÁTH 1960, *Romantická tvár*, p. 54.

68 BEECROFT 2015, p. 198.

69 Of course, there were instances of writers who unambiguously rejected any notion of internationalism or cosmopolitanism in favour of purely national literature, such as Martin Rázus or Ján E. Bor, as well as radical leftist writers who, in turn, rejected national literary tradition in the name of new revolutionary art, such as authors connected with the journal *DAV* in their early years. For Rázus, see: HUČKOVÁ, Dana. Slovenskosť kontra internacionalizmus: Rázusove reflexie modernej slovenskej literatúry. In *Slovenská literatúra*, 2017, vol. 64, no. 4, pp. 318–328; for *DAV* see HABAJ, Michal. Ľavá vpred. Prvý ročník revue *DAV* (1924–1925). In *Slovenská literatúra*, 2017, vol. 64, no. 4, pp. 269–283.

tain levels despite the ideological differences among literary intelligentsia. One such occasion has already been mentioned; the Congress of the Young Slovak Generation, where the majority of attendees agreed to reject the idea of Czechoslovak national and linguistic unity. Another such occasion, albeit with seemingly different results, was the only pre-war Congress of Slovak Writers that took place from 30 May until 1 June 1936. It was a seminal event attended by more than 200 literary professionals of all worldviews, faiths and generations.⁷⁰ Many authors and critics gave speeches, including Mečiar on tradition in Slovak culture and Kostolný on fresh goals of literary criticism, which were later published in a special issue of the journal *Slovenské smery*. Chorváth was active as an initiator and critic of the Congress, but had only limited participation in actual discussions. The result, a brief *Joint Statement of Slovak Writers* addressing several key issues, declared: 1. "a faithfulness to struggle for freedom and the great ideals of humanity that helped the workers of our culture secure our national present;" 2. unity against any enemy and cooperation with Czech authors; 3. co-responsibility for the Czechoslovak state and Slovak nation; 4. an adherence to values of social freedom and justice as a base for literary and cultural progress; 5. the Slovak nation belongs to the world cultural and social space.⁷¹

The role of leftist writers here was placed at the forefront of the Congress, not only because subsequent historiography granted them special emphasis, but also because they initiated the event's organisation and were particularly active in the surrounding discussions. Michal Chorváth was one of the first to contemplate the idea thoroughly in reaction to the articles of Mečiar, Laco Novomeský and Ján Poničan, who all had generally wondered whether an event such as International Congress of Writers for the Defence of Culture in Paris or the Congress of Soviet Writers could be organised in Slovakia. Chorváth was mostly curious if an alliance of particular Slovak ideological movements would be possible, outlining four specifically: 1. nationalist, that he dubbed "new Štúristm;" 2. Czechoslovakist; 3. internationalist/communist, which, according to him, saw nationalism as a revolutionary idea; 4. Catholic modernist, in terms of nationalism connected to the first movement.⁷² Chorváth asserted that the tying idea was that Slovaks are a cultured nation and that art is supposed to educate the people. He later wrote several more articles after the Congress concluded, criticising it for theorising instead of focusing on practical measures. In this respect, he saw three positive results of the event: solving the issue of tradition and worldliness, rejecting Czechoslovakism—instead aiming to maintain a fruitful and healthy relationship with Czech culture—and emphasising contact with ordinary people.⁷³ Chorváth reflected on the presence of Czechoslovakism on the Congress, eventually

70 For a more detailed account of the event, see CHMEL, Rudolf. Závazná tradícia. In CHMEL, Rudolf. *Kongres slovenských spisovateľov 1936*. Bratislava : Tatran, 1986, pp. 182–203.

71 The statement was signed by 51 attendees, including Mečiar, Kostolný and Chorváth. Cf. Spoločný prejav slovenských spisovateľov. In *Elán*, 1936, vol. 6, no. 10, p. 2.

72 CHORVÁTH, Michal. Je potrebný – je možný? Kongres slovenských spisovateľov. In *DAV*, 1935, vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 10–13.

73 CHORVÁTH, Michal. Pasíva a aktíva prvého kongresu. In *Elán*, 1936, vol. 6, no. 10, pp. 3–4.

noting that Slovak writers and critics no longer consider it a vital issue, and even known Czechoslovakists accepted Slovak culture as legitimate, singling out Kostolný.⁷⁴ Although Chorváth capitulated a general acceptance of the aforementioned third way, supported by the Joint Statement, in reality, all major ideological movements (autonomist, Czechoslovakist, communist) interpreted the result as a win for their specific side.⁷⁵

It might seem paradoxical that the writers and critics called for cooperation and unity despite their disputes and apparent irreconcilable differences. They were motivated by what was seen as a rising fascist threat, a strong desire for delimiting and improving the Slovak position within the Czechoslovak state and the perceived need to describe the specifics of Slovak art along with creative and social conditions. The Congress had been seen in the past as an event initiated by leftist writers that, in the end, united Slovak literary professionals in the so-called “third way” approach to the “Slovak question”; neither demanding Slovak autonomy nor accepting the idea of Czechoslovakism, an idea represented at the Congress by Laco Novomeský and later strengthened by Marxist-Leninist literary historiography.⁷⁶ Debates were sparked in the aftermath of the Congress and, considering the reactions in journals and newspapers, revealed that the statement was more of a noble gesture which did not fully correlate with the real situation in Slovak culture.⁷⁷

Conclusion

This article explored how national and nationalist agenda manifested itself in the writings of three well-known literary critics of the 1930s, Stanislav Mečiar, Andrej Kostolný, and Michal Chorváth, as representatives of their respective ideological movements: nationalist/autonomist, Czechoslovakist, and communist. Although each had different opinions on the Slovak position within Czechoslovakia, they all regarded Slovakia as equal to the Czechs. The same can be said about culture; not only the three critics, but the majority of literary professionals of the 1930s would agree that Slovak literature belonged to the world—or at least strongly aspired to do so—either for its idiosyncratic Slovakness with roots in national history, tradition and character, or for absorbing modern(ist) literary trends and adapting them to Slovak literary context. These were the ways used to legitimise the Slovak nation and its culture alike, which was the main goal of contemporary literary critics, theoreticians, historians, and writers too.

74 CHORVÁTH, Michal. Čechoslovakizmus na spisovateľskom zjazde. In *Slovenské zvesti*, 4 June 1936, p. 1.

75 CHMEL 1986, p. 196.

76 As Filip Pavčík asserts, this opinion is still relatively alive in some ways in today’s historiography and social consciousness. See PAVČÍK, Filip. Spory a konflikty medzi slovenskými spisovateľmi v rokoch 1945–1948. In *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 2018, vol. 22, no. 2, pp. 398–399.

77 Similarly, two years later *Ludová politika* published a manifesto of several well-known authors of various incompatible ideological movements calling for unity in defence against “an expansive enemy,” declaring legitimacy of the Czechoslovak state and Czech-Slovak brotherhood, and assuring victory against propaganda and small-mindedness. See “Voľme radšie nebyť, ako byť otrokmi!” Prejav slovenských spisovateľov vo vážnych chvíľach. In *Ludová politika*, 30 September 1938, p. 2.

Stanislav Mečiar represented the nationalist/autonomist movement, connecting modern Slovak literature to its historical roots and utilising the narrative of a thousand-year oppression and historical role of Slovaks on their way to independence and self-determination. In literature, Mečiar advocated for a return to Slovak folk roots, its rich artistic tradition and depicted the Slovak historical and social struggle, yet he was simultaneously aware of world modernist and avant-garde movements, which he did not outright reject, but cautioned against a mechanical adaptation. Just like he considered the national issue in teleological dimensions, he saw Slovak art as destined to become purely national, thus finally modern. On the other end of the spectrum, Michal Chorváth opposed political nationalism and its manifestations in literary works and contested traditional Slovak autostereotypes regarding history, tradition and character. Chorváth legitimised Slovak literature by its ability to mirror social issues of the common folk and bridge gaps between classes. Whether deliberately or not, his efforts were in certain union with official Communist Party policies following its Bolshevisation, according to which the national question was inseparable from communist revolution.

Among the three, Andrej Kostolný gives the oddest impression; an advocate of Czechoslovak unity that, though official state policy, was no longer viable in practice and was rejected by a significant part of Slovak intelligentsia. He was a commentator, whose agenda was to amicably equate and bring together Czech and Slovak cultures arguing that Czechoslovak unity is not a threat to Slovak self-determination. He was also a literary critic, who wished to call Slovak literature a part of European and world culture, yet subordinate to common Czechoslovak culture. As to the legitimacy of the Slovak nation and its literature, it was not an important issue to Kostolný. To him, the widespread use of the Slovak language and writing perfectly legitimised the existence of the nation and its literature. All three saw literature as a space for delimiting a certain national idiosyncrasy that might comprise Slovak nation-ness—or national identity—acting as a vehicle for, according to them, universal values. Despite declaring a certain degree of cooperation and agreement on national and cultural issues, concrete solutions diverged dramatically, as is evidenced by the Congress of Slovak Writers and proceeding developments. It was an event which, on the one hand, united the attending literati (as a social group) in the moral imperative of being engaged and conscious writers, cultural workers with duties to society. On the other hand, in practical terms, it only accentuated the ruptures and differences that became more transparent after the First Vienna Award and the founding of the Slovak state.