



A community in dire straits - situation of ethnic Germans in Slovakia during years 1944 - 1946.

Milan Olejník, Spoločenskovedný ústav SAV, olejnik@saske.sk

OLEJNÍK, Milan. A community in dire straits - situation of ethnic Germans in Slovakia during years 1944 - 1946. Individual and Society, 2008, Vol. 11, Nr. 1.

History of German settlement in Slovakia came in the years 1944 - 1946 in tragic completion. More than eight centuries of coexistence with the Slovak majority and other minorities ended the attempt by Nazi Germany to dominate Europe. Members of the German minority in Slovakia was under Nazi doctrine became part of this plan. After the defeat of Germany, the Czechoslovak government decided that the decisive majority of the German population must leave the Republic. After approval of the plan by the allied powers were the so-called mass expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia relegated the Germans living in Slovakia. After completion of the removal in October 1946, remained in Slovakia only a tiny fraction of their original number.

Ethnic German. Slovakia. Nazi Germany.

A prelude to tragedy

A decade of years 1938 - 1948 belongs to the most dramatic and, unquestionably, to the most tragic periods in Slovak history. During mentioned ten years a multiethnic society living in Slovakia - Slovaks, Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Czechs, Poles and members of other ethnic groups, underwent a series of rapid and profound changes. These changes can be mostly contributed to geopolitical convulsions, which affected whole Europe and later acquired a global character.

As a direct consequence of growing aggressiveness of Nazi Germany during the second half of third decade of twentieth century and failure of European powers to stop it, the existence of Czechoslovak Republic (CSR) became threatened. This ominous development culminated on September 1938 and materialized in form of the Munich Dictate¹, an infamous political agreement concluded by France, England, Italy and Germany, which spell an end to Czechoslovakia as a democratic state. The repercussions affecting the internal political situation in rump Czechoslovakia were numerous and substantial. The political system built for twenty years was shaken to the ground, and remnant of Czechoslovakia, abandoned by her western allies, was becoming growingly depended on Nazi Germany.

In Slovakia, political forces², which were fighting for autonomy of Slovakia since inception of Czechoslovak State, exploited weakening of central government to gain a dominant political position in Slovakia and install an autonomous government in October 1938. During the following months, unceasing German pressure resulted in further erosion of Czechoslovakian cohesion. Even though there were no significant tendencies among Slovak political representation to break up completely with the Czech part of the Republic, external political developments led to this conclusion. Slovakia should play a Trojan horse in plans of Nazi Germany to swallow Czechland completely. A. Hitler invited leading Slovak

political representative Jozef Tiso to personal talks. J. Tiso, who could not refuse such an invitation, arrived to Berlin on March 13. There he became a target of unveiled blackmail - Slovakia either declare independence, or will be occupied by Hungary - stated A. Hitler. J. Tiso declined to proclaim Slovak independence outright, but agreed to transmit this Hitler's warning to Slovak parliament. On next day, March 14, J. Tiso referred the whole matter to members of Slovak parliament, which was convoked in morning hours. The deputies voted for independence of Slovakia unanimously by acclamation. This dramatic development was, however, tarnished by a fact, that Slovak independence was fallacious, in reality Slovakia became a satellite of Nazi Germany.

Consequently with these changes altered also the status of German minority in Slovakia. The Constitution of Slovak Republic, adopted by the National Assembly on July 21 1939 in Chapter XII (articles 59, 91 - 95) defined the basic regulations determining the position of ethnic minorities in Slovakia. German minority, though awarded a position of privilege, was refused any form of territorial autonomy and chairman of the German Party (GP) - Franz Karmasin, was denied position in the Slovak government, which would be equal to Slovak ministers.³ F. Karmasin was entitled to participate on government sessions, but his decision making rights were limited to internal affairs of German minority. F. Karmasin fought these limitations with a bitter resistance and submitted his complains to Office for German Minorities (Volksdeutsche Mittelstelle - VoMi). However, Berlin decided, that his direct participation on decisions adopted by Slovak government are not needed at that time. Despite its limited powers as a minority party in Slovakia, GP undertook a number of steps aimed to control all aspects of social, economic and cultural life of German minority. The political principle implemented by GP was requirement of an utter subordination of every ethnic German in Slovakia to German Party and blind following of its political program. Every German who refused to become a GP member was stigmatized as a traitor and was threatened by severe reprisals after German victory in the war. A mixture of threats, propaganda and open pressure resulted in mass entry of Slovak German into GP. A significant factor in this „achievement“ was willingness of Slovak authorities to lent GP a free hand in treatment of German minority members. Slovak government representatives went as far as to allow German Party to organize its own militia - Freiwillige Schutzstaffel and organization of young Germans - Deutsche Jugend. In a frame of GP were organized also special military units - Einsatztruppe.⁴ The initial military campaigns of Nazi Germany, which resulted in overwhelming victories over Poland and France, aroused a wave of euphoria among German minority members in Slovakia. This state of elevated mind helped GP to forge a unity, unknown among German communities scattered throughout Slovakia in the past. Especially young Germans embraced the Nazi ideology without critical reflexion. As a result, German Party recruited till January 1940 almost 60 000 members from ranks of ethnic Germans, that is, practically every adult German became a GP member.⁵ It is difficult to judge, to what extent all Germans fully accepted the Nazi ideology. Especially young German minority members grew up in a democratic environment of Czechoslovakian Republic, where a number of political parties fought for sympathy of electorate. Regardless of seemingly attractive concept of German superiority and German leading role in a „New Europe“, there must have been some doubts in minds of German minority members living in Slovakia. These were, however, hidden under a layer of excitement during the first period of World War II and fear of being not „a good German“ and, consequently, suffering reprisals. But being part „a superior race“ had its price. Slovak Germans carried a burden to participate on struggle of Nazi Germany in war. Commander-in-chief of SS, H. Himmler, decided to include into these elite military formations also members of ethnic minorities living in various European countries. In line with this decision, also Slovak Germans were recruited into SS from summer of 1941. Without regard to the fact, that German minority members were citizens of Slovak Republic, German recruits could enroll into SS on „voluntary“ basis. However, Even in summer 1941, when German military victories culminated, many young Slovak Germans joined ranks of SS only as a result of pressure tactics applied in process of recruitment. General worsening of military situation of Germany after 1943 and tremendous losses, which suffered German Army especially in the East, dampen euphoria among German in Slovakia considerably. A loss of willingness to fight and die for Nazism is reported by several sources. According to report of a member of Slovak resistance from February 1943, Germans sent to the front were not „Hailing and singing as they were doing in the past, but mostly are departing with their heads down and some of them are crying. There occurred also a cases of desertion of German soldiers from Slovakia“.⁶ Also Slovak authorities noticed changes in German attitudes. The chairman of County Office of Dobšina reported to State Police Headquarters, that recruitment to SS units aroused „a considerable dissatisfaction“ and German minority members „avoided in great numbers from reporting to SS“.⁷ In similar fashion were written reports from other regions of Slovakia, where Germans lived. There were other signs of German insecurity and loss of hope in victory of Nazi Germany. If before Germans were carrying Nazi insignia and converse in public exclusively in German language, after year 1943 they began to communicate in Slovak and behaved much more modestly. Nazi greeting *Heil Hitler* almost gone from the streets and was superseded by common civil „good day“. Despite of possibility of severe consequences, some of Germans were desperate enough to request release from German Party.⁸

Non-voluntary departure from home (organized evacuation and individual leaves)

As military situation of Nazi Germany worsened fears of Slovak Germans grew. Feelings of hopelessness and desperation were enhanced by traumatic experiences suffered by many Germans during Slovak National Uprising. At that time German population was exposed to violent reprisals, in some cases mass killing and other atrocities committed by partisans, namely Soviet guerrilla fighters operating on Slovak territory, who were avenging cruelties committed by Germans in Soviet Union. Worries that Red Army will occupy Slovakia filled Germans with horror. In year 1944 these fears were becoming reality. Soviet armies were irresistibly approaching Slovak boundaries. German authorities desperately searched for some kind of solution. In face of imminent danger it was decided to evacuate German population from Slovakia. German military started to evacuation proceedings in September 1944. First were evacuated school pupils under supervision of their teachers. At the end of September 1944, in accordance with transport possibilities, followed women with children and men older than 60 years. Till the beginning of October over three thousand ethnic Germans were evacuated from locality of Lower Spiš. Another four thousand persons followed from Upper Spiš. Destination to which evacuees were transported was designated Sudetenland and Austria. The evacuation, as numerous testimonies indicate, was a traumatic event. The evacuees could take only thirty kilos of necessities with them. They must leave all other movable property in their homes. The desperation, confusion and sadness ruled supreme. A vivid description of these tribulations is recorded in Chronicle of National Uprising from town of Toporec - „Men sadly, with their heads down, walked streets. Slowly, hesitantly they were selling their cattle off. To do anything was suddenly useless. They were just sitting and waiting when the transport will arrive. Hold and below - how sadly these people became victims on unfortunate politics of Hitler, his political hallucinations. Stripped of their birthplaces, their property, homes, they must, in cruel winter, travel to unknown world“.⁹

In December 1944 Red Army was approaching Slovakian boundary lines. Military situation was rapidly worsening and evacuation proceeded on much larger scale. Resistance of many Germans, who refused to leave their homes, was ruthlessly broken. Till end of January 1945 almost all Germans living in Spiš were evacuated.¹⁰

German authorities originally planned transportation of important industrial equipment and raw materials, but due to insufficiency of transport capacities and necessity to secure logistic needs of military, these intentions were not realized.

In November 1944 a decision was made to evacuate also Germans living in environs of Bratislava and Žitný Ostrov. During the spring months of 1945, a majority of Germans living in this territory, evacuated to Austria. Central part of Slovakia, where Germans lived in region named Hauerland, was evacuated at beginning of 1945. Only several hundred German inhabitants remained in their homes.¹¹ There is no exact figure of evacuated Germans known. The data vary from 120 thousand (records of German Party) to 70 000 (L. Luža). According to Slovak Commission of Interior, Slovak territory left, either in organized transports, or individually, approximately 83 000 Germans. German minority members, who left their homes individually, were mostly farmers who have their own transportation.

A majority of evacuees hoped that their non-voluntary departure is only temporary and they will return to their homes after military operations will end. These hopes, however, did not materialized.

Ominous developments - a decision to oust Germans out of Czechoslovakia

Shortly after Munich dictate a number of Czechoslovak political representatives, including President Edward Beneš, went to exile.

After outbreak of World War II a makeshift Czechoslovakian exile government in London was formed. So called State Council, led by E. Beneš, claimed to be a political representative of Czechs and Slovaks and gradually gained recognition from Allies. Another center of political power in exile formed Communists. Czechoslovakian Communist Party (CPS) split its representation in exile to two parts. The leading faction resided in Moscow and subordinated group, designated to carry out a political dialogue with E. Beneš, who was seated in London. The recognition of State Council by Great Britain, USA and Soviet Union gave E. Beneš¹² political means to plan measures, which he planned to enact against Germans living in Czechoslovakia for their „crimes against Czechoslovakian people“. In exile E. Beneš contemplated the compulsory transfer of ethnic Germans out of Czechoslovakia. The only question was to what extent this measure should be carried out. An important political development occurred in December of 1944, during E. Beneš' visit in Moscow. E. Beneš negotiated with Soviet representatives and also with Czechoslovakian communist leaders political development Czechoslovakia renewed after war. These

negotiations were concluded in an agreement - A Czechoslovakian - Soviet Agreement in Regard to Friendship Mutual Help and After-war Cooperation (Agreement).

Agreement became a first step to form a legal base for Soviet meddling into Czechoslovakian internal affairs after war. Beside other issues, a status of ethnic Germans after war was discussed Soviets benevolently agreed to support E. Beneš' plan for compulsory transfer of Germans. Communists were more ambiguous in their plans how to handle status of Germans after war - in their view only individuals who committed a high treason by actively helping Nazis should be punished and expelled. During year 1944 Communists were gradually shifting more to an idea of wholesome expulsion of German minority members from Czechoslovakia.

The support of Soviet Union gave to E. Beneš space to more openly define his decision to transfer Germans out of Czechoslovakia. For example, in his radio speech, broadcasted from London on September 8 1944 he declared: „We are saying this without passion, but with a full awareness of our responsibility to execute a revenge and purge to the real and ruthless end“.¹³

In similar tone he spoke on October 27 1944: „Even today I can not pass over with silence the question of clearing all accounts with our Germans, who in year 1938 thrust a dagger into back of our state. *All those, who did it, must go away*“.¹⁴

A more precise form of decision to expel Germans out of Czechoslovakia was formulated in „Memorandum of Czechoslovakian Government in Regard to Question of German minority in Czechoslovakia“. Czechoslovakian government declared in this document an intention to expel at least two thirds of estimated 3, 2 million German living in Czechoslovakia. The permission to stay could be granted maximally to eight hundred thousand Germans. In treatment of Germans living in Slovakia, there was no difference, despite fact, that these persons were citizens of Slovak republic, unlike Germans living in Protectorate, who were citizens of Nazi Germany.

So, hopes of Slovak Germans that after evacuation they will return home, were to be rudely disappointed.

Expropriations of property left by German evacuees

Evacuated Germans, especially German minority members living in small towns and villages, left their homes, farms, and movable property practically utterly unguarded. German property became an easy target to marauders, pilferers and Soviet soldiers who were looking for loot. Ravaging of German property was greatly facilitated by a fact, that immediately after cessation of military operations there was no an authority to secure public security. Even though National Committees were formed shortly after expulsion of German Army, these ad hoc created public organs were unable, and frequently unwilling, to secure protection of German property. The presence of Red Army and Soviet security organs strongly influenced situation in Slovakia. It was a powerful factor facilitating rise of communist to position of significant political power. Communists gained a majority in National Committees and pursued their political agenda. The political radicalization with totalitarian elements permeated political development in Slovakia. Germans as a whole were stigmatized as enemies of Slovak nation, agents of Nazis in Slovakia and as such deservingly condemned to ill treatment. This included clandestinely stealing, or openly appropriating their property. From many recorded occasions of German property stealing at least few examples - according to chronicle of village Ruskovce, which after evacuation of its German dwellers was left almost empty, inhabitants of neighboring villages came to steal movable property of evacuees. As is in the chronicle recorded, „Houses were plundered. Things scattered. Grain spilled on the streets, mixed with the snow“.¹⁵ According to report of National Council of Bušovce, villagers of Podhorany and Toporec were deprived of their property, which was „stolen, taken away and sold“.¹⁶

Houses and farms left by German evacuees attracted attention of many people, especially from eastern regions of Slovakia, who saw this as an opportunity to acquire property without much effort. Some of these persons, however, had no serious intentions to reside on occupied property permanently and were looking only for quick and easy gain. This was true namely in cases when incomers settled on farm property. These persons lacked necessary skills to work land and as a result, many farms fell into disrepair. For example, according report describing situation in German village Švedlár, newcomers „...took everything what could be stolen. Presently in Švedlár is stripped clean. People, who never worked fields and will not farm, steeled farm equipment, plywood and other things ...and these articles sold for a gain“.¹⁷ In some localities National Committees attempted to stop stealing of German property and to regulated process of its confiscation and redistribution. For example County National Committee in

Poprad ordered to record all instances of confiscation of German property. County National Committee in Kežmarok demanded, that local national committees will name persons invested with authority to temporary control and management of German property, who will take care, that „movable property will be not stolen and already stolen property returned to national committees“.¹⁸ However, to close this „window of opportunity“ immediately after fighting was ended, was impossible.

A great damage to property left by German evacuees caused also Red Army. Soviet soldiers considered all German property lawful war prey and acted accordingly. This was happening despite an agreement between Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union stating, that property of German minority members who were citizens of Czechoslovakia, is not to be considered as booty. Commission for Agriculture and Land reform of Slovak National Council instructed county committees about this agreement and requested these public institutions to „in cases of need to defend this agreement so material values will be rescued for Czechoslovakian state and for community“.¹⁹ These measures, however, came to avail. Soviet soldiers, either from ignorance or pure disregard, plundered German property without restraint. As the instance of Soviet marauding incursions into town Spišská Belá shown, Slovak authorities were helpless to stop such activities. According report of Slovak security organs, to Spišská Belá and surrounding villages „Soviet soldiers are coming with lorries. Soldiers are entering homes left by Germans. Without regard, if Germans or Slovaks are living in these houses now, they are taking movable property away. Interference by security organs is impossible, because soldiers are always armed and drunk. In reason to abstain from use of arms, interference is avoided“.²⁰

It is necessary to remark, that an endeavor of Slovak authorities to save German property was not done for Germans sake.

Situation of German minority during the second half of 1945 and spring months of 1946

In line with intention to uproot German minority members from their homes, Slovak National Council issued on February 27 1945 Decree no. 4/1945, according to which German land property should be confiscated, without compensation. Excepted were only Germans participating actively of anti Nazi fight, whose land did not exceeded 50 hectares in total. To define who is to be considered an ethnic German was in competence of Chairmanship of Slovak National Council. A decisive factor of ethnic adherence was a language used in family.

In determination of further destinies of German community in Czechoslovakia was instrumental so called Košice Government Program (named after city where it was adopted) proclaimed on April 5 1945. In regard to German minority, a decision was adopted to strip ethnic Germans of Czechoslovakian citizenship with exception of active antifascists and persons of German nationality who were persecuted by Nazi regime and jailed for their activities. All ethnic Germans, who were accused of crimes against Czechoslovakia and other war crimes should be immediately imprisoned and judged by extraordinary People Courts, created for this reason. In economic sphere, all German property should be confiscated and given under control of authorities of „National Management“. Further, all German minority schools were to be closed and whole attitude to German culture reevaluated.

During the summer of 1945, when war conflagration died out, majority of German evacuees was struggling to return to their homes in various localities in Slovakia. Some of them never reached their homes. A tragic event occurred in Přerov, where transport of returning Slovak Germans arrived on June 18 1945. Sergeant K. Pazúr, who led a squad of soldiers of First Czechoslovakian Army Corps, ordered to shut German civilians without any consultation with local authorities. 265 civilians were killed, among them 120 women and 74 children. The Ministry of Interior in Prague tried to cover this abominable mass murder with argument, that „the event is necessary to judge as a deed committed in a revolutionary situation and there is no need to investigate the whole affair and to blame anyone...the investigation could be made public and this would be deeply detrimental to our country abroad“.²¹ The case was eventually submitted to High Military Court and K. Pazúr was sentenced to 20 years in prison. However, he was son pardoned.

Many Germans were stopped on their way home for less tragic reasons. They were apprehended by security authorities in various locations in Slovakia and placed in temporary detention centers. However, even majority of those German evacuees, who successfully arrived to their places of living, could not return to their homes. These were already occupied and new „owners“ were, for the most part, unwilling to leave their newly acquired properties. German „intruders“ became target of attacks and people who dwelled in their houses complained to public authorities. An illustrative example is the letter of National Council of Smokovce dispatched to County National Council in Poprad, according to which „National

Committee is receiving reports, that local population of German nationality, evacuated by German army are returning to their home villages. This uncomprehending event is upsetting namely Slovaks who settled in former German villages...National Committee in Smokovce is respectfully requiring stop return of such persons to our regions as to prevent any complications in sphere of ethnic relations and security, because, otherwise National Committee can not guarantee the public order."²²

A majority of German evacuees found itself in impossible situation. Besides being refused to move into their homes, many of them where without food and other life necessities. They were desperate. According to report of, County National Committee of Nová Baňa, „...it is reported a several cases of suicides of old Germans, who returned to their villages. They are starving and are committing suicides.“²³ Local authorities had no clue how to deal with the situation. Instructions how to deal with ensuing confusion and potentially explosive situation did not existed. Eventually the Commission of Interior issued on June 9 1945 a letter, ordering to all county national committees to concentrate returning Germans into facilities suitable for this purpose. Concentration camps should be established in each district town a where possible, in each village. Incarcerated Germans should be used as a labor force, repairing bridges and other public facilities.²⁴ More detailed instructions how to deal with German minority members were issued by Headquarters of National Security for Eastern Slovakia. The instructions, named contemptuously *Cleaning Slovakia of Germans*, advised all security authorities to arrest all German minority members immediately. All Germans - men, women and children in age from 14 to 60 years should be apprehended and put into labor camps. German minority members under or over stated age should be transferred into special facilities. Food and other necessities should to be paid, if possible, by Germans themselves. Instructions copy a measure implemented by Nazis - inmates should have shaved heads and were obliged to carry a sign in circular shape made of white linen with black letter N. Inhuman measure, however, was abolished by Commission of Interior on July 12 1945. Also Slovak National Council decided to refute this extremity with explanation, that „...it will not recourse to old Nazi methods, but the status of German and Hungarian minority will be solved by other means corresponding to our democratic norms.“²⁵ The so called mix marriages were a special case - if German an of woman was married to person of „Slavic“ origin, and German partner in marriage was not an active Nazi, these marriages should be not apprehended. Other conditions were added - children of such marriage should be raised in „Slovak spirit“ and language of communication in family should be Slovak.

Even though the worst excesses in mistreatment of German population were eliminated, the situation of a majority of German minority members was truly destitute. Not knowing what will happen to them, they were placed in makeshift buildings, frequently utterly unsuitable to house a large number of people. Because in year 1945 clear regulations how to build and operate such facilities did not existed, local authorities improvised and in some occasions avoided their responsibility to secure necessary needs of concentration camps. Necessity to concentrate German population into camps as soon as possible resulted in a very low level of organization. Buildings designed to house German inmates frequently lacked basic hygienic and medical facilities. There were no beds, no blankets and other articles needed to house large numbers of people. The most pressing problem was to secure sufficient supplies of food. The plan to cover expenses associated with purchasing food supplies by money earned by inmates shown to be unrealistic, due to lack of job opportunities in second half of year 1945. In some instances, Red Cross provided for basic needs of inmates. Generally, however, the supply situation was unsatisfactory and in some cases inmates were on the verge of starving. Such a situation occurred for example in camp at Gelnica, where, as county representative of National Security²⁶ reported „if immediately some kind of help will not come, inmates begin to die“.²⁷

Besides lack of food supplies, an impossible situation existed also in the sphere of hygiene and medical care. This resulted in several cases in outbreak of infectious diseases. Such a critical situation was in concentration camp in Kremnické Bane. The police station in Kremnica reported outbreak of scabies in local camp. Approximately 1 800 inmates were placed there. The medicine was lacked. The only substances available to alleviate situation were petrol and low quality soap. Chief of local police station suggested as only possible solution return of inmates to their homes.²⁸ Some members of German minority, who were fortunate enough to dwell in their homes, kept precarious existence, most of them, however, were uprooted and thrown into utter confusion not knowing their future.

To judge an attitude of Slovaks to the Germans as a whole, it is necessary to say, that there were a number of circumstances, which differentiate situation in Slovakia in comparison to Czechland. Traditionally German community living in Slovakia, unlike Germans living in Czechland, was never perceived by Slovaks as a potential threat to the territorial integrity. This position was „reserved“ for a much numerous Hungarian minority. For centuries lived Germans and Slovaks in peace and harmony. Occasionally, ethnic tensions occurred, but these skirmishes were local and never grew into interethnic

hatred. German enclaves, scattered throughout Slovakia, were separated and differed in many ways. This was markedly visible especially between two major German communities - Germans of Bratislava and her environs and Germans living in Spiš region. Political, cultural and confessional differences separated these two communities practically till the end of Czechoslovakia. Stable and for most part non-conflicting coexistence between Germans and Slovaks was punctured during the existence of Slovak state. Nazification of German community in Slovakia led to growth of ethnic tensions between Slovaks and Germans. A decisive majority of Slovaks were Christians and Nazi ideology was strange, in many ways, detestable to them. The Nazi propaganda, operating with notion of racial superiority of German Nation was insulting to Slovaks and arrogant display of Nazi insignia, flags and greetings „Heil Hitler“ created strong feelings of revulsion among many Slovaks. This resulted in a general reluctance to cooperate with German authorities and representatives of German Party. Franz Karmasin repeatedly complained to Nazi institutions in Germany, pointing to hidden, but clearly present tendency to obstruct status and endeavors of German Party. Increasing revulsion to all German manifested itself during Slovak National Uprising, which foremost goal was to end German domination of Slovakia. Still Slovaks, in comparison to Czechs, never felt deep hatred to Germans. Unlike Czechs, who suffered under direct terror of Gestapo in Protectorate, Slovaks had, at least formal, independence. Slovakia was, on the surface, a sovereign state with government and parliament making its own decisions. Political resistance was suppressed and punished by jail, but sentences were, for most part, mild and many cases jailed persons escaped. There were no mass executions such as in Protectorate. Also economy played a role in placidity of a significant segment of Slovak population. Slovakia was during existence of Czechoslovakia plagued by unemployment and in some regions poverty affected majority of people. Many destitute Slovaks left their homes to look for better fortune overseas. All this rapidly decreased during the first years of Slovak State. Economic conjuncture resulted almost in full employment. In comparison with Protectorate, even with Germany proper, the supply situation in Slovakia was better. Other factors also contributed to increase of standard of living in Slovakia - possibility to work in Germany for high wages, expulsion of thousands of Czechs from well paid jobs in administrative and security organs, exploitation of natural resources, namely wood and wood products and growth of trade with European states, who were „allies“ of Nazi Germany. It is necessary to mention one horrible event, which led to enrichment of some Slovaks - confiscation of Jewish property and elimination of Jewish community from economic and social life of Slovakia. Deportations of tens of thousands impoverished Jews to concentration camps inevitably erased any moral credit Slovak State could have.

As war progressed and was becoming more and more clear, that German war machine will be destroyed, Slovak German relations soured. Except for few fanatical pro-Nazi collaborators, majority of Slovaks distanced themselves from Germans. This attitude manifested itself during evacuation of German minority members, when local Slovak population paid very little attention to the whole matter. After departure of German Army from Slovakia, in a completely new political situation, the „German question“, which dominated public affairs in Czech part of renewed Czechoslovakia, absented in Slovakia almost completely. Limited attention aroused return of German evacuees, but only in localities directly affected by it. For political representation of contemporary Slovakia, this, however, was a different matter. For the two centers of political power - Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS) and Democratic Party (DP) approach to two „non-Slavic“ ethnic communities became a powerful ideological element in their political struggle. Both parties were struggling to show their patriotic fervor and zeal to created Czechoslovakia as a state without these „unworthy“ minorities. One of the representatives of CPS, Gustav Husák, declared necessity „...to expel all Germans and Hungarians, except those, who were provably active anti-fascists. Till then, to establish for these persons concentration camps latest to one month since now. I do want to German concentration camps, not German villages“.²⁹ No less radical attitude exhibited exponents of Democratic Party. One of the leading members of DS, Jozef Lettrich, proclaimed - „We will not accept the minority of this nation (Germans - M.O.), who undermined fundamentals of state and its democratic regime. For this reason Hungarians and Germans must leave...They will there, where their hearts are pulling them.“³⁰ KPS incited its members to „...maintain an energetic approach to deportations of Germans and Hungarians - all communist organizations must support this action in a full measure“.³¹ Even though communists never publicly admitted, they saw confiscations of German property and redistribution thereof, as a welcomed opportunity to gain political popularity in Slovakia. During the session of CPS in Košice on March 1, 1945, G. Husák declared, that German land „will be divided among the Slovak people... Land must be distributed to those peasants, who can rightfully claim it.“³²

No less „patriotic“ acted representatives of public administration and various resistance organizations. At the first general assembly of National Committees, delegates adopted a resolution, in which stated, that „In the interest of security of peoples of Czechoslovakia and in the interest of general security we are insisting on cleansing of our renewed Czechoslovakian state from insidious and destructive German minority... Immediate and uprooting and stern punishment of all traitors and collaborators is the matter

not only security organs and peoples courts, but it is a matter of each democratic citizen and the whole nation".³³

In existing political environment also Democratic Party had only one course to go - participate on populist and nationally excited course. One of the front man of DP, a commissioner of agriculture M. Kvetko, proclaimed, that abolition of "...lease our land to Germans and Hungarians, or so called colonization is a part of great revolutionary process, penetrating to our national, economic and social order, which we are calling a land reform".³⁴

Another heavy blow, which fell upon members of German minority, was establishment of so called peoples courts. People courts were special legislative organs set-up to punish all persons, who committed war crimes, actively participated on Nazi activities and were members of Nazi organizations. These courts were created on the base of Decree of Slovak National Council No. 33/1045 from May 15, 1945. Though verdicts of people courts were not aimed exclusively at Germans, German minority members were, comparatively to their share of the total population, disproportionately sentenced. This was caused by a high number of ethnic Germans drafted into German Party and decision of courts, that even mere membership in the organization was a crime. In total, 1095 ethnic Germans were sentenced to various punishments.³⁵

Transfer of German minority members out of Slovakia

The primary aim of Czechoslovakian government in its policy toward German community, however, was to expel as many Germans as possible out of country. International situation took a positive turn to this plan after conclusion of Potsdam Conference on August 2, 1945, where Allies (USA, GB and USSR) agreed with request of Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Poland to transfer German minorities living on tier territories to Germany. On the very same day president of CSR, E. Beneš, issued a Constitutional Decree No. 33/1945, nullifying Czechoslovakian citizenship of German minority members with exception of those persons, who at the time of "increased endangerment of Republic" reported Czech or Slovak nationality, who actively fought against Nazism and those, who suffered under Nazi terror. Constitutional Decree No. 33/1945 clearly accepted a postulate of „collective guilt“ as a operational principle in judging a certain community as a whole.³⁶

On December 14, 1945 the Czechoslovakian government approved *Směrnice k provádění soustavného odsunu (transferu) Němců z území Československé republiky* (Guidelines to realization of continuous deportations (transfers) of Germans out of Czechoslovakian Republic), which elaborated main principles for organization of ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia. Organization of transfer was handed out to Ministry of Interior. In Slovakia it was Commission of Interior, which, however, was subordinated organ and practically only implemented measures of Ministry of Interior in Slovakia.

Because Soviet authorities in Germany refused to take any German transferees to their occupational zone at that time, Czechoslovakian representatives negotiated with the American authorities. During the negotiations carried on during January 1946, American side agreed to take Germans transferred from Czechoslovakia to their zone, provided that certain conditions will be met. Americans were willing to take only whole families. Persons suffering from infectious diseases and mentally ill were excluded. Also children and elderly, who were not family members, were excluded. All transferees should be provided with certain life necessities and could take with them up to 50 kilos of personal belongings (this amount was later increased to 70 kilos). In each transport a medical personnel formed from German transferees should be included. Finally, American representatives requested upholding agreed quotas of persons transferred to their zone.

It was estimated, that approximately forty thousand Germans would be deported from Slovakia. Concentration and preparation of Germans for transfer was realized in so called transfer centers. Four transfer centers were established in Slovakia.³⁷ Preparations for transfers were in competence of transport referees. They should solve all problems occurring during preparations and after departure of transport write a detailed report describing all steps taken. These reports were dispatched to Commission of Interior. Partly due to general improvement of supply situation in post-war Slovakia, but also because strict American requirements, situation of German deportees in transfer camps was considerably better that immediately after their detention in various makeshift camps scattered throughout Slovakia. However, endeavors of authorities not to allow Germans to take any valuables, led to stern, humiliating personal inspections. For many German minority members, the last days in Slovakia, a country, which was a homeland for countless generation of their predecessors, was undoubtedly a traumatic experience.

The first transport left camp Petržalka-Kopčany on April 30, 1946. It was composed of 1197 persons, men, women and children and went off to American zone. Other transports, each consisting approximately of 1200 persons, followed. With exception of few cases, American authorities accepted all transferees.

During the summer months of 1946, however, difficulties ensued. The Soviet authorities changed their refusal to accept German transferees and starting June 1946 agreed to take them into their occupational zone. An idea to be sent into Soviet zone was for many Slovak Germans utterly unacceptable and they tried to avoid it. Especially Germans from region of Spiš, utilized their knowledge of country site and run to hills, where they took refuge. For example, County National Committee in Gelnica informed Commission of interior, that despite of „endeavors of security organs, persons designed for transfer could not be gathered, because they left their homes and went to hiding, either to more remote villages, or to hills where they constantly changing their place of staying.“³⁸ Others, who had their family members in American zone, refused to go to Soviet part of Germany.

There were other impediments to transfer of Germans out of Slovakia. During the second half of 1945 and in spring months of 1946, many ethnic Germans become employs of Slovak companies. These found Germans to be welcomed source of cheap and responsible labor and were reluctant to release them. Requests to retain German employs as „indispensable experts“ absolutely for keeping up production abounded. A special category of German workers who should remain in Slovakia consisted of miners employed by mines in Handlová.

The „mass transfer of Germans“ ended in October 1946. In total, 27 transports were dispatched out of Slovakia carrying 32 400 persons. In final report of Commission of Interior is stated: „The mass transfer is practically accomplished and remaining Germans due to transfer will leave in irregular transports. The number of Germans who could be taken into consideration is very small and it will be dispatched in one transport.“³⁹

In following years only a few hundred ethnic Germans left Czechoslovakia and resettled in Germany. The precise number of German minority members, who remained is impossible to determine. The Commission of Interior in report to Ministry of Interior dated January 5, 1949, set number of Germans living in Slovakia approximately to 24 thousand persons.

However, during the census in year 1950, only 5 179 persons adhered to German nationality. This was over 96 % drop in comparison with census from year 1930. This was the tragic fate of community, which for centuries contributed to economic, cultural and social development of Slovakia.

Poznámky a literatúra:

¹ According to Theodore Procházka, as a consequence of Munich Dictate, „Bohemia and Moravia-Silesia lost about 30 000 square kilometers (11 600 square miles) to Germany i- e. about 38% of their area. In 1930 the Czech lands had 10 674 000 inhabitants. After Munich they lost 3 869 000 inhabitants (of whom 200 00 went to Poland), i. e. about 34% of the whole population. Some 2 806 00 Germans went to Germany (along with ca. 720 000 - 750 000 Czechs).“ PROCHÁZKA T., Sr.: The Second Republic: The Disintegration of Post-Munich Czechoslovakia (October 1938 - March 1939). East European Monographs, Boulder, New York : Columbia University Press, 1981, p. 28.

² The main driving force for autonomy of Slovakia was Hlinka´s Slovak Peoples Party (HSPP). A goal to achieve autonomy for Slovakia was also a political program of Slovak National Party (SNP).

³ Session of Slovak government, June 21 1939.

⁴ On September 27 1939 Slovak government issued a Decree no. 240 in regard of Freiwillige Schutzstaffel and on December 21 1939 a Decree in Regard to German Youth (Deutsche Jugend), which legalized these organizations.

⁵ KOVÁČ, D.: Nemecko a nemecká menšina na Slovensku (1871 - 1945). Bratislava : Veda, 1991, s. 161.

⁶ PLEVZA, V. (Ed.): Dejiny Slovenského národného povstania 1944. SNP a jeho historický význam. Bratislava : Pravda, 1984, p. 164 - 165.

⁷ Ibid, p. 154.

⁸ State Archive (SA) Bratislava, Deposit (Dep.) District of Bratislava III 1940 -1946. A District Office 1940 - 1945, box. 54, pres. Instruction in regard to state security service - report from May 1944.

⁹ SA Poprad 1945 - 1948, Dep. A District Office, box. 3, A Chronicle of National Uprising in Toporec.

¹⁰ W.A.: Die Folgen des Partisanenaufstandes und die Evakuierung der Oberzips Ende januar 1945. In: Hudak, A. - Laasslob, I. (Eds.): opus cited, p. 19 - 24.

¹¹ SA Prievidza, Dep. County Office Prievidza, box. 88, prez. D1 29/1945.

¹² The political influence of E. Beneš in exile government was decisive. He could nominate and terminate members of State Council and was entitled to make pivotal political decisions. Only Communists were an independent political power and their influence grew with Soviet victories as war progressed.

¹³ BENEŠ, E.: Šest let exilu a druhé světové války. Praha : Orbis, 1946, p. 239 - 240. Translation M.O.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 240 - 243.

¹⁵ SA Poprad, dep. ONV Kežmarok, box. 3, prez. Slovenská dedina v povstaní (A Slovak village in the Uprising).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ SA Spišská Nová ves, dep. ONV Gelnica, box. 10, prez., 547/46.

¹⁸ SA Poprad, dep. ObÚ MNV Vrbov, box. 1., prez. Opustené domy, byty - dočasná správa (Vacated houses, flats temporary management).

¹⁹ SA Poprad, dep. ObÚ MNV Slovenská Ves, box. 1, prez. Dohoda medzi československou vládou a vládou ZSSR o vojnovej koristi - vykonávanie (An Agreement Between Czechoslovakian Government and Government of Soviet Union in regard to war booty - execution).

²⁰ Slovak National Archive (SNA), Dep. PV - bezpečnostný odbor 1945 - 1950, box. 1, Situačná správa veliteľstva NB pre východné Slovensko (A report of National Security Headquarters for Eastern Slovakia).

²¹ Archív Ministerstva vnútra (Archive of Ministry of Interior), Levoča Dep. A17, inv. u. 1.

²² SA Poprad, dep. ONV Poprad, box. 2, prez., 214/45.

²³ SA Žiar nad Hronom, dep. ONV Nová Baňa, box. 19, prez., 73/46.

²⁴ SA Spišská Nová Ves, dep. ONV Gelnica, box. 2, prez., 631/45.

²⁵ SNA, dep. PV - BO, box. 442, inv. u. 2877.

²⁶ Contemporary name of police force.

²⁷ SA Spišská Nová Ves, dep. ONV Gelnica, box. 2, prez., Očistenie Slovenska od Nemcov (Cleansing Slovakia of Germans).

²⁸ SA Žiar nad Hronom, dep. OÚ Kremnica, box. 528, adm., 1561/45.

²⁹ Východoslovenská pravda daily, June 16 1945.

³⁰ Čas daily, June 19 1945.

³¹ SNA, dep. ÚV KSS - predsedníctvo 1945 - 1989, box. 789. Záznam zo schôdze členov ÚV KSS a komunistických členov SNR z 13. apríla 1945. (A record from session of Central Committee of KPS and communist members of Slovak National Council , April 13 1945).

³² VARTÍKOVÁ, M. (Ed.): KSS. Dokumenty z konferencií a plén 1944 - 1948. Bratislava : Pravda, 1971, p. 93.

³³ National committees, Year. I., No. 2, October 1, 1945, p. 10.

³⁴ Čas daily, June 27, 1945, p. 1.

³⁵ ŠUTAJ, Š.: Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945 - 1948. Bratislava : VEDA, 1993, p. 128.

³⁶ Sbírka zákonu a nařízení republiky Československé. Year 1945, Part 17, 17.VIII.1945, p. 57 - 58.

³⁷ Localities Petržalka-Kopčany, Nováky, Poprad and Krompachy.

³⁸ ŠA Košice, dep. OÚ and FNO Košice, box. 2.

³⁹ SNA, dep. PV - prezídium, box. 69.

Komunita v krajnej núdzi - situácia etnických Nemcov na Slovensku počas rokov 1944 - 1946.

História nemeckého osídlenia Slovenska dospela v rokoch 1944 - 1946 do tragického završenia. Viac ako osem storočí spolunažívania so slovenskou majoritou a ďalšími menšinami ukončil pokus nacistického Nemecka o nadvládu nad Európou. Príslušníci nemeckej menšiny na Slovensku sa v rámci nacistickej doktríny stali súčasťou tohto zámeru. Po porážke Nemecka československá vláda rozhodla, že rozhodujúca väčšina nemeckého obyvateľstva musí republiku opustiť. Po schválení tohto zámeru spojeneckými mocnosťami boli v rámci tzv. hromadného odsunu Nemcov z Československa odsunutí aj Nemci žijúci na Slovensku. Po ukončení odsunu v októbri 1946, zostal na Slovensku len nepatrný zlomok ich pôvodného počtu.