70th ANNIVERSARY OF THE SLOVAK NATIONAL UPRISING
1944–2014
Although the Slovak Republic is one of the youngest European states, its lands were settled in the distant past. However, its people, the Slovaks, lived and grew up in the shadow of the Hungarian nation under the rule of the Hungarian crown and were not entitled to make decisions regarding their future for a long time. A hundred years ago, few people knew anything at all about the Slovaks or Slovakia. And if they did, they knew only that the Slovaks lived in the Kingdom of Hungary. Slovakia did not exist as an administrative unit and was only mentioned as a country lying somewhere between the River Danube and the Tatra Mountains.

The 20th century saw the dreams and longings for independence nurtured by several generations of Slovaks come to fruition. Independence was achieved at the end of the 20th century and in the ensuing years Slovakia joined the European Union. The history of this young and dynamic country, narrated by its people, is an example of what the media refer to as a success story.

Slovak Republic

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<th>Total Area: 49 034 km²</th>
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<td>Population: 5 405 000</td>
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<td>Capital: Bratislava</td>
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<td>(413 000 inhabitants)</td>
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Slovakia is a country situated in the heart of Europe. The geographical centre of Europe is in fact the Church of St John in Kremnické Bane, a village in central Slovakia. Measuring 49 000 square kilometres and with a population of slightly less than 5.5 million, Slovakia is not a large country. It is only slightly larger than Denmark, Switzerland or the Netherlands. It takes a mere half hour to fly over Slovakia.

Slovakia occupies an area between Poland in the north and Hungary in the south. Its western neighbours are the Czech Republic and Austria, while Ukraine lies on its eastern border (this is the shortest border, only 96 kilometres long). Slovakia has no access to the sea. The nearest sea is the Adriatic in the south (361 km away). Slovaks wishing to bathe in the Baltic Sea have to fly some 440 kilometres north of the border.
The Slovak armed struggle against Nazism was also a fight for the Slovaks' own national existence in the face of probable liquidation by the Nazis.

The Slovaks demonstrated their national growth and inner self-consciousness through the Uprising, which triggered by the decision to end their vassal dependency on Nazi Germany.

The Slovak nation thereby proved both to itself and to the democratic world at large that it had a distinct national existence. This manifested itself in true patriotism and in a display of solidarity with anti-fascists from other European nations.

The Slovak nation voiced clear, categorical and spontaneous objection to the military occupation of Slovakia.

The Uprising was one of the greatest national acts in the modern history of the Slovak people, a history which appears to be modern only after the event.
Division of Czechoslovakia

Following the annexation of Austria, interests of Nazi Germany turned against the last bastion of democracy in Central Europe – Czechoslovakia. On September 29, 1938, Germany, Italy, France and Great Britain ordered the Czechoslovak government to cede the Sudetenland to Germany in accordance with the Munich Agreement. Following the signing of the Vienna Arbitration on November 2, 1938, Germany and Italy permitted Hungary and Poland to take possession of Czechoslovak territory. On March 14, 1939, the Slovak State was declared, in effect dividing Czechoslovakia. On March 15, 1939, Nazis occupied Bohemia and Moravia and declared the founding of the Protectorate.

On July 21, 1939, the Constitution of the Slovak Republic was adopted. It was a corporatist constitution like those in fascist Italy and Portugal. Economic and foreign policy was subordinated to the interests of Nazi Germany. On October 26, 1939, a Catholic priest named Jozef Tiso, chairman of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party, became president and head of state. The leading role of Hlinka’s Slovak People’s Party was embodied in law.

In addition to this Slovak political party, there were also a couple of ethnic minority parties - Deutsche Partei (Franz Karmazin) and Szlovonszkoi Magyar Párt (János Esterházy).

The Slovak Republic fought alongside Nazi Germany in the war against Poland on September 1, 1939, against the USSR on June 22, 1941 and declared war against the USA and Great Britain in December 1941.
Political emigrants found asylum in Paris and, after the defeat of France, in London. Former Czechoslovak President Edvard Beneš was the leader of the London emigrant community. The Slovak Communists were represented in the London-based resistance by Vladimír Clementis. The Czechoslovak Communists in Moscow, led by Klement Gottwald, formed the other centre of resistance abroad. Following the German attack on the USSR, the Soviets acknowledged the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in London and broke off diplomatic relations with the Slovak Republic. The British government followed suit. On December 12, 1943, E. Beneš signed a Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation with the Soviet Union.

Czechoslovak political resistance abroad

Former political party members (mainly Social Democrats, Agrarians, Nationalists and National Socialists), members of civic resistance groups (Obrana národa, Flóra, Justícia, Victoire and Demec), the church, and the illegal Communist Party had fought since 1939 against the new conditions in Slovakia and against Nazi policy. Those representing civil democracy and members of the Illegal Fifth Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia created an underground Slovak National Council in December 1943. The founding agreement and the first programme document – the Christmas Agreement, which demanded the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic and the equal status of Slovakia within it, were signed by J. Ursíny, J. Lettrich and M. Josko on behalf of the civic bloc and K. Šmidke, G. Husák and L. Novomeský on behalf of the Communists in Bratislava. Social Democrats I. Horváth and J. Šoltés and representatives of other civic groups (P. Žarko, J. Styk) made up the rest of the underground Slovak National Council in January 1944.

Czechoslovak National Committee (ČSNV) in Paris, the first resistance organization abroad. From the left: J. Šrámek, M. Ripka, General R. Viest, General S. Ingr, Š. Osuský, J. Slávik and E. Outrata

Political resistance in Slovakia
The Slovak National Uprising occurred partly as a consequence of the decision taken by Josef Tiso, President of the Slovak Republic, to concede to the German occupation of Slovakia on August 28, 1944 – the Uprising began the following day. It was also the result of long months of preparation, and the political ambitions of the Czechoslovak government-in-exile in Great Britain, the Czechoslovak Communists in Moscow, sections of the Slovak army becoming an insurgent force, and the work of the pro-democracy and Communist resistance. The Uprising began as General Staff Lieutenant Colonel J. Golian, the military commander of the insurgent Slovak army ordered Slovak troops to resist the German troops.

The order with the code name: “Start the evacuation” came into effect at 8 pm that evening.
Banská Bystrica became the centre of the anti-Nazi uprising. The Slovak National Council and National Councils took power. Free Slovak Radio began broadcasting in Banská Bystrica. The insurgent army of around 60,000 men played a key role in defending the insurgent territory. The insurgent army fought alongside 18,000 partisans for 61 days against well-equipped German troops of over 48,000 soldiers with front-line experience. Disarmament of two East Slovak Divisions by the Germans before the outbreak of the Uprising, was a heavy loss.

**Centre of the Uprising**

**Insurgent Territory**

View of Banská Bystrica and the historical town centre

Loading weapons at the barracks in Martin

Map of the insurgent territory
The Slovak National Uprising brought radical political, economic, and social change to those living in the liberated insurgent territory of Slovakia, an area measuring 20,000 km² and containing more than 30 districts and approximately 1,700,000 inhabitants.

The Slovak National Council became the political power in the liberated zone and the supreme legislative, government, and executive body. From September 1, till October 26, 1944, it issued 40 directives.

The Slovak National Council maintained executive authority in the liberated zone via the Revolutionary National Committees. These people’s authorities and the administration oversaw life in the towns and villages in the liberated zone and organized civilian support for the insurgent fighters.

Ján Lukášik, from the machine-gun section before being sent into action in Liptovský Hrádok on August 30, 1944.
The main armed forces to defend the insurgent territory from August 29, 1944 onwards, was the Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia (from October 1, the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia). Together with the partisans, the insurgent army joined the Allied forces in the anti-Hitler coalition. The Council for the Defence of Slovakia, the main operational and coordinating body of the Uprising, was established on September 12, 1944. Its primary task was to coordinate the advance of all the armed units (the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia, partisans, gendarmerie, financial guard and other armed units) and to organize the defence of insurgent territories.

The first phase in defending the insurgent territory lasted from August 29 till September 10, 1944. The insurgent military forces managed to secure the front despite losing large areas of territory. The Carpathian–Dukla operation run by the Red Army and the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps in the USSR greatly assisted in securing the front.

The second phase in defending the insurgent territory lasted from September 10 till October 16, 1944. During this phase, the 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Regiment in the USSR and the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade in the USSR were incorporated into the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia. The Plešivec and Kosatec units of the 2nd Tactical Group took Liptovská Osada–Biely Potok and fought intensely in the Ostró highlands. The enemy had the upper hand in the north-western section of the insurgent front, pushing the insurgents out of Turiec. The insurgents in the western section of the front retreated from the Handlová–Prievidza–Kremnica area and the Svätý Kríž nad Hronom area. Hungary remained neutral on the Uprising, and therefore southern sections of the insurgent defences saw no activity.

The German Army began its general offensive against the insurgents during the third phase of the defence of the insurgent territory, from October 18 till the end of October 1944. The German Headquarters gradually amassed its military forces numbering approximately 48–50,000 experienced and well-armed soldiers. Hungary’s unsuccessful attempt to exit the war under Regent M. Horthy’s leadership on October 15, 1944, became grounds for Germany to launch its general offensive against the insurgent forces. Consequently the German occupation was able to create a base in Northern Hungary to launch an attack on the weakly defended and still inactive area south of the insurgent territory.
The Army

Artilery firing position of the 2nd Tactical Group near Trenčín

Armoured train – the Štefánik

Top: Civilians digging trenches

Top: Guards at anti-tank barriers

Right: Civilians digging trenches

Left: Rationing ammunition in Liptovská Osada

Top: soldiers from the 3rd Tactical Group in trenches
Once the Slovak National Uprising had begun, a Combined Squadron was formed at Tri Duby airfield. Although the Combined Squadron used rather outdated aeroplanes, it supported the insurgent land operations and hampered the Luftwaffe air-raids. Combined Squadron members helped set up and maintain the Air Bridge of Soviet Long Range Aviation at Tri Duby airfield.

The 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade fought hard in the Slovak National Uprising. It was engaged in many a battle en route from Jefremovo in the USSR to the insurgent territory in Slovakia, fighting in the successful Carpathian–Dukla Operation along the way. The deployment of the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade, due to begin on September 25, was delayed till October 19, 1944, owing to bad weather. Headquarters of the insurgents embattled the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade into the most vulnerable zones on the front.

The 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade

The Combined Squadron

AF růk R. Beňík, a memorable fighter pilot with the Combined Squadron (KL), in front of his Messerschmitt Bf 109G-6 at Tri Duby airfield in September 1944

Hlučka lands his plane (Lavochka) at Zolná airstrip on October 18, 1944, and soldiers bring a tractor to assist

From the left: J. Studnická, M. Petrutynová and Moravcová – female members of the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade
With volunteers arriving at the end of August/beginning of September 1944, the number of partisans swelled to almost 18,000. On September 7, 1944, the Slovak National Council appointed K. Šmidke main commander of the partisan units in Slovakia. Two weeks later he became Commander of the Headquarters of Partisan Units in Slovakia. The joint military actions carried out by insurgent soldiers, partisans, the gendarmerie and financial guard were coordinated by the Council for the Defence of Slovakia from September 12, 1944 onwards.
In terms of scope, military, national and international importance, the Slovak National Uprising was one of the greatest armed-political acts of the Slovak nation in its modern history. It was part of the wider resistance movement in Europe. The Slovak Uprising against Nazism was also a fight for the Slovaks’ own national existence.

The Slovak National Uprising provoked a great international reaction and became an important part of the European anti-fascist resistance during World War II. Thirty-three nations and nationalities from four continents were involved.

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Soviet support for the Slovak National Uprising was legally formalised in the Czechoslovak and Soviet Agreement on Friendship, Mutual Assistance and Post-War Cooperation dated December 12, 1943. The Carpathian-Dukla Operation was the most important Soviet act in support of the Slovak National Uprising. The operation of the 1st and 4th Ukrainian Front lasted from September 8 till October 28, 1944. The Soviets also provided extensive air support to the Slovak National Uprising. All military and sanitary material was supplied via the Air Bridge. The Air Bridge was also used to fly in ground personnel of the 1st Czechoslovak Fighter Regiment, members of the 2nd Czechoslovak Paratroop Brigade and the operating Headquarters of the Corps of the Soviet Long Range Air Force, commanded by Colonel B. F. Chirskov.

The US 15th Air Force provided military assistance during the Slovak National Uprising by transporting out US airmen shot down over Slovakia, particularly in Banská Bystrica, following the launch of the Uprising. In addition to military, communications and sanitary material, Western Allies also flew in a group of liaison and intelligence officers and OSS petty officers to Tri Duby airfield. The US Air Force (fighting on the same side as the insurgent armed forces) hit and destroyed large quantities of German military material and wagons at Vrútky railway station on September 13, 1944. The US Airforce bombing of the key Luftwaffe airbase at Malacky-Nový Dvör on September 20, 1944 was its greatest contribution in support of the Slovaks.

During operations Manganese/Windproof, the British parachuted in a Czechoslovak intelligence and communication group near Veľké Uherce in Topoľčany district on June 10, 1944. On the night of September 18, 1944 to September 19, 1944, the crew of a Halifax B Mk from the 148th RAF Squadron dropped containers holding radio and sanitary material in the Tri Duby area and also flew in a 4-member SOE group. The Amsterdham Group, consisting of Jewish volunteers, was also part of the SOE intelligence group.

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Significant changes occurred in education, culture and training in the insurgent territory. The education system was nationalized, a Front Theatre was established, Free Slovak Radio began broadcasting and a military film company provided the News. Many Slovak writers, artists and musicians were involved in the Uprising. The military and political authorities began publishing and delivering periodicals, leaflets and appeals within the insurgent territory. The most important of these was “Bojovník”, the bulletin of the 1st Czechoslovak Army in Slovakia. The National Committee of Banská Bystrica established an Information Agency.

**Life at the insurgent territory**

Hlinka Guard Flying Squads were established under Otomar Kubala’s command on September 21, 1944. They underwent special training courses in Germany and Slovakia to prepare them for close cooperation with Nazi security services – SiPO, SD, DP, and FS. The Hlinka Guard had 37 flying squads and 6 troops in the field, comprising around 5000 guards on rotation, at the end of January 1945. They cooperated closely with the SS units in terrorist, intelligence and shock actions against the partisans, insurgent soldiers, civilians and racially persecuted. The Hlinka Guard Flying Squads also took part in the mass executions of the defenceless populations of Nemecká, Kremnička, Kovačová, Zvolen and many other places in Slovakia.

**Pro-regime military and repressive units**
HSipo and SD Flying Squad Units led by SS Obersturmführer Jozef Witiska provide backup for German and Hungarian units occupying Slovakia. This Group contained 5 Flying Squads of approximately 500 men each. The repressive campaign it carried out in conjunction with pro-regime repressive units ended in the slaughter of 5,304 anti-fascists, racial persecuted individuals and innocent people, including children. They left behind 211 mass graves and more than 100 burnt out villages.

Nazi terror and the reprisals

Exhuming victims (747 in total) from mass graves near Krnánka, where Hlinka Guard Flying Squads assisted the Nazis.
Defeat of the Uprising

48,000 Nazi soldiers from the Wehrmacht, Waffen SS and Volkssturm troops fought in the Slovak National Uprising. In spite of the initial self-confidence of the Nazi troops, the poorly armed insurgents resisted the enemy attack for almost two months (from August 29 till October 27, 1944). The German general offensive began on October 18, 1944.

Partisan War

Following the retreat of the insurgents into the mountains, around 20,000 partisans fought in 40 partisan units from the end of October 1944 till the end of March 1945. They carried out 169 subversive actions and hampered German troops on front line access paths and in the rear of retreating troops.
When the insurgents still controlled part of Central Slovakia, the units of the 1st and 4th Ukrainian Front together with units of the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps crossed the Carpathian Mountains in the Dukla Pass region and entered Slovakia (East Carpathian Operation). The units formed a line running from the river Ondava to Vranov nad Topľou, central and southern Slánske hills and the river Hornád south of Košice. The south east of Slovakia, ceded to Hungary, was liberated at the end of 1944.

The battle for Slovakia continued in January 1945. The troops of the 1st Ukrainian Front and the 1st Czechoslovak Army Corps advanced from the north east, the 4th Ukrainian Front from the east and the 2nd Ukrainian Front along with the Romanian army from the south east. Intense fighting occurred in the Veľká and Malá Fatra area and in Liptovský Mikuláš. The German army was pushed out of Bratislava on April 4, 1945, and thus most areas in Slovakia had been liberated. The border village of Makov was the last place to be liberated by the Red Army on May 3, 1945. The war in Slovakia had come to an end.

Memorial sites

Staré Hory village was one of the important centres of insurgent activity. It had an ammunition store, field hospital, store and field bakeries belonging to the insurgent army. During the partisan war of winter 1944-1945 the Boženko and Stalin partisan brigades were active in the area alongside the Pomstiteľ, Vpred and Smrť fašizmu units. German units attacked the village several times in reprisal for supporting the partisans, and the nearby villages Richtárová and Turecká were burned down. Members of the Pomstiteľ unit and former Free Slovak Radio employees produced Mor ho! magazine from a partisan bunker under Jelenská rock.
One of the most famous sites of partisan and insurgent army activity is in the western Veľká Fatra mountains. After the retreat to Turiec on September 21, 1944, the Jablon infantry battalion of the 5th Tactic Group and the 10th Unit of the Jegorov partisan group provided cover for the 1st and 6th Tactic Group of the insurgent army. After the Uprising had been suppressed, a section of one of the units of Veličko partisan brigade from Kremnica retreated here. During the partisan war of winter 1944–1945 sections of Žingor partisan brigade, Popov partisan brigade and the Pobeda autonomous unit were headquartered in this area. The headquarters of the Pomstiteľ unit were in neighbouring Kráľova studňa.

The Vtáčnik partisan unit was active in the Vtáčnik Mountains, before, during and after the Uprising. It was the core unit of the Upper Nitra partisan brigade, helping defend Upper Nitra together with the insurgent soldiers from Veľké Kostoľany garrison and volunteers from Nováky labour camp. The Vtáčnik Mountains were also the site of activity by the Alexander Nevsky partisan frontline unit and especially the Nitra partisan brigade and Ján Žižka partisan frontline unit. Nazis burned down Kľak, Ostrý Grúň and Župkov and plundered Prochot in January 1945 as revenge for the help they gave the partisans.

Between January 4 and 11, 1944, there were 900 people burnt in the flames of the lime kiln in Ráztocká valley in Nemecká. Members of the SiPo German Security Police and SD Security Service, and the most effective unit, Einsatzkommando 14, transported the prisoners in lorries from the district prison in Banská Bystrica. They stole the prisoners valuables and shot them in the back of the neck. The bodies of the victims fell into the lime kiln fires. The murderers threw the ashes into the River Hron.
The Museum of the Slovak National Uprising

The Museum of the Slovak National Uprising (SNU) in Banská Bystrica is a central, specialized, research institution operating nationwide. The museum contains a specialist archive. The collections contain more than 222,000 exhibits and archives. The Museum of the Slovak National Uprising was founded on May 8, 1955. Since 1969, it has been housed in the Memorial building of the SNU. Prof. Dušan Kuzma, CSc created the architectural design. The building consists of two concrete and steel sculptures, which hold the permanent exhibition entitled Slovakia in Europe’s Anti-Fascist Resistance Movement in the Years 1939–1945. In terms of content, design and artistic presentation, and use of computer techniques and electronics, it is one of the most modern exhibitions in Europe. The information panels and exhibit labels are in Slovak, English and Russian. A sculpture, Victims Warn Us, by Prof. Jozef Jankovič is located in the centre of the memorial hall of the museum. The hall also contains soil from memorial sites and plaques honouring the victims of the reprisals and the Holocaust, and the foreign nationals who participated in the SNU. Open-air display of heavy artillery and the tanks is also part of the permanent exhibition at the museum.

August 29 is rightfully a public holiday in the Slovak Republic. The significance of the Slovak National Uprising lies in the fact that the Slovak nation took up arms against the occupation of its own historical lands and succeeded despite the uncertainty of the outcome. The Uprising was spontaneous. It had not even been officially declared when the soldiers garrisoned in Žilina rebelled against the enemy. Following mobilization, recruits flocked to join the insurgent army. The army, the partisans and the civil administration were all helped by people living at the insurgent territory. Breaking the yoke of cooperation with Nazi Germany was an inevitable historical step for the Slovak nation. We must be rightfully proud of all those who found the moral strength to join in the two-month-long heroic resistance against a more experienced and better-armed enemy. The victims of the Uprising should be revered and all those who participated deserve the respect of the people of the Slovak Republic.
The Americans  The Armenians  The Australians
The Austrians  The Azerbaijans  Nations
The British  The Bulgarians
The Dutch  The French
The Greeks  The Hungarians
The Kazakhstanis  The Kyrgyzstanis
The Poles  The Romanians
The Slovenians  The Spaniards
The Ukrainians  The Uzbeks

Published for the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic by the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising
© Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic 2014
© Museum of the Slovak National Uprising 2014
Author: Stanislav Mičev
Photographs: Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic,
Archive of the Museum of the Slovak National Uprising, Jozef Lomnický
Design: Ivan Kocák

EAN 9788089514250