

# THE CZECH AND SLOVAK REPUBLICS

*Twenty Years of Independence,  
1993–2013*

Edited by  
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# Introduction<sup>1</sup>

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In 2013, the Czech and Slovak Republics celebrated twenty years of independence. Not all citizens welcomed the split. Furthermore, the new countries' subsequent trajectories, which were sometimes painful and controversial, have received little comparative scholarly attention within the two republics. For observers on the outside, however, the new states have provided a rare opportunity to study political and social change in two closely related countries, an experiment of significant importance. Without emotional and political restraints, Western scholars quickly seized upon the causes of the split and the subsequent paths taken by the two new independent republics.

One of the first works to appear was by Carol Skalnik Leff, an American political scientist. She briefly described the history of Czechoslovakia from 1918 through 1989 and its 1993 breakup. Her main focus, however, was on the period from 1989 to 1996 in the two republics with respect to the evolution of political parties, the economic challenges, and the desire to join the European Union (EU). While recognizing the difficulties both countries faced, she remained cautiously optimistic about their future.<sup>2</sup>

While Leff presented the first attempt at a broad comparative analysis of the new states, other Western scholars dug deeper into

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Kevin Deegan-Krause for having critiqued and strengthened this introduction.

<sup>2</sup> Carol Skalnik Leff, *The Czech and Slovak Republics: Nation Versus State* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997).

issues of national identity, political parties, local communities, and European integration. The British literary historian, Robert B. Pynsent, led the way by looking at the issue of national identity, and he found the Czechs exhibited an individualistic, non-national outlook while the Slovaks were community-oriented.<sup>3</sup> The American historian, Hugh Agnew, followed up with his survey of Czech historical thinking, which centered on the history of the Kingdom of Bohemia, while the Slovaks emphasized “natural rights,” based on their language and culture.<sup>4</sup> Nadja Nedelsky, meanwhile, found that, starting in the late nineteenth century, Czechs increasingly adopted a civic identity, whereas the Slovaks continued to focus on their ethnic identity. That is why, she concluded, the Czech Republic stresses citizenship, while the Slovak Republic views nationality as important.<sup>5</sup>

Politics in the Czech and Slovak Republics also interested Western scholars. Thus, Petr Kopecky, a Czech political scientist at the University of Leiden in the Netherlands, carefully described the creation and democratic functioning of political parties in the Czech and Slovak Republics.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, Kevin Deegan-Krause, in the United States, showed the differential impact of issue dimensions—primarily economics in the Czech Republic and nationalism in Slovakia—on the success of early democratization efforts in the two countries.<sup>7</sup> The American political scientist, James W. Peterson, compared and contrasted the foreign policy of the Czech Republic with that of Slovakia and found that, in the initial years of their independent existence, the Czechs looked westward, while the Slovaks turned their attention east-

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<sup>3</sup> Robert P. Pynsent, *Questions of Identity: Czech and Slovak Ideas on Nationality and Personality* (Budapest – New York: Central European University Press, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> Hugh Le Caine Agnew, “New States, Old Identities? The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Historical Understandings of Statehood,” *Nationalities Papers* 28, no. 4 (December 2000): 619–50.

<sup>5</sup> Nadja Nedelsky, *Defining the Sovereign Community: The Czech and Slovak Republics* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Petr Kopecky, *Parliaments in the Czech and Slovak Republics: Party Competition and Parliamentary Institutionalization* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Kevin Deegan-Krause, *Elected Affinities: Democracy and Party Competition in Slovakia and the Czech Republic* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

ward. However, after the defeat of the Vladimír Mečiar government in 1998, Slovak governments switched to cooperating with the West.<sup>8</sup> The American political scientist, John A. Scherpereel, meanwhile, asked why the Czech and Slovak Republics did not decentralize into regions in the 1990s or create an independent civil service and why they identified the EU as the driving force for regionalization and civil service reforms in the 2000s.<sup>9</sup> The American sociologist, Simon Smith, edited a book of readings that compared the environmental movement, civil society, community life, and group strategies in the Czech and Slovak Republics.<sup>10</sup> The British political scientist, Kieran Williams, teamed up with American Dennis Deletant to compare the newly established security services in the two republics and found mismanagement and incompetency within the Czech Secret Service, while its Slovak counterpart, under the Mečiar regime, evolved into a political police linked to organized crime.<sup>11</sup> The American defense analyst, Jeffrey Simon, showed how *both* the Czech and Slovak Republics had to change their military policies and strategies when they were admitted into NATO at the turn of the millennium.<sup>12</sup> Finally, in the field of political economy, John Gould, an American, delved into the flaws of the initially well-received Czech privatization plan, which he compared with the deliberate politicization of the privatization process in Slovakia.<sup>13</sup>

While Western scholars compared various aspects of the two independent republics after 1993, Czech and Slovak scholars, working in their home countries, opted to focus on other questions. As Jan Rychlík

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<sup>8</sup> James W. Peterson, "Separate Paths: Czech and Slovak Foreign Policies since 1993," *Slovakia* 38, Nos. 70–71 (2005): 121–45.

<sup>9</sup> John A. Scherpereel, *Governing the Czech Republic and Slovakia: Between State Socialism and the European Union* (Boulder, CO: First Forum Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Simon Smith, ed. *Local Communities and Post-Communist Transformation: Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia* (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Kieran Williams and Dennis Deletant, *Security Intelligence Services in New Democracies: The Czech Republic, Slovakia and Romania* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Simon, *NATO and the Czech and Slovak Republics: A Comparative Study in Civil-Military Relations* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>13</sup> John Gould, *The Politics of Privatization: Wealth and Power in Postcommunist Europe* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2011).



pointed out, even though certain Czech scholars still are interested in Slovak history, they focus only on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, especially on the history of Czechoslovakia. Since Slovakia is no longer a part of their former common state, they do not compare and contrast their experiences since 1993.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, scholars in Slovakia, while they have produced comparative works and analyses of Slovakia's development since 1993, often do not compare and contrast what happened in the Slovak Republic versus the Czech Republic since separation.<sup>15</sup> Time, however, has produced a new generation of scholars, who came of age after the split and the independence of the two countries, and time has given the more senior generation the ability to reflect on the intertwined stories of the Slovak and Czech republics.

This volume emerges from the valuable insights of some of the best and brightest Slovak and Czech scholars, who came together with the explicit goal of comparing Czech and Slovak achievements and failures in the twenty years since independence. With support from the University of Ottawa and the Czech and Slovak communities in Canada, the editor put into motion, in 2011, an effort to promote discussion among Czech, Slovak, and Western scholars that resulted in an international scholarly conference entitled "The Czech and Slovak Republics: Twenty Years of Independence, 1993–2013" at the University of Ottawa on October 3–4, 2013. This volume presents the papers and responses from that conference, all of which the authors extensively revised and reworked to take into account the conference discussions, external reviews, and subsequent events. The chapters are clustered in thematic sections, each containing papers by leading Slovak and Czech

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<sup>14</sup> Jan Rychlík, "České, slovenské, československé dejiny—vztahy a souvislosti," [Czech, Slovak, Czechoslovak history: relations and continuities] in *Československo 1918–1938. Osudy demokracie ve Střední Evropě I* [Czechoslovakia 1918–1938. The fate of democracy in Central Europe], ed. Jaroslav Valenta (Historický ústav ČAV, 1999), 163–9; and Jan Rychlík, "Výskum slovenských dějin v České republice," [The study of Slovak history in the Czech Republic], *Historický časopis* 52, no. 2 (2004): 363–74. Rychlík confirmed this observation to the editor in an e-mail sent on September 12, 2015.

<sup>15</sup> Adam Hudek confirmed the opinion of the editor via e-mail on September 14, 2015. He edited *Overcoming the Old Borders: Beyond the Paradigm of Slovak National History* (Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, 2013), which is the latest and most comprehensive historiography of the Slovak Republic.

scholars along with the responses of North American experts. They cover the causes of the breakup of Czechoslovakia and the political, social, and economic developments over the subsequent twenty years.

Although the chapters deal with a wide range of topics and vary significantly in their methods and the type of evidence they present, they share quite a few common theoretical perspectives and recurring themes. The most striking of these is the implicit (and sometimes explicit) debate over issues of individual agency and deeper political structures that, in this volume, take shape around questions about the inevitability of the split and the subsequent trajectories of the two countries. In this sense, many of the chapters represent thoughts about broader questions of political change and stability. On a slightly smaller scale, the chapters address the relative impact of cultural variables against economic ones and some discussion about the specific leadership styles that may (or may not) have made a difference in the split and subsequent events. Finally, the chapters address the underlying issues of national identity: what it might mean to be a Czech as opposed to a Slovak and why that might matter.

Jozef Moravčík's and Petr Pithart's plenary addresses could not have been more different. While both had initially opposed the breakup of Czechoslovakia, Moravčík, the interim prime minister of the Slovak Republic in 1994, recognized that, by 1992, the two sides continued "to face a permanent political crisis"; therefore, the best solution was to "divide the state." After retracing historical developments, especially over the past twenty years, Moravčík concluded that the division made sense and that "my conscience is clear." Pithart, the prime minister of the Czech Republic in 1990–1992, by contrast, lamented that, "for the first time in our more than one-thousand year history, we Czechs are living in our 'state-house' alone." He blamed Czech intellectuals and politicians for having failed to recognize the legitimate demands of the Slovaks for home rule, for having been unwilling to compromise, and for carrying most of the blame for the breakup. He bitterly concluded that the breakup was legal but was "without any legitimacy." While neither former politician is typical of the populations they led, their comments subtly reflect on the relative trajectories of the two countries: Slovakia avoided the worst-case scenarios that seemed likely during the government of Vladimír Mečiar in the 1990s and, for most citizens of Slovakia, the split has proved the source of relatively few regrets.

Czechs, too, have regretted little, but they are also unlikely to see the split as “freeing” them from the burden of Slovakia. Pithart focused on the role of human agency. He saw the split not as a structural inevitability but as the result of the personal failure among his colleagues to see a bigger picture and keep the two peoples together. Czechoslovakia, he suggested, probably should have—and could have—been saved.

In the section on the breakup of Czechoslovakia, Jan Rychlík’s chapter presents a comprehensive set of underlying factors that led to the breakup of the country. Rychlík, who had served as one of Petr Pithart’s advisors during the latter’s premiership of the Czech Republic, points out that the basic reason why Czechoslovakia split was that there was no strong “Czechoslovak” identity, in spite of the efforts of Tomáš G. Masaryk (1850–1937), his colleagues, and their successors to promote it. In 1968, the republic federalized, and the Slovaks acquired veto powers in the House of Nations, where their representatives enjoyed parity with the Czechs. Consequently, if the Communist Party ever lost control over Czechoslovakia, which happened in 1989, the Slovaks could paralyze federal legislation. Furthermore, no Czechoslovak political parties arose after 1989 because the Slovak Public Against Violence (VPN) movement forbade them in Slovakia. The first inkling that all was not well in relations between Czechs and Slovaks arose in the winter and spring of 1990, when president Václav Havel (1936–2011) proposed that Czechoslovakia drop the word “socialist” from its official name (it became known as the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1960).<sup>16</sup> The Slovaks agreed but wanted to reintroduce the hyphen into the name so that it would be spelled as Czecho-Slovakia, as it had between 1918 and 1920 and again between 1938 and 1939. The Czechs refused because the hyphen reminded them of the ill-fated post-Munich Second Republic (1938–1939).<sup>17</sup> On April 20, 1990, the

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<sup>16</sup> See the *Ústava Československé socialistické republiky* [Constitution of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic] in the *Sbírka zákonů Československé socialistické republiky*, částka 40, vydána dne 11. července 1960 [Compendium of documents of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, Part 40, published on June 11, 1960].

<sup>17</sup> Stolarik explained the “hyphen war” of 1990 to American readers in “For Slovaks, a Hyphen Means Recognition,” on the editorial page of the *New York Times*, April 22, 1990.

two sides finally compromised on the “Czech and Slovak Federative Republic,” which appeared on official stationery and on embassy buildings, but the Czechs continued to spell the country Czechoslovakia, while the Slovaks preferred Czecho-Slovakia. This so-called “hyphen war” reflected the two different interpretations of what Czechoslovakia meant to the Czechs and Slovaks. To the Czechs, it meant a strong “functioning federation”; whereas to the Slovaks, it meant two sovereign republics in a loose federation. In the June 1992 elections, Václav Klaus’s Civic Democratic Party (ODS) won the largest number of seats in the Czech Republic, while Vladimír Mečiar’s Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) gained the largest number in Slovakia. These parties and their leaders reflected the two different conceptions of what Czechoslovakia should be, and since they could not come to an agreement, they decided to dissolve the state. Finally, Rychlík reminds us that “states come and go, and no state on earth is eternal” and that “all multinational states are unstable,” and offers the examples of the Ottoman Empire, Austria-Hungary, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia as multinational states that failed. He also points to the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Spain as states that continue to experience disunity.<sup>18</sup> He concludes that the breakup of Czechoslovakia was not necessarily a bad thing because today “Czech-Slovak relations are excellent. Nobody could want more.”

Michael Kraus’s commentary largely agrees with Rychlík’s analysis. Kraus, too, summarizes the scholarship related to the breakup of Czechoslovakia and concludes that the field still lacks consensus. He gives former president Havel credit for helping to keep the negotiations on the breakup “civilized.” He also agrees with Rychlík that “the Czechs and Slovaks today get along better than at any point in the seventy-four-year history of their common statehood.”

With their Slovak perspective on the breakup of Czechoslovakia, Adam Hudek and Jozef Žatkuliak offer a comprehensive historiographical discussion of the problem that rejects the interpretation of some

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<sup>18</sup> On September 18, 2014, Scotland held a referendum on separating from the United Kingdom, which failed to pass by a vote of 55% against and 45% in favor. See “A Kingdom Still United,” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), September 20, 2014, A9, and “Three Cheers for Pluralism Over Separatism,” *The New York Times*, September 21, 2014, SR1.

scholars that an underlying conflict between Slovak *ethnic* nationalism and Czech *civic* nationalism caused the split.<sup>19</sup> The authors agree with Abby Innes that, on both sides, post-communist elites, who retained a pre-1989 mindset to the effect that politicians can do anything without the approval of the people, facilitated the split.<sup>20</sup> Having surveyed events between 1989 and 1992, Hudek and Žatkuliak find a critical juncture in the decision of the dissident Civic Forum, in the Czech Republic, and Public Against Violence, in the Slovak Republic, both of which negotiated the transfer of power from the collapsing Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in November of 1989, to call for early elections in 1992. The authors suggest that the decision did not leave enough time for Czech and Slovak politicians to come to a mutually acceptable agreement on the future form of their state. Ultimately, Czech politicians following Klaus, favored the breakup of Czechoslovakia over the confederal model that Mečiar and his associates proposed. Interestingly enough, the authors conclude that the breakup of Czechoslovakia into two independent states bodes ill for the future of the EU, which attempts to promote more, rather than less, unity in Europe.

Stanislav J. Kirschbaum's commentary on the Hudek-Žatkuliak chapter takes the authors to task for what he argued was their incomplete historiographical discussion and inadequate historical background. Kirschbaum asserts that a discussion of independence should reach back to the period of the first Slovak Republic (1939–1945) to show that the Slovaks were capable of running their own affairs and that "independence was the only solution."

Juraj Hocman's chapter begins the section on politics since 1993, and his detailed, step-by-step analysis of Slovak politics since independence traces, in great detail, the rule of the autocratic Mečiar between 1992 and 1998. Hocman sees it as part of a wider process by which Slovak politicians have evolved into "an autonomous political class which opened itself to the public only in times of elections." He argues that, initially, the members of this political class shaped economic developments

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<sup>19</sup> Nedelsky, in *Defining the Sovereign Community*, was among those who presented this interpretation.

<sup>20</sup> Abby Innes, *Czechoslovakia: The Short Goodbye* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

because they allowed their friends to gain control over state assets during the privatizations of the 1990s. Within a decade, however, the tables were turned, and the winners in the privatization process began to dominate the politicians. As a result, ordinary Slovaks became disillusioned with politics and opted for the left-of-center populist, Robert Fico, and anyone else who sought to stop the oligarchs. Hocman concludes that the Slovak political system still showed signs of political immaturity, that Slovak citizens still had to learn how to become good patriots, and that Slovak politicians needed to start behaving in the public interest.

In his commentary on Juraj Hocman's chapter, Kevin Deegan-Krause argues that, in a sense, "Slovakia is everywhere" since Slovak politics are typical in East-Central Europe. Deegan-Krause supplements Hocman's analysis with attention to other issues. Among these is the relatively successful accommodation between the ethnic Slovak and ethnic Hungarian populations and the far-from-resolved situation of 400,000 Roma citizens in Slovakia, whose poverty and exclusion from mainstream society has posed challenges for every Slovak government since independence.<sup>21</sup> Deegan-Krause also focuses on the role of political institutions and the "authority issue," noting that Mečiar tried to undermine the democratic system in Slovakia but ultimately failed to do so, unlike in Belarus and Russia, and that Prime Minister Fico's loss in the presidential elections of 2014 reflect the continued unwillingness of the Slovak electorate to put all power into the hands of one party, unlike in neighboring Hungary, where Fidesz was simultaneously consolidating its rule. The rise and fall of new political parties in Slovakia is a cause of concern to Deegan-Krause, but it is not unique to Slovakia and is a worldwide phenomenon. In spite of these open questions, Deegan-Krause concludes, independent Slovakia has become "ordinary" in East-Central Europe and is, therefore, a success.

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<sup>21</sup> According to the 2000 census, 520,528 Magyars and 89,920 Roma lived in Slovakia. The number of Roma is too low since many of them self-identify as Magyars, Slovaks, or others. For more on minorities in Slovakia, see Pál Csáky, "Human Rights and Inter-Group Relations in Slovakia," in *The Slovak Republic: A Decade of Independence (1993–2002)*, ed. by M. Mark Stolarik (Wauconda, IL: Bolchazi-Carducci, 2002), 95–104.

In her succinct chapter on Czech politics since independence, Adéla Gjuričová focuses on the main trends. She agrees with Jan Rychlík that the Czechs always regarded Czechoslovakia as “their” state and look upon the Czech Republic as a direct (if somewhat truncated) continuation of that state. She then asserts that, in the two decades after independence, individual agents, particularly Havel, Klaus, and Miloš Zeman, dominated Czech politics. While Havel was a bohemian, in the literary sense of the word, and anti-political, Klaus and Zeman were pragmatic economists from different sides of the political spectrum, Klaus being a right-wing “neoliberal” and Zeman a Social Democrat. In spite of their ideological differences, both Klaus and Zeman rejected Havel’s humanism and managed to isolate him and other political parties so that, for the next two decades, Czech governments were under the leadership of either Klaus’s Civic Democratic Party (ODS) or Zeman’s Social Democrats (ČSSD). Indeed, in spite of their ideological differences, Klaus and Zeman often supported each other’s legislative policies, even as they criticized each other. In addition, Klaus was a eurosceptic who, in spite of having supported the inclusion of the Czech Republic into the EU and NATO, heavily criticized the EU and rejected adopting the euro as the Czech currency. The other main anomaly in Czech politics, Gjuričová continues, was the enduring popularity (15 percent support) of the old Communist Party (now called the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia or KSČM), although none of the other major parties were willing to accept it into a coalition. By the time of the 2013 elections, Czech voters had grown so disillusioned with the “old” parties that 18.6 percent of them voted for a brand new pro-business party under the leadership of the expatriate Slovak billionaire, Andrej Babiš, who became a deputy prime minister in the new coalition government under the Social Democrats. It remains to be seen if the ODS, which received only 7.7 percent of the vote, or the Social Democrats, who fell to 20 percent, will be able to maintain their support at these lower levels.

In her commentary on Gjuričová’s chapter, Carol Skalnik Leff focuses on the paradox of the Czech Communist Party and the continuities and discontinuities among other parties. To the question as to why the Czech Communist Party survived with strong electoral support in the new Czech Republic, in contrast to the failings of such parties in other East-Central European states, she answers that it had stronger historical roots than elsewhere, and was thoroughly purged of reformers in 1969–

1970, so that only the more “rigid” and “ossified” members remained. Since the Social Democrats refused to form coalitions with the Czech Communists, the SDs have found it very difficult to form coalitions, and this has led to unstable governments (twelve of them) between 1996 and 2014. Political parties, by contrast, were quite stable in the Czech Republic until 2010. After that, newcomer protest parties gained a solid foothold against the establishment. Among them were two pro-business, populist parties under the leadership of Babiš and the Czech-Japanese Tomio Okamura. Interestingly enough, even though 70 percent of Czechs were either atheists or non-religious, a viable Christian Democratic Party has endured, largely based in Moravia. It attracts voters who prefer traditional Christian values, whether or not they are atheists.<sup>22</sup> Finally, even though only 40 percent of Czechs expressed pride in their nation, Klaus and Zeman both raised the specter of Czech nationalism, when, in the 2013 presidential elections, they questioned the Czech identity of Zeman’s opponent, former foreign minister Karel von Schwarzenberg!<sup>23</sup>

The section on economic development begins with a chapter on Slovakia by Eudovít Hallon, Miroslav Londák, and Adam Hudek. In a survey of Slovakia’s place in Czechoslovakia’s economy since 1918, they show the process by which the Slovak economy, which started out much weaker than the Czech economy, climbed to within 13 percent of Czech per capita GDP by 1989. In the section on development after 1993, the authors argue that, unlike the economists at the Czech

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<sup>22</sup> For Czech attitudes towards organized religion, see Paul Froese, “Secular Czechs and Devout Slovaks: Explaining Religious Differences,” *Review of Religious Research* 46, no. 3 (March, 2005): 269–83. Karel D. Bicha dealt with Czech hostility towards the Roman Catholic Church in “Settling Accounts with an Old Adversary: The Decatholicization of Czech Immigrants in America,” *Histoire sociale—Social History* 8 (November, 1971): 45–60.

<sup>23</sup> Klaus and Zeman’s alliance against the “suspect” Czech Schwarzenberg refutes the claim of the former communist historian, Jiří Kořalka, who, in a very flawed historiographical article, wrote that Czech nationalism is “unthinkable.” See his “Czechoslovakia,” *American Historical Review* 97 (October, 1992): 1026–40. For critiques of this article, see “Communications” by M. Mark Stolarik and Milan Hauner, (*American Historical Review* 98 (April, 1993): 650–1). For a general discussion of Czech nationalism, see Ladislav Holy, *The Little Czech and the Great Czech Nation: National Identity in the Post-Communist Social Transformation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).



Academy of Science, some Slovak economists rejected the principles of a “standard economy” and preferred one based on “national sentiments.” Therefore, they disagreed with the “voucher privatization” of the federal minister of finance, Klaus, in favor of direct sales to the managers of various large industries in Slovakia, a position that supported the desire of Prime Minister Mečiar to create “a strong group of Slovak businessmen,” who would support his policies. The same approaches, however, led to tunneling of large Slovak enterprises, such as the Eastern Slovak Steel Works in Košice, and the creation of instant billionaires, such as Alexander Rezeš. Only the National Bank of Slovakia, they conclude, managed to remain independent of Mečiar’s influence, and its continued independence prevented more damage to the Slovak economy. By 1998, the Slovak public had tired of Mečiar’s authoritarianism and voted in a right-wing electoral coalition under Mikuláš Dzurinda, who reversed Mečiar’s policies. During its two terms in office, Dzurinda’s governments opened up Slovakia to foreign investment, floated the currency, and replaced existing taxes with a 19 percent flat tax, which attracted many new foreign investors. While the rest of Europe approved the political transformation and admitted Slovakia into both the EU and NATO, the policies had less positive impact on Slovak citizens, who suffered from high unemployment and relatively low wages. The left-wing populist Fico replaced Dzurinda in 2006 and has remained in office since then, except for the brief interregnum of Iveta Radičová’s pro-market government between mid-2010 and early 2012. Fico proceeded to dismantle many of Dzurinda’s reforms, even making some modifications to the flat tax.

According to the authors, the true impact of these policy shifts remains to be seen. They note that Slovakia’s economy did not collapse after independence, as many western observers had predicted,<sup>24</sup> and

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<sup>24</sup> For misgivings about Slovakia’s future, see Stephen Engleberg, “Czechoslovakia Breaks in Two, To Wide Regret,” *The New York Times*, January 1, 1993; and Paul Koring “Breakup of a Nation, a Split Decision,” *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), December 31, 1992. The Canadian political scientist, Robert Young, even used the breakup of Czechoslovakia and the supposed dark future of independent Slovakia as a warning to French separatists wanting to proclaim the independence of Quebec from the rest of Canada. See his *The Breakup of Czechoslovakia* (Kingston: Institute for Intergovernmental Relations, 1994).

the Slovak GDP increased from 57 percent of the EU average, in 1993, to 75 percent, in 2013. However, Slovak unemployment remained at 14 percent, 160,000 Slovaks were working in Western Europe, and the significant disparity between western Slovakia and the rest of the country continued.

John A. Gould's commentary generally supports the Hallon-Londák-Hudek analysis and underlines the mistaken belief of many economists and political leaders in East-Central Europe, the Balkans, and Eastern Europe that the privatization of industry in the former Soviet Bloc countries would lead to political reform and democratization. Instead, Gould argues, it frequently led to "a short-term, high-stakes battle for the wealth and power of the country." Slovakia's example is notable. Mečiar cancelled voucher privatization in Slovakia in 1994, largely because he wanted the managers of the large firms to become his allies and supporters. Gould credits the Dzurinda governments with reversing Mečiar's policies and notes that, despite the problem of unemployment, Slovakia performed very well economically, until the worldwide recession hit in 2008–2009. Gould argues that, in the process, "Slovakia has now fully hitched its wagon to the global economy," and how well it will do in the future depends heavily upon the performance of the world economy, as well as on the policies of Fico's Social Democratic government.

Martin Pospíšil, in his chapter on economic developments in the Czech Republic since 1993, covers three periods: the initial transformation (1991–1997); crisis and convergence (1997–2007); and the global crisis (2008–2014). In the first part, he focuses on the transition from communism to capitalism under the leadership of economists from the Prognostic Institute of the Czech Academy of Science. He points out that there was no game plan for this transition, so Czech economists, under Klaus, adopted neoclassical economics, based upon the "Washington consensus," which stressed privatization, liberalization, and stabilization.<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, this "Washington consensus" ignored his-

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<sup>25</sup> In spite of the Cold War between the Soviet Union and the West from 1947 to 1989, and American hostility to communism, the American government never developed an economic game plan for Eastern Europe should communism collapse. Jean Kirkpatrick, the American ambassador to the United Nations in the early 1980s, best summarized the American attitude in one

toric and institutional differences among countries. Thus, the Czech Republic, using Klaus's voucher system, privatized 75 percent of all businesses. However, Czech law enforcement, corporate governance, and business ethics were unprepared for the rapid changes, and the privatization led to the tunneling of businesses and much corruption. In addition, Klaus did not shut down inefficient enterprises for fear of rising unemployment. So low productivity continued, and income stagnated below 1989 levels until 2001. In the second part of his essay, Pospíšil pointed out that state-owned banks were under the control of privatization funds until 1997, and they made tunneling possible by lending money to companies under their control. This led to a banking scandal in 1997, the defeat of Klaus's right-wing government, and its replacement by Zeman's Social Democrats. Ironically, it was the Social Democrats who privatized Czech banks and stopped tunneling, and this led to the 1998–2007 economic recovery. The fickle Czech electorate returned Klaus's party to power between 2006 and 2013, and the new prime minister, Mirek Topolánek (Klaus had become President), asked Czechs to tighten their belts when the world recession hit in 2008. He also moved the Czech economy closer to that of Germany, and this helped Czechs weather the storm. Thus, Pospíšil concludes, "despite mistakes made, Czech economic development over the last decades has been a success."

Sharon Fisher, in her commentary on Pospíšil's chapter, sharply disagrees with his assessment of success. She points out that Czech per capita GDP, as compared to that of the EU improved only from 77 percent in 1995 to 80 percent in 2013. Slovakia's GDP, by comparison, shot up from 48 percent to 76 percent. In fact, Fisher argues, "Slovakia experienced one of the fastest convergence rates of all new member states [of the EU]." According to Fisher, Pospíšil did not explain this huge difference. Indeed, she continues, there was very little economic

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of her speeches, when she tried to justify American support for right-wing regimes in Latin America and hostility towards communism. She declared that she had seen many instances of right-wing governments eventually becoming democratic, but she never had heard of a communist regime reverting to democracy. She based her speech on an article that she had published as "Dictatorship and Double Standards," *Commentary Magazine* 68 (November, 1979): 34–45.

reform in the Czech Republic after 1993, and the coupon privatization failed to create an adequate legal and institutional framework. The Czech “economic miracle” that Klaus bragged about in the early 1990s had disintegrated by 1997, and Social Democratic governments were left to clean up the mess, while Klaus played the nationalist card and became a eurosceptic. As a result, Fisher concludes, the Czechs now “appear to be happy with neither EU membership nor the Czech-Slovak split.”

In the final section on societal changes, Martin and Zora Bútora use empirical data and many public opinion surveys to offer a comprehensive overview of developments in Slovakia between 1993 and 2013. They present seven snapshots of Slovak society, over the last twenty years, which depict a country that “has muddled through,” succeeding in some ways and lagging in others. Slovakia, they argue, has joined the club of the most successful countries in the world; but it scores high in corruption, with an inefficient bureaucracy and a corrupt judiciary. Slovakia’s citizens are deeply concerned with unemployment and “civic helplessness,” but 64 percent of Slovaks take pride in their country, and ethnic pluralism has become the norm, in spite of the nagging difficulties related to integrating the Roma into Slovak society. Civil society survives, even though most Slovak governments do not like NGOs and often set up roadblocks in their way. Although the Bútoras worry that Slovakia still needs a clear vision for the future,<sup>26</sup> they nevertheless echo the message “Don’t be afraid!” that the late Pope John Paul II delivered to Slovakia, and they finish with the cautiously optimistic conclusion that, no matter what the difficulty, Slovak society has always been able to “stand up after falling down.”

In her commentary on the Bútoras’ chapter, Sharon Wolchik raises four follow-up questions: Why, if Slovakia ranked so high on the corruption index, did its citizens not perceive the problems with the judiciary? How, in light of the 2012 Gorilla scandal, which pointed to the major financial institutions’ widespread illegal financing of parties, can Slovakia deal with the inability (or unwillingness) of political parties

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<sup>26</sup> They may have taken the need for a vision for the future from Tom Nicholson’s chapter, “Je čas dať tomuto štátu zmysel” [It’s time to give this state some meaning], in *Odkiaľ a kam?* ed. Bútora et al., 281–91. A revised and expanded version of this article appeared as “Corruption in Slovakia: Time to Reclaim the State,” in *Slovakia* 42, nos. 78–79 (2015): 112–25.

and their leaders to act in the public interest?<sup>27</sup> How should Slovakia deal with those who are economically disadvantaged, especially women, the poor, and young people who are leaving for work elsewhere? And finally, what kind of “new narrative” would serve to achieve these various goals? Wolchik suggests that observers still need to understand Slovakia as a post-communist society, whose leaders have yet to overcome communist ways of thinking and doing, and that Slovakia’s citizens need to broaden their definition of democracy from simply free and fair elections to include the rule of law, a well-cultivated civil society, and democratic political values. Thus, Wolchik concludes, “Slovakia still has a way to go.”

In his chapter on social developments in the Czech Republic since 1993, Oldřich Tůma claims that outsiders could perceive this story as “boring,” and that Czech society, over time, had fallen into “a bad mood.” He blamed this situation on post-communist society, which saw the Czech Republic turn from a fairly egalitarian society to a stratified one, with former communist functionaries, members of State Security, and black marketers gaining a jump on others in social mobility. His statistical analysis finds that the share of Czechs defining themselves as “middle class” dropped from 61 percent in 1991 to only 37 percent in 2007, and that the Czech Republic’s unusually low unemployment rates of only 4 percent, in the 1990s, reached higher levels, between 6–9 percent, depending upon the region. Nevertheless, while only 10 percent of young people studied at university in the 1980s, 50 percent did so in 2013. He argues that, even as the Czech Republic came closer to Western Europe in economic terms, it continues to suffer from political division, constant squabbling, and prevailing feelings of frustration, failure, and skepticism. He finds it to be “spiritually stagnant.”

In his commentary on Tůma’s chapter, James W. Peterson called for more research on the relationship between public opinion and the actions of politicians that might yield insights into the disconnect between political activity and the general public’s reaction of feelings of “frustration.” Peterson also asked whether there was a relationship between political behavior and economic conditions, particularly with

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<sup>27</sup> For an exposé on the Gorilla scandal, see Tom Nicholson, *Gorila* (Bratislava: Dixit, 2012).

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regard to the continuing strength of the Communist Party in the Czech Republic and specific examples of the communist legacy.

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the first two decades of Czech and Slovak independence. The new findings range from the immediate and factual to deeper insights into the methods by which we compare large-scale social transformations. The evidence suggests a strong similarity of outcomes, despite potentially large initial differences in leadership and institutional paths between the two republics. While the Czechs privatized their state-owned industries, largely with the voucher system, and the Slovaks did so through crony sales (as Petr Pithart put it, the Slovaks stole openly while the Czechs stole discreetly), both ended up with thoroughly tunneled industries and rampant corruption that no one seems capable of eliminating. While the Czech party system experienced twenty years of continuity in players and alliances and Slovakia's system changed seemingly with each election, both ended up with a political class that demonstrated contempt for the electorate, ushered in widespread dissatisfaction, and engendered a rapid influx of new outsider-led parties. The similarity of these outcomes at the macro-level suggests the need for a serious reconsideration of the underlying factors that produced the result. If Czech and Slovak cultures are truly different, as some Slovaks and Czechs would suggest, then the similarities suggest the existence of powerful homogenizing influences, old ones, such as the legacy of communism and persistent aspects of political culture, or perhaps new ones, such as economic globalization and the spread of new political technologies.<sup>28</sup> Another possibility may be that, despite the appearance of fundamental differences in culture between Slovaks and Czechs, their underlying similarities in certain areas, such as in tolerance of corruption, orientation toward the market, xenophobia, and national pride, may be greater than many care to acknowledge.

The difficulty in finding answers to such questions reflects the deeper challenges of scholarly research in the social sciences. The complexity of societal change means that even the most experienced scholars are unable to agree about the interpretation of data. Where

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<sup>28</sup> See Steve Forbes, "Investor's Paradise," *Forbes*, August 11, 2003; Matthew Reynolds, "Once a Backwater, Slovakia Surges," *The New York Times*, December 28, 2004, and "Slovakia: Unleashing the Tatra Tiger," Special Advertising Feature, *Business Week*, August 7, 2006.

the questions are so fundamentally difficult, circumstances stand in the way of efforts to find answers. The baseline of expectations plays a big role in how scholars judge outcomes. This leads to relatively more sanguine views of progress for Slovakia, which seemed in greater danger than the Czech Republic in 1993, even though both have arrived at much the same destination. Perspective also matters: one's national origin—whether Czech or Slovak or outsider—shapes what one expects to see. It is for this reason that this project's goal of creating a focused dialogue directly between Slovaks and Czechs has been so important. Putting these accounts side by side and then provoking a direct dialogue was essential for the participants in the conference to filter out what was superficial from what was essential. Whether the split of Czechoslovakia was inevitable or preventable, whether the (re)convergence of the two countries' paths is ingrained or merely superficial are questions that have too many variables for crafting easy answers. Nevertheless, academic projects, like the chapters in this book, help guide researchers and rule out glib answers about "those Czechs" and "those Slovaks" that are more easily repeated than researched.

Any increase in understanding should lead to an improvement in action. The chapters in this book lead the reader to a few immediate conclusions about what might have been done and what could be done better. Tunneling and corruption arose because there was no game plan for converting a communist economy and society to capitalism and democracy. This was a major failing of the West, which railed against communism for forty-five years but made no plans about converting the so-called captive nations into democratic and capitalist states should Soviet rule and its Marxist-Leninist ideology disintegrate. At the same time, the relative success of the separation of Czechoslovakia into the Czech and Slovak Republics does not bode well for the EU, which is struggling to promote deeper integration among its member states.<sup>29</sup> The Czech-Slovak split may even contribute, in a

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<sup>29</sup> At the time of this writing (September 2015), the European Union was deeply divided over whether or not to accept hundreds of thousands of Middle Eastern, African, and Afghan refugees. Generally speaking, the wealthier western and northern European countries were willing to accept them; the poorer eastern European countries were not. See "Hungary Shuts its Border to Refugees," *The Globe and Mail*, September 16, 2015, A3.

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small way, to movements that aim to break up the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Spain. That may not be a bad thing because, as Rychlík pointed out, “states come and go, and no state on earth is eternal.” Finally, all the scholars who contributed to this book agreed that, ever since the split, relations between the Czechs and Slovaks have never been better. Thus, the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993, like Norway’s secession from Sweden in 1905, may be a good model for other nations who live in a common state but wish to go it alone.<sup>30</sup> After all, there were only fifty independent political states on the face of the earth in 1914.<sup>31</sup> Today there are 193.<sup>32</sup> Most of them became independent through armed struggle. The Slovak and Czech model can provide, for many states facing dissolution, a reasonable alternative.

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<sup>30</sup> For this story see Stuart Burch, “Norway and 1905,” *History Today* 55, no. 6 (2005): 2–3.

<sup>31</sup> *The Statesman’s Year-Book: Statistical and Historical Annual of the States of the World for the Year 1914* (London: Macmillan, 1914).

<sup>32</sup> See the official website of the *United Nations*: [www.un.org](http://www.un.org).