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# The case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ and its Hungarian ties



## ABSTRACT

The interest of the Czechoslovak state security services (Státní bezpečnost, StB) in the Slovak politicians and diplomats accused with ‘bourgeois nationalism’ can be considered the first step towards the Slánský-trial, since it was the first stage of the hunt after the ‘Czechoslovak Rajk’. The investigation after these men quickly interweaved with the forthcoming case of the then Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimír Clementis. It was promising to the StB to create Czechoslovakia’s own Rajk-trial with these people, however, due to the regional nature of the case, they soon abandoned this concept, because as it seemed, they caught a bigger fish. Thus, the concept of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ were prepared only after the Slánský-trial, and the case was tried only as a follow-up trial in 1954.

In this study, whilst showcasing this case, I also point out the Hungarian aspects of it, which prove well that the Hungarian Rajk-trial played an enormous role – although, mostly as pressure on the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Kommunistická strana Československa, KSČ) and on the StB – in the ‘unmasking the enemies within the party apparatus’. In order to do so, this research is based on both Czechoslovak and Hungarian sources, although, in different degrees as one will see, since the Hungarian sources are way less than the Czechoslovak ones. Still, it is important to note that one can not summarize the case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ without discussing the threads leading to Hungary.

## KEYWORDS

show trial, political trial, Czechoslovakia, Státní bezpečnost, Államvédelmi Hatóság

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It is beyond doubt that from the Stalinist show trials within East Central Europe, the trial of László Rajk and the trial of Rudolf Slánský fulfilled Stalin’s expectations entirely, thus these two trials can be considered the most successful and infamous proceedings. However, while the drawing up of the Rajk-case – as a result of the ‘diligent’ work of Mátyás Rákosi<sup>1</sup> – took place in a somewhat fast pace and the trial was held between September 16th and 24th in 1949, due to the prolonged investigation, the ‘main culprit’ in Czechoslovakia was unveiled only in 1951 by the Státní Bezpečnost (StB) in the person of Rudolf Slánský, the general secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (Komunistická strana Československo, KSČ). The trial of the so called ‘Anti-state conspiracy center headed by Rudolf Slánský’ was held between November 20th and 27th in 1952 in Prague.

The reason behind the time gap of the two trials can be found in the hunt after the perfect candidate for the main defendant. The StB’s first choice was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vladimír Clementis, however, it became clear not long after his arrest that his person would have only been enough for a smaller case. The second candidate was the district party secretary of Brno, Otto Šling, but the state security service could not stage a grandiose show trial concentrating on him either. Thus, the name of the general secretary arised, although, the StB found a good use of the previously arrested politicians as well, who later got sentenced either in the main trial or in one of the follow-up trials. Clementis and Šling, for example, was sentenced to death in the main trial and they were executed together with their nine co-accused on December 3rd, 1952.<sup>2</sup>

At the inchoative stage of searching for the so called ‘Czechoslovak Rajk’ the attention of the StB turned to the Slovak part of the state as the Slovak Communist Party (Komunistická Strana Slovenska, KSS) started to unveil the ‘bourgeois national’ deviation within the party apparatus. Although, the unmasking of the ‘bourgeois nationalists’ can be considered the first step towards the Slánský-trial, due to its regional character, the final hearing of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ was held only as a follow-up trial between April 21st and 24th in 1954 in Bratislava.

<sup>1</sup> Rákosi was the general secretary of the Hungarian Communist Party (Magyar Kommunista Párt) between 1945 and 1948 and then the Hungarian Working People’s Party (Magyar Dolgozók Pártja) between 1948 and 1953. He was the head of the Council of Ministers between 1952 and 1953.

<sup>2</sup> The fourteen accused of the main trial were: Rudolf Slánský, Vladimír Clementis, Otto Šling, Ludvík Frejka, Josef Frank, Vavro Hajdú, Evžen Löbl, Rudolf Margolius, Otto Fischl, André Simone, Artur London, Bedřich Reicin, Karel Šváb, Bedřich Geminder. With the exception of London, Hajdú and Löbl, all of them were sentenced to death and were executed. For more on the main trial in Hungarian see: BESSENYEI 2019. 15–33, in English: KAPLAN 1990. 116–248, in Czech: KAPLAN 2022. 161–347.

The goal of this study is not only to give a comprehensive insight of this case from its unfolding to the rehabilitations taking place in several waves, but also covering its Hungarian aspects, which is quite seldom-discussed, but nevertheless an important aspect of the case. The study is only focusing the case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’, although there were other trials with the charge of ‘bourgeois nationalism’ in Slovakia. From a certain perspective the trial of Gustáv Husák<sup>3</sup> and his co-accused could be seen as the main trial for this charge and so the study only examine this case and do not discuss the case of Oskar Valášek and his co-accused, Anton Rašla, Ján Belanský, and Imrich Karvaš who were also charged under the term of ‘bourgeois nationalism’.<sup>4</sup>

The majority of the accessible sources regarding this case can be found in the Security Services Archive (Archiv bezpečnostních složek, ABS) and the National Archives of the Czech Republic (Národní archiv, NA). Less, but still relevant sources can be found in the the Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára, ÁBTL) and in the National Archives of Hungary (Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár, MNL). Most of the archival documents are interrogation protocols or reports of the state security services about the state of the investigation. Having regard to the constructed nature of the case, one cannot rely only on the interrogation reports and the indictment since they were based on the fictitious concept of the state security services. Moreover, most of the interrogation protocols were already written by the members of the state security and the accused only had to sign them. Although these documents, while give a firm basis for showing the concept of the case, one cannot ignore the rehabilitation materials which make the research of the case much more authentic, even though it is important to keep the place and time of their creation in mind: completely objective and ideologically free documents were not prepared neither in the second half of the 1950s, nor in the beginning of the 1960s, thus the application of source criticism is inevitable during the research.

The topic has a quite wide literature in Slovak and Czech language.<sup>5</sup> The biographies of Gustáv Husák and the monographs of the Slánský-trial also mention the case to a certain extent.<sup>6</sup> However, this trial, and especially the Hungarian ties of it, are seldom discussed in English, even though one must consider the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ an important first step in the hunt after the ‘Czechoslovak Rajk’.

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<sup>3</sup> In 1945, Husák was the Commissioner of Internal Affairs, then, between 1945 and 1946, he was the Commissioner of Transport and Public Works. From 1946 until May in 1950, he was the chairman of the Board of Commissioners, which practically made him the most influential person in the Slovak government apparatus. After the case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ and his complete rehabilitation in 1963, he became the Deputy Prime Minister of the Czechoslovak government in 1968, and the first secretary of the KSS between 1968 and 1969. From 1969 to 1987, he became the general secretary of the KSČ and, in parallel, between 1975 and 1989, he also served as the president of Czechoslovakia. His name is associated with the so-called ‘normalization’ after the ‘Prague Spring’ in 1968, which in reality meant political reversion.

<sup>4</sup> More on these cases in Slovak see: Štefanica 2017. and BUMOVÁ 2019.

<sup>5</sup> See Štefanica 2017.; KINČOK 2012.; KINČOK 2018.; KINČOK 2019.

<sup>6</sup> See MICHÁLEK – LONDÁK 2013.; KINČOK A KOL. 2015.; MACHÁČEK 2017.; KAPLAN 2022.

## THE FORMATION OF THE CONCEPT AND THE INCHOATIVE STAGE OF THE CASE

‘Bourgeois nationalism’, what indicates a deviation from the official socialist ideology and directive of the communist parties, was not new. The marxist-leninist term refers to the ‘capitalist’, thus ‘hostile’ practice when a nation emphasizes its own interests at the expense of another nation. The term ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalism’, was one interpretation of the original term and was in connection with the somewhat problematic relation between Slovaks and Czechs, and was mainly used for the fight against the ‘enemies’ within the party apparatus.<sup>7</sup> Although, the KSS made its members well aware that it was present within the party apparatus and had to be fought against mainly in the early 1950s, the term appeared much earlier, in 1948.

On June 15th, 1948 two left-wing Hungarian writers from Slovakia, Árpád Balogh-Dénes and Zoltán Fábry wrote a letter to Rákosi, Erik Molnár<sup>8</sup> and József Révai.<sup>9</sup> Majority of the letter’s content was about the disadvantages of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia,<sup>10</sup> but the two authors pointed out that the political leadership showed the signs of ‘bourgeois nationalism’, which even after the takeover of the KSC̄ in 1948 did not change.<sup>11</sup> They wrote especially denouncing about Husák, Clementis and Štefan Bašťovanský.<sup>12</sup> They highlighted the fact that in 1939 Clementis voiced an opinion opposing the Soviet Union, for which he was expelled from the party,<sup>13</sup> to where he could only return in 1945 and after practicing self-criticism.<sup>14</sup>

From the summer of 1948 more and more critical voices could be heard within the KSS and the KSC̄ regarding the ‘bourgeois nationalist’ deviation: two prominent members of the political life, Václav Kopecký<sup>15</sup> and Viliam Široký<sup>16</sup> sharply criticized the tendency believed to be discovered within the party. And although the materials gathered by the StB on the politicians suspected with this deviation were growing, no substantial step were made against them by the KSS or the KSC̄.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Štefanica 2017. 9–19.

<sup>8</sup> In addition to his career as a historian and philosopher, Molnár was Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1947 and 1948 and again from 1952 to 1953, and chairman of the Supreme Court between 1953 and 1954. He held the position of chairman of the Hungarian Historical Society from 1958 to 1966.

<sup>9</sup> Révai was Minister of Culture between 1949 and 1953.

<sup>10</sup> For more on the situation of the minority and the population exchange in Hungarian see: POPÉLY 2006. and POPÉLY 2014.

<sup>11</sup> The KSC̄ took power in Czechoslovakia in 1948 as part of a coup d’état, which it referred to as ‘Victorious February’.

<sup>12</sup> As an influential politician, Bašťovanský was a member of the KSS’s Central Committee (CC) and the KSC̄’s CC from 1946 to 1952.

<sup>13</sup> MNL-OL-X 10872-50664, MF 50664 X 10455 (1948–1956)

<sup>14</sup> KAPLAN 2022. 91.

<sup>15</sup> A hard-line Stalinist until his death in 1961, Kopecký was the main ideologist of the KSC̄. From 1948 until his death he was the member of the KSC̄ CC and also its Presidium.

<sup>16</sup> In 1945 Široký was elected chairman of the KSS, which position he filled until 1953. He was also the member of the KSC̄ CC and its Presidium, but he was also the member of the CC’s Political Secretariat and the Politburo. Between 1945 and 1953 he was Deputy Prime Minister, between 1950 and 1953 Minister of Foreign Affairs and from 1953 to 1963 he was Prime Minister.

<sup>17</sup> KAPLAN 2022. 98–100.

The darkest shadow of suspicion were casted on Husák and Ladislav Novomeský,<sup>18</sup> who had to practice self-criticism on the IXth congress of the KSS due to ‘diversion from the official party line’.<sup>19</sup> The criticisms and self-criticisms expressed at the congress, held between May 24th and 25th in 1950, can be considered the first actual steps against the ‘bourgeois nationalists’, if one does not take into account the StB’s collecting activity behind the scenes, only the publicly perceptible steps. It is important to note that the KSS accepted both Husák’s and Novomeský’s self-criticism even though at the time Široký was already well aware about the extensive incriminatory documents about the two politicians gathered by the StB.<sup>20</sup>

The criticisms and self-criticisms expressed at the congress and the previous meetings of the Presidium were in tight connection with the case of Clementis, which was developing almost parallel to the case of the ‘bourgeois nationalists’, hence it is not a surprise that the arrest of Clementis and the members of the later created group of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ happened around the same time. The first person arrested by the StB was Ivan Horváth<sup>21</sup> on December 3rd in 1950. In 1951 February the StB arrested in quick succession Ladislav Holdoš<sup>22</sup> (on the 2nd), Daniel Okáli<sup>23</sup> (on the 4th) and finally Novomeský and Husák (both of them on the 6th). Clementis was arrested on January 28th in 1951.

In order to see clearly the connection between the two cases – which after a while ran in parallel – and to understand the circumstances of the creation of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalist’ group, it is essential to briefly touch upon Clementis’ activities in the 1920s and 1930s. After the arrest of Clementis and while working on his case, the StB started to

<sup>18</sup> Slovak-born Novomeský, who was also active as a poet, was a representative of the Constituent National Assembly between 1946 and 1948 and the National Assembly between 1948 and 1951. After a brief time he spent in the Slovak National Council (Slovenská národná rada, SNR) in 1945–1946, he became a Commissioner of Information in 1948, then, between 1948 and 1950 Commissioner of Education. After the case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ and his complete rehabilitation in 1963, he was the member of the SNR again between 1968 and 1971.

<sup>19</sup> KAPLAN 2022. 105–106.

<sup>20</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha-komise, sv. 23, a. j. 496. Doplňující údaj: Komise II.19.

<sup>21</sup> Slovak-born Horváth was working as a lawyer and he only participated actively in politics after 1945. Originally he was the member of the socialist democratic party and only became a member of the KSČ in 1944. In 1945 he was appointed Social Welfare Commissioner, then from 1946 to 1948 he was the vice-chairman of the SNR. He was the member of the Czechoslovak delegate to the peace conference in Paris and took part in the assembly of the United Nations in New York. Between 1946 and 1947 he was chairman of the Czechoslovak section in the joint committee which worked on the peace treaty with Hungary. Due to his knowledge in the Czechoslovak–Hungarian relations and his Hungarian language skills, he was appointed Czechoslovak envoy in Budapest in 1948, which position he filled in until his arrest. In January 1950 he was appointed to head the Department of Interantional Law at the Faculty of Law of Comenius University. Unfortunately, he did not live his full rehabilitation: he died in 1960.

<sup>22</sup> The also Slovak-born Holdoš participated in the Spanish civil war and between 1946 and 1948 he was the member of the Constituent National Assembly and between 1945 and 1948 the SNR. He was the member of the National Assembly between 1948 and 1951. He was appointed head of the Office of Church Affairs in 1950, which position he filled in until his arrest. After the case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ and his complete rehabilitation in 1963, he worked at the Institute of Historical Sciences at the Slovak Academy of Sciences. In 1969 he became the ambassador of Cuba, which position he filled in until 1970.

<sup>23</sup> The Slovak-born Okáli, who was also active as a literary critic, poet and publicist, actively participated in the political life only after 1945. Between 1945 and 1946 he was the head of the SNR’s Commission of Internal Affairs. He played an important role in the Czechoslovak–Hungarian population exchange: he was the government representative of the exchange and the head of the Settlement Committee. Between 1948 and 1950 he was the member of the KSS CC and from 1948 until his arrest the SNR. Between 1948 and 1951 he was the Commissioner of Internal Affairs. After the case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ and his complete rehabilitation in 1963, he worked at the Slovak Academy of Sciences.

pay attention again to the politicians accused with ‘bourgeois nationalist’ deviation. It was not a surprise, since not only their Slovak nationality and the obligations arising from their positions connected the above-mentioned Slovak politicians and diplomats to Clementis, but their long-standing friendship as well. Most of these friendships were formed in the active years of the *DAV*, a periodical founded by Daniel Okáli, Andrej Siracký and Vladimír Clementis in 1924. This strongly leftist paper published articles mostly in the fields of art, philosophy and politics. Although it ceased to exist in 1937, during its run a group of young left leaning Slovak intelligentsia gathered around it. Among these so-called ‘davists’ were Novomeský,<sup>24</sup> who was also the paper’s editor-in-chief for a brief period of time from 1935 to 1937, and Horváth as well.<sup>25</sup> Thus, due to their shared ‘davist’ past, when the StB began to investigate Clementis’ official and personal relationships it was evident to watch his connections to these Slovak politicians and diplomats with suspicion. Later, the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ relationship with Clementis were strongly highlighted throughout their investigation as the later part of this study showcases.

According to the confession of Bohumil Doubek<sup>26</sup> during his own criminal case, the Hungarian Rajk-trial compelled the StB to start their inquiry in Husák. Later they thought that it is Clementis who might be their own Rajk, however, when the StB arrested Šling they dropped this concept and only then started to work on the idea of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’. Since, however, both the KSČ and the StB were perfectly aware of the regional characteristics of the case, they could afford to delay its development due to the much more important investigation in the case of Šling and then Slánský. Three facts follow from this prolonged development: at the precise moment of the arrest of Husák and his fellow co-accused, the final concept of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ did not exist, thus their arrest were justified differently; the concrete development of the case only started in 1953, due to its follow-up trial nature; the defendants only got attached to the group also in 1953, at the final stage of the StB’s investigation.<sup>27</sup>

The Slovak politicians and diplomats had to wait quite a long time for the justification of their apprehension. In the last months of 1951, the StB explained the arrest of Husák and Novomeský with ‘reasonable suspicion of anti-state activity’. The security service justified the arrest of Okáli similarly, however, in his case the emphasis was on his ‘leading role’ in the Slovak Zionist movement. The StB explained the apprehension of Holdoš with ‘anti-state activity and the co-operation with the arrested Trotskyist, Artur London’<sup>28</sup> and in the beginning he was interrogated about the ‘Trotskyist anti-state subversive group’, which was a case based on the confessions in the Rajk-trial. According to these confessions, Holdoš

<sup>24</sup> BAER 2017. 51–52.

<sup>25</sup> ABS, f. MNB, sign. MNB-64. část 1. 4.

<sup>26</sup> Bohumil Doubek was the leader of the VI/A sector at the StB between 1950 and 1953, which meant that he was responsible for the most important and serious cases, and that he worked in close connection with the Soviet advisers. After 1953 his career at the StB went downhill due to his alcoholism and negligence. He was arrested in 1955 due to the illegal methods used during interrogations and investigations. In 1957 he was sentenced to 9 years in prison, but he was released only a few months after his trial.

<sup>27</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha, Komise I, sv. 36, a. j. 906. Doplnující údaj: Komise I. 10–11.

<sup>28</sup> Artur London was Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1948 until his arrest in 1951. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in the Slánský-trial, but in 1955 he was released. For more on his experience on the Slánský-trial in English see: LONDON 1970.

was in a spy connection with Noel Field,<sup>29</sup> who was one of the most important person in the Rajk-trial.<sup>30</sup> It was Horváth who had to wait the least amount of time: his arrest were justified on January 1st in 1951 with the utterly different Monaco-case<sup>31</sup> and with his relationship with Étienne Manac'h, French consul general in Bratislava.<sup>32</sup>

From this, it is clear that the concept of the 'Slovak bourgeois nationalists' and the members of the group were certainly not crystal clear in the beginning of the investigation and the StB only clarified these factors much later. This is also supported by the statements of the Presidium of the Supreme Court in the decision annulling the sentences. According to this document, for example, the StB spoke about Horváth's participation in the group with full certainty only in the application dated on October 7th in 1953 extending his detention (again). But the document states also that in March 1951 the StB only spoke about Husák and Okáli as 'bourgeois nationalists'.<sup>33</sup>

## THE NATURE OF THE INVESTIGATION

After the beginning of the investigation, the constructed and distorted interrogation protocols were signed by all of the accused – except Husák –, which is not a surprise considering the extreme interrogation methods used by the StB. Although the Czechoslovak officials who visited Budapest for to the materials of the Field-case in 1949 were shocked by the interrogation techniques of the State Protection Authority (Államvédelmi Hatóság, ÁVH),<sup>34</sup> in the 1950s they were not shy using them as well. Thus, most of the accused broke after a short period of resistance and signed the previously prepared confessions and interrogation reports. The StB used serious physical and psychological coercion to get the interrogation protocols signed and to achieve confessions. Sleep and food deprivation, lack of hydration, physical violence, threatening with death sentence and with the destruction of the family's existence were all part of the interrogations. The interrogators used these extremely harsh methods, especially after the accused refused to confess or sign the protocols, to change their minds. It was only Husák who did not break, and he declined all protocols and did not sign one after 1951.<sup>35</sup>

The majority of the interrogation protocols – except a few – are from 1953, when the concept were ready and it was obvious on what basis the case had to be compiled and what the accused had to be forced to confess. Most of the testimonies are also originating from

<sup>29</sup> Field was the starting point for the Hungarian, Czechoslovak and East-German show trials due to his job at the US. Department of State, his confusing party memberships and his job at Unitarian Service Committee during the second world war. After sentencing him in the Rajk-case he stayed in prison in Hungary and even after his rehabilitation he lived in Budapest with his wife until his death in 1970. For more on his life in English see SHARP 2014, in Hungarian see MAJTÉNYI – MIKÓ – SZABÓ 2017.

<sup>30</sup> NA, f. KSC Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha-komise, sv. 23, a. j. 496. Doplňující údaj: Komise II. 23–24.

<sup>31</sup> The Monaco-case was the case of an alleged French espionage group tied to Manac'h in Slovakia. ABS, s. ZV, sign. ZV-4 MV 47. 207.

<sup>32</sup> ABS, f. MNB, sign. MNB-64. část 4. 5.

<sup>33</sup> NA, f. KSC Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha, Komise I, sv. 36, a. j. 906. Doplňující údaj: Komise I. 10.

<sup>34</sup> BESSENYEI 2021. 55.

<sup>35</sup> NA, f. KSC Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha-komise, sv. 23, a. j. 496. Doplňující údaj: Komise II. 25–30.

around this time. The majority of the witnesses were also in detention or prison with the suspicion and charges of ‘anti-state activity’.<sup>36</sup>

Most of the StB’s interrogation officers did not get any materials to execute their task, which, however, gave them the opportunity to create or modify the protocols as desired by their superiors, the Soviet advisers and the concept in general.<sup>37</sup> Thus, due to the nature of the interrogations and the fabricated nature of the concept, interrogation protocols and reports reflecting the truth could not be created, the confessions and their general narrative have to be considered distorted, systematically falsified and fictitious.<sup>38</sup> Although the interrogation officers based their work on real details and moments of the accused’s political or diplomatic career and personal life, these facts were distorted according to the concept, thus several contradictions and inconsistencies can be found in the protocols and reports, on the basis of which one cannot get an authentic picture of reality. In one occasion, for example, within one protocol Horváth stated that he did know that Clementis used the information sent from Budapest to him for espionage and then a few paragraphs later he confessed that he did not know what Clementis needed the information for.<sup>39</sup> According to Husák’s complaint later, the attorney-general of the case, Ladislav Gešo signed the falsified protocols together with the StB, which means that he was well aware of their constructed nature, as well as with the fact that the StB needed such protocols, because the evidences corresponding to the concept were insufficient for the prosecution.<sup>40</sup>

Despite the illegal methods used during the investigations and the insufficient evidences, on March 4th in 1954, the Minister of Interior, Rudolf Barák brought an action against the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’.<sup>41</sup>

## THE CHARGES, THE TRIAL, AND THE REHABILITATIONS

According to the lawsuit all five men were charged with high treason, sabotage, and, in the case of Horváth and Holdoš, espionage. Unfortunately, showcasing the charges in detail is not possible due to the lack of space, but at the same time it is inevitable to note the most important statements of the indictment.

According to the indictment, as enemies of the Czechoslovak working people, the people’s democracy and socialism, in close co-operation with the ‘anti-state conspiracy center’ headed by Slánský, the five men created a ‘bourgeois nationalist’ group in Slovakia, which was proven by Clementis’ confession in the Slánský-trial.<sup>42</sup> And although it is true that the passages from Clementis’ interrogation protocols, that were used as evidence, match almost word for word with the details of some of the confessions of the group’s members, considering that

<sup>36</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha-komise, sv. 23, a. j. 496. Doplňující údaj: Komise II. 73–75.

<sup>37</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha-komise, sv. 23, a. j. 496. Doplňující údaj: Komise II. 27–28.

<sup>38</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha-komise, sv. 23, a. j. 496. Doplňující údaj: Komise II. 33–34.

<sup>39</sup> ABS, f. MNB, sign. MNB-64. část 3, 91–92.

<sup>40</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha-komise, sv. 23, a. j. 496. Doplňující údaj: Komise II. 85.

<sup>41</sup> NA, f. Politický sekretariát ÚV KSČ, 1951–1954, 1261/0/22, sv. 77, a. j. 201, 1.

<sup>42</sup> NA, f. Politický sekretariát ÚV KSČ, 1951–1954, 1261/0/22, sv. 77, a. j. 201, 5–8.



Clementis' interrogation took place under the same illegal methods and directives from above as the aforementioned investigation, they cannot be taken as credible.

The indictment also stated that the anti-state activity of the group dated back to the 1920s, when – led by Clementis – they formed a group rooted in bourgeoisie around the *DAV*. Later, they used their positions acquired in the SNR and in the Board of Commissioners to isolate Slovakia from the Czech regions. In Slovakia, taking the reactionary bourgeoisie under their wings, they created the conditions for a possible capitalist turn. By sabotaging the instructions of the government of the republic in the state apparatus, they endangered the construction of the people's democracy in Slovakia, but according to the indictment, sabotage was also carried out in the areas of culture and education, as well as in the economy. They did not clean Slovakia from the fascist and traitorous elements, moreover, they protected and supported them. By sabotaging the national policy, they jeopardized the friendly relations with Hungary. According to the indictment, they carried out espionage in favour of the Western imperialist powers, and by helping Zionist elements leaving the country, they made it possible for significant assets to leave Czechoslovakia with these people.<sup>43</sup>

It is important to note, however, that Czechoslovakia's relationship with Hungary at the time could hardly be described as friendly regardless the political activities of the defendants, but it is true that during the population exchange it significantly deteriorated.<sup>44</sup>

It is also worth to touch upon an other charge which refers to Hungary. According to the concept and the indictment, Horváth carried out espionage not only in Slovakia in favour of Manac'h, but after he was appointed Czechoslovak envoy in Budapest, he continued his espionage. Allegedly, he maintained the espionage network created in Budapest by his predecessor, Dr. František Černý and Clementis. He performed this task with the help of a mysterious agent named 'Berecz'<sup>45</sup> and the press attaché of the Czechoslovak Legation in Budapest, Dr. Jan Danko.<sup>46</sup> The espionage network was financed by Clementis, and Horváth either sent him written reports or gave him verbal ones during his visits in Prague. These reports were about the Hungarian political and economic situation,<sup>47</sup> and he informed Manac'h about these topics as well.<sup>48</sup> However, the phrasing of the 'political and economic situation' is so vague and average, it is impossible to base any charges on it,<sup>49</sup> and neither Clementis, nor Danko and Horváth did not confess more serious details than this regarding the contents of these reports. The fact that the espionage network at Budapest is fictitious is proven by the lack of relevant documents in the Hungarian archives as well, since it is hard to imagine that such network could operate under the watchful eyes of the ÁVH without being noticed, and it is even less likely that if said network had existed, the StB would not have notified the ÁVH so they could 'unmask' it together, just as they did in the case of Field.

<sup>43</sup> NA, f. Politický sekretariát ÚV KSČ, 1951–1954, 1261/0/22, sv. 77, a. j. 201, 7–33.

<sup>44</sup> BENCŠIK – MITROVITS 2021. 241–244.

<sup>45</sup> Although both Horváth and Danko attributed an extremely important role to him in their protocols, it is even uncertain whether 'Berecz' was his code or real name, since they did not add any other information regarding him in their confessions. By definition, his existence can also be questioned.

<sup>46</sup> ABS, f. MNB, sign. MNB-64. část 5, 59. and 180.

<sup>47</sup> ABS, f. MNB, sign. MNB-2. část 1, 33.

<sup>48</sup> ABS, f. MNB, sign. MNB-64. část 5, 90–92.

<sup>49</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha, Komise I, sv. 36, a. j. 906. Doplňující údaj: Komise I. 27.

In the report of the Political Secretariat of the KSČ CC on March 26th in 1954, details of the trial were revealed such as the members of the Senate, the judges of the people's court and their deputies, the general attorney and his deputy and the identity of the defenders. In the report the trial is dated on April 5–8th, but the exact date was changed later. It was already certain, however, that the hearing would be held behind closed doors and that it would be recorded on radio. It was this document in which they decided about the workgroup responsible for the press release, and about the sentences, which only slightly differentiated from the final penalties.<sup>50</sup> From this, one can see that the KSČ decided the sentences long before the trial and that the accused could not even choose their defenders.

During the trial the defendants had to recite their previously written confessions, which they had memorised in the prison. Doubek visited Husák the night before the hearing and in the name of the party ordered him to stick to the confession written for him and do not change it. The Senate rejected Husák's suggestions regarding the supplementary process of investigation and the hearing of more witnesses.<sup>51</sup> Ultimately, Husák was sentenced to life in prison, Horváth to 22 years, Okáli to 18 years, Holdoš to 13 years and Novomeský to 10 years in prison. Additionally, the five men's sentences involved confiscation of property to varying degrees, loss of civic and political rights.<sup>52</sup>

The rehabilitation process started with the proposal regarding the rehabilitation committee on the meeting of the KSČ CC's Politburo on January 10th in 1955,<sup>53</sup> but this first wave of the revisions was futile. Although the committee, lead by Barák, pointed out numerous illegal elements in the proceeding, eventually, on May 30th in 1955, they proposed to keep most of the original sentences, reducing only Husák's life sentence to 25 years in prison.<sup>54</sup>

It was Novomeský who got released (at the time conditionally) first, on February 28th in 1956.<sup>55</sup> The remaining punishment of Holdoš was let go on the basis of the Presidential pardon on March 28th in 1957, and after signing a confidentiality agreement he was released on April 17th in 1957.<sup>56</sup> On the basis of the Presidential amnesty on May 9th in 1960 Okáli was released on the 5th and Husák on the 10th. Horváth was released on January 6th in 1960 on the basis of the President's individual pardon. All five men were fully rehabilitated in 1963, which Horváth, sadly, could not live to see: he died on September 4th in 1960.<sup>57</sup>

## CONCLUSION

This short summary of the case shows well the enormous pressure of the Rajk-trial on the KSČ to create a similarly massive show trial. Due to its initially blurred and only later crystallized

<sup>50</sup> NA, f. Politický sekretariát ÚV KSČ, 1951–1954, 1261/0/22, sv. 79, a. j. 205, 1–5.

<sup>51</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha-komise, sv. 23, a. j. 496. Doplnující údaj: Komise II. 86–87.

<sup>52</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha, Komise I, sv. 36, a. j. 906. Doplnující údaj: Komise I. 6.

<sup>53</sup> KINČOK 2018. 25.

<sup>54</sup> NA, f. Politické byro ÚV KSČ, 1954–1962, 1261/0/11, sv. 45, a. j. 61, 1–13.

<sup>55</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha, Komise I, sv. 36, a. j. 906. Doplnující údaj: Komise I. 7.

<sup>56</sup> KINČOK 2018. 38.

<sup>57</sup> NA, f. KSČ Ústřední výbor 1945–1989, Praha, Komise I, sv. 36, a. j. 906. Doplnující údaj: Komise I. 6–7.

concept and its regional nature, the case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ could only be a follow-up trial to the grand Slánský-trial.

The threads of the case leading to Hungary are especially interesting. However, the StB did not work them out properly after the main trial, which is proven by the lack of materials in the Hungarian archives: although, according to Husák, it was Široký who consulted with Mihály Farkas<sup>58</sup> regarding the importance of unmasking enemies within the party in Slovakia,<sup>59</sup> so far no relevant material proves this. Similarly, there are only a few documents in Hungary regarding Ivan Horváth and only in the Jacobson-case,<sup>60</sup> in connection with his personal relationship to the Hungarian sculptor, Zsigmond Kisfaludi Strobl.<sup>61</sup> There is no sign of any espionage network. Despite these superficially developed aspects of the case, these threads leading to Budapest clearly prove the effect of the Rajk-trial not only in the early days of the hunt after the ‘bourgeois nationalists’, but later as well.

Although the case of the ‘Slovak bourgeois nationalists’ was ‘only’ a follow-up trial, due to its concept dating back to 1948, its connection to Clementis and the later political career of Husák – who can be regarded as the main accused of the group –<sup>62</sup> the examination of the case is highly important, and is also my further research goal.

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<sup>58</sup> Farkas was the Minister of Defence between 1948 and 1953.

<sup>59</sup> KAPLAN 2022. 99.

<sup>60</sup> Israel G. Jacobson was the director of the American Joint Distribution Committee for Hungary. He was arrested by the ÁVH in December in 1949 due to alleged espionage. After interrogating and forcing him to name other ‘spies’ (with Jewish origins) he was released and expelled from the country.

<sup>61</sup> ÁBTL, 2.1 – VII/13-b (V-101890/7), 2.1 – VII/13-h (V-101890/7) and 2.1 – VII/13/1 (V-101890/1)

<sup>62</sup> For more about his role in the case in Czech see: MAHÁČEK 2017. 239–315.

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