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Agata Tatarenko

**The Habsburg heritage
in collective memory
and politics of memory:
the Czech Republic,
Hungary, and Slovakia
(1989-2020)**



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Executive summary

Currently, the Habsburg heritage does not cause much controversy or historical disputes in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia due to the fact that this phenomenon belongs to the relatively distant past. At the same time, it is occasionally the subject of disputes on the international arena, mostly because of the politics of memory pursued by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

The Habsburg heritage occupies an important place in the collective memory of the societies of Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia and is a significant element of their national and regional identities. Belonging to the Habsburg Empire in the past is one of the elements connecting the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, an argument for the cultural community of these countries.

In the case of the Czech Republic, issues concerning the period of Habsburg rule in the Czech lands are on the margins of the politics of memory implemented by state institutions. This results from the general approach of state authorities to the politics of memory and collective memory.

Activities concerning the Habsburg Empire are organized by cultural institutions and public benefit organizations and are of an educational nature.

It is similar in the case of Slovakia. However, due to the fact that in the past Slovak lands belonged to the Kingdom of Hungary, the Habsburg heritage in Slovakia is additionally overlapped by complicated Slovak-Hungarian relations and the Hungarian policy of memory.

In the case of Hungary, the period of Greater Hungary, i.e. the time when Hungary was part of the dualistic monarchy of Austria-Hungary, is a key element of the politics of memory implemented by the authorities, which is subordinate to the current political agenda. The memory of the Habsburg era is maintained in a national perspective.



Introduction

The Habsburg heritage is one of the focal points of the collective memory of some nations of Central Europe, particularly the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. This is due to several reasons. The first, and most obvious, is the relatively long period of Habsburg rule in the region. An important part of it coincided with the 19th century, a time of modernization in Central Europe with the expansion of cities or the construction of public facilities, which to this day constitute the heritage of the Habsburgs and remind citizen of their former presence in the region.

Secondly, even in the Habsburg times, the rulers made sure that their reign was recognized in a specific way by their subjects. An extensive propaganda and censorship apparatus stood guard over it. For example, the myth of Franz Joseph I, which still has an important place in the imaginarium of Central Europe, was shaped during his long life and reign by, among other things, the portraits of the emperor that hung in the most remote corners of the empire. It is worth recalling that Franz Joseph I, during his 68 years of rule, re-

ceived, according to estimates, about 150,000 subjects for three-minute audiences. Thirdly, the collective memory of the Habsburgs is sustained by popular culture – movies, TV series, and books. This is demonstrated by, for example, the enormous popularity of the film trilogy about Empress Sisi.

At the same time, the heritage of the Habsburgs is a dissonant one. From one point of view, Habsburg rule is associated with a period of modernization and development (e.g. reforms carried out by Maria Theresa). From another, it was also a period of incorporation into the borders of a foreign structure, which for the same parts of society was not justified even by the relative stabilization of the period of the Franz Joseph I rule.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse how the Habsburg heritage is recognised in the collective memory in Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, and how it has been shaped and used by different actors of the politics of memory between 1989-2020. The analysis will cover Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. Other important questions which I will try to answer are: what are the differences between the attitudes toward the Habsburg heritage between state and non-state actors? How about the differences in the attitudes and actions towards the Habsburg heritage between chosen countries? What events and persons are the focus of activities of the politics of memory in Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia?

In this paper, I adopted the broadly understood definition of the politics of memory proposed by the Polish sociologist Lech Nijakowski, according to which the politics of memory is an activity by governmental or non-governmental institutions interested in the past with the active participation of

the society, financed both from the state budget and other sources, e.g. subsidies, contributions, grants¹.

It is important to emphasize that this paper does not have the ambition to describe the entirety of the complex issue related to the collective memory of Habsburg heritage nor the political use of Habsburg heritage, but only to indicate the main trends in the presented phenomena on chosen case studies (e.g. monuments, cultural activities, exhibition, etc.). Secondly, the main point of this paper is to analyse the memory discourse, not the historiographic one.

¹ L.M. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny*, Warszawa 2008.



CHAPTER I

Czech Republic

In the Czech Republic, the politics of memory is implemented mainly by non-governmental non-profit organizations and cultural institutions. The involvement of the authorities in the politics of memory is relatively small and mostly limited to providing organizational frameworks for this type of activity (e.g. establishing archives or museums) and managing public space: naming streets and squares, and the creation or dismantling of memorial sites. This approach resulted from the experience of communism, when authorities had a monopoly on the interpretation of the past. After 1989, new political elites, often coming from artistic and scientific circles, did not want to allow this situation to happen again, and therefore they gave up the leading role in the scope of politics of memory. The authorities of the Czech Republic, as in the case of Slovakia and unlike the case of Hungary, do not use different interpretations of the past in their political discourse. However, in the last few years, the past occasionally has been the subject of political rival-

ry in the Czech Republic between the ruling party and the opposition, as demonstrated, for example, by the dispute over the statue of Marshal Koniev² and the changing of the name of the square where the Russian Embassy is located in Prague, from the Under the Chestnuts Square to the Boris Nemtsov Square³.

The horizon of the collective memory of Czechs, unlike many other Central European societies, is not limited mostly or only to the history of the 20th century. Among the events that have a strong imprint in the Czech collective memory and influence the Czech national identity, are following: the reign of Charles IV, the times of Jan Hus, the Battle of White Mountain, the First Czechoslovak Republic, and the Velvet Revolution⁴. Apart from the Battle of White Mountain, these historical periods and events have been positively recorded in Czech collective memory and are the source of both contemporary political traditions and national myths.

Between 1989-2020, the above-mentioned historical events returned to public debate and memory discourse at various times and with varying intensity. For example, during the first years of political and social transformation after the Velvet Revolution, the First Czechoslovak Republic was the main point of reference for the organization of a political and social system. During the integration with the Eu-

² A. Tatarenko, *Demontaż pomnika marszałka Koniewa w Pradze: kryzys w relacjach czesko-rosyjskich*, "Komentarze IES", no. 166, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/demontaz-pomnika-marszalka-koniewa-w-pradze-kryzys-w-relacjach-czesko-rosyjskich/>.

³ Sz. Czarnecki, *Czechy: polityka miejska Pragi w wymiarze międzynarodowym*, "Komentarze IES", no. 133, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/czechy-polityka-miejska-pragi-w-wymiarze-miedzynarodowym/>.

⁴ J. Šubrt, J. Vinopal a kol., *Historické vědomí obyvatel České republiky perspektivou sociologického výzkumu*, Praha 2013, pp. 98-114.

ropean Union (EU), especially at the peak of this process, the topic of the reign of Charles IV, when the importance of the Czech lands in the international arena increased significantly, often appeared in public debate. However, while the horizon of Czech collective memory also covers the distant past, the activities of institutions and organizations implementing the tasks of politics of memory in the Czech Republic (or conducting educational activities) are largely limited to the history of the 20th century – the First Czechoslovak Republic, World War II along with the Holocaust, and communism.

Battle of White Mountain – the national defeat

An event that is of fundamental importance for the Czech collective identity and is related to the Habsburg Empire is the Battle of White Mountain (cz. bitva na Bílé hoře). It imposes a negative perspective on the entire period of the Habsburgs in Czech lands, although some exceptions are noticeable.

The Battle of White Mountain was fought on November 8, 1620, near Prague between the forces of the Kingdom of Bohemia and the Habsburg Catholic army. The place where the Czech and Habsburg troops fought the battle in 1620 is now within the borders of the capital of the Czech Republic. However, it is located away from the city centre and the main tourist attractions. Information about White Mountain appears in most guides due to both the historical battlefield and some other objects worth visiting, such as Brevnov Monastery, Star Villa (cz. Letohrádek Hvězda), and the Church of Our Lady of Victory (cz. Kostel Panny Marie

Vítězné⁵), which was founded on the initiative of Ferdinand II to commemorate his victory over the Czech Republic in 1620⁶. The surroundings of White Mountain (in fact, a 381-meter-high hill), are not particularly lively and are relatively rarely visited by residents of Prague and tourists.

At the top of the hill, there is a small monument commemorating the place of the fight. The object was set up in 1920 at the initiative of the local population. According to sources, it quickly gained wider social support. Initially, it was planned to erect a massive monument in the form of a marble mausoleum. Ultimately, mainly for financial reasons, it was decided to build a small building resembling a common military grave. The monument was unveiled on the 300th anniversary of the battle and attended by local authorities and the then-mayor of Prague, Karel Baxa⁷. In 1962, the complex on White Mountain, consisting of the site of the battle and the Star Villa, was declared a national cultural monument, which in later years saved the battlefield from the construction of a housing estate on it. After 1989, there were no major initiatives aimed at changing the monument into a new one.

In the memory discourse, the battle is described as the event that changed the fate of the Czech lands and as the greatest defeat in the history of the Czechs. As a result of their victory, the Habsburgs abolished the independence of the Kingdom of Bohemia, making it their own hereditary

⁵ According to the legend, it was the Holy Mary that the Habsburgs owed their victory in the battle.

⁶ The church was built on the site of a former chapel and morgue with the remains of those who died in battle.

⁷ Z. Hojda, J. Pokorný, *Pomníky a zapomínky*, Paseka 1996, pp. 117-126.

province. In the period right after the battle, several hundred representatives of the Czech social and cultural elite were sentenced to death, and the property of Protestants was confiscated. Then, mass recatholicization and Germanization of Czech population were carried out. These actions resulted in a deep and long-lasting antagonism between the populations of Czech and German origins, which manifested itself most strongly during World War II and immediately after it (Beneš decrees).

The First Czechoslovak Republic also had an important influence on contemporary Czech collective memory of the Battle of White Mountain. In the realities after World War I, this event legitimized the need to disconnect from the Habsburg and build a new democratic state. Due also to this approach, in the contemporary collective memory of the Czechs, the battle functions not only as an event that took place on November 8, 1620, but also as a process that began earlier – with the Defenestration of Prague in 1618 – and continued in subsequent years – bloody executions, recatholicization, of the population, domination of foreign nobility, and consequently liquidation of the independence of the Kingdom of Bohemia⁸.

This image of the Battle of White Mountain is also present in Czech memory discourse from 1989 until now. Most often, the Battle on the White Mountain as a symbol of the biggest national defeat and the beginning of the Habsburg dynasty rule in the Czech lands appears in media reports

⁸ M. Stehlík, *Neřešitelný rébus bitvy na Bílé hoře. Mýtus, paměť a bohemocentrické dějiny*, "Vesmír", 06.11.2020, <https://vesmir.cz/cz/on-line-clanky/2020/11/neresitelný-rebus-bitvy-bile-hore.html>.

on the occasion of subsequent anniversaries of this event. It can be the result of a duplication of well-known patterns that have been recorded in the Czech collective memory.

Between 1991-2020 neither state nor local authorities were significantly involved in the commemoration of the battle. There were no special speeches by the heads of state of the Czech Republic on this occasion⁹. In November 2020, on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the battle, some educational activities about the battle took place. The main one was the temporary exhibition organized by the National Museum in Prague entitled: “1620. Journey to the Mountain: Exhibition dedicated to the 400th anniversary of the Battle of White Mountain” (cz. “1620. Cesta na Horu: Výstava ke 400. výročí bitvy na Bílé hoře”). The exhibition lasted from November 6, 2020, to September 30, 2021, and was located in the new National Museum building. The exhibition was also available online on the museum’s profile on YouTube¹⁰. The Battle of White Mountain was presented from two perspectives. Firstly, it showed what led to the battle and its course, and secondly, it showed its far-reaching consequences – political, social, and artistic, including architecture¹¹. The online exhibition was educational and devoid of ideological content.

The contemporary representation of the Battle of White Mountain, which enjoys the greatest interest by the pub-

⁹ However, the last round anniversary of the battle, the 400th one, coincided with the peak of the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic which could have had an impact on participation by authorities and the public.

¹⁰ Národní muzeum, *Bíla hora // komentovaná prohlídka a vernisáž*, 09.11.2020, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPXQ-fipr1l>.

¹¹ Národní muzeum, *1620. Cesta na Horu. Výstava ke 400. výročí bitvy na Bílé hoře*, <https://www.nm.cz/program/vystavy/1620-cesta-na-horu>.

lic and, consequently, of the media, is its reconstruction. The project named “Bila Hora 1620” is implemented by the civic association “Bila Hora 1620”, founded on January 1, 2008, with the aim of an annual re-enactment of the battle. It was created as a non-profit activity for people interested in history and military affairs. The goal of the association is simply to strengthen the traditions and interest in history¹². The re-enactment is organized in September (and therefore not on the anniversary of the battle) to minimize the risk of rainy weather. The event is entertaining and, again, devoid of political or ideological content. In line with the goal of the association, “Bila Hora 1620” attracts history enthusiasts¹³.

To sum up, after 1991 the collective memory of the Battle of White Mountain is maintained to a large extent by the activities of non-governmental organizations. These projects are educational and have no political or ideological undertones. The Czech authorities, as in many other cases when it comes to the politics of memory, do not show initiative to commemorate this event by, for example, founding a new monument or memorial site. At the same time, the Battle of White Mountain continues to have fundamental significance for Czech national identity.

1848 – the revival

The genesis of the Czech National Revival (as in the case of the Slovak National Revival) dates back to the second half of the 18th century. Initially, it was mainly a linguistic (cul-

¹² Bila hora, *Project “Bila hora 1620”*, <https://bilahora.eu/en/project-white-mountain-1620/>.

¹³ M. Bartlová, *Či vítězství a či prohra? Revize paměti Bílé hory, “A2 Alarm”*, 18.11.2020, <https://a2alarm.cz/2020/11/ci-vitezstvi-a-ci-prohra-revize-pameti-bile-hory/>.

tural) awakening in the face of the Germanization process. The negative memory of the Battle of White Mountain was also maintained and has contributed to the national awakening. The Czech National Revival changed its character during the Revolutions of 1848 – known in some countries as the “Springtime of the Peoples” – when it gained a political element under the influence of events in Europe and the region. Its reach also increased – it turned from a movement of intellectual and artistic elites into a national movement.

From June 2-12, 1848, the Slavic Congress took place in Prague. It was a meeting of numerous representatives of Slavic nations under the rule of the Austrian Empire. During the congress, Czech national activists presented the assumptions of Austro-Slavism, a project that postulated the transformation of the character of the Austrian Empire into a federal state of equal nations under the rule of the Habsburgs. The methods of combating the advancing Germanization and Magyarization were also discussed during the Prague Slavic Congress. The congress was interrupted on June 12 when riots and clashes with the Austrian garrison took place in Prague. The Prague Uprising of 1848 was suppressed after six days.

Today, the Czech National Revival has a highly significant place in the collective memory of Czechs and is of great importance for Czech national identity. However, detailed events related to 1848, such as the Prague Uprising, do not currently function in the memory discourse of the Czech Republic. At the same time, the collective memory of this event is not maintained by the activities of institutions implementing the tasks of the politics of memory. This is largely due to the approach of the Czech authorities

to the policy of memory described above and the interest of non-governmental organizations in dealing with the past in public spaces in the history of the 20th century.

Currently, the collective memory of the Czechs on the national revival and the events of 1848 focuses mostly on František Palacký, a Czech historian and political activist. He wrote a multi-volume work "The History of the Czech Nation in Bohemia and Moravia", which has gone through many editions and has crucial meaning for the historiography of the Czech nation. Palacký undertook political activity in 1848. He is the author of many political manifestos, such as the "Manifesto to the European Nations", known also as Manifesto of the First Slavic Congress, which he chaired, and "Writing to Frankfurt" (cz. "Psaní do Frankfurtu"), in which he developed the concept of Austrianism. For many years after 1848, he strove to create a Czech kingdom that would include Bohemia, Moravia, and Silesia. During his lifetime, Palacký enjoyed great popularity among the Czechs. He was involved in Czech social and political life. He was a speaker at various national celebrations. In 1868 he was entrusted with laying the foundation stone for the construction of the National Theater in Prague.

In contemporary memory discourse, Palacký is described as one of the three "fathers of the Czech nation", together with Charles IV and Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Palacký is remembered in Czech collective memory as a defender of Czech national values and, consequently, of the Czech nation, a supporter of its independence from the Habsburgs. For many years his memory has been maintained by activities in the field of the politics of memory carried out by local and state authorities. In 1912, his monument was erected on

Palacky Square in the Old Town of Prague. Another father of the Czech nation, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, often referred to Palacký writings and his memory during the construction of the First Czechoslovak Republic. The University of Olomouc has been named after him since 1946. In Prague, one of the oldest bridges carries his name (1878-1940, 1945-today).

After 1989, new democratic authorities also took steps to commemorate Palacký. Since 1993, the 1,000 CZK bank-note has Palacký image on it. Another example was the issue of a 200 CZK commemorative silver coin in 1998 on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Palacký's birthday¹⁴. In 1998, there were also several grassroots initiatives to commemorate Palacký¹⁵. It is worth adding that in current public debate in the Czech Republic, the fathers of the nation, including František Palacký, are often presented as almost perfect politicians, especially when compared to the current ruling party.

The positive image of Palacký does not affect significantly the attitude towards the Habsburg dynasty in a negative way. The Czech National Revival and the events of 1848 are not remembered by Czechs as bloody events (as in the case of Hungary, for example), but rather as an attempt to build a certain autonomy within the Austrian Empire, which to some extent – at least according to the memory discourse – has been achieved. This means that the collective memory of 1848 or, more broadly, the experience of the Spring of

¹⁴ Česká mincovna, *Archiv historických ražeb. Stříbrná mince 200 Kč 1998 200. výr. narození Fr. Palackého stand*, <https://ceskamincovna.cz/stribrna-mince-200-kc-1998-200-vyr--narozeni-fr-palackeho-stand-456-4240-d/>.

¹⁵ Eg. Žurnál UP, 200. výročí narození Františka Palackého (1798-1876). Kulturní výročí UNESCO, 12.06.1998, http://oldwww.upol.cz/fileadmin/zuparchiv/VII/vol_28.pdf.

Nations in the Czech Republic, does not have such a strong anti-Habsburg element as, for example, in Hungary. This is due to the very nature of these events – the Prague Uprising was incomparably smaller than the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, and it did not have so many victims that the memory of which would have to be maintained through various types of practices. Therefore, the anniversaries of the events of 1848 are not loudly celebrated. The events of 1848, from the perspective of the Czech authorities, also do not have the potential to be used as a current political agent.

Maria Theresa – modernization

As in Slovakia, the positive image of Maria Theresa has also been preserved in the Czech Republic. She is remembered in the collective memory of the Czechs mostly as the only woman on the Czech throne, a powerful and energetic ruler, active both in political matters and in the sphere of culture. Once again, as in the case of Slovakia, the memory of the numerous reforms carried out by Maria Theresa, which also covered the Czech lands, is very alive in the contemporary Czech Republic. The positive image and memory of Maria Theresa in the Czech Republic is equal to, if not exceeded by, the memory of Franz Joseph I. The emperor is very well recognized in Czech collective memory thanks to popular culture, e.g. book “The Good Soldier Švejk” by Jaroslav Hašek, which largely contributed both to the infantilization of the era of Franz Joseph I and to building a feeling of nostalgia for those times.

The positive image of Maria Theresa is strengthened by actions in the field of the politics of memory, implemented especially in recent years. In 2017, on the occasion of

the 300th anniversary of Maria Theresa's birth, a historical mini-series devoted to her life premiered. The series was described as the largest international co-production project of Czech Television. It was realized in cooperation with Austria, Slovakia, and Hungary, i.e. with the main states that are currently heirs of the Habsburg Empire. The first two episodes of the series were broadcast in 2017 and two more in 2019. The fifth and final parts are expected to air in 2022. The series was produced by Romanian-American director Robert Dorhnelm, based on the script of the Czech screenwriter Mirka Zlatníková. Many Czech actors have played in it. According to press releases, the series "Maria Theresa" shows the most important events in the life of "the famous and important queen, who opened the modern history of the Habsburg monarchy"¹⁶.

The series received positive reviews and was well received by the Czech audience. The premiere of the first two episodes was watched by 2,5 million viewers on Czech Television, and about 800,000 viewers in Slovakia. The series sparked discussions about the reign of Maria Theresa and her role in the development of the Czech lands. Despite some historical controversy, the series – still available on the Czech Television streaming platform – maintains a positive image of Maria Theresa.

Maria Theresa and her reign over the Czech lands is also commemorated by a monument set in October 2020 in Prague, in 6 districts (Prague 6), in Maria Theresa Park, which is located near Prague Castle. In 2017, on the occasion

¹⁶ Česká televize, *Marie Terezie*, <https://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/11258030360-marie-terezie/>.

of the 300th anniversary of the birthday of Maria Theresa, the design and visualization of the monument were presented. It is a simple, minimalistic form of a woman in historic dress by Jan Kovářík. It is over 5 meters high. The cost of its construction reached 4 million CZK.

The very idea of the foundation of the monument to Maria Theresa arose among local authorities of Prague 6 in 2013, when a competition for the sculpture was announced. The project met with opposition from some Prague residents, who submitted a petition against it being erected. They were against creating a monument to a member of the Habsburg dynasty. For some people, Maria Teresa was considered the “evil stepmother of the Czechs”, who additionally centralized the Austrian Empire in the interests of the Habsburg dynasty, as a representative of the family that oppressed the Czech nation. Also, the choice of location was criticized – the monument was erected in the park where Václav Morávek, a member of the anti-Nazi resistance movement, died in 1942¹⁷. However, arguments by supporters of the commemoration, including representatives of the authorities of Prague 6, indicated numerous reforms carried out by Maria Teresa, whose positive, long-term effects are – according to them – still felt by the Czechs today¹⁸. The mayor of Prague 6, Ondřej Kolář (TOP 09), also emphasized

¹⁷ Echo24.cz, *Chceme Morávku, ne Marii Terezii, „macechu Čechů“*. Petice proti pomníku na Praze, 23.02.2019, <https://echo24.cz/a/SyRSF/chceme-moravka-ne-marii-terezii-macechu-zechu-petice-proti-pomniku-na-praze-6>; Česká televize, *V Praze vyroste první český pomník Marie Terezie. Měřit bude přes pět metru*, 12.01.2020, <https://ct24.ceskatelevize.cz/regiony/3026498-v-praze-vyroste-prvni-cesky-pomnik-marie-terezie-merit-bude-pres-pet-metru>.

¹⁸ Praha 6, *Praha 6 odhalila pomník Marie Terezie. K vidění je i digitálně*, 20.10.2020, <https://www.praha6.cz/aktuality/praha-6-odhalila-pomnik-marie-terezie-k-videni-je-i-digitalne-2020-10-20>.

that Maria Teresa was the only woman to ascend the Czech throne. Despite protests from some Prague residents, the project to build a monument was completed. The popularity of the TV series about Maria Teresa, mentioned above, contributed to an increase of social support for the idea of founding the object.

It is worth adding that the authorities of Prague 6 are active in the Czech scene of the politics of memory. The authorities of this district decided to dismantle the monument of Marshal Konev, which caused a crisis in Czech-Russian relations. They also changed the name of Under the Chestnuts Square to the Boris Nemtsov Square, where the Embassy of Russia is located. However, it is difficult to see a clear vision of the politics of memory in the actions of the authorities of Prague 6. Rather, it can be assumed that these activities are part of a political rivalry with the ruling camp. The attitude toward the heritage of the communist era allows opposition parties such as TOP 09 or the Czech Pirate Party to distinguish themselves from the current political powers, especially the president of the Czech Republic Miloš Zeman, who is known for his pro-Russian sympathies.

St. Mary's column in Prague – the oppression

The fact that the period of the reign of the Habsburg dynasty in the Czech lands still arouses some controversy among the Czechs is evidenced by the course of the public debate accompanying the return to public space in Prague, the so-called St. Mary's column (cz. mariánský sloup)¹⁹. The

¹⁹ I wrote about the return of the St. Mary's column to the Prague Old Town Square in the text: A. Tatarenko, *Spory wokół pomników: lekcja z Europy Środkowej*, "Komentarze IEŚ",

16-meter-high column, crowned with a 2-meter-high statue of Our Lady Immaculate, was unveiled on June 4, 2020, at the Old Town Square. The column in this location was originally erected by Emperor Ferdinand III in 1650. It was a votive to the Virgin Mary for defending Prague against the Swedish army in 1648. The original monument was demolished on November 3, 1918, by a group of firefighters from Žižkov after information was spread that the Czechoslovak National Committee called for it. It is no coincidence that the date of the column's disassembly coincides with the fall of Austria-Hungary. Baroque columns of a religious character were part of the propaganda of the Habsburg dynasty and were indirectly meant to testify to the triumph of Catholicism over Protestantism and, implicitly, Protestant opponents. For the Czechs, the column was partly a vehicle of memory of the Battle of White Mountain.

The dismantling of the column was met with some criticism shortly after its removal. Steps were taken to re-position the monument, but without success. For many people, the column was a symbol of the oppression of the Habsburgs and Czech subjugation. Additionally, in 1915, a monument to the Czech national hero, Jan Hus, was unveiled in Prague's Old Town Square on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of his death. Hus, born in 1370, a precursor of Protestantism, was condemned by the Vatican and burned at the stake, which resulted in the outbreak of the Hussite wars (1419-1436). The Hus statue still stands in the Old Town Square,

no. 215, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/spory-wokol-pomnikow-lekcja-z-europy-srodkowej>.

which further exacerbates the debate on the legitimacy of placing the St. Mary's column in the same space.

Social efforts to reconstruct the object were undertaken several years before the Velvet Revolution broke out. They were intensified after 1989. Due to collected donations and the involvement of volunteers from the Society for the Reconstruction of the St. Mary's Column in the Old Town Square in Prague (cz. Společnost pro obnovu mariánského sloupu na Staroměstském náměstí v Praze, which was established in 1990), the baroque statue was reconstructed in 2020. However, the 30+ -year-long process of rebuilding the column triggered a socio-political debate on the legitimacy of its return to the Old Town of Prague. This idea met with strong opposition from the majority of the inhabitants of the Czech capital. It quickly became a topic of national discussions. The opponents of the project argued that the building is a symbol of Czech subordination and that the symbol, associated with the cult of a particular religion, should not be located on the representative square of the old town in the capital of the secular state. By contrast, supporters of the project claimed that the St. Mary's column is a symbol of tolerance and reconciliation²⁰.

The very decision-making process of local authorities of Prague 1 may raise many doubts. Authorities debated the reconstruction of the column on several preceding meetings, including the penultimate one in 2017, when the application was rejected. The vast majority of the representatives of the Czech political scene was against the project – the Czech

²⁰ It is worth adding that St. Mary's columns can be found in several other cities in the Czech Republic, e.g. in Olomouc, where they do not raise any particular controversy.

Pirate Party, the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (KSČM), the Czech Social Democratic Party (ČSSD), ANO, and TOP 09. At the end of January 2020, local authorities again undertook the issue and, as a result, changed their decision. The application for reconsideration of the project was submitted by representatives of the United Forces for Prague (cz. Spojené síly pro Prahu), Christian and Democratic Union (KDU-ČSL), and TOP 09. Almost the entire Civic Democratic Party (ODS), with one exception, 12 local government officials from ANO, and 5 from the United Forces for Prague voted for the installation of the St. Mary's column. The entire Czech Pirate Party voted against it. The project was loudly criticized by the then-mayor of Prague, Zdeněk Hřib (Czech Pirate Party), who noted that the funds allocated for the maintenance of the column could be used to renovate the Old Town Hall. Despite numerous controversies and loud public debate, which resulted in a lack of public support for the project, the St. Mary's Column was erected on the Old Town Square. A few weeks after the monument was placed in the old town, an attempt was made to set it on fire.

Conclusions

The attitude of Czech society to the heritage of the Habsburg monarchy is twofold. On the one hand, due to the negative memory of the Battle of White Mountain, maintained over the centuries, the time of the Habsburg Empire is recognized as a period of national subalternity and lack of freedom, as is demonstrated by the history of St. Mary's column in the Old Town of Prague. At the same time, the period of the reign of the Habsburgs in Czech lands is remembered as a time of

modernization and development – the rule of Maria Theresa and Franz Joseph I. Due to popular culture (films, tv series and books) in the modern Czech Republic, there is a rather infantile image of the Habsburg Empire, which is especially true of the period when Franz Joseph I was in power²¹.

²¹ Compare with O. Slačálek, *The Paradoxical Czech Memory of the Habsburg Monarchy: Satisfied Helots or Crippled Citizens?*, "Slavic Review", vol. 78 , no. 4 , 2019, pp. 912-920.



CHAPTER II

Hungary

Just after the fall of the Iron Curtain, political elites in Central Europe paid relatively little attention to the politics of memory. Hungary wasn't an exception on this point. In the 1990s, the political discourse about the past in Hungary focused primarily on issues related to decommunization. The politics of memory implemented by the State was rather passive. A significant change in the Hungarian government's approach to the past took place in 1998 with coming to power of Fidesz party under the leadership of Viktor Orbán.

During the first government of Viktor Orbán (1998-2002), a number of activities were undertaken from the field of politics of memory. For example, the flagship project of Viktor Orbán's politics of memory, House of Terror (hu. Terror Háza Múzeum), was established. The period of a particularly active politics of memory implemented by the government came under the leadership of Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and took place after 2010, i.e. during the second, third, and fourth government of Fidesz and its coalition partners.

In the years 2010-2021, a number of legal regulations were introduced to guarantee financial resources for projects devoted to the politics of memory and to create an appropriate framework for it.

New public holidays were introduced. The most significant one was the Day of National Unity – June 4 – established on May 31, 2010. The date was not accidental – on June 4, 1920, the Treaty of Trianon was concluded. Its result was that Hungary lost approximately 60% of its population and 70% of its territory. The treaty sealed the fall of Greater Hungary. In Hungarian collective memory, the treaty is perceived as the greatest tragedy of the Hungarian nation and the source of national trauma. Reports toward the treaty of Trianon is an important element in the programs of the political parties in Hungary, an issue on which they have to define their position²².

Establishing of the Day of National Unity coincided with approving a new law by the Hungarian Parliament on May 26, 2010, that removed a residence requirement for naturalization, allowing citizens in neighbouring countries who had Hungarian ancestors before 1920 or between 1938 and 1945 to apply for Hungarian citizenship²³. The law was introduced on August 20, 2010 – Saint Stephen's Day, a national holiday in Hungary, and took effect on January 1, 2011. The document was positively received by the Hungarian diaspora but heavily criticized by the authorities of neighbouring countries like Romania and EU representatives.

²² D. Héjj, *Trianon. Dyskurs o narodowej krzywdzie w prasie węgierskiej w latach 2010-2020*, "Prace IES", no. 4, 2020, pp. 10, 13-19.

²³ S. Benazzo, *Not All the Past Needs To Be Used: Features of Fidesz's Politics of Memory*, "Journal of Nationalism, Memory & Language Politics", vol. 11, no. 2, 2017, p. 211.

Since 2010, a gradual nationalization of the memory landscape in Hungary has occurred, as has the establishment of a quasi-monopoly of state power for activities related to the politics of memory. This is done by controlling the resources allocated to institutions dealing with the past (museums, public history institutions, social archives, etc.), which lead to the closure of independent centres. Nowadays in Hungary, the main actors of the politics of memory are state institutions²⁴.

A very important role in the Hungarian politics of memory is played by the Prime Minister, Victor Orbán. For Victor Orbán, historical narratives are full-blown tools of political action. Politics of memory implemented by the current Prime Minister of Hungary and by the political and intellectual elites gathered around him combine with their political projects, and it provides its legitimacy²⁵. Victor Orbán himself is an active participant in the memory debate through his activity in social media and media statements. Another important element through which the Victor Orbán influences collective memory are his speeches on the anniversaries of historical events, such as the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 or the Day of National Unity.

The politics of memory pursued by Hungarian authorities over the last decade focuses primarily on the period of Greater Hungary (1867-1918) – a dual monarchy of Aus-

²⁴ G. Halmi, *Memory Politics in Hungary: Political Justice without Rule of Law*, "Verfassungsblog", 10.01.2019, <https://verfassungsblog.de/memory-politics-in-hungary-political-justice-without-rule-of-law/>. Compare G. Egry, *The greatest catastrophe of (post-)colonial Central Europe? The 100th years anniversary of Trianon and official politics of memory in Hungary*, "Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej", vol. 18, no. 2, 2020, p. 133.

²⁵ S. Benazzo, op.cit., p. 199.

tria-Hungary – together with the Treaty of Trianon, which sealed its fall. The second important point of contemporary Hungarian politics of memory consists of Hungarian Revolutions – the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 and the Hungarian Uprising of 1956. Appropriate actions are untaken by state power to keep the memory of these events and periods alive, such as establishing and celebrating national holidays or funding monuments in public spaces.

The collective memory of Hungarians about the Habsburg rule on Hungarian lands is a complicated problem because it involves two experiences with opposite meanings for Hungarian history. The first is the period of Habsburg sovereignty over Hungary²⁶, with the cornerstone being the Hungarian Revolution of 1848²⁷ against the Habsburgs, the suppression of which in 1849 buried the hopes of Hungarian independence for several decades. The second important period in Hungarian history associated with Habsburg which has a crucial place in Hungarian collective memory started in 1867 with the establishment of the dualist monarchy of Austria-Hungary and ended in 1914. It is commonly known as “Greater Hungary” (Nagy-Magyarország), a so-called “golden age” in the history of the Hungarian nation. The concept of Greater Hungary has been used by Hungarian irredentist movements to promote a return to the pre-World War I Hungarian borders during the interwar period. Both the Hungarian Uprising of 1848 and Greater Hungary appear in Hungarian political discourse and are objects of the

²⁶ The Habsburgs took power over the Hungarian lands gradually in the years 1687-1718.

²⁷ The Hungarian Revolution of 1848 is also known under the name Hungarian Uprising of 1848.

politics of memory after 1989, especially since 2010 when Victor Orbán came to power for a second time.

1848 – the freedom

The Hungarian Revolution of 1848 broke out on March 15 under the influence of the February Revolution in Paris. It became part of the European Revolutions of 1848. The revolutionary movement was triggered by young radicals led by poet Sándor Petőfi – considered nowadays as Hungary's national poet and one of the key figures of the 1848 revolution, who, as it is said, on March 15 recited his poem entitled "National Song" (hu. "Nemzeti Dal") to the Hungarians and, by his passionate interpretation, marked the beginning of the revolution. The revolutionists presented to the public their political claims known under the title "What do the Hungarian people want?" (hu. "Mit kíván a magyar nemzet"). They demanded above all the abolition of censorship, the establishment of an independent Hungarian government, equality before the law for all citizens, and the abolition of serfdom. The manifesto gained public support.

On March 17, Emperor Ferdinand I agreed to establish a Hungarian government headed by Lajos Batthyány, with Lajos Kossuth as the minister of finance. The turning point of events was the invalidation of April laws – a collection of laws legislated by Lajos Kossuth with the aim of modernizing the Kingdom of Hungary – by Franz Joseph I shortly after his coronation and without any legal precedent, which led to riots. Initially, the battles were won by the Hungarians. The situation changed when newly appointed Emperor Franz Joseph I asked Tsar Nicholas I for help. As a result of the entry of Russian troops into Hungarian lands, the revolution was

bloodily suppressed, and the Hungarian lands were placed under brutal martial law.

The Hungarian Revolution of 1848 occupies an important place in the collective memory of Hungarians. Together with the anti-communist uprising of 1956, it is a symbol of the fight for freedom, a symbol of Hungarian resistance to imposed power or foreign supremacy²⁸. The memory of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 is maintained by action undertaken by authorities. March 15, the exact date of the outbreak of the uprising, is celebrated as 1848 Revolution Memorial Day, also known as Hungarian National Day, a national holiday and a day free of work. It commemorates the revolution and the War of Independence 1848-1849 against the Austrian-Hapsburg rule. Hungarian National Day is celebrated loudly, especially in Budapest. Every year on this occasion, many institutions and historical sites welcome the public with free activities and attractions. For example, visitors may admire the Hungarian Parliament House, along with the Dome Hall where the Holy Crown of Hungary is treasured, as well as Buda Castle, the Hungarian National Gallery, and many other facilities. In the public space, performances and exhibitions are held. Tribute is paid to the heroes of the 1848 Revolution.

On this day, historical figures associated with the outbreak of the Hungarian Uprising of 1848 are also commemorated, including Lajos Kossuth, to whom a monument is located in the square named after him, next to the Hungarian parliament. The Kossuth memorial is an important na-

²⁸ P. Lendvai, *Węgry. Tysiąc lat zwycięstw w klęskach*, translated by B. Nowacki, A. Krzemiński, Kraków 2017, pp. 709-882.

tional symbol and a scene of official celebrations. Another important point on a symbolic map of Budapest, where the celebration of Hungarian National Day also takes place, is a memorial to Józef Bem, the Polish general who fought alongside the Hungarians during the revolution.

The official commemorating ceremony, attended by state authorities in Hungary and invited distinguished guests, usually takes place in front of the Hungarian National Museum in Budapest. The 150th anniversary in 1998 of the Hungarian Uprising of 1848 was especially sumptuous. The main commemorative event was organized as usual in front of the Hungarian National Museum. The building was draped in Hungarian national colours. The banners on the front of the museum read: “Liberty, Equality, Fraternity”²⁹. The municipality organized a parade of *huszárs*, light cavalry, in traditional costumes. In the evening there was a reconstruction of the revolutionary events combined with scenes from everyday life from this time period. The celebrations attracted a wide audience³⁰.

However, in 1998, the commemoration of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 was not focused on the event itself. Nor were the military defeats or triumphs during the battles. There was also a little reference to the Habsburg rule. Instead, attention was paid to the longer-term historical process for which 1848 could be interpreted as a symbolic

²⁹ The slogan of the French Revolution that broke out in 1789 was officially adopted as a motto during the February Revolution of 1848, which initiated revolutionary movements in many countries, including the lands upon Habsburg rule, thus in Hungary.

³⁰ R. Brubaker, M. Feischmidt, *1848 in 1998: The Politics of Commemoration in Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia*, “Comparative Studies in Society and History”, vol. 44, no. 4, 2002, pp. 712–713.

beginning. The state and intellectuals' elites as well as the mainstream media discussed mostly the continuing Hungarian commitment to civil liberties and the development of civil or civic society, which – according to the interpretation presented at that time by the elites – started in 1848 with the outbreak of the revolution. This, though, was also presented in the address by the then-president of Hungary, Árpád Göncz³¹. In his speech, the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 was put into larger European frames. It was described as a part of a European phenomenon. The aim of this narrative was to inscribe Hungarian history into the history of Europe. The Hungarian president highlighted the multiethnic dimension of the revolution against the Habsburg Empire and the collective effort of different nations. The Hungarian Revolution of 1848, which united the fate of Hungary and other European countries, was a kind of reference to the political situation at that time³².

The official celebrations of the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 focused on issues such as civil society, Hungarian belonging to a European identity, or the common destiny of the nation of Europe due to the political climate. In the 1990s, especially in the second half of that decade, the main goal of state power in foreign policy was Hungary's entry into European and NATO structures. The actions undertaken by the left-wing government headed by Gyula Horn (The Hungarian Socialist Party, hu. Magyar Szocialista Párt) were in many dimensions

³¹ President Árpád Göncz was then a member of the Alliance of Free Democrats – Hungarian Liberal Party (hun. Szabad Demokraták Szövetsége – a Magyar Liberális Párt, SZDSZ).

³² R. Brubaker, M. Feischmidt, op.cit., pp. 712-713.

subordinated to this aim. The project of euro integration had to find support among Hungarian citizens. The main argument to convince the Hungarian society was the economic benefits of joining the EU. However, authorities also used rhetoric referring to the past to give the project of EU and NATO integration historical legitimacy.

The 150th anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 provided a suitable occasion to demonstrate the connection between Hungarian and European history because in the same year revolutions took place in many countries in Europe (France, German states, Italian states, Spain, Denmark, and many others). President Göncz in his speech during the official celebration made many references to the common past of Europe. In the end, European integration was presented as the final remedy against further conflicts among European nations. This message was so important that the passage from the president's speech was printed on the brochure containing the program of the official commemoration³³:

It is the lesson of two crushed struggles for freedom (i.e. 1848 and 1956) and two lost world wars, that the equal peoples of the fractured area of historic Hungary can once again be frank with one another in a Europe in which borders exist only on the map, in which – as has been the case for centuries – they have enriched each other's culture. They can be themselves, but good friends, as members of the great territory that embraces them, the common Europe. Hungary is striving for this today.

³³ Ibidem, pp. 715-716; S. Benazzo, *op.cit.*, p. 202.

For this would solve, peacefully, the contradictions of the revolutionary period that have survived to this day³⁴.

Over the years, the Hungarian National Day has been an occasion to commemorate those who fought against the Habsburgs. However, it is worth emphasizing that in the 1990s, the emphasis was put on the general values that the revolutionists fought for, such as “freedom”, “the right to self-determination”, or “community” rather than external oppression, symbolized by the Habsburgs. Limited references to the Habsburgs may have arisen for several reasons. The reign of the Habsburgs in Hungarian lands belongs to a relatively distant history, which does not fit into the horizon of the memory of living, and therefore does not rouse much controversy nor discussion. Secondly, the political climate – Hungary’s efforts to integrate with the EU – was not conducive to opening historical disputes, especially in view of the positive relations between Hungary and Austria, the main heir of the Habsburg heritage.

Viktor Orbán, then the opposition candidate, also took part in the celebration on March 15, 1998. His speech was rather toned down. He emphasized the heroism of the Hungarians who fought in the 1848 revolution. After Viktor Orbán coming to power, he made full use of the celebrations of anniversaries of historical events to express his political views on current affairs. His speech from 2016, presented on the occasion of Hungarian National Day in front of the Hungarian National Museum on March 15, was particularly loud in commenting on Hungary, as well as the whole EU.

³⁴ Quoted after R. Brubaker, M. Feischmidt, *op.cit.*, p. 717.

The Prime Minister of Hungary in his address related it to the migration crisis.

In 2015 and 2016 Hungary dealt with a wave of immigrants from the Middle East, mostly Syria, that passed through the country. In 2015 Hungary closed its borders with Serbia and Croatia. Later on, on March 9, 2016, a state of emergency was declared in Hungary due to the migration crisis, and the Hungarian Defense Forces, as well as the Hungarian police, were sent to Hungary's borders. The Hungarian government's actions and decisions around the migration crisis has created a lot of controversy and strong critiques from EU leaders and European society, especially from Western Europe. For Victor Orbán, the celebrations of the anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 became an opportunity to respond to his critics and to present the Hungarian government's position to the nation. The Prime Minister used the past to justify his way of handling the migration crisis, which stood in opposition to EU guidelines.

Firstly, Viktor Orbán, referring to the history of the Hungarian revolutions, pointed out that the Hungarian people very rarely enter the path of revolution or disobedience. They only do so as a last resort, when other solutions have been exhausted. He says:

By nature, Hungarians stand up for what is right when the need arises. What is more, they fight for it if needs be, but do not seek out trouble for its own sake. They know that they can often achieve more through patience than through sabre-rattling. This is why those like us are rarely given to revolutions. We have only gone down that path twice in one hundred and seventy years. When we did follow that path, we had reason to

do so: we felt that our lungs would burst if we could not breathe in freedom. Modern European history has preserved both Hungarian revolutions among the glorious memories of the world: two blazing stars, two national uprisings bursting forth in 1848 and 1956 from Hungarian aspirations and Hungarian interests³⁵.

In his speech, the Hungarian Prime Minister, by referring to the collective memory of the revolutions, especially to the memory of its heroes, indirectly referred to both the migration crisis and the situation of Western Europe, which he judges rather poorly. He said that Hungarian revolutions were led by respectable citizens with a sense of national duty who embodied Hungarians' best aspects³⁶. Orbán pointed out that Hungarians had won their own freedom without any help (although he mentions the "shared fate of Poland and Hungary"). These words were intended to strengthen the moral right of Hungarians to resist "the danger" – migrants as well as the EU. The migration crisis was presented as the same threat as the oppression of the Habsburgs in the first half of the 19th century or the supremacy of communists in the second half of the 20th century. As then, now the Hungarians also have the moral right to resist.

In 1848 it was written in the book of fate that nothing could be done against the Habsburg Empire. If then we had resigned ourselves to that outcome, our fate would have been sealed and the German sea would have swallowed up the Hungarians.

³⁵ Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, *Speech by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán on 15 March*, 15.03.2016, <http://www.miniszterelnok.hu/speech-by-prime-minister-viktor-orban-on-15-march/>.

³⁶ Ibidem.

(...) Today it is written in the book of fate that hidden, faceless world powers will eliminate everything that is unique, autonomous, age-old and national. They will blend cultures, religions and populations, until our many-faceted and proud Europe will finally become bloodless and docile. And if we resign ourselves to this outcome, our fate will be sealed, and we will be swallowed up in the enormous belly of the United States of Europe³⁷.

As the above examples show, the interpretation of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 used by politicians during official celebrations since 1990 changed over time, along with the development on the Hungarian political scene. During the accession processes to the EU and NATO, the revolution was inscribed in European history. It was indicated that the Hungarian Revolution of 1848 was the beginning of the process of creating a civil society in Hungary. The focus was almost exclusively on those aspects of the revolution that place it in wider European history. Several years later, in 2016, the Hungarian Uprising of 1848 was interpreted by the political elites in a completely different way. The nationalist dimension of the events was brought to the fore. The revolution itself became a symbol of resistance to external pressure, not only in historical but also in present times.

During the migration crisis, the Hungarian Revolution against the Habsburg served as the historic legitimacy for the current political agenda. It is worth emphasizing that this perspective was less visible in the 1990s when the political climate was not conducive to settling accounts with the

³⁷ Ibidem.

distant past. Habsburg as a symbol of “external oppression” returned to the public discourse in 2016 in the context of the migration crisis and EU pressure on Hungary in this matter. However, even then, the Habsburgs were rather a historical symbol taken out of context more than they were meant to represent a specific group of historical figures, particular historical figures or periods in time.

Greater Hungary – the golden era

Since the agreement between the Austrians and Hungarians in 1867, Hungary’s position in the Habsburg Empire has steadily increased. Suffice it to say that around 1900, Budapest was one of the most dynamically developing cities in Europe. The years from 1867 to World War I ended for Hungary with the Treaty of Trianon and are functioning in Hungarian collective memory and political discourse under the name of Greater Hungary. Greater Hungary holds an important place in Hungarian collective memory and is recognized as the golden era in the development of the nation and as the time of the greatest power of the state. It is combined with a sense of nostalgia and is supported by Hungarian popular culture.

The concept of Greater Hungary was strongly present in the Hungarian political discourse in the interwar period. Returning to pre-World War I borders was a priority of Hungary’s foreign policy. Revisionism became the ideological foundation of the interwar regime of regent Miklós Horthy. It was also a time of collective mourning over Greater Hungary. The national flags were lowered until 1938. Prayers were conducted in schools for a return to the pre-Trianon order.

After 1945, under the conditions of the Yalta order, the subject of a revision of the Treaty of Trianon practically did not exist in public debate due to the political climate. During the transformation period, the new government did not give much attention to the politics of memory. They limited their interest in the past to the celebration of exceptional historical events, such as the 150th anniversary of the outbreak of the Hungarian Uprising of 1848, described above. History in the political discourse was subordinated to the overriding goal of foreign policy in the 1990s, which was integration with EU structures. For these reasons, Greater Hungary appeared relatively rarely in public debate. However, it was still very present in the collective memory.

Currently, political and memory discourses about Greater Hungary are dominated by themes related to its “great power” and the area it occupied. In fact, one of the most recognized and utilized symbols of Greater Hungary is a map that shows its territory. The map of Greater Hungary is a symbol that often appears in public spaces in Hungary. It is used by both private persons, e.g. in the form of stickers placed on cars or motorcycles, and by public figures, including the Hungarian Prime Minister, Victor Orbán, who personally shows a special penchant for this symbol. According to media reports, including the Facebook account of the Hungarian Prime Minister himself, the map of Greater Hungary is hanging in his office³⁸. Victor Orbán also uses this symbol in his social media activities.

³⁸ Kropka_hu, *Premier Orbán pokazuje premierowi Morawieckiemu mapę Wielkich Węgier sprzed Trianon 1920. Bardzo znamienne. Fb premieraVO*, Twitter, 06.04.2018, https://twitter.com/kropka_hu/status/982291015959793664.

One example is from 2020. On May 6, Viktor Orbán posted a Facebook message wishing good luck to students taking their final exams with a globe showing the borders of Greater Hungary. It included large parts of contemporary Romania, Croatia, Slovakia, and Serbia³⁹. This short piece of text, and especially the photo that came with it, sparked an international scandal. The “wishes for students” were the most controversial in Romania and Croatia. Ludovic Orban, then Prime Minister of Romania, reacted to the post with a Romanian proverb “the sparrow dreams of the dough”. He also suggested that placing Transylvania within Hungary’s borders is “a typical Orbán’s behaviour”. Zoran Milanović, the President of Croatia, also loudly criticized Orbán’s Facebook message. As it was condemned by Croatian society, Milanović appealed to Croatians not to publish the historical maps and maps that show Croatia much bigger than it is today because they are not achievable today, and, more importantly, they irritate Croatia’s neighbours⁴⁰.

The theme of the Greater Hungary territory is also present in a monument which was founded by Victor Orbán’s government on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Treaty of Trianon in 2020. The monument is placed in front of the parliament in Budapest. It is officially called Monument of National Cohesion (Hu. Nemzeti összetartozás emlékműve). Its form resembles a hole in the ground or a grave. It is a 100-meter-long, four-meter-wide passage that slopes

³⁹ V. Orbán, 56. Az érettségizők történelmet írnak. Hajrá! // 56. A historic exam. Good luck!, Facebook, 06.05.2020, <https://www.facebook.com/orbanviktor/posts/10158178404746093>.

⁴⁰ M.G. Barberá, A. Vladislavljec, *Orbán’s ‘Greater Hungary’ Map Creates Waves in Neighbourhood*, “Balkan Insight”, 07.05.2021, <https://balkaninsight.com/2020/05/07/orbans-greater-hungary-map-creates-waves-in-neighbourhood/>.

from Kossuth Square. On the two side walls of the passage, names of the 12,485 cities and villages which Hungary lost as a result of the Treaty of Trianon (formerly part of Greater Hungary territory) were engraved on separate granite bricks. At the centre of the memorial is an eternal flame.

Kossuth Square, where the Trianon Memorial is located, is a symbolic place on the map of Budapest. It is a scene of special activities carried out under the umbrella of Victor Orbán's politics of memory. In 2010-2020, several monuments were removed and replaced with others. In 2012, the monument to Count Mihály Károlyi (1875-1955) was dismantled. Károlyi was a Hungarian politician who served as Prime Minister between 1-16 November 1918 and as a President between 16 November 1918 – 21 March 1919 of the short-lived and unrecognized First Hungarian Republic. Károlyi was a supporter of the equality of nations living in the imperial-royal monarchy, and he also advocated the dissemination of electoral law and a break with the pro-German policy of Austria-Hungary. He was an opponent of István Tisza (1861–1918), Prime Minister of Hungary in 1913-1917. In the place where his monument stood on Kossuth Square, the monument István Tisza returned in 2012, originally placed in this space in 1920-1944, i.e. during the reign of regent Miklós Horthy. Tisza was a great supporter of the dual monarchy of Austria-Hungary. He was assassinated during the Aster Revolution, led by Mihály Károlyi, on 31 October 1918 – the same day that Hungary terminated its real union with Austria⁴¹.

⁴¹ B. Góralczyk, *Dreams of Power. The Politics of History and Hungary's Return to Horthy*, "Visegrad Insight", 07.05.2020, <https://visegradinsight.eu/dreams-of-power-hungary-politics-history/>. Another symbolic change in Kossuth Square was the removal of the Imre Nagy Monument in 2018.

Another example, in 2016, is the 6,5-meter-high bronze equestrian statue of Count Gyul Andrassy, originally located there in the years 1902-1945, which has returned to the square in front of the parliament. It was erected on the site of the monument to Attila József (1905-1937), one of the most famous Hungarian poets of the 20th century and called the “proletarian poet”. Gyula Andrassy is remembered in the collective memory of Hungarians as a persistent advocate of Hungarian independence and one of the founding fathers of Greater Hungary. He took part in the Hungarian Revolution in 1848. He served as Prime Minister of Hungary (1867-1871) and subsequently as Foreign Minister of Austria-Hungary (1871-1879). In popular culture he is presented as a close friend of Queen Elizabeth⁴².

The above-described changes on the symbolic map of Budapest clearly show that the politics of memory implemented by the government of Victor Orbán in relation to Greater Hungary focuses solely on the commemoration of those historical figures of Hungarian nationality who were involved in the forging of an agreement between Austria and Hungary, which is presented as a victory of Hungary. The participation of representatives of the Habsburg dynasty, apart from the role of Queen Elizabeth, is virtually absent in the public debate. Information that Greater Hungary was part of a part dualistic monarchy under the Habsburg dynasty appears in school textbooks, but it is largely excluded from the memory discourse. The “golden age”, the development of Budapest, and the modernization of the entire country in collective memory and contemporary memory

⁴² Ibidem.

discourse are almost exclusively attributed to the actions of the Hungarians.

This approach is primarily due to the role of the Habsburgs in the earlier history of the Hungarian nation, especially in the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1848. At the same time, this perspective is favoured by the politics of memory pursued by the government of Viktor Orbán since 2010, which concentrate strongly on national history and became the engine of new forms of nationalism in Hungary⁴³. Using Greater Hungary by the state authorities is not intended directly to open revisionist discussion; instead, it has a more general meaning. Greater Hungary is a symbol of the territorial and political strength of the Hungarian state, as well as a symbol of the cultural superiority of the Hungarian nation. In such an approach, the concept of Greater Hungary has an identity-building character⁴⁴.

Franz Joseph I and Queen Elisabeth – the nostalgia

In many Central European countries, the times of Franz Joseph I evoke strong feelings of nostalgia. Nonetheless, Hungarians' collective memory about the emperor himself differs from the way in which this historical figure is remembered by other central European nations. Despite the extensive apparatus of propaganda, which was used to

⁴³ M. Feischmidt, *Memory-Politics and Neonationalism: Trianon as Mythomoteur*, "Nationalities Papers", vol. 48, special issue on the Emergence and Resilience of Parastates, January 2020, p. 130.

M. Feischmidt, *A nemzet varázsa és a jobboldali szimpátia fiatalok körében*, [in:] *Nemzet a Mindennapokban: A Nacionalizmus Populáris Kultúrája*, ed. M. Feischmidt, R. Glózer, K. Kasznár, Z. Ilyés, I. Zakariás, Budapest 2014, pp. 52-139.

⁴⁴ Eadem, *Populáris emlékezetpolitikák és az újnacionalizmus: a Trianon-kultusz társadalmi alapjai*, [in:] *Nemzet a Mindennapokban...*, op.cit., pp. 57-58.

glorify the positive image of power during his reign, Franz Joseph I never enjoyed great popularity in Hungary. It continues until now. This is visible in, for example, the lack of commemoration of the emperor in the public spaces in the centre of Budapest. One of the few exceptions is the mini statue of Franz Joseph I sitting in a hammock, placed in 2021 on the Liberty Bridge, which was originally named Franz Joseph Bridge (Ferenc József híd)⁴⁵.

The history of the Liberty Bridge itself also indicates that Franz Joseph I – or in the larger scale the Habsburgs’ – heritage is now in Hungary rather a dissonant one. The Liberty Bridge over the Danube was built between 1894-1896. The last clinch on the abutment on the Pest site was inserted into the iron structure by Franz Joseph I himself. The bridge was opened in the presence of the Emperor. It was constructed in the art nouveau style. It features the national symbols of Hungary, such as Turul Birds and the large Crest of the Kingdom of Hungary, in the centre of the bridge’s arch below the Holy Crown of St. Stephen. The bridge was destroyed during World War II, and it was the first one reconstructed after the end of the conflict and then named Liberty Bridge. This name has been kept to this day. During the communist period, for obvious reasons, the original name of this object was not restored. After 1989, in a different political climate, no such step was taken either. The reason that the Liberty Bridge never regained its original name is due to the lack of positive image in Hungarians’ collective memory of Franz Joseph I. The monarch who oversaw the modernization of

⁴⁵ Facebook, *Statues of Budapest*, posted on 10. 05. 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/statuesbudapest/photos/a.1668879486541250/3861789997250177/>.

Budapest is largely absent from public spaces and, consequently, from Hungarians' collective memory⁴⁶. This is primarily due to his role in the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, especially in the bloody crushing of the movement in 1849.

In Hungary, much more popular than Franz Joseph I has been his wife, Elizabeth of Bavaria, known in Austria as Sisi, and in Hungary as Queen Elisabeth (hu. Erzsébet királyné). This is also visible in the public space of Budapest. One of the bridges over the Danube is still named after Queen Elizabeth (hu. Erzsébet híd). The Queen Elizabeth Bridge was originally built between 1897 and 1903. Like other bridges, it was blown up by German troops at the end of World War II. It was reconstructed in a much more simplified version between 1961-1964 and kept its original name.

Next to the Elizabeth Bridge, a statue of the empress is placed. The process of its creation started shortly after the death of the empress and lasted several dozen years. Initially, there had been long arguments about what the monument should look like and where it should be erected in Budapest, but eventually, the Queen Elisabeth monument sits by the Buda side of the bridge named after her, in the middle of a small garden. The original structure, consisting of the queen's statue in the mausoleum, was unveiled in 1932. It was dismantled in 1956. In the mid-1980s, the sculpture was renovated, and in 1986 it was placed on the other side of the Danube, in Döbrente Square.

In 2018, another monument dedicated to Queen Elizabeth was unveiled in Budapest. It is situated in Madách tér

⁴⁶ For more please see: T.A. Szigeti, *Bridge Over Troubled Waters: Hungarian Nationalist Narratives and Public Memory of Francis Joseph*, The Ohio State University, 2015.

in District VII, named Elizabeth Town (Erzsébetváros). The bronze sculpture shows Sisi in a light summer dress with the Hungarian Coat of Arms on it close to the heart, holding an umbrella in one hand and, in the other, a book by Hungarian poet and translator Dezső Mészöly.

The monuments and the bridge over the Danube are not the only public objects that sustain the positive image of Queen Elizabeth in Hungarians' collective memory. Another is the Royal Palace of Gödöllő, famous in Hungary for being a favourite place of the queen. After its renovation in the 90s, the palace serves as a public museum. It is positioned on the international Sisi-circuit, a cultural route from Bavaria to the Ionian Sea. Museum activity is focused mostly on the figure of the queen and her relationship with the Hungarian nation.

The above information suggests that the positive image of Queen Elizabeth, which has remained in the collective memory of Hungarians, is sustained by the activities of the authorities, both state and local, e.g. through the foundation of monuments or museum activities⁴⁷. However, it is worth noting that in Hungarian narratives about Sisi, attention to her commitment to the Hungarian cause is mostly drowned out, as is her increasing struggle for Hungarian independence. Equally often, the focus of historical narratives about the empress is on her alienation from the imperial court in

⁴⁷ The story of Queen Elizabeth is still of social interest and is also sustained by popular culture. The popularity of Sisi is not weakening, as evidenced by subsequent film productions devoted to her, e.g. miniseries, which is being created with the support of the international streaming service Netflix.

Vienna and her disappointment with historic injustices⁴⁸. In this approach, the story of Queen Elizabeth has a lot in common with the story of the Hungarian nation under the rule of the Habsburgs. Both historical narratives revolve around “oppression” and “injustice”. The “Sisi story”, although enjoying the social interest of Hungarian society⁴⁹, is not a focal point of the politics of memory implemented by current Hungarian authorities.

Conclusions

A number of changes were introduced to the Hungarian politics of memory during Viktor Orbán’s time as prime minister. The organizational framework was changed, and new national holidays were introduced. The role of the state authorities in carrying out the tasks of the politics of memory has also increased significantly. Currently, the dominant role in Hungarian collective memory is played by the period of Greater Hungary and the Trianon Treaty, and therefore, phenomena associated with the Habsburg Empire. However, in the memory discourse, these are interpreted in the spirit of national history. The memory of these events is maintained by the politics of memory implemented by the authorities also from the national perspective.

⁴⁸ Royal Palace of Gödöllő, *The life of Queen Elisabeth*, http://www.kiralyikastely.hu/page.59.the_life_of_queen_elisabeth.

⁴⁹ For more about the Queen Elizabeth see e.g. *Sissi’s World: The Empress Elisabeth in Memory and Myth*, eds. M.E. Hametz, H. Schlipphacke, New York 2018, or Á. Windhager, *Playing with Anthems: the Formation of the Cult of Empress Elisabeth in Hungarian Music*, “Muzikologija”, no. 20, 2016, pp. 31–51.



CHAPTER III

Slovakia

Slovakia is the youngest state analysed in this paper. After 1993, when the Slovak Republic was established after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, this country had to face a number of problems concerning the re-interpretation of the national history of Slovak lands, national identity, and national mythology. The politics of memory implemented in Slovakia by state and local authorities is not as extensive as in the case of Hungary. The authorities limit their actions to establishing national holidays and their celebration, naming public spaces, and the founding of museums and archives, as well as of monuments and memorials. The past and its different interpretations do not serve the current political agenda, as is the case in Hungary. Public benefit institutions play an important role in building collective memory in Slovakia, but their network is smaller than in the Czech Republic.

Currently, the collective memory of Slovaks focuses largely on the events of the 20th century: the formation of the

First Czechoslovak Republic, World War II with the Slovak Uprising that broke out in August 1944, and the Velvet Revolution. Thus, the collective memory of the Slovaks includes mostly the history of the 20th century. This phenomenon is the effect of the relatively young age of the Slovak state, which resulted in the lack of a long-term politics of memory implemented by the earlier forms of the Slovak state, as was the case with the Czech Republic or Hungary.

Later periods of the Slovak lands arouse less interest both from the public and the authorities undertaking activities in the field of the politics of memory. One exception in this regard is the reign of Maria Theresa and the Slovak National Revival that took place in the mid-19th century. The collective memory of these events is a complicated phenomenon that results from the overlapping of two foreign forces in the Slovak lands – the Habsburgs and the Hungarians. Before 1918, Slovak lands were part of the Kingdom of Hungary, which in turn was part of the Habsburg Empire, after 1867 the Austro-Hungarian monarchy.

Maria Theresa – the modernization (and Hungarian Queen)

Among all the historical figures associated with the Habsburg dynasty, it is Maria Theresa who had the biggest impact on the collective memory of the Slovaks. The reign of Maria Theresa is remembered as a time of modernization. Maria Theresa made many reforms in Slovak lands, including in the area of economy, the army, the judiciary, and education. Bratislava has also undergone a number of changes. The queen spent more time in this city than previous rulers. She made a thorough renovation of the Bratislava Castle, and she established a garden in the French style that was

fashionable in Europe at that time. Relatively frequent visits of Maria Theresa to Bratislava encouraged Hungarian nobility to build new houses and palaces in the city. The result was the development of both craftsmanship and the middle class. During that time, Bratislava (like some other cities in the Habsburg empire) grew so quickly that its expansion was limited by city walls. For this reason, their demolition began in 1775 by the order of Maria Theresa. During the reign of Maria Theresa, Bratislava also became an important centre of cultural life in then-Hungarian lands. By the decision of Maria Theresa, Bratislava Castle from 1765 became the seat of the governor for the Kingdom of Hungary, who obeyed the queen. The castle has become a meeting place for scientists and artists. As a result of Maria Theresa's decision, in Bratislava the largest printing house in Hungary was established. Architects and artists associated with the imperial court in Vienna, such as Johann Baptist Martinelli, also actively participated in the expansion and renovation of the city.

The collective memory of Maria Theresa as a “modernizer” has been maintained over the decades by activities in the field of the politics of memory. The renovation of Bratislava Castle and the expansion and development of Bratislava are often emphasized and positively valued in the memory discourse related to the queen. Maria Theresa was also commemorated in public spaces. Between 1989-2020, there were initiatives aimed at returning or founding new memorials dedicated to the queen. The most loudly discussed idea was the reconstruction of a monument to Maria Theresa, which in the years 1897-1921 was located on the former coronation hill (Bratislava was the coronation city for Hungarian kings) on the banks of the Danube. Today the place is named after

Ľudovít Štúr, one of the most famous Slovak writers, national activist, and precursor of the Slovak National Revival.

The monument depicted Maria Teresa sitting on a horse, wearing a Hungarian royal crown, accompanied by two figures representing the Hungarian nobility, and was placed at the pedestal. There was also an inscription on it that read “*Vitam et sanguinem*” (“Life and blood for our queen”). In addition, a commemorative plaque was placed on the pedestal explaining the circumstances of the monument. It was erected by “the population of the free royal city of Prešpork (a former name of Bratislava, AT) to commemorate the coronation of Hungarian rulers on the occasion of the millennium of Hungary”. The whole object was 11 meters high. The sculptor of the marble sculpture was Ján Fadrusz, a Hungarian artist who was born in Bratislava. The idea to build the monument was proposed by Károl Neiszedler, a Member of the Hungarian Parliament. Originally, a monument was considered to commemorate the Hungarian kings crowned in Bratislava. Ultimately, though, it was decided to honour only Maria Theresa due to the fact that during her reign, Bratislava experienced the greatest development. The monument was officially unveiled on May 16, 1897, in the presence of Emperor Franz Joseph I.

In the following years, the sculpture created a lot of controversy and was interpreted differently by the multinational community of Bratislava. According to the German population, it was an expression of the loyalty of the local population to the ruling Habsburg dynasty. For Hungarians, it was a kind of commemoration of the Kingdom of Hungary. There is little information in the sources about the site of the monument to the Slovak people. After the end of

World War I, in the face of Hungarian efforts to restore the monarchy in what was then the First Czechoslovak Republic, anti-Hungarian sentiment grew. The Maria Theresa monument was demolished on October 26-29, 1921, by Czechoslovak legionnaires with the help of the local population.

After the collapse of Czechoslovakia, the idea of rebuilding the monument to Maria Theresa was resumed. The topic returned to public debate several times. However, concrete steps were taken in 2011. On the initiative of the Bratislava Beautification Society (sk. Bratislavský okrášľovací spolok), near the place where the original monument was located, a model of a horse sculpture of Maria Theresa resembling the original, by Martina Zimanova, was erected. The object was three times smaller, and the queen was not accompanied by figures personifying the Hungarian elite.

The action of the Bratislava Beautification Society was aimed at reconstructing the monument to Maria Theresa. The project, despite the support of 5,000 people, was ultimately not approved by the city authorities of Bratislava, nor was it recognized by the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Slovak capital. In 2012, the creation of the Maria Theresa monument was debated again, this time in the vicinity of Bratislava Castle. Again, the project has not been welcomed positively by either the city council or the public. The original monument, due to its Hungarian character and origin, raised controversies related to its location and the original character of the building.

According to the original plans of the Bratislava Beautification Society, the reconstructed statue of Maria Theresa was to be erected near its original location, on the former coronation hill, now Ľudovít Štúr Square. After the queen's

monument was demolished in 1921, city authorities tried to erase its “Hungarian” character. A few years after the fall of the statue of Maria Theresa, the square was made to commemorate General Milan Rastislav Štefánik, one of the founders of the First Czechoslovak Republic. His monument was demolished during World War II. Since 1972, the square has a monumental sculpture of Ľudovít Štúr and other people associated with the Slovak National Revival. Thus, the square, after dismantling the statue of Maria Theresa, changed its symbolic meaning: originally it was strongly associated with Hungarian history, but after 1921 it was aimed at commemoration of historical figures connected with the history of Slovakia. The symbolic meaning of the square is now strongly associated with national, Slovak history.

The former coronation hill, now Ľudovít Štúr Square, is not the only place with historical ties to Maria Teresa. Another is Bratislava Castle. Currently, the castle serves as one of the seats of the Slovak National Museum and, for representative purposes, for the president of the Slovak Republic and the National Council of the Slovak Republic. There are numerous mentions of Maria Theresa in the area, especially about the reconstruction of the building, which was carried out on her initiative. Similar traces of the memory of the queen can be found in other places in the public space of Bratislava, created during her reign. An example is a statue of Maria Theresa located in the gardens (sk. Prezidentská záhrada or Grasalkovičova záhrada) at the Grassalkovich Palace (sk. Grasalkovičov palác), the seat of the President of the Slovak Republic. It is a relatively small equestrian statue of Maria Theresa made of limestone and partially gilded. It is the reconstruction of a sculpture that was located in the

Veľprepoštský palác in Nitra, which was built in 1778-1780 on the initiative of Maria Theresa. A sculpture by Miroslav Černák was added to the presidential gardens in 1992.

A recent example of a failed project to commemorate the Habsburg queen was the renewed attempt to place her sculpture in Bratislava's old town on one of the most recognizable squares, named after Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav (sk. Hviezdoslavovo námestie), between the New Bridge and the Slovak National Theatre. In March 2018, a copy of the marble statue by Ján Fadrusz was placed on Hviezdoslav Square for presentation to the Bratislava public and city council who were to decide on the fate of the project. The Bratislava Beautification Society (Bratislavský okrášľovací spolok) was once again the initiator of the idea of placing the monument to Maria Theresa. The project was approved by the Capital Monuments Committee, but the city councilors rejected it.

Among the arguments against erecting the monument, attention was drawn to it being placed in the wrong location – there is already another monument on Hviezdoslav Square, dedicated to Pavol Országh Hviezdoslav, Slovak poet, dramatist, and translator. Founding a statue of Maria Theresa in Hviezdoslav Square seemed an inappropriate idea for many people due to the role of this place in Bratislava's public space and its historical importance. The square evokes historical associations with the reign of Hungarians and Habsburgs in the Slovak lands, which would be additionally emphasized by the statue of Maria Theresa. In the 19th century, many representatives of the Hungarian elite had their seats here. In 1911, a monument to Sándor Petőfi, a Hungarian poet and participant in the Hungarian Revolu-

tion of 1848, was erected on the square. The sculpture was demolished in 1918 shortly after the Czechoslovak army entered Bratislava. Currently, the square has representative functions. For example, in this place in 2005 US President George W. Bush gave his public speech on this spot. Some councillors postulated that the monument should be placed near the Bratislava Castle, which was opposed by members of the Bratislava Beautification Society, arguing that the monument would not then be in a public space, but in a closed facility, and therefore not accessible to everyone to admire it, especially in winter⁵⁰.

The Bratislava Beautification Society is an important actor in Slovak politics of memory, especially in the symbolic space of Bratislava. It is a civic association bringing together the inhabitants and friends of Bratislava, whose aim is to preserve the historical values of the city and build an aesthetic sense in the society of the Slovak capital. Bratislava Beautification Society refers to a similar initiative – Okrášľovacieho spolku – established in 1868. The reconstruction of the statue of Maria Theresa is one of several activities undertaken by the society to keep the memory of the period of Habsburg rule, especially of the times of Maria Theresa, alive. In the summer of 2017, the Bratislava Beautification Society, in cooperation with the City of Bratislava and the Museum of the City of Bratislava, organized an exhibition on the fate of the statue of Maria Theresa by Ján Fadrusz. The exhibition was part of the “Year of Maria There-

⁵⁰ M. Štrbáková Urbanovičová, *Mária Terézia odmietnutá mestskými poslancami. Socha na Hviezdoslavovom námestí nebude*, “Novinky.sk”, 18.03.2018, <https://www.noviny.sk/slovensko/318099-maria-terezia-odmietnuta-mestskymi-poslancami-socha-na-hviezdoslavovom-namesti-nebude>.

sa", which the Bratislava Beautification Society announced in 2017 on the occasion of the queen's 300th birthday. In the description of this initiative, Maria Teresa was described as one of the most important people in the history of Slovakia in terms of European importance⁵¹. The Society also carries out a number of other projects concerning Bratislava's past, especially during the Habsburg rule. It can be argued that this is mainly due to the fact that during the times when the Habsburgs, especially Maria Theresa, were in power, the present-day capital of Slovakia underwent intensive development. Municipal authorities and their subordinate institutions relatively often engage in Bratislava Beautification Society initiatives, especially if they are of an educational nature (exhibitions, lectures, etc.).

However, this cooperation does not translate into the implementation of the society's most ambitious project, which is the reconstruction of the statue of Maria Theresa, originally located on the former coronation hill. It can be concluded that this approach results mainly from the Hungarian character of the original sculpture – Maria Teresa was accompanied by two representatives of the Hungarian elite, the monument was founded on the initiative of the Hungarian side. An additional problem was the aggressive politics of memory implemented by Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán after his return to power in 2010, which

⁵¹ Bratislavský okrášľovací spolok, *Rok Márie Terézie 1717-2017*, <http://bos-bratislava.sk/rok-marie-terezie-1717-2017/>; idem, *Prešporské večery: Panovníčka Mária Terézia – manželka, matka, zbožná kresťanka*, <http://bos-bratislava.sk/presporske-vecery-panovnicka-maria-terezia-manzelka-matka-zbozna-krestanka/>.

referred to the Hungarian minority living in neighbouring countries, including Slovakia⁵².

The Kingdom of Hungary in Slovak collective memory is remembered rather negatively. This was largely due to historical conditions. Until 1918, the Slovak lands were part of the Hungarian Kingdom within the Habsburg Empire. For the local population, this situation became acute, especially after the formation of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, due to the marginalization of Slovaks in public life and the process of assimilation, known as Magyarization⁵³. Consequently, an important factor in the memory discourse today is a well-organized Hungarian minority with a population of around 458 467 people, which constitutes 8.5% of the total population⁵⁴ (Slovakia is inhabited by around 5.45 million people total), living in a compact area in the south of Slovakia.

The Slovak authorities to some extent undertook the problem of the presence and reign of Hungarians in the Slovak lands in the past, as evidenced, for example, by the establishment and operation of the Museum of Hungarian Culture in Slovakia (sk. *Múzeum Kultúry Maďarov na Slovensku*). This subject could not be completely marginalized due to the significant role of Slovak-Hungarian relations in Slovakia's foreign policy. At the same time, especially in the 1990s, when Vladimír Mečiar held the function of the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, there were many tensions

⁵² D. Héjj, *op.cit.*

⁵³ See more: T. Kopyś, *Kwestia narodowościowa na ziemiach Korony Świętego Stefana w latach 1867-1918*, Kraków 2001.

⁵⁴ Data from the 2011 census.

in relations with Hungary. In March 1995, a treaty on good neighbourly relations and friendly cooperation was signed. Hungary also recognized the inviolability of the border with Slovakia. However, in November 1995, the National Council of the Slovak Republic adopted an act making Slovak the only official language, which in practice hurt the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. The Hungarian side also criticized the concept of resettlement of the Hungarian minority living in the southern part of Slovakia proposed by the government of Vladimír Mečiar. Slovakia, as in other countries of the Carpathian basin, negatively reacted to the introduction by the government of Viktor Orbán of facilitating the granting of additional Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries that were formerly part of the Kingdom of Hungary, in 2010. Slovakia then adopted a law that would revoke Slovak citizenship in the event of the adoption of another⁵⁵.

At the same time, in the new geopolitical reality after 1989, the threads of the historical dependence of the Slovak lands on Austria, the main heir of the Habsburg empire, did not return to public discourse. In the 1990s and later, Austria – unlike Hungary – did not show revisionist ambitions, neither in the political discourse or specific actions by the authorities, nor as part of wide-ranging social initiatives. Therefore, there was no need to react to this type of action, e.g. with the use of politics of memory tools. An additional factor that made it possible to leave issues related to the past

⁵⁵ Ł. Lewkowicz, „Nie pisaliśmy przeszłości, przyszłość jest w naszych rękach”: nowe otwarcie słowacko-węgierskie w cieniu Trianon, „Komentarze IES”, no. 211, <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/nie-pisalismy-przeszlosci-przyszlosc-jest-w-naszch-rekach-nowe-otwar-cie-slowacko-wegierskie-w-cieniu-trianon/>.

out of the political discourse were the positively developing Slovak-Austrian relations.

Based on the analysis of history of Maria Theresa's memorials in the public space of Bratislava, it can be concluded that the queen herself does not raise any particular controversy in contemporary Slovakia. The period of her reign is remembered in the collective memory of Slovaks as a time of modernization and development in the capital. A similar meaning is attributed to the reign of Emperor Franz Joseph. The positive valorisation of the rulers of the Habsburg dynasty is additionally affected by the negative significance attributed to the presence of Hungarians in Slovak lands, which results from a strong policy of assimilation (Magyarization), especially after 1867, i.e. after the establishment of the dualist Austro-Hungarian state. The strong processes of Magyarization are now recalled by the aggressive politics of memory pursued by Viktor Orbán in the Carpathian basin over the past decade. The Hungarian character of the sculpture of Maria Theresa, by Ján Fadrusz, twice influenced the negative decision of Bratislava city councillors regarding the reconstruction of the monument.

1848 – the revival (against Hungary)

The year 1848 – or the experience of the Revolutions of 1848 in a broader sense – does not occupy such an important place in Slovak collective memory as in Hungary or even Czech Republic. Moreover, these events have a completely different meaning for contemporary Hungarians and Slovaks due to their historical context. In the 19th century, Slovaks lived within the Kingdom of Hungary without a separate administration or any other kind of administrative framework,

so the Hungarian beginning of the Revolution – with the passing of the April laws which King Ferdinand I ratified – could not be considered by Slovaks as worth remembering. The Slovaks were not involved in the work on establishing the Hungarian government, even if, as some historians point out today, some Slovaks sympathized with the general revolutionary spirit of that time. However, this was true for a small group of liberals. On the other hand, the Slovak national movement itself in 1848 was reduced to a relatively small group of intellectuals, which formulated a political manifesto, “Demands of the Slovak Nation”. The Hungarian government responded repressively to this petition. For Slovaks, the period of the Springtime of the Peoples itself was not a period of mass protests or mobilization of society, although it should be emphasized that it was then that the “national uprising” broke out. A small number of people of the Slovak intelligentsia were involved in this phenomenon. It has not been recorded in Slovak collective memory as a nationwide event. During the period of revolution, there were no calls for the separation of Slovakia from the Kingdom of Hungary or the Habsburg Empire. However, 1848 is important for the collective memory of Slovaks because it is a prelude to a much more important process that occupies a prominent place in the Slovak immaginarium, namely the Slovak National Revival⁵⁶.

The Slovak National Revival was constituted in opposition to the independence aspirations of Hungarians during the Springtime of the Peoples, although the roots of

⁵⁶ R. Brukaber, M. Feischmid, *op.cit.*, p. 736.

this phenomenon can be traced back to the 18th century⁵⁷. Initially, Slovak nationalism was largely due to the fear of losing cultural identity, which at that time was understood through the prism of a national language. The language was the carrier of national culture and, thus, defined the national affiliation of individuals and groups. The main proponent of the idea that the Slovak language is a separate national language was already mentioned several times, Ľudovít Štúr. The writer pointed out that due to the fact that the Slovaks have their own language, they are a separate nation among other Slavic nations, as well as among the subjects of the Kingdom of Hungary⁵⁸. In this context, 1848 marks the transition from cultural to the beginnings of political nationalism⁵⁹.

Celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the European Revolution in Slovakia was during successive period of Vladimír Mečiar's time in office, who made strong references to Slovak nationalism. However, the years 1848-1849 were not recorded in Slovak collective memory as a period of uprisings or national mobilization (as in Hungary, for example); therefore, there were no grounds for organizing celebrations on the scale of those held in Budapest. Neither the government camp nor the opposition lobbied for the organization of such events. The memory of the events of 1848 did not fit in 1998 into the political agenda, especially

⁵⁷ R. Kochowski, *Krótką historią Słowacji*, "Teologia Polityczna", 05.08.2019, <https://teologia.polityczna.pl/krotka-historia-slowacji-1>.

⁵⁸ R. Zenderowski, *Słowacka tożsamość narodowa. Geneza. Proces kształtowania. Kluczowe dylematy*, [in:] *Współczesna Słowacja. Sytuacja wewnętrzna i pozycja międzynarodowa*, ed. E. Pałka, Warszawa 2010, pp. 27, 37.

⁵⁹ R. Brukaber, M. Feischmid, op.cit., p. 707.

considering the circumstances. In many Central European countries, such as Hungary, the pan-European nature of the events was emphasized, which was to strengthen the historical unity of this region with the West in the face of integration with the EU structures. However, the situation in Slovakia was different. Despite applying for admission to the EU in June 1995, i.e. under Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, there was a discrepancy in Slovakia between declarations at the level of foreign policy and political practice. In December 1997, the European Council excluded Slovakia from the first group of countries to join the EU due to a democratic deficit and concerns about the stability of democratic institutions. In 1998, the celebrations of anniversaries were of a marginal nature and were limited to grass-roots events, for example in the village of Liptovský Mikuláš, where on May 11, 1848, the “Demands of the Slovak Nation” were announced. This document was the first political act of the Slovaks and at the same time the first national program with significant democratic elements.

Over the last few years, the importance of 1848 has been gradually increasing in the collective memory of Slovaks and in the politics of memory implemented by various entities. On the field of maintaining the memory of the Slovak Uprising in 1848, one actively working organization is Matica slovenská. It is a national Slovak cultural and educational organization established in 1863 with its seat in Turčiansky Svätý Martin. The activities of Matica slovenská are mainly educational and populist.

Conclusions

In the case of Slovakia, due to historical conditions, the collective memory of the Habsburg largely refers to the presence of Hungarians in Slovak lands. It affects the memory and politics of memory related to historical figures from the Habsburg dynasty, as it was demonstrated by the example of Maria Theresa. Still, Maria Theresa is remembered as the modernizer of Bratislava, and this image is sustained by the activities of non-governmental institutions carrying out the tasks of the politics of memory. At the same time, state institutions distance themselves from those forms of maintaining the memory of Maria Theresa which remind people of Hungarian rule in the Slovak lands. It should be emphasized that the attitude of Slovak public administration to issues related to the past is influenced by the politics of memory and the nationality policies pursued by the Hungarian government after 2010, i.e. after Viktor Orbán became prime minister. At the same time, Slovak authorities have so far failed to take decisive action in response to Hungarian policies. On the contrary, there are some changes in Slovak-Hungarian relations in terms of the approach to their common past. This was demonstrated by the celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Trianon treaty in June 2021. Then-Prime Minister of Slovakia, Igor Matovič, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Slovakia, Ivan Korčok, declared a new opening in their relations with Hungary after their visit to Budapest, emphasizing the dynamization of bilateral relations, legislative changes concerning national minorities, and the implementation of joint cross-border projects⁶⁰.

⁶⁰ Ł. Lewkowicz, *op.cit.*

So far (July 2021), no steps have been taken in these matters, which may partly be explained by the COVID-19 pandemic and, above all, by the opposition of a significant part of Slovak politicians, especially in regards to the legislative changes concerning the Hungarian minority. For Slovakia, relations with Hungary are largely based on a pragmatic approach.

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The purpose of this paper is to analyse how the Habsburg heritage is recognised in the collective memory in Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, and how it has been shaped and used by different actors of the politics of memory between 1989-2020. The analysis will cover Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. Other important questions which I will try to answer are: what are the differences between the attitudes toward the Habsburg heritage between state and non-state actors? How about the differences in the attitudes and actions towards the Habsburg heritage between chosen countries? What events and persons are the focus of activities of the politics of memory in Hungary, Czech Republic, and Slovakia?

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