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***Formulation of the Slovak national narrative and its Slovak-Hungarian constellation<sup>7</sup>***

*National and collective identity research allows us to understand the formation of national identity. It supports us to comprehend the linkage between past-present and the silhouette of the possible future. Analysis of the Slovak identity formation, national logics, identity-framing, boundary structures and its call for a more cooperative understanding of identity might lead to an environment enabling successful cooperation and cross-border interactions with Hungary.*

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**Introduction**

Central Europe is a geopolitical space which has been divided into several small countries for a century. This division has been done either by physical borders, by mental borders or by both of them at the same time. In spite of its century long dividedness, Central Europe exists as an exceptional shared meta-space with connected culture, history, memories and future fate of different nations and nation-states.

Geopolitical identities are in powerful shifts in our age, urging us to make effort in understanding the geopolitical space of Central Europe, its nation-states and their collective identities. The Central European space is characterised by two basic attributes. On the one side, it is a space with a post-socialist legacy, generating significant (meta)narratives of nationhood, where the old structures of political and economic organization were destroyed in parallel with rejection of social cohesion (Bassin 2012). On the other hand, the post-socialist space is characteristic with unstable national and geopolitical goals (Balogh 2020), while Slovakia has been suffering from identity ambivalence (Bátora 2004), armoured with combined eastern and western frames of civilization, thus formulating an unclear and 'hybrid' collective identity (Gonda et al. 2003, p.16) which can be aptly described in the following way “we know that the Slovak Republic is a state, but we do not know what kind of state it is” (Bátora 2010, p.174).

The aim of this research article is to critically analyse the Slovak national narrative, collective identity and its relationship towards the Hungarian 'other', to reflect on its historical development and to describe its shapes and formulation; thus gaining a clearer picture and insight into the contemporary collective identity and mentality of Slovakia. The analysis builds on desk research and secondary sources, like study of the already published academic literature, media content and survey of public attitude.

The first part presents a short insight into the historical development of Slovakia. The second part describes the formation of the Slovak national narrative and collective identity. It is followed by the articulation of new narrations, 'new wine in old bottles', that underline more attention on co-existence and might have the capacity to go beyond the dominant 'Self – Other' paradigm. The fourth part initiates us to rethink the relationship between the Slovaks and the Hungarians and it portrays the positive mutual shift in the representation of the neighbour; while

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the last part deals with the elements of mutual trust, interactions and the bottom-up approaches towards identity structure with the ability to generate an environment suitable for cooperation.

### Short insight into the historical development of Slovakia

The Slovak collective identity strongly builds on the historical idea of Great Moravia, its socializing efforts into the international society and on the mission of Methodius and Cyril. Revival of the memories about the Slavic Great Moravian history surfaced with intellectuals such as Pavol Jozef Šafárik and Ján Kollár since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In their approach, the Slavic nations represented a civilizational community with Slavic reciprocity. The collective remembering to Great Moravian and the Methodius/Cyril legacy is visible in the Preamble of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, specifically “...*mindful of the spiritual heritage of Cyril and Methodius and the historical legacy of Great Moravia*”. Moreover, two historical artefacts can be immediately found in the reception hall of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic that further strengthens the mentioned collective remembering. One is a copy of a Byzantine ivory pyxis, found in 1974. It is considered as a gift to the ruler of Great Moravia from the Byzantine emperor. Another artefact is the papal Bull of Pope John VIII, '*Industriae*' that addresses Svätopluk as '*comes*' that can be interpreted as an evidence that the ruler of Great Moravia was recognized on par with the Latin Christendom (Bátora 2014).

Later, territory of Slovakia became part of the Hungarian Kingdom, then of the Habsburg Empire and then of the Austro-Hungarian Empire after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. The Slovak elites did not formulate open anti-Hungarian nationalistic positions during the existence of the Kingdom/Monarchy until the rise of modernity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century that triggered a powerful development of national awakening all over the European continent. The pre-modern period was characterized with multi-layered and mutual cultural, linguistic and ethnic interactions (Kollai 2021) which could be brilliantly mirrored by Matthias Bel who claimed about himself as a person with '*lingua Slavus, natione Hungarus, eruditione Germanus*'. The idea that Slovakia could be separated from Hungary was indeed present in political debates, but it was substantially outside of the mainstream until 1914 (Kováč 2013; 2016). Rather, the Slovak approaches and endeavours supported such a development that could have promoted a reformed Kingdom with multi-lingual and multi-ethnic, even federative, structure instead of a separate state and disintegrated Kingdom (Hudek 2011; Kocsis 2020; Maxwell 2005).

The First World War substantially altered the 'European chessboard' and it led to the disintegration and disappearance of many empires on the European continent, namely the Austro-Hungarian, the Ottoman and the Tsarist empire, thus opening institutional and organizational space for the formation of the newly emerging nation-states, including Czechoslovakia. The central and eastern parts of the European continent became fragmented and disintegrated among many smaller nation-states, where the winners dictated the post-world war order (Gerbet 2004).

Czechoslovakia was constructed as a common republic of the Czech and the Slovak nations under the political, ideological, and spiritual leadership of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. Nonetheless, the idea of a joint Czechoslovak nation was only marginal among the Slovaks, the Slovak society never accepted it widely and it does not accept it even today. This means that the idea of Czechoslovakia was rather a pragmatic political concept that aimed to find a solution for the Czech and Slovak nations (Hudek 2011). As Nič (2010) expresses, the Slovaks became a state-creating entity together with the Czechs in a very controversial formulation of the 'Czechoslovak nation'. The first decades of the First Czechoslovak Republic experienced development of liberal democratic establishment with strong agricultural and centrist parties; although, these decades were followed by harsh traumas (Kováč 1998).

The following geopolitical shifts included several modifications of borders in Central Europe. On the one side, the German administration received control over the Czech and Moravian

territories. On the other side, the Hungarian and Polish administrations ruled over the Slovakian territory after the Vienna Arbitration. These shifts within the sovereignty resulted in the establishment of the Second Czechoslovak Republic that existed only for 169 days and it was disintegrated by the invasion of Germany to Bohemia and Moravia. Subsequently, the (First) Slovak Republic, known as the Slovak State, was born with the leadership of the Roman Catholic priest Jozef Tiso. This wartime Republic still remains one of the most controversial part within the Slovak historiography. The end of the Second World War once again restructured the borders and the emerging Third Czechoslovak Republic linked its roots and heritage to the Czechoslovak ideal embodied by the First Czechoslovak Republic. The third Republic lasted until 1948 when the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was established by the communist coup d'état with strong Soviet backing.

Czechoslovakia was peacefully disintegrated on 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1993 and two sovereign political entities emerged on the map of Europe as heirs of the former joint state, specifically the Czech and the Slovak republics. In other words, since the establishment of the First Czechoslovak Republic, Slovakia has gone through dramatic developments, namely six constitutional models, three political systems and several regimes succeeded one another (*Ministerstvo zahraničných vecí Slovenskej republiky* 2011).

### **Formation of the Slovak national narrative and collective identity**

The Slovak collective psyche and identity has been powerfully influenced by the fact that the Slovak nation constituted a minority for a long time, either during the era of the Monarchy or in the Czechoslovak republics, while the Slovak nation constituted a majority in two exceptions, namely within the institutional frame of the Slovak State between 1939-1945 and since the independence in 1993 (*Kusý* 2002; *Kováč* 2016; *Čaplovič et al.* 2000). The independence and the sudden feeling of being a national majority have generated a certain form of closeness of the Slovak society and state. This closed state structure was inaugurated with the inability to digest the past, unwillingness to include all its citizens and was paralleled with a ceaseless tradition of fear (*Chmel* 2010). The elements of closeness are visible in the national anthem that addresses only the ethnic Slovaks, while the other parts of the society are left outside (*Kusý* 2002). As *Hudek* (2011) notes, the Slovak ethnic understanding has been stuck within the traditional defensive attitude and search for an eternal struggle against the other.

The national awakening in the 19<sup>th</sup> century generated a phenomenon that can be identified as 'magyarization' after 1867, specifically a social process supported by government policies that promoted assimilation and acculturation. Closeness went hand in hand with the emotional Slovak narratives about the oppressive Hungarian rule, as *Halás* (2015, p.63) writes, "*Slovak nationalists after the 1989 revolution often emotionally described Hungarian rule of the territory as a 1000-years-long oppression of the Slovak nation.*". 'Magyarization' is undeniable, but its lengths is questionable. The current Slovak collective memory articulates a millennia of oppression; although, the Martin Declaration of the Slovak Nation from 1918, which was a declaration of independence from the Kingdom and an expression of a Slovak will to unify with the Czech lands, explicitly speaks about decades long of 'magyarization' instead of a millennia (*Gyulai – Demkó* 2020), specifically the Martin Declaration says "...the Hungarian government, which for decades has not known a more serious task than suppressing everything that is Slovak..." (own translation of the author).

In this narration, the Slovak identity approach towards the minorities, especially towards the Hungarian minority, mirrors certain measure of incomprehension which can be characterised by the expression, 'what are they (meaning the Hungarians) doing here?'. Consequently, the Hungarians were identified as a 'negative other' and/or as a 'traditional enemy' (*Hudek* 2011), they fulfil the role of the 'other' for the Slovak identity and as *Kusý* (2002, p.43, 180) expresses, the 'Hungarian (internal) other' is the constituting element of the Slovak identity. As a result, Slovak national identity is stuck within the antagonist approach and interpretation of 'self' and

'other'/Hungarian'. Halás gives an interesting point on this Slovak antagonist identity. Namely, the Czech artist, David Černý, attempted to propose an ironic deconstruction of the European national stereotypes by his sculpture during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union in 2009. Slovakia was portrayed as a Hungarian sausage wrapped up by a Hungarian tricolour ribbon. A brief etymological explanation is needed to understand the performance, specifically 'uherák' is the Czech name of the Hungarian sausage, while the Austro-Hungarian monarchy is termed within the Slovak historiography as 'Uhorsko'. This means that this kind of portraying of Slovakia associates it with the pre-1918 Hungary and with the Kingdom/Monarchy. Immediate reaction emerged from the Slovak side, claiming that the portrayal is unacceptable. Nevertheless, *"Instead of saying: 'Good point! Show them we are not like that!', they said 'Yes, precisely! We are just like that!'"* (Halás 2015, p.63).

Additionally, the Slovak self-identification involves a lack of self-confidence that can be rooted in the historical fact that Slovakia lacks its own kings, kingdoms and/or saints that could form a solid basis for a collective identity (Chmel 2010). The Slovak self-identification recognizes the legacy of Great Moravia (Findor 2002); nevertheless, Great Moravia was not an explicit Slovak state, thus it assures only indirect links, and as Batora explains that identification with Great Moravia rather brought a perplexity and flawed identity into the Slovak society based on memories and errors of interpretation. Misinterpretation of the position of Great Moravia and its identification with the East, the Byzantine Empire and Russia appears as a phenomenon 'lost in translatio imperii', thus *"until today, this flawed memory continues to produce all kinds of mnemonic practices and discourses"* (Batora 2014, p.457).

The political elites of the independent Slovakia have attempted to structure the contemporary collective identity on the basis of nation, nationalism and privatization. The possibilities of the planned economy with limited forms of property were exhausted, hence the emerging liberal democracy was powerfully linked with market capitalism and privatization. However, the privatization was implemented as a rapid and comprehensive systematic change instead of progressive convergence that were implemented in the West in previous decades. The Central European region, including Slovakia, has undergone a laissez-faire capitalist transition, often labeled as a 'shock therapy', but this approach brought huge social and economic side-effects (Beaulier – Boettke – Krasnozhan 2012) and the state property was 'tunneled out' (Leška 2011) in such a scale that there was almost a need to once again establish the Republic. On the other side, the inflowing foreign-based capital and companies, like Kia, Hyundai, Peugeot, Citroen and many others are not appropriate to generate any pride and self-respect of the nation (Chmel 2010). And, it becomes visible that the idea of economic convergence, as a fundamental element of the post-socialist state system of Slovakia, based on highly disciplined, highly qualified and very low paid workforce as a tool of catching up with developed countries is already depleted. Consequently, Slovakia highly needs to find its inclusive identity that is less dependent on the search for a 'negative other' and/or as a 'traditional enemy'.

### **'New wine in old bottles?', as a call for a more cooperative Slovak identity**

Different historical periods produce their own specific approaches with elements that are emphasized and celebrated and with elements which are overshadowed, ignored or forgotten. The Slovak historical approach is no exemption from this general phenomenon. Slovakia is characterized by frequent changes in interpretation of national history. Different generations were socialised with different interpretations of historical events. Lipták (1997) and/or Kollai (2021) describe how the different state systems, like the First Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938), the Slovak Republic (1939-1945), the Third Czechoslovak Republic (1945-1948), the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic known as the Fourth Czechoslovak Republic (1949-1993) and the independent Slovak Republic since 1993 (has), interpret the same historical event in substantially different way. What is even more, Kusá and Findor (1999) underline the repeated changes, where changes were made even during the school years of the generation.

Fall of the bipolar world order, together with socialist mode of governance, separation of the joint Republic and the declaration of independent Czech and Slovak republics generated profound resonance within the domain of narration of history. Simply, the Slovak Republic, together with the Slovak society, have been searching their post-socialist and democratic interpretations even in our times. The interpretation of the conflict-based relationship between the Slovaks and the Hungarians, as the principal identity nexus, has not been exceeded, yet. The idea of the conflict is still present and it is undoubtedly a building block of the current Slovak collective memory. However, a new narration has emerged which prefers coexistence, cooperation and multi-layered structures instead of a never ending conflict. This new narrative has been articulated by the highest Slovak political levels (top-down) and by local historians (bottom-up) approach as well.

The former, top-down, narration is demonstrated by two speeches of the highest Slovak political representatives. First political representative was Pavol Hrušovský, who was the Speaker of the National Council of the Slovak Republic between 2002-2006 and 2011-2012. The Speaker of the National Council, as the second highest constitutional political representative after the President of the Slovak Republic, gave a speech in 2003, titled as 'The Face of Slovakia: In Need of Historical Self-Reflection for the Future'.

Hrušovský summarized the main historic developments of the past decade, emphasized that the twentieth anniversary of the Republic is a suitable moment for critical reflection. The one thousand years period (from the 9<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> century) and the existence of the Hungarian Kingdom were presented as an organic and undeniable element of the Slovak history. To be more specific, *“distinctive feature in the face of the future Slovakia was the formation of the Hungarian Kingdom in the year 1 000. Slovakia became part of a kingdom, which for nine hundred years molded the history of Central Europe. The words of the founder of the Hungarian Kingdom, St. Stephen, have a prophetic value when he in his testament appealed to his son to respect the linguistic and ethnic variety of the inhabitants of his kingdom. For almost eight hundred years, his followers respected his recommendation, and that's also why for eight hundred years, Slovakia was not the object but the subject of the history of the Hungarian Kingdom. Thanks to this, our nation gained extensive experience and our country was marked by all the important events, which moved Europe (...) Let's proudly accept the history of the Hungarian Kingdom as part of our history”* (Hrušovský 2003, p.17).

Mr. Speaker articulated an opinion that the territory of Slovakia was an organic part of the Kingdom and the Slovaks were integral elements of it, *“Slovakia was the center of the history of the whole Hungarian Kingdom in general and its political history in particular”* (Ibid.); therefore, 'participation in the history of the Hungarian Kingdom is one of the basic features printed on the face of Slovakia'.

The second speech was given 17 years later in 2020. The Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Igor Matovič, invited the representatives of the Hungarian community in Slovakia for a meeting to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Treaty. The Prime Minister issued a speech with title 'We did not write the past, the future is in our hands' and he articulated, 'historical Hungary was also ours (...) let us dare to say that Hungarian history is our common history, that the Hungarian kings were our common kings.' Furthermore, the Prime Minister underlined common grounds that mirror closeness of the two nations and that the Slovaks and Hungarians should be jointly proud to Hungarian art and literature, such great writers like Kálmán Mikszáth, Imre Madách, Sándor Márai and Lajos Grendel, and such world-famous musicians, like Ferenc Lehár or Zoltán Kodály (*Mad'ari* 2020). These expressions and speeches are appropriate symbolic spaces for cooperation in the realm of history in order to look for common ground of cooperation, and rediscovering common shared history with a less dialectic identity of Slovakia.

### **No longer afraid from the neighbour, or ...**

The relationship between Hungary and Slovakia has its own specific turbulences because they have an inseparable long history with each other, where both nations can enumerate their grievances and complaints. Both nations suffer, in different way, from the imperfect peace settlement after the First and the Second World War (*Kollai* 2021). Consequently, both nations looked at each other suspiciously.

The nationalist sentiments and the post-war settlement overshadowed the idea of cooperation and a more conflictual, war-driven and identity-struggle with zero-sum game approach (has) been prevailing for decades and it still dominates our times. Although, we can be an eyewitness that the two nations might have understood that the 'History' is not a zero-sum game, but it is rather a collective memory about living in the same Kingdom, under the leadership of the same kings and bearing the same conditions of the joint space. Simply, the two nations have started to realize that they are integral and inseparable parts of the same historic space and they have a joint fate in Central Europe. Nevertheless, a joint Central European space is not a new idea, both Slovak and Hungarian politicians wrote about this possibility.

In the case of the former, the Slovak politician Milan Hodža, who served as the prime minister of Czechoslovakia between 1935 and 1938, articulated the idea of a Central European Federation, where cooperation and mutual understanding is the tool to strengthen security, while the lack of cooperation is a direct critical point because of German domination. Cooperation is an absolute necessity in Central Europe and it is the only 'organism able to preserve national, individual liberty, ordered freedom and market policy' (*Hodža* 2004). While in the case of the latter, Lajos Kossuth, who served as the governor-president of the Kingdom of Hungary during the revolution of 1848–1849, imagined a Danube confederation/federation of states. This loose state structure would have been suitable to prevent oppression by the central powers, to prevent nationalist feuds and to guarantee the political freedom and independence of smaller nations (*Ács – Szakasits* 1943).

The principal question in creating a common space in Central Europe is the enemy of the neighbour. It is important to underline that the image of a 'Hungarian enemy' has been in alteration in Slovakia. According to the study of the Institute for Sociology of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, we can see a profound change on the issue of 'dangerous countries'. In 1996, Hungary was the most feared country for the Slovaks, because 40% of the respondents identified Hungary with insecurity issues. These feelings were even fuelled by some political representatives from Slovakia, who threatened by war between Slovakia and Hungary expressing that if there is a need 'we will go into the tanks and we will go and destroy Budapest' (*Sme* 1999). Nevertheless, this indicator was substantially decreased and reached only 5% in 2014 (*Bahna* 2014). In other words, Slovakia just acknowledged its independence during the 90s and it was searching its own identity and place in the world. It was a period of geopolitical uncertainty and the Slovak nation had a real fear that Hungary can occupy the newly formed independent state. As a result, Hungary resonated as a hot topic of national security issue. Today, Slovakia has a stable position within the international realm as a recognized subject of international society and the uncertainty disappeared. Along this ontological certainty, Hungary ceased to be a topic of national security for Slovakia.

### **Mutual trust and the rising bottom-up approach**

The Slovak and Hungarian mutual trust is a key component of political, economic and societal stability of Central Europe. We can explicitly pinpoint some positive signs of this mutual understanding. Hungary and Slovakia has been experiencing a profound development of their bilateral contacts. The often conflicting relationship between Slovakia and Hungary has been substituted by more and more expanding mutual respect from 2012, where the two nations see each other as a valuable partner.

The development and expansion of infrastructure is substantially important element, since it reflects the permeability of the border section. Currently, the border section can be crossed at 35 locations. Significant increase and development can be experienced during the decade and 10 border crossing sites were built. The new road bridges have to be mentioned since they profoundly support the linkage of the two countries, e.g. the Monostor Bridge over the Danube between Komárno and Komárom was opened in September 2020 and Ipolydamásd – Chľaba was opened in July 2023. New road bridges are planned over the river of Ipeľ, namely between Drégelypalánk – Ipeľské Predmostie and Órhalom – Vrbovka. Pedestrian and cycling bridge over the Danube is also agreed between the two countries and it links Szigetköz – Žitný ostrov, namely Dunakiliti – Dobrohošť.

Regarding the gas infrastructure, Hungary and Slovakia negotiated a development of the capacity of a natural gas pipeline border interconnector towards Slovakia by 2024 which allows bi-directional gas transfer. The pipeline was officially inaugurated at the beginning of 2020. In case of electricity infrastructure, Slovakia and Hungary are linked by the new cross-border 400 kV electricity lines. The cross-border capacities built between Gönyű-Veľký Ďur and Gönyű-Gabčíkovo, as well as Sajóivánka and Rimavská Sobota, are the longest and busiest cross-border sections in the north-south electricity flow direction, with a 400 kilovolt connection, each. The cross-border capacities increase energy security in East-Central Europe and it is a substantial stage to ensure energy supply for both countries. At the meeting of the Slovak-Hungarian long-distance power line connection, the Slovak Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, expressed, 'we are not concerned what divides us, but what unites us' (*Trend* 2021).

Besides, we can palpate certain disproportionality between the top-down and bottom-up interpretations of Slovak history and collective identity. The former one can be classified as the official interpretation, founded on the premise that the Slovak nation was oppressed during centuries, while the harming side is usually identified with the Hungarian elites. This top-down interpretation flirts with the 'zero-sum game' logic, where the essence of identity is a ceaseless conflict within the imagined self and other frame. Nonetheless, the bottom-up approach attracts more and more attention within the Slovak society and it is the ground of local historians and researchers who usually concentrate on local perspective, like the history of cities, castles, mansions, etc. This interpretation resembles 'non-zero sum game' logic and emphasizes centuries long peaceful, but sometimes conflictual, co-existence and cohabitation of the Slovak and Hungarian nations side-by-side.

For instance, this positive bottom-up trend is explicitly embodied by the city of Bratislava that was a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual city during the Monarchy; nevertheless, the Czechoslovak administration promoted homogeneity and the city was shifted towards national, linguistic and ethnic monogamy. After independence of the Slovak Republic, the city of Bratislava was nominated as the capital city and it has become integrated into the wide network of capital cities. Currently, Bratislava aims to rediscover its own multicultural roots. Since 2003, the capital city has been a site for coronation celebrations, commemorating the coronation of Maria Theresa who was the ruler of the Kingdom of Hungary between 1740 and 1780. It is one of the most important summer cultural events of Bratislava. The celebrations are done with the copy of the Holy Crown of Hungary, signalling positive memory and remembrance towards the Monarchy. Another example of this bottom-up shift in Bratislava is the remaking of the sculpture of Maria Theresa which was destroyed among strong anti-Hungarian tones in 1921. There were no protests against its remaking, while the destruction was condemned as an act of barbarism of past age (*Kollai* 2021).

What is more, a rising respect towards the Hungarian kings of the Árpáds dynasty is clearly palpable in the Slovak society which is embodied by the new statues on the territory of Slovakia, e.g. the statue of Andrew II of Hungary and the statue of Andrew III of Hungary in the vicinity of Zvolen or the statue of Béla IV of Hungary in Banská Bystrica. Moreover, a private university, Saint Elizabeth College of Health and Social Work, was established in Bratislava and is named after Elizabeth of Hungary who was a daughter of Andrew II of Hungary. Or, a statue

of Emeric Thököly, Prince of Upper Hungary, was inaugurated in the city of Kežmarok that symbolises an indivisibility of the Slovak and Hungarian past. Moreover, this bottom-up approach is also identifiable in other areas, like rediscovering local history of cities and settlements, castles or ruins of castles, mansions or parishes. This rediscovering uncovers a mutual co-habitation and co-influence between different nations, languages and ethnicities and it might generate an appropriate space for shared and common understanding.

## Conclusion

Fragmentation of Central Europe by the imperfect peace agreements have generated implicit and explicit obstacles to fully develop the Central European space and have obstructed the utilisation of the unique feature of Central Europe, namely a multiple, multi-layered-lingual-ethnic identity. As a result, the Slovak and Hungarian tensions have not been spoken out, yet. Certain feeling of animosity is still present and if anyone scratches the surface of the Slovak – Hungarian relations, it can be immediately seen that the ember of the conflict can flare up at any moment.

It is important to underline that this ember of conflict has been built up without any serious direct conflict and clash between the two nations. The conflict aggregated on the back of other conflicts, in the shadow of geopolitical 'chess-game' of great powers. The missing direct military clashes did not build up irreconcilable emotions, thus deconstruction of the tension and conflict is a real possibility between the Slovak and Hungarian nations.

The often conflicting relationship between Slovakia and Hungary has been substituted by more and more expanding mutual respect and trust from 2012, where the two nations see each other as a valuable partner. Slovakia has been diverting itself from the narration of Hungarian thousand years of oppression and it rather searches its historical and valuable space within the structures of the Monarchy, thus searching for a common indivisibility of the Slovak and Hungarian past. This historical reconciliation offers valuable space for deepening of cooperation, mutual trust and creating a strong Central Europe. Perhaps, it will require decades of heavy work and strong willingness to avoid the 'trap of simplicity' in reading history, but it is the necessary and essential step to do.

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