



## Memorial of Vasil Biľak: Did the Truth Really Remained Truth?

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### ABSTRACT

The paper deals with the memorial of Vasil Biľak that was unveiled in Krajná Bystrá in Eastern Slovakia in February 2015. However, Vasil Biľak was considered as a very negative figure for his participation at the Warsaw Pact occupation in 1968. The paper points out some gaps in the remembrance policy in Slovakia after the fall of communism and also some inconsistency that accompanied the process of the coming to terms with the totalitarian history of Slovakia.

**KEY WORDS:** memorials, remembrance, communism, Vasil Biľak, rehabilitation

Memorials, monuments or busts at public places are the image of collective remembrance of nation. In Slovakia, such memorials have a long tradition that goes down to history, up to the Hungarian-millenary celebrations in 1896 and installations of the statues and monuments commemorating the Hungarian statehood. After the Great War, Slovakia was littered by memorials dedicated to soldiers fallen on the battlefields, to commemorate the war horrors. However, unveiling of the statues and memorial tables was – with the exception of monuments dedicated to victims of war – indebted to the political regimes which ruled in Slovakia. Of course each state and every regime used to unveil monuments on its own honor and to their own leaders and personalities. But here should be the difference between the democratic and totalitarian regime – in case of the totalitarian regime, unveiling of the monuments (and in general – remembrance policy) is the matter of

the Party or Dictator decision. In the democratic regime, remembrance policy should accept results of the independent historical research and in the matter of the unveiling of the monuments these should consider public opinion as well as historical (or political scientists, local self-government etc.) research. Particularly negative in that sense was the period of communism (1948-1989), when the statues and memorials of the “leaders of proletariat,” “liberators” or partisans “flooded” Slovak towns and villages. After the fall of communist regime in 1989 slowly came to the fore unveiling of the memorials and commemorative tables dedicated also to personalities, previously erased by communists from the remembrance of nation.

Unveiling of memorials dedicated to some “controversial” personalities after 1989 drew the attention of general public and discussion of professional researchers. Several memorials provoked stormy emotions that prevailed over discussions. It was a concern particularly by memorials dedicated to personalities connected with the reign of Hlinka’s Party<sup>1</sup> or communist regime. Perhaps the greatest controversies were accompanied by memorial tables dedicated to the Catholic priest Ján Ferienčík in Ružomberok in 2004<sup>2</sup>, a bust to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Interior of the 1<sup>st</sup> Slovak Republic Ferdinand Ďurčanský in Rajec in 2011<sup>3</sup>, and a bust to János Esterházy in Košice in 2011 as well.<sup>4</sup> I do not want to mention other similar cases, there have been plenty of articles in the media, and also discussions of professional researchers. I would like to focus my attention on the last

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<sup>1</sup> Transl. note: In Slovakia there were ruling regime called „ľudácky režim“. The name was derived from the name of the Hlinka Slovak People’s Party, the authoritarian party in power during that period of time. See MEDVECKÝ, M.: Coming to Terms with the Totalitarian Past in Slovakia and the Mission of the Nation’s Memory Institute in that Process. In: MEDVECKÝ, M. (ed.): *Coming to terms with the totalitarian past – from the level of criminal law aspects to the scientific research*. Bratislava 2014, p. 105.

<sup>2</sup> Due to the protests of the several journalists and some part of public was the table removed in 2011, which sparked discussions about Ján Ferienčík. The result of the discussions was a scientific conference organized by the Nation’s Memory Institute, which was followed by publication of the conference proceedings. See HRUBOŇ, A. (Ed.): *Msgr. ThDr. Ján Ferienčík (1888 – 1950). Život, verejné pôsobenie, konktroverzie* [Life, Public Activities, Controversions]. Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Discussions about activities of Ferdinand Ďurčanský divided opinion of Slovak historians and researchers. Due to the expertise of the Nation’s Memory Institute, regional self-government supported the idea of the bust, which is still in the city. There were also several protests against the bust, even larger than in the case of Ján Ferienčík.

<sup>4</sup> Problems with the unveiling of the statues and memorial tables are not entirely matter of the personalities from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Clear evidence are statues of General Milan Rastislav Štefánik in Bratislava in 2009, equestrian statue of King Svätopluk on Bratislava Castle in 2010 and the attempt of the restoration of Hungarian-millenary statue of Queen Maria Theresa in Bratislava in 2012. Former initiative was stopped due to the protests of general public.

*causa*: unveiling of the memorial dedicated to communist official Vasil Biľak in his hometown Krajná Bystrá. This *causa* is specific, because Biľak was a leading communist official and in 1968, he became very infamous by signing the “letter of invitation” addressed to the Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev, by which he *de facto* invited Warsaw Pact troops into Czechoslovakia to stop the democratization process known as a “socialism with human face”. He is (was?) considered as a very negative figure of the previous era by researchers and general public.

### **Who was Vasil Biľak?**

Let me put a little historical excursion and make a short introduction of Vasil Biľak, based on the current knowledge of Slovak historiography. Vasil Biľak was born on 11 August 1917 in small village Krajná Bystrá, near Svidník in Eastern Slovakia, and was of Ruthenian (Rusyn) origin. In the 1930s he trained and worked as a tailor in Czech lands and later in Bratislava. As a young man, he sympathized with the communists movement and ideas. In 1944 he was fighting as a soldier in Slovak National Uprising. He joined the Communist Party in 1945 and worked in the party apparatus since 1948, earning highest ranks in 1960s and especially after the Soviet invasion in 1968. In 1953-1989, he was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (abb CC CPC). In 1953-1956 he served as a Secretary for Ideology and Industry of the Regional Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia (abb CPS) in Prešov (Eastern Slovakia) and in 1956-1958 as the 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary at the same office. In 1958-1960 he served as a Commissioner for Education and Culture in Slovakia, later in 1960-1962 as a vice-chairman of the Slovak National Council and in the period from 1962 up to January 1968 he was Secretary for Ideology of the CC CPS. From January till August 1968 he was the 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary of the Communist Party of Slovakia. After the invasion of Warsaw Pact troops, he became secretary for ideology and foreign relations at the CC CPC. From January 1968 until 1988 was a member of the most influential political body in country, Presidium of the CC CPC. He remained in those functions until December 1988.

During the bloody 1950s he belonged to those officials who obediently served the party directions. He became known to the highest party officials through his activities in the Eastern Slovakia in late 1950s, when forced collectivization and industrialization of this region took place. In the 1960s, he gradually became one of Dubček’s closest collaborators and had merits in the process of political easing in Slovakia, so called “Early-Spring”. He helped Alexander Dubček to become the 1<sup>st</sup> Secretary of the Communist Party (the most

influential man in the country) instead of Antonín Novotný in January 1968. But in the course of 1968, Biľak slowly ranked to those communist officials, who created hardline wing<sup>5</sup>, and later secretly and closely cooperated and collaborated with the Soviet Union aiming to stop democratization process of the “socialism with a human face” in Czechoslovakia. Biľak slowly passed among hardliners in the moment when the leaders of the Warsaw Pact countries<sup>6</sup> led by the Soviet Union started to openly criticize democratization process in March 1968. Biľak became strictly negative to the democratization measures within the Communist Party in May 1968. He took part in several secret and conspiracy meetings with the highest party officials of the Soviet Union and during these meetings made denunciations to his colleagues, who supported democratization. At the same time he also helped to organize the hardliners within the Party.

His collaboration culminated in August 1968 by signing the “letter of invitation” through which the Soviets intended to legitimize forthcoming invasion to the whole world and Czechoslovak population. Biľak should have been one of the leading officials of the intended after-occupation, “worker-peasant” government, which should be created from the Soviet collaborators. Such government was never appointed due to mass and spontaneous nonviolence resistance and protests against occupation. During the subsequent Moscow discussions Biľak, as a member of the Czechoslovak delegation, closely collaborated with the Soviets and was persuading Czechoslovak leaders to sign the Moscow Protocol, which demanded removal of democratization measures and in fact was the political capitulation and the first step toward “normalization”. After the occupation Biľak openly collaborated with the occupying power, thanks to which he received the highest party positions – he became the Secretary for Ideology and Foreign Affairs of the CC CPC, which was in fact the second highest party position (after the 1st Secretary). He stayed on these positions for almost whole period of “normalization”, until 1988. From these positions, he oversaw the purges within the Communist Party between 1969-1970 that brought about mass discrimination of thousands of people. He also approved the ideological fundamentals of the “normalization”, summarized by the publishing of the *“Lessons of the Crisis Development within the Party and Society after the XIII Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia”*, which renamed the occupation as an “international help” and became the

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<sup>5</sup> So called „Healthy forces“, term used by the Soviet leadership.

<sup>6</sup> Not all Warsaw Pact countries participated on the invasion. Romania and Albania did not participate even on the political discussions and Ceausescu's Romania was against the invasion. Five states that took part on the events were Soviet Union, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and German Democratic Republic.

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ideological canon for “normalization”. The consequences of his ideological (hard)line were the removal of the democratization process results (for example free travel, removal of censorship, economic reform), re-introduction of the non-democratic regime, bolstering his totalitarian tendencies like systematic violation of the human rights and religious freedom, as well as judicial and non-judicial persecutions against the real or alleged opponents.

Second half of the 1980s brought radical changes in the stance of communist Czechoslovakia due to Gorbachev’s new policy of “perestroika”.<sup>7</sup> Vasil’ Biľak stood firmly against any political changes, but lost his influence and later withdrew from party positions. His final political fall was connected with the fall of the communist regime in November 1989. He lost all functions and was even excluded from the Communist Party. Following the democratic change in the country, he retreated to the privacy of his “dacha” in Bratislava, where he lived until his death in February 2014.<sup>8</sup> Biľak drew public attention only during the annual anniversary of 1968 occupation on 21 August, when wreath lying ceremonies on the place of commemoration took place, and also mainstream media dealt with the topic. In fact Biľak made virtually no comments about the occupation and since 1990 lived in isolation. Meanwhile, he faced charges of treason, but long-lasting trial ended without his conviction in 2011. We can symbolically consider this judgment as a summit of inconsistency in the process of coming to the terms with the totalitarian history in Slovakia. Vasil Biľak was also in the people’s narrative considered as a traitor and one of the main culprits of the communist totalitarianism. When he died on 6 February 2014, it was not

<sup>7</sup> Czechoslovak equivalent was policy of “prestavba” (re-building).

<sup>8</sup> For more information about Vasil Biľak, see LONDÁKOVÁ, E.: Vasil Biľak. In: PEŠEK, J. a kol.: *Aktéri jednej éry na Slovensku 1948:1989*. [Acters of an Era in Slovakia 1948:1989] Bratislava 2003, pp. 41 – 44; BIL’AK, V.: *Vybrané prejavy a state. Zväzok 1. 1953 – 1971*. [Selected Speeches and Papers. Part I, 1953-1971] Bratislava 1982; LOVAŠ, K.: *Biľakovo svedectvo*. [Biľak’s Testimony] Bratislava 2000; JAŠEK, P.: Vasil Biľak v období normalizácie, Nežnej revolúcie a po páde komunistického režimu. [Vasil Biľak in the Period of Normalization, Velvet Revolution and after the Fall of the Communist Regime] In: HRUBOŇ, A. – LEPIŠ, J. – TOKÁROVÁ, Z. (eds.): *Slovensko v rokoch neslobody II. Osobnosti známe – neznáme*. [Slovakia in the Period of Non-Freedom II. Personalities known – unknown] Bratislava 2014, pp. 143 – 167. From the books and papers dealing with the role of Vasil Biľak on historical events of 1960s and normalization see LONDÁK, M. – SIKORA, S. – LONDÁKOVÁ, E.: *Predjarie. Politický, ekonomický a kultúrny vývoj na Slovensku v rokoch 1960 – 1967*. [Early-Spring. Political, Economic and Cultural Development in Slovakia in the Years 1960-1967] Bratislava 2002; PAUER, J.: *Praha 1968. Vpád Varšavskej zmlouvy. Pozadí – Plánovanie – Provedenie*. [Prague 1968. Invasion of the Warsaw Pact. Background – Planning – Realization] Praha 2004; SIKORA, S.: *Rok 1968 a politický vývoj na Slovensku*. [Year 1968 and Political Development in Slovakia] Bratislava 2008; JANÁČEK, F. – MICHÁLKOVÁ, M.: Příběh zvacího dopisu. [Story of the Letter of Invitation] In: *Soudobé dějiny*, [Contemporary History] Vol. 1, 1993, No. 1, pp. 87 – 101; We also need to pay attention to the Biľak’s memories, published in the authorized version: BIL’AK, V.: *Až po mé smrti*. [Just after my Death] Praha 2014.

expected that his person will attract the interest of general public. However, it became the opposite, which once again showed that communism is a very sensitive place of remembrance among the Slovak nation.

### ***Causa* memorial and the public reactions**

*Causa* memorial have broader connections and presents the climax of attempts of Biľak's rehabilitation. I guess that immediately after Biľak's death in February 2014, current leaders of the Slovak Communist Party, as well as several other people adoring normalization regime, started to work on his rehabilitation, which is in fact rehabilitation of "normalization" and in the broadest context also the whole communist regime. In autumn 2014 Czech publishing house named BVD published an authorized version of Biľak's memories, named "*Just after my Death*". Publishers announced the publication through media campaign, although the book was ill-prepared by editors and in fact the same as Biľak's memories published in the 1990s. In addition, in 2015 the memories were withdrawn from sale due to problems with copyright on demand of Biľak's family. But even greater shock for whole Slovak (as well as Czech) society was unveiling of Biľak's memorial in his hometown Krajná Bystrá. The memorial consists of commemorative table with a text and a bust. Representatives of regional self-government and officials of Slovak Communist Party ceremonially unveiled the memorial on 22 February 2015, in front of the local culture house. Officially, building of the memorial was initiative of Mrs. Helena Polanská, the chairman of the Regional organization of the Slovak Communist Party in Prešov, Eastern Slovakia.<sup>9</sup> Initiators of the event made clear that the monument was built on the suggestion from the local inhabitants, who appreciate Biľak's merits and his help to his hometown during the period of communism. Of course, we can't dispute that Biľak was, as a famous native from small city, popular among the village as well his merits for hometown – eastern Slovakia was traditionally region with poor living conditions and during normalization there were built school, road etc. But as a TV report made by investigative journalist Pavol Fejer has shown, it was only a part of inhabitants of Krajná Bystrá that called for monument.<sup>10</sup> It looks like the initiative of the Slovak communists, which is masked as a local inhabitants' action.

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<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/271363/uder-komunistom-za-odhaleny-pamatnik-vasila-bilaka-aktivisti-spisuju-peticiju/>

<sup>10</sup> TV report was broadcasted on Slovak television on 25 June 2015 as a part of TV show Reportéri.

The visitors can read the following text on the commemorative table: “*Dr. Vasil Biľak was born in the village Krajná Bystrá on 11 August 1917. Prominent official of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Deputy of Federal Assembly of Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. In the years 1950-1988, he honored to the development of the Eastern Slovakia.*” Under the bust is situated a legend: “*The truth will remain truth.*” Unveiling ceremony took place on 22 February, the date that commemorates anniversary of “Victorious February” (in fact communist coup d’état in February 1948, celebrated in communist Czechoslovakia on 25 February) more than Biľak’s death (6 February).

Texts on the memorial can hardly remain without comment. Even if we strip away a mistake in the name (Biľak used to be written as a Vasil, not Vasil’), the information that Vasil Biľak was the Deputy of Federal Assembly is very doubtful for Biľak’s life. His mandate has very dubious character, because he was never elected in free and democratic elections, only as a member of single list candidates. We also need to check the real merits of Vasil Biľak for Eastern Slovakia. In the second half of 1950s Biľak served as a secretary of the Regional Committee of CPS in Prešov. Among his main responsibilities belonged also forced collectivization of agriculture, that brought (among others) the break-up of traditional structures as well as the wave of the cruel violence affecting those who had to give up their land, machinery and cattle for the established Joint Agricultural Cooperatives.

The inscription under the Biľak’s bust *Truth remains truth* must seem like an open provocation for democratic and free-thinking persons. For the clarification, it is a paraphrase of the headline of publication containing Biľak’s speeches from October 1967 till December 1970. During this period Biľak as a signatory of “letter of invitation” and leading collaborator actively launched the regime of “normalization” and systematically brought the exclusion of the democratization process in 1960s including freedom of speech (to which refers initiators of Biľak’s memorial). As a leading official he also managed the purge within the Communist Party. The main evaluation criterion of the purge was the attitude towards the Warsaw Pact troop invasion in August 1968. Those who not agreed with the (Biľak’s) interpretation that it was “international help”, were excluded from the party, sacked from their jobs or shifted to the lower positions. Last but not least, during this period Biľak closely cooperated with the Soviets (in fact occupation power) and nominated himself into leading positions within the Communist Party, where he stayed until 1988.

Immediately after the unveiling of the memorial, the broad public discussion condemned it. Artists Luboš Lorenc and Peter Kalmus from Košice painted the memorial

with red color and wrote there the word “pig”.<sup>11</sup> Leader of the Velvet Revolution in 1989 Ján Budaj commented memorial by the statement: “*If someone built a statue to murderer, it is awkward and embarrassing*”.<sup>12</sup> Shortly later, the group of activists lead by former Members of Parliament Peter Osuský and Ondrej Dostál initiated the charge on the crime of support and propagation of the groups violating basic rights and freedoms. At the beginning of March, an unknown offender stole the bust, which was a part of the memorial.

Several Slovak remembrance institutions published official protest statements. Chairman of the Board of Nations’ Memory Institute Ondrej Krajňák considered unveiling of the memorial as a “*derision to the victims of the communist regime and a provocation to all democratic-minded citizens*”. He argued that Biľak is responsible for the victims of the 1968 occupation as well as for the thousands of persecuted people during the subsequent normalization. He stated that “*from the terms of dealing with the period of non-freedom I am considering this initiative as a same danger as the attempts of neo-Nazi to excuse the crimes of Nazism*”.<sup>13</sup> Protest of the Nations’ Memory Institute was joined also by the associations of former political prisoners.<sup>14</sup> The directors of other key remembrance institutions published their mutual protest against memorial as well. The statement, presented by the director of the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences Slavomír Michálek, claims: “*We protested against celebration and heroism of a man, who by all his political activities cynically violates right to freely express opinion and was co-responsible for the persecution of thousands of people and their families, who wants to use the right to freedom of expression.*” The statement called Biľak as a “*really dark person of our history*” and talking about his personal responsibility claims it as an “*open and intentional collaboration with the occupying powers, the organization of discrimination and persecutions for thousands of people in the name of a false ideological chimera.*”<sup>15</sup>

Mainstream media reflected this *causa* as well. Several TV channels broadcasted information about the memorial and condemned it, as well as journals, newspapers and

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.aktuality.sk/clanok/271026/utok-na-pamatnik-vasila-bilaka-aktivisti-ho-pomalovali-cervenou/>.

<sup>12</sup> See <http://www.noviny.sk/c/slovensko/pamatnik-bilaka-budaj>.

<sup>13</sup> See Kauza pomník Vasilovi Biľakovi – protest ÚPN. [Causa Memorial Vasil Biľak – protest of Nations’ Memory Institute] In: *Pamäť národa*, [Memory of Nation], roč. (vol.) 11, 2015, č. (No.) 1, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> In Slovakia there are several such associations, but most known are Confederation of Political Prisoners and Association of Anti-Communist Resistance – Political Prisoners.

<sup>15</sup> Statement of the directors of four institutions see <http://www.history.sav.sk/bilak.htm>. Statement were also signed by the directors of the Military Historical Institute, Museum of The Slovak National Uprising and Institute of the Political Sciences of the Slovak Academy of Sciences.



magazines. The newspaper SME presented an interview with the director of the Museum of the Crimes and Victims of Communism, who was condemning the memorial. He used the metaphor by which memorial must be considered in such context that nobody would build memorial dedicated to Adolf Hitler in his hometown.<sup>16</sup> Influential leftist journalist Michal Havran jr. at his column on website jetotak.sk called Biľak as *“the most incompetent and odious representative of former regime”* and made a conclusion: *“Vasil Biľak gone down to the history on the Russian tanks, but not as a general, but as a traitor, who did his own memorial from the whole country through his letter. He built it himself in year 1968, changed country into marble and wrote there the names of our parents. He sacrificed them all, and by each destroyed story he fixed his place in history. His legacy is still alive.”*<sup>17</sup>

### **Did the truth remain truth?**

As we can see, public reactions were almost all condemning. Remembrance institutions matched at this point and published protest statements against memorial. So did the media, doesn't matter whether liberal or conservative, rightist or leftist. One can say that the general public and professional researchers condemned Biľak's memorial. Nevertheless, the memorial still stays on its place and reminds the slap that his initiators put into the face of citizens. How is it possible?

There are several possible explanations. One is really pragmatic. From the technical point of view, local self-governments make the decision about unveiling of memorials in the cities and villages and they have set very broad criteria. In this case, the initiative of Slovak Communist Party supported by a petition of several local inhabitants was enough. In fact it is paradoxical situation, because in December 1989 the Communist Party excluded Vasil Biľak from their ranks, which was for him the only consequence of democratic change. However, after another historical metamorphosis, which is used to be repeated in the ranks of the Communist Party each 20 years, communists once again “revised history”. Currently they are once again dedicated to legacy of normalization as well as to her most negative representative. In the history of communism this is nothing extraordinary, quite contrary.

Other explanations are incomparably more serious, because they show a wide gap and harsh fail that the current concept of coming to terms with the totalitarian history at the

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<sup>16</sup> See <http://www.sme.sk/c/7671220/historik-hitlerovi-by-sme-sochu-v-rodisku-nepostavili-tak-treba-vnimat-aj-bilaka.html>

<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.jetotak.sk/editorial/bilak-uz-pamatnik-ma>

level of the remembrance policy suffered. We can apply it especially to the attitude towards communism, where the attempts of “drawing a thick line” under that period prevail.<sup>18</sup> However, especially during the 1990s, public discourse openly talked about the need to punish some communist crimes. Responsibility of the traitors from 1968 was at the forefront of public discussion and the name of Vasil Biľak was mentioned as the most frequent. He was charged for treason and it was barely thinkable, that someone was even considering his rehabilitation. What was few years ago even hardly imaginable is a reality today. There is no need to conceal the fact that by the unveiling of Biľak’s memorial he was de facto rehabilitated, albeit against the wishes of the vast majority of population. This happened almost four years after the court finally ended without a conviction after a protracted trial for charges of treason and his share on the events of 1968 occupation due to alleged lack of evidence.

The political level in this *causa* remains still unclear, but we must be aware that the Communist Party is truly a marginal one, with small influence on the society. However, several legal regulations were adopted in previous years through which society tried to express its attitude to the communist regime, to at least relieve the injustices that occurred during the era of communism and to contribute to the purging from public life of people who were responsible for the totalitarian regime’s acts.<sup>19</sup> At this place we can mention especially the Act N°125/1996 Coll. *On Immorality and Illegality of the Communist system*, which defines the resistance of people against the communist regime as a legitimate and morally justified activity that is worth respect and condemns the regime based on the Communist ideology. The Act N°219/2006 Coll. concerning anti-communist resistance goes even further and defines the anti-communist resistance as “*the continuation of national fight for liberation*”, considering its participants active fighters for freedom and democracy entitled to full moral rehabilitation.<sup>20</sup> We should have in mind the above mentioned laws as a part of coming to terms with the communist era, because they to some extent reflect the attitudes of the society towards communism. Unveiling of Biľak’s memorial is in direct opposition to these laws.

In that sense we can mention that recently, Russian television channel broadcasted a documentary dealing with the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops in 1968 and used the

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<sup>18</sup> In the case of authoritarian regime of the first Slovak Republic one can speak about harsh judicial settlement with its representatives that took place immediately after the WWII.

<sup>19</sup> PETRANSKÝ, Ivan: *10 years of the Nations Memory Institute*. Bratislava 2012, pp. 10-11.

<sup>20</sup> For more about see also JAŠEK, Peter: Introduction. In: JAŠEK, Peter (Ed.): *Protikomunistický odboj v strednej a východnej Európe*. [Anti-Communist Resistance in the Central and Eastern Europe] Bratislava 2012, pp. 15-17.

same interpretation as did Biľak during the “normalization”, describing the events as the “international help”. The documentary raised negative reaction and official protest of the Slovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs. But is it only a coincidence that similar documentary was broadcasted shortly after the unveiling of the memorial and *de facto* Biľak’s rehabilitation? Are there any connections? We must not forget that during the normalization, sovietization of the Slovak society reached its summit.

Other level of the *causa* is related to the historiography that played a key role in the remembrance policy. Which role plays in this *causa*? Remembrance institutes published their protests against memorials, but in fact it did not change the situation. The initiators did not consult suitability of memorial by asking about the opinion of professional researchers before installation. It is clear evidence that their intents were much more political. Anyway, the research focusing on communism in Slovakia is not among the popular topics. There are only a few historians dealing with this period, especially in comparison with the number of historians dealing with the period 1939-1945. One can say that we are only at the beginning of the research on communism, and the interpretation of this period is quite different among historians. Some of them try to excuse the communist regime and their crimes, which I consider as a very dubious attitude.

It is even more true in the area of writing scholarly biographies of personalities who lived in such complicated times. We do not have even one scholarly biography about anyone of the three key Slovak communist representatives: Alexander Dubček, Gustáv Husák and Vasil Biľak. The absence is partially filled in the case of Alexander Dubček and Gustáv Husák by the conference proceedings and memories, but in the case of Vasil Biľak, such absence is fatal. It is a great challenge for the Slovak historians to pay much more attention to the period of communism and to scholarly biographies of personalities, to collect and publish documents about their activities. This is the only way how the general public can be closer to knowing the truth about these persons and make assessment of their role in the Slovak history. Biľak’s memorial clearly shows that it is much more than actual need.

The publication of the Czech historian and sociologist Michal Pullmann named *The End of Experiment* (Prague 2011) draw great attention in the recent times. Despite fruitful efforts to open discussion, the publication claims that normalization period of communist regime was a social consensus among population and the Communist Party. Of course it is not just this particular publication that tries to rehabilitate the communist regime. Even more influential in that sense in Slovakia is a publication of the political scientist Peter Dinuš named *Vyrovňávanie sa s minulosťou?* (translation *Coming to terms with the past?*; Bratislava 2011), where he challenged this process by several doubtful claims, i.e. there were no totalitarian regime under communism, or no anti-communist resistance. Such

opinions became more and more popular and prevailed in the discussions about communist past in recent years. Unfortunately, nobody seriously challenged by scientific review such opinion, which means that this discussion is one-sided.

At the end of my paper, I would like to quote Czech historian Jan Cholínský, who wrote interesting sentences about the understatement of the communist crimes during the normalization and the position of normalization in the remembrance of the nation that are very actual regarding to the *causa* of memorial: *"From the ethic point, questioning of the crimes of the communist regime in the normalization period (or even earlier) is an understatement of the denial of the right to all citizens, that couldn't freely develop their lives. It is also an understatement of injustices against those who were persecuted, imprisoned or expelled from their homelands, as well as an understatement of the victims of 1968 occupation. From the point of common sense it is clear that defending the normalization regime based on treason, usurpation of power by the small group of people connected with the occupation power, harassment, terrorizing of citizens by the state authority or violent indoctrination by perverted ideology, is absolutely inadmissible."* Nevertheless, this happened in February 2015 in Krajná Bystrá in front of the whole nation, which is really alarming for the Slovak society and for the dealing with the communist past. What will be the peak of the attempts for rehabilitation of the communism? It remains to be seen. After the *causa* at Krajná Bystrá, we can't exclude the attempts to build other monuments even in the public places of bigger cities. Hopefully, on the other hand, after this *causa* Slovak society has to become more sensible on the unveiling of monuments to personalities connected with the communist past. It is also clear that remembrance institutions must improve their efforts and focus their attention also to the personalities of the communist past and their responsibilities for crimes that took place in Slovakia. This *causa* is also good reason to start public discussion or at least organize scientific conference about the remembrance policy in Slovakia. Scientists dealing with the social sciences should together discuss all relevant matter to avoid in future similar *causas*.

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