

## Too Little, Too Late: The Period of 'Reconstruction' in Czechoslovakia Through the Lens of the Documents of the Communist Party of Slovakia

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### Za mało i za późno. Okres „przebudowy” w Czechosłowacji w świetle dokumentacji Komunistycznej Partii Słowacji

**ABSTRACT:** This study examines selected aspects of 'reconstruction' in Czechoslovakia (Slovak: *prestavba*; Czech: *přestavba*), with a particular emphasis on developments in Slovakia. The analysis primarily draws on documents from the Communist Party of Slovakia, allowing us to present its activities in the second half of the 1980s. The period of 'reconstruction' was the final phase of Communist regimes in the Eastern Bloc before their collapse. This process was a response to the changing international political situation, which necessitated reforms in the planned economy. The reform efforts in the Soviet Union, known as *glasnost* and *perestroika*, also influenced Czechoslovakia. While recognizing the country's economic difficulties, Czechoslovak Communists could not overlook the parallels between 'reconstruction' and the 1968 Prague Spring. As a result, they focused their 'reconstruction' efforts on economic reforms while rejecting political changes leading to pluralization and democratization. Unlike in Poland and Hungary, they had no intention of engaging in dialogue with the opposition. The party implemented only the necessary personnel changes, aimed at replacing the most compromised officials.

**KEYWORDS:** reconstruction, Communist Party of Slovakia, economic reform, *perestroika*, Czechoslovakia

**STRESZCZENIE:** Artykuł omawia wybrane aspekty „przebudowy” (po słowacku *prestavba*; po czesku *přestavba*) w Czechosłowacji, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem rozwoju wydarzeń na Słowacji. Analiza opiera się głównie na dokumentach Komunistycznej Partii Słowacji, które pozwalają przedstawić jej działalność w drugiej połowie lat osiemdziesiątych XX w. Okres „przebudowy” był ostatnią fazą reżimów komunistycznych w bloku wschodnim przed ich upadkiem, sam zaś proces był odpowiedzią na zmieniającą się sytuację polityczną na arenie międzynarodowej, która wymagała reform gospodarki planowej. Reformy w Związku Sowieckim, znane jako głośność i pierestrojka, miały również wpływ na Czechosłowację. Chociaż czechosłowaccy komuniści zdawali sobie sprawę z trudności gospodarczych kraju, nie mogli nie zauważyć podobieństw między „przebudową” a Praską Wiosną 1968 r. W rezultacie skoncentrowali swoje wysiłki na reformach gospodarczych, odrzuciwszy zmiany polityczne prowadzące do pluralizacji i demokratyzacji. W przeciwieństwie do Polski i Węgier nie mieli zamiaru angażować się w dialog z opozycją. Partia wprowadziła jedynie niezbędne zmiany personalne, mające na celu zastąpienie najbardziej skompromitowanych urzędników.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** przebudowa, Komunistyczna Partia Słowacji, reforma gospodarcza, pierestrojka, Czechosłowacja

## Introduction

The inflexible structure of the political and economic system of socialist countries caused their economies to be characterized by the low efficiency of five-year planning, weak productivity, and wasteful use of raw material, human, and production resources. Excessive consumption of materials and financial resources led to high production costs, which ultimately caused demand to outweigh supply. While computing and information technologies were developing in capitalist states, the Socialist Bloc persisted with a low level of innovation in the introduction of new production methods and technologies, further widening the technological gap between the East and the West<sup>1</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu. Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu*, Prague: Scriptorium, 2011, pp. 30–31.

elites realized that the power confrontation with the West could not continue without changing the way the economy was managed.

Whatever terms we use to describe the attempts at reform, it would be wrong to assume that they were only made possible by Gorbachev's rise and the launch of *perestroika*. In the Eastern Bloc, efforts to reassess central planning and introduce elements that would increase economic efficiency had already emerged in the previous decade. In some countries, reform initiatives focused on introducing market elements, as the increasingly complex economy was no longer being efficiently managed solely through administrative indicators. One of the main motives was to strengthen competition (though, of course, no one called it that) in the economic system, which was to contribute to the modernization of industry, increased efficiency, and the expansion of consumer goods supply. These changes also included strengthening the economic autonomy of enterprises, partially relaxing price regulation, and, in some cases, supporting the private sector in services, retail, and agriculture. Although some countries within the Eastern Bloc approached reforms more progressively and their economies were more dynamic compared to other Soviet satellites, the systemic constraints of the planned economy remained a significant obstacle. Implemented reforms often did not bring the expected growth in productivity or technological progress. The economies of socialist states were dependent on foreign trade but were unable to respond flexibly to market stimuli. The authorities tried to compensate for the lack of capital primarily with 'Western' loans, which temporarily led to an improvement in living standards.<sup>2</sup> The brief euphoria, however, evaporated the moment the loans had to be repaid. Ultimately, it became clear that these attempts at economic reform were not sustainable in the long term.<sup>3</sup>

The second half of the 1980s was marked by the Ronald Reagan's confrontational policies, who intensified pressure on the Soviet empire and Communism as a whole. The escalating arms race had not only a military dimension, but also aimed at the economic exhaustion of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Its economic difficulties were significantly exacerbated by the protracted military intervention in Afghanistan. In this situation, in 1985,

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<sup>2</sup> In this respect, this is particularly significant for Poland and Hungary.

<sup>3</sup> P.S. Wandycz, *Střední Evropa v dějinách. Od středověku do současnosti*, transl. J. Valenta Prague: Academia, 1998, pp. 243–250; J. Vykoukal, B. Litera, and M. Tejchman, *Východ. Vznik, vývoj a rozpad sovětského bloku 1944–1989*, Prague: Libri, 2000, pp. 528–534, 551–558; "Ekonomika musí být ekonomická," *Nové slovo* 23 (1981), p. 10.

after the brief, just over a year-long tenure of Yuri Andropov and Konstantin Chernenko at the helm of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev became the country's top leader. Compared to his predecessors, he was considerably younger and more energetic. The reform efforts, which had already begun during Andropov's rule, were further intensified under Gorbachev. His policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost* were ultimately intended to lead not only to economic reforms and a reduction of tensions in relations with the West, but also to the pluralization of the political system and fundamental social changes aimed at rapid improvement of the Soviet population living standards. As for relations with satellite states, the new Soviet leadership signaled a departure from the previous policy; reforms were considered necessary for all states of the Soviet bloc, but their implementation was to remain within the competence of the Communist parties of individual countries. This shift created space for more independent development without direct political interference from Moscow.<sup>4</sup>

In Czechoslovakia, this process was referred to as *reconstruction* (Slovak: *prestavba*; Czech: *přestavba*). In literature and especially in journalism, it is sometimes referred to as *perestroika* in relation to Czechoslovakia, but this is not historically accurate. One reason for this is that the Czechoslovak leadership attempted to differentiate itself in a certain way.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, we will use the term 'reconstruction,' and we will use the term *perestroika* only where it relates to the Soviet Union or as a broader phenomenon of the Eastern Bloc.

The aim of this work is not to provide an exhaustive history of the reconstruction, but to supplement existing research with a Slovak perspective, set within the broader dynamics of the reconstruction in Czechoslovakia, with an emphasis on the use of archival records produced by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Slovakia. The study describes the position of the Communist Party of Slovakia (*Komunistická strana Slovenska*, hereinafter the KSS) and the Slovak national authorities within the framework of Czechoslovakia. The paper examines why the reconstruction in Czechoslovakia was primarily economic in nature and did not progress to the stage of political liberalization, as was the case in Poland and Hungary. The article therefore also examines the relationship between the officially declared reforms and the actual policies of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (*Komunistická strana*

<sup>4</sup> B. Katrebová Blehová, "Michail Gorbačov a koniec komunistického režimu v Československu," *Pamät národa* 1 (2008), pp. 23–24, [https://www.upn.gov.sk/publikacie\\_web/pamat-naroda/pamat-naroda-01-2008.pdf](https://www.upn.gov.sk/publikacie_web/pamat-naroda/pamat-naroda-01-2008.pdf) (accessed 25 September 2025).

<sup>5</sup> The problems of use of this term will be discussed further in this article.

*Československa*, hereinafter the KSČ) and the KSS. The author seeks to follow events primarily along political and economic lines; the social context is only marginal and serves to explain some of the necessary connections that the reconstruction (re)opened.

## The Years of the Reconstruction in Czechoslovakia as a Subject of Historiographical Research

The second half of the 1980s offers a wealth of issues that historians can explore, with numerous interdisciplinary overlaps – whether economic, political, or sociological. The subject matter is not limited to key topics such as power structures, regime repression and resistance to it, or biographical works devoted to prominent officials. There is also a trend towards research into academic, economic and philosophical methods and concepts. Last but not least, there is also the “history of everyday life” of those population groups which, if we accept a certain degree of simplification, were not in any form of confrontation with the regime. This approach is also documented by research from recent years.

There is currently a wealth of literature available on the subject of socialist Czechoslovakia, but it must be said that the period of restructuring and the final years of the Communist regime, with the exception of the events of the Velvet Revolution in 1989, were not among the subjects of greatest interest to historians for a long time. With the passage of time and the emergence of a new generation of historians, interest is growing, as is the scope of academic research.<sup>6</sup>

Martin Štefek focuses specifically on the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) during the period of restructuring, analyzing how the KSČ leadership perceived Gorbachev’s policies and how various issues related to the reconstruction and external influences from the Soviet Union penetrated the agenda of the party’s top leadership. He uses archival sources produced by the Central Committee of the KSČ (*Ústřední výbor Komunistické strany Československa*, ÚV KSČ) and critically applies typologies of undemocratic

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<sup>6</sup> In this regard, we would like to mention the introduction to the publication *Československo v období socialismu. 1945–1989* by Jan Rychlík, in which the author outlines the key themes of historiography in relation to the history of socialist Czechoslovakia. See J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu*, Prague, 2020: Vyšehrad, pp. 26–33.

regimes. He identifies factions within the party and tracks how their activities changed after 1985.<sup>7</sup> Štefek already had dealt with the period of the reconstruction in his diploma thesis.<sup>8</sup>

The publication *Každodenní život v Československu 1945/48–1989* (Everyday Life in Czechoslovakia 1945/48–1989) signals a historiographical shift in research on this period, which is moving away from a dominant focus on power mechanisms and political persecution towards an analysis of the history of everyday life and lifestyle changes. The aim of this collection is to overcome a simplified view of the Communist regime by studying the experiences of “ordinary” people in their social and cultural context. The studies are structured into general methodological considerations and case studies that address specific phenomena, offering a view of the various interactions between the authoritarian state and society.<sup>9</sup>

One of the most comprehensive monographs synthesizing several aspects of socialist Czechoslovakia is the aforementioned *Československo v období socialismu* (Czechoslovakia in the Socialist Period) by Jan Rychlík.<sup>10</sup> The author deepened various topics that he had also addressed in his earlier work on Czech-Slovak relations.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the most widely acclaimed publication of the past decade was Michal Pullmann’s *Konec experimentu. Přestavba a pád komunismu v Československu* (The End of the Experiment: The Restructuring and Fall of Communism in Czechoslovakia).<sup>12</sup> The author analyzes the years 1985–1989 as a period of gradual disintegration of the consensus on which the stability of the Communist regime was based. He argues that the regime

<sup>7</sup> M. Štefek, “Komunistická strana Československa a proces přestavby v letech 1985–1989,” in *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu*, ed. J. Kocian, J. Pažout, and J. Rákosník, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, Dokořán, 2010, pp. 92–138. This collective monograph is interesting in that it is divided into two parts, the first focusing on the KSČ and the second on the KSS. Unfortunately, none of the texts deals with the KSS during the period of restructuring. The closest to this is Norbert Kmeř’s study, “Komunistická strana Slovenska 1969–1985,” in *Bolševismus, komunismus a radikální socialismus v Československu*, which examines changes in the social, organizational, and personnel structure of the KSS and analyzes data on the party’s membership base.

<sup>8</sup> M. Štefek, *Komunistická strana Československa a proces přestavby*, Diploma thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Politology Prague, 2010, <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/30527> (accessed 26 November 2025).

<sup>9</sup> *Každodenní život v Československu 1945/48–1989*, ed. J. Pažout, Prague, Liberec: Technická univerzita v Liberci, Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu*.

<sup>11</sup> J. Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století. Spolupráce a konflikty 1914–1992*, Prague: Vyšehrad, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu*, p. 243.

did not fall as a result of external pressure, but because it lost its ability to maintain a social agreement based on silent tolerance and the ideological language of Normalization (the period after August 1968 and the process of removal of the Prague Spring reforms, launched by the Husak regime – editor’s remark). Pullmann rejects the simple model of a repressive state and an oppressed society, emphasizing the importance of informal consensus, which allowed people to “live in peace” in exchange for passivity towards the system. However, this consensus began to crumble in the second half of the 1980s – ideology turned into empty slogans, economic problems undermined social security, and new Soviet rhetoric allowed for the emergence of non-conformist discourse.<sup>13</sup>

Pullmann sparked unprecedented controversy on the topic of the Normalization period, which is always beneficial in the scholarly community. Of all the reviews and reflections on Pullmann’s work and speeches, we will mention at least a few. A sharp commentary by Jan Cholínský, who fundamentally rejects Pullmann’s revisionist hypothesis that the Normalization Communist regime was based on general social consensus and that the majority of society accepted it. Cholínský, on the contrary, argues that the regime was a criminal, illegitimate dictatorship that was imposed by a foreign occupying power and systematically prevented the fulfillment of basic human rights and the development of individuals. Any conformist behavior (such as participation in 1st of May parades) was not an expression of support for or acceptance of the ideology, but part of a strategy for survival in a police state, which most of society rejected at the first opportunity.<sup>14</sup>

Matej Cívik argues similarly when he points out that in a dictatorship, where freedom of speech was suppressed and it was impossible to leave the country freely, it is impossible to speak of real consensus or legitimacy, and that cooperation in the form of conformist behavior was more a result of coercion and personal interest than genuine support for the regime. Instead of legitimacy, the absence of “belief in legitimacy” among the majority of the population led to a withdrawal of their activities into the private sphere and

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<sup>13</sup> See also P. Kolář and M. Pullmann, *Co byla normalizace? Studie o pozdním socialismu*, Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2016.

<sup>14</sup> J. Cholínský, “Československý „normalizační“ režim nebyl společenským konsenzem, ale znásilněním společnosti,” *Securitas imperii* 24 (1) (2014), pp. 278–295 <https://www.ustrcr.cz/data/pdf/publikace/securitas-imperii/no24/278-295.pdf> (accessed 25 September 2025).

to social, political, and economic stagnation, which ultimately contributed to the inevitable implosion of the regime in 1989 once it lost external support.<sup>15</sup>

In connection with Pullmann's focus, it is appropriate to refer to the words of Jan Rychlík from the introduction to his above-mentioned monograph. Rychlík assesses that the shift of researchers away from the topics of repression and resistance of the population is understandable and correct from a research and historiographical point of view. He perceives it as a thematic expansion of historical material and access to it. He points out that after 1989, there was no great interest in this issue, as everyday life under the Communist regime was known from personal experience. The passage of time since the fall of the regime has thus created a natural interest in learning how the population lived their daily lives at that time.<sup>16</sup>

Within the framework of new topics, approaches, and perspectives on the nature of the Czechoslovak system, the works *Řídit socialismus jako firmu. Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956–1989* (Managing Socialism Like a Company. Technocratic Governance in Czechoslovakia 1956–1989) and *Architekti dlouhé změny* (Architects of a Long Change)<sup>17</sup> also resonate. Both shift the focus from repressive mechanisms to knowledge-based administration and examine the internal logic of the regime. Sommer's project focuses on the roots of belief in scientific progress and expert management. It shows how technocratic (and partially utopian) visions of the 1960s became the basis for technical authoritarian state management during Normalization. Kopeček's team dealt with specific expert disciplines (e.g., law, management, sociology) during Normalization and in the 1990s. The publications emphasize historical continuity and "long change," showing that key trends continued through significant political turning points. At the same time, they criticize the "(neo) liberal consensus" of the 1990s. The authors introduce new methodological forms as well as terminology, requiring a broader interdisciplinary overview.

<sup>15</sup> M. Cívik, "Michal Pullmann a filosofické aspekty sporu o charakter normalizace," *Reflexe. Filosofický časopis* 60 (2021), pp. 169–191, <https://reflexe.flu.cas.cz/archiv/reflexe-60/michal-pullmann-a-filosoficke-aspekty-sporu-o-charakter-normalizace/> (accessed 25 September 2025). Interestingly, at the end of the text, Cívik thanks Pullmann for his comments, as he was willing to overview on the text despite its critical tone.

<sup>16</sup> J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu*, p. 32.

<sup>17</sup> V. Sommer, M. Spurný, and J. Mrňka, *Řídit socialismus jako firmu. Technokratické vládnutí v Československu 1956–1989*, Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2019; *Architekti dlouhé změny*, ed. M. Kopeček, Prague: Argo, Univerzita Karlova, Filozofická fakulta, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2019.

The period of reconstruction and Normalization is also reflected in recent foreign collections of studies,<sup>18</sup> which also introduce new topics and methodological approaches. They emphasize that the stability of the regime was based not only on repression, but also on negotiations between the state and society, with the aim of historicizing and destigmatizing this period. The anthologies focus on political mechanisms, economics, social policies, gender aspects, and foreign relations, showing Normalization as a process shaped not only “from above” but also by interaction “from below.” The specific situation in Slovakia is also reflected, where the combination of economic growth and the national-Communist narrative reduced the motivation for systemic change.

Despite growing interest in recent years, it is generally true that the topic of restructuring and its prerequisites is less represented among historians, and this applies perhaps doubly to Slovak historiography. This does not mean that it is not reflected upon, but it often forms only a contextual part, a kind of prologue to November 1989, and only rarely becomes the primary topic. This is partly evidenced by collective monographs and anthologies, which, as their titles suggest, focus on November 1989 or Normalization as such.<sup>19</sup> Of course, publications devoted to persons who played an important role in political life, such as Gustáv Husák,<sup>20</sup> who is probably the most interesting, or Vasil Biľak,<sup>21</sup> also contribute to our understanding of the period.

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<sup>18</sup> *Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe in the Era of Normalisation 1969–1989*, ed. K. McDermott and M. Stibbe, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022; *After utopia. Czechoslovak Normalization between Experiment and Experience, 1968–1989* Ed. Ch. Brenner, M. Pullmann, and A. Tippner, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht Göttingen, 2022.

<sup>19</sup> See e.g. *November '89. Medzník vo vývoji slovenskej spoločnosti a jeho medzinárodný kontext*, ed. J. Žatkuliak et al., Bratislava: Historický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, Prodana, 2009; *November 1989 na Slovensku. Súvislosti, predpoklady a dôsledky*, ed. J. Pešek and S. Szomolányi, Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, Historický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, Katedra politológie Filozofickej fakulty Univerzity Komenského, 1999; *Slovensko a režim normalizácie*, ed. N. Kmeť and J. Marušiak, Prešov: Vydavateľstvo Michala Vaška, 2003; *'Annus Mirabilis' 1989 and Slovakia. From a totalitarian regime to democracy*, ed. B. Katrebová Blehová, Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2021; 20. výročie Nežnej revolúcie. Zborník z vedeckej konferencie Bratislava 11.–12. november 2009, ed. P. Jašek, Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2010.

<sup>20</sup> B. Kinčok et al., *Gustáv Husák a jeho doba*, Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2015; *Gustáv Husák. Moc politiky, politiky moci*, ed. S. Michálek, M. Londák et al., Bratislava: VEDA, 2013; M. Macháček, *Gustáv Husák*, Prague: Vyšehrad, 2017.

<sup>21</sup> P. Jašek, *Vasil Biľak. Zradca alebo kolaborant?*, Bratislava: Marenčin PT, 2018.

There are also essayistic studies<sup>22</sup> (often from former exiles) and chronological overviews.<sup>23</sup> A special category is formed by the memoirs of contemporary actors, which can also be drawn upon, taking into account all the limitations of working with memoirs.<sup>24</sup>

The above overview of historiography and literature is only a rough outline. Given the large number of different works, studies in academic journals, proceedings from scholarly conferences, and research articles mapping the various nuances of this period, it is impossible to reflect the sources in their full breadth.<sup>25</sup>

Although Czech and Slovak historiography examine Normalization and restructuring within the history of a common state, it is clear that Slovak development was not merely a regional phenomenon, but had its own dynamics, which often significantly influenced national politics. Anthologies and collective monographs almost always include historiographical representation from both parts of the former federation. Research on the Czech side is considerably deeper and more diverse, not only in terms of subject matter and publications, but also in terms of institutions. Nevertheless, archival records of Slovak origin are only marginally represented or absent.<sup>26</sup> For example, Michal Pullmann apologizes explicitly to Slovak readers in the introduction to *Konec experimentu* and explains that his original intention to treat Czech and Slovak developments equally fell apart after he realized the different dynamics of Slovak development and contemporary collective memory. He states that the Slovak context would be enough for a separate book, and therefore it only appears where it serves to explain national devel-

<sup>22</sup> See e.g. Z. Mlynář, *Krise v sovětských systémech od Stalina ke Gorbačovovi*, Prague: Prospektrum, 1991; K. Hrubý, *Cesty komunistickou diktaturou*, Prague: Argo, 2018; M. Hübl, *Cesty k moci*, Prague: Naše vojsko, 1990.

<sup>23</sup> J. Suk, J. Cuhra, and J. Koudelka, *Chronologie zániku komunistického režimu v Československu 1985–1990*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1999.

<sup>24</sup> L. Štrougal, *Paměti a úvahy*, Prague: Epoque. Pražská vydavatelská společnost, 2009; L. Štrougal, *Jěšte pár odpovědí*, Prague: Epoque. Pražská vydavatelská společnost, 2011; V. Bilak, *Až po mé smrti*, Prague: BVD, 2014; M. Jakeš, *Dva roky generálním tajemníkem*, Prague: Regulus, 1996; V. Plevza, *Vzostupy a pády. Gustáv Husák prehovoril*, Bratislava: Tatrapress, 1991; I. Knotek, *Pasca bez úniku*, Bratislava: ProMédia, 2003; E. Polák, *Ako sme (ne)robili perestrojku. Z diára šéfredaktora 1987–1989*, Bratislava: CCW, Klub Nového slova, 2020.

<sup>25</sup> For the useful literature in the field, see the further footnotes at the end of this article.

<sup>26</sup> The most significant exception in this regard is the work of Jan Rychlík, who has strong ties to Slovakia.

opments.<sup>27</sup> Understandably, as the author himself says, this is not a deliberate attempt to diminish the importance of Slovakia.

However, he has touched on a broader phenomenon. Czech academic literature is disproportionately broader than Slovak literature in relation to the issue we are examining and offers significant contextualization potential and methodological starting points for “Slovak topics.” However, when highlighting the specificity of Slovak development within the common state, its use has certain limitations. Slovak researchers thus have more limited possibilities for using secondary literature (in our topic) than it might seem from a “Czechoslovak perspective.” In the future, the focus of research on this issue will continue to be on archival research.

## The Position of the KSS and Slovak National Authorities

The KSS operated illegally during the war years 1939–1945. It resurfaced after the outbreak of the Slovak National Uprising and became one of the dominant political forces in the insurgent territory. At the so-called unification congress, which took place on 17 September 1944 in Banská Bystrica, it merged with the left wing of the Czechoslovak Social Democratic Workers’ Party in Slovakia. It continued to function as an independent entity after the end of the war, the liberation and restoration of Czechoslovakia, until 1948. Although its independence was rather formal and it was functionally linked to the KSČ, internally it had considerable organizational independence and a different structure. In September 1948, several months after the Communists definitively seized power in the February coup, it merged with the KSČ. The KSS thus became a territorial organization of the national party, modeled on the Soviet union republics, which significantly limited its real decision-making powers. Its main task was to ensure the implementation of KSČ policy in Slovakia. In a relatively short time, the party apparatus was effectively unified and structured along the lines of the Prague headquarters. Although its powers developed to some extent, they remained marginal in principle. It thus became a kind of intermediary in the power hierarchy.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu*, pp. 21–22.

<sup>28</sup> For a broader context of the development of the KSS in this period, see J. Pešek, *Komunistická strana Slovenska. Dejiny politického subjektu I. Na ceste k moci (1945–1948), pri moci – od prevratu k pokusu o reformu (1948–1968)*, Bratislava: VEDA, 2012.

The KSS was no longer an independent party in the true sense of the word, but as a territorial (national) organization, it retained its independent bodies and processes. The supreme body of the party was still the Congress, which elected the Plenary, the Presidium (or Bureau), the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the KSS (*Ústredný výbor Komunistickej strany Slovenska*, ÚV KSS), and other bodies. The party was headed by the First Secretary. ÚV KSS also had at its disposal an extensive party apparatus, which ensured the daily agenda and the implementation of decisions made by higher bodies. The personnel regulations determined which functions were subject to approval in Prague and which were already within the competence of Bratislava.<sup>29</sup>

The Košice government program of April 1945 declared the principle of equal relations between Czechs and Slovaks and recognized the Slovak National Council (*Slovenská národná rada*, SNR), which had been constituted in the underground at the end of 1943, as the holder of legislative power in Slovakia. The Board of Commissioners (*Zbor povereníkov*) became the executive body. After 1945, Slovakia's position underwent a development leading to a gradual reduction in the powers of its legislative and executive bodies. Through a series of three so-called Prague Agreements, the powers of the Slovak authorities were significantly reduced from their 1945–1946 status, and a substantial part of their powers was transferred to the central government. The 1948 February Communist coup further deepened the centralization of power, which was inherent in the very nature of Communist rule.<sup>30</sup> This also led to the aforementioned organizational unification of the KSČ and KSS into a single party. The new Constitution of 1960 formally removed the last remnants of the independence of Slovak authorities. The SNR was de facto reduced to an authority with minimal legislative power, focused on the implementation of national laws. Its role, apart from a few initiatives in the

<sup>29</sup> The functioning of the apparatus of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and the Central Committee of the Slovak Communist Party was addressed mainly by Karel Kaplan, see K. Kaplan, *Aparát ÚV KSČ v letech 1948–1968: studie a dokumenty*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1993; J. Maňák, *Proměny strany moci. III. Početnost a složení pracovníků stranického aparátu KSČ 1948–1968*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1999; and specifically in relation to the KSS, especially by J. Pešek, *Centrum moci. Aparát Ústředního výboru Komunistickej strany Slovenska 1948–1989*, Bratislava: AEPress, 2006. The structure and organization of the apparatus of the ÚV KSČ was also described in F. Štverák, *Schematismus k dějinám Komunistické strany Československa (1921–1992). Základní informace o ústředních orgánech a biografické údaje o vedoucích představitelích strany*, Prague: Národní archiv, 2018; for information on the cadre nomenklatura, see K. Kaplan, *Kádrová nomenklatura KSČ. 1948–1956*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny ČSAV, 1992.

<sup>30</sup> D. Kováč, *Dejiny Slovenska*, Prague: NLN, 2024, pp. 307–311.

cultural sphere, was to approve national economic plans and budgets. The separate Board of Commissioners was abolished completely.<sup>31</sup>

During the 1968 Prague Spring, there was a strong push for extensive reforms in Czechoslovakia, which, among other things, affected the constitutional order and led to the federalization of the state and the elimination of the asymmetrical arrangement that had led to a feeling of inequality on the part of Slovakia. There were discussions about the creation of executive national (on both the Czech and Slovak sides) and federal bodies, with the boundaries of joint competences being defined. The Constitutional Law on the Czechoslovak Federation, adopted on 27 October 1968, and effective from 1 January 1969, transformed the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic into a federal state of two equal national republics: the Czech Socialist Republic (*Česká socialistická republika*, ČSR) and the Slovak Socialist Republic (*Slovenská socialistická republika*, SSR). This law was based on the principles of equality, self-government, and the prohibition of one nation dominating another. The SNR gained a counterpart in the form of the newly created Czech National Council (*Česká národní rada*, ČNR) and thus became the highest organ of state power in Slovakia with legislative authority. The government of the SSR became the executive body, and ministries were also established – some operated exclusively at the national level (e.g., education and culture), some at both the national and federal levels (e.g., finance, and the interior), and some fell under the exclusive competence of the federation (defense, foreign affairs).<sup>32</sup>

The liberalization process also triggered movement within the KSS. The subordination of the KSS leadership to the KSČ was officially maintained, but its position was strengthened. The idea of overcoming the Soviet centralist model of state organization thus also served as a starting point for an attempt to federalize the KSČ itself. This would divide political power within the entire state into three centers – the federal one and the two national republics. This led to the need to create an equivalent to the KSS on the Czech side, similar to the national councils or governments. Preparations for the creation of the Communist Party of the Czech Lands began, and a Bureau for the Management

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<sup>31</sup> Its executive power was formally taken over by the SNR, or rather its commissions. In 1964, a certain correction occurred, and the commissions were headed by SNR commissioners. However, the powers of the SNR did not change significantly. See E. Rákoš and Š. Rudohradský, *Slovenské národné orgány 1943–1968*, Bratislava: Slovenská archívna správa, 1973, pp. 222–269.

<sup>32</sup> J. Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci*, pp. 479–532.

of Party Work in the Czech Lands was established for a transitional period. After January 1969, this became the Bureau for the Management of Party Work in the ČSR, but the course of events ultimately halted these developments.<sup>33</sup>

A key turning point came after the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968. The Moscow protocol of late August 1968 directly undermined the political conditions necessary for resolving state relations through federalization of the state and simultaneously halted efforts to democratize and federalize the party. The Kremlin did not want political and economic power in Czechoslovakia to be divided into three centers. By exerting pressure during negotiations with Czechoslovak representatives in early October 1968, Moscow forced the KSČ to reject federalization. The convening of a Czech party congress, which would have been a natural step towards the federalization of the party, was thus halted, and although it was proclaimed that it would take place after the regular party congress, it did not happen. The position of the KSS thus returned to what it had been before January 1968.<sup>34</sup>

Under the conditions of socialist Czechoslovakia, it was not possible for the federation to be fully functional without federalizing its decisive power component – the Communist Party. The onset of Normalization<sup>35</sup> thus diminished the significance of the federation, as it led to the re-centralization of party and state power.

## A 'Normalized' Country

After 1968, developments in Czechoslovakia took on a different dynamic than in other Soviet satellites. This period was defined by a process of Normalization, with the aim of eliminating reformism as a political force and legitimizing the new leadership of the KSČ based on milder, but pre-reform principles.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> S. Sikora, *Po jari krutá zima. Politický vývoj na Slovensku v rokoch 1968–1971*. Bratislava: Historický ústav SAV, Typoset Print, 2013, pp. 38–39; J. Pešek, *Komunistická strana Slovenska*, pp. 80–84.

<sup>34</sup> A. Hudek, "An Uncommon Course: Normalisation in Slovakia," in *Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe in the Era of Normalisation 1969–1989*, pp. 104–105.

<sup>35</sup> 'Normalization' in Czechoslovakia refers to the period after the invasion of the Warsaw Pact. It was characterized by party purges, political persecution, censorship, gradual economic stagnation, and loyalty to the USSR. It ended with the Velvet Revolution in 1989.

<sup>36</sup> M. Štefek, *Komunistická strana Československa v období tzv. normalizace*, Dissertation thesis, Charles University, Faculty of Philosophy, Institute of Politology, Prague, 2016, p. 14, <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/1348> (accessed 26 November 2025); see also J. Žatkuliak, "Čo otvoril November 1989 vo sfére politickej ekonomickej a štátoprávnej," in *November 1989 na Slovensku*, p. 78.

A significant turning point came in April 1969, when Gustáv Husák replaced Alexander Dubček as a First Secretary of the ÚV KSČ. From this period until 1971, extensive personnel purges took place, although Husák initially rejected them vehemently. The mass wave of purges and vetting at the turn of the 1960s and 1970s took place on several levels, horizontal and vertical, affecting both party members and non-party members, and intersecting in various ways. It was turbulent not only in party bodies but also in state organs. The purge at the highest party levels thus preceded, in a certain way, the widespread party vetting and the infamous process of replacement of party membership cards.<sup>37</sup>

Regarding the ÚV KSS, the report of the Presidium of the ÚV KSČ, presented at the plenary session of the ÚV KSČ on 25–26 September 1969, was key to the start of the purges. It already explicitly spoke of purging the party and attempting to win over the “wavering and disoriented” to its side.<sup>38</sup> This September plenary session can be considered, on a national scale, as the beginning of this process at the highest party levels, as well as the countless revocations of resolutions adopted either before August 1968 or immediately after the Soviet invasion, including the statement by the Presidium of the ÚV KSČ condemning the military intervention in Czechoslovakia and officially rejecting the Vysočany Congress.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Prověrky a jejich místo v komunistickém vládnutí*, ed. M. Černá, J. Cuhra et al., Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2012, pp. 78–79; J. Kocian, J. Pažout, T. Vilímeček, S. Balík, and V. Hloušek, *Dějiny Komunistické strany Československa IV (1969–1993)*, Prague: Academia, 2020, pp. 60–67; M. Otáhal, *Opozice, moc, společnost 1969–1989 Příspěvek k dějinám „normalizace“*, Prague: Maxdorf, 1994, pp. 19–20; Jiří Maňák dealt comprehensively with the purges and the process of exchanging party membership cards, see J. Maňák, *Čistky v Komunistické straně Československa 1969–1970*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1997.

<sup>38</sup> Slovenský národný archív [Slovak National Archive] (hereinafter: SNA), fond (collection) (hereinafter: f.) Ústredný výbor Komunistickej strany Slovenska [Central Committee of Communist Party of Slovakia] (hereinafter: ÚV KSS) – Plénum [Plenary], box 1888, Zasadnutie pléna [Plenary Session] 5–6 February 1970, Informácia o postupe ÚKRK KSS, pri realizácii záverov septembrového pléna ÚV KSČ v riešení členských otázok s dôrazom na očistu strany [Information on the proceedings of the ÚKRK KSS in implementing the conclusions of the September plenary session of the ÚV KSČ in resolving membership issues with an emphasis on purging the party].

<sup>39</sup> The so-called Vysočiansky Congress (named after the venue in one of the halls of the ČKD train engines manufacturing company in the Vysočany district of Prague) was an extraordinary congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, which took place on the second day of the Soviet invasion, on 22 August 1968. It adopted resolutions condemning the occupation and elected new members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, with the reformist wing led by Dubček clearly prevailing. However, due to objective circumstances, only 50 delegates from Slovakia participated in the congress, which occurrence Gustáv Husák later used as one of his arguments for not recognizing the results of the congress. Between 26 and 29 August 1968, an extraordinary congress of the KSS was

Normalization was carried out under the direct Soviet influence and supervision. The official and canonised interpretation of the events of 1968 and the basic program document of the regime became the document “Lessons from the Crisis Development in the Party and Society after the 13th Congress of the KSČ” (*Poučení z krízového vývoja ve straně a společnosti po XIII. sjezdu KSČ*), adopted by ÚV KSČ in December 1970. Life in normalized Czechoslovakia was therefore perceived as “Life in Lessons.” The political leadership attempted to create a “pseudo-consumer” society, which was supposed to neutralize the public and keep it out of the public political sphere through social security and a relatively high standard of living (compared to other Eastern Bloc countries).<sup>40</sup> While basic needs were met, people felt a lack of higher-level goods and services. This led to the spread of the “gray zone” and corruption, which was specific to the everyday life of citizens in ‘normalized’ Czechoslovakia.<sup>41</sup>

As mentioned above, the Normalization regime aimed at re-centralizing power. The federal structure remained intact and retained all its formal characteristics, but the decision-making process was concentrated in the hands of the KSČ. Nevertheless, emphasis was placed on industrialization in Slovakia, which led to a reduction in the disparities between the Czech lands and Slovakia. Slovakia benefited from this, although its economic structure, based on heavy and arms industry, proved vulnerable.<sup>42</sup> Historians largely agree that Normalization in Slovakia took a different course than in the Czech part of the federation. The Normalization regime in Slovakia managed to integrate much broader sections of society than in the Czech Republic, thanks in part to the fact that economic growth guaranteed a significant material rise in Slovak society. Moreover, the onset of Normalization, which coincided with the creation of the federation, offered the Slovak elites the prospect of power and social advancement through the creation of new job opportunities in public

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held in Bratislava. See S. Sikora, *Po jari krutá zima*, pp. 186–187; *Komunistická strana Československa [Prameny k dějinám československé krize v letech 1967–1970, vol. 9/4]*, ed. J. Vondrová and J. Navrátil, Prague, Brno: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, Doplněk, 2003, p. 599; M. Štefanský, “Invázia, okupácia a jej dôsledky,” in *Slovenská spoločnosť v krízových rokoch 1967–1970. Zborník štúdií III*, Bratislava: Komisia vlády Slovenskej republiky pre analýzu historických udalostí rokov 1967–1970, Politologický kabinet SAV, 1992, pp. 116–119.

<sup>40</sup> J. Vykoukal, B. Litera, and M. Tejchman, *Východ*, pp. 576–577.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 585; *Každodenní život v Československu 1945/48–1989*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>42</sup> E. Londáková and M. Londák, *V tieni železnej opony. Príbeh Slovenska (1945–1989)*, Bratislava: VEDA, 2025, p. 207; J. Marušiak, “1989 in Slovakia – Between Reform and Radical Change,” *Securitas Imperii* 1 (2020), p. 110, [https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SI\\_36\\_s82-122.pdf](https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SI_36_s82-122.pdf) (accessed 25 September 2025).

administration, education, culture, and science.<sup>43</sup> While in the Czech part of the country those affected by the purges were largely deprived of the opportunity to work in their field (many had to take up manual jobs), in Slovakia they were demoted and sidelined in their careers, but most of them found employment in lower positions within their profession.<sup>44</sup> The Communist regime in Slovakia was able to rely more on strong social ties (family, regional, professional, religious), which mitigated the adverse effects of repressive policies and acted as a stabilizing factor.<sup>45</sup>

Resistance to the Communist regime during the Normalization period was primarily embodied by the civil initiative Charter 77 (*Charta 77*), proclaimed on 1 January 1977. It defined itself as a free, informal, and open community, not as a political opposition. The fundamental goal of Charter 77 was to advocate for the respect of human and civil rights in the country, based on ratified international covenants. The Communist regime never recognized the legitimacy of Charter 77, perceiving it as an “internal enemy” or “anti-socialist forces.” The regime’s response was repressive, carried out mainly by the State Security (Slovak *Štátna bezpečnosť*, Czech *Státní bezpečnost*, StB).<sup>46</sup> Specialized initiatives also arose within Charter 77, such as the Committee for the Defense of the Unjustly Prosecuted (*Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných*, VONS), which focused on persecuted citizens.<sup>47</sup>

In Slovakia, the opposition was weaker in number and more fragmented than in the Czech lands. Civil and political dissent was not nearly as widespread as in the Czech part, where dissidents were often driven into direct confrontation.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, individuals from Slovakia focused mainly on

<sup>43</sup> J. Marušiak, “Rok 1989 na Slovensku,” *Česko-Slovenská historická ročenka* 7 (2002), pp. 159–160; see also: J. Marušiak, “1989 in Slovakia – Between Reform and Radical Change,” *Securitas Imperii* 36 (1) (2020). [https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SI\\_36\\_s82-122.pdf](https://www.ustrcr.cz/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/SI_36_s82-122.pdf) (accessed 25 September 2025).

<sup>44</sup> J. Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století*, pp. 538–539.

<sup>45</sup> J. Marušiak, “1989 in Slovakia – Between Reform and Radical Change,” pp. 108–109.

<sup>46</sup> A whole series of publications have been released on the topic of dissent and resistance to the regime. Here are just a few examples: *Charta 77. 1977–1989. Od morální k demokratické revoluci. Dokumentace*, ed. V. Prečan, Scheinfeld, Prague, Bratislava: Čs. středisko nezávislé literatury, Archa, 1990; *Opozice a odpor proti komunistickému režimu v Československu 1968–1989*, ed. P. Blažek, Prague: Ústav českých dějin FF UK, 2005; M. Otáhal, *Opoziční proudy v české společnosti 1969–1989*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2011; *Projevy a podoby protirežimní rezistence v komunistickém Československu 1948–1989*, ed. T. Vilímek and O. Tůma, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2018.

<sup>47</sup> *Výbor na obranu nespravedlivě stíhaných*, ed. J. Pažout et al., Prague: Academia, 2015.

<sup>48</sup> Slovak political scientist and sociologist Soňa Szomolányi described the Slovak opposition as the weakest and least visible among the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, see S. Szomolányi, “November 1989: otvorenie klukatej cesty k demokracii,” in *November 1989 na Slovensku*, pp. 102–103.

Prague. Resistance was understood more as a “personal, domestic activity,” and the level of repression in terms of large-scale purges was milder. The dominant currents here were the Christian opposition (especially the underground church and lay apostolate) and the environmentalist “green” movement. Dissent was expressed through samizdat publications, mainly of a religious nature, and the publication of unofficial press. Among the most significant was the conservationist text “Bratislava/nahlas” (Bratislava/aloud) from 1987, which extensively analysed and criticised the ecological and urban problems of the city. This publication became politicised and used ecology for political expression. A significant turning point was the Candlelight Demonstration in March 1988<sup>49</sup> and activities in defense of the so-called Bratislava Five.<sup>50</sup> The weakness of politically oriented dissent in Slovakia, combined with the imprisonment of some of its leaders, contributed to its lesser role in the creation and formation of the Public Against Violence (*Verejnôst proti násiliu*) movement in November 1989. This is especially true when compared to the significant contribution of Czech political dissent to the creation of the Civic Forum (*Občanské fórum*).<sup>51</sup>

Although there was social stability and high employment, economic growth began to decline after 1976 and the regime entered a period of economic stagnation.<sup>52</sup> Resources were gradually being depleted, which limited the regime’s ability to maintain the loyalty of the population by providing the declared social security and subsidized goods. State planning was no longer

<sup>49</sup> The *Sviečková manifestácia* [Candlelight Demonstration] was a peaceful public protest by Catholics for religious freedoms and the observance of civil rights, which took place on March 25, 1988, at Hviezdoslav Square in Bratislava. It was organized by the so-called underground church. The participants prayed and carried candles, while the regime violently dispersed the gathering with the help of the riot police, water cannons, and batons. The demonstration became the first mass public protest against the Communist regime in Slovakia since the beginning of Normalization. See *Sviečková manifestácia. I. Štúdie. Spomienky a svedectvá*, ed. P. Jašek, F. Neupauer, O. Podolec, and P. Jakubčín, Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2015.

<sup>50</sup> The ‘Bratislava Five’ was a group of opposition activists (Ján Čarnogurský, Miroslav Kusý, Hana Ponická, Anton Selecký, and Vladimír Maňák) who were arrested in August 1989 after announcing their intention to honor the victims of the 1968 occupation. They were charged with incitement and subversion of the republic, and subsequently arrested. This sparked an unprecedented wave of solidarity at home and abroad. See J. Marušiak, “Rok 1989 na Slovensku,” p. 152.

<sup>51</sup> J. Marušiak, “Nezávislé iniciatívy na Slovensku v rokoch normalizácie,” in *November 1989 na Slovensku*, pp. 54–75; see also: E. Londáková and M. Londák, *V tieni železnej opony*, pp. 208–218.

<sup>52</sup> M. Štefek, “The Leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia During Normalization: Stability and Change,” in *Czechoslovakia and Eastern Europe in the Era of Normalization 1969–1989*, pp. 81–82.

able to respond effectively to growing economic problems. The regime could not avoid attempting economic reform.<sup>53</sup>

The Communist party was aware that further growth in living standards was inextricably linked to economic growth. Analyses and forecasts warned of unfavorable developments and pointed to the need to increase the availability of consumer goods. They warned that economic cooperation with other Socialist states based on the prevailing model would inevitably lead to a deterioration of conditions. Participation in so-called Socialist integration required a high degree of involvement in investments, the return on which was in the long term and did not solve the acute problems of the Czechoslovak economy and the population's living standards.<sup>54</sup>

It was possible to read between the lines that the state should strive to achieve a kind of proportionality. In medias res, it was to satiate the population's demand for scarce goods that were modern in the world, or in the West, and at the same time take into account the real possibilities of the socialist economy.<sup>55</sup> One of the results of the reform effort was to be a program document from 1980, called the *Soubor opatření ke zdokonalení soustavy plánovitého řízení národního hospodářství po roce 1980* (Set of Measures to Improve the System of Planned Management of the National Economy).<sup>56</sup> This document was assumed to become the basis for economic reforms in the coming years. The primary goal was to change the planning process. Five-year plans would

<sup>53</sup> J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu*, p. 301.

<sup>54</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Předsednictvo [Presidium], box 1564, Zasadnutie predsedníctva [Meeting of the Presidium] 19 February 1980, Návrh hlavných smerov vývoja v 7. päťročnici [Proposal for the main lines of development in the 7th Five-Year Plan].

<sup>55</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Předsednictvo, box 1651, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 4 January 1983, Správa z previerky účinnosti uplatňovania práva kontroly činnosti hospodárskeho vedenia podnikov a závodov v podmienkach postupnej realizácie Súboru opatrení na zdokonalenie sústavy plánovitého riadenia národného hospodárstva [Report on the verification of the effectiveness of the exercise of the right to control the activities of the economic management of enterprises and factories in the conditions of the gradual implementation of the Set of Measures for the Improvement of the System of Planned Management of the National Economy].

<sup>56</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Předsednictvo, box 1564, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 19 February 1980, Soubor opatření ke zdokonalení soustavy plánovitého řízení národního hospodářství po roce 1980 [Set of measures to improve the system of planned management of the national economy after 1980]; Národní archiv České republiky [National Archives, Czech republic] (hereinafter: NA ČR), f. Ústřední výbor Komunistické strany Československa [Central Committee of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia] (hereinafter: ÚV KSČ), 02/1, Předsednictvo [Presidium] P 129/80, point 7, Návrh politicko-organizačního zabezpečení usnesení PÚV KSČ a vlády ČSSR k souboru opatření kde zdokolení soustavy plánovitého řízení národního hospodářství po roce 1980 [Proposal for political and organizational security of the resolution of the Presidium of the ÚV KSČ and the Government of the ČSSR on a Set of measures to improve the system of planned management of the national economy after 1980].

of course remain, but they were supposed to be based on long-term forecasts of economic development with the possibility of adjustments.<sup>57</sup>

The *Set of measures*... was not a radical reform like in the 1960s, but a moderate economic initiative. Interestingly, it partially improved the position of private entrepreneurs providing services, who were priorly on the absolute margin of state economy. Of course, the Communist leadership tried to suppress and limit the possibilities of private enterprise as much as possible – which is, after all, typical of a Communist regime. Nevertheless, in Czechoslovakia, which had an unusually high level of nationalization of economy and property, there was limited scope for individual fruitful activity, which was absolutely marginal, although legal.<sup>58</sup>

However, the *Set of measures*... ultimately strengthened the powers of the central planning authorities, which were responsible for coordinating the entire process and specifying the terms for individual economic measures. The center had greater control over corporate decision-making, regulation of materials, raw materials, fuels, and energy increased, and imports were restricted. However, the desired improvement in the economic condition of the state did not occur, and national income stagnated in 1981 and 1982. Inspections repeatedly highlighted problems relating to the quality and breadth of supply for the domestic market. Companies' managements defended themselves with "objective reasons," but inspectors, who also submitted evaluation reports to party leadership, pointed to subjective reasons — professional competence, expertise, and "political maturity."<sup>59</sup> Inspections carried out in Slovakia came to the same conclusions. They were also emphasised by internal evaluation reports from the economic department and economic commission of ÚV KSS.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Václav Rameš examined the possibilities for private enterprise in socialist Czechoslovakia; see V. Rameš, "Individual Service Providing as an Economic Practice in Late Communist Czechoslovakia," *Moderní dějiny* 31 (1) (2023), pp. 207–230; see also: V. Rameš, *Trh bez přívlastků, nebo ekonomickou demokracií? Spory o podobu vlastnické transformace v porevolučním Československu*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2021.

<sup>59</sup> T. Vilímek, „Kdo řídí – kontroluje!“ Podnikový management a úskalí „socialistické kontroli“ v československých podnicích v osmesátých letech 20. století, *Soudobé dějiny* 24 (3) (2020), pp. 364–367, [https://sd.usd.cas.cz/artkey/sod-201703-0004\\_whoever-manages-supervises-corporate-management-and-pit-falls-of-socialist-supervision-in-czechoslovak-en.php](https://sd.usd.cas.cz/artkey/sod-201703-0004_whoever-manages-supervises-corporate-management-and-pit-falls-of-socialist-supervision-in-czechoslovak-en.php) (accessed 26 November 2025).

<sup>60</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1666, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 5 July 1983, Vyhodnotenie účinnosti Súboru opatrení na zdokonalenie sústavy plánovitého riadenia v hospodárstve riadenom vládou SSR za roky 1981–1982 [Evaluation of the effectiveness of the Set of Measures to Improve the System of Planned Management in the Economy Managed by the Government of the SSR for the Years 1981–1982.]

František Nevařil, then advisor to Federal Prime Minister Lubomír Štrougal, classified the *Set of Measures*... among the reform attempts gradually introduced from the beginning of the Normalization period in the 1970s. These were intended to be a kind of formal substitute for the fundamental reforms of the 1968 Prague Spring period. The party needed to present to the outside world that reform was necessary, but that it could be implemented without the “economic revisionists” or the “people of ‘68” The *Set of Measures*... itself was described as a step backwards, “cosmetic changes out of place and out of time, in many ways internally contradictory, which could not bring anything good... It was simply a camouflage for incompetence and inaction, and its results reflected this.”<sup>61</sup>

## Czechoslovak ‘Reconstruction’

Although the prospects for the future might have looked optimistic after Gorbachev’s rise in 1985, the framework of Czechoslovak-Soviet relations remained unchanged. It was defined by the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance between Czechoslovakia and the USSR from May 1970.<sup>62</sup> Soviet troops continued to be stationed on Czechoslovak territory, the Iron Curtain remained, and there was no indication that anything would change in regard to Czechoslovakia’s full integration into the Eastern Bloc. However, the regime no longer had its draconian form from the 1950s. After the unsuccessful reform attempt in 1968, Czechoslovak society lived under the ‘Normalization’<sup>63</sup> regime represented by Gustáv Husák.

In March 1986, about a year after Gorbachev’s appointment, the Congress of the KSČ was held in Prague. Although the party leadership officially subscribed to the ideas of ‘reconstruction,’ its application was to focus primarily on the economic sphere, while fundamental political changes remained taboo.<sup>64</sup> The Normalization leadership of the state viewed Gorbachev’s reforms

<sup>61</sup> F. Nevařil, *U tří premiérů* [unpublished, manuscript in author’s collection], pp. 6–7.

<sup>62</sup> For its full text, see *Mezinárodní souvislosti československé krize 1967–1970. Zář 1968 – květen 1970*, ed. J. Vondrová and J. Navrátil, Prague, Brno: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny Akademie věd České republiky, Doplněk, 1997, pp. 346–349.

<sup>63</sup> B. Katřebová Blehová, “Michail Gorbačov a koniec komunistického režimu v Československu,” pp. 23–34.

<sup>64</sup> See chapters “Uznesenia XVII. zjazdu KSČ” and “Hlavné smery hospodárskeho a sociálneho rozvoja ČSSR na roky 1986–1990 a výhľad do roku 2000,” in *XVII. Zjazd Komunistickej strany Československa. Dokumenty a materiály* (Bratislava, 1986), pp. 153–212; see also J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socializmu*, p. 301.

with concern. They understood that Gorbachev's effort to reform the system bore too close a resemblance to the revival process of the 1968 Prague Spring, which was violently suppressed by the Warsaw Pact military intervention. Paradoxically, it was the collapse of democratization efforts in Czechoslovakia that brought many members of the then party leadership to power. Those who replaced the reformist politicians from 1968 during the Normalization period now faced a situation where the ideas they had previously rejected as dangerous and 'counter-revolutionary' were gradually being pushed under the auspices of the Soviet leadership; moreover, it were them who were expected to become the initiators of these ideas in their own countries. This development caused uncertainty among them — on the one hand, they did not want to come into direct conflict with Moscow, but on the other hand, they realized that this could threaten their own position of power.<sup>65</sup>

It is impossible not to mention that the KSČ closely monitored the changes in Poland, not only in connection with the fact that the ruling Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) found itself under pressure from the Solidarity trade union movement, "which de facto took away its monopoly on the officially proclaimed representation of the interests of the working class," but also because fundamental internal changes were taking place in it in terms of politics, organization, and ideology. Later, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) also attracted such attention.<sup>66</sup> On the contrary, in its cautious stance towards Gorbachev's policies, it found a partner in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED), led by Erich Honecker, formally endorsed *perestroika*, but emphasized the need to take local conditions into account, which was appreciated by conservative members of the KSČ, led by Biřak.<sup>67</sup> From this comparison, the KSČ, or rather the KSS (as well as SED), emerges as a party in which not only did no dialogue with a well-defined opposition take place, but no internal reformist movement comparable to those in Poland or Hungary gained ground. Czechoslovakia,

<sup>65</sup> J. Kalous, "The lonely fencepost. Miloř Jakeř and his idea of Perestroika in Czechoslovakia," in *Annus Mirabilis' 1989 and Slovakia*, pp. 434–435.

<sup>66</sup> P. Weiss, "KSS v období perestrojky a slabnúceho Husákovho vplyvu," in *Gustáv Husák. Moc politiky, politik moci*, pp. 697–698; see also S. Szomolányi, "Prehistória, zrod a rola aktéra novembra '89 – VPN," in *Verejnosc' proti násiliu 1989 – 1991. Svedectvá a dokumenty*, ed. I. Antalová, Bratislava: Nadácia Milana Šimečku, 1998, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> J. Dejmeck, *Československo, jeho sousedé a velmoci ve XX. století (1918 až 1992)*, Prague: Centrum pro ekonomiku a politiku, 2002, pp. 79–80.

the GDR, and Romania became a “neo-stalinist triangle,”<sup>68</sup> where there was no period of opening of the regime that would have come from the party itself. They thus distanced themselves not only from Poland and Hungary, but also from the Soviet leadership. Thus, unlike its neighbors, Czechoslovakia did not experience a stage of liberalization and opening of the regime that would have originated from the party itself.<sup>69</sup>

However, it was natural for the population to draw parallels with the Prague Spring. Former party members, expelled during the purges at the beginning of Normalization, demanded rehabilitation. Criticism and expressions of dissatisfaction with the situation in the state coming from the ranks of the working class or student environment were growing. The ‘specter’ of the 1968 revival process was thus still present in party leadership and government circles. The approach of the KSČ could seem ambivalent – on the one hand, it declared its readiness for economic reforms and perceived the USSR as its model, which it usually blindly followed. On the other hand, the party resisted any connection between the ‘reconstruction’ and the policy of *glasnost*, which aimed at a multiplicity of topics in the public sphere. The KSČ never officially subscribed to *glasnost*, and thus the expectations that the influence of Gorbachev’s policy would have a more noticeable impact on the situation in Czechoslovakia remained unfulfilled. Criticism was therefore leveled at the KSČ leadership, that its policy was at odds with the policy of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), and that it was only pretending to conduct a ‘reconstruction.’<sup>70</sup>

It is characteristic that in Czechoslovak records concerning this issue, in the early stages of the reconstruction (1985–1986), a noticeable avoidance of the term ‘reconstruction’ can be observed. This was because, initially, it was perceived mainly as a Soviet matter with uncertain outcomes. The party leadership seemed to be waiting for the moment when the project’s binding nature for the entire Soviet Bloc<sup>71</sup> would become clear. Even official statements on the developments in the USSR or the presentation of Gorbachev’s texts full of the ‘reconstruction’ did not exactly exude enthusiastic zeal. They were usually adorned with celebratory rhetoric of the achievements of

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<sup>68</sup> J. Vykoukal, B. Litera, and M. Tejchman, *Východ*, pp. 590–591.

<sup>69</sup> P. Weiss, “KSS v období perestrojky a slabného Husákovho vplyvu,” pp. 697–698; see also S. Szomolányi, “Prehľad, zrod a rola aktéra novembra ’89 – VPN,” p. 13.

<sup>70</sup> P. Weiss, “KSS v období perestrojky a slabného Husákovho vplyvu,” pp. 718–719.

<sup>71</sup> M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu*, p. 60.

socialism, and where possible, paraphrasing occurred, such as “acceleration of the concept of the development of socialist society,” “intensification,” “acceleration strategy,” or the term *perestroika* was translated as *prestavba* – *přestavba*, ‘reconstruction.’ Only when Soviet statesmen were directly quoted was it impossible to avoid the term ‘reconstruction.’ If it did appear in documents, it was used only in connection with a specific sector, e.g., “the reconstruction of retail prices,” “the reconstruction of the economic mechanism,” and so on.<sup>72</sup> It was not used as a comprehensive term for the entire process, as it could then give the impression that it was about restructuring the entire system as such into another one.<sup>73</sup>

The term ‘reconstruction’ became established only from the beginning of 1987, when it became clear that Gorbachev’s project was not just another ideological campaign and that the reform effort would not remain just on paper.<sup>74</sup> The ‘reconstruction’ became so established that it replaced previous formulations about restructuring. Understandably, it was to be a change in the spirit of reformist currents, especially from the 1960s. Ideologically, the whole effort was formulated as “revival of socialism,” “deepening of socialist democracy,” and so on. The basic premise, similar to the reform attempts in the 1960s, was to combine non-capitalist economic and social relations with political democracy.<sup>75</sup>

The ‘reconstruction’ found a greater response in government circles, as it opened up space for more radical reforms and allowed for addressing the issue of worsening economic indicators. Some representatives of the federal government began to point out the need to reassess existing approaches and emphasized the necessity of modernizing economic management. However, the reformist attitudes of some government elites were not only an expression of genuine conviction about the necessity of change but also an attempt to adapt to new conditions and gain favor with the Soviet leadership.<sup>76</sup>

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 55–62.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>74</sup> J. Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století*, p. 62. The turning point in the use of this term came in connection with the plenary session of the Central Committee of CPSU in January 1987, where the personnel changes in favor of the Gorbachev garrison were completed. At the same time, a set of legislative measures regulating the status of state enterprises, cooperative production, trade and other economic sectors was approved.

<sup>75</sup> Z. Mlynář, *Krize v sovětských systémech od Stalina ke Gorbačovovi*, p. 121.

<sup>76</sup> M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu*, p. 95.

This included efforts to jump-start the lagging scientific and technical sector. In documents dealing with this issue, we find a general appeal directed at the heads of the relevant sectors to “create conditions for entrepreneurship,” with the addition that the goal is to achieve innovations with world-class parameters. Therefore, they were to approach the assignment of tasks with the possibility of failure,<sup>77</sup> which was, in itself, innovative within the party’s vocabulary. Such stimulation of initiative indicated that the rapid expansion of computer technology in the West contrasted sharply with the situation east of the Iron Curtain. The Communist party regime was forced to look for ways to increase competitiveness against Western economies. The Presidium of ÚV KSS also studied the structures, strategies, and overall functioning of corporations from Japan and the United States.<sup>78</sup>

At the beginning of 1987, the Principles of Restructuring the Economic Mechanism in the Czechoslovak Socialistic Republic (Československá socialistická republika, ČSSR)<sup>79</sup> were published, containing nearly 40 articles serving as a basis for reform laws. The document partially returned to the economic reform attempts of 1968, which, of course, no one referred to. As mentioned, the term “reform” was intentionally not used anywhere in the text. The key was to be Law No. 88/1988 on the State Enterprise, which was to transform the existing national enterprises into state ones and open them up to a certain degree of business freedom. The enterprise itself was to develop its own business activities, generate profit, and cover a substantial part of its expenses from it. Furthermore, it was to be obliged to create its own funds (reserve, development, cultural, social, etc.). The establishment of a foreign exchange fund was to give the enterprise the right to establish direct relations with organizations based in other Eastern Bloc states, without the need for party’s

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<sup>77</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1765, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 6 July 1987, Opatrenia na realizáciu záverov 5. zasadania ÚV KSC a zasadania ÚV KSS v oblasti vedecko-technického rozvoja v pôsobnosti ústredných orgánov SSR [Measures for the implementation of the conclusions of the 5th Session of the ÚV KSC and the Session of the ÚV KSS in the field of scientific and technical development within the competence of the central organs of the SSR].

<sup>78</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1770, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 6 October 1987, Stratégia japonských korporácií; K organizačnej štruktúre priemyselných korporácií USA [The strategy of Japanese corporations; On the organizational structure of U.S. industrial corporations].

<sup>79</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1774, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 20 January 1987, Zásady Predsedníctva ÚV KSC a vlády ČSSR pre prebudovanie hospodárskeho mechanizmu a ich politicko-organizačné zabezpečenie v podmienkach SSR [Principles of the Presidium of the ÚV KSC and the Government of the ČSSR for the reconstruction of the economic mechanism and their political-organisational security in the conditions of the SSR].

or higher bureaucratic approval. The law also introduced employee self-governing, within which the work collective could elect and dismiss its director, as well as members of the enterprise council.<sup>80</sup> Enterprises were to be given relatively broad autonomy in the organization of their internal life, whether it concerned wage levels, working hours, self-financing, or mutual relations. All of this was to replace the previous practice of administrative tutelage by the party headquarters. The legal regulation was based on the Soviet *perestroika* model, which defined the enterprise as a “socialist producer of goods,” thus giving the socialist economy a commodity, consumer character. As a market entity, it was to be managed economically, not politically. The initial proposal still assumed a binding state plan for the enterprise and a unified pricing policy, i.e., state-set prices at which goods could be sold and raw materials could be purchased, which was the result of pressure from party circles. The opinion of the Economic Department of the ÚV KSS from July 1987 on the draft of this law stated that it had, in the preparatory phase, more the character of a statement and declaration than direct and binding regulations.<sup>81</sup> However, it was deemed necessary to point out that “the prepared law does not fully reflect the legal connection between the center and the enterprise sphere. The formulations persist as if there were fears from current practice to avoid unnecessarily frequent operational interventions from the center...”<sup>82</sup>

Other pillar laws included the Law on Agricultural Cooperatives, the Law on Housing, Consumer, and Production Cooperatives, and the Law on the Use of Land and Other Agricultural Property. Similar to the Law on State Enterprise, these were to expand the possibilities of internal management and independent economic/entrepreneurial activity. The Government Com-

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. See also Zákon zo 14. júna 1988 o štátnom podniku. Zákon nr. 88/1988 Zb., <https://www.slovlex.sk/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1988/88/19880701.html> (accessed 25 September 2025); see also J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socializmu*, pp. 301–304.

<sup>81</sup> This is a typical phenomenon, a paradox of the system, “which on the one hand created – partly proclaimed and partly real – the preconditions for social development, which it then, on the other hand, hindered and limited itself. Thus, an industrial society with limited entrepreneurship and a political system that, although declaratively recognizing the rights of citizens to self-government, in practice did not allow for the institutionalisation of practices of real advocacy and defence of their interests. Thus, the development of education and culture has been associated with a reduction of creativity, etc. These contradictions became an important source of reform movements in all societies of real socialism.” F. Novosad, *Alchymia dejín*, Bratislava: Iris, 2004, p. 19, quoted by P. Weiss, “KSS v období perestrojky a slabnúceho Husákovho vplyvu,” p. 725.

<sup>82</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS - Predsedníctvo, box 1765, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 6 July 1987, Stanovisko ekonomického oddelenia ÚV KSS k Návrhu zákona o štátnom podniku [Opinion of the Economic Department of the ÚV KSS on the Draft Law on State-Owned Enterprises].

mittee for the Planned Management of the National Economy<sup>83</sup> was tasked with their drafting. The preparation of these measures proceeded very slowly. The comment procedure and discussions on specific parameters lasted more than a year. In the case of the key Law on State Enterprise, a controlled public discussion also took place (in regions, districts, enterprises...), which was to incorporate comments into the draft law.<sup>84</sup> However, its result showed that enterprise management would not accept the announced changes with open arms. They realized that the coming model was to redefine the existing hierarchies of decision-making, the possibility of their election or dismissal by the work collective, ultimately leading to the weakening of their positions.<sup>85</sup> In the short period of operation of the enterprise councils, in most cases, only one candidate stood for election, usually the existing enterprise director. Alternatively, an unpopular person from management, without the necessary support and influence, was purposefully added. Subsequently, the pre-agreed situation was to be confirmed by a “democratic election.”<sup>86</sup>

Soviet *perestroika* brought momentum in the form of planned electoral reform. Communist elections, of course, were not a political contest and had nothing to do with democracy. They served as a facade for demonstrating unanimity and support for the ruling regime, where voters de facto only approved a single, pre-selected candidate. The proposed reform was intended to allow a choice between several candidates and thus increase public confidence. In reality, however, it was only an attempt to create the appearance of competitiveness while maintaining the KSČ monopoly on power. To ensure the results, the introduction of multi-member constituencies was pushed through, where six to eight candidates would be nominated. Control over the electoral process was to be ensured by institutional unilateralism. Candidates could only be nominated by institutions that conformed to the regime and were associated with the National Front. Officially approved candidates were to be listed on the ballot in

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<sup>83</sup> J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu*, p. 301; M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu*, pp. 67–68.

<sup>84</sup> Such public discussions were not uncommon. The regime needed to push through in its propaganda the key changes “with the support of the broad masses” and to declare the “breadth of socialist democracy.” The course was always similar, with the party meeting issuing an internal directive with the desired interpretation a few weeks before the opening of the debate. These were sent to the lower echelons of the party apparatus, right down to its basic organizations. A public debate was subsequently opened in which the proposed changes were to be acclamatively endorsed. See M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu*, p. 77.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

the order in which they were preferred by the leading officials. The possibility of choosing from several candidates was tested in the 1989 by-elections,<sup>87</sup> but the final reform proposal was never finalized or adopted due to political events at the end of 1989.<sup>88</sup>

In April 1987, Gorbachev's visit to Prague and Bratislava attracted a great deal of attention. Part of the population associated his arrival with hopes for personnel changes in the top state and party institutions, and thus for an overall transformation of the political climate. However, these expectations were not fulfilled. Gorbachev did not in any way indicate sympathy for the 1968 Prague Spring, did not condemn the Soviet occupation, and did not comment on the presence of Soviet troops in Czechoslovakia. Gorbachev justified this by abandoning the "Brezhnev Doctrine" and striving not to interfere in internal affairs, believing that the Czechoslovak leadership, headed by Husák, would be capable of implementing reforms on its own.<sup>89</sup>

The end of 1987 became a breakthrough. The Presidium of the ÚV KSČ approved the "Comprehensive Document for the Restructuring of the Economic Mechanism in the ČSSR" in November. It was based on the aforementioned "Principles of Restructuring the Economic Mechanism in the ČSSR." It became a set of methodological and organizational rules, specified previously addressed issues, including the Law on State Enterprise, and was to serve as the "cornerstone" of the Czechoslovak 'reconstruction.' The prepared legal norms resulting from it were discussed by the Federal Assembly and finally approved by the government of the ČSSR. The reconstruction was to be a lengthy process; individual steps were to be applied gradually over several years. Part of the reform laws focused on the economy entered into force in mid-1988, and

<sup>87</sup> These were by-elections to the Federal Assembly (nine constituencies), the ČNR (six constituencies) and the SNR (two constituencies). Only in one constituency of the ČNR was the candidate in second place elected. In several constituencies, no opposing candidate was nominated, while in others, the candidates in first place on the ballot were elected.

<sup>88</sup> J. Charvát, M. Štefek, "Kořeny československé volební reformy připravované v druhé polovině osmdesátých let dvacátého století," *Politologický časopis / Czech Journal of Political Science* 1 (2010), pp. 24–38 <https://czechpolsci.eu/article/view/34725> (accessed 25 September 2025).

<sup>89</sup> M. Barnovský, "Vedení KSČ a KSS – od nástupu Gorbačova po November 1989," in *November 1989 na Slovensku*, p. 34; M. Štefek, "Komunistická strana Československa a proces přestavby v letech 1985–1989," pp. 117–118. See also *K vývoji sovětské politiky vůči státům Varšavské smlouvy. Dokumenty a materiály 1989–1990*, ed. V. Prečan and Z. Sládek, Prague: Československé dokumentační středisko, Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1999; M. Gorbachev and Z. Mlynář, *Reformátoři nebývají šťastní*, Prague: Victoria Publishing, 1995.

part from January 1989. The completion of the entire enterprise transformation was planned for January 1, 1991, when a new 5-year plan was to begin.<sup>90</sup>

The formal adoption of the document took place at the ‘reconstruction’ session of the ÚV KSČ from 17 to 18 December 1987. This went down in history primarily due to the resignation, or rather the removal, of Gustáv Husák from the post of General Secretary of the ÚV KSČ<sup>91</sup>, which he had held since 1969. After many years, the functions of President of Czechoslovakia and General Secretary of the ÚV KSČ were separated. This change was the result of several factors. Husák’s failing health undoubtedly played a role, but primarily it was the result of an internal power struggle within the party, in which the ambitions of the conservative Vasil Biľak and the federal Prime Minister Lubomír Štrougal played a significant role. Biľak had long held the most conservative position and referred to the “Lessons from the Crisis.” His conflict with Štrougal confirmed the existence of factional currents within the leadership.<sup>92</sup> Although Biľak was among those who voted for Husák’s dismissal<sup>93</sup> (pursuing his own power interests), he himself was dismissed from the Presidium of ÚV KSČ in December 1988.<sup>94</sup>

However, Moscow promoted the compromise candidate Miloš Jakeš as the representative of “Czechoslovak reconstruction,” and was prepared to intervene against the potential rise of Biľak. Husák yielded to the Soviet leadership and expressed support for Jakeš, who thus succeeded him in the chair of the party’s first man.<sup>95</sup> Gorbachev’s, or his leadership’s, stance on this issue can be considered surprising. Jakeš was, in essence, an average, if not unsuitable, candidate in every respect. He did not represent a “breath of fresh air” and was certainly not the rejuvenation that the ‘reconstruction’ proclaimed. His career was synonymous with a typical Normalization apparatchik. By betting

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<sup>90</sup> NA ČR, f. ÚV KSČ 02/1, Presidium P 49/87, point 6, Návrh Komplexního dokumentu pro přestavbu hospodářského mechanismu ČSSR [Draft Comprehensive Document for the Reconstruction of the Economic Mechanism of the ČSSR].

<sup>91</sup> The division of functions had also taken place almost 20 years earlier, in the context of the 1968 revival process. In January, Alexander Dubček became the First Secretary of the ÚV KSČ, succeeded by Ludvík Svoboda. The merger of the highest party and state positions occurred again in 1975, when G. Husák became president of the ČSSR.

<sup>92</sup> M. Štefek, *Komunistická strana Československa a proces přestavby*, Diploma thesis, p. 71.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>94</sup> J. Kocian, J. Pažout, T. Vilímeček, S. Balík, and V. Hloušek, *Dějiny Komunistické strany Československa IV (1969–1993)*, pp. 155–156.

<sup>95</sup> M. Pullmann, *Konec experimentu*, pp. 96–97; see also B. Katrebová-Blebová, *Der Fall des Kommunismus in der Tschechoslowakei*, Vienna: LIT Verlag, 2006, pp. 175–185.

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on Jakeš, the Soviet party made a misstep and caused “Czechoslovak reconstruction” never to exceed the economic framework. His leadership did not fundamentally oppose economic reforms, but did not intend to make significant concessions on the issue of political and civil liberties, did not allow dialogue with the opposition, and maintained the positions of the “leading role of the party.”

## Economic Experiments

The period of reconstruction favored various economic experiments designed to test the functionality of economic measures in enterprises. Among the most important was the so-called “Comprehensive Experiment to Increase the Autonomy and Responsibility of Organizations for Effective Development.” The principles of the experiment were agreed upon by the republican and federal governments, which drafted specific legislation. The Communist Party played a key role in monitoring and evaluating the experiment.<sup>96</sup> Within its framework, several enterprises from various industrial and commercial sectors were selected, in which greater autonomy was introduced, the binding nature of the state plan was reduced, and basic market mechanisms were applied. Enterprises were to generate profit, which they were to reinvest at their own discretion. They were given greater autonomy, while the binding tasks arising from the state plan were significantly limited and essentially restricted only to foreign trade and scientific-technical development financed from public resources. In line with the Law on State Enterprise, enterprises were to self-finance and apply the so-called full *khozraschet*<sup>97</sup> (economic accountability). Approximately 40 companies from all over Czechoslovakia were involved in the experiment.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>96</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1753, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 6 January 1987, Příloha k usnesení vlády ČSSR č. 321/1986 [Appendix to Resolution No. 321/1986 of the Government of the ČSSR].

<sup>97</sup> The term *khozraschet* is a contemporary one, or rather it is a term significant mainly for the socialist economies of the Eastern Bloc countries. It was a method of planned management of the economy in enterprises in which the individual enterprise components act as separate economic units in relation to each other. Costs and expenditures were to be covered from the enterprise’s income, thus pursuing the profitability of production. The term itself is an acronym from the Russian *хозрасчет*, abbreviated from *хозяйственный расчет, khozaystvennyi raschet*, which translates as economic budget/account.

<sup>98</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS - Predsedníctvo, box 1771, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 19 October 1987, Informácia o realizácii Komplexného experimentu zvýšenia samostatnosti a zodpovednosti organizácií za efektívny rozvoj [Information on the implementation of a comprehensive experiment to increase the independence and responsibility of organizations for effective development].

The Presidium of ÚV KSS monitored the implementation and progress of the experiment in organizations that were under the jurisdiction of the republican ministries of the Slovak Socialist Republic.<sup>99</sup> In May 1988, the economic department of the KSS evaluated it critically, although it pointed out its short duration, on the basis of which it was not possible to draw general conclusions. It pointed to problems in the management of enterprises, pressure from superior authorities, insufficient links with foreign trade, and persistent bureaucracy. The main cause was identified as the poor elaboration of the conditions of the experiment on specific enterprise mechanisms.<sup>100</sup>

The People's Control Committee (*Výbor ľudovej kontroly*) also carried out an inspection of the experimental enterprises.<sup>101</sup> Organizations criticized the unclear relationship with superior authorities and the center. Problems also arose in the so-called supplier-customer relationships, which acted as an impediment. The high tax burden (up to 65% of planned profits) was counterproductive and made it impossible to purchase new technology and modernize. There were also documented cases where, in certain organizations, most employees were unaware that any experiment was taking place at all. Slovak ministers were late in introducing the experiment, which led to a lack of understanding of its objectives in companies. Some of the SSR ministries deliberately included in the experiment the organizations in good condition, thus limiting the possibility of comparison. Overall, it was found that the experimenting organizations achieved higher dynamics and were more profit-oriented, but the difference was not significant compared to normally functioning enterprises. The committee subsequently recommended several measures and further checks before the definitive introduction of the new, "rebuilt" economic mechanism.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Some of the Slovak enterprises were managed at the federal level.

<sup>100</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS - Predsedníctvo, box 1786, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 24 May 1988, Správa o predbežnom hodnotení výsledkov hospodárskych organizácií realizujúcich Komplexný experiment zvýšenia samostatnosti a zodpovednosti organizácií za efektívny rozvoj v roku 1987 [Report on the preliminary evaluation of the results of economic organizations implementing the comprehensive Experiment to Increase the Independence and Responsibility of Organizations for Effective Development in 1987].

<sup>101</sup> The People's Control Committee was a supervisory body responsible for controlling the economic activities of state authorities.

<sup>102</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS - Predsedníctvo, box 1801, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 20 March 1989, Správa o výsledku preverky uplatňovania Zásad komplexného experimentu zvýšenia samostatnosti a zodpovednosti za efektívny rozvoj vo vybraných organizáciách [Report on the results of the review of the application of the Principles of a comprehensive experiment to increase the independence and responsibility of selected organizations].

The experiment was considered useful and necessary for testing the planned economic changes. It showed that the implementation of market mechanisms could bring positive results. In general, however, it ended in failure. The slow pace of change was due to a combination of unclear competences, high tax burdens, and, most importantly, the inability to eliminate decades-old forms of management.<sup>103</sup> However, the experiment shows that even the elites themselves were aware of the unsustainability of the previous economic system and, within the constraints of the system, attempted to bring about a new, more promising model. They did not shy away from using the market mechanisms of their ideological opponents, even though they cloaked this fact in conformist socialist rhetoric.

### KSS, Slovakia and the ‘Reconstruction’

The everywhere-declared effort for rejuvenation and ‘new’ faces, with which the party tried to convince the public that it was acting in accordance with the new ‘reconstruction’ trend, was also reflected in the KSS. Just like in the nationwide KSČ, there was a change in the position of the First Secretary. Jozef Lenárt, who had been at the head of the KSS since 1970, resigned in April 1988.<sup>104</sup> He did not leave political life but moved to a party’s secretary position in the Central Committee apparatus in Prague. He was replaced by the unremarkable, and practically unknown to the wider Slovak public, Ignác Janák. Internally, he was perceived as part of the conservative-dogmatic wing of the party spectrum, close to Vasil Biľak. With this party past, like Miloš Jakeš, he was certainly neither a new face nor an energetic reformer.

Throughout 1988, several of the most compromised officials were removed from their positions. For example, Ludovít Pezlár, a member of the Presidium of the KSS and secretary for education and culture. Pezlár was a key personality

<sup>103</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1806, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 30 May 1989, Informácia o účinnosti komplexného experimentu zvýšenia samostatnosti a zodpovednosti organizácií za efektívny rozvoj [Information on the effectiveness of the comprehensive experiment to increase the independence and responsibility of organizations for effective development]. See also SNA, f. ÚV KSS - Predsedníctvo, box 1786, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 24 May 1988, Správa o predbežnom hodnotení výsledkov hospodárskych organizácií realizujúcich Komplexný experiment zvýšenia samostatnosti a zodpovednosti organizácií za efektívny rozvoj v roku 1987 [Report on the preliminary evaluation of the results of economic organizations implementing the Comprehensive experiment to increase the independence and responsibility of organizations for effective development in 1987].

<sup>104</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Plénum [Plenary], box 1953, Zasadnutie pléna, 14 April 1988, Kádrové návrhy [Cadre proposals].

behind the mass personnel purges in this area. He even spoke out against Gorbachev's *perestroika*. Pezlár's departure from top-level politics was reportedly demanded by the Soviet ambassador himself. Pezlár was transferred to the position of ambassador in Denmark. He was replaced by Gejza Šlapka, chairman of the City Committee of the party in Bratislava, who, however, was not a reformer either<sup>105</sup>. The personnel changes in the party leadership were thus practically only superficial; the 'new faces' were long-time party workers who could not bring about any real change. Parallel changes were also taking place in state functions; the most significant for Slovakia was the resignation of the Slovak Prime Minister Peter Colotka, who had held this position since 1969. As part of this, he also resigned from the position of Deputy Prime Minister of the federal government and membership in the presidiums of both party central committees – the KSČ and the KSS.

Given the mechanism of internal party discipline and so-called 'democratic centralism,' from an external perspective, the Communist party could appear as a strict, ideological political-power monolith. Similarly to the national level in the KSČ, the KSS was also internally ideologically differentiated. Especially its non-dogmatic-minded intellectuals could, thanks to Gorbachev's rise, become acquainted with the development vicissitudes in the CPSU and the Soviet Union, as well as in other Eastern Bloc states<sup>106</sup>. As an example, we can mention Ivan Knotek's recollection<sup>107</sup>:

"I was enthusiastic about the ideas of reconstruction of socialism. I was inspired by materials from the CPSU Central Committee meetings published in the press and materials that we had at our disposal. After reading M. Gorbachev's book *Reconstruction and New Thinking*, I was convinced of the necessity of accelerating reforms in our Czechoslovakia as well."<sup>108</sup>

Similar to the situation at the federal level, the atmosphere in Slovakia was also becoming more favorable to a thought trends oriented toward the so-called scientific and technological revolution. This school of thought originated primarily in the academic community – the Economic Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences (*Ekonomický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied*, EÚ SAV), specifically among the staff associated with the institute's director,

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> P. Weiss, "KSS v období perestrojky a slabného Husákovho vplyvu," pp. 693–694.

<sup>107</sup> Ivan Knotek was a member of the Presidium of the KSČ and KSS, and from October 1988 to June 1989 he was Prime Minister of the Slovak Socialist Republic.

<sup>108</sup> I. Knotek, *Pasca bez úniku*, p. 79.

Ivan Okáli. They argued that Marxism is defined as a scientific system and therefore economic management should also be based on scientific methods. Okáli appealed to the need for a professional approach and emphasized that change must be based on a deeper understanding of the mechanism of management, its essence, functions, structure, and its relationship to other components of social life. The previous method of economic change based on an empirical-pragmatic approach would be unacceptable<sup>109</sup> in the new economic conditions, and further solutions could not be found without applying modern economic scientific theory. Okáli reported that the EÚ SAV had prepared an extensive study entitled “Hospodársky mechanizmus v etape formovania intenzívneho typu rozšírenej reprodukcie” (The Economic Mechanism in the Stage of Forming an Intensive Type of Expanded Reproduction), which was an initiative of the academic community and a kind of economic-political outline for economic reform. The key topic was the reform of the planning system, which sought to reduce the binding nature of five-year plans and link them to long-term economic forecasts. Five-year plans were no longer to be an instrument of rigid administrative and directive planning, but rather framework documents determining the basic direction of economic development.<sup>110</sup>

Long-term economic forecasting<sup>111</sup> came to the fore, which was to create a basic framework for the strategic direction of the economy. Five-year plans would no longer be seen as instruments of rigid administrative management but rather as indicative guidelines based on long-term analyses. The planning center was to respond to real economic conditions through analytical outputs generated “from below,” thereby achieving a reduction in the extensive bureaucratic structure of planning. The intellectual foundations of this approach were not new – they had already appeared in the 1960s, but in various forms, they

<sup>109</sup> I.e. trial and error method.

<sup>110</sup> I. Okáli *et al.*, “Hospodársky mechanizmus v etape formovania intenzívneho typu rozšírenej reprodukcie. (Politickoekonomický náčrt koncepcie) I.,” *Ekonomický časopis* 4 (1983), pp. 309–372; I. Okáli *et al.*, “Hospodársky mechanizmus v etape formovania intenzívneho typu rozšírenej reprodukcie. (Politickoekonomický náčrt koncepcie) II.,” *Ekonomický časopis* 5 (1983), pp. 411–473; It is interesting to note that when this study was published in the *Ekonomický časopis*, its editorial board published a separate page calling on the general public to discuss this issue. It noted that this was not a standard journal article, but that the authors based it on the results of the latest research in political economy in the USSR and other Eastern Bloc countries. See also V. Jancura, “Pripomienky a podlžnosti teórie. Rozhovor s Ivanom Okálím,” *Nové slovo* 41 (1983), pp. 4–5.

<sup>111</sup> In connection with forecasts, see V. Sommer, M. Spurný, and J. Mrňka, *Řídit socialismus jako firmu*, pp. 74–81; *Architekti dlouhé změny*, pp. 232–241; I. Okáli, “Výskum systémových otázok fungovania ekonomiky,” in *60 rokov výskumu v Ekonomickom ústave Slovenskej akadémie vied*, ed. M. Šikula. Bratislava: Ekonomický ústav Slovenskej akadémie vied, pp. 23–34.

also appeared later, although, of course, no one referred to the experiences of the liberalization period<sup>112</sup>. Those foundations began to strengthen in the first half of the 1980s, and the 'reconstruction' provided them with greater opportunities for implementation. It is also worth mentioning that as early as 1985, a working meeting on the use of forecasting works in the national economy and the clarification of the political-party approach to forecasting was held at ÚV KSS under the auspices of Jozef Lenárt. The meeting was attended by prominent experts from economic research institutions, which suggests that the issue of systematic forecasting was gaining importance even before the official adoption of the 'reconstruction' reforms.<sup>113</sup>

The increasing interest in social science and the strengthening of scientific knowledge were reflected in the formation of a team of over 150 members, composed of employees of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, Comenius University in Bratislava, and other research institutions. Their task was to examine solutions to contemporary social problems and outline approximate development trends in comparison with broader developments in Europe and the world. In addition to scientific and technological progress, these included, for example, labor and social development, nation and nationalities, the young generation, social consciousness, and culture. Although such an interdisciplinary scope had its political and ideological boundaries, it created a platform for an unprecedented amount of expert outputs, which also included non-members of the Communist Party.<sup>114</sup>

In the academic and scientific circles, there were groups that identified with the restructuring process and saw it as an opportunity to present and implement specific concepts. Moreover, thanks to their erudition, they had the ability to interpret these ideas using the ideological vocabulary of the time and present them as being in line with the wishes of the party.

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<sup>112</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1774, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 20 January 1987, *Zásady Predsedníctva ÚV KSČ a vlády ČSSR pre prebudovanie hospodárskeho mechanizmu a ich politicko-organizačné zabezpečenie v podmienkach SSR* [Principles of the Presidium of the ÚV KSČ and the Government of the ČSSR for the reconstruction of the economic mechanism and their political-organisational security in the conditions of the SSR]; J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socializmu*, pp. 301–304.

<sup>113</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát [Secretariat], box 697, Zasadnutie sekretariátu [Meeting of the Secretariat], 7 October 1985, *Návrh opatrení k výsledkom pracovnej porady k problematike využitia prognostických prác v národnom hospodárstve, uskutočnenej na ÚV KSS* [Draft measures on the results of the working meeting on the problem of the use of forecasting work in the national economy, held at the ÚV KSS].

<sup>114</sup> P. Weiss, "KSS v období perestrojky perestrojky a slabnúceho Husákovho vplyvu," pp. 728–729.

There were smaller groups of younger members in the KSS who sympathized to a certain extent with the reform process as enabled by Soviet *perestroika*. However, their development was hampered by the generation gap and isolation, as there was no broader political background, and the regime did not allow for horizontal exchange of information. These initiatives did not seek to step outside official structures but strove for reforms from within and from above. The most prominent group consisted of young employees of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism of the ÚV KSS, notably Peter Weiss and Pavol Kanis, who had the support of the institute's director, Viliam Plevza. They published in the weekly *Nové slovo* (New Word), and organized seminars with unconventional intellectuals, and arranged translations of important foreign works, such as Toffler's *Third Wave*. Alongside them, other groups of former and current members of the KSS were also working to bring about political change. These included the Leninist Spark Club (*Klub leninskej iskry*) initiative, led by former journalist and State Security officer Igor Cibula, who lost his job after 1968. The club operated under the auspices of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Friendship Association (*Zväz československo-sovietskeho priateľstva*) and aimed to spread information about Soviet reforms through lectures and discussions. However, attempts to legalize it were rejected by the KSS leadership, and in 1987 the club was dissolved. Its activities were continued in 1988 by the Social Science Forum Dialogue (*Spoločenskovedné fórum Dialóg*) operating under the Municipal Council of the Czechoslovak Scientific and Technical Society (*Československá vedecko-technická spoločnosť*) in Bratislava. Cibula was again involved, and the chairman was Jozef Moravčík, a lawyer and later prime minister of the independent Slovak Republic. A specific feature of the Slovak environment was that in these structures, current members of the KSS cooperated with former Communists who had been expelled after 1968, which was unprecedented in the Czech lands.<sup>115</sup>

Regarding the economic situation, the speeches of economist and member of the ÚV KSS Herbert Ďurkovič are characteristic. He worked as the director of significant engineering enterprises, later held several government positions, and even led the Czechoslovak delegation to the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. This allowed him to gain a deeper understanding of economic relations within the Eastern Bloc. During the 'reconstruction' period, he worked at the Scientific Institute of Marxism-Leninism. At the meeting of the ÚV KSS in

<sup>115</sup> J. Marušiak, "1989 in Slovakia – Between Reform and Radical Change," pp. 88–89.

October 1988, he delivered a comprehensive critique of the economic situation. Ďurkovič spoke of political mystifications, of the fact that the entire society was being misled by alleged economic successes. He pointed to the incompetence of the management structures and the overall problem that the ‘reconstruction’ itself was not enough; it was necessary to change the overall mindset. His speech was atypically sharp, even for the more relaxed conditions; after all, he declared: “The last two decades have been a period when our lagging behind the surrounding world has significantly deepened and cannot enter the history of building a socialist society in Czechoslovakia as a successful period.”<sup>116</sup> Ďurkovič’s speech was also addressed by the party presidium, which tried to counter it and accused him of having the right to any opinion, but in his speech, he only spoke about negative things, and that he formulated his words exclusively critically, while he should have tried to ‘mobilize the workforce.’<sup>117</sup> Shortly after his speech, Ďurkovič’s employment at the institute was terminated, which he perceived as a consequence of his speech, although the institute’s management denied this and claimed that he belonged to the non-registered staff, and new regulations no longer allowed such positions in party organizations.<sup>118</sup>

Although there were no fundamental political reforms, some loosening did occur in certain areas. Regulations for traveling to Western countries were partially liberalized, and the publication of some newspapers was allowed. There was also a partial reassessment of the view of the First Czechoslovak Republic, which was labeled a “bourgeois” state by Communist propaganda. In 1988, when the 70th anniversary of the founding of Czechoslovakia was commemorated, the day of the establishment of the Czechoslovak state (28 October) was even declared a national holiday<sup>119</sup>. These matters were also addressed by the Presidium of ÚV KSS. On the occasion of the old-new national holiday, they approved an article in the press organ *Pravda*. The article was, of course, tendentious. The establishment of the Republic was constantly linked to the

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<sup>116</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Plénum, box 1954, Zasadnutie pléna, 17–18 October 1988, Stenografický záznam zo zasadnutia, vystúpenie Herberta Ďurkoviča [Stenographic record of the meeting, speech by Herbert Ďurkovič].

<sup>117</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1802, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 4 April 1989, Stanovisko predsedníctva ÚV KSS k vystúpeniu s. Herberta Ďurkoviča na zasadnutí ÚV KSS 18 October 1988 [Opinion of the Presidium of the ÚV KSS on the speech of comrade Herbert Ďurkovič at the meeting of the ÚV KSS on 18 October 1988].

<sup>118</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Plénum, box 1957, Zasadnutie pléna, 22 June 1989, Stenografický záznam zo zasadnutia, Vystúpenie Viliama Plevzu [Stenographic record of the meeting, speech by Viliam Plevza].

<sup>119</sup> J. Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století*, pp. 558–560.

Bolshevik revolution, but it admitted that the First Czechoslovak Republic brought some progress and had a significant impact on the formation of the Slovak nation. It also acknowledged the merits of the founders of the state – Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, Edvard Beneš, and especially Milan Rastislav Štefánik. Their personal impact was still interpreted in the sense that legends were purposefully created about them, their role was overrated, but they still had some merits in the establishment of the state. It was critically pointed out that in the 1950s, an extreme was reached when their role in the process of the state's formation was completely denied. In the case of Štefánik, it was recalled that he was a pro-Western anti-Communist, but he still had good intentions towards the Slovaks and indelible merits in the establishment of the state.<sup>120</sup>

On the other hand, as with any political loosening, the issue of the arrangement of relations between Czechs and Slovaks resurfaced, similar to 1968, when the loosening brought about the federalization of the state. A group of young Slovak reformist Communists was strongly nationally oriented. On the pages of *Literárny týždenník*, which began to be published by the Union of Slovak Writers, they published articles in a nationalist spirit, pointing to the original idea of federation from 1968, in which national republics were to have their own constitutions, which did not occur. Some of the authors held intellectual currents and views embracing the creation of an independent, then still socialist, Slovakia. Some of them became involved in the movement for an independent Slovakia after 1989 and entered parliamentary politics<sup>121</sup>. This partially refutes the common perception that the issue of state-legal arrangement only began to appear after the 1989 Velvet Revolution, although it must be taken into account that the discussion at that time took place within the limits set by the system.<sup>122</sup>

The discussion on eliminating asymmetry in the structure of the KSČ was also renewed. At a meeting of the Presidium in July 1988, Husák noted that the Bureau for the Management of Party Work in the ČSR had ceased to exist, partly under Soviet pressure. Karel Hoffman, a member of the Presidium of ÚV KSČ, was tasked with drafting a proposal to eliminate asymmetry in the central party

<sup>120</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, box 1779, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 16 February 1988, Návrh na publikovanie článku: Utvorenie štátu Čechov a Slovákov a význam osobnosti M.R. Štefánika [Proposal for publication of an article: The establishment of the state of Czechs and Slovaks and the significance of the personality of M.R. Štefánik].

<sup>121</sup> J. Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století*, pp. 561–562.

<sup>122</sup> For Czech-Slovak relations, see also *Čečo/slovakismus*, ed. A. Hudek, M. Kopeček, and J. Mervart, Prague: NLN – Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2019.

organs. At the end of September 1988, a separate body for the Czech lands was re-established – the Committee for the Management of Party Work in ČSR. Its tasks involved directing and coordinating the work of Communists in the republic, economic, and social bodies and institutions, which had previously fallen within the competence of ÚV KSČ. Its powers were to be similar to those of ÚV KSS, although this did not involve the federalization of the party, as some members of the presidium emphasized.<sup>123</sup> In the broader context of efforts to eliminate or at least reduce the asymmetrical structure associated with the restructuring plans for decentralization, new personnel regulations were adopted in November 1988. This led to a certain strengthening of the powers of ÚV KSS in relation to the party and state *nomenklatura* (list of positions which appointment was reserved for the Communist party decision – editor’s remark). It was decided that only the highest positions in the party and state would remain in the nomenclature of ÚV KSČ, and that positions with predominant jurisdiction in Slovakia would be transferred to ÚV KSS *nomenklatura*. Although ÚV KSS had previously had the power to manage party work in Slovakia, the new arrangement broadened the scope of its *nomenklatura* powers. *Nomenklatura* positions in the Czech lands were transferred to the competence of the Committee for the Management of Party Work in the ČSR.<sup>124</sup>

The elimination of asymmetry was also enshrined in the new statutes of the KSČ, which were discussed by the Presidium of ÚV KSČ in August 1989. However, these did not come into force due to the events of November 1989. Given the slow pace of restructuring reforms, the proposal was relatively groundbreaking, even though it preserved the leading role of the party and “democratic centralism.” It enshrined the principle of secret elections of officials with the possibility of choosing from several candidates. The term of taking an office ranging from district committees to the Central Committee was to be limited to a maximum of 10 years. The party was to abandon bureaucratic methods, among other things by ensuring that the Central Committee apparatus did not take over the powers of elected bodies. Between individual congresses, it was possible to convene

<sup>123</sup> M. Štefek, “Komunistická strana Československa a proces přestavby v letech 1985–1989,” pp. 131–132.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., pp. 123–124; J. Kocian, J. Pažout, T. Vilímek, S. Balík, and V. Hloušek, *Dějiny Komunistické strany Československa IV (1969–1993)*, pp. 95–98. For a broader context of the cadre *nomenklatura* in earlier periods, see V. Hradecká and F. Koudelka, *Kádrová politika a nomenklatura KSČ 1969–1974*, Prague: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1998; K. Kaplan, *Kádrová nomenklatura KSČ*.

national conferences, which had the right to dismiss and elect up to one-third of the total number of Central Committee members and candidates.<sup>125</sup>

Part of the Czechoslovak 'reconstruction' was supposed to be a new constitution that would formally guarantee certain rights and freedoms, including the possibility to leave the state and return to it at any time without limits. Mentions of it appeared as early as in the KSC Congress in 1986. The first working commissions tasked with its preparation were established a year later. The need to implicate fundamental changes related to the 'reconstruction' was particularly emphasized. The Constitutional Law on the Czechoslovak Federation No. 143/1968 Coll.<sup>126</sup> already anticipated, in addition to the adoption of a new federal constitution, the adoption of national constitutions. However, the article of the law was never implemented, and thus its fulfillment became the most emphasized problem for the Slovak side<sup>127</sup>. However, this intention encountered a circle of people around Miloš Jakeš, who feared excessive loosening of the federation, and thus the idea of drafting national constitutions could not be fulfilled. The new federal constitution was to become a so-called triune one<sup>128</sup>. The difference was to be in the method of its adoption – first, it was to be approved by both republican parliaments and then by the federal parliament. During the discussion in the ČNR, no one was against it; on the contrary, in the SNR it provoked unusually intense discussion and dissatisfaction, which, however, was outweighed by party discipline, and thus the method of adopting the constitution was finally approved. The process associated with the new constitution also took place during the Velvet Revolution in November and December 1989. In the changing political environment, the prepared enacting of the new Communist constitution lost its significance. Already in December 1989, both republican parliaments rejected it.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>125</sup> J. Kocian, J. Pažout, T. Vilímek, S. Balík, and V. Hloušek, *Dějiny Komunistické strany Československa IV (1969–1993)*, pp. 157–158.

<sup>126</sup> J. Rychlík, *Češi a Slováci ve 20. století*, pp. 561–564; Ústavný Zákon z 27. oktobra 1968 o československej federácii. Zákon nr. 143/1968 Zb., <https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1968/143/19900301.html> (accessed 25 September 2025).

<sup>127</sup> SNA, f. ÚV KSS - Predsedníctvo, box 1779, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 16 February 1988, Informácia o postupe prác spojených s prijatím novej Ústavy ČSSR [Information on the progress of work related to the adoption of the new Constitution of the ČSSR]; SNA, f. ÚV KSS - Predsedníctvo, box 1780, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 1 March 1988, Informácia o stave prác na príprave novej Ústavy ČSSR [Information on the state of work on the preparation of the new Constitution of the ČSSR].

<sup>128</sup> It was supposed to be the constitution of the entire federation and of both republics.

<sup>129</sup> J. Rychlík, *Československo v období socialismu*, pp. 307–309; SNA, f. ÚV KSS - Predsedníctvo, box 1816, Zasadnutie predsedníctva, 4 December 1989, Postup pri príprave novej Ústavy ČSSR, ČSR a SSR po

## Conclusion

The 'reconstruction' in Czechoslovakia represented a specific adaptation of reforms which, unlike in Poland or Hungary, focused primarily on the economic sphere. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia leadership, which had come to power by violently suppressing the 1968 renewal process, viewed Gorbachev's reforms with concern because they were too reminiscent of the Prague Spring. Paradoxically, the Normalization politicians were forced to initiate ideas that they themselves had previously rejected as dangerous and 'counterrevolutionary.' This internal uncertainty and fear of losing power led the regime to strictly avoid linking economic restructuring with the policy of *glasnost*.

Economic reforms aimed at increasing efficiency proved to be too little, too late. Earlier attempts at reform, such as the "Set of Measures" of 1980, were merely superficial changes, and a cover for inaction. Despite the introduction of elements of employee self-governing and greater entrepreneurial freedom, binding state planning and a uniform pricing policy remained in force under pressure from party circles. Economic experiments to increase the independence of enterprises ended in failure, with the results showing that modernization efforts failed due to unclear competences, persistent bureaucracy, and a high tax burden that prevented enterprises from purchasing new technologies and modernizing. Thus, it was not possible to overcome the systemic limitations of the planned economy.

In an effort to declare being open to change, the KSS and KSCĚ replaced some discredited officials, but only with lesser-known, long-standing party members, making the personnel changes merely superficial. Nevertheless, within the KSS there were small, ideologically differentiated groups, which, together with the academic community, sympathized with the 'reconstruction' and promoted reforms based on scientific methods and long-term forecasting.

In Slovakia, the reconstruction opened up topics related to the constitutional and legal status of Slovaks. Discussions resumed on the adoption of national constitutions and the elimination of asymmetry in the structure of the KSCĚ, although these intentions were not fulfilled due to the resistance of some leading officials and the events of November 1989.

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stranickej, štátnej líniej a líniej Národného frontu SSR [Progress in the preparation of the new Constitution of the ČSSR, the ČSR and the SSR along party, state and National Front of the SSR lines].

The ‘reconstruction’ was an attempt to reform a system that was difficult to reform. The regime was unable to offer adequate solutions to economic, social, and political problems and reached its own limits. It was necessary to change not only the system, but also ideas and people. In November 1989, a series of social and political events culminated in the Velvet Revolution, which quickly led to the collapse of the Communist regime.

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