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HISTORICAL POLICY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA: EXPERIENCE AND PRACTICES

Abstract. *The purpose of the research* – using the example of the Czech Republic and Slovakia to reveal the features of the policy of historical memory, developed in the process of “overcoming the past” in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. **Methodology:** General scientific methods (analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization) were used to collect information and analyze it. **The scientific novelty** consists in the fact that, based on the collected materials, the peculiarities of the historical policy of the Czech Republic and Slovakia have been analyzed; common and distinctive features of such policies have been traced; the creation aspects of special organizations engaged in memory policy have been noted, in particular, the Institute of National Memory (Ústav pamäti národa) in Slovakia as a participant in the revision of the history of World War II and the role of the Institute for the Study of Authoritarian Regimes (Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů) in the Czech Republic; the conclusions

have been drawn about the strategies for the development and functioning of models of historical policy of Slovakia and the Czech Republic in a comparative perspective. **Conclusions.** Over the past three decades, the communist theme has remained a priority for the Czech and Slovak historical policy, despite the diversity of other aspects. The analysis of the activities of the Memory of the People project and special organizations shows that the focus is mainly on the memory of the crimes of the communist regime. The researchers note the success of the historical policy of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which is indirectly confirmed by the achievements of both countries after joining the European Union. The main topics in the Czech and Slovak political and social discourse are the topics related to World War II, the Nazi occupation, the Soviet period, the period of the collapse of Czechoslovakia and the modern life of countries within the European Union. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia the historical memory policy on these topics is not limited only to the participation of the aforementioned institutions and the concepts put forward by them. The study of the past is manifested in the decommunization of history, the dismantling of Soviet monuments, as well as active discussions in the media. The role of these discussions in the historical policy formation is significant and requires further study.

Keywords: historical politics, politics of memory, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, international relations.

ІСТОРИЧНА ПОЛІТИКА ЧЕХІЇ ТА СЛОВАЧЧИНИ: ДОСВІД І ПРАКТИКИ

Анотація. Метою статті є аналіз особливостей сучасної історичної політики східноєвропейських держав на прикладі Чехії та Словаччини, її взаємозв'язку з історією ХХ ст. **Методологія:** загальнонаукові методи (аналізу, синтезу, порівняння, узагальнення) застосовувались для збору інформації та її аналізу. **Наукова новизна** полягає у тому, що на основі зібраних матеріалів було проаналізовано особливості історичної політики Чехії та Словаччини; простежено спільні й відмінні риси такої політики; відзначено аспекти створення спеціальних організацій, що займаються політикою пам'яті, зокрема Інституту пам'яті нації (Ústav paměti národa) у Словаччині як учасника ревізії історії Другої світової війни; роль Інституту дослідження авторитарних режимів (Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů) у Чехії; зроблено висновки про стратегії розвитку та функціонування моделей історичної політики Словаччини та Чехії у порівняльній перспективі. **Висновки.** Протягом останніх трьох десятиліть комуністична тематика залишалася пріоритетною для чеської та словацької історичної політики, незважаючи на різноманітність інших аспектів. На прикладі аналізу діяльності проєкту "Пам'ять народу" та спеціальних організацій можна побачити, що увага зосереджується переважно на пам'яті про злочини комуністичного режиму. Дослідники відзначають успіхи історичної політики Чехії та Словаччини, що опосередковано підтверджується досягненнями обох країн після вступу до Європейського союзу. Головними темами у чеському й словацькому політичному та соціальному дискурсі є теми, пов'язані з Другою світовою війною, нацистською окупацією, радянським періодом, періодом розпаду Чехословаччини і сучасним життям країн у рамках Європейського Союзу. Історична політика пам'яті щодо зазначених тем у Чехії та Словаччині не обмежується лише участю зазначених інститутів і висунутими ними концепціями. Вивчення минулого проявляється у декомунізації історії, демонтажі радянських пам'яток, а також в активних дискусіях у ЗМІ. Роль цих дискусій у формуванні історичної політики є значною і потребує подальшого вивчення.

Ключові слова: історична політика, політика пам'яті, Чехія, Словаччина.

Problem Statement. Currently, the problem of forming a policy of historical memory is one of the most urgent social problems in many countries in which an active phase of nation-building is underway, this is especially evident in the post-Soviet space. History appears as a kind of society memory, which is implemented in specific discursive practices. Holding memorial events aims not only to actualize knowledge about individual events of the past in the mass consciousness, but also to consolidate them in the form of symbols that can evoke strong emotions and memories, and become an integral feature of the community. Historical memory also performs specific legitimizing functions in terms of establishing statehood, nationhood,

the status of groups and communities. Historical memory is both a component of the culture of a particular ethnic group, imprinted in the form of traditions and values, and an instrument of national self-identification of a person. This is accompanied by the formation of a sense of belonging to the nation (regardless of its ethnic origin), as well as value orientations, which are expressed in a selective attitude towards a set of material and spiritual goods. In the context of the emergence of interethnic conflicts, historical memory appears as a socio-cultural phenomenon, which in concentrated terms contains a complex of “fuses” that prevent the conflict from turning into acute forms of the course. Historical memory is the emotional colouring of information about the tragic pages of the nation’s history as a reminder of unacceptable alternatives to conflict processes for development, a project of a future that should not happen. At the same time, as shown by the events preceding World War II, the events of many local wars of the Cold War period, military conflicts in the post-Soviet space, including the Russo-Ukrainian war, historical memory can act as an instrument of aggressive policy.

Review of Recent Research and Publications. The issue of historical policy in its various aspects was analyzed in the subject field of international relations, political and philosophical sciences. A systematic analysis of historical memory was carried out by the domestic researcher Larysa Nahorna, who reveals the peculiarities of the evolution of theories and the memory space formation based on the analysis of scientific approaches to the interpretation and understanding of a collective memory, a description of the world experience of implementing memory policy, and the disclosure of the role and place of historical memory in the process of self-identification (Nahorna, 2012). The categorical and conceptual characteristics of “historical memory” were determined by Oksana Stasevska, who considers this phenomenon as a source of self-awareness of a person and a tool for their identification in the cultural space (Stasevska, 2018). Scientific research is significant, in which the practice of overcoming the consequences of “traumatic events / historical periods” by different countries is compared. For the countries of Eastern Europe, this primarily concerns decommunization. A thorough analysis of anti-communist legislation and relevant political practices was carried out by Valentyna Voronova (Voronova, 2020). The features of the formation of historical memory and memory policy in the transformation context of Central and Eastern Europe are considered in the studies by Alla Kyrydon (Kyrydon, 2016), Olha Makliuk (Makliuk, 2011), etc. A number of researchers from European countries highlight changes in the memory policy of the states of the former “socialist camp”, determined by their accession (or aspiration to join) the EU. In particular, given the subject of our study, the collective monograph jointly edited by Alena Marková and Mariia Kuznetcova deserves attention, in which memory conflicts are analyzed, the source of which are individual markers of the traumatic past of individual European countries in the context of modern political events (Marková, & Kuznetcova, 2023). The impact of Europeanization on the collective memory of both EU member states and EU candidate countries is covered in the monograph “Europeanisation and Memory Politics in the Western Balkans” (Milošević, Trošt, 2021). The authors of the study try to answer the questions: Can we observe the emergence of a consensus narrative about the past as a result of Europeanization? What internal / external factors contribute to or hinder these changes and through what mechanisms etc.? The research subject is also the influence of individual historical events on the formation of the historical memory of the Czechs and/or Slovaks. It is worth noting the study by Svitlana Vlasenko, in which the author analyzed the national memory policy of the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic in the context of overcoming the communist past (Vlasenko, 2023).

And Muriel Blaive described the role of the Czech student leaders in the Velvet Revolution and their influence on the historical memory of post-colonial Czechia (Blaive, 2024). The study by David Klimes is relevant, who, using the example of the Czech media production, showed the role of the media in preserving national memory (Klimes, 2024). In our previous studies, we also revealed the problems of preserving historical memory through the activities of religious organizations (Slyusar, Sokolovskyi, & Slyusar, 2024) and the role of historical memory as a mediation factor for resolving irredentist conflicts in the world (Sliusar, Mosiienko, & Sliusar, 2024). The Ukrainian scholars Ihor Tsependa and Petro Kostyuchok consider the historical aspects of the Slovak-Ukrainian interethnic interaction (Tsependa, & Kostyuchok, 2024). The analysis of the research topic historiography showed the presence of scientific interest in the historical memory issues of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe through the prism of their accession to the EU.

The purpose of the research – using the example of the Czech Republic and Slovakia to reveal the features of the policy of historical memory, developed in the process of “overcoming the past” in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The methodological tools are determined by the specifics of the research object and are implemented using the analysis of documentary and legal acts in the field of implementing anti-totalitarian practices, in particular, the Law of the Slovak Republic No. 553/2002 “On the disclosure of documents on the activities of state security bodies in the period from 1939 to 1989 and on the establishment of the Institute of National Remembrance, as well as on amendments to certain legislative acts” (Zákon o sprístupnení dokumentov..., 2002), the Agreement on Cooperation between the Security Service of Ukraine and the Institute of National Remembrance of the Slovak Republic (Dohovor pro spivrobotnytstvo, 2020).

Research Results. Domestic experts interpret the essence of memory policy as one of the types of state activity in the public sphere, aimed at forming a meaningful view of society on the relationship between the past, present and future, a balanced ratio of traditions and innovations, as well as an understanding of the importance of preserving cultural heritage (Nahorna, 2012, p. 117). Therefore, historical memory, within the framework of the state memory policy, is a function of the government that determines how the past should be received by society. Memory policy is always aimed at creating the desired synthesis between the present and the past. From this point of view, it is appropriate to speak of the state memory policy as a system of goals and measures implemented by the subject of this policy to create conditions under which citizens could see their identity in connection with the nation-state and/or the corresponding supranational entity (in the case of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the European Union). The above confirms that the state plays an active role in the formation of national identity, demonstrating the continuation of national state traditions and socio-cultural identity, which in turn ultimately legitimizes the existence of the nation-state (Yablonskyi, Lozovyi, & Valevskyi, 2019, pp. 20–21).

The memory policy is an important tool of soft power for any state, especially relevant in the era of the information society. By shaping citizens' ideas about the past, actively involving them in social processes, political forces acquire additional opportunities for mobilizing voters. Under modern conditions, a similar strategy is used by almost all states of Eastern Europe, including the Czech and Slovak Republics. The experience of these countries is unique due to the peculiarities of their historical development after the crisis of the socialist system, as well as successful integration into the European Union and NATO, which is confirmed by high economic and social indicators for the region. Historical policy

acts as a factor in consolidating society and shaping its response to internal and external political challenges and is interpreted by Ukrainian scholars as “a set of practices through which political forces or states seek to establish certain interpretations of historical events as dominant. Historical policy performs three functions:

- 1) symbolic (giving significance to certain events);
- 2) interpretative (interpreting events within the framework of current policy);
- 3) identification (forming national identity).

Therefore, historical policy is the choice and dissemination by the state of a system of socio-political values” (Yablonskyi, Lozovyi, & Valevskyi, 2019, p. 26).

Different approaches to interpreting the historical past can lead to “wars of memory”, both within a society/nation and at the interstate level. For example, “an increase in the level of conflict on the basis of the political use of the past in interstate relations was observed in 2019–2020. The “minefield” in the struggle for the interpretation of history was the celebration of a number of anniversaries related to World War II” (Bohinska, 2021, p. 104). After the wave of “velvet revolutions” in the countries of the former, so-called, “socialist camp”, the reinterpretation of the history of the 20th century is used by them as a tool of political legitimization, the right to one’s own historical heritage in the pan-European narrative. The key markers of memory policy in the vast majority of Central and Eastern European countries are the theme of decommunization of a public space and the reassessment of traditionally established views on the events of World War II. In this context, the Czech and Slovak society is no exception.

On the eve and at the beginning of World War II, Czechoslovakia and Poland, as independent states, were liquidated, which caused significant damage to national identity, seriously traumatizing national memory. The same applies to the problem of cultural trauma, which occurs “when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (Alexander, 2004, p. 1). While Slovakia, on the contrary, entered World War II as a formally independent state on the side of Germany. After the war, both states of the region developed within the framework of the socialist model and participated in alliances such as the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and the Warsaw Pact. During the Soviet period from the 1940s to the end of the 1980s, controversial issues of historical heritage were marginalized and silenced. The collapse of the socialist system, the disintegration of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic and the processes of democratization became the beginning of a reassessment of previously dominant versions of history. If in the 1990s these problems were solved by scientific historiography mainly, then in the 21st century new participants joined the process, represented by specially created institutions, memory institutes, which coordinate the implementation of historical policy and the formation of a new memorial canon, including the history of World War II. To investigate and prosecute criminals who belonged to the communist government, special organizations were established in Eastern European countries: the Department of Documentation and Investigation of Crimes of Communism (the Czech Republic); the National Institute of Memory (Slovakia). In Ukraine, since 2006 these functions have been performed by the Ukrainian Institute of National Memory (Voronova, 2020, p. 9).

The Czech Republic

In his work “The Czech Republic: From the Politics of History to Memory as a Political Language”, Michal Kopeček, referring to international experts, notes that without the lustration process and civic activism in the early 1990s, the Czech Republic would not have been able to

become a truly democratic state and integrate into the European Union. He draws particular attention to the role of the Czech judiciary, which took a very balanced position. On the one hand, the activities of the legal system did not allow the past to be forgotten, and on the other hand, it avoided violent measures, as happened, for example, in the Baltic States. This balanced position ensured high legitimacy, as it allowed the involvement of various social groups (Kopeček, 2013).

Contemporary Czech memorial policy, which concerns the memory of World War II, reflects the contradictions that arise in the formation of “collective memory” in a given political context. The majority of projects of the Institute of History of the Czech Republic are based on a similar logic. For example, the project entitled “Three Fatal March Days: March 14-16, 1939” aims at rethinking in contemporary historical memory how and why the Czechoslovak state became a victim of the German aggression. In the context of contemporary politics of processing the past, responsibility for the disappearance of Czechoslovakia from the Czech historical memory is mainly placed on external actors, primarily Germany, which is responsible for the beginning of the period known in the Czech memorial culture as the “time of non-freedom” (*doba nesvobody*). The second country to be held responsible was the Soviet Union, which is credited with collaborating with Nazi Germany in the division of Europe, as well as participating in the defeat of Poland and the liquidation of its statehood in 1939 together with Nazi Germany. The degree of responsibility of Slovakia in this context is also taken into account (the Three Fatal March Days project), which indicates significant differences and demarcations of historical narratives and, as a result, versions of historical memory in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In the modern Czech memorial canon, Slovakia, like Germany and Hungary, is considered a country that participated in the destruction of Czechoslovakia as a state in 1939 (*Tři osudové březnové dny...*).

Despite the efforts of the state, contemporary representatives of culture and science note the insufficient knowledge of history in modern Czech society, especially among young people (Pavec, 2006). To some extent, this is explained by the fact that the authorities withdrew from the sphere of culture after 1989 (including from the sphere of institutions dealing with history and memory), as a decision was made to liberalize and decentralize educational systems, refusing to interfere in the content of cultural activities (Ruczaj, 2020, p. 190). That is why, in 2003 “Recommendations of the Ministry for Education on Teaching the History of the 20th Century” were adopted. It emphasized the need to focus the attention of history teachers at all levels of school education on teaching the history of the 20th century with an emphasis on the modern interpretation of events. It is worth noting that during this period, processes related to Europeanization and the formation of a European identity took place in Western Europe, which updated discussions about the problematic past of the European continent in the 20th century. This applies to the Czech-German relations, which are regulated by the declaration adopted in 1997, designed to find common approaches to the interpretation of specific historical processes (Vomlela, 2020, p. 44). In the recommendations, the 20th century is understood as the period from 1914/18 to 1989/91, defined as the “short 20th century” or “era of extremes” (Stradling, 2003). In this context, a project called “Memory of the People” is of particular interest, aimed at disseminating information about the past. Created in 2008, this project is, according to its organizers, the largest collection of historical memories on such topics as “Churches and Religious Communities”, “Holocaust”, “Communism”, “Nazism”, “National Minorities”, “Political Prisoners”, “Special Services” and “Veterans”. In fact, these eight topics are currently the main ones for the Czech memory policy and form the basis of the national historical policy. The materials stored on this portal are available to anyone,

regardless of registration, as an educational resource and another source for understanding the past (Paměť národa, 2008).

In addition to preserving and disseminating historical documents and memories, the Czech government also takes care of restoring places of memory associated with different eras. One such place at the current stage is the abandoned prison in Uherské Hradiště, where, along with the administrative buildings, it is planned to create a museum dedicated to the repressions of the Nazis and Communists by 2028 (Věznici v Uherském Hradiště začítli vyklízet dělníci, 2020).

Slovakia

Slovakia is a European state whose history is closely connected with the formation and search for its own identity. Having gained independence only in 1993, this state focuses on the preservation and development of its historical heritage, which the country shares with the Czech Republic and other countries in the region. Slovakia, which belongs to the countries that have not previously claimed independent statehood, finds it more difficult to justify its aspirations for sovereignty, since the construction of appropriate historical narratives to support claims to statehood may involve selective interpretation and evaluation of certain historical figures and events (Hartikainen, Syrovátka, & Szebeni, 2024, p. 538). In national historical policy chief focus is on the twentieth century, when the foundations of the autonomous development of the Slovak people were laid, but at the same time it had to face the challenges of the totalitarian regimes of Nazism and communism. At the state level, the Slovak memory policy includes the rehabilitation of victims of totalitarianism. However, despite the clarity of state policy, in the 21st century the Slovak society has faced certain problems and challenges. That is why, the interaction of state policy and public interests makes the study of historical politics in Slovakia relevant.

The memory of the people is never a single and monolithic entity, but it is typical of almost all post-communist regimes in Eastern Europe to institutionalize it, thus creating a certain historical boundary between the “wrong” regimes of the past, which include Nazism and communism, and the “correct” modern liberal regime with European values. The same model was formed in Slovakia. However, at the state level, this took on clear outlines only in 2002 in the form of the Institute of National Memory (Ústav pamäti národa), whose task was to preserve the police archives and state security archives of the fascist Slovak state and the communist regimes of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, as well as to popularize historical information that contributes to historical justice. The institute’s mouthpiece is the journal “Pamäť národa”.

The Institute of National Remembrance of Slovakia was established in accordance with Act No. 553/2002 “On the Disclosure of Documents on the Activities of State Security Bodies during the Period from 1939 to 1989 and on the Establishment of the Institute of National Remembrance, as well as on Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts (Act on National Remembrance)” (Zákon o sprístupnení dokumentov, 2002). The Act on National Remembrance became a factor in the institutionalization of the entire memory policy in Slovakia. This was made possible by the clear articulation of who is considered a victim of a totalitarian regime, who is a criminal, and what rehabilitation procedures apply to victims (Zákon o sprístupnení dokumentov, 2002). The Institute of National Remembrance, in addition to rehabilitation and archival work, also promotes the ideas of freedom and the protection of democracy from regimes similar to Nazism and communism. The institution also makes decisions on granting the status of a participant in the anti-communist resistance and assigning the corresponding status of a veteran of such a movement. However, an analysis of the activities of the Institute of National Remembrance of Slovakia indicates that the institute

associates its activities primarily with opposition to the communist regime in a historical perspective with the aim of integrating Slovakia into regional European politics alongside Poland and Hungary. The issue of Nazism in this regard recedes into the background and is mainly associated with the memory of the Holocaust.

The model of historical memory of World War II in Slovakia is developing in a different context, which is significantly different from the strategies and tactics used in the modern Czech Republic within the framework of “processing the past”. Slovak researchers note that the revision of the past came after the collapse of communism, and accordingly, the authoritarian legacy was accepted as a threat to historical memory. Some “inconvenient” moments of history are marginalized and repressed. This specificity of historical politics is associated with the status of Slovakia during the war, when the Slovaks formally acquired independent statehood, partly due to the ignoring of the Slovak issue by the Czech political elites in the 1920s–1930s, who pursued the policy of assimilation and persecuted the national clergy and intelligentsia. In modern Slovak memory politics, a complex image of the Slovak state during World War II is being developed, which is the result of compromise (Lacko, 2010). In this context, the Institute of National Remembrance actively disseminates documents about Slovakia during the war in open access, presenting not only the historical formation of Slovak statehood during World War II, but also the features of its undemocratic and authoritarian nature and the external factors that caused its emergence (Kubík, 2010).

The policy of memory for Slovakia plays an important socio-political role. This role is determined by two factors. The first type can be conditionally designated as “moral”, i.e. it is associated with the memory of the crimes of Nazism, the Holocaust, and the crimes of the communist government. The second factor is associated with Slovakia’s acquisition of statehood, its separation from the Czech Republic, and its independent integration into the European Union. It can be said that these factors are pragmatic in nature and determine the current vector of state development. Moreover, dialogue with countries on overcoming the communist legacy is important, which includes not only neighbours from Eastern Europe, such as Poland and the Czech Republic, but also Ukraine. For example, on February 20, 2020, an agreement on cooperation between the Institute of National Remembrance and the Security Service of Ukraine in the field of archival research, scientific intelligence, and publication of documents on political repressions in the 20th century was signed in Kyiv. This agreement was signed by the Chairman of the Board of the Institute of National Remembrance Jan Palffy, the Director of the Archives of the Security Service of Ukraine Andriy Kohut, and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic to Ukraine Marek Šafin (Dohovor pro spivrobotnytstvo, 2020).

The attitude of the Slovaks towards the past, including the events of the Velvet Revolution of 1989, is largely connected with the current political life of society. In this case we should mention the government of Robert Fico, which influenced the reception of the past by the country’s population, including through the fight against right-wing populism and rapprochement with Russia.

In general, the problem of historical memory and its politicization is relevant for Slovakia, just as it is relevant for all countries of Eastern Europe. Memories of totalitarian regimes contribute to the unification of society around modern tasks related to European integration and general economic development. However, it should be noted that at the beginning of the 21st century Slovakia is facing numerous social and economic difficulties that cause concern among the population and stimulate the reverse effect, leading to a split in society in the

reception of the past. Thus, almost 40 % of the country's population in 2019 stated that before the "Velvet Revolution" life was relatively good, there was stability, order, there were no migration crises and the growth of nationalism. Under the conditions of such a social split in the evaluation of the past, the state faces a difficult task of managing public opinion, especially in relation to the younger generation. However, formally, at the level of legislation and political institutions, Slovakia maintains its commitment to the ideas common to the Visegrad Group countries, post-communist liberal development, which is reflected in the work of the Institute of National Remembrance and other interested organizations (Bútorová, 2019).

For a more complete understanding of the historical policy of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, it should be considered in the context of the Visegrad Four. On October 14, 2011, in Prague, with the participation of the prime ministers of the Visegrad Group – the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary, the Platform of European Memory and Conscience (Platforma evropské paměti a svědomí) was created. This international project aimed at studying the activities and crimes of totalitarian regimes in Europe of the 20th century, with the aim of preventing the revival of totalitarianism on the continent.

In Poland, where the term "historical policy" first appeared, its most obvious manifestation is the work of the Institute of National Remembrance and the Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish People (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiem (IPN)). The mentioned above institutions are engaged in researching the activities of the Polish state security agencies during the period from 1944 to 1990, as well as the security agencies of the Third Reich and the USSR, with the aim of investigating crimes against Polish citizens during this period and conducting lustration procedures. These agencies are powerful instruments of domestic policy. We also agree with Kateryna Tryma, Olha Stadnichenko and Natalia Salnikova that "the historical policy of the Polish authorities, consistently based on historical experience, in the minds of the Polish society strengthens the idea of an exceptional Polish nation that has made a significant contribution to the development of European civilization, which gives it the right to a more significant role in modern Europe" (Tryma, Stadnichenko, & Salnikova, 2023).

Hungary, within the framework of European standards, carries out events in its memorial policy condemning the crimes of the communist regime, wars, genocides and deportations. In 2002, such institutions as the House of Terror in Budapest, founded by the Foundation for Research on the History and Society of Eastern and Central Europe, were established. Its activities were complemented by the independent research committee of National Remembrance (2013), the Institute for the Study of the History of Regime Change (2013), the Historical Research Institute VERITAS (2014), the Institute and Archive of the History of Regime Change and the others, including the Governmental Structure "Trianon-100", established in 2016 as a research group with a grant from the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. These institutions condemn the repressions, the policies of the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, the communist regime of 1949–1989, and the suppression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 (Koch, 2023, p. 69). As part of the condemnation of past political regimes, Hungary equated the Nazi and Soviet occupations, as well as collaboration with these regimes. Hungary's historical and memorial policy is carried out by the state, in particular by the Fidesz party (Hungarian Civic Alliance) and Prime Minister Orbán (Dzheripa, 2019, p. 26).

Thus, Eastern European countries, having lost the Soviet influence, showed solidarity in the process of liquidating the communist legacy. This affinity of processes arose from the desire for sovereignty after the "guardianship" of the Soviet Union. Anti-communist laws

received broad support from the population, protecting the countries from possible external intervention by the Kremlin. Domestic researchers emphasize that in the Czech Republic, Poland, and the Baltic countries, the liquidation of the communist legacy affected almost all spheres of public life. This process led to the condemnation of the communist regime, the ban on the use of its symbols, the lustration of former officials, the opening of access to the archives of repressive bodies, and the granting of special statuses to people who resisted the communist regime (Voronova, 2020, pp. 8–9).

The periodization of the policy of the Czech and Slovakia memory can be divided into several stages that reflect the evolution of national identities, attitude to the communist past, World War II and other historical events.

1. 1991 – 1993. Restoration of national identity after the communist period. This period was characterized by political lustration and growth of nationalist sentiment, which led to discussions about federalism and national autonomy.

2. 1993 – 2004. The beginning of the formation of memory policy at the state level. New institutions have been created dedicated to comprehension of important historical topics. After the collapse of Czechoslovakia in 1993, the memory policy in each of the countries developed with certain differences, although there were common features.

3. 2004 – ... Slovakia and the Czech Republic continue to modernize their approaches to memory policies. The role of historical policy to educate younger generations is emphasized. Disputes are continuing to evaluate the cooperation of some Czech and Slovak politicians with Nazis and Communists.

In the Czech Republic and Slovakia approaches to the policy of memory regarding World War II differ significantly, although they have some common features.

The Czech model of historical policy is distinguished by the development of a narrative about the Czech Republic as a victim of two dictatorships – the National Socialist and the Soviet. The occupation of the Czech Republic by Germany and its liberation by the Red Army are considered in accordance with this narrative. The liberation of the Czech Republic by the Red Army is recognized as liberation from one dictatorship and the beginning of a new one. Therefore, the definition of the “period of unfreedom” is used in relation to the occupation regime of Germany and the regime established after 1945. The absence of active Czech collaborationism in occupied Czech Republic frees modern intellectuals from the ethical problems associated with including the topic of military and political collaboration with the occupiers in the canon of historical memory.

A more compromising image of the war is being formed in the Slovak historical memory. The Slovak intellectuals recognize that the Slovak State emerged as the first modern form of Slovak statehood under war conditions. At the same time, the participation of this state in the organization of the Holocaust is not denied. The Slovak model of memory is also based on the silencing of some moments of the war history, related to the role of President J. Tiso, and on attempts to localize the Slovak Republic in historical memory, in order to normalize its image within the framework of the modern historical narrative.

Thus, in contemporary Czech Republic and Slovakia, the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes and the Institute for National Remembrance apply different models of memory development regarding the history of World War II. They are based both on a consistent portrayal of the Czechs as victims of German occupation and on attempts to form a compromise memorial canon that takes into account both national and European narratives of reception of one’s own experience in the case of the Slovaks.

Regarding the acquisition of sovereignty in 1989 – 1991, there was some difference between the approach of Slovakia and the Czech Republic to the dismantling of the Soviet occupation. In Slovakia, there was moderate dissatisfaction with the socialist system, and ideas of reconstruction were widespread, while in the Czech Republic there was talk of the complete collapse of the Soviet system and the need for a deep political and economic reform (Bútorová, 2019). In this case, the Slovak sociologists speak of the divergent approach of Eastern Europe and the Visegrad Group. The Czech Republic and Poland advocated radical transformations, while Slovakia and Hungary spoke in favour of a softer transition from a socialist to capitalist system.

The differences in the interpretation of the Soviet past in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, according to the researchers, are related not only to the composition of the population and the level of education of citizens, but also to the social impact that socialism left in both countries within the framework of a single state. In the early 1950s, Slovakia, which had a smaller area, benefited more from industrial development and urbanization, which led to an increase in the standard of living and education. As noted by the Slovak sociologist Z. Bútorová, in Slovakia political normalization was softer and less radical than in the Czech Republic. Compared to the Czech public opinion, Slovak public opinion remains less pronounced and less protest-oriented (Bútorová, 2019).

Conclusions. Over the past three decades, the communist theme has remained a priority for the Czech and Slovak historical policy, despite the diversity of other aspects. The analysis of the activities of the Memory of the People project and special organizations shows that the focus is mainly on the memory of the crimes of the communist regime. The researchers note the success of the historical policy of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, which is indirectly confirmed by the achievements of both countries after joining the European Union. The main topics in the Czech and Slovak political and social discourse are the topics related to World War II, the Nazi occupation, the Soviet period, the period of the collapse of Czechoslovakia and the modern life of countries within the European Union. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia the historical memory policy on these topics is not limited only to the participation of the aforementioned institutions and the concepts put forward by them. The study of the past is manifested in the decommunization of history, the dismantling of Soviet monuments, as well as active discussions in the media. The role of these discussions in the historical policy formation is significant and requires further study.

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