

LONDÁK, Miroslav – MICHÁLEK, Slavomír – WEISS, Peter et al. *SLOVAKIA: A EUROPEAN STORY*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2016. 350 p., ISBN 978-80-224-1522-4.

During four decades of soviet rule, Slovakia and her history were locked away behind the iron curtain and only a very limited number of scholarly works about the country appeared in the English-speaking world. And despite the recent publication in English of a number of pioneering works on the subject, the history of Slovakia remains, in Western and Anglophone historiography at least, seriously under researched. Very much aware of this lack, Miroslav Londák, Slavomír Michálek and Peter Weiss decided, on the occasion of the first ever Slovak presidency of the Council of the European Union, to attempt to fill this gap, at least partially, by providing the broadest possible readership with a comprehensive survey of Slovakia's journey towards European integration. Thus appeared this very fine multi-authored monograph, of which they are the editors.

In their introduction, Miroslav Londák and Slavomír Michálek set out the purpose of the book, which is to illustrate the unique and progressive changes that Slovak people have experienced over the past century and “to show the reader the specific nature of the politics, history and economy of the Central European region” (p. 11). The book is divided into four main sections, which explore, in turn, the history of the formation of the independent Slovak state, Czechoslovak foreign policy in the years leading up to the break-up of Czechoslovakia, the development of Slovak society since the revolution of 1989, and the integration of Slovakia into the European Union.

Part I, *The Historical Context of the Formation of Independent Slovak Statehood*, consists of three chapters. In the first of these, Milan Zemko, Tomáš Gábriš and Valerián Bystrický manage in ten short pages to provide a whistle-stop tour of Slovak history from the origins of the formation of Slovak identity in the ninth century to the creation of the Slovak Republic in 1993. In the next chapter, which focuses on the years 1945 to 1989, Miroslav Londák and Elena Londáková offer a fresh look at this most complicated period of Slovak history, dealing especially with the events of 1968, the revolution of 1989 and the collapse of communist rule. Their analysis is not merely political but also economic and cultural and provides one of the most comprehensive contributions to the entire work. The final chapter of this section, by Jozef Žatkuliak and Peter Weiss, provides a more detailed investigation of the years 1990 to 1992 and the problems Slovakia faced on its troubled journey towards independence.

Part II, *The Foreign Policy Context of the Break-Up of Czechoslovakia*, comprises a single chapter in which Slavomír Michálek and Peter Weiss re-assess the significance and consequences of Czechoslovak foreign policy during the process of dis-unification, from 1989 to the end of 1992, with a particular focus on relations between Prague and Bratislava and the Washington administration – a much overlooked topic in the historiography to date.

The focus in Part III, *Slovak Society after 1989*, is Slovak society in the years following the Velvet revolution. The three chapters deal, in turn, with various aspects of living in post-November Slovakia. First, Ján Bunčák, Roman Džambazovič and Ján Sopóci highlight the great changes that have taken place with respect to the relationships between the various social classes in Slovakia. Branislav Šprocha then addresses Slovakia's demographic development, particularly noting the substantial growth of the Slovak population. Finally, Milena Sokolová deals with the churches' contribution to social development in the country and discusses fundamental changes in the general perception of religion during the two decades of Slovak independence.

Part IV, *Slovakia in the New Europe*, addresses the integration of Slovakia into the political structures of the European Union. In the first chapter, Juraj Marušiak details the internal political developments in Slovakia from 1993 onwards, and concludes that the general consensus from

around 1998 was that Slovakia's national interests would be best served by joining NATO and the EU. Milan Šikula then explores economic developments in Slovakia after 1989, especially the difficult transition from a centrally planned economy to a market economy, the problems relating to privatisation during the 1990s, the socio-economic development of Slovakia and its integration into the EU (particularly from an economic perspective), and the global economic crisis of 2008. The chapter by Darina Malová and Peter Weiss discusses Slovakia's accession to the EU in 2004, and the public discourse surrounding it, from the very beginnings of the integration process and the "return" to Europe, right up to attitudes towards the threat of "Grexit" in 2015. Finally, Ľudovít Hallon and Miroslav Sabol, both senior researchers at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, round off Part IV with an exploration of globalization and the economic transformation of Slovakia in the years since it became an independent state on 1 January 1993.

*Slovakia: A European Story* offers a unique look at Slovakia's political history from the very beginnings of the foundation of the nation to the present day, and narrates an engaging account of Slovakia's economic and social development with a special focus on the years immediately following the Velvet Revolution of 1989. It brings together not only historians but also political scientists, sociologists, economists and experts in cultural studies, who combine to offer a properly comprehensive insight into Slovakia's journey towards membership of the European Union. This unprecedented gathering of arguably the most influential and experienced researchers that the Slovak humanities and social sciences have produced in recent decades brings a fresh perspective on Slovakia's history and in so doing offers a truly cutting-edge piece of research.

However, the book is not only the fruit of a highly professional piece of academic research; it is also interesting, engaging, and suitable for a wide audience: such a combination of readability and academic rigour is both rare and very welcome. Via its extensive reference apparatus, the book provides a rich source of data for scholars who wish to go deeper into the subject or follow up on their particular area of interest. One relatively minor drawback is that page numbers are not always included in the citations, making them difficult, on occasion, to follow up.

*Slovakia: A European Story* provides the English-speaking reader with more detail and a greater variety of sources on Slovak history, society and economics than any other work to date. It is a must-read, therefore, for anyone interested in Slovak history, especially the history of the country's integration into the European Union.

*Jakub Drábik*