



Emilia Hrabovec, Beata Katrebova-Blehova. *Slowakei und Österreich im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Nachbarschaft in historisch-literarischer Perspektive.* Wien: LIT Verlag, 2008. 256 S. ISBN 978-3-8258-9574-7; ISBN 978-3-7000-0743-2.

Reviewed by Adam Hudek

Published on H-Soz-u-Kult (December, 2008)

E. Hrabovec u.a. (Hrsg.): Slowakei und Österreich im 20. Jahrhundert

Despite hundreds of years of neighbourhood, the history of Austrian-Slovak relations is still in many aspects a *terra incognita*. As Emilia Hrabovec, one of the editors of this collection stated: this topic is still waiting to be discovered and investigated. Regarding the limited knowledge of Austrian-Slovak relations in the 20th century, the declared main aim of the work is to give an outline of future research. Even showing examples of interactions and mutual perceptions of Austrians and Slovaks, the presented contributions are *only small parts of mosaic, which is yet to be finished* (p. 5).

The whole book consists of 15 studies offering a broad variety of approaches, perspectives and aspirations. They are chronologically ordered and not divided into specific subcategories like cultural and literary relations, Slovak minority in Austria, basic surveys etc.) That the editors clearly expected a very low knowledge about Slovak history among readers is to be seen in the article *Die Slowakei zwischen Ostmitteleuropa und Europäischer Union* by Arnold Suppan. He offers a brief survey (8 pages and 14 paragraphs) of Slovak history in the context of east-middle Europe from the 5th century till 1990. However, to fulfil its introductory role, this text should have been placed among the first and not among the last articles of the book.

A similar problem also applies to Peter Bachmaier's contribution, which provides basic information about the history of East Central European nations, the different conceptions of *Mitteleuropa* and the role of these na-

tions in the *New Europe* (p. 237) from 1989 till 2005. The problem of Austrian-Slovak relations is in fact concerned only marginally in his chapter since he pays much more attention to the other mid European nations like the Czechs, the Hungarians and the Poles. This is especially visible in the part about ideas of Central Europe, where conceptions of Palacký, Jászi and Vajda are listed, while the only plan from a Slovak politician, Milan Hodža's *Federalisation in Central Europe* from 1942, is omitted.

Bachmaier's article is not the only one, where the main topic of the collection is practically not present. In the contribution by Maddalena Guiotto *Italien und die Tschechoslowakei im mitteleuropäischen Kontext der Zwischenkriegszeit* Slovakia is not directly mentioned, although *the Italian-Czechoslovak relation in the interwar period concerned also Slovaks because they were part of the common state with the Czechs* (p. 130). The author deals exclusively with the diplomatic relations between Prague and Rome and the activities of political elites where Slovakia and Slovaks didn't play any substantial role.

Directly focused on the Austrian-Slovak relations is the contribution of Lothar Häußel, investigating under the question *Unbelastet oder unverbindlich?* why the relationship between Austrians and Slovaks was practically *ein Nicht-Verhältnis* (p. 7) and thus non-existent till 1918. The fact that Slovak territory was part of Hungarian Kingdom made the geographical proxim-

ity of Slovakia and Austria irrelevant. Despite some empathy towards Slavic nations in Hungary, the *Realpolitik* of the monarchy still favoured the cooperation between Austrians (Germans) and Hungarians (Magyars) often at the expense of Slovaks. This is also shown in the article by R bert Letz about Slovak societies in Vienna. Although the activities of associations like *Tatran* or *Naroda* (Nation) were quite modest and apolitical, they were regularly restricted, as the government of the Austrian part of the monarchy respected requests of their Hungarian counterparts. The article gives quite detailed information on the development of Slovak societies in Vienna but it lacks the *Austrian point of view*. Except for the relation to the administrative apparatus of the capital, there are no remarks about possible contacts to the Austrian society. As far as the Slovaks in Austria are concerned the volume offers a text written by Jozef M. Rydlo which is more or less a mere compilation, describing Slovaks as one of the oldest ethnic groups on Austrian territory. His labelling of the Slavic population in the 9th century as Slovaks is problematic. The rest of the article is mapping the life of the Slovak population in Austria, and it ends with the official acknowledgement of Slovaks as a national minority by Austrian authorities in 1992.

The most important part of the book is represented by five *core* articles. In one of them (*Wien, die Monarchie und  sterreich in der slowakischen Prosa*), Viliam Jablonick  is reconstructing the image of Austria and especially Vienna in the works of Slovak writers in the 20th century - from memoirs of a soldier in the WWI to the problems of emigrants from communist Czechoslovakia in the 1980s. The common theme of all analyzed works is the perception of Austria by Slovaks coming and being there as foreigners. The article by M ria B torov  (*Umbruchstendenzen im  sterreichischen Kulturambiente und die slowakische Literatur der Zwischenkriegszeit*) is looking for the influences of Vienna intellectual milieu of the interwar period, represented by Sigmund Freud, Stefan Zweig und Arthur Schnitzler, on Slovak literature, specifically the work of Jozef  ger Hronsk . Through the comparison of Hronsk 's works with those of Zweig and Schnitzler, M ria B torov  is trying to confirm the existence of the specific *face* of Mid-European culture.

Milan Kutuninec is analyzing how the Slovak Christian trade-union was reflecting the political changes in Austria from 1934 (death of Austrian chancellor Dollfu) till 1938 (*Anschlu*). Kutuninec describes the trade union as anti-fascist (although linked with Slovak people's party where the pro-fascist wing was present) and supporting the struggle of Dollfu's successor, Schuschnigg, for the independence of Austria. David Schriffel is describing the role of Vienna diplomatic channels in the creation process of the Slovak state in 1938-1939 based on his previously published book. David Schriffel, *Die Rolle Wiens im Prozess der Staatswerdung der Slowakei 1938/39*, Wien 2004.

Of high importance for the main topic of the volume is the contribution by the second editor Beata Katrebova-Blehova. She describes the Slovak political exile in Austria during the years 1945-1955, mainly the actions and the fate of the former political elite of the wartime Slovak state. The second part of the article deals with the activities of Jozef Vicen and his organization *White legion* (*Biela legia*), which operated an illegal anti-communist broadcast from Austria and cooperated with American Counter Intelligence corps. Although the article brings a precise analysis of an example of Austrian-Slovak history, it also tends to be one-sided, showing clear sympathies to the exiled representatives of the Slovak state. The authoritarian regime in Slovakia, cooperating with Hitler's Germany till the end of the war, was by no means a democratic republic suddenly assaulted by Soviet armies, as it sometimes could be assumed reading the article. The assertion that the restoration of Czechoslovakia in 1945, has directly lead to the communist totalitarian regime also seems to be exaggerated.

The book as a whole is a composition of qualitatively very different articles. There are some useful, well-written analyses, alongside with the texts giving basic information, only summarizing and hardly bringing new insights into the given problem. Thus the collection is to be considered as a small step towards a deeper understanding of the history of Austrian-Slovak relationship, useful in the first place for those readers, who have only scarce knowledge of the history of Central Europe.

Annotation:

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/>

Citation: Adam Hudek. Review of Hrabovec, Emilia; Katrebova-Blehova, Beata, *Slowakei und Österreich im 20. Jahrhundert: Eine Nachbarschaft in historisch-literarischer Perspektive*. H-Soz-u-Kult, H-Net Reviews. December, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=23496>

Copyright © 2008 by H-Net, Clio-online, and the author, all rights reserved. This work may be copied and redistributed for non-commercial, educational purposes, if permission is granted by the author and usage right holders. For permission please contact H-SOZ-U-KULT@H-NET.MSU.EDU.