



# VISEGRAD YOUTH FORUM 2018



## Slovakia behind the Iron Curtain and today

Post-war Slovakia. The political system in Czechoslovakia, oscillating between a totalitarian regime and democracy. Influence of the Soviet Union and the rise of left-wing tendencies in a society opposed to the formation of anti-communist resistance. Emigration of our grandparents, or the impact on art and education behind the Iron Curtain. In this spirit, the opening VYF 2018 event preceding the final conference in Banská Bystrica took place on October 18, 2018, at the University of Economics in Bratislava. Speaking at the event were **Marína Zavacká**, *research fellow at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences*, whose research focuses on the history of propaganda and the context of building regime loyalties in the 20th century, and **Juraj Kalina**, *research fellow at the Institute of History of the Slovak Academy of Sciences and the Archive of the Security Services of the Czechoslovak Republic*, whose research includes investigating the forms of anti-communist resistance in former Czechoslovakia and the activities of intelligence services in the 1940s and 1950s.

Opening the discussion, Mrs. Zavacká presented articles, photographs and quotations from various leaders and magazines, who were once supporting Hitler's regime and back then were idealizing the working class. Her aim was to prove that the generation raised in the Slovak state was gradually transformed into a generation living in the socialist Czechoslovak Republic. Interactive materials confirmed that propaganda and a celebration of the system took place analogically in both regimes. Following a brief presentation Mrs. Zavacká elaborated on a question concerning the post-war history of the renewed republic and its loyalty to the Soviet Union. According to her, it was impossible to avoid a connection with the Soviet Union in 1945. Back during WWII, the idea of "Soviet Slovakia" was backed by many communists, including Gustav Husák. She also mentioned that communism was not only a problem in our region, but in many Western countries as well. As an example, she mentioned Italy and France, where communities of people celebrating communism were present.

The question of the post-war orientation change in foreign policy of Czechoslovakia was answered by Mr. Kalina. Following WWII, the mutual East-West mistrust began to grow. Western powers considered Czechoslovakia to be an ally of the USSR, as it took the Soviet's side on numerous occasions. The failure to sign the treaty of alliance with France, as well as the rejection of the Marshall Plan, demonstrated our orientation towards USSR. Many citizens of Czechoslovakia blamed the West that it did not react in February 1948. In reality, the West reacted, but not as most people envisioned it to be. It is still possible to find analytical reports from that period in the CIA archive.

The formation of resistance in Slovakia can be described as a continuous process. Back in 1938-39, several groups were opposed to the totalitarian Nazi regime. In terms of resistance within Czechoslovakia, people were used to surveillance and undemocratic practices during the war, and they took it as a normal thing said Mrs. Zavacká. However, many did not like such approaches, which led a large part of the population to flee into exile. Mr. Kalina remembered the lost illusions of emigrants from Czechoslovakia about the West, where they could present their opinion, but their ideas about life were quite different. According to him, during the 40-year period of communist rule, about 220,000 people left Czechoslovakia.





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The regime also had a strong influence on culture and education. Many writers were changing the texts of their novels every two years, newspapers were frequently censored, editors-in-chief strictly controlled. Since the early 1950s, the education system was heavily influenced by the regime. It all depended on social status and the education of the parents. Mrs. Zavacká also mentioned the loss of power of many people who, in communist Czechoslovakia, made decisions about the lives of the citizens, but lost their power following the fall of the Iron Curtain. As an example, she stated the job loss only based on one bad recommendation.

Questions from the audience included topics, such as urgent emigration of our grandparents, the life in the socialist Czechoslovak Republic, the formation of resistance within Slovak territory or the topic of political and religious dissidents.

