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THE CONTRIBUTION OF GUSTÁV HUSÁK TO THE ANTI-CHURCH MEASURES OF THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN THE YEARS 1948–1950

The figure of the politician and statesman Gustáv Husák is associated, in the awareness of the general public and especially in the Czech lands, mainly with the years of the so-called normalisation, when Gustáv Husák held the highest party and state functions and his personality symbolised the regime established after the occupation of the Czechoslovak Republic by Warsaw Pact troops. In Slovak society, in addition to the above, Gustáv Husák is also perceived as the organiser of the 1944 Uprising, a protagonist of the February coup of 1948 in Slovakia, a victim of bourgeois-nationalist hysteria, or as a fighter for the federalisation of the republic. However, there is less discussion about his involvement in persecution interventions against the churches and the Roman Catholic Church in particular, which were unleashed by the ruling communist leaders at the turn of the 1940s and 1950s in order to bring individual churches and the whole religious life in the country under their absolute control. It should not be forgotten that Gustáv Husák played one of the main roles in the sad and tragic anti-church campaign in Slovakia. Several historians have already dealt with this issue and some quality works have been created. These are mainly the works of R. Letz, J. Pešek and T. Černák.¹ The aim of the presented study is therefore to approach and clarify the contribution of Gustáv Husák to the anti-church policy of the communist regime, which culminated in brutal actions during 1949–1950, as well as to outline the development of his personal attitude towards faith.

¹ R. Letz, *Postoj Gustáva Husáka ku katolíckej cirkvi v rokoch 1944–1950* [in:] B. Kinčok a kol., *Gustáv Husák a jeho doba*, Bratislava 2015, pp. 116–190; J. Pešek, *Vo funkcii povereníka – predsedu Slovenského úradu pre veci cirkevné* [in:] S. Michálek, M. Londák a kol., *Gustáv Husák. Moc politiky – politik moci*, Bratislava, 2013, pp. 403–422; T. Černák, M. Syrný, *Husák vrcholy a pády 1945–1951*, Bratislava 2018, pp. 242–280.

Gustáv Husák's relationship with religion and with the Roman Catholic Church, to which he belonged, underwent a complex development during the rise and fall of his intertwined life. He was born on January 10, 1913 into the practicing catholic family of Nikodém Husák in the small village of Dúbravka, which is now part of Bratislava, the capital of the Slovak Republic. His parents had him baptised as Augustine two days after his birth. The register recorded that he was born into a proper Christian marriage and that both parents were of the Roman Catholic faith.² His mother died when he was only one year old, so after his father left for the fronts of the First World War, he and his two older sisters were raised by his grandmother. Fortunately, Husák's father returned from the war and remarried shortly after.

The childhood of little Gustáv did not deviate in any way from the framework of a small Slovak village and its usual Christian traditions. At school, the pupil Husák took part in religion classes, attended the first Holy Communion and ministered in the local Roman Catholic Church. In this sense, he was shaped by the local pastor Anton Moyš. According to later testimony, Husák's childhood classmates even celebrated nine first Fridays as boys.³ Everything changed with his arrival at Masaryk's secondary state school in 1925 in Bratislava. Husák turned on his faith and the church at around 1929, when he joined the *Komsomol*. He was sixteen years old and enthusiastic about Marxist ideas. He did not follow in the footsteps of his father Nikodém, who belonged to the agrarian camp and was involved in the agrarian party at the municipal level.

After starting his studies at the Faculty of Law of the Comenius University in autumn 1933, Husák joined the Communist Party as a student and at the same time paradoxically applied for accommodation at the well-known Catholic boarding school *Svoradov*. The commission approved his application (he had to have a recommendation from the pastor from his place of residence), and so Augustín Husák (he used the name Augustín and not Gustáv in official documents) spent the whole first year in the Catholic *Svoradov* (after a year he moved to the *Lafranconi* boarding school). During his five-year study of legal sciences, he declared himself as Roman Catholic in the religion column of official university documents, while, for example, his future wife Magda Lokvencová stated without religion in the same column.⁴

Nevertheless, in the mid-1930s, young Gustáv Husák wrote tumultuous anti-church articles in the student periodicals of the time under his pseudonym Ivan Kola. These articles were often hard and radical. With a sharp pen he spoke derogatorily about the Catholic Church and its representatives, whom he accused of medieval sectarianism and student restrictions, which, according to law student Husák, should have been met with

² Register of the Roman Catholic Parish Office in Bratislava-Dúbravka. The register is kept in Latin and Hungarian.

³ P. Hnilica, F. Vnuk, *Fatimské posolstvo a Božie milosrdenstvo – Výzva a posolstvo pre dnešný svet*, Bratislava 2005, pp. 231–233. The first nine Fridays means that for nine months in a row it is necessary to go to confession and to receive the communion on the first Friday of the month.

⁴ Archive of the Comenius University (Archív Univerzity Komenského), f. Právnická fakulta UK, zoznam poslucháčov A-L 1933–1938.

decisive opposition from the youth⁵. Similarly tuned articles signed by Ivan Kola could be found in several student magazines (especially in *Šíp*). In the mid-1930s, the baptised Catholic Gustáv Husák came into conflict with the church and religion, although so far only in written form. From writing to deeds the doctor of law Husák entered a decade later into a completely different socio-political situation.

Gustáv Husák entered high politics for the first time after the outbreak of the Uprising in early September 1944, when after a dramatic arrival in Banská Bystrica he became a member of the Slovak National Council (SNR) presidency and the commissioner of interior. This entitled by these given functions he participated in the nationalisation of church education in the territory controlled by the insurgents (SNR Regulation No. 5/1944 of 6 September 1944). At that time, the Slovak communists began to deal with church issues and the nationalisation of education even preceded similar developments in the Czech Republic. It is interesting that Husák negotiated with the Bishop of Banská Bystrica, Andrej Škrábik⁶ regarding the bishop's position on the Uprising and the possible issuance of a pastoral letter in its favour.

Gustáv Husák was also aware of the lack of Catholics in the insurgent bodies. At the turn of September and October 1944, Husák had a conversation with a representative of the Moscow leadership of the Communist Party – with a representative of the Moscow leadership of the Communist Party Jan Šverma in the presence of Slovak journalist Imrich Kružliak on the topic of involvement or non-involvement of Catholics in the resistance. Surprisingly, it was Šverma who blamed Husák for his lack of interest in the role of Catholic leaders in the organisation of the Uprising and reproachfully asked him, “where are your Catholics?”⁷ Gustáv Husák agreed with Šverma's words, but at the same time argued with the objection that he himself could not push Catholics against “Beneš and the Czechoslovakists” in the resistance.⁸ Apart from the non-interest of Catholic representatives in insurgent bodies, Gustáv Husák already had clear views on the solution of the post-war problem with Slovak Catholicism at the turn of 1944/1945.

Husák presented his plans to fight against the Roman Catholic Church in a well-known report for the Moscow leadership of the Communist Party from February 1945. He personally considered it necessary to carry out sharp interventions in Catholic organisations (seminaries, schools, the press, and so on) and to provoke a certain, “revival movement from new people and with help of these perform a perfect purification and rebirth”.⁹ We can therefore state that Husák in February 1945 indicated the possibility of creating a kind of revival movement in the midst of the Catholic Church serving

⁵ I. Kola, “Nápor klerikálnej reakcie na školy”, *Šíp* 1934, vol. 2, no. 2, p. 22.

⁶ Andrej Škrábik (1882–1950) was bishop of Banská Bystrica since 1943. He also became known as author of *Red Slovakia*, in which he pointed out the danger of Bolshevism in Slovakia.

⁷ The above information was provided in a personal interview to the author of the presented study by Imrich Kružliak.

⁸ *Ibidem*.

⁹ *Report of Dr. G. Husák on the preparations, course and results of the Slovak National Uprising intended for the Moscow leadership of the Communist Party* [in:] V. Prečan, *Slovenské národné povstanie. Dokumenty*, Bratislava 1965, p. 948.

communist intentions, which later (May–June 1949) was actually organised under the name *Catholic action*.

Gustáv Husák also held the post of commissioner of interior and vice-president of the Communist party and SNR shortly after the end of the Second World War. At the Communist Party of Slovakia (KSS) conference in Žilina in August 1945, when the so-called insurgent leadership was removed from the party leadership, he lost his position as commissioner of interior, but still remained a member of the presidium of Central Committee (ÚV) of the KSS and continued to participate in anti-church policy. The communists began attacking and carrying out interventions against the Catholic Church in Slovakia in summer of 1945, because they could relatively easily accuse the Slovak Catholic hierarchy of *Ludakism* (the ideological identification with the Ludak movement – the Slovak national catholic movement), fascism, collaboration or hostility to the new republic in general. They were very well aware that, especially in traditionally strongly catholic Slovakia, the Catholic Church could be a difficult obstacle on their way to the absolute seizure of power and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat. From the beginning, the bishop of Spiš Ján Vojtaššák¹⁰, who did not hide his resistance against the restoration of the Czechoslovak Republic and the end of Slovak statehood (Husák had expressed once that “to eliminate Vojtaššák would be useful, however it is not only embarrassing, but also difficult”¹¹) was a thorn in the communist’s side. Husák’s initial anti-church activities also included a house inspection order for Archbishop Karol Kmetko in his residence at the Castle of Nitra, the dissolution of several Catholic associations, the confiscation of their extensive material and the arrest of many priests. Husák managed all this in the function of commissioner of interior, that is until August 1945.

After the Žilina conference of the KSS, Gustáv Husák managed the transport ministry and from August 1946, despite the loss of the KSS in the elections, he held the position of chairman (practically the Slovak Prime Minister) of the Board of Commissioners (Zbor povereníkov, ZP). In this context, Husák’s efforts to create an independent party of Slovak Catholics, which, according to the Communists, were to be under the influence of the KSS and its existence was to significantly weaken the chances of the Democratic Party (DS) to succeed in the elections, should not be neglected. Husák led interviews with former member of the Slovak Parliament and well-known Catholic politician, former member of the Slovak Parliament and well-known Catholic politician Pavel Čarnogurský on the issue, but without success. Slovak Catholics joined the DS by the so-called April Agreement, which was of key importance for its victory in the elections in May 1946. After the electoral failure of the KSS, there was a frontal attack by the Slovak communists against the DS, which culminated in the revelation of the so-called seditious conspiracy in autumn 1947, in the construction of which Gustáv Husák significantly participated. However, this issue is beyond the scope of the presented study.

¹⁰ Bishop Ján Vojtaššák of Spiš (1877–1965) was one of the most determined opponents of communism and the greatest fighter for Slovak statehood.

¹¹ J. Halko, *Rozbit’ Cirkev: Rozkolnícka Katolícka akcia*, Bratislava 2004, p. 23.

Three months before the so-called “victorious February”, on 17 December 1947, Gustáv Husák had, as the chairman of the ZP, a meeting with the apostolic administrator in Trnava, Ambróz Lazík.¹² It mainly concerned personnel and state security issues. In the dialogue with Lazík, Husák introduced anti-governmental actions related to the catholic clergy, organisations, orders and especially the catholic press, where, according to the chairman of the ZP “sat criminals of the coarsest grain”.¹³ He presented Ambróz Lazík with specific cases of the “reactionary activity” of priests, their contacts with emigrants or the publication of leaflets, and reproached him that the entire ecclesiastical apparatus had been involved in the activities of foreign *Ludák* emigration. Gustáv Husák continued in a sharper and more threatening tone: “I told him [Ambróz Lazík – T.Č.], that remediation is absolutely necessary and possible in two ways: either the state will force changes in individuals and institutions, or the ecclesiastical authorities themselves will make amends. Specifically, I requested personnel changes in the Central Catholic Office, in the Catholic Newspaper and in other press, the removal of Dr. Botek from the leadership of the Central Catholic Office, strict instructions to all orders with the prohibition of politicisation and especially with the prohibition of any contact with the underground and emigration and guarantee in persons as and in the line of the Catholic Gazette and the Catholic Office”.¹⁴ According to Husák, Lazík remained astonished and surprised after this conversation, but promised to inform the bishops about the submitted demands.

We only repeat known facts to emphasise that the events of February 1948 significantly affected the life of our country, the fates of its inhabitants and determined their direction and development for the next forty years. Of course, the Christian churches were no exception. In Slovakia in particular the Roman Catholic Church had a strong position, background and tradition in society, as the new atheist regime was well aware of.

Gustáv Husák, who was supposed to play an important role in the church issue in the near future, significantly “deserved” the so-called working people’s February victory. As chairman of the ZP, he was officially still the first man in Slovakia, in today’s words, a kind of Slovak prime minister. As a result of this function, but mainly due to the established communist monopoly of power, he began to become significantly more involved in the anti-church campaign. The communists could afford to solve the problem of churches according to their own conception. After February, an interesting situation arose on church and religious issues. The ruling communist regime wanted to avoid a sharp confrontation and began to seek the favour of individual churches. The explanation of the established tactics is simple. The Communists had to stabilise their power, and a conflict with the churches was really the last thing they needed.

The Roman Catholic Church in particular was probably the only force that could partially prevent the Communists from carrying out their intentions to completely control society. According to the population census of 31 March 1950 exactly 9,415,244 people

¹² For more on the life of Ambróz Lazík (1897–1969), see: *idem, Ave crux. Život a dielo biskupa Ambróza Lazíka*, Bratislava, 2006.

¹³ *Dokumenty o postavení Katolíckej Cirkvi na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948*, ed. F. Vnuk, Martin 1998, p. 170.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 171.

of Roman Catholic faith lived in Czechoslovakia (Czechoslovakia had a total population of 12,338,450)¹⁵, which presented a large population group that the ruling circles could not afford to ignore. Not to mention that also many members of the Communist Party openly professed religion, especially in the Slovak countryside. After all, according to statistics from 1951 alone, 64,55% of members of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ) professed the Roman Catholic faith, 10,4% belonged to the Czechoslovak Hussite Church and 6,0% to the Evangelical Church. On the contrary, only 17,7% of party members were without religion. Thus, in various ways, the Communists sought Church representatives to give their new regime loyalty and trust, or at least not to take an openly negative attitude.¹⁶ For this reason, the Communists were interested in external mitigation of anti-church activities and tactically suppressed their atheism.

Already on 3 March 1948, Alexej Čepička, then Secretary General of the Central Action Committee of the National Front (ÚAV NF), negotiated with the Archbishop of Prague, Josef Beran¹⁷ on the issue of taking a positive stance on the people's democratic regime by the Roman Catholic Church. The next day, 4 March 1948, the Slovak and Czech Catholic bishops rejected Čepička's request for a meeting in Brno and decided not to issue a declaration of loyalty to the new state. They did not consider it necessary, as the Catholic Church is not bound by any political or state form.¹⁸

On the other hand, the youth of the Reformed Church sent greeting telegrams from their meeting in Bánovce nad Ondavou to the President of the Republic, the Prime Minister and the President of the ZP, who also sent them a reply.¹⁹ The personal secretary of the chairman of the ZP subsequently the personal secretary of the chairman of the ZP subsequently interpreted "sincere thanks for the telegram in which you assure him that you want to do your best to help the work of the Board of Commissioners for a better and happier future for our nation and state".²⁰ The declaration of the presidency of the ÚAV NF of 18 March 1948, in which it emphasised freedom of religion and described it as one of the basic principles of the people's democratic establishment, was to be a conciliatory gesture. At the same time, the statement said that various interventions in religious freedom were undesirable.²¹

At that time, however, several priests had already been detained, many of whom had been excluded from public life because of their religious beliefs and the restriction on the rights of the churches. In this context, Archbishop Karol Kmeťko sent a letter to Gustáv Husák on April 26, 1948, in which he pointed to the so-called cleansing of public life, that is, to people dismissed from employment and to citizens who were persecuted or

¹⁵ J. Halko, *Rozbit' Cirkve...*, p. 26.

¹⁶ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku 1948–1953*, Bratislava 1997, p. 32.

¹⁷ On the life of Cardinal Josef Beran (1888–1969) see: S. Vodičková, *Uzavírám vás do svojho srdca. Životopis Josefa kardinála Berana*, Praha 2009.

¹⁸ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 33.

¹⁹ N. Kmeť, *Postavenie Cirkví na Slovensku 1948–1951*, Bratislava, 2000, p. 25.

²⁰ *Idem*, *Nekatolícke cirkvi a február 1948* [in:] *Február 1948 a Slovensko*, ed. O. Podolec, Bratislava 2008, p. 631.

²¹ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 32.

illegally detained in pre-trial custody.²² Meanwhile the Communists imposed national administration on the important Roman Catholic Society of St. Adalbert, represented by the suspended priest Alexander Horák.²³

Another problem between the state and the churches was the candidacy of priests for various political positions. The ruling power had an eminent interest in the so-called progressive priests engaging in political activity. If church leaders agreed to something similar, it would practically mean approval of the standing political system. Slovak and Czech Catholic bishops therefore addressed this request at a meeting on 3 May 1948 in Olomouc, where they decided not to give consent to any priest to run for parliament. Joining any party remained absolutely forbidden for priests, and for clergy there was also a ban on speaking at political assemblies or writing articles of political nature.²⁴ If a priest violated this order, he was threatened with suspension. However, such clergymen were not of great value to the ruling regime, therefore the communist leaders tried to enforce at least exceptions. These were mainly cases of priests and commissioners such as Jozef Lukačovič²⁵ and Alexander Horák, who were ecclesiastically punished for accepting positions in the ZP after the May elections in 1948.

Their superior in the ZP, Gustáv Husák, also interfered in this fight, in an effort to achieve a cancellation of this suspension. Jozef Lukačovič did however, despite emphatic warnings from church officials not give up the office of commissioner. Gustáv Husák on 15 June 1948, did, as the chairman of the ZP, at least formally officially ask Ambróz Lazík for an exemption, “that Prof. Jozef Lukačovič was granted an exemption from the general ban and the ecclesiastical authorities did not make it difficult for him to perform his responsible function from which the church can also benefit”.²⁶ However, he knew very well that the representatives of the Roman Catholic Church did not intend to make any exceptions, so the dispute between the church and the state dragged on.

A new conflict however was not long in coming. On 16 August 1948, a joint conference of Slovak and Czech Catholic bishops was held in Nitra, at which they drew up a memorandum addressed to the government pointing out the unacceptable state intervention in church matters and restrictions on basic religious freedoms. In Slovakia, the problem was that the memorandum was to be read on Sunday, 29 August 1948, that is on the fourth anniversary of the Uprising. For the Slovak communists, this meant another provocation from the “reactionary clergy”. They requested that the reading of the memorandum be postponed. Gustáv Husák therefore turned to Archbishop Karol Kmeňko, with whom he agreed that the reading of the memorandum would be postponed to a week later. A day before the original reading date, on 28 August 1948 Husák again urged by telephone the upholding of the agreement and informed Ambróz Lazík, that

²² *Dokumenty o postavení Katolíckej Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 41.

²³ More on the character of Alexander Horák (1911–1994) see: J. Pešek et al., *Aktéri jednej éry na Slovensku 1948–1989*, Prešov 2003, pp. 129–132.

²⁴ J. Halko, *Rozbit' Cirkev...*, pp. 28–29.

²⁵ Jozef Lukačovič taught Gustav Husák religion at the secondary school in Bratislava for some time. For more about his character see: J. Pešek et al., *Aktéri jednej éry na Slovensku...*, pp. 221–223.

²⁶ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 42.

he considered the memorandum to be extremely unfortunate in terms of the content and reading date from the pulpits, which would not serve the Catholic Church in any way. It was not to be banned by the authorities, but “they will see the reading as an act against the current regime, that may have consequences”.²⁷ Similar calls were broadcast on 28 August by radio. Nevertheless, the memorandum was read in most churches. Of course, the Communists then used the situation as propaganda against the Catholic Church. They accused church leaders of abusing pulpits, disregarding the agreement, inciting tensions, and so on. They emphasised everywhere that it was a serious violation of the law and a criminal offence according to the Act for the Protection of the Republic (on 24 October 1948, it was replaced by the famous Act No. 231/1948 for the Protection of the People’s Democratic Republic). In addition to the memorandum, a pastoral letter was read in the churches on 10 and 17 October 1948, which provoked similar reactions from the government.

In the autumn of 1948 (on 20 November 1948), a meeting of the ÚAV NF was held on church and religious issues, in which Gustáv Husák also took part. With regard to Slovakia, those present agreed on harsh measures against the Roman Catholic Church. They immediately wanted to cut back religious press, reduce the circulation of the *Catholic Gazette* to 50,000 copies and, on the contrary, publish for the clergy in Slovakia, under the supervision of the ÚAV NF, the *Bulletin for Church and Religious Issues*. Magazines and radio were planned to be used to systematically expose the reactionary policy of the Vatican and against the so-called reactionary (unreliable) priests, and to “fight their activities on a class basis”.²⁸ So-called cultural houses and halls serving religious associations were handed over by communists to the administration of edification inspectors. The regime gradually tightened its grip, which was to become more evident the following year.

The ruling elites sought to disengage the Roman Catholic Church from the Vatican, eliminate its influence, and subdue it completely along with other Christian churches. From the discussion thus far it can be seen that Gustáv Husák acted very thoughtfully and purposefully in the anti-church struggle, although, of course, he followed instructions from the centre. In church politics, he often used coercion and blackmail as means to an end. An example is Ambróz Lazík’s application for permission for a Catholic newspaper and youth associations. Gustáv Husák replied to him: “that everything can be talked about, but only if the Church proves itself in a certain period [...] and especially in the pre-election period neutrality towards all political parties will be maintained publicly and in fact and the regime will not be weakened”.²⁹ In this case, Husák used “something for something” tactics and made it clear to church officials that concessions from the ruling regime could only be expected by the Roman Catholic Church if it behaved according to the Communist conception.

The year 1949 already brought a substantially different dimension and means to the relations between the state and the churches. It brought, first and foremost, the end of at

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 45.

²⁸ *Dokumenty o postavení Katolíckej Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 209.

²⁹ J. Halko, *Rozbit’ Cirkev...*, p. 33.

least partial dialogue and the end of even the slightest hope of reaching a compromise. It began with a visit by a delegation of Catholic bishops (Josef Matoch, Štěpán Trochta and Eduard Nécsey³⁰, who became the bishop of Nitra after the death of archbishop Karol Kmetko on 22 December 1948), to President Klement Gottwald on 19 January 1949. The bishops presented a ten-point memorandum on wrongs against the Roman Catholic Church to the first workers' presidents and Klement Gottwald promised that the continuation of the dialogue with the church would be resumed. One week later, on 28 January 1949, the Holy See's diplomatic representative in Prague, Monsignor Segni, sent a letter to Foreign Minister Vladimír Clementis protesting against the illegal persecution of the Roman Catholic Church.³¹ Clementis subsequently granted him an audience and informed him that the government refused to accept the content of his letter.

On 17 February 1949, the Commission for Religious and Ecclesiastical Affairs of the ÚAV NF met to resume negotiations on ecclesiastical matters. At the outset, its chairman and Minister of Justice Alexej Čepička conditioned the government's willingness to negotiate with the Roman Catholic Church over four points: the church declares loyalty to the government, abolishes the suspension of priests, stops discrimination against priests who cooperate with the government and suspends priests convicted of anti-governmental activities.³² The Bishops' Conference discussed Čepička's ultimatum on 22–23 March 1949 in Dolný Smokovec. However, the conference ended prematurely as a listening device was found in the meeting room. With its interruption, the negotiations between the church and the state ended.

The Czechoslovak government therefore informed the Holy See at the end of March 1949 that its diplomatic representative was *persona non grata*, and in April the presidency of the ÚV KSČ issued directives to achieve full control over the churches. The so-called "Church Six" of the ÚV KSČ, composed of Alexej Čepička, Václav Kopecký, Viliam Široký, Zdeněk Fierlinger, Vladimír Clementis and Zdeněk Nejedlý, became the highest governing body of all anti-church actions. On 30 April 1949, this body approved a plan to initiate the action of progressive Catholics, which they called the *Catholic action*. The state consciously misused the name of the movement that spread in the Catholic Church after the encyclical of Pope Pius XI. *Ubi arcano Dei Consilio* of 1922 as a movement of the laical apostolate.

The Communist *Catholic action*, on the other hand, aimed to break the unity of the Roman Catholic Church, detach it from the Vatican and fully subordinate it to the Communist regime. Communist regime was preparing a large-scale campaign among clergy and believers to support it. As expected, the Bishops' Conference, which was held on 16–17 May 1949 in Trnava, took a strongly dismissive and negative position on the entire campaign. The bishops reminded priests and believers that any action taken without the consent or against the will of the bishops associated with the Pope of Rome

³⁰ On the personality of Archbishop Eduard Nécsey (1892–1968) see: V. Judák, *Vo všetkom láska. Životopisný profil ThDr. Eduarda Nécseya*, Nitra 2012.

³¹ V. Vaško, *Neumlčená. Kronika Katolíckej cirkve v Československu po druhej svetovej válce II*, Praha 1990, p. 58.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 59.

undermines the basic structure of the Church, breaks its unity and necessarily leads to its destruction³³ – and that was exactly what the communist regime was about.

Therefore, on 10 June 1949, a state *Catholic action* was established in the Municipal House in Prague, the founding assembly of which was attended by approximately 68 so-called patriotic priests and another 215 people. The Congress accepted the *Repercussion of the Catholic action* and elected a 60-member ÚV headed by Ferdinand Pujman (the opera director at the Prague National Theatre). The Slovak Committee of the *Catholic action* was constituted on 22 June 1949, and its chairman was Šára Šurányiová. The Communists began an extensive initiative to expand this schismatic organization, which consisted of organising regional and district conferences of believers, collecting signatures for the *Repercussion of the Catholic action* in the countryside (further in factories and individually at home) and, of course, exerting pressure on priests. Just for the sake of interest, it should be noted that not only priests and believers without party affiliation, but also some ordinary members of the Communist Party refused to sign. It was Gustáv Husák who proposed not to punish such cases provisionally by exclusion from the party, but only to register them for the future.³⁴

The campaign also massively took its course in the press and on the radio. The bishops responded to the situation with a pastoral letter drafted at a secret meeting on 15 June 1949 in Prague entitled *The Voice of Bishops and Ordinaries in the Hour of the Great Examination*, and ordered priests to read it at all Holy Masses on Sunday, 19 June 1949. The communist powers, of course, tried to do everything possible to prevent the pastoral letter from being read. Priests were visited by members of national security, menaced, pressured, threatened with arrest, just so they would not read it. Believers responded by guarding their priests and parish buildings, which in many places logically transformed into open confrontation with the state authorities.

A wave of riots, bloody clashes and commotion swept through Slovakia, involving thousands of citizens. Slovakia experienced a widespread unrest at the end of June and the beginning of July 1949 and it was the largest uprising against the regime since February 1948. In addition, on 20 June 1949, Pope Pius XII declared by special decree the so-called *Catholic action* in Czechoslovakia to be a schismatic movement. The government responded with, initially only verbal notice, similarly harsh methods and repression. In Slovakia, they appeared mainly out of Husák's mouth, as the regime officials entrusted him to comment on events in front of the public.³⁵

At the Presidency of the ÚV KSS on 17 June 1949, Ladislav Holdoš reported on the ongoing *Catholic action*, and outlined among other things, the issue of planned pilgrimages and the consecration of churches: "There will be large Catholic events [...] such as the pilgrimage in Levoča on July 1st and 2nd, where about 100,000 people are expected, the pilgrimage in Ružomberok on June 26th, where there will be a procession of about 20,000 people, a church consecration in Partizánske, a church consecration somewhere

³³ M.S. Ďurica, *Dejiny Slovenska a Slovákov*, Bratislava 2003, p. 616.

³⁴ F. Vnuk, *Pokus o schizmu a iné proticirkevné opatrenia v rokoch 1949–1950*, Bratislava 1996, p. 31.

³⁵ J. Halko, *Rozbit' Cirkev...*, p. 171.

around Nitra and church consecration in Zlaté Moravce³⁶. Since the communist leadership was not interested in carrying out these religious events and they also needed to mobilise the public for the so-called Slavic Day, Husák came up with a different solution. The chairman of the ZP proposed that the pilgrimages and ordinations of the churches be simply cancelled under various pretexts, such as the ongoing harvest or unfinished church constructions.³⁷

At the mentioned presidency, they also discussed the inclusion of Catholic laics in the *Catholic action*. The Chairman of the Communist Party of Slovakia, Viliam Široký, presented the proposal in the form of former deputy for DS Július Špánik, who was in prison at the time. Gustáv Husák responded to the chairman of the KSS: “Špánik will escape into emigration, he is a characterless rat. I don’t like it because he is discredited in those Catholic circles. Kempný is more serious, but Špánik was better able to climb, he is humble in the slammer, that is true. Here is the question of what we can get out of him. The trump would be Kempný, and I would rather raise my hand for Kempný ten times.”³⁸

Husák also suggested addressing the Pavel Čarnogurský in this matter. From this it can be deduced that the communists urgently needed to support its crumbling conception of Catholic action by respected personalities from the Catholic camp. The presidency of the ÚV KSS subsequently decided that the consecrations of churches should be postponed indefinitely and other actions should be allowed only if they were influenced by the spirit of the *Repercussion of the Catholic action*. The commissioner of justice, Július Viktory was to speak with the imprisoned Július Špánik on the topic of the *Catholic action*. Later, Špánik was actually released.

However, the appearances of the faithful against the regime continued. On 24 June 1949, Gustáv Husák declared that Catholic bishops headed by Archbishop Beran and some priests could not escape responsibility for such riots and the damage caused by them. It is said that under the influence of a pastoral letter the health of the state and the public were seriously endangered and property destroyed. According to Husák, these are the intentions of the subversives of the state, who do not like peace in our villages and towns.³⁹ The chairman of the ZP further stated that “attempts to terrorise by the episcopal assembly against priests and believers will not last long. Disruptive wreckers themselves are exposed and thus neutralised. We will ensure peace in our state.”⁴⁰

Despite Husák’s fighting words, the uprisings spread and became more extensive by the day. It should also be borne in mind that these were essentially spontaneous manifestations of the population defending their priests. Rumours of widespread arrests of clergy also contributed to the aggravated situation. The communist leadership was surprised by this development and considered various solutions, including the deployment of the army against the faithful, as the situation became really dramatic. In 1963, Viliam

³⁶ Slovak National Archive (hereinafter: SNA), f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, šk. č. 791. Zasadnutie PÚV KSS zo dňa 17.6.1949.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, pp. 77–78.

⁴⁰ J. Halko, *Rozbit’ Cirkev...*, p. 171.

Široký considered Husák and other Slovak officials to be responsible before the Barnabit rehabilitation commission.⁴¹ Gustáv Husák, as a member of the Presidium of the ÚV KSS and the Chairman of the ÚV, was certainly responsible for the situation and other anti-clerical measures in which he was significantly involved, but he was far from the only one in this regard. It should also be pointed out that Gustáv Husák did not belong to the group of “chosen ones” in the so-called the Church Six of the ÚV of the Communist Party, which determined church policy in the republic. However, he consistently applied its conclusions in Slovakia.

One of the largest uprisings broke out on 23 June 1949 in Čadca. According to Slovak communist officials, it was so serious that they decided to fly to Čadca in person and investigate the matter on the spot. The then commander of the State Security Service in Slovakia, Viktor Sedmík, noted in 1963 that when he received the news that there were great riots in Čadca, “I told Husák that nothing could be done, we should go there. We flew. Holdoš, Okáli, Lietavec etc. In the belief, we were doing a good service. The next day comrade Široký called me and scolded me terribly, that as soon as someone [...] in Čadca, the whole Board of Commissioners was already flying there.”⁴² The riots in many places in Slovakia were suppressed and ended by radical security interventions and the subsequent arrest of insurgents and priests. Needless to say, detainees were treated in an extremely brutal manner. By mid-July 1949, 717 people had been detained in connection with riots and commotions during the *Catholic action*.⁴³

Representatives of the KSS paid attention to the *Catholic action* at a meeting of the Secretariat on 14 July 1949. Those present had to admit that after the publication of the pastoral letter, the signing of the *Repercussion to the Catholic action* practically stopped and lagged significantly behind the Czech lands.⁴⁴ Gustáv Husák nevertheless claimed that the action should be evaluated positively. From his point of view, it was the bishops’ interest to keep the whole church behind them and claim, there would be no church without bishops.⁴⁵ On the question of arrested believers and clergy, Husák said the following: “It is necessary to say why those pastors are in jail. We have to choose at least a few typical cases and say why they are sitting in jail [...] It needs to be shown that this is a political struggle and we will raise it to the field where we want it to be and not where the church wants it to be.”⁴⁶

An attempt to break the Catholic Church through *Catholic action* and subordinate it to governmental power, however, did not succeed. This is mainly due to the fact that after the intervention of the bishops and the Vatican, they encountered resistance from the faithful. However, the communist leaders did not evaluate the whole event completely negatively and according to them it had the expected continuation from the national point of view.⁴⁷ The campaign continued later during July 1949, when the opinions of

⁴¹ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 78.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 79.

⁴³ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 80.

⁴⁴ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát, šk. č. 3. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 14.7.1949.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

the presidency of the *Catholic action* or supporting statements from various associations or institutions were published in the press.

During the summer of 1949, Slovak and Czech Catholic bishops met again and drafted their last uncensored pastoral letter at the meeting on 13–14 August in Trnava. In it, believers were informed that priests who had accepted positions in the ZP (in Slovakia it was mainly Alexander Horák and Jozef Lukačovič), will be suspended from priestly positions. Thus, the church hierarchy did not intend to seek a compromise with the Communists on this issue. This is one of the reasons why the communist regime changed tactics to control the churches after the failure of the *Catholic action*. Party leaders had previously considered the idea of creating ecclesiastical laws that would radically curtail the rights of churches and bring them completely under their control.

In the given situation, the above-mentioned proposal was back on the agenda. The preparation of these so-called ecclesiastical laws culminated in autumn 1949. Specifically, it was a matter of economic security of churches and the establishment of the State Office for Church Affairs. That is, the office under whose competence all ecclesiastical or anti-clerical activities of the regime would fall. Also, the law on the economic security of churches was to make the church financially dependent on the state. Also the SNR dealt with ecclesiastical law on 18 October 1949. Gustáv Husák made a traditional anti-church speech at the meeting and attacked both the Catholic and the Evangelical Church. For Catholics, he focused mainly on the church hierarchy and its reactionary goals, on the suspension of Alexander Horák and Jozef Lukačovič, and did not leave out the bishops.⁴⁸ Among the Evangelicals, he mentioned their connection with the “greedy Slovak bourgeoisie”, with people like Lettrich, Hodža or Ursíny, and the effort to use freedom of religion to spread hate. On 25 November 1949, the General Bishop of the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession, Vladimír Pavel Čobrda, commented on Husák’s words.⁴⁹ He explained Husák’s words by saying that they were said by a non-evangelical, who did not know the evangelical church system well.⁵⁰

The National Assembly approved both ecclesiastical laws (Act No. 217/1949 on the Establishment of the State Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs (SÚC), headed by Alexej Čepička, and Act No. 218/1949 on the Economic Security of Churches) on 14 October 1949 effective from 1 November 1949. According to Act No. 217/1949, the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs (SIÚC) was established in Slovakia, but in fact subordinated to the central office in Prague. According to “c. Široký three candidates came in question: c. Husák, Holdoš and Prof. Sýkora”⁵¹ as head of the Slovak office. Viliam Široký was mainly involved under Ladislav Holdoš, but in the end the chairman of the ZP Gustáv Husák was appointed.

Subsequently, at the meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS on 29 October 1949, those present discussed the organisational and personnel staffing of the SIÚC. Husák also

⁴⁸ N. Kmeť, *Postavenie Cirkví na Slovensku...*, p. 155.

⁴⁹ On the personality of Vladimír Pavel Čobrda (1880–1969) see: P. Uhorskai, E. Tkáčiková, *Evanjelici v dejinách slovenskej kultúry I.*, Liptovský Mikuláš 1997, p. 59.

⁵⁰ N. Kmeť, *Postavenie Cirkví na Slovensku...*, p. 156.

⁵¹ *Církevní komise ÚV KSČ 1949–1951*, ed. K. Kaplan, M. Bulínová, M. Janišová, Praha–Brno 1994, p. 241.

suggested not to engage Catholic priests in the office, that a separate Greek Catholic division be established in the future (until then only a department for the Greek Catholic Church should work at the office) and that the Secretariat of the Party give its principal consent to the establishment of an internal advisory board of Commissioner.⁵² Furthermore, those present only discussed personnel issues. Gustáv Husák then announced to the competent authorities on 2 November 1949 the establishment of the SIÚC: “The Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs, established by Act. No. 217/49 Coll. began its activities on 1 November 1949. I request that all designated offices include the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs in the list of credentials and their equivalent offices and send them all relevant correspondence. SIÚC has its offices in Bratislava, Lenin square No. 5.”⁵³ The Prague SÚC and the Bratislava SIÚC, were organisationally identical, the only exception was the mentioned establishment of a separate institute for the Greek Catholic Church in the Department of the Catholic Church.⁵⁴ Gustáv Husák and Alexej Čepička agreed on this unified organization of both offices during a joint meeting.

It was stated in the ecclesiastical laws that spiritual activity can only be permitted for those who have received state consent. The clergy thus became civil servants, they had to take the vow of allegiance to the People’s Democratic Republic, and the state had the right to decide on their reliability. The state simply decided who could and could not perform the priestly ministry. According to the *Act on the Economic Security of Churches*, the salary was also paid to priests by the state, tying them together. The churches lost their independence in internal affairs and could not freely elect their superiors. So, after 1 November 1949, the church officially came under direct state supervision.

The laws logically met with strong opposition from higher church leaders, who refused to accept a salary from the state. However, the Communists wanted the exact opposite – as many clergy to accept the wage as possible, thus committing themselves to the regime. This tactic was certainly more successful than the schismatic *Catholic action*. Just for the sake of interest, I will mention in this context a greeting telegram to Gustáv Husák sent on 27 March 1950 from a ceremonial meeting of clergy and political figures in the Apostolic Administration in Trnava on the occasion of handing over material state support to cover the budget deficits of parishes in Trnava: “Dear Dr. Gustáv Husák, Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, entrusted with the leadership of the SIÚC in Bratislava... on behalf of the clergy and believers of the local diocese, we would like to greet you warmly and thank our government for its great care for the economic security of the churches”⁵⁵

At the end of 1949, the regime tried to show a “human face” and therefore began to grant amnesty to persons who had “transgressed” from the communist point of view during the *Catholic action* and took part in the summer uprisings. The ZP alone granted amnesty to 102 people by the end of 1949.⁵⁶ The released priests had the opportunity to

⁵² SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát, šk. č. 4. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 29.10.1949.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, f. Slovenský úrad pre veci cirkevné, Sekretariát – dôverné, 1949, šk. č. 1.

⁵⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁵ *Ibidem*, f. Slovenský úrad pre veci cirkevné, Sekretariát – dôverné, 1950, šk. č. 2.

⁵⁶ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 114.

sign such a declaration with the express consent of Gustáv Husák: “On the occasion of the pardon of the President of the Republic in a criminal case led against me, I declare that I admit my guilt. I recognise the valid laws of the republic, promise to uphold them, lead the life of a proper citizen, support the people’s democratic regime and its building efforts”.⁵⁷ However, it was a false “humanity”, as it was Gustáv Husák who, at the meeting of the Presidium of the ÚV KSS, on 3 February 1950, had personal reservations about the moderation of courts, which in his opinion were to impose significantly harsher punishments against the clergy: “In this ecclesiastical commission there are very weak people from interior and justice. I ordered our representatives to submit only few cases. If needed, the peaks will come together then the three of us can sit down with Okály and Viktory and make arrangements. Beňuška [Pavol Beňuška, secretary of the bishop’s office in Nitra – T.Č.] was in court and sentenced to 6 months, but served only 5. He will be released in a while. He could have been sentenced to 5 years.”⁵⁸

Husák had a strong aversion to the high ecclesiastical hierarchy in general, which he made very clear. This was visible at the reception of representatives of Catholic institutions on 29 November 1949, which was attended exclusively by the so-called patriotic priests led by Alexander Horák and Jozef Lukačovič. The Episcopate thus clearly has been shown who the state considered to be a partner.⁵⁹

As for the issue of the pledge of allegiance, the ecclesiastical commission of the ÚV KSS decided that the clergy must take the oath in the hands of the chairman of the District National Committee or the Regional National Committee, without any amendments. The Communists did not expect the bishops to take the oath, so they focused on lower dignitaries. So for example, on 3 February 1950, the general vicar of Trnava, Jozef Minárik and Michal Beňo, holding the same position in Nitra, took the oath directly into the hands of the chairman of ZP Gustáv Husák.⁶⁰

On the same day, Husák reported on this and other ecclesiastical issues at a meeting of the Presidium of the ÚV KSS. After general information notes about individual churches, he turned to the issue of clerical salaries: “Expenditures on the salaries of clergy have increased significantly. In June 1949, 1697 clergy received a total of 4,343,436 CZK in salary per month. In January 1950, 2216 clergy total salaries in the amount of 11,817,026 CZK. On average, the salaries of clergy increased by about 2/3.”⁶¹ Subsequently, he touched upon the vow of allegiance, stating that the taking of vows of clergy took place according to the law in the second half of January 1950 all over Slovakia.

According to Husák, the vast majority of clerics took the vows without hesitation or great embarrassment: 2,280 clergy were summoned, 2,216 came and took the vow, 64 did not appear. Husák also gave praise that “despite the instructions of the Catholic bishops, the majority of the clergy did not make any oral or written reservations about the vows wording... On the whole, it can be said that the uniform composition and signing of the

⁵⁷ J. Halko, *Rozbit’ Cirkev...*, p. 118.

⁵⁸ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, šk. č. 794. Zasadnutie PÚV KSS zo dňa 3.2.1950.

⁵⁹ N. Kmeť, *Postavenie Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 166.

⁶⁰ J. Pešek, M. Barnovský, *Štátna moc a Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 115.

⁶¹ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, šk. č. 794. Zasadnutie PÚV KSS zo dňa 3.2.1950.

vow is a complete defeat of the episcopal agitation against the vow, or for the vow with written reservations, as well as ordered in the pastoral letter in November”.⁶²

In the monitored issue, we gradually arrive at the very beginning of 1950 in Banská Bystrica, where a case started to be written, which became the most acute conflict in granting state consent between the regime and the Roman Catholic Church, a kind of precedent in which Gustáv Husák was significantly involved.

On 8 January 1950, Bishop Andrej Škrábik died in Banská Bystrica. Five days later, according to the valid ecclesiastical laws, the former General Vicar, Daniel Briedoň, was duly elected Vicar Capitular. However, he did not ask for state consent, but only sent a letter to the SlÚC announcing the death of Bishop Andrej Škrábik and his appointment. However, the SlÚC refused and demanded the submission of a proper application. If Daniel Briedoň had sent it, the Communists had decided to reject such request.⁶³ At the above-mentioned meeting of the Presidency of the ÚV KSS on 3 February 1950, Husák stated to the problem: “As this is the first case in the whole republic where the episcopal see was vacated after the issuance of new ecclesiastical laws, the case of Banská Bystrica is an important precedent both for the state’s progress in implementing ecclesiastical laws and for the progress of ecclesiastical circles in respecting laws and occupying higher church posts”.⁶⁴

The case in Banská Bystrica was indeed the first, and the ruling regime was about to use it to its advantage and inflict another strike on the Roman Catholic Church and the Vatican. In this struggle, the Communists did not intend to retreat at any cost. Gustáv Husák himself had a conversation with the duly elected Daniel Briedoň on 3 February 1950, in which he informed him of the interpretation he gave to the provisions of the Act on State Consent and that he would insist unconditionally on respecting the law. At the end of the conversation, Briedoň himself asked Husák to take the oath. Gustáv Husák refused”, as he [Daniel Briedoň – T.Č.] did not give a clear answer regarding the requests for consent and related matters and that he practically does not recognise, respectively violates the law”.⁶⁵ Daniel Briedoň finally resigned after this dramatic conversation with Husák and government officials began looking for a new candidate. Gustáv Husák commented on this issue that “it must be a priest who has not been excommunicated. I already have tips. However, he risks excommunication. I am for it, although there will be some uproar”.⁶⁶

Husák was certainly right about that. Such a priest would be excommunicated and, in addition, risk total isolation and hostility from the church hierarchy and most clergy. Finding someone suitable was therefore not quite easy. After the visit of Gustáv Husák and Alexander Horák, the dean of Ivanka pri Dunaji, Ján Dechet⁶⁷, accepted the position of administrator of the Banská Bystrica diocese, appointed by the SlÚC on 13 February 1950,

⁶² *Ibidem*.

⁶³ *Církevní komise ÚV KSČ...*, p. 355.

⁶⁴ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, šk. č. 794. Zasadnutie PÚV KSS zo dňa 3.2.1950.

⁶⁵ *Církevní komise ÚV KSČ...*, p. 371.

⁶⁶ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, šk. č. 794. Zasadnutie PÚV KSS zo dňa 3.2.1950.

⁶⁷ For more about the collaboration of Ján Dechet (1908–1968) with the communist regime see: J. Pešek et al., *Aktéri jednej éry na Slovensku...*, pp. 73–75.

to be subsequently imposed on the Vatican on 18 February by the highest ecclesiastical punishment “excommunicatus vitandus”⁶⁸, which was also announced on Radio Vatican. The bishops, of course, refused to accept this choice and issued pastoral letters to the faithful. Ján Dechet remained, as expected, isolated and began to engage in a difficult internal struggle.

The Communists organised a massive campaign supported by delegations of workers to prevent him from sprinkling mentally and themselves suffering a fiasco. In the report of Gustáv Husák at the meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS on 15 February 1950, we can read that Ján Dechet was visited by a delegation of workers from Podbrezová, with whom he allegedly sat in a very cordial conversation. The Communists also appointed to Dechet two other reliable priests (they were to act as chancellor and secretary of the Banská Bystrica diocese) and provided various security measures for his protection.

Gustáv Husák further stated that counter-action can be expected from the high church hierarchy and local priests, and again touched on the originally and duly elected Daniel Briedoň: “In the conversation, Dr. Briedoň indicated whether it would be possible to obtain consent if he were re-elected, but in compliance with all regulations. We left them hope because we did not want to close all doors and then we will have the initiative in our hands [...] I propose to take note of the report and instruct the Church Office to monitor the situation closely, because there may still be a great war”⁶⁹.

In the ensuing discussion, Husák outlined the weakness of the whole case. Neither Ján Dechet nor the other two appointed priests belonged to the Banská Bystrica diocese and also did not have the consent of their bishop. Although they formally asked for consent, Bishop Róbert Pobožný, as well as Bishop Ambróz Lazík, refused to give it. Gustáv Husák therefore personally considered the first 14 days to be critical, but at the same time expressed a clear position: “We definitely won the first round”⁷⁰. In addition, Gustáv Husák granted Ján Dechet a rank allowance to the annual amount of CZK 48,000 on 1 February 1950.⁷¹ The chairman of the ZP thus bet on money that was supposed to help Dechet withstand the pressure not only from the church hierarchy and the Vatican, but also from his immediate surroundings. Since, with Dechet’s consent, the Communists installed two reliable priests from the Rožňava diocese in the episcopal office, a conflict soon awaited between Husák and Róbert Pobožný, Bishop of Rožňava. Gustáv Husák therefore decided to intimidate the Bishop of Rožňava and issued an instruction to introduce an investigation on all letters sent by Bishop Pobožný to the appointed chancellor and secretary of the Banská Bystrica diocese.⁷²

The state-organised support of Ján Dechet culminated on 18–19 March 1950 in Banská Bystrica with the participation of political representatives, the so-called patriotic priests and various delegations. It was a kind of communist inauguration of Ján Dechet into his new position. On 16 March 1950, Husák had, at the meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV

⁶⁸ F. Vnuk, *Vládni zmocnenci na biskupských úradoch v rokoch 1949–1951*, Martin 1999, p. 115.

⁶⁹ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát, šk. č. 6. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 15.2.1950.

⁷⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷¹ F. Vnuk, *Vládni zmocnenci na biskupských úradoch...*, p. 117.

⁷² *Ibidem*, p. 120.

KSS, presented and outlined the program of the mentioned event. On Saturday morning, 18 March 1950, delegates of action committees from all municipalities and districts of the Banská Bystrica diocese were to meet for a conference, where a lecture by Gustáv Husák on church policy was prepared. In it, Husák wanted to explain to those present why Ján Dechet had become the administrator of the diocese, to further support his authority and, finally, to convince everyone of the correctness of the state church policy.⁷³

Gustáv Husák also outlined the planned course of the festive inaugural mass, in which the participation of the government delegation and the ZP was expected, stating that the scenario of the mass was prepared in Prague.⁷⁴ In the preparations, Husák did not even miss the acquisition of part of the clergy. The communists organised a conference of Catholic priests in Sliač, the main purpose of which was “to clarify all problems, to establish themselves in their position and to convince the weaker and, if appropriate, to give a response. We still have to think about that. This would give us such a strong cadre of priests who are committed to everything”⁷⁵ The communist power planned the event in Banská Bystrica really conscientiously and did not forget to invite even the suspended priests – commissioners Jozef Lukačovič and Alexander Horák.

Husák's speech to the representatives of the district and local AV NF sounded exactly as planned on Saturday, 18 March 1950, accusing the bishops of anti-governmental activities and the Vatican of trying to create a fifth column in the people's democratic countries. The next day, Ján Dechet served his, directed carefully by the communists, first mass in his new position. Beforehand, the Banská Bystrica Cathedral was subjected to careful inspection by State Security, and only a selected audience, wearing paper tricolour ribbons, was allowed to mass. Dechet's inauguration was broadcasted live on radio. However, the streets of Banská Bystrica yawned with emptiness, except for the invited guests. Nevertheless, the state power made it clear with the “Dechet case”, who is master of the house and how all the subsequent conflicts and clashes will end.

Therefore, on 30 March 1950, Gustáv Husák was able to evaluate the whole matter positively at the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS: “The event in Banská Bystrica was quite successful [...] We managed to concentrate a considerable number of clergy, no longer on a meeting, but on an active speech against the Vatican, thus hitting the Vatican's efforts to isolate Dechet. I also talked about B. Bystrica with c. Čepička, which considers it an important victory, which we managed to focus masses on direct action against the Vatican. The situation of Dechet has been consolidated and the progressive priests strengthened”⁷⁶

Ján Dechet began to perform his function despite excommunication, which created serious problems as, according to ecclesiastical law, all his decisions were invalid. At the beginning of 1951, he was also elected Capitular Vicar, and therefore the administration of the Diocese of Banská Bystrica had to be unofficially taken over by the Bishop of Nitra, Eduard Nécsey. It was not until spring of 1951 that the Bishop of Trnava, Ambróz Lazík,

⁷³ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát, šk. č. 7. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 16.3.1950.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁵ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*, šk. č. 7. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 30.3.1950.

removed Ján Dechets' excommunication on the basis of the so-called secret faculties. Later, Dechet became actively involved in the pro-regime peace movement of the catholic clergy, for which he earned the Order of the Republic in 1955.

One of the most brutal actions of the communist regime against the Roman Catholic Church is undoubtedly the liquidation of men's and women's orders. These orders were a thorn in the government powers' side since the end of World War II. In particular, the communists accused them of aiding and hiding war criminals, traitors and collaborators (Greek Catholic monasteries for helping the Banderas) or directly cooperating with fascism. After February 1948, the measures against the monasteries took on a new, in the beginning very elementary dimension. Searches and similar persecution were commonplace. The fact that some monasteries were established after 1945, and of course, without state consent, which was not necessary at that time, also played a role in favour of the communists. Those were to be cancelled without exception. The issue of religious orders was discussed and dealt with by bodies such as the Church Six of the ÚV KSČ, ÚAV NF, SÚC, in Slovakia the leadership of the KSS and later the SIÚC. All with one goal – the liquidation of monasteries as “nests of reaction”.

Preparations for an intervention against the male monasteries, which the Communists called *Action K*, began in the early 1950s. In Prague, a four-member group was formed at the SÚC, which secretly drew up an organisational plan for the entire event and prepared instructions for other officials. One of those significantly participating in the liquidation measures against the monasteries in Slovakia was, of course, Gustáv Husák, who still held the position of chairman of the SIÚC.

The presidency of the ÚV KSS discussed the liquidation issue of religious orders at a meeting on 3 February 1950. It was Gustáv Husák who presented, among other things, a report on the procedure against the orders. In his review, he first outlined the problem of allegedly illegally gathered youth in monasteries, which was allegedly brought up in an unfavourable spirit towards the republic in a boarding or semi-boarding way. Husák also described the monasteries as centres of resistance against the people's democratic establishment and as centres of militant anti-socialist forces, which eroded the whole area with their missionary activity. According to the chairman of the ZP, the monasteries have become “the most dedicated and efficient apparatus of Vatican and episcopal politics in our country”.⁷⁷ With such an assessment, it was only a matter of time before their liquidation came into play.

Gustáv Husák said about the planned liquidation measures: “Large male orders from all over Slovakia are to be concentrated in one monastery [...] Secret seminars in monasteries are to be liquidated and theologians handed over to the faculty and normal seminars. At the beginning of this event, due to anti-state activities, the Jesuit order is to be banned in the entire territory of the state [...] This concentration will initially be carried out only in cities [...] Disruptive anti-state elements from monasteries will have to be concentrated separately”.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*, f. ÚV KSS – Predsednictvo, šk. č. 794. Zasadnutie PÚV KSS zo dňa 3.2.1950.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

Women's orders were to come right after the male ones. The communists planned to keep the nuns in medical service as nurses in institutions or hospitals, however not in education. Despite the lack of teachers, monks and nuns had to leave the educational sector. In this matter, on 9 March 1950, Gustáv Husák addressed a letter to his close friend, the Commissioner of Education, Ladislav Novomeský, "that at the end of this school year [school year 1949/50 – T.Č.] all members of male or female orders be dismissed from school services at all types of schools, or that all teaching positions, with the exception of teaching religion, be filled with civilian teachers in the new school year".⁷⁹ This proposal was implemented in the following months, and the religious teachers received dismissal decrees on 30 June 1950.

Rehearsal for the interposition on religious orders in April was to be an action against some boarding schools, in which orders liked to prepare their juveniles. Gustáv Husák spoke about it at a meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS on 16 March 1950. The mentioned intervention against those monasteries in which young people were still concentrated was carried out at the direct command of the Prague leadership of the Communist Party. It concerned mainly the orders of Salesians and Jesuits. Gustáv Husák himself proposed, "to combine it with the second action to be done, but there [in Prague – T.Č.] they decided that it should be done in advance. Probably to see what the reaction will be, but also because there is legal reason for it. Yesterday we selected administrators; everywhere there will be one administrator for education, who will take over the boarding school and one from the church office. They have to separate it from the monastery and say that it is a state boarding school. They have instructions from Prague on how to do it".⁸⁰

The second mentioned action, with which, according to Husák's proposal, the intervention against the boarding schools was to be connected, was the complete liquidation of the male monasteries, that is *Action K*. Gustáv Husák said: "The event with the monasteries will begin in the coming days. It will begin with a trial against the superiors of some monasteries [the trial before the state court in Prague on 31 March – 4 April 1950 against ten religious superiors – T.Č.] and then there will be 7 orders completely concentrated, each in one place. In a week, I will be able to give a very accurate report on that. This will be a major mobilisation of security, as it affects almost 80 cities. At the next meeting of the secretariat, I will give a very precise report, especially on the policy measures, because this seems to be the one that will cause the most uproar of the measures taken so far. It affects a large number of cities and, from a human point of view on the street, it will be done in a very brutal way".⁸¹

The last sentence about brutality was true. On 1 April 1950, units of the People's Militia, Army and Security forcibly invaded the male monasteries in Slovakia and deported monks from there to the preconceived concentration monasteries. This intervention went down in history under the name "Barbarian Night". By the end of May 1950, 1002 monks had

⁷⁹ F. Vnuk, *Akcie K a R*, Bratislava 1995, p. 78.

⁸⁰ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát, šk. č. 7. Zasadanie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 16.3.1950.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

been interned. The monks were deprived of basic civil rights and freedoms and subjected to intense pressure to leave the order. Some of them had to enter military service in the Auxiliary Technical Battalions, others were reassigned to production, and many suffered years in communist prisons for their faith. The action against the females (*Action R*) took place on 29–31 August 1950.

Some nuns remained working in health care (charity homes, for example), others had to leave for the Czech Republic, and some even went to prison for helping persecuted citizens. For a closer idea of the situation in the concentration monasteries, we can quote the words of the new chairman of the SIÚC Ladislav Holdoš, which he used at the meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS on 20 April 20 1950: “Pezinok is also not suitable because there is little space, they are terribly crowded and there is danger that some diseases could spread there. In addition, there is one case of open tuberculosis.”⁸² On the issue of concentration monasteries, Gustáv Husák subsequently stated that the choice of places was made mainly in terms of the capacity of the monasteries.⁸³

At this point, it is necessary to mention a few words on the exchange in the position of the chairman of the SIÚC. Ladislav Holdoš replaced Gustáv Husák as chairman of the SIÚC on 3 April 1950. Štefan Baššovský submitted a proposal for the appointment of Holdoš to the Presidium of the ÚV KSS. Although this exchange was officially presented as due to the great busyness of Gustáv Husák, as chairman of the ZP and member of the presidency of the ÚV KSS, the change actually indicated Husák’s imminent fall. At that time, however, no one could have guessed that Ladislav Holdoš would fall into the net of State Security investigators with him. Important to this end was the role of Gustáv Husák in the forcible liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church, which went down in history as *Action P*. Gustáv Husák, paid attention to this issue in March 1947 in a letter to Ladislav Novomeský, who at that time was in charge of education and edification. In the letter, Husák drew attention to anti-Slovak developments in the leadership of the Greek Catholic Church. He told Novomeský how he was alerted by Greek Catholic priests of Slovak origin to the fact that the entire leadership of the Prešov diocese, the seminar and the education of priests were moving in an anti-Slovak direction. Despite the fact that in Slovakia there was a larger half of Greek Catholic believers of Slovak nationality.

According to Husák, Bishop Pavol Gojdič was supposed to be behind the situation. Husák also asked Novomeský to intervene in the planned consecration of the second Greek Catholic bishop – another Ruthenian. In this context, Gustáv Husák referred to requests from Slovak Greek Catholics out of fear of strengthening the Russification line in their church. Husák ended his letter with the words: “In any case, I think that it would be necessary for him to be interested in this matter and to intervene in the appointment of a new bishop to the relations between the Greek Catholics, or at least to reach an agreement with Bishop Gojdič”⁸⁴

⁸² *Ibidem*, šk. č. 7. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 20.4.1950.

⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁴ *Dokumenty o postavení Katolickéj Cirkvi na Slovensku...*, p. 182.

The above-mentioned second Greek Catholic bishop was Vasiľ Hopko, a Ruthenian national, who was appointed auxiliary bishop of Prešov by the bull of Pope Pius XII. on 2 January 1947. The consecration took place on 11 May 1947 in the Prešov Cathedral and Hopko became the right hand of Bishop Pavel Gojdič, also Ruthenian. It is difficult to say how much Husák was concerned about the national rights of Slovaks of the Greek Catholic faith in this matter and how much he was already trying to weaken the Uniate Church at that time. However, the first option is more likely.

The Greek Catholic Church was definitely in a better place to coexist with state power than the Roman Catholic Church, as it was in some opposition to the regime during the First Slovak Republic. However, none of this came true. Very quickly, the Communists began to accuse the Greek Catholic Church of cooperating with the Banderas, of providing assistance to refugees from the Soviet Union, of Ruthenian nationalism and so on. At the end of 1948, Gustáv Husák also spoke out against the Greek Catholic Church at a meeting of the presidency of the ÚV KSS. In an incomparably sharper tone than the year before, Dr. Husák warned from succumbing to the false notion that, unlike the Roman Catholic Church, there would be no worries with Greek Catholics.

According to Husák, the Greek Catholic Church was *Magyaron-ish* in the past, became the protector of the emigrant elements and recently began to mint the motto: “Closer to Rome!” At the end of his report, Husák also said these words: “I think we should make all schools Ukrainian and remove the influence of the clergy completely... On the other hand, we should support pastors who help us carry out the ecclesiastical policies we have in mind. These could be the foundation of the home church. There we can afford – I think – an even sharper intervention than perhaps we will do against the Roman Catholic Church. If we can remove the influence of the emigrants and the clergy, I think we will make a big leap forward”.⁸⁵ Husák thus outlined in an abbreviated form how the regime’s relationship with the Greek Catholic Church should and did develop in the following months and years. The transition of Greek Catholics to Orthodoxy was not just a purely Czechoslovak affair. Similar measures were taken in some other Eastern bloc countries. In the Czechoslovak Republic, the Orthodox Church itself, which was in the minority compared to Greek Catholic believers, was particularly interested in unification. In February 1950, about 57,500 believers professed the Orthodox faith, while the Greek Catholic Church could count on approximately 305,645 believers.⁸⁶ Its liquidation was finally decided by the Church Six of the ÚV KSČ, which at the same time commissioned Gustáv Husák in December 1949 to draw up a plan of activity in this direction.⁸⁷ However, the communist leaders had to reckon with decisive resistance of the Greek Catholic church hierarchy against Orthodoxy, namely with Bishop Pavel Gojdič and his auxiliary bishop Vasiľ Hopko.

Already at the end of 1949, Husák received a notification from Deputy Minister Alexei Čepička Jaroslav Havelka that at its meeting on 13 December the government

⁸⁵ F. Vnuk, *Vládní zmocnenci na biskupských úradoch...*, p. 221.

⁸⁶ K. Kaplan, *Stát a Církev v Československu 1948–1953*, Praha–Brno 1993, p. 114.

⁸⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 115.

decided to grant state approval in the matter that Archimandrite Alexei (Alexander Petrovich Dechtere, an USSR citizen) be appointed bishop of the Prešov Eparchy.⁸⁸ It was a purposeful attack, as also Bishop Pavol Gojdič resided in Prešov. Gustáv Husák proposed a cautious approach to the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church, and the original plan did indeed envisage a similar development of the situation. In the districts and in the countryside, so-called return committees were established, which were given the task of promoting the return to Orthodoxy among believers. That was to be announced at the so-called sobor (assembly) a few months later. However, circumstances changed and the tactic of a quick transition came on the agenda sooner.

It was to be supported by a promotional trip of a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church led by Metropolitan Nikolai to the Czechoslovak Republic. Gustáv Husák disagreed with this and the rapid transition, as he feared the return of unrests from summer 1949.⁸⁹ The truth really was that unification provoked strong opposition from believers. However, the Church Six of the ÚV KSČ decided otherwise, and Husák subordinated himself in a disciplined manner. At a meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS on 7 January 1950, he presented a report on the topic of the unification of Greek Catholics with the Orthodox Church, in which he reported on the main reasons for *Action P*, and in fact indicated a plan for violent unification. The first reason for the implementation of *Action P* was to be the fact that in other people's democratic states the connection was already implemented and only the Czechoslovak Republic was the exception.

Furthermore, Husák emphasised the need for the orientation of Greek Catholics to the East and not towards the Vatican; he also mentioned the planned ordination of Bishop Alexei in Prešov by the Russian Orthodox metropolitan Nikolai and thus the establishment of the Orthodox diocese. Husák also touched on the question of nationality among Greek Catholic believers: "The Slovak part of Greek Catholics will turn to Catholics with waving flags. Among Ukrainians, it depends on our influence. The disadvantage is that it is not a compact area. It's intertwined with Catholics everywhere. One risk it may have is that it will affect Catholics as well. The third disadvantage is that they do not have a typical representative among Slovaks. No one has seriously dealt with this yet"⁹⁰

Husák then spoke only about the organisational arrangements for the Soviet delegation's trip. According to the original plan, the delegation was to visit Slovakia on February 5, 1950. The relatively large Soviet delegation had to have the journey planned politically, organisationally and in terms of security. According to Gustáv Husák, "it will be connected with the beginning of a large missionary action of the Orthodox Church in Slovakia. A commission needs to be set up in Bratislava to prepare and monitor this. There must be a party and an interior, and the commission should be at the Slovak church office."⁹¹

A commission consisting of Gustáv Husák, Ladislav Holdoš, Daniel Okáli and Ivan Rohaľ-Ilkiv was actually formed at the SlÚC, which was to organise a tour of the delegation

⁸⁸ SNA, f. Slovenský úrad pre veci cirkevné, Sekretariát – dôverné, 1949–1950, šk. č. 2.

⁸⁹ K. Kaplan, *Stát a Cirkev v Československu...*, p. 115.

⁹⁰ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát, šk. č. 6. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 7.1.1950.

⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

of the Orthodox Church in eastern Slovakia in an organisational and promotional manner. The commission acted similarly in Prešov. In his above-mentioned report, Gustáv Husák also touched upon possible problems with the Greek Catholic Bishop Pavel Gojdič at a meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS: “The delegation will do such missionary work. There may also be scandals. The church needs to be arranged with Gojdič. We have to appoint another trustee to Gojdič.”⁹²

The arrival of the Soviet delegation did not yet officially mean the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church. This goal was to be kept secret so that Bishop Pavol Gojdič and his believers would be surprised and could not form significant resistance. However, Gojdič was preparing for something similar and suspected the planned intervention. Possible popular unrest posed a greater risk than in the days of the *Catholic action*. The Communists were already concerned with organising a trip of a delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church in eastern Slovakia, and therefore they thoroughly prepared for its arrival. ZP chairman Gustáv Husák himself organised a reception in honour of the Soviet delegation for 200–250 invited guests at the Carlton Hotel in Bratislava.⁹³

The “Soviet Comrades Bishops”, as one member of the Presidency of the ÚV KSS called them, visited Košice and Prešov on 10–12 February 1950, and during this trip the Orthodox Bishop Alexei was ordained in Prešov to administer its Eparchy. The delegation then travelled from the metropolis of Šariš back to Prague and from there returned to the Soviet Union on 15 February 1950. On the same day, Gustáv Husák evaluated the stay at a meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS. He reported, first of all, the great success of the trip of the Russian Orthodox delegation from a political point of view, as well as the satisfaction of Soviet and Prague comrades with the overall course and results.

He also touched on the reaction of the Greek Catholic bishop Pavel Gojdič from Prešov: “The second success is that, despite the sabotage efforts of Gojdič and his pastors, it was not possible to create even a nervous atmosphere. When Gojdič saw the masses welcoming them, he also wanted to help himself in the end and offered to be willing to accept the metropolitan in his residence. After the meeting, the metropolitan refused. The comrades evaluate the whole thing in such a way that the situation is a little prepared for the other that is to come. I suggest taking cognisance, so within 10 days I would submit a proposal for further action.”⁹⁴

Subsequently, at a meeting on 27 February 1950, the Church Six of the ÚV KSČ finally decided to liquidate the Greek Catholic Church, since according to Čepička et al. it would be a pity not to use the favourable response of the trip of the delegation of the Russian Orthodox Church in eastern Slovakia and to risk the situation that Bishop Pavol Gojdič will pull the believers to the side of the Vatican.⁹⁵ However, the ruling regime still did not fully clarify the exact procedure for the liquidation of the Greek Catholic Church.

⁹² *Ibidem*.

⁹³ *Ibidem*, f. ÚV KSS – Predsedníctvo, šk. č. 794.

⁹⁴ *Ibidem*, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát, šk. č. 6. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 15.2.1950.

⁹⁵ *Církevní komise ÚV KSČ...*, p. 389.

The communist leaders therefore suggested starting a major explanatory campaign and organising some sort of return committees that would win over the majority of the population to the Orthodox side. These so-called return committees were planned to be organized at local level. The event was to ultimately culminate in the internment of both bishops, Pavel Gojdič and Vasil' Hopka.⁹⁶

Gustáv Husák reported on the issue of the transition to Orthodoxy at the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS on 16 March 1950. According to Husák, the Slovak communists agreed with Prague that the Orthodox Church would not interfere in the plan in any way, while the emphasis should be placed on a persuasion and agitation campaign among the faithful. They planned to start this with the help of the mentioned return committees in the countryside. In this context, Gustáv Husák criticised some spontaneous and thoughtless actions of communist functionaries at the local level, which ultimately only mobilised Greek Catholic priests and bishops. The chairman of ZP literally said that “Gojdič responds by preliminarily mobilising pastors. Last week, there were 26 pastors at Gojdič's. We have taken some administrative measures to ensure that those who have run the most around the villages, mostly professors of theology, have been detained and we will stop paying some reactionary parishioners. The comrades expect that in 2–3 weeks the event will start in full swing, it is said that it is already furiously discussed in the villages.”⁹⁷

The communist regime did have considerable problems with this merger. In fact, it was not entirely clear how and when the unification would take place. The Communists still naively hoped for an agreement with Bishop Pavel Gojdič, and for this purpose he was also visited by a delegation. They wanted to persuade the bishop to convert voluntarily to Orthodoxy, which would mean a great victory for the regime. However, the bishop steadfastly adhered to his faith and vehemently rejected the offer. On the contrary, he was preparing for the expected liquidation intervention. Therefore, the government focused on progressive priests, who were to issue a statement to the clergy and believers in the so-called “small sobor” (assembly).

The break with Rome and the return to the Orthodox Church subsequently was to be concluded by the so-called “large sobor” with the participation of priests and laity. On the course of the planned event at the meeting of the Secretariat of the ÚV KSS on 30 March 1950, Gustáv Husák proposed that a broad meeting of Greek Catholic priests and believers be convened on 22 April 1950. This meeting or small sobor would, on one hand, create an ecclesiastical body of priests and laity, which would lead the action of return to Orthodoxy along the religious line, and on the other hand it would give a response to all believers and priests who would subsequently sign it. Gustáv Husák also emphasised that it is extremely important for the priests themselves to be active. Husák discussed the whole matter with the chairman of the SÚC, Alexej Čepička, who agreed with his proposal on the condition that the success of the event be guaranteed.⁹⁸ On the question of the date of *Action P* Dr. Husák said: “The comrades from Prešov suggested that in a week

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ SNA, f. ÚV KSS – Sekretariát, šk. č. 7. Zasadnutie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 16.3.1950.

⁹⁸ *Ibidem*, šk. č. 7. Zasadanie sekretariátu ÚV KSS zo dňa 30.3.1950.

[after the small sobor – T.Č.] the assembly would be called, for the event to basically be completed within a week. I myself think that it will not be good, because things will not be so ready yet. Comrade Čepička is of the opinion, to principally do it quickly, not to take it on a long run, but not to set fixed deadlines and go to political processing with all energy. It seems to me that the last thing, the assembly, could be after the congress, [the Ninth Congress of the KSS, which took place on 24–27 May 1950 – T.Č.] because before the congress we would not even have enough time to pay due attention to it. I think that a week, two after the descent, we could finish the whole event”⁹⁹

Husák's proposals for the unification of Greek Catholics with Orthodox were not accepted. The transfer did not take place after thorough preparation (Gustáv Husák counted 2–3 months) and even after the IX. Congress of KSS. The whole event was completed by the new chairman of the SÚC, Ladislav Holdoš, who took office on 3 April 1950.

On 28 April 1950, an assembly of return committees was held. It was originally planned that it would be the so-called small sobor, but a few days before its start, the organisers decided to declare a transfer immediately. The Communists considered further delay dangerous. Therefore, on 28 April 1950 in Prešov, a manifesto was approved at a staged event in the Hotel *Čierny orol* with the participation of 820 delegates (including 73 priests) on the abolition of the Uzhorod Union from 1646 and on the return of Greek Catholic believers to the Orthodox Church. After the recognition of this act by the SÚC, the Greek Catholic Church officially ceased to exist in the Czechoslovak Republic. The bishops were later interned according to plan.

Let me mention another paradox in conclusion. At the beginning of 1950, the inhabitants of the village of Ložina in eastern Slovakia asked Gustáv Husák, as the chairman of the SÚC, for help in the finish of a new Greek Catholic church building.¹⁰⁰ Specifically, they requested building materials. At just the time when black clouds began to move over their church, in which Husák also played a part.

One week after the imprisonment of both Greek Catholic bishops Pavel Gojdič and Vasil Hopka, Gustáv Husák was removed from the position of chairman of the ZP and continued to decline in power. He lost all important functions during April and May. On 7 May 1950, he had to end his function as chairman of ZP. After the IX. KSS Congress, Husák was appointed only as head of the agricultural department of the ÚV KSS. His greatest political and human downfall came relatively shortly after he himself was involved in the persecution of churches. In Slovakia, especially in the years 1948–1950, Gustáv Husák was one of the leading figures in the anti-church struggle, and the fact that he only carried out orders from the leadership of the Communist Party does not change anything. Despite often having different views than his superiors, he carried out orders with party discipline and acted harshly and ruthlessly.

Another chapter in Slovak history is that in 1977, as President of the Republic and Secretary General of the ÚV of the KSČ, Gustáv Husák significantly contributed to the establishment of an independent ecclesiastical province in Slovakia.¹⁰¹ A lot of time passed

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*, f. Slovenský ústav pre veci cirkevné, Sekretariát – dôverné, 1949, šk. č. 1.

¹⁰¹ On this issue see for example E. Hrabovec, *Slovensko a Svätá stolica v kontexte vatikánskej východnej poli-*

before this happened and Gustáv Husák went through a complex life development. At his very end, on Friday, 8 November 1991, at approximately 9:00 pm, Gustáv Husák was to receive all the sacraments of the dying at the Anesthesiology and resuscitation department of the Bratislava Hospital in Kramáre from the hands of Archbishop Ján Sokol of Trnava.¹⁰²

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¹⁰² On this issue see T. Černák, *Posledné dni života Gustáva Husáka a otázka jeho zmierenia sa s Bohom*, „Historický zborník: vedecký časopis o slovenských národných dejinách“ 2011, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 114–130.

Wkład Gustáva Husáka w antykościelne działania reżimu komunistycznego w latach 1948–1950

Gustáv Husák był jedną z głównych postaci w kampanii przeciwko Kościołowi na Słowacji od przejęcia władzy przez partię komunistyczną aż do upadku politycznego w 1950 r. Mimo że pochodził ze środowiska katolickiego, stał się przekonany komunistą i posłusznie wykonywał polecenia przywódców Komunistycznej Partii Czechosłowacji. Kiedy powierzono mu zadanie zajęcia się sprawami Kościoła na Słowacji, a tym samym wszystkimi antykościelnymi interwencjami reżimu komunistycznego, wykonywał rozkazy w sposób zdyscyplinowany. Był jednak zaangażowany głównie w działania przeciwko Kościołowi katolickiemu. Gustáv Husák uważał Kościół katolicki za skompromitowany z powodu jego działalności w latach 1939–1945; później wykorzystał ten czynnik w atakach na Kościół katolicki i jego najwyższych rangą przedstawicieli. Całkiem słusznie widział w Kościele katolickim zagrożenie dla ustanowienia reżimu komunistycznego. Jego celem było mocne związanie wszystkich kościołów, a zwłaszcza Kościoła katolickiego, z reżimem komunistycznym.

Po objęciu urzędu komisarza-przewodniczącego Słowackiego Urzędu ds. Kościelnych prowadził twardą politykę antykościelną na Słowacji i uczestniczył w takich działaniach reżimu komunistycznego przeciwko kościołom, jak przymusowe powołanie nowego kierownictwa diecezji bańsko-bystrzyckiej, Akcja „K” i Akcja „P”. Szczególnie dwie ostatnie akcje charakteryzowały się ekstremalną brutalnością. Mimo że nie zawsze zgadzał się z decyzjami kierownictwa partii komunistycznej w zakresie polityki antykościelnej, za każdym razem się do nich stosował. Oficjalnie uzasadniał swoje działania rzekomą antypaństwową działalnością przedstawicieli Kościoła i zakonów. W wystąpieniach publicznych nie kwestionował wolności religijnej, która jednak miała ograniczać się do wykonywania ceremonii religijnych. Jego zdaniem Kościół nie powinien ingerować w życie polityczne i krytycznie wypowiadać się na temat reżimu komunistycznego; przeciwnie, Kościół powinien być w pełni podporządkowany państwu. Jak na ironię, Gustáv Husák stracił wszystkie ważne funkcje polityczne podczas realizacji tych antykościelnych posunięć. Jego osobisty upadek, którego kulminacją było aresztowanie i uwięzienie, nastąpił wkrótce potem. W więzieniu Husák spotykał się także z księżmi i zakonnikami, którzy zostali uwięzieni właśnie wskutek jego antykościelnych działań. Jednak nawet te wydarzenia nie zmieniły komunistycznych przekonań Husáka. Niemniej jednak w czasie, gdy piastował najwyższe stanowiska państwowe i partyjne w Czechosłowacji, odegrał znaczącą rolę w ustanowieniu niezależnej słowackiej prowincji kościelnej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

Kościół katolicki, partia komunistyczna, Gustáv Husák, Akcja „K”, akcja katolicka, biskupi, religia

The Contribution of Gustáv Husák to the Anti-Church Measures of the Communist Regime in the Years 1948–1950

Gustáv Husák was one of the main figures in the campaign against the Church in Slovakia from after the Communist Party took power until his political downfall in 1950. Despite coming from a Catholic background, he became a convinced communist and obediently followed the instructions of the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. When he was entrusted with the task of dealing with the ecclesiastical issue in Slovakia, and thus with all the anti-Church interventions of the communist regime, he carried out orders in a disciplined manner. He was, however, mainly involved in measures against the Catholic Church. Gustáv Husák considered the Catholic Church to be compromised because of its activities in 1939–1945; he later used this factor in attacks against the Catholic Church and its highest representatives. He quite rightly saw the Catholic Church a danger to establishing the communist regime. His goal was to firmly bind all churches, and especially the Catholic Church, to the communist regime.

After taking office as commissioner–chairman of the Slovak Office for Ecclesiastical Affairs, he pursued a tough anti-Church policy in Slovakia and participated in such measures of the communist regime against churches as the forcible establishment of a new leadership of the Banská Bystrica diocese, Action K and Action P. In particular, the last two actions were characterized by extreme brutality. Despite the fact that he did not always agree with the decisions of the Communist Party leadership in the field of anti-Church policy, he always complied with them. He officially justified his actions with the alleged anti-state activity of Church representatives and religious orders. In public pronouncements, he did not question religious freedom, which, however, was to be limited to the performance of religious ceremonies. In his opinion, the Church should not be allowed to interfere in political life and express itself critically about the communist regime; on the contrary, the Church should be fully subordinated. Ironically, Gustáv Husák lost all his important political functions during the implementation of these anti-Church measures. His personal downfall, which culminated in his arrest and imprisonment, followed shortly afterwards. In prison, Husák also met with priests and religious who had been imprisoned precisely because of his anti-Church measures. However, not even this fact changed Husák's communist beliefs. Nevertheless, at a time when he held the highest state and party positions in Czechoslovakia, he played a significant role in the establishment of an independent Slovak ecclesiastical province.

KEYWORDS

Catholic Church, Communist Party, Gustáv Husák, Action K, Catholic Action, Bishops, Religion

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