

# THE ROLE AND POSITION OF THE SLOVAK CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN THE PROCESS OF SLOVAK INDEPENDENCE (1990–1993)

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## *Abstract*

*The study analyses the attitudes of the Slovak Catholic bishops in the period following the collapse of the communist totalitarian regime in the former Czechoslovakia. These bishops expressed support for the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic as a subject of international law. Although they did not intervene directly in the political developments of the newly emerging democracy, they publicly declared—through pastoral letters and various official statements—that the Slovak nation was likewise entitled to its own statehood. The most prominent ecclesiastical figures of this period were the then Slovak Metropolitan and Archbishop of Trnava, Monsignor Ján Sokol, and the Bishop of Nitra, Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec. The article also presents the views of the Slovak Catholic exile, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, who at that time served in the Holy See during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II, the first Slavic pope. By the time of the Slovak national emancipation movement's culmination (1990–1992), Slovakia had already achieved ecclesiastical independence. During the socialist era, Pope Paul VI, following negotiations between the Holy See and the then Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, had issued on 30 December 1977 the papal constitutions *Qui divino* and *Præscriptionum sacrosancti*. These documents separated the territory of the Trnava Apostolic Administration from the Archdiocese of Esztergom and aligned the boundaries of the remaining Slovak dioceses with the existing state borders. In this way, the territory of Slovakia was definitively separated from the former Kingdom of Hungary also in the canonical sense. The independent Slovak Republic, established peacefully and constitutionally on 1 January 1993 through the disso-*

*lution of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, was recognized first by the Holy See, led by Pope John Paul II.*<sup>1</sup>

Key words: *Slovak Republik, Indipendence, Catholic Church in Slovakia, Holy See*

## INTRODUCTION

The national and emancipation struggle of the Slovak people for their own statehood began, in general terms, in the mid-nineteenth century, and culminated in the creation of an independent and democratic Slovak Republic as a subject of international law on 1 January 1993. The representatives of the Slovak national movement—both Catholics and Lutherans—in the former Kingdom of Hungary and later in Czechoslovakia, grounded their aspirations primarily in the legacy of Great Moravia and the Cyril-Methodian tradition. Great Moravia, the state of the ancestors of today's Slovaks, held a position of considerable power in Central Europe during the ninth century, especially under the reign of Svatopluk I. Owing to the mission of the Byzantine missionaries Saint Constantine (Cyril) and Saint Methodius, Pope Hadrian II issued in 869 the bull *Gloria in excelsis Deo* ("Glory to God in the Highest"), confirming Church Slavonic as the fourth liturgical language of the Church. At the end of that same year, Pope Hadrian II also consecrated Saint Methodius as the Pannonian-Moravian bishop.<sup>2</sup> Another papal bull, *Industriae tuae* ("Of Your Diligence"), issued by Pope John VIII in 880 and addressed to Svatopluk I, again confirmed the autonomy of the Great Moravian ecclesiastical province, which ceased to exist with the fall of Great Moravia between 906 and 907.<sup>3</sup> According to the Slovak historian Professor Matúš Kučera, Great Moravia thereby

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<sup>1</sup> Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, in his memoirs—which are also incorporated into this scholarly study—states that on 30 December 1992, he received at his Episcopal Office in Nitra a letter from Giovanni Coppa, Apostolic Nuncio to the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, containing the following message:

*"Pope John Paul II expresses his wishes of peace, prosperity, and development to the new Slovak Republic, which on 1 January appears on the horizon of the other free nations of Europe and the world as an independent and sovereign state..."*

This letter was later cited by Ján Košíar, a Roman Catholic priest, writer, and publicist, who argued that its content proves that the Vatican was the first state to recognize the independent Slovak Republic.

<sup>2</sup> Ján Hnilica, *Svätí Cyril a Metod (Hortiví hlásatelia božieho slova a verní pastieri cirkvi)*, Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2012, pp.58-59

<sup>3</sup> Ján Hnilica, *Svätí Cyril a Metod (Hortiví hlásatelia božieho slova a verní pastieri cirkvi)*, Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov, 2012, p.63

became a fully recognized member of the family of Christian European nations and states, alongside the Frankish Empire and others.<sup>4</sup> The collapse of Great Moravia marked the beginning of a new period in Slovak history, characterized by the gradual formation of the Hungarian Kingdom. The memory of Great Moravia endured within Slovak society as part of its tradition.<sup>5</sup> Veneration of the Thessalonian brothers—Saints Cyril and Methodius—re-emerged during the first attempts at Slovak national revival, when, besides Christianity, the Slovak language itself began to emerge as a key attribute of a strengthening national consciousness.<sup>6</sup>

Conversely, Marian devotion to Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows (*Sedembolestná Panna Mária*) was deeply rooted in the hearts of Slovaks not only during the era of Great Moravia but also throughout the whole existence of the Hungarian Kingdom. Unlike the Cyril-Methodian tradition, Marian veneration was continuously preserved during the entire existence of the Hungarian monarchy. The earliest written evidence of Marian devotion among the ancestors of present-day Slovaks on the territory of Slovakia dates back to the second half of the ninth century<sup>7</sup>, during the activity of the Cyril-Methodian mission.

On the basis of the above facts, it can therefore be stated that the Cyril-Methodian tradition, founded chiefly on the ancient Great Moravian ecclesiastical province, together with the veneration of Our Lady of the Seven Sorrows, possessed immense significance for the Slovak Catholic bishops at the time of the establishment of the independent and democratic Slovak Republic (1990–1993). On this basis, the Slovak bishops in this period played a positive historical role in the creation of the independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993.

The primary aim of this scholarly study is to analyse the attitudes, articles, and declarations of Slovak bishops active in Slovakia who supported the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic as a subject of international law after the fall of communist totalitarianism in the former Czechoslovakia after 1989. In the

<sup>4</sup> Matúš Kučera, *Slovenské dejiny I. (Od príchodu Slovanov do roku 1526)*, Slovenské literárne centrum, Bratislava, 2011, p. 108

<sup>5</sup> Matúš Kučera, *Slovenské dejiny I. (Od príchodu Slovanov do roku 1526)*, Slovenské literárne centrum, Bratislava, 2011, p. 129

<sup>6</sup> Matúš Kučera, *Slovenské dejiny I. (Od príchodu Slovanov do roku 1526)*, Slovenské literárne centrum, Bratislava, 2011, p. 130

<sup>7</sup> Róbert Letz, *Sedembolestná Panna Mária v slovenských dejinách*, Post Scriptum, Bratislava, 2014, p. 15

same manner, the study also analyses Cardinal Jozef Tomka, who, as a representative of the Slovak Catholic exile, served in the Holy See during the pontificate of John Paul II and likewise supported the emergence of an independent Slovakia. The secondary aim of the study is to examine the first visit of Pope John Paul II to Slovakia in April 1990, the message of which had an indirect impact in encouraging support for Slovak independence on the part of the Slovak bishops in Slovakia.

Two research questions were formulated:

1. What was the attitude of the Slovak Catholic bishops toward the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993?
2. Which specific historical events in the history of the Slovak nation inspired the Slovak Catholic bishops to support the creation of independent Slovak statehood between 1990 and 1993?

In processing the research results, we proceeded to define the research sample, understood as the set of persons, objects, subjects, and phenomena that constitute the focus of the present research. Whenever the research concerns individuals, it is advisable to use the term research sample; for other materials and documents, the term research material is more appropriate.<sup>8</sup>

As our research material, we primarily selected articles from the contemporary press. The main source was *Katolícke noviny (Catholic News)*, which contained the key sources necessary for the preparation of this study. This choice was made because *Katolícke noviny* published pastoral letters and various declarations by Slovak bishops corresponding directly to the subject of the present research. For this reason, we consider the sources from this medium to be primary and original. During the observed period (1990–1993), *Katolícke noviny* served as the principal information medium concerning the life of the Catholic Church in Slovakia. It provided concrete evidence of how the Slovak bishops positioned themselves regarding the creation of an independent Slovak Republic. Other periodicals of the time also published certain reports related to the bishops' support for Slovak independence; however, for the reasons stated above, the pastoral letters and declarations published in *Katolícke noviny* were regarded as the primary and authentic sources. Additional materials—such as *Slovenské národné noviny (Slovak National News)* and various articles written by involved con-

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<sup>8</sup> Marcel Lincényi, *Základy metodológie výskumu v politológii*, First edition, Trenčianska univerzita Alexandra Dubčeka v Trenčíne, Trenčín, 2017, p. 59

temporaries active during 1990–1993—were used only to supplement historical events that, for objective reasons, were not covered in *Katolícke noviny*. The inclusion of these auxiliary sources completed the research corpus.

Within the primary research objective, our research sample consisted of Slovak diocesan and titular bishops active on the territory of Slovakia who openly supported the creation of an independent Slovak Republic. Besides Mons. Ján Sokol and Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, support for an independent Slovak Republic was also voiced by Mons. František Tondra, Mons. Alojz Tkáč, Mons. Eduard Kojnok, Mons. Dominik Tóth, Mons. Peter Dubovský, Mons. Milan Chatur, Mons. Ján Hirka, Mons. Rudolf Baláž, Mons. Dominik Hrušovský, Mons. Vladimír Filo, Mons. František Rábek, and Mons. Andrej Imrich. The sample also included Cardinal Jozef Tomko, who, as already mentioned, served in the Holy See. The rationale for selecting these Slovak bishops and Cardinal Tomko was twofold: (1) these eminent Slovak ecclesiastical authorities publicly advocated for the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic; and (2) *Katolícke noviny* published their pastoral letters and declarations explicitly supporting the emergence of an independent Slovakia. Since the rank-and-file clergy, with few exceptions such as the nationally oriented Ján Košiar, either did not publicly address the topic of Slovak independence or supported the decision of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) to maintain the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, they were not included into the research sample for objective reasons. The statements of the Slovak bishops are therefore not to be regarded as representing the collective voice of the entire Catholic Church in Slovakia, but rather as their individual convictions regarding the necessity of creating an independent Slovak state. Nevertheless, by virtue of their authority, these bishops could have influenced certain nationally undecided priests and laypersons to recognize that an independent Slovak state constituted the best path forward for the Slovak nation. Consequently, it was crucial from the standpoint of this research to focus precisely on this research group, which could substantiate the historical fact that the highest ecclesiastical hierarchy in Slovakia supported national independence. It is, however, a historical fact that part of the clergy and laity did not immediately identify with the newly established Slovak Republic, as the political movement KDH had favoured the preservation of Czecho-Slovakia. The study therefore excluded, with the exception of Cardinal Jozef Tomko, all other Slovak exiled bishops and priests, since the research object was limited exclusively to Slovak bishops active within Slovakia. The inclusion

of Cardinal Tomko was justified not only by his engagement in the national-emancipation struggle of the Slovaks for statehood but also by the fact that, as a high-ranking ecclesiastical dignitary, he served in the Holy See during the pontificate of Pope John Paul II. Other exiled Slovak bishops and priests were not included because the analysis of Slovak Catholic exile lies beyond the scope of this study. That topic has been addressed by other Slovak historians such as Professor Emília Hrabovec and Beáta Katrebová Blehová. Within the secondary research objective, the research sample comprised Pope John Paul II, who visited Slovakia in April 1990 as part of his apostolic journey to the former Czechoslovakia. The message of this apostolic visit had an indirect influence in reinforcing the support of Slovak bishops for Slovak independence.

Regarding the research methods, the study employed document analysis, content analysis, and the method of historiography. The method of document analysis represents a research strategy based on the examination of already existing materials. The method of content analysis consists of the analytical examination of documentary texts and available sources, serving as a quantitative data-collection approach. The historiographical method investigates source materials and represents a qualitative data-collection approach.<sup>9</sup> These methods were found to be the most appropriate for the purposes of the present research.

## 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Several Slovak historians have devoted their scholarly work to the study of Slovak national and ecclesiastical history. Among them, Professor Róbert Letz stands out for his research focused primarily on the Cyril-Methodian tradition, the Catholic Church under communism, and the personality of Andrej Hlinka. A scholar of international renown, Professor Emília Hrabovec, specializes in the history of the Church and in the Slovak Catholic exile after the Second World War. The topic of Slovak Catholic exile has also been explored by Beáta Katrebová Blehová. Modern Slovak history, particularly the national emancipation struggle of the Slovaks for their own statehood, has been examined by numerous historians, including Róbert Letz, Ivan Mrva, Peter Mulík, Tomáš Černák, Ján Bobák, Martin Lacko, Anton Hrnko, Peter Jašek, and many others.

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<sup>9</sup> Marcel Lincényi. *Vybrané metódy výskumu v politológii*. First edition, Trenčianska univerzita Alexandra Dubčeka v Trenčíne., Trenčín, 2018, pp. 17-48

The views of Slovak bishops concerning the establishment of independent Slovak statehood on 1 January 1993 were partly described by Ján Košiar, a Roman Catholic priest, journalist, and writer, in his book *Mojich prvých 60 rokov (My First Sixty Years, 2020)*. In his subsequent publications and articles, he has also addressed the topic of the creation of the independent Slovak ecclesiastical province on 30 December 1977.

The present scholarly article, *The Role and Position of the Slovak Catholic Bishops in the Process of Slovak Independence (1990–1993)*, constitutes the first systematic account of all relevant statements by Slovak Catholic bishops active in Slovakia, as well as by the Slovak exile Cardinal Jozef Tomko, which supported the national-emancipation struggle of the Slovaks for statehood after the fall of communist totalitarianism in the former Czechoslovakia after 1990. The study also links these supportive ecclesiastical positions to specific historical, political, and state-building measures undertaken by the then democratically elected Slovak political leadership, which ultimately led to the constitutional and peaceful dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic and the creation of the independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993.

Since this study connects the Catholic Church with Slovak nationalism, it must be noted that there exists a considerable body of research on religious influences on national politics, most of which focuses on the impact of religious organizations on governmental policy. Such influences are often rooted in historical legacies of national-religious configurations, where the fusion of national and religious identity enables religious institutions to exert significant influence on policy creation. In this context, the Turkish scholar Şener Aktürk observes a crucial difference between Catholic and Protestant traditions: the former is characterized by transnational and hierarchical institutionalization, while the latter by national or subnational organization. These two traditions thus occupy opposite poles in the spectrum of national-religious configurations they generate.<sup>10</sup> The findings of the present study confirm Aktürk's argument, insofar as the Catholic Church, as a transnational institution, did not directly participate in the political processes in the former Czechoslovakia between 1990 and 1992. Nevertheless, its representatives—the Slovak bishops active in Slovakia and Cardinal Jozef Tomko serving in the Holy See—publicly expressed their

<sup>10</sup> Şener Aktürk, *Nationalism and Religion in Comparative Perspective: A New Typology of National-Religious Configurations*. In: *Nationalities Papers*, VOL. 50, NO. 2, 2022, pp. 210-211

personal conviction that the Slovak people were entitled to their own independent state, without directly intervening in political affairs. These Slovak bishops and Cardinal Tomko, as representatives of the Catholic Church, adhered to Catholic teaching, which advocates love for one's country or nation. Such love (patriotism), according to Steven Grosby, must be qualified by a greater love—that of the Church for God—whose object is all humanity and whose ultimate aim is the salvation of every individual.<sup>11</sup> The Slovak bishops and Cardinal Tomko regarded the establishment of an independent Slovak state as the natural culmination of the national-emancipation efforts of the Slovak people. At the same time, the broader separation between Christian thought and the political system of the state, including that of the Slovak Republic, meant that the unity of the state vanished, and internal divisions emerged—divisions which, according to the Polish theologian Andrzej A. Napiórkowski, will ever continue to shake not only state systems but also the consciences of individuals.<sup>12</sup> Christian religion, as argued by Edward A. David, can be recognized as a fundamental good.<sup>13</sup> In the view of Lisa Sowle Cahill, it is therefore essential that Catholic social ethics continue to offer a tradition of political practice, ecclesial teaching, and interpretive theology that explicitly connects the practice of the Kingdom of God with public analysis and participation.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, it must also be noted that the independent Slovak Republic was constituted in 1992 as a secular state. According to Eric Vincent Batalla and Rito Baring, such a state is characterized by the absence of institutional religious control over legislative and judicial processes, constitutional neutrality toward religions, and the non-establishment of any official religion or atheism.<sup>15</sup> In this context, one may refer to the doctrine of separation, which, as

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<sup>11</sup> Steven Grosby, National Identity, Nationalism, and the Catholic Church. In: Oxford Handbook Topics in Religion, 2014, Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/edited-volume/41330/chapter/352334269>

<sup>12</sup> Andrzej A. Napiórkowski, CHRISTIAN AND SECULAR CULTURE IN THE LIGHT OF (POST)-CONCILIAR ECCLESIOLOGY THEIR UNITY IN DIFFERENCE, In: *European Journal of Science and Theology*, VOL. 20, NO. 1, 2024, p. 53

<sup>13</sup> Edward A. David, Should the State Still Protect Religion qua Religion? John Finnis Between Brian Leiter and the "Second Wave" in Law and Religion, In: *Religions*, VOL. 16, NO. 7, 2025, p. 4

<sup>14</sup> Lisa Sowle Cahill, THEOLOGICAL ETHICS, THE CHURCHES, AND GLOBAL POLITICS, In: *Journal of Religious Ethics*, VOL. 35, NO. 3, 2007, ISSN 03849694, p. 392

<sup>15</sup> Eric Vincent Batalla and Rito Baring, Church-State Separation and Challenging Issues Concerning Religion, In: *Religions*, VOL. 10, NO. 3, 2019, p.3

David Haines explains, governs the relationship between Church and State on the principle that religious institutions should not interfere in matters of the State, and vice versa.<sup>16</sup>

## 2. EMANCIPATION OF THE SLOVAK NATION (CONSTITUTIONAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL DIMENSION)

### 2.1. Constitutional dimension

The national emancipation struggle of the Slovaks for their own statehood was initiated in the mid-nineteenth century by the generation led by Ľudovít Štúr. During the revolutionary years of 1848–1849, the *Žiadosti slovenského národa* (*Demands of the Slovak Nation*) were adopted in Liptovský Mikuláš, in which the Slovaks proclaimed themselves a distinct nation within the Kingdom of Hungary. Both the Viennese imperial court and the Hungarian political authorities refused to accept these Slovak demands.<sup>17</sup> A few years later, in June 1861, the Memorandum of the Slovak Nation was adopted in Turčiansky Svätý Martin as part of the Slovak national movement. Similar to the Demands of the Slovak Nation, the Memorandum respected the territorial integrity of Hungary. Its contents called for national equality based on the principle of the natural right of nations to self-determination, and it included a demand for the establishment of the Upper Hungarian Slovak District (*Hornouhorské slovenské Okolie*). From the side of Vienna, only linguistic, cultural, and educational requests were accepted. However, the greatest success was the approval of the foundation of Slovak Matica (*Matica slovenská*) on 4 August 1863, commemorating the thousandth anniversary of the arrival of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Great Moravia.<sup>18</sup> At its founding general assembly, Bishop Štefan Moyses was elected president, and the Lutheran pastor Karol Kuzmány became vice-president.<sup>19</sup> The activities of Slovak Matica were forcibly terminated by the Hungarian state authorities on 9

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<sup>16</sup> David Haines, Christian Citizens in a Democratic State: Is a True Separation of Church and State Really Possible?, In: *Religions*, VOL. 15, NO. 3, 2024, p. 2

<sup>17</sup> Peter Podolan and Miriam Viršínská, *Slovenské dejiny III. (1780-1914)*, Literárne informačné centrum, Bratislava, 2014, p. 166

<sup>18</sup> Peter Podolan and Miriam Viršínská, *Slovenské dejiny III. (1780-1914)*, Literárne informačné centrum, Bratislava, 2014, p. 256-271

<sup>19</sup> Peter Podolan and Miriam Viršínská, *Slovenské dejiny III. (1780-1914)*, Literárne informačné centrum, Bratislava, 2014, p. 256-271

November 1875, and its restoration occurred only after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic at the beginning of 1919.<sup>20</sup>

Within interwar Czechoslovakia (1918–1938/1939), the so-called autonomist movement, led by the Roman Catholic priest Andrej Hlinka, struggled for the national rights of Slovaks. Slovak autonomism in the interwar Czechoslovak Republic, as in the time of the Hungarian Kingdom, was based on the idea that the Slovaks, as a distinct nation, were different from the surrounding peoples. The 1920 Constitution established centralism and the concept of a fictitious Czechoslovak nation. Slovak autonomy was recognized only after the Munich Agreement on 6 October 1938.<sup>21</sup> Before Nazi Germany occupied the remaining Czech territories of truncated Czecho-Slovakia, the autonomist Slovak Assembly proclaimed the Slovak State on 14 March 1939. According to the Slovak historian Martin Lacko, this act also represented a form of protection against further territorial claims by Hungary and Poland. After the adoption of the Constitution on 21 July 1939, the Slovak State was renamed the Slovak Republic.<sup>22</sup> If we compare the Slovak case with that of Croatia, we observe that between 1935 and 1939, many Croatian Catholic priests were politically active within the Croatian Peasant Party, which advocated for the political rights of Croats within monarchist Yugoslavia.<sup>23</sup>

During the Slovak National Uprising of 1944, whose goal was to defeat German Nazism and local Slovak collaborators, the idea of an anti-fascist Slovak statehood within a restored Czechoslovakia was also conceived. The renewed Czechoslovak state of 1945 was originally intended to establish equality between Slovaks and Czechs, thereby abandoning the earlier artificial concept of Czechoslovakism. Both before and after the communist takeover in 1948, Slovak local institutions were gradually weakened. A genuine federalization of Czechoslovakia occurred only in 1968, during the Prague Spring, whose central figure was the Slovak reform com-

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<sup>20</sup> Peter Podolan and Miriam Viršínská, *Slovenské dejiny III. (1780-1914)*, Literárne informačné centrum, Bratislava, 2014, p. 306-307

<sup>21</sup> Martin Vašš, Slovenské autonomistické hnutie v medzivojnovom období, In: *Slovenské štátoprávne snahy v dvadsiatom storočí*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2018, pp. 121-134

<sup>22</sup> Martin Lacko, Prvá Slovenská republika a jej význam z hľadiska slovenských štátoprávnych snáh, In: *Slovenské štátoprávne snahy v dvadsiatom storočí*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2018, pp. 161-180

<sup>23</sup> Hrvoje Markulin, Katolička Crkva i hrvatski seljački pokret na primjeru Splitske i makarske biskupije od 1935. do 1939., In: *Crkva u svijetu*, VOL. 57, NO. 4, 2022, p. 542

munist Alexander Dubček. With the adoption of Constitutional Act No. 143/1968 Coll. on the Czechoslovak Federation on 27 October 1968, Slovakia was, for the first time within Czechoslovakia, constituted as a state entity on the principle of the right to self-determination. As of 1 January 1969, the former unitary Czechoslovak Socialist Republic became a federative state composed of two equal republics—the Slovak Socialist Republic and the Czech Socialist Republic.<sup>24</sup> A significant role in the drafting of this constitutional act was played by the later Czechoslovak communist president of Slovak origin, Gustáv Husák. The federal arrangement of Czechoslovakia following the Velvet Revolution of November 1989, within new democratic conditions, had a decisive influence on the emergence of the second independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993, which was founded upon democratic principles.<sup>25</sup>

## 2.2. Ecclesiastical dimension

The Cyril-Methodian tradition acquired particular significance from the second half of the nineteenth century onward in the national liberation struggle of the Slovaks for their own statehood. From an ecclesiastical perspective, it also carried profound spiritual and cultural importance. The first president of Slovak Matica, the Slovak Roman Catholic bishop Monsignor Štefan Moyses, who had served for many years in Zagreb<sup>26</sup>, Croatia, petitioned Blessed Pope Pius IX in 1864 to introduce a common liturgical feast of Saints Constantine (Cyril) and Methodius, to be celebrated on 5 July in all Slavic dioceses. The Pope granted Moyses's request, and this observance remains in force for all Slavic nations to this day.<sup>27</sup>

After the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918, the Holy See recognized the distinct identity of the Slovak nation through several important steps:

First, it authorized the consecration of three Slovak bishops—Mons. Karol Kmeťko (Diocese of Nitra), Mons. Marián Blaha (Dio-

<sup>24</sup> Jozef Beňa, *Slovenská otázka v Česko-Slovensku (1944-1992)* (Slovenská národná štátnosť – genéza, evolúcia, dosiahnutie), In: *Slovenské štátoprávne snahy v dvadsiatom storočí*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2018, pp. 181-241

<sup>25</sup> Peter Jašek, *Pokus o "rovného s rovným"* (Zákon o československej federácii má päťdesiat rokov), In: *Národný kalendár 2018*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2017, pp. 130-132

<sup>26</sup> Marián Gepšer and Pavol Parenička, *Predsedovia Matice slovenskej 1863-2019*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2019, p. 20

<sup>27</sup> Milan S. Ďurica, *Sv. Konštantín a Metod (Dielo a dedičstvo u Slovákov)*, Vydavateľstvo LÚČ, vydavateľské družstvo Bratislava, Bratislava, 2013, p. 20

cese of Banská Bystrica), and Mons. Ján Vojtaššák (Diocese of Spiš)—on 13 February 1921 in the Piarist Church of Saint Ladislav in Nitra.<sup>28</sup>

Second, on 22 April 1927, the Holy See proclaimed the Virgin Mary of the Seven Sorrows the Patroness of Slovakia. The proclamation stated, among other things, that through her intercession Slovak Catholics had been preserved from the plague of heresy and maintained in the true faith.<sup>29</sup>

Third, on 30 December 1977, Pope Paul VI established an independent Slovak ecclesiastical province. Through the papal constitutions *Qui divino* and *Praescriptionum sacrosancti*, the Pope separated in Rome the territory of the Trnava Apostolic Administration from the Archdiocese of Esztergom and aligned the boundaries of the remaining Slovak dioceses with those of the Slovak Socialist Republic. This decision was the result of negotiations between the Holy See and the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.<sup>30</sup> According to the information available to date, the establishment of an independent Slovak ecclesiastical province was particularly desired by the then General Secretary of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and President of the ČSSR, Gustáv Husák, himself of Slovak nationality. It is also highly probable that Cardinal Jozef Tomko, later a prominent Slovak cardinal serving in the Holy See, exerted considerable influence on this development.<sup>31</sup> The first Slovak archbishop and metropolitan became Monsignor Ján Sokol, Bishop of Trnava, appointed to this office by Pope John Paul II on 26 July 1989.<sup>32</sup> Monsignor Sokol remained the sole metropolitan of the independent Slovak ecclesiastical province until 1995, when two separate ecclesiastical provinces were established within the territory of the Slovak Republic.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Viliam Judák and collective, *Pred 103 rokmi boli v Nitre vysvätení slovenskí biskupi Karol Kmetko, Marián Blaha a Ján Vojtaššák.*, In: *Rímskokatolícka cirkev Biskupstvo Nitra*, 2021, [online], (Cited 20. August 2025), Available at: <https://www.biskupstvo-nitra.sk/?p=26072>

<sup>29</sup> *Vyhlasenie Panny Márie Sedembolestnej za patrónku Slovenska*, In: Róbert Letz, *Sedembolestná Panna Mária v slovenských dejinách*, Post Scriptum, Bratislava, 2014, pp. 129-130

<sup>30</sup> Ján Košiar, *Štyridsať rokov slovenskej cirkevnej provincie*, Vydavateľstvo LÚČ, vydavateľské družstvo Bratislava, Bratislava, 2018, p. 5

<sup>31</sup> Ján Košiar, *Medzníky cirkevnej samostatnosti Slovenska*, Vydavateľstvo LÚČ, vydavateľské družstvo Bratislava, Bratislava, 2023, p. 86

<sup>32</sup> Ján Košiar, *Medzníky cirkevnej samostatnosti Slovenska*, Vydavateľstvo LÚČ, vydavateľské družstvo Bratislava, Bratislava, 2023, p. 70

<sup>33</sup> Ján Košiar, *Medzníky cirkevnej samostatnosti Slovenska*, Vydavateľstvo LÚČ, vydavateľské družstvo Bratislava, Bratislava, 2023, p. 88

Thus, Slovakia achieved ecclesiastical independence long before attaining constitutional and state sovereignty. The establishment of an autonomous Slovak ecclesiastical province had a profound influence on the fact that Slovak Catholic bishops active in Slovakia supported the creation of the independent Slovak Republic as a subject of international law after the Velvet Revolution of 1989, in the new democratic socio-political context. Although they did not intervene directly in the political affairs of Slovakia within the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, they regarded the emergence of an independent state as the natural culmination of the Slovak national emancipation movement.

### 2.3. The socio-political development after the fall of socialism in November 1989 leading to the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993

The constitutional reconstruction of the common Czecho-Slovak federal state was originally intended to establish a democratic federation and to create a genuinely equal union of two national states—the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic—within a federal structure based on their original sovereignty. On 20 April 1990, by Constitutional Act No. 101/1990 Coll., the name Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was officially changed to the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. The subsequent socio-political developments ultimately led to its constitutional and peaceful dissolution, resulting in the creation of two successor independent states—the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic. The idea of establishing an independent Slovak Republic gradually took shape within the Slovak political scene. After the second free elections in June 1992, the Slovak National Council and the Federal Assembly obtained constitutional majorities composed of political parties that either directly or indirectly supported Slovak independence. Similarly, in the Czech Republic, the June 1992 elections to the Czech National Council and the Federal Assembly produced a constitutional majority that did not oppose the constitutional and peaceful dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic.<sup>34</sup>

On 17 July 1992, the Slovak National Council, by a constitutional majority, adopted the Declaration of the Slovak National Council on the Sovereignty of the Slovak Republic. A total of 113

<sup>34</sup> Matej Mindár, *„Cesta k demokratickej slovenskej štátnosti (Pronárodná občianska spoločnosť a Federálne zhromaždenie)*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2024, pp. 16-29

deputies from the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), the Slovak National Party (SNS), and the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) voted in favour. The Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and the Hungarian minority parties voted against.<sup>35</sup> The Declaration stated:

*“We, the democratically elected Slovak National Council, solemnly proclaim that the thousand-year endeavour of the Slovak nation for its distinct identity has been fulfilled. In this historic moment, we declare the natural right of the Slovak nation to self-determination, as enshrined in all international treaties and conventions on the right of nations to self-determination....”*<sup>36</sup>

On 1 September 1992, the Slovak National Council, again by constitutional majority, adopted the Constitution of the Slovak Republic (No. 460/1992 Coll.) as the constitution of the future independent Slovak Republic, a subject of international law. It was approved by 114 deputies from HZDS, SNS, and SDL, while deputies from KDH and the Hungarian minority parties again voted against.<sup>37</sup> The preamble of the Constitution explicitly refers to the Cyril-Methodian tradition and the historical statehood of Great Moravia.<sup>38</sup>

Finally, on 25 November 1992, a constitutional majority of Slovak and Czech deputies in the Federal Assembly adopted Constitutional Act No. 542/1992 Coll. on the Dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic. The Slovak political parties supporting this act were HZDS, SNS, two independent deputies of SDL, and two deputies of the Social Democratic Party of Slovakia (SDSS). Opposition to Slovak independence came mainly from the majority of SDL deputies, as well as from the KDH and the Hungarian minority parties. The adoption of this constitutional act made possible the lawful and peaceful dissolution of the Czech and Slovak

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<sup>35</sup> Anton Hrnko, Slovenský parlament pred vznikom suverénnej Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 1990-1993, In: *Slováci a ich národné bytie v Európe: vznik 2. Slovenskej republiky*, Panslovanská únia, Bratislava, 2012, pp. 92-93

<sup>36</sup> Deklarácia Slovenskej národnej rady o zvrchovanosti Slovenskej republiky, 1992, In: *National Council of the Slovak Republic*, [online], (Cited 20. August 2025), Available at: [https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/v\\_deklaracia-o-zvrchovanosti.htm](https://www.nrsr.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/v_deklaracia-o-zvrchovanosti.htm)

<sup>37</sup> Anton Hrnko, Slovenský parlament pred vznikom suverénnej Slovenskej republiky v rokoch 1990-1993, In: *Slováci a ich národné bytie v Európe: vznik 2. Slovenskej republiky*, Panslovanská únia, Bratislava, 2012, p. 94

<sup>38</sup> Ústava Slovenskej republiky, 1992, In: *National Council of the Slovak Republic*, [online], (Cited 8. November 2025), Available at: [https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1992/460/vyhlasene\\_znenie](https://www.slov-lex.sk/ezbierky/pravne-predpisy/SK/ZZ/1992/460/vyhlasene_znenie)

Federative Republic and enabled the immediate international recognition of the two successor states—the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic—on 1 January 1993.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. RESULTS - THE ROLE AND POSITION OF THE SLOVAK CATHOLIC BISHOPS IN THE PROCESS OF SLOVAK INDEPENDENCE (1990-1993)

The question of whether the Slovak Catholic bishops in fact supported the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic as a subject of international law is directly addressed in one of the interviews with Monsignor Ján Sokol, former Slovak Metropolitan and Archbishop Emeritus of Trnava. As the Slovak Metropolitan at that time, together with the other bishops active in Slovakia, he supported all measures leading to the fulfilment of the Slovak nation's right to self-determination. He stated: *“Since it was primarily the HZDS and the SNS that fought for the Slovak cause, it was logical that we supported them in this regard. Naturally, we did not agree with all their steps or with their decisions concerning other socio-political issues. But the fact that they achieved the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic will be remembered by history. It was a great pity that the KDH was against it.”*<sup>40</sup> According to Jozef Markuš, former president of Slovak Matica, which also played a role in the creation of the independent Slovak Republic, Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec strongly supported the Slovaks' efforts to have their own state. In his view, Cardinal Korec possessed a very clear national stance and conviction.<sup>41</sup> The same opinion was recently expressed by the current Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico, who noted: *“Father Cardinal thought very clearly and also understood the importance of the Slovak nation and of the Slovak Republic as such.”*<sup>42</sup> In his own memoirs, Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec likewise confirms the assertion stated above—that the Slovak Catholic bishops

<sup>39</sup> Matej Mindár, *„Cesta k demokratickej slovenskej štátnosti (Pronárodná občianska spoločnosť a Federálne zhromaždenie)*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2024, p. 117

<sup>40</sup> Juraj Domin, Rozhovor s Mons. Jánom Sokolom, In: *Slovenské Národné Noviny*, VOL. 40, NO. 17, 2025, ISSN 0862-8823, p. 4

<sup>41</sup> Matej Mindár, *„Cesta k demokratickej slovenskej štátnosti (Pronárodná občianska spoločnosť a Federálne zhromaždenie)*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2024, p. 68

<sup>42</sup> Robert Fico, Medzinárodná konferencia pri príležitosti 100. výročia narodenia kardinála Korca, In: *Kardinál Ján Chryzostom Korec (Storočnica narodenia 1924-2024)*, Vydavateľstvo LÚČ, vydavateľské družstvo Bratislava, Bratislava, 2024, pp. 42

did not intervene directly in the process of the constitutional and peaceful dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic.<sup>43</sup> According to the Slovak historian Professor Emília Hrabovec, Cardinal Jozef Tomko supported the creation of the independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993. As a Slovak exile during the communist period, he regarded the right of the Slovak nation to have its own state as a natural and inherent right.<sup>44</sup>

### 3.1. The first visit of Pope John Paul II to Slovakia in April 1990 – an osculation of Slovak land symbolizing recognition of the Slovak nation’s sovereignty.

After the fall of the communist totalitarian regime, Pope John Paul II visited Czechoslovakia in April 1990. Along with several Czech cities, he also visited Slovakia on Sunday, 22 April 1990. Upon arriving at the Bratislava airport, the Pope kissed the Slovak land.<sup>45</sup> According to Šebastián Labo and Ján Košiar, Pope John Paul II knew and loved the Slovak nation, and therefore bowed in reverence and kissed the Slovak land, since it was his first visit as the pontiff. In their view, this was a historic moment in Slovak history, as the papal kiss of the Slovak land had not been scheduled according to diplomatic protocol.<sup>46</sup> It was, rather, a seal by the Holy Father — a custom he observed whenever he arrived for the first time in a country — in memory of his first parish and as an imitation of the holy Curé of Ars, who began his pastoral mission in the same symbolic way in a place God had determined.<sup>47</sup>

According to the recollections of Cardinal Jozef Tomko, who accompanied the Pope during this visit, “*a delicate problem arose*

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<sup>43</sup> Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, *Cirkev a vznik Slovenskej republiky 1. Januára 1993*, In: *Vznik samostatnej Slovenskej republiky (K dvadsiatemu výročiu vzniku republiky)*, Martin, Matica slovenská, 2016, p. 34

<sup>44</sup> Emília Hrabovec, *Za prvým slovenským kuriálnym kardinálom Jozefom Tomkom (1924-2022)*, In: *Na pamäť prvého výročia smrti Kardinála Jozefa Tomku Emeritného prefekta Kongregácie pre evanjelizáciu národov, člena Slovenského ústavu*. Bratislava: Post Scriptum 2023, ISBN 978-80-8218-052-0, p. 41

<sup>45</sup> Ladislav Hučko, *Nie zbohom, ale dovidenia*, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 141, NO. 17, 1990, p. 1

<sup>46</sup> Šebastián Labo and Ján Košiar, *Ján Pavol II. Posol lásky a pokoja (Návšteva svätého otca v Česko-Slovensku)* Second edition, Trnava, Dobrá kniha, 1992, p. 94-95

<sup>47</sup> Carlo Maria Rognone, *WHY DID JOHN PAUL II. KISS THE LAND WHEN HE CAME TO THE COUNTRY?*, In: *Vatvision*, 2025, [online], (Cited 25. August 2025), Available at: <https://vatvision.com/perche-giovanni-paolo-ii-baciavala-terra-quando-arrivava-in-un-paese/>

shortly before landing — whether or not to kiss the land. Cardinal Casaroli did not wish to give a definitive answer, so the Holy Father turned to me. I told him: ‘When we landed in Prague, you said in your address: “Here I have kissed the Czech land.” This, now, is Slovak land.’ The decision was made immediately.”<sup>48</sup> In the opinion of several Slovak politicians and journalists, Pope John Paul II, by this act, acknowledged before the world the Slovak nation as a distinct and sovereign nation. Former Federal Assembly deputy and journalist Ján Smolec (HZDS) wrote: “Pope John Paul II must have heard of the Slovaks’ aspirations, for the Czechoslovakists led by Havel were frozen in astonishment when, on 22 April 1990, during his visit to Czechoslovakia, the Holy Father, upon his arrival in Bratislava under rainy skies, knelt at Vajnory Airport and kissed the Slovak land. In doing so, he made it perfectly clear to the Prague politicians what his attitude was toward the Slovaks and their emancipation efforts.”<sup>49</sup> In a more recent interview, Monsignor Ján Sokol interpreted the Pope’s symbolic gesture as a sign that the Pope regarded us Slovaks as an equal nation among the state-forming nations of Europe. “In this way, he also showed the world that the former Czechoslovakia was not a ‘Czech state,’ but a state of two sovereign nations — the Slovaks and the Czechs. At the same time, he paid us homage and expressed gratitude that we had preserved the true Christian faith during the communist totalitarian period.”<sup>50</sup> Although there has been some debate in certain circles as to whether Pope John Paul II actually supported the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the emergence of an independent Slovakia, his statements during his second visit to Slovakia in 1995 clearly express recognition of the independent Slovak Republic as a subject of international law.

In his address at the Bratislava airport, titled “*To Build the New Slovak State on the Firm Foundations of Truth, Solidarity, and Democracy*,” the Pope declared: “When I took leave of you five years ago, I expressed my desire to see you once again. Shortly before that, a revolution had ended — the one so aptly called ‘velvet.’ Today, as this wish comes true, your country has reached another goal: Slovakia is independent and sovereign. Through serious and calm negotia-

<sup>48</sup> Marián Gavenda, *Jozef kardinál Tomko Na životných cestách (Rozhovory s Mariánom Gavendom)*, Spolok svätého Vojtecha, Trnava, 2008, p. 303

<sup>49</sup> Ján Smolec, Slovensko vystúpilo z tieňa (Roku 1992 sme urobili rozhodujúci krok k slobodnému štátu), In: *Národný kalendár 2018*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2017, p. 51

<sup>50</sup> Juraj Domin, Rozhovor týždňa Mons. Jánom Sokolom, In: *Slovenské Národné Noviny*, VOL. 40, NO. 17, 2025, ISSN 0862-8823, p. 4

tions in 1993, two nations — the Czech and the Slovak — peacefully separated. You have given the world an excellent example of how dialogue and mutual respect for rights can resolve issues that arise between nations and states.”<sup>51</sup> Pope John Paul II held the Croatian nation in similar esteem. Although the Croats achieved independence by shedding blood and waging a war, he called for a peaceful resolution of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia. During his first visit to Croatia in 1994, while the war was still ongoing, he declared that the effort to build peace is a sacred duty of every faithful one<sup>52</sup>. According to Stanislav Šota and Marija Hardi, Pope John Paul II also had a deep pastoral affection and love for the Croatian Church and the Croatian nation.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.2. Statements of Slovak bishops regarding the independence of Slovakia and the desire of Slovaks for their own state

1990

In an interview for *Katolícke noviny* in February 1990, Cardinal Jozef Tomko indirectly supported the Slovaks as a sovereign nation, stating: “We must one day study and truly internalize our own Slovak history. And we must see what the Cyril-Methodian tradition has meant and continues to mean for us... Here lies strength—an immense strength in our history.”<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec (at that time still serving as a bishop) expressed an indirect affirmation of Slovak national sovereignty in his article “Lay Believers and Politics” from February 1990: “The highest organs of the state, through legal reforms, have ensured the freedom of action of the Church and the faithful, thus allowing them to develop their activity freely in the spirit of the Gospel for the good of our nations (the Slovak and the Czech—author’s note).”<sup>55</sup> In the conclusion, he emphasized that the Church itself, together with the bishops and

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<sup>51</sup> Ján Košíar, *Apoštol národov dvadsiateho storočia (Druhá návšteva Jána Pavla II. na Slovensku)*, Trnava: Dobrá kniha, 1995, p. 16

<sup>52</sup> Alojzije Čondić, Poruke Ivana Pavla II. za Hrvatsku pastoralnu obnovu, In: *Crkva u svijetu*, VOL. 60, NO. 2, 2025, p. 281

<sup>53</sup> Stanislav Šota – Marija Hardi, Teološko-pastoralni naglasci pohoda sv. Ivana Pavla II. žitnici Hrvatske, In: *Crkva u svijetu*, VOL. 60, NO. 2, 2025, p. 322

<sup>54</sup> Ladislav Hučko, Rozhovor s Kardinálom Jozefom Tomkom (Part 1), In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 141, NO. 5, 1990, p. 3

<sup>55</sup> Mons. Ján Chryzostom Korec. Veriaci laici a politika, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 141, NO. 6, 1990, p. 1

priests, did not engage in specific political activity, but presented only fundamental moral principles.<sup>56</sup>

Before the first free elections in June 1990, the Slovak bishops issued the “First Pastoral Letter of the Bishops of the Slovak Ecclesiastical Province (Elections – A Decisive Event in Christian Life).” In this document, too, they indirectly supported the sovereignty of the Slovak nation, declaring: *“The future of Slovakia and its development in the spirit of profound Christian and Cyril-Methodian traditions depend on you and are in your hands... Slovakia, as a predominantly Christian country, must bear witness before the whole world to its faith and decide on its future... We commend you to the protection of Saints Cyril and Methodius and of our Patroness, the Virgin Mary of the Seven Sorrows.”*<sup>57</sup> The letter was signed by Monsignor Ján Sokol, Monsignor Ján Chryzostom Korec, and seven other Slovak bishops.<sup>58</sup>

In his pastoral letter of November 1990, entitled “Let Us Find the Right Direction!”, Monsignor Ján Sokol wrote that the Slovak nation was preparing to enter the community of nations of the new Europe, the common European home. However, he implicitly suggested that such participation would be possible only within the framework of an independent Slovak Republic, stating: *“Yet, we have a place there only as a free, united, and cultured people.”*<sup>59</sup>

1991

Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec (at that time still holding the rank of bishop), in his address “Let Us Serve the Nation for the Good of All” delivered to the national assembly of Slovak Matica in Bratislava on 11 March 1991, expressed the view that Slovakia is an ancient historic land: *“The roots of the Slovak nation’s birth reach more than eleven centuries deep into history and thus surpass in antiquity many other nations of Europe and the world... No one in the world can deny the Slovak nation the right to an independent life in the spirit of its rich spiritual traditions. The Slovak nation possesses an undeniable natural right, guaranteed by God, to its own life.”*<sup>60</sup>

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Slovak bishops, Prvý pastiersky list biskupov Slovenskej cirkevnej provincie (Voľby – rozhodujúca udalosť kresťanského života), In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 141, NO. 19, 1990, pp. 1 and 7

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Mons. Ján Sokol, Pastiersky list arcibiskupa, metropolitu Slovenska Mons. Jána Sokola (Nájdime správnu orientáciu!), In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 141, NO. 47, 1990, p.1

<sup>60</sup> Mons. Ján Chryzostom Korec, Slúžme národu pre dobro všetkých, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 142, NO. 12, 1991, p. 3

In March 1991, a joint address of the Slovak Catholic bishops, led by Monsignor Ján Sokol and Bishop Ján Chryzostom Korec, was also published. It declared: *“Together with you, we share concern for the future destiny of our nation. We are united with you in the conviction that the Slovak nation, like every other, has the right to an independent existence and that it alone can and must rightfully decide its own destiny — the form in which it wishes to design and build its state home. Today, our nation is sufficiently mature that, in securing its sovereignty, it need not submit to the political manipulations of others. No one can reproach it for striving, by lawful and constitutional means, to secure its national and state sovereignty.”*<sup>61</sup>

On 25 April 1991, Cardinal Jozef Tomko, in his address to the Slovak National Council, stated that his various life experiences had led him to deepen his sense of national identity and to reflect often on the state of the Slovak nation: *“For more than a year now, it has been said — and rightly so — that a moral renewal of the nation and of all its citizens is underway in Slovakia... A nation is like a human person or like a tree: it cannot live without roots, nor without a future... The roots of our nation lie in the Cyril-Methodian heritage. The Slovaks are the direct heirs of the spiritual wealth brought to us by the great missionaries Saints Cyril and Methodius... Christian faith has indeed accompanied the Slovaks throughout their entire history.”*<sup>62</sup>

On 29 May 1991, Pope John Paul II appointed the Bishop of Nitra, Monsignor Ján Chryzostom Korec, as Cardinal<sup>63</sup>, and he was formally created Cardinal on 28 June 1991.<sup>64</sup> As a Cardinal, on 22 October 1991 in his address delivered at St. Vitus Cathedral in Prague, he reminded his audience that a nation, in order to achieve its goals, must form a state. He also highlighted the fact that the Czech and Moravian bishops had likewise adopted the fundamental position that every nation has the right to self-determination, thereby indirectly supporting the Slovaks' efforts to attain their own statehood.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Slovak bishops, *Príhovor katolíckych biskupov Slovenska všetkým veriacim a ľuďom dobrej vôle!*, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 142, NO. 13, 1991, p. 1

<sup>62</sup> Kardinál Jozef Tomko, *Prejav na zasadnutí Slovenskej národnej rady 25.4. 1991*, In: *Slovenské Národné Noviny*, VOL. 6, NO. 17, 1991, ISSN 0862-8823, pp. 8

<sup>63</sup> Editorship of Catholic Newspaper, *Slovensko má kardinála*, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 142, NO. 23, 1991, p. 1

<sup>64</sup> Marta Ščurková, *Kreácia o kardinála Jána Chryzostoma Korca (Veľký deň našej Cirkvi)*, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 142, NO. 28, 1991, p. 1

<sup>65</sup> Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, *Národ ako spoločenstvo*, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 142, NO. 46, 1991, p. 1

In November 1991, the Slovak bishops, led by Monsignor Ján Sokol and Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, issued another pastoral letter devoted partly to questions of statehood: *“We are not competent to make political decisions; we do not wish to determine what form of state existence or coexistence our nations should choose. This should be decided by the elected representatives of the people, or by the people themselves. Yet we regard as a profoundly moral question — one on which we not only have the right but also the duty to speak — the fact that every nation has an inalienable right to self-determination. The Church has proclaimed this right of nations in the past and affirms it still today.”*<sup>66</sup>

1992

Before the second free elections in the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, the results of which ultimately led to the emergence of two independent successor states—the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic—the Slovak bishops, led by Monsignor Ján Sokol and Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, published a pastoral letter for the elections (*Pastiersky list k voľbám*). In this letter, they expressed their great sense of responsibility for the life of both the Church and society: *“Let our choice be motivated and guided by calm and prudent reflection, for it will be judged first by God and, after a few years, by the coming generation.”*<sup>67</sup>

On 17 July 1992, the Slovak National Council, by a constitutional majority, adopted the Declaration of the Slovak National Council on the Sovereignty of the Slovak Republic. The Slovak bishops supported this act. In contrast, the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), despite its Christian orientation, voted against the declaration. The KDH also did not support the subsequent adoption of the Constitution of the Slovak Republic on 1 September 1992, nor the Constitutional Act No. 542/1992 Coll. on the Dissolution of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, approved by the Slovak and Czech deputies of the Federal Assembly on 25 November 1992. The Slovak bishops, on the other hand, endorsed all constitutional and political processes that led to the creation of an independent Slovak Republic. Following the adoption of the Declaration of Sovereignty, the Slovak Catholic bishops—again led by Monsignor Ján Sokol and Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec—issued a joint statement, in which

<sup>66</sup> Slovak bishops, *Pastierky list biskupov Slovenska (Nech zavládne Kristovo kráľovstvo)*, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 142, NO. 48, 1991, pp. 1 and 3

<sup>67</sup> Slovak bishops, *Pastierky list k voľbám (Komu zveríme verejné veci)*, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 143, NO. 22, 1992, p. 1

they affirmed that every nation with a long historical and cultural tradition aspires to see its national life culminate in full state sovereignty: “Such was the desire and the goal of the most noble figures in our history, especially during the past 150 years of our national life.”<sup>68</sup> To commemorate the proclamation of Slovak sovereignty, bells from more than two thousand church towers across the country rang out at noon on 17 July 1992.<sup>69</sup> During the adoption of the Declaration of the Slovak National Council on the Sovereignty of the Slovak Republic, Archbishop Ján Sokol, the Slovak Metropolitan and Archbishop of Trnava, was present as an invited guest in the parliament’s premises. According to the memoirs of Ján Smolec (HZDS), a former Federal Assembly deputy and journalist who was also present, he overheard Monsignor Ján Sokol quietly exclaim, “My God,” when KDH leader Ján Čarnogurský publicly voted against Slovak sovereignty.<sup>70</sup> Archbishop Sokol himself in his own recollections confirms these words: “I was rejoicing that Slovakia would once again have its independence. I remember how the Hungarian deputies voted — most abstained, and the others were against. Then came the turn of the KDH, and I was unpleasantly surprised when, from the first to the last, each said: ‘I am against sovereignty.’ It struck me so deeply that I sighed, ‘Lord God, surely this cannot be true.’ Some journalist overheard it and later published it on the tenth anniversary of independence. I was disappointed by the stance of the KDH.”<sup>71</sup>

Despite the positive reaction of the Slovak bishops to the political developments leading to Slovak independence, at the end of August 1992 they again publicly emphasized that the Church was not bound to any political regime or party: “The Church respects public authority, all the more so when it has been democratically elected...”<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Slovak bishops, *Hodina zvrchovanosti Slovenska* (Vyhlásenie katolíckych biskupov Slovenska), *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 143, NO. 30, 1992, p.1

<sup>69</sup> Ján Smolec, Slovakia stepped out of the shadow (In 1992 we took a decisive step towards a free state), In: *National Calendar 2018*, Slovak Matica, Martin, 2017, p. 54

<sup>70</sup> Ján Smolec, Slovensko vystúpilo z tieňa (Roku 1992 sme urobili rozhodujúci krok k slobodnému štátu), In: *Národný kalendár 2018*, Matica slovenská, Martin, 2017, p. 53

<sup>71</sup> Peter Sokolovič, *Je čas mlčať a čas hovoriť Arcibiskup Ján Sokol, prvý metropolita Slovenska, v rozhovore s Petrom Sokolovičom*, Second edition, Vydavateľstvo LÚČ, vydavateľské družstvo Bratislava, Bratislava, 2021, pp. 226-227

<sup>72</sup> Slovak bishops, *Z biskupskej konferencie Slovenska* (V duchu viery, lásky a jednote), *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 143, NO. 37, 1992 p. 3

### 3.3. Statements of Monsignor Ján Sokol and Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec Concerning the Establishment of the Independent Slovak Republic.

Monsignor Ján Sokol, as Slovak Metropolitan, welcomed the independent Slovak Republic in his address given during a solemn celebration at the Cathedral of St. Martin in Bratislava on 1 January 1993, the feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Present at the festive Mass were the then Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, the Speaker of Parliament Ivan Gašparovič (later President of the Slovak Republic), as well as members of the Bratislava diplomatic corps. In his homily, Monsignor Sokol declared: *“Many nations today are experiencing the turning point between the old and the new year. But the Slovak nation is celebrating the proclamation of its state independence. It is also the liturgical feast of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. Is it perhaps only a coincidence that this day has fallen on her feast? No—it is providential, for, as we know from history, this nation living beneath the Tatras has always sought refuge with the Mother of God... This nation needs the protection of the Blessed Virgin Mary... May God be with us all. May the Mother of God stand beside us. Long live and flourish the sovereign Slovak Republic. Amen.”*<sup>73</sup>

Likewise, Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec rejoiced at the creation of the independent Slovak Republic. In his memoirs, he recalls that in December 1992 he had been asked by TASR what he expected from the creation of the new state: *“I expect that in freedom and democracy we will be able to overcome initial difficulties with patience, perseverance, and solidarity, and that with love we shall shape the life of Slovakia as our home...”*<sup>74</sup> Cardinal Korec also recounts that on 30 December 1992, he received at his Episcopal Office in Nitra a letter from Giovanni Coppa, Apostolic Nuncio to the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, containing the following message: *“Pope John Paul II expresses his wishes of peace, prosperity, and development to the new Slovak Republic, which on 1 January appears on the horizon of the other free nations of Europe and the world as an inde-*

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<sup>73</sup> Mons. Ján Sokol, Boh žehnaj Slovensko, In: *Katolícke noviny*, VOL. 144, VO. 2, 1993, p. 1

<sup>74</sup> Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, Church and the creation of the Slovak Republic on January 1, 1993, In: *The creation of the independent Slovak Republic (On the twentieth anniversary of the creation of the republic)*, Martin, Slovak Matica, 2016, p. 35

*pendent and sovereign state...*"<sup>75</sup> This letter was later cited by Ján Košiar, who argued that its contents prove that the Vatican was the first state to recognize the independent Slovak Republic.<sup>76</sup>

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the research carried out within the primary objective, it can be concluded that the Slovak Catholic bishops publicly supported the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic as a subject of international law. After the fall of communism, Monsignor Ján Sokol and Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, in particular, took a clear stand in favour of Slovak independence through their public statements and positions. Similar support was expressed by other Slovak bishops, including Monsignor Dominik Hrušovský, whose nephew, Pavol Hrušovský, as a deputy of the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) in the Slovak National Council, voted against the creation of an independent Slovak Republic. From abroad—specifically from the Holy See—strong support for Slovak aspirations for independence also came from Cardinal Jozef Tomko. Other Slovak bishops living abroad also supported the creation of an independent Slovakia; however, they are not included in this study, as they were not the object of research, and their contribution to this historical process continues to be analysed by Slovak historians such as Professor Emília Hrabovec and Beáta Katrebová Blehová. The research further revealed that, although the Slovak Catholic bishops supported the establishment of an independent Slovak state, they remained non-partisan and left the actual formation of the independent Slovak Republic entirely in the hands of the democratically elected political representatives. In contrast to the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), which opposed the creation of the independent state, the Slovak Catholic bishops active in Slovakia played a positive and memorable role in modern Slovak history and in the national-emancipatory struggle of the Slovaks for their own statehood. It was also found that the Cyril-Methodian tradition served as a significant point of reference with which the Slovak bishops frequently identified in their sup-

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<sup>75</sup> Cardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec, *Cirkev a vznik Slovenskej republiky 1. Januára 1993*, In: *Vznik samostatnej Slovenskej republiky (K dvadsiatemu výročiu vzniku republiky)*, Martin, Matica slovenská, 2016, p. 36

<sup>76</sup> Matej Mindár, *Rozhovor týždňa Jánom Košiarom*, In: *Slovenské Národné Noviny*, VOL. 40, NO. 7, 2025, p. 6

port for Slovak independence. The bishops viewed the creation of an independent Slovakia as natural and legitimate, given that Slovakia had already achieved ecclesiastical autonomy in 1977 through the establishment of an independent Slovak ecclesiastical province.

Within the framework of the secondary objective, it was established that the visit of Pope John Paul II to Slovakia in 1990 indirectly encouraged the Slovaks' efforts for independence and strengthened the courage of the Slovak bishops to support this cause. For instance, on 22 April 1990, during his visit to Czechoslovakia, upon his arrival in Bratislava, under rainy skies, the Pope knelt on Slovak soil at Vajnory Airport and kissed it. By this gesture, he made clear to the Prague political elite his sympathy with the Slovaks and their emancipatory aspirations. In this way, he also demonstrated to the world that the former Czechoslovakia was not a "Czech" state, but a state of two sovereign nations — Slovaks and Czechs.

The results of the research, for the first time in a comprehensive way, place the statements and reactions of Slovak bishops supporting Slovak independence in historical context alongside the key socio-political events that led to the creation of the independent Slovak Republic as a subject of international law. These include in particular the adoption of the Declaration of the Slovak National Council on the Sovereignty of the Slovak Republic (17 July 1992) and the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic (1 January 1993). In doing so, the findings of this study expand upon and systematize the partial works not only of Ján Košiar, but also of other Slovak historians and political scientists who have addressed the period surrounding the creation of the independent Slovak republic.

The primary source of research was the periodical *Katolícke noviny* (*Catholic News*). As the principal Catholic press medium in Slovakia during the period under study (1990–1993), it provided detailed information about church life in Slovakia and abroad, a role it continues to fulfil today. The newspaper, with its first Slovak version published in 1849<sup>77</sup>, contained the key materials for this research, including pastoral letters and other statements of Slovak bishops corresponding to the topic under investigation. These materials were objectively identifiable as primary and original sources. *Katolícke noviny* therefore offered concrete insights into how the Slovak bishops viewed the creation of an independent Slovak Republic.

<sup>77</sup> Marta Dobrotková, *Katolícke noviny – najstaršie slovenské katolícke periodikum*, In: *Acta Musei Nationalis Pragae – Historia litterarum*, VOL. 67, NO. 3-4, 2022, p. 93-100

lic. While other contemporary media also reported on the bishops' attitudes toward Slovak independence, in consideration of the above-mentioned reasons *Katolícke noviny* has been considered the principal and most authentic source for this study. As other secondary sources, the research also utilized *Slovenské národné noviny* and other relevant articles written by contemporaries active in the period 1990–1993. Nevertheless, these materials only complemented historical events that, for objective reasons, were not covered in *Katolícke noviny*. As the official publication of Slovak Matica, *Slovenské národné noviny* provided recently published testimonies of key actors, such as Monsignor Ján Sokol, which further substantiated the historical findings.

#### CONCLUSION

The results of the present research have provided new insights into previously little-known historical facts concerning the Slovak Catholic bishops who supported the establishment of the independent Slovak Republic between 1990 and 1992.

Within the framework of the first research question, “*What was the attitude of the Slovak Catholic bishops towards the creation of the independent Slovak Republic on 1 January 1993?*”, the following findings were established: During the observed period, the Slovak bishops openly supported the establishment of an independent Slovak Republic. This stance was expressed above all in several pastoral letters in which they publicly affirmed their support for the creation of an independent Slovak statehood. At the same time, however, they consistently emphasized that, as representatives of the Church, they did not wish to be involved in party politics and therefore did not endorse any specific political party. In their view, matters of state and constitutional governance were to be left exclusively to the democratically elected representatives. The bishops' aim was thus to maintain their supra-partisan and apolitical position. Nonetheless, and this is of great significance, they openly supported the creation of the Slovak Republic as a subject of international law, guided by their personal inner conviction that the establishment of an independent Slovakia was in the best interest of the Slovak nation. It is, however, very likely that some lower-ranking members of the Catholic clergy—priests, together with certain laypersons—aligned themselves with the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), which opposed Slovak independence.

Within the framework of the second research question, “*Which specific historical events in the history of the Slovak nation inspired the Slovak Catholic bishops to support the creation of independent Slovak statehood between 1990 and 1993?*”, the research revealed the following results: The Cyril-Methodian tradition, the Great Moravian heritage, the proclamation of the Virgin Mary of the Seven Sorrows as Patroness of Slovakia, and the establishment of the Slovak ecclesiastical province were the historical milestones that inspired the Slovak bishops to openly support the emergence of Slovak statehood.

The findings of this research may serve as an inspiration for further studies on the positions of Catholic bishops in other European states that gained independence after 1990—countries that, like Slovakia, arose during the same historical period. These include, in particular, the Czech Republic, Croatia, and Slovenia. A comparative analysis of the attitudes of Catholic Church representatives in these countries would most likely lead to the conclusion that national consciousness has always been closely intertwined with Catholicism. Therefore, it is recommended that this important historical topic be further explored in relation to the above-mentioned states.

#### ULOGA I POLOŽAJ SLOVAČKIH KATOLIČKIH BISKUPA U PROCESU STJECANJA SLOVAČKE NEOVISNOSTI (1990. – 1993.)

##### *Summary*

Ovaj rad proučava stavove slovačkih katoličkih biskupa u razdoblju nakon pada komunističkog totalitarnog režima u bivšoj državi Čehoslovačkoj. Ti su biskupi izrazili podršku uspostavi neovisne Slovačke Republike kao subjekta međunarodnog prava. Iako se nisu izravno miješali u političke procese demokracije u nastajanju, javno su izjavljivali – kroz pastoralna pisma i u raznim službenim izjavama – da i slovački narod također ima pravo na vlastitu državnost. Najistaknutiji predstavnici Crkve tog razdoblja bili su tadašnji slovački metropolit i nadbiskup Trnave, monsinjor Ján Sokol, i nitranski biskup, kardinal Ján Chryzostom Korec. Članak također predstavlja gledišta slovačkog katoličkog prognanika, kardinala Jozefa Tomka, koji je tada službovao pri Svetoj Stolici u vrijeme pontifikata pape Ivana Pavla II, prvog slavenskog pape. Kada je slovački nacionalni pokret za osamostaljenje bio na vrhuncu (1990-1992), Slovačka je već bila postigla crkvenu neovisnost. Tijekom razdoblja socijalizma,

papa Pavao VI, nakon pregovora između Svete Stolice i tadašnje Čehoslovačke Socijalističke Republike, izdao je 30. prosinca 1977 papinske konstitucije *Qui divino i Praescriptionum sacrosancti*. Tim dokumentima odvojilo se područje Trnavske apostolske administracije od Ostrogonske nadbiskupije te su se uskladile granice preostalih slovačkih biskupija s postojećim državnim granicama. Na ovaj način teritorij Slovačke se definitivno odvojio i u kanonskom smislu od bivšeg Mađarskog Kraljevstva. Neovisnu Slovačku Republiku, mirno i ustavno uspostavljenu 1. siječnja 1993. raspuštanjem Češke i Slovačke Federativne Republike, prvo je priznala Sveta Stolica, predvođena papom Ivanom Pavlom II.

*Ključne riječi:* Republika Slovačka, neovisnost, katolička crkva u Slovačkoj