

THE SLOVAK STATE : ITS DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICY

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On March 14th a new State appeared on the map of Europe, — the Slovak Republic. According to Article 1. of the Independence Act — which takes the place of a Constitution — "Slovakia is an independent and self-governing State", that meaning that Slovakia's State sovereignty ought to be absolute and unrestricted in respect both of its international and of its domestic policy. In actual fact, however, that sovereignty is limited in both respects.

In respect of its foreign policy, on March 16th, two days after the declaration of its independence, Slovakia subjected itself to the protectorate of the German Empire. This protectorate was confirmed in international law too by the Agreement concluded on March 23rd between the Slovak and German Governments Article 4. of which provides that the Slovak Government shall at all times pursue a foreign policy in close agreement with that of the German Government. In order to give practical effect to the obligation of protection undertaken by the German Empire the German army occupied the territory encircled by the Little Carpathians, the White Carpathians and the Jablonka range, where it exercised military prerogatives.

So far as the foreign policy of the Slovak State is concerned, in a statement published in the April 5th. issue of the "Curentul" Foreign Minister Durcsánszky admitted that "there cannot be any question of a truly Slovak foreign policy, seeing that a nation comprising only 2.7 million souls cannot carry on an independent international policy". "Our

policy" — continued the Slovak Foreign Minister — "consists solely and exclusively in bringing about good economic and cultural relations with our neighbours".

In a speech broadcast on March 30th Foreign Minister Durcsánszky — dealing with Slovakia's connections with the neighbouring States — observed that the pivot of Slovakia's foreign policy would be the friendship of Germany, that course being pursued in the hope that the neighbouring German State with its 80 million inhabitants could always be relied upon to support Slovakia. He was anxious to strengthen to the greatest possible degree the connections with Poland and to maintain the best relations with that country. In connection with Hungary the Slovak Foreign Minister stressed the point that he was not averse to a friendly rapprochement with that country.

This statement too shows that the Slovak Government is not in control of the situation; for the series of attacks on the Poles and the Hungarians originating from Slovak sources — combined with the constantly recurring bloody frontier incidents provoked by Slovak frontier guards — prove beyond doubt that there are certain Slovak elements anxious to sow the seeds of hatred and dissension as between Slovakia and Hungary and between Slovakia and Poland respectively.

As for the army, the Slovak Republic possesses armed forces of its own; but in terms of the German-Slovak Agreement concluded on March 23rd these forces must be organised in close agreement with the German military authorities. As a consequence — according to a report published in the April 16th 1939, issue of the "Slovak" — the character of the Hlinka Guards has changed completely. This organisation, which so far was of the character of an army, will in the future be employed exclusively in the work of physical training and of popular education. In the statement published in the April 5th issue of the "Curentul" Foreign Minister Durcsánszky explained that the expenditure of the War Ministry would not be large, seeing that the Slovak army would be merely a symbol of the militarism of former days. Its business would be to maintain order in the country and to train the younger generations in a spirit of nationalism. "What we have in mind" — said

Durcsánszky — "is certainly not an army whose business is the defence of our frontiers".

The legislative power has been placed on totalitarian foundations by the transformation of the Hlinka People's Party into a State Party. The parties of the national minorities have been dissolved. This procedure has rendered the inner consolidation of the State practically impossible; for there can be no doubt that the minorities thus deprived of their vested rights will carry on a strenuous and uncompromising struggle against the despotic methods of the Slovaks.

Economically — according to a report published in the April 15th 1939, issue of the "Slovak" — Slovakia is to adjust itself to the Four-Year Economic Programme of Germany. A Slovak-German economic agreement similar to that concluded between Germany and Rumania is to be drafted. The investment of German capital is to be effected systematically on a scale gradually increasing in intensity. Slovakia's natural resources and her industry are to be developed in a manner calculated to satisfy the requirements of Germany.

Under the German-Slovak economic agreement which came into force on April 1st Slovakia is to form a separate customs unit, though in union with the Czech and Moravian territories now under German protectorate and with the Sudeten territories. The customs boundary coincides exactly with the present political frontier of Slovakia. The trade in goods as between Slovakia and Germany is to be carried on on a clearing basis. Slovak debtors are to pay into the Slovak National Bank both the debts due by them in German and those payable in the Czecho-Moravian territories under the protectorate of Germany, the Slovak State then settling the accounts by payment to Germany in marks.

For the purpose of ensuring the equilibrium of Slovakia's public finances an inland loan was issued on February 25th; but — though the period of subscription has been twice prolonged — the amount of the issue has not yet been fully subscribed. This circumstance proves that the inhabitants have no confidence in their Government and are not prepared to offer that Government's policy financial support.

In terms of the Law dated April 4th which deals with

the Slovak currency the Slovak National Bank — an institution of vital importance to the State — was established in Pozsony, a German expert being invited to take over its direction. The new currency issued by the new Bank is the KS. or Slovak crown, the gold value of which corresponds to the gold value of the former Czecho-Slovak crown, (32.21 milligrammes gold).

The organisation of the public administration is proving a most difficult task owing to the general anarchy prevailing in the country. Although the arbitrary action of the Hlinka Guards is no longer in evidence in certain regions, there is nevertheless a general prevalence of lawlessness in Slovakia. Arbitrary arrests are the order of the day in practically all towns alike. The unfortunate victims are usually members of one or other of the national minorities. Nor is there any kind of judicial activity; the courts of law are indeed only just being organised. The Supreme Administrative Tribunal and the Court of Appeal, for instance, were only set up on April 16th. And it will be a long time before they are fully organised.

It is questionable whether Slovakia will be able to cope with the economic and political difficulties incidental to the organisation of her independent State life.