

Symbols of Czech and Slovak Political Parties After the “Velvet Revolution”

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Communist totalitarianism did not tolerate the existence of political parties, nor of any independent organizations between the state and the family. The situation in Czechoslovakia fortunately was not as severe as in the Soviet Union. Czech and Slovak citizens could join a limited number of organisations and associations which mainly used emblems, although some of them had flags. The Vexillology Club researched them in 1977 and published a report on them in its periodical in 1978¹. No article has yet appeared on the symbols of Czech and Slovak political parties, although such an article should be of interest not only to Czech vexillologists, but to others too.

After the Communist putsch of February 1948, apart from the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia four other parties were tolerated, the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party, the Democratic Party and the Liberation Party. However they had to give up their own programs, except that of the Communist Party and that of the National Front, and to recognise the so-called “leading role” of the Communist Party. The November 1989 revolution meant the end of the one-party system. The rise of many new political parties and movements could be expected.

Following the “Velvet Revolution”, Czechoslovakia was ruled by a coalition of two civil, non-political movements, the Civic Forum (in the Czech acronym OF) in Bohemia and Moravia and its sister organisation, the Public Against Violence (VPN in the Slovak acronym) in Slovakia. This experiment lasted little more than a year until February 1991, when OF split. In gatherings organised by both movements, many flags were seen. Whereas the Czechoslovak state flag flew over the heads of participants in Bohemia and Moravia, Slovak national flags prevailed in Slovakia. These movements did not adopt their own flags, but only carried logos mainly in the form of badges. A lighthearted logo of OF combined a smiling face with its initials in the white-red-blue national colours (Fig 1). Pavol Ľastn suggested the use of the letter V for the Public Against Violence with the Slovak white-blue-red colours.

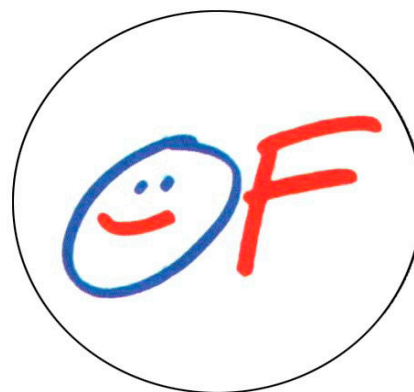


Fig. 1

Some members of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, the Czechoslovak People's Party and the Communist Party were instrumental in the rise of the Czech Civic Forum, but their secretariats maintained their own policy and did not cooperate with the Civic Forum. They continued to use their own emblems, which in some cases were completely and in others only slightly changed in the following years. It is interesting that all three parties used the Czechoslovak flag as part of these emblems. The Communists had for a time a red five-pointed star with a Czechoslovak flag, a hammer and sickle and the letters KSČ. In about 1994, two red cherries and a green leaf replaced the star in its striking position (Fig 2). A French song from the time of the French revolution of 1871 which mentions mellowed cherries is said to be the reason why the Czech Communists chose them². The red star became only a smaller appendix in the emblem and the hammer and sickle completely disappeared. The acronym changed from KSČ to KSČM, because the Czech Communists tried to reform the party. On 31 March 1990 they founded the Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia, whose acronym is KSČM.



Fig. 2

The emblem of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party consists of a crossed hammer and quill, two ears of grain and a linden leaf. All appear on the Czechoslovak state flag within a circle (Fig 3). These are well-known symbols of workers, intelligentsia, and farmers. The linden tree is said to be the Czech national tree.



Fig. 3

The Czechoslovak People's Party (ČSL) first displayed its emblem after World War II. It is a clear example of an emblem lacking inspiration (a golden oblong with the Czechoslovak state flag and the blue letters ČSL) (Fig 4).



Fig. 4

The first democratic elections in June 1990 were designed to legitimise the transfer of power from the Communist Party to the Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence. Both non-political movements were winners with more than 53 and 32 percent of votes respectively. Catholic parties were also successful in both the Czech and Slovak halves of the federation. Thus the Movement of Christian Democrats (KDH) gained 25 seats in both chambers in Slovakia. This movement adopted both an emblem and a flag at its founding congress on 17 February 1990. The flag was white with the party emblem in the centre. It consisted of a white circle with a blue border. There was a blue cross with a red vertical arm merging into the letter "D" in the circle (Fig 5). The letter is an acronym for democracy. The cross as a symbol of Christianity stresses that the Christian Democrats follow the principles of Christianity. The circle stands for mutual unification of citizens who support the ideas of Christian democracy. White is a symbol of purity. White, blue and red are the Slovak national colours³.

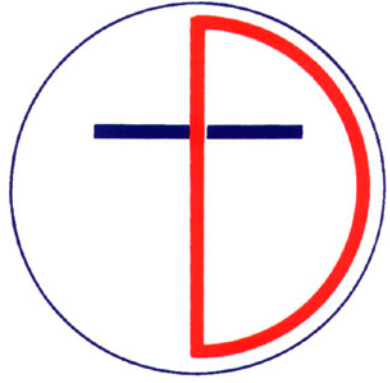


Fig. 5

Regional Moravian, Slovak nationalists and Hungarian ethnic parties were successful in their respective regions. Most of these parties used their own flags and emblems. The Movement for Autonomous Democracy – Community for Moravia and Silesia (HSD-SMS) was founded on 1 April 1990 and flies the yellow over red Moravian colours and the black over yellow Silesian colours. There is an emblem (Fig 6) in the centre of these flags. It is divided pale blue and yellow, with half of the Moravian eagle checkered in white and red in the dexter and half of the black armed eagle with a silver perisionium on its breast in the sinister. The Moravian National Party (MNS) describes its emblem in its constitution as a blue shield bearing an alighting eagle with yellow claws, checkered in white and red which is fighting a silver snake. This emblem may be placed in the middle of a white over blue flag (Fig 7). The eagle symbolises the uncompromising struggle for political, social and economic rights of the Moravian nation. The snake was originally golden. The colours of the flag are derived from banners of Moravian lords from 1611⁴. The designer of both symbols is Jiří L. Bílý, a former member of the Vexillology Club. Another Moravian regional party took part only in the 1996 elections. Its black over yellow over red flag carried an emblem (a combination of the Silesian and Moravian eagles and the acronym HSMS for the Movement of Autonomous Moravia and Silesia – Moravian National Union) in the centre. The proportions of the stripes are 1:2:1 (Fig 8).

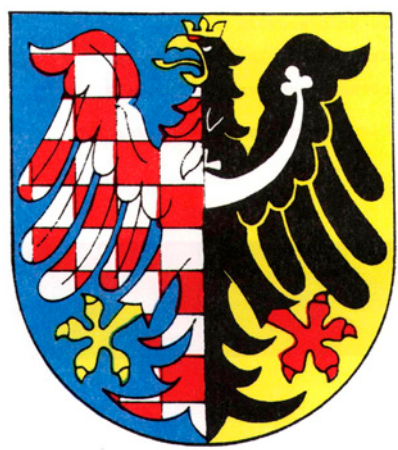


Fig. 6

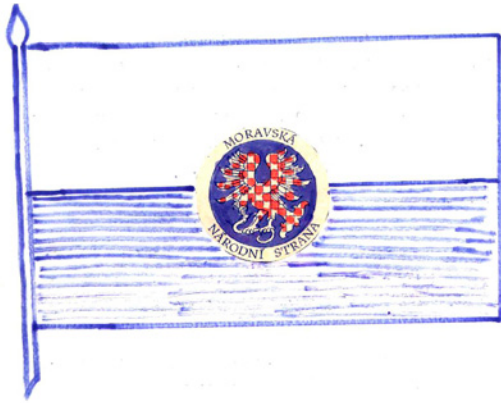


Fig. 7



Fig. 8

The strongest nationalist party in Slovakia was the Slovak National Party. It was founded in December 1989 and was registered in March 1990, when its emblem and flag were adopted. A red circle with a blue three hill group and a white patriarchal cross form the emblem designed by Milan Stano⁵. The name of the party can be read in black letters in the ring (Fig 9). The party flag consists of three stripes, white over blue over red. There is a white acronym in the middle stripe and the Slovak national arms in the upper left corner (Fig 10).



Fig. 9

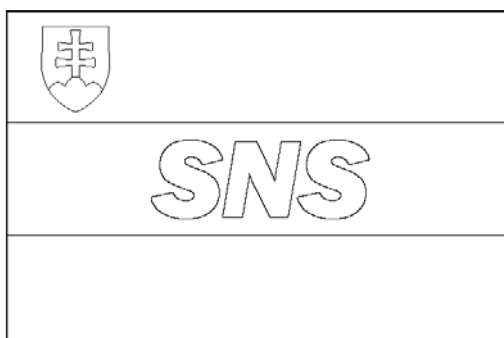


Fig. 10

A white patriarchal cross can be seen also in the circular emblem of the Slovak People's Party. The cross is partially covered by the portrait of Andrej Hlinka, a Slovak priest and politicians (1864-1938). The inscriptions in the ring contain the party motto (For God and Nation) and the party name (Fig 11). This is the only Slovak or Czech party emblem to include a portrait.



Fig. 11

The emblem of the Hungarian Civic Party can be seen as an example of a symbol of Hungarian ethnic parties. The predecessor of this party was the Hungarian Independent Initiative which used a letter "F" as the acronym of the party. A graphically simple design of a bird in green and red made by Ilona Németh in 1990 accompanied by the letter "F". When the Hungarian Civic Party changed its name on 25 January 1992, only the bird which stands for liberty was kept (Fig 12).



Fig. 12

An important landmark was the congress of the Civic Forum on 13 October 1990. It was convened to elect new leaders and approve a new program and a proposal to redefine the Civic Forum as a political party. The congress voted 175 to 126 to become a political party on 12 January 1991. The "right wing" of Klaus loyalists then formed the Civic Democratic Party (ODS in the Czech acronym) which has been a parliamentary party up to now. Its logo has changed several times. The first one drawn by Aleš Krejčí was very simple: the letters "D" and "S" inside the letter "O" (Fig 13). It followed from a competition, the designs of which were exposed in a Prague hall Aurora in June 1991⁶. The election campaign in 1992 called for a more striking logo. Petr ejdl designed a blue bird on blue narrowing stripes and a blue acronym ODS below it (Fig 14). The new logo was introduced in April 1992.

The party flag was white with the logo in the centre. The fact that the Civic Democratic Party uses a bird has evoked many jokes (Fig 15). Some were a little obscene because the Czech word for bird can also mean penis. In addition, the unusual shape of the bird caused that the chairman of the Social Democrats to refer to it as a magpie.



Fig. 13



Fig. 14



Fig. 15

In September 1996 the logo of the Civic Democratic Party was embellished with red wavy stripes narrowing to the right, so that it contained all the Czech national colours. However this modification, made just before the 1996 elections, was ridiculed by the present Minister of Culture Pavel Dostál⁷ and by vice-chairman of the Czech Communists, Vlastimil Balín⁸. They judged that the red stripes could indicate that many ODS members were former Communists. The logo was modified again

before the 1998 elections, when the wavy stripes were removed and the bird and acronym appeared in blue and yellow. A new symbolic strategy was chosen before the elections to the Senate in 2000 and a red heart appeared on the breast of the bird (Fig 16).



Fig. 16

The nonpolitical centrists of the Civic Forum formed the Civic Movement (OH in the Czech acronym) in March 1991, led by the Czech Prime Minister. Its emblem was a blue "H" on a yellow circle resembling the letter "O" (Fig 17). The Civic Movement did not pass the 5% threshold in the 1992 Czech elections and was dissolved.



Fig. 17

A third offspring of the Civic Forum was the Civic Democratic Alliance, the policy of which was similar to that of the Civic Democratic Party, and which gained some seats in the 1992 and 1996 elections. Its first logo contained the acronym, the full name, the words "the democratic right" and five broken lines resembling the American eagle (Fig 18). This ugly design was replaced by a new one adopted at the 4th conference on 16 March 1992. Its designer, Karel Haloun took advantage of the situation by which the party acronym could be expressed in simple geometric forms (Fig 19). However, the vice-chairman of the party, Daniel Kroupa, had the idea that the party must change its emblem before the 1996 elections. He introduced a white unicorn on blue (Fig 20). He explained that this mythical beast was a restless animal which could not be tamed by violence. Only a virgin can calm the unicorn who approaches her, lays its head on her knees, falls asleep and is then as tame as a lamb⁹. The change in the emblem did not prevent financial scandals within the party and the loss of support by the

public after 1997, so that the party presently has no seats in Parliament.



Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20

The corruption of the Civic Democratic Party led to its split into two parties and to the collapse of Klaus's government in November 1997. The faction that split from the Civic Democratic Party formed the Freedom Union Party on 17 January 1998, and adopted a tree as its logo on 23 January 1998. The logo was designed by the agency SENS (Fig 21). When it appeared for the first time, the inhabitants of the town of Jablonec nad Nisou complained that the tree was similar to that in their municipal arms. The leader of the party, Jan Ruml, explained that unlike the arms where an apple tree was displayed, the tree in the logo of the Freedom Union Party was a linden tree, and symbolised its conservative policy¹⁰. Thanks to it, it won 19 seats in the last parliamentary elections.



Fig. 21

The Social Democratic Party has profited from the weakened position of the Civic Democratic Party since 1996. It was second after the Civic Democratic Party in the 1996 elections and it won the 1998 elections. After negotiations about cooperation with other parliamentary parties failed, it signed an agreement with the Civic Democratic Party to be able to govern. The Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party is one of the oldest parties. It was founded in 1878 and was forced to unite with the Communist party in 1948. It was re-established immediately in November 1989 and started to use its traditional emblem, three yellow ears of corn, a blue cogwheel and yellow inscriptions (Fig 22). This emblem was replaced by a new one designed by Jiří Novotný in 1991. It was a stylised drawing of a red rose in bloom, with blue leaves (Fig 23). The entire emblem could also be in blue (Fig 24). The flag was white with the emblem in the centre. The designer received only 8,000 crowns (about £140) in 1991 for the design. When the party entered Parliament and its emblem appeared on many party souvenirs, he asked one hundred times more. The leader of the party called him a cushy jobber. The party refused to pay extra money and organised a new competition for the emblem in 1998. Petr Mohyla was the most successful of the 200 competitors. His winning design for which he received 200,000 crowns again features a red rose in bloom but less realistic¹¹. Apart from red and blue, green was added (Fig 25). The change in the emblem did not help the party to avoid paying the copyright fees to Jiří Novotný. He appealed to the court and was awarded the sum he had requested¹².



Fig. 22



Fig. 23



Fig. 24



Fig. 25

The 2002 elections in the Czech Republic will show whether the Social Democrats, the Civic Democratic Party or the Four-Party Coalition will win. The Four-Party Coalition is a good alternative for those who are disappointed by the policies of the two main political parties and do not want to vote the Communists. The Four-Party Coalition unites the Christian Democratic Union (Fig 26), the Freedom Union Party, the Civic Democratic Alliance and the Democratic Union (Fig 27). All these parties agreed on using a common emblem and on paying 20,000 crowns to the Freedom Union Party which commissioned the design of the common emblem¹³. It was introduced on 17 April 2000¹⁴ and its nickname is the "Microsoft" (Fig 28). It resembles the logo of the Windows software, as it is formed by four squares of green, yellow, red, and blue¹⁵.



Fig. 26



Fig. 27



Fig. 28

As said, the main political parties which won seats in both chambers of the Czech Parliament have used emblems more than flags. The exceptions are the Moravian parties whose flags were shown earlier, and the ultra-right party.

The extremist Republican Party (SPR-RSČ) was established in December 1989 and its symbols were adopted at the 1st ordinary congress on 24 April 1991. The emblem and flag were designed as a team and are inaccurately described in the party constitution. Article 14 deals with the party emblem and the party acronym. Article 15 says that the flag is blue with white upper and lower borders. There is an emblem in the form of a blue circle with three lozenges and an inscription "REP" in the middle of the flag (Fig 29). I have a paper flag with the stripes in 1:7:1 ratio and the complete emblem. This is described in Article 14 as a blue or white circle containing three lozenges of white, blue and red. The left side of the white lozenge and the right side of the red one are partly covered by the blue one. The acronym "REP" for the Republic is written in capitals in the emblem. The name of the Republican Party (SPR – Republikánská Strana Československa) is in a white outer ring (Fig 30). The leader of this party, Miroslav Sládek, refused to collaborate with the Civic Forum and the Public Against Violence in 1990, and the party tried unsuccessfully to get votes in alliance with an insignificant party in the same year. They profited from the votes of citizens dissatisfied with the economic and politic situation in Czechoslovakia in the following months, organised demonstrations under the party flags and gained 6.5% of the votes in both

chambers of the Federal Parliament in 1992. After the partition of Czechoslovakia, the party did not change the name, continued using the word “Československa” and attempted to preserve Czechoslovakia within the borders prior to 1938 (including Carpatho-Russia). It gained 18 seats in the parliamentary elections in 1996, but lost all of them in 1998. From the vexillological viewpoint, the regular demonstrations on 28 October commemorating the rise of free Czechoslovakia are important, as the party members and sympathisers use the party flags. The demonstration in January 1997 was seen widely in the media because the party members burned the German flag. Their charismatic leader explained this act with the words that it was the flag of Germany and not that of Czechoslovakia which flew over the concentration camps during World War II¹⁶.



Fig. 29



Fig. 30

To be complete, a little can be said also about the symbols of Slovak political parties after the division of Czechoslovakia at the end of 1992. However it is difficult to get exact information from the Czech newspapers and Czech TV, because Czech journalists rarely refer to the vexillological situation in Slovakia, and Slovak newspapers are not easy to obtain. Nevertheless, photos on the Internet show the emblem of the Democratic Party (the white letters of “DS” on blue) at several gatherings (Fig 31). The texts of constitutions (e.g. of the Party of Civil Understanding) shown on the Internet confirm that some Slovak political parties have flags, even though they are not described in the party constitutions. The flag of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), whose

leader, Vladimír Meiar, was Prime Minister 1993-1998, was even hoisted on the peak of Mount Everest in May 1998¹⁷. We can expect that the flag of HZDS contained the party emblem (Fig 32), rather over the Slovak national colours white, blue and red, than over a plain white field that is more common with Czech party flags. The flag of the Party of the Democratic Left (SDL) after it changed its name from the Communist Party of Slovakia supports this assumption. As can be seen, the upper white stripe bears the party emblem that is the acronym in Slovak national colours, partly covered by the Slovak tricolour and a red swallow. This bird symbolises spring and the transformation of the party¹⁸. A paper flag (Fig 33) with the emblem designed by the academic painter Anna Gregorova is the last in this overview. (Fig 34)



Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Fig. 34

Notes

1. J. Martykán: *Vlajky eskoslovenských spoleenských a úelových organizací*. *Vexilologie* No. 27, p. 415-425.
2. *Modrá pravice, ervená levice*. *Lidové noviny*, 25 April 1996
3. A letter to the author from the party secretariat of August 1992
4. A letter to the author from the party secretariat of 28 May 1992
5. A letter to the author from the party secretariat of 3 June 1992
6. A photo in *Lidové noviny* of 25 June 1991
7. *Zítva se bude tanit všude*. *Právo*, 9 September 1996
8. *Levicové praporky v logu ODS?* *Lidové noviny* 6 September 1996
9. *Modrá pravice, ervená levice*. *Lidové noviny*, 25 April 1996
10. *Jablonetí brání svůj strom proti Unii svobody*, *Lidové noviny*, 27 January 1998
11. *Mladá fronta dnes*, 14 December 1998
12. *ČSSD bude platit za své bývalé logo*. *Mladá fronta dnes*, 3 November 2000
13. <http://www.deu.cz/clanek.asp?ID=17&word=logo>
14. A photo in *Slovo* of 18 April 2000
15. *Mladá fronta*, 14 April 2001
16. *Lidové noviny*, 29 January 1997
17. *MF dnes*, 7 July 1998
18. A letter to the author from the party secretariat of 1 May 1992

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