

# FIRST WORLD WAR MEMORIALS IN SLOVAKIA

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*This survey focuses on Slovak cultural heritage and social memory, in particular First World War monuments in Slovakia. The description of historical circumstances provides a exemplary overview of memorials in Slovakia.*

Keywords: *First World War, Slovakia, Memorials*

*Članek se osredotoča na slovaško kulturno dediščino in družbeni spomin, zlasti na spomenike prve svetovne vojne na Slovaškem. Opisu zgodovinskih okoliščin sledi vzorčni pregled spomenikov na Slovaškem.*

Ključne besede: *prva svetovna vojna, spomenik, Slovaška*

## INTRODUCTION

In terms of geographical location and natural terrain, Slovakia was not a densely populated part of Europe in the past, and it has never been a geopolitical or geostrategic focus of historical development. However, its small and sparsely populated character on the periphery rather than at the center of action did not protect Slovakia and its residents from wars and violent conflicts. Age-old rivalries between ethnic groups and countries for hegemony in central Europe and the Carpathian Basin led to battles to control this strategic corridor, which linked Europe both east to west and north to south (Segeš et al. 2007: 5).

Wars, military operations, and campaigns related to subduing and annexing Slovakia became a frequent phenomenon of geopolitical changes reflected in all areas of life in the victorious and the defeated community. The causes for expansion into Slovakia varied greatly in history. However, the common denominator was to capture the area's human and material potential, and to control this particular geographic space.

The Slovaks have never been a large nation, illustrated by the fact that in the past and today each neighboring nation or state has always been at least twice as large as the Slovaks and Slovakia. Another historically and geopolitically determined factor is that Slovakia as a sovereign state was constituted only recently, in the twentieth century. In particular, this is why the history of Slovakia shows a long absence of its own identity. There was also a lack of military identity, despite the fact that the administrative units that the Slovaks lived in were always full of Slovak soldiers (Segeš et al. 2007: 6).

This survey focuses on Slovak cultural heritage and social memory, in particular First World War monuments in Slovakia. The description of historical circumstances provides a modest overview of memorials in Slovakia. For the first Czechoslovak Republic, I also review the existence of these historical events.

## SLOVAKIA AS PART OF AUSTRIA-HUNGARY IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The First World War was an armed conflict of global proportions, lasting from July 28th, 1914 to November 11th, 1918. At the time, it was the largest military conflict in human history, taking place largely within Europe, but also in Africa, Asia, the oceans, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

The war was of international importance, reflecting the imperialist interests of the great powers. The objective was to construct a new economic, political, and territorial division of the world. The world's great powers were divided into two opposing alliances: the Allies (based on the Triple Entente of the British Empire, France, and the Russian Empire) versus the Central Powers of Germany and the Austria-Hungary. These alliances were reorganized and expanded as more nations entered the war. Eventually, Italy, Japan, and the United States joined the Allies, and the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria joined the Central Powers.

According to Slovak historian Marián Hronský in his book *Slovensko pri zrode Československa* (Slovakia at the Birth of Czechoslovakia), directly or indirectly the war gradually involved over thirty-three countries with a population of 1.5 billion when there were approximately only 1.8 billion people in the world altogether. From the very beginning of the war, the size of the army was enormous on both sides. The Allies mobilized 9,302,000 soldiers (202 infantry division and forty-one cavalry division). In contrast, the Central Powers sent out 6,323,000 soldiers (148 infantry division and twenty-two cavalry division). Austria-Hungary had 2,300,000 armed men at the beginning of the war. By the end of the war, the number of those mobilized had increased repeatedly on both sides. The Allies mobilized a total of 44,558,000 men and the Central Powers 25,598,000. (Austro-Hungarian soldiers represented 9,000,000 of that number; Hronský 1987: 23–25).

Over time, mobilization orders sent around 400,000 men from Slovakia to the battlefields, or about one-seventh of the population. Slovak soldiers represented 4% of the Austro-Hungarian army. The army's ethnic composition was extremely varied (Germans 25%, Hungarians 23% Czechs 13%, Serbs and Croats 9%, Poles 8% Ukrainians 8%, Romanians 7%, Slovaks 4%, Slovenians 2%, and Italians 1%; Hronský 1987: 69). Slovaks were involved in practically all branches: the infantry, cavalry, artillery, specialist units, and navy. Most of them, however, were in the infantry regiments of the common army, in the Royal Hungarian Honvéd and battalion field troops.

As shown by Vladimír Segeš from the Slovak Military History Office in his book *Vojenská kronika* (Military Chronicle), in Slovakia the majority of the population was against the war. Many conscripts clearly showed their attitudes already during mobilization, and later through desertion, crossing into Russian captivity, and rebelling in the army. Slovakia was affected by direct combat during the war, first more or less only marginally and then overall for a relatively short time. This was mainly in the northeastern areas of the Carpathians, which were an important strategic points, and an Austro-Hungarian frontier zone. This is the reason why the fighting in the Carpathians was also combat on

the borders of the Austria-Hungary. In the winter and spring of 1914–1915, due to the gradual arrival of Russian troops, this region became a battleground for the armies on the Eastern Front (Segeš et al. 2007: 82). These circumstances therefore left traces in this area.

The most terrible and bloody experiences of Slovak soldiers in the Austro-Hungarian Army are linked to the Eastern Front in Halič and fighting in Italy, in particular Piave. In smaller numbers, however, Slovak soldiers were deployed on all the battlefields of the Austro-Hungarian Army and also on the Western Front. Based on information from Hronský, about 69,700 soldiers died in combat, and 61,680 were disabled. In some regions of Slovakia, the loss was catastrophic. In some areas the losses were 76% of the soldiers mobilized (Hronský 1987: 73).

In the first years of the war, the Austro-Hungarian command praised Slovak soldiers for their obedience and valor. Some Hungarian publications sought to highlight the dedication and loyalty of the Slovaks to Austria-Hungary. Over time, however, the Slovaks realized that their bravery and great sacrifices in the ever-expanding war did not yield any improvement to their ethnic and social status in the military. They began to understand that in the hands of the Hungarian and Austrian officers they had been only used to fill gaps on the front line. They were also sent to the most difficult sections of the front, where they fought for interests unrelated to them.

#### CIRCUMSTANCES PRECEDING THE FORMATION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

There was ethnic fighting against the Austro-Hungarian Empire in what is now Slovakia. During the war, the domestic political representatives of Slovaks in this territory were under the control of the Austro-Hungarian authorities, implying that their resistance movement was simply hidden. The propagators of the idea of Slovak independence and cooperation with the Czechs were therefore primarily dependent on foreign Slovaks. Together with the Czechs, they were the first to proclaim the clear need to break up the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which significantly affected national liberation and also contributed to the creation of the common state of the Czechs and Slovaks. Slovaks living abroad were most concentrated in the United States and Russia, and to some extent in France and England.

In 1914, there were about 620,000 Slovaks living in industrial centers in the eastern United States with relatively good contact with their home country. They therefore cared about positive changes to the conditions in Austria-Hungary. There were several well-organized Slovak associations and magazines in the US at that time, and thanks to the bourgeois democratic regime in the US they were more progressive in many ways than the Slovak political leaders at home. Their unifying platform, in terms of the primary objective of a constitutional solution to the Slovak issue, brought together various Slovak

organizations in United States. They were represented by the supreme organization of American Slovaks, called the Slovak League.

September 10th, 1914: under the control of Ivan Daxner, the league's officials issued the Memorandum of Grievances and Slovak Requirements, in which they called for the right to national independence and full autonomy of the Slovaks in Austria-Hungary (Hronský 1987: 76). However, this memorandum did not speak specifically about what state solution would best suit the Slovaks. Various Slovak organizations reflected the autonomy of Slovakia in the context of building a federal state. There were several suggestions: a Slovak-Hungarian, Slovak-Russian, or Slovak-Polish alliance, or the well-known option of building a common state of the Czechs and Slovaks (Hronský 1987: 77). Gradually the idea of the Czechoslovak republic won. However, there were some doubts about Czech supremacy, and also about the political and economic pressure of the larger and stronger Czech nation, regarding the possible assimilation of the Slovaks. One of the first models of the new common state for the British foreign office was created by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk. The aim of foreign resistance was fighting against Austria-Hungary and influencing public opinion and policy in the Allied countries in order to win them over to the idea of an independent Czechoslovakia.

October 22nd, 1915: the Slovak League and the Czech national association in US drew up the Cleveland Agreement, which requested that the Czechs and Slovaks join together in one common federal state with full national autonomy for Slovakia.<sup>1</sup> In February 1916, Masaryk became the head of the Foreign Resistance of the Czechoslovak National Council, which was located in Paris. This office was a de facto temporary Czechoslovak government. Milan Rastislav Štefánik was the vice-president, and Edvard Beneš received the position of secretary. The national council was involved in organizing foreign troops.

In the meantime, the situation also started becoming complicated in Russia. This created a series of revolutions in 1917 as a result of the difficult situation in Russia. For the Russian Empire, the First World War involved an enormous engagement of all forces, and so social dissatisfaction resulted in a revolution. This consisted of two different revolutions or phases: the February Revolution of 1917 (also called the Russian Revolution), and the October Revolution of 1917 (known as Great October Socialist Revolution or the Bolshevik Revolution). After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks, who were headed by Vladimir Lenin, overthrew the Provisional Government and began to fight against the opposition. To suppress the opposition, they also established a secret police force. To end the involvement of Russia in the First World War, the leaders of the Bolsheviks signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and Austria-Hungary in March 1918 (Hronský 1987: 92). Meanwhile, the Bolshevik government stood against the opposition forces, and so the Russian civil war broke out. After the October Revolution, some Slovak and Czech

<sup>1</sup> Full autonomy for Slovakia meant its own council, its own state administration, and complete cultural freedom. Under these terms, the Slovaks could use their own language as a state language (Hronský 1987: 80).

social democrats began to openly endorse the Bolshevik side. Under the influence of the Russian revolutionary circumstances, the anti-war movement and social movement for the liberation of the Czech and Slovak people became radicalized.

Especially at the beginning of 1918, under the influence of the Russian Revolution, there was a visible increase in revolutionary sentiment, and also of Slovak national consciousness in terms of the broad masses. There arose a variety of strikes, and the number of deserters increased as well. According to Hronský, in 1917 there were 452,417 deserters in Austria-Hungary. In the first quarter of 1918 there were already 193,181 and for the entire year there were about 800,000 (Hronský 1987: 179). In this context, the rebellion of Slovak returnees from Russian captivity also took place. This was one of the most radical Slovak demonstrations in the revolutionary process of 1918. It is also the only form of armed struggle by the Slovak people, and it was held in the absence of political leadership during the war. Although the individual rebellions did not grow into a significant armed struggle, they meant a lot. They implied the collapse of the ossified Austro-Hungarian army, and undermined its confidence and self-assurance. Slovak soldiers were no longer regarded as soulless material suitable for filling the front lines (Hronský 1987: 196). Army commanders began to realize that a new chapter in these events was beginning.

## CREATION OF THE CZECHOSLOVAK REPUBLIC

Before the outbreak of war, the Czech bourgeoisie did not take into account the Slovak issue as a part of their political agenda. The Czech bourgeoisie wanted to determine the borders of their own state on the basis of the natural historical principle and also as a rejection of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Equally, not only Masaryk, but also other figures from the Slovak political spectrum did not foresee the national unification of “the lands of the Czech crown” with Slovakia. The idea of unification of the state emerged after the outbreak of the war. Opinions about the connection between these two nations, despite their fraternal relationship, varied significantly. On the one hand, there was sympathy, but on the other hand there appeared a degree of antipathy. There also appeared quite a strong inclination abroad to merge the Slovaks with the Czechs. The goal was to have greater strength in confronting the Germans and the Austro-Hungarians.

In general, Slovakia had a lack of unity. During the war and especially at the end of war, the Slovak political camp overcame its deep differences of opinion. The Slovaks were lacking a higher organizational to earmark them as a separate group. The only political authority representing Slovakia in those days was Slovak National Council. In the second half of 1917 and in early 1918, some activist groups appeared in Slovak political life. The beginnings were not easy because the policy of passivity had struck deep roots in Slovakia. Slovak national officials offered insufficient support. Suspicion due to inactivity among particular groups also persisted.

Over time, Prague received the news that on June 29th, 1918 the French government had recognized the existence of the Czechoslovak National Council as the official representative of the Czechoslovak foreign resistance headquartered in Paris. On July 13th, 1918, the Czechoslovak National Committee was also established—however, paradoxically, without real Slovak participation yet. Slovakia was “represented” by Czech politicians that had the reputation of being friends of Slovakia (Hronský 1987: 265).

From the middle of October 1918, after the defeat of the Central Powers, the development of political events abroad, in the monarchy, in the Czech lands, and also in Slovakia was accelerated. In connection with the changed situation, on October 18th the chairman of the Czechoslovak National Council based in Paris, Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, declared the creation of an independent Czechoslovak Republic in Washington.

On October 30th and 31st, 1918, in Martin, Slovakia, there was a significant meeting and negotiation, which resulted in the adoption of the Declaration of the Slovak Nation. There followed a declaration, stylistically adjusted by Samuel Zoch, announcing the Slovak National Council as the only legitimate representative of the rights of the Slovak nation in Slovakia. Its main requirements were the right to self-determination and the immediate conclusion of peace. Self-determination was understood in conjunction with the term the Czech-Slovak nation, which actually endorsed the call for the creation of a common state with the Czechs. Therefore, on October 30th, 1918 in Martin, the new state of Czechoslovakia was truly created. In this regard, it is appropriate to mention that the National Committee in Prague declared the Czechoslovak state on October 28th, 1918. However, at that time the Slovak declarants did not yet know this (Hronský 1987: 289–305). Such a Slovak declaration of the common state therefore sounded like the spontaneous consent of the Slovak nation with the creation of a common state, and for the Slovaks it meant the constitutional separation of Slovakia from Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. For the Slovak side, it was a key constitutional act. This was one of the fundamental documents constituting the Czechoslovak state, which united the two brotherly nations, and especially saved the Slovaks from the threat of loss of national existence. For both nations it also created unprecedented favorable conditions for future development (Segeš et al. 2007: 85).

The complex process of creating an independent Czechoslovak state did not end with the state-building statements on October 28th in Prague and on October 30th in Martin, especially not for Slovakia. The first meeting of the National Assembly in Prague took place on November 14th, 1918. On that day, the first Czechoslovak government was established. However, this act in fact abolished the Slovak government.<sup>2</sup> Within the National Assembly, Slovak parliamentarians created the united Slovak Club, which had legislative authority in the Slovak part. Around this time, Slovakia was engulfed by a strong and unrestrained

<sup>2</sup> Based on Minister Šrobár's decree of January 23rd, 1919 all Slovak national councils and committees were dissolved, including the Central Slovak National Council in Martin (Segeš et al. 1987: 321).

revolutionary explosion because there was competition for its territory. The most significant activity was shown by the Hungarian side, which had already made claims for Slovak territory for many years. Even after the official creation of the Czechoslovak state, Hungary did not want to give up. Therefore, Slovakia once again became a battlefield and the subject of many diplomatic negotiations.

At the beginning of January 1919, Slovakia started being occupied by Czechoslovak units, domestic troops, and foreign troops. Administrative staff arrived from the Czech part of the state. On February 4th, the ministry of Vavro Šrobár moved from Žilina to Bratislava, which became the capital of the Slovak part of the country. This act, in fact, meant that all Slovakia was finally integrated into the Czechoslovak state (Hronský 1987: 320–327).

Determination of the Czechoslovak border also involved the same problems. The most serious issue was defining Slovakia's southern border with Hungary because in this area there were no solid historical or political boundaries. This was obviously the result of a difficult past, as well as the result of many years of strong Hungarization. The problem was solved by the Treaty of Trianon on June 4th, 1920 (Hronský 1987: 312, 319). Prior to this, the border was determined by individual demarcation lines as set by the victorious powers.

To conclude this section, it must be stated that, in general, the Slovak political camp never became an adequate partner to its fellow combatant, the Czech bourgeoisie. The initial existence of distinct Slovak political passivity and the advance of the Czech bourgeoisie intensified the political leadership of the Czech camp in the common state of the Czechs and Slovaks.

With the establishment of the Czechoslovak state, the domination of the stronger Czech bourgeoisie started to crystallize explicitly. This created a clear tendency not to recognize Slovak national independence. There was an expression of political and ideological oppression of the Slovak nation by the ruling Czech side. Despite these circumstances, the establishment of Czechoslovakia needs to be assessed as substantial historical progress (Hronský 1987: 329). In comparison with previous historical circumstances, it was a major step forward and resulted in changes in the international conditions of Slovak national existence, and also saved the Slovak nation from the threat of Hungarization.

## FIRST WORLD WAR MEMORIALS IN SLOVAKIA

Several memorials to fallen soldiers were created in Slovakia to commemorate the bloody events of the First World War. In the words of Juraj Babják from the Military History Office of Slovakia, despite the fact that these memorials are the most widespread monuments in Slovakia, in the past this phenomenon received relatively little attention (Babják 2014a: 21). Here I present some additional information about them.

The initial First World War monuments were the products of patriotic activities and nationalistically oriented individuals, and were created in the first years of the war. In

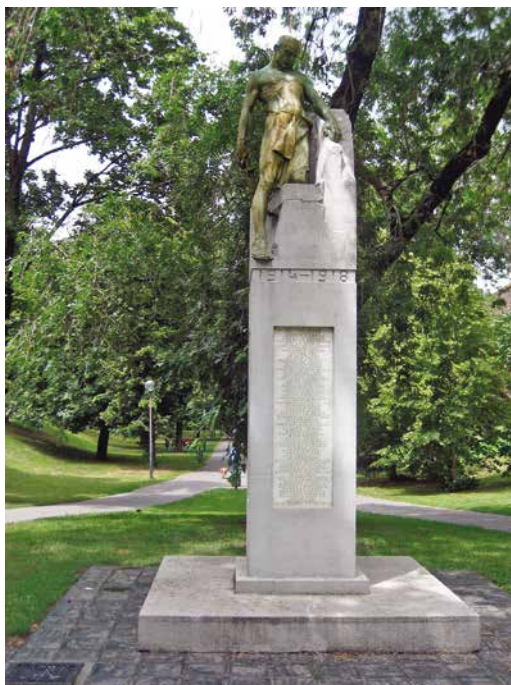
addition to individuals, there were also various organizations working in favor of commemorating the fallen soldiers. For instance, in 1915 (in Slovakia) the HEMOB (National Committee for Immortalized Monuments of Heroes) was established. Activity was also undertaken by the War Press Tent (Babják 2014b: 79).

In 1917, a new act was adopted in the former Austria-Hungary. In line with this act, all municipalities were required to build monuments to commemorate the fallen (depending on the financial means of the particular villages). The impulse to create memorials during the first Czechoslovak Republic was based on grassroots initiatives, mainly expressed by broad masses of the population. Although this involved honoring those that fell in the Austro-Hungarian army, the Czechoslovak state could not entirely ignore this particular process. Therefore, the leaders of the state participated in dedicating new memorials, and there were also public competitions for memorial designs organized by the state. The aim was an effort to uphold the artistic level of the memorials (Babják 2014a: 80).

According to the Slovak historian and art critic Ľuba Belohradská, as cited in Juraj Babják's study "Autori pomníkov padlým v prvej svetovej vojne" (Creators of First World War Memorials), during the interwar period there were some Slovak sculptors creating memorials; however, artistically, these memorials were inadequate. Several sculptures and the statues that were part of them were simply unbalanced in terms of proportions and their composition, standing halfway between naive and high art. These artists also experimented a little with the approved style, with typical motives of mourning soldiers (Babják 2014a: 21). However, when building a memorial funded by collections from ordinary donors, they could not fully develop their creativity and the artistic side of work. Presumably, this was the reason why they gave preference to previously validated forms and solutions. According to Belohradská, the memorials dedicated to the fallen are (mostly) not artistically valuable outdoor objects; however, this does not detract from their importance in the eyes of ordinary Slovak people (Babják 2014a: 21).

One of the first sculptors to address the issue of the memorials was Ján Koniarek (1878–1952). According to him, he had not wished to do such work. Although he did not shun it, this work was poorly paid, and in particular was unable to satisfy his artistic ambitions. One of the artist's most important works is undoubtedly the monument in Trnava, the city where he lived and worked from 1921 onward. "The bronze statue of the fallen," as the sculptor called it, is the most artistically valuable First World War sculpture in Slovakia, according to some critics. It looks unusually supratemporal. Although the man is not shown in uniform, one can easily understand that it is a theme with a military atmosphere, thanks to the posture and expression of his body. In the domestic Slovak context, the material used is also unusual. The bronze sculpture was cast by the Frant Anýž company in Prague. Despite its clear artistic quality, the memorial seems quite undersized due to its location. Once again, the main reason was a lack of finances (Babják 2014a: 21).





Figures 1 and 2: Bronze First World War memorial in Trnava

1. Photo by Peter Zelizňák; Access: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trnava\\_pamatnik\\_padlym\\_v\\_prvej\\_svetovej\\_vojne.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Trnava_pamatnik_padlym_v_prvej_svetovej_vojne.jpg)

2. Photo by Bc. Samuel "koba" Jablonka, Photo taken: 01.10.2006; Access: [https://www.vets.cz/vpm/foto/mista/normal/slovenska-republika/trnavsky-kraj/trnava/trnava-3646/11770\\_2111-001-trnava1-sr.jpg](https://www.vets.cz/vpm/foto/mista/normal/slovenska-republika/trnavsky-kraj/trnava/trnava-3646/11770_2111-001-trnava1-sr.jpg)

## MEMORIAL ON MURMANN HILL, BRATISLAVA

Another important Slovak sculptor that devoted himself to creating memorials was Alojz Rigele (1879–1940). Most of his works can be found in Bratislava, where he more or less spent all of his productive life. Rigele was connected with the upper class of Bratislava's society, which gave him the unofficial status of the “town sculptor.” After the First World War, he was among the minority (Hungarian) artists, which paradoxically brought him enough work. His first monument was even created during the war (Babják 2014a: 22). One of his most important works is the monument on Murmann Hill (Slovak: *Murmanská výšina* or *Murmannova výšina*).

Murmann Hill rises above the city of Bratislava, near the well-known Slavín memorial.<sup>3</sup> The street is called French Partisan Street (*Ulica Francúzskych partizánov*). This place is not named after Murmansk in Russia, but after a wealthy family that these lands previously belonged to.

The memorial on Murmann Hill is a simple tomb surrounded by four lions on the corners with the inscription “1914 ✠ 1918.” The creators of the monument were a pair of well-known local architects, Franz Wimmer and Andrej Szönyi. The bodies of the lions were carved by the sculptor Alojz Rigele. He used solid granite from the base of a former sculpture of Maria Theresa. The memorial was unveiled in 1927. This sarcophagus is symbolic. It contains a metal box with a charter and hymns to the fallen heroes written by Dora Wimmer, the sister of Franz Wimmer (Vyčislík 1974: 105). Pursuant to Babják study, it is the only granite memorial in Slovakia. According to the personal recollections of the stonemason Alexander Mahra, work on this statue was very difficult because the hard granite quickly wore out the chisels. However, Rigele worked patiently and he was also able to make new tools by himself (Babják 2014a: 22).

In Bratislava, there is an association<sup>4</sup> called the Devin Gate, the aim of which is to commemorate the forgotten anniversary of the First World War. For decades, an ecumenical religious ceremony has been held on the eve of anniversary with the participation of the Honor Guard of the Armed Forces, military music, and representatives of the diplomatic corps, city districts, and civic associations (Tomčík 2006).

Another example shows the monument marked by youthful vandalism: there is graffiti sprayed on it.

<sup>3</sup> Slavín is a monument and military cemetery in Bratislava. It is the burial place of thousands of Soviet soldiers that fell during the Second World War while liberating the city in April 1945 from the German units and the remaining Slovak troops that supported the clerical fascist Tiso government. It stands on a hill in a wealthy neighborhood of detached houses and embassy residences close to the center of Bratislava (Zilincan 2016).

<sup>4</sup> There is also the Association for Military Memorial Sites, which maps military places of commemoration and the fates of the heroes and victims of the wars in the former Czechoslovakia and abroad. For more information, see Rypáček (2014).

## CONCLUSION

Slovakia has a relatively large number of First World War memorials. In terms of iconography, motives of piety dominate, combined with figures of fallen soldiers and also memorial columns. However, according to Babják, it is difficult to determine the exact number of such monuments. There is no list or summary mapping all of the monuments. Only a few have been registered, around sixty. For a few particular reasons, the exact number of monuments cannot be determined. Several monuments do not correspond to their original purposes, or do not form a space for presenting historical memory. Another complication is the sometimes quite eccentric location of the memorials, which makes them difficult to inventory. Other memorials were simply destroyed or not maintained, and so they stopped “functioning” as monuments (Babják 2014b: 82).

In the framework of the nationwide localization of monuments, Babják notes that the First World War memorials in Slovakia are not distributed uniformly. There are some areas or regions that are richer in the number of the memorials, whereas others are poorer. In general, Babják’s conclusion is that the number of memorials decreases from west to east in Slovakia. In some Slovak towns, instead of memorials commemorative plaques were installed, or entire military cemeteries.<sup>5</sup>

The most First World War memorials are located in western Slovakia. There are some areas or districts that are even oversaturated with monuments. According to Babják, the greater number of memorials in the western part of the country is related to the increased national awareness of Slovaks and Hungarians living in this part of Slovakia. Especially in ethnically mixed areas, the construction of the monuments was understood as sign or display of power (Babják 2014b: 83).

Based on the study by Babják, First World War memorials are mainly associated with smaller rural environments. The anonymous urban environment did not make it possible to honor the personal memory of the fallen. The most frequent location of a memorial in rural places was definitely near the church<sup>6</sup> and its surroundings. Less common locations of memorials were crossroads (in small villages), squares, spaces in front of the local administrative offices, schools, small parks, main streets, and other locations (Babják 2014b: 87).

A very important part of the memorial is also the inscription. The inscription on the monument was related to efforts by the residents or the artists to create some sense or

<sup>5</sup> As an example, there are thirty-four First World War military cemeteries near the town of Snina, and seven of them in Medzilaborce. The overall incidence of the memorials in eastern Slovakia is linked to several factors. In particular, in 1914 and 1915 eastern Slovakia was directly affected by the fighting in the First World War, and the Russian army occupied several eastern towns. This immediacy of war (even after 1915) probably resulted in attention being more focused on building military cemeteries in this particular part of Slovakia (Babják 2014b: 82).

<sup>6</sup> The symbolism of a location near a church reflects the importance of the perception of the memorials because the church environment could create an intimate atmosphere (Babják 2014b: 86).



Figure 3: Monument on Murmann Hill

3. Photo by Peter Zelizňák. Access: [https://sk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomn%C3%ADk\\_padl%C3%BDm\\_v\\_1.\\_svetovej\\_vojne#/media/File:Bratislava\\_ulica\\_francuzskych\\_partizanov.jpg](https://sk.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pomn%C3%ADk_padl%C3%BDm_v_1._svetovej_vojne#/media/File:Bratislava_ulica_francuzskych_partizanov.jpg)

guide a general impression. The inscriptions mostly express mourning, and are sometimes pathetic. In some cases, however, the inscription could change the overall understanding of the monument, and so it formed an essential means of expression (Babják 2014b: 88).

In any case, to maintain the existence and the positive condition of the memorials is an important part of the historical memory of the nation. It is a substantial form of remembering the souls of the warriors, sons, brothers, and fathers of Slovak families that were forced to leave their loved ones and were senselessly drafted during the Austro-Hungarian period.

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## SPOMENIKI PRVE SVETOVNE VOJNE NA SLOVAŠKEM

*Raziskava se osredinja na slovaško kulturno dediščino in družbeni spomin, zlasti na spomenike prve svetovne vojne na Slovaškem. 22. oktobra 1915: Slovaška liga in češko nacionalno združenje v ZDA sta pripravila Clevelandski sporazum, ki je zahteval, da se Čehi in Slovaki združujejo v eni skupni zvezni državi s polno nacionalno avtonomijo za Slovaško. Sledila je deklaracija, ki jo je slogovno prilagodil Samuel Zoch in napovedal slovaški nacionalni svet kot edinega legitimnega predstavnika pravic slovaškega naroda na Slovaškem. Slovaška izjava o skupni državi je tako zvenela kot spontano soglasje slovaškega naroda o oblikovanju skupne države, za Slovake pa je pomenila ustavno ločitev Slovaške od avstro-ogrske monarhije. Slovaški parlamentarci so v okviru Državnega zbora ustanovili združeni slovaški klub, ki je bil zakonodajni organ v slovaškem delu. Prvotni obstoj ločene slovaške politične pasivnosti in napredek češke buržoazije sta okrepila politično vodstvo češkega taborišča v skupni državi Čehov in Slovakov.*

*V primerjavi s prejšnjimi zgodovinskimi okoliščinami je bil to velik korak in povzročil spremembe v mednarodnih okoliščinah slovaškega nacionalnega obstoja, prav tako pa je slovaški narod rešil pred grožnjo madžarizacije. Po slovaškem zgodovinarju in likovni kritiki Lubi Belohradská, kot je navedeno v študiji Juraja Babjaka "Autori pomnikov padlým v prvem svetovnem vojni", so v medvojnem obdobju nekateri slovaški kiparji ustvarjali spomenike, vendar so bili v teh umetniških delih spomini nezadostni.*

*Po Babjaku je večje število spomenikov v zahodnem delu države povezano z močnejšo nacionalno zavestjo Slovakov in Madžarov, ki živijo v tem delu Slovaške.*

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