

Gbúrová, Marcela: Slavdom in Europe, Europe in Slavdom. A Vision of The “Modernization of Slavs by Štefan Launer. Lambert Academic Publishing. Saarbrücken, Deutschland. 115 pages. ISBN 978-3-659-71462-7.

An open debate in public started in Slovakia after the year 1989 in the layman, political, and professional communities on the sensitive topics of the Slovak national past. One of the dominant themes included the Slovak-Hungarian coexistence in the 19th century, especially at the time following the so-called Austro-hungarian or Austro-Hungarian Settlement in the year 1867, which brought the Slovaks a decade of violent Magyarization and national oppression. The attention of the professional community focused on the defensive nation-forming strategy of the Slovak personalities of the Slovak national movement who in the politically harsh conditions tried to address the Slovak issue in two ways. Leaders of the dominant conservative cultural and political mainstream of the Štúr's generation (particularly Ľudovít Štúr) were encouraging the Herderian ethno-language--cultural model of the nation, where the individual is shaped by a particular language-cultural community, in which this community was part of the diverse and pluralist human whole. Based on the political reality of historic Hungary, they claimed that the best form of the relation between the national and the State (civil) principles was the civil unity of the population. The unity can be achieved by constantly improving their national, civil, and political status. The aim of that political streaming was to remove all the obstacles and misunderstandings in the inter-ethnic communications, including the politically current issue of promoting the ideas of dominance “of one nationality and one language” on the territory of historic Hungary. The leaders of the other political mainstream (especially Ján Palárik and Štefan Launer) were convinced that by engaging in the contemporaneous (especially historic-Hungarian) political liberal currents and debates they would help solve the Slovak issue, alongside with the Hungarian Liberals, in a constitutional way within the framework of the historic-Hungarian constitutionalism. The political and ideological positions of the representatives of these political currents having been gaining in their sharp lines could not go without disputes, which were of a more personal rather than scholarly nature.

For the author of the reviewed book, Marcela Gbúrová, the dispute on the nature of the modernization of the Slovak society in the 19th century was the starting point for a more detailed examination of the liberal line of Slovak politics, which started to be formed in that very dispute with the conservative political mainstream of the Štúr's generation. It should be noted here that the author has

for long been engaged in the Slovak political thinking from the historical point of view. She devoted special research on the personalities of three generations of Slovak politics in the 19th century. From among the authors of the “Slavic” generation, who tried to make a self-reflection of the Slovak nation as a nation-forming entity via the Slavic whole, she created politically conceived portraits of Pavol Jozef Šafárik and Ján Kollár. From among the Slovak cultural and political figures of the Romantic Generation, she was mostly attracted by the authors of the pragmatic line (Ľudovít Štúr, Jonáš Záborský, Štefan Marko Daxner), the Messianistic line (Michal Miloslav Hodža, Samo Bohdan Hroboň, Peter Kellner-Hostinský, Pavol Hečko), and the liberal line (Ján Palárik, Štefan Launer, Ondrej Lanštiak, Andrej Seberíny), and the authors of the third post-Romantic period (Milan Hodža, Svetozár HurbanVajanský, Vavro Šrobár, Ján Malý Dusarov, Pavol Blaho), to whom she devoted several studies and two monographic works (*Dotyky s politikou*, 2002; *Between the National and the Civil. Slovak Experience*, 2004).

We encounter the issue of political liberalism, its ideological dimension and political practice, in the Slovak public and political milieu and professional reflection by political science especially after the year 1989. Not only that plurality of political thought was not being developed in the period of socialism in Slovakia, but liberalism and liberal democracy were tabooed theory and political projects that were not being discussed in the public. They were in stark contrast with the principles of the socialist political and economic theory. From the events in November 1989, the ideas of various streams of Western political philosophy got into the awareness of the civil society in Slovakia. From among them, the ideas and values of conservatism, social democracy, and liberalism became the most prominent in the Slovak party system. Liberal democracy has raised considerable interest of intellectuals, professionals in the field of political science, history, and sociology, the politicians and civil public. Currently, the values and principles of liberal democracy have put down the roots in the political and social life in Slovakia, although it should be emphasized that they are not the dominant current in party-political environment. This position of the liberal democratic platform resulted from a variety of circumstances, in particular from the fact that liberalism had not had the type of tradition in the Slovak political thinking and practice as Christianity- or social-oriented political parties have had.

The formation personality of the Slovak political liberalism was a Catholic priest, Ján Palárik (1822-1870). His Christian-liberal concept of solutions to the Slovak issues progressive from the perspective of political science, corresponding with modernisation trends in the historic Hungarian society, but

in the contemporaneous historic-Hungarian and Slovak political situation within them, it was only viable in particulars. The liberal conception of politics, political work, civil rights, relationship between freedom and constitutionalism, as well as his active and authentic participation in the management of the affairs of the Church and in the formation of modern Slovak and Slavic national identity, did not encounter a favourable response from the representatives of the so-called Old Slovak School. A similar fate also marked the political visionary activities of Štefan Launer (1821-1851), who intervened in the complicated process of the Slovak national identification in the 1840s. In her book, Marcela Gbúrová builds on the existing knowledge of him, in particular on the studies by Rudolf Chmel and Tibor Pichler, and she exploited them more deeply in a number of ways. She presented his detailed biography, and what should be particularly appreciated is the analysis of the links between Launer's life story, in which the dominant role was played by his Protestant religion, and his advocacy of Luther's Reformation and Protestantism, and the history of his native Slovak town of Krupina. Some poems from the end of Launer's study at the Lutheran Lyceum in Bratislava have been preserved, which he wrote in the vein of Classicistic -Romantic poetry. The authoress of the book, who revealed them, assesses the ideational value of the volume of poems and notes that Launer presented himself through them as a man of critical dialogical communication and the author of future reflections on the Slavic future. It is well known of Launer that he radically declined the language reform of the Štúr group. He considered the reform a gross distortion of the State (historic Hungarian) and national (Czechoslovak) integration. In this context, M. Gbúrová closes this issue by making an important statement that Launer took advantage of the complicated situation of looking for the most appropriate solution to the language issue of Slovaks in historic Hungary to make his education visible. On the other hand, it should be noted that he used his intellectual traits to formulate his principal stance on the concept of cultural modernization of Slovaks, which, according to him, was not to be based on language nationalism, but on taking over the contemporaneous civilizational standards through one or several of the dominating nations. He called the time in which he lived Western European, and claimed that it consisted of four dominant nations with their cultures. He did not include the Slavs among them, but noted that they can achieve it, if they adopt their civilizational level. He developed his own visionary ethno-emancipation theory, which he presented in his most famous work in the year 1847, *Povaha Slovanstva, se zvláštním ohledem na spisovný řeč Čechů, Moravanů, Slezáků a Slováků* (On the nature of the Slavs with a special regard to the literary language of Moravians, Silezians, Czechs, and Slovaks). M. Gbúrová devotes considerable interpretative attention to this book. In her

opinion, the essence of his concept consisted in the fact that he had set up the routing of the cultural-political modernity in Europe from its western part to the eastern part, while “entrusting” the world-historical initiative to the four Western-European nations (the Italians, the French, the Englishmen, the Germans), which by their levels of education and the spirit are to revive the Slavic world. The authoress of the book after her deliberations is of the opinion that Launer, regrettably only theoretically, contributed by this theory to the political- liberal solution of resolving the process going on in the context of modernisation of the multilingual historic Hungary.

The book by Marcela Gbúrová, which was published in the famous German publishing house in the English version, brings not only to the Slovak readers a portrait professionally well crafted from the perspective of political science of the main opponent to Štúr’s conservative idea of modernization of Slovakia in the 1840s. Her research findings on Launer’s ideational alternatives of resolving the cultural-civilizational development of the Slavs and the political and civil modernisation of historic Hungarian in politically demanding times are beneficial not only for the specialists engaged in the study of the above issues, but also for the history of the Slovak and Central European political thought in the 1840s.

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