



Nebojša R. Kuzmanović^[1]

Archives of Vojvodina
Novi Sad (Serbia)

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Editorial

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Serbs and Slovaks: from Tatra Mountains to Gračanica!

Ties between Serbs and Slovaks are specific in many ways. First of all, they are ancient: their origins can and should be sought in the shared Slavic homeland and followed through the early meanderings of migrations and the battles on the borders which seem to be Slavic historical destiny. In addition, they lasting, permanent ties, and as such not a relic of the past, a proof of former connection, but a live force, a bloodstream that connects the two organisms to this day, regardless of the fact that the passage of time, thanks to the borders of great empires, initially split them into two, then three, faiths that, each in their own way, shaped the understanding of the world, themselves in history, and consequently, shaped the paths along which the two peoples took to meet their own destiny.

The ties that bind Serbs and Slovaks do not require vow renewals. They were never violated nor defaced, seeing as there had not been a historical moment in which the Slovak state did not know how to properly determine itself towards the Serbs, their fate and aspirations. What is perhaps most important is that there has never been a moment in which the

Slovak people behaved in a manner unworthy of their shared destiny. For us, this fact is all the more significant because it is possible that, at times of historical turbulence, a state authority may emerge which, enchanted by “lofty” ideas, false values, or simply corrupted through betrayal, becomes self-absorbed and detached from the national spirit, severing all ties with its own roots and veering into dark corridors (at least we Serbs know what that looks like). In such moments, the national spirit arises, as a warning, as a bulwark, and as a guide. The Slovak people and the Slovak state have never reached such a divergence, at least when it comes to their relationship with the Serbs (as for others, we leave it to our Slovak brothers to resolve themselves).

Due to all this, Serbian-Slovak ties exist even when invisible. When people do not talk about them, sing about them, when people do not “beat the drums” about the closeness of the two peoples. They are unaffected by our recollection of them. They are implied, and the days when we live this truth are its best confirmation. Serbia has as good of a relationship with very few states as it does

[1] kuzmanovic62@gmail.com; <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9486-8523>

with Slovakia, and no country populated by Slavic peoples is so strongly oriented toward the Serbs. No country represents a Slavic people in whom the Serbs find a safer harbour and support (if we set aside the derivative connection between the Serbs and the Russians, and what arises from those ties, which are often irrational, elusive, and thus resemble an expression of almost boyish infatuation).

Or maybe the lack of that “boyish infatuation” is precisely what makes Serbo-Slovak ties everlasting. For all of us who have ever been in love (or still are) know that in that state of mind, we frequently overlook the actual problem, just as we are prone to finding one where it is not present. In that disconnect, our love expands and contracts, in grows and then falls, it blurs and enlightens, it becomes crystal clear and unattainable, burdened by apprehension about how the other person will infer our gesture, willingness, intentions...

Everything aforementioned is not present in Serbo-Slovak relations. Yet, this does not mean that our relations are mathematically calculated, icy, boiled down to who will earn more, who will profit, who will accomplish a short-term goal. On the contrary! Our relations mirror those of a stable couple which tested its infatuation against rational, external challenges, a logic that is not ours but with which we are forced to fight. From it, we came out closer than before, aware that possible differences do not serve to shake our stability but as an instigator for mutual communication, a call to reconnect and speak once more, recognizing that we each walk our own path, master our own fate, and hold the power of our own redemption.

The writings before you are but a modest contribution to a conversation that has endured for

centuries. They offer an overview of the interwoven destinies of Serbs and Slovaks, revealing a common denominator; not hidden, but manifest that defines who we are: brothers whose shared spirit originates in the Tatras, soars above the Pannonian Plain, and, like a whirlwind, sweeps across Avala toward the heights of Lovćen and the Dinaric Alps, descends to the rolling Adriatic, and finds its ultimate home in Kosovo and Metohija.

These works further illuminate the musical ties between Serbs and Slovaks. This thematic issue reveals that Vojvodina was once home to Viliam Figuš-Bystrý, the composer of *Detvan* — the first Slovak opera — as well as Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský. The latter was a prominent choirmaster who, during the years of the struggle for full Serbian national emancipation, successfully directed the “Beseda” Serbian Church Choral Society in Veliki Bečkerek.

By reading these lines, we may also learn that the first Slovak Sokol Society was founded in Srem, in Stara Pazova, and that the Slovak Sokol members were the only ones who, without any difficulty, joined the newly formed South Slavic Sokol organization in 1919–1920. We may also learn that modern Serbian–Slovak relations were established primarily through literature, through which, thanks to Kollár, Šafárik, Štúr, Vuk, Njegoš, Branko, Matica srpska, and Matica slovenská, Serbs and Slovaks first recognized one another and then came to know each other more closely. That, inspired first by Štúr and later by his disciple Miletić, they fought together as revolutionaries against Magyarization, as well as volunteers of the Great War on fronts stretching from Russia, through France, to Thessaloniki... and that, ultimately, they perished together while resisting Germanization and total extermination in the war from 1941 to 1945.

And yet, all those lines are nothing but just one in a line among many manifest expressions of the deeper, spiritual ties between the two Slavic people, ties that endure precisely insofar as the spirit itself is greater and more enduring than anything that is self-defined by physical matter. For if matter depends on time (and thus comes into being, grows, decays, and ultimately disintegrates into final disappearance), the spirit remains beyond time, beyond geography, as their origin, as a guiding force, a direction that, in times of the disintegration of matter indicates the path to be taken in the process of constructing a new one.

Today, that idea, as an expression of a shared spirit, is being realized by Serbs and Slovaks in the cultural sphere, through cooperation between *Matica slovenská*, *Matica srpska*, and the Archives of Vojvodina, in the realm of memory culture, through efforts to restore the monument erected in 1928 in Stara Pazova in honour of Serbs and Slovaks, heroes of the Great War, and finally, in the political sphere, through the strong ties between the Republic of

Serbia and the Republic of Slovakia, primarily thanks to the fraternal relations between the Slovak Prime Minister and the Serbian President.

Finally and equally importantly, Serbia exceptionally appreciates the fact that Slovakia has never recognized the so-called "independence" of the fake state of Kosovo. That is why even today as throughout all these centuries, those fraternal ties are built by Serbs and Slovaks, the "ordinary" people, workers and peasants, who, by traveling from one country to another, socializing, marrying, singing and grieving together, and meeting at Gazimestan, in Gračanica and Dečani, demonstrate that everything great achieved in the life of a nation is grounded in "small" connections and "small" aspirations, which are steadfastly pursued despite all possible trials, not because they bring any short-term benefit, but because they express the truth that the only true path is the one to which the soul and the heart call you.

For Serbs and Slovaks, this is a path traversed in a firm embrace!



Bratislava and Belgrade
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