

The
SLOVAK-POLISH
BORDER, 1918-47

MARCEL JESENSKÝ



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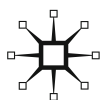
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Marcel Jesenský

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*To aunt Lenka, the
woman who put my feet on a path of learning
and to my wife Zuzana,
the woman who sustains me on this path.*

*In loving memory of
Ján Jerga and Zuzana Jergová*

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Preface

This book is the outcome of an effort to compound my various interests: diplomacy, international relations, and Central Europe during the interwar period. It is the most complete study to date in the English language on the delimitation of the Slovak–Polish border after the World War I. What is more, it deals with a historically neglected but important element of the relations between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland, and Slovakia and Poland – the Orava and Spiš questions.

The 1919 Paris Peace Conference was a pivotal historical event of the twentieth century. The Conference prepared the peace treaties with Germany, Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, and Turkey, and sanctioned the borders of postwar Europe. The Conference made decisions about the borders of Czecho-Slovakia and Poland, two allied countries in Central Europe. The Tešín question, the border between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland in Tešín Silesia, a region of high economic value, strategic importance, and with a predominantly Polish population, became an apple of discord. While the Tešín question dominated the border delimitation and the relations between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland, the Orava and Spiš questions and the delimitation of the Slovak–Polish border received much less political and scholarly attention.

This work examines the delimitation of the Slovak–Polish border in the interwar period and the impact of the cession of parts of the Slovak districts in Orava and Spiš to Poland on the relations between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland, and Slovakia and Poland. The Peace Conference diplomacy linked the destiny of Orava and Spiš with that of the Tešín region, in a protracted dispute, which left a bitter legacy for the mutual relations of the Slovaks, Czechs, and Poles. The Orava and Spiš border delimitations in the Slovak–Polish border, and their consequences for Slovak–Czech–Polish relations, remain largely neglected by scholars in the English and French historiographies. Fully aware of the complexity of the issues under consideration, this work attempts to make a small contribution towards filling an existing gap in historiography.

The conventional understanding of the border delimitation between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland can be summed up in three main propositions. First, the economic imperatives of Czecho-Slovakia and Poland made Tešín Silesia vitally important. Second, its strategic location made Tešín Silesia vitally important, in particular to Czecho-Slovakia, to

safeguard the Bohumín–Košice railway link. Third, a large Polish majority made Tešín Silesia a politically sensitive issue. These propositions dictated a *realpolitik* approach to foreign policy and national security.

Understanding and explaining the Orava and Spiš border delimitations in the Slovak–Polish border and their consequences for Slovak–Czech–Polish relations requires us to go beyond the analytic lens focused on the Tešín question or the narratives found in most of the available literature on the subject. While the existing narratives of the border settlement are important and still relevant, they only offer partial accounts of the question. Relying on previously unused documents primarily from the diplomatic archives in Paris, Prague, and Warsaw, this work, by extending the line of analysis beyond the “narrative of Tešín” found in most available accounts of the Orava and Spiš border delimitations, will help to bring academic analysis closer to a more balanced and comprehensive view.

The Orava and Spiš border delimitations play an important role in understanding Slovak–Polish–Czech relations and international relations in the interwar and post-World War II periods. The questions posed by examining the Orava and Spiš border delimitations are as relevant in Schengen Europe as they were almost a century ago.

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The officials and staff of the Archives of the Foreign Ministries in Bratislava and Prague, the Diplomatic Archives (Archives diplomatiques) in Paris (La Courneuve), the National Archives in Bratislava, Prague and Washington, D.C., the Archives of Modern Records (Archiwum Akt Nowych) in Warsaw, the Central Military Archives (Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe) in Warsaw, the University Library of the Comenius University in Bratislava, the National Library in Prague, the T. G. Masaryk Institute Archives in Prague, the Archives of the President's Office in Prague, and Library and Archives Canada in Ottawa – all helped me with research, shared their experience, or located sources.

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This book is dedicated to my family. Regretfully, words are insufficient to express my love and gratitude to members of my family, both past and present. Zuzana, my wife and a superb reference librarian, took part in this project in every way, finding books, accompanying me on trips and assisting with research. I am greatly indebted to my family in Betliar for their unceasing support. Responsibility for any shortcomings in this book rests solely with me.

List of Abbreviations

AAN	Archiwum Akt Nowych, Warsaw
AD/MAE	Archives diplomatique, Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Paris
AMZV	Archiv Ministerstva zahraničních věcí, Prague
AOBM	Dokumenty z historie československé politiky 1939–43, Acta Occupationis Bohemiae et Moraviae (Prague, 1966)
APIP	Archiwum polityczne Ignacego Paderewskiego (Warszawa-Wrocław, 1973–74)
CAW, TB	Centralne Archiwum Wojskowe w Rembertowie, Teki Baczyńskiego
CSPC 39–44	CzechoSlovak–Polish Negotiations of the Establishment of Confederation and Alliance, 1939–44 (Prague, 1995)
CSPL 44–48	Dokumenty a materiály k dějinám československo–polských vztahů v letech 1944–48 (Prague, 1985)
CSPMK	Československo na pařížské mírové konferenci 1918–20, sv. I (listopad 1918 – červen 1919) (Prague, 2001)
CSSO 45–48	ČSR a SSSR 1945–1948. Dokumenty mezinárodních jednání (Prague, 1996)
CSZP-18	Vznik Československa 1918. Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky (Prague, 1994)
CSZP-38	Dokumenty československé zahraniční politiky. Československá zahraniční politika v roce 1938 (Prague, 2000–01)
DBFP	Documents on British Foreign Policy
DCER	Documents on Canadian External Relations
DDF	Documents diplomatiques français
DGFP	Documents on German Foreign Policy
FRUS	Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States
HEB	Listy důvěrné. Vzájemná korespondence Hany a Edvarda Benešových (Prague, 1996)

MBPPC	Masaryk a Beneš ve svých dopisech z doby Pařížských mírových jednání v roce 1919 (Prague, 1994)
PCIJ	Permanent Court of International Justice, Publications
PPC	Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, the Paris Peace Conference, 1919
PWW	Papers of Woodrow Wilson
SFVE	Sovetskij faktor v Vostochnoj Evrope 1944–53, 2 vols (Moscow, 2002)
SPCS 18–39	Stosunki polsko–czesko–słowackie w latach 1918–39 (Rzeszów, 1994)

Place Names

Polish	Slovak	Polish	Slovak
SPISZ	SPIŠ	ORAWA	ORAVA
Czarna Góra	Čierna Hora	Bukowina-Podszkle	Bukovina-Podsklie
Dursztyn	Durštín	Dolna Lipnica	Nižná Lipnica
Falsztyn	Falštín	Dolna Zubrzyca	Nižná Zubrica
Frydman	Fridman	Górna Lipnica	Horná Lipnica
Jurgów	Jurgov	Górna Zubrzyca	Horná Zubrica
Kacwin	Kacvín	Harkabuz	Harkabúz
Krempak	Krempach	Chyżne	Chyžné
Łapszanka	Lapšanka	Jabłonka	Jablonka
Łapsze Niżne	Nižné Lapše	Orawka	Orávka
Łapsze Wyżne	Vyšné Lapše	Piekielnik	Pekelník
Niedzica	Nedeca	Podwilk	Podvilk
Nowa Biała	Nová Belá	Sernie	Srnie
Trybsz	Tribš	Jaworzyna	Javorina

Slovak, Czech, and Polish Pronunciation Guide

á	long a, as in awful
ą	o, as in French <i>bon</i>
ä	wide e, as in sad
ć	ch, as in child
č	ch, as in child
ch	kh, as in loch
ď	soft d, as the du in duty
ě	soft e, as in yet
ę	e, as in French <i>main</i>
é	long e, as in eagle
í	long i, as in peel
ǐ	long l (no English equivalent)
ł	soft l (no English equivalent)
ł	o, as in one
ń	soft n, as the ni in opinion
ñ	soft n, as the ni in opinion
ó	long o, as in more
ř	approximately the tr in true
rz	zh, as the s in treasure
ś	sh, as in shop
š	sh, as in shop
sz	sh, as in shop
ș	sh, as in shop
ť	soft t, as the tu in Tuesday
ů	short u, as in hook
ú	long u, as in tool
ý	long i, as in feel

ž	zh, as the s in treasure
ž	zh, as the s in treasure
ż	zh, as the s in treasure

Chronology of the Main Events

828	Consecration of the first church in Nitra (Slovakia)
833–907	Great Moravia (Slovakia and Central Europe)
863	Saints Cyril and Methodius (Slovakia and Central Europe)
966	Mieszko I baptized (Poland)
1000	St. Stephen crowned (Kingdom of Hungary)
15 March 1412	King Sigismund of Luxemburg mortgaged Stará L'ubovňa, Podolíneč, Hniezdne, and the 13 Spiš towns to Władysław II Jagiełło
1412–1769	Polish administration of the mortgaged territory
1769	Austrian annexation of the mortgaged territory
1772, 1793, 1795	Partitions of Poland
1867	Compromise (Ausgleich) (Austria-Hungary)
1867–1918	Austro–Magyar dualism (Austria-Hungary)
1910	Hungarian census
1912	Pamphlet Co my za jedni a kielo nas jest na Węgrzech
28 Oct 1918	Národní výbor in Prague proclaims independence (Czecho-Slovakia)
28 Oct 1918	Polska Komisja Likwidacyjna formed in Cracow (Poland)
30 Oct 1918	Slovenská národná rada in Turčiansky Svätý Martin declares itself in favor of a union between Slovakia and the Czechs Lands (Czecho-Slovakia)
5 Nov 1918	Partition agreement for Tešín Silesia concluded
11 Nov 1918	Regency Council appoints Józef Piłsudski Commander-in-Chief

- 14 Nov 1918 Regency Council hands over all power to Piłsudski
- 24 Dec 1918 Local delimitation agreement for Spiš signed in Poprad
- 31 Dec 1918 Local delimitation agreement for Orava signed in Chyžné
- 10 Jan 1919 Statute for the governmental administrative commission for Galicia, Tešín Silesia, Upper Orava, and Upper Spiš approved in Warsaw
- 18 Jan 1919 Paris Peace Conference (PPC) starts
- 23–30/31 Jan 1919 “Seven Day War” in Tešín Silesia (Czecho-Slovakia and Poland)
- 26 Jan 1919 Parliamentary elections in Poland
- Feb 1919 Czecho-Slovakia and Poland present their territorial demands at the PPC
- April 1919 F. Machay, P. Borowy, and A. Halczyn meet with President Wilson
- 28 June 1919 Versailles Treaty signed
- 22–28 July 1919 Cracow negotiations (Czecho-Slovakia and Poland)
- 10 Sept 1919 Treaty of St. Germain signed
- 19 Sept 1919 A. Hlinka, F. Jehlička, J. Rudinský, Š. Mnoheľ, and J. Kubala arrive in Paris
- 27 Sept 1919 Peace Conference orders plebiscite in Orava and Spiš (and Tešín Silesia)
- Jan 1920 The Conference of Ambassadors established
- 5 April 1920 French troops occupy the plebiscite areas of Orava and Spiš
- 6 May 1920 the International Subcommittee for Orava and Spiš designated
- 10 July 1920 Spa Agreement (Edvard Beneš and Władysław Grabski)
- 28 July 1920 Spa Arbitration assigns Upper Orava and Upper Spiš to Poland
- 10 Aug 1920 Treaty of Sèvres signed

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 8 March 1921 | Poland proposes territorial swaps in Orava and Spiš |
| 23 April 1921 | Delimitation commission adopts territorial swap in Orava |
| 6 Nov 1921 | Beneš–Skirmunt Pact (Czecho-Slovakia and Poland) |
| 6 Dec 1923 | Advisory opinion of the Permanent Court of International Justice (Javorina) |
| 6 May 1924 | Czecho-Slovakia and Poland sign the Cracow Protocol |
| 23 April 1925 | Czecho-Slovakia and Poland sign a series of treaties in Warsaw |
| May 1926 | Marshall Piłsudski inaugurates the Sanacja régime in Poland |
| 26 Jan 1934 | Non-Aggression Pact between Poland and Germany |
| 16 May 1935 | Treaty of Alliance between Czecho-Slovakia and the Soviet Union |
| 21 Sept 1938 | President Beneš proposes to President Moscicki rectification of the border |
| 29–30 Sept 1938 | Munich Agreement between Germany, Britain, France, and Italy |
| 30 Sept 1938 | Poland issues a 24-hour ultimatum to Czecho-Slovakia (Tešín Silesia) |
| 1 Oct 1938 | Czecho-Slovakia accepts the ultimatum |
| 6 Oct 1938 | Žilina Declaration |
| 8 Oct 1938 | Memorandum of Prof. Władysław Semkowicz (Kysuce, Orava, and Spiš) |
| 30 Nov 1938 | Zakopane Agreement (Kysuce, Orava, and Spiš) |
| 23 Aug 1939 | Soviet–German Pact |
| 14 March 1939 | Slovakia declares independence |
| 15 March 1939 | Bohemia and Moravia occupied by the Germans (the Protectorate) |
| 23 March 1939 | Treaty of Protection (Schutzvertrag) (Germany and Slovakia) |

- | | |
|-----------------|---|
| 1 Sept 1939 | Slovakia participates in the invasion of Poland alongside Germany |
| 26 Nov 1939 | German–Slovak Border Treaty |
| 12 Dec 1939 | Slovak parliament ratifies the Border Treaty |
| 11 Nov 1940 | Declaration on the Czecho-Slovak–Polish confederation |
| 18 July 1941 | the Soviet Union and Britain accord full recognition to the Czecho-Slovak provisional government and establish diplomatic relations |
| Dec 1943 | Treaty of Friendship between Czecho-Slovakia and the Soviet Union |
| 30 Jan 1945 | Czecho-Slovakia recognizes the Polish Provisional Government |
| 5 May 1945 | Czecho-Slovak government adopts the pre-Munich borders in Orava and Spiš |
| 20 May 1945 | Trstená Protocol transfers Upper Orava and Upper Spiš to Poland |
| 15 June 1945 | Poland presents an ultimatum to solve the Tešín issue |
| 25–30 June 1945 | Czecho-Slovakia and Poland negotiate in Moscow |
| 29 June 1945 | Czecho-Slovakia cedes the Subcarpathian Ukraine to the Soviet Union |
| 10 March 1947 | Treaty of Friendship between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland signed |

1

Introduction: Rethinking Teschen, Orava, and Spiš, 1918–47

On 28 July 1920 the Conference of Ambassadors decided to cut in two the regions of Orava and Spiš and to allocate their upper parts to Poland.¹ It was widely assumed that they were incorporated into Poland as a compensation for allocating predominantly Polish areas in the former Duchy of Teschen² to Czecho-Slovakia³ and were a result of a gross misapprehension that the local population was purely Polish.⁴ The Czecho-Slovak government did not recognize these districts as Polish, but in fact was quite ready to abandon some parts to Poland to facilitate a settlement with the Polish government.⁵

In *The Abandoned Ones: The Tragic Story of Slovakia's Spis and Orava Regions, 1919–1948*, Irene Matasovsky Matuschak wrote, “Today, students can find little reference to this subject in books, and when they do, it is usually an addendum about the Tešín compromise.”⁶ One way of addressing this shortfall in the literature on the Slovak–Polish border in Orava and Spiš is to examine the border delimitation between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland after World War I from the perspective of its Slovak-Polish part. The present work examines the effects of the Paris Peace Conference border settlement on the regions of Orava and Spiš in Slovakia. The purpose of this study is to illustrate how Orava and Spiš were affected by higher diplomacy and by Czecho-Slovakia’s and Poland’s priorities in the border settlement and to assess the impact of Orava and Spiš on the relations between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland.

The Slovak–Polish border is formed by the crest of the central Carpathians and resembles a natural barrier. This border had been remarkably stable (with the exception of a small territory in Spiš) until the twentieth century and divided the Polish lands from Slovak territory within the bounds of the Kingdom of Hungary.⁷ This border was accepted in 1918–19 as the natural frontier between Czecho-Slovakia

and Poland. Orava and Spiš were two small “teacups,” two exceptions, which became a source of controversy between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland after World War I.⁸

Overwhelmingly peaceful relations among the Slovaks, Czechs, and Poles foster a certain sense of belonging to a common Central European cultural heritage forming an integral and dynamic part of a larger European heritage (see Map 1). These peaceful relations support a view that cooperation and friendship prevail over discord and misunderstanding in Slovak–Czech–Polish relations.⁹ Newly available archival materials and societal changes invite scholars to contemplate new perspectives on Slovak–Czech–Polish relations that, in this sense of mutual understanding and belonging, inspire a frank exchange of views on topics previously deemed too polemical to debate. Few topics are capable of being more controversial than border delimitation and everything related to it. Border delimitation, with its related territorial claims and the assessment of roles certain persons played in it, establishes what we may call a “borderland polemic.”

In the Slovak–Czech–Polish circumstances, this “borderland polemic” is a legacy of post-World War I border delimitations in the regions of Tešín,



Map 1 Central Europe in 2014

Orava, Spiš, and the village of Javorina.¹⁰ In a bilateral Slovak-Polish context, this “borderland polemic” comes to the forefront from time to time, and with variable emotional impact, to which the evaluation of the historical legacy of Józef Kuraś,¹¹ the memory of Michal Dočolomanský,¹² or a relatively obscure act of vandalism on the eve of the World Cup soccer qualifying match in 2010 between Slovakia and Poland all attest.¹³

The Slovak–Polish border and its delimitation became an issue after World War I when Czecho-Slovakia and Poland sought international recognition of their political and territorial presence in Central Europe. The delimitation and recognition of this border started as a relatively minor and secondary issue on the bilateral border delimitation agenda between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland. The border question rose in status when it was put on the multilateral international agenda at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference and the 1920 Conference of Ambassadors. In the early 1920s, a relatively obscure and minuscule village of Javorina became a very enduring point of discord between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland that successfully blocked their eventual rapprochement. Javorina and its surroundings on the Slovak–Polish borderland attained their share of international limelight as the Permanent Court of International Justice in The Hague weighed in on a dispute between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland and cut the proverbial Gordian knot.

Evidently the delimitation of the Slovak–Polish border was a part of the larger problem of border delimitations between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland. These delimitations focused primarily on Tešín Silesia due to economic, strategic, transportation, and ethnic considerations. Whereas the Czech–Polish border jigsaw concentrated on one larger and ethnically complex territory (Tešín Silesia), the Slovak–Polish border puzzle revolved around the smaller and ethnically less complex regions of Spiš, Orava, and initially also the Kysuce region adjoining the town of Čadca.¹⁴

The regions of Spiš and Orava failed to earn the kind of attention given to Tešín Silesia. The Slovak–Polish borderland, in comparison with Tešín Silesia, was scarcely populated and deemed economically less important. The question of what criteria to apply in order to pass a sensible judgment on the importance of regions open to dispute necessarily invites criticism. But it would be fair to argue that from a perspective of the Czecho-Slovak government the importance of disputed regions in Spiš and Orava came a distant second to the region of Tešín Silesia. The population of the Spiš and Orava regions waged and lost an uneven fight with Tešín Silesia for the hearts and minds of Czecho-Slovakia and in international fora as well.

The 1919 Paris Peace Conference inaugurated in international relations a new concept of national self-determination. The term “national self-determination” emerged in World War I, but the principle, the nation’s right to freely determine its political status and freely pursue its development, has been around for some time. In December 1917 and January 1918, the Allies – for their own pragmatic and ideological reasons – defined their war aims, and from this context emerged announcements by Russian, British, and American statesmen. The Russian Provisional Government identified itself unequivocally with national self-determination as a war aim in 1917 and the Bolsheviks extended the principle to the whole world. The Russian situation formed the chief *raison d’être* of Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points speech on 8 January 1918. By the 1919 Paris Peace Conference Wilson,¹⁵ whose name has been fully associated with the concept since his speech, had come to believe that it was his and the United States’ moral duty to promote national self-determination.¹⁶

As a manifestation of political idealism, the Conference advanced, albeit selectively and carefully, the idea that each nation should freely dispose of its own fate, if necessary in its own state. The concept of national self-determination was a very attractive and effective foreign policy tool. The Marxist leader in Russia Vladimir Ilyitch Lenin and US President Woodrow Wilson became the two most outspoken advocates of national self-determination during and after World War I. In 1919, at the Paris Peace Conference, the nations of Austria-Hungary and Central Europe expected to transform their national self-determination hopes into the reality of their own statehood. Inescapably, the national self-determination programs of neighboring nations “overlapped” in their territorial designs. Thus, political idealism – embodied in the principle of national self-determination – collided with political realism, the so-called *realpolitik*, incarnated in economic, strategic, military, and foreign policy considerations and the local balance of power.

Border delimitations between Czecho-Slovakia and Poland acquired very rapidly all the attributes of *realpolitik* arm-twisting. The two allies failed to resolve their borders by themselves and consented to accepting the decision of the Paris Peace Conference. The Conference assumed its responsibility over the settlement in order to avoid any further escalation of smoldering conflict. The Conference decided in September of 1919 upon a plebiscite in Tešín Silesia, Orava, and Spiš, a vote by the local population to trace the borders. The plebiscite of the local population in the disputed areas symbolized the principle of national self-determination in its purest form, and if applied correctly it could have been the most just