The Memory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in Slovakia

- A project about the memory of communism in the public sphere of Bratislava, Slovakia

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After 41 years of totalitarian rule under the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic, the first free election was held in 1990. However, 13 years had to pass before Slovakia began an institutionalised transitional justice. Today the Institute for National Memory and the memorial Gate of Freedom are the only official elements of a transitional justice in the capital, Bratislava. This project analyses with theory of memory politics and specific focus on usages of history, how the memory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic is visualised in Bratislava and furthermore, the impact it has on the vergangenheitsbewältigung – to come to terms with the past.
# List of Content

1. Field of Research ................................................................................................................................. 3
   1.2. Research Question .......................................................................................................................... 5

2. Theory .................................................................................................................................................. 6
   2.2. Transitional Justice .......................................................................................................................... 6
   2.1. Political Collective Memory ........................................................................................................... 7
   2.3. Operationalisation of Theory .......................................................................................................... 8

3. The Memory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic ............................................................................. 10
   3.1. The Repression during the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic .......................................................... 10
   3.2. Transitional Justice and Vergangenheitsbewältigung? ................................................................. 12
      3.2.1. The Process of Transitional Justice .......................................................................................... 12
      3.2.2. The Institute for National Memory ......................................................................................... 16
      3.2.3. Brána Slobody – The Gate of Freedom Memorial ...................................................................... 18

4. Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 19

5. Further Perspectives ............................................................................................................................... 20

6. Bibliography .......................................................................................................................................... 21

7. Appendix ............................................................................................................................................... 23
   Appendix 1 ........................................................................................................................................... 23
   Appendix 2 ........................................................................................................................................... 24
1. Field of Research

Slovakia is placed as the land flowing with milk and honey in between Czech Republic and Poland to the north, Ukraine to the east, Hungary to the south and Austria to the west. Through history, this geographic location has entailed the dominance of empires and monarchies as many as the amount of bureaucrats during the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. (Shepherd 2000:12-13,134)

After World War II, the communist came to power in 1948 with one of the strongest democratic mandates in a free election. Due to democratic freedom in the aftermath of the World War, the communists had managed slowly to gain control over the apparatus of state power, including police and security forces and by the 1948 elections: “[the] Democracy was dead and non-communists would be excluded from power for the next 40 years.” (Shepherd 2000:23) Furthermore, with the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (CSSR) joining the Warsaw Pact in 1955 the population's political influence was out of reach.

The repression

The repression forced by the CSSR from 1948 and up in the 1950’s is not comparable with the brutality of Stalinist Russia in the same period. However, CSSR was efficient organised and reproduced from Stalin’s Russia; authority mandate to the security police, harassment, imprisonment in labour camps, torture, and killings of opponents. (Shepherd 2000:23)

After the initiative of Socialism with a Human Face and the Prague Spring in 1968 president Alexander Dubcek was removed from power and replaced by Gustav Husak. Husak was directly appointed by Moscow to reinforce order. The policy to characterise the period almost until the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 was named the normalisation, and comprised an overall control by the communist party and subtler forms of repression to be used to keep ordinary people in line. For example, the threat of losing jobs or taking children's opportunity to go to university away, were blackmails that forced passivity. (Shepherd 2000:30-31)

The independence

The start of the ending of CSSR was with a student demonstration 17 November 1989. The Velvet Revolution, which ended the rule of communism, was without any killings and 29
December 1989 Vaclav Havel was announced as the first non-communist president in 41 years. (Shepherd 2000:36-37)

With the Velvet Revolution, the CSSR disintegrated and an intense discussion emerged about what to name the country. Especially the Slovak side did not see themselves equally represented in the name; Czechoslovakia. However, with discussions as this something more substantial was reflected in the relationship between the two people of the Czech and Slovak Republic. (Shepherd 2000:36-37,137)

Through a longer process, the two prime ministers of the republics, Vladimir Meciar (Slovak) and Vaclav Klaus (Czech) accomplished the peaceful so-called velvet-divorce in July 1992, and finally Slovakia achieved its independence 1 January 1993\(^1\). This was a shift in history for the country of Slovakia from being a republic dominated by various regimes to be an independent nation-state. (Shepherd 2000:127)

Nevertheless, the process of independence in Slovakia was more challenging than in the Czech Republic. Tangible issues such as the capital of CSSR, Prague continued as capital of Czech Republic, whereas Bratislava as a republican capital had to upgrade to the new source of political power illustrates, how Slovakia had widespread development issues before accomplishing its independence de facto. (Shepherd 2000:135)

The challenge after decades of being a republic in Prague-dominated Czechoslovakia (1918-1938) and CSSR was not only the transformation from a communist totalitarian regime to democracy, plan economy to capitalism, but also the building of the nation-state; Slovakia. (Shepherd 2000:4,135)

These challenges are to a certain extend dealt with in today’s Slovakia, and a process of collective narratives to unify the Slovak citizens under the roof of the nation-state Slovakia is still ongoing. Politically, emphasis is put on the political development the country has achieved. Especially what the country achieved after, what they themselves acknowledge as the dark years of Slovakia, with Meciar as prime minister in 1992-1998. (Kraske&Puhl 2005) Meciar undermined the democratic development, which meant Slovakia was not a part of the NATO enlargement in 1999 with the three other countries in the region; Poland, Czech

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\(^1\) Slovakia was independent from Czech Republic 1938-1945 however, as a puppet regime of Nazi-Germany. (Shepherd 2000:4)
Republic, and Hungary. Furthermore, Slovakia was questioned whether the country actually was ready to become an EU member state with the great enlargement in 2004. (Sniegon 2013:119) The country was ready, and now the country is in the core of the EU and the only country in the region, which is also a part of the Euro-zone. (Terenzani – Stanková 2014)

However, the political focus in storytelling of the nation-state Slovakia in post 1993 makes me wonder, how the period 1948-1989 is remembered in the collective memory of the Slovak people?

The term from memory politics, *vergangenheitsbewältigung* is describing the process of dealing with the past in order to be able to move on. This process consists of various methods, one of them being the visibility of the past in the public sphere. I wonder how Slovakia’s past in the CSSR is visible in the public sphere of the capital Bratislava today as a way to collectively process the decades of the totalitarian regime CSSR.

Thus, with the perspective of vergangenheitsbewältigung from memory politics and the history of Slovakia in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic following report answers:

**1.2. Research Question**

*How is the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic remembered in the public sphere of Bratislava? And what influence does it have on the process of vergangenheitsbewältigung for the country?*

**Clarification of Research Question**

With the formulation *remembered in the public sphere of Bratislava* I mean two concrete things. The first is the Institute for National Memory in Bratislava, because the institution is open for Slovaks who wish to see their own or deceased relatives’ files of the State Security (StB). This is in addition to the published investigation the institute provides about former collaborators and persons who worked for the regime, e.g. the list of collaborators. Besides the Institute for National Memory, the memorial, Brána Slobody, The Gate of Freedom is the second element of the formulation *public sphere of Bratislava.*
2. Theory

In following section the theory, which will be used to shed light on how the visualisation of the collective memory of CSSR in the public sphere of Bratislava is influencing the process of vergangenheitsbewältigung for the country, is presented.

2.2. Transitional Justice

As mentioned in the Field of Research, the process of vergangenheitsbewältigung consists of several tools with the common good of creating transitional justice. Transitional justice is understood as: “... the conception of justice associated with periods of political change, characterized by legal responses to confront the wrongdoings of repressive predecessor regimes.” This also means that transitional justice becomes a part of nation-state building and the democratisation. (Teitel 2003:69,77-78)

Truth Commissions and Symbolic Acknowledgement

Of the several tools to create transitional justice, this section will have a specific focus on truth commissions. These are official institution created by national governments to investigate and prove human rights abuses within a specific period of time defined by the government. By this investigation, documentation and final reports, these truth commissions provide a truth telling of the former totalitarian regime's victims, repression, etc., which can give the society a “moral satisfaction for struggling in the past, by disclosing unlawful practices of oppressive forces”. (Sniegon 2013:98)

Moreover, this truth telling that a truth commission facilitates also promotes scholars to research in the former regime, contributes to young and future generations’ democratic education, and advance a reintegration of victims and perpetrators in the society. (Sniegon 2013:98, Shaw&Waldorf 2010:10)

Secondly, focus will be on symbolic acknowledgement of abuses of the past regime by monuments, museums, commemorations, etc, as the symbolism in the public sphere also is interpreted as a part of the truth telling. Hence, together with truth commissions, symbolic acknowledgement are two out of several truth and justice pathways. (Riesenfeld 2008:24-25)

Lustration and Political Justice
A used method in the process of transitional justice in post-communist European countries has been lustration. The concept of *lustration* is to implement screening laws to promote administrative purges of persons from the former regime from the state apparatus. Through the work of truth commissions/institutions investigations in the background of employees and their relationship they had with the former regime, especially the secret police, has been a method to “free” public life from people who worked for the former regime. In the light of democratisation, this is a crucial factor to re-establish trust in the state apparatus. (Kunicova & Nalepa 2006:4,6)

In lustration laws three parameters characterise the differences among these. 1) who are the targeted persons? 2) What activities should persons be screened for? 3) What sanction should the targeted person receive for the uncovered activity? (Kunicova & Nalepa 2006:9)

Besides lustration to “clean” the state apparatus for persons who worked for the former regime, political justice is another tool in the re-establishment of trust and justice. Lustration laws sometimes overlap with political justice in the sense that persons with a background in the former regime can be rejected to run for elections on several levels (national, regional), or to get seats in committees etc. (Kunicova & Nalepa 2006:9) Moreover, political justice describes the proceedings, which are held to try crimes that are committed by the former regime. These crimes are often concerning political repression, economic corruption or other activities that have social consequences. The proceedings of these crimes do not necessarily end in punishment, but also provides economic or other symbolic compensation to the victims of the crimes. (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2001:218-219)

### 2.1. Political Collective Memory

Collective memory in this project is not understood as concerning the past and history, but as the link between the past, present and future. People’s present situation in combination with memories and experiences from history creates a historical consciousness that has an impact on people’s expectations and fears to the future. (Sniegon 2013:99)

Hence, the truth telling about the crimes committed by the totalitarian regime creates a collective memory, which provides justice and a process of democratisation in the present and future. (Lanegran 2005:111,116)
The political collective memory is characterised by institutionalised and centralised collective memory from a top-down initiative on society. This is in contrary to ‘bottom-up’ collective memory, which consists of collective values, symbols, rites and traditions. Political collective memory is dependent on the political organisation that institutes it. (Sniegon 2013:99)

**Usage of History**

Approaching collective memory as a historical consciousness puts the focus on how history is produced more than, how the history is received. Three types of uses of history then become relevant: ideological, moral and scholarly-scientific. Ideological use of history is connected to power and legitimacy by exploiting the history. Relevant contexts from the history are created to legitimise and justify the positions of power. Therefore, problems and mistakes in the history are ignored or toned down to achieve this legit power position. (Sniegon 2013:100)

The moral history usage concerns questions of right and wrong in history. By activating history to a moral-political power, it is possible to include unnoticed or suppressed history to the political-cultural agenda. A time of radical change or political liberalisation is necessary to have a moral usage of history. (Sniegon 2013:100)

The scientific use of history is focused on what is true and false in the understanding of the history. It is scientific because it is based on theoretical-analytical studies within the discipline of history. (Sniegon 2013:100)

**2.3. Operationalisation of Theory**

In the following analysis, the outlined theory above will analyse the process of transitional justice in Slovakia. This will be with specific focus on the usages of history in the law on national memory from 2002. The outcome of law was the establishment of the Institute for National Memory, which will also be analysed with the usage of history approaches to be able to elaborate the processes behind the visualisation of the memory of the CSSR. Finally the Brána Slobody is included as the only memorial in Bratislava and how the symbolic acknowledgement is lacking how transitional justice is processing in Slovakia with specific focus on the truth commission/institution the Institute for National Memory and the symbolic acknowledgement by the memorial Brána Slobody. Thus, in combination with concepts of
usage of history the processes behind the visualisation of the memory of CSSR in the public sphere of Bratislava are elaborated to answer how these influence the transitional justice and vergangenheitsbewältigung for the Slovakia.
3. The Memory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

In the following section, a brief historical overview of the repression doing the CSSR will be presented. This is because I understand the comprehensive repression in CSSR by the State Security (StB), as a part of the reason behind the lack and delay of the transitional justice in Slovakia. The section Transition Justice and Vergangenheitsbewältigung? analyses further the process of the Institute for National Memory and the importance of Brána Slobody in the public sphere of Bratislava to promote a transitional justice and the vergangenheitsbewältigung.

3.1. The Repression during the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic

Looking at the repression of the Czechoslovak people during the CSSR, the history can be divided into several subgroups. As mentioned in the section Field of Research, the regime used in the 1950's strong direct violence with imprisonment, labour camps and killings of opponents to the CSSR. After the reformist period of Alexander Dubcek's socialism with a human face, culminating with the Czechoslovak Spring and intervention by the Warszawa Pact in August 1968, the policy to characterise the CSSR until 1989 was the normalisation. (Shepherd 2000:23-33)

The repression towards the population doing the policy of normalisation was not to compare with the 1950’s however, especially the intellectuals came in the spotlight of StB in the period after 1968. The reason behind was the progressive ideas about socialist economy, society and democracy that had driven the Czechoslovak Spring. These ideas and the research were made and promoted by the intellectuals, and according to Moscow these ideas had affected the uprising in a much more dangerous way than the uprising in Budapest in 1956. This despite no one was killed in Czechoslovakia in contrary to Budapest. Therefore, the intellectuals were blamed and became the main target. “They [Moscow] had to come to the conclusion that the dangers from the ideological nature of the Czechoslovak experiment were far more significant that the gunfire in Budapest had been. It therefore ruled out in advance any mercy towards the purveyors and authors of the dangerous ideas in question, that is, the Czechoslovak intelligentsia.” (Simecka 1984:73-75) The intellectuals were, among others, media-employees, academics; mainly social and political scientist and historians but also natural scientists.
Furthermore, civil engineers, primary and secondary school teachers, civil servants, and others who could influence the public, young generations and colleagues. However, this definition of influential people was broadly interpreted and people with no such abilities were still removed from their posts. Political revenge influenced these decisions. The process of the StB when they had persons suspected for having a part in 1968 uprising, was first professionally exclusion by losing the right to publish, preform theatres, etc. and finally they lost their jobs. Even funerals of prominent figures from the 1968 uprising were forbidden to attend. (Simecka 1984:76)

The rule of law was in the same period opaque. For example, it was not forbidden to appeal to the authorities or to write complaints however, people went to prison for doing it. Despite it was not illegal to associate with persecuted intellectuals StB approached such association as subversion. (Simecka 1984:76)

The method by the StB can be characterised as effective civilised violence, because it had a broad scope for the persecuted intellectuals. They could keep their apartments and cars, no one really experienced third degree treatment, in some cases exile was allowed to seek. Thus, the repression or violence was not brutal as seen in the 1950’s, but intelligent because the result was the same as in the 1950’s: passivity and silence. (Simecka 1984:78-79)

The extreme surveillance of the Czechoslovak population was comprehensive, as the case was in all communist European countries. In 1990 the Ministry of Interior of Czechoslovakia listed 140.000 people in relation to the StB – 70.000 people marked as “candidates for collaboration” and the rest were assumed collaborators. In total 1 % of the population were connected with the StB in Czechoslovakia. (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2001:223-224)

Despite the pressure from anti-communist groups concerning removing former pro-regime employers from administration etc. these demands were not met with great public support, and in general for the de-communisation in Central and Eastern Europe was that hardly any communist leaders were convicted. (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2000:219)

Hence, the way CSSR kept its people in line was by civilised violence through a net of people from every social class in society who worked for and collaborated with the StB. With the democratic transformation after 1989, Slovakia had to promote justice for the victims of the repression and re-establish trust in the state to further the democratisation. However,
concerning establishing a truth commission and introduce lustration laws to promote transitional justice, Slovakia began as the last country of the countries in the region (Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary) in 2002 (Kunicova&Nalepa 2006:1), which will be elaborated in the next section.

3.2. Transitional Justice and Vergangenheitsbewältigung?
As mentioned above, the following section will analyse the transitional justice process in Slovakia to answer the question of how CSSR is remembered in public sphere of Bratislava and how this way of remembering CSSR influences the vergangenheitsbewältigung for the country.

3.2.1. The Process of Transitional Justice
General for Central and Eastern Europe was the pointing out of the secret police as the scapegoats from the former communist regimes. This was no exception in de-communisation of the Czechoslovakia. The feelings of betrayal, rage, and humiliation in people when they were to discover the net of collaborators made the StB an obvious scapegoat. The size of the institution and the extent of collaborators who were ordinary people; colleagues, neighbours, friends and family members made these collaborators more to blame than the officials who recruited them or the leaders that actually used the information. Moreover, the targeting of one group responsible for the repression was also a political method of removing blame from the politicians and the population. (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2001:223-224)

As a way to punish the former collaborators and members of the StB, the Czechoslovak federal parliament passed the Lustration Law in 1991. According to the law, people from five kinds of positions within the former CSSR were to be removed from elected or high-ranking offices. (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2001:225-226)

These were: 1) agents and collaborators of the StB, which were around 70,000 people. 2) leaders of The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSC) in the period 1948-1989 (except the years 1968-69) at the central or district level. 3) Members of the paramilitary organisation Working Militia, which were around 100,000 people. 4) Anyone who had studied at the high-level police school in the Soviet Union or KGB agents in CSSR. 5) Members of the Action
Committee of the National Front, which were the 15 people responsible for the coup d’état in 1948. (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2001:226)

However, despite the agreement that all federal laws from Czechoslovakia should be implemented in each republic after the *velvet divorce*, the Lustration Law was never implemented in Slovakia as a lustration agency was never proposed by the executive or voted in by the legislature powers. (Kunicova&Nalepa 2006:4,14)

The lack of political will was missing in Slovakia. The Prime Minister Meciar, was a former communist and leader of the party Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS). He was also accused of have being a spy for the StB and his party was mainly a party of former communists. None of these had an interest in lustration laws. (Nedelsky 2004:89-90) However, the political will to start a transitional justice did not change immediately after Meciar’s government lost elections in 1998 either.

Neither was there political will to start prosecution of former leaders of the CSSR in contrary to the neighbour country, Czech Republic. However, in this case Slovakia had focused more on compensation to victims of abuse from the StB than on prosecutions (Nedelsky 2004:79). Thus, Slovakia had started a process of political justice however, not by prosecutions.

After Meciar lost elections in 1998, a new collation government came to power and started a new discussion of lustration laws, however likewise without impact on opening of files and defining who, what and how about former workers and collaborators for the StB. However, a push came with the prospect of EU membership. Slovakia now had to promote a process of transitional justice to move closer a membership, which was expressed by the Prime Minister Mikulas Dzurinda: “*We either dedicate ourselves to the level of unemployment and the [EU] integration process, or we contribute to the further polarisation of our society.*” (Kunicova&Nalepa 2006:4-5,20-21, Sniegon 2013:119)

**The Law on National Memory**

In 2002, the process of transitional justice finally became institutionalised after 13 years had passed since the fall of communism, when the National Council passed the *Law on National Memory*. However, the law did not put up any legal sanctions against the people who had worked or were collaborators with the StB, nor it did not have the mandate to prevent them from running or remaining in public offices. (Kunicova&Nalepa 2006:4-5)
Thus, the process of cleaning the state apparatus for persons who worked or collaborated with the StB to re-establish trust in the new democracy was not enforced with the law on national memory in the sense of sanctioning the targeted persons (cf. *Theory: Transitional Justice*). Comparing with the lustration law from 1991, which was enforced in Czech Republic, more than 400,000 certificates has been issued in the period 1991-2001. Of the total 3,2 % of them indicated that the person had had one of the above-mentioned five positions in CSSR with the consequences of no possibility of getting a higher position in the state apparatus. In 2001 2,5 % of the certificates indicated above mentioned. (Nedelsky 2004:76) However, there are no numbers of how many actually had to leave their job. (Gonzalez-Enriquez 2001:226)

Looking at the law on national memory from the perspective of a scientific usual of history, the law would be a result of theoretical-analytical studies, which clarified the true and false understanding of the past and StB. Thereby who the persons were and what activities these persons had done would be defined through acknowledged methods within the studies of the discipline of history from the Institute for National Memory. Reading the history with the scientific glasses of historians, the law on national memory defines truth and false in the history of whom the workers and collaborators were in the StB. As the numbers indicates above, many persons were connected to the StB, and even more in the periphery. For example, journalists who wrote state propaganda in the national newspapers, would they also be characterised as collaborators? According to the law on national memory through the perspective of scientific usual of history, the answer would be no. Nuances are not considered in this perspective but solely the scientific reading of history and the law is therefore an expression of what is true and false in the understanding of the StB and the network of collaborators. However, the lack of nuances in the individual cases was for example persons who were labelled as collaborators even though they were forced, or did not include journalists who had worked actively for the propaganda machine of the CSSR through their job. (Sniegon 2013:120) Moreover, what the scientific usage of history cannot explain is the lack of sanctioning of persons who worked or collaborated with the StB.

In addition, to see the law on national memory as a moral usage of history, the definition of which persons and what actions is a question of what was right and wrong in history. The change of regime from totalitarian to democratic became evident with the law in 2002 and suppressed history about people who worked for StB or were collaborators could then
become a part of the political agenda. A part of the moral satisfaction was the publishing of the list of collaborators in 2005 (Kunicova&Nalepa 2006:24) however, due to the scientific reading of the history, which was without nuances as well as mistakes, innocent and persons who were forced to collaborate with the StB was exposed as collaborators publicly.

Moreover, the lack of sanctioning of former workers and collaborators meant no one with high positions in the state apparatus were forced to leave their position, which limits the moral satisfaction in the question of right and wrong in history for the population of Slovakia. Without the sanctioning, the law allows the population to look up the list of collaborators, individual files or the files of deceased relatives, but does not promote administrative purges of former workers and collaborators in the state apparatus (INMa).

The explanatory element missing in the analysis of the law on national memory with the two concepts; scientific and moral usage of history is the factor of ideology in the truth telling of the history. Considering the ideological usage of history, the law on national memory is understood in the light of creating history to legitimise and justify positions of power and problems to pursue these positions are ignored (cf. Theory: Political Collective Memory). When the list of collaborators was published in 2005 by the Institute of National Memory, several MP’s, bishops and archbishops, etc. were nearly forced to resign by the public, and some did resign. For example, deputy construction minister Jan Hurny resigned after his name was published on the list for being a spy for the StB from the 1980’s and forward. After pressure from the public and especially the party that nominated him to his position, the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKU) he resigned from his position. (Jurinová 2005) Even the Parliament Speaker at that time, Pavol Hrusovsky was on the list with the label “candidate for cooperation” (Kraske&Puhl 2005). However, the revealing of his past did not have any consequences to his political career. He continued in politics as a MP for the Catholic Christian Democrats (KDH) and ran for presidential elections as a common candidate for the established right-wing/liberal parties of KDH, SDKU and Most-Hid in March 2014. (The Slovak Spectator 2014)

Looking at the process of Slovakia towards a transitional justice, the ideological usage of history delivers an additional understanding of the reason why the law on national memory does not contain the elements of sanctioning or forbidding persons who worked or collaborated with the StB to run for positions in public offices. With the interpretation that
history is produced, the fact that the law is passed by the power holders gives these actors a producing role of the history. As the law does not contain sanctioning, which promote a creation of a collective memory that does not accept the methods used by the StB however, accepts that the persons who actively used these methods should not be sanctioned. Thus, the use of history creates an understanding that sectors or individuals are not to blame, but structures and the collective. Besides leaving the victims without moral satisfaction this understanding also ensures the power holders to maintain their legit power position as the one to blame for the StB not is the people who worked for them, but the collective. The examples above moreover show how MPs, bishops and archbishops stayed in their positions after they rode out the storm, which likewise can be explain from the perspective of ideological use of history by focusing on the blame of the collective.

Hence, the StB is acknowledge as a crucial part of the history and not ignored by the power holders. However, by using the history as a tool to question the role of the collective doing the CSSR, the power holders manage to legitimise their positions. In the section below, a look at the outcome of the law on national memory: The Institute for National Memory\(^2\) gives another aspect of how ideological usage of history is used in the goals connected with the institution.

### 3.2.2. The Institute for National Memory

The Institute for National Memory is public-law institution with several tasks as evaluating the repression of the population, publish information about persecutors and their activities, promoting freedom and democracy, etc. all defined in the 553/2002 Act on Disclosure of Documents Regarding the Activity of State Security Authorities in the Period 1939 - 1989 and on Founding the Nation's Memory Institute and on Amending Certain Acts. (INMb) Hence, the power holders define the work of the institution, which gives them a role in the institutionalised and centralised collective memory from top-down on society. (cf. Political Collective Memory)

The institute works within the two periods of totalitarian regimes at power in Slovakia; the Nazism doing 1939-1945 and then the Communism 1948-1989. However, no division of

\(^2\) The Institute for National Memory was established to see through the elements of the law on national memory concerning who worked or collaborated with the StB and what activities they did.
history beside the two periods are further clarified, which has been object for critic, as the focus of the institute does not reflect the actual history. By T. Sneigon (2013) the work of the Institute for National Memory focusing on one period of oppression from 1939-1989 is problematic. The Slovak history has several stages, first as the puppet state of Nazi-Germany 1939-1944, which resulted in a new stage with the national uprising 1944-1945. Then the re-establishment of Czechoslovakia in 1945, which ended with the coup d’état in 1948 and the creation of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. The fourth stage was the Czechoslovak Spring in 1968, which caused the policy of normalisation towards the end of CSSR and the final stage of Slovak history of oppression in 1989. The lack of understanding the Slovak history of oppression exemplifies the accusation that the power holders who passed the law on nation memory and the establishment of Institute for National Memory never took the transitional justice serious. (Sneigon 2013:102-103)

Another argument in relation to T. Sneigon (2013) is that the institute is the Institute for National Memory however, the nation is not defined in the act. When it comes to traditions of fighting for occupants, and to protect democracy and human rights the country is mentioned as the Slovak Nation. However, concerning the repression, violence of human rights etc., the guilty is “a state, which violated human rights and its own laws.” (INMc) Thus, Slovakia is not guilty on repression and violated human rights, but a state is. From an ideological usage of history, this formulation implies a certain use of history; when Slovakia fought the occupation (1944) and for democracy and human rights (1968 and 1989), it was the Slovak nation. Hence, exploiting the history by distinguishing between the Slovak nation and a state, the power holders legitimise their power positions by having a state as guilty of repression. The connection between Slovak nation in the CSSR and repression of the people, by power holders under the CSSR deciding the establishment of StB and acknowledged their methods of work, is ignored to archive legit power positions.

Thus, the ideological usage of history in order to legitimise the positions of power holders is also present in the act on the Institute for National Memory. The institute seems to work within the scientific and moral usage of history however with heavy influence from the ideological use. Despite this, there is a process of transitional justice, however the ideological use of history forms the question of whether the interpretation of the StB as the fault of the collective, as the power holders present it, contributes to the process of
vergangenheitsbewältigung. Especially considering the moral satisfaction of victims and the truth-telling as a process of democratisation and a method to democratic education of young generations.

3.2.3. Brána Slobody – The Gate of Freedom Memorial

The Gate of Freedom Memorial was published in 2005 and is a memorial to recall the victims of the period of oppression 1945-1989 (INMd). Specific focus is on the 400 men and women who were killed in their attempt to escape the CSSR. Moreover, the memorial remembers the 20,000 who were deported to Gulag camps, the 2,200,000 deportations from 1945-1989, the 180,000 refugees under communism, and the 60,000 who was imprisoned for attempting to escape. (appendix 1)

The place of the memorial is at the border with Austria only the Danube dividing the two countries and it is also where the physic iron curtain was crossing through. The importance of the Gate of Freedom is that it acknowledges the repression and abuses of CSSR by remembering the victims who did and did not survive. Furthermore, it is a part of a democratic education for new generations especially with the plate stating: “The Iron Curtain used to stand here. It cannot be pulled away. It can only be cracked. Four hundred people sacrificed their life while fighting for their rights, human being, free and unlimited. Do not forget that freedom of thinking, acting and dreaming is a value that is not only worth living, but also bringing sacrifices.” (appendix 2)

Despite the symbolic acknowledgement of the repression and abuses of the CSSR is an important part of the transitional justice and vergangenheitsbewältigung for the country, the Gate of Freedom is the only one of its kind. Official established memorials or museums are not to be found other places in Bratislava despite occasional temporary exhibitions at the Institute for National Memory. Thus, the transitional justice through symbolic acknowledgement is not a used method in Bratislava, whereas the truth telling and thereby democratisation might be affected.
4. Conclusion

The research question of this project is: *How is the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic remembered in the public sphere of Bratislava? And what influence does it have on the process of vergangenheitsbewältigung for the country?*

The memory of the CSSR in the public sphere of Bratislava is limited to the Gate of Freedom and the Institute for National Memory nevertheless, these two elements are part of a process of transitional justice, by contributing to a truth telling about the CSSR and the StB.

Looking at the law on national memory and the institute with the three usages of history approaches, influencing factors on the truth telling becomes evident. The scientific usage explains the objective investigation behind the lustration law (who are the targeted persons and what activities they have done). The moral usage is evident with the law on national memory in 2002, which implies a change of regime and opening up for suppressed history as the StB. The publishing of the list of collaborators in 2005 is moreover in line with the use of history to express what was right and wrong in history and gives a moral satisfaction. Nevertheless, neither the moral nor the scientific usages of history are able to explain the lack of sanctioning in the law on national memory.

Therefore, this project concludes that the memory of CSSR in the public sphere of Bratislava to a great extent is remembered within the limits of the power holders’ ideological usage of history. The collective memory of the history is affected by a certain interpretation of history, which does not promote unifying national memory in the young nation by a truth telling based on rehabilitation and reconciliation, but an interpretation that legitimise the positions of the power holders. Thus, the ideological use of history gives a lack of moral satisfaction and slows down the democratisation and democratic education of young generations by exploiting the history in the gaining of legit power positions, which affects the vergangenheitsbewältigung for the country.
5. Further Perspectives

With the continuing focus on the transitional justice and vergangenheitsbewältigung in Slovakia, an elaboration of the aspect of nation state building in the context of constructing collective national memory would add new perspectives to the reason for Slovakia past 13 years before it started a transitional justice. Looking at the history of the Slovakia, empires and repression has dominated its people always, and in 1989 the country had to go from totalitarian regime to democracy and from plan economy to capitalism, which meant that the country on every level had huge challenges, not only the challenge to come to terms with its past.

What is excluded from the project here is the civil society of Slovakia. With concluding that the power holders limit the memory of CSSR, actors from the civil society are not acknowledge for the important roles they also obtain. Hence, focusing on the role of the civil society in the process of transitional justice would fairly put some other relevant actors into play and give nuanced views on the transitional justice in the country.

Lastly, as mentioned in the section Transitional Justice and Vergangenheitsbewältigung? the EU integration and potential membership pushed the Slovak government into an institutionalised transitional justice in 2002. Including EU in the aspect of transitional justice would broaden up the understanding of such a process from something promoted by national actors to also include the EU. With the big enlargement in 2004 not only post-communist countries became members, but a new neighbourhood was a reality. What the role of the EU is in the transitional justice in these new Eastern neighbourhood countries would be an interesting approach to memory politics on an international level.
6. Bibliography

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7. Appendix

Appendix 1
Appendix 2