

Alexander DUBČEK

A Slovak who gave hope to freedom



MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN
AND EUROPEAN AFFAIRS
OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC

Slovak Republic



Total Area: 49,034 km²

Population: 5,421,349

Capital: Bratislava (417,678 inhabitants)



Geography

Slovakia is in the very heart of Europe, the geographical centre of which is St. John's Church in the village of Kremnické Bane.

The neighbouring countries are the Czech Republic and Austria in the West, Hungary in the South, Poland in the North. The 96 kilometres of border with Ukraine in the East make it the country's shortest border. Although Slovakia has no direct access to the sea, Slovaks don't have to go far to reach it. Air distance to the Adriatic is just 361 kilometres and Baltic Sea is 440 kilometres.





21 August 1968, Bratislava: the public standing against the occupants. The photo by Pavol Bielik was seen across the world

Alexander Dubček

Each nation has a political elite that guides it through the challenges of history. Such an elite is no abstract notion, but is comprised of personalities that have entered history.

For instance, Ľudovít Štúr is rightly considered the key leader of the Slovak enlightenment in the 1840s when he played a major role in the emergence of the modern Slovak nation and created the political and cultural foundations for its subsequent successful development. General Milan Rastislav Štefánik made a significant contribution to the foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 that became a common state of two closely related Slavic nations, the Czechs and Slovaks.

The same was attempted by Alexander Dubček after he entered high politics in 1963. His effort

The Washington Post

“He was a kind, modest and exceedingly politic man who carried in his heart the fate of Czechs and Slovaks, political liberty and social justice.”



A room in Uhrovec that saw the birth of two Slovak leaders – Ľudovít Štúr (1815) and Alexander Dubček (1921) is now the Ľudovít Štúr Museum. Photo: TASR / Vladimír Benko



28 April 1969, Prague Castle – The Spanish Hall: MPs elected Alexander Dubček (right) the Speaker of the Federal Assembly of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic (hereafter FA CSSR). Members of the diplomatic corps came to congratulate the new Speaker. Photo: ČTK / Jiří Karas

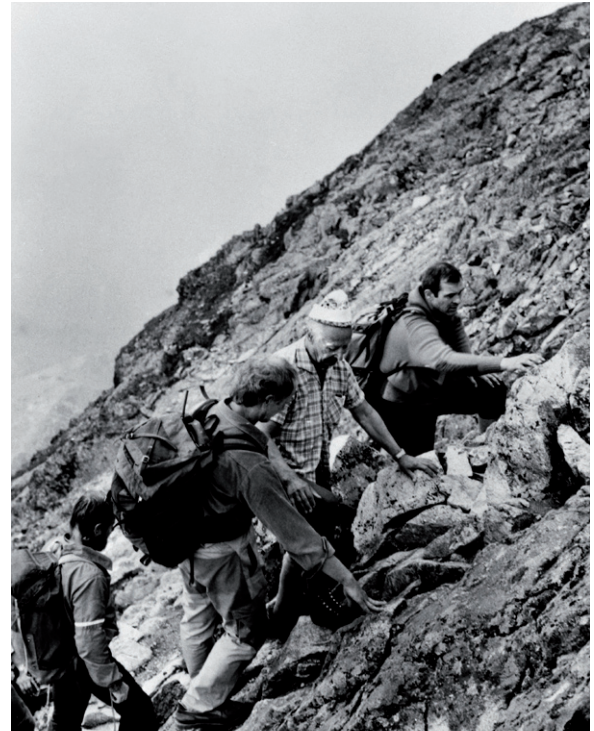
to facilitate the political emancipation of the Slovaks and of Slovakia within the Czechoslovak Republic was coupled with a focus on democratisation of the totalitarian socialism of the Soviet type, since after the communist takeover in 1948 Czechoslovakia had become a satellite of the Soviet Union. In 1968, Dubček's courageous yet uneven struggle for the fulfilment of his dream was followed worldwide. He proved

August 1968: occupation of Czechoslovakia. Photo: ČTK





26 November 1989, Letenská Plane in Prague: twenty years after the persecution, the public cheers Alexander Dubček. Photo: ČTK



26 August 1990: the Speaker of the Federal Assembly of the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic (hereafter FA CSFR) Alexander Dubček (second from the right) climbing Kriváň (2 494 m) in the High Tatras. Photo: TASR / Ivan Bohuš

ultimately unsuccessful: the mighty power represented by the Soviet Union proved to be insurmountable. Yet Dubček's determination to fight for democracy under all circumstances (including risking his life) made him the best known Slovak politician of all times, both locally and internationally.

Childhood and Youth (1921–1968)



Alexander Dubček was born on 27 November 1921 in Uhrovec, in the birthplace of the Father of the Slovak nation Ľudovít Štúr. The coincidence lends itself to a possible symbolism. Dubček's father Štefan was one of the founders of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC, founded

in 1921). He was among the romantic revolutionaries of the time. In 1925 he relocated with his entire family to the Soviet Union to join the Interhelpo group in order to help build communism. The Dubčeks first settled in Pishpek (Frunze, today Bishkek) in Kyrgyzstan. They later moved to Gorky (today Nizhniy Novgorod) where Štefan Dubček took a job in an automobile factory. Even though Alexander was still a child, his insightful soul of a child and later of a youth absorbed deeply the Stalinist methods of terror. Even though he did not always understand what was happening, the political purges and trials of the second half of 1930s remained deep in his memory. The developments turned former heroes into traitors and led to 'enemies of the nation' being tried,

1921	Uhrovec im. kat.	Bratia Kutiš Loni Västice	im. kat.
27 nov 1921	Alexander chlapec sv. s. v.	Štefan Dubček kolar	sv. a. 29.
		Paulina Kobišová Uhrovec	im. kat. 26.
4. dec. 1921	Michal	Jan Bagara white	sv. a. 18.

executed or deported to Siberia. At that time young Dubček developed a deeply ingrained resentment towards the Stalinist totalitarian socialism, which had nothing in common with his dreams of freedom, work and the dignified life of a common man.



The birthplace of Alexander Dubček in Uhrovec (born on 27 November 1921); 106 years earlier, the house saw the birth of Ľudovít Štúr



The Dubčeks returned to Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1938. Following the ban on the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Štefan Dubček joined the underground movement of the Communist Party of Slovakia (CPS). He was assisted by his son Alexander who found employment in the Škoda factory in Dubnica nad Váhom where he trained as locksmith. In August 1944 Alexander joined the Slovak National Uprising against fascism and was twice wounded.

After the liberation and the reconstitution of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1945, Alexander Dubček found work as technician in. Yet his colleagues who had known him from the underground and resistance movements convinced him to enter politics. Unfortunately, the situation within the CPS and in the country after the 1948 takeover that brought the Communists to power, started to deteriorate rapidly. The infamous State Security became the most powerful political body. The society faced constant attacks against the former ‘bourgeois’ politicians, entrepreneurs, self-employed, wealthy farmers, priests and members of Christian churches, artists, even members

of the CPC who were outspoken about the fact that the reality was not how they envisaged socialism in Czechoslovakia. As these developments reached their peak in 1953, Alexander Dubček became the Secretary of the CPS Regional Committee in Banská Bystrica. He was one of a small group of leaders able to speak with the public openly and in a friendly manner.



At the end of 1954 he was told that he was being sent to Moscow, to study at the Political College of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). In his time there, between 1955 and 1958, Dubček witnessed at the 20th CPSU congress Khrushchev denouncing Stalin's cult of personality. Later, in similar fashion to the later reform communists (Mikhail Gorbachev, Zdeněk Mlynář, Ota Šik, Čestmír Cisař *et al*), Alexander Dubček used to say that the criticism of Stalin at the Congress was a major breakthrough in his understanding of the Soviet and Stalinist model of socialism.



Alexander Dubček with fiancée Anna in 1943

A. Dubček:

"The importance of a secure job is universally understood; unless one is born very rich, a job is a matter of subsistence. Freedom loses its meaning if a person does not have the basic means to exercise it. I have never wavered in this belief."

Following his return from Moscow, Dubček served as the Secretary of the CPS Regional Committee in Bratislava. He was still a provincial politician without sufficient experience of a high ranking position in national politics. He first reached this in 1960 when he was appointed Secretary of the CPC Central Committee responsible for industry. He quickly gave up the many dogmas and illusions that he had retained from his past. Moreover, he entered into conflict with Antonín Novotný, the powerful Secretary of the CPC Central Committee and the President of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. Novotný was an old guard orthodox Stalinist communist. He had had a major share in the unlawful activities that developed in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s. The conflicts between him and Dubček concerned investment priorities in Slovakia, the insufficient influence of the Slovak bodies in their implementation and a need for a thorough rehabilitation of those who had been unfairly sentenced in the show trials between 1949 and 1954. The conflicts acquired such a dimension that Novotný decided to remove Dubček and send him back to Slovakia.



10 February 1969: Alexander Dubček visited his native Uhrovec in the district of Topoľčany; at the cemetery he honours the memory of his brother Július, a partisan who died fighting the Nazis in January 1945. Photo: TASR / Ivan Dubovský

Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin's reign of terror led to a political détente in all countries within the Soviet zone of influence. Equally, Czechoslovakia entered an era of gradual and cautious liberalisation, called by historians the 'Early Spring' (1963–1967). It opened the issue of the rehabilitation of innocent victims of the political trials and the responsibility for them. Novotný thus had to sacrifice

a number of politicians among his circle that were compromised, in order to, *inter alia*, detract attention from his own share in the injustice caused. Against Novotný's will, Dubček became the leading political functionary in Slovakia and also an *ex officio* member of the CPC Central Committee, the supreme political body in Czechoslovakia. In this role Dubček gradually gained the understanding

Los Angeles Times

Alexander Dubček has written himself into world history for his daring attempt to renew democracy in Czechoslovakia."

needed to implement his political vision of socialism as a democratic system that would bring happiness to mankind. This was happening within the framework of



Prague, January 1968: following the resignation by Antonín Novotný, Alexander Dubček was elected the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia; it triggered national renaissance and democratisation in Czechoslovakia – the process became known as the Prague Spring. Photo: ČTK / Jiří Rublič



two fundamental agendas: national and democratic, that overlapped in a number of key areas. Dubček first rejected the thesis of the time regarding the accelerated mutual approximation of nations and ethnic groups until their ultimate merger under communism. In 1965, on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Ľudovít Štúr, he said:

“Socialism not only fails to eliminate national difference, but, on the contrary, it provides for universal progress and development of economy for all peoples and ethnic groups. We must not oversee those nuances and differences, but we have

to take them into proper consideration in all our practical efforts in managing economic and cultural development.”

Dubček’s attempt to extend the powers of the Slovak bodies resulted in the subsequent Constitutional Law on the federal arrangement of Czechoslovakia on the 27 October 1968. This was the culmination of an enduring effort by the Slovaks to gain an equal position with the Czechs in the common state.

Dubček was increasingly dedicated in an effort to democratise the Soviet-type socialism. He particularly focused on the so-called leading role of the Communist Party in a society that was previously understood in dictatorial terms and implemented in an administrative-directive and centralist-bureaucratic manner.

Dubček’s effort soon encountered resistance from the dogmatic conserva-

A. Dubček:

“My belief in socialism was complete, and I was prepared to give it my heart and soul to bring about a better world.”

A nation guided by
both wisdom and
conscience shall not
be extinguished.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Dubček', written in a cursive style.

tive wing of the CPC, led by President Novotný. The conflicts between the two politicians and their supporters continued to grow throughout the entire period between 1963 and 1967. Novotný made several attempts to remove Dubček from his positions. On the eve of 1968 the tension grew into an internal crisis within the Party that brought about an open clash between the reform Communists led by Dubček and Novotný’s dogmatic conservative wing. Novotný resigned from his post of the CPC First Secretary at the Party’s Central Committee session on 3–5 January 1968, to be replaced by Dubček.

The Prague Spring (1968–1969)



Bratislava, 22 August 1968: a day after the Soviet troops entered the city.
Photo: TASR / Miroslav Vojtek

Novotný's resignation and the rise of Dubček set the conditions essential for the dramatic advance of the democratic movement in 1968. For Dubček, it was the 'stellar year', to be filled with drama and disappointment. His popularity grew rapidly; he became a charismatic leader, a legend not only in Czechoslovakia, but across the democratic world. He was the mirror of the era, a symbol and one of the creative forces behind the Czechoslovak renaissance and democratisation. His close colleague Zdeněk Mlynář in his memoirs points out that this was no coincidence, because Alexander Dubček possessed such human and political virtues that inevitably led to his gaining influence. Mlynář saw the key to Dubček's nation-wide support in "the fact of faith on both sides": Dubček believed in his ideals and in people; the people sensed it and believed in him.



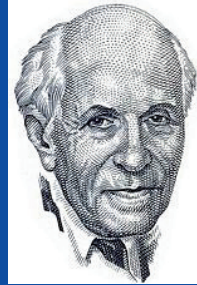
The reform wing of the CPC led by Dubček took control of the political scene in Czechoslovakia in 1968. In early April it adopted a reform agenda, the CPC Action Programme. It aimed to fundamentally reform the totalitarian socialism and stimulate the democratisation into its ultimate goal of reform, 'socialism with a human face', as it had become known in Czechoslovakia at the time. It was the first attempt at a comprehensive reform of socialism in the then Soviet camp, the zone of the Soviet Union's satellites in Central and South-Eastern Europe. The project addressed the entire spectrum of political, economic, social and cultural life.

To fulfil the democratic requirement of freedom of speech, Law 84/1968 of 26 June 1968 ended censorship and launched the freedom of press and other mass media. The reform did not omit the areas of religion, changes in the management of the socialist market economy and the anticipated permission for private enterprise. Foreign policy raised new needs, including an effective European policy for Czechoslovakia, a political solution for the Middle East crisis, support for the realist forces in the German Federal Republic, and an attempt at cooperation with France, Italy and the Scandinavian countries. Not all of this was in line with the interests of the Warsaw Pact and the superpower ambitions of the Soviet Union.

21 June 1968: Alexander Dubček addresses the Congress of the Association of Czechoslovak journalists that brought together 400 delegates elected in a secret ballot – an uncommon practice at the time. Photo: ČTK / Jiří Rublič



30 March 1968: General Ludvík Svoboda is elected the President of CSSR; from the left: Alexander Dubček and President Ludvík Svoboda at the court of the Prague Castle. Photo: ČTK



Andrei Sakharov:

“I am convinced that the taste of freedom, which the Czechs and Slovaks savoured during the period when they were led by Alexander Dubček was a prologue to today’s bloodless revolution in the countries of East Europe and in Czechoslovakia itself.”

Dubček remained unabated in his support of his political child, the CPC Action Programme. The Programme met with a strong negative reaction from the allies within the Warsaw Pact, particularly the USSR. Representatives of the conservative and dogmatic communist regimes in those countries particularly feared the democratic ‘virus’ that was coming from Czechoslovakia. They were also concerned that the democratisation process in Czechoslovakia would not necessarily be confined to ‘socialism with a human face’, but would grow into the feared ‘bourgeois democracy’ of the developed Western countries. The allies suspected that such developments would lead Czechoslovakia away from the zone of the Soviet satellites, with all the military and strategic implications of such a development.

Strong criticism of what had been labelled as the ‘counter-revolutionary’ movement in Czechoslovakia



July 1968: the Soviet and Czechoslovak delegations negotiating in Čierna nad Tisou. Left: Leonid Brezhnev and Andrei Kosygin; right: Alexander Dubček, Ludvík Svoboda and Josef Smrkovský (the negotiations were held from 29 July – 1 August 1968). Photo: ČTK

arose at the advisory meeting of party and state leaders of Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Hungary, East Germany, Poland and USSR in March 1968 in Dresden, and subsequently at the bilateral Czechoslovak–Soviet negotiations in Moscow in May. This led to a split in the reform wing of the CPC and the emergence of a new conservative group led by

Alois Indra, Drahomír Kolder and Vasil Biľak. The USSR and its satellites considered the latter group to be the ‘healthy core of the CPC’. Together they started planning a takeover of power in Czechoslovakia. In the circumstances Dubček decided to slow down the pace of democratisation and to consolidate the internal social and political developments.

The radical reform Communists, together with various groups of the reascent civil society sector feared that the reform was running out of steam. Hoping to revive the reform, they published a document

A. Dubček:

“Socialism, or any other modern social system, could not exist without democracy. That was the essential change in direction that I was trying to carry out in 1968. But then we were brutally prevented from implementing our plans. I knew that the agony of the Soviet system would merely deepen and accelerate further.”



2 August 1968: a meeting of Communist Party leaders in Bratislava. The Soviet delegation was led by Leonid Brezhnev, Polish by Józef Cyrankiewicz and Władysław Gomułka, and the Czechoslovak one by Alexander Dubček and President Ludvík Svoboda. Photo: TASR / Koloman Cich

Two Thousand Words. This manifesto outlined further developments for the civil society in Czechoslovakia. It went as far as proposing a number of new

social structures that would help achieve these goals. The leaders of the USSR and other countries within the Soviet bloc used this to intensify the fight against the

Czechoslovak ‘counter-revolution’. This also significantly increased the likelihood of a military solution to the situation in Czechoslovakia.

Margaret Thatcher:

“The sun then showed us your face. That was the Prague Spring of 1968 when you, Mr President, played such an important role until hope was so cruelly suppressed. The picture of this brave attempt is ineffably etched in our memories, at the same time that our inability to help you will always weigh on the conscience of the free world.”



Despite this Dubček refused to reduce the extent of implementation of the democratisation project. With all his strength he tried to prevent excesses that inevitably accompanied the rapid democratic developments and that deviated from the reform programme and the legislation. He seemed to have succeeded and a number of statesmen believed that there would be no military intervention.

On the night of 20 August 1968, the Warsaw Pact troops crossed the border of Czechoslovakia and swiftly occupied the country. This was a major shock for most of the people, given the twenty years of intensive propaganda regarding brotherly relations within the Soviet block and love for the Soviet Union. The slogans scrawled on the walls illustrated public sentiments, such as one of those written in Russian: “Otets osvoboditel – syn zakhvatchik!” [Father liberator – son occupant!]



August 1968: President Ludvík Svoboda and the First Secretary of the CPC Central Committee Alexander Dubček (left) in conversation during the Moscow negotiations. Photo: ČTK

Events of August 1968 at the Wenceslas Square, Prague. Photo: ČTK



The occupation of Czechoslovakia was a major surprise to Dubček, too. He did not believe in the likelihood of military intervention. He later commented: “The crush of the Hungarian attempt in 1956 was long behind us. Since we lived in different times I did not believe that they would proceed similarly.”

Strong protests against the occupation of Czechoslovakia came from European social democrats, socialist and liberal parties, as well as communist parties in Italy, France, Spain,

EL PAÍS

“Dubček has gone from this world with the certainty that history has proven him right.”

Japan, Britain and Austria, and even from Romania and Yugoslavia, which had previously rejected the Soviet dictate. A number of European cities staged angry demonstrations against the events.



Willy Brandt:

“Europe could be much further ahead had Alexander Dubček been allowed to continue his policies after 1968”.

A. Dubček:

"We have to learn about tolerance in such a way that we must not see only the opponents but also the partners on opposing sides."

The extent of the public outcry, coupled with the protests by the Party and State bodies that still included the majority of the reform Communists, prevented the creation of an effective worker-peasant puppet government and the introduction of revolution tribunals that were to try the 'counter-revolutionaries'. Instead there came about a need to negotiate. A meeting in Moscow on 23–26 August 1968 brought together the supreme leaders of the CPS and CPSU. The Czechoslovak representatives Alexander Dubček, Josef Smrkovský, Oldřich Černík, František Kriegel *et al* were arrested and interned in the Subcarpathian Ukraine.

The ambiguous results of the Moscow talks convinced Dubček that, in the situation of retreat, there still was a chance to save at least the fundamental postulates of the reform, in part thanks to the clear

will from the Czechoslovak public. He recalls in his memoirs: "Our situation was not hopeless. Yet everything depended on the unity in our midst – among the [Party] functionaries, and between the Czechs and the Slovaks." Yet this unity suddenly disappeared. The Soviet leadership had managed to divide the reformers. Already



August 1968: the people of Czechoslovakia in protest against the invasion by the foreign troops; the demonstrators carry a banner in Russian addressed to the occupiers: "Go home!". Photo: ČTK

during the Moscow talks in August a group of realists emerged (Gustáv Husák, Ludvík Svoboda, Lubomír Štrougal *et al*) who were willing to concede to Soviet demands. Thus the power of the reform Communists declined rapidly from the Autumn of 1968. Tragically, the developments were unaffected by the attempt to stall them by the university student Jan Palach, who immolated himself in Prague in January 1969 in protest against the occupation. Nor was the new course altered by the mass demonstrations at the end of March 1969 after the victory of Czecho-



27 August 1968: radio broadcast by Alexander Dubček upon return from Moscow; left: CSSR President Ludvík Svoboda. Photo: ČTK

A. Dubček:

"I often rethink my past reactions and behaviour, and I would be lying if I said that I am satisfied with all I did. Though I believe I have never betrayed my conscience."

slovakia over the Soviets in the ice hockey championship in Sweden. Under extensive pressure from the Soviets, coupled with that from the Czechoslovak conservatives and 'realists', Dubček resigned as the CPC First Secretary on 17 April 1969.

As the return to the totalitarian socialism of the 1950s gradually resumed – a process that came to be known as 'normalisation', the political leaders at the time adopted a historically-proven tactic: eliminating an inconvenient enemy by 'exiling' them to a diplomatic post. Dubček eventually accepted an offer of the post of Czechoslovak ambassador in Turkey, mainly because his wife's health was suffering from the constant public and media attacks against him. The new CPC leadership led by Gustáv Husák hoped that Alexander Dubček would leave for real exile and seriously considered preventing him from returning home.

In fact a number of Western democracies offered Dubček hospital-ity had he not wished to return to Czechoslovakia. That, however, was not his style. After an adventurous journey he managed to return home only to undergo the agony of someone displaced to the margins of society, whose mere existence was a challenge to the conscience of the new power holders of the normalisation.

The family of Alexander Dubček: (from left) sons Peter and Pavol, wife Anna and son Milan. Photo: TASR / A. Tarkoš



Autumn 1968: the people believed in and supported Alexander Dubček. Photo: ČTK / Josef Nosek and Švorčík Věněk



Time of 'silent' Protest (1970–1988)



13 November 1988: Alexander Dubček receives *doctor honoris causa* at the University of Bologna, on the occasion of the 900th anniversary of the University

In mid-1970 Dubček was dismissed from the Communist Party and from all other social and political organisations. The renowned Slovak politician was under constant surveillance by the State Security, even at the cemetery when he visited the graves of his father and brother. Despite the pressure he wrote two protest letters in 1970 addressed to the supreme representative of the CPC, Gustáv Husák. Dubček pointed to the breach of his personal freedom and to overall lawlessness. In 1974, he sent an extensive letter to the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly and the Slovak National Council, in which he analysed the net of totalitarian power that had spread over the daily life of the public. In summary the analysis stated that it was “a breach of human rights.” Alexander Dubček thus became one of the first opponents of the new regime in Czechoslovakia, resolutely identifying with civic and human rights. In Slovakia an independent circle of dissidents gradually emerged around Dubček that included such personalities as Ivan Lалуha, Vladimír Krajčí, Hvezdoň Kočtúch, Ján Uher, Teodor Baník and others.

1988 became another milestone in Dubček’s life when one of Europe’s oldest universities in Bologna awarded him a doctorate *honoris causa*. It was a major tribute not only to Alexander Dubček, but to the entire reform and democratic movement in Czechoslovakia. In his inaugural speech Dubček highlighted the need for “a common European house.” This position brought him to a wider context of European politics. His subsequent activity at home ultimately contributed to the final fall of the totalitarian regime in Czechoslovakia in the autumn of 1989.

Era of Democracy

(1989–1992)

On 17 November 1989 Alexander Dubček found himself again at the centre of events in Czechoslovakia. He was in Prague at the time and hurried with friends to join a student parade marking the 50th anniversary of the Nazi activities against Czech



23 November 1989: Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia; Alexander Dubček addressing protesters in Bratislava.
Photo: ČTK / Peter Brenkus

universities. The event was a signal for the ‘Velvet Revolution’ and the fall of communism in Czechoslovakia. Dubček never made it to the parade as he was held by the police only to be released late at night. Yet he soon took a public stance in massive demonstrations both in Prague and Bratislava against the Communist regime, including that at the Letenská Plane in Prague which brought calls of “Dubček for President!”. It manifested the public desire for Dubček to become the head of the country. The Presidium of the Slovak National Council nominated Dubček for the Presidency. Yet at the time of the struggle over the nature of the new system between the former reform communists and the civic political groups, Dubček lacked the support from either the Civic Forum [Občianske fórum] or the Public Against Violence [Verejnosť proti násiliu], the two most influential political movements in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The two groups chose Václav Havel as the Presidential candidate. In December 1989 Dubček was elected the Speaker of the Federal Assembly.

Under his leadership, the parliament adopted a number of fundamental laws that codified the changes that had been achieved and created a legal and social framework for future reforms in the economy and social system. Dubček did his utmost to ensure



24 November 1989: Václav Havel (right) embraces Alexander Dubček having received news that "all members of the Presidium and Secretariat of the CPC Central Committee resigned."

that the new legislation served the people. He often pointed out the need to respect the principles of solidarity and social justice, and the necessity of effective control mechanisms within the society.

At that time he resolutely refused to join any of the emerging political parties. He was convinced that it was a time for broad movements aiming to bring society from totality to democracy. He

therefore appeared on the ballot of the Public Against Violence, even though this was the group that previously had not supported his Presidential candidacy.

In the Spring of 1992 Dubček became the Leader of the Social Democratic Party of Slovakia, thus closing the circle at the beginning of which stood his father Štefan, who had originally been a social democrat.

Dubček, a major protagonist in the 1960s of the emancipatory aspirations of the Slovaks within their common state with the Czechs, had to take a decisive stance also on the conflict between the political representatives of the two nations. On the eve of 1993 the conflict led to the peaceful split of Czechoslovakia into the two successor states, the Czech and the Slovak Republics.

November 1989: Wenceslas Square, Prague. Photo: TASR / AP



A. Dubček:

“It was on 26 November 1989 that Václav Havel and I appeared, side by side, on the famous balcony of the Melantrich publishing house on Wenceslas Square. We symbolized the alliance of Czech and Slovak opposition forces in their struggle against the remnants of the Stalinist system.”

In line with his earlier attempts for equality between the Czechs and the Slovaks, Dubček continued to support a fully fledged federation that would not have been a mere centralist omission of some earlier limitations to the powers of the national governments and parliaments, but a federation created from the bottom up.

Slovak historian and political scientist Ivan Laluha suggests that Dubček envisaged the common state as an optimal form that would help advance the national sovereignty in the next one or two electoral periods. He placed his vision within the context of the country’s intended integration into the European Union. Yet he was not *a priori* against an independent Slovak statehood, although he was weighing up the optimal conditions and an opportune moment for such a major step. At the time of this fervent creative activity, being re-elected an MP and Member of the Presidium of the Federal Assembly, whilst continuing to build and consolidate the Social Democratic Party of Slovakia, Dubček was travelling to a meeting of the parliament on 1 Septem-

ber 1992. His car had an accident on the motorway between Prague and Bratislava. The struggle for his life proved fruitless and Alexander Dubček succumbed to his injuries on 7 November 1992. His death has not fully been explained to this day. It thus continues to fuel the imagination of many of our contemporaries, not least as the other two prominent figures of the Slovak history, Ľudovít Štúr and Milan Rastislav Štefánik, had also died in somewhat uncertain circumstances.



From 16–17 January 1990 the Speaker of the Federal Assembly CSSR Alexander Dubček attending a session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg to receive the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought; the archival photo shows press conference with Alexander Dubček and President of the European Parliament Enrique Barón Crespo. Photo: TASR / Pavel Neubauer

The Legacy of Dubček

Alexander Dubček was a left-wing politician who adopted social conscience and solidarity. He had under all circumstances been a democrat and humanist. The life of Dubček as the leading Czechoslovak politician can be traced in two key phases. The different nature of the two systems in which he had played an active role inevitably determined the different methods by which he attempted to facilitate democratisation of his country. The first phase, that of the Soviet-

A. Dubček:

"One should always strive to understand the past before presuming to look into the future."



29 June 1992:
Alexander Dubček
at press conference
with political party
leaders discussing
constitutional
arrangement of the
Republic. Photo:
ČTK / Igor Zehl

type socialism, was marked by a totalitarian regime. Although a convinced communist at the time, Dubček realised that the Soviet model could only survive and compete with the Western democracy after it had undergone comprehensive reform, democratisation, humanisation and modernisation. In order to achieve this, Dubček displayed a rare willpower and inner freedom, even at times when, after the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, his life was potentially under threat. An unabated struggle for democracy and humanism under any circumstances was Alexander Dubček's universal legacy.



Bratislava, 13 November 1992: thousands of people lined up in front of the Slovak National Theatre to bid farewell to Alexander Dubček. Photo: TASR / Pavel Neubauer

Bill Clinton:

“The death of Alexander Dubček has saddened me, but at the same time I am glad that as one of the leading personalities of the Prague Spring he lived to a time when he could see with his own eyes the spread of democracy to Eastern Europe.”



The second key phase in Dubček’s political and civic life was the period of Czechoslovakia’s transformation into a modern Western-type democracy following the fall of communism. Dubček entered public life as a left-wing politician with an increasingly social-democratic inclination. He particularly wanted to see the interests of the working people being advocated. He also strove for a balanced relationship between the Czechs and the Slovaks within a prosperous and democratic common state.

Alexander Dubček also played an important role internationally. At the time of the Prague Spring of 1968, he declared the right of individual states within the Soviet bloc to build upon their background and seek appropriate forms and means in international relations, while retaining unity in diversity. He abandoned his vision after the occupation of Czechoslovakia. Having reassessed his earlier political experience, from 1989 Dubček’s focus shifted to the common European house that established him as one of the leading Europeans subscribing to



13 November 1992: funeral ceremony at the Slovak National Theatre; the Speaker of the FA CSFR Michal Kováč delivered the keynote address.
Photo: TASR / Vladimír Benko

this vision. Hand in hand with these ideas he moved towards a platform of democratic socialism in line with European social democracy, thus joining the ranks of the leading politicians in the field. An unabated struggle for democracy and humanism regardless of the political conditions, and the endeavour for Europe's unification within a common home, are the two major legacies of Alexander Dubček for the contemporary world.



THE INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS GROUP

"Your work in defending human rights, your leadership of the spring of 1968 and the responsibility you took upon yourself as president of the Federal Association ... inspired individuals throughout the world and gave hope to oppressed nations that rights and freedom can be victorious."



Alexander Dubček's favourite bench in Horský Park, Bratislava.
Photo: ČTK / Samuel Kubáni

International and Integrationist Activities of Alexander Dubček (1990–1992)

Parliamentary and leading institutions

- 9 January 1990: Alexander Dubček sends a letter to Anders Björck, the Speaker of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe informing him of his country's interest in having guest status at the Council of Europe. The status was awarded to Czechoslovakia in May 1990. Czechoslovakia was accepted as a regular member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 22 April 1991. Alexander Dubček attended the ceremony in Strasbourg. The Speaker of the Parliamentary Assembly welcomed him by saying that “We have been waiting for you for a long time and here you are at last.”
- 16–17 January 1990: As the Speaker of the Federal Parliament Dubček makes his first official trip abroad, visiting in Strasbourg the Council of Europe and the European Parliament. In his address he officially identified Czechoslovakia with European integration



16 September 1990: the FA CSFR Speaker Alexander Dubček (right) addressing the Parliament; left President Václav Havel and the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. Photo: ČTK / Michal Krumphanzl

François Mitterrand:

"I am glad that today for the first time I can greet the freely elected representatives of the Czech and Slovak people... My deep respect for the character and activities of President Dubček plays a part in this... We remember what the Prague spring meant until it was broken by violence and we loved and admired those over the long years refused to have their consciences in any way silenced."



and its institutions. The preparations for the agreement between Czechoslovakia and the European Community began; the agreement was signed on 16 December 1991 in Brussels.

- Autumn 1990: A joint commission for cooperation with the European Community was formed, consisting of the governments of the Czechoslovak Federal Republic, and the Czech and the Slovak Republics. It coordinated the pre-accession negotiations. Alexander Dubček regularly demonstrated an interest in the work of the joint commission.

Euroatlantic security structures

- November 1990: A group of Members of the Czechoslovak Federal Assembly attended a session of the North Atlantic Assembly in London. Led by Alexander Dubček, this was the first group of representatives of a country from the former Soviet bloc. At the same time, Dubček carried out his official visit to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

- 27 November 1990: Dubček addressed the political committee of the North Atlantic Assembly outlining the relationship between Czechoslovakia and the Warsaw Pact. He won support for his country's ambitions to participate in the work of the Assembly.
- Dubček addressed the 36th session of the North Atlantic Assembly. He reaffirmed the interest of Czechoslovakia to participate in its activities.



13 September 1990: French President François Mitterrand (left) in conversation with the FA CSFR Speaker Alexander Dubček.
Photo: ČTK / Michal Doležal



17 November 1990: official visit of US President George Bush; from left: Václav Havel, George Bush and Alexander Dubček as the FA CSFR Speaker. Photo: ČTK

The Assembly adopted his analysis. Subsequently the Federal Assembly passed a resolution accepting the offer of an associate membership status in the North Atlantic Assembly.

On 16 January 1990, the Speaker of the European Parliament B.E. Crespo welcomed Alexander Dubček to the Andrei Sakharov Award ceremony by saying: “I am convinced that many welcome you as an older friend who has constantly stood by us for the past two decades and is closely connected with the memories of our younger years. I must be the same age as you were when your country was brutally occupied in

August 1968. That summer we, the millions of Europeans, shared with your people their major disappointment.”

Additional successful activities of Alexander Dubček in his role as the Speaker of the Federal Assembly entailed making contacts and developing bilateral relations between Czechoslovakia and other states of Europe and beyond. Up to the summer of 1991 he made twenty three official visits abroad, visiting parliaments, meeting prime ministers, royalties and the global moral leader John Paul II.

Alexander Dubček was the first Czechoslovak citizen to be received by the Emperor of Japan, to negotiate with the King of Norway Olav V, and to enter into discussions with Mikhail Gorbachev.



22 April 1990: Alexander Dubček and the Pope during farewell at the Bratislava airport. Photo: TASR / Pavel Neubauer

Awards, Honorary Doctorates and Medals:

Awards:

Sakharov Human Rights Award, European Parliament, Strasburg, 1990

2nd Annual Human Rights Award, International Human Rights Group, Washington, D. C., 1990

Human Rights Award, World Jewish Congress, Australian Institute for Jewish Affairs, Australia, 1991

International Alfons Comín Award, Barcelona, 1991

Paul Haris Award, Rotary International Foundation, Bombay, 1991.

Doctor honoris causa (Dr.h.c.) awards:

Dr.h.c. Universita degli Studi Bologna, 1988

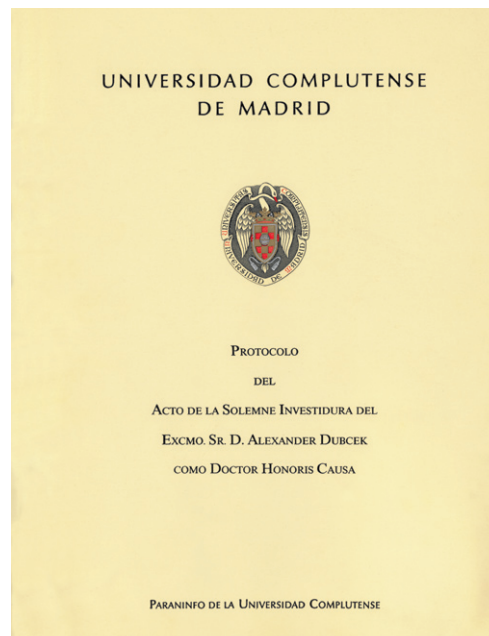
Dr.h.c. Universidad Complutence de Madrid, 1990

Dr.h.c. The American University, Washington, D. C., 1990

Dr.h.c. Université Libre de Bruxelles, 1990

Dr.h.c. University of Dublin, Trinity College, Dublin, 1991

Dr.h.c. Comenius University, Bratislava, 1991.



Domestic Medals:

The Order of Ľudovít Štúr of the 1st degree *in memoriam* for exceptional contribution and the development of democracy and human rights, promoting the reputation of the Slovak Republic abroad, awarded by the President of the Slovak Republic, 1995

The Pribina Cross of the 1st degree *in memoriam* for untiring struggle for humanism and democratisation of life, awarded by the President of the Slovak Republic, 2000

The Medal of M.R. Štefánik of the 1st degree for significant activities in domestic and international resistance, awarded by the Central Committee of the Slovak Union of Antifascist Fighters, 1991.

Commemorative 200-Crown coin issued by the National Bank of Slovakia in 2001 to mark the 80th birthday of Alexander Dubček. Photo: ČTK / Samuel Kubáni



Alexander Dubček commemorative medal.
Photo: ČTK / Michal Kamarit

International Medals:

Wolfgang Reitter Orden; the supreme award of the Republic of Austria, awarded on Dubček's 70th birthday, 1991

Ordine Al Merito della Repubblica Italiana in the rank of Cavaliere di Gran Croce; the supreme award of the Republic of Italy

The Order of the White Lion; *in memoriam* 2003; the supreme award of the Czech Republic.

Honorary Medal of T.G. Masaryk awarded *in memoriam* in Prague, 1998.

The background is a complex, abstract composition of various geometric and organic shapes. It features overlapping circles, some with dashed or solid borders, and others with radial or horizontal line patterns. There are also large, stylized letters, such as a prominent 'L' with an intricate floral or scrollwork pattern inside it, and a large 'A' on the right side. The overall color palette is monochromatic, consisting of various shades of gray, white, and light blue, with a vertical strip of blue and red on the far right edge.

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2. vydanie

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