



Josette Baer

SEVEN SLOVAK WOMEN

Portraits of Courage, Humanism,
and Enlightenment

With a foreword by Jan Foltín

ibidem

Josette Baer

SEVEN SLOVAK WOMEN

Portraits of Courage, Humanism, and Enlightenment

ibidem-Verlag
Stuttgart

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <http://dnb.d-nb.de> abrufbar.

Cover picture: © SNG - Slovak National Gallery, Bratislava. Reprint with kind permission.

ISBN-13: 978-3-8382-0708-7

© *ibidem*-Verlag / *ibidem* Press
Stuttgart, Germany 2015

Alle Rechte vorbehalten

Das Werk einschließlich aller seiner Teile ist urheberrechtlich geschützt. Jede Verwertung außerhalb der engen Grenzen des Urheberrechtsgesetzes ist ohne Zustimmung des Verlages unzulässig und strafbar.

Dies gilt insbesondere für Vervielfältigungen, Übersetzungen, Mikroverfilmungen und elektronische Speicherformen sowie die Einspeicherung und Verarbeitung in elektronischen Systemen.

All rights reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced,
stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form,
or by any means (electronical, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Any person who does any unauthorized act in relation to this publication may be liable to
criminal prosecution and civil claims for damages.

Printed in the United States of America

Josette Baer

Seven Slovak Women

Portraits of Courage, Humanism, and Enlightenment

**This study is dedicated to Slovak women in particular and women
in general, wherever they live.**

Abbreviations

CC	Central Committee of the Communist Party
DS	Demokratická Strana – Democratic Party
HG	Hlinkova Garda – Hlinka Guards
HSLŠ	Hlinkova Slovenská Ľudová Strana – Hlinka's Slovak People's Party
HZDS	Hnutie Za Demokratické Slovensko – Movement For a Democratic Slovakia
KSČ	Kommunistická Strana Československá – Czechoslovak Communist Party
KSS	Kommunistická Strana Slovenska – Slovak Communist Party
ODS	Občanská Demokratická Strana – Civic Democratic Party
OF	Občanské Forum – Civic Forum
OSS	Office of Strategic Services
RAF	Royal Air Force
SAV	Slovenská Akadémie Vied – Slovak Academy of Sciences
SDKÚ-DS	Slovenská Demokratická Kresťanská Únia-Demokratická Strana – Slovak Democratic Christian Union-Democratic Party
SNK	Slovenská Národná Knižnica, Martin – The Slovak National Library, Martin, Slovak Republic

SNR	Slovenská Národná Ráda – Slovak National Council
SNP	Slovenské Národné Povstanie –Slovak National Uprising
SNS	Slovenská Národná Strana – Slovak National Party
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SSI	Strana Slobody – Party of Freedom
ŠtB	Štátní Bezpečnosť – State Security Service
WAAF	Women's Auxiliary Air Force
VPN	Verejnost' Proti Násilie – Society Against Violence

Foreword

Dear Readers

The book you have before you is Professor Josette Baer's study of seven Slovak women, significant figures in the history and contemporary life of the country.

I was aware of Mrs Baer's work from the Slovak media before my arrival in Switzerland in 2010. On the Internet I had found her interview with the popular station FUN Radio. As ambassador I was naturally interested since it is quite rare to find a native Swiss who focuses on Slovakia. That is why I met up with her and followed her work. I reacted spontaneously when she asked me to write the foreword to her latest study.

In four years as Slovak ambassador to Switzerland, I often had to deal with a lack of both knowledge and interest on the part of ordinary citizens concerning the Central European region, not only Slovakia. In this regard, Switzerland is different from Austria or Germany, for example, which have historical links and current interests in our region. In the past, Switzerland was concerned primarily with her larger neighbours Germany, France and also Italy. But what was happening behind the Iron Curtain was of little interest to the common citizen. It is a pity that, as a consequence of these circumstances, we see hundreds or thousands of Austrian and German investors in Slovakia, while Swiss investors can be counted on the fingers of two hands. That's why I greatly appreciate Mrs Baer's latest book. In her description of the lives of seven Slovak women, she not only presents their often complicated and tragic fates, but also the difficult journey of the Slovak nation from the mid 19th century to the present day.

Professor Baer chose four historical and three contemporary personalities who have exerted a significant influence on Slovak public life. Naturally, one can discuss whether other important personages should have been chosen. For example, the following distinguished women would not be out of place among the group of contemporary Slovak personalities: the economist and former Minister of Finance Brigita Schmönerová, the Deputy Governor of the National Bank Elena Kohútiková, who rendered great service with the smooth introduction of the euro, or the successful entrepreneur Mária Reháková. Also, the famous opera singer Edit Gruberová, already a legend, or the Olympic champion Anastázia Kuzminová, who won the gold medal for biathlon in successive Olympics.

However, the author's main aim was to describe the situation of Slovak women in different historical eras; from her viewpoint it was thus not a priority to choose specific life stories. For example, in her chapter about Elena Maróthy-Šoltésová she precisely describes the struggle of the Slovak nation for self-determination, particularly in the critical years following the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867. In those years, the Slovaks were threatened with oblivion: the fate of many European nations we know today only from historical studies. But the Slovaks survived, also – or perhaps mainly – thanks to their women, and today Slovakia is an equal member of the family of European and world nations.

The author's thoughts about the emancipation of Slovak women in specific epochs guide the reader through the book. As a man, I am probably not the most suitable person to make a judgement about this issue. I allow myself only to state that, with regard to female emancipation, Slovak women were not and are not worse or better off than Swiss women, or women in other countries of Central and Western Europe. One can muse on the significance for

women's rights of Empress Maria Theresa, who ruled Austria-Hungary for forty years in the 18th century, or the decree on equality for men and women in Socialist Czechoslovakia. It is a fact – also mentioned by the author – that many female emigrants from the former Czechoslovakia were astonished to learn, when they arrived in Switzerland in 1968, that women didn't have the vote.

I would like to take issue in particular with the author's opinion that the dissolution of Czechoslovakia was unconstitutional. I remind readers that both chambers of the Federal Parliament voted in favour of the separation. From the viewpoint of the Swiss political system, I can see that it is difficult to understand why Slovak and Czech voters did not get a chance to decide about such an important issue. However, the reality that Slovaks and Czechs understand each other better today than in the times of the common state vindicates the former leaders who decided not to organize a plebiscite. An election campaign on the issue of separation could have provoked nationalist agitation and done severe damage to the relations of the two brotherly nations for many years to come.

I fully understand the author's aim to describe the Slovak National Uprising as a decisive episode of Slovak history, introducing the life and fate of Chaviva Reiková. In Slovakia, however, she is practically unknown, and the question arises, since the author also mentioned others active in the SNP in those years, whether a different woman representing that generation would not have been a better choice.

One task of a diplomat and, in particular, an ambassador is to present his country in a positive light. From this viewpoint, I was somewhat taken aback by what I consider an overly pessimistic view of Slovakia's post-89 development, as discussed in the interviews with Magda Vášáryová and Iveta Radičová. They certainly have a right to their own opinion and the legitimate critique of spe-

cific aspects of our development. However, after twenty years of independence, and in comparison with other countries of our region, Slovakia's development should undoubtedly be referred to as a 'success story', all the more so as the young state's starting point after the dissolution of Czechoslovakia was significantly less propitious than that of the neighbouring countries.

With my critical views I certainly don't want to diminish the significance of the author's work or cast doubts on her objectivity or knowledge of Slovak history. On the contrary, I believe that this study will help to fill specific gaps of knowledge about the young country that still prevail in Switzerland and, in view of the fact that the author wrote her study in English, also in other European countries. It is of no importance whether the majority of readers are women or men. I think that some of the information the author gathered in foreign archives and publications could also awaken the interest of specialist circles in Slovakia.

Jan Foltín, Ambassador of the Slovak Republic
to Switzerland from 2010 to 2014,
Bratislava, Slovakia, August 2014

Acknowledgements

At first glance, every historical study by a single author might seem to be just that. Yet, the author is never working alone, since every scholar who takes their profession seriously is in steady contact with their peers, with experts who can teach them about the particularities of a region's history and the subject under investigation. As a careful student of the difficult Czech, Slovak and common Czechoslovak histories I am honoured that my colleagues and friends in Slovak and Czech academe support me in my endeavours to present my views of their political history to the English-reading public.

The idea for this study was born in Bratislava and Martin. In the summer of 2012, my friend and colleague Gabriela Dudeková, a historian at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, gave me a copy of her book about family relations in Central Europe. Gabriela's book opened up a new world to me, the history of women and family relations in Central Europe through three centuries. Her analysis and that of her fellow authors answered many questions and addressed many issues I had been wondering about – suddenly things fell into place. Their scientific contributions raised the interest of the international community of historians: the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Press in Boston, USA, published my review of Gabriela and her co-authors' volume.

That same summer, I visited the Slovak National Library SNK in Martin for my annual research in the archives. I was looking for source material about *Živena*, the Slovak women's association in the 19th century. My friend, the librarian Ľudmila Šimková, who is knowledgeable about Slovak history and historiography to the

point that I would like to call her the Slovak lexicon, a praise I am quite certain she would modestly and firmly reject, told me that it would be a good idea to write a book in English about Slovak women, since no such study yet exists. Ľudmila, here it is.

My thanks. I am greatly indebted to my colleagues and friends for their interest in my research and willingness to discuss specific issues with me. My thanks, in alphabetical order, go to Valerián Bystrický, Gabriela Dudeková, Karen Henderson, Karol Hollý, Adam Hudek, Vlasta Jakšicsová, Ivan Kamenec, Daniela Kodajová, Dušan Kováč, Slavomír Michálek, Jan Pešek, Jaroslava Rogul'ová, Stanislav Sykora, and Jozef Žatkuliak. Thomas Hardmeier is always available when I have a question about medicine; he is a retired professor of pathology and a meticulous researcher and scientist. Dan Holcer, born in Komárno and now living in Israel, helped with the translations from Hebrew and the details of Israeli history. Jan Foltín, the former ambassador of the Slovak Republic to Switzerland, supported this project from the start and I am honoured that he agreed to write the foreword.

My special thanks go to the ladies at the Slovak National Library SNK in Martin for their tireless and outstanding services. Diana Manevich from the Yad Vashem library in Jerusalem sent me archive material in a swift and uncomplicated manner. Mária Bohumelová and Anton Kajan of the Slovak National Gallery SNG in Bratislava provided me with the cover picture of Juraj Jurkovič, which I had first seen in the exhibition *Nové Slovensko/New Slovakia* in 2012. The ladies at the housing office of the Slovak Academy of Sciences SAV have made my annual research stays since 2008 such a joyful and uncomplicated matter: Mária and Lenka Vallová, Božena and Ľubica Konečná, thank you. Valerie Lange at ibidem publishers in Stuttgart is an exceptionally patient, effective and supportive editor. Peter Thomas Hill proofread the manuscript,

patiently soldiering on with the demanding task of teaching me English that is up to his own high standards.

I would like to express my gratitude and respect to the ladies who agreed to participate in my oral history interviews: Magdaléna Vášáryová, Iveta Radičová and Adela Banášová, your *esprit*, commitment, modesty, beauty, honesty and intellect are inspiring – you are in a league of your own.

The errors and shortcomings in this volume are my own.

Josette Baer

Zurich, Switzerland, and Bratislava, Slovakia, September 2014

ibidem-Verlag / ***ibidem*** Press
Melchiorstr. 15
70439 Stuttgart
Germany

ibidem@ibidem.eu
www.ibidem-verlag.com
www.ibidem.eu

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	XI
Acknowledgements.....	XV
X. Introduction.....	1
X. 1 Criteria of selection.....	2
X. 2 The portraits.....	9
X. 3 The method.....	10
X. 4 A brief word on gender studies in Central Europe.....	13
I. Elena Maróthy-Šoltésová (1855–1939) – the first feminist? ...	17
I. 1 The historical context.....	17
I. 2 The feminization of the nation.....	20
I. 3 <i>Živena</i> – the Slovak women's association.....	21
I. 4 Elena – chairwoman and writer.....	25
I. 5 The education of girls.....	28
I. 6 <i>Živena</i> – conservative or feminist?.....	29
I. 7 New times and old issues.....	37
I. 8 Conclusion.....	40
II. Mária Bellová (1885–1973) – the first female physician.....	43
II. 1 The historical context.....	43
II. 2 "Medicine is not for you. Find yourself an occupation suitable for a woman!".....	47
II. 3 Medicine, not politics – Mária's life-long dedication.....	52
II. 4 Conclusion.....	56
III. Chaviva Reiková (1914–1944) – a Jewish resistance fighter..	61
III. 1 The historical context.....	61
III. 2 A Slovak Jew and a patriot.....	72
III. 3 Women in the Slovak National Uprising (SNP).....	75
III. 4 Chaviva's last days.....	80
III. 5 Conclusion.....	82

IV. Anna Štvrtecká (1924–1995) – a courageous historian	85
IV. 1 The historical context.....	85
IV. 2 Anna Štvrtecká, a Party historian critical of the Party ...	95
IV. 3 <i>Normalizácia</i> – the politics of normalization in Slovakia.....	97
IV. 4 Anna's critique of the normalization	106
IV. 5 Conclusion	112
V. Magdaléna Vášáryová (*1948) – actress, diplomat and politician	135
VI. Iveta Radičová (*1957) – the first female Prime Minister	145
VII. Adela Banášová (*1980) – the face of young Slovakia	157
Conclusion	163
Appendix	171
Chronology.....	171
Bibliography.....	181
Index	196