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**THE RESPONSE OF SLOVAK HISTORIANS TO M. S. ĎURICA'S BOOK:
A HISTORY OF SLOVAKIA AND THE SLOVAKS**

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Dear Mrs. Minister,

At the request of the Ministry of Education and with its funds, the book authored by Milan S. Ďurica, A History of Slovakia and the Slovaks, was distributed to Slovakia's public schools. We consider it to be our professional duty to advise you that it is a thoroughly unprofessional handbook, full of basic factual errors and misinterpretations that stand in defiance of accepted historical knowledge. It is not our role to judge who is responsible for the distribution of this book to our schools. Enclosed is an analysis undertaken by the members of the scientific board of the History Section of the Slovak Academy of Science (SAV). It is clear from this analysis that a handbook of this type does not belong in schools and that a suitable way to inform teachers of the shortcomings of this work should be found.

Yours sincerely,

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At the end of 1996, all primary schools in Slovakia received copies of A History of Slovakia and the Slovaks, written by Milan S. Ďurica. As is mentioned in the preface, this book was intended as an educational supplement by the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic. The book is not primarily designed as a history of Slovakia and the Slovaks but is rather a chronological reference book. In terms of its educational value, this guide is basically of no use to students at the primary level, as the study of history has long since ceased to be a matter of the sheer memorization of dates and events. As a supplement to the regular curriculum, such a chronology of Slovak history could be helpful to teachers – provided that the book satisfied basic academic standards. Ďurica's book does not meet these criteria. The selection of dates is often arbitrary and the tendentious manner of their interpretation is frequently at odds with the level of knowledge that has been achieved thus far in the field of historical science. The text revives old and long outdated myths and contains a great number of untruths and fabrications. The division of the various sections of the book is also significant. Some seventy pages are devoted to the period of the autonomous Slovak State which existed between 1938 and 1945; that is, more than a quarter of the whole work! In contrast, only seventy-five pages are devoted to the developments of nearly nineteen whole centuries, from the first century to 1848. The author spends only thirty pages on the period from 1848 to 1918, despite its crucial importance to the formation of Slovak national consciousness. A mere thirty-three pages are devoted to the period of the first Czechoslovak Republic (1918-1938), while only sixty pages are given over to events of the post-World War Two period. There exists no scholarly rationale for such a distribution. Even more serious is the fact that Ďurica's book contains a great number of fundamental errors and misinterpretations. We consider it our duty to bring attention to these errors, if only to the most serious ones:

p.5 - The author maintains that Slavs were present on the territory of what is now Slovakia as far back as the earliest centuries of the Christian Era, whereas archeological research has established that the tribes that lived in this region at that time were not at all related to Slavs. (...)

p.8 - Without any qualification, the author describes the Great Moravian Empire as a Slovak State and the Moravian Prince Mojmír as the Prince of the old Slovaks. This is a sheer invention which contradicts all the archeological and written evidence that is available.

p.10 - The author claims that the language into which Constantine and Methodius translated was the vernacular language of the Slovaks of the period of Rastislav. This too contradicts everything we know about the fairly unified character of the old Slavonic language. (...)

p.33 - The author relies on the account of one statement of E. Denis, by which he claims that the establishment of an independent state formation – backed by the great masses of Slovak people – can already be detected in the political unit that was created by Matúš (Matthias) Čák. This romantic view has long since been over-

come and does not belong in such a handbook without some further explanation. The undertakings of Matúš Čák had nothing to do with Slovak statehood and even less to do with the Slovak people. (...)

p.61 - The author's description of the formal declaration of Slovak statehood by Ferdinand II. Rákoczy (1618-1637), with the comment that "some historians consider this rebellion to be the first distinctive act of Slovak independence in modern history", is simply farcical. However, for children who possess no knowledge of history, this claim might lead to a serious misinterpretation of how our history has unfolded. (...)

p. 79 - Ďurica claims that in Myjava on September 19, 1848, Štúr declared the independent statehood of Slovakia. What for Ďurica is "a breakthrough discovery" is actually a plain falsehood.

p. 91 - His claim that the Slovak Social Democrats were "a movement alien to Slovaks" is without foundation. (...)

p. 104 - Ďurica's description of the creation of the Czechoslovak Republic is entirely unacceptable. In his view, the founding of Czechoslovakia is an entirely negative event. Nowhere is it mentioned that Czechoslovak statehood rescued Slovaks from oppressive Magyarization or that this form of statehood was – at that time – the optimal solution of the Slovak problem. After 1918, Slovakia in effect became an autonomous administrative unit with generous borders, including Bratislava, which was at that time a mostly Hungarian-German city. (...)

p.110 - The author's account of the death of Slovak General, M.R. Štefánik, is a case of ethnic bashing and is unacceptable. Not only does he imply that Štefánik was murdered ("it is very likely..."), he even seeks to suggest who the alleged murderer was when he directly proceeds to discuss Štefánik's disagreements with Masaryk (when in fact there were none) and with Beneš. He goes on to add that these disagreements concerned the position of the Slovaks. Again, this is simply a fiction. Ďurica further states that Masaryk and Beneš were not able to handle Štefánik, thereby suggesting an evident motive for his murder. (...)

p.114 - With respect to both the Constitution and the Language Law of 1920, the author somehow neglects to mention that the phrase "Czechoslovak language" was only a legal expression and that, officially, this language had two variants: Czech and Slovak. Thus, contrary to Ďurica's suggestion, Slovak was in fact the official and operational language of the state in Slovakia and the Slovak language was used in schools.

p.161 - Ďurica's portrayal of the Holocaust of Slovak Jewry is simply unacceptable, unethical and defies present scholarly evidence. Although Ďurica acknowledges the existence of the Holocaust, he first supplies incorrect and often contradictory figures which diminish the actual number of victims and then places full responsibility on Germany. He describes the Slovak leadership, and especially President Tiso, as the saviours of the Jewish population, when in fact they were directly responsible for the deportations. In his effort to exonerate him, Ďurica stresses that President Tiso did not sign the so-called Jewish Codex, even though it is well-known (although perhaps not to Ďurica?) that President Tiso never signed any government decrees. He does refer to some of the reports of the Sicherheitsdienst, in which the Germans indicated their dissatisfaction with the Slovak government's handling of the Jewish question. Yet, he completely omits any mention of the German regime's positive assessments of the Slovak leadership's performance in this regard. Nor does he mention Tiso's anti-Jewish speeches and the anti-Jewish propaganda program of (The Hlinka Slovak People's Party). The author also discredits himself by obviously tampering with Vatican documents. The published documents (which are also available in Slovak) make clear the very critical position of the Vatican towards the racial laws and the deportation of the Jews. In Ďurica's account, however, the position of the Vatican towards the Slovak government is portrayed as one of praise... As cynical as it sounds, Ďurica claims that the number of Jewish public schools at this time actually increased. There is no mention in the book that the Jews were expelled from all universities and secondary schools, including apprenticeship schools, and that Jewish children were also segregated in public schools. Most repulsive of all is his portrayal of daily life in the Jewish work camps (p.162) as one of gaiety and happiness. Here, he literally claims that Jewish doctors in the work camps were paid for their services in gold when it was not available to common Slovak citizens. In Ďurica's account, it appears that to have been a Jew in Slovakia was in fact a stroke of good fortune. Ďurica's explanation of the decision of Vojtech Tuka (then Prime Minister) and Alexander Mach (Minister of Interior) that Jewish families not be separated on the transports is both cynical and unacceptable for school children. As if to suggest that the concern of the regime was the well-being of Jewish families, he concludes: "so from April 1942 whole families started to be transported".

p.182 - Here, the description of the Slovak National Uprising of 1944 as an anti-Slovak, anti-state putsch organized from abroad is again unacceptable and contrary to both current scholarly knowledge and conventional understandings in Slovakia. (...)

p.267 - It is quite amusing to see listed in the appendix, under the rubric of “representatives of Slovak statehood“, not only Samo and all of the Mojmir’s but also the appointed Arpad Princes from Úllö to Álmoš.

The entire publication is swamped with factual errors and incorrect information. To list and explain all of them would require an entirely separate publication. By virtue of the great number of the factual inaccuracies of this book, which is after all primarily an encyclopedic resource, we believe that this book is for all practical purposes useless.

That this book appears in a second edition is quite astonishing in itself. The fact that such a great number of factual errors have remained even in the second edition means that it is no longer just a matter of simple oversight and typographical slip-ups

The scope and selection of facts and events is problematic. Besides the matter of his arbitrary and biased selection of data, the more serious problem is that Ďurica focuses only on certain periods of political history. Both social and economic history remain virtually unaddressed; where anything from these areas appears, the information given is incorrect. To take one example, the amount which Ďurica claims to be the foreign currency reserves of the National Bank of Slovakia in 1995 – 1,745 billions US dollars – is simply stupendous.

Almost entirely absent is any information about the social, civil and cultural development of Slovakia. However, substantial omissions exist even with respect to political history. After 1919, for example, Ďurica reduces Slovak history to the history of the Hlinka Slovak People’s Party. (.....)

Ďurica’s publication does not belong in schools for both educational and moral reasons.

1. We have already mentioned his inappropriate depiction of the tragedy of Slovak Jews. One can find in other sections of the book remarks that could be characterized as anti-semitic – for example, when he talks about R. Slánsky or V.Kopecký or when he describes events in Topolčany in 1945 and mentions that there were forty Jews and “nine Slovak citizens“ involved.

2. Equally alarming is the anti-Czech tone of the book, which at some points is almost malicious. Ďurica’s treatment of the Moravian question is likewise unfortunate. Ďurica portrays the Great Moravian Empire as a Slovak state. From this, he concludes that Moravia is in fact a part of Slovakia that was forcefully taken over by the Czechs.

This kind of statement is the leitmotif of the entire book... The whole history of the Czech-Slovak relationship is described as one continuous attempt by the Czechs to suppress and dominate the Slovaks. Ďurica’s xenophobia against Czechs is evident even in the most trivial details, as in his account of how the President of the Protectorate of the Czech Lands and Moravia (1939-1945), Emil Hácha, sent a very servile telegram to the Germans – one just wonders what this has to do with Slovak history. Meanwhile, he consciously omits the compliant speeches of Slovak politicians, including those of Tiso which celebrated Hitler and Nazism. It is not and cannot be in the interest of Slovak society and the Slovak Republic to infuse pupils with contempt against their neighbour nation and its state, even moreso as this is being done on the basis of invented facts and spurious interpretations of historical reality.

3. Another serious problem of Ďurica’s book is his biased and fanatic “Catholic“ perception of Slovak history. Ďurica never misses an opportunity to mention the title of every Catholic cleric. However, with respect to the Lutheran clergy he does not mention their religious affiliation up to the year 1785 (the one exception is Jacobeus). Even in subsequent periods, he more often than not neglects to mention the Lutheran affiliation of even those Slovak sages as J. M. Hurban or M. M. Hodža. Any sense of proportion is lost for Ďurica when he describes the victims of the religious wars of the 17th century. The hostile expropriation of Lutheran churches is mentioned only once, even though more than 800 of these churches were taken over!

Thanks to professional historiography, contemporary Slovak society is able see these religious conflicts in their wider historical context, without bias or antagonism. Unfortunately, Ďurica’s book seeks to implant in Slovak society a confessional hatred and separateness that has long been overcome.

We realize that our book market is flooded with a great number of pseudo-scientific and fraudulent publications, a tendency that one surely cannot prevent. What is intolerable, however, is that such an unprofessional publication as this one has been financed from public funds and distributed to public schools. We consider it to be our moral and professional duty to notify the public about this. We cannot pretend that nothing is happening, for we feel responsible for the guidance and education of future generations.