

DIDACTIC UNIT 4

Historical Memory Nowadays

**The New Language of Totalitarian Movements
in Europe**

Gymnázium Angely Merici, Trnava, Slovakia

2014-2017

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1. INTRODUCTION

Title

Historical Memory Nowadays: The New Language of Totalitarian Movements in Europe.

Age

Secondary School students (15-17 years old).

Duration

135 minutes.

Sources

- **Film documentary**

The Velvet Revolution: Ivan Hoffman: **SPúbili sme si lásku (We've Promised to Love Each Other)** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voD-fUt43P0>

text and the cords <http://www.supermusic.sk/skupina.php?idpiesne=715>

News coverage from the Kalmus/Lorenzo happening (1,42´-2,5´)

http://www.tvnoviny.sk/domace/1822044_aktivisti-reaguju-na-kotlebovcov-v-parlamente-tisove-busty-natreli-blatom

- **PowerPoint presentations**

The Present – Danger of Extremism

- **Activity 1:**

Ivan Hoffman's song *We've Promised to Love each other.*

The text and the cords can be found at <http://www.supermusic.sk/skupina.php?idpiesne=715>

Youtube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voD-fUt43P0>

- **Activity 2 (Pictures):**

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20386089/1989-nezna-revolucia-17-1.html#ixzz4QIabRVPX>,

retrieved 20.11.2016

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20386089/1989-nezna-revolucia-17-11.html#ixzz4QIarET1V>,

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<http://domov.sme.sk/c/8074536/nezna-revolucia-ako-padol-komunisticky-rezim-u-nas.html#ixzz4QIdoGq44>, retrieved 20.11.2016

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/8074536/nezna-revolucia-ako-padol-komunisticky-rezim-u-nas.html#ixzz4QIdoGq44>, retrieved 20.11.2016

- **Activity 3:**

Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic:

<http://volby.statistics.sk/ep/ep2009/sr/tab108c7.html?lang=sk>, retrieved 20.11.2016

- **Activity 5 (Pictures):**

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20386175/bielymi-vranami-sa-stali-utecenkyňa-pracovnička-charity-blogger-a-ucitelka.html#ixzz4QIYV7Qpd>, retrieved 20.11.2016

- **Activity 6 (Pictures):**

<https://dennikn.sk/54944/bilakov-novy-pomnik-v-noci-postriekali-cervenou-farbou/>,

retrieved 20.11.2016

http://www.tvnoviny.sk/domace/1822044_aktivisti-reaguju-na-kotlebovcov-v-parlamente-tisove-busty-natreli-blatom, retrieved 20.11.2016

Aims

- To understand the term extremism.

- To recognise specific manifestation of extremisms in everyday life and to take a moral stance.
- To understand the causes that lead to passivity, apathy and lack of interest in social life, thus leaving free space for the dissemination of extremist attitudes.
- To consider how to brace oneself against extremism, how to be active, speak one's mind and defend democracy and tolerance.
- To take a moral stance in various current situations from everyday life.

Other aspects

- Classroom arrangements: ordinary classroom, preferably indoors.
- Groups: ideally minimum 20, maximum 30.
- Equipment: Handouts of texts and photos or computer, projector and electronic versions of photos and texts.

2. BIOGRAPHY RATIONALE

A democratic regime has been established in Slovakia by the end of 1989. Slovakia was part of Czechoslovakia, when the totalitarian communist regime fell. Czechoslovakia was peacefully divided into two independent states: the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic.

Democracy brought freedom and civil rights but the social development was stigmatized by many difficulties namely unemployment and the loss of social security, increasing corruption and crime. Numerous political parties and movements have been created, including some with nationalistic and extremist features. The economic crisis, a gradual increase in distrust of politicians, disgust with the political skirmishes - all led to frustration and apathy of many people. The result is a declining participation in elections and declining participation in public life. All this made space for radicals and their extreme solutions.

Nationalism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and criticism of minorities and ethnic groups is typical for right-wing extremists. They use their own symbolism and have a common uniform dress code, regular meeting places and a hierarchy within the group. Verbal and physical attacks are common, as well as creating websites, publishing music with racist or xenophobic content.

Nowadays they are campaigning against refugees and against Slovakia's membership in Euro-Atlantic organizations (NATO, European Union). Attempts at falsification of history or trivializing the tragedy of the Slovak Jews during WW2 have started to appear.

Left-wing extremism is differentiated: besides anarchists and anti-globalists, there are several groups with communist ideology. The Communist Party is a legal political party.

The Slovak government adopted a concept on fighting against extremism, which is enforced by the Department of Extremism and Spectator Violence at the Criminal Police Office of the Presidium of the Police Force.

Many social organizations and institutions openly campaign against racism (People against Racism, Amnesty International, Nation's Memory Institute), as well as many artists, performers and activists.

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Velvet Revolution: In Prague university students went on strike on 17th November 1989. Student demonstrations were repressed by the police. Students demanded democratic rights, the abolition of the monopoly on power by the Communist Party as well as free and fair elections. Shortly they were joined by other students, artists and employees. Civic movement formed to negotiate with the communist government. In the Czech Republic it was called Civic Forum (Občanské fórum) and in Slovakia it was called Public Against Violence (Verejnost' proti násiliu). Most of the people involved in these movements became Members of Parliament afterwards. The new temporary government was preparing free elections. The focal character of the Civic Forum was Václav Havel, who became the first non-communist president after 40 years of totalitarianism. The fall of the communist regime was not violent, which is why these events are called Velvet Revolution or Gentle Revolution.

4. ACTIVITIES

4.1. ACTIVITY 1

Ideals - disillusion - apathy

- **Watch a videoclip with a song by Ivan Hofman “Sľúbili sme si lásku” - We Promised to Love Each Other. It was sung at gathering of people in the squares during the Velvet Revolution.**
- **Which ideals can you find in the lyrics *We've promised to love each other*?**

1. *We've seen those who stretched out their hands,
Their hands were bare and it was still dark,
Since then ages have past our streets
And we have woken from a nightmare.*

R: *We've promised to love each other, we've promised to tell only the truth,
We've promised to withstand, we've promised a brand new day.*

2. *Those youths stretched out their bare hand for us,
They were beaten for us, for our silence,
Since then ages have past our streets
And for evil the final bell has sounded.*

R:

3. *Let's all stretch out our bare hands,
And we will get a grip on our future,
Let's join hands in our streets,
Because there has been enough of unbelief and fear.*

R:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=voD-fUt43P0>

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4.2. ACTIVITY 2

- Have a look at authentic photographs of November 1989. Take a look at the banners held by the protesters.
- What were some of the demands of the protesters during the Velvet Revolution?



21st November 1989

Demonstration in front of the statue of St Wenceslas on Wenceslas Square in Prague

FOTO - TASR/AP (source: TASR/AP)

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20386089/1989-nezna-revolucia-17-11.html#ixzz4QIabRVPX>

Slogan in the foreground "Free Elections"



28th November 1989

Students making and immediately distributing banners and leaflets

FOTO - TASR (source: TASR)

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20386089/1989-nezna-revolucia-17-11.html#ixzz4QIarET1V>

Banner in the foreground: "We demand: 1. the end of legal monopoly 2. free elections with multiple parties running"



27th November 1989

FOTO - TASR (source: TASR)

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20386089/1989-nezna-revolucia-17-11.html#ixzz4QIbPirA2>

"The unity of the people prevailed."

"Let the election not to be postponed until the next millennium."



10th December 1989 cutting of the barbed wire near the Devín castle during a Peace March from Devín (Slovakia) to Hainburg (Austria)

(source: TASR - Vladimír Benko)

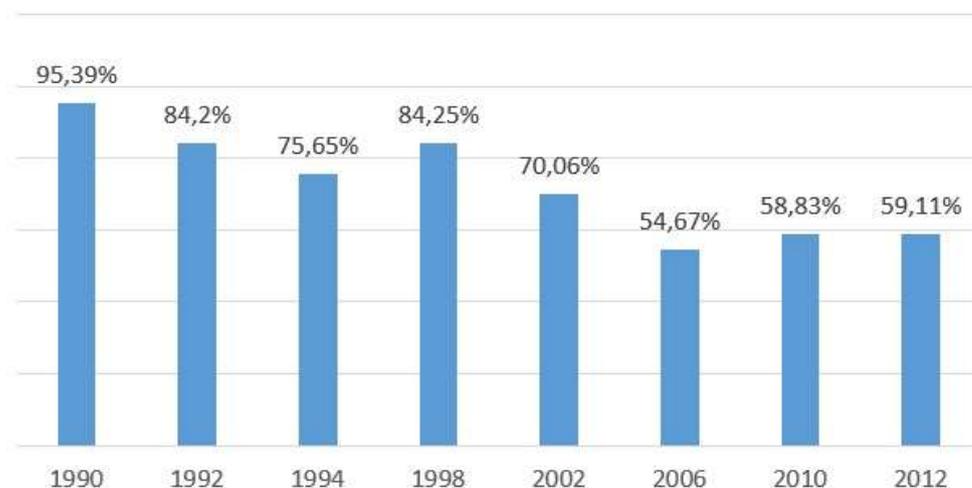
<http://domov.sme.sk/c/8074536/nezna-revolucia-ako-padol-komunisticky-rezim-u-nas.html#ixzz4QIdoGq44>

4.3. ACTIVITY 3

- **Have a look at the development of the voter turnout in democratic elections for the Slovak Parliament and the European Parliament.**
- **What do you think of the development of the voter turnout over the years? Can you think of any reasons for such a development? Compare the development in Slovakia with the development in other countries. (help: distrust in politicians, disappointment with politics, economic crisis, indifference).**



Turnout in the European Parliament Elections in Slovakia



Turnout in the Parliamentary Elections in Slovakia

4.4. ACTIVITY 4

- **Watch the PowerPoint presentation *The Present – Danger of Extremism*.**
- **Analyse what you have seen:**
 1. What possible extremist threats are there in Slovakia nowadays?
 2. Is there a chance to prevent extremism?

4.5. ACTIVITY 5

- **Read and answer the questions under the text:**

“to be a white crow”: old saying meaning “extraordinary, rare, scarce phenomenon, rarity” (according to the Slovak Phrasal Dictionary)

White Crow is an award for socially beneficial and courageous civil acts. The laureates are selected by the White Crow board. The board is comprised by philosopher Fedor Blaščák, historian Ivan Kamenec, former judge of the Constitutional Court and the European Court of Justice Ján Klučka, pastor of the Church of Brethren Daniel Pastirčák, and president of the Human Rights League Zuzana Številová. The organisations Aliancia Fair-play and Via Iuris are also represented in the board.

“The White Crow project originated from the feeling that we are surrounded by people who are doing something good for all of us, but are suffering the consequences and need help. So we decided that we will search for these people and publicly thank them for their actions. It is important that these people know that there is a community of people who value what they do. At one of our award ceremonies it was said that these people are basically happy, because they live in freedom and do not have to watch all the injustice anymore. The fact that they found the inner strength to act means that they do not bent their back, do not turn a blind eye to crime and it gives them a good feeling that it was worth it. I often ask them why they had done what they had done. And they tell me that they wanted to be able to look in the mirror or look their children in the eye once they grow up.” Fero Pauliny, Project Coordinator

Retrieved 20.11.2016 from

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20068478/odvaha-ich-nezradila-institucie-ano.html#ixzz4QTUCM6e2>



Laureates of the 2016 White Crow Award are Monika Podolinská, a teacher of Roma children; Ján Benčík, a blogger uncovering activities of extremists; Khadra Abdile, a Somali refugee; Emília Trepáčová, charity worker (Zdroj: Jozef Jakubčo)

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20386175/bielymi-vranami-sa-stali-utecenkyňa-pracovnica-charity-blogger-a-ucitelka.html#ixzz4QIYV7Qpd>

The Somali refugee Khadra Abdile and the charity worker Emília Trepáčová were awarded for mutual solidarity and tolerance. Both have faced attacks and shown courage. Khadra and her son came to Slovakia in 2013 to seek refuge for her family from persecution in Somalia. After the refugee crisis had begun, she often faced abusive behaviour. She has been physically assaulted several times. After one of the attacks she had to be taken to hospital. The attacker in a tram pulled down her hijab and started strangling her with it until the scarf was torn. A few days later, when she went to see a doctor, someone threw stones at her and her son. Only Emilia Trepáčová helped her and defended her from the abuser.

A Part of the Interview with Khadrou Abdile

“Until the beginning of last year I did not have any problems. Normally, when I traveled around Bratislava running errands nothing bad has ever happened. People even asked me who I was, why I was in Slovakia and they were surprised that I wanted to stay. I was always telling them that I didn't have a problem with that.

I got on the last carriage. After two or three stops someone grabbed my scarf and started strangling me with it. I think it was the same man who had shouted at me out of a car. Furthermore he hit me and knocked out my tooth. He shouted something at me, but at that moment I did not perceive it. Then he fled. After he fled, I called for help in Slovak. The tram driver came to see what had happened and people described it to her. At first she did not help me, nor asked anything and drove on with the tram. I started crying. Once again nobody helped me and my throat was bleeding. Only later a lady came and addressed me in English. She roused others to help me as well. And also according to her it was the same man from the car. She called the driver and told her to stop the tram and help me. She stopped the tram at a tram stop, called the police and told people that they have to get off.”

<http://domov.sme.sk/c/20264509/bratislavská-mhd-somalčanku-ňapadli-seškrat.html#ixzz4QJCJBMEa>

▪ **Discussion:**

1. Imagine you are a passenger and witness an attack. You are also afraid. Come up with a solution for the situation.
2. Who would you give the White Crow award to (think of family, friends and people you know personally) Explain why.

4.6. ACTIVITY 6

- Read and answer the questions under the text:

Let us be heard!

„Evil prevails when good people are silent“

On 21st February 2015 two artists, Peter Kalmus and Ľuboš Lorenz, covered the newly dedicated monument of communist functionary Vasila Biľaka with red paint and an inscription “SVIŇA” (“pig” in Slovak).



Foto – Peter Kalmus

<https://dennikn.sk/54944/bilakov-novy-pomnik-v-noci-postriekali-cervenou-farbou/>

Who was Vasil Bil'ak?

Vasil Bilak was a neo-Stalinist representative of the conservative wing of the Communist Party. He signed the invitation letter to the Soviet occupation forces, which invaded Czechoslovakia in August 1968. The invasion of Soviet troops (as well as troops of four other Warsaw Pact countries) stopped the process of democratization in Czechoslovakia. The democratization process was stopped for 21 years. Soldiers killed over 100 people. Thousands of people have emigrated to western countries. Thousands were dismissed from work or school. From 1954 until the fall of communism in 1989 Bilak was a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party and is therefore jointly responsible for the crimes of communism. After the Velvet Revolution he lived in retirement in his villa in Bratislava. He was never convicted or punished for his actions. He died at the age of 96. A year after his death, a monument was dedicated in his birth place, Krajná Bystrá, a village in eastern Slovakia.

The artists were prosecuted and indicted for vandalism and a 1,600-Euro damages. The injured communists demanded as much as 3,500 €.

Who is Peter Kalmus?

He is an artist, a prominent figure of the underground during Communism. He signed an anti-communist petition and actively participated in the Velvet Revolution. It is well-known for public protests against Communism and Fascism. Since 1988 he has been ceremoniously wrapping a stone in wire. He has been doing this daily. Each stone stands for one Jew deported by the Slovak State to a concentration camp.

How does the artist defend his act?

“Vasil Bilak is a murderer. It is not normal to build him monuments.”

“Can you imagine that in Germany, someone would build a monument like this for the Nazi NSDAP functionaries?”

<https://dennikn.sk/54944/bilakov-novy-pomnik-v-noci-postriekali-cervenou-farbou/>

▪ Discussion:

1. How do you assess this act?
2. Divide into 2 groups: **Group 1** finds arguments in defence of the act and **group 2** finds arguments against the act.
3. What sort of protest would you have chosen? Suggest other possibilities.

4.7. ACTIVITY 7

- **Read an epilogue and watch a short video of news coverage from the happening.**
- **Answer: Do you agree with these attitudes?**

Epilogue

On the 20th May 2016, after three hearings, the judge ruled that it is not a crime of damage to the property of another and the case was moved to the minor offence procedure of the district office.

According to the defendants' attorney, Daniel Lipšic, they acted in extreme necessity to prevent the crime of promoting criminal groups and criminal regimes.

The defence lawyer Daniel Lipšic on the verdict: "I am satisfied with the court decision, because if the court said that there had been a crime, it would be a serious precedent. Then monuments representing top officials of criminal systems could be built in Slovakia. At a time when extremism is on the rise, I would consider it unsafe but also disrespectful to the thousands of victims who had lost their loved ones because of such people as was Vasil Bilak."

<http://presov.korzar.sme.sk/c/8191680/kalmus-vyhral-sud-s-komunistami-o-poskodenej-bilakovej-buste.html#ixzz4QJ2EtYCQ>

Opinion of sociologist Lukáš Lipták

"I think that this man does not deserve to have a memorial and I find the demonstration of resistance shown by Mr. Kalmus and Mr. Lorenzo agreeable. Even I can imagine that I would have done the same, but - a this is important - I would be ready to bear the consequences for my actions. Because that is simply an integral part of civil resistance.

The whole thing looks different from the criminal point of view: Mr. Kalmus and Mr. Lorenzo damaged a thing of another. The Penal Code (§ 246, subpara. 1) states clearly: "Who damages a thing of another, by spraying it, painting it, writing on it with paint or other substance shall be punished by imprisonment of up to one year There lies the fundamental problem. If we want to live in a state with rule of law, it is simply not possible to take justice into one's own hands with impunity. Not even when fighting the communists in Krajná Bystrá. Kalmus's and Lorenzo's act is a striking symbol – they dealt with Bilak briefly by hand, as he would probably have dealt with them. However, if we do not want to be like the communists, we must not assume their ways, such as impunity for violation of rights.

<https://blog.postoj.sk/10431/kalmus-a-lorenz-musia-byt-odsudeni-aj-ak-urobili-dobre>

Statement of Dr. Tibor UJLACKÝ, PhD., secretary and spokesperson of Nation's Memory Institute “Ústav pamäti národa”

In the Name of Nation's Memory Institute, I strongly protest against the fact that 25 years after the Communist totalitarianism, there might be memorials build in Slovakia to unpunished members and prominent representatives of criminal organizations such as the Czech and Slovak Communist Party apparently were. I call upon all democratic forces in Slovakia to join the protest and condemn such and similar perverse initiatives, which are an affront to the memory of the victims of Communist totalitarianism.

<https://dennikn.sk/54944/bilakov-novy-pomnik-v-noci-postriekali-cervenu-farbou/>

Another happening by the artists:

Ľuboš Lorenz a Peter Kalmus smeared mud over commemorative plaques dedicated to the President of wartime Slovak State in Varín, Oščadnica, Bytča and Rajec. "He was legally convicted as a war criminal responsible for the death of 70-thousand Jewish fellow citizens," says Kalmus.



Watch a short video of news coverage from the happening (1,42´ - 2,5´)

http://www.tvnoviny.sk/domace/1822044_a

4.8. ACTIVITY 8

- **Read the poem and answer on the question: How old is the poem? (note for the teacher: published 1624)**

No man is an island,
Entire of itself,
Every man is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thy friend's
Or of thine own were:
Any man's death diminishes me,
Because I am involved in mankind,
And therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls;
It tolls for thee.

John Donne

1. Give reasons why people should be interested in and care for the society they live in
2. What could increase the interest of young people in public affairs?
3. How can we effectively fight extremism and intolerance?

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