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Physical Education and Sport in Slovakia after the Establishment of Czechoslovakia (1918–1924)

Abstract

Creation of the Czecho-Slovak Republic after the WWI, in 1918, was a milestone also in the development of physical education and sport in Slovakia. New Czecho-Slovak government tried, within the new constitutional conditions, to enforce the Czechoslovak character of the state and to withhold the Hungarian influence in individual towns.

Following its multi-national, multi-cultural and multi-confessional history, Slovakia had to get over long-time Hungarian wrongdoing and Hungarization also in the area of sport. Before 1918, the Hungarian and partially also German sport clubs prevailed and any efforts to establish Slovak sport clubs were more platonic than realistic. However, the conditions and circumstances changed and were adapted to the new state layout after 1918.

Because of the tense military-political situation at the Czech borders and in Slovakia during 1918–1920, arrival of the Czech and also German sport organizations was postponed until 1921. The Sokol (Falcon) organization started to organize its advertising tours in Slovakia in 1921. Similarly, the German organizations DTV came to Bratislava in 1921 and to Spiš in 1922. In 1920, the Sokol organization had 93 units with 18 494 members, the RTJ organization had 31 units with 4139 members and the Orol (Eagle) organization had 149 units with 15 772 members. Nationally conscious members of Slovak intelligence were entering the Sokol organization independently of their party membership or political orientation. Bratislava was a typical example of such attitude. The long-time rival of the (originally Czech) Sokol organization was the Orol organization, which formally belonged to the Czecho-Slovak Orol but had also an autonomous management in Slovakia. Physical education in the Orol was only secondary, because the organization was mostly religiously focussed.

All relevant national physical education, sport, scout or touristic organizations gradually established themselves. Particularly the physical education organizations were ideologically closely connected with political parties. Football, volleyball, basketball, tennis, swimming, wrestling, box and table tennis became the most popular sports during 1918–1924. However, Slovakia lagged behind

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when talking about the material and technical equipment, swimming pools or gyms. Czech sport enthusiasts, who originally came during 1918–1920 to protect the new republic, often helped with the development and management of the sport clubs as well.

Keywords: physical education, sport, Slovakia, Sokol, Orol, YMCA, YWCA, scout.

The origin of Czechoslovakia in 1918 was a breakthrough in the development of physical education and sports in Slovakia. In the legislative conditions of the new state, the Czechoslovak Government was trying to underline the Czech and Slovak character of the state and to suppress the Hungarian influence in individual cities. After the establishment of the new state, Slovakia, with its multi-national, multicultural and multi-confessional history, had to overcome the long-standing harsh pro-hungarian pressure, even in the field of sports. According to the census of 1921, out of the total number of 2 958 557 inhabitants living in Slovakia, there were 68.07% Czechoslovaks, 21.54% Hungarians, 4.73% Germans, 2.89% Rusyns, 2.38% Jews and 0.39% were other nations¹. In 1921, such a multinational centre as Bratislava had a population of 87 621 inhabitants of which 39.8% were of Czechoslovak, 27.7% were of German, and 22.2% were of Hungarian origin. In 1930, the population of Bratislava increased to 116 897 (with the share of the German nation 28.1% and of the Hungarian nation 15.2%)². The transferred international obligations for protection of national minorities ensuing from Paris Agreements were embedded in the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic of 29 February 1920 (Title VI, § 121–134), in Language Act Nr. 122/1920 Coll. and in other statutory standards resulting therefrom³. With emerging Czechoslovak Republic (Czechoslovakia) the multi-national and multi-cultural environment of Slovakia began to change also in the area of sports life. While up to 1918 the prevailing phenomenon in Slovakia sport was Hungarian and partly German, and the efforts to establish Slovak sports clubs were more fictive than real, after 1918 the situation in the field of sport began to reflect the new state order. As to school physical education, a new type of physical education was established in schools, but physical education was compulsory only at the lowest, basic level of education and in urban schools. In apprentice education, vocational education or university education physical training was still not included⁴. In Slovakia the physical training was practiced after Spiess, the basics of which were simple and command-related work-outs. In October 1919 the Ministry with Full Administrative Powers for Slovakia in the struggle against Hungarianization and irredenta ordered a revision of sport unions. This act was

¹ “Československá štatistika” 9 (1924), 65.

² *Štatistický lexicon obcí v Republike Československej*, vol. 3, 1936, Praha.

³ *Encyklopédia Slovenska*, vol. 4, Veda, Bratislava 1980, p. 71.

⁴ J. Grexa, *60 rokov prípravy telovýchovných pedagógov na Slovensku*, [in:] *60 rokov prípravy telovýchovných pedagógov na Univerzite Komenského v Bratislave. Zborník FTVŠ UK*, Bratislava 1999, p. 12, ISBN 80-967487-9-3.

followed by dissolution of those unions that had performed national oppression and irredenta. The revision affected also those unions and sports clubs that intentionally used Hungarian names for Slovak towns (e.g. PTE in order to preserve its abbreviation renamed itself from “Pozsonyi torna egyesület” to “Polgári torna egyesület” – Bratislava Training Club). The central administration of individual sports unions that were firmly in the hands of the representatives of Czech sport, many of whom were active in Slovakia in order to prevent the influence of Hungarian clubs in Slovakia, acted in a similar line. Since in the multinational state there officially existed only one “Czechoslovak nation”, the situation gave rise to Czechoslovak, German, Hungarian, Polish and Jewish sports training organizations and sports clubs. At the time the new Republic was created, the highly developed Czech sports movement, as well as the German, Hungarian, Jewish sports training organisations, exported to Slovakia some well-organised and various sports, tourist and scout organizations. Before 1918, under the effect of the Hungarian law, there did not exist any Slovak sports union or sports club in Slovakia, except for Hungarian or German clubs (the exceptions were RTJ in Holic, in Bratislava and in Liptovský Mikuláš, i.e. organisations set by the Czech Social Democrats in 1914). Due to the tense military and political situation at the Czech border and in Slovakia between 1918 and 1920, the arrival of Czech and also the German representatives representing their sports organisations was delayed until 1920, or even until 1921. Sokol started to organise promotional tours to Slovakia in 1921. In the same year the German representatives of DTV (German Training Union) started to come to Bratislava, also to Spiš, but not before the autumn of 1922. As a follow-up, in 1923 the training county DTV Kežmarok was established and so was the training county DTV Bratislava in 1924. Between the years 1921–1925 the established DTV organisation in Slovakia reached 20 representations (9 in Bratislava and its surroundings and 11 in Spiš)⁵. However, the number of their members was negligible in comparison with the nation-wide organisations existing in the 1920s. By then, both the state and the national education system had been consolidated to create basic conditions for motivation of young people to join these organizations. In 1920 Sokol had 93 representations in Slovakia, comprising 18 494 members, the ZRTJ (Worker Sport-training Union) organisation had 31 units, comprising 4 139 members, and Orol had 149 units, comprising 15 772 members⁶.

After 1918, the most numerous organization in Slovakia became Sokol, the Czech sports organisation ideologically founded on Czechoslovakism. In this difficult national – political situation, on 2 February 1919, V. Šrobár turned in

⁵ For more details, see: M. Bobřík, *Nemecká menšina na Slovensku a jej telovýchovné a športové aktivity v rokoch 1918–1945*, STU Bratislava 2006, ISBN 80-227-2357-6.

⁶ J. Perútka, *Dejiny telesnej výchovy a športu na Slovensku. Šport, slovenské telovýchovné vydavateľstvo*, Bratislava 1980, p. 219.

a telegram to the leading personality of the Czech Sokol community, J. Scheiner, asking for assistance. On the next day there were almost 3000 Sokol members in Bratislava, dressed in national costumes, who, after suppressed resistance against the origin of the Czechoslovak Republic, initiated new Sokol representations all over Slovakia⁷. In the first months of the year 1919, the nation-conscious members of Slovak intelligentsia joined Sokol regardless of their political preferences. Bratislava was a typical example in this respect.

When the 1st Regiment of Freedom Guards, mostly composed of Sokol members, was transferred to Bratislava at the beginning of February 1919, the Czech officials, teachers and representatives of the Slovak national life, took the initiative to prepare conditions for starting Sokol in Bratislava. The constituting General Assembly of Sokol in Bratislava was held on the 24th February 1919⁸. The government adviser Dr. M. Ivanka, was elected Chairman of the Union. The committee included the representatives of the Slovak People's Party F. Juriga, F. Tomanek and the editor of the Worker Newspaper (*Robotnícké noviny*) M. Korman. Between 1918 and 1938, Sokol in Bratislava gradually built four district units, called Sokol I. – IV. The top political figures joined Sokol, which prompted the establishment of a significant number of new units throughout Slovakia. However, the gymnastic and training activities themselves were not so vivid and started rather hesitantly, They were motivated mostly by the Czech soldiers and administrative staff⁹. At the beginning the main task and intention was to create national consciousness about the Czechoslovak state and to boost patriotic feelings toward the new state that was threatened in that period by the existence and activities of the Hungarian Provisional Republic of Councils as well as the Slovak Provisional Republic of Councils. After the establishment of the Masaryk Sokol County, 6 districts were created that later played the role of a basis for county-concept of Sokol in Slovakia. At the county general assembly on 12 October 1919, a resolution was adopted to create six Sokol counties in Slovakia, namely the Bratislavská County Masaryk, the Považská County Štefánik in Trenčín, the Podtatranská County, the Pohronská County Sládkovičova, the East Slovakia County J. Jiskra of Brandýs, and the Nitrianska County Svätopluk. Slovak politicians V. Šrobár, V. Paulíny, and others were elected chairmen.

The rival of Sokol in Slovakia was Slovak **Orol**, questioning national, religious and political choices. It was an organic part of the Czechoslovak Union Orol, but was autonomously administered in Slovakia. The training work in Orol was only an instrument to ensure religious education and the training itself played

⁷ See for more details: M. Waic a kol., *Sokol v české společnosti 1862–1938*, Fakulta tělesné výchovy a sportu Univerzity Karlovy, Praha 1996.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, e.g. at the beginning, in Bratislava only 6 Slovaks participated in the exercises, the rest were Sokols from the guard *Stráž slobody*.

only a secondary role in this union. The main activity aimed at religious-moral, national-civic and social-economic education. The Slovak organisation Orol was supportive and assisted mainly hiking, rhythmical activities, sledging, skating, cycling, swimming, football, athletics, volleyball. The members of this organisation lived mainly in rural communities, where the impact of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (HSĽS) and Catholic priests was far more influential than it was in the multicultural, cosmopolitan and multi-confessional town Bratislava. The administrative staff of Orol, especially Catholic priests, in their speeches strictly argued against Sokol, and were warning the Slovak youth not to join that organization, mainly because of religious reasons. In the 30's of the 20th century, two streams were gradually formed in Orol: the autonomous stream (promoting, on one side, total independence for Orol in Slovakia, but on the other side, promoting unity with the Czechoslovak Orol) and the separatist stream (with the effort to create a completely separate organization of Orol in Slovakia). In Bratislava, the membership basis inclined mostly towards the autonomous stream and was assembled mostly from supporters of the Czechoslovak People's Party.

YMCA (Young Men's Christians Association) and **YWCA** (Young Women's Christian Association) were training organisations of Anglo-American origin that played active role in the years of the World War I in the Armed Forces of the Allied Powers, hostage camps, and the Czechoslovak Legions. Their activity was based on religious tolerance, built on the Christian moral principles of life, cosmopolitan orientation, and the dissemination of American lifestyle, that would give man a chance to become successful if he were hardworking and persevering. YMCA came to our territory in 1918 with Czechoslovak legionaries returning back to the newly established Czechoslovak Republic. YMCA and YWCA built their activities on religious tolerance, supported by Christian moral principles of life, cosmopolitan orientation, and popularisation of American style of life. YMCA in Banská Bystrica was founded in 1919 with the help of American instructors. Together with the organisations in Bratislava and in Lučenec it was one of the pillars of YMCA in Slovakia¹⁰. Bratislava saw the so-called "railway YMCA", and after closing the homes for the military in 1921, YMCA turned towards civilian activities – educational, cultural – social, religious and physical education. The attention was paid mainly to young men (later also to girls) to forge "human beings so healthy, with better physical, mental, moral and social qualities"¹¹. On 24 June 1920, one of the first civilian representations of YMCA was founded in Bratislava. On 8th August 1920, in celebration the foundation stone of a building for this organization was placed in nowadays Šancová Street.

¹⁰ See for more details: T. Tlustý, *Budování národních organizací YMCA v Československu a Polsku. Rozvoj tělesné kultury v letech 1918–1939*, Karolinum Press, Praha 2017, ISBN 978-80-246-3559-0. I. Sedláčik, *Od začiatku po začiatok (Činnosť YMCA Banská Bystrica v rokoch 1919–1999)*, YMCA, Banská Bystrica 2004, p. 2.

¹¹ J. Perútka, op. cit., p. 75.

In one of its first activities YMCA built a playground in Vazovova Street that was transferred to the town administration in October 1920.

In 1932, Bratislava had as many as 17 such playgrounds and their average daily visit rate was 3 000 children¹². In the autumn of 1923, the YMCA building in Bratislava opened its door for the public, which was also an incentive to establish a local representation. On 30 October 1923, a constituting general assembly was held, electing a nomination committee and later an administration board. From 1922 also the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) started its activities in Bratislava even though the general assembly was not established before 28 November 1923¹³. YWCA in Bratislava had the largest number of members in 1928 – 508 (of which 166 were Slovaks, 224 Czechs, 57 Germans, 51 Hungarians, 6 Russians, and 4 Jews). In 1930, there were only 337 members. The most widespread sport in YMCA was athletics. The first competition was organized by YMCA in 1920 at the ČSŠK sporting field (Czechoslovak Sports Club) and its main organizer was the US officer M.W. Jounger. On 12 December 1920, YMCA in Bratislava successfully organized the first „Cross Country” run competition that was run from 1922 on along the Lamač - Bratislava track¹⁴. The athletic competitions took place on the PTE sporting field in Petržalka. From 1934, YMCA in Bratislava issued the monthly edition of magazine Ruch under the editorial supervision of A. Plávka. The most widespread sport in YMCA was athletics. However, competitions in athletics, for which YMCA did not have suitable conditions, diminished in quality, while swimming, volleyball and basketball found more suitable conditions for their further development. YMCA in Bratislava organised competitions in swimming also for the PTE and PAC¹⁵ swimmers who those days belonged to the most excellent competitors of the kind in Czechoslovakia. YMCA Bratislava supported also basketball, especially in the 1930s. In 1932 YMCA officials organized matches with the advanced Czech teams from the University of Prague, YMCA Prague and Sokol Brno. The results of this quality work with the youth can be documented by the fact that in 1935 there were eight teams of boys playing in the basketball league and division. The above-mentioned proficient work with youth also influenced the university campus in Bratislava. Active students from Comenius University established still another independent representation of YMCA, Academic YMCA, and submitted its statutes to the Academic Senate on 29 March 1922, and got approved on 26 October 1922¹⁶. In

¹² Ibid, p. 76.

¹³ Ibid, p. 77.

¹⁴ I. Tobiáš, *YMCA na Slovensku v rokoch 1918–1938*, Diplomová práca, FTVŠ UK, 1969.

¹⁵ PTE (Polgári torna egyesület – established in 1880 as Pozsonyi torna egyesület, after 1918 to keep the abbreviation it was renamed as Polgári torna egyesület); PAC (Pozsonyi Atlétikai Club).

¹⁶ Archív Univerzity Komenského Bratislava, D/8, K 33.

the Medical Garden, new tennis courts, volleyball and basketball grounds were built in just one year. Academic YMCA started the following sections: athletics, boxing, fencing, volleyball, basketball and football. Because of unceasing contradictions with the club Moyzes, in 1923 the academics eventually decided to establish a new club named the Slovak Sports Club University (Slovenský športový klub Univerzita). At the end of 1924 most of the athletes from Academic YMCA decided to move to this new club.

After 1918 the physical training movement of the working class in Slovakia just began to form, so the establishment of **FRTJ** (Federation of Worker Physical Training Unions) was delayed. Before the Maninska Spartakiada in May 1921 only three units – Vrútky, Ružomberok and Sučany - left the union ZRTJ (Union of Worker Physical Training Unions) in Slovakia. After the success of and great publicity for the Maninska Spartakiada, but also under the feelings of great dissatisfaction with the policy of social democrats and under the formation of the Communist Party, the number of FRTJ representations, created in Slovakia at the end of 1921, was stabilised at 31 units¹⁷. At the end of 1921 the union ZRTJ had only 23 units.

The first **scout club** in the conditions of Czechoslovakia was founded by students from a school in Žilina in March 1919¹⁸. The other clubs were established in Bratislava, Svätý Jur, Lučenec, Banská Bystrica and in other towns and villages in Slovakia, and became members of the Union of Scouts of Czechoslovakia (Zväz junákov skautov ČSR). The first meeting of the Slovak scouting took place in Žilina in 1922. In the following period Slovak scouting stepped to crisis. To improve relations with the Prague headquarters, the so called Slovak Administrative Centre (Slovenský referát) was created in Dolný Smokovec. By the end of 1926, the scouting movement was established in 34 locations in Slovakia, with 1 308 members (4.2% of the nationwide number)¹⁹. The end of the 20s of the 20th century saw a variety of scout organizations established in Slovakia on either national or confessional principle (1924 Jewish Haschomer Hacair, 1928 Catholic Scouting, German Pfadfinder, Spartak Scouts of Work, etc.).

After Czechoslovakia was established, **tourism** gained slightly more favourable conditions. Until 1918, several tourist organizations and unions were active in the territory of Slovakia. Their activity left positive marks in the development of tourism and travelling (e.g. MKE, Naturfreunde, Kleinkarpathen Touristenverein, etc.). After the establishment of Czechoslovakia, especially the MKE representatives from Spiš were in opposition against the new state and they confirmed their loyalty to Hungary. After the Trianon Treaty was signed, the political situation in Slovakia gradually got stabilized, which was also reflected

¹⁷ J. Perútka, op. cit., p. 115.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 81.

¹⁹ Ibid, p. 82.

in the activities of tourist organisations. After MKE was closed down, but on its foundations, a newly established **Karpathenverein**²⁰ took over, with a reduced membership basis of 400 members from the original 5000. Positive though, after 1926, when the political conditions were somewhat consolidated, the Karpathenverein had 4560 members and in 1928 even 5260 members²¹. An important event in the history of tourism was founding the Tatra Tourist Club (Tatranský Spolok Turistický) in Liptovský Mikuláš in 1919, which in 1920 had 10 representations with 985 members²². The need to break the hegemony of German-Hungarian tourist organisations led to merging the Tatra Tourist Club with the Czech Tourist Club into the **Club of Czechoslovak Tourists (KČST, Klub Československých Turistov)**²³, with 4654 members in 1925, representing 9.8% of the nationwide basis. The second long-lasting tourist organization, which continued with its activities even after the establishment of the Czechoslovak Republic, was **Kleinkarpaten Touristenverein** (Low-Carpathian Tourist Union), set up in 1901 in Bratislava²⁴. In the year 1920, this union merged with Karpatenverein to counter-balance KČST in Slovakia. The largest left-wing tourist organization in Slovakia was **Naturfreunde** (Friends of Nature), members of which joined together on international principles and consisted of Czechoslovaks, Germans, Hungarians and Jews, members of the lower and middle social classes²⁵. The chairman of the organisation, Augustín Maszár, became one of its founders and at the same time a leading representative of the German Social-Democratic Party in Slovakia. The managers of the union already in 1922 contacted the Karpathenverein leadership to coordinate their actions against KČST in the sense of hut construction, marking tourist trails, and nature conservation²⁶. The union was the only tourist organisation for working class in Bratislava that was active in the region of Low Carpathians. In 1923 the union bought an old house in Modra-Na Pieskoch, which was rebuilt by volunteers into a centre serving the purposes of the union. The opening ceremony was held on 27 June 1926 in the presence of other German educational unions Magnet and Liedesfreiheit. The supported activities were organised in sections: the tourist-

²⁰ See for more details: ŠULC, I. 2004. Uhorský karpatský spolok a Karpathenvereinna Slovensku. UPJŠ Košice 2004. ISBN 80-7097-550-4. – Magyarországi Kárpátgyesület (MKE) established in 1874. Statutes of Karpathenverein were approved by the Ministry with Full Administrative Powers for Slovakia on 23rd March 1922.

²¹ “Karpathen Post” 11.08.1928, p. 8.

²² J. Perútka, op. cit., p. 85.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ SNA Bratislava, FPR, Mat. 1/6 – Malokarpatský turistický spolok.

²⁵ SNA Bratislava, FPR, Mat. 18 – Naturfreunde Bratislava established on 8th April 1908 as a section of the international tourist organisation seated in Vienna. In Czechoslovakia, the statutes were approved by the Ministry with Full Administrative Powers for Slovakia on 1 September 1921, nr. 5053/1921. Seat of the union in Ústínad Labem.

²⁶ “Grenzbote”, 29.03.1922, p. 5.

-guide section, hut section, music section, and youth-work section. In the year 1927 the union had 343 members (275 adults and 68 young members).

The nationally heterogenic composition of population in Czechoslovakia, negative attitude towards the new state and emancipation efforts complicated the situation in sport movement to a considerable extent. The leading representatives of the Czech sports unions responded quite quickly to the new conditions in the state and renamed the existing Czech unions with the name ‚Czechoslovak’. In Bohemia, in the times of the monarchy, the sports life in communities used to be at high level and it had an influence on almost all social groups. The new state had various social groups well-organised in the area of sports, while in Slovakia, under the impact of harsh Hungarian policy, the Slovaks could not organise themselves in national sport organisations, only organising in Hungarian or German unions or clubs was allowed, but for the price of loosing one’s national identity. The Czechoslovak Sports Community (Československá Obec Športová) was set up at the end of 1918 as a central representative organization for the sports movement with the aim to coordinate sports and to ensure unified views and processes of work in sport unions. However, in those hectic times the tasks could hardly be fulfilled. The sports unions with their limited number of members could hardly compete with sports organizations, namely with Sokol, DTV, ZRTJ, ATUS (Worker Sport-training Union), and later Orol or FRTJ. These organizations were patronized by political parties, having their own ideological, national or political goals. When the more advanced Czech sports unions wanted to react to this situation, in some sectors they were confronted with resistance, or even with hostile reaction of clubs that were in the hands of the Germans, the Hungarians in Slovakia or the Slovak-Hungarian irredenta. In particular, the Hungarian sports leaders in Slovakia were trying to create their own management centers for Slovakia. In that period the Hungarians had nine football clubs in Bratislava, which had been established before the WWI: Ligeti SC, VAS (Vas és fém munkások sport club Bratislava – Sports Union of Metalworkers Bratislava), PTE (Polgari Torna Egylet – Bratislava Physical Training Club), PMTK (Training Club of Private Administrative Staff) Törekvés, PULE, Terézvárosi SC (predecessor of SC Donaustadt), PAC (Pozsonyi Athletic Club – Bratislava Athletic Club), ŠK Mäsiari (Sports Club of Butchers) and Makkabea SC (Jewish Sports Club). On their initiative the Union of Bratislava Sports Clubs (Pozsonyi Sportegyesületek Szövetsége) was founded on 3 February 1919²⁷. Soccer clubs in Bratislava and elsewhere in Slovakia were organized from 1919 without any national exclusion in the Football Association for Slovakia. The abbreviation SzLSz (Szlovenskoí Labdarúgók Szövetsége) was taken over in the official language of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

²⁷ L. Baráth, *Začiatky činnosti maďarských telovýchovných a športových spolkov v medzivojnovom Československu*, Nitra 2011, p. 27. ISBN 978-80-8094-934-1.

In 1921 SzLSz (Szlovenskói Labdarúgók Szövetsége – Football Association for Slovakia) was deprived of its powers and its competence was taken over by the newly created **Hungarian Football Union in Slovakia** (MLSz)²⁸ that in 1922 became a member of the Czechoslovak Football Association, together with the Czechoslovak Football Union, the German and the Jewish football unions. After the constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, the football-players wanted to set a separate Football Union for Slovakia, which would cover all football clubs without taking nationality into account. This proposal was initiated by Hungarian clubs. Against this proposal were both the Czechoslovak Football Union, and Czechoslovak football clubs. The Ministry with Full Administrative Powers for Slovakia did not approve the statutes of that union which triggered protests at FIFA filed by the clubs willing to establish that union. The Hungarian clubs reacted by establishing the Hungarian Football Union (MLSz)²⁹ which joined the Czechoslovak Football Union. Together with the German and Jewish unions the four organisations formed the Czechoslovak Football Association which was in 1923 coopted to FIFA. Competitions were played within union lines, separately in the Czech countries and Slovakia. In the competition for the Champion of Slovakia the winner of the Slovak section of the Czech Football Union played the winner of the competition run by MLSz. At the beginning of sport activities the Czechoslovak sports community was beneficial to the sport life in the unions, but later it clashed with the Czechoslovak Football Association as well as with the Czechoslovak Olympic Committee. In 1928, Czechoslovak sports community was replaced by a new body – the Czechoslovak All-sports Committee (Československý všesportový výbor).

It was the arrival of Czech intelligentsia, officers, administrative staff, policemen or professional workers, who considerably aided the little-experienced Slovak sports officials to establish sports clubs under the flag of the new statehood. This was the way how the first Czechoslovak Sports Club in Bratislava (ČŠŠK) started on 29 March 1919. The main initiative to found the **First Czechoslovak Sports Club Bratislava** (I. ČŠŠK) came from three eminent personalities of Bratislava: Antonín Humhal, the director of the Bratislava Telegraphic Center, Karel Helmuth, the director of Agrar Bank and Richard Brunner, the director of the Police in Bratislava. Other contributors to the establishment of sports clubs were the Czech officials: Anton Máša-Balík, Karel Rotkovský, Karel Ziegler and many others³⁰. One of the most serious obstacles to founding unions, especially in the first years of existence of the republic, was

²⁸ Ibid, p. 33. MLSz was founded on 11th September 1921 in the Small chambre of Reduta building in Bratislava.

²⁹ See for more details: L. Baráth, *Začiatky činnosti maďarských telovýchovných a športových spolkov v medzivojnovom Československu*, Nitra 2011, ISBN 978-80-8094-934-1.

³⁰ See for more details I. Machajdík, *Športové hry starej Bratislavy*, Perfekt 2011, ISBN 978-80-8046-493-6.

the dual legislation. According to the directives, each union should have statutes approved by the Ministry with Full Administrative Powers for Slovakia. However, the establishment of the state administration was progressing with problems and just gradually, so it often happened that permissions to act were signed just by county authorities; in many places, the authorities acted on the already overcome and obsolete Hungarian legislation and regulations (e.g. Regulation Nr. 1508 of the former Ministry of Interior of 1875). The duality often was the cause of delays in approvals of statutes. For example, in 1921 the statutes of the Sports Club Vrábľe (ŠK Vrábľe) were not approved because the principal of municipal administration had denoted the club chairman as “a staunch Hungarian”. The athletic club in Banská Bystrica was dissolved because, though in its statutes it had stated the Slovak language as the language of communication, in 1922 in Prague the club presented itself as the Hungarian Beszterczébányi Átletikai Club, so later, on the proposal of the county president of Banská Bystrica, the club was dissolved³¹. After the state power had been consolidated, the situation in the sports movement in Slovakia got stabilized even though the nationality clashes in sport competitions continued. From 1921, the county championship was played in three counties – West Slovakia, Mid-Slovakia and East Slovakia. The first county masters were I. ČSŠK Bratislava, ŠK Slavia Banská Bystrica and ČSŠK Uzhgorod, they were managed by the Czechoslovak Football Union. The Hungarian Football Union established three sports counties in Slovakia (Bratislava, Košice and Fiľakovo) and one in Zakarpatska Ukraine (Uzhgorod).

The second most widespread sport in Slovakia was volleyball, most popular with YMCA and Sokol sportsmen. Volleyball was played in Slovakia in YMCA Žilina in spring 1919. In 1921, YMCA founded a volleyball union in Prague, and it is considered to be the beginning of organized volleyball in Czechoslovakia. The Volleyball and Basketball Union was founded in 1924. In Slovakia, it became popular in the first half of the 20th century, in Bratislava, Banska Bystrica and the High Tatras. The first championship of Slovakia was held in 1928 and was organised by YMCA Banská Bystrica.

Basketball, so widespread and popular collective sport in American universities, gained wider attention in Bratislava in 1922 thanks to the YMCA secretary Jan Kopal. In those days Bratislava did not have any suitable gymnasiums for this sport and the only place for its dissemination and practicing was the Medical Garden (Medická záhrada) where Academic YMCA built sporting areas for tennis, volleyball and basketball. J. Kopal, a pioneer of basketball not only in Bratislava, but also in the whole of Slovakia, was not only a promoter of basketball, but also an organizer, coach and referee. After the republic was constituted, basketball in Slovakia was promoted mainly by YMCA.

³¹ J. Perútka, p. 91.

Initially the performing center of basketball was Banská Bystrica. In the years 1924–1926 the YMCA team from Banská Bystrica became the Champion of ČSR. Later, the center of excellence was transferred to Bratislava.

Handball was practised in sports organizations (Sokol, RTJ) as well as in sports clubs. Its dissemination was primarily aided by Czech secondary school teachers. The first women handball clubs were promoted by Czech sports officials (in 1920 at ČSŠK Košice, in 1923 at ČH Vrútky (Red Star Vrútky). The popularization of this sport, in this period especially the Czech women handball, was helped by promotional tours of Czech teams, for example Moravská Slávia Brno, Meteor Prague.

The **Czechoslovak Lawn-tennis Association** associated the Czechoslovak, German and Hungarian tennis players. The club with the most successful history was PTE Bratislava, with the strongest support in the inter-war period, having strong material, players and official background. In 1923, the I.ČSŠK started a tennis club, but the level of performance in the first years of existence was more of a recreational than competitive nature. Agile tennis managers of the club, headed by Průša and Zahraník, with their club members “eškars”, gradually built 8 tennis courts in Petržalka equipped with social infrastructure. This was where the I. ČSŠK could enjoy the largest tennis complex not only in Bratislava but also in the whole of Slovakia, where then both domestic and international tournaments were held. Another important achievement that contributed in a decisive way to top-quality tennis and excellence of Bratislava tennis players was the establishment of the *Lawn-tennis Club Bratislava* in 1923, situated in Petržalka. The major personality of the LTK was Gustav Hubáček. Soon after its foundation, the club built 5 tennis courts on the right bank of the Danube and in the same year it organized an international tournament. In 1923 the first indoor tennis courts, as the only ones in the whole of Czechoslovakia³², were officially opened in the pavilion of the Oriental Market in Bratislava. However, it should be reminded that a real tennis boom supported by construction of courts took place in Bratislava soon after the turbulent post-war situation calmed down. The two towns, Banská Bystrica and Žilina, became an important tennis center in Slovakia. L. Hecht, who represented Czechoslovakia in Davis Cup competition, achieved his most important success there. The top players in the 20s of the 20th century, representing not only players from Bratislava but also from the whole Slovak LTK, were Salomonová and Nedbálek, who on the request of the officials from the Prague union was included in the national team.

A game played with a celluloid ball gained great popularity in Bratislava both as a recreational and competitive activity. When the Czechoslovak Table Tennis Association (ČSTTA) was established in Prague in 1925, the function of the association representative for Slovakia was entrusted to M. Švec, a citizen of

³² I. Machajdík, op. cit., p. 27.

Bratislava. In 1928, he was succeeded by another Bratislava citizen L. Mutňanský, a former excellent football “back player” of the I.ČSŠK. Table tennis in Bratislava took place mainly in three main clubs – YMCA, PTE and I.ČSŠK (founded on November 1, 1931). However, the truth is that during the whole period of the pre-Munich Republic only two clubs – PTE and YMCA – were competing for the title of “Slovakian Champion“. In the years 1918 – 1920, the Hungarian clubs in Bratislava had a tendency to join the central sports organizations in Hungary, which solution was partly motivated by the Prague efforts to centralize management of sport to Prague headquarters, but also long-lived efforts on the Hungarian side to restore Great Hungary. The best **athletes** were leaving for Prague clubs because of better training and economic conditions (e.g. M. Koczán, A. Engel). The situation did not get any better after the unsuccessful establishment of an independent all-Slovak athletic organisation. The year 1920 was a breakthrough for the athletics in Bratislava because the athletic section was launched as part of the I.ČSŠK. The section was established in January 1920³³. The “home address” of the athletic section of the I.ČSŠK was a bumpy area at Kuchajda (the area today is the site of the Inter Stadium, the home of ŠK Slovan Bratislava). Thanks to the chairmen of the I.ČSŠK club, Gejza Reháč and Antonín Maša-Balík, the activity of the athletic section started quite vigorously. On 22 August 1920, members of the section opened their new athletic track, where Otokar Jandera, who represented Czechoslovakia on multiple occasions, could develop his talent. The athletic section of the I.ČSŠK also attracted the American athletic quality-coach M.W. Younger. Because of poor material equipment of the athletes in the 20s of the 20th century, endurance races became the most popular competitions. The rich history of the Devín – Bratislava Race began in 1921. In 1922, the Academic YMCA initiated the Lamač – Bratislava Road Race and in 1924 the popular race Červený most – Bratislava³⁴ was added to the group of running competitions. The PAC Bratislava was the organizer of the first year of the Cross-Country Running Race Železná studnička – Bratislava on 15 March 1926. On 4 October 1932, the Štefánik Marathon was organised in Bratislava, with the route that led from the Slovak National Theater to Ivánka pri Dunaji and finished at the I. ČSŠK stadium. Results of some years of this competition are included in athletic tables as results of official marathon competition of Czechoslovakia. The conditions for performing athletics in Bratislava improved after the establishment of the University Sports Bratislava (VŠ, Vysokoškolský šport Bratislava)³⁵.

³³ *100 rokov organizovanej atletiky na Slovensku*, 1997. Knihu pripravil a spracoval kolektív autorov. Vydal Slovenský zväz atletiky, ISBN 80-967862-5-3.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³⁵ ArchívUniverzityKomenského Bratislava (AUK), D/8, K 31-VŠB a SNA Bratislava, FPR č. 14965/5a 1928. Statutes of VŠB were approved by Academic Senate UK on 29th March 1928 and by the Ministry of Interior on 9th May 1928.

Even though Bratislava had only one indoor swimming-pool (Grössling, 25 m long and 8 m wide swimming-pool opened in 1895) during the period of pre-Munich Republic, **swimming and water polo** were the most popular and successful sports. The Czechoslovak Amateur Swimming Union was founded on 19 January 1919, however, the war situation in Bratislava and in Eastern Slovakia did not allow full development of this sport. Only after the Swimming Union for Slovakia was constituted in July 1923 and swimming counties in Slovakia were subsequently created in the second decade of the 20th century in Bratislava and later in Košice, these two steps allowed the development of swimming and water polo. The Bratislava County registered seven clubs in 1929, all of them in Bratislava (*PTE – Polgari Torna Egyesület, PAC – Polgári Atlétikai Club, PMTK – Training Club of Private Administrative Staff, ŠK Makkabea, DTV – Deutscher Turnverein, I. ČSŠK and ŠK Donaustadt*). Until 1928, the meeting place for swimmers and players of water polo in Bratislava was the *Devín River Bath*, as this wooden structure of a swimming-pool was called by Bratislava inhabitants. It was placed at the conjunction of two rivers the Morava and the Danube, directly under the Devín cliff³⁶. It used to be a place for competitions between Bratislava swimming clubs, but it was also a place of international swimming competitions between swimmers from Bratislava and those from nearby Hainburg or Hakoah Vienna.

After Czechoslovakia was established, **ice hockey** was first played in Slovakia as bandy hockey. The first competition for the title *Champion of Košice* took place in the 1922/1923 season and was aided by ČSŠK Košice. In 1922, bandy hockey began to be played also in Bratislava. The European Championship in 1925 in the High Tatras contributed in a considerable manner to the promotion of Canadian ice hockey. The Tatra Cup (Tatranský pohár), which has been organized since 1927/1928 until today, contributed to its promotion.

As to combat sports, after the founding of the republic, the most popular sports in Slovakia were **wrestling and boxing**. In 1922, the Slovak county for these sports was established in Bratislava as a branch of the Czechoslovak Union of Heavy Athletics and in 1924 two other counties were founded (East Slovakia and West Slovakia). However, only the Bratislava clubs (Herkules, VAS, Ursus), then KAC in Košice, Považan in Trenčín and ĽAK Jánošík in Trnava were regularly active³⁷. In the first years of existence of Czechoslovakia mainly YMCA contributed to the popularisation of boxing. The trend of promoted boxing in YMCA gave raise to Trade Unions for boxers in the I.ČSŠK and PTE Bratislava.

The establishment of Czechoslovakia played a great and undeniably important role in the development of physical education and sports, thanks to the Czech countries that were then more advanced in sports. Before 1918, the

³⁶ I. Machajdík, op. cit., p. 161.

³⁷ J. Perútka, op. cit., p. 99.

majority of sports clubs then existing in Slovakia were Hungarian, that is Magyar, only a few of them were German. After 1918, under considerable aid from Czech physical education and sports organizations, the foundations of the Czechoslovak state started to be reflected also in the field of sports in Slovakia. A serious disadvantage was absence of infrastructure for training, absence of sports specialists or managers, as well as absence of funding to support sports competitions. For that reason, many talented athletes moved to and settled in Prague, so sport achievements of Slovak athletes, especially in the 20s of the 20th century, were rather sporadic. However, step-by-step, physical education and sport in Slovakia grew from the infant stage to the stage of an adolescent nation, the development of which was later confirmed. One hundred years of friendly co-existence with the brother Czech people was a period of creative building of Slovakia's own state, in which certainly some controversies occurred, but as the classical Slovak historian L. Lipták says: "no blood was shed".

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