

Destruction of the Iron
Curtain in BratislavaAlexander Dubček
and Václav Havel during
the Revolution

1990



“Our revolution is not a revolution of violence, it is a revolution of understanding, reconciliation, love and trust.”

Ján Budaj, one of the leaders of Revolution

“In our conditions the fall of Communism was brought by the Velvet Revolution. The system burdened with outrageous crime and suffering of innocent victims ended up ‘gently’ without revenge, even without reproach, rather with joy over its ending. Questions of guilt or responsibility remained without answers. Euphoria overshadowed the legacy and moral ethos of victims. The victory of freedom and justice was the only satisfaction for those who lived to see the change.”

Štefan Paulíny, political prisoner



- **December 28** – Alexander Dubček was elected Speaker of the Federal Parliament.
- **December 29** – Václav Havel was elected President of Czechoslovakia.
- **April 20, 1990** – after a lengthy debate about the country’s future name, the name was changed to Czech and Slovak Federative Republic.
- **June 8 to 9, 1990** – free elections were held and confirm the transition from communism to democracy. Political parties and movements that played a major role in the democratic changes won an overwhelming victory in the elections.

THE AFTERMATH OF THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

The Velvet Revolution was an important mile-stone in the history of Slovakia. It brought about the fall of a totalitarian regime and opened the way for the transition from communist to democratic rule. The Revolution brought an end to the inefficient centrally planned economy, paved the way to civic freedoms, religious freedoms, freedom to travel, and brought about the respect of human rights. With regards to

political freedoms, the Revolution ended the one-party power structure and brought about a multi-party democracy with free elections. In the long-term perspective, the Velvet Revolution made the 1993 foundation of an independent Slovak Republic possible, as well as allowed for Slovakia’s future integration into European political structures.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW MORE?

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www.upn.gov.sk; www.17november1989.sk



EUROPEAN NETWORK
REMEMBRANCE AND SOLIDARITY

FALL OF COMMUNISM

NOVEMBER 1989 – JUNE 1990

The Velvet Revolution (also Gentle Revolution) is a term used to describe the peaceful events that took place in former Czechoslovakia. The Revolution brought about the removal of a totalitarian communist regime and an end to the one-party system. Political and social changes resulted in a non-violent fall of the communist regime and a transition to democracy.



Iron Curtain

April 1987



Mikhail Gorbachev (in the middle) during his visit to Bratislava



Overcrowded SNP Square in Bratislava – centre of the demonstrations in Slovakia



President Gustáv Husák (right) was a symbol of normalization

November 17, 1989

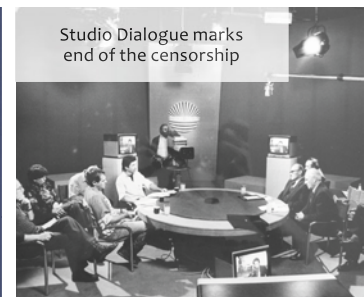


Students' manifestation in Prague

November 1989



Leading figures of VPN on the stage: Milan Kňažko, Ján Budaj and Ladislav Snopko



Studio Dialogue marks end of the censorship

REASONS LEADING TO THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

Totalitarian one-political party regime had been built in Czechoslovakia after February 1948, when the power was taken over by the Communist Party. Both real and alleged regime opponents were persecuted, imprisoned, victimized and in many cases even killed in judicial murders. **The communist regime dominated and controlled all the society: public life, education, culture, economy. Borders of the country were guarded by barbed wire entanglements, sadly known as the Iron Curtain.** In the second half of the 80s, the communist regime fell into crises. The inhabitants expressed more and more their discontent with the situation in all areas, from the lower quality and availability of consumer products, through catastrophic environment and systematic civil rights and religious freedoms violations, up to increasingly more visible economic and technological underdevelopment. The development went hand in hand with the decisive change in foreign policy orientation in Central and Eastern Europe. **The Soviet Union, after Mikhail Gorbachev was appointed in March 1985, replaced the policy of confrontation by the policy of reducing the international tensions. The consequence of this was that regimes without the military backing**

of Soviet Union had to give in to local populations' demands and start to discuss their collapse in form of round table discussions. By the first half of 1989 round table discussion were over in Poland and underway in Hungary. By June 1989 semi-free elections took place in Poland and by November 9 the Berlin Wall collapsed.

THE COURSE OF THE FALL OF COMMUNISM

- **November 16** – a demonstration of students for freedom and democracy in Bratislava.
- **November 17** – the demonstration of students in Prague. Security Forces brutally suppressed it, hundreds of students were injured. The rumour was spread that a student had been killed. To protest against the crackdown of the police, university students in Prague and Bratislava went on a protest strike, which was supported by artistic community and actors.
- **November 19** – In Prague the Civic Forum (OF) was founded and in Bratislava the movement Public against Violence (VPN), as wide civic platforms against the communist regime.
- **November 20** – there were first demonstrations both in Prague and Bratislava. At the same time the strike committees were created, including student strike movement.

- **November 22** – the first mass demonstration took place at SNP Square in Bratislava. The protesters invited the communist regime representatives to an all-society dialogue.
- **November 24** – Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party resigned. In Bratislava the first Studio Dialogue was broadcasted, where the representatives of VPN discussed live on TV with the communists.
- **November 27** – a general strike was held in the whole country actively involving 75% of citizens and bringing a triumph to the opposition.
- **November 29** – the Federal Parliament formally released the article 4 of the Constitution concerning leading role of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia in society.
- **December 3** – a new government was appointed, the so-called '15:5' government, in which the communists had the majority and which had to resign after three days due to the pressure of demonstrations.
- **December 5 to 6** – round table discussions in Prague concerned the reconstruction of the government.
- **December 10 and 12** – new governments 'of national understanding' were appointed in Prague and Bratislava, in which the communists lost the majority.