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## The Industry of Dry Distillation of Wood in Slovakia in the years 1934 – 1938 (Production Possibilities and Employment)<sup>1</sup>

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*Populačné štúdie Slovenska 16:2:23-38*

*The Industry of Dry Distillation of Wood in Slovakia in the years 1934 – 1938 (Production Possibilities and Employment)*

During the interwar period in Czechoslovakia, the chemical industry ranked among the relatively smaller industries in terms of the number of workers. Its importance lay in the production of strategic products and semi-finished products, which were necessary for the functioning and defence of the state. The main aim of the presented study is to analyse developments in the industry of dry distillation of wood (part of the chemical industry) during the post-crisis depression (1934 to 1935) and during the period of economic recovery (1936 to 1938). The effect of the Munich Agreement on the investigated production is not the subject of this study. The dry distillation of wood in Slovakia was mainly comprised of two industrial entities in the subject period: the *Jozef Pálffy Chemical Factory* in Smolenice (a plant in Dobrá Voda was part of it) and a modern plant in Likier belonging to the *Dr. Blasberg* company. In conclusion, it can be stated that the crisis and economic depression that followed had a fundamental impact on their employment, supply, production and sales opportunities. Both entities, however, survived the examined period, albeit with relatively great difficulties, which were manifested until 1938.

Keywords: chemical industry, dry distillation of wood, interwar Czechoslovakia, organic chemistry, economic history

In the 1930s, the dry distillation of wood sector was represented by a total of five major producers in Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus'. Dry distillation of wood can be described simply as a process of thermal decomposition of wood mass

<sup>1</sup> This study was created with the financial support of the project APVV-0199-20: *Transformácia populačného vývoja na Slovensku v regionálnom pohľade od konca 19. do polovice 20. Storočia* [Transformation of population development in Slovakia in a regional perspective from the end of the 19th to the middle of the 20th century] and with the financial support of the project FPPV-25-2023: *Chemický priemysel na Slovensku v 30. rokoch 20. storočia* [The Chemical Industry in Slovakia in the 1930s].

that occurs with limited access to air at a high temperature. The resulting products include acetic acid, charcoal, pitch and others.

The subject of the presented study is the chemical industry of dry distillation of wood in Slovakia for the period from 1934 to 1938. The primary aim is to characterise the development trends and structural changes in this sector, as well as its overall standing and limits within the framework of the then industrialisation structure on the Czechoslovak Republic. I do not track the situation in the industry in relation to the complex production processes themselves and barely take notice of the development of the technical background in the factories. In the text I focus particularly on changes in the supply, production and sales opportunities of individual businesses, or their general economic conditions. I put them into the context of historical-political events and major economic fluctuations, which were doubtlessly their critical driving force.

In terms of time the study focuses mainly on the period from 1934 to 1938, as already mentioned. The reason for demarcating the interval from 1934 is the importance of that year as a turning point, when the industry experienced its greatest crisis and ended up in an extended phase of depression. Compared to previous periods, this one was distinguished by a different quality of economic policy, which can be characterised by the mass use of state interventions. The time horizon observed herein ends in September 1938. The impact of the Munich Agreement on the monitored production is not a subject of this study. Despite the fact that the topic is chronologically demarcated by the mentioned period, space in the work is briefly given to the situation in the industry of dry distillation of wood in Slovakia during the Great Depression. The period before 1934 is, comparatively speaking, a starting point for clarifying the subsequent development in the examined industry.

## The dry distillation of wood

The subject production in Slovakia was mainly represented by the *Jozef Pálffy Chemical Factory* in Smolenice, which also included a branch plant in the village of Dobrá Voda. As the name itself indicates, the chemical works was founded by members of the noble Pálffy family back in 1880.<sup>2</sup> Nearly the entire volume of the primary raw material – beech wood – was acquired by the Pálffy plants from their own forests. Self-sufficiency in the raw material meant a huge advantage over the competition, which had to buy the necessary wood at commercial prices. Aside from the main production programme, the company also produced paints, var-

nishes, artificial resin and lime to supplement its business.<sup>3</sup> The production of varnishes began in the fall of 1929, and the products of the dry distillation of wood were also used during the production process. They had to import the other raw materials; for example, zinc white was supplied by a chemical factory in Košec.<sup>4</sup>

A large and modern plant for the dry distillation of wood was established in Likier (today's village part of Hnúšť'a) in 1924 by the German company *Dr. Blasberg*. The total investment during construction was up to 56 million Czechoslovak koruna (Kč). Immediately after the launching of production, the plant became the leading employer in the region. In 1925, 526 people worked in the factory alone, including 58 office workers and about 250 forest workers.<sup>5</sup> Along with the creation of their own jobs, the importance of the Likier production also lay in securing sales for the surrounding business entities and state forests, which particularly supplied the necessary wood material.<sup>6</sup>

Even during the Austro-Hungarian era, plants for the dry distillation of wood were focused on the broad internal market. Thus, the collapse of the monarchy led to a loss of outlets, and the newly established republic was unable to “absorb” the previous volume of production. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, 80% of the final products of the dry distillation of wood from producers from Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus' were on average exported abroad, and their production capacity was used to a maximum of 53%. From the archives it can be seen that the factory in Likier sold more than 85% of its production on external markets. In contrast, the production in Smolenice, including the production of varnishes, was mostly concentrated on sales within the republic. The largest share of revenues in Czechoslovak koruna of both plants within their main production programmes

<sup>2</sup> *Slovenský priemysel roku 1931* [Slovak Industry in 1931]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1932. p. 29.; JASTRABÍK, Štefan. *90 rokov chémie pod malými Karpatmi (1883 – 1973)* [90 years of chemistry under the Little Carpathians (1883 – 1973)]. Bratislava: Práca, 1973. pp. 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu* [Society for Chemical and Metallurgical Production fund], box 517, signature GS 160/15, Čsl. Stickstoff – Werke – Smolenice, Record number H/1149, June 3, 1938, p. 2, appendix pp. 2-5.

<sup>4</sup> ENGLER, Marko. *Železnice v okolí Smolenic a Dobrej Vody* [Railways in the vicinity of Smolenice and Dobrá Voda]. Trnava: Marko Engler, 2017. p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 5139, Pridelenie palivového dreva [Firewood allocation], March 31, 1934, pp. 2-3. In the case of the development of employment in the plant, the document does not indicate whether the quantification data refers to the average monthly number of workers per year or to the situation on a specific day. Most likely, the average monthly value of the respective year was used.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3. The remaining three more important plants were located in the territory of Subcarpathian Rus'. See *Slovenský priemysel roku 1931* [Slovak Industry in 1931]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1932. p. 29.

was in the products charcoal, acetic acid, acetone, and wood alcohol.<sup>7</sup>

The Great Depression negatively affected world trade. The decrease in export opportunities unleashed an intensely competitive struggle to maintain markets. Despite the high level of cartelization both at home and abroad, the situation could not be stabilised. Neighbouring countries introduced tariffs and various other measures to block imports entering their territory. Hungary almost completely closed its borders to imports from Czechoslovakia, while Poland used price dumping as the main tool for exporting charcoal. Germany dominated in the other products of dry distillation of wood, and it set off on the path of their synthetic production, thereby reducing input costs.<sup>8</sup>

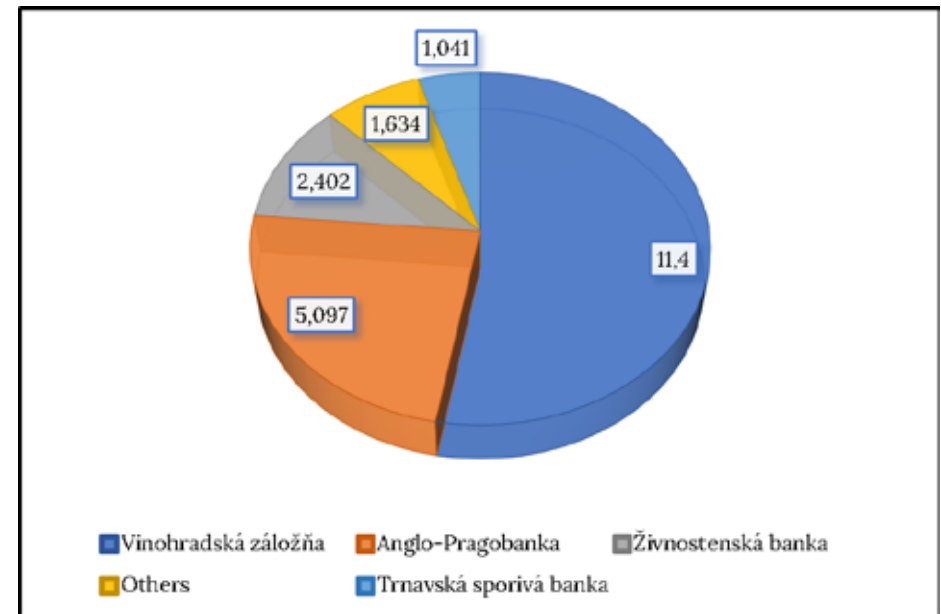
Between 1929 and 1933, the export opportunities for producers in this sector in Slovakia fell by more than half. In the same period, the prices of charcoal and acetone fell by approximately 50%, and with acetic acid and wood alcohol the decrease was even more pronounced. In contrast, the price of beech wood rose significantly. This led to the unprofitability of production, and the factory in Dobrá Voda even had to cease production for several months during the crisis.<sup>9</sup> At the worst part of the recession in 1933, the chemical plants in Smolenice showed a loss of 832,000 Kč.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 5139, Pridelenie palivového dreva [Firewood allocation], March 31, 1934, pp. 6-7, appendix 5/c.; Národný archív v Prahe [National Archives in Prague], fond *Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu* [Society for Chemical and Metallurgical Production fund], box 517, signature GS 160/15, Čsl. Stickstoff – Werke – Smolenice, Record number H/1149, June 3, 1938, p. 3, appendix pp. 2-5.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1929* [Slovak Industry in 1929]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1930. p. 62.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1931* [Slovak Industry in 1931]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1932. p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> *Slovenský priemysel roku 1930* [Slovak Industry in 1930]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1931. p. 34.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1931* [Slovak Industry in 1931]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1932. p. 29.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1933* [Slovak Industry in 1933]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1934. p. 27.

<sup>9</sup> Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 5139, Pridelenie palivového dreva [Firewood allocation], March 31, 1934, pp. 5, 9.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1931* [Slovak Industry in 1931]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1932. p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> Národný archív v Prahe [National Archives in Prague], fond *Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu* [Society for Chemical and Metallurgical Production fund], box 517, signature GS 160/15, Čsl. Stickstoff – Werke – Smolenice, Record number H/1149, June 3, 1938, pp. 4-5.



**Chart 1:** Creditors and their receivables in millions of Kč against the large estates in Smolenice in 1933. Source: Archiv České národní banky v Prahe [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], Živnostenská banka fund, folder number 1, Řed. Zprávy 1920 – 1944 [Reports 1920 – 1944], Chemická továrna Smolenice Josef Pálffy [Smolenice Chemical Factory Jozef Pálffy], March 19, 1934.

In addition to the effects of the crisis, large estates in Smolenice, including chemical plants, faced enormous indebtedness and foreclosures during this time. The situation became so burdensome that these properties had to be put into so-called “forced administration”.<sup>11</sup> In 1933, the total debt amounted to 21.574 million Kč. The biggest creditors were *Vinohradská záložňa* and the *Anglo-Pragobanka* with claims worth 11.4 and 5.097 million Kč (see Chart 1), respectively. According to period archives, Jozef Pálffy, who was supposed to manage the large estates in question for the benefit of his entire family, was responsible for this unfavourable situation. Mikuláš and Ladislav Pálffy blamed him for the debt, for the wasteful handling of revenues, the non-payment of taxes and other expenditures, and in their view, he was to have on the whole deliberately led the property entrusted to him to a loss. The entire dispute eventually led to a long-term lawsuit, because Jozef Pálffy refused to pay compensation for the damage and to relinquish management of the entrusted assets. Unfortunately, the final verdict of the lawsuit

<sup>11</sup> Forced administration was intended to control the business’s financial management and ensure the repayment of debts.

could not be found, though a bank report on the economic status of the chemical plants can serve as an indication. It states that industrial production in Smolenice achieved significant revenues, which were “*spent either by the estate [the Smolenice estates] or privately by Jozef Pálffy*”.<sup>12</sup>

The plant in Likier also reported a loss in the amount of almost 529,000 Kč for year 1933 (see Table 1). Naturally, along with the drop in sales and prices, there were layoffs. During the peak of the crisis, only 177 people were employed in the plant itself, which meant a decrease of 64% compared to 1929 (see Table 2). Despite the above, the situation in the plant can be considered significantly better than in the case of the “astronomically” indebted Pálffy plants and their attached estate.<sup>13</sup>

**Tab. 1:** Production costs and revenues of individual products of the Likier plant for year 1933.

Product	Amount in kg	Costs in Kč	Revenue Kč	Profit in Kč	Loss in Kč
Charcoal	7,681,758	1,843,621.92	1,536,351.60	-	307,270.32
Raw pitch	1,387,790	249,802.18	249,802.18	-	-
Condensed oil	27,587	8,276.10	6,896.75	-	1,379.35
Calcium acetate	1,567,372	1,673,059.58	1,394,961.08	-	278,098.5
Sour vinegar	289,999	4,147,409.74	3,592,118.88	-	555,290.86
Acetone	180,595	1,083,934.69	1,023,973.65	-	59,961.04
Acetone oils	63,669	134,771.44	159,172.50	24,401.06	-
Wood spirit	506,353	1,276,009.56	1,367,153.10	91,143.54	-
Wood spirit oils	34,200	83,935.29	41,040.00	-	42,895.29

<sup>12</sup> Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], Živnostenská banka fund, box 6687, folder number 1, Řed. Zprávy 1920 – 1944 [Reports 1920 – 1944], Chemická továrna Smolenice Josef Pálffy [Smolenice Chemical Factory Jozef Pálffy], March 19, 1934; Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], Pražská úvěrní banka fund, box 586, folder number 1, Josef Pálffy – velkostatek a chem. továrny [Jozef Pálffy – large estate and chemical factory], 5. Pro výkonný výbor [5. For the executive committee], April 27, 1933; Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], Živnostenská banka fund, box 6687, folder number 1, Řed. Zprávy 1920 – 1944 [Reports 1920 – 1944], Ke sporu Josefa Pálffyho s příbuzenstvem [Regarding the dispute between Jozef Pálffy and relatives], November 10, 1932.

<sup>13</sup> Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 5139, Pridelenie palivového dreva [Firewood allocation], March 31, 1934, p. 3, appendix 5/d.

Formaldehyde	92,041	201,771.60	280,725.05	78,953.45	-
Butyl acetate	84,802	842,581.27	942,150.22	99,568.95	-
Amyl acetate	45,158	406,588.61	472,352.68	65,764.07	-
Sodium acetate	70,316	178,248.58	189,853.20	11,604.62	-
Acetic acid ether	54,466	296,792.28	454,246.44	157,454.16	-
Methyl acetate	25,539	63,459.53	235,214.19	171,754.66	-
Burnt lime	1 246,205	158,839.56	174,468.70	15,629.14	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>13,357,850</b>	<b>12,649,101.93</b>	<b>12,120,480.22</b>	<b>716,273.65</b>	<b>1,244,895.36</b>

**Source:** Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 5139, Pridelenie palivového dreva [Firewood allocation], March 31, 1934, appendix 5/a, 5/b, 5/c, 5/d.

In the post-crisis depression, the factories in Smolenice and Likier continued to operate in Slovakia with great difficulties. The branch plant in Dobrá Voda did not function in 1934, and it temporarily started operations only in the following year. The previous poor use of production capacities together with low employment in the whole profession showed no significant improvement. After the initial growth in exports of most of the main products, a deterioration again occurred which subsequently lasted until the end of the depression. The clearing policy of neighbouring states, their quota limits and customs increases were the main negative influences on exports. The intense competition often caused prices to continue to fall below production costs of the finished products of the dry distillation of wood. Demand on the domestic market did not improve much and showed fluctuating rises and falls.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, without a reference number, Lúčobný priemysel dr. Blasberg a spol. komand. spol. [the Lúčobný industry Dr. Blasberg and company, limited partnership], Likier pp. Hnúšťa; Zpráva o situaci čl. průmyslu chemického v roce 1934 [Report on the situation of the Czechoslovak chemical industry in 1934]. In *Chemické listy pro vědu a průmysl* [Chemical Documents for Science and Industry], 1935, vol. XXIX, No. 11-12, p. 156.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1934* [Slovak Industry in 1934]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1935. pp. 29-30.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1935* [Slovak Industry in 1935]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1936. pp. 24-25.; JASTRABÍK, Štefan. *90 rokov chémie pod malými Karpatmi (1883 – 1973)* [90 years of chemistry under the Little Carpathians (1883 – 1973)]. Bratislava: Práca, 1973. pp. 44-47.

**Tab. 2:** Number of employees at the Dr. Blasberg works in Likier.

Year/workers:	In the plant	In the forest	Administrative	Total*
1925	526	250	58	834
1926	502	350	44	896
1927	552	400	42	994
1928	445	400	58	903
1929	497	330	54	881
1930	432	474	44	950
1931	500	300	51	851
1932	320	484	42	846
1933	177	182	38	397

**Source:** Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 5139, Pridelenie palivového dreva [Firewood allocation], March 31, 1934, s. 2-3.

\* In the case of the development of employment at the plant in Likier, the author of the document does not indicate whether the quantification data refers to the average monthly number of workers per year or to the situation on a specific day. Most likely the average monthly value of the respective year was used.

In early 1934, the chemical plants in Smolenice experienced an extremely difficult situation and were only able to fulfil their financial obligations to a limited extent. Therefore, its second largest creditor, *Anglo-Pragobanka*, confiscated the entire volume of wood on the estate, which gradually brought production to a complete halt. The release of the necessary raw material was conditional on the proper repayment of a large loan in cash. After negotiations, a compromise solution was reached on 30 March 1934, when the bank granted a three-month deferral of repayment. The plants subsequently restarted operations.<sup>15</sup> In 1935, production conditions in Smolenice stabilised, and the factories for the dry distillation of wood operated continuously. Although the production of varnishes was limited, it did continue non-stop during the year.<sup>16</sup>

Also of interest is the development of the share of domestic and foreign sales of final products. In 1933, the total turnover of Pálffy's chemical plants was 9.2

<sup>15</sup> Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], Živnostenská banka fund, box 6687, folder number 1, Řed. Zprávy 1920 – 1944 [Reports 1920 – 1944], Chemická továrna Smolenice Josef Pálffy [Smolenice Chemical Factory Jozef Pálffy], March 19, 1934.; JASTRABÍK, Štefan. *90 rokov chémie pod malými Karpatmi (1883 – 1973)* [90 years of chemistry under the Little Carpathians (1883 – 1973)]. Bratislava: Práca, 1973. pp. 44-45.

<sup>16</sup> Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], *Pražská úvěrní banka* fund, box 586, folder number 1, Josef Pálffy – velkostatek a chem. továrny [Jozef Pálffy – large estate and chemical factory], Filiálka v Bratislavě – Josef Pálffy, Smolenice [Bratislava branch – Josef Pálffy, Smolenice], October 4, 1935.

million Kč, the export value of which was 2.4 million Kč. After the subsequent year-on-year increase in turnover by 700,000 Kč, it again fell in 1935 to the level of 9.1 million Kč, while exports fell to 1.5 million Kč. The total turnover also included the sales of varnishes, whose value at the end of the depression was 2 million Kč. Aside from the decrease in exports by 37.5%, the above data show that the importance of the domestic market grew in the monitored period (see Table 3). Nevertheless, the chemical plants had problems with the sale of their main product – acetic acid (edible and technical). Its share in the total turnover and revenues within the dry distillation of wood products reached up to 40%. In his monograph, Štefan Jastrabík points to the then intensive efforts of the *Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants* to promote the use of fermented spirit vinegar instead of edible acetic acid vinegar produced from wood.<sup>17</sup>

**Tab. 3:** Approximate sales in Czechoslovakia, export, turnover and economic result of the Jozef Pálffy Chemical Factory for the relevant calendar year in Czechoslovak koruna.

	Demand in the ČSR	Export	Turnover (from this varnish)	Net profit	Loss
1933	6,800,000	2,400,000	9,200,000 (?)*	-	832,000
1934	8,000,000	1,900,000	9,900,000 (?)*	-	486,000
1935	7,600,000	1,500,000	9,100,000 (2,000,000)	-	748,000
1936	10,800,000	1,000,000	11,800,000 (2,800,000)	-	188,000
1937	13,800,000	1,200,000	15,000,000 (4,800,000)	1,454,000	-

**Source:** Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu* [Society for Chemical and Metallurgical Production fund], box 517, signature GS 160/15, Čsl. Stickstoff – Werke – Smolenice, Record number H/1149, June 3, 1938, pp. 4-5, appendix pp. 3-4.

\* Data for varnishes for 1933 and 1934 could not be obtained.

<sup>17</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu* [Society for Chemical and Metallurgical Production fund], box 517, signature GS 160/15, Čsl. Stickstoff – Werke – Smolenice, Record number H/1149, June 3, 1938, appendix pp. 3-4.; JASTRABÍK, Štefan. *90 rokov chémie pod malými Karpatmi (1883 – 1973)* [90 years of chemistry under the Little Carpathians (1883 – 1973)]. Bratislava: Práca, 1973. p. 47.



Upon looking at the economic result, the *Pálffy* chemical plants ended up with loss each year during the Depression (see Table 3). This did not necessarily mean that the business was in bad shape, since only the value of bank interests and commissions included in the costs in this period exceeded the amount of the final loss.<sup>18</sup> This is confirmed by the report of the *Pražská úvěrová banka* (Prague Credit Bank) from October 1935 on the state of the *Pálffy* plants: “Production of the mentioned chemicals is profitable. However, the factory enterprises are unable to earn enough to pay interest and various court and legal fees, since the entire property is disproportionately indebted and many creditors are demanding the payment of their claims through enforcement.”<sup>19</sup>

Another producer in Slovakia – the *Dr. Blasberg* works – struggled during the Depression in particular with the lack of beech wood fuel, as a result of which he had to limit production. Both contractual suppliers of raw materials gradually reduced their supplies to a minimum for several reasons, and already during the crisis the factory in Likier was forced to use its own wood reserves created in case of an emergency. The raw materials needed could be imported from state forests, but at prices disadvantageous for production and even higher than those paid by the competition. Company representatives therefore turned to the relevant authorities and ministries for help, justifying their demands in a memorandum sent on 31 March 1934.<sup>20</sup> The settling of the matter between the applicant and the state institutions lasted for more than a year. Despite the chemical works in Likier being on the list of plants important for the defence of the republic, the Ministry of National Defence did not consider it necessary to comply with the above-mentioned

request. It justified its stance with the inappropriate capital structure of the *Dr. Blasberg* company, which was de facto in German hands. German national Ludvík Dettelbacher served as company’s director during this period.<sup>21</sup>

After lengthy negotiations, both sides agreed on certain concessions. The plant in Likier was granted a significant discount on railway charges for the transport of wood, both from the forests of Subcarpathian Rus’ (valid from 15 April 1935 to 14 April 1936) and from the Kriváň-Detva station (valid from 19 April 1935 to 31 December 1935).<sup>22</sup> To ensure undisturbed operation, 14,000 spatial metres of beech firewood coming from state forests in Žarnovica were sold at a set price per square metre of 5 to 8 Kč lower than its market equivalent. What’s more, during May and June, negotiations were also underway with the *Czechoslovak Central Wood Store* about the supply of an additional 20,000 to 25,000 spatial metres of raw material.<sup>23</sup> Thus, the plant in Likier managed to avert the threat of shutdown and in 1935, it employed 333 workers on average per month. The plant operated properly for 48 hours a week throughout the year.<sup>24</sup>

In 1936, five more important plants for the dry distillation of wood continued to operate on the domestic market – *Josef Pálffy’s Smolenice Chemical Plant*, *Dr.*

<sup>18</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu* [Society for Chemical and Metallurgical Production fund], box 517, signature GS 160/15, Čsl. Stickstoff – Werke – Smolenice, Record number H/1149, June 3, 1938, pp. 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], *Pražská úvěrová banka* fund, box 586, folder number 1, Josef Pálffy – velkostatek a chem. továrny [Josef Pálffy – large estate and chemical factory], Josef Pálffy, chemická továrna, Smolenice [Josef Pálffy, Chemical Factory, Smolenice], October 14, 1935.

<sup>20</sup> Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 5139, Pridelenie palivového dreva [Firewood allocation], March 31, 1934, pp. 4-6.; Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 9420, Zásobenie bukovým palivom... [Supply of beech fuel...], June 25, 1934.; Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 2436, Továrň v Hnúšťa-Likieru nemá dreva [The factory in Hnúšť’a-Likier do not have wood], February 11, 1935.; Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 4422, Dodávky suroviny [Raw material supplies], March 13, 1935.

<sup>21</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Předsednictvo ministerské rady* [Presidency of the Council of Ministers], box 3650, inventory number 2676, reference number 10498, Lučobný priemysel Dr. Blasberg... Příklad dříví za účelem udržení provozu, Dr. Blasberg v Likieru – dodávky dřeva [Chemical industry... Dr. Blasberg... Allotment of wood for the purpose of maintaining operations, Dr. Blasberg in Likier – supply of wood], May 25, 1935.

<sup>22</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Předsednictvo ministerské rady* [Presidency of the Council of Ministers], box 3650, inventory number 2676, reference number 30908, Lučobný priemysel Dr. Blasberg... Příklad dříví za účelem udržení provozu, Dr. Blasberg v Likieru – osobní poměry [Chemical industry... Dr. Blasberg... Allotment of wood for the purpose of maintaining operations, Dr. Blasberg in Likier – personal relationships in the company], June 19, 1935.

<sup>23</sup> Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, reference number 7772, Obchodnej a priemyselnej komore v B. Bystrici [to Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica,], May 11, 1935.; Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Předsednictvo ministerské rady* [Presidency of the Council of Ministers], box 3650, inventory number 2676, reference number 13031, Lučobný priemysel Dr. Blasberg... Příklad dříví za účelem udržení provozu, Dr. Blasberg v Likieru – dodávky dřeva – osobní poměry [Chemical industry... Dr. Blasberg... Allotment of wood for the purpose of maintaining operations, Dr. Blasberg in Likier – supply of wood – personal relationships in the company], June 18, 1935. The unit of measurement, the spatial metre, can be simply defined as a cube with edges one metre long, which is imperfectly filled with wood, i.e. it contains unfilled gaps. With a cubic metre, the entire volume is filled with wood without gaps, which is very difficult to achieve in practice.

<sup>24</sup> Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 456, inventory number 556, without a reference number, Lučobný priemysel dr. Blasberg a spol. komand. spol. [the Lučobný industry Dr. Blasberg and company, limited partnership], Likier pp. Hnúšť’a.

*Blasberg and co., Ltd Chemical Industry; Bantlin Chemical Works, a.s.* in Perečín; *Clotilda, a.s., for the Chemical Industry* in Veľký Bočkov; and *Szolyva a.s. for Wood Processing* in Svalava. There was only one small factory in the Czech lands. Depending on the season, these five producers employed together some 8,000 to 10,000 workers (the figure includes factory and forest workers, transport workers and others). All the mentioned plants were associated in the main domestic syndicate *Acetic*, as well as in other domestic and foreign cartels.<sup>25</sup>

The revival of the economy in the republic was initially evident only minimally in the industry of dry distillation of wood. Employment rose in 1936, and in the last months of the year domestic sales showed moderate improvement. On average, the plants were operating 45% of their maximum production capacity. While domestic prices did not change compared to the previous period, a significant drop in foreign trade did take place. The decrease in exports was caused mainly by the persistent competition and the application of various restrictions that prevented trade. The loss of markets in Italy as a result of the sanctions imposed on it for its invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935 was a huge problem.<sup>26</sup>

A similar line of development can also be seen in 1937. Sales on the domestic market grew slightly along with employment, though an increase in the price of beech wood had a negative effect on the profitability of production. Exports further declined, as competition from the United States, Canada and Japan battled in foreign markets by cutting prices of their own products.<sup>27</sup> The situation began to improve significantly in early 1938, when Hungary opened up to the import of charcoal from Czechoslovakia. Its original supplier, Romania, began to use most

<sup>25</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Předsednictvo ministerské rady* [Presidency of the Council of Ministers], box 3901, inventory number 2832, reference number 293, Destilace dřeva, Požadavky priemyslu suchej destilácie [Dry distillation of wood, The requirements of the dry distillation industry], November 3, 1936.; Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], *Pražská úvěrní banka* fund, box 689, folder number 5, Josef Pálffy – velkostatek a chem. továrny [Josef Pálffy – large estate and chemical factory], Josef Pálffy, chemická továrna, Smolenice [Josef Pálffy, Chemical Factory, Smolenice], March 12, 1938, pp. 1-4.

<sup>26</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Předsednictvo ministerské rady* [Presidency of the Council of Ministers], box 3901, inventory number 2832, reference number 293, Destilace dřeva, Požadavky priemyslu suchej destilácie [Dry distillation of wood, The requirements of the dry distillation industry], November 3, 1936.; Situace chemického průmyslu v Československu [Report on the situation of the Czechoslovak chemical industry]. In *Chemické listy pro vědu a průmysl* [Chemical Documents for Science and Industry], 1937, vol. XXXI, No. 11-12, p. 220.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1936* [Slovak Industry in 1936]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1937. p. 25.

<sup>27</sup> Situace československého průmyslu chemického v roce 1937 [The situation of the Czechoslovak chemical industry in 1937]. In *Chemické listy pro vědu a průmysl* [Chemical Documents for Science and Industry], 1938, vol. XXXII, No. 15-16, p. 304.; *Slovenský priemysel roku 1937* [Slovak Industry in 1937]. Turčiansky sv. Martin: Ústredné združenie slovenského priemyslu [Central Association of Slovak Industry], 1938. p. 45.

of its own production for weapons purposes and almost completely limited the export of this commodity. The improved sales occurred in the case of acetic acid, which had a major share in the turnover of both plants in Slovakia.<sup>28</sup>

In the case of the *Pálffy* plants, the larger demand in the country for the products of the dry distillation of wood was reflected in the reduction of its loss compared to the previous period. While the branch plant in Dobrá Voda reported a loss of 292,000 Kč, the factory in Smolenice even ended up with a net profit of 104,000 Kč.<sup>29</sup> The negative development in exports continued, as they recorded a decrease of 58.3% between 1933 and 1936. The production of varnish had an increasingly large share of the resulting turnover, and a similar line of development can also be observed in 1937. During the same period, the *Pálffy* plants reported a net profit of 1.454 million Kč for the first time, and better results began being seen even in the case of exports. The domestic sales are interesting to observe, as they more than doubled compared to the deepest part of the Depression (see Table 3).<sup>30</sup> Despite the above, it was still not possible to reduce the indebtedness, which reached a total of 21.883 million Kč in 1937. Yet, the forced administration of large estates and chemical factories belonging to them continued until the end of the republic.<sup>31</sup>

The works in Likier continued to struggle with the lack of wood. What's more, since 1937, the main supplier, the company *Latorica* in Mukachevo, was unable to provide the contractually stipulated volume of the necessary raw material due to a lack of forest workers. Again, lengthy negotiations with the relevant authorities followed, ending in an agreement on 1 June 1938. The state forests undertook to immediately provide 30,000 spatial metres of beech wood. Negotiations on discounted railway charges for the import of timber from the forests of Subcarpathian Rus' also restarted.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], *Pražská úvěrní banka* fund, box 689, folder number 5, Josef Pálffy – velkostatek a chem. továrny [Josef Pálffy – large estate and chemical factory], Chemická továrna Smolenice Josef Pálffy [Chemical Factory Smolenice Josef Pálffy], March 12, 1938, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], *Pražská úvěrní banka* fund, box 586, folder number 1, Josef Pálffy – velkostatek a chem. továrny [Josef Pálffy – large estate and chemical factory], Josef Pálffy Smolenice, May 18, 1937.

<sup>30</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Spolek pro chemickou a hutní výrobu* [Society for Chemical and Metallurgical Production fund], box 517, signature GS 160/15, Čsl. Stuckstoff – Werke – Smolenice, Record number H/1149, June 3, 1938, pp. 4-5, appendix pp. 3-4.

<sup>31</sup> Archiv České národní banky v Praze [Czech National Bank Archive in Prague], *Pražská úvěrní banka* fund, box 689, folder number 4, Chemická továrna Josef Pálffy Smolenice [Chemical Factory Josef Pálffy Smolenice], December 31, 1937.; JASTRABÍK, Štefan. *90 rokov chémie pod malými Karpatmi (1883 – 1973)* [90 years of chemistry under the Little Carpathians (1883 – 1973)]. Bratislava: Práca, 1973. pp. 47-62.

<sup>32</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Předsednictvo ministerské rady* [Presidency of the Council of Ministers], box 3901, inventory number 2832, without a reference number, Destilace dřeva, Palivové dřevo [Dry distillation of wood, Firewood], May 3, 1937.

Sales of the products from the Likier plant on the domestic market can be seen as satisfactory during this period, and the average number of workers even increased to 529 in 1937. In contrast to this, the situation in exports developed unfavourably. The plant was unable to withstand the drop in prices of the products of the dry distillation of wood on foreign markets and was thus pushed out of a large portion of its outlets. The growth of wages and prices of raw materials in the country also had a negative effect on its competitiveness, and the aforementioned sanctions against Italy, which was one of the main buyers of acetone and charcoal from the factory in Likier, led to a drop in exports.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

The economy of Czechoslovakia, a part of which was also the industry of dry distillation of wood, passed through several important stages in the interwar period. One of them – the period between 1934 and 1938 – is analysed in the presented study. The chemical sector mainly placed its products on the domestic market. Plants for the dry distillation of wood were an exception, as they exported part of their production abroad. The collapse of export opportunities during the Great Depression between 1929 and 1933 in combination with the negative economic development in the republic resulted in the temporary stoppage of operations at the factory for the dry distillation of wood in Dobrá Voda.

<sup>33</sup> Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Předsednictvo ministerské rady* [Presidency of the Council of Ministers], box 3901, inventory number 2832, reference number 713/38-V, Destilace dřeva, Dodávka bukového palivového dřeva fe Lučobný priemysel Dr. Blasberg... – záznam o dohode [Dry distillation of wood, Delivery of beech firewood to the Dr. Blasberg... – agreement record], June 1, 1938, pp. 1-2.; Národní archiv v Praze [National Archives in Prague], fond *Předsednictvo ministerské rady* [Presidency of the Council of Ministers], box 3901, inventory number 2832, reference number 36099-III/1938, Destilace dřeva, Sleva dovozného pre bukové palivové drevo zo staníc Čiňadovo, Hankovice, Svalava a Zaňka do st. Hnúšť'a [Dry distillation of wood, Fee discount on the import of beech firewood from stations Čiňadovo, Hankovice, Svalava a Zaňka to station Hnúšť'a], July 26, 1938.; Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 438, inventory number 549, without a reference number, Dotazník: /Likier/ [Questionnaire: /Likier/]; Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 438, inventory number 549, without a reference number, Dotazník: /Likier/ [Questionnaire: /Likier/]. Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 545, inventory number 576, reference number 2316/37, Protokol o Vaší plenárni schůzi, Dotazník:... Dr. Blasberg... [Protocol of your plenary session, Questionnaire:... Dr. Blasberg...]; Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [Slovak National Archives in Bratislava], fond *Obchodná a priemyselná komora v Banskej Bystrici* [The Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Banská Bystrica fund], box 658, inventory number 581, reference number 19271, Dr. Blasberg, Prehľad zamestnanosti v prvom polroku 1938 [Dr. Blasberg, Overview of employment in the first half of 1938], September 7, 1938.

In 1934, the economy of Czechoslovakia overcame the deepest decline and ended up in the protracted phase of the Depression. Although an overall improvement in economic conditions did occur, individual macroeconomic indicators, such as exports, industrial production, and unemployment, continued to show great fluctuations. The chemical industry in Slovakia, too, struggled with a very difficult situation during the Depression. Sales and employment fluctuated; the prices of input raw materials mostly increased, and as a result of overproduction and strong competition on the domestic market, the prices of many final products fell even further. These matters had a negative impact on the efficiency of production and also affected the industry of dry distillation of wood. Furthermore, as a result of customs barriers, limited allocations and the dumping policy of some countries, the *Pálffy* chemical plants, as well as the *Dr. Blasberg* works lost a significant portion of its outlets abroad.

The revival of the world economy manifested in Czechoslovakia in the second half of 1936. On the whole, the chemical industry exceeded the pre-crisis state of production, and in regard to the industry of dry distillation of wood, we can speak of improvements. The *Pálffy* plants succeeded in making a profit again after years of losses, though at the same time its huge indebtedness hindering development did not decrease at all. On the other hand, the plant in Likier continued to struggle with the lack of its primary raw material – wood. What's more, it was gradually and definitively excluded from foreign outlets. Nevertheless, the situation in the industry of dry distillation of wood can be described as stabilised until the Munich Agreement, despite the renewed crisis decline that began at the end of 1937.

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## Úloha bezpečnostných orgánov štátu pri zabezpečovaní štátno-bezpečnostnej agendy, na príklade Okresného úradu v Trnave<sup>1</sup>

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*The role of state security authorities in ensuring the state security agenda, on the example of the District office in Trnava*

The article deals with the organized and role of state security authorities in ensuring the state security agenda. The aim of the article was to analyze their role in ensuring the state security agenda through the presidential files of the District office in Trnava in the years 1923 to 1924. Through this analysis, the article points to the cooperation of the state's security bodies in ensuring the protection of the state and its inhabitants.

Keywords: District office, state security agenda, gendarmerie, state security authorities

## Úvod

Výkon bezpečnostných zložiek štátu bol rozdelený podľa rakúskeho systému z čias monarchie. Četníctvo bolo v teréne a polícia v mestách. Polícia bola štátna a komunálna, ktorá sa delila na mestskú a obecnú. V konečnom dôsledku četníctvo bolo podporované na vidieku obecnou políciou a v mestách štátnou políciou.<sup>2</sup> Po vzniku ČSR neexistovala na Slovensku štátna polícia. Bolo to z dôvodu, že prevzatá uhorská policajná sústava týmito zložkami nedisponovala. Vo všetkých mestách existovala mestská polícia.<sup>3</sup> Situáciu vyriešilo MPS, ktoré vytvorilo

<sup>1</sup> Príspevok je výstupom z riešenia projektu APVV-0199-20: Transformácia populačného vývoja na Slovensku v regionálnom pohľade od konca 19. do polovice 20. storočia.

<sup>2</sup> MACEK, Pavel – UHLÍŘ, Lubomír. *Dějiny policie a četnictva II. : Československo (1918-1938)*. Praha : Přeborská tiskárna, 1999. s. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Tamže, s. 21