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**Augustín Ráth. Prvý slovenský rektor Univerzity Komenského
[Augustín Ráth. First Slovak Rector of Comenius University]**

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The Comenius University, the first Slovak university was established in 1919. The new Czechoslovakia had only three universities in the interwar period – the oldest of them the Central European University in Prague (Charles University) and two new universities in Brno (Masaryk University) and Bratislava (Comenius University). The foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic in October 1918 gave a strong impulse to the use of the Slovak language in all public areas including the courts, the public administration and legal education. The Slovak legal and institutional infrastructure was born only after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. Bratislava became after 1919 not only a university city, but also a venue of scientific conferences, the seat of scientific societies and specialised magazines.

The big problem for prewar Slovakia and the Slovak national movement was the fact that there were only a very limited number of legal professionals with scientific background. The former university in Bratislava (University of St. Elisabeth) was an institution with Hungarian working language and spirit. Several legal academies working in the more important cities were Hungarian institutions, too. The solicitor or barrister was a typical legal profession for Slovak lawyers in the old Hungarian Kingdom before 1918. The public administration was a field mainly reserved for Hungarians or for Slovak renegats (Hungarised Slovaks). Very few Slovak lawyers worked at that time as a judge and Augustín Ráth was an unique exception in this respect.

Augustín Ráth (1873–1942) was born in Ružomberok (Rosenberg, Rózsahegy) in Liptov county. This county together with other north-western counties (Orava, Turiec, Trenčín) represented at that time the main bastion of the Slovak national movement in prewar Hungary. Ružomberok was a Catholic city in a predominantly Protestant county. Ráth descended from an enterprising family and his grandfather came from the mother side of a former mayor of city. Originally he had planned to become a priest, but later he changed this plan and started legal studies in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár), which was a center of Hungarian Transylvania at that time. Ráth finished his studies in Budapest. A very famous professor of Roman law, Márton Kajuch-Szentmiklóssy (a native from Liptov, too) suggested to him to try a university career in Budapest, but Ráth preferred the profession of a practical lawyer. Before 1914 he worked as provincial solicitor. Ráth was at that time active in the Slovak national movement, too – e. g. he founded the regional newspaper Orava and he was editor-in-chief of Slovenské ľudové noviny for a certain period. Ráth protected the Slovak activists in judicial processes. He was on the managing board of Úverná banka

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(Credit Bank) and in 1906 he stood as an unsuccessful Slovak candidate to the Hungarian parliament.

Just before the First World War Rath changed his profession and he became a judge in Novi Sad in Voivodina, which belonged then to Hungary. During the world war he served as a distinguished Austro-Hungarian military judge in Kruševac in occupied Serbia. He may have had good connections with the Serbs, because after the war he worked as a Serbian civil servant in Voivodina and later in Belgrade. Here he worked at the Ministry of Justice. He was responsible for the codification of laws and for this work he was awarded the Order of St. Sava 3rd Class.

Ráth repatriated to Czechoslovakia in 1919. At first he worked as a civil servant and as head of department at the Czechoslovak Ministry of Unification. This ministry was traditionally led by Slovak politicians and professionals, because they knew the Czech, Slovak, German and Hungarian languages. The knowledge of these languages was very important in the field of legal unification. Ráth was simultaneously also a judge of the electoral court. Rath participated in the discussions about the Slovak legal terminology, because this question ranked as very current after the First World War. The Slovak language became an official language of the Czechoslovak Republic, which needed the Slovak terminology, too. This terminology was born immediately after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The journal *Právny obzor* and its founder and first editor-in-chief, Emil Stodola played an important role in this sensitive process.

After his return to Czechoslovakia Ráth restarted his scientific career. He lectured at the Faculty of Law of Charles University in Prague, where he was habilitated in 1920. The president of the republic appointed him professor of civil law in 1921. He was a co-founder of the Faculty of Law of Comenius University in Bratislava and its first dean. He became the first Slovak rector of Comenius University in the school year 1921/1922. Augustín Ráth was a regular professor of civil law between the two world wars. He worked at the Faculty of Law until the end of his life. He was a very helpful and student-friendly professor.

Ráth performed many important functions in the scientific and social life of Slovakia. He was a member of many scientific societies (e. g. *Štátovedecká spoločnosť* (State Science Society) or *Učená Spoločnosť Šafárikova* (Šafárik Learned Society)). He participated in the preparation of an uniform Czechoslovak Civil Code, but this code was adopted only after the Second World War. He and his wife were active in the social life of the interwar Bratislava. His wife was Czech and they had four children. Ráth did not support the restrictions against the Czech professors in Bratislava (the majority of professors of the Faculty of Law had Czech origin) after the declaration of Slovak independence, but he did not protest openly. Augustín Ráth died in 1942 in Bratislava.

During his scientific life Ráth dealt with several aspects of civil law. His important topic was the unification and codification of law. He published about the legal customs and he dealt with the Slovak legal terminology, too.

The author of Ráth' biography is Jozef Vozár (1967), who is presently the director of the Institute of State and Law in Bratislava. This institute is a part of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. Vozár is a specialist for Slovak civil law, but recently he has been publishing very interesting biographies about the life of important Slovak lawyers from the first half of 20th century. Several years ago he published a monography about the four famous Slovak

lawyers coming from Liptov. Vozár is a native of Liptov, too. This book contained one chapter about Augustín Ráth as well. Later he published a monography about Vladimír Fajnor, who was the first Slovak president of the prewar Czechoslovak Supreme Court. Together with professor Ol'ga Ovečková he edited the representative book about the history of the first Slovak legal scientific journal (Právny obzor), which had been founded by Emil Stodola in 1917.

The new publication by Jozef Vozár is based on research in the Czech and Slovak archives (especially of Comenius University, Archiv in Bratislava) and on good knowledge of the memoaires. He used the old and current Slovak legal literature, too. The book has five big chapters. The first chapter is about the private life and studies of the young Slovak lawyer. The second chapter focuses on the socilitor's, scientific, journalist and political career before 1918. Then it deals with the years of the First World War. The third chapter presents the very interesting issue of the unification of law in prewar Czechoslovakia. This issue is especially interesting from the legal point of view. The fourth chapter deals with the activities of Ráth in the Slovak scientific life. The fifth chapter is the biggest – it focuses on the history of Comenius University and on the role of Ráth there. This chapter encompasses half of the book. The final chapter deals with the complex evaluation of the person of Augustín Ráth and with his place in the history of Slovak legal science and legal education. Vozár has called attention to the moral and human qualities of Augustín Ráth. He was a moderate, tolerant and democratic person and he played a very important role in the process of education of the first strong generation of Slovak legal scholars. The style of the book is elegant (Moderált és elegáns stílus – ezt így furcsa. Elég, hogy elegáns.) The readers can feel the sympathy of the author with his hero, but this fact does not change the objective character of the book. This fact is especially evident in the last chapters and the conclusions.

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