

A BANKER AND DIPLOMAT HAS LEFT US

doc. Dr. Ing. Vladimír Valach
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When a person departs, it is a loss for humanity. When a professional departs, it is a loss for his expert circles, and when it is an intellectual, it is a loss for the society to which he belonged. And if a combination of all three departs? Only three? – Vladimír Valach described himself as a „banker, economist, teacher, publicist, diplo-



mat, admirer of art, the beauty of nature and human genius“ in the introduction to his incomparable book: „Paris – Bratislava or Why do I love France?“ However, a friend, aesthete, ethicist, nonchalant, pleasant person with plans for the future has also departed. When describing himself, he remained typically modest. He claimed that the words from his mouth or his pen were weighed on the scales of sensitive analysis, with comparison and consideration of what needs to be said and what can be said, so that it will only be the truth and should not offend anybody.

This was how we all knew him: as a banker and economist, from 1st July 1960, when he joined the Štátna banka československá (State Bank of Czechoslovakia – ŠBČS) in Banská Bystrica after graduating from the Economics University as a 23 year old from Tekovské Nemce, until May 2004, when he was executive director of the Association of Banks. He was repeatedly ahead of his time. He founded and managed a branch of the Československá obchodná banka (Czechoslovak Commercial Bank) in Bratislava, oriented towards support for foreign trade. For five years, from 1st September 1976, he headed the first office representing this bank „in the West“ – in Paris, with which he fell in love at first sight. From 1985, he applied his experience abroad as a deputy of the general director of the ŠBČS headquarters in Bratislava and from 1st January 1990 as first deputy governor of the ŠBČS in Prague. He initiated the establishment of the Slovenská záručná banka (Slovak Guarantee Bank) to help small and middle-sized businesses and two years later the Credit Lyonnais Bank Slovakia. He had the good fortune to see a close connection between thought and action. Immediately after the monetary separation in February 1993, when Slovakia and its currency were still unknown, it was just thanks to him that the first „supra-national“ bank came to us. Also thanks to his compelling enthusiasm, the new bank got its licence in only four days. He never forgot to emphasize that it was probably an unrepeatable „world record“.

The French recognized him as a diplomat in the full sense of the word. For a range of people from the most important politicians to artists and ordinary citizens, he

elegantly, charmingly and successfully communicated and represented the unknown land of Slovakia. In the framework of his diplomatic mission from 4th August 1997 to the end of October 2001, he contributed greatly to strengthening Slovak – French friendship and celebrating and spreading French art and joie de vivre. He

became a knight of the Legion d'Honneur, a dignitary in the Order of National Merit and an honorary citizen of the town of Meudon, which is adorned with a statue of Milan Rastislav Štefánik thanks to him. He was recognized as a teacher at the Faculty of International Relations of the University of Economics and as a publicist by readers of his expert texts, the radio listeners and television viewers from dozens or hundreds of articles and appearances in the mass media. He had something to say and he knew how to say it. He wrote textbooks, expert publications and the above mentioned book – „An Ode to France“. Precisely on the occasion of its publication, we met four years ago in the studio of Slovak Radio, and so I heard and saw in person the indescribable enthusiasm in his eyes as he talked about the book, and especially about his great love, about France, which he knew and loved.

He will not write the book „Why I love Slovakia?“ and he will not participate in creating the planned continuation of the trilogy on the history of banking since 1950. He explained his final small book with the long title: „Events, personalities and crossroads in Slovak banking, 1950 – 2005 through the eyes of a banker“, which now takes the place of the unwritten fourth volume of the history of Slovak banking, with the idea that he wanted to express his respect and thanks, although delayed and perhaps also isolated, to the bank staff, who were not properly appreciated either socially or materially – „especially because many are gradually departing from us for ever.“

Sadly, he has joined them too soon.

When we and Mr. Návrat, a friend who preceded him to the banking heaven by a few months, discussed whether we had bankers, it occurred to us that probably not, if the banker means only the owner of a bank. However, perhaps we forgot Vladimír Valach. He never owned a bank, but he founded at least two. He was a person, who worked in banks, he was precise and exact, but he knew that banks do not exist for money, but for people. He had a heart.

And this gives one of our few bankers the position he deserves in the Slovak banking heaven.

Marián Tkáč