

GUSTÁV HUSÁK, NORMALIZED

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A biography devoted to Gustáv Husák, which was written by Czech historian Michal Macháček and generated considerable public interest, has been available since 2017 and was awarded a prize by Czech President Miloš Zeman in 2018. Husák, who had joined the Communist Party (KSČ) in 1929, was charged with Slovak nationalist activities in the 1950s and found guilty. After the Prague Spring, he was promoted to KSČ First Secretary and President of Czechoslovakia. He became, as it were, the face of the era of „normalization.“ The present review article appraises Macháček’s voluminous book as a missed opportunity to offer serious interpretations of Husák as a politician and as a person. The author criticizes that neither is Husák’s generational and intellectual background depicted with sufficient clarity, nor is examined where his political thoughts came from. Thus, the central question of the importance for Husák of the communist ideology on the one hand and of Slovak nationalism on the other remains open. Husák’s course of action is explained by means of pseudo-psychological motifs such as a pronounced minority complex. Last but not least, there is no comparison of Husák and his political style with the other “last Secretary Generals” in the neighboring socialist countries. The author of the present article characterizes the tendency to collect an enormous amount of facts while at the same time dispensing with a theoretical interpretation thereof, thus depending on the sources explaining themselves well enough, as a manner of historiography which is still widespread in the Czech Republic.