



An impact of political changes upon ethnic identity of Hungarian population in the region of southern Slovakia after 1918

Milan Olejník, Institute of Social Sciences Košice, Slovak Academy of Sciences,
olejnik@saske.sk

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The paper is concisely analyzing history of Hungarian community in Czechoslovak Republic after 1918. Similarly as the majority society - Slovaks, the Hungarians underwent a dramatic flow of changes - adaption to conditions of the First Republic (1918 - 1948), a period of communist dictate and democratic changes after November 1989. Each of these periods affected lives of Hungarians living in Slovakia in a different way. The paper is trying to provide elementary information of these developments and reactions of Hungarians as members of community but also as individuals.

Hungarian minority. Reslovakization. Ethnic identity.

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Factors influencing the formation of ethnic identity are conditioned by character and intensity of changes to which is given community exposed. Slovakia, due to complexity of her ethnic composition and also due to dramatic political and social transformations, which affected country after Great War, became a place, where individual ethnic groups underwent profound changes. Besides Slovaks, territory of Slovakia is a home of Czechs, Hungarians, Germans, Ruthenians, Jews and other smaller ethnic communities.

Till demise of Austro-Hungarian Empire, Slovakia was an integral part of Hungary. During the second half of 19th century, Hungarian political élites initiated a transformation of Hungary with an aim to build an ethnically homogenous state. This process, called "magyarization", accelerated at the outset of 20th century. State authorities supported build-up of schools with Hungarian teaching language, Hungarian patriotism became a foundation of state ideology. Hungarian nationalistic ideology successfully spread not only among ethnic Hungarians, but made deep inroads also in non-Hungarian communities. "Magyarization", as a program supported by government authorities of pre-war Hungary, was ended after defeat of Central Powers. Hungarian kingdom lost two thirds of its territory and sizeable part of population. Slovakia became part of a newly formed state - Czechoslovak Republic (CSR). Hungarian community, which predominantly inhabited southern part of Slovakia, suddenly found itself in a position of minority. According statistics from year 1921^[1], 634 827 persons reported Hungarian nationality.

With goal to consolidate situation in Slovakia, National Assembly in Prague delegated basically an unlimited power to its representative Vavro Šrobár and named him "Minister with Full Powers for the Administration of Slovakia".

Because of reluctance of a majority of Hungarian population to accept existing conditions, situation was far from stable. Civil disorders and strikes erupted. In reaction to disruptions, of which the most serious was strike of railroad workers, Minister V. Šrobár declared in March 25, 1919 a state of emergency on the whole territory of Slovakia.[\[2\]](#)

Situation of Hungarian minority members in Slovakia was worsened also by developments in Hungary. Chaotic political, economic and social conditions, which reigned in Hungary after end of the First World War, deteriorated to such an extent, that a Bolshevik revolution erupted in Budapest. With intention to spread a communist revolution, Hungarian Red Army commenced military operation in Slovakia on May 30 and occupied almost a half of Slovak territory.[\[3\]](#) Despite military success, an ultimatum by Supreme Council of Victorious Powers sent to Hungarian government on June 15, 1919, reversed the situation. It demanded retreat of Hungarian military forces from Slovakia under threat of attack on Budapest. On June 16 Hungarian forces retreated from Slovakia.

Desperate aim of communist Hungary to annex Slovakia worsened Slovak Hungarian relations. Military incursion was classified by Czechoslovak political leaders as proof that Hungary, regardless of a political regime, is a sworn enemy of CSR. This had a negative impact upon the situation of Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. Ethnic Hungarians, especially intelligentsia and aristocracy, who were the main supporters of former Hungarian regime, were classified by Czechoslovak security authorities as enemies of CSR.[\[4\]](#) Hungarian élites, closely attached to pre-war Hungary, were not only viewed with suspicion and occasionally with open hostility, but also lost their possibility to be employed in government agencies and were under constant surveillance of Czechoslovak security authorities. Loss of social prestige combined with loss of possibilities to obtain an employment in government agencies resulted in a mass exodus to Hungary. This, among other factors, contributed to decrease of size of Hungarian community in CSR. Till end of year 1921, approximately 105 000 ethnic Hungarians left Czechoslovakia.[\[5\]](#)

There were, however, also positive changes ongoing in CSR, which to certain extent improved position of Hungarian minority members. On February 29, 1920 Czechoslovak government adopted Constitution of Czechoslovak Republic.[\[6\]](#) This supreme legal document defined civic rights of all citizens in a truly democratic fashion. All feudal privileges were abolished, each citizen, including women, had a right to vote and to be elected to all public offices. Especially encouraging was a constitutional provision dealing with the status of ethnic minorities. Paragraphs 128 - 134 of the Constitution defined the basic rights of ethnic minorities. Citizens of Czechoslovakia, regardless of their ethnic origin, had a right to take an active part in political activities, including establishment of political parties and organizations, had a right to organize cultural and educational associations, right to education in their mother tongue and right to take part in religious congregations without hindrance. The Constitution created conditions for establishment a number of political parties in Slovakia, including parties organized on ethnic principle. In a relatively short period of time, before first general elections into National Assembly (Parliament and Senate), which were held in November of 1920, a number of political parties formed, including political organizations representing Hungarian minority. The position of prominence in Hungarian society attained two parties - Land Christian Socialist Party and Hungarian National Party. During their existence[\[7\]](#) both parties stayed in opposition.

The status of Hungarian minority members was affected by reluctance of inter-war Hungary to accept Peace Treaty of Trianon. The Treaty of Trianon was considered a tragedy, a grave injustice committed against Hungarian Nation and Hungarian representatives, regardless of their political orientation, though clandestinely, harbored intention to use every possible means to restore status quo ante. This revisionist resolve became a source of constant tensions between Czechoslovakia and Hungary. Consequently, Hungarian community in Southern Slovakia was exposed to restrictive measures from Czechoslovak authorities and security agencies. Result was a permanent state of mutual distrust, which gravely limited possibility of accommodation between Slovak society and Hungarian community. Even a segment of Hungarian minority, which honestly strove for some form of accommodation with ruling Czechoslovak political establishment, was largely ignored. Far from evenly balanced and just was also realized a land reform in Southern Slovakia. Land allotments were primarily awarded to Slovaks and Czechs, largely bypassing Hungarian peasants.

Uneasy coexistence among Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Hungarians and other ethnic communities, which constituted ethnic composition of CSR, was exposed to increased strain after imposition of Nazi regime in Germany. Inexorable decision of Adolf Hitler to destroy Czechoslovakia culminated in infamous Munich Dictate. The submission of Czechoslovak government led to dramatic political changes in Slovakia. The main Slovak opposition party - Hlinka's Slovak Populist Party, took reins of power in Slovakia and established autonomy. However, autonomous status of Slovakia was not without price. At that time

influence of Nazi Germany in Central Europe grew enormously. With aim to maintain friendly relations with Hungary, Adolf Hitler decided to consent, though only partially, to Hungarian territorial demands. According to Vienna Arbitration, concluded on November 1938, sizeable part of Slovak territory was awarded to Hungary.

After March 15, 1939, when Slovakia became quasi independent state (in reality a satellite of Germany), relations with Hungary were far from harmonious. The remnant of Hungarian community, which remained in Slovakia, was awarded minority rights only to the extent of rights awarded to Slovak minority in Hungary. Slovak government defended this policy on pretense of reciprocity.

Defeat of Germany and reestablishment of Czechoslovakia in her pre-war boundaries had numerous consequences. In regard to Hungarian population living in Southern Slovakia, it resulted in worsening its situation in a markedly negative way. Czechoslovak government, led by President Edward Beneš, decided to expel so called non-Slavic minorities - that is Germans and Hungarians, arguing that these communities contributed to destruction of CSR. The concept of "collective guilt" was used to justify this intention. Ethnic Germans and Hungarians were stripped of Czechoslovak citizenship, their property was confiscated and government authorities commenced preparations for their deportation.^[8] However, unlike in the case of Germans, Western Allies during the Potsdam Conference in summer 1945 did not approved deportation of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia. Consequently, government of CSR was compelled to look for other ways how to decrease number of Hungarians living in Slovakia. Intention to exchange ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia for ethnic Slovaks living in Hungary was successful only partially because of reluctance of Hungarian government to give an unconditional support to full scale exchange. The main reason, according to Hungarian political representation, was a humanitarian concern. Therefore, less than 90 thousand ethnic Hungarians were resettled to Hungary during years 1945 - 1948. Also a plan to lower number of Hungarian minority members in Slovakia via forced resettlement to Czech part of Republic failed. Czechoslovak authorities eventually tried a bizarre measure - so called "reslovakization". The idea behind decision to "reslovakize" ethnic Hungarians was based on notion that these people were actually, by their origin, Slovaks, who were during period of "magyarization" forced to acquire Hungarian nationality and therefore they should return to their "right" ethnicity. Fear of deportation combined with need to legalize their status in CSR, led many Hungarians to submit requests to "reslovakize". Over 450 thousand persons requested to be included into a program of "reslovakization" and 362 679 of them were accepted.^[9] The futility of forced attempt to change ethnicity is documented by the fact that after change of political conditions in Czechoslovakia, "reslovakized" Hungarians almost without exception assumed their Hungarian ethnic identity. Whereas during of census from year 1950 354 532 persons reported Hungarian nationality, during census from year 1960 518 782 persons adhered to Hungarian nationality, which approximately correspond to actual number of ethnic Hungarian living in Slovakia at that time.

Years 1945 - 1948 were unquestionably the most frustrating time period for Hungarian minority members. After return of Southern Slovakia to the orbit of Czechoslovak Republic, they were stripped of state citizenship, exposed to restrictive government measures and threatened with expulsion. It was paradoxical, that imposition of totalitarian communist regime in Czechoslovakia led in several ways to improvement of situation of Hungarian community.

In February 1948 Communist Party took over political power in Czechoslovakia. Though communist takeover was not violent, it was far from legal and, as following events proved, quickly led to dismantle of all vestiges of democracy in CSR. Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPC) controlled all aspects of life. Communist ideology became mandatory and total control of the whole society ensued. The change affected also a sensitive sphere of Slovak - Hungarian relations. Czechoslovakia and Hungary became communist countries and satellites of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics ((USSR). Relations between both countries, which were up to year 1948 burdened by conflicting ethnic policies, radically changed. A new factor - imperial ambitions of USSR, had a deep impact upon political developments in both countries. Czechoslovakia and Hungary were forced to eliminate their differences and start developing friendly relations. Furthermore, in Czechoslovakia as well as in Hungary a thesis of "proletarian internationalism" became the fundamental principle in guiding relations among ethnic communities. Nationalism was classified as a bourgeois ideology and was strongly condemned.^[10]

A firm decision of Soviet Union to include Czechoslovakia and Hungary into its sphere of influence, compelled both countries to harmonize their bilateral relations and to look for ways of mutual understanding. On April 16, 1949 the Czechoslovak-Hungarian "Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance, and Cooperation" was signed.^[11] Previous restrictive measures enacted against Hungarian minority were abandoned. Ethnic Hungarians were awarded rights in sphere of education and culture. On May 9,

1948 a new Constitution was adopted. Among other clauses, equality of all citizens, including members of ethnic communities, was declared.

Communist take-over changed all aspects of life in Czechoslovakia to an unprecedented degree. Unlike in pre-war CSR, right to establish political parties with different programs and ideological orientations was eliminated. Market economy and free enterprise was proclaimed to be a tool of capitalist class used for exploitation of workers and therefore ruthlessly suppressed. Despite of constant assertions how democratic and righteous society was established under leadership of Communist Party, citizens of CSR became utterly dependent on decisions of government.

Formally, all citizens, regardless of their ethnic origin, were equal. Based on decision of Central Committee of Communist Party of Slovakia (CC CPS)[\[12\]](#) enacted on September 1948, Hungarian minority members could join Communist Party. Radical change occurred also in the sphere of Hungarian language use. On July 1, 1948 binding document named "Principles of dual language use in ethnically mixed regions of Southern Slovakia", which entitled ethnic Hungarians to use their native language in official dealings with state agencies was adopted.

Communist Party accentuated, as a crucial precondition for build-up of "socialist" society, fulfillment of a program of industrialization. Even in Southern Slovakia - predominantly an agricultural region, decision to establish an industrial base was enacted. In line with the program named "A general line of build-up of socialism in Czechoslovakia" (adopted at the IX. Congress of CPCPS in year 1949), differences among various regions in regard to industrial production were to be equalized. A numerous industrial enterprises were constructed, others were modernized. This resulted in growth of employment, but contributed to increase standard of life only partially, because construction of light industry, oriented on production of goods, was neglect in favor of heavy industry. Furthermore, speedy build-up of industrial base resulted in a series of negative consequences. Besides arbitrary displacement of number of people, also a rise of pollution and devastation of environment ensued. Moreover, salaries, as even contemporary historians were compelled to admit, in Southern Slovakia lagged behind average.[\[13\]](#) As the most relevant reason was cited a lower educational level of population of Southern Slovakia. Another reason, which contributed to lower incomes, was seen in presence of strong agricultural segment in economical structure of Southern Slovakia, in which payments in kind still existed.

The most significant change in economic and social life of Hungarian population of Southern Slovakia after communist usurpation of power occurred in agriculture. Traditional ways of life were utterly destroyed. Private ownership of land was replaced, frequently with use of ruthless measures, by collective units called Unified Farmer Associations and State Farms. Land, livestock, machinery and other property was in a collective ownership of these enterprises. Unquestionably, for landless peasants it was a positive change. Equal status of each member of agricultural enterprises was, at least formally, upheld and unemployment, which affected large numbers of inhabitants of Southern Slovakia during existence of inter-war Czechoslovakia, was practically eliminated. However, each aspect of life was controlled and conformity with communist ideology sternly imposed.

The so called socialization of villages in Southern Slovakia changed drastically also an approach to land. Private ownership, which for generations was an unbreakable legal principle and a base of social arrangement in village societies, ceased to exist. Collective "ownership" of land,, though celebrated as a just, revolutionary and supremely efficient, became an abstract notion without concrete attachment. This undermined initiative to work efficiently. Low efficiency and superfluous approach to agricultural production were constantly criticized by communist authorities. In stark contrast to turgid collective methods of production stayed high yields of small plots of land held in private ownership. On the other side, Hungarian farmers of Southern Slovakia, in comparison to period of years 1945 - 1948, were freed from fear of being deported and in a society where all differences were allegedly eliminate, they ceased to be an outwardly disadvantaged community.

A positive change was also achieved in a slow but steady rise of standard of living. This trend was visible especially in Southern Slovakia, which traditionally was one of the most backward regions of Republic. Improvements were achieved in housing and health care.

Totalitarian communist regime paid great attention to educational and cultural spheres, which were, as was emphasized by communist ideologues, a crucial precondition for formation of "socialistic citizen".

Unlike period of years 1945 - 1948, when education in Hungarian language was suppressed, a rapid build-up of schools of various types with Hungarian teaching language begun. In span of two years (1948

- 1950) a number of pupils in schools with Hungarian teaching language increased from 5 400 to 34 200. There was, however, a serious drawback, which noticeably lowered quality of education - a serious lack of qualified teachers. Sizeable part of Hungarian intelligentsia after year 1945 either emigrated, or was deported. Another hindrance was lack of "ideologically suitable" teachers, who would be able (and willing) to teach in line with a communist doctrine.

A majority of Hungarian population lives in compact settlements. In such an environment, knowledge of Slovak language was only partial or nil. Since year 1961 a network of "schools under united management" were created, where Hungarian as well as Slovak was used as teaching languages. However, insertion of Slovak as a teaching language of certain topics was perceived by some Hungarian minority members as a controversial measure. When Ministry of Schools in year 1961 commenced partial education in Slovak language in medium schools for training of pedagogues, it was criticized by Hungarian community representatives as a measure which would lead to assimilation.

As in every totalitarian society, also in communist Czechoslovakia, media were an important tool of indoctrination of all segments of population including Hungarian minority. Already on December 15, 1948, Central Committee of CPS decided to initiate publishing of periodicals in Hungarian language. Új Szó (A New Word), as periodical was named, became the main source of news for Hungarian population. Even in slowly changing world of communist Czechoslovakia, Új Szó exhibited an uncommon longevity and lasted during the whole existence of communist regime. Új Szó functioned as a primary transmitter of political and economic news in Hungarian language. However, value of published articles was compromised by a fact that content of articles was written strictly in line with the communist ideology. Gradually, a whole array of periodicals in Hungarian language emerged. Cultural topics were covered in monthly Faklya (A Torch), for young generation was published Új Ifjúság (A New Youth), sport news covered weekly Czechoslovakiai Sport (Czechoslovak Sport). Other periodicals specialized in actualities from sphere of literature, agriculture etc. After communist take-over Czechoslovakia and Hungary, various periodicals were imported from Hungary. [\[14\]](#)

Regardless of number of periodicals, which were printed either by Czechoslovak publishing houses, or were imported from Hungary, all of them were characterized by conformity with the ideological requirements of communist regime. Achievements in sphere of economy, culture, sport and other fields were constantly emphasized with explanation that this is a result of program of building of socialistic society under leadership of Communist Party. Accentuated was international solidarity of socialist countries, including Hungary and leading role of Soviet Union. Criticism, if allowed, was perfunctory and could be focused only on partial issues. With exception of articles dealing with specific local affairs, content of periodicals published in Hungarian language was basically identical with articles printed in Slovak newspapers.

A special chapter in policy of communist regime was attention given to management of cultural activities of Hungarian community. As in other areas of public life, government authorities decided to create a central agency, which would cover (and control) all aspects of cultural activities of Hungarian minority. After decision of Central Committee CPS in September of 1949 to establish a cultural association for Hungarian minority members, on January 1, 1949 a Preparatory Committee for foundation of "Czechoslovakiai Magyar Dolgozók Kultúregyesülete" (Cultural Union of Hungarian Workers in Czechoslovakia), known in abbreviated form as Csemadok, was established. On March 5, 1949, Csemadok was officially founded. During following years achieved a rapid growth. In year 1953 already over 400 organizations with 40 thousand members operated throughout Southern Slovakia. The main attention was focused upon the various cultural activities such as amateur theatres, dancing assemblies, literary evenings etc. As all organizations in communist Czechoslovakia, an integral part of Csemadok's activities was propaganda. Members of Csemadok were obliged to actively participate on campaigns propagating collective agricultural unions, work as organizers of "people academies" and other training programs. The role of Csemadok was also promote friendship between Slovaks and Hungarians, strove for deepening of mutual understanding via organizing of cultural undertakings and fight against any occurrences of ethnic conflict. Personal leadership of Csemadok and content of its activities was controlled by Communist Party and was strictly in line with tenets of communist ideology. This subordination was illustrated during the Hungarian uprising in year 1956, when leaders of Csemadok condemned desperate fight for freedom in Hungary as a "contra-revolutionary putsch".

With progression of Sixties, political situation in Czechoslovakia gradually changed. Even though Communist Party was still firmly in control, regime was becoming less oppressive and public discussion how to deal with the most urgent societal problems was occurring. Trend toward higher openness enabled also formulate suggestions aimed at improvement of status of Hungarian minority. Since second

half of decade representatives of Csemadok submitted several proposals dealing with specific aspects of school and cultural policy of state in regard to ethnic minorities. Suggestions voiced by leaders of Csemadok were summarized in "Tendencies of development of interethnic relations and solving of minority question in Czechoslovak Socialist Republic"[15], published in March 1967. Cited document contained several clauses which would be impossible to formulate only a few years before. Among others, a request to redefine legal status of minorities in Constitution, so they became "state forming" communities, request to secure rights of minorities also on collective level and request to uphold a proportional representation in administrative apparatus.

Democratization process in Czechoslovakia, which accelerated during the first six months of 1968, led to sharp criticism of centralized structure of government imposed by Communist Party. Public initiative aimed at reform of the whole political structure was growing. In an atmosphere of openness and abating worries from repression, radical proposals emerged also in regard to status of ethnic minorities. In March 1968 leaders of Csemadok approved a resolution in which requested adoption of constitutional law defying rights of ethnic minorities. According proposal, a new legislative should redefine status of ethnic minorities, secure an adequate position of minorities in a political system of state, enact administrative reorganization of counties and districts so they became more compatible with ethnic composition of population and permit a certain degree of cultural autonomy.

Reform, which could lead to abolition of totalitarian regime in CSSR, was stopped in its tracks by a brutal invasion of Soviet Union and member states of Warsaw Pact. Attacks against all persons actively participating on democratic changes ensued. Democratic measures, already enacted by government, were classified as a contra-revolutionary, eliminated and their proponents were purged from Communist Party.

As a contra-revolutionary and subversive were termed also proposals to democratize status of Hungarian minority. Seventies were a decade of return to stern authoritarian government rule. Communist Party controlled in detail all aspects of political and social life, including position of ethnic minorities. Openness and spontaneity, which characterized reform process, receded. Until the end of Eighties no meaningful changes of political and economic conditions were allowed and Czechoslovakia became a static country, where all spheres of life gradually deteriorated.

Sudden and dramatic change occurred with entry of "Velvet Revolution" into lives of Czechs, Slovaks and members of ethnic minorities. November 17, 1989 started a flow of initiatives carried by all segments of society, determined to end communist rule. In a span of a few months Czechoslovakia became an utterly different country. Democratization process, this time irrevocably, led to abolition of all feared pillars of communist regime - secret police and elite force of members of Communist Party named "People Militia". A period of vibrant political activity ensued. In Slovakia an incipient political party - Public Against Violence (PAV) was formed, which concentrated all civic movements including newly formed Hungarian Independent Initiative (HII), established on November 18, 1989. Goal of HII was to secure an active participation of Hungarian public in political and social transformation. At the end of 1990 PAV and HII published a declaration in which formulated necessity to organize relations among ethnic communities in Slovakia on the basis of tolerance and mutual respect. To face off criticism that is excessively interconnected with PAV, Hungarian Independent Initiative changed name to Hungarian Citizen Party (HCP) and in its program, named "For Creation of Rich Minority", accentuated resolve to work for improvement of economic situation of Hungarian community.

Processes of political differentiation characterized development of following years. Spectrum of political parties reflected emerging structure of Slovak society.

A flow of changes affected also Csemadok, which, under a new leadership, defined itself as an independent, free and open association supporting political pluralism and protection of human rights. As consequences of developments of Hungarian political scene which resulted in establishment of several political parties, representatives of Csemadok decided to concentrate on support of cultural activities of Hungarian minority members.[16]

After November 1989 various social and cultural Hungarian associations were founded. Already on November 24, 1989 "Forum of Czecho-Slovak Hungarians" was established with goal to participate on political and social changes ongoing in Slovakia. Others associations, focused upon specific segments of Hungarian society, followed - "Union of Hungarian Students of Slovakia", "Union of Hungarian Pedagogues of Slovakia", "Society of Hungarian Writers of Czecho-Slovakia", "Hungarian Scientific Society of Czecho-Slovakia" etc.

Despite its minority status, which unquestionably had a strong unifying influence upon its ethnic self-consciousness, Hungarian community was not a homogenous society. Spectrum of political attitudes translated into establishment of political parties, formed after demise of communist rule.

With intention to represent political and ideological principles of Hungarian Christians, on

December 15, 1989, a political party, named Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (HCDM) was established. The main objectives of HCDM were implementation of Christian principles into society, maintenance an equality in interethnic relations and refusal of all forms of racism. On March 1, 1990 another political association, named Coexistence, with intention to represent Hungarian community, was founded. Extensive contacts of Coexistence with political parties in Hungary became a target of critical objections by some Slovak political representatives.

A growing pressure to reform centralized character of Republic translated also into a change of name of state. On April 20, 1990 Federal Assembly adopted a constitutional law changing name of country to Czech and Slovak Federative Republic (CaSFR). In June 1990, a general election were held.^[17] In first free election held in the after-war history of Republic, political parties representing Hungarian community followed a different strategy. Whereas Hungarian Citizen Party went into elections in coalition with Public Against Violence, Coexistence together with Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement participated on elections independently. HCP gained 5 seats in Slovak National Council (SNC). More successful was a coalition of Coexistence and HCDP, which gained 14 seats in Slovak National Council.

An impact of positive changes such as freedom of political expression, freedom of movement etc., was, however, weakened by worsening economic situation. Inflation and rapid growth of unemployment resulted in a wide spread dissatisfaction.

Another very serious aspect in life of society was gradually emerging. In a relatively short period of time - since November 1989 till end of year 1992 - growing tensions between Czech a Slovak political representations reach a stadium, when an idea of independent Slovakia became an acute political issue. The main generators of calls for dissolution of CaSFR were economic hardships, growing national awareness among Slovak public and loss of popularity of POV, which was a staunch supporter of preservation of Republic. Inside of POV a nationally oriented faction began to form, led by influential political leader Vladimír Mečiar. V. Mečiar established an independent political platform - Movement for Democratic Slovakia (MDS), which gained a large support of Slovak population and became a political catalyst in drive for Slovak independence. The popularity of MDS was manifested in election of 1992, when party got a majority in Slovak National Council. A coalition of Hungarian parties (Coexistence and Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement) gained also representation in SNC.

MDS utilized its dominant political position and insisted on independence of Slovakia. With help of other Slovak political parties - Slovak National Party (SNP) and Party of Democratic Left (PDL) a "Declaration of Slovak National Council in Regard to Sovereignty of Slovak Republic" was approved. On September 1992 Slovak National Council adopted "Constitution of Slovak Republic" a document which terminated a common state of Czechs and Slovaks. Development leading to dissolution of CaSFR had inevitably an impact upon position of Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

A majority of Hungarians perceived dissolution of CaSFR with fear. Growth of nationalism among Slovaks roused worries of many Hungarians, that in an independent Slovakia position of Hungarian community will deteriorate. Consequently, Hungarian deputies, voted against Slovak independence. To the growth of tensions contributed also a declaration of chairman of HCDM, Béla Bugár, that in case of establishment of independent Slovakia, Hungarian political representation will request a territorial autonomy.

Despite protests of Hungarian political representatives, on September 3, 1992, Constitution of Slovak Republic was approved. By a refusal to award to ethnic minorities a status of "state forming" communities and by inclusion of controversial clause of "state language", the Constitution became for Hungarian political leaders unacceptable.

Establishment of Slovak Republic resulted in deteriorating of relations between Slovak majority and Hungarian community. Feeling threatened, Hungarian political parties started look for ways how to eliminate mutual differences and started cooperate closely among themselves. This was manifested in gathering of Hungarian intelligentsia in Levice on December 6, 1992. Meeting attended also leaders of all Hungarian political parties.^[18] During deliberations a "Memorandum in Regard to Status of Hungarian

Minority in Slovakia” was prepared, in which authors summarized main grievances in regard to status of Hungarian minority and which was dispatched to various European institutions. Meeting resulted also in establishment of “Coordination Council”, with participation of all Hungarian parties.

Tensions were enhanced in connection with adoption of Slovakia into the Council of Europe. A deputy of Slovak National Council for HCDM, Pál Csáky, during visit of Council of Europe by Slovak delegation, submitted several documents including a “Memorandum in regard to acceptance of Slovakia to Council of Europe”, critical of alleged worsening of situation of Hungarians in Slovakia. Controversial aspect of Pál Csáky’s initiative was fact, that he did not inform other members of Slovak delegations about submitted documents. This was sharply criticized by Slovak politicians as a subversive act, aimed against Slovak Republic.

With intention to alleviate tense relationship between Hungarian and Slovak political leaders,

President of Slovak Republic Michal Kováč initiated a “Round table” negotiations. Representatives of minorities, members of government and experts on minority issues were endeavoring to solve issues concerning status of ethnic minorities.

Potentially positive developments in regard to minorities in Slovakia were interrupted by eruption of political crisis, caused by a recall of Vladimír Mečiar from the post of Prime Minister. In autumn 1994 an elections were held, which determined political course of Slovakia for a four years. Vladimír Mečiar again asserted his political primacy as a leader of MDS and in coalition with SNP and Association of Workers of Slovakia (AWS) gained majority in Slovak National Council.

In its program declaration published at the beginning of 1995, ruling coalition guaranteed minority rights. Program, however, also contained a controversial clause, stating that care of Slovaks living in ethnically mixed regions will be one of priorities of government.

Relations between Hungarian minority leaders and government soured after Ministry of Schools assumed authority to recall and name school masters, a measure which was criticized as government interference into independence of schools. Demonstrations of parents in regions populated by Hungarians ensued. Tensions deepened after ruling coalition adopted “Language Law” on November 15, 1995, which elevated Slovak language to the position of official medium of communication. Besides representatives of Hungarian community, Language Law was criticized also by Council of Europe. The objections were raised especially in regard to vagueness of stated legal norm, giving to government authorities a space for a broad interpretation of individual clauses and their potential abuse. Criticized was also a provision of law giving to government agencies right to fine alleged abusers of adopted Language Law.

As manipulative and discriminatory was criticized administrative reorganization of Slovak territory^[19], which artificially lowered number of Hungarian minority members in individual counties. Criticized was also an absence of constitutional law in regard to status of ethnic minorities in Slovakia, non-transparent allocation of funds awarded to ethnic minorities, interferences into self-government administration and restrictions of use of minority languages. To the conflicting atmosphere contributed also xenophobic declarations of chairman of Slovak National Party, Ján Slota, who, besides other insults, characterized Hungarians as barbaric nomads who caused devastation to the whole Europe.

Authoritative rule of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar evoked critical reaction of President Michal Kováč. In his “Report to the State of Slovak Republic”, issued on September 6, 1995, President denounced practice of nomination to all government posts exclusively members of ruling coalition.

On March 27, 1996 Parliament adopted a highly controversial “Law on the Protection of the Republic”. Opposition deputies denounced the vote and walked out in protest. On the basis of adopted legal norm, any person who would be spreading “non-truthful” information and this way endanger the Republic, could be sentenced to jail up to two years. Public rallies could become also a criminal offense, if they, in judgment of authorities, became “subversive” or endangering territorial integrity or defense of Slovak Republic. Leaders of such rallies could be sent to jail up to three years. Vladimír Mečiar defended contested law as necessary measure to protect Slovakia against intensifying attacks upon government authorities. In April of the same year President Michal Kováč vetoed the law, arguing that this legal norm violated democratic principles.

Dissatisfaction with anti-democratic measures of Mečiar’s government expressed also Hungarian minority members. During a public meeting held on October 5, 1996 in Komárno, fittingly named

“Democracy is endangered”, a declaration was adopted in which participants protested against restrictive measures of government, centralization of state power and worsening status of ethnic minorities. Hungarian representatives expressed conviction that anti-European policies of ruling coalition damaged position of Slovakia as a democratic country and as a proof cited failure of Slovak Republic to be invited into North Atlantic Treaty and European Union in first group of countries.

Evident was hostile policy of ruling coalition in regard to financing of Hungarian cultural activities. Whereas in year 1994 Csemadok obtained from Ministry of Culture over 10 million Slovak crowns to finance its activities, next year financing was halved, in 1996 Csemadok received nothing and in year 1997 Hungarian cultural organization received paltry 120 000 crowns. Evident was also reluctant approach of government to codification of minority languages law. Though Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar promised codification of contested legal norm, nothing happened. Besides minority leaders, inactivity of Slovak government was also criticized by EU.

Hotly contested issue became decision of Ministry of Schools to replace school certificates, which were issued in Slovak and minority languages, by certificates issued only in Slovak language. Measure, adopted by Ministry of Schools in January 1997, led to a number of protests organized by Association of Hungarian Parents. Request to reinstate bilingual certificates signed more than 50 thousand persons.

Curtailement of democratic principles in political practice of ruling coalition evoked negative reactions also from European agencies and USA. In April 1998 representatives of European Union, British Minister of Foreign Office Robin Cook and Commissioner of EU Hans van den Broek expressed their objections against non-democratic practices of Slovak government. Sharp rebuke of government policies expressed Ambassador of USA Ralph Johnson when, in an interview for Radio Slovakia, declared that USA cannot consider Slovakia to be a democratic country.

President of Slovakia Michal Kováč, who criticized authoritative methods of governing of Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar, became a target of obstruction. The campaign against President culminated in a suspicious abduction of his son, who was found in Austria. This roused a negative international reaction and worries about political direction of Slovakia. Diplomatic representatives of European Union warned Vladimír Mečiar, that attacks on President Michal Kováč are in collision with rule of law and can damage position of Slovakia. Worries about anti-democratic steps of Prime Minister voiced also US Embassy in Slovak capital Bratislava.[\[20\]](#) High Commissioner of EU for Minorities, Max van der Stoep, expressed also concern about absence of law permitting the use of minority languages in Slovak legislative. Controversial and frequently anti-democratic methods of Mečiar's government endangered membership of Slovakia in European Union. On July 16, 1997 European Commission published a document “Agenda 2000”, in which evaluated preparedness of ten countries aspiring to join EU. In chapter dealing with situation in Slovakia, European Commission stated, that because of instability of Slovak institutions and faults in practices of government, Slovakia is not fulfilling satisfactorily conditions formulated by Council of Europe.[\[21\]](#) On March 13, European Parliament, during its session in Strasbourg, adopted a resolution, in which denounced concentration of power in hands of Vladimír Mečiar.

It is necessary, at least in a concise fashion, to describe development of relations between Slovak Republic and Hungary. After establishment of democracy in both countries, old grievances emerged again. The nadir of mutual relations was reached during period of years 1995 - 1998 when foreign policy of Slovakia was under control of Movement for Democratic Slovakia. Xenophobic declarations made regularly by Mečiar's coalition partner, chairman of Slovak National Party, Ján Slota, poisoned relations with Hungary. Consequently, Slovakia became frequently a target of criticism of Hungarian political representatives.

Monopolizing of political power by ruling coalition led to reinforcement of relations between Party of Hungarian Coalition (PHC)[\[22\]](#) and Slovak opposition parties associated in “Blue Coalition” (Christian Democratic Movement, Democratic Union and Democratic Party). In December 1997 political negotiations resulted in signing a declaration in which Slovak parties denounced policy of administrative restrictions of minority rights and PHC gave up intention to achieve a territorial autonomy.

Party of Hungarian Coalition, which was registered on March 18, 1998 declared willingness to form a coalition with Slovak opposition parties in case of achieving a victory in oncoming elections.

Process of unification of political parties representing Slovak and well as Hungarian opposition was a reaction on strategy of ruling coalition to prevent victory of opposition. It was primarily a new election law, which stipulated that every political party must achieve at least 5 % quorum to be admitted into

Slovak National Council. On the basis of this law, for example, three former parties representing Hungarian community would have to receive 15 % of votes, which would be clearly impossible. Controversial was also prohibition of all election campaigns broadcasted by private media, whereas government controlled media openly supported ruling coalition parties. This measure was criticized by EU and by observers stationed in Slovakia, as a clear violation of equal voting rights.

Ruling coalition parties in their election campaign emphasized their resolve to protect Slovak society in face of alleged danger from Hungarian minority requirements. Requests posted by Hungarian political leaders in sphere of education and other minority rights were classified as an attack upon vital interests of Slovak majority.

A breaking point in political development in Slovakia became elections into Slovak National Council held in September 25 - 26, 1998. The Slovak, as well as Hungarian, opposition parties went into elections as coalitions. Significance of September election for further development of Slovakia documented an unusually high participation of voters - 84, 24% of Slovaks and members of ethnic minorities took part in elections.

Election results allowed exclusion of Movement for Democratic Slovakia, Slovak National Party and Association of Workers of Slovakia from power. An era of "Mečiarizm" whose political practices were criticized at home and abroad ended.

A new ruling coalition composed of Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDC), Party of Democratic Left (PDL), Party of Civic Understanding (PCU) and Party of Hungarian Coalition (PHC) gained 93 mandates from total number of 150 in Slovak National Council and had a constitutional majority.

The precarious condition of Slovakia, which was a result of policies of previous government, new ruling coalition under leadership of chairman of Slovak Democratic Coalition Mikuláš Dzurinda summarized in so called Black Books. Policies of Mečiar's government characterized Vice-Chairman for Human Rights, Minorities and Regional Development Pál Csáky as a continuous chain of offenses against rule of law - "Upholding of laws " said Pál Csáky, "did not belonged to the basic attributes of government activities - government did not ruled in accordance with rule of law and legal norms were interpreted according to needs of government. A number of adopted legal norms, which later were declared by Constitutional Court as invalid, government utilized before their abolition."[\[23\]](#)

In relation to minorities, a trend toward improving was their status gradually emerging. "Parliamentary Committee for Human Rights" was established under leadership of Hungarian deputy Laszlo Nagy. A non-governmental organization Freedom House included Slovak Republic again among free countries.

Even though period of years 1998 - 2002 was marked by improving democratic conditions in Slovakia in general and also in regard to status of ethnic minorities, it was not utterly harmonious. Discrepancies emerged in question of financing of minorities culture activities. Hungarian representatives requested transfer of authority to allocate funds from government agencies directly to minority organizations. This request was eventually granted. Party of Hungarian Coalition urgently demanded codification of a language law, which would regulate use of languages of ethnic minorities. PHC suggested use of minority languages in official conduct in cases when given ethnic community reach 10 % of whole population. Slovak political parties insisted, that minority must reach 20 % of whole population to be entitled to use its language in an official conduct. 20 % threshold as a condition for right to use minority language in official conduct was codified on July 10, 1999.

Hungarian political representatives also objected to formulation of the Preamble of Constitution of Slovak Republic, which begins with words "We the Slovak people...", arguing that formulation is discriminatory to ethnic minorities. Suggestion to change the Preamble was refused by Slovak politicians.

Despite differences between Hungarian and Slovak members of ruling coalition on several issues, chairman of PHC, Béla Bugár, characterized participation of his party in coalition positively. In February 2001, during 3rd Congress of PHC, Béla Bugár expressed satisfaction with achieved results in regard to improvement of status of Hungarian community in Southern Slovakia. Growing respect for rights of ethnic minorities illustrated acceptance of "European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages" by Slovak National Council on June 21, 2001.

Political developments during the first half of year 2002 were deeply influenced by approaching election into Slovak National Council. Members of ruling coalition declared their intention to continue

participation in existing political alliance.

The elections into SNC were held on September 20 - 21, 2002. Party of Democratic Left and Slovak National Party fail to obtain sufficient number of votes to enter Slovak National Council. This signaled decrease of leftist and nationalistic sentiments in Slovak society. As a result of elections a ruling coalition was formed composed of Slovak Democratic Christian Coalition (SDCC), Party of Hungarian Coalition and another new political party - Alliance of New Citizen (ANC). Noticeable on elections was success of Party of Hungarian Coalition, which got 9, 7 % of votes - that is, approximately 1, 5 % of voters of PHC were not ethnic Hungarians.

Relations between Slovak parties and Party of Hungarian Coalition, in comparison with preceding period, were less controversial and more businesslike.

The status of PHC and Hungarian minority in general was summarized during its fifth congress in March 2003. Béla Bugár declared that PHC has a stabile support of Hungarian voters and is capable to work successfully for of interests of Hungarian community.

Less optimistic was development of bilateral relations with Hungary. At the beginning of 2002 Hungarian government adopted a legal norm, entitled ethnic Hungarians living in neighboring countries to several rights, which equalized them to a status of Hungarian citizens. According to adopted law, these persons were entitled to free education, social security, free health care and right to work in Hungary. This roused a strong negative reaction in Slovakia and Rumania. Both countries classified this law as a transgression of their sovereignty. Unlike Slovak members of coalition, representatives of PHC did not perceived contested law as controversial.

However, despite of differing attitudes between Slovak and Hungarian minority representations, general political developments can be valued as positive. In April 2003 Slovak National Council approved entry of Slovakia into North Atlantic Treaty.

During the first decennium of 21st century this trend resulted in full integration of Slovak Republic into European institutions.

Vplyv politických zmien na etnickú identitu maďarského obyvateľstva v regióne južného Slovenska po roku 1918

Článok sumarizuje postavenie maďarskej komunity na Slovensku po roku 1918 a mapuje esenciálne zvraty v osudoch tejto skupiny obyvateľstva v období medzivojnovnej ČSR, v rokoch 1918 - 1948, po nastolení komunistického režim a po novembri 1989. Cieľom je sumarizovať uvedený, nesporne časovo rozsiahly úsek histórie Slovenska tak, aby poskytol koncentrovaný pohľad na postavenie maďarskej minority a pritom postihol hlavné vývojové trendy spoločnosti ako celku. S výnimkou trvania Slovenského štátu, keď väčšina Maďarov bola v dôsledku Viedenskej arbitráže pripojená k Maďarsku, jedná sa o štyri diametrálne odlišné historické obdobia. V každom z týchto období sa príslušníci maďarskej menšiny museli vyrovnávať so špecifickými problémami, ktoré zasahovali, neraz dramaticky do ich postavenia ako komunity, ako aj do ich individuálnych životov.

[1] Report of State Statistical Office of Czechoslovak Republic. Year XIV (1933). Number 195. Schedule 1.

[2] *Úradné noviny* (Government Official Report), Bratislava, 25. III. 1919.

[3] For detailed description of military campaign of Hungarian Red Army see HRONSKÝ, Marián. *The Struggle for Slovakia and Treaty of Trianon*. Bratislava, 2001, pp. 155 - 200.

[4] In report dispatched to the Police Directory in Košice, Minister with the Full Powers for Administration of Slovakia characterized Hungarian intelligentsia as follows: "Hungarian intelligentsia,

even today, can not accept fact, that forever lost its leading position...” Slovak National Archive, fund: Minister s plnou mocou pre správu Slovenska. (Minister with Full Powers for Administration of Slovakia). Box no. 5. Document: Situační zprávy ze Slovenska (Situation reports from Slovakia). Dated December 21, 1919.

[5] Maďari v Československu. (Hungarians in Czechoslovakia). Available on: <http://www.hhrf.org/egyutt/SD-PARTN.htm>

[6] 121/1920 Sb. Zákon ze dne 29. února 1920, kterým se uvozuje Ústavní listina Československé republiky (Constitutional Law no. 121/1920).

[7] In June 1936 these political organizations united and formed United Land Christian Socialist and Hungarian National Party.

[8] For more details see ŠUTAĽ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945 - 1948* (Hungarian minority in Slovakia during years 1945 - 1948). Bratislava : Veda, 1993.

[9]ŠUTAĽ, Štefan. Slovakia and Hungarian Minority between 1945 and 1948. In: *Key Issues of Slovak and Hungarian History. A View of Slovak Historians*. Prešov : Universum, 2011, p. 232.

[10] In Slovakia, during fifties, several leading communist were accused of „bourgeois nationalism“ and sentenced to death or incarceration.

[11] SIKORA, Stanislav. Under the Banner of Socialism (Hungarians in Slovakia During the Communist Regime). In: *Key Issues of Slovak and Hungarian History (A View of Slovak Historians)*. Prešov : Universum, 2002, p. 246.

[12] At that time in Slovakia Communist Party (CPS) was organized as a separate unit, but was an integral part of Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (CPCS).

[13] ZVARA, Juraj. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku po roku 1945* (A Hungarian Minority After Year 1948). Bratislava : Epoque, 1969, p. 135.

[14] For comparison during existence of inter-war Czechoslovakia, with few exemptions, import of all periodicals published in Hungary after year 1918 was prohibited.

[15] In Constitution adopted in year 1960, Czechoslovakia was renamed to Czechoslovak Socialist Republic.

[16] Csemadok became an active organizer of cultural undertakings such as Days of Kazinczy, Days of Jokai, founded periodicals dealing with cultural affairs of Hungarian community (Kelety napló, Ungi Táj ...). Organization also tried to provide assistance to members of Hungarian minority in coping with worsening economic situation.

[17] To Federal Assembly of Czechoslovak Republic and to Slovak national Council.

[18] Coexistence, Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement, Hungarian Citizen Party and Hungarian People Party.

[19] On the base of a new reorganization, Slovakia was divided into eight districts and 79 counties.

[20] *East European Constitutional Review*, Volume 4, Number 4, Fall 1995, p. 30.

[21] BÚTORA, Martin - IVANTYŠYN, Michal (Eds.). *Slovakia 1997 A Summary Report in Regard of the State of Society and Trends for Year 1998*. Bratislava : IVO, 1998, p. 249.

[22] Party of Hungarian Coalition was formed as a result of decision of individual Hungarian parties to closely coordinate their political programs and gain enough votes to be elected into Slovak National Council.

[23] MESEŽNIKOV, Grigorij - IVANTYŠYN, Michal (Eds.). *Slovakia 1998 - 1999. A Summary Report*. In: *Regard to the State of Society*. Bratislava . IVO, 1999, p. 179.