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## Shattered Past. Socio-Psychological Aspects of Slovak-Hungarian Relations

*Summary: The author looks through those problematic points in the Slovak-Hungarian relations, which are originated somehow from the historical consciousness. The article divided them into three subtitles: Communication problems, Memory of grievances, and Slovaks in the mind of Hungarians. Communication problems in this case mean the comparative analysis of using words Uhorsko, Maďarsko, (Magyarország), (Felvidék) and Slovensko. Subchapter Memory of grievances deals with the question of the assimilation process in the era of dualism, of the question of Trianon, and the Hungarian years of homelessness between 1945 – 1948. Finally, the third part of the article highlights some points which introduce how Slovaks are present in the mind of Hungarians.*

**B**efore joining the EU, many politicians and political experts from the Central-East-European region half or fully expected that political relations between the new member states would improve after the accession, within a brand new frame of political cooperation which the EU offers us. Contrary to these high expectations, since 2004, the overall political situation in Central-Eastern Europe (especially in the Visegrad region) has worsened. Beside the internal political crisis of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, the recent diplomatic tension between Slovakia and Hungary is also an important component of this negative tendency. It shows that the problems in the Slovak-Hungarian cannot be solved automatically under the integration process, but we – Slovaks and Hungarians – have to do something in this respect.

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Kollai, I., "Shattered Past. Socio-psychological aspects of Slovak-Hungarian relations – from the Hungarian point of view", *International Issues & Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* Vol. XV, No. 3-4/2006, pp. 27 – 43.

Before analyzing the complex relationship between Slovaks and Hungarians, it should be clearly defined what this ‘relationship’ means. Slovak-Hungarian international relations could be divided into two different (but overlapping) parts: an interstate and an interethnic one. Interstate relations (*medzištátné vzťahy*) mean the official diplomatic connection between Slovakia and Hungary. Interethnic relations (*medzietnické vzťahy*) mean the overall opinion of everyday Slovaks and Hungarians of the other nation. Of course, this latter definition hides the fact that opinions could vary within the Slovak and Hungarian society, as well.

Nevertheless, several socio-psychological research projects have been able to evaluate this complex question at a high, academic level.<sup>1</sup>

In the following pages, we will look through the two main groups of socio-psychological problems burdening Slovak-Hungarian interethnic relations: communication obstacles and the memory of national grievances. Afterwards, we will take a closer look at how the Hungarians thought of the Slovaks in the past compared to the present.<sup>2</sup>

## Communication Problems

The Slovak-Hungarian interethnic relations are burdened by several well-defined communication problems. This essay deals only with the three most important ones: the use and meanings of the words *Uhorsko-Maďarsko*, *Slovensko*, and (*Felvidék*).<sup>3</sup>

### *Uhorsko – Maďarsko*

Slovaks use the idiom of *Uhorsko* for Hungary before 1918 and *Maďarsko* for Hungary after Trianon. The Hungarians – both common people and historians – do not make this kind of distinction and consider the history of Hungary

<sup>1</sup> See e.g. annual reports of Institute for Public Affairs, G. Mesežnikov, M. Kollár, M. Bútora (eds) *Slovensko 2005. Súhrnná správa o stave spoločnosti.* (Bratislava: Institute for Public Affairs, 2006). From the Hungarian side, for instance Gy. Csepeli *Emberek vetése. A XXI. század szociálpszichológiai kihívásai.* (Challenges of socio-psychology in the XXI. Century). (Budapest: József-egyetem, 2003). See results of surveys on p. 59 – 60.

<sup>2</sup> This essay is based on the results of the Shattered Past (*Rozštípená Minulosť*) project, carried out by Terra Cognita Foundation and financed by Stredoeurópska Nadácia and the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The “Shattered Past” project aims to make reflections on those points of the Slovak historical consciousness, which are somehow in connection with the Hungarians or with the Hungarian nation as a whole. (See: www.tra.hu) The personal work of the author was supported by the International Visegrad Foundation (within the frame of Visegrad Scholarship) and the Hungarian Ministry of Cultural Heritage (within the frame of Klebelsberg Kunó Scholarship).

<sup>3</sup> In the following pages, Slovak idioms will be written in *italics* while the Hungarian ones will be put in (square brackets).

(Magyarország)<sup>4</sup> one continuous, unbroken process. (Of course, they pick out very important and decisive turning points, but these milestones mark only new phases within the history of the same country- Hungary.) No foreign language uses two different terms for pre-Trianon and post-Trianon Hungary.<sup>5</sup> The legal and symbolic continuation between *Uhorsko* and *Maďarsko* is also evident: the capital is Budapest, the flag is the red-white-green tricolor, the anthem is the same as well, and the acts remained in force. On the other hand, the Slovak way of making artificial distinction is also logical: *Uhorsko*, as opposed to the term of *Maďarsko*, means a multicultural state, which was the homeland of the Slovak nation as well.<sup>6</sup>

This complex situation originating from different national auto-stereotypes can cause interethnic communication problems even today in that the Hungarian term for Hungary (Magyarország) meaning the 'Hungarian state' may sound discriminative for Slovaks if it is used for historical periods before Trianon. However, we should note that the Latin name of Hungaria was translated into Hungarian as (Magyarország) even in the 16th century. So did for instance Gáspár Heltai, the well-known publisher living and working in the Transylvanian city of Kluž (Kolozsvár, Cluj, Romania) in the 16th century in his book on history of Hungary – in the Hungarian language.<sup>7</sup> He used the expression (Magyarország) for the Latin term Hungaria, and the book itself displays a state which was founded by Hungarians but inhabited by other nations, as well. Heltai Gáspár himself had to be aware of the multicultural trait of Hungary: as a Transylvanian Saxon, his native language was German. To draw a short conclusion, the expression (Magyarország) cannot be seen and judged word by word. It depends merely on the context whether the Hungarian term in the given place has a discriminative feature or not.

Only for the sake of discussion, another remark should be added to this problematic question. The phrase (*Magyar*) (meaning Hungarian) in the Hungarian lingual corpus has a high prestige and a positive connotation: it

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<sup>4</sup> Pronounce in Slovak phonetically *Maďarország*.

<sup>5</sup> For *Uhorsko*, Hungarian Kingdom or 'historical Hungary' expressions can be used. These expressions have Hungarian equivalents as well (történelmi Magyarország, Magyar Királyság) which are used frequently but not consequently. Moreover, the 'Hungarian Kingdom' is historically not correct: Hungary remained officially a kingdom after Trianon as well, only without rulers.

<sup>6</sup> From this point of view, it can be questioned why the borderline between *Uhorsko* and *Maďarsko* is drawn even in 1918 and why it is so sharp, since Hungary was governed as the exclusive state of Hungarians already in the era of dualism. Examples can be found in *Krátke dejiny Slovenska* that Slovak historians facing this problem use the term of 'uhorský-maďarský' (Hungarian-Magyar) as an attribute.

<sup>7</sup> "*Chronica az magyarocnac dolgairól*" (Chronicle on the Hungarians' acts). Printed in 1575.

contains historical spaces such as the mediaeval Transylvania, persons like St. Stephen I or Matthias Corvinus, cultural achievements such as printing books as early as the 15th century. The Slovak verbal and written distinction between *Uhors* ('historical Hungarians') and *Maďars* ('modern ethnic Hungarians') deprives the word *Maďar* of this positive content. Only the Magyar tribes, the present Hungary and the ethnic Hungarians occur to one who encounters the Slovak idiom *Maďar*.

### *Slovakia: a Geographical Rather than Historical Concept*

As the Epilogue of *Krátke dejiny Slovenska* clearly highlights, the one who wants to write a Slovak history has to face the question whether it means the history of Slovaks or the history of Slovakia.<sup>8</sup> Generally, the latter dominates textbooks: the territory of Slovakia is put in the focus and Slovakia – *Slovensko* – is considered a geographic and not a historical idiom. According to this, the Slovak history is the history of the territory of Slovakia, which serves as a historical space of Slovak nation.

The phrase 'in Slovakia' – *na Slovensku* – can refer even to the Middle Ages, although, as *Elena Mannová* in the introduction of the *Krátke dejiny Slovenska* reveals, 'on the territory of the present Slovakia' (*na území dnešného Slovenska*) would be the most correct phrase.<sup>9</sup>

The main Slovak historical works keep this logical rule and describe even the existence of the Romans or the Avars 'in Slovakia' – *na Slovensku*, when the Slovaks did not live on this territory, and portrayed the everyday life of medieval German settlers in towns and in the region of *Spiš*.<sup>10</sup> However,

<sup>8</sup> A. Avenarius, "Základné problémy slovenských dejín a historiografie; Dejiny Slovenska v uhorskom kontexte; Dejiny Slovenska v stredoeurópskom kontexte", E. Mannová, *Krátke dejiny Slovenska*. (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2003), pp. 331 – 340.

<sup>9</sup> E. Mannová *Krátke dejiny Slovenska*. (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2003), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> The following books were considered as 'main Slovak historical works':

- The so-called six-volume History of Slovakia, whose chapters are basic and often compulsory literature for university students in Slovakia. (S. Cambel *Dejiny Slovenska*. (VEDA: Bratislava, 1985 – 1988).)
- In 1992, Matica Slovenská and the Slovak Academy of Science (SAV) published 'The Slovak History'. (R. Marsina, L. Lipták, D. Kováč, V. Čičaj *Slovenské dejiny*. (Matica Slovenská: Martin, 1992). In 2000, it was republished under the title 'History of Slovakia' (Dušan Čaplovič et al. *Dejiny Slovenska*. (Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press, 2000).)
- In 1999, the two-volume Chronicle of Slovakia (Dušan Kováč a kol. *Kronika Slovenska*. (Bratislava: Fortuna-Print, 1999) came out as part of popular Chronicle-series.
- In the first half of the 90's a popular book of historian Anton Špiesz, entitled "History of Slovakia – on the way to the self-consciousness" (*Dejiny Slovenska – na ceste k seba-uvedomeniu*. (Perfekt: Bratislava, 1992).) was published. This work was republished in 2006, in English as well, under the title "Illustrated Slovak History".

unfortunately, the regional history of the Hungarians living in Southern Slovakia remains hidden. It is not usually mentioned how the Hungarians lived in the southern towns and regions for centuries and who among them became famous. Most of comprehensive historical books fail to give an account of the regional Hungarian culture. For instance, the first written continuous Hungarian text from the end of the 17th century is likely to have been used on messes in a little Hungarian settlement *Deákovce* – (Deáki) – in South-Western Slovakia.

### *The Concept of (Felvidék)*

Most of today's Hungarians use the idiom (Felvidék)<sup>11</sup> for Slovakia. This word was introduced into the Hungarian public consciousness in the second half of the 19th century. However, the atmosphere of Hungarian imperial nationalism, which propagated to use this concept, are already in the past, but the expression (Felvidék) remains alive in the Hungarian language and has become a synonym for Slovakia.

Due to its obscure origin, the idiom in question has a strong negative connotation in the Slovak lingual context<sup>12</sup> so several Hungarian historians call for avoiding its use and recommend using the similar but neutral word (Felföld).<sup>13</sup> A pleasant solution may be that the people who represent Hungary or Hungarians before Slovaks do not spare time and energy to highlight the present neutrality of the word (Felvidék).

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• The well-known Slovak historian Dušan Kováč published his "History of Slovakia" in Prague, 1998. (D. Kováč *Dejiny Slovenska*. (Prague: Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, 1998).)

• The latest historical textbooks (*Dejepis*) for secondary schools, published by the Slovak Pedagogical Publisher's (*Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo*) between 2000 and 2005.

• The comprehensive book entitled *A Concise History of Slovakia* (E. Mannová *Krátke dejiny Slovenska*. Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2004.) was printed in 2004. It was published in English as well.

<sup>11</sup> The most correct translation of Felvidék may be Highland or Upper Land; in Slovak *Horníky* or *Horná zem*, but in the word-by-word translation *Horná krajina*, *Horné okolie*.

<sup>12</sup> E. Mannová *Krátke dejiny Slovenska*. (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2003), p. 8. Or.

<sup>13</sup> See for instance I. Käfer *Dona nobis pacem. Magyar-szlovák kérdések*. (Dona nobis pacem. Slovak-Hungarian questions.) (Piliscsaba: PPKE BTK, 1998. See, for instance, p. 23. "Usage of (Felvidék) is disgusting for me." Idiom (Felföld) was widely used in the 19th century as an overall name for the mountainous northern regions of historical Hungary. Despite of this, it is doubted whether it could displace (Felvidék) from the common speech: it does not contain South-West Slovakia, and has a relatively strong literary feature.

## Memory of Grievances

According to either political debates or academic analyses<sup>14</sup>, the following historical events or phenomena determine Slovak-Hungarian interethnic (and interstate) relations:

- The assimilation policy of the Hungarian Kingdom before World War I, in the era of dualism.
- The first Vienna Arbitral of November 2, 1938.
- The years of the Hungarian statelessness (1945 – 1948).

As, for instance, the above-mentioned research work displays based on surveys, the assimilation policy of the Hungarian Kingdom and the first Vienna Arbitral were mentioned by Slovaks as the events responsible for deterioration of the Slovak-Hungarian relations. Contrary to this, the vast majority of the ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia mentioned some of the events from the period of the 'Hungarian statelessness'. In addition, the Treaty of Trianon also belongs to this list – many personal interethnic tensions of psychological or communicational character originate from it.

Thereafter, we shall review these four affairs from a kind of 'Hungarian' point of view, but knowing what the main Slovak historical textbooks say about them.

### *Assimilation Process: Spontaneity Versus Compulsion*

The memory of a strong assimilation policy of the Hungarian Kingdom in the era of dualism (1867 – 1918) plays an important role in the Slovak historical consciousness. Based on historical sources, we can clearly collect and even list the main Slovak historical grievances from this period: the closure of Matica Slovenská and the Slovak secondary schools, the Education Act of 1907 (Lex Apponyi) or the fusillade at Černová in the same year, etc. These events are not known by most Hungarians.<sup>15</sup> In fact, the dimension of compulsory assimilation remains hidden in the background behind the memory of the 'years of peace' and massive economic prosperity, which the era of dualism represents to most Hungarians.

<sup>14</sup> V. Bačová, "Vnímanie problémov možnosti ich riešenia v Slovensko-maďarských vzťahoch na Slovensku", P. Zelenák (ed) *Slovensko-maďarské vzťahy v 20. storočí*. (Bratislava, 1992), pp. 99 – 106.

<sup>15</sup> But these events are well-known by Hungarian historians, whose works usually devote attention to the question. See e.g. L. Szarka: *Slovenský národný vývin – národnostná politika v Uhorsku, 1867 – 1918*. (Bratislava: Kalligram-MKKI, 1999).

The memory of compulsory assimilation seems to hide something else from a lot of Slovaks, namely the fact that the assimilation process in the 19th century had a spontaneous character in many cases.<sup>16</sup> We can highlight this phenomenon now only by two examples. On 6 October 1849, thirteen military leaders of the Hungarian revolution and freedom war (1848 – 1849) were executed in Arad (Arad, Romania);<sup>17</sup> most of them were of non-Hungarian origin: Armenian, Serbian, Croatian or German-Austrian roots.<sup>18</sup> The other example is the personality of István Széchenyi, the ‘greatest Hungarian’ – as today’s Hungarians refer to him – who wrote his personal diary in German.

These cases underline the fact that in the first half of the 19th century there was a kind of ‘Hungarus consciousness’ in the Hungarian Kingdom: many people who were not originally Hungarians, who had partial or completely non-Hungarian roots or whose native language was not Hungarian, consider themselves ‘Hungarians in their souls’. The Hungarus patriotism – a phenomenon that may be better known by the Slovak than Hungarian historians<sup>19</sup> – can be characterised as a pre-modern, territory-based national consciousness. It served as the psychological basis of the ‘voluntary assimilation’: the people feeling Hungarus were willing or liable to begin to use the Hungarian language.

We could object that this kind of assimilation (Magyarization) was often an intentionally undertaken attitude of social mobility. It is a fact that this voluntary (or spontaneous) Magyarization process was also influenced by socio-economical and socio-psychological factors<sup>20</sup> but these (for instance the magnetism of the Hungarian language in the first half of 19th century) were mainly a historically determined phenomenon rather than the result of the assimilation policy. The assimilation policy before the era of dualism was weak and had very limited influence.

And what are the conclusions to draw? It is no doubt that the Slovak nation suffered a rather massive assimilation deficit in the 19th century but it is very hard to answer the question to which extent the assimilation policy

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<sup>16</sup> Several Slovak sources also make clear distinction between spontaneous (*spontánna*) and compulsory (*násilná*) asimilácia. See. E. Mannová *Krátke dejiny Slovenska*. (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2003), p. 254 – 256.

<sup>17</sup> October 6 is an official National Mourning Day in Hungary.

<sup>18</sup> With surnames such as: Aulich, Láhner, Leiningen-Westerburg, Poeltenber, Schweidel.

<sup>19</sup> In Hungary, the Central-European Institute of Pázmány Péter Catholic University is the most active scientific workshop concerning research of Hungarus patriotism.

<sup>20</sup> E. Mannová *Krátke dejiny Slovenska*. (Bratislava: Academic Electronic Press, 2003), p. 221.: “Mnohých Nemaďarov pritom pri ťahoval životný štýl maďarskej gentry...”

is responsible for it. We may risk the statement that the assimilation policy of the Hungarian Kingdom is rather responsible for the qualitative loss causing for the Slovak nation: displacing the Slovak language from the cities and from the middle classes is the main guilt of this Hungarian internal imperial policy. This caused a negative long-term effect for both sides because the Slovak-Hungarian cohabitation thus became 'a thousand-year prison of the Slovak nation' in the Slovak historical consciousness.<sup>21</sup>

### *Trianon and Vienna: the Psychology of Treaties*

Trianon was a shocking trauma for contemporary Hungarians. According to even the censuses conducted by the succeeding countries, every third Hungarian found themselves beyond the new Hungarian borders. They often lived in one ethnic area, in immediate proximity to the Hungarian borders. Almost all families in Hungary had close or distant relatives or friends, from whom they were separated by the new borders. More than 400 thousand people abandoned their own earlier homes and move to Hungary. Some of them left only well-paid jobs while others left their homeland and the rest of their family, as well. The refugees living in railway carriages for years became the symbol of 'Hungarian homelessness' in the Carpathian Basin.<sup>22</sup>

The Hungarians who did not have any serious personal experience somehow felt the negative effects of Trianon, too. Hungary lost not only the 'imperial dreams' about the Balkans, for instance, but their stable international position, as well. The Hungarians were hardly able to get used to being only one of the many little Central-East-European nations. This latter phenomenon was one – but a very important – key-factor of the revisionist public sentiment prevailing among Hungarians between the two world wars.<sup>23</sup>

But why did so many Hungarians get to succeeding countries? The definition of new borders was driven not only by mere ethnic aspects but strategic, economic or geographic ones, as well. Eduard Beneš struggled for having the whole train-line which would ensure the connection with the Podkarpatsky Rus (the Carpathian Ukraine), which was a territory also

<sup>21</sup> *Op. cit.*, Mésáros (2004), p. 191 – 192. "A takto sa stal maďarský-slovenský spoluživot tisícročnom žalári slovenského národa".

<sup>22</sup> Some sources (E. Horváth Petrichevich *Jelentés az Országos Menekültügyi Hivatal négyévi működéséről.* (Report on four-year activity of the National Institute for Refugee Affairs Budapest), (Budapest: 1924.) says about more than 400 thousand refugees, others (e.g. Peter Pastor) estimates it around 350,000. 100,000 of them came from Slovakia. Dr. Petrichevich (1924), p. 37.

<sup>23</sup> M. Zeidler *A revíziós gondolat.* (The Idea of Revisionism.) (Budapest: Osiris, 2001), p. 49, 159.

attached to Czechoslovakia between the two world wars.<sup>24</sup> Czecho-Slovak politicians like Milan Hodža or Vavro Šrobár stressed the importance of having a port on the Danube; as the latter put it: “our state without the Danube cannot exist”.<sup>25</sup> These claims overwrote the pure ethnic aspects of defining borders, which was Wilson’s idea. Although territorial claims supported by strategic and economic argumentation can sound very rational, they should be considered as kinds of psychological phenomena, because they highlight concerns of contemporary national elites that their ‘nation’ is not single and complete without certain territories where they never or only very scarcely lived.

Although several Slovak experts noted that strategic aspects also played a role in the definition of borders,<sup>26</sup> the whole question has not caught such attention in the Slovak historiography as among the Hungarian historians.<sup>27</sup> Another important difference is the usage of concepts. Slovak historiography applies the idiom ‘ethnically mixed regions’ (*etnické miešané oblasti*) to Southern Slovakia while Hungarian experts stress that Slovak ethnic Hungarians live in relatively strong and closed communities.

The question of Trianon was worthy to detail for comparing how the first Vienna Arbitral of 2 November 1938 was evaluated by Slovaks and Hungarians. The common Slovaks considered it a violation over the ‘Slovak territory’<sup>28</sup>, just as the Hungarians did regarding Trianon. Neither party seems to have been able to recognize that both decisions had such components which corresponded with the ethnic principles.<sup>29</sup> It shows only the pure fact that the territorial dimension of national identity seems as evident as its other aspects and its questioning by others evokes instinctive reactions in the short run.

The Hungarians – average people, politicians or even historians – are liable to drift into a ‘trouble-maker’ position by bringing up these subjects. So they (we) should not spare time to clarify, the question of Trianon is a question

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<sup>24</sup> M. Hronský *Boj o Slovensko a Trianon. 1918-1920*. Bratislava, 1998, p. 216.

<sup>25</sup> “*náš štát bez Dunaja nemože žiť*”. V. Šrobár *Oslobodené Slovensko. Pamäti z rokov 1918 – 1920*. (Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press, 2004), p. 107.

<sup>26</sup> L. Lipták in *Dejiny Slovenska* (2000), p. 226: *hranica s Maďarskom je “kombinácia provok etnických, strategických a hospodárskych”*; S. Cambel (ed) *Dejiny Slovenska V*. (Bratislava: VEDA, 1985), p. 21.: *demarkačná čiara “spájala princíp etnický, hospodársky, a geografický”*.

<sup>27</sup> M. Zeidler (ed) *Trianon*. (Budapest: Osiris, 2003); I. Romsics *Trianonská mierová zmluva*. (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2006); For strategic aspects of defining borders see J. Klimko *Vývoj územia Slovenska a utváranie jeho hraníc*. (Bratislava: Obzor, 1980), p. 77, 102.

<sup>28</sup> *Dejiny Slovenska* (2000), p. 259.

<sup>29</sup> The emotional attributes are also the same in both cases. “About us, without us” – say the Hungarians about Trianon.

of the past with an effect on the present. It means, for instance, that more than half a million ethnic Hungarians live in Slovakia, whom the Hungarian society and its official representative, the Hungarian government, consider the bearer of the overall Hungarian cultural values and so feel responsible for their present and future cultural, social situation. It is a question to discuss for the Hungarians as well, what it should mean in practice but it is a discussion over the present and not over the past.

### *The Hungarian 'Years of Homelessness'<sup>30</sup> – 1945 – 1948*

After 1945, the Hungarians living in Slovakia suffered several serious so-called 'internal measures' (*vnútorné opatrenia*): they lost their Czechoslovak citizenship and so their basic human and civil rights, including jobs, insurance and education in their own language. In the memory of grievances it may exceed by the experiences how the Hungarian language was squeezed out from the public life: posters warned people not to speak Hungarian, etc. Meanwhile, 40,000 Hungarians were displaced to Czech lands for obligatory 'public work'.<sup>31</sup>

These steps based on decrees of President Edvard Beneš and modified in some cases by the Slovak National Council (*Slovenská Národná Rada*), aimed to achieve deportation of Slovak Hungarians to Hungary within the frame of an international treaty. Finally, a contract came to exist between Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1946 but it was about mutual exchange of population: in the following year more than 70,000 Slovak Hungarians and Hungarian Slovaks were displaced from their homeland. Slovak works dealing with this question are liable to approach it from a legal point of view and overlook the fact that the Hungarians were displaced against their own will as opposed to the Hungarian Slovaks who were collected by official Czechoslovak propaganda activities.)

The third pillar of grievances originates from the re-Slovakization campaign. Theoretically, it intended to exclude those persons from the scope of anti-Hungarian measures who had Slovak roots and were willing to 'get back' to the Slovak nation. Practically, it was a rude kind of forced assimilation and

<sup>30</sup> J. Kálmán gave this phrase for title of his book on Beneš-decrees. J. Kálmán *A hontalanság évei*. (The Years of the Homelessness; or The Years of Fugitiveness.) (Bratislava, 1992). This work was translated to Slovak: *Roky bez domoviny. Maďarská menšina na Slovensku po druhej svetovej vojne 1945 – 1948*. (Budapest: Püski, 1994).

<sup>31</sup> K. Vadkerty *Maďarská otázka v Československu 1945 – 1948: trilógia o dejinách maďarskej menšiny*. (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2002); Š. Šutaj *Prezidentské dekréty Edoarda Beneša v povojnovom Slovensku*. (Bratislava: VEDA, 2005). The following lines are based on these sources as well.

aimed to modify the ethnic composition of the Southern Slovak population. A crowd of Hungarians called for re-Slovakization in order to escape deportation or to regain their civil rights. After 1948, most of them admitted to being Hungarian again when 'internal measures' went out of effect.

After listing these events, a question logically arises: why should they be mentioned repeatedly? Why could it be worthwhile to open old wounds? These are the questions to be answered by the Hungarian representatives who bring up this topic among Slovaks.

The 'years of homelessness' are not very familiar to the Slovaks.<sup>32</sup> It is not an active part of the Slovak historical consciousness although Slovak historians described this period in a more or less detailed way and some of them unambiguously condemned the anti-Hungarian measures.<sup>33</sup> Improving our knowledge of each other is an evident task for historians, which is badly needed in the Slovak-Hungarian relations, given that both sides are only familiar with the grievances committed by the other side.

There is a Hungarian attempt to reach representatives of the Slovak state to ask forgiveness for these years. The Slovak side evaluates this period 'in its historical context', which means that it was a kind of revenge for the Vienna Arbitral in the aggressive post-war atmosphere.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, looking back on the whole of Slovak-Hungarian history, most Slovaks seem to be convinced that they do not need to feel guilty. It may be pointless to initiate a debate on 'mutual comparison of grievances': it sounds absurd, unserious and, above all, unfair to the victims, whose personal tragedy would seem balanced with that of others.

However, the memory of 'the years of homelessness' bears one important message for the Slovaks, which should be openly discussed. It recalls that the Slovak statehood is responsible for ensuring the minority rights to maintain and improve their culture and to have the same rights as the Slovaks. (Contrary to the popular Slovak approach, this was not the case before World War II: despite the democratic state establishment, The Hungarians suffered many disadvantages originating from the nation-building role of the public administration.) In this aspect, this topic in question is about the relation between the citizens and the state, where the latter does not have the right to deprive citizens of their human rights. The Slovak statehood, for instance,

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<sup>32</sup> M. Kusý *A magyarkérdés Szlovákiában*. (The question of Hungarians in Slovakia). (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> E.g. Špiesz (2006), 241 – 242, or *Dejepis pre 3. ročník* (2005).

<sup>34</sup> E.g. L. Lipták *Slovensko v 20. storočí*. (Bratislava, 1968), p. 261; also L. Lipták *Dejiny Slovenska* (2000), p. 259. Šutaj (2005), p. 7. *Dejiny Slovenska VI*, p. 65 – 66.

wanted to displace its future representative, Rudolf Schuster, from Slovakia.<sup>35</sup> A symbolic official Slovak distancing from these measurements<sup>36</sup> could be very productive for the future; it could serve as a kind of message towards the ethnic Hungarians that the Slovak statehood understands (if not accepts) their way of thinking and does not regard them as ‘sin’, or dangerous for Slovaks. We should note that the role and place of Hungary is not unambiguous in this internal Slovak ‘state – citizens’ debate.

## Slovaks in the Mind of Hungarians

### *Until World War I*

In the 19th century, when modern national movements were rising in the Central-Eastern-European region, the respective political-cultural elites and the dawning national public opinion began to characterize themselves and other neighboring nations by specific ‘traits’ (auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes). In reality, the Hungarians began to feel very lonely in the Slavonic-German world. Ironically, this situation has not changed in the past 200 years; only the Polish are concerned a kind of ‘natural allies’ of Hungarians. What is interesting for us here is that the Slovaks did not gain a well-formed character in this ‘Hungarian globe’, but they were divided into two categories: the Panslav and the (Tóth).<sup>37</sup> It is worth to note that the Slovaks themselves in the 19th century translated the word *slovenský* as (tóth) in many cases. The meaning of the Hungarian word (tóth) deformed in parallel with the process that the Hungarians referred to the representatives of the Slovak national movement as ‘Panslavs’.<sup>38</sup> So the Slovaks with a strong national consciousness were declared Panslavs, agents of Russia; the ‘rest of Slovaks’ were called (Tóth). The Tóths had quite a positive, but in some aspects a bit disdainful connotation: they were described as simple but ‘diligent, hard-working and honest people’.<sup>39</sup> This divided perception of Slovaks hid the

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Rudolf Schuster, President of Slovakia. *Právo*, March 3, 2002.

<sup>36</sup> B. Bugár *Žijem v takej krajine*. (I live in a country...) (Bratislava: Kalligram, 2004). p. 60.

<sup>37</sup> J. Demmel, ‘Slovenskí rodáci’ a ‘krvaví Panslávi’, *Rozštiepená Minulosť*. Manuscript, www.tra.hu.

<sup>38</sup> Oszkár Jászi, propagator of mutual political agreement described a case when Hungarians called persons Panslavs because they spoke Slovak sitting on the train. O. Jászi *A Habsburg-monarchia felbomlása*. (The Break-up of Habsburg Monarchy.) (Budapest: Gondolat, 1982).

<sup>39</sup> Article of (Drótostót) (*Drotár*) in *Pallas Lexikon*, volume V, 1893, Budapest, p. 528. Or see: A. Pechány: *A magyarországi tótok*. (The Slovaks living in Hungary.) (Miskolc: Felsőmagyarországi Kiadó, 2000).

fact from most Hungarians that the autonomous Slovak national movement did exist, with its own aims, its own system of symbols and with its own territorial and cultural claims. They did not, however, have a mother state (contrary to the Romanians or the Serbs), no traditional collective rights (contrary to the Serbs) or any separated, 'own' branch of Christian religion (contrary to the Orthodox Romanians and Serbs). Moreover, they did not mean any serious threat for Hungarian military positions during the war of 1848 – 1849 – contrary, again, to the Serbs and Romanians. These were the factors which emphasized the existence of a national movement in the eyes of Hungarians.

### *Between the Two World Wars*

For this 20-year long period, we cannot examine the Hungarian perception of the Slovaks without paying attention to the revisionist sentiment prevailing in Hungary at that time.

We saw how the Trianon-trauma was created but why has it not weakened as time passed by? It was partly due to the political system of Horthy's Hungary, which gained political legitimization from refusing Trianon in slogans and from stressing the total revision (the restoration of Great-Hungary) – also in slogans. There is no consensus among Hungarian historians about how honestly the political leadership committed itself to the revisionist ideas and plans. One emphasizes that the leading Hungarian politicians tried to exploit all the situations when it seemed realistic that all the main questions (economic and diplomatic connections, rights and positions of ethnic Hungarians) could be settled by negotiations with the neighboring countries. Others point out that "No, no, never" and "Everything back" (*Všetko späť*) were semi-official political slogans of this period and that students in primary schools had to begin every school day with the 'pray of Hungarians' as follows: "I believe in one God, I believe in one Homeland, I believe in the eternal divine truth; I believe in the resurrection of Hungary (*Uhorsko*)".

What is more interesting for us now is how the Hungarian political elite thought about Slovaks. In contrast with the Czechs, Serbians or especially Romanians, the Slovaks did not become 'enemies' in the mind of Hungarians. It originated from the way of thinking that contemporary Hungarians – as long as we can refer to them as one single group – did not consider the Hungarian assimilation policy and national movements as causes of Trianon. In their eyes, Trianon was the work of the anti-Hungarian powers such as the Entente states (*Dohoda*), especially France, who were led by hostility toward Hungarians or misled by the representatives of Czech or Rumanian nations. In addition, the civic government of Károlyi Mihály (October 1918 – March

1919) and the Hungarian Republic of Councils (*Madárska republika rád*) led by communists (March 1919 – August 1919) became the internal scapegoat for Trianon.

The comprehensive Trianon-book compiled by leading Hungarian historians listed many contemporary speeches, public letters and memoranda on Trianon.<sup>40</sup> No one mentioned Slovaks among the anti-Hungarian powers or factors. Slovaks became citizens of Czechoslovakia only as a result of ‘Czechs’ greediness’, says for instance a Santa Claus verse written for children.<sup>41</sup> István Bethlen, Prime Minister from 1921 till 1931 (but a decisive political personality afterwards, as well), spoke in the same sense. In a lecture in Great Britain in 1933 he stated that Slovaks got to Czechoslovakia against their grain, only as a ‘present’ given to the Czechs.<sup>42</sup>

We should not assess this as a positive phenomenon. It means only that the official Hungarian policy failed to face the fact that Trianon and the break-up of the Hungarian Kingdom was not only the work of external forces but the aim of minority leaders, as well, who were oppressed and alienated from Hungarians by the assimilation policy. Some Slovak politicians themselves (e.g. Vavro Šrobár)<sup>43</sup> also acknowledged that national self-consciousness was weak among Slovaks until 1918 (or dominated by a strong political loyalty towards Budapest); but this situation radically changed in 20 years, which many contemporary Hungarian politicians seemed to fail to recognise. István Bethlen, for instance, kept on describing the ‘question of the Slovak Highland’ as a merely Czech-Hungarian problem even in 1940, after the so-called ‘little war’.<sup>44</sup> He regarded Slovak resistance and anti-Hungarian sentiment only as the (temporary and possibly reversible) result of Czech and German propaganda.

<sup>40</sup> M. Zeidler (ed) *Trianon*. (Budapest: Osiris, 2003).

<sup>41</sup> M. Zeidler (ed) *Trianon*. (Budapest: Osiris, 2003), p. 370.

<sup>42</sup> Lecture of István Bethlen in Cambridge, 1933. In I. Bethlen *Válogatott politikai írások és beszédek*. (Selected political writings and speech) I. Romsics (Budapest: Osiris, 2000). pp. 268 – 280.

<sup>43</sup> Šrobár (2004).

<sup>44</sup> I. Bethlen, “Emlékirat a nagyhatalmak béketerveiről és Magyarország revíziós céljairól”, (Memorandum on piece concepts of world-powers and on revisionist aims of Hungary) In: Bethlen (2000), 369 – 392. Some Hungarian experts (László Szarka, director of Research Institute of Ethnic and National Minorities) do not agree with this conclusion and state that Hungarian political elite was fully aware of the existence of Slovak national claims and aims after the political fall of Vojtech Tuka. It is a fact that all Hungarian documents counted on the autonomy of Slovakia and usually with a kind of Hungarian political supremacy.

## After the Second World War

During the communist Kádár-regime (1956-1989), the subject of ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries was taboo. Hungary – in return for relatively high internal freedom – accepted the politics of ‘communist internationalism’ unconditionally in the field of foreign policy, and voluntarily abandoned the right of speaking up for the interests of ethnic Hungarians. Their situation and history, their problems and claims were not allowed to be a ‘common subject’. Textbooks failed to deal with them but with the neighboring nations as well – like in the Horthy era. As a result, we can say that none of the generations currently living in Hungary possesses any comprehensive or at least basic information on Slovaks, or on ethnic Hungarians living there. It is not widely known who Lúdvít Štúr was or approximately how many Hungarians live in Slovakia.

This atmosphere of general ignorance and the suddenly acquired freedom in 1989 gave excellent conditions for spreading gloomy, one-sided ideas on the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Hungary: a kind of ‘Trianon folklore’ was born, with its own system of symbols but without any political conceptions. ‘Trianon posters’ or ‘Great Hungary pictures’ printed on T-shirts symbolize a sentiment that fate was not in favor of Hungarians in the 20th century – it refers not only to Trianon but to Communism, or to the present poverty and depression of the society, as well. Trianon folklore as a socio-psychological phenomenon can be assessed as a curious primitive post-modern subculture.

Paradoxically, the Hungarian society as a whole is not interested in the question of ethnic Hungarians. The democratization process after 1989 brought not only freedom and democracy but also frustrating emotions such as constraints to stand up against the ‘West’, struggle for sustaining at least the current standard of living, and deep political tensions. 5 December 2004 shows this atmosphere unambiguously when a referendum was held in Hungary on the question of ‘double citizenship’ (whether ethnic Hungarians should receive Hungarian citizenship or not). Half of the voting population did not take part in the referendum and half of the votes were against granting Hungarian citizenship to ethnic Hungarians. This was not only the result of internal political debates and phobias but a sign of stolidity and lethargy, as well.

The existence of the Trianon subculture has gained great space in the Slovak and Hungarian public sphere. It corresponds with the irrational logic of modern mass media, which pay more attention to the phenomena and events which are spectacular and curious and the Trianon subculture completely meet these very criteria.

If external observers fail to recognize that the Trianon subculture is rather a formality preferred by a relatively little segment of Hungarians than a determinant of political opinion, they may draw the misleading conclusion that the Hungarian nation as a whole lives in the idea of changing the borders – as unfortunately Dušan Čaplovič did in the Epilogue of a history book written by Anton Špiesz, saying that “Hungary permanently fantasized – and even today fantasizes – about total or partial restoration of ‘Great-Hungary’”.<sup>45</sup>

These opinions may originate partly from personal experience. When Hungarians visit Slovakia as tourists they feel the sentiment of ‘being alien’ knowing that some time ago this territory was not unfamiliar to Hungarians. It may result in sentimental behavior, such as searching for ‘traces of Hungarians’, people who can speak Hungarian ‘even today’, Hungarian inscriptions, graves, etc. It seems to irritate the Slovaks, as Hungarians also had a great many negative personal experiences about the Slovaks (about e.g. waiters, policemen, border controllers) whose behavior they found offensive.<sup>46</sup>

The general behavior of Hungarians cannot be judged as an intentionally anti-Slovak attitude. The point is that Hungarian common knowledge on Slovaks is rather poor even today as Hungarians – even the well-educated lawyers – do not know the main milestones and great personalities of the Slovak history and culture and their grievance.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the effective cure does not seem to be a kind of ‘mutual self-protection’ but improving our knowledge about each other. It requires mutual intention to become familiar with the Slovak and Hungarian ‘target audience’, lively network of personal connections and permanent cooperation within the civil society, which will probably serve as a basis for the Slovak-Hungarian dialogue in the future.

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<sup>45</sup> A. Špiesz: *Ilustrované...* (2006), p. 289.

<sup>46</sup> E.g. A. Szidiropulosz *Trianon utóélete. A magyar társadalom Trianon-képe az ezredfordulón.* (Afterlife of Trianon. Recent Hungarian perception of Trianon.) (Budapest: Kairos, 2004), p. 78 – 88.

<sup>47</sup> See e.g. as the most recent source: Interview with Judit Hamberger, researcher of Teleki László Institute. *Új Szó*, December 21, 2006.

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