

THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MINORITY IN YUGOSLAVIA
AFTER 1945¹
(A HISTORICAL SKETCH)

The almost stereotyped statement most frequently heard in connection with the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia is that compared to the other Central and Eastern European countries it is in Yugoslavia where the situation of the Hungarian minority is the most satisfactory considering both the constitutional and political arrangement and its realization in practice. In Hungarian journalism and official politics during the 1960s and 1970s the Yugoslavian policy towards national minorities was even described as something absolutely positive or at best as the example to be followed. On the other hand in the opinion of the general public in Hungary the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia - compared to the Hungarian minority in Romania and Czechoslovakia - always occupied - and still does - a particularly marginal place, combined with a latent but still continuously present guilty conscience because of the massacres in the South region (Novi Sad and Sajkas) in 1942.² These factors have covered up the major differences in the history of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia since the autumn of 1944 - I am speaking of the years 1944 and 1945 but I could also mention the period between 1945 and 1948 - and the reaction they have evoked is: "We'd better keep quiet."

Nevertheless it is a fact that the rights and established opportunities of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia are really better - have been made better -, but it is not a type of abstract ideal; we cannot even say so on the strength of their own opportunities and needs, it is only in a relative sense - compared with the much worse circumstances of the Hungarian minority in Romania, Czechoslovakia

1 This study is the extended version of the lecture given at the 1989 conference of the Protestant Academy for Hungarians in Europe.

2 Enikő A. Sajti: *Délvidék 1941-1944. A magyar kormányok délszláv politikája. [The South Region 1941-1944. The Southern Slav Policy of Hungarian Governments.]* Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1987 pp. 152-168.

and in Sub-Carpathia. On the other hand, to get a realistic picture of the possibilities of the preservation of their Hungarian identity it must be realized that they did not and still do not live in a sheltered place, independent of space and time, and that their history also has its constant and variable elements.

In the past 70 years there have been quite a few cases where one generation of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia has gone through more frequent changes of border and state, which in each case meant a fresh start. Falling from the position of a national majority into that of a minority always means a collective as well as individual trauma, a loss of social, cultural and national security, and a need to seek a way out. It implies a painful social amputation, and by virtue of logical necessity in most cases it means the loss of the intelligentsia and the middle class attached to the previous state.

This is what happened to the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia in the autumn and winter of 1944; compared to the border change in 1918 it was such a historical burden - because the above mentioned massacres - that the 500.000 Hungarians were within an inch of having the same fate as the German minority there and the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. The policy of the "collectively guilty Hungarian minority" and the vengeance of "we'll pay you back for everything", the mass executions, the terrible atmosphere of the labour camps and the threats with deportation lasted only for a few months here. From the beginning of 1945 the situation eased considerably, still the effect of these things must not be neglected.³ But it would be a mistake to think that the postwar loyal attitude of the Hungarian minority was only due to the above mentioned retaliatory measures taken by the new power or that it could be attributed to a guilty conscience because of the years 1944/45. The structural composition of the Hungarian minority also pointed to a social revolution and the assertion of equal rights. We are talking about a minority society where - as modernization in Central and Eastern Europe was long-delayed and had its own peculiarities - only a modified and combined

3 Edvard Kardelj: *Sećanja. Borba za priznanje i nezavisnost nove Jugoslavije 1944-1957*. Beograd, 1980 p. 85.
Balogh Sándor: *A népi demokratikus Magyarország külpolitikája 1945-1947. [The Foreign Policy of the Hungarian People's Democracy. 1945-1947.]* Budapest, 1982 p. 36. Enikő A. Sajti: *ibid.* pp. 243-251.

form of the so called primary and secondary social restratification could take place. By primary social restratification in sociology they mean the breakup of the earlier agrarian structure and craft industry by capitalist industrial development; by secondary they mean the course of events after the development of large-scale industry. The bulk of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia were peasants - landless peasants and agricultural labourers, who were left out when the last distribution of land took place - and the structure of the working class in the middle of the 20th century was the type that had been long absent in Western Europe. The number of intellectuals drastically decreased, which I'll illustrate with one single figure; in Voivodina in 1945 there were only three secondary school teachers left who had a degree. Let alone the fact that the members of the Hungarian middle class fled almost without exception or became the victims of the retaliations. Even today about half of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia work in agriculture mostly as private smallholders; the ratio of blue-collar workers to white-collar workers is 82 to 18 as opposed to the national ratio of 70 to 30.⁴

In connection with ownership one thing must be mentioned: the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia is the only Central and Eastern European minority which in the sense of ownership has not been completely eliminated. About half of the Hungarians that work in agriculture are entrepreneurs.⁵

The literature on the question of national minorities agrees that not only the archaic social structure is a factor of the survival of a minority but also the structure of settlements i.e. whether the members of a minority live in relatively the same place or they are scattered in the given country.

In the northern part of the country 3/4 of the Hungarian minority live mostly along the Hungarian-Yugoslavian border in the Autonomous Territory of Voivodina, which is a multinational and not Hungarian autonomous territory. Here the

4 Varga László: *A jugoszláviai magyarság társadalmi, politikai helyzete. [The Social and Political Situation of the Hungarian National Minority in Yugoslavia.]* Híd 10-11/1970.

5 Arday Lajos: *A jugoszláviai magyar nemzetiség helyzete 1981. Jelentések a határokon túli magyar kisebbség helyzetéről. (Csehszlovákia, Szovjetunió, Románia, Jugoszlávia.) [The Situation of the Hungarian Minority in Yugoslavia. Reports on the Situation of Hungarian Minorities Abroad. (Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union, Romania, Yugoslavia)]* Medvetánc Könyvek, Budapest, 1988 p. 271.

Hungarians live rather closely together, while in Croatia and Slovenia they are in diaspora.. According to the findings of László Reháč in the 1960s a half of the 450.000 Hungarians in Voivodina lived in settlements where they were in the majority.⁶ However, there are some negative tendencies as well, which must be pointed out: ever since 1945 the absolute number of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia and their ratio in the whole population has been constantly decreasing. From 496.000 it has dropped to 427.000; their percentage in Voivodina has fallen from 25.8% to 18.9% in the whole of Yugoslavia from 3.1% to almost one half, 1.9%.⁷

Of course these negative tendencies are not unknown elsewhere either, however, in Yugoslavia the diminution and ageing of the Hungarian minority - the Hungarian minority is the most aged in Yugoslavia - is counterpoised by the dynamic, almost explosion-like increase of the other non-Slavic minority, the Albanians. On the other hand, paradoxically, the factors that usually obstruct assimilation - a more archaic social structure, living in relatively the same place etc. - have under the peculiar Yugoslavian circumstances started to encourage assimilation and emigration. In the 1970s, when a great number of guest workers flooded to the west, as many Hungarians left Yugoslavia every year - 2000 - as the natural increase in their population. But even in proportion to their percentage in Voivodina the Hungarians were over-represented among the emigrants.⁸

There is an inverse ratio between the numerical proportion of Hungarians and the tolerance of the majority nationalities - Serbs, Croats, Slovenes. Where the Hungarian population is fewer - Slovenia, Croatia - the tolerance of the majority society is greater, there are more official gestures and also more successful results. Let me mention only a few typical facts: the special linguistic and cultural organisations of the Hungarian minority only exist in Slovenia and Croatia. (The

6 Reháč László: *Kisebbségtől a nemzetiségig.* [From Minority to Nationality.] Forum, Novi Sad, 1978 p. 202.

7 Arday Lajos: *ibid.* p. 268.

8 Mirnics Károly: *Demográfiai jellegzetességek a jugoszláviai magyar kisebbség életében.* [Demographic Peculiarities in the Life of the Hungarian Minority in Yugoslavia.] *Híd*, 1/1970 pp. 83-99.

Association of the Hungarians in Croatia and the Educational and Cultural Organisation of the Hungarian Minority) while the Republic of Serbia still does not see any reason for the existence of such vertical organisations, saying that any minority problem can be solved in the most natural way by the general political and social organisations, people's committees and self-governing bodies.

Obviously historical phenomena cannot be squeezed into mathematical formulae and strict correlations. This is also true for the matter of numerical proportion and tolerance, even if we know that unfortunately the law of numbers influences a country's policy towards national minorities. In our opinion in Serbia's case there is the consideration, or to be more precise, the fear that if the Hungarians living in the territory of the Republic formed organisations to safeguard their own interests, the Albanians would demand the same. However, this logic has long been outdated in history. Since 1981 the establishment of their own republic rather than the foundation of a kind of minority cultural organization has been in the centre of Albanian demands.

The following question has to be asked as well: what made it possible that after the tribulations of the beginning period of minority existence the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia gained promising cultural, constitutional and legal positions. What happened here - the number of institutions and constitutional opportunities increased and they got firmly established - was different from what happened in Romania, where under orders from above the conditions of culture and minority existence in general were quietly but deliberately and tenaciously phased out and then completely eliminated. Let me mention a few examples: an intellectual workshop for Hungarian studies - the first in Central and Eastern Europe after 1945 - was set up in Yugoslavia, namely the Institute of Hungarian Studies in Novi Sad (since the Hungarian Department and the Institute were united in 1976 it has been called Institute of Hungarian Linguistics, Literature and Hungarian Studies); but I could also mention the work done by Forum Publishing House and the publication of art and scientific journals and books in the town of Subotica.

In my opinion the causes of this can be found in the wider historical circumstances, in the changes that have taken place in Yugoslavian home policy and in the democratisation process, which Yugoslavian historians call the formation of a

self-governing society. Not wanting to spend much time on going into details about it I'll mention only one important fact: the reforms which were once introduced with the purpose of, and - it was believed - with the result of breaking up state-socialism resulted in spectacular though short-lasting economic development, increasing social consensus and the gradual fading away of false reactions towards the Hungarian minority. In 1959 it was officially expressed that minorities are "not only part of the country they originate from, but they are also attached to the country they live in, and the more guaranties there are for their legal equality and undisturbed development the stronger this attachment is".⁹ The above mentioned measures, the educational policy, the constitutional provisions of local statutes, the bilingual notices in the streets and so forth undoubtedly helped minorities feel more and more at home.

It is rightly asked whether it is still true today or whether it was only true in the long bygone days of economic development and social consensus. The question is all the more right because there are two categories that history surely does not know: the euphemistic expressions of "for ever" and "never".

The question can be put differently: what is the effect of the crisis - indicated by the nearly 1500% rate of inflation, demonstrations, counterdemonstrations and nationalities opposed to one another - on the opportunity for the Hungarian minority to survive?

Before trying to answer the question, we must make a few notes about the nature of the Yugoslavian crisis, the roots of which can be found in the 1960s and 1970s.

The economic reform in 1963, the constitutional reform in 1974 and the associated labour law in 1976 served a double purpose: it was believed that by destroying the federation i.e. the central ownership of the Yugoslavian state and by the introduction of the market economy it was possible to prevent the revival of both state chauvinism - behind which even today we can see the nationalism of the Serbs - and republican separatism. While, however, the economic reform of

⁹ Rehák László: *Nemzet, nemzetiség, kisebbség Jugoszláviában.* [Nation, Nationality and Minority in Yugoslavia.] Gondolat, Budapest 1988 p. 45.

the 1960s was stopped, the reform of the federation, i.e. its decentralisation, was carried out within the scope of the unchanged one-party system. As a result the situation in Yugoslavia became unique: the central role of the federal institutions was taken over by the republics; and the control of the economy and politics became the monopoly of the party hierarchy of the republics. So the fight began "for the best seat at the dinner where the corps of the federation was served up" - as a Yugoslavian historian wittily observed.¹⁰ From the single-centered party-state the multi-centered state of Yugoslavia was born, however, the republics themselves maintained the characteristics of centralized and bureaucratic state socialism. There was a craze of investment due to foreign loans, the biggest in Yugoslavian history, which were supposed to legitimize the new leadership of the republics rather than make a profit. However, as a result of the associated labour law the financial resources were divided among 600.000 organisations (OOUR), were frittered away, and so were not enough for the necessary big investments such as roads, oil refineries, electric power stations. The public kept quiet, the standard of living of almost all social strata became higher - redundant workers flowed to the western countries.

At the turn of the 1970s and 1980s - Tito was already seriously ill - there were two political tendencies waiting with their guns at their feet: those who were against centralism because they got the defeated federation as a sacrificial lamb and the followers of the strong-arm policy who were given the heads of the Croatian and Albanian "nationalists". Although after Tito's death it was possible to make a painless transition without heavy fighting for power, this silence, it is now clear, was only the lull before the storm.

The problems in Kosovo shocked the public: the state, which was taken by surprise, reacted to the problems with drastic measures, and so the appearance of Serbian nationalism, hurt and seemingly forced to be on the defensive and the

10 Dušan Bilandžić: *Jugoslavia posle Tita. 1980-1985*. Zagreb, 1986 p. 35.

withdrawn but more and more clamorous Albanian national movement was not surprising.¹¹

The first reaction of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia to the crisis was fear. The fear was that the crisis by virtue of its nature would destroy their establishments. (Recently the intellectuals in Voivodina had to protest against the closure of a secondary school.) There is no definite answer to the question when and how Serbian nationalism, which has so far been occupied with the crisis in Kosovo, will expand towards the north, in the direction of Voivodina. It is also known that the changing picture of an enemy is not alien from nationalism, i.e. when one concrete "enemy" - more precisely the Albanian minority labelled as an enemy - is suddenly transformed into the picture of the enemy as minorities in general.

The most important question, of course, is: are the rival powers of Yugoslavian political life going to put the Hungarian minority in the stocks again, or on the contrary, is there going to be a new synthesis born from the chaos of the crisis and the decline of the traditional forms of the survival of minorities?

The Kosovo crisis is examined in detail by Branko Horvat: *Kosovsko pitanje*. Zagreb, 1988; Batic Jovanović: *Kosovo. Inflacija, socijalne razlike*. Beograd, 1984. About crisis in general: Branko Horvat: *Jugoslavenska privreda 1965-1983*. Zagreb, 1984; by the same author: *Jugoslavensko društvo u krizi*. Zagreb, 1985; Mijalko Todorović: *Političko biće društvene krize*. Zagreb, 1986.

A JUGOSZLÁVIAI MAGYAROK 1945 UTÁN (TÖRTÉNELMI VÁZLAT)

A tanulmány a jugoszláviai magyar kisebbség 1945 utáni helyzetét elemzi. Röviden felvázolja társadalmi szerkezetüket, főbb demográfiai adataikat, majd utal a többségi nemzetek magyarokkal kapcsolatos politikájának mozzanatára. A továbbiakban arra keresi a választ, hogy e kisebbség jogai, önmegőrzésének intézményes keretei miért alakultak kedvezőbben az 1944-1945-ös mélypont ellenére is, mint a romániai, kárpát-aljai és a csehszlovákiai magyarságé. Az okokat a jugoszláviai magyar kisebbséget körülvevő tágabb történelmi közegben, Jugoszlávia belpolitikai életében, az 50-es, 60-as évektől kibontakozó változásokban jelöli meg. Ezek elemzése után megállapítja: az államszocializmus széttrésztésének céljával bevezetett - s a szerző szerint ebből a szempontból csekély eredményt hozó - reformok rövid ideig látványos gazdasági felfutást, erősödő társadalmi konszenzust és a magyarsággal szembeni hamis reflexek elhalványulását, a kulturális, alkotmányos, jogi lehetőségek bővülését jelentették.

A 60-as, 70-es évek reformjai azonban negatív tendenciákat is magukban hordoztak: a központi, föderatív intézmények etatista szerepét átvették a köztársaságok, s az egyközpontú pártállamból megszületett a policentrikus etatista Jugoszlávia. A 80-as évek elején kirobbanó koszovói válságra az állam durva eszközökkel reagált, s a társadalom porondján megjelent a sértett, látszólag védekezésbe szorított szerb nacionalizmus. A jugoszláviai magyarság első reakciója e válságra a félelem érzése volt. Attól tartottak, hogy a válság elindíthatja eddig kiépített intézményrendszerük erózióját, s a szerb nacionalizmus a Vajdaság irányába is eszkalálódik. A kérdések kérdése ma az - írja tanulmánya befejező részében a szerző -, hogy a jugoszláv politikai életben egymással versengő erők vajon újabb kalodába szorítják-e az ottani magyarságot, avagy ellenkezőleg, a válság zűrzavarából és a kisépek hagyományos önmegőrző formáinak felbomlásából új szintézis születik-e?