



***“INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS”
MULTIDISCIPLINARY
PhD.-program***

THESIS

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**RELATIONS BETWEEN SLOVAKIA AND THE EUROPEAN
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, ESPECIALLY THE MINORITY ISSUE
THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY IN SLOVAKIA AND THE COUNCIL OF
EUROPE (1990-2004)**

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Budapest, 2009

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I. Preliminaries and Aims of the Research Work

The following thesis examines the international relations, especially the minority policy of the independent Slovak Republic which gained its independence on 1st of January, 1993. The process of Slovak independence was closely monitored by international organizations because the state had minority problems which caused ethnic tension in the Central European region. As a result, the issue of Slovak independence was important from the perspective of European security.

After 1989, due to the armed conflict in the territory of former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union, the issue of Central European national minorities, similarly to the interwar period (1918-1938), became a key European issue and beside its human rights dimension gained a security aspect as well.

In this work, the issue of national minorities will be focused on Hungarian national minority in Slovakia because the ethnic Hungarians were the only minority in Slovakia which potentially affected the issue of European order and security. After 1990, in the process of Europeanization of minority problem, the Council of Europe (CoE) played the main role because this international organization gained decisive importance in managing Slovakian minority issue in long term.

Since 1st of May, 2004, Slovakia and Hungary have been members of the European Union which means a new situation because the Slovak-Hungarian debate on the issue of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia became an internal ethno-political problem of the EU. As a result, the European political community imported this problem which, after the end of integration process, cannot be treated as an external human right or security

issue. In this respect, the European Union will be forced to invent new ethno-political methods to manage the ethnic and minority problems.

As a result, after 2004, the problem of Central European national minorities will appear in the institutional framework of the European Union. The period between 1990 and 2004 was pre-Union era which has to be examined as a period of formation of new European minority policy. The results and mistakes will be important for the further evaluation of European ethno-politics. In this work, the issue of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia will be evaluated in a four-element model. This model contains the following elements: Slovakia (home-state), Hungary (kin-state), ethnic Hungarians (national minority) in Slovakia and the international community (especially the Council of Europe). The above mentioned four-element model had a long formative period in the international literature which is showed in the following.

II. Methodology

Since the early 1990s, many authors have tried to make a suitable evaluation model for the issue of Central European national minorities. One of these authors was R. Brubaker who used the nationalist movements of the former Yugoslavia to show how the mutual relationship among home-state, minorities and kin-state works. In the mid-1990s, Brubaker created a so-called triadic nexus which can be characterized with dynamic interdependence. This meant that the home-state, the national minority and the kin-state¹ which was neighbor to the nationalizing home-state, due to the home-state homogenization policy and the kin-state's integration policy (fight for the minorities' self-determination) had a conflicting relationship. However, the above mentioned triadic nexus was lack of the monitoring and intermediating policy of the international community. As a result, the evaluation model of minority issue needed a fourth element or dimension which was the activity of the international community. In this case, the most important role was played by the European organizations (Council of Europe, OSCE and EU) which, in the framework of European integration process, were able to control the ethno-political conflicts in the Central European region. Despite of the above mentioned problems, Brubaker's model had other deficiencies because he used the post-Cold War Yugoslavian ethnic problems as a case study which was based on an armed conflict. As a result, this could not explain the issue of cooperation between the ethno-political actors in Central Europe.

In the late 1990s, in the international literature of political science, there was a very vivid debate on the nature of ethnic and minority conflicts. Brubaker's statements

¹ Brubaker used the following notions: nationalizing state (home-state), external national homeland (kin-state), and national minority.

and the model of triadic nexus were discussed. The majority of scholars agreed that the model had to contain a fourth element, the element of international community. As a result, this model had four actors which created a quadratic nexus-model.

Brubaker stressed that the post-Cold-War era (1990-2004) in Central Europe was very similar to the interwar period. In addition, he predicted that there will be similar ethnic conflicts in the region. In parallel with this, Brubaker rejected that there was a basic difference between Eastern European (ethnic) and the Western European (civic) state. In spite of this, his argumentation strengthened this stereotype. Other scholars stressed that before 20th century, there were similar homogenization processes in Western Europe that is why this stereotype should be revised. Moreover, before the First World War, suitable minority concepts in Central Europe (for example in Austria) were elaborated which showed perspective in managing the ethnic conflicts. It has to be also mentioned that no other than the Western European powers (both, Entente and Germany) were which intentionally polarized the ethnic conflicts during and after the First World War in the region.

Brubaker also said that due to high percentage of ethnic Russians in post-Soviet region, Russia could generate serious minority problems similar to the Weimar Germany in the interwar period (1920-33). However, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Brubaker's predictions did not become reality because the issue of ethnic Russians was used by the Russian government in limited extent in the international relations.

To sum up, international literature stressed that after 1990, the reason of the relative peaceful political transformation processes in Central and Eastern Europe was the active role and influence of the international community in the minority questions. In the

interwar period (mainly after 1933), the Central European states were extradite to the aggressive Germany and Soviet Union because the Western Powers (USA, France or UK) were more or less indifferent towards the Central European region.

Despite of the above mentioned, after 1990, the post-Soviet region faced a strong Euro Atlantic structures (NATO, EU) which prescribed democratic minimum (parliamentary democracy, human and in less extent minority rights) during the integration process. The integration process to the Euro Atlantic structure was attractive for the Central and Eastern European region because this promised that the security and economic problems will be solved in the region.

In case of Slovakia, the "constraint" of the integration into the European structures (CoE, NATO, EU) resulted that beside the issue of (Slovak) national self-determination (Meciar-era: 1990-1998), the so-called Europeanization also became a relevant political factor (Dzurinda-era: 1998-2006). Between 1990 and 2004, these two political processes worked in parallel.

In this respect, the EU prescribed the minimum level of democratization in the Central European region. On the one hand, the main infrastructure of the parliamentary democracy was built very quickly, on the other hand, the compliance with the law and democratic principles was inadequate. This statement was increasingly true for the minority rights. That is why the international community, in the framework of OSCE, established the position of High Commissioner for National Minorities because they wanted to prevent the eruption of ethnic conflicts in Central Europe. The mandate of the High Commissioner was relatively strong in minority issues. As a result, the sovereignty of the states was not taboo in some cases. However, this mandate was geographically

limited because this was not valid for the older member states (Spain, UK, and Greece). As a result, it was not a universal European minority protection tool. The Western European states did not want to internationalize their minority problems because they thought that the outsiders (institution of the High Commissioner) could destabilize their country with the permanent re-opening of minority issues (Northern Ireland, Catalonia). That is why that the community of European states could not agree on universal European minority standards in the 1990s.

In this respect, we have to analyze the activity of the Council of Europe (CoE). On the one hand, the OSCE (the High Commissioner) had a geographically limited (for Central and Eastern Europe) but relatively effective devices, on the other hand, the European legal framework of CoE system was ineffective and weak. Due to the resistance of the above mentioned Western European states, the CoE could not even agree on the legally binding definition of national minorities which could have been a starting point towards a more effective minority protection.

The second international organization, the European Union which had also a crucial influence did not find an effective solution for the so-called minority double standard. This meant that the EU prescribed certain minority standards for the Central European EU-candidates but these standards many times were not compulsory for the old member states. (Until 2008, France did not ratify the Language Charter of CoE.) In this respect, the minority standards which were part of the process of the Europeanization got into a dynamic interdependence (with Brubaker's notion). This meant that the new members of the EU supposed logically that after the accession, there will not be double

standard relating to the minority issues, as a result, they did not have to fulfill their minority protection obligations.

In this thesis, we will examine the four element model which contains home-state, kin-state, national minority and international community. In addition, we will concentrate on the structural character of the elements. In our four element model, the ethno-policy will be the connecting force among the elements. The ethno-policy creates a special space in which the elements can decide on the issue of ethnic confrontation or cooperation.

In the evaluation framework, we will use historical comparative method which will help to find the parallel historical and political structures in the European minority policy between the interwar and post-Cold War era. The case study of Slovakia will help us to demonstrate the structural differences and similarities in the two above mentioned period.

In our work, we will use the so-called multidisciplinary approach which means that during our research work, we will use the methods of history, political science, and international law.

III. Findings of the Work

1. Between the interwar (1918-1938) and the post-Cold War (1990-2004) period, there was a structural parallelism in minority issues in Central Europe. In both eras, a four element international model was adopted which had the same elements: the home-state, kin-state, national minorities and the international community. In spite of structural parallelism, after 1990, there were differences in the activity of international community which resulted that the ethno-political issues were localized in the region.

2. In the post-Cold War period, the activity of OSCE had same goals as the League of Nations' activity which meant that the international community wanted to secure the ethno-political peace in the Central European region. However, the minority protection system was not universal in Europe, which meant that the activity of both international organizations had a security character together with the limited mandate.

3. After 1990, in spite of the relative success of international organizations, the minority issue lacked strong and binding legal instruments in Central Europe. While in the case of OSCE, the international community (Western Europe) was able to limit the scope of activity for Central and Eastern Europe, in the structures of CoE, the European states should have created a universal European legal framework for minority issue. However, the relevant Western European powers (France, UK, and Germany) were reluctant to create universal minority protection system. The Western European states were afraid of instability and interfere to their home affairs.

4. In the case of Slovakia, the structural parallelism of the interwar and post-Cold War period can be seen. The best examples for this can be examined in the framework of minority institutions. In both examined periods, the ethnic Hungarian elementary school

system in Slovakia was relatively complete which meant that it worked without relevant problems. In spite of this, the secondary school system and higher education was very problematic which had a deep impact on labor market position of Hungarian minority in Slovakia. In the two periods, there were also very clear parallelisms in the framework of minority language usage as an official language.

4. After 1990, Slovakia wanted to minimize the expenses of minority protection which in one hand, resulted that it chose the weaker minority points from the international conventions (Language Charter), on the other hand, the legally binding obligations of international conventions many times were not fulfilled in practice.

5. The ethnic cleavage in the framework of Slovakian institutional system was also relevant in both examined periods. The strongest cleavage can be examined in the political party system which was also helped by the proportional election system. As a result, the Hungarian ethnic regional parties were very active in the interwar Czechoslovak and in the independent Slovak parliamentary systems. After 1998, when the Party of Hungarian Coalition (MKP) became the member of Slovakian governmental coalition, the ethnic cleavage weakened because the Slovak-Hungarian ethnic coalition had coercive impact. As a result, the Slovak-Hungarian ethno political cooperation became an every day obligation in political scene of Slovakia.

6. The ethnic cleavage was relevant in the framework of cultural institutions which were not strongly controlled or influenced by executive power. After 1990, there was a very intensive Hungarian-Slovak debate on the lack of ethnic Hungarian priests and teachers in the Slovakian Catholic Church.

7. Due to the Hungarian ethnic character of reformed church in Slovakia, there was also deep cleavage in special issues (state supported higher education of the reformed church or post-Communist compensation) between the Slovak government and Reformed Church.

8. In the interwar period (1918-1938) and after the Cold War (1990-1998), the ethnic Hungarian political representation had weak bargaining power in Slovakia. As a result, the preserving of the *status quo* was a real Hungarian ethnic program. During the Slovak-Hungarian coalition years (1998-2006), positive processes can be seen in the minority institutional system in Slovakia which meant that the membership in the executive power was the only effective tool. However, in long term, the positive institutional situation can be maintained by the institutional (cultural) autonomy which can secure the independence of institutional framework of the Hungarian minority from the executive power. In this respect, there is a little chance for this cultural autonomy because it should have been followed by positive changes in Slovak constitution. However, there is a little chance for the support of ethnic Slovak political parties. In addition, from the above mentioned reasons, international organization did not offer support for the ethnic Hungarian institutional autonomy. As a result, in the near future, there will be permanent Slovak-Hungarian ethnic tension because the political actors of Slovakian political scene (almost each ethnic Slovak political subject, from the political left to right) use the issue of Hungarian minority to maximize their popularity and votes.

9. Between 1998 and 2006, the Party of Hungarian Coalition was a member of the Slovak government which resulted in the decrease of Hungarian-Slovak ethnic tension. In addition, there were many governmental decisions which improved the mental and

financial situation of the Hungarian minority. However, after changes in executive power in 2006, the relative good positions in local authorities changed and the use of Hungarian language became more and more limited. The only exceptions were in such an institutions which had very firm legal framework (Hungarian minority university in Komárno). In other institutions (central governmental and local state bureaucracy), after 2006, the layoff of Hungarian or Hungarian speaking officials was a simple reorganization action in state institutions which in this respect, meant that the official use of Hungarian language narrowed.

10. In the late 1990s, in the process of Euro Atlantic integration, the legal structures of the Council of Europe became more and more important in the managing of minority problems in long term. In this European framework, the most important legal instrument was the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (Language Charter) together with the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (Framework Convention). The four element model which was used in our work can be examined through the legal framework of the Language Charter and the Framework Convention. In the monitoring mechanism of both above mentioned legal instruments, the relations among the four elements (home-state, kin-state, national minorities and international community) can be examined in structural form.

11. Between 1990 and 2004, the case of Hungarians in Slovakia showed that the most important decisions which influenced the everyday life of Hungarian minority community came from the space of Slovak party policy (Hungarian university). In parallel with this, the international legal instruments of CoE helped in codification of minority rights which meant that the practice of minority rights obtained a better legal

basis in Slovakia. For example, after the codification of European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Hungarian elementary and secondary school system in Slovakia obtained a firmer legal construction.

12. The international community in Europe wanted to foster the member states to increase the level of minority rights. As a result, they thought that the publication of the regular reports of the monitoring mechanisms (Language Charter and the Framework Convention) will be effective tools for this purpose. In this respect, publication of the Biennial Report by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to the Parliamentary Assembly on the application of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages had a similar purpose. In case of Slovakia, the sanction mechanism of the CoE minority legal tools which were based on the strengths of international publicity was relatively weak. For example, the state law of 1995 was strictly criticized by the monitoring reports of the Language Charter but the Slovak government refused any revise of the law.

13. The evolution process of the Slovak version of the Language Charter showed that the coordination among the Hungarian minority institutions in Slovakia had to be improved because there were relevant differences between the elaborated drafts. In addition, for the representatives of national minorities, it was obvious that the regular reports of the Slovak government on the actual situation of minorities were not satisfactory. The Slovak authorities collected statistic data on the minority institutional system and language usage but these data did not reveal the existing problems. As a result, the institutions of the Hungarian minority should have collected and add the missing data to completed governmental regular reports. However, between 1990 and

2004, this minority institutional system was *in statu nascendi*. As a result, this work was not regular and there were many problems with the financial sources. After the publication of the regular reports of the Slovak government, it would be very important to elaborate so-called shadow reports which could add the „missing data” in parallel.

14. In the 1990s, this important complementary work was partly made by the Hungarian section of Federal Union of European Nationalities (FUEN). However, József Komlóssy (FUEN vice-president) had to do a very hard minority protection work because the relevant minority institutions in Slovakia had a very weak position in financial and human resources terms. As a result, the FUEN many times did not obtain suitable information on the minority situation in Slovakia in time.

15. In the near future, it would be more efficient if the Hungarian minority institution could collect and elaborate information constantly because the lack of suitable information could render more difficult to stand for the minority rights in the European international organizations. In this respect, the institutional system of Hungarian minority in Slovakia had to be empowered in order to fulfill this important work. The parallel activities had to be synchronized and the human and financial background of these institutions had to be made independent from the executive power in Slovakia.

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