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## Dual citizenship in historical context

### Abstract

*The author from the region of Voivodina is of the opinion that - as it became evident by the rigid refusal during the referendum in 2004 - the grant of dual citizenship or its denial has been the reflection of the social situation and problems; what is the relationship between the inhabitants of the regions and the mother country, what image has developed about the parts of the Hungarian nation cut off and now living in neighbouring states and what is the attitude towards them.*

It is five years that the Hungarians of Voivodina – together with those parts of the nation, who are living in the regions separated from Hungary by the treaty of Trianon, had to face the fact that the majority of the inhabitants of Hungary, the mother country, did not wish to throw in their lot with the Hungarian nationals living beyond the borders of the country, in Upland, Transcarpathia, Romania and the former Yugoslavia (Slovenia, Croatia and Voivodina). Some had been surprised by these facts, others just acknowledged the point of view of the mother country, the definite 'no', the rejection. The latter ones probably did not depend so much on the distribution of the material help arriving from Hungary (the way of the distribution and the choice of recipients - with rare exceptions - have been mysterious). These people keep observing impassively the official Hungarian attitude and the one of the Hungarian public, that might not be entirely independent of the official one but not necessarily identical with it, about the compatriots torn out of the nation without their consent 91 years ago and have remained trapped as citizens in various states.

If the present author should say where she belongs and whether the then rejection have caused her pain or disappointment in the past five years the answer is a short 'no'.

The order set by the Trianon peace treaty that had closed the situation caused by the defeat in WWI was one of the most decisive

events of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. for Hungary and the Hungarians and it has not changed by the beginning of the 21<sup>th</sup> c. either.

What the adjustment of the borders concerns there were no considerable changes for the mother country either after WWII. or by the breakup of the Yugoslave state (that was created in 1918) that lead to local wars in the 1990s. Of the Hungarian communities remaining in the successor states, only those noticed changes that have been living in the southern region. With the seceding of two member republics of the former federative state of Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia, the Hungarians in the southern region were broken into even smaller communities and are now living in three states. The Hungarians thus remaining in the now independent Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia have shared the life of the citizens of these new sovereign states.

The destiny of the Hungarians living in the Republic of Slovenia seems to have been solved; the development in Croatia signals a positive trend by the nomination of Slovenia to EU membership irrespective how the Hungarians in Croatia consider their situation. The development concerning the destiny of Hungarians in Voivodina, however, might seem stagnant as it greatly depends on Serbia's international situation as the latter had been accused of being the instigator of the war of the 1990s. Allegedly the situation and destiny of the Hungarians in Voivodina is not as to be wished since the region is still suffering from the prejudices and reservations against Serbia that has been prevented it to join the EU. In theory the Hungarians in Voivodina could have profited from dual citizenship similar to the Hungarians in Transcarpathia. In 2004 a favourable vote for dual citizenship could have considerably improved their position in foreign policy as well as increased their weight in internal politics.

The negative result of the 2004 referendum indicating the attitude of the mother country and the majority of the population was especially important for the Hungarians in Voivodina. The news, articles and the chronology of events on the question of dual citizenship published in 2003-2004 testify that the Hungarians of the mother country, believed to be homogeneous, had misgivings especially against the Hungarians in Voivodina, even if the Hungarians in Romania, who are the most populous among the minorities, shared the same feelings. In the opinion of Imre C. Ferencz everything was humiliating for the Hungarians left beyond the borders that

happened in the mother country concerning dual citizenship.<sup>1</sup> In the case of Serbia and Voivodina the Hungarians of Voivodina were the only Hungarian community that was refused dual citizenship. It has weakened their situation in Serb politics but started an instinct of self-organization among the Hungarians of Voivodina to show some critical attitude toward the mother country and develop their capability for independent political activity.

The indifferent attitude of the mother country is not recent, it has its historical roots in the 1918 change of statehood then after the events of 1944-45 too.

Looking back it seems that the actual Hungarian governments were too ready to easily give up this 'outer region lacking in local Hungarian consciousness and customs'<sup>2</sup> that could be explained by the economic situation of the Hungarians of the region, the non-existent or only weekly present middle-peasantry, the lack of a political active middle class. After the change of statehood the Hungarian government helped the Hungarians in Yugoslavia by economic aid and political advice. While the personalities who fled from the annexed regions to Hungary were given positions, e.g. István Bethlen became the head of a secret ministry to deal with matters concerning Transylvania, if only for a short time, no such appointment was offered to persons from the southern region showing an order of importance among the regions;<sup>3</sup> that was manifest itself in the different amount of economic aid too.

In addition to the bad relationship between Hungary and the newly created Yugoslav state there was the proclaimed ideal of the party of the Hungarians in Yugoslavia (Hungarian Party) that the Hungarians would not use international forums to enforce its rights, but trusted in the democratic and modern world view of the Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian peoples and hoped for the solution of the situation in political cooperation with the Yugoslav nation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ferencz, C. Imre. *Romániai Magyar Szó*, 2004. november 30.

<sup>2</sup> A. Sajti, Enikő: *Impériumváltások, revízió, kisebbség. Magyarok a Délvidéken 1918–1947*. Budapest, 2004, Napvilág Kiadó, p. 33. [Changes of state, revision, minority Hungarians in the southern region].

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p.37.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* p.45

Characteristically Budapest never supported the foundation of a mutual Yugoslav-Hungarian party and found injurious when the Hungarians of Co. Baranya tried to approach Belgrade. The publications with left-wing contributors were also suspect<sup>5</sup> and were blamed with the deception of the Hungarians [of Yugoslavia – Ó.Á.], thus trying to avert the weakening of the influence of the mother country. The reason of the fiasco of Magyar Párt [Hungarian Party] at the 1925 elections was ascribed to the lack of cohesion and ‘Transylvanian spirit’ though in reality it was the result of the fear on the part of the majority nation as the minority was constantly accused of revisionalism and retribution for it was always held out as a prospect in reply by the actual Yugoslav state power. The suspicion and accusation of revisionism has been still haunting the Hungarians in Yugoslavia, in Serbia that cannot be stopped by any reasonable argument.

Irrespective whether the imagined ‘revisionist’ intent manifested itself in the mother country or among the Hungarians in Voivodina the majority nation retaliated by collective punishment for them, revising their rights and threatening with the prospect of dissolution of their existing institutions. The Hungarians in Yugoslavia had to consider the reaction of the mother country too because with the borders between them again; it was forgotten that it was not by their own decision that the parts of the nation torn away had found themselves on the other side of the border. Thus independent of historical eras be it between the two wars or after 1944 only those were deemed good Hungarians who accepted and carried out the political will of the mother country thus proving their fidelity to the nation.

The Hungarians of the southern region and especially those who were living together with Serbians did not count Hungarian enough in their spirit. The lack of trust was most perceptible after April 1941. In spite of the fact that the inhabitants of the southern region automatically became Hungarian citizens on the 16<sup>th</sup> of December 1941, the civil servants were mainly replaced by those coming from the mother country. The school system was also disrupted and 1300 teachers were sent there to educate the young pupils to be true

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<sup>5</sup> especially *Magyar újság* (Eszék) and *Bácsmezei Napló* (Szabadka)

Hungarians and make Serbian and German children into honest Hungarian citizens.<sup>6</sup>

The new Hungarian power recognized the existence of Hungarian leaders who were considered weak links for the Hungarian purposes and tried to get rid of them acting in the spirit of the slogan of 'Let's be better Hungarians than before'. Not only the Hungarian war propaganda but public opinion too and not only in words called the Hungarians in Yugoslavia *csetniks* and the co-existence with the Serbs made them suspect in the first place. The above phenomena could be observed in the reaction of the mother country to the massacres of 1944-45 in the southern region that was similar to the attitudes at the change of statehoods of 1918 too. Thus contrary to the fear of the Yugoslav communist power there was no intention for border revision on ethnic basis on Hungarian side and Hungary did nothing against the military administrative steps e.g. against the internments started on the 20<sup>th</sup> of November 1944 and the drafting for forced labour of Hungarian men between 16 and 50 years of age; later on the Hungarian state and church leaders remained at the level of 'satisfactory information'.<sup>7</sup>

After 1948 the deterioration of the Yugoslav – Hungarian relationships, the change of direction of the YCP, the accepting of the 'humane socialism' and the changes in the minority policy of the Yugoslav state had important influence upon the situation of the Hungarian minority. Thanks to the spreading of the western bourgeois values, the possibilities of schooling and education the Hungarians in Yugoslavia were able to make up for their lagging behind that was characteristic for them in the period between the two wars. The increasing possibility of education strengthened the intelligentsia who were ready for independent thinking. That fact and the relative prosperity induced various reactions in the inhabitants of the mother country living under increased Soviet control following the suppression of the 1956 revolution. Not only the Hungarian intelligentsia in Yugoslavia, freer thinking and becoming self-conscious for the times, were treated with reservation because of the assumption that they were less loyal to the mother country, but the differences developed

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<sup>6</sup> A. Sajti 2004, p.244.

<sup>7</sup> A. Sajti 2004, p. 330.

in aesthetic understanding was also noticed.<sup>8</sup> The official Hungarian cultural policy stressed not only a centrally directed declaration of uniform Hungarian consciousness in contrast to universality and several centres, but strictly controlled and occasionally punished its own dissident intelligentsia that claimed mental relationship with the Hungarians beyond the borders. Just as the spiritual contacts between Hungarian intelligentsia was not welcomed over the borders either according to Lajos Kántor, Hungarian literary historian in Romania.

However, the official Hungarian cultural circles were in very good relationship with those members of the Hungarian intelligentsia in Voivodina who were members of the Yugoslav party apparatus, had special functions in the party and state management and thus carrying confidential posts could effectively control the activities of Hungarian institutions, newspapers in Yugoslavia and at the same time moulding the official opinion to enforce the minority policy of the Yugoslav Communist association. In the second half of the 1960s these were the acceptable, officially welcomed 'good Hungarians' for the cultural politicians of the mother country.

The past orientation of the mother country have been reflected by those cultural, historical and folklore works, too that had left the area of the southern region uncharted. That empty spot was filled out and 'coloured' by the institutions and scholarly literature of the southern region that became self-conscious and busy in important scholarly activity in the 1970s without any aid from the mother country.<sup>9</sup>

The situation and attitude has changed following the change of regime in Hungary and in the turbulent times when the war broke out after the breakup of Yugoslavia. The Hungarians of the south became involved against their intentions in the crisis carried and their situation reached a low point comparable to the times of the change of statehood and 1944-45. Their life was at danger during the Yugoslav wars and the following financial crisis left the Hungarian communities depending on the help coming from Hungary, that momentarily

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<sup>8</sup> Especially the attitude of the official Hungarian cultural policy toward the writing of a history of the Hungarian avant-garde literature is an example.

<sup>9</sup> Vékás János *Kisebbségi magyar közösségek a XX. században* (Budapest, 2008) [Hungarian minority communities in the 20th c.].

was in an economic upswing, and through could try to influence the 'mental independence' of the south developed in 90 years.

2003 and 2004 were critical years for Hungarians in the southern region and the possibility of the realization of dual citizenship filled them with some hope, and may be with greater expectations and need than in the other Hungarian communities beyond the border.

The definite negative result of the referendum and the rejection it meant if possibly disappointing, was not entirely unexpected for the community that had undergone almost every form hardships but did not lose its heart. For them it was history repeating the same lesson and they did not believe in miracles anymore.

Before the referendum over dual citizenship the two representative parties of the Hungarians in the southern region collected subscriptions to remind the Hungarians in the mother country that dual citizenship was not merely a manifestation of belonging for those in the southern region but could be a question of life and death. That time the parties of Hungarians of the southern country that were organized on national basis (VMSZ and VMDP) managed to collect 50 000 signatures of Hungarians supporting the vote for dual citizenship. Now the way the Hungarians in Voivodina are considering their future is mirrored by the present data: for list about supporting the new form of elections the Hungarian National Council collected more than 100 000 signatures in a month. It may be signalling that the lesson of the past 91 years has been understood, that in spite of hopes and general national feelings, however decreasing in number, they have to stay and live their lives as Hungarians beyond the borders, in this case in the southern region. This is the realization that is making every Hungarian living in regions broken out of Hungary better Hungarians than anyone. Because depending solely on their own strength, surviving all the hardships, remaining on the land of their birth they could remain Hungarians

From this point of view the vote for or against dual citizenship, the image of the part of the nation living beyond the borders that had developed in public thinking in Hungary that produced the negative answer, the question of their attitude toward it and us mirrors the social present and problems of the mother country and its citizens.



# **Minority Culture**

