

The Danube Region

A TRUBLED PAST AND OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

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A distinct feature of the current European rearrangement is the brutal eruption of ethnic conflicts, bottled up, rather than eased, by the various attempts to control them in the past seventy-five years. Of the successor states to, and new states around, the former Austro-Hungarian Empire, Yugoslavia has already disintegrated, Czechoslovakia has split into two, and Rumania is well on the way to recovering Bessarabia; further conflicts can be predicted between Albanians and Serbs in Kosovo, and between Bulgars, Serbs and Greeks in Macedonia unless there is effective intervention by an outside power. And so far I have still not mentioned the German, Russian and other minorities in the Baltic states, nor the problem which most concerns us Hungarians the Hungarian minorities in Croatia, Serbia, Rumania, Ukraine and Slovakia, well over three million in number.

From this point of view, rearrangement seems to indicate the breaking up of earlier multi-ethnic states into smaller cohesive or coherent national or regional units. The question which should be asked is what comes next; what will follow complete disintegration. Will the hopeless confrontation and hostility continue, or will it be possible to achieve some kind of co-operation and, if so, when and to what extent?

Although there have been some attempts to integrate the region in recent years, their future has now been jeopardized by the parallel processes of disintegration.

One possibility in the new situation is a Prague-Vienna-Budapest triangle, which obviously could be joined by Bratislava, Zagreb and Ljubljana. In this way the outlines of a new co-operation would emerge in the Danube region, the historical precedent for which would be pre-1918 plans for the reorganization of Austria-Hungary on a federal basis. The chances of such a co-operation are, of course, equally uncertain. The key to its realization obviously lies not in Budapest, but in Prague and Vienna, and, more importantly, in Bonn and Brussels. If the great powers welcomed and encouraged such a scheme, then the parties concerned could come to an agreement. If they do not welcome it, then any effort will be a waste of time. One lesson should certainly be learnt from the past: it would be a huge mistake if peoples of radically different cultures, histories, and religions were once again forced into the same sheep-fold.

Whether or not the old dream of a Danubian unification comes true, and whether it will be realized with or without the sponsorship of the great powers, a mutually accepted and acceptable way of dealing with the minority problem has to be worked out urgently. No matter how small the cohesive units the region is broken up into, the ethnic diversity in certain areas means that there will always be minorities within the various states. The third feature of the current rearrangement is that a real breakthrough on this fundamental issue has still not been achieved. **An internationally accepted and guaranteed code for the protection of minorities, though vitally important, is still overdue.** As long as there are frustrated minorities, there will inevitably be frustrated majority nations in our neighbouring countries, together with parties and governments that give voice to this frustration.

We all have our share in the work and responsibility. It is up to us to "spiritualize" the borders, to bring peace to the Danube Basin, to end hatred and to promote toleration in the region. As to the politicians, their job is to seek out, optimistically and relentlessly, the small steps that will eventually bring us closer to the desired solution. **The duty of leading intellectuals is to provide arguments and intellectual ammunition to those who act in the name of their nation, as well as taking an active part in the determination of the right policies.**

THE EFFECTIVENESS AND PSYCHOLOGICAL RESULTS OF FORCED ASSIMILATION OF MINORITIES

Compiled by Charles Kőrmendy

Wherever people of diverse races, different religions, customs, languages coexist for a prolonged period, spontaneous assimilation takes place. In cases where this process is very slow, its effect can only be observed in minor changes in long periods.

But it goes on all the time, particularly now, when modern technology brought far away parts of the world closer to each other.

Opposed to this is the concept of forced assimilation, an offshoot of the nation-state idea, a concept born out of the French revolution. Its aim is to eliminate minority groups by forcing them to accept the language and customs of the dominant majority race. Forced assimilation can be practiced only by governments, because only the state has the authority and instruments of enforcement. Anyone who follows with some care the day-to-day affairs of the world must be aware of the existence of such practices. The methods vary, depending on economic, cultural, religious, moral and other conditions present in the area. The process can be very subtle or brutally violent, but the final aim is the same: to create a homogeneous nation-state. But how successful is the policy of forced assimilation?

Oszkár Jászi, Hungarian political scientist and sociologist had some thoughts about the question in his book titled "The emergence of nation-states and the question of nationalities" published in 1912.

In his opinion forced assimilation achieves the opposite of what it aims at. It only strengthens the nationalistic feeling in the mind of the oppressed people. While it is promoted by a ruling clique in order to gain popularity in the eyes of the masses, it generates a democratic mass movement amongst and uniting them against the common oppressor. Forced assimilation demoralises the ruling nation, and strengthens the more vigorous elements in the suppressed ones. So much so their solidarity eventually overcomes class differences.

Forced assimilation of the language is also counterproductive. In places where adequate schooling facilities are not provided, it only leads to a decline of general intellectual level. If schools become the instruments of spreading chauvinistic ideas and narrow-minded hurrah patriotism they will destroy flexibility of the mind and the critical faculty of children.

According to Jászi, forced assimilation impedes the economic and cultural progress of the suppressed nationality thereby harming the whole country because the minorities, after all, also the part of it. The exaggerated pictures of the dangers presented by the nationalities is often used by politicians to divert attention from the real economical and social problems of the state, thus confusing the electorate.

Finally Oszkár Jászi concluded that it is forced assimilation which makes assimilation impossible. Politics, guided by rational thinking in the interest of the common good could not consider forced assimilation under any circumstances as a way to solve the ethnic problem. He wrote all of these in 1912.

There are more than enough examples for the interested observer in today's world, where intense ethnic tensions are present. Chechena and other small states in post communist Russia, Crimea in Ukraine, the Kurdish problem in Turkey and Iraq, the Palestinians in Israel, Catalans in Spain, Tutsi-Hutu massacres in Africa, the still (after how many years?) unresolved Irish question, the Yugoslav ongoing war, etc. And of course, the Hungarian minorities in the post TRIANON successor states of Slovakia, Rumania, Yugoslavia, and Ukraine.

The solution is obvious: the honest application of the principles of democracy and equal rights. The ethnic question should gravitate to unity, not disunity. There are examples for this too.. though unfortunately less than for ethnic discord.

Perhaps most appropriate to quote here Goethe: *"Hatred between nations is a most peculiar thing. We find that it is strongest in most violent always at the lowest cultural level. But there is a point at which it ceases and at which one seems to rise above the nations and feels about the good or misfortune of the neighbouring nation the same way as if it happened to his own."*

To this we should add: but only when that neighbouring nation also rises to the level where she does not feel the necessity of oppressing other nationalities who through an incalculable historical event came under her rule.

WORLD FEDERATION OF HUNGARIANS



TO THE CSCE ^{*} REVIEW CONFERENCE AT BUDAPEST

MEMORANDUM

on the rights and self-determination of nationalities and national minorities

Founded 56 years ago, the World Federation of Hungarians is an international organisation, independent of any political party or government, whose members are active in 38 countries of the world. The objectives of the organisation are: to preserve and develop the Hungarian language and culture, to voice the concerns of Hungarians, especially the nearly 5 million people who live outside the territory of Hungary as ethnic minorities or in diaspora. Fully aware of our responsibility, we submit this memorandum on the unresolved status quo of the Hungarian ethnic groups (ethnic minorities) in Central and South-East Europe to the CSCE. We request the participants of the present convention to listen to our motion and to support our recommendations.

1. The situation of Hungarians living in the territory of other countries cannot be treated as a local issue. The settlement of the status quo of the Hungarian and other ethnic groups (ethnic minorities) is a European matter: it forms a part of the European integration process, as an important factor of the Continent's security.

2. After the fall of the communist totalitarian regimes national self-determination has become the dominant principle in Central and Eastern Europe, and, with the split-up of the former empires, the new countries of the region are building their independent states according to this principle.

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3. Central and South-East Europe is afflicted by the Hungarian issue. One-third of all Hungarians indigenous in the Carpathian Basin, that is 3-4 million people, live in the neighbouring countries, notably Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, the Ukraine, Croatia and Slovenia, mostly in adjacent communities. The legally unresolved status of the large numbers of Hungarians beyond the borders of the mother country is a source of conflicts and tensions which poses a challenge for present-day Europe. The long-term resolution of their situation, which is also acceptable for them, is indispensable for the permanent security and stability of the region and of the whole of Europe. Dramatic situations have emerged in areas where ethnic Hungarians live in Central and South-East Europe. In the Ukraine they are on the verge of pauperization, in Serbia (Vojvodina) and Croatia they have two options: to assimilate or to escape. The exodus of Hungarians from Transylvania (Romania) has reached an unprecedented extent since the political changes in 1989. We must put an end to the causes that give rise to fears, grievances, uncertainties and historical inhibitions among the Hungarian and other ethnic minorities in Central and South-East Europe. We are convinced that the present situation of ethnic groups can only be changed by granting them a higher standard of collective rights.

4. The ethnic minorities have formulated their autonomy programmes along the principle of self-determination. Good examples include the autonomy of the Saxons in Transylvania with a history of over seven centuries, and the Swiss system of cantons, which we consider a model in resolving the problems of our region. This process is supported by the recent revival of regionalism both in Western Europe and in the Carpathian Basin, which means the economic and cultural co-operation of areas which had formed naturally before the emergence of nation-states. Today this is a new demand in areas where ethnic Hungarians live.

5. The social-historical background of autonomy programmes is the natural consequence of being European; a realistic demand arising from universal human rights, and liberal human values. We are convinced that ethnic minorities have the right to define themselves as autonomous communities, and autonomous communities have the right to manifest themselves in various forms of personal, cultural, economic and regional autonomy based on the principle of internal self-determination. We think that the demand and the right of Hungarian and other ethnic groups (ethnic minorities) for democracy can only be fulfilled in self-determination and the various forms of autonomy. The multitude of divisions can re-create integration in autonomies only, thus contributing to European integration.

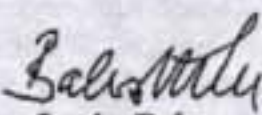
6. The World Federation of Hungarians envisages the future of Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin in a Europe which will achieve full integration in the near future. We hope that the European examples and models of collective rights and self-regulation for ethnic minorities such as the Swedes in Finland, the Flemish and the Walloons in Belgium, the French, the Germans, the Italians and the Rhaeto-Romanics in Switzerland, the Alsatians, the Catalans, the Basques, the Lapps or the South-Tyrolians will be more emphatic in our region than the Soviet-Yugoslav version of a dictatorial unionist approach, or the belligerent efforts of Serbs, Bosnians and Croats, who fight for national exclusivity.

7. The World Federation of Hungarians accepts and acknowledges the activities and the related document of the United Nations, the Central European Initiative and the Council of Europe on human rights and the protection of minorities. It attaches special significance to the Convention on Protection of Minorities, which was accepted by the Commission of Foreign Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

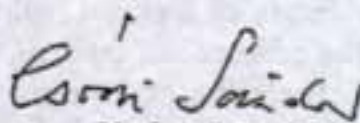
8. We are fully aware that the full exercise of minority rights can become an everyday practice only gradually even if the efforts are assisted by the best intentions of the majority. It is certain however that the common elements of any solution are decentralisation, self-governance and subsidiarity, and ultimately self-determination. Failing these, there will be no permanent peace or security in this part of Europe. Therefore, the people who belong to such ethnic minority communities rightly require a jointly drafted programme for co-existence which guarantees their identity, and a grounded hope in its implementation. We request the support of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe for this cause.

We request the participants of the CSCE to give their support to the efforts of Hungarian and other ethnic groups (ethnic minorities) living in Central and South-East Europe to achieve their autonomy.

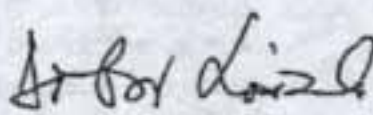
Budapest, 21 November 1994.



István Bakos
Secretary General



Sándor Csóri
President



László Dobos
Vice-President



STATEMENT

OF THE WORLD FEDERATION OF HUNGARIANS ON THE HUNGARIAN-SLOVAK AND HUNGARIAN-RUMANIAN BASIC TREATIES

At the invitation of the World Federation of Hungarians, the representatives of Hungarian political organizations from all neighbouring countries, held on 3 March, a conference on the issue of basic treaties with Slovakia and Rumania. The participants agreed on the following statement:

In the context of the above mentioned Treaties we consider it indispensable to obtain the full agreement of the Hungarian communities in the respective countries. Only such a consensus can secure the peaceful coexistence of all countries involved.

Bearing in mind the fact that joining the European Nation is a principal goal of all three countries, the Basic Treaties must contain the following:

1. As the claims of the Hungarians in Slovakia and Rumania reflected in the statements of Komárom/Komarno (1994 Jan 8) and that of Kolozsvár/Cluj (1992 Oct 25) comply with the principle of subsidiarity, a key element of European integration, they should be fully incorporated into the treaties.
2. The contracting parties must commit themselves to all goals and rules of European integration in their countries and in the bilateral relations with each other. In this context they have to ensure the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital, the unrestricted flow of information and promote actively cross-border regional co-operation.
3. Considering the need to establish constitutional rights according to European standards, Slovakia and Rumania should commit themselves to restitute all Hungarian property confiscated by former governments - be it private or public property such as churches, foundations, companies, community institutions, cultural goods, and so forth.
4. Further on, the treaties should be drafted in congruity with all requirements of the following European documents:
 - Document of the Copenhagen Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE 1990, Jun.
 - European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.
 - European Charter of Local Self-Government, Council of Europe, 1990.
 - Recommendation 1201, Council of Europe, 1993.
 - Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities. 47. General Assembly, 1992.

The World Federation of Hungarians emphasizes that the settlement of all problems connected with the fact that today, approximately three million Hungarians live in Slovakia and Rumania falls exclusively in the responsibility of these countries and not of the Hungarian Government.

The Treaties are scheduled to be signed on 21 March. According to our best knowledge, the current international political environment does not justify such urgency. Yet, on condition of full compliance with all requirements listed above, we hereby declare our commitment to support the Treaties.

We call upon the Governments, the EU Member States and of the US to support this statement, and thus contribute to the establishment of stability and durable peace in our region.

Budapest, 3 March, 1995.

WORLD FEDERATION OF HUNGARIANS