

Paneuropean University, Faculty of Law

**Slovak-Hungarian Relations and the Issue of Nationalist
Populism**

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Introduction

It is a fact that in the case of the Slovaks and their “national” elite after the year 1848, the Hungarian elite was the one, which the Slovak nation-builders opposed most. The process of the co-called forced *magyarization* at the end of the 19th century had had a remarkable impact on the creation of anti-Hungarian sentiments among the members of the Slovak national elite, as well as among the population. After the creation of the first Czechoslovak Republic the negative views about Hungarians were spread also through the official narrative. However, anti-Hungarian sentiments were kept alive by the revisionist propaganda of the post World War I Hungarian governments. These sentiments were even reinforced during World War II after the reincorporating of southern territories of Slovakia into Hungary.

After the creation of the independent Slovak Republic anti-Hungarian sentiments among the population reinforced again. There were basically two reasons for such development. Firstly, the Hungarian ethnic minority increased significantly in size in an independent Slovak Republic in comparison to previous times. While in Czechoslovakia the Hungarians created only 3% of the overall population, in case of Slovakia the number increased to more than 10%. Secondly, after 1993 Slovakia had to overcome the process of the state building, which brought along a new redefinition of the so-called friends and foes among the neighboring states. Negative historical experience from the times of Austro-Hungarian Empire, World War I and II, as well as the configuration of political elites both in Hungary and in Slovakia contributed to the image of Hungary as a hostile country, which attempted to disintegrate the “young”, “fragile” Slovak Republic. The Hungarian minority in Slovakia was labeled as the fifth column of the Hungarian government and its leaders were often accused of betraying the interests of the “Slovak” state and “Slovak” nation. The so-called Hungarian threat reappeared once and again in the political language of the Slovak ruling elite, which was at that time led by the Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar.

On the other hand, the new leaders of the post-communist Hungary triggered several times the tension in the Slovak-Hungarian relation as well by making some politically incorrect statements. József Antal, the Prime Minister of the first Hungarian freely elected government, in one of these statements declared himself to be the Prime Minister of fifteen million of Hungarians, including five million of those living beyond the borders of Hungary. His rhetoric was successfully overtaken by Viktor Orbán, who was a Prime Minister in 1998-2002 (and

again continuously since 2010).

This research study is divided in two parts. The first one provides the reader with a brief overview of Slovak-Hungarian relations. The attention is also paid to the documents that have been framing the Slovak-Hungarian relations, as well as on some initiatives that should have contributed to the “reconciliation” process. Preliminary conclusions are presented as well.

The second part aims to analyze the ways of the exploitation of nationalist-populist appeals in the language of Slovak and Hungarian political elites. The viability of nationalist-populism in political discourse of both countries, as well as in their foreign policy, is demonstrated through several concrete examples.

The study covers the period between the years 1993, when the independent Slovak Republic was established, and 2010, which marked the change of governments in both countries. While in Hungary the year 2010 was the first year of the second government of Viktor Orbán, in the case of Slovakia the coalition government led by the Prime Minister Iveta Radičová came to power. Though the government in Slovakia changed several times in the next decade (between 2010 and 2020), which was not the case of Hungary (Viktor Orbán led government has continuously remained in power since 2010), these years became generally known as the period when Slovak-Hungarian relations got rid of most of the tensions. This change was visible especially in the field of the communication style, which became significantly more moderate. On the other hand, as most of the problem issues remained unresolved, recommendations made in this research study might be considered applicable also on the current situation, as well as for the foreseeable future.

1. Slovak-Hungarian Relations

1.1. A short insight into the recent past

It can be argued that, apart from deeply rooted prejudices and stereotypes resulting from a more than one thousand year long coexistence of the Hungarians and Slovaks in one state, most of the tensions are connected with the status of the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. After the split of Czechoslovakia in 1992, Slovakia became the only country in Central Europe with a significant number of ethnic minorities. Moreover, within the European Union, Slovakia belongs to member states with an above average percentage of ethnic minorities. Officially, around 11% of people living in Slovakia have an ethnic background other than Slovak. The largest minority are the Hungarians, followed by Roma, Czechs, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, Germans,

Jews and others. In the last census taken in 2021, as many as 422,1 citizens of Slovakia identified themselves as ethnic Hungarians (20 years ago, in the 2001 census, the number of ethnic Hungarians was more than 20 % higher).¹

The status of Hungarian minorities living abroad, especially in neighboring countries, has been one of the most important political issues in Hungary; also due to the fact that the support for Hungarian minorities abroad is embedded directly in the Hungarian constitution. Equally in Slovakia, the status of the Hungarian minority and its loyalty to the state was considered to be among one of the hottest political issues. The Hungarian minority is not just the biggest minority living on the territory of Slovakia, but the only one having relevant political representation in the parliament, and, from time to time, also in the state apparatus.² It should also be noted that Slovak-Hungarians represent the most significant '*others*' for the Slovaks and serve as a negative point of reference. It can therefore be argued that Slovak-Hungarian relations (apart from bilateral dimensions) also have a strong internal dimension in terms of the relationship between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

After the split of Czechoslovakia, the relationship between the Slovak majority and Hungarian minority had to reflect the new geopolitical situation. However, instead of building a multiethnic democracy, Prime Minister Mečiar's government opted for an ethnocentric model of a state that places one ethnic group/nationality before another. Mečiar, as well as other politicians from the ruling coalition, started to leverage the so-called Hungarian card. On the one hand, he wanted to overshadow the more important problems Slovak society had to face, whereas on the other hand he was aware of the significant mobilization potential of instrumentally exploited anti-Hungarian sentiments.

Although after the 1998 parliamentary elections the nationalist-populist governmental elite was replaced by a grand coalition of democratic and pro-integration oriented parties³, it could hardly be considered a nationalist-populist defeat. The support for the project of an

¹ According to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic. See <https://www.scitanie.sk/zilinsky-kraj-s-najvyssim-podielom-slovenskej-narodnosti>.

² In the past, the Party of Hungarian Coalition – SMK, had represented the interests of the Hungarian minority. After the 2010 parliamentary elections, however, SMK did not enter the parliament. Most votes from the Hungarian voters went to the Most-Híd party, which declares itself as the first party bridging gaps between the Slovaks and Hungarians.

³ The governmental coalition consisted of four political subjects, namely the Slovak Democratic Coalition (SDK), Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK), Party of Democratic Left (SDL) and Party for Civic Understanding (SOP). Because of its internal heterogeneity, the new governmental coalition started to be called "the coalition of coalitions". The most powerful body of the Coalition – SDK – consisted of five political subjects, including Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH), Democratic Union (DÚ), Democratic party (DS), Social Democratic Party of Slovakia (SDSS) and a Green Party (SZS). SMK consisted of three subjects: Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement (MKDH), Coexistence (Spoluzitie/Együttélés) and Hungarian Citizen Party (MOS).

‘ethnocentric’ state, which emphasizes the fact that the Slovak nation is the state-forming subject and places other national and ethnic groups in a secondary position, was coming not only from former ruling parties like HZDS and SNS, but encompassed other political advocates - mostly the Party of Democratic Left (SDĽ) or Christian-Democratic Movement (KDH). The Slovak and Hungarian opposition parties in the years 1993-1998 had a common interest in fighting Mečiarism, but ethno-national reflexes kept them apart. After the change of the government anti-SMK and anti-Hungarian attitudes have still played an active role in the rhetoric of some party leaders. To some extent, political elites reflected the attitudes of a wider population, based on stereotypes, prejudices and myths from the past. On the other hand, they successfully used them in political discourse and mobilized electoral support. It is also worth noting that leaders of the Party of The Hungarian Coalition (SMK) openly declare that ethnicity (Hungarian) is the dominant factor that differentiates SMK from other democratic parties.⁴

The outcome of the elections in 2006, in which the coalition of the SMER-Social Democracy with HZDS and nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS) received the majority of votes, was considered a regression by the Hungarian minority and its political representation. The participation of an openly nationalist and anti-Hungarian party ‘SNS’ in the government and legitimization of its program by coalition partners was considered as a step back by the representatives of the Hungarian minority, as well as by the Hungarian government. The case of an assaulted student of Hungarian nationality - Hedviga Malinova; ethnically affiliated violence connected with the football match in Dunajská Streda, the issue of the revitalization of Beneš decrees, the case of the Hungarian guards or the prevention of President Sólyom from taking part in the public ceremony in Komárno – these are just some of the most media conscious cases the Fico government had to face in relation to Hungary and Hungarians in Slovakia. The issue of the amendment of the Act on the State Language from 2009 was considered to be a symbolic ‘top of the iceberg’ underlined by a demonstration of anti-Hungarian (and anti-minority policy in general) by the critics of the Robert Fico government in Hungary, as well as in Slovakia. In addition, bilateral relations between Slovakia and Hungary were poisoned by several representatives of the ruling coalition openly voicing anti-Hungarian statements.

⁴ Ethnic character of the party was strengthened, paradoxically, just before the 1998 general elections. The new electoral law pushed three Hungarian parties - Hungarian Christian-Democratic Movement (MKDH), traditionalist Coexistence (Együttélés) and liberal Hungarian Civic Party (MOS) - to create one united “super-party” based rather on ethnic principle than on different ideologies.

The situation in Hungary was significantly different when compared with Slovakia. However, Hungarian ruling elites have also contributed to the deterioration of bilateral relations with Slovakia; the lack of political empathy and support for unilateral action can be viewed as one of the most fundamental mistakes from Hungary's side. The first Hungarian freely elected government led by Prime Minister József Antal had already massaged the tension between Hungary and other neighboring states by making some politically incorrect statements. In one of them Antal declared himself to be a symbolic Prime Minister, not only of ten million Hungarians, which is the population of Hungary today, but the representative of all fifteen million Hungarians, including five million living outside the borders of Hungary. Antal's rhetoric was successfully overtaken by Viktor Orbán, who was the Prime Minister from 1998-2002 and then since 2010. Nationalist-populist appeals of Viktor Orbán reached a peak in the pre-electoral rally in spring 2002, in which he called for the unification of the divided Hungarian nation and claimed to be a Prime Minister of the overall Hungarian national "Community". It was Orbán's government who started to establish institutional links with Hungarian minorities in neighboring countries. The launching of the Standing Hungarian Conference in 1999, which was supposed to provide the representatives of Hungarian minorities living in neighboring countries a direct opportunity for consultations with the institutions of the Hungarian state was viewed with suspicion on the Slovak side. The passing of the Hungarian Status Act was considered to be another attempt at bringing the Hungarians closer to their kin state and therefore it was also rejected in Slovakia. The social-democratic governments, which replaced the FIDESZ led coalition already in 2002 and continued to rule after the 2006 elections, to a certain extent, continued the policy of FIDESZ. The establishment of the Forum of MPs of the Carpathian Basin by the Hungarian Parliament, which provided the Hungarian parliament with a direct instrument for communication with deputies of other national parliaments, was categorically rejected by Slovakia – the argument was that Hungary should not build institutional links with deputies elected in other countries. Though the first attempt to launch a double citizenship law from the year 2004 was not successful, the new FIDESZ led government took the opportunity and passed the law only a few weeks after the May 2010 elections. Again, doing this without having consultations with the governments of the neighboring countries, so both the Fico and Radičová governments obviously had objections against it. And last but not least some unresolved issues from the distant past are also worthy of note: the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros case, which dates back to 1977, is a well known example. Though a joint hydro energetic power plant over Danube should have been an example of good bilateral relations between (Czecho) Slovakia and Hungary, after some time, it had become one of the most

divisive issues of the day. In addition, it gained great symbolic and political value. While for the majority of Hungarians it was a symbol of communist rule, for the Slovaks, especially under Mečiar's rule, it had become a symbol of the sovereignty of Slovakia and a demonstration of the power of the Slovak state. Nevertheless, after some time, the case also acquired an ethnic dimension – due to some of the political leaders, both in Hungary and Slovakia, presenting it as a root of ethnic conflict. Moreover, despite the fact that the International Court had ruled on the case some years ago and the whole issue was passed to the relevant experts, the ruling of the Court has still not been implemented and the case continues to evoke lively emotional discussions in both countries.

The ethnisation of politics is not just a characteristic feature for both societies, but probably the most important element contributing to the problematic character of Slovak-Hungarian relations. In addition, the ethnocentric conception of the state and its foreign policy that dominates the Hungarian and Slovak political discourses seems to be the most significant barrier for further collaboration between the two countries. The efforts of political elites to homogenize the two societies have similar roots and are connected by a similar logic, but with different consequences. Therefore, if not handled with care, the two concepts of homogenic societies will continue to divide both countries.

1.2. Framing Documents

The length of this study does not allow the author to describe all of the documents and legislation framing the Slovak-Hungarian relationship. It is neither possible to analyse all of the documents related to the status of national minorities in Slovakia. The accent is therefore focused on a substantial document which was supposed to shape relations in many aspects: The Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary on good neighborly relations and friendly cooperation. Additional laws and documents framing the status of the Hungarian minority are briefly mentioned, too.

1.2.1. The Basic Treaty (1995)⁵

The Treaty between the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary on Good Neighborly Relations and Friendly Cooperation was signed in Paris in March 1995. The Treaty was a part of a broader initiative of the Stability Pact. Though France, and especially the former PM Edouard Balladur, contributed significantly to the preparation of an adequate diplomatic environment, the signing of the treaty cannot be considered as an act influenced primarily by external actors. By signing the Treaty, both Slovakia and Hungary declared their desire to be integrated in European and Euro-Atlantic structures, while good neighborly relations were considered to be one of the most important prerequisites for their integration into the EU and NATO.

The Treaty as such did not just have a symbolic dimension – its value is mostly based on its content, which provides the basis for the improvement of bilateral relations in a number of areas, including the protection of minorities. The Treaty included so-called national priorities of Slovakia and Hungary, as well as the so-called red lines, which were set up by both sides. All in all, the Treaty was a successful attempt to regulate bilateral relations through a bilateral instead of multi-lateral legal instrument.

The Treaty includes 22 paragraphs and since some of them, especially paragraph 15, which focuses on national minorities, are significantly longer than others, the Treaty can be considered as a slightly asymmetric one. It also has to be underlined that Article 15 of the Treaty has been of particular importance for the Hungarian side, while the representatives of Slovakia have since the very beginning underlined the complex character of the Treaty.

The processes of the signing and ratification of the Treaty (both were accompanied by emotional political discussions on both sides) cannot be separated from its implementation. The twelve bilateral Mixed Commissions were designed as necessary instruments for the implementation of particular paragraphs of the Treaty. They focused on the following areas:

- European and Euro-Atlantic Integration
- Military and other Security Issues
- Economic Cooperation

⁵ Zmluva o dobrom susedstve a priateľskej spolupráci medzi Slovenskou republikou a Maďarskou republikou, <https://www.aspi.sk/products/lawText/1/45399/1/2/oznamenie-c-115-1997-zz-o-uzavreti-zmluvy-o-dobrom-susedstve-a-priateľskej-spolupraci-medzi-slovenskou-republikou-a-maďarskou-republikou/oznamenie-c-115-1997-zz-o-uzavreti-zmluvy-o-dobrom-susedstve-a-priateľskej-spolupraci-medzi-slovenskou-republikou-a-maďarskou-republikou>.

- Environmental Protection
- Transport and Infrastructure
- Cultural Issues and Print Media
- Health, Health Insurance and Social Care
- Internal Affairs
- Education, Science, Sports and Youth
- Cross-border Cooperation
- Agriculture, Veterinary and Phytosanitary Care
- National Minorities.

However, it soon became evident that the instrument of these commissions had not been exploited sufficiently since some of them failed to meet the expectations related to the regularity of their meetings and achieved results. While the commissions on cross-border cooperation and minority issues have been working systematically and continuously since their establishment, others – e.g. commissions on social affairs or education – did not manage to proceed without long breaks. It is also worth mentioning that the Mixed Commission on national minorities played an important role in the moderation of conflicts between the two countries – e.g. in the case of the Hungarian Status Act. However, in the case of one of the most recent conflicts related to the amendment of the State language Law in Slovakia, the potential of the Commission has not been exhausted, while the issue has now moved to a multi-lateral level.

The issue of amending the Treaty or updating it to new circumstances was raised several times by different stakeholders. Such initiatives are also likely appear in the future, especially on the Hungarian side. It can be argued that FIDESZ was not very supportive of the Treaty in 1995. Therefore an initiative aiming at the implementation of some changes in the Treaty might be expected in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, Slovakia considers the Treaty to be a fundamental document framing bilateral relations and views it as a well-drafted document containing all of the key points of bilateral relations.

The most important problem associated with the Treaty does not concern its content, but implementation. As already shown in the example of bilateral mixed commissions, the instruments that were designed to enable the implementation of the Treaty do not work properly. Another important fact to be stressed is that the Treaty was the first important bilateral document in the new history of Slovak-Hungarian relations and remains to be the most complex document between Slovakia and Hungary.

1.2.2. Other Legislation

As already mentioned in the introduction, besides bilateral dimensions, Slovak - Hungarian relations also have a significant internal dimension for Slovakia. Therefore, some of the most important documents guaranteeing the status of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia are to be briefly mentioned as well.

The rights of minorities are included in the Slovak Constitution, while Slovakia also adopted all of the significant international documents related to the protection of the rights of minorities. The Constitution of the Slovak Republic, but also Anti-discrimination Act, the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages have guaranteed equality of members of national minorities and anchored their specific rights on a general level of consensus. On the other hand, some other legislation that would further guarantee the development of ethnic communities, including Hungarians, remains absent in Slovakia.

In addition, laws that are considered as counterproductive or even discriminatory from leaders of minority communities had also been adopted. The list of such laws would include the *State Language Law*, which was adopted in 1995 in order to provide the legal framework for the use of the Slovak language in all official communications. The philosophy of the Law was that the State language is an expression of State sovereignty. The amendment to this law from 2009, which was based on the promotion of the Slovak language actively, including sanctions, evoked a lively discussion among the representatives and members of the Hungarian minority, as well as other ethnic communities. The problem with the amended law was that the state only permitted, in certain frameworks, the use of minority languages, but did not promote their use actively and did not create an intuitive or relevant institutional and organizational-technical environment. In fact, the use of minority languages was postulated as an option but the use of the Slovak language as an obligation in every context; even in the case of internal issues or events of minority communities not directly related to citizens belonging to the majority - or even if it was a private event.

A lot of controversy was also connected to the amendment of the *Educational Law* of 2008, as well as with the so-called Patriotic law, which was drafted by the leaders of SNS and passed by the Parliament in March 2010. According to the latter, the beginning of each week for all Slovak schools and offices of the state administration as well as sporting events organised by national sports associations and all sessions of local, regional and national parliaments would start with the playing of the Slovak national anthem. In addition, other national symbols - the

coat of arms, the flag, the words of the national anthem and the preamble to the Constitution - must be displayed in all classrooms of public schools as an effort towards patriotic education.

Hungary's initiatives aimed at the improvement of the status of its kin minorities in neighboring countries met with categorical rejection in Slovakia. Both the *Hungarian Status Act* of 2001, as well as the *Law on Double Citizenship* of 2010 was criticized for being strictly unilateral initiatives of Hungary and for having interfered with the legal system in Slovakia.

The Hungarian Status Act was passed by the Hungarian parliament in spring 2001. The act guaranteed ethnic Hungarians and their families in the countries surrounding Hungary a set of mainly educational and cultural benefits. For example, it promised direct payments to parents who send their children to Hungarian-speaking schools. Slovakia and Romania, the countries with the highest percentage of a Hungarian population, opposed the act claiming that it interfered with their legal systems and gave members of the Hungarian minority advantages based on ethnic principles. The OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities who argued that it imposed precedents in the protection of national minorities as such refused the act also.

The objections against the act, as well as the important fact that it was incompatible with the legal system of the European Union, resulted in a recommendation by European Union bodies that Hungary prepare an amended version to eliminate all of the problems. The new Hungarian government created in 2002 and led by Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy attempted to do so, but the reactions from neighboring states were quite different. For instance, while the Romanian Prime Minister Adrian Nastasse and Prime Minister of Hungary Péter Medgyessy agreed on the amended version of the act, Slovak Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda categorically rejected the amended version arguing that it still contains discrimination on an ethnic basis. Direct disputes over the validity of the Hungarian Status Act ended only after the treaty on the support of national minorities in the field of culture and education was signed between the Slovak and Hungarian foreign ministers in December 2003.⁶

The new Hungarian government's first parliamentary initiative was the passing of the Double Citizenship Law, which proposed to make it easier for ethnic Hungarians living abroad to obtain Hungarian citizenship. Though the introduction of a double citizenship was the object of a referendum already in 2007, FIDESZ succeeded with it only after the 2010 elections. Though the law concerns all countries with significant Hungarian minorities, only the Slovak

⁶ The treaty, which came into force on February 13, 2004, defined the competences of both Slovak and Hungarian governments regarding the support of kin minorities. According to the treaty, all kinds of financial support directed to national minorities will be distributed through two civic organizations – one in Slovakia and one in Hungary. To guarantee the transparency of financing, a special mixed Slovak-Hungarian interstate commission was established.

government expressed its disagreement with the law claiming that it interferes with the legal system and threatens the sovereignty of the country. Another argument against the law was that it was passed without holding consultations with the Slovak side. Apart from the verbal refusal of the law, the previous Slovak parliament dominated by the SMER-HZDS-SNS coalition voted to amend its own citizenship law, stripping anyone of their Slovak citizenship if they apply for Hungarian nationality. The Slovak draft amendment also stated that holding any public position in the Slovak Republic is bound to Slovak citizenship. Though dual citizenship is generally allowed in Slovakia, according to the amended citizenship law, all Slovak citizens, with only a few exceptions,, on opting for the citizenship of another country would automatically lose the Slovak one.

1.3. Initiatives Aimed to Improve Bilateral Relations

1.3.1. Governmental Initiatives

All the governments created in Slovakia after the 1992 elections had at least once declared their support for a ‘new beginning’ in bilateral relations with Hungary. However, all these new beginnings have been periodically replaced by the erosion of positive bilateral relations. The list of governmental initiatives leading to the improvement of bilateral relations would include several initiatives; some of them are listed below. The uniting element in all of them is that they have not been fully implemented or, despite their great symbolic value, have simply been forgotten; neglected and left to gather dust in the annals of the governments’ halls.

The Speech of the President of the National Council on the Occasion of the 10th Anniversary of the Slovak Republic

On the occasion of the commemoration of the 10th anniversary of the Slovak Republic the President of the National Council of the Slovak Republic Pavol Hrušovský gave a speech on the symbolic “Face of Slovakia“. From the point of view of Slovak-Hungarian relations the speech emphasized the fact that the rulers of Hungary were also Slovak kings and monarchs and Slovakia prospered under their rule. Therefore, according to the speech, the history of the Hungarian Kingdom should be accepted as part of Slovakia’s history.

The speech of Mr. Hrušovský is important thanks to its symbolic value. It was for the first time in the history of independent Slovakia that such a high-level political representative

declared the “compatibility“ of Slovakia and Hungary’s history, the majority of other political leaders rather preferred to have a distinctive approach.⁷

Joint Sessions of the Committees of National Parliaments

One of the consequences of the increased intensity of tensions in bilateral relations in the period of the PM Fico government was an initiative of the heads of the national parliaments – Pavol Paška (SMER-Social Democracy) and Katalin Szili (Socialist party). In December 2008 they initiated the joint meetings of committees of national parliaments as another instrument serving the development of bilateral relations. Through these meetings the MPs of the National Council of the Slovak Republic and Hungarian National Assembly were supposed to discuss and possibly find solutions for some of the problems in bilateral relations. Though this initiative can be viewed as a positive step, it also turned out that problematic relations had a direct impact on the functioning of this instrument – the decision of the head of the Committee on National Minorities of the National Council Mr. László Nagy, for example, to cancel the planned meeting from February 2009 with the equivalent Hungarian committee due to the fact that his Hungarian counterparts had unexpectedly changed the meeting’s agenda.

Common Past, Common Future in the Mirror of Common Projects

On 14 June 2007 the Prime Ministers Robert Fico and Ferenc Gyurcsány agreed on a document entitled *Common past, common future in the Mirror of Common Projects*⁸. The document encompassed fourteen points and reflected different forms of cooperation, including economic and cultural cooperation. The Prime Ministers declared that all fourteen points represented projects that were achievable in the foreseeable future. For the purpose of this paper it is worth recalling all fourteen points:

1. *Regular meetings of the Mixed Committees.* In this point the prime ministers guaranteed that Slovak and Hungarian Governments would ensure the

⁷ P. Hrušovský, “The Face of Slovakia: In Need of Historical Self-Reflection for the Future”, *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Spring 2003).

⁸ See “Informácia o priebehu a výsledkoch pracovného stretnutia predsedov vlád SR a MR v Bratislave dňa 18.6.2007“, <http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/Mater-Dokum-66229?prefixFile=m>.

personal composition of the Mixed Committees created on the basis of the Basic Treaty making them able to hold their sessions within six months time.

2. The second point referred to the *Slovak-Hungarian Friendship Groups* of the two Parliaments and encouraged them to organize their joint session.
3. *Foreign Ministers Prize*. According to the third point, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, with equal financial contribution, were authorized to establish a prize to be granted annually to one individual or community in each country to honour their outstanding contributions to Slovak-Hungarian cooperation.
4. *Cooperation between Institutions of Higher Education*. In this point the governments encouraged the direct cooperation and signing of relevant agreements between institutions of higher education on the one part and institutions of higher education, foundations or governmental institutions of the other country on the other part.
5. *Youth Cooperation*. According to this point, annual Slovak-Hungarian Summer Youth Meetings in the High Tatras and at Balaton Lake, as well as field trips to places of historic interest for the two nations should have been organised. Also, in case of need, the two Prime Minister's Offices agreed to overlook and coordinate the sponsoring activities.
6. *Joint Cultural Projects*. In this point the Prime Ministers encouraged ministries of culture and education of the two countries to include into their cooperation programs joint cultural projects to be implemented in third countries as of 2008.
7. *Health*. This point referred to an agreement on closer cooperation between the oncological institutions of their Countries, which was supposed to be drafted by the two Health Ministries.
8. *Common History Textbook*. Here the Prime Ministers committed themselves to call upon the Mixed Committee of Historians to jointly publish by the

beginning of 2008, a textbook in both languages on the sensitive topics of common history of the two countries. They also declared that the two Governments will provide equal financial support for this project.

9. *Cross-border cooperation.* According to this point, the two Governments were supposed to harmonize their actions in executing the relevant chapters of their National Development Plans in order to promote cross-border cooperation in accordance with the activity and results of the joint commission for cross-border and regional cooperation.
10. *Cooperation of National Industrial and Trade Chambers and the International Trade Development Agencies.* In this point the parties committed themselves to strongly support the meeting and closer cooperation of the National Industrial and Trade Chambers as well as the International Trade Development Agencies of the two countries.
11. *Bridges on Ipeľ River.* In this point the relevant Ministries were asked to offer maximum effort in order to prepare and sign in the second half of 2007 an agreement on the reconstruction of bridges on the Ipeľ river at Peťov (SK) – Szécsény (HU) and Rároš (SK) – Nógrádszakál-Rárópuszta (HU), including the coordinated financial scheme of the projects.
12. *Košice-Miškoltc Motorway.* According to this point, the relevant Ministries were authorized to put forward a joint proposal determining both the meeting point at the border and the technical characteristic of the planned motorway between Košice and Miskolc, as well as the realization time-table.
13. *Harmonization of the Bus and Railway Timetables.* Aiming at easing the cross-border movement of employees, the two Parties committed themselves to take steps to harmonize the bus and railway timetables of the border regions.
14. *Partnership of Towns and Villages.* The two Governments declared their will to strengthen and widen the partnership of towns and villages in order to further develop the civic dimension of cooperation.

The Prime Ministers' Joint Statement from Szécsény

Though the list of priority projects only contains non-conflict issues, there has been a significant delay in their implementation. Therefore, the Prime Minister Robert Fico and the new Prime Minister of Hungary Gordon Bajnai met again in September 2009 and issued a joint statement, which was basically summarized in 11 points⁹. To a large extent this statement was complementary to the *Common Past, Common Future Program*, since some of the project priorities remained unchanged. The parties even directly confirmed their intention to accelerate the implementation of the 14-points working plan accepted at the Hungarian-Slovak Prime Minister's meeting in June 2007. For instance, in one of the points the Prime Ministers again stress the need to reconvene in meetings of all Mixed Commissions for implementation of the Basic Treaty, while giving the Mixed Commission members the task to explore the possibility, preconditions and objectives of a future joint session of the two governments. The Prime Ministers also entrusted the Ministers of Foreign Affairs to prepare an enhanced cooperation package for the consideration of the heads of governments, containing the following:

- Details on the Hungarian-Slovak Cooperation Council and the Hungarian-Slovak Cooperation Fund;
- List of cooperation projects in the field of energy security of the two countries;
- Schedule for the improvement of road and railway connections;
- Framework Agreement for the new bridges to be built on the rivers Danube and Ipeľ/Ipoly;
- Joint package of measures for the reduction of unemployment in border regions;
- Utilization of the textbook on joint history under preparation, and continuation of joint historical research after publication;
- A cooperation plan to foster the integration of Roma, which is a challenging issue in both countries.

⁹ See "Meeting between Gordon Bajnai, Hungarian prime Minister, and Robert Fico, Slovak Prime Minister in Szécsény, Hungary", <http://www.sfm.vlada.gov.sk/17200/spolocne-stanovisko-roberta-fica-a-gordona-bajnaia.php>.

An especially innovative initiative embodied in the declaration is the establishment of the Hungarian-Slovak Cooperation Council as a non-political independent consultative body fostering cooperation between the two countries. The Council was supposed to make annual reports on the development of relations, also putting forward recommendations for the improvement of relationships between the two countries. Another role of the Council would have been to supervise the planned Hungarian-Slovak Cooperation Fund, which was aimed at supporting projects, scholarship and student exchange programs, as well as cultural, arts and sports events focusing on promoting Hungarian-Slovak cohabitation and cooperation. It is also worth mentioning that such a Fund would have become an important source of financing for a number of projects run by both non-governmental organizations and local communities.

Besides the reconfirmation of some of the above mentioned priorities and adding the new ones the most important task of Prime Minister Szecseny was to react to the increasing activities of extremists in both countries. Another important task was to decrease tensions in bilateral relations. Other points of their joint statement therefore contained the following:

- the need to alleviate the political tension between them, which has been a breeding ground for some worrying incidents from the past and create an atmosphere of tolerance and mutual understanding;
- the need to use all available mechanisms and forms of cooperation, including further contacts at Prime Ministers' level, to prevent any steps that could influence mutual relations in a negative way ;
- the need to avoid a repetition of similar situations like the circumstances of the planned visit of the President of the Republic of Hungary László Sólyom to Komárno (Révkomárom) on 21 August 2009 by instructing respective experts to jointly prepare a set of suggestions to be considered for the future;
- confirmation of the international commitment of the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Hungary in respect of the implementation of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities living in Slovakia and in Hungary, as well as all commitments under the Basic Treaty of 1995;
- willingness to accept the opinion and all recommendations of the High Commissioner on National Minorities of the OSCE related to the amended Law on the State Language of the Slovak Republic;

- agreement to take firm measures against extremist phenomena and groups, all forms of xenophobia, intolerance, chauvinism, and nationalism, and all manifestations of violence and their exports to other countries.

Also, the Prime Ministers agreed to undertake the auspices over a dignified commemoration of the 15th anniversary of the Basic Treaty of 1995.

It can be argued that most of the above mentioned tasks, including the establishment of the Hungarian-Slovak Cooperation Council and Cooperation Fund, had not been fulfilled prior to the parliamentary elections in 2010. In fact it means that a significant number of the above mentioned priorities already have a significant delay.

Another task only partially fulfilled; for instance, the Hungarian side withdrew from the preparation of the 15th anniversary of the Basic Treaty, so the Slovak side was able to do it only unilaterally. Though there was a willingness of the organizers to invite the representatives of the Hungarian government and Parliament, invitations remained without response. In the end, only one diplomat from the Hungarian Embassy in Bratislava took part in the event.

Good Neighborhood and Understanding Prize

Another symbolic initiative supporting the standardization and possible development of bilateral relations is the establishment of a new tradition of the prize entitled ‘Good Neighborhood and Understanding’ to one individual or community in each country to honour their outstanding contributions to the Slovak-Hungarian cooperation. Such a prize was initiated by the former foreign ministers Ján Kubiš and Kinga Góncz in 2008 and so far it has been awarded twice – in 2009 and 2010 - to different individuals/communities chosen from different nominees both from Slovakia and Hungary. The new governments are expected to continue this initiative.

St. Adalbert Prize for František Mikloško

In June 2005 the former Hungarian president Ferenc Mádl awarded František Mikloško, an MP of the Slovak parliament, the St. Adalbert Prize. F. Mikloško was awarded for his contribution to the development of Europe and the integration of Eastern and Central Europe to the European Union. It was the first time that a Slovak citizen was awarded such a prestigious prize in Hungary. During the ceremony, which took place in the building of the Hungarian parliament, Frantisek Mikloško apologized for the enforced expulsion of Hungarians after

World War II. While on the Hungarian side his apology was considered as an important symbolic gesture and appreciated by all parties; in Slovakia it evoked an emotional reaction of the representatives of nationalist political leaders.

1.3.2. Initiatives on Regional and Local Level

Euro-Regions

The Slovak-Hungarian border is the longest among all the borders of Slovakia with neighboring countries. This also means that five out of eight administrative regions in Slovakia – Bratislava, Trnava, Nitra, Banská Bystrica and Košice – have common borders with Hungary.

The above mentioned facts also had a positive influence on the development of regional cooperation, especially in terms of euro-regions. There are eight euro-regions on the Slovak-Hungarian border – Košice-Miskolc, Slaná-Rimava, Kras, Neogradiensis, Ipeľ, Váh-Dunaj-Ipeľ, Triple-Danube and Pons Danubii. The ninth – Carpathian euro-region - is to a large extent a specific one, since it also includes Poland, Romania and Ukraine.

In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council established European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) as a new tool to facilitate cross-border, trans-national and inter-regional cooperation. The aim was to enable regional and local authorities from different EU member states to cooperate more efficiently, for example, by allowing them to directly apply for and manage European funds. In the context of the Slovak-Hungarian relations it is worth mentioning that one of the first EGTCs in the EU was established between Hungary and Slovakia in the region of Ister-Granum, while another one – created only in 2009 – is Pons Danubii, which connects five municipalities on the Slovak, as well as on the Hungarian, side of the border.

Multilateral initiatives

EU as an Instrument for Developing Common Projects

After 2004 the EU as such has become an instrument for spreading foreign policy priorities of the new member states, including Hungary and Slovakia, and implements them at the EU level. Both Slovakia and Hungary took the advantage to jointly participate in the development of several EU policies, including European Neighborhood Policy. Generally,

many analysts of Slovak-Hungarian relations would agree that while on multilateral level, Slovakia and Hungary advocate almost the same position - in bilateral relations they usually highlight the differences. Nevertheless, the possibility of exploiting the EU as a foreign policy instrument has been exhausted neither in Hungary, nor in Slovakia.

The Visegrad Group

The Visegrad Group, consisting of Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Poland represents another platform for the exchange of experience and opinions between the representatives and experts from both countries. It is the most efficient autochthonous regional initiative in Central Europe and also a practical demonstration of the will of participating countries to cooperate. Though in the 1990s sensitive relations between Slovakia and Hungary, as well as other unresolved problems contributed to the decline of the Visegrad cooperation, after the revitalization of the Group in 1998 the situation had changed. It can be argued that bilateral relations between the V4 countries, and especially those between Slovakia and Hungary, do not have significant influence on the quality or intensity of the Visegrad cooperation anymore. Therefore, the intensification of cooperation on the Visegrad level might certainly have a positive impact on bilateral relations. One of the crucial issues currently being discussed on different Visegrad fora is energy security and the building of a new north-south connection of pipelines. Both Slovakia and Hungary recognize the importance of energy security and demonstrate their willingness to cooperate on different tasks.

Other Initiatives

Another trilateral initiative, which includes Hungary, Slovakia and Austria is the Győr-Bratislava-Vienna triangle. Since it encompasses the most prosperous regions of all three countries, there are significant opportunities for its development.

Also, the so-called CENTROPE region, which includes bordering regions of four countries – Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia – provides another measure for the development of cooperation, especially in the field of economy, between Slovakia and Hungary.

Slovakia and Hungary are also the founding members of another cross-border cooperation initiative - Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENP CBC Programme.¹⁰ The programme entered into force on the 23rd of September 2008, after the approval of the European Commission and is to be implemented throughout 2007-2013 with the aim of intensifying and deepening cooperation in an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable way between eligible and adjacent areas of Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Ukraine. It offers a wide range of opportunities to potential beneficiaries through four key priorities - economic and social development, enhancement of environmental qualities, an increase of border efficiency and the support of people to people cooperation.

1.3.3. The role of Non-Governmental Organizations

It can be argued that civil societies in both countries are interconnected and that there is actually a viable dialogue between NGOs in Slovakia and Hungary. To a large extent churches might be considered as a part of the NGO sector, so besides other initiatives, it is also possible to mention a reconciliation initiative of the Slovak and Hungarian Catholic bishops.

Reconciliation Initiative of the Catholic Bishops

The process of reconciliation between the Slovak and Hungarian Catholic Church began symbolically in the town of Esztergom in 2006. During their meeting and joint celebration of the mass the Slovak and Hungarian bishops issued official letters in which they apologized for their guilt inherited from the past and asked for forgiveness. Despite the fact that the mass was attended by many worshippers from both countries, the initiative was not followed by any political declaration and was only poorly reflected in national media. The Bishops took the initiative once again in 2008, when they publicly called for understanding between the two nations and rejected any form of violence and extremism.

Roundtable of Hungarians in Slovakia

The establishment of the Round Table was initiated by the South-Slovakian Civic Information Network at the Civic Forum Conference 2008 held in Šamorín. The Round Table

¹⁰ Information on the ENPI Hungary-Slovakia-Romania-Ukraine ENP CBC Programme is available at <http://www.huskroua-cbc.net/>.

is an open, independent, non-partisan, voluntary and informal institution, functioning as an umbrella platform for organizations and esteemed personalities of the Hungarian community in Slovakia. Any cultural, self-governmental, state-run or non-governmental organization (or institution) can participate in the national meetings of the Round Table, which, among other formal criteria, should act in the interest of the Hungarian community of Slovakia or foster minority culture, education or identity, and should be ready to share responsibility for the development of the community and supports its advocacy.

The Round Table, in the form of a professional conference, holds meetings at least once a year. Between the meetings, its operation is carried out by the Coordination Committee. The financial background is ensured by voluntary contributions of the member organizations. The number of the members of the Round Table is currently 51 NGOs and 13 private persons.¹¹

Forum Minority Research Institute

The Forum Minority Research Institute was founded in 1996. At present, the Institute is located in Šamorín, south Slovakia. Its primary objective is to carry out complex studies on the situation and culture of the national minorities in Slovakia, as well as documenting their written and even more extensive heritage. As a non-profit organization, the Institute operates as a public and service institute. The Institute hosts a resource center with Bibliotheca Hungarica, Hungarian Archives of Slovakia and the Centre for Digitalization and Internet Databases. The Institute undertakes various policy research, publishes books and journals, organizes different seminars, training courses and conferences on various topics. With the project *Challenging (National) Populism and Promoting Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance in Slovakia 2007-2010*, the Forum Institute explored how the phenomenon of populism intensified ethnic divisions in Slovakia. Based on the 2006 parliamentary elections and monitoring of printed media, the Institute provided a thorough analysis aiming to raise awareness on the risks and tendencies related to treatment of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. One of the concrete policy outcomes was improving the school curricula on multicultural education at several Slovak universities.¹²

Slovak-Hungarian Consultative Initiative

¹¹ http://www.auxilium.sk/index.php?information_on_the_round_table_of_hungarians_in_slovakia/en/10/1.

¹² www.foruminst.sk

In cooperation with the Institute of Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and Institute for Minority Research of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Public Affairs initiated two meetings of Slovak and Hungarian experts in the field of social sciences and humanities. During the first meeting in Budapest, which was dedicated to possible solutions of conflict situations in Slovak-Hungarian relations, the participants agreed to create an informal Slovak-Hungarian consultative civic initiative and published the joint statement on the situation in Slovak-Hungarian relations. The second meeting, held in Bratislava in February 2009, focused on national minorities and minority politics in the two countries.¹³

Though no other meetings of the Initiative have been organised since February 2009, experts continue to cooperate on an individual level, while the organizers consider the Initiative to be an open project and plan to organize other events in the foreseeable future.

Slovak-Hungarian European Forum

The main goal of the project coordinated by the Slovak Foreign Policy Association in cooperation with the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs is to contribute to the identification of common interests of Slovakia and Hungary and their application on the European, regional, as well as bilateral level. One of the aims was to contribute to the demythologization and qualitative change in bilateral relations between Slovakia and Hungary, by developing a regular and structured dialogue of experts and civil society in general.

The main activity since the establishment of the Slovak-Hungarian European Forum in 2007 was the organization of round tables, which were held equally in Slovakia and Hungary in the period 2006 – 2009. Up to today there have been eight workshops focusing on topics like foreign policy priorities and instruments; European Neighborhood Policy, Regional Cooperation, or joint initiatives in the Western Balkans.¹⁴

Terra Recognita Foundation

The Terra Recognita Foundation, based in Budapest, concentrates longitudinally on the intensification of Slovak-Hungarian dialogue among the young generation of experts and

¹³ www.ivo.sk

¹⁴ www.sfpa.sk. See also N. Garai, T. Strážay *Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation and lessons for the Western Balkans*. Policy Paper, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, November 2019.

scholars in both countries. The book ‘Shattered Past,’ written to a large extent by the most active members of the Foundation, focused on the most problematic and divisive issue in the Slovak and Hungarian history. ‘Shattered Past’ was published in both Slovak and Hungarian languages and was considered an important contribution of young historians to a debate on common history. Another project, ‘Unknown Neighbor,’ coordinated by the Terra Recognita Foundation in cooperation with the Institute of European Studies and International relations at the Faculty of Social and Economic Sciences at Comenius University in Bratislava, is based on a series of lectures on different topics organised in different towns in Slovakia and Hungary. ¹⁵

Palisády Foundation

The Palisády Foundation focuses on the social and cultural cooperation between the two nations. The leading members of the Foundation are also advisors to the Hungarian Cultural Institute (seated on the Palisády Street in Bratislava). Thanks to the Foundation the Cultural Institute is able to acquire sponsorship for bigger projects.

Hungarian-Slovak Network to Reset Political Dialogue and Improve Bilateral Relations

The network of political analysts, researchers and members of civil organizations from Hungary and Slovakia was created in July 2010. During the first meeting members discussed perspectives on bilateral relations after the elections and declared their will to launch a series of public policy events in both countries’ capitals. According to the organizers, these events will seek to challenge political leaders, set policy standards and rejuvenate neglected dialogue across the Danube. The organizers of the first meeting of the network were Political Capital institute (Hungary) and Pontis Foundation (Slovakia).

Joint History Textbook

Due to the fact that many prejudices, traumas and animosities in Slovak-Hungarian relations are an echo from the complicated history of the two nations, the joint commission of Slovak and Hungarian historians has an undoubtedly important role to play in Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation. An important initiative connected to the work of the Slovak-

¹⁵ www.tra.hu

Hungarian Commission of Historians is the development of a joint history textbook, which is supposed to describe chronologically 15 historical periods. The particular chapters of the book would include topics like the arrival of the Slavs and Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin; the creation of the Hungarian state, anti-Habsburg uprisings, the crisis in Slovak-Hungarian relations between the years 1938 and 1948, as well as the development of a state and society of totalitarian regimes. The aim of such a textbook is not to replace current history textbooks, but to serve as an additional source of information for students' and teachers at different stages of the educational process. Each of the fifteen chapters is supposed to be prepared by one Slovak and one Hungarian historian, while the two are also expected to agree on a common summary. Even though the preparation of a joint history textbook has already been undertaken by the program "Common Future, Common past in the Mirror of Common Projects", on which the Prime Ministers already agreed in 2007, the project has not been successfully implemented yet. The main institutional and expert sponsors of the project are the Slovak and Hungarian Academies of Sciences.

1.4. 13 Preliminary Conclusions

1. Despite the above mentioned initiatives, programs and projects neither the governments, nor non-governmental actors have succeeded in the implementation of a reconciliation process between Slovakia and Hungary. It can therefore be concluded that the reconciliation process requires a new approach both on the governmental and non-governmental side.
2. Past development showed that neither the left-wing nor right-wing governments have been convincingly in favor of the reconciliation process between Slovakia and Hungary. Therefore it can be argued that ethnicity turned out to be a more important factor than ideological closeness/differences.
3. Experience from the last twenty years showed that on a political level unilateral actions prevailed over joint initiatives. Even though the latter appeared in political statements or declarations, the vast majority of them have not been implemented.
4. Political elites in both countries tended to pick up on selected historical or legal issues and use them instrumentally in political discourse instead of leaving them in the hands

of experts. By doing so political leaders contributed to the intensification of tensions between the two countries.

5. Ethnic cleavage remains amongst the most important aspects of Slovak society. The complex character of the problem, its attractiveness for political elites, huge mobilization potential and last, but not least, historical heritage predicts that this cleavage will have a long surviving sustainability. Also, taking into account the present configuration of political elites in both Hungary and Slovakia, it is possible that Slovak-Hungarian relations will remain among the most sensitive ones and will therefore also influence stability of Central Europe (and of the European Union) in the foreseeable future.
6. The 2010 parliamentary elections in Hungary and Slovakia changed the political situation and overall climate in both countries. However, these changes – despite verbalized political declarations - did not automatically create favorable conditions for the improvement of bilateral relations and the future reconciliation of the two countries. Additional political will and maintenance of a consensual approach remain necessary preconditions for dismantling deeply rooted ethnic stereotypes from collective memory and changing the status quo.
7. The inclusion of Hungarian minority representatives in the country's government might establish a good base for the future cooperation between the Slovak and Hungarian political parties. On the other hand, the experience over the years from 1998-2006 shows that the participation of the representatives of the Hungarian community alone cannot be considered as the panacea for solving all of the problems and bridging all of the gaps, since other unavoidable steps leading to the improvement of inter-ethnic dialogue need to be addressed.
8. The so-called 'Basic Treaty' can be considered as an appropriate legislation framework for the development of Slovak-Hungarian relations, however, the condition that all paragraphs are implemented in a continuous and systematic way needs to be fulfilled. The same applies to the condition of the common interpretation of the Treaty. In Slovakia, additional legislation needed to be adopted and implemented in order to improve the minority-majority relations and the same is possibly true for the Hungarian case.

9. Even the most perfect implementation of the Treaty cannot completely change the state of Slovak-Hungarian relations since there is a need for adequate political will and willingness to communicate and bridge symbolic gaps. A dialogue should be systematic and well-structured.
10. The improvement of civil dialogue and intensification of cooperation between various non-governmental organisations remains one of the preconditions for the development of Slovak-Hungarian relations. However, it has to be underlined that some of the initiatives backed by NGOs lack continuity, while others overlap in activities. There is also a need for the establishment of a coordinating body in terms of an “umbrella organization”, while NGOs should also reach a consensus regarding certain “division of labor”. Another important task is the creation of an independent Slovak-Hungarian cooperation fund that would support projects aiming at the improvement of Slovak-Hungarian dialogue.
11. In the past, the Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation has often been perceived as a single act that can be reached by one political declaration or agreement. It has to be underlined that the reconciliation is a continuous, longitudinal process and in some aspects it may take several years to reach the first satisfactory, conclusive, results. Therefore, adequate and continuous support of the representatives of both countries is a necessary precondition for it.
12. Due to different historical and structural conditions, foreign examples of reconciliation, such as the Franco-German or Polish-German reconciliation, are applicable only partially in the Slovak-Hungarian case. A study group consisting of Slovak and Hungarian experts could be established in order to evaluate possibilities of know-how and experience transfer.
13. Despite numerous problems and tensions in bilateral relations the Slovak-Hungarian relationship also contains many good examples of cooperation, either on a bilateral or regional level. A focus on the so-called ‘positive’ agenda should also be a part of the reconciliation process; the overcoming of divisions can boost cooperation in existing areas, as well as in the new ones – both at governmental and NGO levels.

2. Nationalist-populism in Slovak and Hungarian Political Discourse

This part focuses on the usage of the nationalist-populist appeals of the Slovak and Hungarian political elite. Political leaders usually like to perceive themselves in the positions of the custodians of collective memory. And since collective memory of particular entity, in our case this entity is the nation or ethnic group, is highly selective, political leaders are looking for those parts of it that might be instrumentally used to legitimize themselves in the eyes of their voters. Therefore it is not the whole history, but only the "usable past" that attracts political leaders. .

As Ilya Prizel convincingly notes, most modern polities rely on legitimizing mythology. The conduct of foreign policy, by extension, is one means of affirming that mythology and thereby legitimizing a governing elite. ¹⁶Simply put, the political discourse in Slovakia and Hungary, as well as the Slovak-Hungarian relations after 1989 have been dominated by two basic myths: it has been the so-called myths of the Hungarian threat shadowing the Slovak political discourse, and the myth, or syndrome of Trianon, which has dominated on the Hungarian side.

2.1. Theoretical Background

A widely spread argument connects the fall of communist regimes around Central and Eastern Europe with an ideological vacuum. Early in the 1990s some analysts pointed out that the ideology of nationalism might have fulfill this vacuum.¹⁷

As Chris Hann rightly noted, after the fall of communist regimes, Central and Eastern European developments started to figure prominently in global discussions of "ethnicity" and "identity politics" while a few scholars have used materials from this region to articulate more general frameworks of comparative analysis.¹⁸ The collapse of communism was accompanied with the need for a redefinition of national or ethnic identity in Central and Eastern European societies. The reconstruction of collective identity went hand in hand with the revival of historically based division between the mythical "we" and "others".

Under authoritarian rule, inter-ethnic hostilities were more or less successfully frozen or

¹⁶ See I. Prizel *National Identity and Foreign Policy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998).

¹⁷ Z.Brzezinski, *Post-Communist Nationalism*, *Foreign Affairs*, vol. LXVIII (Winter 1989/90), pp. 1-25.

¹⁸ See C. Hann, "Postsocialist Nationalism: Rediscovering the Past in Southeast Poland", *Slavic Review* 57(4).

hidden under the surface. The communist system as such provided the nations in the Soviet bloc with a new collective “other”, against whom some of them could define themselves.¹⁹ It can be therefore argued that in the reality of the Cold War the threat of the so-called historical enemies de facto did not exist.

The attractiveness of ethnicity, nationalism and related issues to the population, together with their large mobilization potential have continuously challenged political elites in Central and Eastern Europe. Instrumental exploitation of these issues in the communication strategies with the electorate has become an important tool for voter mobilization around the so-called post-Soviet region. With the changing geopolitical reality in the post-Soviet space, prejudices against historical “others” were rediscovered. At the same time, new “others” were invented. These recently invented enemies, together with the mythological “ghosts of the past”, soon became the popular point of reference for significant part of the political elite in CEE countries.

2.1.1. Nationalism

As a phenomenon, nationalism is a subject to a wide variety of meanings. It is definitely more correct to speak about variety of nationalisms than about nationalism as a singular, uniform phenomenon.²⁰ Peter Alter, for example, develops a typology of nationalisms, which reflects to a large degree the discussion on nationalism for almost half a century. He distinguishes between two basic types: liberal, reformist nationalism and integral nationalism. The former is grounded in nineteenth-century liberalism (Risorgimento movement), the latter in the narrow, exclusivist, right-wing European politics of the late nineteenth century.”²¹

According to Anthony Smith, the phenomenon of nationalism is ranging from “ethnic” nationalism based on a cultural group to “territorial” nationalism founded on the “skeletal framework of the territorial state”. Between these two categories he places a “mixed” one that contains elements of both “ethnic” and “territorial” nationalisms.²²

The common denominator of different kinds of nationalisms is the tendency toward “exclusiveness”. While ethnic nationalism is being centered around common descent, which

¹⁹ See also M. Todorova, “Ethnicity, Nationalism and the Communist Legacy in Eastern Europe”, *East European Societies*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Winter 1993).

²⁰ In the course of the survey of definition of nationalisms made by Paul Latawski, nationalism has been described as “A sentiment, a state of mind, a principle, an ideology, a doctrine, a theory of modernization, an historical process and a catastrophe. Perhaps nationalism is all of these things.” See P. Latawski (ed.) *Contemporary Nationalism in East Central Europe*. (London: Macmillan Press, 1995), p. 5.

²¹ P. Alter *Nationalism*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1991), p. 33.

²² A. D. Smith, *Theories of Nationalism*. (London: Duckworth, 1971).

gives it an exclusive quality, economic nationalism favors market protection of the territory inhabited by particular ethnic group (nation). The latter usually gives economic privileges to those segments of the population that are interrelated with the ruling political elites in many respects. Though economic interests play a dominant role in this type of nationalism, the role of ethnic factors should not be undervalued. Common ethnic bonds do have a significant impact on the political elites' decisions, also in the field of economic policy. In other words, economic "other" is often identical with "ethnic" one.

The supporters of the exclusivist nationalist ideology usually favor a "backward-looking", closed conception of the nation and aim to strengthen national identity and statehood through cultural, language, economic and educational policies, as well as through closer co-operation with some popular organizations, including the Church. They stress the importance of national sovereignty, even at the risk of international isolation.²³

The author of this study conceptualizes nationalism to be an ideology, which holds the nation, and the nation-state as crucial values and which manages to mobilize the political will of large segments of the population.²⁴ He shares an argument that national identity can be described as a mix of expressive relations and feelings, which exist side by side with instrumental and calculated political interests.²⁵ Each generation forms its *cognitive map* of the nation. But it does this in the midst of inherited notions surrounding a series of specific sets of myths and symbols. Using these raw materials, nationalists proceed to 'rediscover' and 'reinterpret' their national ideological capital in accordance with diverse political requirements and urgencies of each moment.²⁶ The adherents of whatever definition of nationalism would probably agree on the role of traditions, stories, myths and symbols as powerful generators of feelings of affinity or exclusion, of proximity or hatred among groups. They are manipulated and reproduced over time by political elites in order to build an insider and outsider, indigenous versus alien – or even friend and foe – dichotomy.²⁷

Regardless of its definition, nationalism represents one of the serious challenges facing

²³ This definition was applied by S. Fisher in order to find similarities between nationalist movements in Slovakia and Croatia. See Sharon Fisher, "The Rise and Fall of National Movements in Slovakia and Croatia", *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. II (Fall 2000), also *Political Change in Post-Communist Slovakia and Croatia: From Nationalist to Europeanist*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

²⁴ See also P. Alter, *Nationalism*. (London: Edward Arnold, 1991).

²⁵ See J. Rothschild *Ethnopolitics*. (New York: Columbia University Press 1981).

²⁶ See A. D. Smith *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986), A. D. Smith *Nationalism and Modernism*. (London: Routledge 1998); also R. Máiz, "Politics and the nation: nationalist mobilization of ethnic differences," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 9, Part 2 (April 2003).

²⁷ See R. Máiz, "Politics and the nation: nationalist mobilization of ethnic differences," *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 9, Part 2 (April 2003), pp. 199-200.

Central and Eastern Europe in the aftermath of Communism. The transition periods from one political regime to another, which are accompanied by political and economic instability and social insecurity, create favorable conditions for different kinds of nationalisms to occur. This was proved also in the case of CEE countries. Moreover, the process of transition has been accompanied by the instrumental use of myths, which are expected to legitimize political decisions and performance of political elites. The old, so-called “traditional” myths, even those from ancient times, have been re-invented, while at the same time new, “modern” myths have appeared in the discourse. In relation to post-communism, Vladimir Tismaneanu, for example, notes that myths are responses to the sentiments of discontinuity, fragmentation, and the overall confusion of post-communist stage. They have the power not only to offer relatively facile explanations for perceived victimhood and failure, but also to mobilize, energize, and even instigate large groups into action.²⁸

As the author of this study argued before that nationalism, which underlines ethnic criteria for national membership and stresses the importance of ethnic identity, holds a great potential to mobilize significant parts of the population, which makes it attractive for political elites. These elites, especially in post-communist countries, usually combine nationalism with democracy and consider them to be complementary concepts, even though they are rather contradictory. As Liah Greenfeld rightly notes, because the classic democratic theory equates the people to citizens, as principles of human association, ethnic diversity and (liberal) democracy are contradictory, antithetical. According to her, the rights of communities and rights of individuals cannot be ensured in equal measures. Plainly put, cultural validation and the empowerment of ethnic identity endangers (liberal) democracy.²⁹

The acceptance of differences in socio-political and economic reality in Eastern and Western Europe led numerous scholars to develop their arguments about differences between the Western and Eastern nationalisms.³⁰ For instance, as Dan Gheorghe Dungaciu notes, when one tries to explain Eastern nationalism, he always tends to find historical patterns.³¹ On the other hand, when it comes to the West, rather concrete and present day causes, sociological explanations, as well as cultural, political, social or economical reasons are considered. A sharp distinction between “Western” and “non-Western” nationalisms appears also in Hans Kohn’s

²⁸ See V. Tismaneanu *Fantasies of Salvation. Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1998).

²⁹ See L. Greenfeld, “Democracy, Ethnic Diversity and Nationalism”, K. Goldmann, U. Hannerz, C. Westin (eds.) *Nationalism and Internationalism in the Post-Cold War Era*. (London and New York: Routledge 2001).

³⁰ In this context the term ‘Eastern Europe’ encompasses both Central and Eastern Europe.

³¹ See D. G. Dungaciu *East and West and "The Mirror of Nature"*. (Vienna: Institute for Human Sciences 1999).

book *The Idea of Nationalism* , while in his subsequent books he distinguishes “good” nationalism from “evil” nationalism.³² In Kohn’s view Eastern nationalism is “organic” in its nature. The nation is viewed as an organism, as a fixed and indelible character that was “stamped” on its members at birth and from which they could never free themselves.

Several more arguments supporting the strict division between Eastern and Western types of nationalism can be found. It can be argued that in comparison with Western democracies, ethnicity and the so-called ethnic nationalism still plays quite important role in Eastern Europe. One of the explanations might be a delayed and centrally driven modernization. On the other hand, more favorable socio-structural and historical conditions do not automatically exclude the so-called ethnic nationalism from the Western societies, even though there it might appear in different, perhaps more moderate forms. To conclude, ethnic nationalism is nothing exceptional in the West, but due to different socio-structural, historical and political conditions it is still more visible in the East.

The author of this study is aware of the fact that the strict distinction between the “civic” and “ethnic” or “civic” and “cultural” nationalism is not possible to be made. Both categories of nationalism are rather complementary than contradictory, and are present in every society. He operationalizes nationalism to be an exclusionary ideology that stresses the social cohesion of one particular group of the population by appealing on the strict differentiation from other groups using ethnic categories, even in the field of economy. From author’s point of view, an essential issue here is the level of identification of particular political leaders with the superiority of their respective ethnic group over other groups. In this regard, he partly shares K.G. Minogue’s argument that nationalism might also be considered as a political movement, which tends to reach and defend “national” integration through feelings based on animosities against “the strangers”.³³

When political and economic transformation of Central and Eastern Europe is taken into account, nationalism seems not to be solely an unpleasant remnant of the past, or rhetorical phenomenon, but rather an influential factor shaping the socio-political development. One could finally agree with Paul Latawski who notes that besides economic, political and social problems besetting the region after communism, nationalism stands alone as one of the most perplexing challenges to the construction of a new post-communist order, regardless of the stage of transition.³⁴

³² H. Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism. A Study in its Origins and Background*. (New York: Macmillan, 1946).

³³ See K. R. Minogue *Nationalism*. (New York: 1967).

³⁴ P. Latawski, “What to do About Nationalism?”, P. Latawski (ed.) *Contemporary Nationalism in East Central*

2.1.2. Populism

Though the definitions of populism vary from one scholar to another, it is generally agreed that it is a multifactorial phenomenon, which cannot be traced to any single case. Some scholars consider populism to be an ideology – in their view the suffix “-ism” as such signals an ideological potentiation³⁵, others perceive it as a specific form of politics.³⁶ There also exist different views on the democratic nature of populism. Some scholars argue that the Latin root of the word populism – “populus” exhibits a clear link with the democratic idea. According to them, the search for the more direct involvement of citizens is a central task not only for democracy, but also for populism. Where there is democracy, they say, there is always populism.³⁷ Populist parties, movements or political leaders usually see the sustaining gap between democracy as an ideal on the one hand, and political reality on the other. The main task for populist leaders is therefore to bridge this gap by direct, or at least, a more intensive involvement of citizens in political processes. In this regard, populism calls for principles that are equal to those contained in the theory of participative democracy.³⁸ However, as Margaret Canovan rightly notes, populism pushes and campaigns for more democratic involvement of, and control by, the citizenry, which is only possible in a homogeneous community fostering exclusion.³⁹ Due to this fact, populism has been studied as a phenomenon in the form of radical parties, protest movements and anti-system organizations. This point of view stresses the undemocratic character of populism, giving it pathological characteristics.

In fact, populism remains a pizza, which can have a different mixture of toppings. Other metaphors have been applied to populism as well. Y. Mény and Y. Surel compare populism to an “empty” shell, which can be filled and made meaningful by whatever is poured into it.⁴⁰ Accordingly, Paul Taggart notes “Populism has an essential chameleonic quality that means it always takes on the hue of the environment in which it occurs”.⁴¹

Europe. (London: Macmillan Press, 1995).

³⁵ See F. Decker, “The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy”, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* 3/2003.

³⁶ See C. Mudde, “In the Name of the Peasantry, the Proletariat, and the People: Populism in Eastern Europe”. Y. Mény, Y. Surel (eds.) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. (New York: Palgrave 2002).

³⁷ See also M. Canovan, “Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 1.

³⁸ See G. Sartori *Teória demokracie*. (Bratislava: Archa, 1994).

³⁹ M. Canovan, “Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 1.

⁴⁰ See Y. Mény and Y. Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism”, Y. Mény, Y. Surel (eds.) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. (New York: Palgrave 2002).

⁴¹ P. Taggart, cf. Y. Mény and Y. Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism”, Y. Mény, Y. Surel (eds.)

The people occupy the central position in the concept of populism. In comparison to the theory of democracy, the people, however, are defined as a group of citizens, who are usually being betrayed by another group, which is considered to be much smaller. The main goal of populist movements is to replace - in the name of the people - narrowly defined elite that is in power. This aim, however, also affects democratic institutions as such. Some political movements call for more frequent use of direct democracy, such as referenda, or want to put independent institutions under political control. The widely spread attitude says that an anti-establishment attitude is a key element of populism. Generally, populism might be characterized by a peculiar negativism – it was anti: anti-capitalist, anti-urban, as well as xenophobic and anti-Semitic.⁴² What makes populism really dangerous for democracy, however, is a consciousness that – let us quote Mény and Surel again - it is an “empty” shell, which can be filled and made meaningful by whatever is poured into.⁴³

The goals of populist leaders actually do not have to be that radical. The decision to label a particular political party or political leader as “populist” depends on the chosen definition of populism. To start with, the so-called populist does not have to have an anti-establishment attitude. On the contrary, they may even become part of the government. Jack Hayward convincingly uses the example of the British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. She saw herself as an “outsider” who, despite being the leader of the Conservative Party, was being opposed by so-called elitists inside and beyond her party. In other words, she was seeking to break the stranglehold of interest groups, hostile institutions, and entrenched practices.⁴⁴ Political leaders or parties often use populist rhetoric in a time of elections. Electoral opportunism leads some political leaders, who are themselves representatives of political elites, to criticize the government for being “too elitist”.⁴⁵

Even if populist political leaders become part of the government, they may maintain their feeling of being in opposition to entities that somehow endanger their position or threaten the supposed interests of the citizens the government represents. There is still a need for homogeneous identity construction, as well as efforts to present the people as a supposed unity,

Democracies and the Populist Challenge. (New York: Palgrave 2002).

⁴² E. Gellner, G. Ionesco (eds.), “Introduction”, *Populism. Its Meaning and National Characteristics*. (The Macmillan Company, 1969).

⁴³ Y. Mény and Y. Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism”, Y. Mény, Y. Surel (eds.) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. (New York: Palgrave 2002), p. 6.

⁴⁴ J. Hayward, “Populist Challenge to ‘Elitist Democracy’”, J. Hayward (ed.) *Elitism, Populism, and European Politics*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1996).

⁴⁵ Mény and Surel use the former French president Jacques Chirac as an example. See Y. Mény and Y. Surel, “The Constitutive Ambiguity of Populism”, Y. Mény, Y. Surel (eds.) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. (New York: Palgrave 2002).

not only internally, united in their fight against corruption or the communist past, but also externally, to distinguish it from other peoples and nations.⁴⁶ The “people” may be then used not just as an abstract phenomenon, but also as a community of blood, common descent, language and culture.⁴⁷

In the case of government officials, or MPs representing the government, it is sometimes more difficult to distinguish whether or not their rhetoric is populist. Because of their responsibility towards international organizations and institutions they cannot use the same language as the parties in the opposition. This was true especially in the pre-EU accession period, when the representatives of the governments were observed very carefully by international organizations, such as the EU. If a politician, for instance prime minister, speaks in the name of “the nation”, he does not necessarily be a populist. But if he speaks in the name of one particular nation (or ethnic group) and relates the interests of this nation (ethnic group) to the interests of the state, he becomes suspicious of being populist. Once he declares that the representatives of other nations (ethnic groups) threaten the interests of his respective nation (ethnic group) in order to convince the citizens that he is the true guardian of the interests of the nation, he can be surely labeled as a populist.

As in the case of nationalism, some scholars underline the distinction between the “Western” and “Eastern” type of populism. Cass Mudde, for example, argues that:

“While in Western Europe, the word populism is generally used to denote postmodern or “more moderate” types of “Extreme Right” or “radical Right” parties, in Eastern (and Central – T. S.) Europe it is considered to be a more general phenomenon, spread across the ideological spectrum.”⁴⁸

2.1.3. Nationalist populism

Let us go back to the metaphors of the pizza and the empty shell. These two metaphors imply that populism is viewed rather as a political style than an ideology. The definition of populism as a style of politics fits in with the conception of my thesis. It suggests that populism

⁴⁶ See also F. Decker, “The Populist Challenge to Liberal Democracy”, *Internationale Politik und Gesellschaft* 3/2003.

⁴⁷ The latter concept prefers a traditionalist, organic view of the nation and contradicts the so-called republican conception, which considers “the people” to be an abstract construction. See, for example, A. D. Smith *Theories of Nationalism*. (London: Duckworth, 1971) and B. Anderson *Imagined Communities* (London and New York: Verso, 1991).

⁴⁸ C. Mudde, “In the name of the Peasantry, the Proletarian, and the People: Populism in Eastern Europe”, Y. Mény, Y., Sural (eds.) *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*. (Palgrave, 2002), p. 214.

gets its ideological connotation only after it becomes interlinked with an ideology. As Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner in their pioneering work on populism suggest, there exists the tendency for populism to be closely associated with, sometimes to be absorbed by, stronger, more cohesive ideologies or movements, one of which is nationalism.⁴⁹

A combination of nationalism, understood as an ideology, and populism, viewed as a style of politics, creates a construct called national populism, or nationalist populism, which fits in very well with the purpose of this thesis. Nationalist-populist leaders exploit nationalism – understood in terms of positive self-presentation, economic nationalism and animosities against ethnic “others” in a populist way. Moreover, they address their statements to a particular ethnic group instead of citizens. The author’s understanding of nationalist populism is further explained in Scheme No. 1.

Nationalist populism might be perceived as a political style carrying nationalist ideology, which contradicts the principles of liberal democracy and has significant mobilization potential.⁵⁰ This mobilization potential represents a challenge for political elites and explains to a large extent the high popularity of the populist use of ethnic identity, national symbols, myths, stereotypes and so forth.

2.2. Nationalist-populism in domestic and foreign policy

This study perceives nationalism as the rejection of the most powerful “other” embodied by a particular ethnic group by another ethnic group (the so-called “we entity”). As Ilya Prizel argues, while a polity must meet a set of preconditions to form a nation, it is interaction with the outside world, namely the acceptance or rejection of “the other”, that allows polities to develop a sense of national uniqueness.⁵¹ Therefore, most of nationalisms, apart of emphasizing common cultural bonds, kinship or common language and common history among the members of particular nations, also date back to a conflict with an outside power. When a state pursues the interests of a particular ethnic group, an outside power, the so called “external other”, is defined predominantly in ethnic terms. Naturally, apart of external others, the polity may develop a whole ranking of “internal others”, among which ethnic minorities usually play an

⁴⁹ E. Gellner, G. Ionesco (eds.) *Populism. Its Meaning and National Characteristics*. (The Macmillan Company, 1969), p. 4.

⁵⁰ M. Zaremba, for instance, in his work underlines unique and big potential of nationalist ideology to mobilize the people, which makes it very attractive for political elites. M. Zaremba *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm*. (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001).

⁵¹ Ilya Prizel *National Identity and Foreign Policy*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998).

important role.

The author suggests that the twofold rejection - of an internal and external other - has played a crucial role in the shaping of foreign policy in ethnically mixed regions, e. g. Central or Southern Europe. As Ilya Prizel notes, to remain credible at home, a government {of almost all Central and East European countries} must defend the nation's (ethnic) identity. Due to weak political institutions and, therefore, a perennially precarious basis for the political legitimacy of the state, the ruling elites repeatedly have had to reaffirm national identity through a distinctly nationalist, in the sense of ethnocentric, foreign policy".⁵²

National or ethnic identity serves not only as the primary link between the individual and society, but between a society and the world. Foreign policy, perceived both as the protector and anchor of national (ethnic) identity, provides political elites with a tool for either mass mobilization or political cohesion.

2.2.1. Nationalist-populist appeals in the political language of the Slovak and Hungarian political elites – four examples

The purpose of this part is not to analyze the three Mečiar governments. Under his rule not only Czechoslovakia split, but the Slovak-Hungarian relations were continuously full of tensions and problems. Quite a few of journalistic and academic articles already cover these topics. What attracts my interest is the situation after the so-called democratic reverse, which took place after the 1998 elections. At that time, the pro-integration oriented government led by Mikuláš Dzurinda replaced the previous isolationist governments led by Vladimír Mečiar. How deeply did the change of the government influence the political language of political elites? Have the nationalist-populist appeals disappeared from the political discourse? Has foreign policy of the Slovak Republic towards Hungary and the Slovak-Hungarian relationship improved significantly? These are the questions that are to be asked.

Although some political analysts tried to connect the change of the government in 1998 to a broader "cultural change", the author considers their statements either to be too optimistic or detached from reality. Despite some undisputable changes, e.g. the incorporation of the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK) in the government, the so-called Hungarian card started to be played again. Ethnic Slovak political leaders have been not the only players on the scene - apart

⁵² Ibid.

of their counterparts from the SMK, political leaders from Hungary itself have been deeply involved in the "game".

When the issues concerning ethnic minorities are being discussed, there is always latent or more obvious presence of Hungarian political leaders. The support of kin-minorities has been one of the three key priorities of the Hungarian governments after 1989. The support of Hungarian communities living beyond the borders of Hungary is involved also in the constitution of the Republic of Hungary. Therefore the inter-ethnic developments in Slovakia are being watched very carefully by the Hungarian political representation settled in Budapest. On the other hand, among the ethnic Slovak political elites there is always a suspicion of the betrayal of the interest of the Slovak Republic by the "tandem" consisting of the Hungarian government and the SMK. The point here is that due to the existence of this specific triangular relationship it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between foreign and domestic policy. Some of examples that will follow might be considered to be connected purely to domestic politics in Slovakia and Hungary, though their importance overreach the borders of these two states.

The forthcoming examples are divided into four categories. The first example focuses on the domestic discourse, domestic in terms of the Slovak political scene, dealing with the regional self-government. The point here is to show the nationalist-populist appeals in the political language of ethnic Slovak and Hungarian political leaders.

The second example, on the other hand, focuses on the active role of the domestic political leader of Hungarian ethnic origin played in political discourse in Hungary.

In the third example the author points at the discourse initiated abroad, which evoked not only a strict reaction of the Slovak political leaders, but had even broader regional consequences.

The fourth example analyzes both the domestic (Slovak) and foreign (Hungarian) discourses concerning a legal norm – the Hungarian Status Act.

Example 1 - Domestic Discourse and Domestic Implications

The Case of the Komárno County

In summer 2000, the SMK presented its demand to create a so-called Komárno County, which would comprise six districts in south-west Slovakia and in which citizens of Hungarian ethnicity would have a majority. However, other coalition parties rejected the SMK proposal, arguing that it was clearly ethnically motivated. SMK's counter-argument was that its proposal complied with the criteria for the creation of regional territorial units

and even if the main argument for the Komárno County was to give ethnic minorities and ethnic groups the right to administer affairs that concern them on the local government level, there are also other arguments that could support the proposal. Finally, SMK agreed on the model of 12 regions anchored in the government's scheme of public administration reform. However, the MPs of the Party of Democratic Left (SDL) and Party for Civic Understanding (SOP), supported by the MPs of the Mečiar's Movement for Democratic Slovakia (HZDS) and Slovak National party (SNS) voted for the model of 8 regions, which was not acceptable for the SMK because of its exclusionist character. Béla Bugár, the SMK leader, in his contribution to the debate on the reform of public administration held on July 3, 2001 in the Slovak Parliament said the following: "When Southern Slovakia is on the program of the day, all Slovak political parties behave according to the ethnic principle."... "National totalitarianism is perhaps more elegant than the communist totalitarianism, however, basically these two totalitarianisms are not that different"... "When the new borders of new counties the thoughts of the Slovak democrats get the nationalist taste, though the map of the region clearly shows that in Western Slovakia a region with the majority of ethnic Hungarians would be the most natural solution".⁵³ On the other hand, an influential MP for the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) František Mikloško publicly defended a more complicated system of regional elections to "diminish the threat that in the Nitra region an ethnic Hungarian candidate would have won the electoral competition"⁵⁴.

Example 2 - Domestic Participation in Foreign Discourse

The "Felvidék" Case

Another case that provoked a lot of emotions on the Slovak political scene was the performance of Miklós Duray, one of leaders of SMK and MP of the Slovak Parliament at the electoral rally in Hungary in spring 2002. During the meeting organized in the front of the Hungarian parliament building Duray openly supported FIDESZ party and its leader Viktor Orbán saying that "*Felvidék* is with you, *Felvidék* supports you, Viktor. (...) The Nation must unite and will be united for sure".⁵⁵ Besides an open call for the unification of divided Hungarian nations, which could be read also as an discredit of current borders of Hungary with neighboring countries, Duray used in his speech several times Hungarian term *Felvidék*, which

⁵³ See B. Bugár *Žijem v takej krajine*. (Bratislava: Kalligram 2004), pp. 144-5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵⁵ See *SME* (April 19, 2002)

was historical name for Slovakia (and Subcarpathian Ruthenia) in frontiers of "Great" Hungary during the period of Austro-Hungarian Empire. Because of its denunciative character this term evokes very negative connotations among the Slovaks. Not only all "Slovak" political parties, but also SMK itself, defeated Duray's participation in the electoral meeting in Hungary. Among the loudest opponents of Duray's performance was the leader of a Smer (Direction) Party and former member of SDL Robert Fico. In his statement published in the SME daily, Fico accused SMK of being aware of Duray's trip to Budapest. According to him, main aim of Duray's performance was to maintain the support of the most extremist and nationalist voters of SMK.

⁵⁶

Because of his nationalist-populist appeals, Miklós Duray has become a well known political figure. As Rudolf Chmel, who worked as the minister of culture at that time, wrote in one of his essays on the Slovak-Hungarian relationship, Miklós Duray is undoubtedly one of the major ideologues of the ethnic Hungarians enforcing a revitalization of the so-called trauma of Trianon.⁵⁷ After the first "Hungarian-Hungarian Summit"⁵⁸ held in Budapest in 1996, Miklós Duray's name appeared on the pages of *Szabad Ujság* newspaper. According to Duray, the Hungarian-Hungarian summit "proclaims ethnic Hungarian communities beyond the borders to be the matter of home affairs ... This is the first step towards a national political reintegration free of any changes of national borders, which might result in federalization of a politically disintegrated nation..." According to Duray, the reaction of the Slovak side on the Declaration adopted at the "Hungarian-Hungarian Summit was "unreasonably nervous".⁵⁹

Example 3 - Foreign Discourse with Domestic and International Implications

The Case of the Beneš Decrees

In 2001 the Hungarian Prime Minister gave a speech to the Assembly of the European parliament. In his speech Orbán openly demanded the repeal of the Czechoslovak President Eduard Beneš's Decrees as a precondition for the entry of the Czech Republic and Slovakia into the European Union.⁶⁰ Apart of open rejections of such attempts by the governments of

⁵⁶ See *SME* (April 19, 2002)

⁵⁷ R. Chmel, "Syndrome of Trianon in Hungarian Foreign Policy", *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* Vol. III, No. I, p. 99.

⁵⁸ The official name of the Summit was "Conference on Hungary and Ethnic Hungarians' Communities Beyond the Borders".

⁵⁹ M. Duray, "A magyar-magyar csúcs találkozó jelentősége és üzenete, " *Szabad Ujság* (July 31, 1996). Cf. R. Chmel, "Syndrome of Trianon in Hungarian Foreign Policy", *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* Vol. III, No. I, p. 99.

⁶⁰ The Decrees of Eduard Beneš were adopted after the World war II in 1945. Viktor Orbán asked on the floor of the European Parliament for the forfeiture of citizenship and goods of the German and Hungarian populations

the Czech and Slovak Republics⁶¹, Orbán's speech had impact on the cooperation in the broader Central European region. In response, the Czech, Slovak and Polish prime ministers cancelled their participation in the meeting of prime ministers of the Visegrad countries scheduled for March 2001. As Jacques Rupnik writes in his especially emotional report published in the 2002 edition of the *East European Constitutional Review*, "The Visegrad variant of Central Europe is on the verge of being replaced by another variant - the transplantation of nationalist populism from Bavaria to the plains of Danube."⁶²

Example 4 - Foreign and Domestic Discourse with some Legal Implications

The Case of the Hungarian Status Act

The passing of the Hungarian Status Act by the Hungarian Parliament in 2001 by the overwhelming majority of the deputies (92%)⁶³ started more than three years long discussion on its implications on legal systems of Hungary's neighboring countries. It contributed to the worsening of bilateral relations between Hungary with some neighboring states, especially Romania and Slovakia, and evoked emotional political discussions between the representatives of ethnic Slovak and Hungarian political parties in Slovakia as well.

The main point of the act was to improve living condition of the kin minorities in the neighboring states and therefore it had an exclusivist, ethnic character since the very beginning.⁶⁴ The act guaranteed ethnic Hungarians and their families in the countries surrounding Hungary a set of mainly educational and cultural benefits. For example, it promised direct payments to parents who send their children to Hungarian-speaking schools. Slovakia and Romania, the countries with the highest percentage of Hungarian population, opposed the act claiming that it interferes with their legal systems and gave members of Hungarian minority advantages based on ethnic principles. Rolf Ekeus, OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities who argued that the act "imposes precedents in the

expelled from Czechoslovakia.

⁶¹ Slovak Prime Minister Dzurinda commented Orbán's remarks in the following way: "Prime minister Orbán has to decide whether he will return to a friendly and European dialogue, or will be getting even more nationalist".

⁶² J. Rupnik, "The Other Central Europe", *East European Constitutional Review*, Vol. 11, Numbers 1/2 (Winter/Spring 2002).

⁶³ See, for example, G. Schöpflin, "Citizenship and Ethnicity: The Hungarian Status Law", or V. Szabó, "Hungary's Neighbourhood Policy and the Situation of Hungarian Minorities", both in *Foreign Policy Review*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2003).

⁶⁴ A term "national minority" as such was unacceptable for ideological fathers of the act since it entailed some superior, degradating connotation. It was therefore shifted to "part of nation" or "national community".

protection of national minorities“, refused it as well.⁶⁵ The Hungarian political leaders had, however, different opinion. Attila Várhegyi, one of the key figure in Orbán's party FIDESZ appealed on the unity of Hungarian nation saying that "all national politics nowadays aims in creation of an institutionalized fifteen million community united on the basis of Hungarian nationhood."⁶⁶

In general, the SMK attitude towards the Hungarian Status Act was very positive. Arpád Duka-Zolyomi, MP for the Party of Hungarian Coalition in the European parliament and former MP for the same party in the National Council of the Slovak Republic considered the reaction of the Slovak political parties towards the act as inappropriate claiming that "their attitudes are partly connected with the anti-Hungarian political tradition of the Slovaks". The state secretary of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs sharply rejected the Slovak side's objections saying, "Hungary cannot be blackmailed by appealing on nationalist feelings and anti-Hungarian sallies".⁶⁷

The objections against the act, as well as the important fact that it was incompatible with the legal system of the European Union resulted in a recommendation by the European Union bodies that Hungary prepare an amended version to eliminate all problems. The new Hungarian government created in 2002 and led by Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy attempted to do so, however, the Slovak Prime Minister Mikuláš Dzurinda categorically rejected the amended version saying, "If this law is applied it would mean that our country's sovereignty is infringed and there would be discrimination on an ethnic basis."⁶⁸

Dzurinda's clear-cut rejection of the amended version of the act surprised not only Hungarian Prime Minister Medgyessy, but also Hungarian politicians from the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK). SMK leader Béla Bugár immediately announced that his party would no longer act as an informal mediator in the bilateral dispute. He also said that Dzurinda had failed to inform SMK of all the objections he presented during his discussion with Péter Medgyessy. In an interview given to the *Pravda* daily Bugár complained that "coalition partners have always a problem with understanding when (Hungarian) minority issues are discussed."⁶⁹ Direct disputes over the validity of the Hungarian Status Act ended only after

⁶⁵ See *SME* (February 5, 2002).

⁶⁶ A. Várhegyi, "Gyökeres változás a magyarság életében, "Magyar Nemzet (August 28, 2001), Cf. R. Chmel, "Syndrome of Trianon in Hungarian Foreign Policy", *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* Vol. III, No. I, p. 102.

⁶⁷ See *Pravda* (February 9, 2002).

⁶⁸ See *The Slovak Spectator*, Volume 8, Number 47 (December 9-15, 2002).

⁶⁹ See *Pravda*, December 11, 2002. The new Slovak center-right governmental coalition came to power after the election held on September 2002 is composed from four political parties: Slovak Democratic and Christian Union (SDKÚ), Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK), Christian Democratic Movement (KDH) and Alliance of a

the treaty on the support of national minorities in the field of culture and education was signed between the Slovak and Hungarian foreign ministers in December 2003.⁷⁰

One might argue that the disputes over the Hungarian Status Act had also a significant symbolic dimension. By rejecting categorically an amended version of the act, and by acting "behind the back" of SMK, Prime Minister Dzurinda sent a clear message to his (ethnic Slovak) voters. He presented himself and his party (SDKÚ) as the protectors of the interests of the Slovak nation. From this point of view it might be interesting to mention that Dzurinda behaved in the above-described manner just before municipal elections, in which SDKÚ candidates gained significantly more votes than they expected.⁷¹

2.3. Concluding Remarks

A broad variety of available examples show that nationalist-populist features are far from being marginalized in political discourses in Slovakia and Hungary. This could be considered as an important conclusion of the study of political discourse in both countries.

Another conclusion points on a close interconnection between the domestic and foreign discourses and foreign policy. The discourses often overlap one another and political discourse taking place inside a particular country is not only reflected in foreign policy, but also has international consequences. The abandoned summit of the Visegrad prime ministers (Example 3) confirms that the tensions in bilateral inter-state relations serve as a destabilizing factor in a broader region.

The Slovak-Hungarian relationship presents a good case to study. The issues dealing to some extent with ethnic/national identity appear regularly in bilateral relations between the Slovak Republic and Hungary. Without the demand or at least acceptance of nationalist-populist techniques in communication strategies of political leaders there would not be so many examples.

In the light of the above, the main conclusion would be that the reproduction of parts

New Citizen (ANO).

⁷⁰ The treaty, which came into force on February 13, 2004, defined the competences of both Slovak and Hungarian governments regarding the support of kin minorities. According to the treaty, all kinds of financial support directed to national minorities will be distributed through two civic organizations – one in Slovakia and one in Hungary. To guarantee the transparency of financing, a special mixed Slovak-Hungarian interstate commission was established.

⁷¹ See also Strážay, T., "Nationalist Populism and Foreign Policy: Focus on Slovak-Hungarian Relations," *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs*, Vol. VI, No. I (Spring 2005).

of collective memory, especially of various stereotypes, hostilities and animosities against the others, which is sustained by both ethnic Slovak and Hungarian political leaders is not likely to disappear neither from domestic political discourse, nor from foreign policy.⁷² Slovak and Hungarian narratives still rather contradict than merge.⁷³

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ R. Chmel, "Syndrome of Trianon in Hungarian Foreign Policy", *Slovak Foreign Policy Affairs* Vol. III, No. I, p. 106.

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