

**‘Bilateral’ Ethnopolitics after the Cold War:
The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia, 1989-1999**

Stefan Wolff

Department of European Studies

University of Bath

Bath BA2 7AY

England, United Kingdom

S.Wolff@bath.ac.uk

Introduction

In Central and Eastern Europe, ethnic and religious minorities have for centuries been players in the political arena. With a history in which empires as diverse as the Ottoman, Habsburg, Russian, and German empires rose, dominated, and declined, in which borders were constantly re-drawn, and in which voluntary and forced migration occurred more often than not, members of different minorities and majorities nevertheless lived together mostly peacefully for centuries. Yet, ethnic group affiliation became an increasingly significant factor in determining policies from the 19th century onwards, and periodically it was the predominant factor leading, for example, to the various population exchanges and deportations during and after the Balkan Wars and after the First and Second World Wars. More recently, too, Central and Eastern Europe has seen a revival of minority issues after the egalitarian period of class rather than ethnic politics under communism. The states of Central and Eastern Europe that rid themselves of an oppressive social and political system had to face up to this reality and had to respond to it by drafting and implementing minority legislation, fulfilling the obligations of old and new international and bilateral treaties, and by balancing minority claims and majority anxieties against the background of a political process partly determined by century-old ethnic prejudices and patterns of discrimination and resentment.

Hungary and Slovakia are no exception in this context. Both countries were part of the Habsburg Empire until its dissolution after the First World War. Yet, their status was fundamentally different. The Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867 had recognised that Hungary was a state of its own, with equal rights, and associated with Austria under a common ruler. Slovakia, on the other hand, did not exist as a state, and the situation of Slovaks worsened considerably after 1867, when the majority of them fell under direct Hungarian rule¹ and was subjected to Magyarisation policies.² The suppression particularly of the Slovak language by the Hungarian state in the second half of the nineteenth century did not achieve its goal of assimilation, rather it

alienated Slovaks from Hungarians and was among the factors that set the stage for the nationalist outbursts of the twentieth century.

After the First World War, the Peace Treaty of Trianon in 1920 between the Allies and Hungary redefined the borders of Hungary so that territories inhabited by ethnic Hungarians became part of other successor states of the Habsburg Empire (most notably, Transylvania, Vojvodina, and today's southern Slovakia). This resulted in more than three million Hungarians becoming one of the most numerous external minorities³ in Europe living in all neighbouring states of Hungary. Another result of the demographic developments, including migration patterns, over the past centuries in Central and Eastern Europe is the fact that no country in the region is ethnically homogeneous. Slovakia as well as Hungary, with minority populations amounting to 8.6% and 14.5%, respectively, thus are hosts to a variety of ethnic groups, all of which have their own distinct cultures and identities and demand, more or less successfully, guarantees by their host-states for conditions under which they are able to preserve, develop, and express them freely.

Examining the role that the Hungarian minority in Slovakia has played in the 'bilateral' ethnopolitics of the two countries means to analyse the ethnic relations and policies in each of the two countries as well as the bilateral relationship between the two states. Because of the existence of a bilateral treaty between both countries, which includes provisions for the protection of ethnic minorities, and because of the complex relationship between both countries' external and internal minority policies, this is a particular good case to study how ethnopolitics are pursued and implemented at various levels and by various sub-state, state, and supra-state actors, and how this affects the actual situation of a specific minority. While the Slovak-Hungarian case is specific in its historic as well as contemporary details, it is by no means unique in Central and Eastern Europe. A number of states are in a similar situation, for example, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, the three Baltic states, and Romania. They all operate in the same international arena where minority protection has become increasingly standardised in the political documents, mechanisms, and

bodies of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and where the Council of Europe's 1994 Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities is the first multilateral legally binding document.⁴ In the same international arena, however, missing opportunities for minorities to participate in the social, political, and economic life of their host-states as equal citizens have led to numerous problems in Central and Eastern Europe after the downfall of communism. Not all of them have escalated into inter-ethnic violence, but there is hardly any country in the region that has not had its share in ethnic tensions.

A discussion of the Slovak-Hungarian case can therefore provide a more general overview of the problems associated with 'bilateral' ethnopolitics in the context of cross-border minority situations. I will start by outlining a theoretical framework for such an analysis, and then turn to the institutional framework of legislation and policy related to minorities in Slovakia. This will be followed by an analysis of the role that minority issues have played in the bilateral relations between Hungary and Slovakia. I will conclude with some more general observations on the factors that influence cross-border minority situations similar to that of Hungary and Slovakia.

A Framework for Analysis⁵

In order to understand the complexity of ethnopolitics in the context of cross-border minority situations, involving a variety of relationships between the minority, and their kin-states and host-states, the very foundation of these relationships has to be examined as well. This foundation is best described in terms of 'nation', 'ethnicity', and 'territory': the relationship between external minority and host-state is one of distinct ethnicity within the boundaries of a civic or territorial nation, while the relationship between external minority and kin-state is characterised by common ethnicity and the ethnic, yet territorially divided nation.

According to Walker Connor, 'ethnicity (the identity with one's ethnic group) ... is derived from Ethnos, the Greek word for nation in the latter's pristine sense of a group characterised by common descent.'⁶ In contemporary scholarship, definitions of ethnicity vary greatly. A basic

distinction can be made between a primordial school, which holds that 'ethnicity is so deeply rooted in historical experience that it should properly be treated as a given in human relations', and an instrumentalist school, which argues that 'ethnicity is not a historical given at all, but in fact a highly adaptive and malleable phenomenon' or that 'ethnicity is primarily a practical resource that individuals and groups deploy opportunistically to promote their more fundamental security and economic interests and that they may even discard when alternative affiliations promise a better return.'⁷ While the tangible aspects of ethnicity, such as customs, traditions, language or religion, and their social and political implications that are emphasised by instrumentalists are important components of an individual's or group's ethnic identity as they allow more easily to draw boundaries between in-group and out-group, they can not fully explain the phenomenon in relation to the intense emotions that 'ethnic issues' generate.

Anthony Smith has described an ethnic group as 'a type of cultural collectivity, one that emphasises the role of myths of descent and historical memories, and that is recognised by one or more cultural differences like religion, customs, language, or institutions.'⁸ As a self-defined community, ethnic groups are distinguishable by a collective proper name, a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more differentiating elements of common culture, the association with a specific homeland, and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population.⁹ Similarly, Horowitz has advocated for an inclusive conception of ethnicity that 'embraces differences identified by colour, language, religion, or some other attribute of common origin.'¹⁰ This link between tangible and intangible aspects is key to understanding the political implications of ethnic identity and of the formation of conflict groups based on ethnicity. Connor has noted that tangible characteristics are only important inasmuch as they 'contribute to this notion or sense of a group's self-identity and uniqueness.'¹¹ In turn, then, a threat to, or opportunity for, these tangibles, real or perceived, is considered as a threat to, or opportunity for, self-identity and uniqueness. Confronting this threat or taking this opportunity leads to ethnicity

being politicised, that is, to the ethnic group becoming a political actor by virtue of its shared ethnic identity. As such, ethnic identity ‘can be located on a spectrum between primordial historic continuities and instrumental opportunistic adaptations.’¹²

Conflict and Patronage: Relationships between External Minorities and Their Host and Kin-States

In their attempts to preserve, express, and develop their ethnic identities, minorities perceive threats and opportunities. The more deeply felt these perceptions are, the more they will be linked to the very survival of the group and the more intense will the conflict be that they can generate. This links the issues of ethnicity and nation to the notion of power, that is, to ‘the opportunity to enforce one’s will against resistance.’¹³ The political implication of this connection between ethnicity/nation and power is that any ethno-national group that is conscious of its uniqueness and wishes to preserve it is involved in a struggle for political power – either retaining the measure of political power it possesses or striving to acquire the amount of power that it deems necessary to preserve its uniqueness as a distinct ethno-national group, that is, to defeat the threats and seize the opportunities it faces. This desire to gain political power for an ethnic group is expressed in the concept of nationalism; according to Smith ‘an ideological movement aiming to attain or maintain autonomy, unity and identity for a social group which is deemed to constitute a nation.’¹⁴ Informed by the principle of self-determination, which goes back to Kant’s concept of the autonomy of the individual, ethno-national movements make claims on behalf of people, yet the implications of these claims are very often of a territorial nature – on one end of this (territorial) spectrum, demands are raised for local or regional autonomy (internal self-determination), and on the other, secessionist movements become active or irredentist policies are pursued (external self-determination).

Conflicting doctrines of ethno-nationalisms are often at the centre of the relationship between external minority and host-state, and it is in this context that opportunity and threat have various, yet concretely identifiable meanings. In general, opportunities and threats are positively and negatively related to the preservation, expression, and development of a group's ethnic identity and to the ability of the host-state to preserve the integrity of the territorial or civic nation. For the external minority, opportunities will manifest themselves, for example, in rights, self-administration, or self-government, and they can be realised in local, regional, or federal frameworks within the host-state; alternatively, opportunities may also arise in the separation from the host-state leading either to independent statehood or to unification with the kin-state. Threats generally occur when state institutions deny an ethnic group access to the resources that are essential for the preservation, expression, and development of a group's identity – access to linguistic, educational, or religious facilities as well as to positions of power in the institutions of the state. Threats can become manifest in policies of unwanted assimilation, in discrimination, and deprivation. At their most extreme, they take the form of ethnic cleansing and genocide.

It is in these most extreme cases that the relationship between external minority and host-state coincides with that between external minority and host-nation. This happens when the titular nation of the state has monopolised the institutions of this state. Even in its less extreme forms, the relationship between external minority and host-nation is often characterised by inter-ethnic tension, resulting from different ethnic identities and claims for the establishment of conditions conducive to their preservation, expression, and development. Responses to such claims made by the respectively other ethnic group are then perceived as threats (which often, but not exclusively, result from resource competition) and/or opportunities (which often, but not exclusively result from policies of accommodation).

In contrast, the relationship between external minority and kin-state, as it is based on common ethnicity and a territorially divided ethnic nation, is normally not one of ethnic conflict, but rather

one of patronage. Patronage results from one of two aspects, and often from a combination of the two – national sentiment and national interest. Popular sentiment concerning the fate of members of the nation living in another state and the desire to unite the national territory and bring together in it all the members of the ethnic nation finds its expression in irredentist or pan-nationalism.¹⁵

As national sentiment is not always expressed in irredentist nationalism, so is the relationship between external minority and kin-state not always about the secession of the territory inhabited by the kin-group and its subsequent unification with the kin-state. Informed by domestic and foreign national interests, territorial unification may not be desirable for either kin-state or external minority or it may not be possible given geo-political or regional interest and opportunity structures.¹⁶ Alternatively then, the relationship between external minority and kin-state can be one of ‘repatriation’, or it can be one of aiming at establishing conditions in the host-state conducive to the preservation, expression, and development of the ethnic identity of the external minority.

A conflictual relationship between external minority and kin-state is then likely to develop when their respective political agendas are mutually incompatible. This can either be the case if the external minority does not reciprocate the irredentist nationalism in the kin-state, or vice versa if the ‘irredentism’ of the external minority is not welcomed by the kin-state or when some of its manifestations are perceived as a threat to the kin-state’s security and relationship with the host-state.

Cooperation and Confrontation: Bilateral Relations in the Context of Cross-Border Minority Situations

Regardless of the form that the relationship between the minorities and their host- and kin-states takes, the very existence of an external minority also establishes a relationship between these two

states, which shapes, and is in turn shaped by, the relationship each of them has to the minority group living on its territory.

Under the system operated by the League of Nations between 1919 and the mid-1930s, such relationships have mostly been of a confrontational nature, adversely affecting the plight of minorities and the state of international relations in general, culminating in the Munich Agreement of 1938. The division of Europe after 1945, the realities of the Cold War, and the conditions in the East Bloc in general suppressed rather than resolved cross-border minority issues in Central and Eastern Europe inasmuch as that territorial changes beyond those that had been part of the Potsdam Agreement of 1945 were ruled out.

For the period after 1990, bilateral relations in Central and Eastern Europe over ethnic minority issues have manifested themselves both in patterns of confrontation and cooperation. Mutual recrimination over the treatment of minorities, public accusations of discrimination, and complaints to international organisations were and are among the most frequently used policies in this context. Cooperation, on the other hand, has become manifest in the negotiation and implementation of bilateral agreements providing for minority rights, jointly funded cross-border cultural and educational projects, and greater permissiveness in allowing cross-border contacts between minorities and their kin-states.

The direction a state chooses to follow in its bilateral relationship with one of its minorities' kin-state depends on a variety of domestic and foreign policy considerations. Governments have to consider national sentiments towards minorities and their kin-states, which are often based on historical experience of the majority population. They need to take into account the effects of their policies vis-à-vis one kin-state on their relations with other states and international organisations, as well as on the system of ethnic relations on their own territory and in a wider regional context. Finally, there are issues of resources – how far can a government go in its commitment to implement minority rights, or alternatively, for how long can it sustain a policy of

internal repression and external confrontation. The recent trend towards the pursuit of cooperation has its source to a significant degree in the influence exercised by international organisations. In connection with the greater openness of societies in Central and Eastern Europe, their desire for integration into Western structures, and the greater leverage of international organisations by means of incentives and pressures have created a situation in which bilateral relations between sovereign states have become much more dependent on an international context in which other state and supra-state actors have priorities of their own. In addition, developments in international law and within international organisations have contributed to the raising of minority issues above the level of domestic and bilateral affairs. This does not mean that the bilateral aspect of ethnopolitics has become less important, but it places it into a different framework.

Minorities and Minority Policies in Slovakia: Some General Observations

The 1991 census for Slovakia established the total population at five and one quarter of a million people, including a total of 14.5% members of ethnic and national minorities.

| Ethnic Groups | Absolute Number | Per Cent of Population |
|---------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Slovaks | 4,511,679 | 85.2 |
| Hungarians | 566,741 | 10.2 |
| Roma | 80,627 ¹⁷ | 1.5 |
| Czechs | 53,422 | 1.0 |
| Ruthenians | 16,937 | 0.4 |
| Ukrainians | 13,847 | 0.4 |
| Germans | 5,629 | 0.2 |
| Moravians | 3,888 | 0.2 |
| Poles | 2,969 | 0.1 |

| | | |
|------------------|-----------|-------|
| Others | 13,196 | 0.3 |
| Total Minorities | 757,296 | 14.5 |
| Total Population | 5,268,935 | 100.0 |

Until the 1998 elections, government policy towards ethnic minorities in Slovakia was generally restrictive, although to differing degrees. Funding for cultural, educational, broadcasting, and publishing activities for the major ethnic minorities had been provided by the government but at ever reduced levels.¹⁸ Funding was also distributed unevenly between the minorities: cultural organisations of non-Hungarian ethnic minorities, who make up less than 4% of the population, received almost five times as many subsidies in the first half of 1996 as the organisations of Hungarian minority, whose members account for approximately 10% of the Slovak population.¹⁹ Minority activists unsuccessfully protested not only against the decrease in government support for their cultural activities, but also against the lack of autonomy for minorities in this area. Press publications (26 Hungarian, 3 Ukrainian, 2 Roma, and 1 German) were subsidised to varying degrees from the state budget. According to the 1993 Radio and TV Law, there were weekly radio broadcasts of 35 hours in Hungarian and 11 hours in Ukrainian. TV broadcasts in Hungarian had been reduced from initially one hour per week to only fifteen minutes plus three monthly TV programs of 35 minutes each in Hungarian and one such program in Ukrainian. Funds for the publication of minority-language newspapers were partly eliminated or misused.²⁰ The lack of permissive minority language legislation had also been criticised repeatedly. A suggestion of Slovak Prime Minister Meciar in 1997 for a population exchange²¹ between Hungary and Slovakia²² drew on the carefully cultivated notion of Hungarians as disloyal citizens who do not accept their territorial status,²³ a notion, however, that had no basis in reality. While this discrepancy between perception and reality did not stop Meciar from proposing a population exchange, it did even less to prevent nationalist leader Ján Slota from urging his ethnic Slovak compatriots ‘to climb into tanks and “fix those Hungarian assholes.”’²⁴

The administrative reforms of 1996 have had a considerable impact on the representation of ethnic minorities at local and district level.²⁵ Considering that from the November 1998 local elections on, these municipalities have had regional self-governments, the entire administrative reform had a certain taste of gerrymandering. However, an overall assessment of the Meciar period in terms of the situation of ethnic minorities in Slovakia must also consider the achievements that were made and the difficult economic situation of the country and the complicated history of ethnic relations in the country in general. The achievements include the establishment in 1993 of a Governmental Council of the Slovak Republic for National Minorities, the creation of an Institute for Education and Culture of National Minorities at the University of Nitra, the preservation and extension of access facilities to native languages for minorities in the education system,²⁶ the introduction of bilingual road signs in local communities with more than 20% ethnic minority population and the revision of the law on names in official registers dropping the request to have female names amended with a 'Slovak' suffix.²⁷ On the other hand, serious constraints for the government's ability to implement minority rights arose from high unemployment, too little privatisation, and thus a lack of foreign investment in Slovakia, all of which left very little room in the budget for minority issues.²⁸ It is equally important to note that ethnic issues in Slovakia are very sensitive for a variety of reasons, including the fact that, without a brief period between 1938 and 1944, Slovaks never had a state of their own before 1993, and that relations with the country's two most visible and politically outspoken minorities, Roma and ethnic Hungarians, had been tense throughout the existence of Czechoslovakia since 1919. The history of Slovak-Hungarian relations, in particular, is additionally complicated by the Slovak memories of the Magyarisation policies after 1867 and the annexation by Hungary of parts of Southern Slovakia in 1939, as well as by Hungarian memories of territorial losses to Czechoslovakia in 1920 and the population exchange after the Second World War. Both economic constraints and mutual prejudice, arising among other things from selective readings of

history, contributed to a situation in Slovakia in which ethnic minority issues continue to be easily politicised by all political parties for their own purposes.

However, the September 1998 parliamentary elections seemed to end a period of mutual recriminations and to change the prospects for minority protection in Slovakia fundamentally. The nationalist government of Vladimír Mečiar lost almost one-third of their seats in parliament and was replaced by a four-party coalition government, including the Hungarian Coalition Party. Under this new government, a wide variety of steps have been taken and processes been initiated to improve the situation of ethnic minorities in Slovakia. These included a substantial revision of the controversial Municipal Elections Act,²⁹ the re-introduction of bilingual school report cards as of January 1999 after a two-year interruption, the appointment of a nineteen-member consultative committee consisting of representatives from ethnic groups and civic organisations and advising the Ministry the Culture, and the introduction to parliament of government-sponsored legislation on minority rights and languages. The recent achievements that the new government has already made in improving the conditions of ethnic minorities also include the establishment of a minority department in the education ministry (employing members of the Hungarian, Ukrainian, Roma, and German minorities) and the reinstatement of minority theatres into their legal status giving them autonomy over their budget and staffing decisions. The new government has also more than doubled the funding for minority cultures in the 1999 budget,³⁰ and remedied some of the imbalances in the funding allocations.³¹ The new government also committed itself to signing and ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.³²

Resistance to the government program on minority protection has come particularly from the nationalist Slovak organisation Matica Slovenska, and the parties of the previous government coalition – the Movement for a Democratic Slovakia and the Slovak National Party. However, given that the new coalition controls ninety-three of the one hundred and fifty seats in parliament, i.e., more than the three-fifths majority necessary for constitutional amendments, it should be

possible to overcome this resistance in parliament easily. A different matter, however, is the change of public attitudes towards minorities. Skinhead attacks on Roma continue to occur, and anti-Semitism and anti-Hungarianism remain part of extreme nationalist propaganda and activities.³³ This is a particularly stark contrast in comparison to the level of integration smaller minorities and their members have achieved.³⁴ The government elected in 1998 was thus left with the tremendous task of dealing with the legacy of a democratisation process that was incomplete and had been mismanaged by the nationalist Meciar government. The improvement of the situation of minorities in Slovakia, consequently, was only one part of a wider program to regain a positive momentum in the transition process and to restore democracy and the rule of law.

The Legal Framework of Minority Protection

1. Constitutional Provisions

The Constitution of the Slovak Republic of September 1992 includes a number of minority-relevant provisions. Slovak is declared the official language of the Slovak Republic, while the use of other languages in official communications is subject to further simple legislation (art. 6). Fundamental rights are guaranteed to anyone regardless of nationality or ethnic origin, and no person is to be denied legal rights, discriminated against, or favoured on these grounds (art. 12). Membership in any national minority or ethnic group must not be used to the detriment of individuals (art. 32). Citizens who are members of national minorities or ethnic groups are guaranteed equal opportunities. Specifically mentioned are the rights to promote their cultural heritage, to receive and disseminate information in their mother tongues, to form associations, and to create and maintain educational and cultural institutions, all of which is subject to further simple legislation. In addition to the right to learn the official language, members of national minorities or ethnic groups are also guaranteed the right to be educated in a minority language, the right to use a minority language in official communications, and the right to participate in

decision-making in matters affecting the national minorities and ethnic groups. These provisions are restricted by a regulation that determines that the exercise of these rights must not threaten the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Slovak Republic or discriminate against other citizens (art. 34).

2. Simple Legislation

The most important piece of simple legislation that affects minorities directly is the Language Law. In its 1990 version, it determined, in accordance with the constitution, that the official language is Slovak (art. 2). Exceptions from this rule were made by allowing the use of Czech in dealings with authorities and similarly the use of minority languages in communities with more than 20% minority share in the population. However, officials were not obliged to speak the respective minority language and all official documents were to be issued in Slovak (art. 6). There were no restrictions on the use of minority languages in the private sphere. Revisions to the language law in 1995 were not implemented, thus creating a situation of legal insecurity for minorities. After months of discussions within the new government coalition, a new minority language bill was introduced in parliament in June 1999 and approved on 10 July. The 1993 Radio and TV Law requires electronic media to spend a significant amount of the production of broadcasts on the preservation of the national identity and the identities of national and ethnic minorities (art. 9/2) and makes licensing in part dependent on the commitment to fulfil this obligation (art. 10/4).

A Municipal Election Law of 1998 had decreed, among other things, that the total number of seats obtained candidates of any ethnic group must not be higher than their total share in the population in the respective municipality, thus giving certain advantages to Slovaks in all those areas where they do not form a majority as it ensures their overrepresentation by allocating seats in local council according to ethnic proportions rather than votes won. Together with other provisions of the law, this ‘cold’ introduction of ethnic constituencies, however, was ruled

unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court on 23 October 1998, and has since been revised by the new government.

3. International and Bilateral Treaties

The Slovak Republic has been a member state of the United Nations since 1993 (1945) and has ratified the “International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination” in 1993, the “International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights” in 1993, and the “International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights” and the first optional protocol to it in 1993. The country has been a member of the Council of Europe since 1993. It ratified the European Human Rights Convention and the additional protocols to it in 1992, with the exception of protocol 11, which was ratified in 1994. The country ratified the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities in 1995.

Apart from the treaty with Hungary, bilateral agreements of a similar nature exist with the Czech Republic, Ukraine, Poland, and Germany. They make provisions for the mutual protection of minorities and the recognition of existing borders.

The Hungarian Minority in Slovakia

As part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until after the end of the First World War, ethnic Hungarians in today's Slovakia enjoyed significant privileges. The creation of the Czechoslovak state in 1919/20 completely changed the situation of the then approximately one million Hungarians north of the new border.³⁵ By December 1920, the re-organisation of administration and public life in the now Czechoslovak state, including the dismissal of around 100,000 Hungarian officials, the denial of citizenship to another 45,000, had caused many Hungarians to emigrate. By 1930, the Hungarian population had declined by 76,000.³⁶

The break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1938 was, after some initial hesitation, seized upon by Hungary as an opportunity to pursue more aggressively its course for Czechoslovakia to cede Hungarian-populated territories. An initial offer to this effect of some 11,000 square kilometres was turned down, and the International Arbitration Court in Vienna ruled subsequently on the territories to be annexed to Hungary to comprise more than 12,000 square kilometres and a population of just fewer than one million people, eighty-seven per cent of who were Hungarians. About 70,000 Hungarians remained in the Slovak state between 1939 and 1945.

In 1945, Czechoslovakia was restored in its pre-1938 borders and the new rulers pursued a policy of collective blame and guilt not only against the ethnic German community, but also against the now again substantial Hungarian minority. The Beneš Decrees deprived Hungarians of their citizenship rights, abolished their education system, and collectively sentenced tens of thousands to forced labour.³⁷ As part of the population exchange agreement between Hungary and Slovakia, about 75,000 Hungarians left Slovakia. Between 1948 and 1968, a gradual, but by no means complete, improvement of the situation of the Hungarian minority began. During the Prague Spring in 1968, Hungarian activists seized the opportunity to press for progressive minority legislation, which, although adopted as constitutional law 1968/144, was never fully implemented after the anti-democratic backlash. From the late 1970s onwards, intellectuals from within the Hungarian minority became more actively engaged in the struggle for democracy. While supportive of the democratisation process in Czechoslovakia, the Hungarian deputies in the Slovak parliament did not support Slovak independence in 1992 and voted against the country's new constitution in protest of what was perceived as insufficient guarantees and rights for ethnic and national minorities.

Today, a little more than half a million ethnic Hungarians live in Slovakia, making up for just under eleven per cent of the population, merely a third of the number Hungarians living on the territory of today's Slovakia in 1910. The vast majority (92.2%) of the Hungarian community

inhabits a continuous stretch of land along the Slovak-Hungarian border, where they constitute almost two thirds of the population. Well over half of all Hungarians in Slovakia (59.3%) live in communities with fewer than 5,000 inhabitants.³⁸ By their religious domination over four fifths are Roman Catholic, the rest are either Calvinists or members of smaller churches. An active Hungarian Jewish community does no longer exist.

Because of its relative population density in Slovakia, the Hungarian collective experience of suppression and deprivation in the post-war period and under communism, and the support they currently receive from the Hungarian government, the Hungarian national identity in Slovakia is very strong. Despite a lack of funding and a variety of restrictive measures previously adopted by the Slovak authorities, the cultural basis of this identity is relatively well developed, too, and a national organisation of Hungarians in Slovakia committed to the preservation and further development of this culture exists in the form of CSEMADOK, which plays an active part in community life. The Hungarian minority is also well organised in political terms. Since 1989/90, three major political parties have existed and represented the interests of their clientele – Co-Existence, the Hungarian Christian Democratic Party, and the Hungarian Civic Party. All three parties united in the Hungarian Coalition Party of Slovakia to make a more effective bid for political representation and minority rights. Relations within the Hungarian Coalition Party have not always been easy, but the 1999 party congress seems of the frictions between conservatives and liberals and between regional organisations.³⁹ They have been successful in local as well as parliamentary elections, and have fifteen deputies in the parliament since September 1998. Despite its being an outspoken critic of the previous government's minority policy, the Hungarian minority did not and does not harbour any secessionist aspirations, and existing demands for territorial or cultural autonomy or for an application of the subsidiarity principle always stress the recognition of the territorial status and of the existing borders as permanent.

Slovak Policy vis -à-vis Ethnic Hungarians

In assessing Slovakia's minority policy, a distinction needs to be made between the policies of the government of Vladimir Meciar, which was voted out of office in September 1998, and that of Meciar's successor as prime minister, Mikulas Dzurinda, which includes the Hungarian Coalition Party as one of four coalition partners.

The minority policy of the Meciar government had repeatedly been criticised for the restrictive nature of its minority policy and its discrimination against the Hungarian minority. Legal obligations exist in relation to educational and cultural matters, and the numerical strength of the minority has provided it with opportunities of political representation at all levels up to the national parliament.

The Slovak education system provides for, and funds, three different types of minority schools. There are schools in which instruction is exclusively in the minority language, schools where instruction is bilingual, adding Slovak as another medium to the minority language, and schools where a particular minority language is taught as a subject at school with Slovak being the main language of instruction otherwise. However, there are a number of limitations to that. Slovak and Slovak literature are always taught in Slovak. According to the 1995 language law, which determines Slovak as the sole language of all official communication, all school reports are issued in Slovak only.⁴⁰ Based on a number of government decrees, regulations for Hungarian schools (i.e., schools where Hungarian is the main medium of instruction) were tightened in March 1997. Since then, Slovak language, history, and geography are supposed to be taught by ethnic Slovaks only, teachers at Slovak schools in communities with a higher than forty per cent local population of Hungarians receive a salary supplement, and in mixed communities with a Hungarian population that do not have a school, the opening of a Slovak school is to be given preference. At the crucial level of primary education, a number of factors have adversely affected the number of Hungarian schools and that of the pupils taught in them, which meant that in 1991-92 more than

one third of ethnic Hungarians were unable to attend a Hungarian school, by 1996-97 this number had decreased to just under thirty per cent, but was even then still higher than in 1960 and 1970, when it had been under one fifth.⁴¹ At the level of higher education, there are limited facilities for ethnic Hungarians to study their mother tongue or selected subjects bilingually. An exclusive Hungarian-language university, however, does not exist.

In relation to official language policy, three language laws have so far been passed in Slovakia. In 1990, still in the Czechoslovak Federation, a language law was passed that regulated the use of an official (as opposed to state) language and the use of minority languages. According to this act, minorities were entitled to use their mother tongue in communication with authorities in all communities where they represented at least twenty per cent of the local population. Even though there was no obligation on part of officials to be proficient in the local minority language, the abrogation of this passage in the 1995 law was seen as a major setback, in particular since no further regulations on these of minority languages have been adopted. In March 1998, the constitutional court ruled that minorities were not allowed to use their mother tongue in parliament as this fell under what the language law terms 'official contact.'⁴² At the same time, however, the 1995 language law did not touch upon provisions in a number of other legal acts that provide for the use of minority languages, e.g., the criminal and civil codes, and the act regulating TV and radio broadcasts. A draft of the new Law on Minority Languages prepared by the Hungarian Coalition Party proposed to lower the population threshold to ten per cent and to grant official status to a total of eight minority languages, including Hungarian.⁴³ The coalition parties began the debate on the bill on 2 February 1999. This proposal was replaced in April 1999 by one jointly drafted by senior government ministers. The key provisions of the new draft provided for the use of minority languages in communities with at least 20% minority population. The Hungarian Coalition Party criticised in particular the high threshold, leaving out of the provisions 158 municipalities with about 100,000 ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia,⁴⁴ and the fact

that the use of minority languages was restricted to communities only and no provisions were made for their use at the level of districts or regions. When the Slovak Parliament passed the law on 10 July with a 70:18 vote, fourteen members of the Hungarian Coalition Party voted against the bill.⁴⁵ Although damaging for the coalition, the disagreement has not created a government crisis. This is partly because of the fact that neither of the coalition members had an interest in ending the existing arrangement. Partly, however, the reason must also be seen in the fact that the three Slovak coalition parties were walking on much thinner ice on this issue, having to reconcile their ambition to enter into accession talks with the EU with a high level of public xenophobia that is easy to exploit the current opposition. The Hungarian Coalition Party, backed by their kin-state, made a gamble in tabling twenty amendments to the bill previously agreed by the government (against the votes of the three ethnic Hungarian members), and lost. Given their stable electorate, the party had to lose little either way.⁴⁶ The political rhetoric used both by the Hungarian coalition party, charging a violation of their rights, and by nationalists inside and outside the ruling government coalition, claiming Slovakia's sovereignty being undermined,⁴⁷ highlights once more the degree to which ethnopoltics can dominate the political process in Slovakia, and to what lengths politicians go to instrumentalise it as a whole or some of its dimensions.

The 1993 recognition of Hungarian names (i.e., the possibility to register Hungarian names at birth without transliteration into Slovak) and the 1994 Law on the Display of Community Names (in minority languages) remained unaffected by the 1995 amendments to the language law.

Slovak cultural policy vis-à-vis the Hungarian minority was a similarly complicated affair. State funds are available for periodical and non-periodical print media,⁴⁸ libraries, museums, theatres,⁴⁹ and cultural centres. Under the Meciar government, Slovak public radio broadcasted thirty-five hours weekly in Hungarian, and there was a weekly magazine in Hungarian on TV. As of 1 March 1999, this was increased to 45 hours weekly, and plans are drafted to extend Hungarian-

language broadcasts in the long term to twenty-four hours a day. In addition, there are a number of bilingual private local radio stations. As of 1 April 1999, the airtime of Hungarian-language TV broadcasts has been increased to a fifteen-minute daily news summary and two weekly half-hour programs on Slovak State Television all of which fall under the authority of a newly established independent Hungarian department at the public television station.

One problem that existed under the previous government and that the new government has begun to rectify is that funding is mostly made available to institutions controlled by the state, while independent, minority-run organisations and cultural centres receive almost no state support, such as the 1949 founded Hungarian cultural organisation CSEMADOK, whose subsidies were cut down to nil in 1996 and remained at this level in 1997 and 1998.⁵⁰ The tremendous task facing the new government in correcting the previous wrongs becomes also apparent from the fact that funding has been significantly cut back over many years, and the Hungarian minority has suffered disproportionately from these cuts, reflecting a policy approach of the Slovak government to 'revive' Slovak culture in ethnically mixed areas.⁵¹ The allocation in the national budget for support of Hungarian culture has decreased over the past years to 0.1%, i.e., about SKK 150,000 (\$4,500) in 1997 compared to over SKK 300,000 (\$10,000) in 1995 and 1996. In 1995, parts of these funds have been spent on subsidising the Hungarian edition of the pro-government daily *Slovenska Republica*.⁵² Further issues in relation to the cultural basis of Hungarian identity are the regulations on the use of foreign national symbols, including flags and anthems, which are very restrictive in their nature. In the same context, the 1996/1997 commemoration of the 1100th anniversary of the Hungarian settlement in today's Slovakia through monuments erected by the Hungarian minority met the fierce resistance of authorities attempting to prevent their erection or to force their destruction.

There are no specific regulations regarding the political representation of ethnic minorities at any level in Slovakia. Because of its size and the electoral co-operation of its three main political

parties, the Hungarian minority has managed to be represented in parliament. In the 1994 elections, the three constituent parties of the Hungarian coalition won seventeen seats. In the 1998 elections, their number decreased to 15, mostly because of revisions to the electoral law. Passed only in June 1998, the amendments forced the three parties of the Hungarian coalition to form a new party, as they placed Slovakia as a whole into a single electoral district and determined that each political party, including those running in electoral coalitions, must receive a minimum of at least five per cent of the overall vote to qualify for seats in parliament. The 15 seats (out of a total of 150) obtained by the Hungarian Coalition Party reflect relatively accurately the population share of the Hungarian minority. In a way, ethnic Hungarians benefited from these changes, as a continuation of the old, majority-based electoral system, in connection with the earlier changes to the boundaries of administrative divisions in Slovakia, had probably reduced their number of seats in parliament even more drastically.

Prior to 1996, Hungarians were a local majority in seventeen primary and two secondary jurisdictions. On this basis, 249 ethnic Hungarians were elected mayors and over 4,000 local councillors in the 1994 local elections. The redrawing of administrative boundaries in 1996 resulted in Hungarians being a local majority in only two primary jurisdictions, while their share in the population in five of eight new secondary jurisdictions is between ten and thirty per cent. The seats won by the Hungarian Coalition Party slightly decreased in the 1998 local elections to 224 mayors (plus seventeen won in various coalition arrangements) and to 3,767 local councillors.⁵³ Three further mayors and 68 more local councillors are members of another ethnic Hungarian party, namely the Hungarian People's Movement for Reconciliation and Prosperity.⁵⁴

The View of the Hungarian Minority in Slovakia

One of the most severe problems in the confrontation between ethnic Hungarians and the Slovak government are the fundamentally different views each side has not only on the history of their

relationship, but also on the present and the future. Both the Republic of Hungary and the Hungarian minority have failed to acknowledge publicly the wrong of the assimilation policies of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With regard to the present, the Hungarian minority does not accept the official Slovak interpretation of the country's legal framework for minority protection as above international standards. The minority has expressed its particular dissatisfaction with successive Slovak language laws and a number of aspects of state policy in the education system that clearly disadvantage and, in the long term, undermine Hungarian identity, primarily because of the reduction of facilities for the learning and public use of the Hungarian language. Since the inception of the new Slovak state in 1993, a growing lack of funding for Hungarian cultural organisations and activities has been claimed by minority representatives to cause gradual erosion of Hungarian culture in Slovakia. The simultaneous stepping-up of efforts to increase the prominence of Slovak culture, especially in mixed Hungarian and Slovak areas, is seen as an attempt of gradual assimilation. Even under the new government, minority representatives have not had any positive response to their demands for territorial or cultural autonomy on a regional basis. Although the principle of subsidiarity had eventually been introduced to the Slovak political system, this only happened after the redrawing of district boundaries had ensured the minimum possible amount of areas with local Hungarian majorities.

That the Hungarian minority has preserved a strong sense of its distinct identity can, from its own point of view, not be attributed to government policy. Rather they believe that "the Hungarians' traditional aspirations for equality and struggles to survive have not led to the desired results. Their struggle has ... merely diminished the effects of government attempts aimed at liquidating the Hungarian national minority..." With regard to the future, ethnic Hungarians insisted in 1996 "new means must be found which will create lasting legal guarantees for the equality of national and ethnic communities and ensure that the respect of the rights of national minority communities

does not depend entirely on the mere goodwill of the majority.”⁵⁵ With its joining the coalition government in 1998, the Hungarian minority has certainly come closer to influencing this process, and has already achieved some good results since autumn 1998. However, the situation for ethnic minorities in Slovakia remains difficult: widespread xenophobia, directed primarily at the country’s two most visible minorities of Hungarians and Roma,⁵⁶ continues to be exploited by political parties, including the post-communist SDL, which is a member of the present government. Accusations of parochialism and of ‘regional and strongly partisan politics’,⁵⁷ were countered by the Hungarian Coalition Party’s Deputy Chairman, László Gyurovsky, saying that ‘from a logical point of view’, Fico’s ‘way of thinking is at a level of a three-year-old boy’, and adding that ‘from a political point of view’, Fico was ‘positioning himself for a run at the SDL party leadership and wider support from ethnic Slovaks in the next elections.’⁵⁸

Despite difficulties within the new governing coalition in relation to the 1999 minority language, the situation of the Hungarian minority has improved significantly, and the political process, too, has become more stable and less xenophobic. A clear indication of these positive developments was the public acknowledgement of a spokesperson for the (ethnic Hungarian) Deputy Prime Minister Pál Csáky, in March 2000, that, although not all expectations of all minorities had been met, significant progress had been made in protecting minorities and their rights.⁵⁹

Ethnopolitics as an Issue in Bilateral Relations

The basic document regulating the bilateral relations between Hungary and Slovakia on all issues related to their mutual minorities is the 1995 Treaty on Good-Neighbourly Relations and Friendly Co-operation. Article fifteen, in particular, details the principles by which the minority policies of both states should be guided. As one of the more or less standardised phrases, at least in the European context of ethnic minority protection, the treaty states that “persons belonging to

national minorities shall have the right, individually or in community with other members of their group, freely to express, maintain, and develop their ethnic, cultural, linguistic, or religious identity and to maintain and develop their culture in all its aspects.” Furthermore, membership in a minority is to be a matter of free personal choice that must not result in either disadvantage or any form of inequality. No forced assimilation shall be permitted, nor shall the use of the minorities’ mother tongue be restricted in private or public. Conditions are to be established in which members of minorities will have opportunities to take part in regional and national decision-making where their affairs are concerned. Minorities are allowed their own political, cultural, educational, and religious institutions. Apart from article fifteen, which is specifically related to minorities, article twelve bears some relevance, too, as it regulates the co-operation in the fields of culture and education. The individual provisions foresee pupil, student, teacher and scientist exchanges, a mutual recognition of school certificates and academic degrees, the teaching of the respective other country’s language and culture in schools and higher education facilities, co-operation in teacher training, and the establishing of conditions necessary for the functioning of cultural centres of the respective other party to the treaty. Thus, a comprehensive framework for co-operation in, and mutually agreed standards of, minority protection exists between the two states.

The implementation of the treaty, however, has not been without problems. As early as its ratification by the Slovak parliament, differences in interpretations and expectations arose. The ratification of the treaty was accompanied by two unilateral Slovak declarations. One of them stated that ratification did not imply an acknowledgement of collective rights, the other one made it clear that collective rights, even if they were recognised, would not mean a right to (territorial) autonomy.⁶⁰ This interpretation was condemned by the Hungarian minority in the country who had read the treaty in exactly this way, hoping that this could pave the way towards (cultural) autonomy. The Hungarian government declared on the issue that it treated the Slovak statement

as a unilateral act not bearing any consequences for the international legal status of the treaty. Another controversial issue in the early period of the treaty was Hungary's Foreign minister signing a declaration adopted by a 1996 conference on 'Hungary and Hungarians Abroad' containing the ambiguous phrase that it was important for Hungary that Hungarian minorities abroad were satisfied with the conditions provided by the country they lived in.⁶¹ Slovakia took this more or less to be in contradiction to the Hungarian-Slovak Treaty and as interference into its internal affairs. Hungary, however, contended that by signing the basic treaty, Slovakia had accepted that minority rights are not just an internal affair of the host-state and has even encouraged Slovakia to get more actively involved in direct co-operation with its kin-group in Hungary. At the same level of disagreement, the Slovak government of Vladimír Mečiar obstructed the creation of a Slovak-Hungarian Joint Minority Committee. First, Mečiar rejected that members of the minorities should be represented in the commission because, in his view, it was up to the government (of which ethnic Hungarians were not a part) to decide on the composition of this commission. Eventually, Slovakia appointed two ethnic Hungarians to the commission in January 1998, both of whom were rejected by the Hungarian government and the Hungarian Coalition Party in Slovakia as not representative of the interests of the Hungarian minority.⁶² Thus, "Slovak-Hungarian relations deteriorated even further after the signing of the ... bilateral agreement. This was a totally absurd situation."⁶³

In addition, there was the occasional noise made by both minorities and the governments of their kin-states complaining about the lack of commitment by the respective other side to implement the treaty.

However, if one looked below the surface of the 'big' issues to the level of actual co-operation, the picture has been less bleak even under the government of Vladimír Mečiar. Several new border-crossings have been opened between Hungary and Slovakia and regional cross-border economic co-operation has improved. A Slovak Culture Centre in northern Hungary was opened,

as was a Hungarian Institute in Bratislava, both as jointly funded projects. Both governments have increased their direct and indirect financial assistance to their ethnic kin-groups and facilities have been created to support, through scholarships, the training of minority teachers in their mother country. Obviously, these are only moderate steps and, given that the treaty has been in force for more than three years by now, more could have been done on a domestic level by both governments to improve the situation of their minorities. Nevertheless, the implementation of the treaty, however slow and painstaking at times, is also an indication that there exists some commitment to resolve the issue of guaranteeing a widely unimpeded cultural development of the two national minorities. The level of this commitment, however, is determined for both governments by a variety of domestic and foreign political considerations as well as economic constraints.

With the change in government in Slovakia in 1998, bilateral relations in general have improved significantly, including the revitalisation of Slovakia's membership in the Visegrad group. On February 8, 1999, the Slovak-Hungarian Joint Minority Committee to monitor the implementation of the minority-relevant provisions of the 1995 bilateral treaty met for the first time. Cross-border cooperation on cultural and educational matters has significantly increased with firm commitments made by both governments. In September 1999, the two prime ministers signed an agreement to reconstruct a bridge connecting both countries over the Danube River, which had been destroyed by the German army in 1944. Both governments hailed this as a symbol of improving bilateral relations. Slovakia has also committed itself to increase the level of assistance given to with the Slovakian minority in Hungary, especially by aiding the 'development of mutual cooperation between Slovak and Hungarian municipalities [i.e., municipalities in Hungary inhabited mostly by Slovaks – S.W.] at cultural, political and economic levels.'⁶⁴

Although the relationship between the Hungarian and Slovak governments has undoubtedly become more cooperative since 1998, it is not without problems. Two issues in particular burden

Slovak-Hungarian relations at the bilateral level: the Beneš Decrees⁶⁵ and the new minority language law. Although all four coalition partners of the new Slovak government had agreed in their program not to open the debate on the issue of whether to rescind the Decrees during their first term in office, the Hungarian government has intervened several times on this issue, most recently in the context of a European Parliament resolution asking the Czech government to annul the Beneš Decrees.⁶⁶ The Slovak government has so far declined to engage in any discussion on this issue. The Slovak Foreign Minister, Eduard Kukan, however, made the point that if ‘the EU wants to deal with it, we will naturally not oppose it.’⁶⁷

The same fixation on conditions set by the European Union occurred in relation to the passing of the new minority language law, which both in terms of process and outcome, has placed a similar strain on bilateral relations between Hungary and Slovakia as the continued validity of the Beneš Decrees. Siding with the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, the government of Hungary has on several occasions expressed its dissatisfaction with the provisions made in the new law. The Hungarian President, Árpád Göncz, voiced his disappointment with the new minority languages law during his state visit to Slovakia in September 1999, after Hungarian Foreign Minister János Martonyi had pointed out in July that his government’s view was that the new regulations went not far enough to ensure the adequate linguistic development of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia.⁶⁸ In response to the criticisms from Hungary and the Hungarian Coalition Party, the Slovak government made it clear that the law as it was adopted had satisfied the criteria set by the European Union and the OSCE.⁶⁹ It is certainly true that the entire process of debating and passing the minority language law had been heavily monitored and influenced by EU and OSCE institutions. Several high-ranking officials had pointed out in public that only the timely passing of a new language law that would meet all the objections of the EU to earlier versions would ensure the beginning of accession talks with Slovakia.⁷⁰ Pressure was exercised equally on all four coalition members to pass an adequate law and maintain their government coalition.

According to the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of Human Rights, Minorities, and Regional Development, the Hungarian Coalition Party Deputy Pál Czáky, the EU country ambassadors to Slovakia had made it their short-term priority to preserve the coalition, pointing out to the Hungarian Coalition Party that they would only support a bill that had the backing of the majority of the government coalition, and thus not the draft submitted by the ethnic Hungarian deputies.⁷¹ However, in exchange for the Hungarian Coalition Party remaining part of the government, European officials also indicated their support for further revisions of the legislative framework in Slovakia and acknowledged that the new minority language law did not resolve all existing problems.⁷²

In the short term, Slovakia's fixation on doing just what is required to fulfil its 'European' aspirations has caused some problems for Slovak-Hungarian relations both at the bilateral level as well as within Slovakia and its governing coalition,⁷³ as the benefits of prospective European integration have not been forthcoming for the minority as expected. However, in the long term, this could fundamentally change. Given Hungary's strong commitment 'to help Hungarians living in neighbouring countries to live and prosper in their own homeland',⁷⁴ the Hungarian government is likely to raise this issue with Slovakia in the future as well. And Hungary's prospects to achieve concessions from Slovakia on both issues are not too bad. Already a member of NATO and from 2002, in all likelihood, a member of the EU, the country has considerable leverage over Slovakia (and other countries with Hungarian minorities aspiring to membership in either organisation), as it can threaten the exercise of its veto power in any accession vote. The down-side of any such development is that it, potentially, leaves a serious question mark over the future development of bilateral relations between Hungary and Slovakia, and thus over ethnic relations within both countries as well.

In addition to these 'big' issues in current Slovak-Hungarian relations, it must also be noted that the Hungarian government at times still takes a self-righteous attitude in its approach to Slovakia.

While it is true that Hungary has achieved remarkable results in its domestic minority policy, it must not be forgotten that these positive results relate mostly to smaller, relatively well-integrated, and in most cases even widely assimilated minorities. From this perspective, the situation of the Slovak minority in Hungary is hardly comparable with that of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. What is often also left out of the public discourse by the Hungarian government is the fact that even a pro-minority government in Slovakia can only go so far in implementing minority rights – economically, the country has still not managed the successful transition to a market economy; and politically, the level of xenophobia and the ease with which nationalist parties can exploit minority issues for their own electoral gain limits government action in this area. Statements like ‘a satisfied minority is the least dangerous minority’ by Hungarian President Göncz⁷⁵ are naturally ill-received on the Slovak side. They do not only burden the official relationship between the two countries, but also mistake the situation: Another change in government in Slovakia could easily turn a satisfied Hungarian minority into an endangered one.

Nevertheless, a statement issued by Slovak President Rudolf Schuster is equally true, namely that ‘relations between the two countries have never had such great prospects as they have today.’⁷⁶ It will now depend on the skill and determination of politicians on both sides of the border to turn this opportunity into a reality – to the benefit of their countries and minorities.

Conclusion

Ethnopolitics, as a concept as well as a reality, eludes easy definitions. It has not been my aim in this paper to provide such a definition, but rather to illustrate the many facets it has and to exemplify these by looking at three dimensions of a particular case, namely Slovak-Hungarian relations both within each country and across borders.

As the discussion has shown, the essence of ethnopolitics in most situations seems to be related to the issue of minority rights, or more precisely, their codification in national legal systems (including the incorporation of international obligations) and their implementation in the day-to-day political process. This means that ethnopolitics has become part of a newly established, and sometimes still frail democratic process, and that its outcome will depend on, and influence, the stability of democratic institutions in the two countries discussed and in the wider region of Central and Eastern Europe.

At the same time, it is not surprising that minority rights take such a central place in ethnopolitics, as they set, after all, the framework within which ethnic minorities can preserve, express, and develop their identities as the basis for the continued survival as distinct social groups. From this perspective, minority policy, as an area of government policy, must include language policies allowing the unrestricted use, in private and public, of the mother tongue; educational policies aiming at equal standards while not infringing a minority's right to reproduce its distinct culture through the generations also by means of education; and it must include the funding of cultural activities and organisations of the minority, a legal context in which these can develop, and the right of minorities to decide upon their cultural evolution in an autonomous way. Yet at the same time, it must be more than this and provide a wider framework of conditions within which minorities and their cultures can prosper and coexist alongside a majority population. These conditions have to include, above all, the right of minorities to have their interests represented in the democratic political process of their host-state and to be able to exercise influence on decisions that affect them directly. Obviously, the Central and Eastern European context is full of examples where governments have failed to live up to the demands and expectations of minorities since 1990. This, however, is not always a matter of governments' policy agendas, but more often than not also a question of the availability of resources to back up policy commitments with adequate levels of funding.

The analysis of the Slovak-Hungarian case has also demonstrated that there are circumstances that have not been caused by today's governments and cannot, or only slowly, be remedied by them. These include historically grown national sentiments, and prejudices and mutual perceptions of population groups, settlement patterns of minorities within and across state boundaries.

On the other hand, there are also areas where national governments and minority representatives can make an impact, ideally for the better. Inter-ethnic conflict can be reduced by cooperation between elites, by addressing power imbalances at various levels and by bridging ethnic cleavages or granting minorities sufficient autonomy to regulate their own affairs, so as to reduce the level of conflict and to compromise 'ethnic' issues. The previous case study has indicated that the ability to pursue such a more accommodative policy depends on the policy agendas of both national governments and minority political parties, and thus on the strength of leadership in the face of disruptive forces. It also depends on the perception of opportunity structures for gaining power and influence – by exploiting nationalism or advocating multiculturalism, and again on the resources available to pursue either. Central and Eastern Europe with its ethnically complex settlement patterns and the often arbitrary nature of state boundaries adds another variable to this equation. No state in the region is ethnically homogeneous, so governments facing one particular minority conflict or issue always have to consider the impact of the way they resolve one situation on the totality of their ethnopolitical context both in relation to their own minorities, to their kin-groups, and to the latter's host-states. This is particularly obvious for Hungary. Not only has the country itself almost a million members of ethnic minorities on its territory, but there are also approximately two million Hungarians living neighbouring states.

The Slovak-Hungarian case gains in complexity by two issues that are not necessarily always a facet of ethnopolitics: a bilateral dimension because of the interest Hungary takes in the situation of its kin-group, and an international dimension because of the geopolitical significance of the

territory. The bilateral dimension is normally played out through bilateral agreements and treaties and various degrees of intervention and pressure, but also includes a cross-border relationship between the minority and its kin-state, normally comprising of synchronising policies on specific issues and funding for a variety of activities. In this latter dimension of the cross-border relationship lie dangers as well as advantages. The relationship of a kin-state on its external minority can have a politically moderating influence, reducing conflict in the host-state, and it can help the minority preserve and develop its identity through targeted funding of educational and cultural activities. The dangers are equally obvious: minorities can be instrumentalised for other political purposes of a domestic or foreign policy nature of the kin-state, thus becoming objects rather than subjects of ethno-politics. While the direction this relationship takes depends on a variety of factors in each state and between them (e.g., political agendas of governments in power and of opposition parties, strength of national sentiment among the different population groups, other actual or potential ethnic conflicts on the state's territory or in the region, opportunity structures to achieve secondary goals through ethno-politics, etc.), it is also the area where the international context plays a major role. Governmental organisations at regional and supra-regional level (in this case NATO and the EU) have interests of their own and pursue them rigorously. The recognition by international organisations of the potentially explosive nature of ethno-politics has, over the past decade, led to a trend of setting global standards of minority rights and force states in regions in which international organisations have a strategic interest to adopt them. In many cases this can coincide with the interests of minorities, but does not always mean that all their demands are satisfied immediately, if international organisations have different priorities, as has been the case with the 1999 Slovak minority language law.⁷⁷ The Slovak-Hungarian case also highlights another dimension of the international context, namely the opportunity for one of the states to use its leverage, gained through different levels of international integration, to exercise pressure on the other, demanding concessions on issues

related to its kin-group. This has not yet become a reality in the Slovak-Hungarian relationship, but is a distinct possibility.

The Slovak-Hungarian case thus emphasises important aspects of ‘bilateral’ ethnopolitics in Central and Eastern Europe as a whole. Unique in the detail of its development, it nevertheless highlights the significance of the range of factors influencing similar cross-border minority situations in and between other countries in the region. These factors can be summarised as follows:

Table: Factors that Influence Cross-Border Minority Situations

| General Criteria | Inter-Ethnic Situation | Intra-Ethnic Situation | Host-State | Kin-State | International Context |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical experience • Substance of territorial claim • Strength of national sentiment in both nations and kin-group(s) • Presence of mutual/multiple minorities • Settlement patterns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level and nature of conflict • Power and numerical balance • Elite and group co-operation • Nature of cleavages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dominant policy agenda • Strength of leadership • Existence of rival factions • Availability of resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stability of democratic institutions • Internal and external minority policy agendas, and the underlying interest and opportunity structures • Availability and commitment of resources • Potential or actual other ethnic conflicts | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Geopolitical significance of the territory • International integration of each state • Regional interest structures and alliances | |

In the context of Central and Eastern Europe, the Slovak-Hungarian case demonstrates both how historical and contemporary developments affect the situation of ethnic minorities and the degree to which their rights are recognised, codified, and implemented. The comparison also makes it clear that it is possible to establish conditions in which minorities can preserve, express, and

develop their distinct ethno-cultural identities without posing a threat to the political or social integrity of their host-state, and how international and regional organisations can facilitate this process. Throughout the region, it is not enough to merely recognise the importance of minority rights for the survival of minorities as distinct ethnic groups, but without such an acknowledgement a fundamental premise of minority policy is missing, with all its implications for inter-ethnic relations and peace and security in the region. Too often, in the past, have the mutual misperception of aspirations led to the rights of minorities being overridden by considerations of state security. Recent developments of minority-state relationships in and between Hungary and Slovakia indicate that the two are not only not mutually exclusive, but could reinforce each other and set an example for the region as a whole.

¹ Most areas of today's Slovakia had been part of the Hungarian Kingdom before 1867, but with the latter being ruled directly from Vienna, Magyarisation was more constrained by the 'divide and rule' agenda of the court in Vienna.

² That such a policy of assimilation was ever conducted has been denied by Hungary on several occasions, including in a letter to the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities by the then Hungarian Foreign Minister, Géza Jeszenszky. Cf. High Commissioner on National Minorities, 'Letter of the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic as well as the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary', CSCE Communication No. 36/1994 1993 (Prague: Secretariat of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1994).

³ The term 'external minority' denotes an ethnic minority with an ethnic affiliation with the titular nation of another, often neighbouring, country. The term 'external minority' thus looks at the minority from the viewpoint of its kin-state. This angle is deliberate, because this external link is a crucial factor with major policy implications at domestic, bilateral, and international levels.

⁴ The Framework Convention came into force on 1 February 1998 and had been ratified by thirty-three states as of 16 January 2001, including Hungary and Slovakia.

⁵ The following can only provide an overview of key issues relevant for the subsequent analysis, but not provide an exhaustive theoretical account of all aspects related to the topic.

⁶ W. Connor, *Ethnonationalism. The Quest for Understanding* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 100.

⁷ M. J. Esman, *Ethnic Politics* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1994), p. 10f.

⁸ A. D. Smith, *National Identity* (London: Penguin, 1991), p. 20.

⁹ Cf. Smith, *National Identity*, p. 21.

¹⁰ D. L. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985), p. 41.

¹¹ Connor, *Ethnonationalism*, p. 104.

¹² Esman, *Ethnic Politics*, p. 15.

¹³ M. Weber, *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* (Tübingen: Moor, 1972), p. 28.

¹⁴ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 51.

¹⁵ Smith, *National Identity*, p. 83.

¹⁶ Cf. D. L. Horowitz, 'Irredentas and Secessions: Adjacent Phenomena, Neglected Connections' in N. Chazan (ed), *Irredentism and International Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1991), pp. 9-22, pp. 9ff.

¹⁷ NGO estimates are about four to five times this figure (Slovak Helsinki Committee 1999).

¹⁸ Part of the problem here was that the government withheld funds because of (alleged) irregularities in the use of funds by cultural organisations of the Hungarian, Roma, and Ruthenian minorities. Cf. High Commissioner on National Minorities, *Report on the Activities of the Team of Minority Rights Experts in Hungary and Slovakia*, OSCE Document No. REF.HC/5/95 (Prague: Secretariat of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1995).

¹⁹ Cf. High Commissioner on National Minorities, 'Letter of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic and Reply Thereto', OSCE Document No. REF.HC/12/96 (Prague: Secretariat of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1996).

²⁰ Cf. D. Ronen, *Managing Cultural, Ethnic, and Religious Diversities on Local, State, and International Levels in Central Europe: The Case of Slovakia*, Management of Social Transformation – MOST, Discussion Paper No. 50 (1999) [WWW Document] URL: <http://www.unesco.org/most/ronen.htm>.

²¹ There is a historical precedent for this kind of 'minority policy', namely the 1947 population exchange. Cf. below.

²² Cf. Slovak Helsinki Committee, *Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe on the Protection of Minorities in the Slovak Republic 1999* [WWW Document] URL: http://www.riga.lv/minelres/reports/slovakia/NGO/slovakia_NGO.htm.

²³ The Slovak Foreign Minister noted in a letter to the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in 1996 that the 'often expressed wish of Hungarian parties in Slovakia for territorial autonomy' amounted to 'convincing proof of the mentality of ethnic separatism' on part of the minority. Cf. High Commissioner on National Minorities, 'Letter' (1996).

²⁴ 'Slovakia losing patience with Roma', in *Slovak Spectator*, 17 January 2000 [WWW Document] URL: <http://www.slovakspectator.sk/slovakspectator/article.asp?id=2886>.

²⁵ Cf. Ronen, *Managing Cultural, Ethnic, and Religious Diversities*.

²⁶ High Commissioner on National Minorities, 'Letter' (1993).

²⁷ High Commissioner on National Minorities, *Report*.

²⁸ The Slovak Foreign Minister noted the limitations of his government in this respect in a letter to the CSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities stating that the authorities in his country were committed 'to guarantee the implementation of rights of persons belonging to ethnic minorities in all fields of political, social, and cultural life – present economic conditions taken into consideration.' Cf. High Commissioner on National Minorities, 'Letter from the HCNM concerning the Hungarian national minority in the Slovak Republic and comments thereto', CSCE Communication No. 308/1993 (Prague: Secretariat of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, 1993).

²⁹ Cf. below.

³⁰ After protests from the Hungarian parties in the government coalition, the original budget draft, which had only allocated SKK 34.7 million (\$0.95 million), was revised twice – first to SKK 54.7 million (\$1.5 million) in December 1998 and then to SKK 104.7 million (\$2.6 million) in March 1999. Yet, even this is nominally only two-thirds of the 1994 rate of SKK 140 million (\$5.7 million at the 1994 exchange rate), considering the rate of inflation, this would be equivalent to SKK 250 million (\$5.7 million) in 1999. All figures from *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 24 February 1999 and 18 March 1999 [WWW Document] URL: <http://www.hhrf.org/monitor>.

³¹ Government of the Republic of Slovakia, *Report Submitted by the Slovak Republic Pursuant to Article 25, Paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (Bratislava, 1999).

³² High Commissioner on National Minorities, 'Letter of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities to the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic and Reply Thereto', 1998 [WWW Document] URL: <http://www.osce.org/inst/hcnm/recomm/slovak/1998/11gal98.html>. As of 16 January 2001, Slovakia had not signed the Charter. However, on 17 January 2001, the Slovak cabinet approved the charter in principle, bring signature and ratification one step closer. Cf. *RFE/RL NEWSLINE*, 18 January 2001.

³³ In December 1998, it was reported that the ethnic Hungarian school superintendent of the Nitra/Niytra School District resigned soon after his appointment because of threats to his family. Cf. *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 4 December 1998.

³⁴ The presidential candidate of the new governing coalition, Rudolf Schuster, a descendent of Carpathian Germans, got the backing of a majority of Slovak citizens in the second round of the presidential elections on 29 May 1999, and beat former Prime Minister Meciar by a margin of 57.2% to 42.8%.

³⁵ Co-Existence, *From Minority Status to Partnership. Hungarians in Czechoslovakia/Slovakia*, 1996 [WWW Document]. URL <http://www.hhrf.org/egyutt/AD-PARTN.HTM>.

³⁶ Parliamentary Club of the United Hungarian Party, *The Situation of the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia* (Bratislava, 1938).

³⁷ Presidential Ordinance 1945/33 (citizenship), Presidential Decree 1944/6 and Parliament Act 1945/81 (education system), Presidential Decree 1945/88 (forced labour).

³⁸ Co-Existence, *From Minority Status to Partnership*.

³⁹ P. Nemes, 'Reversing Xenophobia', *Central Europe Review*, 29 November 1999 [WWW Document] URL: <http://www.ce-review.org/99/23/nemes23.html>.

⁴⁰ In January 1998, after stormy protests one year earlier, the Slovak Ministry of Education issued an order permitting the (fee-based) issuing of bilingual reports, which, however, do not have any legal value. The move to ban bilingual school reports had brought an abrupt end to a tradition that had existed since 1921.

⁴¹ Co-Existence, *From Minority Status to Partnership*.

⁴² This was despite the fact that minorities had enjoyed that right in all Slovak parliaments since 1920.

⁴³ The other seven languages recommended for official status are Ruthenian, Czech, Polish, German, Roma, and Croatian. Cf. *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 27 January 1999.

⁴⁴ G. Nieuwsma, 'Lessons in Democracy: Slovakia, its minorities, and the European Union', *Central Europe Review*, 8 November 1999 [WWW Document] URL: <http://www.ce-review.org/99/20/nieuwsma20.html>.

⁴⁵ *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 10 July 1999.

⁴⁶ L. Nicholsonová, 'Hungarian Language Bill Defeated', *The Slovak Spectator*, 12 July 1999. Of the two other ethnic Hungarian parties in Slovakia, one is electorally insignificant; the other only plays a role below the national level. Cf. below.

⁴⁷ I. Remiaš, 'Language law held up by squabble', *The Slovak Spectator*, 7 June 1999.

⁴⁸ In 1997, the Hungarian press in Slovakia consisted of one daily, three weeklies and monthlies, four scientific and art papers, six professional periodicals, two church and some regional publications.

⁴⁹ Theatres have lost their relative independence in 1996, when they were placed under the control of a regional, state-employed intendant. The new government in 1999 restored the theatre's legal status.

⁵⁰ The new government promised some emergency funding for CSEMADOK, but did not commit to permanently funding the organisation.

⁵¹ Commission on Security and Cooperation Europe, *Human Rights and Democratisation in Slovakia*, 1997 [WWW Document]. URL <http://www.house.gov/csce/slovakia97.html> Already in 1992, the per capita expenditure for culture had been almost three times as high for Slovak citizens (SKK 547.5/ \$18.5) compared to non-Slovak citizens (SKK 189/\$6.4).

⁵² *OMRI Daily Digest*, 31 May 1995; Ronen, *Managing Cultural, Ethnic, and Religious Diversities*.

⁵³ *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 21 and 22 December 1999.

⁵⁴ Slovak Helsinki Committee, *Report on the Implementation of the Framework Convention*. One further ethnic Hungarian party is registered with the Slovak Ministry of the Interior – the Hungarian Election Conservative Liberal Civic Party (Government of the Republic of Slovakia 1999).

⁵⁵ Co-Existence, *From Minority Status to Partnership*.

⁵⁶ In an October 1999 opinion poll in Slovakia, 87% of respondents said they would not want to have a Roma as their neighbour. Cf. *Slovak Spectator*, 17 January 2000.

⁵⁷ R. Fico, 'Hungarians brought own agenda to coalition', *The Slovak Spectator*, 31 May 1999.

⁵⁸ Quoted in I. Remiaš, 'SDL imperils cabinet stability' *The Slovak Spectator*, 31 May 1999.

⁵⁹ *RFE/RL Newslines*, 13 March 2000.

⁶⁰ Perhaps more importantly than these two declarations, the Slovak parliament passed an amendment to its criminal code in the very same session. If had not been vetoed by President Kovacs the amendment would have allowed to jail for a period between six months and three years individuals who act "with the intention of subverting the country's constitutional system, territorial integrity or defence capability", and those who "spread false information" potentially damaging Slovakia's interests could have been sentenced to prison terms of up to two years. Not surprisingly, many ethnic Hungarians saw this as a law directed against them. Cf. Ronen, *Managing Cultural, Ethnic, and Religious Diversities*.

⁶¹ This once more emphasised that the 'fate of three million compatriots abroad (almost one-third of the population of Hungary itself) has been a dominant theme of Hungarian internal and foreign policy under virtually all regimes' Cf. A. Liebich, *Ethnic Minorities and Long-Term Implications of EU Enlargement*, European University Institute, Working Paper No. 49/1998 [WWW Document] URL: http://www.iue.it/RSC/WP-Texts/98_49t.html.

⁶² *Hungarian Minorities Monitor* 19, 21, 24, and 30 January 1998.

⁶³ Ján Figel, Secretary of State in the Slovak Foreign Ministry in an interview with *Magyar Hírlap* on 13 November 1998, quoted in *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 14 November 1998.

⁶⁴ *Slovak Spectator*, 13 December 1999

⁶⁵ The continued validity of the Decrees in the Slovak legal order has been confirmed several times since 1993 and has so far made it impossible for ethnic Hungarians to have property, assets, and land ownership titles restored to them or to receive adequate compensation for the expropriations that occurred between 1945 and 1948. With nearly one-quarter of the ethnic Hungarian population in Slovakia working in the agricultural sector, the minority is at a severe disadvantage here.

⁶⁶ In the "Resolution on the Regular Report from the Commission on Czech Republics progress towards accession", the European Parliament called 'on the Czech Government, in the same spirit of reconciliatory statements made by President Havel, to repeal the surviving laws and decrees from 1945 and 1946, insofar as they concern the expulsion of individual ethnic groups in the former Czechoslovakia'. Cf. European Parliament (1999), "Resolution on the Regular Report from the Commission on Czech Republic's progress towards accession (COM(98)0708 - C4-0111/99)", Document No. A4-0157/99.

⁶⁷ *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 23 April 1999.

⁶⁸ *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 7 September 1999 and 21 July 1999.

⁶⁹ Nieuwsma, 'Lessons in Democracy'.

⁷⁰ *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 16 March 1999, 20 April 1999, 29 April 1999, 16 June 1999, 21 June 1999, 23 June 1999.

⁷¹ *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 27 July 1999.

⁷² *Hungarian Minorities Monitor*, 3 September 1999 and 6 September 1999.

⁷³ M. Kopanic, 'The New Minority Language Law in Slovakia', *Central Europe Review*, 5 July 1999 [WWW Document] URL: <http://www.ce-review.org/99/2/kopanic2.html>.

⁷⁴ Government of the Republic of Hungary, *Government Programme for a Civic Hungary on the Eve of a New Millenium* [WWW Document] URL: <http://www.htmh.hu/govpr-frame.htm>.

⁷⁵ Quoted in *RFE/RL Newslines*, 7 September 1999.

⁷⁶ Quoted in *RFE/RL Newslines*, 22 March 2000.

⁷⁷ For a comprehensive treatment of the international dynamics of the 1999 Slovak language law, see F. Daftary and K. Gál, *The New Slovak Language Law: Internal or External Politics?* (ECMI Working Paper No. 8) (Flensburg: European Centre for Minority Issues, 2000).