

## Reviews

### **Ladislav Macháček: How Are You, Hungarians in Slovakia?**

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The national composition of the Slovak Republic has developed in complex historic conditions. Today it is possible to observe that there is a considerably diversified structure of the ethnic population. The Slovak Republic is a multi-cultural country on whose territories live many national minorities. The first census of inhabitants, houses and flats carried out by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic on May 26, 2001 can serve as evidence for this claim. According to the Office, 18 national minorities live within the territory of the Slovak Republic. The latest results (from May 21, 2011) have confirmed that out of a total number of 5,397,036 inhabitants, Slovaks constitute 80.7 %, while the Hungarian minority accounts for 8.5 %.

This publication by Ladislav Macháček, professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences of SS. Cyril and Methodius University in Trnava, is one of the few research papers concerning ethnic minorities that is available not only to government experts and advisors of political party boards, but also to the general public. It has 76 pages and is divided into 11 thematically related chapters. The reader is offered a wide spectrum of information from the ENRI research project – East Integrity and Diversity. The EC project was dedicated to the analysis of socio-ethnic identities in Eastern Europe (Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, and Hungary), as well as to questions of individual or group self-identification and ethnic allegiance.

The first chapter, *Historical and Sociological Contexts of Minority Issues in Slovakia*, deals with the period since the establishment of the Slovak Republic in 1993. After the split of the federation of Czechs and Slovaks, the proportion of national minorities, and most importantly, Hungarians, has increased in Slovakia. It is not only the most numerous, but also the most developed minority from both civil and cultural viewpoints. A significant proportion of this minority lives in the vicinity of the Hungarian border. Since 1993, there have been attempts to establish harmony between the Hungarian minority and the majority Slovak population. The latest attempt to solve the issue of official language for public usage (2009) led to a deterioration of bilateral relations between Slovakia and Hungary. L. Macháček mentions demonstrations of Hungarian extremist groups in Slovakia such as the Hungarian Guard, but also the refusal to grant entry to L. Sólyom, then president of the Hungarian Republic, when he intended to visit a cultural festival, and the case of the unsolved assault of Hedviga Malinová, a female student of Hungarian nationality, which tarnished the image of Slovakia abroad. These events, which

took place between 2009 and 2010, were intensively covered by the mass media, and in general characterize the social situation and position of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. As noted by the author, these events also influenced respondents' answers in both the quantitative and qualitative frameworks of the ENRI EAST research. Since the occurrence of these events, many factors determining interstate relations have changed in both Hungary and Slovakia. The governments of Iveta Radičová and then of Róbert Fico undertook diplomatic steps towards Hungary, which led to the improvement of general relations.

A questionnaire constituted the main quantitative research method. Data collection in Slovakia was carried out by the FOCUS agency from Bratislava. Using the method of random choice, 801 respondents, a representative sample of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, were interviewed. The regional distribution of the Hungarian minority in the south of Slovakia was taken into account while conducting this research

In the second chapter, *The Place of Nationality in Collective (Social) Identity*, the author reminds readers that ethnic national identity represents only 17.7% of the total structure constituting social identity. Individual replies varied in different countries (e.g. in Hungary or Ukraine) and in various age groups. A hypothesis from the research of young European citizens' "identity" claims that identity is a term that should be strictly evaluated and understood in a situational context. In everyday matters, we can frequently observe that many factors are determined by the expectations of people who answer the questionnaires, who they are and where they are from. Those aspects of an individual's identity which can be observed at first glance are universal characteristics such as gender, age and race. The affiliation to a minority group was specified by a set of questions. The respondents were asked about their local, regional, state and the overall geographical territory they reside in as citizens with a certain national affiliation. Additional questions tried to evaluate the degree of trust towards social institutions and how they see the future prospects of their children in their own country and in Europe.

According to the author, a comparison of the three countries (Slovakia, Hungary and Ukraine) "demonstrates that minorities substantially differ in the importance they give to particular aspects which form their identity in those countries. The results of sociological analysis indicate the existence of certain 'predominant' factors determining the identity of minorities living in these countries. They reflect specific cultural traditions as well as key issues resulting from the long-term minority policy of the individual countries" (p. 28).

In the third chapter, *National Identity Structure and State Citizenship*, the research team of the ENRI EAST project has elaborated a specific typology of the "national identity" of the respondents. This was based on a combination of

two indicators – national identity and state citizenship. The respondents were given a chance to choose from various possibilities (I am a Hungarian; I am a Hungarian of Slovak descent; I am a Slovak). Most minority members identified themselves with the statement “I am a Hungarian living in Slovakia” (68 %). The research results led the author to formulate the following hypothesis: “co-existence with a majority society does not automatically mean cultural assimilation of the minority or the loss of ethnic identity. It expresses only the willingness of Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality to show a certain civic loyalty to the state. The institutional framework of the state has, however, the duty to secure proper opportunities for the cultural development of ethnic minorities”. In-depth interviews submitted by the author serve as examples of respondents’ statements, which indicate that citizenship and nationality are perceived as two independent but mingling entities in Slovakia.

In the fourth chapter, *Pride in Hungarian National Identity*, the respondents who identified themselves as “a Hungarian living in Slovakia” express a high level of pride. This chapter also deals with the issue of who is considered a “real Hungarian” and what it means to be Hungarian for these respondents. Respondents had the chance to assign certain characteristics and attributes to the term “real Hungarian.” The majority expressed their wish to preserve the habits and traditions of ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia; however, not all agreed with the opinion that they shouldn’t or couldn’t integrate themselves with the majority population as citizens. The respondents demonstrated this by declaring good knowledge of the Slovak language as a means of communication, and accepting the role and purpose of the official language, being able to declare knowledge of many facts of both groups’ mutual history, and abiding by the laws of the Slovak Republic.

The fifth chapter deals with important factors affecting the development of Hungarian identity in Slovakia. It can be stated that Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality consider the possibility to develop their identity as crucially important. The development of their identity goes hand in hand with the preference to speak Hungarian with their friends or colleagues. A mother tongue is a symbol of minority identity and, at the same time, a tool of its survival and development. In the majority of Hungarian families and households, only Hungarian is spoken, but in as many as 21% of Hungarian households, both languages are spoken. It should be remarked that even citizens with strong Hungarian identity showed satisfactory knowledge of Slovak. The respondents are interested in public affairs, and they gather information from various information channels, even those in Slovak.

The sixth chapter concentrates on social disparities and differences, conflicts and discrimination. Almost every society is characterized by certain cultural differences and unequal living conditions. Many differences and

inequalities are part of the culture, and members of individual citizen groups may see them as natural and unchangeable. On the other hand, they may be perceived as unnatural, and even unfair, causing social tension or even conflict. According to the respondents, the lowest tension can be observed among various religious groups, while the highest tension is between the Roma minority and Slovak citizens of (not only) Hungarian nationality. Discrimination based on nationality is present in different situations or places. This research has confirmed that Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality consider themselves discriminated against because of their nationality, especially when it comes to health care, employment, and religion. In general, however, these are not cases of classic discrimination where the victim suffers social or economic difficulties due to his or her nationality.

The seventh chapter analyses the trust of Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality in other groups. Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality show higher trust (61.5 %) than mistrust in people. Naturally, as occurs everywhere, there are certain individuals who do not trust anyone (5.5 %), mainly due to their own personal experience. Both groups show higher trust in members of the same nationality than in anyone else. The respondents trust in their own group, i.e. in the Hungarians living in Slovakia, which is quite understandable. Acceptance of “different” people in different life situations is one of the classic indicators of personal trust. It is clear from a first glance at the ENRI EAST research that those of Hungarian nationality are equally and without objections acceptable for the respondents in all life situations. Respondents expressed the lowest trust in the government and parliamentary assembly, followed by the justice system and police. In the trust rating, the media have surprisingly obtained the highest position. A trust indicator can also be seen as information which shows how many citizens would be willing to leave their country. According to the research results, only 7.2 per cent of the Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality declared that they would leave Slovakia if given substantial financial and social support. (Hungary is also among the preferred countries.)

The eighth chapter deals with the interest in politics, political participation and electoral behavior of the Hungarian minority. They obviously show a relatively higher degree of civic and mainly political participation compared with the majority Slovak population. Parliamentary elections in 2006 and elections for the European parliament support this claim. It has been confirmed in both cases that the participation of Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality was higher than the average participation of ethnic Slovaks. Besides political participation, participation in different non-political organizations, interest associations and societies is also important. For Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality, church or religious communities are most important to them. This

research has further confirmed that the respondents of Hungarian nationality are interested in politics in Hungary, but definitely less intensively and not as often as in politics (mainly ethnic policy) in Slovakia.

In the ninth chapter, the respondents answer questions related to contacts between relatives, friends, and colleagues in Hungary. Despite the fact that a break occurred in the natural co-living of families and wider kinship in the past, numerous and intensive contacts with family members, friends, and acquaintances across the border of the Slovak Republic have been found with the respondents. Mutual contacts are diverse at present and not limited to personal contacts. The respondents utilize modern forms of communication through mobile phones or the Internet, but personal contacts are considered irreplaceable for relatives and friends, or business partners.

The tenth chapter evaluates the impact of European integration on the Hungarian national minority's position in Slovakia. Citizens of Hungarian nationality positively evaluate Slovakia's membership in the EU. According to the respondents' statements, after Slovakia's entry, the culture of the Hungarian nationality has been given the same recognition as before, i.e. the situation has not changed. The citizens of Hungarian nationality responded similarly positively to the participation of their national minority in politics. A majority of them claim that the situation is almost the same. Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality have also shown concerns about the effects of European integration. These concerns concentrate first of all around questions related to personal and family safety, the decline of the welfare state, and the growth of criminality.

The eleventh and final chapter compares the viewpoints of three age groups. In this research project, the youngest generation is represented those of 18 – 29 years, the middle generation is represented by the 30 – 59 year olds, and the oldest generation is represented by the 60+ age group. The greatest generational gap between age groups concerned the usage of the Internet as a communication tool. It is the radio which connects the oldest generation with the world, politics, and the public. The young generation not only prefers modern information technologies, but follows Slovak mass media broadcasts substantially more than the older generations. The young generation has also begun to gather information and follow public events in Slovak.

As for the ethnic identity issue, Slovak citizens of Hungarian nationality, both young and old, equally claim allegiance to the dominant identity of "I am a Hungarian living in Slovakia." The households of the younger generation tend to speak less in Hungarian than the households of the older generation. Bilingualism in younger households is gaining ground compared with the older generation. In the domain of civic and political participation, the young

generation declares a substantially smaller interest in politics in Slovakia or Hungary as well as in minority politics in Slovakia.

This publication, based upon the results of comparative sociological research, is beneficial not only for students, politicians, teachers, and scientists, but also for the general public. Ladislav Macháček's publication offers an unconventional view of the cultural needs and interests of the Hungarian ethnic group, and it can help to elucidate some of today's issues concerning the quality of life of the Hungarian national minority in Slovakia and in Europe.

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