

## ETHNICITY AND NATIONALISM IN A CENTRAL EUROPEAN CITY

### (Bratislava in the first half of the 20th century)\*

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The author analyses historically repeated conditions of the growth and the decline in the significance of ethnicity in the milieu of the multinational city of Bratislava in the first half of the 20th century. Group demonstrative manifestations of ethnic affiliation passing to nationalism are followed in the periods of deep changes in political systems and their social consequences are pointed out.

The historically long-term coexistence of a variety of ethnic and religious groups of people both in towns and in the country is a characteristic feature of life in Central Europe. It also concerns the Slovak territory which, in the period of multinational Austro-Hungarian monarchy, belonged to the administration of the old Kingdom of Hungary. After the breakdown of the monarchy in 1918, Slovakia became part of the Czechoslovak state with the exception of period of Slovak statehood in the war years between 1939 and 1945. Slovakia has been an independent state since 1993. In the thousand-year history of the coexistence of Slovak, Hungarian, and German language groups of population along with ethnic or religious exiles and immigrants of various kinds and nationalities, there were some periods of inter-ethnic conflicts. The influence of the role of national identity, although important particularly during the 19th and 20th centuries in political, social, and cultural events, was only marginal in ordinary human relationships in ethnically mixed regions and territories and did not overstep the framework of individual relationships. The question of national identity always came to the fore in the periods of significant political changes within ethnically mixed twentieth century society and it has preserved its importance.

Since the fall of communism in 1989, we have also witnessed gradual shifts, for instance of the question of national consciousness towards the primary social values. Not only ethnic communities but also various political religious, professional or social

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interest groups created on the principle of the unification of ideas and interests within proceeding social changes started to emerge from the unified mass of the so-called socialist nation. We may say today that this quite natural period of the liberation of humans from artificial social structures was accompanied by growing social tension. A rapid process of the split of interests and attitudes of the community united on the outside but, as was shown later, rather differentiated inside was an important point.

The role of national consciousness, cohesion, and identity became an important argument every time that various interests and ideas of further development started to be defended on the basis of historical examples and experiences. On the one hand, the myth of the "good golden age" of democratic inter-war Czechoslovakia started to be declared where various interests of social classes of that time were successfully maintained on an acceptable level; on the other hand, reminiscences emerged of great conflicts of the recent years of our stormy century, which had afflicted the lives of many fellow citizens. The discrepancies and tendentiousness of the historical memory of the present generations thus contributed to the polarization of attitudes towards any political conception of further development and it was natural that public discussion began of cardinal issues which can be called by the general term of national interests. It should be mentioned that in identical meanings together with systematically formulated Czech and Hungarian national interests.

The growth and the decline in the meaning of ethnic consciousness and nationalism are perceived as a process which can, in Central Europe, be denoted as a historically repeated phenomenon. Our aim is to point out its social aftermaths and the forms of its appearance in the everyday life of the Bratislava community in the first half of the twentieth century. We do not analyse the development of the political interests of ethnic groups within the historical context but the reflection of significant political and social transformations in nationality relationships of the particular social milieu.

In search of sources, we assumed that the growth in the importance of ethnic self-identification is usually accompanied by nationally motivated public behaviour of individuals or groups of inhabitants. Such phenomena are chiefly recorded in the contemporary press, memoirs and the reminiscences of contemporaries. We find there concrete signs of ethnicity (manifestation of ethnic affiliation<sup>1</sup>) pointing to the preference of ethnic interests over other interests within a certain time. We suppose various forms of the group manifestation of ethnicity, but, in principle, they are:

a) manifestations of patriotism which do not arouse feelings of threat among members of other ethnic groups. Such forms of ethnicity manifestation are formed on the basis of declarations of sharing common interests with a person's own ethnic group; but regarding the interests of other ethnic groups as coequal (ethnic tolerance);

b) ethnicity manifestations within the frames of nationalism and chauvinism which evoke feelings of threat among the members of other ethnic groups. Such forms of attitudes are created on the basis of the priority of the interests of a

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<sup>1</sup> KALAVSKÝ, M.: *Etnicita alebo etnické vedomie?* Slovenský národopis 39, 1991, p. 357.

person's own ethnic group, without respect for the interests of others (ethnic intolerance). This scheme is an auxiliary methodological starting point for an analysis of semiotic systems in transparent ethnic relations (presented in public).

### *Disintegration of Austria-Hungary (1918)*

The geographical position of Bratislava where three ethnic groups meet and historical events resulted in Bratislava developing as a multiethnic city. The representation of nationalities is simply expressed by the older names of the city: Prešporok in Slovak, Pressburg in German and Pozsony in Hungarian. The name Bratislava has been used since 1919. At the end of the nineteenth century, by the side of the three main nationalities – German, Hungarian, and Slovak, there also lived large groups of Jews and Romanies as well as members of the Czech, Bulgarian, Croatian, Polish, and Russian nationalities. The population growth by several times, occurring from the second half of the nineteenth century led to constant changes in ethnic structure. The Germans represented the most numerous group of population together with Slovaks and Magyars, the proportions changed in accordance with the national policy of the ruling regime. Thus for instance, after the establishment of Hungarian as the state language in 1844, the 1850 statistics shows 42,000 inhabitants, with 18% of Slovak and 7% of Hungarian origin (according to the mother tongue). After Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867) by which Hungarian self-government was strengthened followed by the strengthening of the exclusive position of the Hungarian language in the old Kingdom of Hungary, the statistical data from 1880 show a higher number of members of the Hungarian language group (16% of both Slovak and Hungarian) although the population growth was minimal (48,000). In the following years of economic growth and increase in the importance of the city, the population grew in number (78,000 in 1910), 41% declared their origin to be Hungarian, 15% Slovak and 42% declared their German affiliation (compared to 66% in 1880). The percentage expresses, however, only the proportion of individual nationalities in the ethnic structure of the town. Quantitative recalculation shows that the number of persons declaring their Slovak and German origin remained almost the same but the increase in the number of Magyars was tenfold.<sup>2</sup> By interpreting older statistics it is important to say that at the beginning of the twentieth century the assimilation nationality policy came to a head in the Kingdom of Hungary. The reason presented by state ideology was the historical necessity of creating a united state nation. Its consequences also included the fact that by declaring Hungarian affiliation (e.g. linguistic) and pro-Hungarian orientation, the members of non-Hungarian families also had possibilities to assert themselves in social

<sup>2</sup> GAJDOŠ, P.: *K problematike demografického vývoja Bratislavu od konca 19. storočia do súčasnosti*. In: Slovenský národopis 35, 1987, pp. 259-266. PROVAZNÍK, D.: Národnostné pomery v Bratislave. In: *Dejiny Bratislavu*. Bratislava 1966, pp. 349-354.

life and penetrate into the middle and higher classes. This explains the principal change in the national structure of Bratislava after the dissolution of Austria-Hungary, since one year after the upheaval, Slovaks and Czech immigrants created together almost one-third of the population.<sup>3</sup>

The full consequences of the nationality situation from the period of the monarchy were shown after the Czechoslovak Republic came into existence in 1918. The ruling political forces supported by the Hungarian population did not intend to give up the territories separated from the old Kingdom of Hungary. They did not want to give up Bratislava either, which was, also for that reason, declared as the seat of the state power in Slovakia by the Czechoslovak government. The arrival of the Ministerial envoy to the city was continuously postponed until February 1919 because of the expected resistance of the citizens. Hungarian air forces threw out propaganda leaflets against the new Republic on the city, Hungarian flags were flying from the windows. Before the arrival of the government, workers, railwaymen, postmen and other state employees went out on strike. The new power tried to calm the situation down with demonstrative counter-propaganda. Czech and Slovak flags appeared in the streets, the government delegation was welcomed by a triumphal arch and by crowds of supporters of the new Republic lining the streets, and, as the contemporary press wrote, *there was a lot of music and singing*. V. Šrobár, the Minister for Slovakia, addressed the citizens in Slovak, Hungarian and German, emphasizing that *every citizen of the Czechoslovak Republic, will have the right to live in freedom, to cultivate his national culture*. He expressed his hope that *nationality issues will be successfully resolved and the beautiful city on the river Danube will become the object of envy throughout Europe* (1919). However, the reaction was negative, shots were heard from windows and after a clash with soldiers six people died and twenty were wounded. Chaos, looting and riots led to the declaration of martial law. It was not until April 1919 that the city delegation travelled to Prague to visit President T. G. Masaryk and to explain the *feelings of the citizens of Bratislava which wants to launch its journey towards reconciliation and understanding*.

In that period the city underwent major changes in its social structure. Political groupings and their objectives started to be organized again, the structure of citizens changed, the interests of individual ethnic groups were uncovered; this influenced the changes in political, social and cultural life. Contemporary articles reveal the ethnic closeness of burgher society, saying that during the monarchy the Slovak language was hardly ever heard in offices, banks, more expensive shops, schools, cafés, and restaurants or in the promenade: *It was only heard in factories and suburbs* (1919). The gradual increase and application of Slovak and Czech citizenship in the new Republic was refused by the local burgher class; e.g. during the sitting of

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<sup>3</sup> Statistics of November 1919 reports 83,223 inhabitants, of which 36.3% were Germans, 32.4% Slovaks and Czechs, 29.5% Magyars and 1.8%, other nationalities. Slovenský denník II., 16.11.1919, p. 3.

municipality there was an opinion that it is *the self-assertion of the foreigners who rob burghers and workers of bread* (1920). The feelings of the existential threat were associated with the demands for preservation of the rights of the autochthonous population (meaning the German and Hungarian majority). The adherents of the Republic were contemptuously denoted as incomers and they felt that attitude in various situations. The Slovak population suffered nationality assaults, humiliation and dismissals, e.g. from cafés and restaurants, whose owners tried to maintain their "home" flavour. It was an unfavourable social situation and Czech immigrants employed in the state administration gathered, and lived in interest groups with their own programme (cultural, union, sport, tourist), which was a sort of defensive reflex.

It was difficult for the Hungarian population to give up the position of the ruling nation. Its members mostly formed the administrative class which was directly endangered by changes in public administration, in schools or in cultural institutions. The positions were given to the members of the till then unrecognized nation. Within this framework they showed aversion to the consequences of the proceeding social changes. They were strongly afflicted by the interruption of the continuity of the state and bonds with the mother nation. Almost immediately after the upheaval they initiated the campaign for the protection of minority rights.

The German community, consisting predominantly of entrepreneurs and merchants, was proud of the feeling of the majority nation in the city, of its cultural uniqueness and maturity but its members also admitted that *the culture of these Germans is neither Reich-German nor Austro-German but Bratislava-German. The Bratislava of today is a peculiar formation of the cultures of the three nations living in this city* (1919). The Germans published their opinion that it was a mistake not to teach their children either German or Slovak in their press. In the spirit of traditional cooperation of Magyars and Germans during the monarchy they inclined to the Hungarian political forces within the Christian-social party. A different line of German political efforts was represented by the Sudeten German party, whose programme was declared by Dr. Logdman in Prague: *We shall never reconcile ourselves with the position of minority nation. If we are forced to be Czechoslovak subjects we want to be full citizens with all the rights that belong to us* (1919). This politician also came to Bratislava during the election campaign. The reaction to his agitation for uniting Germans and Magyars in their struggle against the Czechs and Slovaks was a surprise: *The Bratislava Germans and Magyars did not listen to the speaker at all, they hindered him from speaking* (1920). The political conception of collaboration within Czechoslovakia put forward had not yet been welcome, it would have meant recognition of the existing state formation, which they did not trust. The political atmosphere is well defined by a Czech author (1924): *there is no other place like Bratislava where so much of old Austria flickers*.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> PŘIBÍK, Z.: *Živá tôňa*. In: Slovenský denník VII., No. 165, 22.7.1924, p. 1.

The proponents of the new Republic saw their primary task in enforcing the public use of the new state language (codified in 1920). Public signs in the city were still Hungarian or bilingual (Hungarian and German), state employees and merchants whose contact with the public was most frequent either did not speak or did not want to speak Slovak or Czech. The situation was solved under pressure, which again raised resistance and nationalist passions. Misunderstandings were accompanied by the first attempts at using the Slovak language in public. Billboards, official documents or restaurant menus were full of grammatical mistakes, which often were used as a source of entertainment, more often as unwillingness even intentional "disrespect for the state language". Efforts to use the new language resulted in the development of a special Bratislava language, composed of all the languages known in the city.

In the tense situation of the ongoing social changes, the use of a particular language in public was not a mere instrument of communication any more. Language became a significant demonstrator of ethnicity and the source of nationalist misunderstandings. The conflicts concerning language were also transferred to the church. The demand to celebrate Mass for the Czechoslovak public in an intelligible language was solved slowly and with unwillingness from the church circles. In 1921, it was said that although the Czechoslovak population represented more than 40% of the city inhabitants, in the most visited Holy Trinity parish, there were priests who *could not speak and did not want to speak Slovak*. The ideas of the revival of Hungarian statehood were expressed in public or secretly manifested in churches. Prayers and festive services to the traditional patrons of the old Kingdom of Hungary were used for that purpose.

Immediately after the upheaval, old state symbols on public buildings, street names, official names of state administrative buildings but also of private firms, public memorials, etc. were also perceived as typical signs of the monarchy and Magyarism and became the centre of attention. The opponents of the new state declared them to be harmless cultural monuments and traditional signs, the Czechoslovakists considered them to be a public provocation. Their removal, renaming of streets, officially ordered Slovakizing of public signs was launched. Semi-military troops of legionaries began at first with removing of the symbols of the Hungarian St. Stephen's Crown located on public buildings and regarded as "badges of shame". The statue of the poet A. Petőfi was moved from the centre of the city after it had become the place for meetings celebrating anniversaries of the 1848 Hungarian revolution. The statue of Maria Theresia erected on the commemorative crown hill was broken and when the last piece fell down, they cried with joy: Hallo! Long live the Czechoslovak Republic!

Frequent parades of military and semi-military troops in squares and their regular participation in various processions in the streets were demonstrations of the Czechoslovak presence in the city, of strength and courage to protect the Republic. They took part in celebrations of public holidays, anniversaries and events, state fu-

nerals, welcomes of both official and unofficial guests. State flags decorated the streets, reveilles in the city by marching garrison music bands playing from early morning in the streets, festive fires, fireworks, salvos, folk festivals, processions and gatherings of the supporters of the Republic, organization of Slovak groups in folk costumes, propaganda by leaflets and placards, etc. according to the character of the occasion. The celebrations of 28th October (anniversary of the establishment of the Republic) had a special character; the first anniversary was commemorated by 101 salvos, festive procession in front of the city theatre, the oath of Czechoslovak Legionaries from Russia, national anthems, festive fires... The visible presence of soldiers in the city and public mass meetings of the adherents of the Republic strengthened the idea of the new state, which was constantly attacked by both hidden and open propaganda of its opponents (daily press, leaflets, dissemination of rumours, etc.) but also ongoing home and foreign events like the invasion of the territory of Slovakia by Hungarian troops of the Hungarian bolshevik republic (1919) or an attempted monarchist coup in Hungary (1921). Public opinion was also affected by unfavourable foreign commentaries or leaflets, thrown down from Hungarian planes on the city and pasted up or spread by "agents from Budapest".

The analysis of social attitudes of the time signalizes the basic stratification of interests of Bratislava citizens. Conflict situations appeared as ethnic discrepancies but the causes were more complicated. The polarization of attitudes towards the issue of statehood associated with the idea of the state as the only guarantee of the free life of the nation started to play a primary role. It is documented for example by the formulation in the Pressburger Zeitung published in German: *we do not want to live a miserable life, but we want to live, i.e. regardless of and in spite of the frontier to develop organically* (1920). The coexistence of citizens with their mother nations in one state was hardly implementable in a multiethnic city after the fall of monarchy. Every solution proposed afflicted some ethnic groups of the city and deepened their mutual mistrust. The process of dismemberment of the common state into smaller national units was thus accompanied by the growth of nationalism and chauvinism. The ongoing changes in the social status of individual ethnic communities in the city were the main source of tension.

Fear of ethnic intolerance survived as an experience from the previous political regime. In the Hungarian part of monarchy only the Magyar or Hungarian nation was recognized as a political nation with all consequences for non-Hungarian nationalities. The law on one state-forming Czechoslovak nation was enacted in the Constitution of the Czechoslovak Republic, although in terms of the democratic and republican arrangement it promised equality under the law and equal civic and political rights to all citizens regardless of racial, linguistic or religious origin.<sup>5</sup> The feared status of the minorities was thus created, uniting Hungarian and German citizens in

<sup>5</sup> KALAVSKÝ, M.: *Postavenie národnostných menšín na Slovensku v rokoch 1918-1938*. In: Slovenský národopis 39, 1991, pp. 143-156.

group attitudes versus Slovak and Czech fellow citizens. The minority complex was counterbalanced by placing the *natural rights of indigenous population above immigrants* who were, however, supporters of the new Republic. Political trends functioning in the city were based on this scheme since the dominance of groupings declaring different attitudes towards the form of statehood was evident. It is also documented by colloquial expressions for main political orientations of that time: Magyarons – monarchists, Czechoslovaks – republicans, and the new trend of Slovak autonomists – Ludáks (members of the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party).<sup>6</sup>

Nationality relationships changed gradually into the status of social tolerance. The first concessions from strong positions started to appear in the press diffidently. In 1924 the issue of three-language signs, sharply criticized before, was described in a light tone: *On the other hand, it is good: a foreigner visiting Bratislava who had read in foreign journals horrible news about inhuman oppression of the German and Hungarian minorities, would see at first sight at this babel of signs that the reverse is true* (1924). Fears of ethnic oppression from the times after the upheaval probably receded. The challenge of the mayor of the city to the people at Easter time *to stop party, class, religious fights and quarrels* (1924), without any mention of nationality issues can serve as evidence.

In the second half of the 1920s ethnic tolerance already prevailed in Bratislava society. This led to the harmonious coexistence of the nationalities of the city in the inter-war period often recollected and sometimes idealized. For instance in recollection of her childhood, K. Löfflerová (born 1909) said: *It is not only that I remember, I am even sad to think what a beautiful city Bratislava was... There was no difference between nationalities or religions. It was impossible that we would have been on good terms only with Magyars, only Slovaks or Jews or Catholics. We did not know of what nationality people were. One was Fric, another Štefan and everything was all right.* Those were the years of inward migration to the city, new streets and whole quarters were built, where people of various nationalities started to coexist. The poor Dornkapl was described as a suburb of three nationalities: *day by day new houses grow and Slovaks from Považie, Germans from other Bratislava suburbs and Magyars from Žitný ostrov live here in harmony.*<sup>7</sup> The old settlers also adapted themselves to the new situation. They controlled the centre of the city with its restaurants and cafés but also other traditional places of social communication where they created an atmosphere of national tolerance. Numerous wine vaults of Bratislava Germans are most frequently mentioned in this connection: *There was always a very pleasant and friendly atmosphere. We did not mind at all that in one corner people sang in German, in the other one Hungarian, and we sang Slovak songs. It used to be very sociable until 1933, when we suddenly realized that we*

<sup>6</sup> For details see LUTHER, D.: *Spoločenské konflikty v popreveratovej Bratislave (1919-1924)*. In: Slovenský národopis 41, 1993, pp. 16-29.

<sup>7</sup> MARKO, I.J.: *Dornkappel*. Praha 1938.

*really were different nations.*<sup>8</sup> That year reminds us of the advent of Hitler's party and the victory of nationalism in Germany. Its disastrous influence started to be gradually transferred into the political situation of Czechoslovakia. It is noteworthy, however, that nationally-oriented political parties had a hold on ethnic awareness throughout the inter-war period, which was made possible by the complicated nationality situation in the country.

### *The break-up of Czechoslovakia (1939)*

The establishment of Czechoslovakia was made possible by the idea of one Czechoslovak nation that was politically justified but incompatible with civic principles. That political manoeuvre led to the creation of the statistical, more than two-thirds majority of one nation within the state, which was a legal argument for not establishing Czechoslovakia as a multinational state like the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and thus removing a source of conflicts. The unity of the political nation of Czechs and Slovaks was, however, disturbed inside, chiefly by different ethnic awareness based on different historical and religious traditions, linguistic and territorial independence, etc. While the Czechs celebrated the Republic as a form of their own statehood, the Slovaks welcomed liberation from Hungarian national oppression but they became a "tribe of the Czechoslovak nation". The Czech political representation openly presented themselves as the owners of the state, which was reflected in the centralistic system of state administration, in economic life, in the occupation of the power positions of important Slovak offices, the police, army and schools by Czech immigrants, etc. These steps, rationalized by the necessity of rapidly replacing the pro-Hungarian-oriented state apparatus and by the lack of a Slovak intelligentsia in the first years, were gradually losing the powers of argumentation. Part of the Slovak political representation pointed to discrepancies in development and started to demand fulfilment of agreements concerning the autonomous position of Slovakia within the Republic and other changes following from it. It was the basis for the autonomist political current becoming more and more important, and the cause of ethnic conflicts between Czechs and Slovaks during the existence of the First Czechoslovak Republic.

The ethnic awareness of the German inhabitants of the city gradually changed during the existence of the inter-war republic. They saw possibilities of national development in a well-built-up German school system, the press, cultural groupings, theatre, etc. By comparing the conditions for preserving their own national identity in the period of the Monarchy and within the Republic they realized the consequences of Magyarization, when they declared in public that *they had also sacri-*

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<sup>8</sup> The recollection of G. Poláčková was published in SALNER, P. et al.: *Taká bola Bratislava*. Bratislava 1991, p. 95.

*ficed their mother tongue to the Hungarian state.*<sup>9</sup> The initial cooperation between Germans and Hungarians in terms of the renewal of the old Hungarian state was gradually fading away. The growth of German nationalism was an important fact, which was also transferred to neighbouring countries. Z. Zguriška's acumen can illustrate the situation: *Bratislava rang with cheerful German. I really did not know that so many Germans lived here. They spoke in a loud voice on purpose and when they met, they shouted as loud as possible "heil Hitler". My female acquaintances, whom I considered to be Slovaks – pretended not to see me. They started to wear dirndl and the men started wearing leather shorts which showed their hairy legs off to the world.*<sup>10</sup>

The Bratislava Germans inclined to an independent minority policy. They mostly did not identify themselves with the harsh demands of the Sudeten German party which made use of the strong representation of Germans in Bohemia and Moravia, constantly attacking, together with the Slovak autonomists, the nationality policy of the state. In 1937, the party leader Henlein challenged the Carpathian German party to closer collaboration during a festival in Bratislava; but the reaction was, according to the local press, "vague". Many German burghers did not take part in this festival, others sent their wives instead. German inhabitants of Bratislava showed at that time their will to resolve the nationalist tension within the state bred by Hitler's threats: *Future generations will not argue about minor language issues, they will devote all their strengths to building their common fatherland to create a happy existence for themselves and their children. We, the older people, can only feel sorry that we have grown up in a different atmosphere that we will not do it and will not be liberated from all that.*<sup>11</sup> They organized common visits to theatre performances for pupils in Slovak and German schools played alternately in Slovak and German. It was a good habit of the time to read introductory speeches in mother tongues of the participating citizens in public.

The Hungarian political parties enforced a sharper minority policy. In contrast to the German population, they argued that the position of the Hungarian minority was constantly deteriorating, that there was not enough schools, that they were Slovakized. For instance, in parliamentary discussion they maintained that *the Hungarian people in our country feel as if they are under serfdom, they need to ensure the instruction of Hungarian children not only in the Hungarian language but also*

<sup>9</sup> Slovenský denník XX, No. 230, 8.10.1937, p. 3 chose from the speech of the senator Keil. In the article "Minister Zajíček on Germans in Slovakia" (Slovenský denník XX, No. 9, 12.1.1937, p. 3), the member of the government representing the German Christian Social Party reports that in 1937 at the time of culminating nationality problems, school attendance was compulsory for twenty-two thousand German children, who received instruction in 528 German classes of primary schools, 58 classes of burgher schools, at two middle schools and one economic school.

<sup>10</sup> SALNER, P.: *Taká bola Bratislava*, op. cit., p. 20 ff.

<sup>11</sup> Neue Preßburger Zeitung, 12.12.1937, p. 1.

*in the Hungarian spirit* (1937). But in spite of the fact that they preferred spiritual bonds to the Hungarian state, looking at the longer period of life in the city towards the end of the First Republic, they did not organize any remarkable demonstrations. A spontaneous manifestation of a bias towards Hungary took place during the symbolic presence of the Hungarian regent, who passed Bratislava on the river Danube: *Quite a number of inhabitants, mostly Magyars, gathered in Bratislava on the bank of the river to greet Horthy* (1938).

It was the time of apprehensions about the more and more aggressive German fascist regime, about the demands of Hungary with respect to Slovakia and the overall uncertainty about the future. Under the pressure of propaganda (from September 1938 also of government order), the adult population abstained from public manifestations which might have been a pretext for external aggression. They rather gave their voice to their political representatives and the mass media. By their participation in mass public meetings they expressed their attitude towards the Republic and to Czechoslovak unity (commemoration of the death of T.G. Masaryk, celebration of the new President Beneš's birthday, celebration of the anniversary of the establishment of the Republic, unveiling of the monument to the Slovak poet P.O. Hviezdoslav, Sokol rally, Farmers' Day), or to the crucial political demand of the autonomy of Slovakia (welcome to the delegation of the American Slovak League and manifestation for the fulfilment of the Pittsburgh Agreement). During these events with controversial political goals, the national interests of the Slovaks were emphasized on an equal footing and genuine features of ethnicity were presented to a large extent (folk groups in folk costumes were invited, folklore performances took place, with the emphasis on Christian symbols, etc.).

Slovak autonomist movement did not have strong support among the citizens of Bratislava.<sup>12</sup> The proponents were found among the younger, mostly immigrant, generation and among students. They created an ethnically and socially limited stratum endangered by the consequences of economic crisis and unemployment but brought up in favourable conditions of national freedom which enabled them to acquire ethnic self-confidence. The leaders of the autonomist people's party were close to young people and they put forward a variety of cases of social quarrels, corruption as examples of the existential threat to the new-coming generations, which could not assert themselves in nontransparent relationships between party and economic interests (controlled by Czech political representatives). Difficulties with the assertion of the Slovaks in a harsh and not always fair competitive milieu were associated with the restriction of the universal conditions of national being, thus stimulating nationalist thought: *the state is the form in which a nation asserts itself* (1937). They enforced the idea which was condensed into a formulation by

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<sup>12</sup> In 1935 elections the Hlinka's Slovak People's Party gained 2 mandates in the 38-member municipal government. In 1938 this party gained 8,133 votes in Bratislava with its approx. 140,000 inhabitants.

one of the exponents of autonomist movement: *Remember that every Slovak, unless he has lost his soul hunting for money, or is an idiot, is autonomist to the core. Do not let yourself be misled by the opportunist pretence.*<sup>13</sup>

The autonomist Slovak students expressed an openly nationalist attitude. In the autumn of 1937 they pasted posters with the slogan "Speak Slovak in Slovakia" all over the city which launched the action for *Slovakizing Slovakia*. The problem was presented as purely linguistic: Czech teachers lecturing at Bratislava universities were asked to deliver their lectures in the Slovak language. The autonomist press pointed to the language question in all Slovak schools, offices, state radio, the local city theatre, etc. and thus alert people to the disproportionate employment of Czechs in Slovakia and the potential opportunities for Slovak applicants.<sup>14</sup> This action strongly influenced the cohesion and ethnic contacts between Czechs and Slovaks.

The Czechs settled in Bratislava and in Slovakia in greater number as late as during the Republic: *they entered a very difficult situation as volunteers, when (1918) the Slovak people faced the immense terror of Hungarian families.... They were building a new state, replacing pro-Hungarian officials, helping in establishing cultural institutions, the school system, police, army, in protecting Slovakia against the attack of the Hungarian bolshevik troops of Béla Kun (1919), etc. They were therefore deeply touched by the reproaches raised after twenty years that they hindered Slovak development; they did not accept the objection that two nations cannot nurture partner-like relationship on the foundations of merits, in a situation dominated by the power interests of political forces and greedy entrepreneurs.*

The Jewish population represented about 10% of the inhabitants; about half of them also declared their Jewish nationality in 1930. In their attitudes to the Republic, they accepted its democratic principles, but particularly the older generations declared their language and cultural affiliation to the German and Hungarian part of population, which raised numerous objections.<sup>15</sup>

Political resolution of nationality issues of the First Republic was not achieved. Paradoxically, the controversial interests of Czechs, Slovaks, Germans, Magyars, and Jews resulted in the collapse of the Republic; but Bratislava, where those nationalities lived together, did not witness any sharper ethnic conflicts. Young German "Ordners" marched through the city with all signs of their ethnic and political

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<sup>13</sup> The statement of T.J. Gašpar was published in *Slovák* on August 31, 1938, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Statistics of the representation of nationalities in the state administration was a frequent object of political commentaries in the press of that time. For instance, in 1938, the autonomist daily *Slovák* published the distribution of the 99 highest functions in the management of state railways in Bratislava: 74 Czechs, 21 Slovaks, 2 Germans, 1 Magyar, 1 Jew; in Bratislava lower schools, 11 Czech headmasters and 99 teachers versus 13 Slovak headmasters and 98 teachers, etc.

<sup>15</sup> SALNER, P.: *O meste a ľudoch. Kapitoly o Bratislave 1939-1989*. Manuscript.

affiliation, Slovak students also formed military troops, autonomist slogans were heard in streets, hymns were sung and meetings and demonstrations were organized at the memorials of the leading personalities of the Slovak national life. Those phenomena did not attract any greater attention from the public. It was the Vienna arbitration (1938) that led to crisis; when the southern territories of Slovakia were annexed to Hungary. On the eve of the meeting to achieve the resolution of the Czechoslovak question, Hungarian and Jewish young people demonstrated for "Great liberal Hungary". The reaction of the Hungarian grammar school students to the decision of the Powers to keep Bratislava within Slovakia, was a school demonstration: *Slovak professors were not allowed to speak at all, Hungarian anthem was sung and various Hungarian slogans were heard: "Pozsony magyar, minden vissza"* (i.e. Bratislava is Hungarian city, return us everything), etc. The anger of the demonstrating Slovak young people turned finally against the Bratislava Jews: *recently they were the most impudent supporters of the territorial reduction of Slovakia...* Windows and shop windows of Jewish and German houses were found broken in the morning, which allegedly had been done by Slovak and Jewish young people. Regardless of the real culprit (information services also worked there), these riots fitted into a long-term provocation of ethnic intolerance. Society was offered a clean solution – a nation-state.

#### *From multiethnic to monolithic society (1939-1989)*

It surely would be necessary to describe details of the formation and the existence of the Slovak state (1939-1945), which affected political steps in nationality issues in many aspects. After approval of the autonomous supplement to the Czechoslovak constitution (1938), voluntary but more often enforced (based on relocation agreements with Prague) departure of the Czech population from Bratislava was launched. At the time of the cession of the southern territories of Slovakia to Hungary after the Vienna Arbitration (1938), some of the Hungarian and Jewish citizens left the city. The conflict between the Czechs and Slovaks was completed by the occupation of Bratislava by Czech soldiers and arrests of Slovak political representatives (1939) which engendered numerous demonstrations, clashes with soldiers, shooting in the streets and one dead. Military intervention accelerated the declaration of the Slovak state. Czech families had to leave the city. The fears of the Jewish people of the political development in Slovakia were confirmed by the declaration of anti-Jewish laws; according to them the Jewish population was displaced from the city at first, later isolated and deported to labour camps and German concentration camps.

The war years deeply afflicted the ethnic structure of Bratislava. About one third of Jewish population was rescued in Slovakia and only a small part returned from abroad after the war. Since the Jews coming back were those who were primarily interested in assimilation, the typical Jewish part of the city has never been revitalized.

ized. Some Czech families returned. The decrees declared by President Beneš recognized the principle of the collective guilt of the Germans and Magyars for the events of the war years, the city lost the majority of the German old settlers and a number of Magyars also left. According to an old inhabitant, *all who survived and had not left, attended Slovak schools. Germans, Magyars, Jews still lived here but they were all already Slovaks, attended Slovak schools and they wanted to be Slovaks. Of course, nobody declared a Hungarian nationality and German doubly not.*<sup>16</sup> Post-war ethnic homogenization should have definitely resolved the nationality issues in restored Czechoslovakia.

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<sup>16</sup> SALNER, P.: *O meste a ľud'och*, op.cit.