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Review Paper

ETHNO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGES AND (GEO)POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES:

The Case of a Request for the Territorial Autonomy of the Hungarian National Minority in the North of Serbia (2008-2013)

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Summary

In this paper, the aspiration of the Hungarian national minority in northern Serbia (Vojvodina) towards the establishment of the Hungarian Regional Autonomy from 2008 to 2013 and the possible motives of such a request are analyzed. The paper's fundamental thesis is indicative of the fact that the main cause for such a request is a rather observable depopulation trend in the Hungarian community, i.e. the reduction in the Hungarian community's percentage share in the population of the Republic of Serbia and its northern province of Vojvodina. Strategies of the action of the political parties of the Hungarian national minority, directed towards the realisation of the idea of the Hungarian autonomous region are also demonstrated.

INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Serbia is a multiethnic state with a numerically predominant Serbian majority. The total population of the Republic of Serbia counts around 9 million. We say around 9 million because the authorities of the Republic of Serbia have been unable to take the census on the territory of the Autonomous Province of Kosovo and Metohija, for the most part inhabited by an Albanian population. According to the results of the census in 2011, the Republic of Serbia had a population of 7 186 862 without the territory of Kosovo and Metohija, which is around 380 thousand less than the census in 2002. This general depopulation trend is absolutely reflected by the Hungarian national minority living in the northern part of the Republic of Serbia, i.e. the territory of the Serbian autonomous province – Vojvodina. The geographic distribution of the members of the Hungarian minority is characterised by a trend of pronounced ethnic homogenisation with a high degree of spatial concentration in the northern part of the Province which also contain Hungarian municipalities with an ethnic majority (Raduški, 2013).

From 2008 to 2013, the political public in the Republic of Serbia was agitated by initiatives made by several political organisations of the Vojvodina Hungarians regarding the formation of the *Hungarian Regional Autonomy*, i.e. the territorial self-governance for the Hungarians in Northern Serbia (Vojvodina). In Serbia as a state with an already-expressed and rather complicated and challenging problem of secession (the case of the so-called Republic of Kosovo), this political move was mainly resented.

As early as the 1990's, an idea was born in the Vojvodina Hungarians' political circles – the idea that the Hungarian national minority in Serbia should have their cultural, personal and territorial autonomy. Essentially, the predominant segment of Serbian public opinion had never perceived the political, i.e. cultural autonomy for national minorities as an unacceptable requirement and/or a problem. After all, as early as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia's period of existence, national minorities were entitled to a broad spectrum of cultural-educational rights and privileges.

The majority of the (Serbian) population treated those rights and privileges as a completely justified and normal phenomenon in a multiethnic state. It was only needed for political circumstances to mature for the realisation and concretisation of the project, which was delicate for a number of reasons. Finally, in 2009, as the *Law on National Councils of National Minorities* was adopted, members of minority communities were given broad competences via their freely elected representatives with respect to culture, education, information provision and the use of their maternal languages in official communication. After the act had been adopted, a large majority of minority communities held elections for their representatives to national minority councils and began to realise a great number of competences. Yet, political representatives of the Hungarian national minority went public with yet another requirement related to the formation of territorial autonomy.

The fundamental hypotheses of this paper are as follows:

- The requirement for the Hungarian territorial autonomy has not been provoked by the bad legal-political and cultural-educational position of the Hungarian national minority in the north of Serbia – moreover, that position is quite a satisfactory

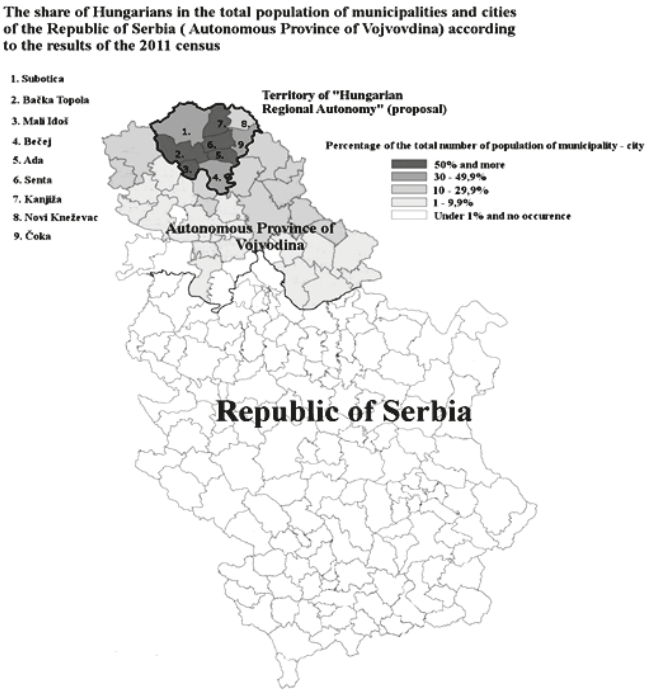
one;

- The main cause for the Hungarian territorial autonomy requirement laid in ethno-demographic changes on the territory of northern Serbia (the province of Vojvodina), also reflected in the fact that the Hungarian population in Serbia (Vojvodina) has incessantly been reducing in numbers and decreasing in percentages;
- The political organisations of the Hungarian national minority implemented different strategies of the realisation of the territorial autonomy project;

POLITICAL PLATFORM OF HUNGARIAN TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY

The most serious political platform defining the Hungarian territorial autonomy in the Republic of Serbia (Vojvodina) is *Zajednički koncept autonomije stranaka Vojvođanskih Mađara (The Common Concept of the Autonomy of the Parties of the Hungarians of Vojvodina)*, reached in Subotica (the biggest urban Hungarian centre in Serbia) in early 2008. This platform was backed by the biggest party of the Hungarian national minority in Vojvodina - *Savez vojvođanskih Mađara (Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians)* as well as two smaller political organisations - *Demokratska stranka vojvođanskih Mađara (Democratic Party of Vojvodina Hungarians)* and *Demokratska zajednica vojvođanskih Mađara (Democratic Fellowship of Vojvodina Hungarians)*, which, all three together, represented the so-called *Mađarska koalicija (Hungarian Coalition)* at that time. Pursuant to this document, the goal of the *Hungarian Coalition* was to form the *Hungarian Regional Autonomy* with the centre in Subotica. Apart from Subotica, this region would also encompass eight municipalities (Ada, Čoka, Bačka Topola, Bečej, Kanjiža, Mali Iđoš, Novi Kneževac and Senta) – all being municipalities where the Hungarian population makes an absolute or relative majority. The municipality of Novi Kneževac is an exception here, being attached to this region because of its geographical position (it borders on Romania, Hungary and two municipalities with a major Hungarian population). The *Hungarian Regional Autonomy* would have various authorisations – from the preparation of a development plan and the coordination of the development of the infrastructure to such competences as those regarding the use of the language, the functioning of health-care, educational and cultural institutions and to performing certain activities from the field of forestry, water management and the protection of the living environment (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2009: 110). This document explicitly stipulates that the *Hungarian Regional Autonomy* would have "a directly elected representative body, an executive authority elected by the representative body, its own property and source incomes" (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2009: 110). In other words, this territorial autonomy founded on the ethnical principle would be a "mini-state" or a "state" in the state of Serbia. The area of the projected region, including all the territories of the stated municipalities, is around 3800 km^2. It is located in the farthest north-east of the Republic of Serbia and has common frontiers with Hungary and Romania. According to the census in 2011, slightly fewer than 160 thousand Hungarians or around 70% of the total population of the Hungarian national minority in the Republic of Serbia lived there.

Map 1.



Is the territorial autonomy platform defined in such a way a manifestation of nationalism? If we acknowledged the opinion of a famous theoretician, Ernest Gelner, that nationalism is an aspiration to make politics and culture congruent and give culture its own political roof (*Gelner*, 1997: 67), then, partially limiting, we could establish a fact that this document really is a manifestation of a sort of "minority nationalism". For the duration of several years, the question of Hungarians' territorial autonomy in the north of Serbia had not been raised until the end of 2011, when four Hungarian minority parties in Serbia – *Democratic Party of Vojvodina Hungarians, Democratic Fellowship of Vojvodina Hungarians*, *Građanski savez Mađara (Hungarian Civic Alliance)* and *Pokret mađarske nade (The Hungarian Hope Movement)*, within the new coalition of *Mađarski preokret (The Hungarian Metamorphosis)* – reinitiated the question of territorial autonomy. These four parties accused the biggest party of the Hungarian national minority – *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians* – of not taking sufficient care of their people. According to statements made by the representatives of these parties, the goal of the autonomy is to preserve Hungarian identity. This requirement, together with the mentioned platform, additionally sharpened the political situation in the Republic of Serbia, whose central authorities were faced with increasingly stronger requirements made by regional parties in Vojvodina (first of all the League of the Social-Democrats of Vojvodina) regarding their aspirations to transform Vojvodina into a federal unit, i.e. to federalise Serbia.

THE LEGAL-POLITICAL POSITION OF THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MINORITY

After the Second World War had ended, due to the expressed ethnic heterogeneity and, also, on the pattern of the Soviet Union, the then ideological paragon, all the constitutive nations as well as the national minorities in socialist Yugoslavia (and, therefore, in Serbia as well) were politically, socially, educationally and culturally on an equal footing with one another. The constitutions of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, as well as the constitutions of its federal republics and autonomous provinces guaranteed the equality of all the ethnic groups and individuals in effecting their rights, irrespective of their sex, religion, nation and skin colour. The Republic of Serbia, as the legal-political successor of not only the SFRY but also the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992-2002), and the state community of Serbia and Montenegro (2003-2006), took over all international obligations in view of the protection of rights of the national minorities and incorporated them in its latest Constitution of 2006. Pursuant to the provisions of the constitution, the Republic of Serbia enacted laws protecting these minority rights, concretising them and enabling their practical realisation.

Three legal deeds are especially significant when the rights of the national minorities are concerned – *Zakon o zaštiti prava i sloboda nacionalnih manjina (Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of the National Minorities)*, *Zakon o službenoj upotrebi jezika i pisma (Law on the Official Use of Language and Alphabet)*, and finally, *Zakon o nacionalnim savetima nacionalnih manjina (Law on National Councils of National Minorities)*. The *Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of the National Minorities* mainly concretises those rights of the national minorities, which are clearly and unambiguously stipulated in the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia.

Finally, in the year 2009, the Parliament of the Republic of Serbia adopted the *Law on National Councils of National Minorities*. By applying this law, the national minorities in the Republic of Serbia, including the Hungarian national minority as well, actually acquired cultural autonomy. According to this law, the national councils of the national minorities are entitled to even 15 general competences – from the establishment of institutions, associations, foundations, economic organisations in the fields of culture, education, information provision and the official use of the language and alphabet, all the way to participating in the writing of regulations regulating the rights of the national minorities in the stated fields guaranteed by the Constitution. Apart from those general competences, the national councils of the national minorities have yet a series of special competences.

The Hungarian national minority plays a significant role in the political life of the Republic of Serbia. By a combination of circumstances, that influence may be said to be bigger than one could assume it to be, if we only observed the number of the Hungarians living in Serbia, i.e. their percentage share in the total population. The Hungarian national minority in Serbia is represented by a number of political parties, and the most significant and the most influential one is the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians*, established in 1994. In the 2008 general elections, together with the *Democratic Party of Vojvodina Hungarians* and the *Democratic Fellowship of Vojvodina*

Hungarians, this party made the so-called *Hungarian Coalition*. At the Assembly of the Republic of Serbia, the Hungarian Coalition (actually the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians*) had four deputies who were part of the ruling coalition *Za evropsku Srbiju (For a European Serbia)*, headed by the pro-western and liberal *Demokratska stranka (Democratic Party)*. Given the fact that the ruling coalition had a very "thin" majority at the Serbian Parliament in the time period between 2008 and 2012, the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians* frequently had opportunities to condition their support of voting certain laws by inserting their proposals in legal resolutions. In the autonomous province of Vojvodina, the *Hungarian Coalition* in 2008 won 9 out of the total of 120 deputy seats, whereas the *Democratic Party*, together with smaller coalitional partners, was the absolute winner with 65 deputy seats. Although the *Democratic Party* had a possibility to individually establish government in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the party offered a share in government to the *Hungarian Coalition* (actually the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians*), who accepted it, as a sign of the party's commitment to the multiethnicity of Vojvodina and Serbia.

The political organisations of the Hungarians of Vojvodina participate in the local government in almost every place where the Hungarians are the major ethnic group or have a more significant percentage share in the population.

THE CULTURAL-INFORMATIVE AND EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE OF THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MINORITY IN SERBIA

As early as in the time of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, the Hungarian minority was recognisable by a significant number of cultural and informative institutions as well as their substantial and quality productions. Currently, according to a 2010 report by the provincial ombudsman, and as far as the Hungarian national minority is concerned, information is provided via 10 newspapers, 15 radio stations and 5 television (broadcasting) stations (Pokrajinski ombudsman, 2010: 12). We should also mention that the media fully or partially communicate in the Hungarian language. The Hungarian national minority has a daily newspaper – *Magyar Szó (Hungarian Word)* – printed for the first time in 1944. Apart from these daily newspapers, there are several weekly newspapers and periodical editions printed in Hungarian in the Republic of Serbia (AP Vojvodina).

Radio Novi Sad broadcasts a 24-hour programme in Hungarian on three wavelengths (two ultra-short and one medium). The programme is informative-political and also educational and cultural. Apart from this radio, the programme in Hungarian is also broadcast by several local radio stations (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2005: 547). Within the Television of Vojvodina, there are two channels, and the second channel is mainly reserved for minority communities and broadcasts daily shows in Hungarian.

Given the total number of Hungarians in Serbia, the theatrical life of the Hungarian national minority is also rich and diverse. There are two professional

theatres performing plays in Hungarian. One theatre is headquartered in Subotica – *Népszinház (People's Theatre),* the other is in Novi Sad, the province's administrative centre – *Újvidéki szinház (Theatre of Novi Sad).* There are also three theatres intended for children. Apart from the theatres, a network of libraries shelved with books in the Hungarian language is also developed in northern Serbia. Every year, several cultural events are held with an aim to affirm and promote the theatrical, artistic and literary works of individual members of the Hungarian national minority. There are more than 180 associations for the preservation of the national, cultural and other specifics of the Hungarian national minority (Manić, 2011: 360).

In northern Serbia, apart from cultural and informative institutions, there is also a well-developed and branched network of kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, where the educational process is conducted only in Hungarian or bilingually (in Hungarian and Serbian). We should highlight the fact that the network was, for the most part, inherited from the time period of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

Members of the Hungarian national minority can also acquire their university degrees in their own language. For a long time, a Hungarian language department, where professors of the maternal language had been educated, has existed at Novi Sad University. What's more, at the Technical College, classes are organised completely in Hungarian (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2005: 552). The Faculty for Teachers in Subotica, where classes are also organised in Hungarian, started to work in 2006. Since 2005/2006, general subjects at the Faculty of Philosophy and the Faculty of Sciences of the University of Novi Sad have been taught in Hungarian, too (*Manić*, 2011: 354-355).

Generally speaking, we can say that members of the Hungarian national minority have no reason to be dissatisfied with the position they have in the Republic of Serbia. All general and special rights of theirs are consistently paid respect to and performed. After all, opinions expressed by members of the Hungarian national minority themselves are in favour of this observation. In a showcase research conducted in Vojvodina in 2010, an answer to the question "How do national minorities perceive the overall position of their communities in the northern Serbian province?" was sought, inter alia. Out of the total number of surveyed Hungarians, only 2% stated that the position of their national community was *very bad*. Their position was assessed as *bad* by 12.3% surveyed Hungarians. In other words, according to the results of this research, less than 15% of the Hungarians considered their position to be unsatisfactory. On the other hand, the position of their national community was assessed as *average* by as many as 45.3% Hungarians. It was considered to be *good* by 30.1%, and 3.7% said it was *very good*. 6.6% of the Hungarians could not assess the overall position of their national community (*Ristić*, 2010: 57). All in all, these data do not speak in favour of the justification for the creation of the Hungarian territorial autonomy in the Republic of Serbia. It seems that there is yet another reason forcing political representatives of the Hungarian national minority to demand such a form of government. It is about a constant decrease in the number of Hungarians in Serbia. Is this tendency really so strongly expressed and inevitable?

THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MINORITY IN NORTHERN SERBIA AND A POSSIBLE MEANING OF THE CREATION OF HUNGARIAN TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY

At the beginning of XX century, the north of the Republic of Serbia, today named the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, used to be part of Austria-Hungary, where, apart from the Austrians, the Hungarians were *de facto* the only constitutive people and had a real government. Then, in 1900, there were almost 380 000 Hungarians in Vojvodina. Ten years later, this ethnic community became more numerous and had 425 000 members (we speak in full numbers). In the next decades, the number of Hungarians in Vojvodina varied (increased and decreased) only to reach its peak in the 1961 census, with 442 560 people (*Kicošev, Njegovan*, 2010: 21). Since then, the Hungarian population has incessantly been decreasing, having gone below "psychological thresholds" several times. For the first time, this was the case in the 1981 census, when the number of Hungarians fell below 400 000, i.e. at 385 000. On the eve of the civil war in the SFRY in 1991, that number fell below 350 000, i.e. the fall stopped at 340 000. After the wars, an economic and social decline and significant migrations, the number of Hungarians in Vojvodina once again fell below the "critical threshold" to only 290 000 in 2002 (it decreased in comparison with the previous census by almost 50 000). According to the 2011 census, there were 253 899 Hungarians, i.e. 3.53% of the total population in the Republic of Serbia. There is a loss of almost 40 000 inhabitants in comparison with the previous census. Given the intensified departure of Hungarian inhabitants from Serbia for social-economic reasons (search for jobs, a better salary and better living conditions), once a new census is carried out after 2020, it will not be surprising that the total number of Hungarians in Serbia has fallen to below 200 000 or remained around that number, which would be yet another dramatic demographic fall in the contemporary history of Vojvodina Hungarians. Also, given the fact that the younger population (labour-capable and in reproductive age) is leaving to go abroad, the population of Hungarians in Vojvodina is additionally older than it was in the prior period. In science and publicist writings, there is a generally accepted attitude that there are three factors causing the demographic decrease in the number of Hungarian community members north of the Republic of Serbia – a very low birth rate, migrations and interethnic marriages.

The intellectual Hungarian elite in Vojvodina feels resigned to such demographic trends; however, they also feel an initiative for the creation of their own autonomy. A distinguished Hungarian intellectual person in Serbia, Alpar Losonc, referring to certain studies, establishes the fact that, "if a national community has fallen below 300 000 members, such a community, simply, begins to decline and sort of degrade itself because, then, it is very difficult for the community to preserve its cultural and other infrastructure […] The Hungarians have exactly reached that point, the very dangerous threshold, or, better say, they have already gone below the threshold" (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2009: 33). Especially alarming is the data of the Hungarian population in Vojvodina being extremely old. There are different opinions in demographics regarding the percentage

of a population over the age of 65, which makes the population referred to as old. For example, according to John Weeks, a community with over 12% of 65-year-olds and older is considered to be old (Weeks, 2002: 303). According to a 2002 census, the share of the over 65 population in the Hungarian minority reached almost 20% (19.36%), which made it extremely old. Then, the average age of Hungarians in Serbia (Vojvodina) was 43.20, and the ageing index was even 1.38 (Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, 2004 : 430). The average age of the male population was 40.9, and of the female population it was 45.0! According to the 2011 census results, the average age of Hungarians in Vojvodina was around 45 (Raduški, 2013). The ageing index speaks about the proportion between the old (over 60) and young (up to 20) population in a community. As long as the index is below 0.40 or as long as the share of the old population compared to the young population is up to 40%, such a community is outside the process of demographic ageing. As we can see from these data, the Hungarian national minority has already gone deeper into that process. According to the 2002 census, the share of preschool children was no more than 5.51%, and the share of compulsory-school children (between 7 and 14 years of age) was merely 7.70% (Ministarstvo za ljudska i manjinska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, 2004 : 430).

Such demographical movements alarm Hungarian intellectuals in Vojvodina. The historian Zoltan Mesaros mentions a research according to which the Hungarian community in Vojvodina will only survive for two or three generations or between 60-90 years. As he says, "the economic and political influences of the Hungarian community are negligible" (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2009: 88). The Hungarian national minority's parties treat such demographic trends and dismal outlooks as an ideal excuse for requiring territorial autonomy. One of the leaders of the *Hungarian Metamorphosis* coalition, Aron Čonka, urges political changes and, establishing a fact that the number of Hungarians has reduced since the last census, he has found the cause in that the Hungarians have reached the periphery of social life. As he categorically asserts, "if it continues like this, there will be no one of us" (Nova koalicija traži autonomiju za vojvođanska Mađare, 2011).

The results of the 2011 census were published in 2012, and not long after that they also provoked certain reactions in certain Vojvodina Hungarian political parties. As early as January 2013, Aron Čonka stated it was high time for a dialogue about the proposal for the formation of Hungarian territorial autonomy in the north of Vojvodina to start with Serbian authorities. He added that he had been speaking about that proposal before the members of the Sub-Commission of the Hungarian Parliament the previous month and that the Democratic Party of Vojvodina Hungarians (DSVM), the Hungarian Hope Movement, the Hungarian Civic Alliance, and certain non-government organisations were also in favour of that proposal. (Pressonline, 2011).

This request was repeated a few months later by Zoran Šećerev, the vice president of the Hungarian Hope Movement (PMN), who added that "Pleading in favour of territorial autonomy is the key point of our party's programme, and should we receive the support of our parent country, I think that this idea would be absolutely attainable and realistic" (Tanjug, 2013). Although Hungary has never clearly expressed its attitude

regarding that issue, there have been individuals sending messages in a likewise spirit. Late in 2013, there were rumours that providing territorial autonomy for the municipalities of Vojvodina with the majority Hungarian population should present one of the conditions for the admission of Serbia to the European Union. That issue was raised in Strasbourg by the European Parliament's female deputy Krisztina Morvai from Hungary, who was otherwise elected from the list of the Jobbik far-right party (RTV, 2013).

What could be the meaning of the request for the creation of the *Hungarian Regional Autonomy*? Given the fact that the Hungarian community makes up the majority in only eight out of 45 municipalities in Vojvodina, while, say, in more than 20 municipalities, or in more than 50% of the municipalities, it makes up less than 10% of the population. According to the 2002 census, the first reason for the creation of this region would be to "put a fence around" their own area with clearly defined frontiers, which would disturb the further processes of reducing the space where Hungarians make up the major population (it has already been mentioned that in two out of these eight municipalities, Hungarians make up no more than a relative majority, whereas their absolute majority is thin in yet two-to-three other municipalities). The second reason concerns a sort of ethnic-regional homogenisation and concentration – if the *Hungarian Regional Autonomy* were created, as time passes, in our opinion, more and more Hungarians living throughout northern Serbia in municipalities with a small percentage share of the Hungarian community (in more than ⅔ of Vojvodina's municipalities, the Hungarian population makes up to 20%) would be relocating to the autonomous region, where they would more easily avoid the natural assimilation processes, where the Hungarian language would be the first official language and the Hungarians themselves would be the constitutive people. It is about the planned "sacrifice" of the space for ethno-homogenisation – as time passes, the Hungarian community would withdraw from the major part of the territory of AP Vojvodina only to achieve a high percentage of ethnic homogeneity in one part of it. We think it is unnecessary to speak about the extent to which such a development of events would disturb the interethnic relationships, multiethnic and multicultural character of northern Serbia as well as, generally speaking, the political stability in the Republic of Serbia.

THE STRATEGIES OF THE POLITICAL ORGANISATIONS OF THE HUNGARIAN NATIONAL MINORITY FOR THE PURPOSE OF THE REALISATION OF TERRITORIAL AUTONOMY

Observing the performance of the political organisations of the Hungarian national minority, a conclusion can be reached that they are conducting a multidimensional strategy directed towards the realisation and concretisation of territorial autonomy.

As already mentioned, the most powerful, influential and best organised party of the Hungarian national minority in the Republic of Serbia is the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians*. From 2008 to 2012, this party has been an integral part of the parliamentary majority, not only in the provincial parliament of Vojvodina but in the parliament of the Republic of Serbia as well. During those years, this party has increasingly been exposed in public and on the

Serbian political stage not only as a minority party but also as the main regionalist party strongly dedicated to achieving as high a degree of independence of AP Vojvodina in comparison with the central authority in Belgrade as possible. During 2011, this party conditioned its support to proposals made by the ruling majority in the Serbian parliament several times by adopting proposals in favour of greater competences and financial allocations for Vojvodina. Given the fact that the parliamentary majority in the Serbian assembly was very "thin" between 2008-2012, the Government of the Republic of Serbia has frequently had to take into consideration the requests made by the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians*. What is behind such a policy conducted by the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians*, and why has this party been so persistent in gaining as big autonomy of Vojvodina as possible in recent years?

In our opinion, the reason for this is simple. In the first place, this party assumes that an ethnically motivated autonomy will be easier for the Hungarian national minority to realise if, previously and gradually, the Republic of Serbia is decentralised as much as possible, i.e. if as large a number of competences as possible is assigned to the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, or, in other words, if Vojvodina becomes a "state within the state". Within a more independent AP Vojvodina, where Hungarians yet represent a rather significant numerical measure with a plethora of competences taken over from the Republic of Serbia – this is at least what the representatives of *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians* think – it will be easier and simpler to make a request for the formation of the *Hungarian Regional Autonomy* than it would be in the centralised state of Serbia, where more important decisions are reached in Belgrade, and where the Hungarian national minority does not even reach 5% of the total population. All in all, this thesis of ours is also confirmed by the declaring of the leader of the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians* Pásztor István, who, at a gathering in Novi Sad in 2008, literally made a statement that "commitment to the autonomy of Vojvodina was also connected with awareness that the position of the Hungarian community is much better at the level of Vojvodina than is the case at the republican level because, in Vojvodina, the Hungarian community can have a bigger influence on the provincial circumstances because of its percentage share in the population of the province. For that very reason, the Hungarian community's elementary interest is to sort things out regarding as many questions as possible because, in that way, we will find ourselves in a situation to more easily transform our aims into reality […] When speaking about the autonomy of Vojvodina, it is known that we have pleaded for a far broader autonomy than is the case in today's reality. We have made efforts towards the autonomy of Vojvodina inclusive of the legislative, judicial and executive powers, for a broad financial autonomy" (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2009: 8-9). In other words, the *Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians* looked for an opportunity for the realisation of territorial autonomy through as big a legal-political fragmentation of the Republic of Serbia as possible. This strategy is time consuming and requires much patience but is rather more difficult to notice and, in the long run, can be absolutely fruitful. We could call it *the indirect approach strategy*.

Less influential parties of the Hungarian national minority have a different approach. As seen in the Introduction, the

four Hungarians of Vojvodina parties – *Democratic Party of Vojvodina Hungarians, Democratic Fellowship of the Vojvodina Hungarians, Hungarian Civic Alliance* and *The Hungarian Hope Movement*, within the *Hungarian Metamorphosis* coalition, demanded territorial autonomy for the Hungarian national minority, *now and immediately.* The informal leader of this group of parties was a very experienced Hungarian politician Agoston Andras, former President of the *Democratic Party of Vojvodina Hungarians*, who, in the early 1990's, when party pluralism in Serbia was being renewed, was the *de facto* leader of the Hungarian community. According to him, he and his party think "the question of Vojvodina is a Serbian-Serbian question" (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2009: 10). That does not mean his party is indifferent when this problem is in question; however, as Agoston himself highlighted, the main preoccupation of his party is "the Hungarian autonomy and the collective rights of the Hungarians in Vojvodina" (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2009: 10). At first sight, such an action strategy – insisting only on territorial autonomy – is not an especially fruitful one possible to realise because it is deprived of a political partner at the level of the state of Serbia to be supportive of that idea. Namely, according to the results of the surveyed attitudes of the public in the Republic of Serbia in view of the Hungarian territorial autonomy conducted in 2006, we can see that 53.8% of the interviewees in AP Vojvodina are explicitly opposed whereas only 7.1% of the surveyed absolutely agree (in between, there are transitional options: "I mainly agree", "I mainly do not agree" and "I am indecisive"). In central Serbia, 48.2% of the interviewed are categorically against (together with 14.1% of those who mainly do not agree), whereas no more than just 6.7% of the surveyed are those who absolutely agree (Helsinški odbor za ljudska prava, 2009: 14). So, there was no sufficient critical mass receptive to the platform of territorial autonomy for the Hungarian national minority, neither in the province nor in the state as a whole. However, it would be wrong to draw a conclusion from these data that such a strategy is inevitably doomed to failure. Namely, if regionalist or even separatist tendencies in the province of Vojvodina were abruptly empowered, even amongst the Serbian population, the central authorities in Belgrade could opt for a "desperate" *quid pro quo* – the Hungarian national minority would be offered territorial autonomy on condition that they deprive the project of "Independent Vojvodina" with federal or even confederal ties with Belgrade of their support.

The third strategy is held by different extremist groups among the Hungarians of Vojvodina, the most well known being the *Omladinski pokret 64 županije (Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement).* It is an organisation advocating the revision of the frontiers drawn in Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War, which does not acknowledge the Trianon Peace Treaty, in which the frontiers of the Republic of Hungary are defined in their present form. For such attitudes, the honorary chairperson of the organisation Laszlo Toroczkai, was exiled from Romania, Slovakia and Serbia (Istorijat, ciljevi i delovanje Omladinskog pokreta 64 županije, 2009). This organisation's goal is to network the whole of the Carpathian Basin, i.e. all the Hungarians living in the three countries we just mentioned. *Sixty-Four Counties Youth Movement* has its cells in the Republic of Serbia, too, in places were the Hungarian national minority

is the majority population or has at least a rather significant percentage share in the population. This organisation is supportive of the idea of territorial autonomy for the Hungarians of Vojvodina (as well as Romania and Slovakia,); however, essentially, it is about a transitional solution in the process of the creation of Great Hungary.

After 2013, the statements made by the political representatives of Vojvodina Hungarians in connection with territorial autonomy have been very rare; practically, that issue has been taken off the agenda, which, of course, does not mean that one day the same may not be actualised again.

One of the reasons as to why the Hungarian minority parties no longer insist on the concept of territorial autonomy is also a reduction in their capacity to blackmail in the Serbian Parliament and the Parliament of Vojvodina as well. The results of the elections in Serbia in 2012, 2014 and 2016, led to the creation of the very stable assembly majorities that were also capable of surviving without the support of the Vojvodina Hungarians Alliance, so this party could not blackmail the ruling majority. The other Hungarian parties did not even enter the Serbian Parliament. The situation was also similar in the Provincial Parliament, when stable majorities were formed after the 2012 and 2016 elections. In 2016, say, the Serbian Progressive Party convincingly won (63 of 120 mandates), whereas the parties of the Hungarian minority won a total of eight mandates (the Vojvodina Hungarians Alliance won 6 and the Hungarian Movement for Autonomy won 2 mandates). Only due to respecting the presence of the Hungarians in Vojvodina was the Vojvodina Hungarians Alliance invited to take part in the Provincial authority, which was accepted, too. Besides, the emigration of the labour-capable population from Serbia (namely including that of Vojvodina Hungarians) is so comprehensive and accelerated that the number of Hungarians in Serbia – namely those "users" of territorial autonomy – is significantly decreasing, so all of the proposals concerning its implementation are also becoming irrelevant.

CONCLUSION

This paper is basically focused on the substantiation of the thesis that ethno-demographic changes in or re-compositions of the ethnic core in an environment (in this particular case in the north of Serbia) produce political consequences mirrored at ethnocentrically motivated projects of the creation of (semi)independent, and according to the ethnic principle, modeled political entities (autonomous areas, regions, federal units and so on). Paradoxically, in the case of the Republic of Serbia, national minorities make the point of their requests for their institutional separation (independence or self-government) both when they are demographically increasing and when they are demographically decreasing. According to the 1931 census in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 400 000 people who considered Hungarian to be their maternal language and 355 000 persons whose maternal language was Albanian lived on the territory of the present Republic of Serbia. During the decades, as the Albanian population increased, their national minority demanded an increasingly higher degree of independence within the then Yugoslavia and the Republic of Serbia (in 1981, they demanded that the Province of Kosovo should be transformed into a federal republic). Today, there are over 1.5 million Albanians in the Republic of Serbia and the majority of them live within

the frontiers of the so-called state of Kosovo, which is not a UN member country. On the other hand, the number of Hungarians has been stagnating or falling, and, at the beginning of this century, when they were at the lowest of the past one hundred years and more, political representatives of this national minority also demanded a certain degree of independence – an autonomous region. We have already mentioned that the main causes for this decrease in the population are a very low birth rate, migrations and interethnic marriages. The creation of the *Hungarian Regional Autonomy* is not an adequate answer to these challenges – if the Republic of Hungary continues to be economically prosperous, members of the Hungarian national minority will continue to gravitate towards it. An individual's decision on the numbers of their offspring is a complex sum of different factors – social, psychological, and economic – and administrative-political moves, such as the creation of an autonomous region, cannot have a more significant influence on married couples' moods when speaking about the possible numbers of their offspring.

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ЕТНО-ДЕМОГРАФСКЕ ПРОМЕНЕ И (ГЕО)ПОЛИТИЧКЕ ПОСЛЕДИЦЕ:

Случај захтева за територијалну аутономију мађарске националне мањине на северу Србије (2008-2013)

Кључне ријечи:
Демографија; регионална аутономија; Мађари; мањине; Србија.

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Сажетак

У раду се анализира тежња мађарске националне мањине у северној Србији (Војводина) ка успостављању мађарске регионалне аутономије од 2008. до 2013. године и могућим мотивима за такав захтев. Основна теза рада указује на чињеницу да је главни узрок таквог захтева прилично уочљив тренд депопулације у мађарској заједници, односно смањење учешћа мађарске заједнице у популацији Републике Србије и њене северне покрајине. У раду су приказане и стратегије деловања политичких партија мађарске националне мањине, усмерене на реализацију идеје мађарске аутономне регије.