

Hungarians in Serb-Yugoslav Vojvodina Since 1944*

Historical Background

The southern counties along the Danube, Sava, Tisa (Tisza) and Tamiš (Temes) rivers, including Srem (Szerém, Sirmium) had been the richest, most developed and purely Hungarian inhabited part of the Hungarian Kingdom in the Middle Ages. The Ottoman conquest brought about a dramatic population shift between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the Hungarians were either massacred or forced to flee the area. The demographic vacuum was filled by Serbian immigration. The Serbs acquired a privileged status as frontier guards of the Habsburg realm, with full territorial, religious and cultural autonomy up to the middle of the eighteenth century.

During the next hundred and fifty years, however, systematic resettlements and colonization, and spontaneous migration created an ethnic checkerboard leading to spectacular economic growth in the area. By the time of the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, these „southern marches” became the granary of Central Europe with an inextricably intermingled population evenly divided between Hungarians, South Slavs (Orthodox Serbs, Croat „Bunjevci”), and Germans, as well as Slovaks, Ruthenes, and Romanians. In November 1918, the Serbian army occupied the whole region, and the South Slavs proclaimed that they wanted to join Serbia. According to decisions made at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference, 21,000 sq. km. of historically Hungarian territory was ceded to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes with 1.5 million inhabitants, one-third of them ethnic Hungarians (Magyars).

The newly created Vojvodina, which was a re-creation of an administrative unit created by Austria between 1849 and 1861, consisted of three parts: the westernmost third of the Banat of Temesvár, Bačka (Bácska) and the Baranja (Baranya) Triangle. After the imposition of royal dictatorship in 1929, a new administrative unit was created. Without historical precedents the Danube

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banovina was created out of the Vojvodina, part of Srem (Szerémség), and northern Serbia, with Novi Sad (Újvidék, Neusatz) as its administrative center.

In April 1941, a few days after the German attack on Yugoslavia, the Hungarian army reoccupied the Bácska-Baranya-Mura region. The Banat became a German protectorate, dominated by local ethnic Germans, the Swabians. A well-organized, Communist-led Serb guerrilla (*Partisan*) resistance movement inflicted heavy casualties on the occupiers which led to retaliations on the initiative of the local commanders of the Hungarian military. The 3,300 victims, of what came to be known as the Novi Sad blood-bath of January 1942, were mostly civilians, and 2,200 of them were Serbs. The *Partisan* revenge came in October 1944, when, following the hasty evacuation of the area by the Hungarian authorities, the indigenous Magyar and German inhabitants were left to their fate.

A decree signed by the *Partisan* leader Iosif Broz Tito on 17 October, 1944, introduced a „military administration” in Vojvodina. In fact, a state of lawlessness existed. The Hungarian and German civilians offered no armed resistance of any kind to the victors, yet approximately 20,000 Hungarians and 200,000 Germans were massacred. The communist-led *Partisan* firing squads followed orders. They were given death lists with a three-fold purpose of revenge, intimidation, and a well-designed plan to liquidate the native intelligentsia, including former political leaders, the shapers of public opinion, and those who had the potential to become such. Consequently, for decades nobody dared to speak about these traumatic events, and the psychological scars have persisted. The total war-related losses of the Hungarian population in the Vojvodina amounted to about 75,000, including 16,000 Jews. Another 30,000 Hungarians fled across the border to Hungary.¹

Demographic Trends

The ratio of Hungarians among the Yugoslav population has been decreasing since 1921. Nevertheless, their absolute number increased until 1961 partly because of an atmosphere of Germanophobia, where surviving Germans declared themselves Hungarian in the census. During the past thirty years Hungarians have been losing ground continuously as a consequence of the cumulative effect of several factors. This includes the extremely low, below replacement, birth-rate; wide-spread assimilation through inter-marriage (in the Vojvodina a third of all marriages); migration to urban centers with a South Slav majority and ethnic character; and the option to declare themselves of „Yugoslav nationality” in the census.

Further cause for population decline has been mass exodus and/or emigration for economic and political reasons. Just recently some 25,000 young Hungarians fled to Hungary to avoid the draft and participation in the fratricidal struggle tearing Yugoslavia apart. Of all ethnic groups of the former Yugoslav state, the Hungarians have the worst demographic profile. They have the highest mortality, abortion, divorce, and suicide rates, and an increasingly aging population.

The Economic Situation

At the start of the reconstruction of Yugoslavia along federal lines in 1943, two autonomous regions (provinces) were set up within the Serb Republic: the predominantly Albanian Kosovo in the south, and the multi-ethnic Vojvodina in the north. The latter consisted of the Banat, Bačka and Srem. The smaller north-western part of Srem and the Baranja were incorporated into Croatia.

In order to accelerate industrialization of the backward southern territories, a number of factories were transferred from Vojvodina to the south. In spite of these economic losses, in 1947 Vojvodina ranked second to Slovenia in terms of *per capita* national income. The collectivization of agriculture during the late forties and early fifties was more extensive in the fertile Vojvodina than in the mountainous areas. On the other hand, after 1953, conditions for independent farming were better in the Vojvodina than elsewhere. By 1981, 60 percent of the arable land was privately owned. The agrarian population, however, fell from 70 percent to 20 percent of the total between 1951 and 1981.²

In investments, until the mid-seventies, discrimination prevailed against the whole region, and particularly the Hungarian inhabited northern part with its urban center at Subotica (Szabadka). Even during the best decade of 1975 to 1984, *per capita* investment in districts with Hungarian inhabited majorities (60-90 percent of the population) lagged behind the regional average. In industrial investment it was only 70-80 percent, while in infrastructure investment it was only 50 percent of the regional average. Agricultural investment, however, was 115-200 percent of the regional average.³

A belated reindustrialization began in the late 1960s and early 1970s and was accelerated after 1974, when the new constitution provided *de facto* equal status for the two provinces with the republics. Problems, however, have arisen since the early 1980s with a slowdown if not reversal in both agricultural and industrial development. In spite of the various reforms and „stabilization programs” (1981–1983 and 1988–1989), a two to three digit inflation has prevailed, accompanied by unemployment exceeding the national average.

After both world wars, land redistribution and resettlement campaigns took place within Vojvodina and Slavonia, with the primary goal of numerically strengthening the Serb population, especially in the areas adjacent to Hungary. Between 1918 and 1948, 385,000 hectares (837,000 acres) of arable land formerly belonging to the Catholic Church, to banks, and to ethnic Hungarians and Germans, was distributed among 40,000 mainly Serbian families resettled from the south. At the same time, 18,000 landless Hungarian families were given only 38,500 acres, creating a legion of dwarfholders with parcels averaging 4.6 acres.⁴ One third of the Hungarians are still private farmers. The number of „part-time peasants,” commuters living in villages or hamlets and working in towns and cities, number in the hundreds of thousands. Thus, at least half the Hungarians earn a living from activities related to agriculture.

Agriculture, as a whole, has been in an ever deepening crisis since the 1980s. The causes are manifold. One has been the adventurist-voluntarist economic policies of the old „autonomist” leadership that aimed to establish autarky. Another has been the inflation which was brought about by politically sanctioned high prices for selected agricultural products. Consequently, since 1988 the prices of these products have become noncompetitive on the world market. The third cause has been the lack of guarantees, either for the continued flow of supplies for agricultural production or for the sale of agricultural products. Finally, the fourth cause has been the systematic plunder of the whole region to refloat the bankrupt Serbian economy and to finance a state of martial law in Kosovo and the military struggle in Croatia and Bosnia.

Social Structure

Industrialization and urbanization has been retarded and sluggish in Vojvodina. The once flourishing country towns with a Hungarian majority along the Tisa (Tisza) river, like Kanjiža (Magyarakanizsa), Novi Kneževac (Törökkanizsa), Senta (Zenta), Bečej (Óbecse), Bački Topola (Topolya), and Subotica (Szabadka) on the Hungarian border, have been stagnating for decades. Deprived of indispensable investments, these towns could not absorb young people who have been unable or unwilling to be engaged in agriculture.⁵

During the seventies, all the above-mentioned and similar settlements in the region lost 11-14 percent of their agricultural, and 3-9 percent of their total population. (For example, Kanjiža with a population of 12,000, of which 90 percent was Hungarian, the number of unemployed was 600; and another 1,000 – the ablest men and women – worked abroad in the mid-seventies.) The social stratification of multiethnic Vojvodina was unfavorable for the Hungarians even

during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The landless peasants working on large Hungarian, Serb and German owned estates, as well as the unskilled day laborers, were for the most part ethnically Hungarian even before 1914.⁶

During the early 1920s the non-Slavs were excluded from the land redistribution. With the break-up of the *latifundia* their employees lost their jobs, resulting in a mass pauperization, migration to the cities, and overseas emigration. In the Vojvodina the Hungarians, Germans (Swabians) and Romanians have traditionally been over-represented among the emigrants and migrant laborers from Yugoslavia in western Europe.

In the 1960s and 1970s the ratio between Hungarian blue-collar and white-collar workers was 82:12. Nearly half of the former were unskilled; they were on the bottom rungs of the Yugoslav social ladder, with only the Albanians below them. The ratio of Hungarians with secondary-school education was about half, and the university and college graduates hardly reached one-third of the national average. There were even fewer Hungarians with higher academic degrees.

The Hungarians were also under-represented among white-collar employees in general, and in top managerial and executive positions in particular. In the late 1960s and early 1970s the Hungarians formed over one-fifth of the region's population. At the same time their representation was 10.3 percent among managers, 6.5-17 percent at the local and district level, and a mere 8 percent in the regional administration; 9.6 percent were on boards of directors in 1981.⁷

Between 1976 and 1981, the ratio of Hungarians among the employed in Vojvodina declined by an average of 2 percent. The decrease was even more significant among those employed in commerce, public catering and tourism (18.6-15 percent), in financial and technological occupations (15.4 percent-13 percent) and in socio-political organizations (14.4 percent-12.1 percent). The percentage of Hungarians and other national minorities was and has remained even lower in the community party echelons, commanders of the armed forces and in the republican and federal hierarchy, with far-reaching detrimental consequences. While during the inter-war years Hungarians provided well over one-third of communist party members and leaders in the region, Tito's ruling party (League of Communists of Yugoslavia) alienated them. The Hungarians looked upon this party with distrust and animosity, because they rightly regarded it as the main instrument of political and national oppression. Hence Hungarian membership in Vojvodina has never exceeded 9-10 percent since the end of World War II. It was only 6.4 percent in the largest city in the Serbian Banat, Zrenjanin (Nagybecskerek), and only 1.8 percent in Bečej (Óbecse), both towns with significant Hungarian populations.⁸

Assimilation in Vojvodina, as in other ethnically mixed areas in East Central Europe, has been promoted by both economic and social underdevelopment-backwardness, and by industrialization/urbanization. In the first case, minority areas and enclaves managed to preserve their homogeneity, but the young and able opted for migration or emigration, or, at best, commuting. In the second case, new factories and housing developments are populated mostly by a transplanted majority (Serb) work force. Social mobility acts as the real driving force, and the minorities turn out to be the all-time losers.

Churches are regarded as the last bulwarks of ethnic identity. This was only partially true in Yugoslavia where the churches identified with various kinds of disruptive nationalisms and, consequently, came under even harsher oppression than in the Soviet Union. In the case of the nearly 90-percent Catholic Hungarians in Vojvodina, the suppression was two-fold up to the end of the 1980s. In the Church hierarchy and clergy the local „Bunjevci” had the majority and the upper hand, preferring the Croat language and culture to Hungarian, although the Hungarian faithful outnumbered the Croats three to one. It was only in the few Protestant, predominantly Calvinist, church communities that Hungarian church services and identity could be maintained.

Constitutional Rights

The federation of Yugoslavia with the creation of multi-ethnic autonomous regions in Serbia was proclaimed by the second AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia) Assembly in November 1943. The fourth paragraph of the proclamation stated, „National minorities in Yugoslavia shall be granted all national rights.” These principles were codified in the 1946 and 1963 constitutions and reaffirmed again, in great detail, by the last federal constitution of 1974.⁹ It declared that the nations and nationalities should have equal rights (Article 245). It further stated that „each nationality has the sovereign right to freely use its own language and script, to foster its own culture, to set up organizations for this purpose, and to enjoy other constitutionally guaranteed rights” (Article 247). For example, „in the armed forces of the SFRY... the languages of the nationalities may also be used for orders and in basic training” (Article 243).¹⁰

In Vojvodina alone twenty laws attempted to ensure the equal use of all the five local languages (Serbian, Croatian, Hungarian, Slovak and Rutheno-Ukrainian) in the fields of education, information, socio-political organizational activities along with economic and administrative units of „self-management,” registration of births, marriages, and deaths, and the naming of settlements. Some of these laws were implemented, especially in education and information,

but most of them have never materialized.¹¹

As in other East Central European „Socialist” states there was an ever-widening gap between theory and practice for three reasons:

(1) All of these constitutions have turned out to be empty propaganda slogans aimed at creating a better than real image. Executive orders for most of these laws have never been issued, nor have sanctions been prescribed for violations of minorities rights.

(2) Defying the more understanding attitude of the highest party and state leadership, the harsher, uncompromising and, ultimately, openly nationalist-assimilationist politics of narrow-minded local leaders prevailed, undermining the long-range state interest for peaceful ethnic co-existence.

(3) In the case of Yugoslavia, particularly in Vojvodina, there were no adequate financial allocations available to support teachers of minority languages, to finance the translation of official texts and speeches at public meetings, or to make and put up road, street, and trade signs, and place names, in the minority languages. Even the existing multi-lingual signs began to disappear.¹²

Education

Education in the Hungarian language had to be restarted from scratch in 1944–1945. Most of the teachers were evacuated or fled, especially those who had been settled there between 1941 and 1944. Many indigenous teachers who continued to serve in those years were imprisoned or executed, labeled as „fascist collaborators.” For example, an outstanding man of letters in Subotica (Szabadka), Jozsef Bogner, was executed. As a result, at the end of 1944, there were only two Hungarian teachers in Vojvodina qualified to teach in a secondary school.¹³

The authorities’ response was to organize abbreviated courses for training teachers in a couple of months. Four- to six-grade elementary schools reopened in 1945. The secondary, and teachers’ training schools followed suit gradually. A „University of Vojvodina” was established in Novi Sad (Újvidék) in 1954, with schools of arts and sciences, and agriculture, but with Serbian as the language of instruction. By the end of the 1950s, it became an accredited university with schools of law, medicine, and engineering, and departments of minority languages and literatures. In these departments Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian, and Rutheno-Ukrainian teachers, cultural and mass media professionals and translators-interpreters have been trained. In the next decade a series of research groups broadened and enriched the activities of these institutions, with research and wide-scale publication in the fields of literature, linguistics and ethnography.¹⁴

Pre-school education for minorities has been fairly good in Vojvodina. In the 1970s, 17.6 percent of the children attended the 161 Hungarian language nursery schools and kindergartens and another 5.6 percent attended bilingual day care centers. The network of minority elementary and junior high schools (providing basic and compulsory education for pupils between six and fourteen, and fourteen to sixteen) in predominantly Hungarian areas was regarded as satisfactory in the 1970s, although 40 percent of such settlements have had only four-grade primary schools.

Since the mid-1950s, the Hungarian (and other minority) language schooling has constantly declined, attributable to the decrease in the number of school age children, and to administrative measures.

Years	Number of Hungarian Schools	Number of Pupils	Number of Teachers
1953–1954	285	50,000	1,500
1977–1978	172	33,200	2,200

A great number of smaller village schools, particularly Hungarian and Slovak ones, have been abolished and the rest have been merged with Serbo-Croatian language-schools under Serbian direction with only subordinate minority sections. This centralizing process, called „districtization” has taken place in every „Socialist” country. The remote isolated villages, many of them with a minority population, have been hit hardest because, in most cases, they were left deprived of the only educational-cultural institution and its intelligentsia. Consequently, over 25 percent of Hungarian children attend schools in the language of the majority (Serb). This percentage reached 50 percent in Novi Sad (Újvidék) and in central Vojvodina, and 70 percent in the southern Banat.¹⁵

In Vrsac (Versec) and Pančevo (Pancsova) there are two additional factors compelling parents to register their children in majority schools. The minority schools are generally in worse physical shape and are provided with out-of-date equipment. The whole system of instruction in the mother tongue is a dead-end street because there are no universities, technical or other colleges where a minority student can study in his or her mother tongue.¹⁶

In Subotica (Szabadka) with a Hungarian population exceeding 50 percent, the situation has been exceptional. It is one of the few places where reciprocity exists, with Hungarians learning Serbo-Croatian and their South Slav schoolmates learning Hungarian as the „language of the neighborhood.” Of the 188 secondary schools in Vojvodina in 1970, thirty-one were bilingual and merely four had Hungarian as the primary language of instruction. Therefore, only 54 percent of the Hungarian students went to minority schools. Of the remainder, two-thirds attended Serbian language trade schools.¹⁷

In 1977 a nation-wide educational reform program was introduced with the aim of improving and modernizing vocational and professional secondary schools. This resulted in the closing down of traditional secondary (grammar) schools. It resulted in increasing the number of minority students attending vocational and professional secondary schools in the majority language.

In Vojvodina the law required that education in the mother tongue should be organized and provided in colleges and universities if it is requested by at least thirty minority students. This provision, however, alongside with several constitutional stipulations, *e.g.*, the use of languages other than Serbian in the armed forces, have remained a pious wish. In spite of a few exceptions, such as the schools of economics and electrical engineering in Subotica, and the law school in Novi Sad, one can graduate only from a Serbian-language college and university in Vojvodina and, as a general rule, in Serbia.

In the area of student services and housing incredible anomalies were common-place. In 1970, 3,500 students were granted educational loans, but only a handful, 255, belonged to any indigenous minority, although minorities at that time made up one-fourth of the region's population of two million. In 1980, a mere 5 percent of the minority students could live in heavily subsidized dormitories. At the same time, 40 percent of the Montenegrin students enjoyed that privilege.¹⁸

In this way Vojvodina has trained a great number of students from outside the region who had no intention of returning to their backward southern homelands. At the same time, this was done at the expense of Vojvodina's minority citizens. These new college and university graduates have seized the most lucrative jobs and key positions in the region, especially after 1988. Minority graduates have been squeezed out and have had to seek employment elsewhere under less favorable conditions.

Culture, Mass Media, Intellectual and Literary Activities

In December 1944 the daily *Magyar Szó* („Hungarian Word”) of Novi Sad, became the third paper to start publication following the Serbian and Slovak papers under the new communist regime. By the 1970s it became the best and most interesting Hungarian daily in the world, including Hungary, with a circulation of 30,000 on weekdays and 70,000 on Sundays. A rival daily, *7 Nap* („Seven Days”) has been published in Subotica. After the collapse of the Tito-created Yugoslavia, several new papers have mushroomed, the *Napló* („Diary”) of Subotica, being the best edited and most outspoken of them.

In 1978 forty-five Hungarian language newspapers and fifteen journals were published in Yugoslavia. Among the monthlies *Híd* („Bridge”) and *Új Szimpozium* („New Symposium”) were literary publications. Since 1971, *Létünk* („Our Existence”) has published the best studies depicting and analyzing the material and intellectual situation of Hungarians in the Vojvodina. Of the ecclesiastical publications, the versatile calendars are the most popular. Forum Publishing House in Novi Sad has had a venerable record: at its zenith, it published over 150 books per year, ten to fifteen of them original works of local Hungarian writers.

There are two Hungarian theater companies based in Subotica and Novi Sad respectively. Neither one of them has its own building, which is a source of constant friction.

During the 1970s and 1980s radio Novi Sad broadcast non-stop in five languages, fifteen hours a day in Hungarian. Minority programs were on television for eight hours a day, half of these in Hungarian. Last but not least, radio broadcasts and television telecasts from Hungary could be received clearly at eighty to one hundred kilometers, about half-way down the region. Thus, programs from the mother country are available for the majority of Hungarians in Vojvodina.¹⁹

Public libraries are in a less advantageous position. There are several reasons for this. There are fewer titles in Hungarian, particularly in technical literature, than there should be. The minority library collections are, on the whole, obsolete; a considerable part was published before 1945, or even 1918. Furthermore, only a few qualified Hungarian librarians are employed.

Vojvodina has always been at the bottom concerning scientific and scholarly research. Although an Academy of Sciences and Arts of Vojvodina was founded in the 1980s, with a few representatives of minorities, mainly writers, the number of those engaged in scientific activities and research was far below the level of Kosovo. In the field of the humanities and the social sciences, the predominant disciplines have been literary historical studies, linguistics, and ethnography. Grievously lacking are economics, sociology, demography, statistics, law and political science. There are no museums exhibiting Hungarian historical and cultural artifacts. Nor are there Hungarian scientific libraries, archives or documentation centers. As a consequence, Hungarians made up a mere 1 percent of the scientific workers and researchers in Vojvodina in the 1980s.²⁰

In spite of all these shortcomings, in comparison to most other states in East Central Europe, a highly developed infrastructure of cultural institutions and communication centers for the minorities has been set up in Vojvodina.

Ties with Hungary, the Mother Country

Both after the creation (1918) and re-creation of Yugoslavia (1943) Hungarian nationalism, possible irredentism, and border changes were regarded as the greatest threat to the integrity of the state. Following the 1948 break with Stalin, but not with dogmatic communism, another phobia was added: the Soviet military-political-ideological „menace from the north.” The combination of these phobias resulted in repeated witch-hunts against everything Hungarian in Vojvodina. Simultaneously, attempts were made to create a local „Vojvodina” patriotism or a Hungaro-Yugoslav identity in order to detach the intelligentsia from a Budapest-centered „Hungarianness.” When these attempts failed, harsher methods were applied. These were: police surveillance, intimidation, compulsory reporting after having contacts with Hungarian citizens, denial of passports, show trials on trumped-up charges, and imprisonment.

On the other hand, there was an incessant drive on behalf of the Yugoslav leadership to challenge the monolithic Soviet system in East Central Europe and to influence events there, particularly in 1956 and again in 1968. For this purpose they were at pains to create a more attractive image of their non-aligned foreign policy and their self-managing economic system. In this context, ostensibly not only the state-forming South Slav nations, but the non-Slav minorities, too, lived in harmony enjoying all kinds of freedom. This was taken at face value by the post-1956 Kádár regime in Hungary .

It was an open secret that János Kádár had been Tito’s protégé in the fateful October days of 1956. Later on, Hungary tried to „diversify” its foreign policy by creating closer ties with Yugoslavia as a kind of counter-balance against Moscow’s domination. Partly for this reason, a misleading image was nurtured in the Hungarian mass media. In connection with Yugoslavia’s nationalities policy toward the Hungarian minority, the really better conditions in Slovenia or from time to time Croatia, were publicized in Hungary, concealing the real oppression in Serbian-dominated Vojvodina, the homeland of over 90 percent of the Hungarians in Yugoslavia.²¹

There were indications of real achievements in the policy of rapprochement. In the 1970s hundreds of Hungarian students from Vojvodina attended colleges and universities in Hungary, the majority of them at their own expense. Wide-scale cooperation flourished in industry, agriculture, and commerce. Delegations of state and party organs, educational and cultural institutions, sporting and hunting clubs, frequently visited the neighboring regions across the border, which had become virtually an open border. Hungarians in Yugoslavia and South Slavs in Hungary, predominantly Croats, benefited most from this favorable turn of events.

All in all, for a while, Hungarians in Yugoslavia enjoyed a more favorable situation than their compatriots in other countries in the Carpathian basin, even including Hungary. For example, after 1952–1953 there was no mandated collectivization, and private farms were allowed. Virtually everybody was allowed to go abroad, and millions worked temporarily in Western Europe in the „golden” sixties and seventies. They had a mass media which satisfied the needs of the population.

What the Hungarians in Vojvodina missed most was an independent organization to articulate their political will, safeguard their interests and organize their educational activities. As a consequence of the fall of the „autonomist” regional leadership in October 1988 and the introduction of a new constitution in Serbia in March 1989, Vojvodina and Kosovo lost their former quasi-republican status. Since then, matters of crucial and vital importance, such as policies on foreign relations, defense, internal security, economy, and last but not least, education and information have been determined by the Serb leadership in Belgrade.

Mass Representation of Hungarians

In spite of the revival of autocracy in Belgrade, a sluggish process of democratization began in Serbia, too. As a sign of it, the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Vojvodina (Vajdasági Magyarok Demokratikus Közössége/ VMDK) was founded in 1989. It is a grass-roots social organization, not a political party. Its goal is the assertion of individual and collective human rights for Hungarians in Vojvodina. Of these, the following are of the greatest importance:

(1) The right of proportional representation in the elected, administrative and jurisdictional bodies;

(2) Free use of the mother tongue in connection with the aforementioned authorities and in public life in general;

(3) Public information in the mother tongue;

(4) Equal opportunities in economic and social life;

(5) Education in the mother tongue in elementary and secondary schools completed by an appropriate arrangement at the university level; and

(6) The right of establishing ties with institutions in the mother country and with international minority organizations.²²

Action committees were formed and did praiseworthy work in the fields of economy, education, health care, culture and science. By the end of 1990, thirteen district branches were in action. The stronger and more viable ones in Bačka (Bacska) have been assisting the weaker ones in the Banat.

Prior to the Serbian elections of December 1990, the VMDK ran candidates in every constituency with a Hungarian or Hungarian-Croat majority. The VMDK leadership was fiercely attacked for failing to reach any agreement about electoral cooperation and, later on, for failing to make coalition arrangements with any of the opposition parties, notably with the Reform Forces of the then premier A. Marković and the highbrow and somewhat out-of-date Yugoslavia Initiative (UJDI). The sad truth was that none of these parties, including the historic Serbian Democratic Party of Professor Mičunović, was willing to accept the unpopular charge of minority protection. The only effective coalition that worked was established in Subotica (Szabadka) which sent to the Belgrade parliament one Croat and three Hungarian representatives. Eight VMDK candidates won seats despite irresponsible promises, propaganda, and intimidation on behalf of the ruling communist-turned-Socialist National Party of Slobodan Milošević, and betrayal of the most influential opposition party, the Party of Serbian Renewal led by Vuk Drašković in some of the voting districts in the second round of the elections. The ninth Hungarian member of parliament, Professor Várady, was elected on a Reform Forces-UJDI ticket in his home town Zrenjanin (Nagybecskerek).

The most important achievement, however, was that in the first round thirty-two VMDK candidates received 80 percent of the eligible Hungarian vote, demonstrating that the great majority of Hungarians were supporting the VMDK objectives. This outcome can be regarded as a substantial success because the „election geometrics” worked openly against a fair representation: in Serbia proper, less than 15,000 voters sent a representative to the Belgrade „Skupština”- while in the 90 percent Hungarian Senta-(Zenta) Ada constituency, the corresponding number was 42,000. Despite these anomalies, 20 of the 56 Vojvodina MPs belong to the opposition parties, among whom the VMDK is the second strongest, and at least ten of them were elected by ethnic Hungarian votes, mainly in northern Vojvodina. At the same time, these results have revealed the tragic weakness of the Serbian opposition forces.

In the spring and summer of 1991, when the clouds of break-up and war were gathering over Yugoslavia, the VMDK issued a statement declaring that Hungarians in Vojvodina „do not want the dissolution of Yugoslavia for several reasons: one of them is that they do not want to be part of a country, or in a state, which would be farther from Europe.”²³

When the Serbs attacked break-away Slovenia in June and Croatia in July-August 1991 – with the massive support of the so called „federal” army – the VMDK was among the first to protest against this cruel and self-destructive war. Realizing that the Hungarians, together with other minorities, were caught in the cross-fire of a fratricidal South Slav war that they had nothing to do with, the

presidium of the VMDK demanded the immediate demobilization of all ethnic Hungarian conscripts and reservists. In November 1991, through the spring of 1992, they organized peaceful marches and demonstrations against war and for the restoration of peace. They want peace above all else because Hungarians have been drafted into the Serbian-led army in disproportionately large numbers relative to their share of Vojvodina's population. According to some leaked information in the Belgrade parliament, every fifth soldier killed in action had a Hungarian surname, although the ratio of Hungarians in rump Yugoslavia (Serbia) is 4.2 percent of the total population. The number of ethnic Hungarians, including civilians, who have perished on both sides, can be put at about 1,500 as of the end of 1992.²⁴

This unambiguous anti-war and pro-rights stance has generated more hate than understanding among the majority population. That part of the local Serb and Montenegrin population which has been perceived by the rest as „colonist” newcomers or descendants of settlers from the south, regard Hungarians and all non-Serbian nationals as unreliable and even as traitors. The mass media – in the hands of former communist *apparatchiks* – is pouring fuel on the fire by claiming that the VMDK leaders are backed by the CIA and the Vatican. They are presented as working for the reunion of Vojvodina with Hungary. The resultant mass hysteria created by these media campaigns has led to threats of retribution and hints of massacre.

Nevertheless, the VMDK has become the sole viable and legitimate mass organization representing the interests of the Hungarian minority. Its leaders are outstanding politicians. Their president, András Ágoston, has been received by the appropriate bodies and agencies of the European Community and the United States. He has submitted his movement's three-tiered program for their consideration. This program wants to ensure: personal-cultural autonomy, local self-government, and, possibly, territorial autonomy.

The national minorities „demand no more and no less than the Serbs in Croatia.” These demands were on the agenda of negotiations under the moderation of Lord Carrington at The Hague and Brussels. The aim of these talks was to achieve a mutually acceptable solution for the peaceful reconstruction of former Yugoslavian territories.

Personal-cultural autonomy is to be based on individual human rights and could provide a general standard for education, cultural activity, and information networks in the mother tongue supported by state budgets. *Local self-government* would safeguard and put into practice minority rights in communities (towns and villages) where a given national minority constitutes a majority. Areas inhabited by an ethnic group which is in minority status in the state or region, are entitled to *territorial autonomy*.

Vuk Drašković,²⁵ the leader of the Serbian Renewal Party (now in opposition) supported this concept which offers rights for the Hungarians in Serbia but does the same for the Serbs in Croatia and elsewhere. The combination of these three interdependent autonomies could provide the effective assertion and guarantee of human and minority rights. Preconditions for these are political democracy, a market economy, and integration with the rest of East-Central Europe with permeable borders. However, these goals remain elusive at best, while rejectionist extremists like Slobodan Milošević and Radovan Karadžić dominate Serbian political thinking.

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Notes

¹ For the Novi Sad massacre see János Buzási's *Az Újvidéki 'Razzia'* (Budapest, 1963); for the demographic changes wrought by „ethnic cleansing” at the end of World War II, see Stephen Kertész, *Diplomacy in a Whirlpool* (Notre Dame, IN, 1953), pp. 57–58; Theodore Schieder, ed., *Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*, in *Dokumentation der Vertreibung der Deutschen aus Ost-Mittel-Europa* (Bonn, 1962), Vol. V, IIA; Marton Matuska, *Days of Revenge* (Novi Sad, 1991); and Tibor Cseres, *Blood Feud in Bácska* (Budapest, 1991).

² For these changes consult *Yugoslavia: History, Peoples and Administration*, B.R. 493 A, Geographical Handbook Series (Great Britain, 1944), p. 76; Schieder, ed., *Das Schicksal der Deutschen in Jugoslawien*, 5:11A; George W. Hoffman and Fred Warner Neal, *Yugoslavia and the New Communism* (New York, 1961), table 3–1, p. 29; *Jugoslavia 1945–1964: Statistički Pregled* (Belgrade, 1965), table 3–13, p. 45; *Statistički Godišnjak Jugoslavije 1973* (Belgrade, 1973), table 202–203, p. 351; *Statistički Godišnjak Jugoslavije 1982* (Belgrade, 1982), table 203–205, p. 437.

³ *Statistički Godišnjak SAP Vojvodine 1982*, (Novi Sad, 1983).

⁴ C. A. Macartney, *Hungary and Her Successors* (London, 1937), pp. 398–403, 427, provides the interwar aspects of this discrimination.

⁵ „Broj Zaposlenih Radnika...” *Statistički Bilten*, No.114 (Novi Sad, 1982); *Statistički Godišnjak SAP Vojvodine, 1982*.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *The Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, ed. Dragoljub Durović, Marjan Barasić, et al., trans. Marko Pavicic (Belgrade, 1974), p. 53; on this point compare and contrast the „Socialist Constitution of 1963”, *Collection of Yugoslav Laws*, pp. 3–4, with „Constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia,” 30 January, 1963, in *Constitutions of Nations*, ed. Amos J. Peaslee (Concord, New Hampshire, 1950), III, art. 1, p. 522, and with „Fundamental Law Pertaining to the Bases of the Social and Political Organization of the Federal Organs of State Authority, 13 January, 1953,” in *Constitutions of Nations*, ed. Amos J. Peaslee, 2nd ed. (The Hague, 1956), III, art. 1. p. 766.

¹⁰ The Yugoslav Constitution of 1974, p. 571. Also see A. Ludanyi, „Titoist Integration of Yugoslavia: The Partisan Myth and the Hungarians of the Vojvodina, 1945–1975,” *Polity*, XII, No. 2, Winter, 1979, pp. 241–249.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 245–248.

¹² *Ethnic Hungarians in Ex-Yugoslavia* ed. S.O.S. Transylvania, Geneva Committee (Ottawa, 1993), pp. 11–12.

¹³ This low point was reversed for a time beginning in the early 1950s. By the late 1960s a decline again became apparent. For the evolution of these policies, see particularly *Statistički Godišnjak SFRJ 1967* (Beograd, 1967), Table 124–126, p. 286.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*; Also see *Jugoslavija 1945–1964: Statistički Pregled*, Table 19.3, pp. 295–296; Radomir Babin, „Principles and Problems of Bilingual Education in Northern Bačka,” in *Razprave in Gradivo* [Treatises and Documents] 18 (Ljubljana, 1986), pp. 188–193; Sonja Novak-Lukanovič, „Some Yugoslav Experiences in Asserting Equality of the Nations and Nationalities in the Field of Education,” *Ibid.*, Table 5, p. 77.; Table 24, p. 87.; Table 25, p. 88.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*; *Statistički Godišnjak SFRJ 1967*, Table 124–126, p. 286; *Ethnic Hungarians in Ex-Yugoslavia*, pp. 10–11.

¹⁶ Mihály Ágoston, „Hova Irassam?” *Magyar Szó*, 3 July, 1966, p. 14.; Géza Vukovics, „Büzlő iskolaudvar meg a többi,” *Magyar Szó*, 24 June, 1966, p. 9.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*; Babin, „Principles and Problems,” pp. 188–193.

¹⁸ Ágoston, „Hova Irassam?” p. 14; Vukovics, „Büzlő Iskolaudvar...” p. 9.; *Ethnic Hungarians in Ex-Yugoslavia*, pp. 11–12.

¹⁹ For a comparison of the cultural opportunities between the 1960s and 1970s with the current conditions compare *ibid.*, pp. 10–12., with A. Ludanyi, „The Hungarians of Yugoslavia: Facing an Uncertain Future,” *Hungarian Studies Review*, Vol. XVI, Nos. 1–2., 1989, pp. 105–112.; and *Jugoslavija 1945–1964: Statistički Pregled*, Table 20–13, p. 331.

²⁰ „Broj Zaposlenih Radnika...” *Statistički Bilten*, No. 114.

²¹ Ludanyi, „The Hungarians of Yugoslavia,” p. 111.

²² *Ethnic Hungarians in Ex-Yugoslavia*, pp. 3, 8–9, 10–13.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

