

THE MINORITY QUESTION IN THE POLICY OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY OF YUGOSLAVIA DURING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNISM, WITH A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE SOUTHLAND HUNGARIANS (1944-1945)

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One of the most significant outcomes of the Second World War was that it made possible for communists to seize power and establish their regimes in Eastern Europe. Although this happened mainly due to the “effective contribution” of the Soviet Union rather than as a natural result of the individual internal evolution of the affected states, it does not change the outcome at all: from Stettin to Trieste an iron curtain fell upon Europe, and political and socioeconomic development followed two different courses for almost half a century in the two halves of the Old Continent. Hungary and its Southern neighbour, Yugoslavia, belonged to those communist countries, where communists first seized power; Yugoslavia was the only state where they could manage to do that on their own. It was critical for the future and the survival of the multi-ethnic Southern Slav state to solve the minority problem. For the Hungarian minority of nearly half a million, it was of vital importance what direction the minority policy of the dominant political power of the new Yugoslav state, the Yugoslav Communist Party, was heading. This study aims to introduce the trends and ideas that influenced the minority policy of the CPY, which ultimately, after a radical shift from the initial use of harsh and repressive measures, made the survival and integration to the new socialist order possible for the Hungarian minority.

Keywords: *Yugoslav Communist Party, Hungarians, minority, Vojvodina*

1. Introduction

The Communist Party of Yugoslavia clearly became the new dominant political power of the civil war ridden Yugoslavia which had been occupied by many of its neighbours during the Second World War. On a “winner takes it all” basis, the party aimed to monopolise its power in the political, economic, and social aspects of life. As in other Eastern European countries, revolutionary forces victorious in the Second World War tried to follow the Soviet example in building society, which

meant breaking with the power-political practice of the previous regime. This was also reflected in the field of minority policy, in which Yugoslavia made a radical turn over the royal Yugoslavia and in the second half of the twentieth century presented itself as a happy homeland of the South Slavic and non-South Slavic peoples, living in brotherhood from Triglav to Vardar. However, this bright future was overshadowed by the dark shadow of the past, the year 1944-1945, the year of change, the year of the seizure of power, when it was far from certain that Yugoslavia would eventually follow the course in its minority policy that was later appraised by many.

2. Theory versus Practice

The basis of the official nationality and minority policy of Yugoslavia was the decree of the AVNOJ (Anti-Fascist Council for the National Liberation of Yugoslavia, the top organisation of the partisan movement), issued at its second session on 29-30 November 1943, which declared that the new state would «grant equality for all the South Slav nations, and guard the rights of the minorities» (Petranović, Zečević 1988, 659). Shortly afterwards, however, it was specified, although not in such a declarative manner, that not all nationalities have the same rights, more precisely, some have no rights at all. The secretary of the AVNOJ, Rodoljub Čolaković, announced in a small scientific institute operating next to the Slovene National Liberation Committee that a decision had been made to expel the Germans from the country.¹ This was not made public, and the AVNOJ Declaration on People's Power of March 1944, specifying in some detail the resolution of November 1943, confirmed that all citizens of the Federal Yugoslavia enjoy full equality regardless of nationality, race, or religion and any violation of their rights based on nationality, race, or religion, as well as incitement to ethnic, racial and religious intolerance and hate shall be punishable.² At that time, unofficially the Hungarians were not wanted to be expelled on the basis of resolutions either. Moreover, in January 1944 and later in the partisan movement led by the Yugoslav Communist Party, the honest Hungarians of Vojvodina were constantly called in pamphlets to join the partisans.

As the only hope of escape, of not sharing the fate of sinful, guilty Hungarians is to choose the way of resistance and armed struggle.³

¹ Božo Repe: Nemci na Slovenskom po drugi svetovni vojni. In: Nemci na Slovenskem 1941-1955, Uredio Dušan Nećak. 1998. 147. Cites Zoran Janjetović: The situation of the Hungarians in Vojvodina after the Second World War In: Dél-Alföldi évszázadok. 28. Rule change in Vojvodina (1944). Biernacki Karol, Fodor István (editor). Szeged-Zenta 2010. 44.

² Branko Petranović-Momčilo Zečević: Jugoslovenski federalizam. Ideje i stvarnost. Tematska zbirka dokumenata. Drugi tom. 1943-1986. Prosveta-Beograd. 1987. 17.

³ The manifest of the Bačka and Baranja District Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia to the Hungarians of Bacča and Baranja, 27 March 1944 Muzej Vojvodine. Istorijfski

The time for the planned expulsion of the German came in autumn 1944; the High Command of the National Liberation Committee of Vojvodina had already deprived the Germans of all their rights on 9 October. Six days later, the local liberation committees were ordered to list all the predominantly Hungarian, German, and Romanian settlements that had helped the occupiers. In order to quickly and successfully stabilise the new regime in this territory with a heterogeneous population, on 17 October 1944 a military administration was introduced in Bačka, Banat and Baranya,⁴ which had a triple function. First, to promote the consolidation of power and the successful completion of the transition to the new system as soon as possible. Second, to ensure the best possible use of the economic resources, which were largely intact compared to the Balkan areas of the country (primarily food). Last but not least to strengthen the Slavic character of the area.⁵

In the spirit of this last function, which was approved by the highest military and political leadership, numerous anti-minority measures were implemented: freedom of movement, use of one's mother tongue, etc. were banned, forced labour was introduced, internments began, not to mention the cruelty and massacres euphemistically labelled „atrocities”, which numbered tens of thousands of Hungarian victims. A day after the introduction of military administration, a decree was issued to intern the Germans⁶ to camps, which was extended for the Hungarians a day later.⁷ Meanwhile, national liberation committees were formed throughout Vojvodina which were meant to represent civil power. Alongside them, the so called „National Guards” were formed. The attitude of the regime towards the nationalities is well-illustrated by the fact that only Slavs could be

arhiv PK SKS. 906.

⁴ Ideje i stvarnost. i.m. 143-144.

⁵ Announcement of Ivan Rukavina on 22 October 1944, Cites A. Sajti Enikő: Changes of Imperialism, Revision, Minority. Hungarians in the Délvidék 1918-1947. Napvilág Kiadó, 2004. 320. Regarding this, see in the newspaper of the National Liberation Front of Vojvodina (Slobodna Vojvodina) the article of Nikola Petrović, member of the Provincial Committee of the CPY, titled Historical Decree, in which, concerning the introduction of military administration, he wrote what follows: “Although the German and Hungarian conquering hordes were scattered and pushed to the west, the poisonous weeds scattered by them have not yet been eradicated radically ... Tens and hundreds of thousands of alien elements settled in areas where our ancestors cleared forests, drained swamps, creating the conditions for civilized life - are still shooting from the dark on our warriors and Russian soldiers and are doing everything they can to prevent the normalization of the situation, preparing to stab the knife in our backs again in this difficult situation for us ... The people feel that this decisive action is needed, and that there is a need for energetic measures to ensure the Yugoslav character of Bačka.”

Quoted by Tibor Cseres in Vérbosszú Bácskában. Magvető Könyvkiadó. Budapest, 1991. 102

⁶ Ideje i stvarnost. i.m. 145-147.

⁷ Aleksandar Kasaš: Mađari u Vojvodini 1941-1946. Novi Sad, 1996. 160.

part of them, and in Hungarian, German, and Romanian villages national liberation councils were not allowed to be formed and power was only held by military authorities.⁸

As we have seen above, the minority issue was envisioned by the new leading force of Yugoslavia, which was reorganizing on a federal basis, on the grounds of equality of nations and nationalities, but there were also a number of ideas and aspirations during the war that called for a radical solution to the issue, and towards the end of the war these ideas unfortunately entered the phase of practical implementation. The partisan movement needed revenge because of its position and perhaps due to its nature. It wanted to build a new system, a significant part of its members suffered serious grievances, so it had to give way to revenge if it wanted a clean situation for the future. From this aspect, the ethnically heterogeneous territories were exposed to abuses the most. At the same time, this wave of punishment was also used to stabilise the new political order, to destroy the base of the opposing forces. Consequently, retaliation was directed not only against one nation or minority, but against everyone. Definite, ideologically based retaliation against a particular nation was against the Germans alone and, in October-November 1944, against the Hungarians.

The introduction of military administration in Bačka and Banat, which make up a large part of today's Vojvodina, and in the Baranya territories now belonging to Croatia provided an opportunity to remove the undesirable elements from the territory, besides achieving the abovementioned goals. The term „remove” means their elimination or expulsion. The completion of the task was put in the hands of the “fist” of the CPY and the partisan movement, the OZNA (Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda ‘Department for People’s Protection’) which was formed following the Soviet example in May 1944. Under OZNA leadership, the invading partisan troops carried out the task with the active assistance of a portion of the local population.⁹ It was enough to face the firing squad or be targeted if one had a larger estate, was a member of the Arrow Cross Party (many poorer Hungarians entered the party due to its promise of radical land reform), cheered for the Hungarian troops in 1941, participated in a Thanksgiving Mass or had any sort of supposed-real quarrel or grievance during the Hungarian era. The only „crime” of most of the Hungarian victims was that they were Hungarians. Those Hungarians who participated in some way in the atrocities and abuses against the Serbs between 1941-1944 obviously did not wait for the entering partisan troops. Those who

⁸ Arhiv Vojnoistorijskog instituta. 49-1/8. k. 211. Commander Kosta Nađ's Order 45 on the organisation of military administration. 1 November 1944

⁹ In December 1944, OZNA had a total of 154 employees in Vojvodina. Arhiv Vojnoistorijskog instituta. 16-7/6 k. 214.

remained thought with a clear conscience: „*we did not commit anything, why would they hurt us*”. They were wrong. October and November 1944 were the darkest period of Southland Hungarians when thousands were killed by inhuman torture, brutal forms of execution, especially in Bačka. In the autumn of 1944, the Hungarians were considered, although unspoken, as collective sinners, which was even declared in the case of three settlements, Csúrog, Zsablya and Mozsor.¹⁰ The Hungarian population of these settlements were interned, their property confiscated, and even after their release in the second half of 1945, they were forbidden to return to their villages. The background of this unique case against the Hungarians was that the Serbian population of these areas asked Tito at the end of 1944 to occasionally allow revenge and the expulsion of the Hungarians because after the events of January 1942 (Cold Days, a raid in the Sajkás district and Novi Sad, of which more than three thousand Serbs and Jews were victims), they could no longer live with the Hungarians. They received the permit. The collective guilt imposed on the Hungarian population of the three settlements was not repealed until the autumn of 2014 by a decree of the Serbian government.¹¹

Retaliation against the Hungarians in the Southland in the last year of the war, after the “liberation” of these areas, was only one element of the massacres that took place. In addition to the undoubtedly present and in many cases dominant desire for revenge, the endeavour of the new regime to stabilise its power, to create a new social order as well as to change the ethnic image of the region were the determining factors, besides an even more prosaic reason, the selfish and lowly human interest.

In the light of all this, it may have seemed in the autumn of 1944, that despite earlier declarations, the above-mentioned decision of the AVNOJ and repeated calls to involve the Hungarians in the new order of the new South Slavic state, Hungarians would face a fate imposed on the Germans. This possibility was even more dreadful, because such a resolution to the problem had a theoretical basis.

3. Getting Rid of The Minorities

The two main theorists and advocates of the radical solution of the minority issue were Vasa Čubrilović, a historian, later the Minister of Agriculture, and Sreten Vukosavljević, the founder of Yugoslav sociology and Minister of Repatriation after the Second World War. They both were of Serbian origin and respected academics

¹⁰ On January 22, 1945, the National Committee for the Investigation of the Crimes of the Occupants and Their Assistants in Vojvodina issued a decision ordering the entire Hungarian population of Csúrog to be declared a war criminal and expelled. Arhiv Vojvodine. F-183. kutija 80. Str.Pov. 2/45.

¹¹ <http://www.vmsz.org.rs/kormanyrendelet>. Downloaded: 2021. 03. 08.

even during the royal era, however, they offered their services to the new regime as well, which was received with a warm welcome. The former was the more significant, working out a ready-made scenario for the JKP leadership in a memorandum dated November 3, 1944, proposing a one-time solution to the Yugoslav minority issue through eviction, expulsion, and to a lesser extent ethnic cleansing. Čubrilović wished to carry out the expulsions in the following order: Germans, Hungarians, Albanians, Italians, Romanians. He believed that as these minorities committed crimes against the Yugoslav nations during the war, essentially all of them deserved to lose their civil rights. However, due to political reasons, he deemed it necessary to make distinctions between them.

After the atrocities committed by the Germans in our country and throughout Europe, all their rights have been lost and all of them must be ruthlessly persecuted. However, the Hungarians, both here and in Hungary, despite the massacres in Bács-Kiskun and the service to the Germans in Russia, still deserve some circumspection. They should not be subject to all the measures we are taking against the Germans. The same stands for the Old Serbian and North Macedonian Albanians. However, to resolve the minority issue, the Bačka, Kosovo, and Metohija region must be ethnically occupied at all costs, removing a few hundred thousand Hungarians and Albanians from the country.¹²

The main question for Čubrilović was not the quantity of the minorities to be removed, but the location itself from where they were to be removed. The minorities scattered throughout the country were not deemed dangerous, but he saw the danger in the large number of minority blocs living in strategically and economically important border provinces, especially if they were bordering on their own neighboring nations. Minorities were considered dangerous for Yugoslavia not because of their numbers but because of their geopolitical location and deportation was thought to be the most appropriate way to eliminate this danger.

Such wars are best suited to solve these problems, sweeping through states like a storm, tearing out roots, and scattering peoples. What would require decades or centuries of work in peace, can be done in a few months or a year during wartime. We must not deceive ourselves: if we want to resolve this issue, we can do it for as long as the war lasts.¹³

¹² Vasa Čubrilović: Manjinski problem u novoj Jugoslaviji. In: Hereticus. Vol. V. (2007). No.1. 385.

¹³ ibid. 387.

He set as an example the fraternal Soviet Union, which was the first to use expulsions to resolve the minority issue; based on this, he argued, Yugoslavia had the right to ask the Allies to resolve their minority issue in this way. Based on their performance in the war, they could rightly hope that

the fraternal Soviet Union will help to resolve the minority question the way they did and still do.

It goes without saying that the war created an ideal atmosphere for the expulsions.

Our minorities know well what they did, and as a result, they will not resist for long if we chase them away.¹⁴[...] Maybe there will never be such an opportunity to get our country as completely our own ethnically. All of today's problems that are present in our country, whether of a national-political, social or economic nature, can wait for a short or long time to be solved. However, the minority issue must be resolved now, otherwise it will never be done.¹⁵

For the other main theorist of the resolution of the minority issue, Sreten Vukosavljević, the strengthening of the Slavic, primarily Serbian, character of Vojvodina was also a priority, and to this end he urged the continuation of ethnic-based repression, shifting its focus from the Germans to the Hungarians.¹⁶ He saw a lasting solution in the forced expulsion of the Hungarians from Bács-Kiskun, thus creating “proportionate relations” in this part of Yugoslavia.¹⁷ He regarded

¹⁴ Ibid. 385.

¹⁵ Ibid. 391.

¹⁶ “With their participation in the war against us and our allies, by voluntarily entering the Hungarian and the German army, receiving Hungarian and German citizenship, respectively, holding public offices during the occupation, joining Magyarisation and Germanisation societies, etc., a major part of Hungarians and Germans chose Hungary and Germany, respectively, against Yugoslavia. Those who did not commit any crimes are not to be punished. However, those, who either with their actions or behaviour sided with their mother country, must be relocated together with their family to Hungary and Germany, respectively. The issue must be resolved at its foundations. The execution could be handed over to a special committee, or to the committee processing war criminals, which operates at Novi Sad next to the Supreme National Liberation Committee of Vojvodina. This issue cannot be delayed. It must be executed while the war lasts.” A document without a date and signature that most likely contains the thoughts of Sreten Vukosavljević based on the content and style and the documents next to them. Arhiv Jugoslavije F-97. 3-35

¹⁷ “If the Hungarians do not leave, the Magyarisation in Vojvodina will be even stronger than before. It will be us, who will Magyarise. If the Hungarians remain here, they must be regarded as

the colonisation as not only a solution for the local agricultural and social problems, but also for local historical and political ones as well. To achieve the desired goal, he proposed several solutions: the expulsion of all Hungarians, their internal displacement from the border area and the districts where the Hungarians are in the majority, and as a last resort, the possibility of territorial concessions, proposing that the area should be handed over to Hungary.¹⁸ As Minister for Repatriation, he wished to kill two birds with one stone. By expelling the Hungarians, the number of distributable farmlands would increase, thus providing a solution for the overpopulation of Yugoslav villages and decreasing the „hunger” for land. Also, economic gains would have been accompanied by significant political ones, since if Hungarians disappeared from Yugoslavia, it would strengthen ethnic cohesion, stabilize the situation at the northern state border, and at the same time end Magyarisation there. Moreover, this solution seemed to be suitable for establishing a good neighborly relationship between Yugoslavia and Hungary in the long run, as there would be no source of conflict in the absence of a minority.¹⁹ Vukosavljević accompanied these theses with scientific reasoning and moral justification, pointing out, like Čubrilović, the importance of the historical moment and the need for decisive, swift action.

Despite the abovementioned ideas, which reached the table of top political decision-makers, the Hungarians finally had a different fate from the Germans,

citizens with equal rights, and they can receive lands from the lands reform. As many of them are landless, the land which previously belonged to the Germans will go to the Hungarians. They would be economically stronger than before the war. Reward instead of punishment. Our people and our poor would be in a worse situation than before. They would be landless in their own country. Maybe even as the servants of the Hungarians.” Ibid.

¹⁸ “If no other way is successful, territories in North Bačka and in the Banat, with Kanizsa, Horgos, Senta, and to Mokrin in the East, could be handed over to Hungary under the condition that Hungary takes on an additional 200 thousand Hungarians from us. With this agreement we could rid Vojvodina of a significant number of Hungarians, disrupting its economic structure, but ultimately securing the territory. However, it seems that if about 80,000 Hungarians were to move to Hungary from the three marked districts, that would be enough for Hungarians to form neither an absolute nor a relative majority in any district in Vojvodina. Now Hungary would accept this partial resettlement more willingly than ever. They know that they have committed many crimes against us, and this would facilitate for them to accept, understand and forget the population relocation. If we have no reason to suspect our Hungarians, those who have remained here, and we do not have to suspect Hungary of the danger posed by the Hungarian minority in our country, there will be a firm and lasting friendship between us. And we need to have good relationships with Hungary. The Hungarian nation is strong, with a high historical rank. In this regard the Hungarian nation will be significant, as it has always been during its history. Sreten Vukosavljević’s memorandum without date. Arhiv Jugoslavije F-97. 3-35.

¹⁹ Ibid.

as the Yugoslav Communist Party's leadership embraced the minority policy concept, as a result of which the military administration made a distinction on November 20, 1944 between "good Hungarian" and "bad Hungarian" based on their attitude towards Slavs.²⁰ On December 1, 1944, the military headquarters in the territory of Vojvodina issued an order to take unified action against the Hungarians, which meant treating them in the spirit of those adopted at the second session of the AVNOJ, i.e. full equality, mostly on paper for the moment.²¹ The turning of the tides is well-illustrated by the creation of the Petőfi Brigade, which had the aim to further the integration of the Hungarians, and to make them more „appealing” for the society. The Hungarian-only brigade was formed from the Petőfi Battalion created in Slavonia in 1943, and it was to demonstrate that the Hungarians also contributed to the effort of the liberation war, and as such they have the right to enjoy the freedom thus obtained.²² On the one hand, the party and the state leadership, which were in fact one and the same company, were driven by domestic political interests, and on the other hand, a radical change in the policy towards the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia seemed advantageous from a foreign political standpoint. The main driving force behind both was the Soviet Union. The “fraternal Soviet Union” did not want the Yugoslav minority issue to be resolved on the basis of the Soviet model in the case of the Hungarians, as it had already been decided that Hungary would be part of the Soviet bloc. And in the spirit of fraternity, it is not possible to pursue a repressive policy against certain nationalities collectively, even if there was a demand for it from certain circles of interest. In the new Yugoslav minority policy announced in spring 1945, the need for the reduction of the Hungarian population was shifted to the need of its integration to the new system. In May, an Extraordinary Controlling Commission was set up to investigate the injustices committed in Vojvodina. More and more Hungarians joined the Yugoslav Communist Party (CPY), although according to party reports, their numbers fell far short of their proportion within the population. The Hungarian Cultural Association was formed in July 1945, Hungarian schools

²⁰ Arhiv Vojvodine. Vojna uprava za Banat, Bačku i Baranju. F-170. kut. 5. 20/44.

²¹ Arhiv Vojnoistorijskog instituta. Arhiva narodno-oslobodilačkog rata. 11-6. 214.

²² In January 1945, the brigade already numbered 1,500 and there were another 2,500 Hungarian fighters at the Sombor mobilization center, but only a part of them was to be assigned to the Petőfi Brigade, as “there is no need to set up an independent Hungarian division, on the one hand because of the lack of cadres, and on the other hand because the brigade alone is sufficient for the political role for which it was created.” It is noteworthy, though, that the Brigade was to be formally established in Pécs, which was obviously a signal of the Yugoslav border change claims in the Baranya areas. Report of the Political Commissioner of the Third Yugoslav Army. Muzej Vojvodine. Istorijски arhiv PK SKS 223.

were opened, land was given as part of agrarian reform²³, and Hungarians also took part in the elections in November 1945 (although the proportion of votes cast for the People's Front of Yugoslavia, which was not led by the CYP, was remarkably high in the areas where they lived).²⁴

There were several reasons behind the sudden turn: placing Hungarians in a less sinful category than Germans; the fact that Hungary can never be as dangerous as Germany; finally, the most decisive reason is the fact that they may have learned from the Soviets that Hungary, like Yugoslavia, will be a socialist country. It was only after the revenge of a part of the population was fulfilled and the number of minorities (mainly Germans, but also Hungarians) decreased and their social and economic weight weakened significantly, that the CYP began its policy of "real" equality of nations. However, this was largely a showcase policy that broke with the violent assimilation practices of previous periods and instead focused on covert assimilation.²⁵ In Tito's Yugoslavia the minority rights of the individual were acknowledged, but the major minorities were prevented from

²³ The Hungarians also benefited from the land distribution but based on the numbers we can state that the principle of equality was not put into practice completely. A total of 18,758 Hungarian families received land on the basis of so-called agricultural entitlements. 41,460 hectares of land were allocated to them. At the same time, in the case of Serbs, 49,599 families received a total of 109,431 hectares of land (data provided by Nikola L. Gaćesa 1984, 198-199.) which at first glance seems good, as each family received the same amount of land. However, if we take into account that almost three times as many Serb families received land as Hungarians, although the proportion of Serbs in the population did not even exceed that of Hungarians by 50%, then we have reason to believe that Hungarians, despite the abovementioned principles have been put at the end of the line.

²⁴ Members of the following parties and mass organizations, economic and cultural associations were excluded from voting: Members of the Arrow Cross Party, Imrédy Party, Turán Hunters, Cultural Association of Southland Hungarians, Magyarház 'Hungarian House'. Arhiv Jugoslavije F-3. f asc. 2. Cites Ideje i stvarnost i.m. 214.

²⁵ It is necessary to briefly touch upon the concept of covert assimilation. According to the generally accepted view, it is a concept with a negative charge, questioning the good intentions of the measures of the current power, and guessing their rear intentions. The definition is, of course, correct. In this case, however, I consider it important to ask what is better for the minority, the individual, and the community: if it struggles under constant pressure, clenching its teeth, and defying the process of hostility against it, slowing the process of assimilation, or, if, taking advantage of the opportunities offered by the tolerant policy offered by the power, without denying the existence of the ulterior motive of the power, it seeks primarily its individual prosperity (achieving good results at the community level in the short run). It is, while somewhat oversimplifying the options, clear from the hypothesis that if we choose the former, then all the anti-minority measures should be welcomed as this way it is easier to delay depopulation and integration. While in the case of the latter, the assimilation will quicken inevitably because the experience from the Carpathian Basin shows that a tolerant policy that offers benefits to the minorities rapidly weakens their ranks and the importance of national identity loses its exclusivity.

organizing into a community. The process of integration of the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia, which began in the spring of 1945, was neither easy nor quick, and at the lower levels there was distrust for them even years later,²⁶ but, but perhaps we are not mistaken in saying that distrust never completely disappeared.²⁷ The post-war situation of the Southland Hungarians is well described by Enikő Sajti's striking statement, according to which in autumn 1944

*the Hungarians lost all the privileges of belonging to Hungary for a short time, but took with them all the burden of the reintegration to the motherland to the new Yugoslav state.*²⁸

The national issue was a fundamental issue for the existence of the whole of Yugoslavia, but the minority issue was also a key issue in many federal units, along with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo and Metohija in Vojvodina. No wonder, since the second Yugoslav state remained as varied an ethnic mosaic as the pre-war South Slavic state. The occupations and atrocities of the mother countries of the minorities, as well as the bloody civil war between the

²⁶ The report of 23 March 1945 on the situation and the mood of the population in the Stara Palnaka district stated the resentment of the Slavic population towards the Hungarians, who were considered unequivocally guilty, and their dissatisfaction with Hungarians' equality was emphasized at every assembly. Arhiv Vojvodine. F-183. kutija 496. Pov. Broj 9. This is reinforced by an unidentifiable document, most likely written by Sreten Vukosavljević, Minister of Relocation: "Vojvodina is dissatisfied with its policy towards Hungarians and dissatisfaction is growing day by day. During the occupation, the Hungarians and the Germans with their behavior took a serious offense against their Serbian compatriots. A deep and wide ditch was dug between us. After all that has happened, it's hard to imagine further living together. In order to have fair and healthy relations with Germany and Hungary, both Hungarians and Germans should essentially leave us." Arhiv Jugoslavije F-97 3-35.

²⁷ Among other things, a summary report from 1947 on the results of the policy of the Central Committee and on the political situation in the Vojvodina proves this. In this document certain results are mentioned, compared to the years 1945 and 1946, after all "they could find a way to certain healthy forces". The main difficulties in establishing relationships with the Hungarian masses were seen on the one hand for objective reasons (the whole historical past and the influence of the fascist revisionist parties strengthened by the Hungarian occupation on the Hungarian masses as a whole) and on the other hand for subjective reasons. The latter included the small number and isolation of party cadres, the fact that they were labeled traitors of Hungarians, and the fact that former local leaders and activists of fascist organizations, although covert, they are active against the system. Arhiv Vojvodine F-334. Pokrajnski komitet Saveza komunista Vojvodine. Kutija 1041.

²⁸ Enikő A. Sajti: Az új kisebbségstratégia lehetőségei és korrlátai 1944-1947 'Opportunities and limitations of the new minority strategy'. In: Büntudat és győztes fölény. Magyarország, Jugoszlávia és a délvidéki magyarok. 'Sense of guilt and victorious superiority. Hungary, Yugoslavia and the Southland Hungarians.' Szeged, 2010. 150.

state-creating ethnic groups during World War II, resulted in a deep and glowing hatred which in the case of the state-creating ethnic groups could be suppressed only with repression and ruthless rigor,²⁹ while as for the minorities (at least as far as Hungarian minority concerned) it could be handled by waving the honeycomb in addition to the strictness.

National impatience, intolerance, and chauvinism, were very strongly present in the last phase of the war in areas under newly partisan rule, including Vojvodina. An important role in this was played by the previously mentioned local liberation committees, whose members came from those who supported the liberation movement either actively or who were known to sympathize with it, but also included local authorities, wealthy people and adherents of the old order. This, of course, allowed ample room for setbacks, not necessarily only against minorities, but also on the Serbo-Croatian line, which grew to such an extent that in May 1945, an Extraordinary Monitoring Committee was set up by executive order to investigate and remedy the situation. To eliminate the problems, the above-mentioned committee developed an action plan for the federal government. The following were suggested: strengthen propaganda to break up chauvinism and strengthen fraternity unity; change the ethnic composition of the liberation committees to proportionately represent the Croats and the minorities;³⁰ cleanse the cadre of officials and make the control of the higher organs over the lower ones more effective.³¹ The proposals were accepted: at its meeting on 11 June 1945, the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia decided to step up the fight against chauvinism, to campaign against it, to correct field mistakes and to strengthen Vojvodina party organizations with cadres.³²

The seriousness of the situation is proved by the fact that at the meeting of the Vojvodina Regional Party Committee of the Serbian Communist Party held on April 5-6, 1945, the consolidation of fraternity unity was called the most important

²⁹ This was served by, among other things, the AVNOJ Act of 24 May 1945 on the prohibition of national, racial and religious hate and conflict. The law severely sanctioned any violation of national equality, the granting of privileges on a national basis, with imprisonment of 3 months to 5 years, in more serious cases, or recidivism with 2-15 years in prison and partial or total confiscation of property. *Ideje i stvarnost*. 184-185.

³⁰ Non-Slavic elements could appear in these committees only from the beginning of 1945, but their number fell far short of their proportion within the population. In May 1945, for example, 39 of the 45 members of the Vojvodina Supreme Liberation Commission were Serbs, 4 Croats and only 2 Hungarians. There was only one Hungarian in the Subotica District Liberation Committee. *Ideje i stvarnost*. i.m. 145

³¹ *Ideje i stvarnost*. 146.

³² *Zapisnici sa sednica politbiroa Centralnog Komiteta KPJ (11. jun 1945 – 7. jul 1948)* Predio Branko Petranović. Arhiv Jugoslavije, Službeni list SRJ. Beograd, 1995. 66.

task and not only concerning minorities. In his opening speech, Jovan Veselinov Žarko, the secretary of the Party Committee, mentioned the Serbo-Croatian animosity in Syrmia and the sectarianism towards Slovaks and Romanians as a key issue. He regarded the issue of the Hungarians as very complex, Hungary being on the one hand a neighboring state and on the other a defeated country that had committed crimes against Yugoslavia, which, however, had also embarked on the path of building socialism (even if this was not yet known in Budapest – Á. H.).³³

The solution of the issue of chauvinism (also) in the territory of Vojvodina was the most important to deal with in the case of the state-building peoples, there were plenty of examples among the Serbs, the Croats and the Bunjevci.³⁴ “Until we resolve the issue of relations between the different nations in Vojvodina well, in the spirit of the liberation movement, we will not be able to perform any other tasks,” the party’s number one Vojvodina man summed up.³⁵ To remedy the situation, he, in accordance with the ideas of the central leadership of the CPY

³³ “You know that many Hungarians took part in the Horthy massacre. However, our position is special towards Hungarians. Hungary, as a state, can never be as dangerous to us as Hitler’s Germany, because Germany is the country that can turn against our people again if we do not defeat it. This is not the case with the Hungarians. In addition, we are communists, we are international. We applied the following principle to Hungarians: to develop the feeling that they want to live in this country and fight for it. But here we encountered difficulties. We often talk to uninformed peasants about brotherhood and unity with Hungarians, but then we get criticism. Here we should apply and implement the party’s policy. There are many rigid templates in our speeches, which makes it difficult to normalize the relationship between Hungarians and Serbs, because we say the same thing in different places and under different conditions. There are flaws both among Serbs and Hungarians, and the relationship is not normalizing because of this. Sometimes the attitude of the Hungarians towards us was tried to be explained by the fact that they had previously been suppressed by the Great Serbian hegemony. This is wrong. We tie the crimes committed during the occupation to war crimes. It is not possible to refer here to what was before. The Hungarians who committed these crimes were servants of the occupiers, and this is how we judge them...” The minutes are quoted in Hungarian by Slobodan Bjelica: *A kommunista hatalom és a nemzetiségi kérdés a Vajdaságban a második világháború utáni első években* ‘Communist power and the issue of minorities in Vojvodina in the first years after the Second World War. In: *Dél-Alföldi évszázadok*. 28. *Impériumváltás a Vajdaságban* (1944). Biernacki Karol, Fodor István (szerk). Szeged-Zenta 2010. 104-105.

³⁴ “There is also a misconception that our Serbian comrades in the Party represent the Serbs, the Croats the Croats, the Slovaks the Slovaks, and so on, but this phenomenon is the smallest among Serbs. And then, one intervenes for the sake of the other... The Bunjevci have some local chauvinism. It is concentrated in and around Subotica. Some leading members of our Bunjevci comrades are convinced that the Serbs will pursue the same policy as before. From this a controversy arose: before, in Subotica, the Serbs had power, now the Bunjevci must have all power. This is wrong. Subotica has no Cyrillic spelling at all. This is wrong. There has developed a form of chauvinism that could be very dangerous for us. Bjelica. i.m., 105.

³⁵ Quotes Jelena Popov: *Narodni front u Vojvodini 1944-1953*. Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu. Institut za istoriju. Monografije. Knjiga 27. Novi Sad, 1986. 248.

(which gave exceptional importance to the creation of a more harmonic coexistence between the nations and the nationalities), envisaged a split with rigidity and sectarianism, and deemed it advantageous to allow the minorities their own schools, newspapers, and cultural events.³⁶

The number of Hungarians in Yugoslavia decreased significantly after the war. The retaliation against the Southland Hungarians claimed around ten thousands of victims.³⁷ About 80,000 people migrated mainly to Hungary, many voluntarily, but most of them were expelled by the Yugoslav authorities. A significant proportion of the expelled were government officials and their families who moved to the Southland after its return to Hungary in 1941.³⁸ The rapid and effective removal of Hungarians who settled after the Hungarian army had entered the region is well illustrated by the report of the Temerin National Committee of 12 September 1945, which stated: "There are no persons of Hungarian nationality living in the territory of the Temerin National Committee who moved here after April 5, 1941. About 500 Hungarians moved here, a significant number of whom, about a hundred, escaped, while the rest were chased out of their territories as soon as our authorities took power, so we have no such person."³⁹ It should be noted here that in the summer of 1945 also the US government felt the need to warn the Yugoslav government that in resolving the issue of the Hungarian minority

³⁶ Ibid. 106. The Germans, of course, did not count here, as they had previously been the subject of a decree ordering their total expulsion.

³⁷ According to the results of the research conducted under the auspices of the Hungarian-Serbian Academic Joint Committee, on the basis of the documents that were found during the archival research, about 7,000 victims who were certainly assumed to be Hungarian were identified. At the same time, the list of Novi Sad and Sombor, although made, was lost. The number of victims in them can be estimated at about 1,500 people for each based on recollections, declarations of death, and registry documents. In addition, there are victims for whom there are no archival data, but who disappeared or were declared dead during this period. It is also based on estimates of the number of these persons, which are, however, well-founded in that there is a difference of about 40 percent in the number of victims detected in some settlements with the help of other sources compared to the documented lists. If we apply this to the entire territory of Vojvodina, the total number of Hungarian victims is about 13-14,000. http://mta.hu/mta_hirei/teljesnek-tekintetho-a-delvideki-magyar-aldozatok-nevsora-136548 Downloaded: 09.03.2021.

³⁸ The ceasefire signed with Hungary made it possible for all Hungarian officials appointed by the occupying Hungarian authorities and their families to leave Vojvodina and get to Hungary within 14 days, in accordance with Decree No. 221 of the Ministry of the Interior of 31 March 1945. They could only take with them what they had brought with them on arrival (this was obviously difficult to control and gave rise to a number of abuses). By the beginning of 1946, 5,564 people had left Vojvodina in this way. However, Yugoslav sources did not clearly see exactly how many officials were and how many were in other occupations. Diplomatski arhiv Ministarstva spoljnih poslova SFRJ 1946. F-55. Kab. Broj. 108.

³⁹ Arhiv Vojvodine F-183. kutija 23.br. 52.

in Yugoslavia, not only the interests of Yugoslavia should be considered but the general needs of European security and future peace, as well as the difficulties of the Allied occupying authorities in Hungary caused by population movements, must be taken into account. One can only guess why, right now, in the summer of 1945, at the time of the implementation of the new policy against minorities, the USA warned Yugoslavia that it should settle the Hungarian issue in consultation with the great powers. It is likely that the rumors about the submission and negotiations of proposals for the deportation of Hungarians led Washington to draw Belgrade's attention to the fact that any attempt to expel all members of an ethnic group on the basis of war responsibility is considered illegal.⁴⁰

Hundreds of thousands of South Slavs, mostly Serbs, arrived from the most backward regions of the country as part of the resettlement, mostly in the name of a conscious national policy, in the place of the expelled Germans. Colonization took on large proportions throughout the country but was nowhere near as great as in Vojvodina. While in the other federal units there was only internal colonization, i.e. people changed their place of residence within the given republic, in Vojvodina the colonization took place from outside. The total of 44,116 settling families came mainly from the Serb-populated areas of the Republic of Croatia and Montenegro.⁴¹ As a result, the ethnic proportions of Vojvodina have changed significantly. The increase in the number of the Serbian population from 593,735 in 1940 to 841,246 in 1948 was particularly significant.⁴² In 1948, according to the first official Yugoslav census, 496,492 Hungarians lived in the country (3.2%). Of these, 428,750 are in the territory of Vojvodina (26% of the total population of Vojvodina), in one block on the right bank of the Tisza, and in large numbers in Northern Bačka. The 50,000 post-war Hungarian minority in Croatia lived mainly in Baranya (a triangle-like part of the county of Baranya bordered by the river Drave), while the 10,000 Hungarians in Slovenia lived mainly along the border in in Prekmurje (Muravidék). The fact that, despite the expulsions, deportations and retaliation, the Hungarian population did not decrease in number according to the census data is that the Germans who remained in Yugoslavia en masse declared themselves Hungarian, trusting that a more favorable political attitude towards the Hungarians also would be applied to them.

Finally, I think it is important to mention that the minority issue had two dimensions in the policy of the CYP. One was the issue of Yugoslav minorities,

⁴⁰ DASIP PA 1945 F-23. 1378. A belgrádi amerikai nagykövetség jegyzéke 1945. június 7. 'List of the American Embassy in Belgrade, June 7, 1945'.

⁴¹ Nikola L. Gačeša: *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija u Jugoslaviji 1945-1948*. Matica Srpska, Novi Sad, 1984. 368.

⁴² *Ibid.* 374.

which has been discussed so far, while the other was the policy on South Slavic minorities across the border, the detailed presentation of which will be the subject of another study. Here I would like to refer only to the most important points and the most important elements of the Yugoslav political changes in their direction. In the policy on South Slavic minorities across the border a radical shift took place compared to the previous period: the issue of nationality / minority in the Hungarian-Yugoslav relationship actually reversed after the Second World War. While the South Slavic minority in Hungary played a completely negligible role in Yugoslav foreign policy in the period between the two world wars, the issue was rarely addressed in a memorandum, rather in a lexicon-like compilation in the 1930s, after World War II, Yugoslavia showed a strong interest in its minorities living in its northern neighborhood. The extent to which this stemmed from a sense of national belonging and a degree of real-policy consideration is difficult to judge with complete certainty. We are perhaps closest to the truth when we say that their weight depended on the circumstances. Just as in the interwar period Hungary intended the minority issue to play an important role primarily in achieving its foreign policy goals, in the first years after the Second World War Belgrade also considered its minorities outside its borders primarily as a means of achieving its foreign policy goals. Not only to achieve the benefits that directly affect him (such as border change in favor of Yugoslavia) but also, where appropriate, to secure its long-term goals align with the Soviet Union and to promote closer relationships with Czechoslovakia, as in the case of the proposed Population Exchange Convention in the summer of 1946. In this context, the issue of the South Slavic minority emerged from the end of 1944 to 1946 as part of the problem of border demarcation as a potential tool for achieving any Yugoslav territorial claims that might arise.

4. Conclusions

The new Yugoslavia portrayed itself in the second half of the 20th century as a happy homeland of the South Slavic and non-South Slavic peoples, living in brotherhood from Triglav to Vardar. However, this bright future was overshadowed by the dark shadow of the past, the year 1944/1945, the year of change, the year of the seizure of power, when it was far from certain whether Yugoslavia would eventually follow the course in its minority policy that was later appraised by many. According to the leading élite of the new federal Yugoslavia, the minority issue was to be resolved by the equality of different nationalities and nations but there were many ideas and endeavours, which urged for a radical solution, and sadly, these endeavours were carried out towards the end of the war. The partisan movement due to its position, or even due to its nature, required vengeance. It

wanted to create a new regime. A significant portion of its members was gravely violated, thus revenge had to be permitted to run rampant to start off with a clean slate. From this aspect, the ethnically heterogeneous territories were exposed to abuses the most. At the same time, this wave of punishment was also used to stabilise the new political order, to destroy the base of the opposing forces.

In autumn 1944 it seemed that the Hungarians would suffer the fate of the Germans. This possibility was even more dreadful because such a resolution to the problem had a theoretical basis. The two main theorists and advocates of the radical solution of the minority issue were Vasa Čubrilović, a historian, later Minister of Agriculture, and Sreten Vukosavljević, the founder of Yugoslav sociology and Minister of Repatriation after the Second World War. They wished to carry out the expulsions in the following order: Germans, Hungarians, Albanians, Italians, Romanians. They believed that as all these minorities committed various crimes against Yugoslavs during the war, all of them deserve to lose their civil rights.

Despite the abovementioned ideas, which were placed before the highest political leadership, a fate different from that of the Germans awaited the Hungarians. The leadership of the CYP embraced the conception according to which by 20 November 1944 the military administration made a distinction between „good” and „bad” Hungarians. The reasons behind the sudden turn were the following: Hungarians were considered to be „less guilty” than Germans; the fact that Hungary could never be as dangerous as Germany; and finally, the most important reason of all, that Hungary just like Yugoslavia would become a socialist country. Only after the revenge of a part of the population was fulfilled and the number of the minorities (mainly Germans, but also Hungarians) decreased, did the CYP start its politics based on the „real” equality of the nations, on paper at least.

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