

# IN SLOVAKIA NAMES ARE BEING DE-MAGYARISED WITH ASSISTANCE OF STATE

BY

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In the columns of this Review we have repeatedly reported that in Slovakia the Magyar names of Slovak citizens are being Slovakised or de-Magyarised respectively. Today we are in a position to give a detailed summary of the developments in this field in their true perspective.

The action for the Slovakisation of Magyar names was initiated by the Slovak paper "Nastup" on February 20th., 1940. Certain passages of the article in question are well worth quoting word for word. "Perhaps nowhere" — writes the Slovak journal — "more than in Slovakia is there is evidence the phenomenon of a multifariousness of foreign names in all classes of the nation. There are a strikingly large number of workers and peasants with foreign names, — *there being indeed numerous cases in which the workers and peasants in question are unable to pronounce or even write their own names and have no idea of their meaning.* This is due to the circumstance that the ancestors of the persons in question originally entered the territory of Slovakia as foreigners. The descendants of these ancestors have been Slovaks for five or six generations already, they have Slovak blood running in their veins, but their names sound Hungarian or end in Magyar suffixes. A whole series of national actions must be initiated for the purpose of Slovakising these foreign names. That is the only worthy way to celebrate the first anniversary of the foundation of the Slovak State."

Encouraged by the article in "Nastup", the Slovak Press began a campaign for the Slovakisation of Magyar names. In order to spread the movement a suggestion was

made that a law should be framed to facilitate the Slovakisation of the Magyar names. And the procedure should be simplified and made inexpensive.

And the Slovak Government lost no time in meeting this demand. Already on April 20th., 1940, the Slovak Telegraph Bureau was in a position to report that *an Order in Council with the binding force of law had been prepared to facilitate the Slovakisation of Magyar names.*

Now let us examine some of the provisions of this Order in Council with the binding force of law.

The most important provision is that withdrawing the control of name-changes from the jurisdiction of the Ministry of the Interior and accelerating the work of attending to the applications, which may be adjudged by the administrative authorities of first and second instance. The Slovak Government believes that this measure will really lead to an extension of the action and that every foreign-sounding name will very shortly be a thing of the past in Slovakia. Another important provision contained in the Order is that it has made the procedure for the change of names exceptionally inexpensive. Applications have been exempted from the payment of the official dues, only the enclosure of a five Slovak crown deed stamp being exacted. This measure was also taken by the Slovak Government in the hope that it would further the extension of the action. In the April 19th., 1940, issue of the "Slovenska Politika" the following opinion of this section of the Order is given: — "We are very pleased that this provision of the Order with the binding force of law will serve to remove and invalidate all objections on the part of even the poorest, seeing that the payment of a due of five Slovak crowns when asking for a change of name will not cause any difficulty at all. We believe that we shall before long be able to feel the beneficial effects of the harmony brought about between the authorities and Slovaks with all kinds of names."

*The Slovak Press thought that the acceleration and the cheapening would lead to the Slovakisation of names developing into a veritable national action, and would very shortly result in there not being in Slovakia a single Slovak with a Magyar name.*

*To the great disappointment of the Slovak nationalists, however, this expectation was not realised. Despite the facilities ensured by the new law, not a single person was moved to apply. The Slovak Press then demanded that the action should be organised. On this occasion too "Nastup" took the lead in pushing the action. On May 25th., 1940, an article appeared in that paper under the title — "When are we going to begin Slovakising the names?" Inter alia this article contained the following passages: — "It is a long time since the Order in Council was issued in the matter of the Slovakisation of Magyar names; but so far it has not led to any results whatsoever. Not only are the names not being Slovakised; people continue to use Hungarian orthography when writing their names, even where that is quite superfluous."*

This article of "Nastup" was taken over also by "Narodni Noviny", which added the following comment: — "Well, so that is how matters stand with the Slovakisation of names?! If the Order in Council is not sufficient, the offices should meet the wishes of citizens and should correct the foreign-sounding names found on documents without charging any dues at all. For this no procedure whatsoever is needed. But, now that we are talking about this subject, we would note also that it would not be detrimental to the cause if the most distinguished factors of our public life were to show the way by beginning to Slovakise their foreign names. For so far there has not been a single case of any such factor Slovakising his foreign name."

*But even these fulminations failed to move the Slovaks with Magyar names; and it became necessary for the Slovak Press to resort to far severer measures. On June 8th., 1940, "Narodne Noviny" was still compelled to establish the following facts: — "The Order in Council issued to encourage the Slovakisation of names has failed to find an echo even in places where we had expected an effective initiative to be taken. We still find the non-Slovak names written without change. But, if ordinances are issued, they must also be carried into practice. We are entitled to expect an action enforcing the terms of the Order in Council issued*

in the matter of the Slovakisation of names and putting an end to *the present deadlock.*"

This far-reaching work of preparation by the Press was followed by the "Hlinka Guard" taking over everywhere the work of Slovakising names. From Party functionaries with Magyar names they demanded explicitly the de-Magyarisation of their names.

The papers have lost no opportunity offered, and have published full lists of all cases of Slovakisation. So far we have counted altogether 135 cases of Slovakisation of names reported in the semi-official "Slovak", in the Catholic organs "Slovenska Pravda" and "Slovenska Politika" and in the "Narodne Noviny" well known as an organ of extreme nationalism. In motivating the action for the Slovakisation of names, these papers refer to the circumstance that it is in reality merely a question of the re-Slovakisation of Slovak names Magyarised in pre-War Hungary. *But of the 135 persons Slovakising their names only 3 were the descendants of ancestors who adopted Hungarian names prior to the first Great War.* As was only to be expected, the Slovak Press triumphantly made a great show of these three cases. But what about the other 132 cases? The ancestors of the 132 Slovaks with Magyar names were Magyars who out of interest or under pressure had during the course of time become Slovakised. The Hungarian-Slovak language frontier once lay far more to the North than it does today. After the Counter-Reformation and the overthrow of Francis Rákóczi II.'s struggle for independence the Magyars were driven southwards, their place being taken by Slovak settlers. In this way Magyar enclaves came into existence which subsequently became gradually absorbed by Slovakdom. The Magyars have always given this small people the full benefit of their demographic strength. This fact is proved by the enormous number of Slovaks with Magyar names. And the object underlying the action for the Slovakisation of Magyar names is to definitively and finally eliminate the historical records of this fact.