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Hungarian parties in Subcarpathia (Ukraine)

Before studying the question of Hungarian parties in Transcarpathia (Ukraine) we have to define the most important concepts that belong to the topic.

The concept of *minority representation* is of fundamental importance for people living in ethnic minority status both for their survival and political self-representation. It may determine whether the Hungarians can become an integral part of the political system of Ukraine, in a way that is organized on a national basis and differs from the majority society, thus ensuring their survival. Thus, the most important question of minority existence is whether the given minority is able to organize itself and represent its interests by engaging in the decision making process.

The concept of the *majority state* is the main center of power that determines the retention or assimilation of national minorities who are residents on its territory. The state may either follow the European way in its minority politics by creating the necessary conditions for the survival and development of minority communities or by rejecting these options.

The concept of the *kin-state* is important in minority survival because the kin-state provides political protection through the channels of diplomacy and finance and provides cultural supports which can guarantee and strengthen minority interests.

The legal status of minorities in Ukraine

In Ukraine the legal status of the minorities are defined by the following documents:

- The Constitution of Ukraine (1996),
- Ukraine's Declaration of Nationality Rights (1991),
- The Law of Ukraine on National Minorities (1992);

All of the above is supplemented by a great number of decrees. Statements with special focus on the Hungarian community can be found in various bilateral agreements between Ukraine and Hungary (e.g. The treaty between the Hungarian Republic and Ukraine about the basis of good neighborliness and cooperation (1991), Declaration of the principles of cooperation between the Republic of Hungary and the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic in guaranteeing the rights of national minorities (1991)) and in the suggestions of the Ukrainian-Hungarian Inter-state Joint Commission).

Political representation of Hungarians in Ukraine – historical background

The Hungarian community of Ukraine – nearly 150 thousand people – is mostly concentrated in the lowlands of Transcarpathia county [Kárpátalja megye/Zakarpatska oblast], where they form the largest minority group of the local population (they constitute 12,1% of the total population).

During the existence of the Soviet Union, there was no chance of representing the interests of national minorities. The Hungarian minority was accused of collective guilt, and annexed to the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, where it had a weak legal standing. Resolution №52 adopted on November 26, 1944 at the first Congress of People's Committees of Transcarpathian Ukraine declare the collective guilt of Hungarians, saying that the Hungarians and Germans are eternal enemies of the Ukrainian nation. This resolution was the ideological basis for the deportation of the Hungarian male population (aged 18-50) in November and December, 1944.

A group of Transcarpathian Hungarian intellectuals addressed petitions to the Soviet government in 1971 and 1972, in which they asked for the abrogation of the document mentioned above. However, the authors of the petitions were called to account, and the resolution is still in force even today. These petitions were the first documents which dealt with the fundamental rights of Transcarpathian Hungarians and the violations they suffered. These were signed by more than a thousand of people living in Transcarpathia.

In the period of political transformation of the '80-ies an opportunity opened for the Transcarpathian Hungarians to make a step towards self-organization. Numerous professional, civic, cultural and political organizations formed in that period in order to facilitate the survival of the Hungarian community, and represent its interests in the newly independent Ukraine.

Due to this process today in Transcarpathia two political parties endeavor to represent the Hungarians' political interests: the Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association – Hungarian Party in Ukraine (hereafter KMKSZ UMP) and the Hungarian Democratic Party in Ukraine (hereafter UMDP). Both of the parties were established because of the change of the electoral system in 2006/2007. Previously they were functioning only as cultural associations under the following names: Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association (hereafter KMKSZ) and the Democratic Association of Hungarians Living in Ukraine (hereafter UMDSZ).¹

The Ukrainian electoral system has been changed many times since the country became independent. The majoritarian electoral system was applied in 1990 and in 1994; the mixed voting system in 1998 and in 2002; the proportional representation in 2006 and in 2007. In 2012 the country returned to the mixed system.

These changes affected the interest representation opportunities of national minorities in different ways. In the majoritarian and mixed electoral systems the ethnic interests were mostly taken into account during the formation of electoral districts. Thus the Transcarpathian Hungarians had the chance for parliamentary presence through the creation of a Hungarian-majority single-member district within the compact Hungarian ethnic block of the county.

The situation of national minorities was affected the most negatively by the transition to the proportional voting system. It became impossible for any national minority to pass the 3% election threshold specified by law within the 46 million-populated country, except for the Russians.

Due to the proportional voting system, after the 2006 and 2007 elections it was the first time since 1994, that the Transcarpathian

¹ We use here the original Hungarian abbreviations.

Hungarians did not have a representative in the Ukrainian Parliament [Verkhovna Rada].

Political activity of the KMKSZ

On February 26, 1989 the Transcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association (KMKSZ) was formed at Ungvár/Uzhgorod as a cultural, national and social organization that protected interests of Transcarpathian Hungarians. The registration of the association as a political party was not permitted by the authorities at that time, but it has nonetheless played a political and interest-safeguarding role from the very beginning.² Today it is the largest ethnic-based organization of the region. According to its register the association has 105 local groups and about 40 thousands members.

Until 2006 the electoral system did not bind the nomination of candidates to political parties, thus the KMKSZ being a cultural association was still able to nominate candidates for MP in order to represent the interests of Hungarians both on the local and on the national governmental levels.

In 1990 – still within the Soviet Union – parliamentary and municipal elections were held, in which the KMKSZ nominated its own candidates, and the cultural association managed to send 11 representatives to the County Council. Its candidates also got into the District Councils of Beregszász/Berehovo, Ungvár/ Uzhgorod and Nagyszőlős/ Vynohradiv.

After the political transformation in the 1990-es the Hungarians living abroad saw their survival in the development of a minority institutional system, including the creation of autonomy and self-governance.³ The KMKSZ has undertaken the representation of the Transcarpathian Hungarians' aspiration for autonomy since its formation. In 1991 the association initiated a referendum on the autonomy of Transcarpathia that was supported by 98% of the local

² MÓRICZ K. (2001): *Kárpátalja sorsfordulói*. Hatodik Síp Alapítvány, Budapest, pp. 147–151.

³ KÁNTOR Z. (2006): Autonómia, önkormányzatiság és kisebbségi magyar közösség-építés. Nemzetállamok, nemzeti kisebbségek, nemzeti autonómiák. In: SZÉKELY I. szerk. (2006) *Magyar Kisebbség*. 2006/3–4, pp. 66–90.

population. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Ukraine won its independence and set the stage for creating democratic institutions, implying the possibility that in the future the national minorities that had lived under oppression during the years of dictatorship might now exist within a democratic framework. However, it soon became apparent, that for a country that started the building of a majority nation-state, the democratic framework did not apply to national minorities. The European practice of facilitating the survival of national minorities and preservation of their identity, granting additional rights were not introduced. Despite the minority population's clearly expressed will the autonomy plans could not be realized, as they encountered serious resistance both from the side of the authorities and the political powers that imagined Ukraine as an ethnically homogeneous state.⁴

Political activity of the UMDSZ

In order to represent Transcarpathian Hungarians on a nation-wide level the KMKSZ together with the Associations of Hungarians of Lviv and Kyiv, founded the Democratic Association of Hungarians Living in Ukraine (UMDSZ). Conflicts of interests occurred soon within the UMDSZ. Different goals were formulated by the Hungarians living in Lviv, Kyiv and Transcarpathia. Objectives of Transcarpathian Hungarians living in large enclaves are different: in Transcarpathia having schools with Hungarian as a language of instruction and political safeguarding of interests represented the main aims. However aims of Hungarians who live scattered in Ukrainian cities are those of having Sunday schools and mother tongue clubs. As the members failed to reach a common position, the KMKSZ suspended its membership in the UMDSZ, which exists only theoretically as it had not been able to achieve practical results either in the political or in the cultural sphere so far.

The union worked for a long time in theory only, it did not carry out any kind of activity. It was reorganized in 1996 and Mihály Tóth

⁴ KACSUR G. szerk. (1999): *Tíz és a kárpátaljai magyarság szolgálatában*. A KMKSZ X. közgyűése, Ugocea Print, Nagyszőlös, pp. 14–17.

was elected as its president. The renewal of the UMDSZ primarily served Mihály Tóth's continued leadership ambitions.

The next reorganization and reform of the UMDSZ took place in 2002, after the parliamentary elections. The UMDSZ supported István Gajdos, who similarly to Mihály Tóth took part in the elections as the president of the district administrative office and the opponent of the KMKSZ nominee. After the elections, having undertaken the Hungarian issues, István Gajdos needed to legitimate himself by an organization in front of both the Transcarpathian Hungarians as well as the kin-state (Hungary), thus in 2002 he took over the presidential seat of the UMDSZ from Mihály Tóth. Since then István Gajdos has reformed the UMDSZ, which now follows an analogous model to KMKSZ and functions as an alternative Hungarian organization.

Parliamentary elections between 1990 and 2010 and Hungarian representation

In 1994 parliamentary and municipal elections were held in Ukraine. Some conflicts emerged within the KMKSZ in connection with the nomination of candidates. The local Hungarians were strongly divided by the campaign. The president of the KMKSZ did not manage to get a mandate. On the county level, nine Hungarian representatives were elected to the sixty-member council.

On August 5, 1994 the Committee of the Beregszász/Berehovo District of the KMKSZ decided to cut free from the KMKSZ and founded an independent organization – the Hungarian Cultural Association of the Bereg Lands. Their founders' meeting was held on November 5, 1994 with the participation of 117 delegates from 35 local groups. The new association managed to get 2,300 members and formed 38 local groups. Shortly after the separation of the Beregszász/Berehovo District, other towns founded independent organizations too. As a result: the Association of Hungarians of the Ung Lands, the Cultural Association of Hungarians of Szolyva/Svalyava and the Cultural Association of Hungarians of Técső/Tyachiv were founded.

On August 6, 1994 the organizations that had separated from the KMKSZ founded the Forum of Transcarpathian Hungarian Organi-

zations consisting of the above mentioned and the Transcarpathian Community of Hungarian Intellectuals (the latter was founded on April 30, 1993 and defining itself as an intellectual association).

The next elections were held in 1998. The KMKSZ managed to send a deputy to the Supreme Council from the Hungarian polling district in the person of a new leader, Miklós Kovács (who had become the president of the association in 1996), to represent the interests of Transcarpathian Hungarians. However the Hungarians had only four representatives in the County Council.

The next elections in Ukraine were held in 2002. The KMKSZ nominated its president in the elections again. His main election opponent in the one-mandate district was István Gajdos, the president of the Beregszász/Berehovo District State Administrative Office, who was nominated and supported by the Social Democratic Party of Ukraine. Based on the incoming reports the winner of the elections in the district was the president of the KMKSZ. However, the results were not officially declared and there were a series of modifications. According to the decision of the Supreme Court of Ukraine the mandate in the district was won by István Gajdos, thus till 2006 he was the representative. The case reached the Strasbourg Court of Human Rights. Six years later the president of the KMKSZ won the lawsuit against the state of Ukraine.

In 2002 on the local level seven Hungarian representatives got into the eighty-five-member County Council.

In 2006, 2007 the proportional electoral system came into being. Only nationally registered parties were able nominate candidates in the parliamentary elections near the election threshold of 3%. Adapting to the new voting system, both of the Hungarian organizations started the formation of their own parties. The KMKSZ established the KMKSZ – Hungarian Party in Ukraine (hereafter KMKSZ UMP), the UMDSZ established the Hungarian Democratic Party in Ukraine (hereafter UMDP). They took part in the elections separately.

In the parliamentary and municipal elections of 2006 the problem of „standing on different sides” did not exceed the 3% threshold, on the contrary it worsened the chances of Transcarpathian Hungarians on getting into the legislative assembly.

On the parliamentary level, both organizations were given positions on the lists of Ukrainian parties, but none of them was eligible

for a parliamentary seat. It was the first time since 1994 that no Hungarian deputy got into the Supreme Council.

In Transcarpathia after the parliamentary and municipal elections of 2006 the two Hungarian parties competing with each other suffered a dual defeat. On the county level, the KMKSZ UMP received 17,692 votes that meant five seats in the ninety-member County Council. The UMDP received 17,465 votes and four seats.

The 2007 early parliamentary elections further widened the gap between the two parties. The two organizations took part in the elections separately again. The KMKSZ UMP supported the election bloc entitled 'Nasha Ukrayina' [Our Ukraine] that granted the ninety-ninth position for Miklós Kovács on its list. The association asked for the cooperation and support of the UMDP. But the party supported the Socialist Party of Ukraine instead, on whose party-list Mihály Tóth, their own man, was included. After the elections the socialists did not get into the parliament, and the ninety-ninth position of the 'Nasha Ukrayina' was not enough to get a mandate. The Transcarpathian Hungarians were left without parliamentary representation again.

The results of the 2010 municipal elections were staggering. The KMKSZ UMP and the UMDP took part in the elections separately again. Even if the sum of votes that the two parties received separately were added together they added up to less than the number of ethnic Hungarian voters in Transcarpathia. The majority of Transcarpathian Hungarians sold their votes for 100-150 Ukrainian hryvna, a sum being equal to 3,000-4,000 Hungarian forints and voted for Ukrainian parties instead of the two Hungarian organizations. While the KMKSZ UMP got three seats UMDP got four in the 108-member County Council. On the district level the Hungarians also lost their former positions, nowhere did they receive a Hungarian majority, which significantly weakened the local representation of the interests of Transcarpathian Hungarians.

The last modification of the electoral system in Ukraine has been carried out in 2011.

The reintroduction of the mixed system could have affected the opportunities of the Hungarian representation of interest positively, because a polling district with a Hungarian majority would have resulted in restoring of the parliamentary representation.

2012 – the year of elections in Ukraine

The Central Election Commission of Ukraine (CVK)⁵ marked the borders of polling districts on April 28, 2012. The establishment of the Hungarian polling district was supported by several international organizations, the Government of Hungary and by the local political parties KMKSZ UMP and UMDP. However, contrary to expectations a Hungarian majority polling district was not formed in Transcarpathia. Hungarian people, living in a block, were divided into three different districts, forming minority groups in all of them.

About 25,6 thousand Hungarian voters belonged to Constituency №68, which center was in Ungvár/Uzhgorod. In the district the proportion of Hungarian voters was only about 16.1%. About 28,5 thousand Hungarian voters were attached to Constituency №69, which center was in Munkács/Mukachevo; in the district the proportion of Hungarians was only 17.8%. The third Constituency №73 based on the town Nagyszőlős/Vynohradiv was considered as „the most Hungarian” district, however the proportion of Hungarians here was 33.6%, but they were in a minority position here as well; in the constituency there were 49 418 voters out of the total of 147 026 Hungarians.⁶

The KMKSZ UMP had one nominee in each of the single-member polling districts. In the Constituency №68 László Brenzovics, vice-president of the KMKSZ was nominated, in the Constituency №69 Géza Gulácsy, the other vice-president of the association was fighting for the votes, while in the Constituency №73 Miklós Kovács, president of the KMKSZ launched his campaign.⁷

István Gajdos, president of the UMDSZ and UMDP, was not nominated in the colors of his own party, but was nominated on the party list of the ruling Party of Regions (PR) on the 74th position.⁸

⁵ www.cvk.gov.ua

⁶ A KMKSZ elítélte a magyarellenés döntést. Parlamenti választások: Eldölt – nem lesz magyar körzet. *Kárpátalja hetilap* №590, 05.04.2012

⁷ Három körzetben indít jelöltet a magyar szervezet. Ülészett a KMKSZ Választmány. *Kárpátalja hetilap* №604, 09. 10.2012

⁸ Kárpátalján parlamenti mandátumra esélyes listás helyet kapott az UMDSZ elnöke. *MTI* 08.13.2012. Retrieved from: <http://www.umdsz.uz.ua/news2012/augusztus/20120813-idehaza.html> Date: 09.17.2012

The UMDSZ supports and campaigns for the Ukrainian nationality nominees of Party of Regions in Hungarian districts.

Between the main topics of the 2012 campaign the new language law of Ukraine adopted just before the elections was especially emphasized. In the campaign launched by the UMDP and the Party of Regions (PR) advantages of the law for Hungarians were highlighted. At the same time leading politicians of PR (Chechetov and German) stated that the language law refers to the Russian minority only. On the part of PR nobody has distanced themselves from these statements.⁹ Contradictions appear not only in the interpretation of the new law, but also in the realization of it (how can it be applied). Another hot topic was the question of dual citizenship. Just before the elections, a law has been accepted fining people having dual-citizenship.

None of the parties, which had nominees in Transcarpathia's single-member polling districts support the language law, dual-citizenship, or the self-governance of the county.

In polling districts of Transcarpathia the biggest competition emerged among nominees of the PR and the Uniformed Centre, dominant political force of the county. In the six individual electoral districts of Transcarpathia mandates had been shared between three Regions Party candidates and three candidates of the Uniformed Centre. County turnout was 51.6%, which is one of the lowest ratio in the country.

In the Constituency №73, Busko Ivan (41.22%, 31,517 votes) came out on top, leaving behind the single candidate of the Uniformed Center Ivan Baloga (36.1%, 27,602 votes). President of the the KMKSZ, Miklós Kovács finished in the third place with 10.41% (7963) of votes. The Ungvár/Uzhgorod centered Constituency №68 was won by Vasil Kovacs (31.14%, 30,054 votes). Vice-president of the KMKSZ, László Brenzovics finished in fifth place (7.73%, 7461 votes). In the individual Constituency №69, Viktor Baloga, leader of the Uniformed Center got a mandate in the district (34,970 votes 49.42%). Vice-president of the KMKSZ, Gulácsy Geza finished in the fourth place (10.59%, 7,498 votes). Nominees of the Hungarian Association collected totally 23,440 votes, however they did not managed to get mandates.

⁹ A kormánypártnak nem tetszenek a magyarok. *Kárpátinfo*. Retrieved from: <http://karpatinfo.net/cikk/politika-ukrajna/kormanypartnak-nem-tetszenek-magyarok>, Date: 11.03.2012.

According to the party list results in Transcarpathia county, PR won the election gaining 30.94% of the votes. Many analysts maintained that this happened because of the votes of the Hungarian people. Gajdos István, president of the UMDSZ managed to enter the Parliament being nominated on the electoral list of the PR. The party of 'Batykivscsina' United Opposition got the second place in Transcarpathia (27.66%), while the party 'UDAR' became the third (19.99%). It is definitely a concern that the radically-right party 'Svoboda', which is well-known for its anti-Hungarian manifestations, entered the parliament and obtained 8.34% of the total votes within the county. The Communist Party of Ukraine also got 5.03% of the Transcarpathian votes.

Summarizing the 2012 elections we can conclude that intimidation, corruption and cheating before and during the elections had serious effects on the final results. 'Administrative power' and its staff led to the support of its own nominees.

Finally we can state that in Transcarpathia, there are lots of Hungarian professional, civic and religious organizations, but the KMKSZ UMP is politically the most significant organization of Transcarpathian Hungarians which expresses its opinion about all questions concerning the minority. The UMDP also seemed to campaign with the questions concerning the problems of the Hungarian minority, however it is still a question if its leader, as a Party of Regions' MP could really protect the Hungarian interests, if these interests would conflict with the interests of the PR?

Finally we conclude that the division, political fragmentation of the small Transcarpathian Hungarian community is the most serious problem of the effective interest-representation in the country which is home to 46 million people.