

ATTITUDES OF THE ETHNIC ELITES MEMBERS IN VOJVODINA TO MINORITY RIGHTS AND TO INTER- ETHNIC RELATIONS

Stavovi pripadnika etničkih elita u Vojvodini prema pravima manjina i interetničkim odnosima

APSTRAKT Izvršeno je ispitivanje po 100 istaknutih pripadnika kulturnih i medijskih elita. Utvrđeno je da su vojvođanske etničke elite materijalno bolje situirane od običnih građana, ali da je i među njihovim pripadnicima svaki deveti siromašan. Oni su na interpersonalnoj ravni izrazito otvoreni prema pripadnicima drugih etničkih grupa. Na planu stavova svojih pripadnika etničke elite se od običnih građana najviše razlikuju jasnim zalaganjem za tržišnu privredu i za liberalni ekonomski model razvoja. Njihovi pripadnici ne razlikuju dovoljno jasno individualna i kolektivna prava. Ovo je razumljivo, pošto su u multietničkoj sredini u uslovima prevlasti srpskog etničkog nacionalizma individualna prava bila i jednim delom još uvek jesu u značajnoj meri određena pripadnošću konkretnoj etničkoj grupi. Pripadnici elita iz manjinskih zajednica o ovome imaju jasniju predstavu, budući da su njihove zajednice plaćale cenu za ovakvo stanje stvari. Pripadnici malobrojnijih zajednica se, verovatno u strahu od srpsko-mađarskog sporazuma na štetu trećih, velikim svojim udelom zalažu za građanska a ne i za kolektivna prava. No, nalazi ovog istraživanja su u ovom pogledu suštinski bolji od nalaza bilo kog prethodnog, pošto je svest o neophodnosti priznavanja kolektivnih prava značajno porasla u svim etničkim grupama, uključujući i većinsku.

KLJUČNE REČI *etničke elite, individualna i kolektivna prava.*

ABSTRACT A survey was done with 100 distinguished members of cultural and media elite members. The results showed that ethnic elites in Vojvodina had better economic position than ordinary citizens, but that one ninth of them was poor. On inter-personal level they are very open towards the members of other ethnic groups. As for the attitudes, ethnic elites members differed from ordinary citizens mostly by strongly supporting market economy and liberal concept of development. They couldn't differentiate clearly between individual and collective rights. This was understandable since in multi-ethnic surrounding where Serbian ethnic nationalism still prevailed individual rights were to the great extent determined by ethnic origin. Minority ethnic communities elites had clearer understanding of this fact

because their ethnic groups payed higher price in such circumstances. Members of least numerous ethnic groups mostly favoured individual over collective rights, major cause for this being probably their fear from Serbian-Hungarian deal at the expense of third party. Yet, this survey's findings regarding this topic were substantially better than any before, since the awareness of need for collective rights to be recognized grew in all ethnic groups, including Serbs.

KEY WORDS *ethnic elites, individual and collective rights.*

The theoretical framework of the research was taken over from the research of national cultural elites in Vojvodina, a project conducted by Slobodan Cvejic and myself (Ilic, Cvejic, 1997) as well as from my research of Serbian nationalist cultural elite (Ilić, 1997). Its starting postulate is that, as a rule, the cultural elite of an ethnic community means a circle of people, who generate and disseminate the most important ideas, determining the ethnic conscience and articulating the political will of the ethnic group. On the whole, members of the cultural elite do not make a separate social stratum, but rather the „spiritual layer“ (Mannheim), which articulates the practical attitude (*Weltwollen*) of their ethnic group members to political, economic and ideological issues. (Mannheim, 1964:381-382) The role of the cultural elite should by no means be taken as an absolute as the shaping and propagation of ethnic (and social) ideas follow, as a rule, two-way course: it would be wrong to observe these processes only from the perspective of the seat of the ideological authority of individual groups. (Cf. Ilic, Cvejic, 1997) There is no doubt that their course and outcome are affected by a greater or lesser readiness of the broader population strata within every ethnic group to suit their views and group behaviour to instructions „emanating“ from cultural elites. In the study of nationalism it is particularly important to be aware of the basically two-way course of the dissemination of ideas, as the question of responsibility is one of the most important ones in this kind of research. In this regard, to attach the absolute casual significance to the cultural elite members would mean to significantly reduce the cognitive power of the analysis, as the question of nationalism would be reduced to the question of responsibility of the national intellectual elite. Day-to-day politics are not foreign to such approach, but in science it is considered unacceptable, as it tends to disregard the most important structural and cultural components of the ethnic awareness, which do not lend themselves to explanation by the elitist theory. It is, therefore, necessary, to point out that members of the middle and lower social strata, even though they evidently do not rank among the creators of dominant political ideas, are not exclusively their receptors either. Members of these strata play an important part in disseminating various political and cultural messages among the broader strata of less educated workers and peasants. Members of the latter groups often tend to be more susceptible to the influence of better-skilled and

more appreciated fellow-workers or neighbors from the same lower strata group than to influence coming through other channels. (Ilić, Cvejić, 1993)

Individual segments of the cultural elite itself need not represent isolated and tight groups, and significant social and cultural differences can be observed within their narrower circles. There is a certain hierarchy, and even invisible censorship of a kind, within groups, that is a mechanism to filter ideas and views considered of consequence for a narrower cultural elite or ethnic group at large. As a rule, members of the cultural elite hold prominent posts in educational, media and cultural institutions and thus can avail themselves of obvious cultural communication channels to promote their ideas. However, within all ethnic groups there is also quite an efficient informal communication network and its role in the shaping of the ethnic conscience should not be ignored. In this sense, one can refer to „invisible national colleges“ as specific analogues of Solla Price's (Solla Price, 1965) global „invisible college“.

The above comments indicate the risk involved in according an absolute value to the import of the national cultural elites („opinion leaders“) in the study of the dissemination of ideas and contents, shaping the ethnic conscience. On the other hand, the influence of the creative national intelligentsia should not be underestimated. The new situation resulted in the need to change the national self-understanding.

At times, modern authors stress the importance of opinion leaders in articulating the ethnic conscience as an „open“ or „closed“, that is „civil“ or ‘ethnic‘ nationalism. (Horowitz, 1985; Roesel, 1995) The importance of the national cultural elites is seen in the provision of guidance for the national education through the development of historical knowledge, political competence and linguistic aptitudes for the civil society (Roesel) or, in the case of „ethnic nationalism“, through historical reinterpretations and reconstructions of the ethnic identity by the science of culture (Horowitz, 1985:70-71).

It is particularly important not to lose from one's sight, when observing the attitudes and views of intellectuals, composing cultural elites, the social and economic circumstances, in which diverse (including national) ideas originate and spread. When Mannheim writes that an intellectual can better perceive complex social problems owing to his detachment, he also warns that members of the „intelligentsia“ can easily lose touch with the reality and consider the social problems only from the perspective of their study or the viewpoint form in conversations with fellow-intellectuals. (Mannheim, 1980: 168-169) This should be added the well-known thesis that intellectuals are eager and fervent promoters of various ideologies, precisely because of their „detachment“ and insecurity regarding their own group identity. Information received from members of the cultural elite needs, therefore, to be taken with a measure of criticism and subjected to verification

complementary sources. Whatever the case, the interpretations should not be reduced to sheer „hermeneutics“ (Ilić, Cvejić, 1997; Ilić, 1997).

The research was carried out from December 2001 to March 2002 through several interviews with the representatives of the cultural and media elites of the Serbian, Croatian, Hungarian, Romanian and Slovakian nationality in Vojvodina. In plan making of the aimed sample the experts such as Miroslav Samardžić (CSDS), Pavel Domonji (Helsinki Committee for human rights in Serbia, Novi Sad office), Tomislav Žigmanov (Open Society Fund, Novi Sad office) and Viorel Flora were consulted. The sample comprised the intellectuals of the highest class from the departments of history, Hungarian studies, Romanian and Slovakian language and literature of the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, from the publishing houses and magazines for minorities „Libertatea“, „Magyar szo“, „Hlas ljudu“, „Forum“, different cultural associations that gather the members of the ethnic minorities (like Matica Slovačka), editorial offices of radio and television channels in the languages of relevant ethnic groups, directors and editors-in-chief of the ethnic and provincial establishments (Ujvideki Sinhaz, Srpsko narodno pozorište – Serbian National Theatre, cultural centers in Subotica, Novi Sad and Zrenjanin). A number of distinguished priests engaged in cultural and political life of the ethnic minorities in Vojvodina were also included in the sample. Some of them, like M. Marko Kljajić, are authors of the books of specific minority problems, as well as the prominent authors and culture workers from the above-mentioned five ethnic groups. Those are the people who do not make operative programs of political self-organizing of their respective ethnic groups, but who contribute to stress and think out both the ethnic consciousness of the less educated members of their groups and their relation towards other ethnic communities in Vojvodina. The next step included completing the sample during ongoing research according to the answers of the responders of the most important representatives of their ethnic groups in Vojvodina. In such a way a more complete picture was assured of the influence and reputation of particular persons that were included in the sample.

Two problems occurred during realization of the sample plan. The Serbian and Hungarian groups in Vojvodina are numerous, while the Slovakian one, although scarcer than the Croatian, has a numerous and mutually well-integrated and very active cultural elite. The grammar school in Bački Petrovac, the Slovakian Association in Vojvodina, Slovakian theatre „Vladimir Hurban Vladimirov“ and the groups of teachers, the ethnic Slovaks, in the grammar schools in Stara Pazova and Kovačica, made completing the required number of the ethnic quota possible. On the other hand, the social elite of the Romanians in Vojvodina is not only estranged and at variance with one another, but it is also scarce regarding the total number and the Romanian share in the urban population in Vojvodina. In the case of this group the sample comprised the representatives of the true ethnic elite together with some of the representatives of the sub-elite, i.e. those who do not belong to the creative

intellectuals but to journalists for instance, less prominent high school teachers and more educated and nationally more conscious lawyers and doctors. They are those who modify and pass the ideas and knowledge rather than those who are first-rate cultural creators. This was unavoidable. In the case of the Croats in Vojvodina, a big problem was that they are divided not only by the different interest coteries but these divisions are made even more complex by the rather cheap politicized division on so called “pure” Croats and Croats-Bunjevci. A separate problem in the fieldwork was so called “crypto-Croats”, or rather those intellectuals of the Croat nationality who were close to the previous regime and who were the only to reject any cooperation in a greater number. In this sole case there were even some rude verbal incidents in the fieldwork.

As a whole, the planned sample was realized with a significant success. The abstinence was never over 20% out of the total number of directly interviewed and instead of them the replacements were included in the sample, the list of them being made in the previously cited way.

It was planned to question 100 leading intellectuals from each mentioned ethnic group respectively. The total number of 502 questionnaires was realized with 471 of them that underwent the logical control. They were further processed, first in the way adequate for treating qualitative material and then through statistic description and analysis.¹

¹ Structure of the realized sample: Among the respondents there were 64% of men and 36% of women. Masculinity was the greatest in the Croatian ethnic elite with almost 100% of men, then in the Serbian one (63%), the Hungarian and Romanian (59% in each) and in the Slovakian (49%). There was a change of generation in the elites in Vojvodina: the middle-aged (those between the age of 30 and 51) formed 55% of the realized sample, older (those who were born between 1931 and 1950) made 35%, and there were very few old (7%) and quite young (a little over 3%). This is understandable considering that 5 October 2000 did rejuvenate the managing positions but it could not weaken the moral and the reputation in the ethnic communities that is acquired within decades. Regarding the professions, among the members of the ethnic elites dominate the editors and prominent journalists who work in the printed and electronic media (29%), authors (12%), university professors (10%), directors of the cultural establishments (7%), priests (4%), etc. Even 70% of the respondents have a university degree and almost all the others have a college degree. The percentage of those with a doctor's degree is far above 12, and the educational structure would have been even better unless in the case of the Romanian community due to its scarcity, a certain number of people from the cultural sub-elite had been also included. The ethnic elites in Vojvodina are, of course, better off than the ordinary citizens, but even among their members there is almost one quarter of those who could not find a few thousands of dollars even in an emergency. This shows potentially big possibilities for conditioning one part of the members of the ethnic elite. Even 11% of the respondents live in a real poverty, reducing meeting their vital needs. In the population of Vojvodina the share of these people is two and a half times bigger. On the other hand, almost 70% of the respondents have quite a good standard of living compared to the situation in the rest of Serbia.

Except for the ethnic Serbs, a low proportion of the ethnic endogamy characterizes the members of the ethnic elites in Vojvodina. In the total sample (including not married persons) only 9% of the Serbs

Characteristics of the cultural and media elite in Vojvodina

Regarding the social origin, the ethnic elites in Vojvodina seem extremely open: a small number of their members come from higher social classes of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia or from the families of former communist officials. The parents of the respondents are relatively often (15%) with a university degree, but a majority of people who occupy key positions in social life of their ethnic communities started from a lower part of the social structure, which means that in the ethnic communities there are few family “dynasties”. Among the fathers of the respondents there are or were many agricultural workers (21%), qualified workers and clerks and technicians with a secondary school degree (20% each), non-qualified workers, etc. Such a social origin obviously affects the attitudes of the members of the ethnic elites.

Majority of them declared to be believers (54% versus 23% of those who are indecisive and 23% of those who declare to be atheists). On the other hand, the real believers, who believe in life after death, are only 31%. The most of them is found among the Croats (63% in this group) and the least among the ethnic Hungarians (17%), while among other three groups there are 24% and 31% of real believers. On the other hand, among the Hungarians there are 46% of the declared believers, almost as much as among other groups (as for the Serbs the percentage is 52, for Romanians and Slovaks 48 each, and for the Croats 81). It is obvious that all the ethnic elites in Vojvodina, except for the Croatian one, are at the same time thoroughly atheistic and incline to accept at great extent a declared religiosity as a socially desirable part of identity. The ethnic elites that have a great influence on forming the consciousness of the members of their communities as well as on forming their views to life with the members of other communities in Vojvodina generally are not made up of people who formally occupy the leading positions. We should remind that a considerable part of the sample was made up in accordance with the suggestion of the members themselves of the ethnic elites got in the first stage of fieldwork and that the sample shows a real structure of the inter-ethnic reputation and influence of an individual of the said communities, which does not

are married to persons who do not belong to their ethnic group, even 36% of the Romanians, 14% of the Hungarians, 22% of the Croats and 27% of the Slovaks. The nationality of the respondents almost in 100% of the cases in all groups coincides with the nationality of their parents. When asked about the nationality of the best friend, 43% of the Croats mention their compatriots, 57% of the Hungarians, 48% of the Romanians, 61% of the Slovaks and 59% of the Serbs. Judging by this finding, the ethnic elites in Vojvodina are on the inter-personal level rather open towards the members of other ethnic groups. This is understandable, regarding a huge number of their members who work everyday in multiethnic institutions like Novi Sad Radio and Television or the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad and that a majority of their members live in Novi Sad or in other bigger towns with the multiethnic structure and deprived of the ethnic spatial division.

necessarily have to correspond to the distribution of the formally most important positions. Among the questioned members of the ethnic elites 27% of them has occupied managing positions in the media and culture until quite recently, 10% had these positions until 5 October 2000 when they were replaced or made resign, 9% had their positions before and after 5 October, and the absolute majority (54%) was not in the position to occupy formally the managing positions. It can be noticed that a considerable part of the members of the ethnic elites got either managing positions or a better rating among their compatriots after the changes of 5 October. The respondents quite truly estimate their social influence. When directly asked "Do you think that your professional activity affect the forming of the social consciousness of the members of your ethnic group and at which extent?" 32% of them give the answers like "it affects it considerably", with even 50% of those who acknowledge their own partial influence. Actually, the members of the ethnic elites in Vojvodina are aware of their importance for preserving the identity of their own communities.

There are still more than two fifths of members of the former Communist League of Yugoslavia in the ethnic elites (42%). This shows a relatively slow changing of the personal composition of the observed groups. It should be borne in mind here that among the respondents there is a previously mentioned percentage of the priests who could not be members of the Communist League. Thus, there is a certain continuity regarding the previous attitude among the former communists at least when it comes to the religiosity, but also regarding the attitude towards the necessary economic reforms in Serbia. Among those who were the members of the Communist League there are 38% of the declared and 17% of the real, later convinced, believers. Among those who were not the members of the Communist League the corresponding percentages are 65 and 42 respectively. The ethnic elites certainly keep in touch with political-party circles in their communities. However, the absolute majority of their members is not organized within the party: among their asked members there are 26% of those who are members of the political parties with 15% more of those who were the members of the political parties after introducing a multiparty system, but who are not any more. The latter were generally members of those party options that were defeated in the events around 5 October 2000. With their number in the total sample the former correspond with the number of the formal holders of the managing positions in different ethnic, provincial or regional institutions and media.

On the level of the social consciousness of their members, the ethnic elites differ from ordinary citizens by their clear arguing for market economy and for a liberal economic model of development. A series of researches showed that among the citizens of Serbia, with some variations according to their ethnic belonging, there is approximately one third of clearly pro-market oriented and almost as many clearly egalitarian oriented, while the rest are indecisive. In our sample a very clear market orientation support 63% of the respondents, and the egalitarian one about 13%. The

ethnic elites are more modern in this regard than the ordinary citizens. It is interesting that the performed crossings showed that on this level there are no relevant differences between the members of different ethnic elites or among those of their members who were once members of the Communist League and those who were not. The majority consent of necessity of a full liberalization of the economy is in all fractions of the ethnic elites in Vojvodina.

Attitudes towards the individual rights

When asked “Which are in your opinion the main conditions for fulfilling the individual freedom of the citizens?” the respondents most often cite the existence of the law regulated state (25% of the total sample), then existence of the democratic institutions (21%), economic prosperity of the society (11%), etc. The respondents of the Serbian nationality disproportionately stress the importance of the economic development of the society and creation of the law regulated state to the detriment of the development of the democratic institutions (19%, 27% and less than 5% in this group respectively), probably considering the matter of the democratization of society already done. On the other hand, among the members of the ethnic elites of the minority communities arguing for the development of democracy as a basic precondition for fulfilling the individual freedom is much spread, maybe because they more clearly see the limitations of the non-consensual type of democracy that is being developed in Serbia at present. Establishing the democratic institutions as the most important precondition for fulfilling the individual freedom in this sense is mentioned in 34% of the answers of the respondents of the Hungarian nationality, 28% of the Romanians, 21% of the Croats and 16% of the Slovaks. The members of the Hungarian elite in this sense argue for the democratic institutions, using of the mother tongue, freedom of expression, tolerance, freedom of speech, press, mutual tolerance, the right to express personal attitudes, education in mother tongue, while they mention “absence of civil society, modern idea of democracy (which always respects the rights of the minorities). The members of the Romanian elite mention among others “eliminating the monopoly of the political power of the parties”, “mutual respect for the opinion of the others”, tolerance and freedom of being informed. The Slovaks also need more tolerance, but also the changing of the social climate, complaining about the absence of the legal regulations of the minority rights. Generally speaking, the members of the minority elites demand not only a multiparty system but also a developed civil society. The Romanians, as the representatives of the least numerous minority, most clearly feel the handicaps of the democracy which is reduced to inter-parties trading, since they alone are incapable of independent party organizing.

When asked “Which are the biggest obstacles of fulfilling the individual freedom of the citizens?” the respondents of the Hungarian nationality mention the undeveloped civil society, absence of the legal regulations and civil consciousness, nationalism, cheap politics, the phenomenon that the major nation does not notice the existence of differences, in definite law system in the field of human rights, political system according to the party criteria, an aggressive, provincial culture, xenophobia, etc. The Romanians warn about the insufficient law system, xenophobia of the major community, nationalism, refugees, etc. The respondents of the Slovakian nationality pay less attention to the insufficiency of the law system but more to the political-party conflicts and arguing. The respondents of the Croatian nationality very frankly warn about the xenophobia and the aggressive Serbian nationalism, and the members of the Serbian elite mainly point out the legal obstacles and poverty of the society as the obstacles to fulfilling the human rights. The question of democratization of society, solved for many Serbs, for the minorities is only open. Those less numerous of the communities particularly feel the danger of attaching the question of democracy to the mutual competition of the political parties, they being unable for party organizing.

When asked to cite directly the biggest obstacles for fulfilling the rights to be freely informed, the respondents rarely (in less than 10% of the cases) say that there are no obstacles there, and most often mention the influence of the political parties and a direct control over the journalists as some of the obstacles. Statistically regarding, the differences between the members of some groups are not significant, except for the case of the members of the Croatian elite, who, since they do not have an established press in the language they consider their separate language, do not mention a direct control over the journalists as a problem. The Hungarians often point to the financial troubles, the Romanians the absence of the educated people, the Slovaks to the self-censorship of the Slovakian journalists in Vojvodina and the influence of the LSV (Socio-democratic League of Vojvodina), and the Serbs to the different pressures that come from particular parties of the DOS. Regarding the fulfilling the right to be educated in the mother tongue, the Croats mention discrimination at a greater extent (27%) as well as the Hungarians (16%). Some of them mention the attitudes that do not have the factual base (e.g. “there are no secondary schools and faculties in the languages of the national minorities (except for some exceptions)” or “there are no secondary schools and faculties in the languages of the national minorities so they are deprived of education”) in the case of the Hungarians (almost 70% of the high school students of this nationality in Vojvodina are included in education in their mother tongue) but also there are those which point to the key problems (e.g. “the law which limits the number of the pupils in one class to 15”). The Croats warn about the centralism, corruption, chauvinism in practice in work and contents and very often, about the absence of the schools in Croatian language. It is not clear here what they mean by Croatian language, since

this is the language of the Serbs in, and the Serbian refugees from Croatia who settled in Vojvodina use its standard form, too. As for the right to handle their property freely, the most reproaches for the legal regulations among the respondents have the ethnic Serbs, while the Romanians and Hungarians primarily complain about the absence of denationalization of the property that the communists took away. Regarding the impediments for fulfilling the right to start an enterprise, the respondents mainly complain about the bad legal regulations and the corruption as a factor of impeding is mentioned in the answers of the asked Hungarians and Croats. It should be borne in mind here the existence of economic-political lobbies that were in function before and after 5 October and which somewhere, like in Subotica, openly assume the properties of the conflicts of different ethnic political-economic-criminal clans. A frequent answer of the respondents of the Hungarian nationality is "corruption", and the Croats cite also "mob" and "the closed market in some fields!" and "pushing back of everything non-Serbian in Srem". As for the attitude towards the voting rights of the citizens and their influence on political decision-making, it is very noticeable that the voting system is mentioned as a basic impediment in 25% of the answers of the Croats, in 24% of the Hungarians, 12% of the interviewed Slovaks, 10% of the Romanians and a little over 1% of the Serbs. The point is that the ethnic Croats can provide their parliamentary representatives only in the region of Subotica and that the limit of the electoral unit affects their possibility to have their elected representatives in Belgrade, as well as their part of their representatives at power on the local level in Subotica. As for the ethnic Hungarians, Milosevic's regime "cut" the electoral units in such a way so he could lessen the possibility of entering a greater number of the representatives of the Hungarians ethnic parties in the Parliament. Scattered and scarce Slovaks and Romanians slightly feel this problem, which particularly goes for the ethnic Serbs.

When asked which are the biggest obstacles on the level of fulfilling the human dignity, the respondents of all nations far too often mention economic poverty of the country and their citizens. In this regard, the members of the ethnic elites in Vojvodina express almost a harmonious attitude. However, when directly asked to cite the obstacles that stand before fulfilling the economic and social rights, the asked ethnic Serbs in an absolute majority (56% in their group, while in others 20% to 34%) cited the poverty of the country, while in the answers of the members of the minority elites there is a critic for the Belgrade centralization, citing the influence of the national-fatherland clans, corruption and the low culture of the population, as well as the undeveloped institutional bases.

When asked to cite the most significant examples of violation of the individual human rights they had heard of, the representatives of the Serbian and Slovakian elites almost did not mention at all the cases that included national discrimination, but concentrated on the examples of deprivation of freedom of the media and violation of the right to be employed. On the other hand, the members of

the Croatian, Hungarian, and Romanian elites cited as the examples of violation of individual rights those which included a dimension of the ethnic discrimination in 53%, 16% and 21% of the cases respectively. While the Serbs cited “expelling of the Serbs from Croatia, the campaign “Merciful angel”, keeping people in the Kosovo prisons without being prosecuted”, the Hungarians cited “the right of privacy (e.g. not only that the telephone conversations are tapped but the one who is tapping enters into conversation and insults)”, “Ric Zoltan who was sentenced to 3 years of imprisonment because during bombing he said that we could not fight against the NATO”, “an entrepreneur of the Serbian nationality employs only the Serbs and does not care about who is good and who is bad”, the Romanian maltreatments of the Romanians who emigrated from Romania, and the Croats, for example, “a capital case when the Republic Minister of Justice at the grandstand of the Parliament repudiates its political opponent by saying he is not a Serbian or at least, not a pure Serbian”, “threats, forced changing of residence, territorial cleansing, war, etc...”, “being a Croat, I feel deeply humiliated because the Croats in this country are not recognized as a national minority. This leads to a series of troubles and constant violations of human rights” or “I was searched at the border and taken to an informative talk for seventeen times during the previous regime only because I was a catholic priest” or “robberies, persecutions, killings that have not been even started to investigate”. It should be stressed here that during Milošević’s regime only the ethnic Croats were exposed to the mass repression on the ethnic grounds (from 1991 to 1993 with forced expelling, physical maltreatment and killings) as well as the ethnic Albanians (during the NATO intervention, with the mass burning of houses and shops and attempted lynching and expelling).

It is noticeable that the answers of the respondents rather show their insufficiently clear differentiation of individual and collective rights. This is rather understandable, since in the multiethnic environment and conditions, the supremacy of the Serbian ethnic nationalism the individual rights were and partially still are in a significant proportion determined by belonging to a concrete ethnic group. Members of the elites from the minor communities have a more clear idea of this, since they and their communities paid for such a situation.

Attitudes towards collective rights

The attitude towards the rights of the minority communities changes under the pressure of the demands of time and surroundings. Only 5% of the respondents of the Serbian nationality think that the members of the ethnic minorities in Vojvodina have too many rights. Even 36% of the respondents of the Serbian group (when compared to 33% of the asked Romanians, 40% of the Slovaks, 60% of the Croats and 64% of the Hungarians) think that special minority rights should also be assured

for the members of the minority communities. Other respondents mainly think that members of the minority communities should be assured the usual civil rights, without special collective rights. It is very interesting how the members of scarcer communities, probably for fear of Hungarian agreement at the expense of others, mostly argue for civil and not for collective rights. However, the findings of this research are in this regard fundamentally better than any other findings of any previous one.

What is the opinion of the members of the ethnic elites in Vojvodina about respecting different collective rights? 79% of the interviewed Croats, 54% of the Hungarians, 42% of the Slovaks and 20% of the Romanians are not satisfied with the right to be informed in their mother tongue. The Croats request their separate language to be acknowledged, and often “a support of the state” in the field of informing. The Hungarians request a positive discrimination, decentralization of the Novi Sad Television and Radio, reinforcing of the local media, but also releasing of the media in Hungarian language from the influence of the political parties. The Slovaks, partially the other way round, request centralization of the program in Slovakian language within Vojvodina, and have a lot of objections to the program broadcast in Backi Petrovac and to rather determined anti-Hungarian demands (“to take from the Hungarians and to give them to the others”, “the Hungarians have too many rights”). Regarding this anti-Hungarian signs of chauvinism the Romanians somehow remind of the Slovaks, which was confirmed in the previous researches. (“The Hungarians have a full daily TV and radio program, unlike other minorities; all should be assured the same rights to be informed”). They also demand better frequencies for the RTV and better financial conditions for newspapers in Romanian language.

When asked “Do you think that all bigger national groups in Vojvodina have satisfactory possibilities for education in their mother tongue?” the asked Hungarians answer negatively in 88% of the cases, the Croats in 80%, the Romanians in 27% and the Slovaks in 21%. We should remind here that according to the research of our associate Miroslav Samardzic, the education in the mother tongue in primary school cover about 78% of the Hungarians in Vojvodina (about 68% in secondary schools), and far over 60% of the Slovaks and Romanians in primary schools. When asked what they would change about the rights to be educated, the respondents of the Hungarian nationality mainly request education in their mother tongue on all levels, including university. Sometimes they are more reasonable in their demands (“primary education in all places and secondary in bigger places”), and the demands of the Alliance of the Hungarians in Vojvodina for a special education for Hungarians “from kindergarten to faculty” and in special shifts or in special school buildings, practically do not exist in the answers of the respondents. It will be seen that different findings were obtained when a direct question was asked. The Romanians have objections to a number and skill of the

teaching staff (which the fieldwork experiences confirm as a justified objection, but which is very difficult to change regarding the number of the Romanian population) and the Croats demand that “the Croats as a nation in Vojvodina have the same rights as the Hungarians, Slovaks, Ukrainians, Romanians...” including the demand for education in Croatian “from the kindergarten to university”. The number and quality of the teaching staff occupy the Slovaks as well as the Romanians. Dissatisfaction with the possibility of holding the managing positions, which is objectively the field of the existing ethnic discrimination in Vojvodina, is present among 81% of the interviewed Croats and Hungarians, 73% of the Romanians, 57% of the Slovaks and 21% of the Serbs. It is a field where there is the most expressed inter-ethnic competition but also the conflicts between the ethnic groups, which potentially can be passed over to other fields of social life in the easiest way. When asked what they would consider a favorable direction of change in this fields, the members of the minority communities argue for either “a civil principle” (i.e. skill) or the ethnic key (e.g. “following the ethnic structure in state firms”) the Croats, often faced with the specific situation in Subotica, stress the importance of eliminating the local fatherland-clan connections, the Slovaks hesitate between arguing for criteria of skill and ethnic proportion, the members of the Serbian elite (being in the most numerous group) stress that for the managing positions the ethnic belonging should not be crucial. The Hungarians demand elimination of the Serbian nationalism from distribution of the managing positions and sometimes introducing the quotes in a liberal sense, and the Romanians (since they belong to the group too scarce to enter into inter-ethnic deals) demand bigger proportion of the minority staff and elimination of the ethnic discrimination. It should be repeated that a high degree of dissatisfaction of the members of the minority elites with the distribution of the managing positions is a potential dangerous detonator of the inter-ethnic conflicts: this is how the conflicts started in Croatia and Bosnia.

Attitudes toward the inter-ethnic relations

When asked, “Which are the most significant examples of violating the collective rights of the minorities that you know of?” the members of the Slovakian elite, beside discrimination in being informed and educated, sometimes cite a change of the right of the minorities because of the coming of the refugees, and say that the documents are not in the languages of the minorities any more, complain that the Slovaks cannot be found in the managing positions, there are no donations for Bački Petrovac, or the notices in Slovakian in the public institutions. They say that in Stara Pazova the Slovaks use their mother tongue in secondary schools, but the mark in it is not included in the final results, which is not a motivation for preserving the ethnic identity. The Hungarians more openly and severely speak of the ethnic

discrimination, which begins in the kindergarten, and even of “the ethnic cleansing”. The Romanians mention discrimination, national intolerance increased by the coming of the refugees to Vojvodina, and the Croats mention discrimination, non-recognizing of the national minority, persecutions, killings, the so-called “Hrtkovci syndrome” – a synonym for the persecution of the Croats from Srem during early 90s.

To the question “How do you see the present position of your national group in Vojvodina?” the answers which include the feeling of the national peril give 45% of the asked Romanians, 44% of the Croats, 41% of the Serbs, 40% of the Hungarians and 7% of the Slovaks. The vitality of the Slovakian population is confirmed in this as well as in a series of other researches. It is very important that even two fifths of the asked members of the Serbian elite express the feeling of national peril. With such a feeling of peril even among the representatives of the ethnic majorities and among those from the minority groups, the possibility of a drastic aggravation of the inter-ethnic relations is not unreal whatsoever.

Who are the most prominent representatives of the ethnic elites according to the opinion of their colleagues? When asked about the most important representatives of their own ethnic group in Vojvodina, the asked Slovaks most often distinguish Vjera Boldocka, Zoroslav Spevak, Ljuboslav Majer and M. Harpanj. The Romanians more often than the others mention Slavko Almažan, Niku Čobanu and Kosta Rošu, and almost never the Romanian politicians like Jon Čizmas or Jon Srbovan. The Hungarians very often mention political leaders of the Hungarian ethnic parties and very often the professors close to the politics like Tibor Varadi and Korhec Tamaš or the authors and scientists like Tolnai Oto, Vegel Laslo, Bori Imre or Ribar Bela. Croats neglect party leaders such as Franjo Vujkov and Bela Tonković and they often mention the culture workers or priests like Kalman Kuntić, Josip Ivanović, Slaven Bačić, Lazar Merković, Andrija Kopilović and Marko Kljajić. Among the Serbian elite there is an obvious lack of personal preferences and the names like Vasilije Krestić or Kosta Čavoski although these people do not live in Vojvodina any more, are not eliminated from the list of those who are estimated as the most important.

Three questions are of special significance for understanding the attitude of the members of the ethnic elites towards the inter-ethnic relations. For the question “What do you think about the idea suggested by some politicians to form two houses in the Assembly of Vojvodina, the House of deputies and the House of national communities?” a positive attitude have 60% of the respondents of the Croatian nationality, 51% of the Slovaks, 49% of the Romanians 46% of the Hungarians and 41% of the Serbs. It is very interesting that the idea at first promoted by the political organizations of the Hungarians in Vojvodina found a stronger support among the distinguished intellectuals of other minority communities and what is especially

surprising is that this idea is supported by a significant number of the Serbian elite. The question “Do you agree that the members of the national minorities in Vojvodina have a possibility to be educated in their mother tongue in special schools from kindergarten to university?” had a positive answer in 72% of the members of the Slovaks elite, 69% of the Croatian, 64% of the Serbian, 58% of the Hungarian and 37% of the Romanian nationality. The question “What do you think of introducing a territorial autonomy for the members of the national minorities where they are in majority according to the total population?” 23% of the Croats showed a positive attitude towards the ethnic territorial autonomies, 11% of the Romanians, 9% of the Hungarians, 5% of the Serbs and 4% of the Slovaks. The last finding can seem confusing because only the Hungarian group is numerous enough and concentrated to aspire a territorial autonomy that would not be of pure local or municipal character. We could think that the Croatian intellectuals are, regardless of their dissatisfaction with the distribution of the resources in Subotica, more inclined to North Bačka autonomy than that of Vojvodina because in the former they would not make a marginal factor. On the other hand, the answers of the respondents of all nationalities to the questions about the special ethnic educational systems and about sometimes demanded House of nationalities, clearly show that they, when regarded on the collective level, rather live one beside the other than one with the other, contrary to the findings regarding the inter-personal level of their relations. If judging by the findings of this research, and it was done by the same methodological principles as the previous, among the ethnic elites in Vojvodina the principle of multiculturalism and a parallel peaceful life triumphed over the principle of interculturalism, i.e. common, mutual cultural enriching with developing of the differences. It seems that even the leading cultural and media exponents of the ethnic majority agreed to this solution, partially probably confused by the fast rhythm of changes that came after 5 October 2000. Anyway, it means that those who form the opinion of the citizens of Vojvodina are willing to live one beside the other rather than one with the other, which means certain differences in the case of a change of a relatively stable outside political surroundings and new messings-ups in the Balkans.

Instead of a conclusion

A summarized conclusion is that in the ethnic elites in Vojvodina the principle of multiculturalism and a parallel peaceful life triumphed over the principle of interculturalism, i.e. common, mutual cultural enriching with developing of the differences. Consequently, it means that those who influence the public opinion in Vojvodina are willing to live one beside the others, which comprises certain differences. However, as a whole, the attitude towards the human rights and the

rights of the minorities has much improved when compared to the previous researches. Providing that the stable political surroundings exist, we can expect a further favorable trend.

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