

RESEARCH DRAFT

**SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF
SLOVAK-HUNGARIAN INTERETHNIC AND INTERSTATE
RELATIONS**

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SUMMARY

Before joining the EU, many politicians and political experts from the Central-East-European region half or fully expected that political relations between the new member states would improve after the accession, within a brand new frame of political cooperation which the EU offers us. Contrary to these high expectations, since 2004 overall political situation in Central-East Europe (especially in the Visegrad region) has been worsened. Beside internal political crises of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic, the **recent diplomatic tensions** between Slovakia and Hungary are also one important component of this negative tendency. It highlights that problems in the Slovak-Hungarian will not be solved automatically under the integration process: it needs **active intercultural Slovak-Hungarian dialogue**.

„Recent diplomatic tensions” –

April 2006 – three Hungarian teachers (visiting Bratislava with their students) were imprisoned in Slovakia for one day; official reason was illegal tourist guiding for their students. Hungarian mass media and political life reacted powerfully.

May 2006 – the political campaign of Slovak National Party (Slovenská Národná Strana, SNS) focuses on anti-Hungarian messages.

June 2006 – elections in Slovakia; the SNS (with 12 % of votes) becomes the member party of the new governing coalition.

July-August 2006 – symbolic anti-Slovak phenomena in Hungary and symbolic anti-Hungarian phenomena in Slovakia (videos about burning national flags, hostile subscriptions on football matches) – Slovak and Hungarian authorities are trying to step against these tendencies.

August 2006 – an ethnic Hungarian girl living in Slovakia stated Slovak skinheads, who wrote anti-Hungarian messages on her blues, had beaten her up. Slovak-Hungarian problems became the “Number one” subject of mass media on both sides. Slovak police states that the girl lied and found out the whole story.

October 2006 – Visegrad meeting of prime ministers (CZ, PL, HU, SK) – Hungarian and Slovak prime ministers conducted sharp and offensive debate on the press conference, Slovak-Hungarian relations reached to a deadlock.

Before analysing the complex relationship between Slovaks and Hungarians, it should be clearly defined what this “relationship” means. Slovak-Hungarian international relations could be divided into two different (but overlapping) parts: an **interstate** and an **interethnic** one. Interstate relations (*medzištátné vzťahy*) mean the official diplomatic connection between Slovakia and Hungary. Interethnic relations (*medzietnické vzťahy*) mean the overall opinion of everyday Slovaks and Hungarians on the other nation. Of course, this latter definition hides the fact that opinions formed on each other could be very different within the Slovak and Hungarian society as well. Nevertheless, several socio-psychological research projects have been able to evaluate this complex question on a high, academic level.¹

In the next pages, we will look through the two main groups of socio-psychological problems burdening Slovak-Hungarian interethnic relations: communication obstacles and the memory of national grievances. The results are based on the comparative research of the **main Slovak historical works**.

The following books were considered as „**main Slovak historical works**” –

The so-called „six-volumed History of Slovakia”, whose chapters are basic – and often compulsory – literature for university students in Slovakia. (*Dejiny Slovenska*. Ed. Samuel Cambel. VEDA, Bratislava, 1985-1988.)

In 1992, Matica Slovenska and the Slovak Academy of Science (SAV) published “The Slovak History”. (*Slovenské dejiny*. R. Marsina, E. Lipták, D. Kováč, V. Čičaj. Matica Slovenska, Martin, 1992). In 2000 it was republished under the title “History of Slovakia” (*Dejiny Slovenska*. Dušan Čaplovič et al., AEP, Bratislava 2000).

In 1999, the two-volumed “Chronicle of Slovakia” (*Kronika Slovenska*. Dušan Kováč a kol. Fortuna-Print, Bratislava, 1999) was brought out as part of popular Chronicle-series.

In the first half of the nineties was issued the popular book of historian Anton Špiesz, entitled “History of Slovakia – on the way to the self-consciousness” (*Dejiny Slovenska – na ceste k sebauvedomeniu*. Perfekt, Bratislava, 1992.) This work was republished in 2006, and issued in English as well, under the title “Illustrated Slovak History”.

The well-known Slovak historian Dušan Kováč brought out his „History of Slovakia” in Prague, 1998. (Dušan Kováč: *Dejiny Slovenska*. Nakladatelství Lidové Noviny, Praha, 1998)

The latest historical textbooks (*Dejepis*) for secondary schools, published by the Slovak Pedagogical Publisher (*Slovenské pedagogické nakladateľstvo*) between 2000 and 2005.

The comprehensive book entitled „A concise history of Slovakia” (*Krátke dejiny Slovenska*. Ed. Elena Mannova. AEP, Bratislava) was printed in 2004. It was published in English as well.

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I. Communication problems

Slovak-Hungarian interethnic relations are burdened by several well-defined communication problems. Present essay shall deal only with the three most important ones: usage and meanings of words –

- *Uhorsko-Madžarsko*,
- *Slovensko*, and
- [Felvidék].

In the following pages, Slovak idioms will be written in *italic style*, Hungarian ones will be put in [square brackets].

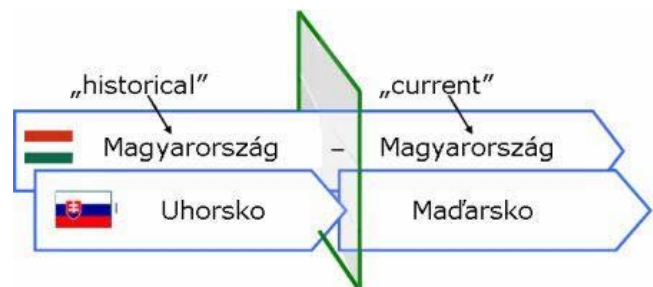
Uhorsko – Mađarsko

Slovaks use the idiom of *Uhorsko* for Hungary before 1918, and *Mađarsko* for Hungary after Trianon. Hungarians – nor the average people neither the profession of historians – do not make this kind of strong distinction, and consider the history of Hungary [as Hungarians call: Magyarország]² one continuous, unbroken process. Hungarian public opinion considers the events of 1918-1919 (e.g. Treaty of Trianon, when the historical borders of Hungary were abandoned) very important milestone, but it marks only a new phases within the history of the same country, Hungary.

Pros and cons in the question over continuity:

- Neither foreign languages use two different terms for pre-Trianon and post-Trianon Hungary.³ Legal and symbolic continuousness between pre-Trianon and post-Trianon Hungary is also evident: capital is Budapest, flag is the red-white-green tricolour, anthem is the same as well, and the acts remained in force.
- In the other hand, the Slovak way of making distinction is also logically: *Uhorsko* – in contrary to term of *Mađarsko* – means a **multicultural state**, which was the homeland of the Slovak nation as well.⁴

This complex situation originating from the **different national auto-stereotypes** can cause interethnic communication problems even today in that aspect, that Hungarian term for Hungary [Magyarország] meaning “Hungarian state” may sound discriminative for Slovaks if it is used for historical periods before Trianon.



Slovakia: not historical, but geographical concept

Slovak historians who want to write a Slovak history have to face the question whether “Slovak history” means the history of Slovaks or the history of Slovakia.⁵ Generally, this latter solution dominates the textbooks: the territory of Slovakia is put in the focus, and Slovakia – *Slovensko* is considered as a geographic and not a historical idiom. According to this, the **Slovak history is the history of territory of Slovakia.**

It involves that phrase “in Slovakia” – *na Slovensku* – is used by Slovak historians in connection even with the Middle Ages. Phrase “in Slovakia” means in this case a geographical concept, and not a territory of a state, since only in 1918-1919 were the today’s borders of Slovakia defined. Nevertheless, this question causes permanent debates between Slovak and Hungarian historiography.⁶

The main Slovak historical works keep the logical rule (Slovakia – as a geographical concept), and describe even the existence of Roman or Avars “in Slovakia” – *na Slovensku* – when the Slovaks did not live on this territory. However, the regional history of other nations living in Slovakia remains partly hidden in these works.



How to give a comprehensive historical account of a historical region – Slovak Upper Land, Slovakia – which existed for ages, but whose borders were put down precisely only in 1918? What does the „history of Slovakia” contains? – a methodical problem which facing Slovak historians.

Concept of [Felvidék]

Most of today’s Hungarians use the idiom [Felvidék]⁷ for Slovakia. This word was introduced into the Hungarian public consciousness in the second half of the 19. century. However the atmosphere of Hungarian imperial nationalism, which propagated to use this concept, are already in the past, but the expression [Felvidék] remains alive in the Hungarian language, and became a synonym of Slovakia.

Due to its obscure origin, the idiom in question **has a strong negative connotation in Slovak lingual context.**⁸ A pleasant solution may be that persons who represent Hungary or Hungarians before Slovaks do not spare time and energy to highlight the today’s neutrality of the word [Felvidék].

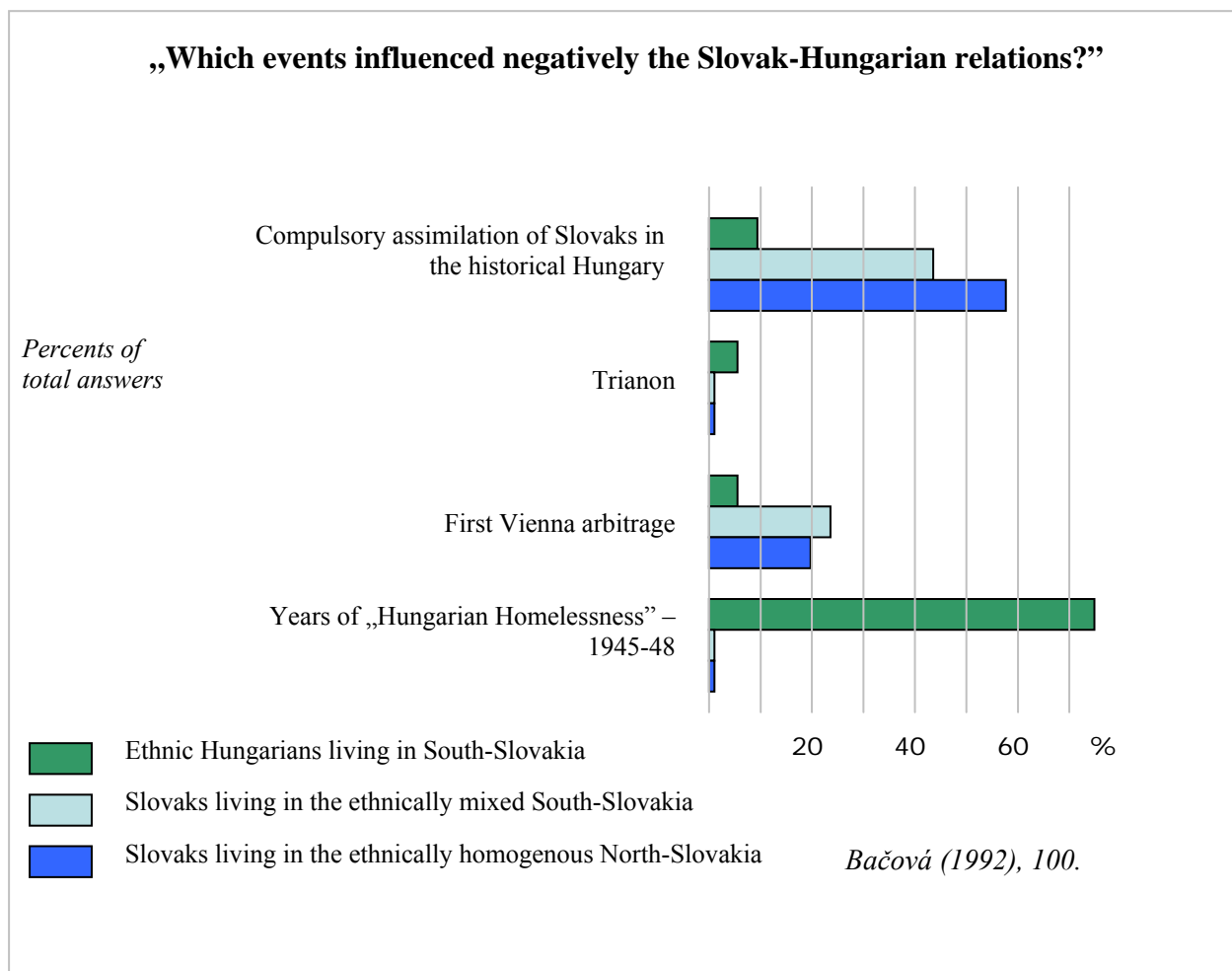
II. Memory of grievances

According to either political debates or academic analyses,⁹ the following historical events or phenomena are determinative for Slovak-Hungarian interethnic (and interstate) relations:

- The assimilation policy of the Hungarian Kingdom before the first world war, in the era of dualism
- Trianon and the first Vienna Arbitral of November 2, 1938
- The “years of the Hungarian statelessness” (1945-1948)

As for instance the above-mentioned research work displays on the basis of surveys, the assimilation policy of the Hungarian Kingdom and the first Vienna Arbitral were mentioned by Slovaks as events which are responsible for deterioration of Slovak-Hungarian relations. Contrary to it, the vast majority of ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia mentioned some of those events which can be grouped under the “years of the Hungarian statelessness”. In addition, the Treaty of Trianon also belongs to this list – many personal interethnic tensions of psychological or communicational kinds originate from it.

Thereinafter, we shall review these four affairs from a kind of “Hungarian” point of view, but knowing what the main Slovak historical textbooks say about them.



Assimilation process: spontaneity versus compulsion

Memory of strong assimilation policy of Hungarian Kingdom in the era of dualism (1867-1918) plays an important role in the Slovak historical consciousness. On the basis of historical sources, we can clearly collect and even list the main Slovak historical grievances from this period:

- **closure of Matica Slovenska** (most important Slovak scientific and cultural organisation) and the Slovak secondary schools – 1874-1875;
- the Education Act of 1907 (lex Apponyi), which abolished many Slovak-language elementary schools;
- the **fusillade at Cernova** in the same year (fusillade of Hungarian gendarmeries, 5 Slovaks were killed).

These events are not known by most of Hungarians.¹⁰ The era of dualism represents for most Hungarians the “years of peace” and the memory of massive economical prosperity. Memory of compulsory assimilation is very elementary for lots of Slovaks, and it hides, that the assimilation process in the 19. century **has a spontaneous character too.**¹¹

Hungarian assimilation policy in the era of dualism (1867-1918) caused negative long-term effect for Slovak-Hungarian relations, because the Slovak-Hungarian cohabitation so became “the thousand-year prison of Slovak nation” in the Slovak historical consciousness.¹²

Trianon and the first Vienna arbitrage: the psychology of treaties

Trianon (Treaty signed in 1920.06.04; historical Hungary was divided between succeeding countries) was a shocking trauma for contemporary Hungarians:

- Every third Hungarian found themselves beyond the new Hungarian borders. Often they lived in one ethnic block, immediately close to the Hungarian borders.
- Almost all families in Hungary had some close or distant relatives or friends, from whom they were separated by the new borders. More than 400 thousand people abandoned their own earlier home and move to Hungary.¹³
- For those Hungarians, who did not have any serious personal experience, felt somehow the negative effects of Trianon too. Hungarians were hardly able to get used to being only one of the many little Central-East-European nations.

These factors were the most important key-factors of the revisionist public sentiment prevailing among Hungarians between the two world wars.¹⁴

But why so many Hungarians got to succeeding countries? The definition of the new borders was driven not only by mere ethnic aspects, but strategic, economic or geographic ones as well.¹⁵ Eduard Beneš struggled for having the whole train-line which ensure the connection with the Podkarpatksy Rus (**Carpathian Ukraine**) which territory was also attached to Czechoslovakia between the two world wars.¹⁶ Czecho-Slovak politicians like Milan Hodža or Vavro Šrobár stressed the importance of **having port on the Danube**; as the latter put it down: “our state

without the Danube can not exist".¹⁷ These claims overwrote the pure ethnic aspects of defining borders which was the idea of Woodrow Wilson.

Hungarian revisionism between the two world wars stressed territorial claims also from strategic, geographical and economic points of view. Although territorial claims supported by strategic and economic argumentation can sound very rationalistic, they should be considered kinds of psychological phenomena, because they highlight those **fearing feelings of contemporary national elites, that their "nation" is not single and complete without certain territories where they not (or only very scarcely) lived.**

The question of Trianon was worthy to detail for comparing how the **first Vienna Arbitral** of 2 November 1938 (South-Slovakia was attached to Hungary) was judged by Slovaks. The Slovak Everyman considered it a violation over the "Slovak territory"¹⁸ – like Hungarian Everyman considered Trianon. Neither of them seems to had been able to recognise, that **both decision had such components which corresponded the ethnic principles.**¹⁹ It shows the pure fact that territorial dimension of the national identity seems as evident as the other aspects of the identity, and its questioning by others evokes instinctive reactions in the short run.

The Hungarian "years of homelessness"²⁰ – 1945-1948

After 1945, Hungarians living in (Czecho-)Slovakia suffered from several so called "**internal measures**" (*vnútré opatrenia*) between 1945-1948:

- they lost their Czechoslovak citizenship, and so their basic human and civil rights, they did not have job, insurance, and Hungarian language schools.
- the Hungarian language was squeezed out from the public life: posters warned people not to speak Hungarian, etc.
- 40000 Hungarians were displaced to Czech lands for obligatory "public work".²¹

These steps based on decrees of president Edvard Beneš and modified in some cases by the Slovak National Council (*Slovenská Národná Rada*).

Within the frame of an international contract on **mutual exchange of population** between Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1946, altogether more than 70000 Hungarians were displaced from Slovakia, and 70000 Slovaks from Hungary.

Reslovakisation campaign: theoretically, it intended to excluding those persons from the scope of anti-Hungarian measurements who had Slovak roots and were willing to "get back" to the Slovak nation. Practically, it was a kind of forced assimilation and aimed to modify the ethnic composition of the South-Slovakian population. Crowd of Hungarians called for Reslovakisation in order to escape before deportation, or to gain back their civic rights. After 1948, most of them admitted themselves Hungarian again when "internal measures" went out of effect.

The “years of homelessness” is badly known by Slovaks.²² It is not creating an active part of the Slovak historical consciousness, although Slovak historians described them in a more or less detailed way, and some of them unambiguously condemned the anti-Hungarian measurements.²³

There is a Hungarian attempt to reach representatives of Slovak state to ask forgiveness for these years, or at least to make symbolic steps distancing from these measurements. Slovak side judges this period “in its historical context” which means that it was a kind of revenge for the Vienna Arbitral in the aggressive post-war atmosphere.²⁴

Appendix – Project “Shattered Past”

This research draft is based on the results of „Shattered Past” (*Rozštiepená Minulosť*) project, lead by Terra Recognita Foundation and financed by Stredoeuroopska Nadácia and the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The “Shattered Past” project aims to make reflections on those points of the Slovak historical consciousness, which are somehow in connections with the Hungarians, or with the Hungarian nation as a whole. (See: www.tra.hu) The personal work of author was supported by the International Visegrad Foundation (within the frame of Visegrad Scholarship) and the Hungarian Ministry of Education (within the frame of Klebelsberg Kunó Scholarship).

FOOTNOTES

¹ See e.g. yearly reports of Institute for Public Affairs (*Inštitút pre verejnú správu*): *Slovensko 2005. Súhrn správa o stave spoločnosti*. IVO, Bratislava, 2006. From Hungarian side, for instance Csepeli György: *Emberek vetése. A XXI. század szociálpszichológiai kihívásai*. [Challenges of socio-psychology in the XXI. century] Józsoveg-Hiánypótló, Budapest, 2003. See results of surveys on p. 59-60.

² Pronounce in Slovak phonetically *Maďarország*.

³ For Uhorsko, Hungarian Kingdom or „historical Hungary” expressions can be used. These expressions have Hungarians counterparts as well [történelmi Magyarország, Magyar Királyság] which are used frequently but not consequently. Moreover, “Hungarian Kingdom” is historically not correct: Hungary remained officially a kingdom after Trianon as well, only did not have rulers.

⁴ From this point of view, it can be questioned why the borderline between Uhorsko and Maďarsko is drawn even 1918 and why it is so sharp, since Hungary was governed as the exclusive state of Hungarians already in the era of dualism. Examples can be found in *Krátke dejiny Slovenska* that Slovak historians facing this problem use the term of “uhorský-maďarský” (Hungarian-Magyar) as an attribute.

⁵ *Krátke dejiny...* (2003), p. 331-340. Written by **Alexander Avenarius**.

⁶ Many Slovak historians put down that phrase “on the territory of today’s Slovakia” (*na území dnešného Slovenska*) would be the most correct phrase, but it is hard to use in written Slovak. *Krátke dejiny...* (2003), p. 8.

⁷ Most correct translation of Felvidék may be Highland or Upper Land; in Slovak *Horniáky* or *Horná zem*, but in word-by-word translation *Horná krajina*, *Horné okolie*

⁸ *Krátke dejiny...* (2003), p. 8. István Käfer: *Dona nobis pacem. Magyar-szlovák kérdések*. [Dona npobis pacem. Slovak-Hungarian questions.] PPKÉ BTK, Piliscsaba, 1998. See, for instance, p. 23. „Usage of [Felvidék] is disgusting for me.”

⁹ Viera Bačová: Vnímanie problémov možnosti ich riešenia v Slovensko-maďarských vzťahoch na Slovensku. In: *Slovensko-maďarské vzťahy v 20. storočí*. Zost. Peter Zelenák. Bratislava, 1992. 99-106.o

¹⁰ But these events are well-known by Hungarian historians, whose works usually devote attention to the question. See e.g. László Szarka: *Slovenský národný vývin – národnostná politika v Uhorsku, 1867-1918*. Kalligram-MKKI, Pozsony-Bratislava, 1999.

¹¹ Several Slovak sources also make clear distinction between spontaneous (spontánna) and compulsory (násilná) asimilácia. See *Krátke dejiny*, p. 254-256.

¹² Mészáros (2004), p. 191-192. *A takto sa stal maďarsky-slovensky spoluzivot „tisícročnom žalári slovenského národa”*.

¹³ Some sources (Dr. Petrichevich Horváth Emil: *Jelentés az Országos Menekültügyi Hivatal négyévi működéséről*. [Report on four-year activity of the National Institute for Refugee Affairs Budapest], 1924.) says about more than 400 thousand refugees, others (e.g. Peter Pastor) estimates it around 350000. 100000 of them came from Slovakia. Dr. Petrichevich (1924), p. 37.

¹⁴ Zeidler Miklós: *A revíziós gondolat*. [The idea of revisionism]. Osiris, Budapest, 2001. p. 49, 159.

¹⁵ Lubomir Lipták in *Dejiny Slovenska* (2000), p. 226.: *hranica s Maďarskom je „kombinácia prvkov etnických, štartegických a hospodárskych”*. *Dejiny Slovenska V*. (Ed. Samuel Cambel, VEDA, Bratislava, 1985), p. 21.: *demarkačná čiara „spájala princíp etnický, hospodársky, a geografický”*.

¹⁶ Marian Hronský: *Boj o Slovensko a Trianon. 1918-1920*. Bratislava, 1998. p. 216.

¹⁷ „*náš štát bez Dunaja nemože žiť*”. Dr. Vavro Šrobár: *Oslobodené Slovensko. Pamäti z rokov 1918-1920*. AEP, Bratislava, 2004. p. 107.

¹⁸ *Dejiny Slovenska* (2000), p. 259.

¹⁹ The emotional attributes are also the same in both cases. „About us, without us” - say Hungarians concerning Trianon.

²⁰ Kálmán Janics gave this phrase for title of his book on Beneš-decrees. Janics Kálmán: *A hontalanság évei*. [The years of the homelessness; or The years of fugitiveness] Pozsony, 1992. This work was translated to Slovak: *Roky bez domoviny. Maďarská menšina na Slovensku po druhej svetovej vojne 1945-1948*. Püski, Budapest, 1994.

²¹ Vadkerty Katalin: *Maďarská otázka v Československu 1945 - 1948: trilógia o dejinách maďarskej menšiny*. Kalligram, Bratislava, 2002. Štefan Šutaj: *Prezidentské dekréty Edvarda Beneša v povojnovom Slovensku*. VEDA, Bratislava, 2005. The following lines are based on these sources as well.

²² Miroslav Kusy: *A magyarkérdés Szlovákiában*. [The question of Hungarians in Slovakia]. Kalligram, Pozsony, 2002.

²³ E.g. Špiesz (2006), 241-242, or *Dejepis pre 3. ročník* (2005).

²⁴ E.g. Lubomir Lipták: *Slovensko v 20. storočí*. Bratislava, 1968, p. 261; also Lubomir Lipták in *Dejiny Slovenska* (2000), p. 259. Šutaj (2005), p.7. *Dejiny Slovenska VI*, p. 65-66.