



Issues of Autonomy and Hungarian Political Parties in Voivodina after the Change of System

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Abstract. In the paper we attempted to analyse the autonomy created in the special moment of the Serbian political scene in 2008 in order to present the (ever-current) political influences on the views on and attitudes towards the institutional system of the minority. These influences affected the documentary codification of the three-pillar autonomy, too. This has majority and minority constituents as well. From a majority viewpoint, we discussed the abolition of the threshold for minority lists as a support for the development of minority autonomy. Then again, the ab ovo refusal of regional segmentation is also present in the minority political discourse of the majority society. From this, attempts to 'de-territoriate' the minority autonomy institutions are generated in a straightforward way. At the same time, the relations of minority participants to each other and to the majority are of decisive importance as well. Enough to mention the Hungarian question that emerged about the making of minority register of voters: who is able to make the list substantively and whose interest is it? This problem, being essentially a problem of election techniques, manifested in the Hungarian discourse of Voivodina as a pivotal clash of interests not without ideological undertones, and it also destroyed the coalition. The attitude towards it has posited the very existence of the manifest personal autonomy in Serbia as a subject of legitimacy disputes.

Party interests and institution formation create a multi-agent political field where the momentary interests of actors and their longer-term strategies cannot be distinguished clearly. The classical threefold distinction of political studies is reproduced by the institutional scenes of minority autonomy in connection with both the respective attitudes and the minority political results they achieve. Therefore, aspects of institution (1), of party political antagonisms (2 – politics) and the desired policies (3) should be distinguished in

the minority political field as well. Since the segment itself is quite complex due to the number and size of participants, interpretation of its processes is also complicated.¹ However, if we intend to understand the causes of the phenomena, to make relevant comments on a politico-theoretical level about the social advantages of the forming institution system and about the challenges it generates, (apart from the classical horizontal segmentation) we have to include the characteristics stemming from the minority/majority/parent-nation constellation in our analysis.

If we succeed in doing so, we can perhaps avoid such superficial social judgements about personal autonomy as hurray-optimism or pitifully devaluating institutional assessments. Our goal was here to contribute to this effort with our humble academic methods.

Keywords: minority politics, Hungarian parties beyond the borders of Hungary, National Councils, autonomy.

1. Introduction

Following the change(s) of system, the attitude towards personal (in other terms: cultural) autonomy has been a main political topic for trans-border Hungarian communities. Almost everywhere where Hungarian minority representation of interest was able to take an institutionalised (organised as political parties) and pluralistic (with multiple political orientations) form, minority parties deal with the issues of cultural autonomy: they articulate their relevant concepts and expectations. It is only in Serbia, however, where the topic has become an institutionalised (implemented) and not only wished (posited as a goal to be realised) part of the political arena, where it has been able to affect the daily political life of the minority. As of today, Hungarians in Serbia (mostly in Voivodina) have to face also the drawbacks (i.e. the less than ideal and unexpected aspects of the original plans) of the institutions (national councils) implementing personal autonomy. Therefore, the attitudes towards the national council as an existing political institution and towards the wider context of minority autonomy shape the daily events of minority politics in a different way.

Our present paper examines the situation of minority parties in connection with the elections of the national councils, a phenomenon that has recently emerged in the majority-principled arena of direct representation: first we present the theoretical (declared) comments of the Hungarian parties in Voivodina about the minority institution system. Then we attempt to interpret the reasons and motivations of the *dissatisfaction* concerning this system of minority institutions that has remained only a wish in other Hungarian-populated areas. The basis for the

¹ So their analysis is not the most fruitful academic occupation.

interpretation will be the behaviour of the examined social formations during the 2010 elections of the MNT II and their relationship with the functioning of the current MNT.

Hopefully, the analysis will provide an interpretation of these minority institutions that is also relevant in a sociological sense. We find this particularly important for the following reasons: In the last two decades, many concepts have been formed in public thought about personal autonomy and in many cases these were unable to distinguish between wishes and possibilities. The prolonged debates on the functioning of the MNT may well be able to falsely diminish the seeming necessity of autonomy and devalue the institution itself, just because its actual operation, its instrumentalised functioning and its reputation failed to become perfect in the recent past.

2. The attitudes of Hungarian parties in Serbia towards minority autonomy before 2010

The then relevant Hungarian parties in Voivodina took part in the 2008 national and provincial elections together. The ‘press term’ for this temporary cooperation became Magyar Koalíció (MK – Hungarian Coalition). In Serbia, the ever current coalition lists tend to be referred to by a list name that suggests the goals of the given alliance. These labels do not need to cover any closer and institutionalised cooperation. Their function is merely to make the competing formations distinguishable. In the same year, the winning coalition was labelled as ‘For European Serbia – Boris Tadic’ during elections. The name of the party leader/head of state was only to impersonate the offered option. (Here we do not need to elaborate on the question whether or not an already inaugurated president should enter the election struggle, even in such a tertiary-presidential system² as Serbia.) The Hungarian Coalition (from now on: the MK) consisted of the then relevant Hungarian parties: Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség, Vajdasági Magyar Demokrata Párt and Vajdasági Magyarok Demokratikus Közössége. István Pásztor was the Coalition’s facade person in the aforementioned sense. Just before the elections, they produced a merely 7-page text referred to as ‘*A Magyar Koalíció Autonomiakoncepciója*’ (The Autonomy Concept of the Hungarian Coalition, from now on: MKak) which was to be evaluated as a common viewpoint. The document was essentially a commonly propagated and desired election programme of all the three parties.

² In Serbia, the President is elected directly, while his (so-called ‘weak presidential’) functions correspond to systems commonly referred to as Parliamentary. To mark the controversy of this situation, the terms ‘tertiary presidential system’ or ‘asymmetric presidential system’ are used in the discourse space of political theories.

The text exceeded its election aims by far, both in its linguistic style (over-sophisticated legal style)³ and content (it sketched out an institutional system far beyond the 4-year representational term). According to its preamble, its main tasks were the followings:

- a) *to organise the personal- and regional-principled forms of autonomy into one unified system*
- b) *to provide solutions of administration and justice-organisation that correspond better to the interests of the Hungarian community in Voivodina (C.f. MKak, p.1.)*

The formation of the coalition was induced mainly by the previous negative experiences about the vote-maximising possibilities. From 2004 on, parties were competing in a system of proportional lists, but (and this was the reason for the alliance four years later) the 5% threshold for entering the Parliament did not apply to minority lists, so they gained mandates according to the principle of the so-called natural threshold, with their received votes in the proportion of the same quote for majority parties to whom the threshold applied. Indeed, this factor forced⁴ the unified appearance of these otherwise antagonistic (incompatible on a personal level) formations that were created basically by secession from each other (let us ignore who and why seceded from who, or which was the original).

But the above applies only to the national level of the election system. However, the times of the (before-schedule) national and the provincial elections partially overlapped. (Only partially because provincial elections are done in a mixed-form system similar to – but less sophisticated than – the previous Hungarian system and its individual phase has two turns.⁵)

3. The theoretical approach to minority autonomy

The autonomy concept listed the followings as the goals to reach:

- 1. Personal-principled autonomy (see: MKak, pp. 1.-5.)
- 2. Regional municipalities – a multiethnic region with Hungarian majority (see: MKak pp 5.-6.)

³ Which is not worse than the overly complicated academic language of our paper, yet it is less than suitable for interpellating the majority of voters, and suitable for laying the foundations of the political discourse about autonomy.

⁴ The 2007 elections brought 3 mandates for the individual party of VMSZ. The coalition list of VMDK-VMDP had none. Since the turn in 2000, Serbia only saw out-of-schedule elections. This pattern seems to break as the same government is in power since 2008. According to normal schedule, the next elections will be in the spring of 2012, uninfluenced even by the possible positive outcome of the December 9. 2012 EU-decision about the status of Serbia.

⁵ And they had to suffer a serious loss of representation on this level (even if the small party mythology of Voivodina tends to ignore this fact) – half of the mandates proportional to population numbers.

3. Political autonomy – proportional Parliamentary representation (see. MKak, p. 6.)
4. Autonomy of Voivodina (see MKak, p.6.),
5. Autonomy of local municipalities (MKak p. 7.)
6. Regional organisation of administration and jurisdiction (see. MKak p. 7.).

As it can well be seen from the page numbers, the legal establishment of personal autonomy, the future framework of the law concerning national councils gained the most space in the document.⁶ It must be especially noted that the chapters 1, 2 and 5 can be regarded as the direct constituent parts of the so-called *3-level autonomy*. The other three chapters include the frameworks for (national, Parliamentary-level manifestation of) minority representation, strengthening of the sub-national level and government decentralisation. These are not direct parts of the institutional system of minority autonomy, but can assist its operation in more than one regard.

4. Majority institutions supporting the formation of minority autonomy

A) *Political autonomy* (chapter 3) is nothing more than a lasting commitment to the aforementioned ‘minority-friendly’ form of the national elections (which positively discriminates ethnic and national minorities by ignoring their threshold for entering Parliament).

B) *Autonomy of Voivodina* (chapter 4) does not qualify as a minority autonomy effort, not even according to the MKak. This is to be emphasised since it is not clear from even the academic publications about the Autonomous Province of Voivodina (Vajdasági Autonóm Tartomány – from now on: VAT) how it should/could be labelled. (C.f. Soós, 2011.) We consider it (in accordance with the interpretations of the 2008 MK statement) as a catalyst institute that supports minority institutional system but does not equal or substitute it.⁷ The MKak also considers that establishment of minority autonomy would be supported by (1) the restoration of the former legal powers of the VAT that were nullified during the establishment of the Milosevic system and (2) their update to the present challenges.

⁶ The section on the national council (personal autonomy) is nine times longer than the description of the ideas about regional autonomy.

⁷ See Sarnyai-Pap, 2010 and Pap, 2010 for a detailed discussion on the autonomy efforts and national councils in Voivodina. The ethnically based regionalism of minorities in Voivodina was presented at a conference in Kaposvár, the paper is under publication.

“We have the earnest conviction that a Voivodina that possesses autonomous assets, incomes, and widespread economic, political and administrative autonomy would result in

- a) faster economic development*
- b) a more consistent implementation of the principles of a constitutional state*
- c) more efficient realisation of human and minority rights*
- d) quicker spreading of European ideas” (see MKak, p. 6).⁸*

It cannot be ignored that all of this was articulated in the period between the 2006 sudden change of constitution (Sarnyai-Pap 2010) and the ‘statute-debate’ peaking in the fall of 2008.

C) *Regional organisation of administration and jurisdiction* is a Serbian manifestation of the Europe-wide decentralising efforts to increase the efficiency of resource distribution.

When considering the Serbian political conditions in 2008, we cannot ignore the phenomena that, regarding the secession of southern regions (Montenegro and Kosovo), posed a false political dilemma to Serbian society. The daily-political (almost journalistic) articulation of these was “Kosovo or Europe?” Without elaborating on the aspects of this (pseudo) question, we must note the followings: the role of those minority communities that did (do) not threaten with secession (national minorities in Voivodina and the regionally diverse ethnic minority of the Romani) gained more value for the pro-Europe election block (those lists able to form a government along this ‘choice of values’). They had to consider that in the case of government formation they might need the mandates to be gained by minorities. This view must have affected the modification⁹ of the election formula and thus also the strategic actions of the Hungarian community which reacted accordingly on a national political level, too.¹⁰

The regionalisation of the Serbian society happened quite separately, if not absolutely independently from this: besides the role of parties that leaned toward

⁸ The text is modified into bullet points by us, for better understanding, PT-SCSM

⁹ The threshold was abolished in 2004 because majority parties did not intend to lose the mandates from minority votes (previously lost easily). After the murder of Zoran Dindic, the Serbian Radical Party gained the majority but was unable to form coalition with majority parties and to install a government, while minority parties were left without mandates even with a 4,22% vote percentage of the list referred to as ‘Tolerance Coalition’ (C.f. Mátyus, 2011, 236).

¹⁰ It must be noted that the ‘prime rehearsal’ was the 2008 presidential election, without significant stakes for the Hungarian community. Hungarian politics gained greater value here by nominating István Pásztor, who received 93.039 (2.26%) from the votes of the first round on January 20 and finished at the fifth place. By this, Hungarian parties made it clear that they are a factor to be reckoned with in the Parliamentary elections too. See: (L.: http://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/latinica/propisi_frames.htm.)

classical autonomy, the mobilisation role of other parties (that represented the local interests of certain town regions of central Serbia) also increased in value.

In the above discussed political situation the externally motivated (by force/opportunity) formation of the autonomy concepts of Hungarian parties in Voivodina was not unfounded. The political articulation and opportunities of the self-governance goals came closer than ever. However, discerning the individual and actual preferences of the three constituent parties and whether the analysed document was a result of strategic or tactical considerations – these can be topics for another discourse.

5. The actual components of minority autonomy: the national council

The main points of the institutional formation of Hungarian minority autonomy were already articulated in the ‘single-party’ period of the Hungarian political representation in Voivodina (Győri Szabó 2006: 325-327; Mátyus 2011: 233-234). But their realisation was inconceivable in the Milosevic era: “as good as it was, it was far from possible realisation” as Mátyus’ paper puts it. The unified effort had its more or less successful precursors. However, the work known as ‘Agreement on the political and legal framework of Voivodina and the national communities in Voivodina’ was written in 1999 due to an external incentive (from the government of Hungary) and not as a reaction to the internal conditions of the minority’s political situation (Győri Szabó 2006: 327-328). Under the name of Interim Hungarian National Council, the national council as a singular example of self-organisation of the minority institutional system was already formed in 1999, in the crisis period of the late Milosevic era. Yet, this formation is best seen as a minority-based pressure-exercising tool of the democratic anti-Milosevic forces (Győri Szabó 2006: 329).

The novelties of the newer document seem to be the following:

- (a) It was created in an endogenously formed situation.
- (b) The articulated goals conform to a legal environment that is characteristic of the institution forming phase of political struggles.
- (c) It is a basic document to demonstrate the converging efforts of the relevant actors of Hungarian minority political will.
- (d) It was published in a period when there was an actual chance for the partial realisation of the goals.

But the most probably realisable element of the 3-pillar autonomy, which is the most detailed in the concept itself, was a de facto functioning, though insufficiently embedded part of the Serbian minority political institution system (Győri Szabó 2006: 322-323). Formed after the turn of October 5, 2000, the wide political coalition of DOS (approximately the Serbian democratic opposition) included minorities, thus the Hungarian political actors, too. As a minority political

achievement at the beginning of the new system, the law of 2002 was adopted, which allowed the official formation of the national councils but it did not regulate their form and detailed functioning. So it became the main topic of minority parties including the Hungarian minority political scene. The political environment still had elements that pushed the topic of minorities into the background. These included the inhibited democratic transformation threatened by restoration, by the secret service, and by the series of assassination attempts that led to the death of the prime minister. The secret service took the side of the DOS semi-officially, so it could not be made responsible for the wartime actions for a long while; it had a significant influence on interior politics and proved impossible to eliminate overnight.

Institutionalisation became ‘important’ again only at the escalation of the aforementioned ‘Kosovo or Europe’ issue, when minority politics gained a better position. Up to that time, national councils, including the first MNT, existed¹¹ (they were elected indirectly, by electors from minority organisations and representatives of Hungarian political levels) but could only act in a constant democratic deficit that characterised the whole society, without sufficient (legal) warrant. It was in 2008, when the cooperative compulsion and the revaluated minority politics offered an opportunity, that the following expectations about the MNT were included in the MKak:

“The primary organisation of the Hungarian personal autonomy is the MNT, which is embedded in the legal system of the Republic of Serbia as a Hungarian minority municipality.

The goal of the MNT is:

- *to expose, articulate and represent the interests that ensure the maintenance of Hungarian collective identity in Voivodina,*
- *(based on the democratic dialogue with the political bodies of the Serbian Republic) to ensure the survival of the Hungarian community and the development and maintenance of its immaterial and material culture*

Being a legal person with its own assets, the MNT possesses lawful powers of interest-representation, decision, opining, advice and agreement in the fields of education, culture, information and official language use, and it establishes institutions, non-profit economic companies and foundations. Those legal actions that ignore the aforementioned legal powers of the MNT are to be nullified. The MNT regulates the educational, cultural, informational and language use issues within its powers by general acts of legislation, in concordance with the law.

On the basis of national, provincial and local municipal decisions, the MNT fulfills tasks of public power by the rights assigned to it.” (See MKak p. 1.)

¹¹ For further details on its conditions, see the introductory chapters of the paper on the language remedial projects of the MNT I. (Pap, 2011b)

6. The actual constituents of minority autonomy: regional autonomy

The regional pillar is also included in the document; it has been strongly propagated by VMDP, a party constantly representing the original 1992 autonomy model of the VMDK. We have discussed the Serbian limitations of regionally-principled political segmentation in several other papers (Sarnyai-Pap 2010, 2011; Pap 2011a). It is to be noted that the mentioning of regionalisation is a main neuralgic point of the Serbian political field, and minority regionalisation is of especially problematic nature. From a realistic viewpoint, this is absolutely unfounded in the case of Hungarians but it has its basis in an existing frustration, the fear of secessionism. Nothing can make Serbian political public thought more hysterical than the idea of regional secession. Therefore, not even the pro-European part of the Serbian majority society shows any empathy towards political efforts of that sort. The otherwise justified (and, in a political sense, based on the functional necessity of the institution) minority discourse of the Hungarian community is, due to the majority context, both a communal compulsion¹² and a real-political illusion. Before the details of the discussion let us cite the relevant chapter of the MKak:

“The Hungarian Coalition propagates that similarly to many European countries regional municipality system should be formed in Serbia according to the bottom-top regionalisation model. According to our concept, the voters decide by means of referendum on establishing and joining a regional municipality with its own assets and incomes.

A defined goal of the Hungarian Coalition is to create a region with Subotica as its center, the Hungarian Autonomous Region (Magyar Autonóm Körzet – MAK) consisting of the villages Ada, Csóka, Kishegyes, Magyarkanizsa, Óbecse, Topolya, Törökkanizsa and the town of Subotica. The thus created multiethnic region of Hungarian majority would combine the ethnically-based regional autonomy demands of the Hungarian majority with ideas of modern European regionalism. In the process of establishing the Hungarian Autonomous Region, settlements on the borders of the region could join a local municipality of the MAK according to the interest of the local population as expressed by referendum.

According to the Hungarian Coalition, the system of installing its legal powers can be realised on the one hand by decentralising such powers of the present state and provincial bodies that can be fulfilled more efficiently on a regional level, and on the other hand by raising certain tasks in local municipalities’ powers to regional level.

¹² In the analysis of the educational strategy of the MNT II, we also showed that the personal-principled pillar has only limited efficiency if lacking the regionally-principled competences. A longer English-language version of our exposition at the conference in Eszék is under publication, but a shorter summary with relevant details has already been published in the Oct 8-9 issue of *Kilátó* (appendix to the periodical *Magyar Szó*), see Pap 2011c.

The powers of the regional municipalities do not cover the areas controlled by personal-principled autonomy.

The tasks of the regional municipalities would include:

- *creating the rural development concept and operative programme of the region, coordinating town development plans*
- *coordinated improvement of regional infrastructure*
- *coordinated improvement of the region's agriculture*
- *ensuring the equality of officially used languages*
- *certain tasks of forest-, water- and waste management, of environment protection*
- *operating the healthcare and the educational, cultural institution system of the region*
- *maintenance of the institutions founded by the regional municipality*
- *other issues transferred into its power by the state, the province or the local municipalities of the region". (See: MKak, p 5-6.)*

We also consider the above goals as justified and necessary for ensuring the survival of the Hungarian community in Serbia, and for preventing the further economic and political loss of ground. On the third and least problematic level of autonomy, that of the local municipalities, effective improvements can be made only if the connected Hungarian majority areas that complete the above procedure by the rules of representational democracy can also function as bottom-up regional self-organisational units.

The main problem is: how to (and with what intensity) keep the issue on the Serbian political agenda?¹³ It is clear from party statements that the degree and means of commitment to regional autonomy is a main distinguishing and profile-forming characteristic among the Hungarian parties.

7. The actual constituents of regional autonomy: local municipalities

Local municipalities are the least problematic elements of the three-pillar autonomy. This is because the majority principle can work better to the benefit of the otherwise minority community,¹⁴ compared to institutions of both larger

¹³ Organising regional administration is a Europe-wide problem for unitarist states. The European Charta for regional Municipalities is still in planning phase. (See Soós-Fejes, 2009, 66.) An October 2011 EC decision is a positive achievement, it was accepted due to the modification appeal of two Hungarian MPs, Tamás Gaudi Nagy and Ferenc Kalmár. (See Appendix 2.)

¹⁴ Serbia is almost completely Europe-compatible regarding local municipalities. The European Charta for Local Municipalities was signed in 2005 and ratified in the fall of 2007, so it applies from 2008 on (See. Soós-Fejes, 2009, 64.) On the basis of this document, the state can be held responsible for the local operation of minority autonomy. It is not by chance that this is the least problematic element of the MKak.

regions (ethnic regions, economic/political regional autonomy) and of non-regional, personal autonomy (in any of their usual forms in every elective democracy). This paradox is referred to as the fractal-nature of minority relations, creating self-similar forms on the different levels of regional segmentation by replicating the original majority-minority opposition inversely, i.e. also swapping the majority-minority situation on the given level of segmentation. However, as the document shows, the organisational position of local municipalities in the general Serbian government structure (without regard to majority/minority characteristics) has serious democratic deficiencies. So its reform (decentralisation, maintaining local political powers, delegating of tools and competences to local level) is a profound interest of minority communities, indispensable for efficient functioning. The document reflects this fact:

Basic interests of the Hungarian community in Voivodina are the development of our municipalities, the expansion of the legal powers and financial autonomy of our towns and villages.

The Hungarian Coalition's conviction is that apart from the restoration of municipality assets and the establishment of a financing and legislative system based on decentralisation and subsidiarity a comprehensive revision of the municipality system is crucial.

The strengthening of local municipalities is inconceivable without the followings: significantly extending the scopes of authority, creation of community police, exercising municipality-level agreement right in the commission of local police leaders, motivating municipality cooperation from state budget sources, and curbing the state's supervisory rights over municipalities.

Realisation of local democracy also requires restoring both the institution of direct mayor elections and the individual (majority) election system of municipality representatives.

Furthermore, the Hungarian Coalition propagates that apart from increasing the role of local communities local municipalities should be formed in settlements that are capable of self-maintenance with regard to economic resources and the operation of educational, healthcare and cultural institutions. (See: MKak, p 7.)

Here we do not delve into the analysis of the items mentioned by the MKak above.

The minority political party arena is determined by local municipalities of minority character. This is the level of day-to-day minority politics, it is an available domain of intra- and inter-community interest articulation for each of the Hungarian parties, so this is the level of the most interesting struggles. Apart from the villages mentioned under the regional autonomy heading, the village of

Temerin and certain Hungarian majority partial municipalities¹⁵ of the periphery are to be highlighted.

8. The 2010 election of national councils in Serbia

In the summer of 2009, the Serbian Parliament finally passed the long debated Act on National Councils of Minorities (TKNT)¹⁶ (Mátyus 2011: 237). But the legal codification of the long awaited institution distracted the 2008 coalition of the Hungarian parties.¹⁷ The relationship between the VMSZ and the other two historical parties became antagonistic again on the pretext of the passing of the bill. The reasoning for this was a number of formal requirements that are included in the MKak but left out from the TKNT, the state's obligation to make the minority register of voters and irregularities in the making of these registers (Pap-Sarnyai 2011). In any case, the VMDK and the VMDP have been boycotting the MNT since 2009: they kept questioning the lawful operation of the MNT I and they did not get involved in the 2010 election of the MNT, already made direct by the new law. Thus the two parties define themselves as 'anti-system' parties on this level of autonomy who consider the institution 'illegal and illegitimate' until any relevant change in the conditions. Interestingly enough, two other formations which became included among the relevant Hungarian parties at the MNT elections, the MPSZ (about its creation, see Györi Szabó 2006: 327) and the MRM (for further details, see Mátyus 2011: 236-237) share this attitude. Though they got into the MNT II with one person each, with regard to criticism, they do not differ significantly from the other two.¹⁸

¹⁵ Serbian settlements are positioned in the so-called system of local communities. Most of the settlements belong here and these 'partial municipalities' (as the international term refers to them) have only limited powers (even narrower than those of the local municipalities). But this level is less relevant from a minority political viewpoint since competence-possessing decisions are made on the level of town and villages.

¹⁶ The regional department (*Tartományi Jogalkotási, Közigazgatási és Nemzeti Kisebbségi Titkárság*) and its leader, Tamás Korhenz Jr played a significant role in the creation of the law. The political personalisation of the debate is connected to him, too. The role of the department and the later MNT-leader is undisputed, but the debate ignores the crucial intentions of Serbian politics: for them the bill grants too many competences for minority bodies even in its accepted form, it will yield political revenue only when regional autonomy is off the agenda.

¹⁷ Asymmetric coalitions (like the MK was) can only be long-lasting if the involved parties formally subordinate their will to the interests of the dominant power. Such is the case within Tadic's already mentioned Pro Europa coalition.

¹⁸ A four-party coalition seems to be forming for the 2012 elections, so the VMSZ, the four small parties and Serbian majority lists will probably struggle for Hungarian votes. This could make the Hungarian minority political situation more perceivable since the actual impact of and the protest-votes against the VMSZ could be made visible.

The direct MNT elections demonstrated that institution-installing strategy and minority party tactics to stabilise one's situation can generate serious controversies in the extended area. As minority politics remains politics as such (and not responsibility-free delegation of experts, as a certain stratum of the Hungarian intellectuals in Voivodina, fearing for its influence, tried to argue before the MNT election¹⁹), so ideological attitude towards the institution is mixed up with the ever preferable party tactics in the interpretations of minority party statements. The attitude of the 'new' parties, the MPSZ and the MRM is particularly interesting. They gained position and became relevant parties largely due to the votes acquired in the MNT elections and the resulting 1-1 mandates.²⁰

Appendixes

Appendix 1: The section of the modified (2004/18) election formula regarding the abolition of threshold for minorities:

Article 13

Three new Paragraphs shall be added to Article 81, reading:

Political parties of ethnic minorities and coalitions of political parties of ethnic minorities shall participate in the distribution of mandates even when receiving less than 5% of the total number of votes.

All parties whose basic aim is to represent and stand for the interests of an ethnic minority and the protection and improvement of the rights of members of ethnic minorities, in accordance with standards set forth by international law, shall be considered political parties of ethnic minorities.

The Republic Electoral Commission shall decide, at the proclamation of an electoral list, whether the submitter of the electoral list should be considered a political party of an ethnic minority or a coalition of political parties of ethnic minorities, at the request of the submitter of the electoral list which should be made when the electoral list is submitted.²¹

Appendix 2:

7. The Assembly considers that even if international law were to recognise a right of national or ethnic minorities or even, in some cases, national majorities to self-determination, such a right would not give rise to an automatic right to

¹⁹ We discussed this pseudo-question (whether experts or politicians are elected into the MNT) in a separate chapter (See Pap-Sarnyai, 2011, 244-246.)

²⁰ It must also be noted that their successful performance is largely due to the passivity of the two smaller heir-parties (of the historical VMDK) and the probable protest-voters against the VMSZ that would have otherwise go one to them.

²¹ Source: webpage of the Serbian Committee of Elections (RIK)

http://www.rik.parlament.gov.rs/engleski/propisi_frames.htm, date of access: November 15, 2011.

secession. The right to self-determination should first and foremost be implemented by way of the protection of minority rights as foreseen in the Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157) and Assembly Resolution 1334 (2003) on positive experiences of autonomous regions as a source of inspiration for conflict resolution in Europe, as well as in other relevant instruments of international law.

8. The Assembly therefore:

- 8.1. reiterates its invitation to those member states which have not yet done so to sign, ratify and implement the Framework Convention and to respect the basic principles set out in Assembly Resolution 1334 (2003) as soon as possible;
- 8.2. will continue to analyse the origin and trends of self-determination movements by addressing the most salient factors, in particular instances of growing tensions among minority or ethnic groups, and to support national parliaments in addressing these demands for self-determination through dialogue and reconciliation, in order to prevent recourse to violence and secession;
- 8.3. invites all member states to refrain from recognising or supporting in any way the de facto authorities of territories resulting from unlawful secessions, in particular those supported by foreign military interventions;
- 8.4. notes that conflicts should be solved exclusively by peaceful means on the basis of international law;
- 8.5. proposes that the criteria for statehood, including those for the emergence of new states by legal secession, and the modalities of protection of national sovereignty and territorial integrity of states be examined thoroughly in the framework of a follow-up conference to the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty.

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