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## **Sociological Survey on the Identity of Hungarian Intellectuals in Slovakia**

According to the definition of one of my favourite sociologists, the Czech I. A. Bláha, the most important task of intellectuals is to create intellectual values and organise as well as unify society in the name of these values. In his words, this function aimed at the creation, organisation, dissemination and, last but not least, consumption of these intellectual goods, is the crystallising principle of the intellectuals, it is the unifying axis around which the intellectual class evolves. The words of Bláha (but also according to the conception of the intellectual as seen in definitions, literature and by general consciousness), therefore, imply that the intellectual is a person of the mind. This is all true but sociologists have no instruments, which could measure, moreover reliably, the intellectual radiation of individuals. Consequently, when conducting empiric research, they have to find another criterion to establish the sample. In the case of our surveys, higher education degree was this clearly identifiable objective criterion. Therefore, when I write about ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia, I will always mean ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia with a higher education qualification.

We carried out the first empiric research on intellectuals in Slovakia in the framework of Spectator TM in 1995. This was a questionnaire survey with 450 intellectuals forming the countrywide sample. The next one was the qualitative research of the Forum Institute for Social Studies, which we started in 1999 and have been continuously conducting ever since. The third one was a qualitative survey jointly performed with the Forum Institute for Social Studies and the Career Office of Márton Áron College at the beginning of 2001. The issue of the identity of the intellectuals, more exactly three dimensions of it, played a central role in all of the above-mentioned researches:

1. the identity of the intellectuals as the identity of a social stratum,
2. the professional identity of the intellectuals,
3. the ethnic identity of the intellectuals.

In the lack of space, a few questions related to their identity as a social stratum and their ethnic identity shall only be dealt with. Prior to that, however, the basic characteristics of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia will be presented.

According to the figures of the 1991 census, the number of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia amounts to 567,296 persons and Hungarians make up 10.76% of the overall population. 16,407 persons of the Hungarians have a higher education degree, which is 2.89% of the overall ethnic Hungarian population and 3.64% of the Hungarians with a school qualification. Already these data indicate that intel-

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lectuals form a rather narrow stratum of the ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia. In comparison to this, the proportion of Slovak intellectuals is 6.08% in the overall Slovak population and 8.24% in the Slovak population with a school qualification.

We cannot draw positive conclusions regarding the development of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia when looking at present tendencies either. Although the number of university and college students of ethnic Hungarian origin has grown by 1150 persons as compared with 1990, this is still low, no matter whether we take into consideration their proportion – and, together with this, their needs – in the overall ethnic Hungarian population in Slovakia or the tendencies in the country as a whole. While the proportion of university students grew by 62.49% in Slovakia between 1990 and 1998, that of the students of ethnic Hungarian origin increased by 44.60% only. Another negative fact is the manifest disproportionateness of the distribution of Hungarian students among the various fields of study. *“The number of university students has significantly grown in the economic fields. (...) We must search for the causes of phenomena like for example why the proportion of ethnic Hungarian students grew by 10.47% in agricultural studies, while the growth rate was 59.54% nationwide and the territories where ethnic Hungarians live in Slovakia are mostly of an agricultural character. Similarly, it is surprising that the second largest increase – of 56.94% – in the number of Hungarian students in Slovakia occurred exactly in those technical fields, which presented the lowest national increase by far: only 18.96%. In the case of university-type training, the increase in the proportion of ethnic Hungarian students is again much lower (25.38%) than the national figure, which was 70.89% between 1990 and 1999”*<sup>1</sup>.

The breakdown of our intellectual stratum by sex is as follows: male – 9,873 (60.18%), female – 6,534 (39.82%). 4.6% of ethnic Hungarian men possess a higher education degree<sup>2</sup>, while this proportion is even less among the women: only 2.76%<sup>3</sup>. Another comparison: 9.82% of Slovak men and 6.63% of Slovak women have higher education qualification.

According to the breakdown by age, those between the age of 30 and 50 form the majority, that is, 60.8% of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia.

Following the demographic figures, a few words about the origin of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia. One fifth are descendants of intellectuals, while four fifth of them are first-generation intellectuals. Accordingly, the social origin of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia is heterogeneous. One can find among them first-generation intellectuals who are descendants of peasants, workmen or else, while there are others whose ascendants were already intellectuals. The majority of present-day ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia bear the signs

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<sup>1</sup> László, Béla. A szlovákiai magyar oktatásügy a kilencvenes években [Hungarian Education Policy in Slovakia in the Nineties]. In: Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle, 2000/2., 15.

<sup>2</sup> 38.87% has basic school, 35.7% skilled worker's, 13.31% grammar school qualification.

<sup>3</sup> 59.45% has basic school leaving, 14.02% skilled worker's, 22.75% grammar school leaving certificate.

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of intergenerational upward mobility, that is, they have risen higher on the social ladder than their parents. At the same time, the signs of homogenisation appear more and more markedly when one examines the social origins of the intellectuals dynamically, in a chronological order: on the father's side, there is a gradual shift from intellectuals of peasant origin toward intellectuals of worker and intellectual origin. On the mother's side, intellectual mothers also appear in an increasing number. This tendency indicates the intensifying self-reproduction of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia.

As far as intragenerational – that is, within one's own life cycle – mobility is concerned, one third of the ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia can be considered mobile. The rest, two thirds of the intellectuals, have conserved their original profession and social status. In practice, this means that they have been in the same profession since the obtainment of their degree, they have remained employees with the only difference being that they are not employed by the state any more but instead by the private sector. Mobility points in the direction of two professions: the field of education and entrepreneurship.

After these few fundamental pieces of information that sought to circumscribe the subject of our research, let us examine the identity of the intellectuals as a social stratum: how they define themselves, what their expectations are toward themselves, and how they identify with these expectations.

According to the interviewed intellectuals, the main characteristic of an intellectual is the white-collar work connected to or independent of a degree in higher education and that he or she is oriented toward culture. There are clearly identifiable shifts in stress in the opinion of intellectuals with an education in humanities and those with a background in sciences. These latter believe that the main characteristic of an intellectual is intellectual work, culture, and informal authority, which stems not from one's institutionalised position. Those with an education in humanities indicate the degree in higher education with one voice in the first place and intellectual work, culture, and natural authority come only afterwards.

The proportion of those who believe that it is enough for intellectuals to carry out their tasks at the workplace adequately and no other expectations can be raised towards them, is insignificant: only 4%. The rest of the respondents took the stand that the intellectuals defined above have other, additional tasks. Consequently, these expectations are formulated not outside the stratum but within it, and their presence points out two important facts: first, that ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia have an awareness of their mission and second, that a person who considers himself an intellectual must embody this in addition to intellectual work, a degree in higher education, culture, and informal authority.

What are these additional tasks? According to the respondents, an intellectual is to undertake the following tasks in the order of their importance:

1. *An intellectual is to enrich the life of the community according to his profession and field of interest*, said 50.3% of the respondents, primarily the entrepreneurs (56.8%), the teachers (52.5%), and those in technical fields (52.1%).

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2. *An intellectual is to be a role model within the community* (29.5%) – said first of all the agriculturists (32.1%), the economists (31%) and those in the humanities (30%). This expectation appears in the case of the entrepreneurs the least (15.9%).
3. *An intellectual is to play a leading role in the various fields of life, including public life* (18,1%) – other intellectuals in humanities (22.4%) and agriculturists (21.4%) emphasised this the most, while teachers the least (9.8%).

It stems from the above that a part of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia marks out the role of a “torch” for themselves and cannot be satisfied with the role of the passive spectator. They want to play an active part in leading and forming the community especially in a professional sense. At the same time, there are intellectuals who identify themselves less with one or the other of the expectations. We also encountered this duality in the course of the surveys. For example, a part of the young intellectuals return to Slovakia after earning a degree in Hungary even though they know they might find a job in their profession under better conditions abroad. They account for this by saying that they would like to work at home, they would like to contribute to the progress and improvement of the life of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, they would like to make good use of their knowledge in their homeland, they do not want to let their natives down, etc. On the other hand, others search for the best conditions possible and they decide about settling somewhere else, while feedback toward the environment of their origins is not so important for them. In their case, no additional tasks are missing from among the elements defining the identity of the stratum but it is a question in favour of which community and on the basis of what deliberation they want to perform them. Moreover, the meaning of additional task is also altered in the direction of an emphasis on individual career.

The answer to the difference between the two groups can be seen when we throw a light upon their scale of values. We examined the general, political, and ethnic scale of values of the ethnic Hungarians intellectuals in Slovakia. We found a striking difference between the general scale of values of the ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia and those of the intellectuals. It was exactly the dimension of the community, in which they differed. While the dimension of the community does not play the role of a “watershed” in the case of the general scale of values of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia, the general scale of values of the intellectuals extends along the axis going from community orientation to individualism; it is exactly this axis that defines them the most.

The most characteristic general scale of values of the intellectuals is the *traditional-collective* scale of values, which is based on family, national, and religious continuity. Already this indicates – but it is seen from in-depth interviews even more – that this is not a self-centred scale of values. Nevertheless, it is characterised not merely by openness towards one’s community but by a higher degree of it: *servicing one’s community*. Those who live by the traditional collective scale of values very firmly reject the consumerist lifestyle.

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For the other group of intellectuals, those of a *modernised-individualistic* general scale of values, individual success comes first.

There is a marked difference between the two types of scale of values. But let us go further. We were curious to see what political values and principles intellectuals identified with. 60% of the ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia clearly classifiable on the basis of political values can be divided into two types: democrats and authoritarians (this latter has two subtypes). As far as their size is concerned, they are almost identical, since the proportion of the democrats is of 29%, while that of the authoritarians' two subtypes is of 31%. Who are the democrats and who are the authoritarians? A strong correlation can be revealed between the traditional-collective scale of general values and the democrats' political values, which means that the intellectuals of traditional-collective scale of values take the political position of the democrats. Authoritarianism is not strongly connected to either of the general scale of values. At the same time, there is one major difference between the two subtypes of the intellectuals of authoritarian values: their age. Although emphasising unflinching political leadership, central state supervision and allegiance is not too age-specific, it characterises those between the age of 30 and 55 the most. It is clearly those under the age of 30 who profess neutral foreign policy and that the majority has a right to bring decisions disadvantageous to the minorities. Consequently, the authoritarianism of the older generation is based on classic centralism, while that of the young clearly has an anti-ethnicity tone.

Following all this, it is fitting to shed a light upon a few projections of the ethnic identity of the Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia. Let us see first the issues of ethnic identity and the homeland. Two thirds of the Hungarians in Slovakia trace back their ethnic identity from their culture and mother tongue, while the rest from their citizenship and their own decision. As opposed to this, 96.8% of the intellectuals believe that the role of the mother tongue and culture is determining. 93.7% of them find it natural that those who were raised on Hungarian culture and are of Hungarian mother tongue in Slovakia, can only be Hungarians. They also profess this the other way around: only those can be of Hungarian ethnicity who grew up on and absorbed Hungarian culture and language. Intellectuals place an emphasis on the role of the mother tongue and culture on all occasions: 77.8% of them are expressly proud of being Hungarians, 92% believe that being a Hungarian carries in itself responsibilities, exactly because of the preservation of the culture: it is the lot of the intellectuals to preserve it. It is very important: according to 60%, one can succeed even as a Hungarian in Slovakia. In comparison with the total ethnic Hungarian population in Slovakia (75%), questions related to ethnicity engross the attention of the intellectuals more (88%), with 80% of them saying that it is important to be occupied with questions of ethnicity. Intellectuals are also more attached to their homeland, although the already indicated duality appears here again: the wish to leave is a characteristic of the intellectuals as well.

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The examination of the scale of values related to ethnicity in the case of ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia shows a similar picture. However, the proportion of those intellectuals, who disavow their ethnicity or are passive, is of importance as well.

At this point, we return to the requirement that emerged during the examination of the identity of the stratum of the intellectuals and was pronounced within the stratum: the requirement of additional work, the community role taken up by ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia. Let us also think back to the collective dimension of the general scale of values of the intellectuals. One cannot disregard that there are persons among ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia for whom ethnicity is not important, who are afraid to identify themselves as Hungarians publicly, and even persons who accept and find legitimate the political decisions afflicting the Hungarians. Since they are not committed to the ethnic Hungarian community in Slovakia, it can be presumed that assuming any role for the sake of the ethnic Hungarian community is not an issue for them. The connections between the general, political, and national scales of values throw a light even better upon this problem. As it has been indicated above, the political orientation of those with a traditional-collective general scale of values correlates with the democratic scale of values. The political scale of values of the modernised-individualists cannot be defined with only one or the other type of political scale of values. However, the difference between the two general scales of values is rather marked when it comes to the examination of the two scales of values related to ethnicity. While the dominant ethnic scale of values of those with a traditional-community general scale of values is the firm ethnic scale of values, one can find a strong rejection of this in the case of the modernised-individualists. Consequently, it is once more revealed that the identity of the stratum of Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia is strongly intertwined with the ethnic identity of the intellectuals. Therefore, when one asks who are those intellectuals who are willing to become the role models, intellectual and/or public-political leaders of ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia – in a way and to the extent they find it important deriving from their identity as a stratum –, the answer is: primarily the intellectuals with a traditional-collective scale of values and, at the same time, firm ethnic identity. What are the actual everyday deeds in which this becomes manifest? For example, in the fact whether intellectual parents make their children go to a basic school of Hungarian or Slovak language of instruction. In the reality of present-day Slovakia, this decision can have an exemplary value and be of a considerable importance from several respects amongst local circumstances. Since the intellectuals who enrol their children in a Slovak basic school act as the snake that bites its own tail: by doing so, they endanger the future of their own stratum, the ethnic Hungarian intellectuals in Slovakia.

