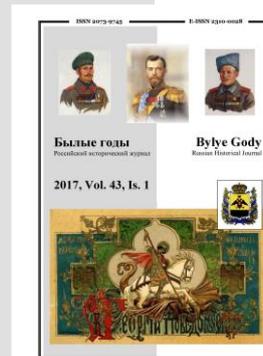


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## The Slovak Politics and Society in Austria-Hungary before the First World War

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### Abstract

This article is an analysis of the conditions in Austria-Hungary, respectively the Kingdom of Hungary, focused at political and social status of Slovakia (Upper Hungary). The political representation of the Slovak citizens (at about 12 % of the citizens of the Kingdom of Hungary) since the beginning of the 20th century went through dynamic transformation. This transformation went into the direction of some kind of deviation from the idea of Slovak autonomy within the Kingdom of Hungary.

The general frame of the description of conditions of the era Austria-Hungary is based on authoritative researches by Slovak, Hungarian and Anglo-Saxon origin. There were used such scientific methods as analysis and synthesis, concretization, generalization while solving the research tasks. In addition, the paper used the historical-situational method, involving the study of historical facts in the context of the period under review in conjunction with the "neighboring" events and facts.

The creation of the own statehood in cooperation with more powerful Czech politics became the new goal of the Slovak politics. This study will emphasize preconditions and development not only within political elites but also within the dimension of public climate of the Slovak part of the Kingdom of Hungary.

**Keywords:** Slovak national movement, nationalism, political liberalization, Magyarization, Upper Hungary, Austria-Hungary.

### 1. Introduction

At the beginning of the 20th century the current territory of Slovakia created part of Austria-Hungary. Till the establishment of Czechoslovakia, actually up to the precise defining of its borders in the Treaty of Trianon, Slovakia was not strictly specified.

In the year 1905 approximately 2.85 million inhabitants lived in the territory of present-day Slovakia. Out of them (according to the mother tongue) up to 1.7 million were Slovaks, more than 800,000 Hungarians, up to 200,000 Germans, up to 100,000 Ruthenes and other minor ethnics (the Croats, Romanians, Bulgarians, Serbs...). At that time the Jews were not statistically introduced and mostly they were identified according to the language spoken in the family as the Germans and Hungarians.

So Slovaks represented up to 60 % of all inhabitants of this area. The Kingdom of Hungary had about 18 mil. inhabitants and approximately 1.9 mil Slovaks (*Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények, 1912: 17*) used the Slovak language (including the Slovaks inhabiting so-called "Lower Land", i.e. Hungarian, Romanian or Vojvodina enclaves). The real number of the Slovaks was little bit higher comparing to official statistics affected by a method of collecting information and also significant illiteracy or ignorance of common people. The percentage of Hungarians within the citizens of the Kingdom of Hungary grew from 47 % in 1880 to 55 % in 1910 via the policy of Magyarization (*Holec, 2012: 88*).

Slovaks created approximately 12 % of citizens (*Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények, 1912: 18*) of the Hungarian Kingdom (apart from self-governed Croatia). They were members of Austria-Hungary ruled by the Hungarian nobility and exposed to assimilation tendencies of the modern Kingdom of Hungary. On the

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one hand, after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise in 1867 economic (and partly also social) modernization and development proceeded but on the other hand, non-Hungarian nationalities suffered national persecution aimed to establish the homogeneous Hungarian state.

## 2. Materials and methods

The era archive documents (Štátny archív Bratislava – State archive in Bratislava), analysis of the published era documents and era press releases were the main sources of this study.

The general frame of the description of conditions of the era Austria-Hungary is based on authoritative researches by Slovak, Hungarian and Anglo-Saxon origin. There were used such scientific methods as analysis and synthesis, concretization, generalization while solving the research tasks. In addition, the paper used the historical-situational method, involving the study of historical facts in the context of the period under review in conjunction with the "neighboring" events and facts.

## 3. Discussion and results

The change in social-political mentality of the Slovak elite as well as the ordinary people at the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century became the main issue of the Slovak era history. An insufficient support by the state power of the Kingdom of Hungary and reductions in development of these territories had a negative impact on progress within this part of the kingdom.

How was it possible that in spite of the generally unfavourable environment the idea of Slovak uniqueness became the issue?

How could the nation of just two million citizens, which at the beginning of the 20th century faced the assimilation with Hungarians, influence (via few dozens of intellectuals) the thoughts of the emperor's court in Vienna concerning the monarchy federalisation?

Why did the Slovak politics finally abandon the idea of coexistence within the Austria – Hungary and focused on the own statehood of reciprocity with Czechs?

Why was it that the Slovak politics oriented at the national liberation from the East – the Russian Empire – changed their mind and focused on the liberation from the West – the western powers?

To answer those questions one has to focus not only at the classic and nation-subjective approach of the Slovak or Hungarian historiography or following just the political slope of the development.

To answer those questions we have to search for and sum up the broader historical context of impacts of the social-economical and cultural events of the last pre-war years.

Actually, it was not the Nationality Question what affected Hungarian, eventually Austro-Hungarian politics during the first 20 years of the 20th century, i.e. years before the First World War. Relationships within the monarchy, between its Austrian and Magyar (Hungarian) politics seemed to be the most problematic ones. In spite of the fact that after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise relationships between both dominant representatives of the Empire normalized and got better (the House of Habsburg and the Hungarian nobility) previous Hungarian rebelliousness did not disappear (Romsics, 2002: 17). In the year 1908 celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the accession of Franz Joseph to the throne were held. Although Hungarian representatives did not hide their loyalty and Franz Joseph could have been satisfied with penetration of Austrian influence to the Balkans (Bosnia and Herzegovina) within domestic politics disputes with the Hungarian Kingdom kept breaking out, i.e. relatively intensive fights were held between conservatives and liberals regarding electoral reform, democratization of a society etc. (ŠABA-1)

A brief glance at Slovak national reality before the First World War does not show very nice picture of it. Not so big group of a nationally conscious intellectuals was able to encourage just small part of the influential Slovak society. From 1875 to 1892 no Slovak members appeared among more than 400 members of the lower house of the Diet of Hungary. In the most successful year 1906 even 7 Slovak members appeared there, otherwise only 2 or 4 (Lettrich, 1955: 34-35) not enough to change anything via constitutional reforms. Situation outside a nationally conscious group of intellectuals was even worse. Apart a small town Martin there was no real economically and socially significant center. Bratislava (Pressburg, Pozsony, Prešporok) being more German and Hungarian than Slovak had weak relations with the rest of Slovakia. Slovak conscious identity was present only within smaller part of the nation, mostly among the intellectuals or emerging bourgeoisie and lesser nobility, such as lords of Turiec count. Large parts of Slovakia, at that time Upper Hungary, although inhabited by Slovaks, did not significantly realize their relationship towards the nation (Lipták, 1998: 25-31). Numerous part of inhabitants living in cross-border territories with Poland considered themselves Gorals and regions of Zemplín, Abov and Šariš, apart bigger towns of Košice or Prešov, were completely passive regarding Slovak national enlightenment.

An argument that the Slovak National Party (SNS) and Slovak nation-conscious politicians are not representatives of Slovaks, common people, who are not pro-Slovak oriented and do not support Slovak national initiatives was often used by pro-Hungarian, i.e. pro-Magyar upper classes in Slovakia (including local Germans and Jews), ethnic Magyars and also Slovaks (nobility, clerks, businessmen, teachers, clergymen...) against Slovak national-political efforts. At the close of the Kingdom of Hungary this fact was often used by Budapest politicians for their benefit via intended support of creation of so-called the Slovaks nation resulted in declaring the pro-Hungarian so-called Slovak People's Republic in Eastern Slovakia.

So Slovak national politics entered the 20th century with not so much encouraging prospects. Despite the fact that the Kingdom of Hungary after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise was organized as a unitary (apart from the Banovina of Croatia) and strongly centralized state, Slovak politics did not show any lethargy. Vice versa, the beginning of the century brought leaving existing electoral passivity (lasting from the year 1884) and despite evident handicap of national candidates in the Assembly of Hungary the Slovak National Party gathering nation-conscious politicians decided to join electoral political fights advocating democratic or social requirements ([Dokumenty slovenskej národnej identity a štátnosti, 1998: 383-386](#)). Pavol Mudroch remained the party leader. He also held a position of the leader of the central committee representing all directions of the Slovak politics with the exception of Social Democrats being formed within Hungarian social democracy. SNS succeeded in creating the net of district confidants and gradually consolidated organizational units within the party. In 1911, taking into consideration assurances of the Government regarding cultural requirement of nationalities, SNS proposed its requirements as the Memorandum to the Chancellor of the Kingdom of Hungary emphasizing unlawful measures of Magyarization and questions related to keeping Nationalities Law from the year 1868 (such as permission to use the Slovak language in offices in Slovakia...). It also required to use the Slovak language in some types of schools as well as the returning of the property of the dissolved Matica slovenská and its restorig ([Dokumenty slovenskej národnej identity a štátnosti, 1998: 390-395](#)). The Hungarian government rejected all of these demands and all appeals of SNS ended as it was happening from 1870s.

Some changes were indicated by reviving national-political demands of other nationalities of the Kingdom of Hungary and mainly their cooperation. Later, the Croats put more effort to gain greater autonomy. More national – liberal parties demanding an electoral reform and financial independence from the Kingdom of Hungary were established ([Romsics, 2002: 13-14](#)). They were followed by Romanians and their Romanian National Party, which similarly to SNS, declared the end of electoral passivity. Creation of joint parliamentary club of nationalities in 1905 within the Kingdom of Hungary, the Assembly Nationalities Party, was a climax of activities of political representatives of nationalities of the Hungarian Kingdom. The party was led by Teodor Mihali, the Romanian member of Parliament and Milan Hodža, Slovak was a recording clerk. Also nationality cooperation out of the parliament was boosted, e.g. “Slovanský sokolský zlet“ (the Sokol movement was an all-age gymnastics organization) was held in Zagreb, Croatia, in attendance of hundreds of Croats, Slovenes, Serbs, Bulgarians, Czechs, Polish and Slovak Americans ([Dokumenty slovenskej národnej identity a štátnosti, 1998: 494](#)).

Massive movement of political representations of non-governing nationalities was seen also by Franz Ferdinand, the heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne who, influenced by various advisors from national politicians – including Milan Hodža – started thinking about the plan of changing politics towards nationalities and the reform of the monarchy. Thus “Belvederská politika“ (Belvedere politics) or “Belvederský kruh“ (Belvedere circle) was formed (named after the palace Belvedere, the residence of Franz Ferdinand). Hodža altogether a Romanian politician Iuliu Maniu, both entrenched in the agrarian politics, proposed a secret memorandum to draw solution of the Nationalities Question by the federalization of the monarchy ([Hodža, 1997: 92-105](#)). Slovakia, as it was in Memorandum from the year 1861, should have formed an autonomy. The type of solution to Slovak situation via federalization of the monarchy by the monarch was also adapted by the Slovak National Party of Martin.

The stoppage of electoral passivity, an improved political programme and the new leadership of the SNS (Slovak National Party) led to relatively good results of the Slovak parliament candidates. Taking into consideration the proportional representation of the Slovak citizens of the Kingdom of Hungary the representation of Slovaks in the Hungarian parliament should have risen to dozens. But the reality was very different. In 1901 only 4 SNS candidates (out of 13) were elected: lawyers Ján Ružiak (the candidate of the electorate of Liptovský Svätý Mikuláš), Ján Valášek (the candidate of the electorate of Vrbové), František Veselovský (the candidate of the electorate of Senica) and a Roman Catholic priest Martin Kollár (the candidate of the electorate of Trnava). In 1905 – after the administration had taken some steps against Veselovský and Kollár - there were only 2 candidates elected: Milan Hodža (a representative of SNS in Vojvodina, the district of Kulpín) and František Skyčák (a representative of Catholic People’s Party – Néppárt). And finally, in the most successful year of 1906, seven candidates out of 18 were elected: Pavel Blaho, František Jehlička, Ferdinand Juriga, Martin Kollár, František Skyčák and Milan Hodža (SNS representatives), and Matej Metod Bella (a representative of the Slovak People’s Party) ([Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov, 2014: 480, 489, 494](#)). Realizing that the only a tiny fraction of the adult population had a right to vote, the Hungarian administration took all possible precautions against the Slovak candidates being elected ([ŠABA-2](#)) and not all the Slovaks with the right to vote were the nationality-conscious ones, the election results at the beginning of the 20th century should be considered a kind of success. On the contrary, spreading of the national politics outside the parliamentary soil led to an activation of the Slovak society within other platforms and spheres of life.

By the spirit of previous „everyday influence“ on ordinary people Pavel Blaho started issuing a weekly paper „Pokrok (Progress)“ in the town of Skalica. The aim was to educate and provide information to the target audience – the Slovak peasants. In Budapest (an important number of Slovak immigrant workers lived there) Milan Hodža also started issuing „Slovanský týždenník (Slovak Weekly)“ which soon reached the printing of 14 000 and became the most spread newspaper in Slovak language ([Chronológia dejín Slovenska](#)

a Slovákov, 2014: 484). Contrary to the party (SNS) leadership in Martin, and in the same line as Blaho, Hodža emphasized a social-economic programme aimed at the peasant tier of the Slovak society. Few years later in Budapest Hodža started issuing also Slovenský denník (Slovak Daily) with an idea of supporting the agrarian movement and reciprocity of Czechs and Slovaks.

Besides papers supporting the Slovak national movement there were also similar activities of the opposition within the Slovak territories – Hungarians and Slovaks who supported the Kingdom of Hungary. For instance, a weekly newspaper „Krajan“, which became issued in Banská Bystrica was oriented against the Slovak national movement and its ideas and requirements.

In 1905 one of the largest public gatherings of Slovaks (until the establishment of the Czechoslovak state) took place in Bratislava. This meeting was quite important due to the fact that the representatives of all of the streams of the Slovak politics delivered their speeches there – Svetozár Hurban Vajanský of the old conservative SNS, Milan Hodža on behalf of the agrarian group, Ferdiš Juriga as a representative of the Catholic People's Party and Emanuel Lehotcký who represented the socialists (*Dokumenty slovenskej národnej identity a štátnosti*, 1998: 391). Such mutual activity organized by all main parties of the Slovak national politics was an exception and in the following years the separation and division of the former SNS into different political streams became evident.

Social democrats were among the „first defectors“ from the original SNS platform, which as the only political subject had represented the Slovak national politics for almost 30 years. Emanuel Lehotský was the leading figure of the movement. He started issuing „Slovenské robotnícke noviny (the Slovak Labour newspaper) in Bratislava. In 1905 the 1st congress of the Slovak Social Democratic Party took place in Bratislava. The party was established after they had left the Hungarian Social Democratic Party, even they followed the same political ideas and programme. In addition, the Slovak Social Democrats requested recognition of the Slovak language as the official one. But this party did not last for long. After one year of independence they rejoined the „mother party“ under the condition of keeping their own independent Slovak executive committee (*Hronský, 1996, 31-37*).

At the end of 1905 in Žilina the representatives of the Slovak political Catholicism decided to leave their former all Hungarian party Néppárt (People's party). Even they declared the establishment of the Slovak People's Party, the party had was not fully formed at the time and acted alongside the SNS. Finally, in 1912 in Ružomberok, they left the SNS (*Dokumenty slovenskej národnej identity a štátnosti*, 1998: 388), which was led mostly by Protestant leaders at that time. The official establishment (the first congress) of the Slovak People's Party took place a year later in Žilina. It was considered the end of the process of differentiation of the Slovak politics up to the outbreak of the First World War. Andrej Hlinka became a director of the party executive committee; František Skyčák was appointed his deputy and Ferdiš Juriga took the position of the secretary. The Slovak People's newspaper became the party official press.

The agrarian movement led by Milan Hodža tried to find their own „bearing“ too, even they were still a part of SNS. At first they tried to influence the SNS with the aim to recreate the party into the mass agrarian type (as did the Catholic People's movement). But this attempt wasn't a success. As a consequence, shortly after the war, the agrarian movement founded their own standard political party.

Seemingly, before the First World War there had not been any confrontation engagements of the Slovak national movement with the Hungarian ruling power. But this was just the illusion. The „Lex Apponyi“ (the Apponyi Education Law) or discriminatory electoral practices were important yet minor and non-violent means of suppression of the Slovak identity and political activities (*Viator, 1908: 210, 456-460*). But even before the war started there had been several occurrences of use of power, imprisonment or life firing against people at public political meetings. Two of the later Slovak most important political figures, a catholic priest and a doctor from Ružomberok – Andrej Hlinka and Vavro Šrobár – both payed for their pro-Slovak activities. 16 Slovaks were accused of inciting voters at Ružomberok electorate and went on trial. Before the trial started Hlinka had been suspended by Sándor Párvy, the bishop of Spiš. He was found guilty, sent to prison for 2 years and had to pay a fine of 1500 crowns. The unsuccessful parliamentary candidate Šrobár was sent to prison for 1 year (*Podrimavský, 2012: 193*); the others got imprisonment for few months and financial fines. The convicts, after unsuccessful appeals, went to prison in November 1907. In the meantime so-called „tragedy of Černová“ happened. It became the synonym of oppression of Slovaks in the Kingdom of Hungary, even abroad in Europe.

In 1906 in the village of Černová (near Ružomberok) work began on the construction of a new Roman Catholic church based on an architectonic design by Slovak famous architect Milan Michal Harminc. Andrej Hlinka initiated public money collection for the church construction among the local worshippers. When the church was built the worshippers insisted that Hlinka, their countryman and collection initiator, would consecrate the church. But Párvy, the bishop, stood against. He expected possible problems at the consecration, which he ordered to be executed by an outside dean, so he managed to have policemen at hand there. Finally, the policemen started fire and shooting at the crowd. As a consequence – there were 15 people shot dead and 12 severely wounded. At the follow – on trial 40 men and women of the village were found guilty and sent to prison for 37 years in total. The tragedy in Černová shook the public opinion at home and abroad (*Lettrich, 1955: 37-38*).

In 1907 the aforementioned „Lex Apponyi“ (Apponyi Education Law) struck the non-Hungarian nations of the Kingdom of Hungary (*Podrimavský, 1996: 22-23*). This law was named after its proposer - the

Minister of Culture and Education of the Kingdom of Hungary Albert Apponyi. The first part of this law regulated salaries of teachers of state-rulling schools and the second one was aimed at teachers of schools rulled by the towns (villages) and by the Church. At the state-rulling schools only the Hungarian language (Magyar) was accepted and at the Chuch-rulling ones the students were required to use this language (to be able to write and speak the language). The teachers were obliged to influence students loyalty and patriotism towards the Kingdom of Hungary and their behaviour in a sense of possible patriotism towards other nations was strictly prohibited (Deák, 1993: 93-95).

On the contrary, that open Magyarization effort (ŠABA-3) finally influenced the Slovak pro-national politics in a positive way. It mobilized the Slovak leaders to act and to think about ways of changing that negative political development (Bibó, 1996: 162). The aforementioned educational activities aimed at the ordinary people represented the way of slow but long-lasting effort. Its main goal was to influence uneducated (illiterate) mass of Slovak peasants and workers and bring them to the level of politically committed and economically active Slovak population.

To support this effort the Slovak Youth Committee in Budapest started issuing a review „Prúdy“ (Streams) which followed the ideas of the older generation of the Slovak politics who had been represented by the „Hlas“ (Voice) magazine issued at the turn of the century (inspired by the Masaryk´s idea of „everyday small steps“ in the work with the nation). In addition the committee stressed the importance of reciprocity of Czechs and Slovaks and they criticized the leadership of SNS in Martin for their conservatism and tradicionalisms. Bohdan Pavlů and Ivan Markovič (later a deputy leader of Social Democrats) became the editors of the revue. Vavro Šrobár also influenced the revue by his ideas.

The establishment of the Slovak National Council in 1914 as an unbiased authority of the Slovak politics was another important achievement initiated by the newly elected leader of SNS Matúš Dula (he followed the proposal by Vavro Šrobár) (Chronológia dejín Slovenska a Slovákov, 2014: 518). Unfortunately, the First World War just stopped the progress of Slovak politics for the following four years. To avoid persecution, shortly after the outbreak of the war, the SNS leading committee was forced to publish in their „Národné noviny“ (National newspaper) announcement of political passivity in wartime. Persecution and cancellations affected the papers of other national-political parties and fractions. For example the government cancelled issuing „Slovenský denník“ (the Slovak Daily) published by Hodža and „Národný hlásnik“ (Nation´s Watcher), the paper being issued in Martin.

#### 4. Conclusion

To sum up, despite the relatively mild forms of Magyarisation politics applied towards Slovaks (in comparison to national repression in the Ottoman Empire or the Russian Empire) up to the end of 1914 there occurred persecutions against hundreds of Slovaks for their nationalism, anti-militarism or so-called „Pan-Slavism“.

That persecutions, together with the other forms of political, economical or cultural suppression motivated and forced the Slovak politicians and politics to consider and think about some options and courses of action concerning the future of the nation – other than the future under the „yoke“ of Austria-Hungary...

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### Словацкая политика и общество в Австро-Венгрии перед Первой мировой войной

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**Аннотация.** Статья анализирует ситуацию в венгерской части Австро-Венгрии с акцентом на положение Словакии (Верхней Венгрии) в политическом и социальном плане. Политическая репрезентация словацкого населения (составляющего около 12 % населения Венгрии) проходила с начала XX века до Первой мировой войны динамическим перерождением – постепенно отходя от идеи словацкой автономии в составе Австро-Венгерской империи.

Новой целью значительной части словацких политиков начинает быть создание собственной государственности в сотрудничестве с более сильной чешской политической элитой. Статья обращает внимание на предположения и развитие этих изменений не только в области политических элит, но и в диапазоне общественных настроений словацкой части Венгрии.

**Ключевые слова:** словацкое национальное движение, национализм, политическая либерализация, мадьяризация, Верхняя Венгрия, Словакия, Австро-Венгрия.

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