

SLOVAKIA

Hungarians

Activity: 1993-2020

General notes

NA

Movement start and end dates

- After the 1989 Velvet revolution, nationalist sentiment began to flourish among the Hungarian population (then still in Czechoslovakia). While only a small portion of ethnic Hungarian leaders advocate secession from Slovakia, many ethnic Hungarians make claims for a greater degree of autonomy and self-determination within the Hungarian areas in southern Slovakia, especially with respect to language, education, and cultural issues. Although this movement has been active since 1989, Slovakia did not become an independent state until 1993. We therefore begin to code movement activity in Slovakia in 1993, but indicate that the movement was both active and nonviolent prior to independence.
- Hungarian leaders called for an “assembly made up of one hundred members that would represent the Hungarian community” as well as “self-administration and special status” in December 1993 (Divald 2022: 260f).
- In the wake of the regime change, Hungarians set up four political parties, including Hungarian Christian Democratic Movement, Co-existence Party and Hungarian Civic Party, which merged in 1998 to become the Hungarian Coalition Party (MKP). While the group claims they are not a separatist party, they do aim for greater cultural and language freedom as well as greater autonomy over the Hungarian regions (AAJ News 2007; Hewitt & Cheetham 2000; Keesing’s; Magyar Közösség Pártja; Marshall & Gurr 2003; MAR).
- In a bid to minimize disputes between different Hungarian minority parties and achieve better electoral outcomes, a new party called Alliance was founded in 2019 that merged three Hungarian minority parties including the MKP. The Alliance party makes claims for the restoration of historical administrative divisions and regional autonomy (Alliance 2022). The movement is ongoing. [start date: 1989; end date: ongoing]

Dominant claim

- While there have been some calls for secession, Minorities at Risk notes that most Hungarians favor autonomy. Hewitt & Cheetham (2000: 271-272) also note a claim for autonomy. Divald (2022) also suggests an autonomy claim. Hence, we code a claim for autonomy throughout. [1993-2020: autonomy claim]

Independence claims

NA

Irredentist claims

- Present-day Slovakia was originally under Hungarian rule for centuries, as part of Greater Hungary – and the southern border under contention was reincorporated into Hungary by Nazi Germany during World War II.
- In 1990, the then prime minister of Hungary, Jozsef Antall declared that “he represented the interests of the 5 million Hungarians living abroad” (Ottaway 1994). At the time, there was, however, no local movement for a merger with Hungary.
- This changed after the break-up of Czechoslovakia. While the movement’s dominant claim was for increased self-government and a special status for the southern border regions where the group constitutes a majority, a vocal minority contended for secession and a merger with Hungary (Divald 2022: 260f; Ottaway 1994). Our sources suggest that the group has moderated its claims in c. 1994 (Divald 2022: 261f). We cannot identify any concrete evidence of irredentism post-1994. [start date: 1993; end date: 1994]

Claimed territory

- The Hungarians have sought to improve the political autonomy in Hungarian inhabited regions in southern Slovakia. These areas do not have an official status, although it includes the districts of Dunajská Streda and Komárno, where the Hungarians form a clear majority (Bakker 1998: 424f). Beyond this, we were unable to find a specific definition of the territory to which Hungarian claims relate. We therefore flag this territorial claim as ambiguous and code it based on the group’s ethnic settlement area as indicated by the GeoEPR dataset, which serves as a useful approximation.

Sovereignty declarations

NA

Separatist armed conflict

- We found no reports of separatist violence, hence a NVIOLSD classification. [NVIOLSD]

Historical context

- After the Second World War, Hungarians were discriminated in Czechoslovakia (Minority at Risk Project). The 1945 Government Program of Kassa implied the loss of citizenship, and the Hungarian language was removed from the public sphere. Then, in 1949, the Hungarians were granted the right to native language education. The Czechoslovak Constitution of 1956 for the first time made a brief mention of the Hungarian minority, and the 1960 Constitution promised to ensure for all minorities education and culture in their native language. The 1968 constitution guaranteed the Hungarians’ right to education in the mother language as well as representation in local bodies. In practice, however, these rights were ignored (Minority Rights Group International). In effect, Czechoslovakia’s federalization in 1968 implied greater scope for Slovak nationalism (Hungarians in Czechoslovakia mainly lived in the Slovak part). According to the Minorities at Risk Project, “[n]ew policies of assimilation included progressive Slovakization of education, elimination of Hungarian place-names from signs, bans on using Hungarian in administrative dealings and in institutions and workplaces, and pressure to Slovakize Hungarian names.” Shortly before Slovakia’s independence, legislation reaffirmed the Hungarians’ cultural rights. The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, adopted in January 1991, prohibited all forms of discrimination and reaffirmed the right to education in the first language, which was already included in the 1968 constitution but not implemented. Similarly, while declaring Slovak

the state language in Slovakia, Slovakia's parliament in 1991 recognized the right of minorities to use their language in official venues where they exceed twenty per cent of the local population. (Minority Rights Group International; Minorities at Risk Project). The 1992 Slovak constitution reaffirmed the Hungarians' cultural rights; at the same time, however, the Slovak government embroiled in increasingly anti-Hungarian rhetoric and discrimination against Hungarians. There were no moves to implement the rights granted by the constitution (Neuwahl 2000). We do not code these lip service concessions, given the continued lack of implementation.

Concessions and restrictions

- Following Slovakia's independence, new legislation required that all official documents (such as birth certificates) needed to be in Slovak. Hungarians needed to name their children in Slovak (Minorities at Risk Project). [1993: cultural rights restriction]
- In 1994, the Slovak Parliament adopted a law which gave ethnic Hungarians the right to give their children Hungarian names (Minorities at Risk Project). The same year, the Slovak parliament passes a law allowing villages with at least 20 per cent Hungarian population to use bilingual signs (Minorities at Risk Project). [1994: cultural rights concession]
- In 1995 Slovakia and Hungary signed a treaty that committed Slovakia to respect the language rights of its Hungarian population. Yet, in direct contradiction to this, the 1995 language law restricted the language rights of ethnic Hungarians as it not only reaffirmed the status of Slovak as the country's only official language, but also provided that Slovak was to be used also in commerce, the administration of religious bodies, and in communications between patients and physicians (Neuwahl 2000: 25). [1995: cultural rights restriction]
- The 1995 language law was in parts declared illegal by the Constitutional Court in 1997. The Court ruled that minorities had the right to use their mother tongue in official written contact with authorities (MAR). [1997: cultural rights concession]
 - o Related to this: the 1999 law on Minority Languages gave ethnic minorities increased rights. The law allows the use of minority language in public administration at the local level where the minority's share in the local population exceeds twenty per cent (Neuwahl 2000: 26).
- With the approaching EU accession, Slovakia moved to implement the constitutional guarantee to be educated in the native language. In particular, in 2002 legislation expanded minority-language university courses; moreover, the Slovak government authorized the creation of a Hungarian-language university, which opened its doors in January 2004 (Minority Rights Group International). [2002: cultural rights concession]
- Mainly as a consequence of EU pressure, Slovakia moved towards regionalization in the late 1990s (Bryson & Cornia 2004). Slovakia re-introduced regional administrative sub-divisions in 1996 (Brusis 2003). The 8 provinces were devolved some limited powers in 2002. In particular, the 2002 reform introduced directly elected regional executives (before 2002, these were appointed by the government). Over time, the competencies of the regional governments were extended. In particular, the regions got the right to set region-specific tax rates mainly for the real estate tax in 2005. Note: regional competencies have though remained fairly limited (Bochsler & Szöcsik 2013). Furthermore, the regionalization efforts were put in question after the 2006 elections, when an anti-devolution government was voted into office (Bryson 2008). More importantly, the 2002 reform did not lead to significant autonomy for the Hungarian minority, who forms a minority in all provinces (Bochsler & Scöcsik 2013: 426). Calls for the formation of a Hungarian-majority region were rejected. The Hungarians did have some successes: for instance, the MKP (a Hungarian party) participated in the regional government of Nitra, a Slovak region. Nevertheless, overall regionalization had too limited effects on the Hungarians to code a concession.
- In 2009, Slovakia passed a new language law that discriminates against the Hungarian language. The use of languages other than Slovak was prohibited both in public (including singing in the street!) and in business (Schöpflin 2009). [2009: cultural rights restriction]
- In 2011, key parts of the controversial 2009 language law were repealed. [2011: cultural rights concession]

- In 2017, the Law on the Fund to Support the Culture of National Minorities was passed, which guaranteed the Hungarian minority €4 million per year for cultural projects. [2017: cultural rights concession]

Regional autonomy

NA

De facto independence

NA

Major territorial changes

- Slovakia attained independence in 1993, implying a host change. [1993: host change (new)]

EPR2SDM

<i>Movement</i>	Hungarians
<i>Scenario</i>	1:1
<i>EPR group(s)</i>	Hungarians
<i>Gwgroupid(s)</i>	31702000

Power access

- We follow EPR. [1993-1998: powerless; 1999-2006: junior partner; 2007-2010: powerless; 2011-2012: junior partner; 2013-2016: powerless; 2017-2020: junior partner]

Group size

- We follow EPR. [0.101]

Regional concentration

- According to MAR, the majority of the Hungarians in Slovakia lives in Southern Slovakia. According to the 2001 census, they made up an absolute majority in a contiguous area in Slovakia's southernmost western and central areas. [concentrated]

Kin

- There is kin, obviously in Hungary, but also in Croatia, Romania, Serbia/Serbia and Montenegro, Slovenia, and Ukraine (according to EPR and MAR). [kin in neighboring country]

Sources

- AAJ News (2007). "Hungarian Party in Slovakia Denies Any Separatist Aims." February 4. <http://www.aaj.tv/2007/02/hungarian-party-in-slovakia-denies-any-separatist-aims/> [June 19, 2014].
- Alliance (2022) "Our basic objectives", <https://szovetseg.sk/alapveto-celkituzeseink> [June 11, 2022]
- Bakker, Edwin (1998). "The Development of Slovakia's Hungarian Population and Its Habitat." *Espace Populations Sociétés* 16(3): 417-430.
- Bochsler, Daniel, and Edina Szöcsik (2013). "The Forbidden Fruit of Federalism: Evidence from Romania and Slovakia." *West European Politics* 36(2): 426-446.
- Brusis, Martin (2003). "Regionalization in the Czech and Slovak Republics: Comparing the Influence of the European Union". In Michael Keating, and James Hughes, *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe. Territorial Restructuring and European Integration*, 89-105. Paris: Presses Interuniversitaires.
- Bryson, Philipp J. (2008). "State Administration" vs. Self-government in the Slovak and Czech Republics. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 41 (3): 339-358.
- Cederman, Lars-Erik, Andreas Wimmer, and Brian Min (2010). "Why Do Ethnic Groups Rebel: New Data and Analysis." *World Politics* 62(1): 87-119.
- Divald, Susan (2022). "Looking to the Past to Survive the Future: The Hungarian Minority in Government of Slovak Republic (2017). "Act No. 138/2017 Coll. on the Fund for the Promotion of the Culture of National Minorities and on the Amendment and Supplement of Certain Acts."
- Hewitt, Christopher, and Tom Cheetham (2000). *Encyclopedia of Modern Separatist Movements*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, pp. 124-125, 270-272.
- Keesing's Record of World Events. <http://www.keesings.com> [April 11, 2002].
- Magyar Közösség Pártja. <http://www.mkp.sk/> [December 13, 2013].
- Marshall, Monty G., and Ted R. Gurr (2003). *Peace and Conflict 2003: A Global Survey of Armed Conflicts, Self-Determination Movements and Democracy*. College Park, MD: Center for International Development and Conflict Management, p. 63.
- Minorities at Risk Project (2009). College Park, MD: University of Maryland.
- Minority Rights Group International. *World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples*. <http://www.minorityrights.org/?lid=3533> [July 11, 2014].
- Neuwahl, Nanette (2000). "The More the Merrier? Hungarian and Romany Minorities in Slovakia." *Liverpool Law Review* 22: 21-37.
- Ottaway, David B. (1994). "Ethnic Hungarians in Slovakia Are Demanding Self-Government". *The Washington Post*. January 10. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1994/01/10/ethnic-hungarians-in-slovakia-are-demanding-self-government/4c412c7f-0eb3-4990-a183-c04f0485ee10/> [March 22, 2023].
- Schöpflin, György (2009). "The Slovak language law is discriminatory and restrictive" *euobserver.com*. July 10. <http://euobserver.com/opinion/28440> [December 11, 2013].
- Slovakia". *East European Politics and Societies* 36(1): 248-271.
- Vogt, Manuel, Nils-Christian Bormann, Seraina Rüeeggler, Lars-Erik Cederman, Philipp Hunziker, and Luc Girardin (2015). "Integrating Data on Ethnicity, Geography, and Conflict: The Ethnic Power Relations Data Set Family." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 59(7): 1327-1342.