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The analysis of the education strategy of the National Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority (MNT) in Vojvodina¹

Our present work is part of a longer research project on the political aspects of the Hungarian minority's institutional system in Vojvodina, Serbia. In this paper, we consider the educational concepts of the present National Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority (MNT II) as our starting point. The coordinative language use of minority communities is generally accepted today. According to language-policy examinations, it is important to facilitate this language use by the educational system. The particular conditions and the effectiveness of its realization are more complex issues: they need a so-called horizontal perspective of policies. The political measures are largely dependent on, for example, the regional characteristics of the particular minority situation. Coordinative bilingualism is a stated goal to reach, concerning both majority and minority societies. However, it can be realized in the block and in the periphery² by differing methods. This difference is a major internal cut-off point of the current challenges facing the MNT II. Regarding the competences and resources of the local municipalities, differing tools are at disposal.

In the first part of the present work, we summarize the goals of the MNT II's educational strategy (OS) and the conclusions that can be drawn so far. After this, our

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² The term 'block' refers to a spatially continuous community forming local majority within its area, while Hungarian communities in periphery are too small and separated to form local majority within their immediate environment.



paper aims at presenting the wider, so-called regional economic-political framework of the MNT's education strategy and the minority political discourse connected to the elements that have been realized so far. In the second section, we focus on the limitations (structural deficiencies) of the institutionally achievable education policies of the MNT, while in the third section the main issue is the relation between efficiency and the tactical and strategic debates that originate from the internal struggles of minority politics. In the fourth and last chapter, we sum up the lessons of the usual and long unrevised practice of the majority-principled decision-making in education politics.

Key words: Vojvodina; Hungarian ethnic minority; education; language.

1. Introduction

Minority formation is linked to processes that put such manifold burdens both on the individual and the minority community that are hard to counterbalance. They pose an obviously severe challenge for the organizations and institutions of the so-called secondary community – if and when these latter exist and efficiently function at all, within the framework of the majority-principled representational democracy. Of course, the respective institutions of the majority society do not (or only marginally) need to face similar difficulties. Such is the situation in the case of the Hungarian minority communities in Serbia's Vojvodina, too.

The aforementioned additional challenges appear in two distinct dimensions regarding education, as a socio-political subsystem. On the one hand, there is a practically inherent and statistically ever-present disadvantage that afflicts the individuals of the minority community and generally the community alike. This drawback tends to appear in the interrelated areas of level of education, majority language competence and job market involvement. A responsible minority education policy is expected to be aware of such problems. Thus, it is also required that it should allocate resources to eliminate or mitigate the potentially negative effects of the phenomena – in a conscious, deliberate and institutionally organized manner.

On the other hand, minority political and intellectual elites (not to mention the institutional systems of minority culture, language and educational politics) also have the responsibility to (indirectly and directly) affect (hold back) the destruction processes that are at work regarding ethnic identity of a minority and its secondary and tertiary communities.



Naturally enough, the principles above are not omitted by the academic (sociologist) community dealing with education in Vojvodina. This awareness is at work in the case of those (authors of) publications that address descriptive issues of past and present, and also in those cases when they study the possible future tasks belonging to the desirable/avoidable dimension.³

2. The educational strategy of the MNT II

Considering the above issues, it is no surprise that the MNT II marked education as a focal issue of the Hungarian community in Serbia. A so-called educational strategy summarized the relevant tasks and tools; the plans were finished by October of 2010. According to the stated goals, the following conditions are necessary for the individuals (constituting the Hungarian community) to stay in their homelands: (1) skills and training; (2) appropriate level of education; and (3) competent knowledge.

These are the foundations of an existence equal to the majority society and to representatives of other minorities. Previous education-political efforts lacked planning, were often individual initiatives, improvisatory and isolated. *“In order to make **our actions and policy-making** more planned, more organized and thus more effective, it is imperative to **form such an educational and training strategy** which is based on objective assessment of realities and the right evaluation of tendencies and which can, at least on medium term, determine the goals that are to be reached by similarly determined, actual projects.”* – states the introduction of the strategy. (Our highlights SCSM-PT, Cf. OS, 2).

2.1. The education-political features of the Hungarians in Vojvodina

In 2010, the educational situation is characterized by a progressively decreasing number of children. Additionally, the stability of the environment and the institutions is important. The environment itself is not unfavorable, compared to the opportunities of other Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian basin. However,

³ Compare the relevant volume of essays in the series of the Academic Society for Hungarian Researches (Magyarsághutató Tudományos Társaság (MTT): Gábrity Molnár (1997) and Mirmics (2005).



the existing opportunities can be used more efficiently by installing competences on the appropriate levels.

General features: The number of the institutions remained constant; they are bilingual as to their type: i.e. there are both Hungarian and Serbian faculties within the same institution. Changes can be seen mainly in management: (1) the role of the local municipalities has increased, (2) a significant part of elementary school curricula has been modified positively, (3) importation of textbooks from Hungary has become easier. Thus, on elementary and pre-elementary levels, the basic network remained stable. The legal regulating framework of minority education is also unchanged. It is compulsory to start a Hungarian-language class in case fifteen pupils are present, but there is a possibility to launch it with fewer participants, too. The rate of those studying in native language is around 80 percent: four Hungarian children out of five have elementary education in their mother tongue. However, comparing the block and the periphery, this ratio is less favorable. In the block, 99 percent of Hungarian children study in Hungarian, while in the periphery, only one out of two. Hungarian language education is provided in 78 elementary schools, in 900 school faculties. The network of Hungarian kindergartens, however, is somewhat behind the elementary school network.

There is a continuous decrease in the number of schoolchildren. See Table 1 for details. The causes of this decrease are (1) the progressive fall in childbirths and (2) consecutive waves of negative migration. The tendency will stay in the next decade, yet in a reduced rate. By 2016, ca. 15,000–17,000 Hungarian children are expected to attend elementary school, and 13,000–15,000 of them will study in their native language. The periphery is more threatened in several ways. Small-number Hungarian faculties will eventually become unsustainable and this will lead to the decrease of the number of such faculties (OS, pp 2–4).

Table 1.

School term	No. of Hungarian students in elementary schools	Of this, no. of students studying in Hungarian
1985/86	33,240	26,201
1995/96	29,000	25,000
2005/06	20,000	17,778

The recent past has brought many more, mainly positive shifts with regard to secondary school education. From 2001 on, the institutional system expanded.



Hungarian education improved with the 2003 foundation of two well-equipped, so-called *talent-developing* secondary schools financed from multiple sources. These are the Kosztolányi Dezső Talent-developing High School in Subotica and the Bolyai Talent-developing High School and Hostel. An additional 39 institutions and 327 faculties provide Hungarian-language education in Vojvodina.

The Educational Secretariat of the province has granted the start of new Hungarian-language faculties at the so-called 4-year classes in Novi Sad and Nagybecskerek. The number of profiles and faculties offering a school-leaving exam has increased, substituting the classes of the so-called 3rd grade skill training. Two-thirds of Hungarian secondary school students study in a class providing high-school level graduation, while 50 percent of them used to graduate in so-called skilled laborer classes. Both the foundational and management rights and administrative supervision of the schools are now on provincial or municipal levels.

17.35 percent of Hungarian students in Vojvodina attend high school, 82.65 percent attend technical high school. 28.14 percent of the latter study in 3-year faculties, 71.86 percent in the so-called fourth grade, according to 2010 data.

Higher education: The two main changes: (1) many youths continued their education in institutions of higher education in Hungary (2) the opportunities for Hungarian-language higher education in Vojvodina have also widened. A Hungarian-language Elementary Teacher Training Faculty started in Subotica in 2006, and the Technical College in Subotica has opened up toward Hungarian education. The rate of university students with Hungarian ethnicity did not change in Vojvodina (2007/2008 – 2507; 2008/2009 – 2261 Hungarian students).

3000–3500 college/university students attend state-managed institutions (900 of which are first-year students). Another result of the educational policy is that since 2001, those who took their school-leaving exam in Hungarian are allowed to take the entrance exams for all Faculties of the University of Novi Sad in Hungarian. This fact has greatly improved the chances of acceptance, but it has not resulted in a significant increase of the students' numbers. Since 2005, sociology, psychology and pedagogy have been available in Hungarian language as well. An insignificant proportion of the 1600 annual school-leavers continue their education in private universities/colleges.



Including the Vojvodinians who had taken their school-leaving exams abroad, last year 1385 youngsters attended institutes of higher education in Hungary. The growth can be explained by the fact that education in Hungary for Hungarians has been tuition-free for years. However, the stipend resource pool did not change. According to estimates, those having a Vojvodinian school-leaving exam study in Hungary by hundreds. Few graduated youngsters, though. The reasons for this: (1) lack of sufficient Serbian language competence; (2) scarcity of job opportunities in Vojvodina; and (3) administrative and material difficulties of accrediting their degrees.

2.2. Key points of the educational strategy

In the key document of the MNT's educational strategy seven main goals of improving the Hungarian education in Vojvodina between 2010 and 2016 is to be achieved through the systematic realization of these seven points:

1. Increasing the skill and educational level of Hungarians in Vojvodina;
2. Increasing the proportion and number of those learning in Hungarian;
3. Increasing the professional level of Hungarian-language education, quality improvement;
4. Strong content-based presentation to strengthen ethnic identity, in Hungarian-language education and mother-tongue culture;
5. More efficient learning and acquisition of the Serbian language;
6. General improvement of Hungarian-language higher education;
7. Developing adult education/skilled laborer training network.

2.2.1. Increasing the skill and educational level of Hungarians in Vojvodina

The primary and most extensive development goal is to increase both the absolute number and proportion (as to the whole number of Hungarians in Vojvodina) of those Hungarian youngsters who have university or college-level higher education. Compared to the Serbian majority, the Hungarian minority communities today show half as big a proportion of people with higher education.



The strategy acknowledges the long-known fact that the development and even the mere collective survival of Hungarians in Vojvodina requires that in skill and educational levels they become competitive and equal with the Serbian majority society, by gradually eliminating or minimizing its backlog behind the Serbian community.

Concentrating on the Novi Sad University, the main goal of the strategy is to increase the number of Hungarian students (from 350–400 to even 700–750) in a way that does not cause a decrease in the number of college students. Considering the temporal context of higher education, the life phases before and after university/college are also kept in mind: the facilitation of signing in to higher education and giving situational advantages to graduates are in cause-and-effect relationship with the narrower subject matter of the development goal.

2.2.2. Increasing the proportion and number of those learning in the Hungarian language

There are two reasons behind this strategic goal: the knowledge acquired in one's native language is more profound and more efficient, and a Hungarian-language school is a most important institutional instrument to maintain minority ethnic identity.

Due to the consecutiveness of the phases of education, the issue is relevant and important on every level, yet the strategic goal focuses on elementary schools. Twenty percent of elementary school pupils of Hungarian nationality do not receive education in their native language – the strategy realistically aims at a decrease by 3–4%, which is already a complex challenge. A prerequisite is the improvement of quality and competitiveness of primary education, and several indirect factors are to be controlled, too. The related programs include the elimination of geographic and informational hindrances, with provision of transport such as school buses, improvement programs for the gifted and instructional campaigns.

The strategy is actually against the (total) separation (in economic, legal and physical terms) of institutions with both languages, but in certain cases autonomy for Hungarian-language schools is advisable. Yet, in institutions where studies are conducted in both languages, the financial, legal and organizational background for the effective and autonomous management of Hungarian-



language education must be created. A feasible method seems to be the installing of vice-manager positions that are responsible for Hungarian-language education.

2.2.3. Increasing the professional level of Hungarian-language education, quality improvement

This is a strategic goal that is important in and of itself but also serves as a prerequisite for the other goals. Bearing in mind the present (less than competitive) state of affairs, quality improvement is instrumental, compared both to the present situation and to the professional level of education in the Serbian language.

The document emphasizes numerous issues among the required programs and projects. Changes are to be made with regard to lack of teachers and of proper quality of Hungarian textbooks and to the student boarding-system. It seems inevitable that controversies between the Serbian educational framing laws and the regulation of the MNT should be eliminated, and similarly indispensable is an accredited training system for educators, approved by the Serbian education system.

2.2.4. Strong content-based presentation to strengthen ethnic identity, in Hungarian-language education and mother-tongue culture

The document reflects dissatisfaction with the present situation in these aspects as well, and this goal, too, must affect the whole spectrum of education, from the kindergarten to educator training. In order to strengthen the consciousness of identity, the strategy intends to substitute the insufficiently extensive, imprecise and inorganically implemented Serbian educational materials of the present with a more serious body of knowledge, in areas like history, music and fine arts.

The strategy would focus even more on those Hungarians who do not have access to education in their native language. A more efficient familiarization with the institutional aspects of the national culture and the extension of Hungarian language culture are also urged.



2.2.5. *A more efficient learning and acquisition of the Serbian language*

The problem is by no means new, but the situation worsened in the last 15–20 years. It is emphasized that a lack of a sufficiently high-level Serbian language competence is not only an individual drawback but a problem that also has communal feedback.

A positive advancement is the program to teach Serbian as a so-called *second language* (as opposed to both *native* and *foreign*, since it is used in the immediate linguistic environment). But this program does not really reflect on “the comparative differences [between the two languages], the heterogeneous preliminary knowledge of the students, and the local specifics of the education (block or periphery). The newly published textbooks still feature linguistic archaisms, they do not enable knowledge transfer and the development of applicable communication and language competences” (OS p.16). The Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina has created a curriculum suitable for the mentioned issues, but the department of education in Belgrade did not accept it until the publication of the strategy.

Additional measures to take include institutionalized remedial trainings, more experimental and play-like language learning programs with the possible involvement of student exchanges, decreasing the “distrust” toward the Serbian language.

2.2.6. *General improvement of Hungarian-language higher education*

As it has been shown, higher education in the Hungarian language has its own practice and opportunities in Vojvodina. The strategic goal includes a further and more systematic expansion of these opportunities.

According to the proposal, it could be possible to study in Hungarian during the first two years of the studies. From the third academic year on, Serbian *or* Hungarian, German, perhaps English language education could be added. The advantage of the model is that it could decrease the chance of too sudden linguistic leaps, possible failure experiences etc. and would endorse the familiarization with profession-specific English, German or other languages. Certainly, a lack of Hungarian educators could pose a problem in some cases, which could be possibly remedied by establishing language lectorates.



2.2.7. Development of an adult education/skilled laborer training network

Adult education (outside the spheres of public and higher education) is unregulated and unorganized in Serbia. By joining the recently forming accreditation programs, Hungarian institutions in Vojvodina could gain an advantage; Vojvodina could even become a leading center of adult education in Serbia. The strategy considers making use of experience in Hungary to be obviously beneficial.

2.3. Projects to realize the strategic improvement goals

These development goals can be loosely defined by their very nature; sometimes they propose the desirable directions, rather than particulars. Then again, numerous particular projects have been developed, being in either planning or realization phase.

The strategy does not have the primary intention to connect each of these with a respective strategic goal directly. In other words, the particular projects to realize the strategic improvement goals are not coordinated in any declarative way with of one or more given goals. However, this is not really necessary, since some of the projects described below can and do obviously contribute to the efficient achievement of more than one strategic goal.

2.3.1. Finishing the construction and installation of the 'Európa Kollégium (Europe College)'

The MNT is a co-founder of this future Novi Sad boarding academic facility with a capacity of 350. Building and installation works are in the final phase: in theory, it would have opened in the fall of 2011, but the date had to be postponed due to the insufficiency of the province's resources. Even with the additional support of the MNT and the Hungarian state, the opening has to wait at least until the second semester of the 2011/2012 academic year. The founding documents claim that at least 90 percent of the benefited university students must be of Hungarian nationality. An important supplement is that the institution is to operate a support system for especially gifted students.



2.3.2. *Tuition and student loan programs*

These projects are additional and do not intend to replace or substitute either the Serbian system of student support or the scholarship resources from Hungary. The scoring system of the higher education tuition program include the following: professions of greater demand, previous education in the Hungarian language, results on the high school final exams, economic and educational level of parents, distance between hometown and place of education, being listed on the Hungarian electorate list. As it will be shown later on, the actual implementation of these factors generated quite a (party-)political debate in the summer of 2011, due to the fact that they can be interpreted as discriminative from certain viewpoints.

The strategy also claims that the educational support system of the Hungarian state can be rationalized and improved. It makes several proposals to the effect that such support should not function as a general social welfare support system, but as an efficient education-political measure. Student loan programs are scheduled to start as early as the 2012/13 academic year. Similarly to the Hungarian and European precedents, interest rates would be checked and controlled by the financial assistance of the MNT.

2.3.3. *School bus program*

Apart from the Hungarian school buses of Subotica and Nagybecskerek, several theoretical options (possible and relevant routes) are available. This element of the strategy is still in the planning phase. The full extent of the studies and consultations to delineate the system (number and routes) of the school buses have not been finished, but as of the summer of 2011 (or the beginning of the new educational term), the accessibility level of Hungarian-language educational institutions has, to a certain extent, already increased.

2.3.4. *Improvement of the Hungarian-language higher education in Subotica: establishing the Hungarian Pedagogy Faculty*

As it can be derived from the claims above, the strategy considers the advancement of higher education in the Hungarian language as a primary issue. Howev-



er, developing and realizing the effective and relevant programs are the most cumbersome task in this area. The plans (so far only delineated, rather than fully formed) include the expansion and advancement of the Hungarian Teacher Training Faculty (MTTK) and programs enabling the so-called lifelong learning and educational programs without formal skill qualification.

The major aim of the former is to re-organize and rename the MTTK into the Hungarian Pedagogy Faculty, which would provide double-subject majors and PhD opportunities as well. The possibilities of this are being surveyed. Another important advancement would be to reorganize the present Technical College into a university-level institution. The idea appeared years ago already, yet the conditions are still inadequate (especially the lack of a highly skilled staff of instructors).

2.3.5. Reforming the teaching of the Serbian language

As we mentioned before, the realization of these efforts (the efficient teaching/learning of Serbian as a second language) has more political than professional reasons. So far Belgrade refused the submitted proposals. “We should utilize our professional and political influences to the maximum so that the new curricula would be accepted as soon as possible. All the more so since the law on national ethnic councils grants an opinionating right for the MNT with regard to Serbian language programs.” (OS, p. 23.)

2.3.6. Higher education in Hungary, accreditation of degrees

As Hungarians with foreign citizenship may also study at Hungarian universities free of charge (since 2008/2009) and there are approximately 1400 Hungarians from Vojvodina studying in Hungary, it is crucial to continue the degree-accreditation project of the MNT, started in 2009. This project is used to refund the translation and other costs that arise when accrediting non-Serbian diplomas. About 400 students have made use of this. It is obvious that job opportunities in Vojvodina and even graduates’ return to there can heavily depend on such conditions, yet this is “only one of many factors”. The strategy emphasizes not only the system of refunding itself, but the importance of streamlining and simplifying the whole process.



2.3.7. Claiming the co-founder rights of educational institutions

The subjects of this already ongoing project are such educational institutions (originally founded by the Serbian State or the province of Vojvodina) that feature mostly Hungarian language education and/or are highlighted for the interests of Hungarian education. After designing the list of these institutions of elevated importance, the process is to be finished by the end of 2012.

These are the most relevant projects to pursue the strategic development goals, also those that have had the most impact on the state of affairs in the educational segment of the socio-political (policy) discourse in Vojvodina and/or in the daily (party-)political discourse of the Hungarian minority. Other projects of (from our present perspective) lesser importance including the expanding the capacity of high-school student hostels in centers of Hungarian secondary education; the career-starting support program; the teaching of Hungarian in Serbian-language faculties; the improvement of pre-school education and acculturation; and the orientation campaign for native-language education and to facilitate higher education.

2.4. Permutations and complications in the first year; plans and results – debate on the tuition system

The actual effectiveness and efficiency of the MNT's education strategy (as a complex action plan to achieve long-term results) cannot be assessed unproblematically, possibly not even after several years. However, it became clear in August 2011 that some of the initiatives already set in motion are quite suitable for becoming yet another discursive battlefield between the two historical minority parties, the VMDK (The Democratic Association of Hungarians in Vojvodina) and the VMSZ (The Hungary Alliance in Vojvodina).

The process of highlighting the most important institutions and claiming co-founder rights (mentioned in the previous paragraph, also in accordance with 1.2.2.) was implemented in a way that resulted in the MNT delegating three members in the management boards – in essence, exactly according to the content of the strategy. But the (either real or fictional, to be politically correct) interconnections between the interests of the MNT and those of the VMSZ eventually led to the situation that the actual manifestation of a strategic goal also offers (primarily for the VMDK) a sort of a weak point to be attacked. To put it



more simply: certain points of the strategy are carried out in a way that can be (and by some, it is) interpreted as political positioning of party “henchmen”. This aspect of the issue is well represented by the printed and electronic press in Vojvodina (those that are concerned with the affairs of Hungarians, that is), partly as subtle allusions, partly as more tangible, yet significantly less expert-like statements or comments.

The (daily, populist) political discourse was even more profoundly stirred by the part of the implemented tuition system (1.3.3.) that controls the ranking of the potential beneficiaries.

Even Nevena Petrušić, the equity ombudsman of Serbia, was addressed by the VMDSZ to analyze and judge the situation. Again, the subject of the dispute was *how* the factors concerning the above discussed tuition (accepted and published in 2010 by the MNT in its strategy) were actually implemented – and the nature of their principles, in addition. Among other issues, Petrušić agreed with the VMDK inasmuch as the MNT tuition system actually functions in a negatively discriminative manner towards those Hungarians in Vojvodina who did not (to be more precise: did not and *do not even intend to*) register themselves on the VMSZ electorate list. What is more, each and every factor seems to involve discriminative dimensions:

According to Petrušić, the MNT has violated the principle of constitutional and legal equity of citizens, as – on the basis of personal characteristics and their parents’ personal characteristics – negatively discriminated those (...) university students:

- a. who applied to non-Serbian state higher educational institution (to those who applied to such educational institution whose founder is not Serbia),
 - b. whose parents are of higher educational level (to those whose parents are of lower educational level),
 - c. who are not registered in the Hungarian electorate list (to those who are registered on this list)
 - d. who have not made a statement of intention to register on the Hungarian electorate list (to those who have made such a statement)
 - e. who finished their secondary education in the Hungarian language in their hometown (to those who have finished their secondary education in the Hungarian language, but not in their hometown)
- (<http://www.vajma.info/cikk/tukor/4317/Ujabb-botranyt-okozott-az-MNT.html>)



The aims of the present paper do not include judging the tendencies⁴ of the debate/dialogue that have arisen from the above “arguments”. Then again, the relevant points of the educational strategy of the MNT (IV.3.1, IV.3.2. OS 19–20.) leave no doubt that it was far from their intentions to establish a fully non-discriminative system in the sense that the issue is not any kind of social allowance, but an active and selective educational political program that functions along the previously defined principles.

As a consequence, it seems plausible that at times (unintentional or intentional instances of misinterpretation or, more diplomatically speaking: dispute-inducing revisions) certain elements of the strategy have to and probably will have to get through the party and personal antagonisms that exist inside the current Hungarian minority-political discourse in Vojvodina. As of August of 2011, the debate does not show any signs of consensual resolution.

Therefore, the realizations of the strategic development goals so far (and the activity of the second MNT in general) seem to be actively reflected on by the daily political discourse, not without power struggles and popularity-related considerations. Obviously, this is also a feature of a series of actions that may significantly influence the medium and long term future of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina (and which is also forced to directly assess and adapt to the tendencies of respective departments both in Budapest and Belgrade).

3. The regional aspects of minority politics

The Hungarians of Vojvodina form a majority in the settlements along the Tisza River and the section of the so-called Corridor 10 between Subotica and Novi Sad (see Gabrity-Molnár 2006). The Hungarian Coalition that existed until the previous, 2008 elections saw these seven-eight settlements as the basis for a future regional autonomy (see *A magyar koalíció autonómiakonceptiója*, 2008). It is this area where Vojvodinian Hungarians should especially harmonize educational politics with the economic demands of regional policy making. This is not easily done, since the range of the National Councils is *ab ovo* “supra-regional”, which means that they only articulate the general cultural demands of their elec-

⁴ Cf. <http://www.vajma.info/cikk/tukor/4320/A-ket-koordinatarendszer.html>, <http://www.vajma.info/cikk/tukor/4316/A-magyar-allampolgarsag-viszont-lehet-kriterium.html>, <http://www.vajma.info/cikk/tukor/4315/A-palyazok-megkapjak-az-MNT-felsooktatasi-osztondijat.html>.



tive communities without detailing these according to the particular needs of each village or town. Another efficiency-decreasing factor is that National Councils are without any formal connection with the local administrative bodies (not even coordinative, not to mention super- or subordinative connections). This was demonstrated most clearly when the current governing bodies of the Hungarian majority villages (e.g. Zenta) were reluctant to carry out the decrees (about school management boards) within the lawfully defined decisive range of the NTs.

3.1. The situation of regionalism in Serbia

We present the negative (slowing developments and generating economic challenges) aspects of the unresolved, undecided, politically neglected issues in accordance with the study by Takács (2008).

There are huge regional differences within Serbia that can reach the 1:10 ratio in state of development. The significant underdevelopment, demographic and economical problems of the Eastern, Western and Southern parts affect the under/development of the whole country. The weak regional cohesion further aggravates the otherwise also tangible regional differences, so do the partly unused, partly inadequately used regional resources (natural, human, material and also immaterial – stemming from cultural, ethnic and other diversity – resources). The project *Regionalization of Serbia*, published in 2003, discusses the regional segmentation of Serbia as an unresolved issue which never reached an actual final form. This is explained as the constitutionally defined centralization of Serbia, which is due to the “autocratic political regime, the complete state control and the fundamental lack of democratic procedure”. Regionalization is a necessary evil: it serves the disappearance of the un-maintainable conditions according to European expectations and treaties.

The distribution of urban centers is quite polycentric: towns and regional centers are situated in the main development zones of Serbia, which is a prerequisite of a balanced regional development of the republic. The national endorsement politics of polycentrism should support more efficient regional development and better mobilization of the local resources of the regions.

Regional planning has been neglected in Serbia. The political exercising of interests could not serve as a sufficient base for rational (economically reasonable)



regional strategies. This does not seem to change soon. The sub-systems of society are affected by the reigning political interest or, to be more precise, by the 'communal interest', shaped by current international or (radical) national pressures and represented by political agents. It is quite telling when the Serbian elite, if needed, can actually adapt itself to the otherwise unfamiliar processes of strategy and project creation: this is how statistic regions will be created (probably due to international pressure).

The issue is to be solved quickly, since regional differences are increasing, both holding back the economic development of the regions with interests in the joining of the EU and conserving the situation of the underdeveloped regions by the unresolved issues of sovereignty.

3.2. The regional characteristics of Northern Bácska

We do not wish to maintain the opinion that Vojvodina is one of the most developed regions of Serbia. Today this is no longer true (cf. Jovanov 2005), except for the agglomerate of Novi Sad in the core region: Southern Bácska and certain parts of the Szerémség. In the case of Northern Bácska and Northern Bánát, the underdevelopment tendencies of the global economic effect (heightening the local trap situations) have been increased: Belgrade and Novi Sad are concentrating the resources around themselves. Industry is dwindling in the farther territories while the labor requirements and population-holding potential of agriculture are only fractions of what they used to be. In other words, the Hungarian-inhabited Northern Bácska region is on its way of becoming an internal periphery, while half a century before it was Subotica and the towns along the Tisza that collected the Hungarian population from the Bánát and thus formed the present block-and-periphery distribution.⁵ The change of system came late and Serbia, for fear of losing further territories, has been reluctant to form either a framework for local (economically relevant) decision-making or legal control over provincial and settlement possessions – at the time of the present paper, the so-called restitution act is only in a preparatory phase. The country cannot and does not wish to address regional challenges, not even in the case of potentially significant industrial sites of the Corridor 10 area. Education has a relatively low potential to exercise interests (needing at least medium-term, economically well-considered planning, which is not a minority-specific expectation) and local

⁵ Compare Gábrity-Molnár (2002).



communities are also low on such a ranking (see Somogyi, Lakner, Kajári 2008). Educational politics was formed as an effect of strong central bodies and significantly weaker local initiatives, without the perspectives of integrating longer-term economic requirements.

3.3. Regional politics and minorities

Regional politics sees the most potential in bottom-up initiatives based on regional characteristics, even more so in the so-called demand-oriented postmodern era of commerce. The output side of public and higher education should prepare students for the expected requirements of potential investors. These requirements arise probably from the sectors of electric power industry, machinery, meat and mill industry (based on the traditions of the area and local population). This can be strengthened by joining into the main European traffic infrastructure. The higher education capacity of Subotica is also a positive factor (primarily the technical, architecture, and economic faculties). Education has to be set to serve professions with medium-term economic relevance. The education policy of the MNT has focused on a tuition system that counterbalances the disadvantage of the minority situation, which is understandable from a fairness-related viewpoint. But a part of these sources has to be used in accordance with economical demands, which necessitates the improvement of the tuition system in this direction. Education policy, a crucial point of any regional policy based on horizontal cooperation, becomes a common challenge all around Europe.

3.4. Fine-tuning minority education policies

After one year, it seems clear that the legality of the National Councils are not easy to put into effect. This is also true for both majority and (not or less involved) minority stakeholders. Those elements of the education policy that are designed for the given particular communities have to be accepted by the involved parties. From these elements, an important question arises: in which settlement and which educational directions should get extra resources? An effective and efficient version of community-level education policy must also be created. In other words: the involved parties have to understand why they do what they do, not only see what they do. In Serbia, this is difficult due to the fact that (as we have shown with regard to the study by Takács) the country does not have a really regional development strategy. The tangible parts do not go be-



yond the regions of planning. The creating of this is forced by the EU-accession. And minority strategies can only have results if they can be harmonized with regional concepts of both the bigger region (Vojvodina) and the country.

3.5. The missing pillar of educational policy

As a consequence of the aforementioned factors, we think it is inevitable to create regionally based minority municipalities along the local and personal representation, if a successful and efficient minority educational policy is to be realized. This can be a realistic and economically positive (for the whole country) institution in the case of those communities that form majority in several adjacent settlements.

This is a bottom-up form of regionalization without which minority communities will have insufficient self-organization – a most perceivable example of this can be seen in the area of education. If the state, due to certain historical fears, is unable or unwilling (see Gulyás 2010) to set up an institution system to make the most use of its features, then the existing (and, for the above reasons, insufficient) institutes will be unable to utilize the potentials of human resources. And this responsibility does not belong to the National Councils.

4. The discourse around the education policy of the MNT

Considering the educational strategy of the MNT and the party-political and press reactions to the related decisions, it is to be pointed out that the performance of the institution (creating the strategy and realizing the particular items) has returned, in this discourse, to the terrain of minority policies where competing agents attempt to reach political significance by strengthening their own positions and weakening those of others. Therefore, in order to collect those ideas of the VMDP and VMDK that are relevant from the viewpoint of policy-making, a close discourse analysis has to be performed on the related statements, separating political and professional contents. Here and now, this is not possible: we already have detailed the relations between the MNT and the two historical parties elsewhere.

From the articles of the two parties and some publicists, some control feedback is visible on the MNT's functioning which counterbalances its moves



through the media – by this, the MNT itself is forced to correct those decisions that have insufficient legal support. Yet, it must be mentioned that this discourse (being primarily current and not professional politics, with its blurring, omitting and overstating tendencies) does not serve well to the minority political activity of the institution (which has only reached its second year and has done organized and strategically based work only in the last year) and explicitly attempts to undermine its social support.

This is a typical situation where political opponents strive to discredit even those institutions that are claimed by them through democratic decisions. (Their main reason for this is that the law itself by which it was created, is not good enough.)

The professional and political aspects of the educational strategy are, therefore, to be separated, even if the latter could be more easily analyzed (which we will not do here, due to the nature of the present paper). The policy-related elements that are relevant in medium and long terms are at their early phases, so we cannot attempt to judge their level of successfulness. So this paper only presents a specific manifestation of a (regionally) new institutional opportunity by trying to describe its role in its social and economic contexts.

5. Consequences that can be used in governance-theories

Inter-regional and global competition both prompts to utilize human resources on a more efficient level. Such situation makes the EU-conform remedial development of communities politically more legitimate. This also necessitates a proper change of profile in minority politics.

A general and inevitable (from both majority and minority viewpoints) policy expectation is to harmonize the language- and education-political methods (according to the general principle of subsidiarity) to the economy-political strategy making, whose most efficient form (in the present regard) is the so-called ‘multi level governance’ decision-making method (see Mayntz 2010).

The global economic production paradigm counts on the equalization of urban labor distribution. Meanwhile, the rural (small-town) regions will continue to lag behind if proper development strategy and methods are missing. The tendency is



that Hungarian minority communities have been able to maintain their block-like character only in small-town zones (they are “ruralized”).

The regional politics of the EU has been aware of this for a while. ESDP (2007, Leipzig) deals with social fairness as a highlighted issue, along with economic sustainability and environmental renewal – these were recommended for further discussion by the Barca-report (see Illés 2010; Nagy 2009). As a consequence of this, minority communities can gain better understanding and more serious funding if they align with this new approach of the EU. Minority politics gain a new sense in this discursive field and a new importance regarding educational politics and language use. In the global economic struggle with the – ethnically more homogenous – USA and the Far East, every endogenous resource that increases competitive potential gains priority. Due to the developmental compulsion of the EU, minority areas are becoming of ever greater importance. The social/economic processes in these (i.e. regions with minorities) cannot be regarded as internal affairs of one nation state; the problems of their inhabitants cannot be solved through previous methods. In other words, the pseudo-solutions cannot be left to homogenization strategies, since on the long run, these are built on assimilation. It is important to note that the political form of the majority-principled decision-making and representation has involuntarily facilitated assimilation for the last two centuries.

Every student who intends to and cannot study in their mother tongue is also a potential loss of efficiency in the global competition. The minority member who does not study a competitive profession (due to the rigidity of the education system) also belongs to this group. Today this is not in the interests of the majority societies either, since they require this human resource for their development, too. For *adaptive homogenization*, it is the performances (and not the performing agents) that are to be equalized and balanced. Such a situation also means a great challenge for those involved. First and foremost, a policy has to be developed that brings both spatial distribution and the ethnic features of production factors into consideration. This is our only way to maintain a competitive position.

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**ANALIZA OBRAZOVNE STRATEGIJE NACIONALNOG VIJEĆA MAĐARSKE
NACIONALNE MANJINE (MNT) U VOJVODINI**

Ovaj je rad dio opsežnijeg znanstvenog projekta koji se bavi političkim aspektima institucionalnog sustava mađarske manjine u Vojvodini, u Srbiji. U ovom se radu kao početna točka razmatraju obrazovni koncepti trenutnog Nacionalnog vijeća mađarske nacionalne manjine (MNT II). Danas je općeprihvaćena koordinativna jezična upotreba manjinskih zajednica. Prema istraživanjima jezične politike, tu je jezičnu upotrebu potrebno ugraditi u obrazovni sustav. Konkretni uvjeti i učinkovitost provedbe puno su složenija pitanja: za njih je potrebna takozvana horizontalna perspektiva politika. Političke su mjere u velikoj mjeri ovisne o regionalnim karakteristikama pojedine manjinske situacije. Koordinativni bilingvizam je jedan od zacrtanih ciljeva, a odnosi se i na većinske i na manjinske zajednice. Međutim, on se može provoditi i u središtu i na periferiji različitim metodama. Ova je razlika glavno unutarnje sječište različitih izazova s kojima se Vijeće suočava. Što se tiče kompetencija i resursa lokalnih općina, na raspolaganju su im različiti alati. U prvom se dijelu rada sažimaju ciljevi obrazovne strategije Nacionalnog vijeća i zaključci koji se do sada mogu donijeti. Nakon toga, u radu se iznosi širi, tzv. regionalni gospodarsko-politički okvir obrazovne strategije Nacionalnog vijeća i manjinski politički diskurs koji je povezan s do sada realiziranim elementima. U drugom se dijelu rad bavi ograničenjima (strukturnim nedostatcima) institucionalno provedivih obrazovnih politika Nacionalnog vijeća, dok se u trećem dijelu rado i odnosu između učinkovitosti i taktičkih i strateških debata koje proizlaze iz unutarnjih previranja u manjinskim politikama. U četvrtom, posljednjem dijelu sumiraju se pouke iz uobičajene i dugo neizmijenjene prakse donošenja odluka o obrazovnoj politici temeljenih na principu većine.

Ključne riječi: Vojvodina; mađarska nacionalna manjina; obrazovanje; jezik.