CONTENT AND QUALITY OF THE SLOVAK-HUNGARIAN RELATIONS


1. KEY ISSUES IN THE OFFICIAL HUNGARIAN-SLOVAK RELATIONS SINCE THE TREATY

General Characteristics

The Treaty of Good Neighbourly Relations and Friendly Co-operation between the Republic of Hungary and the Slovak Republic, signed in Paris on 19 March 1995 contains a solution framework for the fundamental problems of the bilateral relationship. However, the relationship of the two countries is based on the persistent mutual mistrust which, on the Slovak side, stems from the fear of a Hungarian threat to the territory of the Slovak State (including also the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia) and, on the Hungarian side, the suspicion of the Slovak assimilation pressure on the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. All negative and positive events, developments and phenomena of this relationship have always been a form or a variant of expression of this dual fundamental problem.

The most important and long-lasting problem in the Slovak-Hungarian relations continues to be the existence of a large Hungarian minority in Slovakia, and the Slovak suspicion of it, reflected in a legal form, primarily in the Slovak laws and regulations urging the assimilation of the minority Hungarians.

While the Slovak government(s) adopt(s) laws and regulations mainly trying to restrict language, usage, educational and cultural rights and urging the assimilation of the Hungarian minority, the Hungarian government(s) adopt(s) counter measures trying to offset the assimilation pressure. (Such Hungarian measures include: the Status Act or the Preference Act, the Act on Dual Citizenship, the Forum of Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin in Parliament, i.e. KMKF and similar endeavours.) The Slovak party has deemed each of them as intervention in its own internal matters, or violation of its national territory.

The minority of the other nation is present in the two states in different proportions and with different weights, therefore reciprocity, which is usually claimed by Slovakia, is a principle which cannot be widely applied in satisfying the demands concerning the status of the minority, or finding a mutual solution for their position. According to the 2001 census, in Hungary the Slovak minority represents 0.17 % of the population (17,700 people of the 10 million), while in Slovakia the Hungarian minority made up of 9.68% of the population (520,530 of the 5.4 million residents). Full reciprocity is impossible also because Slovaks live in Hungary sporadically, while Hungarians in Slovakia live in blocks, close to the border.

Since the signature of the Treaty, the performance of the tasks specified in the framework of cooperation, regulated by the Treaty, has always depended on the actual governments. The history of the treaty in Slovakia after its signature has proved its dependence on government. While Hungarian Parliament adopted the Treaty in April 1995, the Slovak Parliament did the same only in March 1996. The Slovak party wished to present an annex to the Hungarian Prime Minister simultaneously with the signature of the Treaty, which contained the unilateral
Slovak interpretation of the Treaty. The Hungarian party rejected this as a method, unacceptable in diplomatic terms, and an initiative triggering pointless interpretation disputes. The separate Slovak annex contained restrictions on the minority options contained in the Treaty: it included primarily the Slovak interpretation of the recommendation of the 1201 Recommendation of the Council of Europe, prohibiting territory-based cooperation of minority local governments. (Which is included in the Recommendation.) The annex contained other minority restrictions, too. Although the Hungarian party rejected it, the Slovak government openly kept referring to it as part of the Treaty. It also proved the government dependence of the implementation of the Treaty that the control mechanism, laid down in the Treaty was not put in place during the period of Vladimir Mečiar’s third nationalist government (1994-1998), because no consensus could be reached on the composition of the joint committee to be established for control. This dispute lasted for years after the signature and ratification of the Treaty in the two countries.

The establishment and activities of the inter-governmental joint commission(s) (in total 12) required by the Treaty also depend on the actual governments (especially because the committees are led by the state secretaries of the competent ministries of the actual government). This is why the committees were established only after December 1998 within the framework of the new politics, introduced by the new government elected in the parliamentary elections in October 1998 (the three Mečiar governments were followed by the two Dzurinda governments between 1990-1998: October 1998-September 2002 and October 2002-May 2006).

**Framework of the Treaty**

The Treaty provides favourable, but not absolutely clear conditions for the overall development of the Hungarian-Slovak relations. It is a framework, the provision of which allow for different interpretation. The two fundamental problems referred to above, i.e. the management of the status of the Hungarian minority and the respect for the territory of Slovakia by Hungary are confirmed several times in the Treaty. Two articles are dedicated to minority protection, one of which (Article 15) is the longest article in the whole Treaty. However, the provisions allow for contrary references.

The preamble itself already indicates that persons belonging to national minorities constitute an integral part of the society and of the state of the contracting party on whose territory they live. It also states that they feel responsibility for granting protection, too, and promoting preservation and deepening of, national or ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic identity of minorities living within their respective territories. So, it not only declares that the minority is an internal matter of a particular state, it also agrees to protect the national identity of the minority. The preamble also confirms the need for a dialogue in each area of joint interest.
The various articles confirm the spirit of good neighbourliness, trust and friendly cooperation and the obligation to follow the principles and norms of international law. Article 3 confirms what is most important for the Slovak party: they shall respect the inviolability of their common state border, and each other’s territorial integrity. They confirm that they had no territorial claims on each other, and will not raise any such claims in the future. In their mutual relations, the parties shall refrain from the use of force or the threat of use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence. They shall settle any dispute arising between them exclusively by peaceful means.

Then, the parties declare that in several ways that they shall have regular consultation with each other at various levels and on all important issues. The need for the future joint committees is expressed as the parties shall, with a view to implement this Treaty, establish an appropriate frame for cooperation in every field of mutual interest. Then the articles of the Treaty list the fields in which the parties need to cooperate.

The parties attach special significance to cooperation and to development of relations between their legislative and executive bodies. In this context, they specifically state that the prime ministers shall have at least once a year a meeting, and the ministers for foreign affairs shall also meet at least once a year to assess the implementation of the Treaty. Cooperation between sectors and the regular meetings of sectoral leaders are regulated in separate agreements between the sectors. The regular annual bilateral meetings of the prime ministers did not take place at all while Péter Medgyessy was Prime Minister (from the summer of 2002) until Ferenc Gyurcsány met Fico in 2007. The meetings failed primarily because of the Slovak policy against the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia. The two Prime Ministers generally met only at international events. The bilateral official meetings were neglected.

In a separate article, the parties confirm that they shall mutually support each other in their integration endeavours into the European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Western European Union. However, the Treaty also lists the economic fields of bilateral cooperation, valid “locally”, and specifically stresses the importance of cooperation in the border region at regional and local levels, i.e. in various municipality forms, and also promises laying down the conditions of such cooperation. Then science, environmental protection, transport, infrastructure, culture and education are also listed as areas of cooperation. With regard to each field, the parties stress that they shall conclude a separate inter-governmental agreement regulating cooperation.

In another article, the parties promise to increase the permeability of borders by opening new border crossing points. However, the border crossing points will be opened in accordance with the possibilities and needs of the two Contracting Parties. This latter provision allows either party to refer to its own possibilities and needs to the other party in a particular case. (What specifically happens is that the Hungarian party applies to the Slovak party for an increasing number of border crossing points, and the Slovak party responds to such applications with a contrary tendency: by continuously reducing the number of the required
border crossing points. An excellent example for this is the case of bridges and roads to be built over the border river Ipoly, which will be described in detail later.)

The Treaty also supports cooperation between the individuals and groups of the two societies, which is badly missed: it focuses primarily on civil initiatives, student exchanges and mutual recognition of documents. It also gives an opportunity for something that is not implemented in either state in the field of education and culture, according to the provisions of the Treaty: this is support of teaching the language of the other state in both countries, at all levels. Concerning higher education, the parties confirm their mutual intention in a separate article that they shall endeavour to expand the opportunities in their institutions of higher education for gaining acquaintance with the culture, literature and language of the other Contracting Party, and for promoting the Hungarian Slovak language studies in such institutions. This provision has not been applied for a long time, especially in Hungary. As a reason, references are usually made to the lack of financial resources.

In the Treaty, the Contracting Parties also endeavour to preserve the historical and cultural monuments and the memorial sites of the other party, located within their respective territories. In this respect, both parties can put a lot of blame on each other: the disappearance of such monuments and memorial sites has been a long-lasting tendency. Minority protection is extensively underlined in the Treaty. In Article 14, the two Contracting Parties promise a climate of tolerance and understanding and that they shall ensure equal and effective protection of rights of every person on their territories, irrespective of nationality or any other factor. In Article 15, the two parties confirm that protection of national minorities and of the rights and freedom of persons belonging to those minorities form an integral part of the international protection of human rights, and as such, falls within the scope of international cooperation, and, in this sense, it is therefore not an exclusively domestic affair of the state concerned, but constitute a legitimate concern of the international community. This provision forms the subject matter of many disputes, and it is often referred to be the Hungarian party when it comes up with various public law forms in the protection of the Hungarian minority and tries manoeuvring them also on the territory of Slovakia.

This article contains also the minority protection principles. They include equality before the law and equal protection of the law. But it also contains a provision, which may be used by the Slovak party as reference: the treaty prohibits discrimination based on belonging to a national minority only in this respect (i.e. in respect of equality before the law and equal protection of the law). (This can also be used as reference that the Treaty does not prohibit discrimination in any other respect.)

The principles also include that all persons belonging to a national minority shall have the right to maintain and develop their linguistic, religious and other identity, in every respect.

The stressing of the next principle is fundamental in the Hungarian party’s minority protection argument: the parties shall refrain from policies and practices aimed at assimilation of persons belonging to minorities against their will. In addition, the parties also refrain from measures that would alter the proportions of the population in the areas inhabited by persons belonging
to national minorities, and which aim at restricting the rights and rights to freedom of those persons that would be to the detriment of the national minorities.

However, since the approval of the Treaty Slovakia has introduced a lot of laws and regulations and applied various political practices that are contrary to this principle. The most obvious examples are the definition of the borders of administrative and municipality units by the state (Acts passed between 2000 and 2003.)

Slovakia did not and does not comply with the minority principles laid down in the Treaty, and none of the Slovak governments have changed this practice, apart from some modifications made towards alleviation or reinforcement.

Apart from non-compliance with the principles of minority protection, the Slovak anti-minority practice is also strengthened by the basis of reference, which are contained in the following provision of the Treaty: persons belonging to national minorities shall have the right to take part effectively at the national and, where appropriate, at the regional level, in the decisions affecting the minorities or the regions inhabited by the minorities, in the manner, which is not incompatible with domestic legislation. This last provision provides a basis for various anti-minority measures. The Slovak government policy actively applies this reference.

This shows that some principles, contrary to protection, are also hidden among the minority protection principles of the Treaty, and the Slovak party has the same right to refer to them, as the Hungarian party has in referring to minority protection rights.

The same situation is repeated several times in the Treaty: where it states that the minorities shall have the right to use freely, individually or in community with other members of their group, orally or in writing, their mother tongue in public or private life, it immediately adds that this can only be done in conformity with the domestic law and with the international commitments undertaken by the two Contracting Parties. However, the situation, whereby Slovakia continuously passes acts against the use of minority languages that form part of its domestic law, forms a hotbed of acrimonious disputes. The act on the official language of the state is an excellent example for this. The two parties can even go to grips on the issue of what is the fundamental rule in the use of the minority mother tongue. Both have a good basis of reference, but the “within the property”, and clearly anti-minority Slovak government standpoint is the stronger.

The principle of education in mother tongue, whereby minorities have adequate opportunities for being taught their mother tongue or for receiving education in their mother tongue without prejudice to the learning of the official language or the teaching in this language. In the interpretation of the impatient nationalist Slovak governments, this principle must also be applied to newborn babies of Hungarian nationality, and the Slovak language must be taught already in crèches and kindergartens. It would be best, if a Hungarian mother cared for and educated her child only in Slovak starting from childbirth.
The minority protection article of the treaty also states that both countries have turned the provisions of three minority protection into international documents internal legal obligations, legal norms. These include Recommendation 1201 of the Council of Europe, which permits the organisation of territory-based autonomy as well in the form municipality associations. This resulted in stormy political disputes in Slovakia, due to which the Slovak Parliament approved the Treaty one year later than the Hungarian Parliament. The other international document is the Declaration of the General Assembly of the United Nations on Minority Protection, adopted in 1992, and the third one is the document of 1990 of the Copenhagen meeting of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Before moving on the control mechanism applied to the execution of the Treaty, the parties once more confirm that under the minority protection article nothing may be interpreted as implying any right to engage in any activity or perform any act contrary to the fundamental principles of the sovereign equality, territorial integrity and political independence of states.

The article dedicated to the control mechanisms states that the parties shall set up an intergovernmental joint commission entitled to make recommendations, consisting of sections, whose composition will be determined as they deem necessary, for the purpose of the exchange of information and experience. In monitoring the implementation of their commitments in the field of protection of national minorities, the parties shall apply the rules of the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe that are binding upon both Contracting Parties.

Consequently, with regard to the joint commissions, the Treaty sets a requirement for the establishment for only one specific commission, which would control compliance with the provisions on minority protection. However, by the time the commission was actually established (at the end of 1998), it turned out that there was also a need for control and exchange of information concerning several areas of cooperation specified in the Treaty. Consequently, at the end of 1998, a separate bilateral document was adopted on the establishment of 11 joint commissions (to which one more was added later).

**Assessment of the Treaty**

Consequently, the framework of the Treaty does not provide a clear answer to the question as to whether the status of minorities is an absolute internal matter, and it does not specify the legal importance of the international documents on minority protection either. The Treaty does not give a clear response to the question either as to whether the pressure upon the assimilation of Hungarians living in Slovakia, i.e. the adopted anti-minority laws, which are contrary to the international minority protection legal norms included in the Treaty should be considered only as Slovak internal matters, or they violate international laws, and therefore create a basis under international law for intervention. The other aspect of the same open issue is whether or not Hungary’s objections to these laws and its measures adopted within its own competence, but applicable also to Hungarians living in Slovakia, are lawful measures, or
they could be considered intervention into Slovak internal matters. It is not clear whether the
decisions made by the Slovak or the Hungarian party fit in the framework of the Treaty, or are
in conflict with, or contrary to, it. This is because occasionally the issue of performance of the
obligations laid down in the Treaty comes up, including the “control” of operation of the
inter-governmental joint commissions. This happened in December 2008, when Kíňa Göncz,
Minister for Foreign Affairs, suggested a consultation on the Treaty, and a review of the
operation of the joint commissions. On 20 July 2010, the two new Prime Ministers (Orbán
and Radičová) referred the discussion of the mutual problems back to the scope of the Treaty,
and the expertise of the joint commissions.

The Slovak and the Hungarian parties are not equally satisfied with the Treaty. While the
Hungarian party primarily claims its inadequacy in terms of minority protection, and is
generally dissatisfied with the framework contained therein, the Slovak party is a lot more
satisfied and even celebrates the conclusion of the Treaty.

**Long-lasting open issues**

Despite the Treaty, a lot of old and new unresolved problems have accumulated in the official
relations. The majority of these problems are concerns for the Hungarian party, while
Slovakia does not consider them severe, urgent tasks that need to be resolved. One of such
problems is the issue of the Bős Power Plant, which has been left open for decades. On the
Hungarian side, the situation of the linguistic rights, education and cultural situation of the
Hungarian minority in Slovakia and the difficulties of their economic and social
circumstances are considered intolerable problems. The Hungarian party finds that there is a
lack of a complex minority act in Slovakia, legal regulations on the financing of minority
cultures, would urge modifications of the act on the use of minority languages and the
abolition or adequate modification of the act on the official state language. It also finds
inadequacies in the undisturbed operation of higher education in the Hungarian language in
Slovakia. The Hungarian party would like to see South Slovakia, populated densely by
Hungarians, to develop economically and in every other aspect at the same rate as the rest of
Slovakia.

The Slovak party finds that there is no parliamentary representation of Slovaks living in
Hungary, considers inadequate the financial resources made available for material and
cultural opportunities of the Slovak self-governments, and calls for an improvement in the
conditions of primary, secondary and higher education of the Slovak minority. Adequate
reception of the programmes transmitted by the Slovak media from Slovakia by the Slovak
minority living in Hungary is not yet possible.
**Bős Power Plant**

The problem of the hydro power plant has been a bilateral issue since 1989. The construction plan fits in the framework of the grandiose Bolshevik nature conversion and energy intensive concepts of the 1950-s. The two socialist countries signed the Treaty in 1977, pursuant to which a dam system would be constructed on the River Danube, generating electricity for both countries and resolving the issue of flood protection. Hungary unilaterally terminated this treaty in 1988, referring primarily to environmental damages. The second large component of the system would have been constructed in the Danube bend at Nagymaros in the form of another large power plant, against which the Hungarian society began to protest very strongly from 1988, during the important period of the systemic change. Consequently, the issue of the power plant became a political issue.

The (Czecho)Slovak party declared the termination of the Treaty the violation of an international treaty and began to build a power plant individually in November 1992. Based on the so-called ‘C’ option, it unilaterally diverted the main branch of the Danube to the Slovak territory, although the river was also the international border line between the countries. Both parties took unilateral actions: the Hungarian party terminated the treaty and the Slovak party diverted the Danube.

Slovakia uses the dam on the main branch of the Danube on its own territory to generate electricity. On the Hungarian side, in Szigetköz, the natural flora and fauna began to gradually and persistently decay as a result of this diversion. The Slovak party demands from the Hungarian party to construct the second power plant or at least the lower dam (below the Danube bend) on its own territory, and the Hungarian party claims from Slovakia to return half of the water of the main Danube branch to revive Szigetköz. The Hungarian party does not wish to construct a power plant or a new dam on its own Danube section.

Due to the unresolved problem (which cannot be resolved either), the two parties agreed to take the matter to the International Court of Justice in Hague. To a lot of surprise, the court decision (1997) was in favour of the Slovak party in eight of nine points. The only thing that it deemed unlawful by the Slovak party was the commissioning of option ‘C’ and the unilateral diversion of the Danube. The Court deemed the termination of the Treaty by the Hungarian party unlawful, and obliged the parties to implement the objectives of the Treaty (energy generation, ensuring the conditions of navigation, water management, flood and ice protection on the river) in a reasonable manner, and set various deadlines, which neither party complied with. The verdict did not oblige the Hungarian party to build a dam on the lower section of the river. In the autumn of 2010, the Hungarian party thinks that since The Hague verdict in 1997 not one inch of progress has been achieved in resolving the issues, and neither countries has changed its position despite negotiations. According to the decision of the Court of Hague, a compromise should have been made this spring, but it was never reached. The Hungarian party prepared six options for raising the water level of the river Danube by this spring, but the Slovak party has not sent any proposals yet.
Slovakia, which as the top of the situation in this matter, too, is not in a hurry to find a mutual solution, because Hungary suffers more from the situation. Slovakia needs only more energy, but Hungary needs water that gives life. It is a Slovak objective to make the Danube suitable for navigation at least until Bratislava in each season which, according to the Slovak part, depends on whether or not the Hungarian party builds the lower power plant or dam. Suitability for navigation has also become a “European matter” for years, in relation to the Austrian and German transport and forwarding plans on the Danube-Rhein-Main channel.

The main feature of the dispute in Hungary is that the construction of the dam system is in the interest of the so-called concrete “lobbies”, which relate to the left governments. These lobbying parties (the dominant persons of which were also interested in the implementation of the power plant construction plan in 1977) would build not only one, but several huge water reservoirs and dams. For this reason, we put strong pressure on the actual government. The leftist governments intend to exclude the intervention options of environmental protection activists, and of course, they object to it. They negotiate with the Slovak party in secret, and would be willing to submit themselves to the will of the Slovak party. The right wing governments insist more on environmental protection arguments than the leftwing ones and do not accept the Slovak will. Regardless which government is in power, none is capable of resolving this deadlock. In addition, for both parties the issue of the power plant also symbolises the contrary national intentions. The Hungarian government is inclined to involve also a third party in the discussion, but Slovakia is against it.

The situation, which began twenty years ago, has been heavily affected by politics, and therefore both parties were eager to express several times the need to approach the issue based on technical or expert grounds. It has been mentioned several times that bilateral cooperation has been effective and good in other areas for many years. The joint commission for environmental protection has been in place since 1999. The nine sections of this commission have completed several negotiation rounds on the issues, but could not find a solution. The expert negotiations concerning the power plant began again in January 2004. Then the Hungarian Coalition Party was a member of the Slovak government coalition, and the Slovak partner of the Hungarian party was László Mikós minister for environmental protection, a Hungarian living in Slovakia. However, even they could not agree on the implementation of the Hague verdict.

The two countries established a strategic joint commission in 2008 (led by the Ministries for Environmental Protection and Water Management) in order to resolve the problem of the Bôs power plant. This commission would have had to present proposals to decision-makers by 22 December 2009. This deadline was extended with a mutual agreement until the end of April 2010. The Hungarian Ministry of Environmental Protection prepared six drafts for water replenishment by April 2010 (bottom threshold, narrowing of the river bed, filling of the riverbed with natural or artificial methods, establishment of a windy branch). The two governments must decide on the option to be implemented, but the Slovak party has not prepared any draft solutions. The Hungarian green party objected to the secrecy of the Hungarian government concerning the proposed solutions.
Some people hope that the requirements of the European Commission related to water management will force the two parties to resolve the problem. These hopes relate primarily to the mandatory water catchment management plans of the countries, and the Danube strategy, which is currently being drafted. The issue of the Bős power plant will also be on the agenda again in the framework of the EU’s Danube strategy. Solutions will have to be found for water transportation, i.e. navigation in the regional Danube valley, for environmental protection and water management. In this context, the Slovak part demands that the Danube be suitable for navigation on its entire length.

The Hungarian and Slovak environmental protection civil organisations cooperate excellently in relation to the Bős power plant, whenever cooperation is required in a particular situation.

**Cooperation mechanism arising from the Treaty: the joint commissions**

**General characteristics**

The protocol for establishing the institutional mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the Treaty was signed by the two new ministers of foreign affairs in Bratislava on 24 December 1998 (three years after the signature of the Treaty). This protocol stated the establishment of a mechanism based on joint commissions and the start of its operation. The Contracting Parties referred to the implementation of the Treaty and called for the establishment of 11+1 joint commissions covering the main special policy issues.

The following commissions were defined: joint commission for minority issues, joint commission on environmental protection and nature conservation, joint commission for European and Euro-Atlantic matters, joint commission for military and security policy, joint commission for the economy, joint commission for transport, telecommunication and infrastructure, joint commission for culture and press, joint commission for health and labour, joint commission for education, science, sports and youth, joint commission for agriculture, joint commission for internal matters, joint commission for cross-border cooperation.

The operation of each commission is regulated in a separate bilateral agreement. This mechanism is the largest inter-governamental framework for managing and resolving bilateral relations. The joint commissions, most of which were established in 1999, do not operate in the same way. They have irregular meetings, and there are no official data of the execution of the adopted resolutions and recommendations. (The two parties usually blame each other for the irregularity and cancelled meetings. The data published on the implementation of the recommendations in 2005 concerning the acceptance and execution of the recommendations of the joint commission for minority issues, which held its sessions most frequently, reflected the tendency of one-third accepted and two-thirds of unaccepted draft recommendation.) The recommendations resulted from the sessions are often viewed and interpreted differently by the two parties. Occasionally, leading politicians and members of the commissions also express their doubts about the efficiency of the commissions.
There are some joint commissions, the operation of which can be controlled also by the public and which inform the public of their activities. (These commissions are the joint commission for minority issues and the joint commission for environmental protection.) However, there are other commissions, which operate in isolation from the control of the public and public information (e.g., the commissions for European matters, the commission for health or the commission for military and security issues). Sometimes, there are multiple overlaps between the various specific areas.

The joint commissions consist of mainly of experts and stakeholders of the relevant field and are led by the state secretaries of the appropriate ministries (i.e. top politicians). The members are permanent members and occasional guests who have consultation rights. The inter-ministerial joint commissions have Hungarian and Slovak sections. Minutes are taken at the meetings, and the commission presents them to the governments of the two countries in the form of proposals and recommendations. They form proposals and recommendations, but the problems are not solved within this framework. It is the task of the governments and is the responsibility of their political decisions.

The law does not contain any obligation for implementing the recommendations, and the governments of the two countries decide independently to what extent and which recommendation they will accept. The governments of the two countries decide, in a government resolution adopted within the respective competence of each government, on which ministry they will assign for the implementation of the various recommendations within the applicable deadline, if the government does not reject the implementation of the recommendation of the joint commission.

The joint commissions could be effective tools in the improvement of the Slovak-Hungarian relations at international level, only if the politicians have a political will to do so. The governments occasionally block the activities of the commission on both sides. For example, they do not appoint the chairman of the commission for a long time. If the will is missing, then the joint commissions also turn into blank formality, and the mechanism of superfluous and uninteresting negotiations. The joint commissions are only important, if the governments attach significance to them. Otherwise they are weightless, and their sessions often become non-respected obligations. The commissions may also be superfluous, if they operate in an exemplary manner and have regular sessions and prepare recommendations. (This was also illustrated in the dispute around the Status Act in 2003, including the weightless endeavours of the joint commission for minority affairs. The latest example is the special series of sessions of the joint commission for minority matters in the autumn of 2009, concerning the act on the official state language adopted in the summer of 2009 and its implementation decrees.)

The operations of the joint commissions are affected by the changes of internal politics of the two countries, including especially the government changes and the related personal changes. Whenever an individuals holding positions change, the operation of the commissions also comes to a halt, because the co-chairmen of the commissions are also changed. The political
The intention of reviving the consultation mechanism through joint commissions was announced last by the new heads of governments, Viktor Orbán Hungarian Prime Minister and Iveta Radičová Slovak Prime Minister at their meeting on 20 July 2010. They stressed that they would rely on the new start of joint commissions as a mechanism for improving the relationship between the countries. According to the Hungarian government’s spokesman’s declaration, those joint commissions, whose work stopped earlier, would start their activities again. The Prime Ministers will evaluate the results of this work.

The Prime Ministers think that the joint commissions should focus their activities primarily on those areas where there are tensions or conflicting views between the two countries. In addition, they will have to deal with burning issues as well, such as the elimination of the consequences of floods, employment issues, or regional development. They also decided to add new areas to the Slovak-Hungarian cooperation, including the North-South infrastructure development projects, cross-border cooperation and dynamism of economic relations. The Prime Ministers expect a lot from these commissions, which are expected to come up with constructive solutions. Until the joint commissions find solutions on the problems, the problems will not be disputed between the representatives of the two countries. Thus, perhaps the joint commissions now face an extremely serious task.

The individual commissions

In 1996 (during the period of the third Mečiar government) only one commission was established, the Hungarian-Slovak Inter-Governmental Joint Commission for Economic Cooperation. Although its operation (similarly to all other commissions) is regulated in a separate agreement between the two countries, the commission is exposed to the whims of the changing governments. Sometimes the commission stops for years, and then it is revived. Last it was revived in February 2009 when the two actual Ministers for Economy wanted it. At that time, the two countries were preparing plans for a joint electricity and gas pipe network, proceeding jointly in order to obtain satisfactory financing for Hungarian and Slovak subsidiaries from foreign banks, (The current government wishes to suspend the construction of this joint North-South gas pipeline, referring to a shortage of money, and would rather invest into the construction of gas pipeline towards to the Balkan peninsula.)

The Slovak-Hungarian economic relations are getting stronger even without the joint commission. Slovakia is Hungary’s sixth largest trade partner, with EUR 6 billion turnover and considerable growth. The investment relations are dominated by Hungarian investments. Based on the USD 1.112 billion, registered by the Slovak National Bank, Hungary is the fifth largest investor in Slovakia, with 6% share. 8,000 Hungarian companies have subsidiaries in Slovakia.

Among the joint commissions, the Hungarian-Slovak Inter-Governmental Joint Commission on Minority Issues, founded on 8 February 1999, has an outstanding role. The state secretaries of the Slovak and the Hungarian Ministries for Foreign Affairs are the co-chairmen of this
commission. This commission meets most frequently and is most active (even though it does not meet once a year either; for example, in 2007, the commission had only its 7th session). The public is informed most about the activities of this commission. This is where the problems of symbolic national politics are reflected more spectacularly as well.

In comparison with the other commissions, this commission has had a summarising, controlling and synthesising task every since its start. As the joint commissions operate independently, and hardly consult with each other, the commission monitoring the status of minorities also considers its task to monitor the activities of the other commissions. It collects the problems to be discussed by the commissions, classifies the topics and assigns the tasks to the competent technical commissions. (For example, the reconstruction of the Mária Valéria Bridge between Esztergom and Sturovo was promoted not only by the Commission for Internal Matters and the Commission for Infrastructure, but also by the Commission for Minority Issues. The same principle also applies to the opening of new border-crossing points, the reconstruction of the Petőfi statue in Bratislava and the production of a Ján Kollár memorial plaque in Budapest, and the positioning of both in a worthy location, finding a solution to the educational and cultural problems of the Hungarians living in Slovakia, or the status of Thália Theatre in Kosice. The promotion of the senior counsel offices mutually opened in the two countries in Kosice and in Békéscsaba, was also an achievement of the joint commission for minority issues.

The commission meets once a year either in Budapest or in Bratislava, alternating the venues. In terms of operation, the commission adopts new recommendations from time to time and the commission adopts and summarises new recommendations from time to time, without concentrating on their implementation. The main topics discussed by the commission are all kinds of matters concerning the mutual minorities, from the laws related to their rights to the difficulties of their everyday lives, including the Hungarian Status Act and its application, the Slovak act of the official state language and its application, and any kind of action against the other minority in both countries (such as inciting signs and actions, problems of religious life conducted in as minority language). The joint Commission for Minority Issues was entrusted, for example, to find a solution for the problems stemming from the Status Act (in 2003-2004), or from the Slovak act on the official state language in 2009. During these discussions, it became obvious that the two parties had different interpretations for the situations and solutions. In 2003, the Slovak party wished to discuss only the general and mutual situation of minorities in relation to the Status Act, although the Hungarian party wished to cover the total act. When the commission finally had a meeting, not one word was mentioned about the Status Act. In 2009, when a series of negotiations were held concerning the Slovak act on the official state language and its implementation, the final outcome fully reassured to the Slovak party and, while it depressed the Hungarian party.

The Hungarian-Slovak Joint Commission for Cultural and Press Issues held its first meeting in Bratislava on 19 May 1999. The agreement regulating the operation of the commission has been amended several times, for example, in 2005 the scope of cooperation was extended with cultural heritage protection and culture financing (including also the financing of cultural
minorities). This commission is one of the commissions that holds regular meetings. This commission is most satisfied when it assesses the previously implemented bilateral cultural relations and the executed recommendations. In general, it is also satisfied with the cultural opportunities of minorities. The commission also evaluates the relationship building activities of the national cultural institutions. One of these institutions is the Institute of Hungarian Culture, which belongs to the Hungarian Ministry of Education and Culture and operates in Bratislava (its Slovak equivalent is the Centre of Slovak Culture in Budapest). These institutions are the most important local initiators of cultural relations. They belong to the most important cultural institutions in cultural diplomacy and relationship building and improvement. Cultural cooperation is not a field for political confrontation, but is an area, which can be most easily concurred for cooperation.

The Agreement on the operation of the Hungarian-Slovak joint commission on Environmental Protection and Nature Conservation was signed in Bratislava on 12 February 1999 and entered into force on 27 May 1999. The commission held its first meeting in Budapest on 31 May 1999. The Agreement defined the areas of environmental protection, which required joint activities. This commission controls cooperation in the case of natural disasters. At present, nine teams and one expert consultation forum operates within the framework of the joint commission.

This commission also has regular meetings and it has results. It is one of the joint commissions, which is available for the public, too. It has its own website: http://www.huskenv.org/. The commission meets once or twice a year, and has some important topics, including the EU’s Nature 2000 Programme. The commission focuses primarily on the EU’s nature preservation and water management framework programmes, but their tasks also include the supervision and evaluation of the environmental protection observations, impact studies and other analyses related to the Bős power plant. The commission also deals with the bilateral, cross-border impacts and issues of environmental protection, waste management and environmental pollution, and the management of such issues. The members of the commission share the experiences and knowledge with each other. Their results are not striking, yet are tangible (e.g., maps, publications, such as the leaflet describing the environmental status of the border region or the noise map, or the physical development study plan of the total border region, or the declaration of the Aggtelek and Slovak karst cave as joint world heritage and similar attempts). The commission tries (in cooperation with the civil organisations) implementing joint nature preservation objectives in the border region (e.g., Csallóköz-Szigetköz), including, among others, the establishment of joint nature parks. This region contains the largest potable water stock of Central Europe, in the increased protection and utilisation of which the cooperation of the regions in environmental protection is a key factor. The Hungarian party would like to receive information and have the opportunity to form its opinion on the large projects envisaged in the border region in Slovakia in time within the framework of this commission.

The Hungarian-Slovak Inter-Governmental Joint Commission on Internal Matters was established in 1999, but it meets very rarely, sometimes with gaps lasting for years. In 2003
and 2004, it held a meeting for presenting to each other the results and experiences of the analyses of the reconstruction of roads and bridges, crossing the future Schengen border sections, including also the Hungarian-Slovak borders. They referred to government resolutions as the reasons for organising the meeting. These sessions were attended, for example, by the representatives of the competent Hungarian and Slovak ministries, the Hungarian counties and Slovak municipality districts of the border region, and the euro-regions stretching over the joint border section (Vág-Duna-Ipoly, Ister-Granum and Sajó-Rima).

At that time, satisfactory infrastructure connections and a simplified system required by the accession to the border crossing system were considered important in relation to the requirements of the establishment of the Schengen border. It was important for Hungary and Slovakia to coordinate the accession to the Schengen system and the related preparations. It was a good opportunity for the Hungarian party to urge for an increase in the number of border crossing points on the Hungarian-Slovak border, and the sub-regional relations. The technical conditions related to the reconstruction of roads and bridges and the required costs were also outlined for these plans.

Consequently, the commission on internal matters deals with issues, which also fall within the scope of competence of the joint commission on infrastructure and the joint commission on regional cooperation, including the regional development programmes. Similarly, several commissions discuss new bridges to be built on the Danube and Ipoly, the border rivers, and the old bridges and roads that need to be reconstructed. These tasks also relate to the establishment of an entrepreneurial environment.

The bridge and road construction between the two countries is an important topic not only for the joint commissions, but is also the most important objective of numerous regional organisations and civil groups. It is not surprising, because it is an essential issue for Hungary and the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia: they would facilitate and renew their physical contact. Concerning the bridges on the river Ipoly, before 1945 in total 47 bridges existing on this border river (there was a bridge at every 3 kilometres), of which the Hungarian would like to reconstruct 26 bridges. However, in the near future, only 8 Ipoly bridges seem to be feasible, because the Slovak party also must approve the construction and supply also part of the financial resources. The idea of the construction of the Ipoly bridges was shared with the public only after the construction of the Mária Valéria Bridge between Esztergom and Sturovo, at the beginning of the new millennium (following a change of government in Slovakia). Preparations began for the reconstruction of 8 Ipoly bridges, but only two new Ipoly bridges will be constructed in the next one or two years. The density of bridges and roads crossing over the borders are prerequisites of development, and improvement of the border regions.

The Hungarian-Slovak Joint Commission on Infrastructure was established on 30 November 1998. It operates primarily in infrastructure matters related to the economy and transport (it assists in the construction of roads, railways and bridges, and recently it has also been
involved in the opening of a new border crossing point). The main task of the commission is to develop rail and road connections between the two countries, and to boost regional economic relations. This commission is also responsible for preparing the meeting of the competent ministers.

The commission holds its meetings annually, in line with the provisions of the treaty, so it is one of the joint commissions, which operates regularly. One of the most important tasks of this commission is specific bridge construction. As some bridges have already been constructed on the Danube and the Ipoly (joint border rivers), the commission may be considered successful.

Its evergreen topic is the construction of a Kosice-Miskolc dual carriage way or motorway on the Slovak-Hungarian border section, as it would also be an important section of the European North-South road corridor. However, this issue is a stake of the political gains of the governments, therefore it progresses only very slowly, with a lot of hiccups. Its effectiveness depends on the political will of the current government. There are some government periods when almost nothing is progressing. It is stated at each joint commission meeting that the two parties have a strong intention to establish closer North-South road connections between the two countries.

The construction of a new Danube bridge for road traffic, connecting the two Komárom/Komarno towns is another long-term topic. The preparation and joint impact study of this bridge requires 2-3 years, and a bilateral inter-governmental agreement. If the preparations are successful, the joint project can be started no sooner than after 2013.

In terms of bridge construction, it is a long-lasting (national and economic) interest of the Hungarian party to build more bridges on the border rivers and establish more border crossing points along the Slovak-Hungarian borders, connecting the two countries by water, road or railway, especially considering that the majority of the population on both sides of the border are of Hungarian nationality. These border crossing points could contribute a great deal to the smooth flow of labour in the regions, and the establishment of various individual and group economic and cultural relations. The bridges and the related diversified opportunities contribute a great deal to the development of the surrounding area and the settlements related to it. At least one bridge in each region is absolutely necessary for the life, direct relationship and transferability of the sub-regions along the river.

The harmonisation of the bus and train timetables between the two countries is on the agenda of not only the joint commission on environmental protection and internal matters, but also of this commission. In the recent years, personal traffic has increased in the Slovak-Hungarian border regions. Recently, a lot of people have moved from Bratislava to Rajka, and more and more Hungarians take jobs in Slovak towns. The two railway companies coordinate their timetables regularly at scheduled meetings. New electrical trains have been put into service between Győr and Bratislava and Bratislava and Rajka.
This commission and other commissions as well discuss the conditions of consultations between the Hungarian regional public administration offices and Slovak public administration agencies performing similar tasks. The commission also deals with the relationship of the Hungarian county and Slovak regional (or district) municipalities.

Similarly to the joint commission on regional cooperation, described below, this joint commission is also interested in the financing of the EU funds related to the euro regions in the applicable fields of the cross border regional developments. At present, it monitors the construction of two Ipoly bridges, which began in 2009 and 2010, for which the two countries submitted a joint application within the framework of the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) support scheme on 16 December 2008.

The Slovak-Hungarian Inter-Governmental Joint Commission on Cross Border Cooperation, known by its short name as joint commission on regional cooperation, was established on the basis of the Hungarian-Slovak agreement on the cross border cooperation of local governments and public administration agencies on 23 April 2001. The Hungarian section of the commission is led by the state secretary of the Ministry of Local Governments, and the Slovak section is chaired by the state secretary of the Slovak Ministry of Internal Affairs. The tasks of this commission include the development of cross border euro regions and municipality cooperation in the border region. This commission also meets regularly and has results, which are primarily due to the support of the EU Funds (Phare, INTERREG).

The commission had two meetings a year. Its 15-member Hungarian section consists of mayors actively involved in the fostering of Slovak relations, delegated by the interest groups of municipalities, and other individuals delegated by the various ministries. Experts and managers of organisations, involved in the topics discussed by the commission, mayors and embassies also contribute to the activities of the commission as guests.

The long-term objectives of the commission are implementation of joint development actions and projects, joint performance of tasks, and cooperation for the development of the quality of life, economy and infrastructure of the residents of the region. In this context, the increase of tourist traffic in the parts of the country concerned is a major objective.

This commission usually discusses the experience of cooperation between the Slovak and the Hungarian municipalities and the outlook of potential development of cooperation. The commission has stressed several times that it causes a problem in the regional cooperation in this field that often the principles, laws and regulations of the cooperating public administration agencies are not “compatible” with each other.

It is referred to as a success of this commission that the Hungarian and Slovak border region settlements joining the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (EGTC) are the leaders in the European Union, because they stated their cooperation intentions not only in a political declaration, but also gave a specific legal framework to the jointly submitted applications.
The cooperation organised by the joint commission takes place primarily in territorial regions, and therefore, an increasing number of more and more intensive regional cooperation initiatives are created on the joint Slovak-Hungarian border section. (These will be described later within the framework of regional cooperation.)

The local and territorial and county municipalities form successful regions, cooperating with each other on diversified topics. One of the preferred areas is sustainable energy projects, i.e. effective energy management and utilisation of renewable energy resources.

Development of the transport relations of the population living in the border regions, and the infrastructure of small regions also fall within the scope of competence of this joint commission.

**Bilateral Inter-Parliamentary Relations**

The co-operation of the legislative agencies, required under the Treaty is based on inter-parliamentary relations and the quality of this co-operation and its performance depends on the composition of the actual parliaments, i.e., the four-year election cycles. The Hungarian – Slovak inter-parliamentary relations are not always but very often only formal. This co-operation takes place within the framework of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Hungarian-Slovak Friendly Section (which has a Hungarian and a Slovak chairmen), the meetings of the Speakers of the two Parliaments and the meetings of the Parliamentary Commissions. The Inter-Parliamentary Union Hungarian-Slovak Friendly Section is transformed as many times as there are parliamentary elections in the countries. Most recently they have been restructured since 20 May 2010.

Consequently, these relations are based primarily on the meetings and mutual exchange of information between the Speakers of Parliaments and the Parliamentary Commissions. There are some periods when the number of bilateral parliamentary relations and working visits decreases significantly. This was the case in the previous government cycle, when the anti-Hungarian nationalist policy and specific laws of the Fico government created hostility in the entire set of relations. While in 2004 three Slovak Parliamentary Commissions paid working visits to Budapest, in 2005 only the Defence Commission visited Budapest and the delegation of the Commission for Environmental Protection of the Hungarian Parliament returned the visit in Bratislava (Pozsony) in November 2006.

In order to improve the inter-parliamentary relations, in December 2008 a commission cooperation month was announced. This month was scheduled for January-February 2009 according to the agreement of the two Speakers of Parliaments. The Commissions visited each other one after the other, discussing the current issues between the countries. Originally, Commissions operating in five fields were requested to take part in this programme but, given the different commission structure, altogether representatives of 8-8 Parliamentary Commissions had opportunities to meet with each other. The meeting of the Commissions of
Human Rights ended in a scandal right at the beginning of February 2009. (The scandal was caused by the fact that one of the Hungarian Commission members wished to show a video on which Slovak policemen were beating Hungarian supporters at the football match in Dunaszerdahely. The Slovaks did not accept it and left without any discussion.) One member of the Commission, Zoltán Balog, explained that the problem in the Slovak-Hungarian relationship was that first the Hungarian minority was put into a very difficult situation in Slovakia, which was alleviated later. The two Commissions for Human Rights met each other again in Bratislava at the beginning of March. At the Bratislava meeting, the agenda concerning the position of minorities included textbooks, the use of geographic names and national symbols, the Language Act, the conflict related to the Slovak house in Pilisszentkereszt, the material and other problems of the programmes broadcast by the Hungarian Pátria Radio in Slovakia, and the issue of extremists in Hungary and Slovakia.

The peak month of Commissions was closed with the meeting of delegations of the Commissions for Foreign Affairs on 25 February 2009. (These two Parliamentary Commissions did not hold any joint meetings between 2002 and 2009.) The parties reached a consensus on several issues at the meeting of the Hungarian-Slovak Commissions for Foreign Affairs. The Slovak politicians stated for the first time that they did not object to the existence of the Forum of Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin (KMKF), and that the only thing that they could not accept was that Parliament considered this forum its own permanent institution. The parties also agreed that the Treaty between the two countries did not have to be amended, its provisions had to be applied, only the basic approach needed to be changed. The two Commissions approved a catalogue of problems of the issues concerning the position of the minorities living in the two countries for which a solution had to be found. Zsolt Németh, the Chairman of the Hungarian Commission at that time (Fidesz), said that the ‘catalogue of the Hungarians was longer, and that of the Slovaks was slightly shorter.’ The two Commissions agreed to turn to the Governments of the respective countries requested not to withdraw resources from the Slovaks living in Hungary and from Hungarians living in Slovakia. They also agreed that there was a need for regular meetings, held at least once or twice a year. The two partner Commissions also agreed that the Slovaks would present their legal objections to KMKF to the Hungarian Commission for Foreign Affairs for discussion. The topics to be discussed at the subsequent joint meetings of the two commissions were not defined in advance, but the KMKF issue, and the problems of Slovaks in Hungarian and Hungarians in Slovakia are included among the main topics.

The Commissions for Foreign Affairs (in the new parliamentary structure) held their last joint meeting in Bratislava on 30 September 2010 lasting for two hours without approving any specific resolution. The Commissions agreed that they would meet and negotiate with each regularly, at least twice a year. In their statement, they acknowledged that they agreed on certain issues, yet disagreed on others. According to the Slovak opinion, they discussed everything openly, and this is why the meeting was held behind closed doors. The discussions included some disputed items (the Slovak official Language Act and the Hungarian Act on DualCitizenships) and they came to an agreement reinforcing their co-operation. However, neither the issue of KMKF, or that of the joint commissions fit in this framework. Although
Zsolt Németh, who is now the State Secretary of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, stated two days prior to the meeting of the Commissions that Hungary and Slovakia wished to resolve any dispute within the framework of bilateral relations in the future. The dialogue will continue in 12 joint commissions, which cover the entire range of politics.

Meetings of the Prime Ministers

With regard to the framework of the Treaty, it was already mentioned that the Treaty provides for at least one meeting of the Prime Ministers and Ministers for Foreign Affairs for the purpose of reviewing the implementation of the Treaty. We also mentioned that from 2002 this provision was often not complied with during the period of two Hungarian Prime Ministers (Socialist), Péter Medgyessy and Ferenc Gyurcsány. Both Prime Ministers met their Slovak colleagues mostly in the framework of multilateral events. In 2002, Medgyessy met the Slovak Prime Minister, Mikuláš Dzurinda, but from 2003 he rather avoided official bilateral summits, and delegated only a deputy even to the V-4 meetings of Prime Ministers. The primary reason for that was the bilateral dispute and atmosphere driven by the Status Act or the Preference Act.

Ferenc Gyurcsány had problems with the Fico government. The new Slovak nationalist government, formed in July 2006, let loose Ján Slota, the President of the Slovak National Party who, as a coalition partner, continued making abusive and derogatory remarks about Hungarians (and members of the Hungarian Government), raising the vulgar anti-Hungarian statements to the level of the government policy. Consequently, the Hungarian Prime Minister, who often rejected such statements of the Slovak Government, lost interest in meeting the new Slovak Prime Minister. At the end of August 2006, another anti-Hungarian incident discouraged the Hungarian Prime Minister from engaging in smiley diplomacy with the head of the Slovak Government in a good-natured meeting. The triggering event was the brutal attack on Malina Hedvig, a Hungarian student living in Slovakia, for speaking Hungarian on her mobile phone. In this case, two leading politicians of the Slovak Government, Prime Minister Fico and Interior Minister Kaliňák (strikingly) immediately committed themselves towards the brutal attackers accusing the beaten up Hungarian student that she had invented the whole thing and she has beaten herself up, claiming that the whole case was also a game of the Hungarian secret service in order to ruin the reputation of the new Slovak Government.

There was no point in discussion the implementation of the Treaty with such a Slovak Government. In addition, the Slovak National Party enforced its own party programme in the government programme, indicating that Hungarians living in Slovakia had too many rights, which had to be reduced at least by 20%. The next few years (between the autumn of 2006 and the autumn of 2009) passed with all kinds of efforts taken by the Slovak Government to diminish the rights of the Hungarian minority. It attacked the rights of Hungarians to schooling and the use of their language in education, then it moved on to attacking the rights to use the mother tongue in public life, which had been hardly enforced before, achieving
excellent results in infringing those rights. The Slovak Government did so despite the fact that Prime Minister Robert Fico had promised in July 2006, prior to the establishment of his government, that the rights of the Hungarian minority obtained before (minority legal status quo) would not be infringed.

Thus only the president of the Hungarian Coalition Party in Slovakia, Pál Csáky could encourage Ferenc Gyurcsány to meet and negotiate with his Slovak counterparty (in November 2008) due to the hostile relations (the memorable football matches and similar fights, anti-Slovak and anti-Hungarian demonstrations), while the Slovak Prime Minister kept making statements that he was willing to meet the Hungarian Prime Minister and discuss anything with him anywhere and at any time. The European Socialists also demanded such a meeting from the Hungarian Prime Minister.

Based on this background, the Prime Ministers met each other on three occasions, and although a mutually binding document was adopted at each meeting, neither party considered these obligations binding. The provisions of these points repeated the obligations falling within the agenda of the Inter-Governmental Joint Commissions.

The first (Gyurcsány-Fico meeting), took place on 18 June 2007 and was dedicated to the Common past, the common future and common projects (14 points). The Prime Ministers undertook to ensure the personal composition of the Joint Commissions and start the activities thereof. They promised to encourage joint meetings of the Hungarian-Slovak Friendly Sections of Parliaments. They made even more specific mutual promises, including the foundation of joint prizes and encouraging co-operation among higher education institutions, as well as among educational institutions and foundations in general. They also promised promoting civil relations, primarily by supporting the direct contact and co-operation of economic organisations and meetings of young people. They both promised mutually to support initiatives in scientific and professional fields, in the municipality sector, in the economy, in bridge and road construction, and in cross-border transportation, i.e., in the most important areas of the civil sector.

The two Prime Ministers met autumn in the autumn of 2008, when the relations became tense and were full of conflicts again. On 15 November they issued a joint declaration containing a few points, in which they distanced themselves from their respective extreme movements and tried to extinguish the fire (which, in my opinion, was instigated by them). They stressed the importance of mutual national minorities in the bilateral relationship, and also admitted that the minority had to learn the language of the majority. (This provision was included because the Slovaks are convinced that Hungarians living in Slovakia do not speak Slovak and do not wish to learn it either. To justify this statement, Slovaks usually refer to the language skills of the pupils of the lower forms of Hungarian primary schools teaching in Hungarian in Slovakia, i.e., the language skills of those pupils who had just begun to study Slovak, so it is natural that they do not speak it well. This is why Slovaks want Hungarian children to learn Slovak already in kindergartens, and in fact they should be communicated with in Slovak as early as in crèches. Consequently, it is an obligation of all Hungarians living in Slovakia to
speak Slovak perfectly. Otherwise they will become the target of cruel mockery of the Slovaks.

The two Prime Ministers confirmed the execution and further development of the 14 points adopted in 2007. Like in the 14 points, in the 4-point declaration adopted in 2008, they also confirmed their intention to develop cross-border co-operation with a lot of joint projects.

The two Ministers for Foreign Affairs (Kinga Gőncz and Ján Kubiš) reviewed the execution of the promises made in 14 points in December 2008. Then they declared that a few points (according to the Hungarian Minister for Foreign Affairs, three and a half) had been executed and the implementation of ten other points was in progress. The resolved issues included the bridges over the River Ipoly, the award of the Hungarian-Slovak Ministers for Foreign Affairs and a joint history reader. The two Ministers for Foreign Affairs then agreed that many of the fourteen points could be implemented in the long term. The Slovak Minister for Foreign Affairs referred to the cross-border projects as one of such points. However, they also promised to activate the Hungarian-Slovak Inter-Governmental Joint Commissions too, which met very rarely (especially those that dealt with the issues, most sensitive in national aspects), sometimes after a few years’ gap. They also admitted that the meetings of some commissions were formal.

The Slovak Minister for Foreign Affairs promised also a schedule for making the work of the Commissions regular. He also admitted that Commissions should work more effectively on the protection of minority rights. After these events, the operation of several Joint Commissions actually picked up in 2009, which was also indicated by the characteristics of the Commissions outlined above.

Both Ministers for Foreign Affairs confirmed (several times) that they considered the Treaty the basic document regulating the relationship between the two countries. However, the Hungarian Lady Minister for Foreign Affairs also called for the need of revisiting the Treaty. The Treaty must be reviewed every five years and may be amended with mutual consent. However, before 2009 it had never been reviewed or amended.

The following Slovak Minister for Foreign Affairs, Miroslav Lajčák, did not exclude the possibility of meeting again and potentially amending the provisions of the Treaty. Kinga Gőncz stressed several times that she intended to review the Treaty and assess the implementation of its provisions instead of amending it. She expressed her opinion that the Treaty was a fair and balanced basic document for the two countries and the provisions contained therein should be complied with. According to Lajčák, what counts is that any amendment should comply with the concepts of both parties and that there should not be any ultimatum. He stressed that the most important thing was to comply with the Treaty instead of revising it. He also added that in terms of the Act on Dual Citizenship, the Hungarian party did not comply with the Treaty. (Naturally, he kept quiet of the provisions of the Treaty which were violated by the Slovak party by approving the Act on the official state language.) From 2009, the leaders of the Hungarian Coalition Party in Slovakia (MKP) also began to call for the revision and revaluation of the Treaty. According to József Berényi, who was the Vice
President of MKP then (currently he is the President of the party), the Hungarian-Slovak Treaty was not bad, but as it had been signed 15 years ago, provisions were obsolete and no longer satisfied the requirements of the current period, therefore it had to be revised.

When the Slovak-Hungarian relationship became very tense again due to the Act on the Official State Language, approved in July and implemented in September 2009 as a sly legal act, not at all complying with the principles of the European Union, the new Prime Minister of the Hungarian Socialist government, Gordon Bajnai, met the Slovak Prime Minister. The 11-point declaration of the Bajnai-Fico meeting was adopted on 10 September 2009. They jointly addressed the population of the two countries requesting the people to show patience and understanding towards each other. They confirmed the intentions of making use of any available form of co-operation. They tried to resolve a few disputes, including, e.g., the problem of the visit to Slovakia of Hungarian President László Sólyom. They confirmed that they intended to proceed pursuant to the provisions of the Treaty in resolving every problem, including also the problems of their mutual minorities.

Compared to the past, a new element of this agreement was the approval by both parties of all recommendations of the General Commissioner of OSCE for minority issues concerning the Slovak Act on the Official State Language. In this matter the parties promised special meetings of the Joint Commission for Minority Issues, attended also by the delegates of the OSCE General Commissioner as observers. These commission meetings took place, but in terms of their final outcome they were absolutely formal because the Slovak party approved an implementation decree for the Act on the Official State Language, which could briefly be described as ‘an ill fantasy of an ill government’. Apart from the discussions, the Slovak party has not implemented any other recommendations of the OSCE General Commissioner to date.

The other points of the declaration adopted at the meeting were also implemented only in part. The ban of extreme organisations was also ambiguous. The implementation of the 14-point action plan had to be declared again, including also a new start in the meetings of all Joint Commissions, established for the implementation of the Treaty. There were no joint government meetings.

In this declaration, the parties promised an independent Co-operation Council of Experts, and an Independent Co-operation Fund. The objective of both initiatives would be to have an independent organisation put in charge of the improvement of the relationship independently from the governments and politics. Neither of them were established, because the governments lacked the required political will.

In order to implement the objectives of the declaration (the majority of which were already concluded in the 14 points adopted in 2007) the Ministers for Foreign Affairs were assigned to develop a co-operation package, the components of which cropped up in the subsequent developments of the relationship and in the Hungarian presidency programme of the Visegrád Co-operation (including energy security, co-operation plan for increasing Roma integration; initial results were achieved in both fields, but they were achieved within the framework of the V-4 presidency).
This declaration also contained a statement whereby the two Prime Ministers would act as patrons of the celebration of the 15th anniversary of the Treaty. In the end, the celebration was not magnificent and representative enough, because the Hungarian party did not see any reason for a true celebration because of the proceedings against the Hungarians in Slovakia and other issues (including the Slovak Act on the Official State Language, the proceedings against the President of the Republic of Hungary, the treatment of the Hungarian minority and the anti-Hungarian statements regularly repeated by the Slovak Prime Minister and his National Party supporter, as well as the incitement of an anti-Hungarian atmosphere in Slovakia).

(When we refer to ‘anti-Hungarian statements’, it involves a rather wide range of statements abusing Hungarians. Prime Minister Robert Fico, other members of the Slovak Government and also the president of the Slovak National Party very intensively followed this practice for four long years. The Prime Minister and Slota kept referring to Hungary as an extreme threat on the peace of Central Europe and the entire Europe, scaring everybody that Hungary and the Hungarians, including naturally Hungarians living in Slovakia, were the biggest threat on Slovakia. We cannot even remember exactly how many times the Slovak Prime Minister and his friend said that Hungary was an extreme fascist and Nazi country, imposing a risk on the security of Slovakia, and similar things. These statements and attacks were repeated so frequently that not only in Slovakia but also after a while in the entire European Union people ignored them as a kind of Slovak folklore.

Meetings of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs

The co-operation of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs takes place according to the provisions of the Treaty. The two Ministers for Foreign Affairs are ‘the most diligent’ parties of the Slovak-Hungarian international and inter-governmental co-operation. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs met and still meet most frequently. The outcome of their talks is not ideal, or optimum, but sometimes it has some results. At the same time, these meetings represent the most important bilateral ‘forum’ of the dialogue between the two countries. Occasionally, when relations are tense, they also perform the ‘fire-fighting’ tasks.

The two Ministers for Foreign Affairs were so diligent in the recent past that in 2008, when the relationship was most tense, they founded a joint co-operation award, under the title of ‘Hungarian-Slovak Good Neighbourhood and Understanding’. The award founded by the two Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Kinga Göncz and Ján Kubiš, is granted to a Hungarian and a Slovak person organisation each year who or which made some outstanding contribution to the development of the Hungarian-Slovak relations and to the strengthening of mutual understanding between the two nations. This year the award was granted to a joint Slovak-Hungarian peacekeeper unit in Cyprus (SLOVHUNCON) and to the members of the High Tatras Mountain Rescue Service. In 2009, the award was granted to Rudolf Chmel' literary expert, the last ambassador of Czechoslovakia in Budapest (these days he is the Deputy Prime Minister of the new Slovak Government for human and minority rights) and the village of
Hejce, which is close to the common border. The parties are trying to exclude politics when they choose the winners.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of the temporary Bajnai government, Péter Balázs, deemed it so important to manage the Slovak-Hungarian relationship at ministry level that on 23 July 2009 he formed a task force at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, responsible for the management of Hungarian-Slovak relations, led by the Minister for Foreign Affairs. There is no public information about the activities or results of this task force.

Presidential meetings

The Treaty does not contain any provision for the meetings of the Presidents. Such meetings depend on the will, feelings and goodwill of the two Presidents. In general, the contents and atmosphere of the meetings of Slovak-Hungarian Presidents reflected the topics and tone of the other bilateral relations between the countries. The relationship of the last two Presidents (Ivan Gašparovič and László Sólyom, the former one held his position from 2004, while the latter one took his position in 2005) may not be considered too friendly. An incident on 21 August 2009 aggravated further the not very friendly relationship between the two presidents. The Hungarian President wished to unveil a Saint Stephen Statue in Komárno, Slovakia, which the Slovak Government prevented by refusing the Hungarian President’s entry to Slovakia. This procedure triggered legal disputes between the two parties, which have not yet been concluded. Its solution, which was also a requirement stemming from the Bajnai-Fico meeting, was extended much longer than expected by the Hungarian party, because the Hungarian party applied to the European Court for Human Rights as they competent agencies of the European Union (including also the European Commission), did not provide satisfactory legal remedy. László Sólyom’s declarations often enraged the Slovak Government and the Slovak President, because he often criticised the Slovak party for proceedings against the Hungarian minority.

Framework of cultural relations

The institutional framework of the official Slovak-Hungarian cultural relations is primarily based on the Cultural Institutes, operating in both countries: the Cultural Institute of the Republic of Hungary in Bratislava and the Cultural Institute of the Slovak Republic in Budapest. Both operate well and efficiently. They organise a lot of events dedicated to the culture, history and mutual relations of the two societies. Both institutions organise events in other parts of the country, not limiting their activities to the capital city only. The young generation is an important target group for both institutions.

Both institutions face a problem that they have a limited number of visitors and audience, which is growing only very slowly. They share the same objective of improving the image of their own respective countries in the host country.
2. MAIN ASPECTS OF NATIONAL (BILATERAL, REGIONAL AND COMMUNAL) CO-OPERATION

The cross-border regional co-operation formed on the joint Slovak-Hungarian border section (679 km) play a key role in this field. The fundamental framework of such co-operation is a Euro Region, the number and framework of which may vary. There are six Euro Regions, which may be considered permanent, but the actual number is higher: Ister-Granum Euro Region; Treble Danube Region Euro Region; Neogradiensis Euro Region; Vág-Duna-Ipoly Euro Region; Ipoly Euro Region; Sajó-Rima Euro Region; Karszt Euro Region; Zemplén Euro Region and Kassa (Kosice)-Miskolc Euro Region. These Euro Regions have been gradually established since 1999, some of which have been active for more than 10 years. They have different results and opportunities, but among all cross-border Euro Regions of Hungary, the Slovak-Hungarian Euro Regions operate most efficiently. Their operation is funded primarily from the EU’s Regional Development Funds, but they also depend financially on the two central Governments. Inter-governmental and regional, as well as municipality co-operation, as well as co-operation of the civil organisations and the civil sector are all required for the successful operation of the Slovak-Hungarian Euro Regions.

Euro Region and cross-border co-operation

The accession to the European Union created a new situation for Hungary and Slovakia in the development of cross-border relations. The planning procedures of the EU Member States became consistent, and transferability and potential co-operation simplified considerably within the internal borders of the EU. Under the objective of the European Grouping of Territorial Co-operation (EGTC), the European Regional Development Fund is allocating twice as much funds for the co-operation and realignment of the regions, including border regions, than in 2004-2006.

Inter-regional development represents a good perspective for people living on the two sides of the border, who are mostly Hungarians also in Slovakia. This fact causes a ‘dilemma’ to the Slovak Governments. If they support and encourage Slovak-Hungarian cross-border regional development projects, then it is beneficiary primarily for the Hungarians, and only secondly for Slovakia. Consequently, the Slovak party, not openly but clearly, hinders the implementation of the specific projects, or ‘has no ambition’ with regard to them which conduct was more typical of the Slovak Government, which entered into office in 2006 than before. As regional development involves primarily Hungarians on both sides of the border, Slovaks are not especially interested in it, with the exception of Slovaks living together with Hungarians (whose ratio is approximately 1:5). Given the such ‘unbalanced national ratios’, the cross-border regional development projects face several problems. One of the problems is that Slovaks are not interested enough and they are inactive. The other problem is that proposals must be submitted and they are also fundamentally assessed within a national
framework. Consequently, the national bias can also be captured in this field according to indirect sources.

Regarding the Hungarian actions (in Hungary), which have been progressing for years, both the Hungarian Government (led by the Prime Minister’s office), and the lower administration and municipality levels (counties, statistical regions, local municipalities) have implemented programmes both within and over the border that promoted the development of these cross-border regions. Such programmes included the following: the Seamless Europe Programme of the previous Hungarian Government, dedicated to the transferability of the borders; and the cross-border adult training network building programme, which promoted the labour market relations between the regions. The Hungarian party established a Central European virtual business club, CEUCOM (Central European Community), which may serve as an electronic contact building framework in the larger region (i.e., not only for Slovaks and Hungarians) for entrepreneurs, municipalities and the civil sector. (Its Slovak partner is the International Business Advisory and Support System (NADSME – National Agency for Development of Small and Medium Enterprises). The purpose of this portal is to enable organisations and people with development intentions representing them to meet without any borders, on a virtual basis, and then jointly plan the development of the region and programmes for improving their own lives and their environment using the IT network.

The Hungarian Party intends to boost the development deadlocks, which are blocked by artificial borders. Its main intention is to contribute to the harmonisation and synchronisation of cross-border national development objectives with resources from the European Territorial Co-operation Framework and other sources. The cross-border co-operation framework of settlements, sub-regions and regions promote the revitalisation of regions and areas that formed natural units in the Carpathian Basin earlier, and the intensification of the relations between the areas and settlements along the borders.

The lag of the economy of the South Slovakian areas, populated by Hungarians and their omission from development was absolutely obvious in the discussions concerning the implementation of several important infrastructure investment plans. The most spectacular of those included the rejection of the construction of a dual carriage way across the country in East-West directions, or the new motorway in South Slovakia, where the conditions of land were ideal for road construction. Instead, the new motorway will be built in the Northern and middle parts of Slovakia, on much harder terrain and route, involving numerous tunnels and bends. The Slovak postponing policy concerning the motorway connecting Kassa and Miskolc also reveals the different intentions (driven by national interests) of the Slovak and Hungarian parties in road construction.

The only good chance of development of the South Slovakia region is successful Euro Regional proposals, eligible for support from the EU Structural Funds. Consequently, the Slovak political elite monitors with reservation and suspicion, or even with hostility, the cross-border co-operation of Hungary and Hungarians living in South Slovakia, occasionally hindering or impeding it.
Bridge construction and relationship building on regional and municipality levels (regions, sub-regions, settlements)

The main Hungarian-Slovak projects in this field include bridge construction on rivers forming the border between the countries, including primarily the construction of Danube bridges, Ipoly bridges (which existed also in the past), border crossing points, public roads and railways, which were already mentioned in relation to the Joint Commissions. Each bridge is constructed in co-operation, based on the Inter-Government Agreements of the two countries. The Inter-Governmental Agreement for the reconstruction of the Danube bridge between Esztergom and Sturovo (Párkány) (Mária-Valéria bridge) was signed in 1999, and the bridge was actually opened in 2001. 50% of the construction was financed from the Phare programme.

However the civil initiatives are equally important as the inter-governmental goodwill for Slovak-Hungarian bridge construction. There are much fewer Slovak civil organisations than Hungarians (both in Slovakia and in Hungary). Civil initiatives, working as associations, provide the social pressure in the process of construction of Danube bridges and Ipoly bridges, and the fact that the demand and the topic remain continuously on the agenda.

The Párkány–Esztergom Friendly Association (PEBE), a non-profit international organisation, was established prior to the opening of the Esztergom-Sturovo Danube bridge. Its members are Hungarian and Slovak citizens. The Association supports the diversified development of the relations between Párkány in Slovakia and Esztergom in Hungary, primarily in economy, culture and sports. The Association co-operates with the technical and non-profit organisations of the two towns, including the sub-regional association, centred in Párkány-Esztergom, the leading agencies of the Vág–Duna–Ipoly Euro Region, the organisations of the Slovak and Hungarian minorities living in the two countries and other twin-town associations.

Sub-Regional Territorial Development Associations were formed with the co-operation of primarily local municipalities along the River Danube, which is a river forming the border. These created the Ister-Granum Cross-Border Sub-Region referred to above in November 2000. The contracting parties set themselves as main objectives to build intellectual bridges and to increase awareness of cohesion on the two shores of the River Danube. In order to achieve this objective, special commissions are operated (focusing on transport, industry, agriculture, environmental protection, health, public security, training and tourism development). The reconstruction of the bridges on the lower section of River Ipoly is a permanent topic on the agenda of the general meetings. Unable to wait for the construction of the North-South European Transport Corridor, the Ister-Granum Sub-Region operates a freight ferry between Esztergom and Párkány, thus promoting the economic development of the area, The Eurohid (Euro Bridge) Foundation was established in the same spirit in 2005.
After the systemic change the residents of Ipoly Valley in Hungary and Slovakia (approximately 400,000 people) hoping to belong to the European Union soon, had a natural demand, ranked first in the order, to restore the former connections, i.e., the bridges. Numerous initiatives were developed on both sides of the border supporting the idea of reconstruction of the Ipoly bridges. The Civil Association for the Reconstruction of Ipoly Bridges consisting of Hungarian and Slovak municipalities was established in 2004 (the co-chairmen of this association are of Hungarian nationality both in Hungary and in Slovakia). The mid-term concept includes the construction of 8-10 Ipoly bridges. In 2009, the construction of two new Ipoly bridges began. These bridges were included in the 14-point action plan resulting from the Fico-Gyurcsány meeting in 2007. However, despite the impressive declarations, neither country covered the costs of the construction of the bridges. Consequently, the Association and the region prepared a successful proposal for the resources of the EU funds.

The reconstruction of the Ipoly bridges fits in the Seamless Europe programme, referred to above, which aims at the development and revitalisation of the border-crossing points, which will consequently influence the entire region and will also contribute to the expansion of relations of the businesses and civil actors of the region. Another objective is to come up with complex regional development programmes including not only the development of the road border crossing points, but also capturing other transport opportunities as well as environmental protection and water management issues of the areas situated on the two sides of the border.

Apart from bridge construction, the re-launch of railway traffic along the River Ipoly seems also feasible for the Civil Association for the Reconstruction of Ipoly Bridges, which also began to promote the construction of a water reservoir in Slovakia which may have considerable flood protection and water management, agricultural and tourism impacts in some sub-regions of the Neogradensis (Nógrád) Euro Region. The Association expects to finance the majority of these investment projects also from EU funds.

According to the leaders of the Association, after the construction of the bridges unemployment has decreased, trade has picked and tourism has become an increasingly important source of income. More and more people attend cultural events crossing River Ipoly on the bridges, and the relations between relatives and friends, which had loosened before, because of the orders, have revived and strengthened again. Freight and personal traffic is increasing. Slovakia and Hungary support this programme also within the framework of national co-financing.

**Partnership building with the help of the European Union**

*The Hungary-Slovakia European Territorial Co-operation Operational Programme 2007-2013* (cross-border co-operation programme between the two countries, [www.husk-cbc.eu](http://www.husk-cbc.eu), [www.hungary-slovakia-cbc.eu](http://www.hungary-slovakia-cbc.eu)), which relates to the Regional Development Funds of
the European Union, specified the support of the cross-border bridges and funds also 85% of the investment. The purpose of the programme is to strengthen the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises along the Hungarian-Slovak borders, to make services more effective and to promote more active cross-border co-operation.

Puskás Tivadar Public Foundation, ITD Hungary Zrt. and the National Agency for the Development of Small and Medium Enterprises (Národná agentúra pre rozvoj malého a stredného podnikania), seated in Bratislava, launched a joint project to support the programme. This project helps primarily in the establishment of business relations. It organises conferences and business meetings. The services are aimed primarily at the businesses operating along the Slovak–Hungarian border, but the target group also includes organisations supporting various enterprises, such as chambers of commerce, cultural institutions and advisory centres. Sub-regions and small regions situated along the border and stretching over the border submit proposals on specific subjects (e.g., a successful joint proposal was prepared in co-operation with Nagykapos and Region Association, which is sometimes also called as Ung Region Association, in the Without Borders for Renewable Energies EU tender).

The implementation of the ‘Hungary-Slovakia Cross-Border Co-operation Programme 2007-2013’ is progressing more successfully than before. The stakeholders of both countries are producing more and more proposals. Driven by the interest, the Hungarian-Slovak Inter-Governmental Joint Commission for Economy also agreed, on its meeting held in March 2010 (fifth meeting) to establish a co-operation task force from small and medium-sized enterprises of the two countries to promote the intensification of bilateral economic relations in the society.

Regarding the legal framework of Slovak-Hungarian cross-border co-operation, apart from the Treaty (pursuant to which such co-operation is supported intensively), bilateral agreements were also signed with Slovakia (in 2001), which rely on the principles of the Framework Agreement of Madrid, and specify them according to the special conditions of the two countries.

The intensity of the cross-border relations also depends on the degree of decentralisation in the respective country. Hungary falls in the category of the unitary states, the administrative structure of which does not contain a regional level for the time being. In Hungary, there are local and county governments, in terms of regions we only have statistical regions. On the other hand, Slovakia is a decentralised country because, apart from local governments, it also has regional governments. Consequently, in the two countries the partners’ co-operation at regional and lower levels do not represent administrative units that correspond to each other on the two sides of the border. Consequently, the (central) government agencies must also be involved in the work in Hungary in order to achieve full regional co-operation.
3. CO-OPERATION BETWEEN THE CIVIL SECTORS OF THE TWO COUNTRIES

There are permanent or established forms of co-operation in the civil sector, and there are temporary, ad hoc co-operations that last only for a short while or only for campaigns. The most typical forms are associations, foundations, friendship circles and clubs. (Examples for this include the Limes Anavum Regional Cultural Association of Nána, the Madách Circle of Vác, the King St. Stephen Foundation of Vámosmikola, and the Ipoly Area Development Foundation of Balassagyarmat.)

The joint historian committee and the case of the joint history schoolbook

A separate form of co-operation in the civil sector is an established or establishing co-operation between the scientists of the two societies. The Slovak-Hungarian historian joint committee, the joint scientific forum of the two Academies of Sciences, was set up to research the problems and reconcile the results of the research of the common past. It has been in operation for several decades, and its most recent venture to combat a number of problems is the drafting of the joint Slovak-Hungarian schoolbook. For the time being, this objective has been realised yet only in the form of a joint history textbook due to the conflicting views. This is the first joint work, a volume on teaching methodology, which is a joint methodology textbook and manual on teaching history. (It took ten years to prepare from 2000.)

One of the 14 points (point 8) conceived in June 2007 (during the Gyurcsány-Fico meeting) talks only about a common historical textbook and not a common schoolbook (by the way, both governments promised equal financial support for this project, which was not implemented to an appropriate extent even after being encouraged by the Bajnai-Fico meeting; in mid-2008, the Hungarian Government approved HUF 2.4 million while the Slovak Government approved 100,000 crowns for the work). What was and is being prepared is financed by the historian joint committee mostly out of independent EU funds. This committee has organised a number of conferences out of this money, and a regular publication has also been born (Historia Slovaco-Hungarica --- Hungaro-Slovaca).

There are considerable obstacles to writing a common schoolbook. This is primarily because the historical awareness and the evaluation of historical processes differ significantly between Hungarians and Slovaks. The two nations have not experienced and do not evaluate their common history the same way. On the Slovak side, there are some who interpret it as a thousand-year oppression by the Hungarians, which is not a historical but an ideological evaluation, which is nevertheless very much alive in Slovak public awareness, having been nurtured from the end of the 19th century. (The recognised leading Slovak representatives of the historian community do not accept the theory of thousand years of oppression.) The fact that there has been a strong pressure to assimilate the population of Slovak nationality under
the auspices of the idea of a Hungarian nation state, which threatened the existence of the Slovak nation, is very much denied by Hungarian nationalist historians and ideologists but is a fact beyond doubt. This is an irrefutable fact, similarly to the historical problem that the Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia were subject to contemptible humiliation after 1945 (complete deprivation of rights, forced population exchange, forced relocation, re-Slovakisation, nationalisation, confiscation of property and similar). All these are facts that are evaluated and interpreted differently by the two parties.

According to László Szarka (the current Hungarian co-chairman of the joint committee), it would be important for the Slovaks to accept that the Czezhoslovakia-Hungary border that evolved after 1918 was not an ethnic border; it would also be important for Hungarians to accept that the Slovaks had a right to national autonomy, and the state of Czechoslovakia was not the result of an international conspiracy but followed from the development logic of the 20th (or rather, the 19th century). Hungarian history and public opinion has yet to properly process the responsibility of Hungary’s policy concerning nationalities before 1918 for the falling apart of historical Hungary.

One of the most objective and most recognised Slovak historians, Dušan Kováč – who has been a member of this committee for a decade – believes that there will hardly ever be complete agreement between the two parties in e.g. the evaluation of the Treaty of Trianon and of the period between 1938 – 1948. However, he does not see this as an obstacle to creating a common schoolbook. In the reasons for this, he cited the common German-French schoolbook as an example (at the end of 2008). That schoolbook discloses irrefutable facts together with the interpretations and explanations of the two countries’ historians, which prompt the young and other readers to think and develop their own opinion. This was the basic principle for creating the joint Slovak-Hungarian history textbook in 2010 as well. This allows for learning about each other’s views and for conducting sensible dialogue. (It is often mentioned in connection with the common history schoolbook that the French and the German published their common schoolbook only 40 years after their declaration of mutual reconciliation, which is no more ‘common’ than the Slovak-Hungarian book being prepared.)

The Slovak historian also expressed an opinion on the extent to which the French-German model of reconciliation may be applied to this relationship. He firmly believes it can be applied, but it should be borne in mind that the Western process was launched by two statesmen, who were then joined by the intelligentsia; the representatives of education administration and other professionals played an important role; and thanks to all of them, citizens had gradually come to realise that being good neighbours was much better than discord. Here, however, this view is taken mostly by the group of intelligentsia and bourgeoisie that confesses to European values. Here, he sees no Slovak or Hungarian statesman who could initiate this process. Therefore, despite the various initiatives and attempts by certain groups of the intelligentsia, reaching actual reconciliation between Slovakia and Hungary will be a long-term process.
The joint committee would like to first prepare a teacher’s manual, and then a common Slovak-Hungarian alternative history schoolbook covering a millennium, to be used by the teachers and pupils of both countries.

In addition to attempts at writing a common history schoolbook, the scientific community contributes to gaining better insight into common history by conferences where – from time to time – Slovak and Hungarian historians and other social scientists present the Hungarian and Slovak scientific positions on the given topics. The confrontation of these positions remains the ‘secret’ of restricted professional groups more often than not, but the lectures of these debates are disclosed in publications from time to time. For instance, the Nógrád region launched a series on both sides of the borders (with Balassagyarmat and Salgótarján, and Filakovo and Banská Bystrica as their centres) in 2009 in which Slovak and Hungarian historians conducted a dialogue on the debated and problematic period of the common past and common history indicated above in professional meetings that take one or two days. They hope to reach the goal of coming up with an objective interpretation of the basic issues of national histories easier by clarifying the history of micro-regions.

A number of civil initiatives have been realised to encourage or promote Hungarian-Slovak co-operation, which were basically of a campaign nature. Most of them are implemented in the border side and cross-border regional co-operation and development programmes indicated above (funds financed by the EU), are linked to and supported by such funds. Examples include the building of bicycle roads, bicycle tours, environmental protection collaboration (e.g. to protect sea eagles and other similar environmental campaign programmes). When relationships grow tense or conflicts arise, meetings are organised in a campaign-like manner between Slovak and Hungarian intelligentsia in a relatively restricted public, which usually end by issuing a joint declaration calling on the politicians of both countries to make every effort to improve relations. However, these are merely ad hoc meetings and not permanent or established co-operation (e.g. in the autumn of 2008).

A recent initiative endorsed by both Slovaks and Hungarians is the Slovak-Hungarian well-wishing campaign launched on New Year’s of 2010. Slovaks and Hungarians sent each other their best wishes for the new year (Štastný Nový rok, Slovensko/Boldog Újévet, Magyarország). Private individuals initiated a politics-free campaign to resolve the Slovak-Hungarian conflict, calling on the civil society of the two countries. A number of Hungarian and Slovak public and commercial television and radio stations and civil organisations endorsed the cause, presenting it free of charge. The campaign film that can be seen in Slovakia and Hungary is dedicated by Hungarian and Slovak civil organisations, while the message was displayed on the bags of Hajtás Pajtás bicycle courier service. Tilos Rádió held a theme day on the issue on 18 January; in just a few weeks, nearly 2,000 users gave their support to the initiative on Facebook. (Szlovák+Magyar Facebook).

Another initiative aimed at improving the relationship, which can be called quite recent, is the Bridge over the Danube programme organised by Partners Slovakia and a Partners Hungary Foundation (a member of the Partners for Democratic Change International). During their first
meeting held in December 2008 they organised round-table discussions. On the first day of the meeting, Slovak institutions and civil organisations met in Bratislava; the next day, Hungarian institutions and organisations met in Budapest and analysed the situation on the experience and positive practice of co-operation, in response to the Slovak-Hungarian conflict. The participants found that these conflicts were present more on the level of high politics and the media, and not so much in the everyday life of people. In order to prevent conflicts, the civil organisations of the two countries should intensify their relations, and each should establish as great a degree of co-operation as possible in their respective fields of expertise, thereby giving first-hand experience on the actual relations to the citizens of the two countries.

The two peer foundations organised the second meeting of Hungarian and Slovak civil associations on 26 March 2010. The meeting’s specific objective was to set up a civil network around the common border that implements Slovak-Hungarian collaboration, thereby strengthening the two countries’ relations. It was important that the Forum Information Centre of Samorín also took part in organising this second meeting (a division of the Forum Minority Research Institute, it was set up as a civil foundation in 1996).

Co-operation between Catholic Churches

In 2006 (after the beating of Hedvig Malina when relations first grew very tense) the chairmen of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Hungary and Slovakia proposed a co-operation, which started by a joint Holy Mass held by the chief pastors of the two countries at the Esztergom basilica and the adoption of a Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation declaration. Ever since 2006, a Slovak-Hungarian Mass has been held at Mátraverebély–Szentkút every year, and Slovak bishops continue to be happy to take part in this continued series. The most recent such meeting was held in the summer and on 9 September 2010. On that occasion, the Hungarian and Slovak Catholic archbishops Péter Erdő and Stanislav Zvolenský met. During joint prayers of heads of the Catholic Church, common Masses are celebrated, common prayer and common preaching as well as the disclosure of joint church statements have become the custom. Prayers are said for Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation on each occasion. This is a common, bilingual Slovak-Hungarian prayer day, attended by several thousands of people.

Cultural co-operation is realised in diverse forms, which are devised with the specific intention of improving relations from time to time. Such forms are events, programmes, exhibitions and festivals born out of occasional alliances between Slovaks and Hungarians pursuing various branches of art. These are mostly campaign-like events, which are generally not set in any structural or institutional framework, other than perhaps applying for support.

Co-operation in the field of arts is very rich. Many different (theatrical, fine arts, literature and other) meetings are held. There are relations and even series of events between publishing houses and editorial offices.
Out of the cultural institutes mentioned above, the Hungarian Cultural Institute of Bratislava has set up even a 'Védcölöp' Foundation (in 2007) to foster Hungarian-Slovak cultural relations. This foundation talks primarily to the young of the two countries.

Cultural relations are nurtured by co-operating municipalities on the two sides of the border, when they organise festivals and meetings of a cultural nature, which often become traditions. Such collaboration works between municipalities of settlements as well as regional or county councils. (An example for this is the International Folklore and Gastronomy Festival of Nógrád, held for the 15th time in 2010.)

An example for cultural alliance between the two countries is that from time to time they submit joint applications to the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO. Such an application was the joint application for the fort system of Komárom in 2007, which was successful. (‘Fort system at the junction of the Danube and Vág rivers in the cities of Komárno-Komárom’.) A Hungarian and a Slovak foundation were set up earlier to preserve the fort system. The ‘Monostor Fort Military Culture Centre Historical Real Estate Development and Utilisation Public Benefit Company’ of Komárom and the Pro Castello Comaromiensi Foundation of Komárno have continuously collaborated in restoring the forts and preserving their original values earlier.

Given its position, Hungary is particularly interested in co-operation subject to special support related to cross-border locations. Out of the eight Hungarian sites already included in the World Heritage List, the Aggtelek cave is also joint with Slovakia.

Hungarian-Slovak co-operation for the development of castle tourism is a civil initiative that is an important example for co-operation in tourism. This is an initiative launched in 2009-2010, the objective of which is the touristic development of thirty castles along the Slovakia-Hungary border with some HUF 26 million of EU and domestic funds. It promotes the linkage of castles and manor houses in Szabolcs and Kosice counties (i.e. in Eastern Slovakia and Eastern Hungary) and their promotion, and it increases the population’s income from tourism in the two regions that are lagging behind in respect of economy.

**Civil co-operation in environmental protection**

There are a number of environmental protection organisations that have contacts, primarily in the framework of programmes linked to protecting the Danube. They tend to act together if needed for some problem. There is, for example, an alliance between Hungary and Slovakia for imperial eagles, or the preservation of significant natural protection areas, or protests against damaging the environment (such as the joint protests against cyanide gold mining). Collaborations are formed to develop and disseminate environmentally aware farming. It is true also for environmental protection that co-operation takes place on a campaign basis and not in the form of permanent co-operation. For instance, the 'Bicycle tour for Slovak-Hungarian common thinking’ was implemented in 2008 for the purpose of increasing
awareness of the Hungarian-Slovak Co-operation application programmes that rely on EU funds.

Recent collaboration in regard to the environment is a cross-border civil initiative registered in April 2010, the Nógrád–Novohrad International Geopark, which promises to be permanent. (This is first cross-border geopark in the world. It was registered in the international network of geoparks in Malaysia.) This opportunity may expand the opportunities available for spreading tourism. The obligations and duties entailed by this: a common uniform regional development strategy has to be developed, which can attain its goals in line with the different effective laws and requirements of the two countries. There may be substantial differences in nature protection requirements, business and commercial legislation and requirements applicable to municipalities and civil organisations in Slovakia and Hungary, which do not facilitate either the operation of the geopark or the setting up or operation of other municipality and civil associations.

**Co-operation between chambers of commerce**

The Slovak-Hungarian Chamber of Commerce was set up originally as a regional initiative in Lučenec in Slovakia and Salgótarján in Hungary based on an agreement between the chambers of the commerce and industry of the two countries in 1997 (7 October). Its objective is to promote economic relations and mutual trade between the two countries. The economic and cultural co-operation developed has a tradition going back to several years, and this is chamber moved frequently contacted by the chambers and businesses of the two countries. The core activity of the joint chamber is mutual co-operation in public administration, at municipality level and in professional associations and societies in both countries. They collect information and documentation, legal requirements and standards, set up databases on companies, offers and the fields for co-operation, organise missions, meetings, exhibitions for businesses. They support primarily small and medium sized enterprises and promote the setting up of joint ventures. They offer information and advice, help to seek out partners and organise joint events for the purpose of improving economic relations between Slovakia and Hungary.

Starting from 1998, a number of professional and chamber co-operation forms have been set up; for instance, in addition to the chambers of commerce, chambers of architects of Slovakia and Hungary have signed co-operation agreement that was extended in 2003 with regard to the achievements until then.

There is also a Hungarian-Slovak Friendship Society as well, but barely any information is available on it. It was set in Hungarian-populated area in Slovakia and has only a few Slovak members. It is presumably more a formal than a real substantial civil organisation.

Based on public figures, there are altogether 48 partner settlement relations in operation. (Knowing the length of the common border, this is quite little in proportion. For instance,
there are 65 partner settlement relations in operation with the Czech Republic.) Their joint events and meetings establish traditions through personal contact. The best-known partner city relationship is that between Sturovo and Esztergom, which started in 1991. At that time, an agreement was signed, which has been continuously enriched since then. They set the objective of harmonising city programmes, organising joint cultural, education and tourist events, the setting up of economic relations as well as the development of joint regional development concepts and business plans. The Industrial Association of the Southern Region of Sturovo published a joint publication together with the Industrial Association of the City of Esztergom already for the opening of the bridge between the two cities, which presents the civil organisations, regional associations and businesses operating on the left and right sides of the Danube. The partner city relationship between Salgótarján and Banská Bystrica should also be mentioned. Both are up-and-coming centres of the Nógrád-Novohrad regional co-operation. Salgótarján has even set up a Hungarian-Slovak Trade-Center.

**Micro-regional associations**

Micro-regional associations take an important position and play a great role among the permanent or establishing forms of Slovak-Hungarian civil organisations. These are alliances between municipalities but are based on civil co-operation. They most frequently collaborate for developing smaller and larger euro-regions along and across the border. They are related to the establishment of euro-regions, so they are results of the co-operation during the 2000’s.

For instance, starting from 2002, the civil sector associated with the Ister-Granum euro-region (connected by the bridge between Esztergom and Sturovo, which operates best out of the euro-regions functioning along the border between Slovakia and Hungary) has been publishing (initially with help from the Dutch) a Civil Catalogue and Civil Bugle (the letter is published in two languages every quarter), which contains information on the civil sector of cross-border co-operation. This is a date of warehouse for civil organisations containing the details of more than one thousand civil organisations engaged in cultural, leisure, sports and other activities. For instance, the most important civil supporters of this euro-region are two foundations: Euro-Bridge Foundation of Esztergom and Future 2000 Foundation of Mužla, Slovakia. They publish a euro-regional cultural monthly (Crossing). They have set up a ‘Without borders’ Civil Service Network as well with the objective of developing a regional service provider network that assists civil organisations of the border region. Civil societies provide information about themselves based on data warehouses in the Hungarian and Slovak languages. In 2006, civil organisations of the Ister-Granum euro-region have already set up a Regional Civil Parliament. (With 200 civil organisations as members from both sides of the border.)
The particular characteristics of co-operation in the civil sector

The most important point is that the relations of the civil sector (civil societies and foundations) connect primarily Hungarian civil organisations in Slovakia and in Hungary, in the framework of cross-border co-operation and euro-regions. In addition to Slovakian funds, the Slovaks and Slovakia play a small role in developing the civil sector of Hungarians in Slovakia, given that they rely mostly on funds from Hungary. Co-operation is aimed at regional development, culture and education, so the Slovaks of Slovakia participate only rarely in these. Therefore, the civil initiatives of Hungarians in Slovakia almost always focus on co-operating with Hungarians in Hungary, and the reverse is also true.

The vast majority of the system of Hungarian institutions in Slovakia relies on organisations representing a civil character, which further emphasises and strengthens their importance in the life of Hungarians in Slovakia. Since 1999, Hungarian civil organisations in Slovakia and the entire structure of institutions of Hungarians in Slovakia have been registered by Forum Information Centre, which (as part of the Forum Institute) in itself is a Hungarian civil association in Slovakia. Only a small part of the Hungarian civil organisations in Slovakia seek contact with civil organisations of Slovakia. The primary reason for this is the politisation of the affairs, life and problems of Hungarians in Slovakia in Slovak public life, and the lack of trust on the part of Slovaks.

The significance of co-operation along and across the borders from the Hungarian perspective is – as already mentioned – that they restore the unity of areas that have been organically integrated earlier. These are usually inhabited by Hungarians and have declined to be regions and areas in a backward position or lagging behind during the last century. Co-operation offers a change for them to rise, and for economic and cultural development. Therefore, the Hungarian minority (and for the Hungarians in Hungary), this co-operation is a link between the areas that have been separated by a border but which used to form a single unit earlier.
4. A INITIATIVES AND ACTIVITIES AIMED AT IMPROVING SLOVAK-HUNGARIAN RELATIONS

Current initiatives supporting Hungarian-Slovak co-operation includes the *Most-Hid political party* set up in the summer of 2009, which identified itself as the political party for Hungarian-Slovak co-operation. It was successful in the 2010 elections and secured a 8.2 per cent representation in the Slovak Parliament, after which it became a member of the current central right government coalition. The establishment and support of this party carries the message that there is a need in society for various formations that set the target of improving relations. This party included the setting up a Slovak-Hungarian joint fund in its election programme, which is to operate like the Czech-German cultural fund. (However, it was unable to apply in this government programme.)

*The case of the reconciliation declaration:*

There were several attempts based on primarily Hungarian initiatives to have the two countries, the two states, the two societies to adopt a joint declaration of reconciliation. The first such attempt was made in 1991 and the last in the autumn of 2007, but it usually failed because a declaration for such a purpose should be based on mutual apologies and forgiveness for the mutual sins that embitter the common history, and these cannot be realised due to the resistance or objections of one party on one occasion and the other party on another.

In 2006, a reconciliation declaration was born out of the catholic co-operation mentioned above, but this was merely the initiative of the heads of the two churches, was not comprehensive and extensive, and was not even noticed by the political élites and societies of the two countries. Adoption of the reconciliation declaration requires proper timing and should take place at the right moment, which is not always present. Both parties, in particular the Hungarian party have missed the few proper moments that have arisen so far.

In the agreement reached in the Bajnai-Fico meeting (September 2009) mentioned above (points 9-10) the two heads of governments agreed to set up the two institutions so necessary for institutionalised dialogue between Slovakia and Hungary, the Hungarian-Slovak Co-operation Council and the Hungarian-Slovak Co-operation Fund. However, there is not a trace of these entities. They were to be set up as bodies independent from politics, but this failed to take place. Exactly because the governments are unable to set up these institutions, the civil sector should attempt to create the framework for institutionalised dialogue between Slovakia and Hungary. This would ensure the establishment and continued existence of dialogue.

The two major components of institutionalised dialogue would be the Slovak-Hungarian forum or council that would carry on and keep on the agenda the dialogue; and the reconciliation fund, which would finance the projects for implementing the dialogue. The
most important tasks of this forum or council would include the preparation of the strategy for the long-term reconciliation process.

One of the core conditions for institutionalised dialogue would be the preparation of a catalogue of problems, between the two nations, which would encompass all historical and current problems that should be clarified in the course of the dialogue.

In addition to the framework of these institutions, clarification should also take place before the public, these issues should be discussed. In order to do so, media programmes for implementing these clarification discussions should be created. The outcomes of such clarifications should also be broadcast to the societies in the various forms and genres of media.

This should be a task primarily for Hungarians and Slovaks, while German foundations could also participate in it, even by sharing the German-French experience.

**My proposals to German foundations**

Out of the relationships in the civil sector outlined above, a lesson could be drawn that two aspects should be focused on in realising all further ideas for improving relations: the one is that Slovaks should be involved in the co-operation on as broad a basis as possible and as high a number as possible; the other is that it would be useful to involve Hungarians living in Slovakia in implementing this task in respect of giving ideas, making proposals, participation and mediation. The Forum Minority Research Institute of Slovakia is a very useful civil institution for the purposes of organising our activities aimed at improving relations.

Therefore, the key task is to promote collaboration between the civil initiatives of Hungarians in Slovakia and Hungarians in Hungary, and civil initiatives of Slovaks in Slovakia. Two civil formations operating in both countries are suitable for this: one is them consists of the two organisers of the ‘Bridge over the Danube’ programme mentioned above, Partners Slovakia and Partners Hungary Foundation (members of the Partners for Democratic Change International). The other is the Forum Minority Research Institute, a Hungarian entity in Slovakia.

Péter Hunčík, who implements the research and application of psychiatric and social psychology methods of conflict management, functions as a ‘one-person institution’ for improving relations (and he is a Hungarian living in Slovakia). The German foundations could support the teaching and expansion of his method and applied practice and the provision of forums, venues and opportunities for such activities.

The forms in which the methods, instruments and mechanisms of improving German-French relations can be implemented in the case of the Slovakia – Hungary relations should be investigated. Such methods might be adapted to the relationship in question.
It can be seen from the above as well that the greatest shortfall is in the personal, physical contact between the individuals of the two nations. Therefore, opportunities should be ensured for personal meetings, relations, contact and discussions. These should be ensured for as great a number of people as possible.

Children and youth meetings should be provided in school and extra-curricular forms (e.g., in the form of partner schools and school partnerships – many of these work in the Polish-Hungarian relationship), and possibilities should be provided for personal meetings between the young of the two nations. Bilateral school co-operation should be promoted (even by way of applications). This may take the form of language camps (with Slovak-Hungarian language teaching, or even in the form of English language or German language camps), competitions, presentations, festivals.

Personal meetings between children, the young and adults should be promoted, disseminated, turned into a habit or tradition, for the purpose of mutually getting to know each other. Many topics and areas offer opportunities for this (such as culture, sports, information technology, spending leisure time, nature protection and others). The ideas may be taken from the practice of French-German reconciliation.

The venue and location of such meetings may even be third countries (as a neutral zone), such as German areas. Individuals and groups of the two societies should be urged and encouraged to take steps for establishing such relations.

Taking into account all the above, German foundations could launch separate project, possibly under the title: ‘Slovak-Hungarian reconciliation on a French-German pattern’. Or: ‘Central European reconciliation on a Western European model’.

To finish, I will outline some factors that may influence initiatives and activities aimed at improving the relations.

The Hungarian-Slovak relations are bad basically at the level of national politics, symbolic politics with an underlying national theme. There are rarely any tensions at sectoral and professional level, in the civil sector, at municipality and regional levels; the influencing factor is more the traditional Slovak suspicion.

We cannot or do not want to hear each other’s sensitivities. What is even sadder is that we are mutually unclear about that. The Slovak partner traditionally is very sensitive about messages coming from Hungary and is capable of understanding even recommendations made in good faith as ultimatums. Hungarian foreign policy underestimates this. The Hungarian party should have a clear understanding of what its messages sound like in Slovakia.

The two countries have different ideas about mutual relations. (According to Slovak government opinion, the Hungarian party treats the minority issue as an absolute, whereas the Slovak-Hungarian relationship has a number of other topics, aspects, affairs and interests. Slovak politics prefers to forget about the fact that the minority issue is a part of bilateral relations. The Slovak partner likes to treat the affairs of the fate and rights of Hungarians in
Slovakia as bagatelle. For Hungary, the situation of minorities is a common issue for us in the EU.

The Hungarian and Slovak diplomats usually emphasise that the interests of the two countries are the same in almost all respects. Sometimes they explain that it is difficult to find international relations that are tighter than the relationship between Hungary and Slovakia, because there are barely any issues on the agenda of the European Union, NATO and the United Nations in which the opinions of the two countries differ. Many also say that the histories, interests and the characters of the citizens of the two nations are more similar to each other than to any other nation, yet politicians emphasise differences. The two countries are so dependent on each other that they cannot be successful without the other. What is more, they are each other’s allies at all levels.

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