



**International  
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**SYNOPSIS**

of Ph.D. thesis  
**István Kollai**  
**Memory policy in Slovakia**  
**and the image of Hungarians in the Slovak society**

**dr. András Blahó**  
CSc

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**Department of World Economics**

# **SYNOPSIS**

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## **Content**

**I. Background of the research and rationale of the theme – p. 4**

**II. Applied methods – p. 6.**

**III. Survey outcomes – p. 7.**

**IV. Main references – p. 16**

**V. Publication of the author – p. 19.**

## **I. Background of the research and rationale of the theme**

### *Own background of the research*

The research builds upon the analyses of the Slovak historical awareness, collective remembrance and the politics of remembrance since 2004 and their impact on the Slovak-Hungarian relations. The background materials include a comparative terminological study of the key Hungarian and Slovak historical concepts (e.g. *Felvidék*/Upper Land - Slovakia, Hungarian Kingdom - Uhorsko, Pozsony - Bratislava); a comparative analysis of the Hungarian and Slovak history textbooks used after the Velvet Revolution; a study of the multinational historical heritage of Bratislava and, a comprehensive publication on the history of Hungarian-Slovak relations elaborated by a collective of authors. The above sources may be considered as the background of my doctoral dissertation thesis. (See the References.)

### *External sources of the research*

The analyses of the Slovak historiography, historiographical research and surveys, textbook and teaching policy guidelines constitute an essential part of the thesis. Despite their genre diversity, these papers relate to the reproduction of the Slovak collective remembrance and the national self-representation. One of the earlier trends applied in the thesis has been elaborated in the workshop of experts on the history of relations. The thesis also incorporates the findings of cooperation based on the platform of the Joint Commission of Hungarian-Slovak teachers of history (Szarka-Šutaj [2013]), activities of the Department of History, University of Eötvös Lóránd and the Central European Institute of the Catholic University of Peter Pázmány targeting the Hungarian-Slovak and Central European issues. (Kiss Gy. [2012], Käfer [2012].) The latter examines the evolution of the Hungarian and Slovak nations upon their cultural interactions, outlining the parallels and differences. In Slovakia, a similar workshops of Hungarian scholars functions at the University of Hans Selye in

Komárno and at the Forum Institute for Minority Research in Šamorín (Simon [2007], Vajda [2009]) examining the history of relations (in particular in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century) and the related didactic issues. On the Slovak side, particularly significant are the activities of the Historical Institute of the Slovak Academy of Sciences. From the perspective of postmodern historical science (Gyáni [2007]) they represent an important added value (Michela [2013]. Škvarna-Hudek [2013]). Equally important are the manifold activities of the University of P. J. Šafárik in Košice in the field of history teaching (Otčenášová [2010]) and those of the Institute of Social Science of the Slovak Academy of Sciences in Košice in the area of social and psychological research of the Hungarian - Slovak interethnic relations in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and history of Hungarian - Slovak historical events (Šutaj [2013]) as well as the research of the University of Prešov targeting the history of relationships in the early Modern Era (Kónya [2007]). Moreover, the Kalligram Publishing House also serves as a scientific workshop and, this thesis intensively drew from its publications related to the past images associated with mythicized ethno genesis (Findor [2011]) and the research of historical narratives in the literary texts (Bilik [2008]).

*The subject matter, theme and substantiation of the research*

It should be noted that the objective of this thesis is not a comprehensive overview of historical relations or solving the issues/explaining the history of relationships. It aims to provide a comparative study of the Slovak historical narrative along its entire time horizon based on the structure and priorities set out below:

- To focus on the elements of Slovak historiography and teaching of history associated with the shaping of the image of Hungarians during the teaching process.

- To examine the image of Hungarians in the Slovak society based upon the analysis of textbooks (and major historical synthesis) by examining the key general (terminological) issues and, to continue analysing the specific historical periods. The comparative nature of the study will be ensured by the comparison of Slovak history textbooks used in different periods, highlighting the relatively “permanent features” and variable tendencies in the Slovak narrative. The presentation of the Slovak narrative will be complemented by the information on the corresponding attitude in Hungary, but only at the level necessary to point out the differences that could be source of possible interethnic contradictions.
- Each chapter will be complemented by elements outside the textbooks policy (public opinion, public space) and from the sphere of the culture of remembrance to reflect the social establishment of the historical content. Their investigation is important in spite of the fact that their descriptive research is not easy, the methodology of the research in this regard is rather challenging. A special attention was devoted to the research of the available resources of historical awareness.

## **II. Applied methods**

The applied methods correspond to the well-established methods of analysing textbooks having a tradition on the Hungarian (Vajda [2009], Jakab [2007] as well as on the Slovak side (Otčenášová [2010], Findor [2011].), prevalingly qualitative analysis of the context, focusing, besides the apparent content, also on the latent contents (i.e. the use of epithets, the selection of content, avoided

themes). In some cases we also apply quantitative methods, the results of which can be summed up in charts (e.g. findings of socio-psychological surveys).

### III. Survey outcomes

**1. Research of terminology:** The Slovak historiography and textbooks traditionally distinguish between the name of Hungary before and after 1918. This apparent formal difference reflects a different perception: the Slovak historiography considers the historical Hungary a multinational state. The Slovak equivalent of Felvidék/Upper Land („Horniaky”, “Horná zem”) does not appear in Slovak history books, which reflects the attitude of the Slovak historiography, according to which this concept “*still recalls the traumatising historical experience of violent Hungarisation in many Slovaks*”. (Mannová [2003].) However, the term Slovakia (Slovensko) is commonly used even before 1918 as a geographical name, however, because of its reference to the Slovak nation, it also include an ethnicity aspect referring to earlier times. (Mannová [2003] 8., Dejepis-1 [2002] 158., Dejepis-2 [2002] 69.) The term “Uhorsko”/Kingdom of Hungary” (and its adjective form “uhorský”) constitutes a serious translating challenge from and to Slovak and Hungarian.

**2. Writing of historical names:** Since the 1970s, the policy of history has undergone serious changes, introducing e.g. a compulsory transcription of Hungarian names using Slovak phonetic. This process began as a tendency to “dehungarise” and can be considered as such to this day, causing confusion in the field of historical science as well as in the general historical discourse.

**3. The Great Moravian Tradition:** The quantitative analysis of the Slovak textbooks shows that the Slovak policy of history strongly emphasis the history of early Slavic nations. Even the early Slavic state formations partly appear as the predecessor of the Great Moravian Empire and, in the historical

remembrance they appear as an integral era constituting part of the Slovak national past, its uniform and glorious chapter.

**4. The narrative of the integration of the territory of today's Slovakia into the Hungarian Kingdom** is very strongly represented in the Slovak interpretation. (Dvořák-Mrva [1996] 16.) Recently a new trend appeared representing the Arpads as if its Vazul-branch had had a Slavic princely court in Nitra. (Krátké dejiny [2003]., Dejiny Slovenska [2000]). The Hungarian historiography considers the century between the arrival of the Hungarians to the Carpathian Basin and the establishment of their state a factor that makes continuity of the Moravian Empire and ecclesiastical structures unrealistic. (Szarka-Šutaj [2013].)

**5. The Slovak interpretation of the establishment of the Hungarian State:**

There is apparent continuity in the Slovak narrative, according to which the Hungarians had taken over the principal elements of Western civilization from the ancestors of the Slovaks. (Dejepis-1 [2002].) The theory of the continuing Moravian civilization and culture is not only embodied in the one-sided Slovak-Hungarian acculturation, but also in the moment of persistence of the former Moravian Empire, its system of counties and early Slavic religious centres.

**6. The Duchy of Nitra:** According to Hungarian historians it was established according to the tradition of the Turks; others claim that it was established because of family disputes and unresolved inheritance issues. (KMTL [1994] 261.) On the contrary, the Slovak historiography traditionally claims (and lately it came to the forefront again) that the Duchy of Nitra was a continuation of the Moravian Empire.

**7. Establishment of the Hungarian Kingdom and attempts to define the Slovak nation:**

The modern Slovak textbook narrative and historiography consider the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century as the beginning of the use of the concept of the Slovak nation. (Dejiny Slovenska [2000] 98.) The opinion of the Hungarian



historiography is rather opposing, since it dates the formation of the Slovak nation back to the end of the medieval period, as the result of the merge of the native Slavs, the immigrant Poles and Moravians arriving to the area after the Tatar raids. (KMTL [1994] 652.-653.)

**8. The Slovak interpretation of the medieval history of Hungary:** The Slovak history perceives this period from a rather ethno-regional perspective, considering it a neglected period dominated by the pessimistic narrative established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century about “thousand years of oppression”. The Slovak history traditionally emphasises two elements of this period: the small kingdom of Matthew Csák and the period of the Hussites as perceived predecessors of the Slovak statehood. Both elements became part of the Slovak literary tradition, but ultimately they were removed from the Slovak national canon of historiography. The Slovak interpretation of the medieval coexistence of the two nations can be characterized by the tendency to fill up these centuries “without history” with events, figures and content, mostly disasters endured together (e.g. the Tatar raids or the Battle of Mohács concluding the medieval period). The Arpads continue to be marginalised figures of the Slovak historical remembrance, only mentioned in connection with their internal conflicts; except St. Stephen, their legal and statehood activities are not mentioned. However, the sovereigns of merged dynasties became “fashionable” due to their power politics, cultural achievements at the European level and their strong Czech-Polish ties. Their significant position was further enhanced by their urban development policies greatly affecting the territory of today's Slovakia, the results of which are still present in the local remembrance of the concerned towns.

**9. Slovak interpretation of the period of Turkish domination** highlights the increase of the value of Upper Hungary concurrently with the victimisation of its population. (Dvořák-Mrva [1996].) The strong Czech-Slovak ties (including

the Czech cultural influence) in the period of Turkish domination are highly appreciated. (Dejepis-2 [2002] 17.). The Hungarian historiography indicates significant Hungarian-Slavic-Slovak cultural interactions over those centuries, which the Slovak narrative - in the shadow of the mutual Czech-Slovak fateful connection and cultural influence - does not even recognise; but, in essence, they had not become integral part of the Hungarian collective remembrance either. (Kollai [2013].)

**10. The Hungarian-Habsburg conflict and Rákóczi's War of Independence:** The anti-Habsburg actions are highlighted and viewed generally positively by the Hungarians. On the Slovak part, they were only vaguely mentioned in the past in connection with Thököly, and a generally negative interpretation prevails in the present Slovak textbooks indicating that the uprisings facilitated the procedure of Hungarianisation, while Slovakia is represented as a territory destroyed by war and its people as victim of the war events.

**11. Ethnic relations and national awareness in the Middle Ages and early Modern Era:** The Slovak textbooks represent the Slavs as a continuous, autochthonous and majority population in this territory since the Middle Ages (since the 10<sup>th</sup> century referring to Slovaks).(Kollai [2013], Dejepis-1 [2002] 217., Krátke dejiny [2003]). The Slovak attitude emphasises the multinational context of the centuries of coexistence. This attitude is rather contradictory to the Hungarian historiography, according to which there were extensive uninhabited territories in the North in the early centuries of the Hungarian Kingdom, and the Slavs did not form an organic ethnic unit. The Hungarian narrative does not see any proof that with regards to the Slovaks any ethno-regional or pre-modern collective national awareness could be anticipated until the beginning of the early Modern Era. It is also a dilemma for the Slovak interpretation that the name of the Slovak nation and geographical name of

Slovakia appears rather late in the historical sources.

From the viewpoint of the Hungarian-Slovak relations, the Middle Ages and the early Modern Era – the period of “populating” the centuries of coexistence by the Slovaks - is an inspiration as well as a challenge. This pre-modern and territorially defined “Hungarus” identity lasting several centuries and the feudal and religious fragmentation is often difficult to incorporate into a purely Hungarian or Slovak ethno-centric process of historical development, although there was a number of such attempts. This phenomenon – “the dissemination of the common history” and filling in the “white spots” with the Slovak historical awareness is not unprecedented, but due to its intensity it is considered a relatively new trend. (Jakab [2013], Michela [2008].) Since the change of the political regime, a number of disputes occurred in the politics of remembrance because certain Hungarian historical figures were declared to be “Slovaks”, causing tension even at the diplomatic level. Since the Velvet Revolution and establishment of independent Slovakia, the new scientific synthesis has purposely started emphasising the integration of the history of the Hungarian Kingdom into the Slovak history. (Dejiny Slovenska [2000], Mannová [2003].) This process was also facilitated by the (re)discovery of the cultural heritage in the territory of Slovakia, which can, through its touristic utilisation, affect the recollections of the millennium of coexistence.

**Chart 1. Cultural heritage as a tourist destination in Slovakia**

Sites included in the official promotional materials of the Slovak Tourist Board	National heritage	Architectural monuments	
		“Common heritage”	Slovak heritage
	39.0%	44.1%	16.9%

*Source: Regional publications of the Slovak Tourist Board, 2008.*

**12. The Slovak interpretation of the Revolution 1848-1849:** The basic difference between the Slovak and Hungarian interpretation lies in the fact that while the Slovak narrative focuses on the Slovak resistance, the Hungarian narrative is basically unaware of the Slovak military actions, considering it isolated and radical, without hitting power and separated from the majority of the Slovak population; the Hungarian historical remembrance does not even know about Slovak military activities.

**13. The assimilation processes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century:** The analysis of textbooks and other areas of remembrance policy indicates that the recollections of Hungarisation and assimilation still constitute a sensitive part of the Hungarian-Slovak interethnic relations. The natural assimilation intensely investigated by the Hungarian historiography and accepted as an existing phenomenon is, in principle, not known or recognised by the Slovak interpretation. The representation of the events, political and societal history of the period of dualism associated with the politics of assimilation in the Slovak textbooks of different periods includes many similar elements outlining a negative picture of the Hungarian politics.

**14. Trianon and the Slovak-Hungarian border:** In the Slovak interpretation of the military collapse ending the WW I and the disintegration of Hungarian Monarchy, the ethnic composition of the region, including the issues of the Slovak-Hungarian border, remain in the background. The textbook interpretations use key concepts describing Slovakia as an a priori existing entity. (Dejepis-3 [2005]). In the Slovak history, the Treaty of Trianon is not as dominant as it is in the Hungarian collective remembrance. Even the very concept of “Trianon” evokes a rather negative feeling, as it is associated with irredentism, revisionism and a perceived threat to the nation. In this sense, “Trianon” constitutes a trauma also for the Slovaks – a trauma of uncertainty.

The Czech-Slovak relationship was also triggered by the fact that the new Hungarian-Slovak borderline was not obvious. One of the reasons is the perception of the “national territory” dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, established in the folk songs and political pamphlets, identifying the Slovak national territory from the Tatra Mountain to the Danube River and, in the minds of the Slovak intelligentsia the Danube symbolised a sort of “internal border”. (Bílik [2008].) In the eyes of the Slovak elite and intelligentsia, Danube as the borderline was a “national evidence”.

#### **15. Czechoslovakia between WWI and WWII and the Hungarian minority:**

In the interwar period, the context of Slovak historical texts in different periods was determined by the situation of Slovakia within Czechoslovakia. Except for some general issues, the textbooks do not refer to any problems of the Hungarian minority indicated in the Hungarian historiography and textbooks with regard to the interwar Czechoslovakia.

**16. The Revisionism and the Vienna Arbitration:** While the Hungarian policy of remembrance shows an ambivalent picture of the Horthy era, the Slovak interpretation in the textbooks characterises it to be a harsh dictatorship. From the Hungarian revisionist actions, the Slovak narrative only mentions the first Vienna Arbitration (in Slovak simply referred to as Vienna Arbitration), representing Slovaks as a nation persecuted by the Hungarian state, which gives it a strong emotional charge. The losses of Slovaks are articulated similarly (same concepts, similar rhetoric) as the Hungarian rhetoric developed in conjunction with the Trianon (e.g. in consequence, some areas of “Slovak” agriculture and mining were lost). (Dejepis-3 [2005].) On the contrary, the Hungarian history considers the adjustment of the border based on the ethnic principle fair. The situation of minorities in both countries is also presented in a contradictory way: the Hungarian historiography and collective consciousness

of historians considers the existence of a large Slovak community in Hungary an assumption, distortion. (Kollai [2013].)

**17. The Beneš decrees:** It is not immediately obvious from the comparison of the textbooks that the Beneš decrees constitute one of the heaviest burdens of the Hungarian-Slovak interethnic relations; a kind of time-bomb that again and again puts a strain on the bilateral relations. Compared to the Hungarian narrative, the Slovak interpretation emphasises the contractual nature of the exchange of inhabitants and, its forced nature is not emphasised so much; it accentuates that the population was deprived of its rights according to “European standards” as if it was a Euro-compliant phenomenon; and claims that the history of outlawry started in 1938 with the Vienna Arbitration, and that the Beneš politics was only a consequence. Such approach of the Slovak interpretation to the Vienna Arbitration associated with Beneš decrees is rather common. (Dejiny Slovenska [2000] 264.-265, Krátke dejiny [2003] 300.) As regards the general concept of Beneš decrees, after the revolution the previously taboo topics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were “unleashed”, which, however, does not mean that the knowledge became rapidly disseminated, nor the convergence of opinions. The Hungarian public opinion associates the Beneš decrees with the deprivation of rights and the unacceptable principle of collective guilt; on the contrary, the Slovak political rhetoric associates the decrees with the short period of post-war democracy in Czechoslovakia, post-war recovery of the country and Potsdam-based “the new arrangement of the world”.

#### **18. The policy of remembrance on a non-state level**

In addition to the textbook, other analysed themes also indicate that the Slovak policy of remembrance can be shaped on a non-state level as well. We can provide examples of many Hungarian historical figures appearing and having ties with the regions or towns with majority Slovak populations (e. g. Nagy

Lajos in Skalica, Charles I of Hungary in Kremnica). The decentralised public administration makes it possible to display the local history on public spaces. Moreover, the role of the Hungarian civil sector and local authorities is also significant in the field of satisfying the interest of the Slovak society in the centuries of mutual coexistence. (e.g. the cultural heritage of Bálint Balassi in Modrý Kameň or Zvolen, or the Rákoczi cult in Košice.) (Lacika [2013].)

### **19. Literature and the historical remembrance**

The Slovak national literature developing in the 19<sup>th</sup> century monumentalised the period of the Great Moravian Empire, which does not mean that it does not cover at all the period of the Hungarian Kingdom, although in this regard we cannot speak about monumentalising. The centuries of the Hungarian Kingdom, the “era of coexistence” is rather represented as a historical background or a lesson learned by the nation. The Slovak historicising literature focuses on the period of Turkish domination, historical events associated with the Hussites, and introduces an idealized picture of King Matthias. (Bílik [2008] 59.) Later, after the establishment of Czechoslovakia and the end of romanticism, the specific historical topics got into the background, but the characters associated with the Slovak self-representation (e.g. the tradition of a poor lad) continued to appear. A rather significant role was played by the site-specific historical and promotional literature, the influence of which on the local and national identity has been confirmed by surveys. (Hlôšková [2008])

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