THE FORMATION AND TRANSFORMATION OF THE MINORITY AND REGIONAL INSTITUTIONAL SYSTEM IN THE SERBIA OF THE NEW MILLENNIUM

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Abstract. The present treatise is based on the assumption of political history that political minorities in Central Europe appeared and created their movements of regional demarcation in parallel with the formation of the representational systems (of majority election). This scientific meta-context of the paper is Luhmann’s social theory (: systems theory). The structural logic of political and administrative demarcating attempts is explicated with such a terminology. Its conclusion is that, without reconsidering the structural causes of regionalism and minoristaion (e.g. the democratic deficit of power/legislative participation), both the attempts of regionalization and the institutional systems of minorities can provide only a symptomatic treatment for the contemporary problems of regional and social inequalities.

1. RAISING THE ISSUE

One of the greatest political challenges of the 21st century is the local treatment of global social risks. Among these the legitimate articulation of interest – the establishment of institutions promoting the involvement of an ever-growing layer of voters into decision-making – is of utmost importance. By the spreading of universal suffrage and the appearance of the so-called electoral democracies in the former Eastern block the focus of the problem seems to be shifted. Today the attention is concentrated on the structural weaknesses of democratic popular representation – the foundational institution of
democracy – which derive from its internal logic. These include the possibility to articulate the minority interest and its loss in today’s parliamentary systems.

1.1. The social-theoretical foundation of the problem
In the 20th century social theory and empirical sociology made great efforts to find explanations for institutionalized social inequalities: for their formation, the process of their institutionalization and for the moral judgements relating to the driving forces hiding behind them (Angelusz 1997, p. 6-7). Within social theories, relative consensus has been established concerning the existence of vertical social differences in the field of the perception of this group of phenomena. The same cannot be said in connection with horizontal social differences, although the institutionalization of inequalities can be traced back continuously since majority representative systems were gaining ground. Paradoxically, one of the main sources of this process was the new form of rule, majority representation, which was becoming more and more dominant. While this form of rule – with the spreading of suffrage – extends the circle of social layers which can be included in political decision-making, at the same time it excludes some social groups permanently. By forcing them into the role of the ‘eternal loser’ it transforms them into minorities.

The point of the exclusion mechanism is that the majority parliamentary representation, as the most wide-spread and least unfair form of the exercise of power, creates so-called primary majorities. Primary majority can be considered as more or less homogeneous in the main dimensions of political community establishment.

The reassessment of the state’s role in the 19th century greatly contributed to the intensification of horizontal inequalities. The main difference between the 18th and 19th century is the change of the medium of rule from master/subject relationship to majority representation (Luhmann 2002, p. 58). From the aspect of political will formation, the latter is characterized by the duality of being in power / forced into opposition. The significant difference between the 19th and 20th century can mainly be demonstrated by the gradually changing formation of state involvement (redistribution). The level of state intervention increased from the minimum at the beginning (defence, infrastructure) to the level of redistribution, which exceeded one-third, but in wealthy and socialist states sometimes the two-thirds of revenues (Kolosi 2000, p. 60). At first it took education under its own supervision and incorporated it into its scope of activities, then by controlling the institutions of marriage and birth it tried to push the churches into the background. At the same time it forced (gently or by less polished means) mass media to operate by observing regulations which provide competitive advantage to its own, and beside this mainly for the interests of the primary majority. These are the main lifeworld- and system-dimensions which – beyond decision-making / will formation – affected the depression of people living on the edge of society, in the process of minoritization [the institutionalized horizontal social differences].

1 This was crucial in the minoritization of secondary majorities: by referring to the interest of the state (the interest of the primary majority) it was possible almost any time to limit their public articulation of interest.
2. THE ACTUAL RELATIONS TO THE INCIDENTS IN THE EXAMINED AREA

Practically it is only October 2000 since we can talk about general, equal and secret elections in Serbia and Vojvodina. In 2003, after getting over the initial difficulties, the institutional system of the freshly forming electoral democracy started on the way of consolidation. However, within the primary majority the priorities regarding the issues of territorial unity (the prevention/recognition of Kosovo’s secession) and supranational integration (EU Accession) have not been definitely decided so far.

The policies of the European Union which are based on regional foundations and aim at the cohesion of the accessed countries highlighted some average (NUTS 2 level) potential solutions of the issue which encouraged the creativity of the regions. Let us think, for example, on the settlement practice of the British and the Spanish ethnic minorities or the Belgians and the Italian national minorities dating back several decades, which combined to more universal models by the new millennium. These solutions, as the minimum of democracy, are precedents for countries aiming to join the EU. Among others things, this motivates Serbia when it tries to provide EU-conform answers with the local forms of territorial and personal autonomies for the challenges arising from its multiethnic population- and heterogeneous territorial structure. A local example for territorial autonomy is the regionalization of Vojvodina, which was a grassroots initiative, and the so-called statute debate related to it. The example for personal autonomy would be the representation of national minorities as separate cultural worlds: the establishment of the so-called national councils. This study aims to highlight the political emergence of the problem by examining the case of Hungarians in Serbia. As a framework of interpretation the social theory of Niklas Luhmann is used.

In the course of analysis we want to handle the following topics separately:
1. institutions actually established/being established due to political compromises²,
2. the reception of these institutions in political discourses
3. the perspective inhering in these institutions: the social-theoretical consequences of the perspective of evolution from a monolith national state into the equal community of the partner-nations.

2.1. The legal framework of minority existence in Serbia after 6th October 2000

In September 2000 Vojislav Koštunica inflicted such a great defeat on Milošević that it could not be eased by face-lifting the results and forcing the challenger into a second round. All this happened on 5th October. However, the new elite was not able / did not want to fulfil entirely the increased social expectations, either. To mark this, the expression the 6th October came into general use in reflections on politics as the symbol of unfulfilled expectations and unperformed reforms.

After the mentioned event the preparations for the legal settlement of the situation of minorities which were satisfying for the majority of the concerned³ also started. One of the

² Here we wish to emphasize the different perspectives of searching compromise and consensus: the first one is only capable of easing (correcting) the examined structural anomaly, the latter may also terminate the anomaly by creating a new form of rule (e.g. the so-called deliberative democracy).
first steps was the Charter on Human and Minority Rights and Civil Freedoms adopted by the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. This was adopted by the Council of Citizens, i.e. the Federal Assembly of Serbia and Montenegro on 28th February 2003, and it was also ratified by The National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia on its session of 26th February 2003. In this charter those fundamental rights were listed which were considered normative by the state union, including several relating to the situation of minorities. In that particular constitutional situation this was the highest forum where such things could be declared.

2.2. The draft of the Act on the Legal Status of Minorities

The draft of the minority act included in the title of the chapter was prepared. When analysing it in detail, Miodrag a. Jovanović discovered the following (comp.: Jovanović 2004, pp. 167-194). First of all, the draft uses the term national minority as a collective term for minorities in different situations and of different origins in order to be able to regulate their situation in one, although their situations are sociologically different (ib. p. 274). The draft itself is highly liberal and it has great significance beyond the basic principles posited in international expectations. According to its writers, this legal act not only accomplishes the constitutional rights of minorities but also greatly contributes to their political integration into Serbian society. The first two articles of the draft, which consists of 6 parts and 25 articles, include the general regulations on minorities. Jovanović states that despite the fact that collective rights are mentioned already in the first article, the draft – considering its character – rather concentrates on the elaboration of individual rights (ib. pp. 267-268). He welcomes the fact that the draft, contrary to the general political trend, attempts to provide a definition of the term minority. The definition includes such basic principles as: (1) being attached to the territory of the state for a long period of time; (2) specific characteristics that distinguish the minority from the majority; and (3) solidarity within the community (comp.: Győri Szabó, p. 48.). These principles are treated in great detail, so the aspects of language and religion are also included in the definition. It is a good point in the regulation that it offers a large scope for future changes. Those social groups which, due to their cultural heritage or historical origin, want to define themselves in the future as minorities, may expect a favourable judgement.

2.3. The new Serbian constitution and the minorities

Realising the irreversible tendency of the secession of the province of Kosovo, Serbia decided to take such a symbolic step which – without the pressure of external circumstances – it was not inclined to take in the past three years. In a few months the new constitution was compiled and the MPs had only 12 hours (!) to discuss it in the parliament. Even so, considering the current situation the statute was adopted in a very short time and in such accordance that had not been experienced since October 2000. The main drive of this fast consensus was the condition of the preamble which stated that Kosovo was the integral part of Serbia. This new constitution, which was adopted without a real democratic debate,

3 The Albanians of Kosovo could not be included in this process.
4 Here we would like to draw the attention to the fact that minoritization is not a closed process: through the shifting of big political groups new primary majorities and, therefore, new minorities may emerge.
5 We also consider this as an important development, which breaks the habit of listing minorities in so-called residual (doomed to evanescence) categories, and handles them as communities which are still able to rise from society.
also contains articles regulating the situation of minorities (75-81). Aleksandar Gajić highlights the following as positive values:
1. the constitutional guarantee of the institution of national councils founded since 2002,
2. the prospect of changing minority rights under stricter conditions,
3. the mixed nature of national and civil self-definition on behalf of the state,
4. and that the definitions of articles on minorities coincide with other declarations included in other legal acts of the state union (Gajić 2007, pp. 60-65).

At the same time he also draws attention to the fact that the territorial autonomy based on ethnology will not be realisable on the basis of the constitution in the future, either. In connection with this he also emphasizes that the territorial autonomy based on ethnology is not listed in exemplary European recommendations as a condition for the ’EU-conform’ settlement of the situation of minorities either.

The new Constitution of the Republic of Serbia is undoubtedly a big step towards the establishment of modern constitutionality, and that also includes minority rights. By its adoption the legal and institutional vacuum which emerged with the disintegration of the state union Serbia and Montenegro was filled, and so the constitutional framework of the regulation of the situation of minorities also ceased to exist for a while, and consequently one of the apparent and successful efforts of the political efforts of the post-October period was also exposed to danger (Gajić 2007, p. 66).

2.4. The relevant minority existence and the divided Serbian political public life

After 6th October 2000, in the midst of the post-Octobrian skirmishes in the parliament, the democratic institutional system had difficulties in becoming consolidated. Wolfgang Merkel and his colleagues listed the state union among the so-called defective democracies (defekte Demokratie). Moreover, in their study published in 2007 they evaluated the overall performance of Serbian democratic institutions under 7 out of 10 (comp.: Merkel 2003, 2006, 2007). Dušan Pavlović and Slobodan Antonić sees the reasons of this in the fact that after the overthrow of President Milošević and his system, the primary interest of the new political elites was the actual and smooth takeover of power. In this fight not much energy and honest intention remained for the actual and all-embracing transformation of the democratic institutional system. „...the major dilemma of social transformation lies not in the established institutions – the election, multi-party parliament, free media, independent court, etc. – facilitating the overthrow of power, but in whether somebody remembers after the coming election to restore the old system by dissolving the newly built institutional system“ (Pavlović–Antonić 2008, p. 23).

Among the dangers of the restoration of the old system, the role of minorities possessing democratic attitude in parliamentarism was revalued. Society wanted to involve them in the political life ruled by the majority society not only with the constitution and the letter of the law (promises); they were actually needed: their mandates at forming a cabinet and their votes at presidential elections.

Serbia has been in constant crisis: the peculiar geopolitical situation that leaves the main political participants struggle in the captivity of the Kosovo-issue, often, but at least at each election, reprograms the parties: they always have to form their view pro/contra an
issue⁶, which seems to simplify the articulation of political interests. Meanwhile, some people take an explicit view of hating minorities. Minorities felt that their political part was revaluated⁷ – accordingly, they started to set up their own home⁸. Simultaneously, they also had to face that – in case of the occasional restoration of the national consensus – the forces composing primary majority are not really interested in their aspects. Neither the internal motivation of the political elite in majority, nor the international recommendations are capable of enforcing the consideration of the peculiar interests of minorities independently from the actual games of power. As regard of minorities, we are far from being a consensus democracy.

3. NATIONAL COUNCILS

3.1. The challenges inhering in corrective tests

According to our opinion, the institution of national councils is a potential stress-releasing alternative for the structural anomaly of majority representation. In its Serbian form it is a so-called proto-representation. With its representative forum adjusted to the number of minorities – in the case of Hungarians it covers 35 persons – this form is capable of providing deliberative political ground for the establishment of policies destined to represent the identity of minorities.⁹ It mainly has the function of allocating resources since it is only entitled to decide on the allocation of sums envisaged by the higher majority representative bodies (province, republic). The legal forms for their decisions are also provided by the public administration supervised by the majority society. Considering its function (competences) it is rather similar to a deconcentrated administrative body, i.e. by taking its own priorities into consideration it may dispose of the operation of the institutions it was able to obtain by fighting – beside the approval of the majority: community centres, theatres, educational institutions, research centres and the native-speaking media. These institutions are crucial for the preservation of minority lifeworld as a social separate world (Sondernwelt).

After all, through the national councils these separate worlds will not be self-sustaining, i.e. the national council is not the embodiment of personal autonomy, but it is a firm and positive step towards autonomy.

⁶ This rupture seems to stabilize now in the matrix of being against/for Europe and for/against Kosovo’s secession. The really relevant parties cannot/dare not take an explicit (exclusive) view in either question.
⁷ The so-called loyal (devoted/cooperative) minority parties organize their activities around the minority politics within the framework of compromise. In exchange, they can also take part in the decision-making about the disposable resources, which are sometimes significant. Of course, this also depends on the actual political power relations (games). Here and now we cannot elaborate on the classification of minority role-taking. We follow the text of Losoncz Alpár in which he applies the well-known division of Hirschmann (see the parts on loyalty = Hirschmann 1995) to minority existence (see Losonz 2002, pp. 261-265).
⁸ The title of the volume in italics, which is half-quoted (Otthonteremtőben a szülıföldön) [Setting up a home in the fatherland], practically communicates the stages of this process from the expert politician’s point of view: the aspect of the provincial Secretary of Minority Affairs, today the Minister – author (comp.: Korhecz 2009).
3.2. The evaluation of the institution

The representative character of national councils – beside the allocation of special sections of politics – ideologizes minority communities. In case of relevant but not homogeneous minorities, like the Hungarians in Vojvodina, the confrontational, ideological projection of political will formation imposes itself on the allocating function of the special sections of minority policies. The allocation of the narrow resources of the majority, the motherland and the international/future pre-accession (EU) can easily fall prey to the fight of minority elites, if they are not able to overcome their own internal conflicts of interests and values.

What at stake is in this moment is to what extent the institutions, which are established by a legitimate (general and not electoral) election now already according to the majority of Hungarians, will be capable of allocating the resources for their own separate- and lifeworld on the basis of consensus. And also how much the dominant political force within individual minorities gives in to the demon of power, and whether minority politics make the political decisions affecting its own community even in this peculiar field according to the logics of majority rule.

Due to the dominant position of the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians there is a greater chance for the latter and political culture does not encourage corporative solutions either.

Also from this aspect, the external social- and political-theoretical analyses, commentaries (also represented by us) and the establishment of a future institution with an evaluating function may have a crucial role from this aspect. It could highlight the possibilities which are inhering in the institution of national councils and cannot be properly realized from the perspective of the daily routine of minority policing. It could also highlight the restrictions resulting from the corrective character of the institution. It may extend the minorities’ scope of action and throw cold water on unsubstantial expectations, so that for lack of adequate success the judgement of national councils does not become counterproductive. That could namely mean that experiencing failure would also hinder the development of the institutional management of the minority issue.

4. THE INSTITUTIONS OF SEPARATION IN CONNECTION WITH THE TERRITORY: THE REGION AND THE STATE

4.1. From peaceful separation/secession to secession involving conflicts

The consolidation of the Serbian change of regime was followed by the emergence of three main topics between 2004 and 2009. The first series of events was the disintegration of the asymmetric state union of Serbia-Montenegro. In this respect Serbia was doomed to passivity. Montenegro exclusively exercised its sovereignty even within the state union de facto. This led to the referendum of 2006 when Montenegro decided on independence.

The other problem, which Serbia has not been able to solve formally so far, is the autonomy effort of Kosovo. The rights of the province for sovereignty are not so explicit as the ones of Montenegro were, which led to its secession. However, Kosovo had been under international protectorate since 1999 de facto, so Serbian power had only limited influence.
on the circumstances there. This influence actually covers (covered) only the operation of the institutions of Serbs living in minority in Kosovo. The proclamation of Kosovo’s independence and its international recognition forced the otherwise EU-friendly Serbian government and Serbian President Boris Tadić in an ambiguous situation. According to the preamble of the new constitution Kosovo is an integral part of Serbia\footnote{Considering also that the Province of Kosovo and Metohija is an integral part of the territory of Serbia, that it has the status of a substantial autonomy within the sovereign state of Serbia and that from such status of the Province of Kosovo and Metohija follow constitutional obligations of all state bodies to uphold and protect the state interests of Serbia in Kosovo and Metohija in all internal and foreign political relations”:\hspace{1em} http://www.puma.vojvodina.sr.gov.yu/etext.php?ID_mat=512 (As of 31st January 2010). The English text of the constitution is available on the website of Skupština: http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/eng/akta/ustav/ustav_1.asp (As of 31st January 2010).}. As a result of the amendment of the constitution President Tadić is not entitled to recognize the independence and politically he does not consider it profitable either. Meanwhile, this uncomplying attitude concerning Kosovo significantly narrows Serbia’s scope for action in regard of its EU-accession aspirations.

Here we would like to highlight that at the level of states this sovereignty-anomaly does not seem to be resolvable provisionally either. In this respect, Serbia’s situation is rather similar to the situation of Hungary between the two World Wars. Today the antagonistic position of Serbians and Albanians concerning the sovereignty of the Province of Kosovo can be compared with the Rumanian-Hungarian 'relationship' at the beginning of World War II\footnote{According to a popular anecdote, when Hungary declared war upon the USA, it was forced to admit that it did not have any territorial demands on the USA; at that time it had such demands (among others) on Rumania but Rumania was part of the same alliance as Hungary.}. Both parties intend to reach/get into the same place: they both have aspirations for EU-membership. It is to be feared that the settlement of the Western Balkan-issue will not be realized until the wished/planned point of time, i.e. the centenary of the eruption of the 1st World War, because of the national state-level opposition of the southern countries of the region (Serbia, Kosovo, Macedonia). It is also possible that by a simultaneous EU-accession the problem could be handled at a higher level. However, this would necessitate an actual change (concerning the attitude) on behalf of all parties concerned.

4.2. Regionalism versus minority territorial autonomy

The third problem which was raised is rather of a symbolic nature: it was the issue of unitary state \textit{vs.} regionalisation. By the actual formation of this issue we can still experience the political games of the past. As an integral part of Tito’s games of politics, the Constitution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, adopted in 1974, ensured greater regional scope for action for Vojvodina and Kosovo from a certain point of view, as opposed to the centralisms developing on federal levels and being organized on national basis (e.g. the so-called \textit{Croatian Spring}). László Gulyás summarizes the contradictory consequences of these steps in the following:

„...the investments were not realized in proportion to the production of GDP at regional level, i.e. a part of the GDP of the developed republics was spent on the undeveloped ones. That means, the developed areas (…), e.g. Vojvodina, were the sufferers of the redistribution of revenues (…). The solution of Tito did not work because, on the one hand, the results did not satisfy the Slovenian and the Croatian nations and they did not solve the
Albanian issue in the long run. On the other hand, also Serbians felt that the Yugoslav state discriminated them” (Gulyás 2010, pp. 112-113). Even today the heritage of this loser-loser game is forming the attitudes concerning Vojvodina. The ones who want to regionalize make a grievance of the economic consequences and the newer disadvantages arising from centralization (Jovanov 2005, p. 26), and the ones who reject regionalization make a grievance of the potential secession which, according to them, is hiding behind the regionalization effort. The major issue of today was shaped in relation to the ‘restoration option’ of the actual autonomy of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (VAT), in the framework of the so-called statute-debate. Its point is the question whether – under the current circumstances in Serbia – legislative and executive (money-distributing) scopes of authority can be assigned to the representational elements of territorial separation, which have already been ensured so far by the independent assembly of Vojvodina.

The debate, which dragged on for years, became relevant in autumn 2008, when the new statute of the province was formulated and then adopted by the provincial assembly. The National Assembly of Serbia (Skupština) could not / did not want to place the ratification of the provincial statute on the agenda for more than a year, although it was necessary also at a republic-level. The situation almost brought up the regional pillarisation of Serbian politics. However, this did not occur, although it cannot be fully excluded in the long run. The issue of provincial spheres of activity is clearly not a minority issue. It cannot become one since the breakdown of Vojvodina by ethnozography is 66% Serbian and 34% minorities. So the minorities would not be able to outvote the primary majority, no matter how much they would like it and how much the believers of the Serbian unitary state would represent it as a danger. They would not be able even if the organizational scopes of autonomy were expanded. Here the expansion of autonomy is of an economic/territorial character, which only indirectly affects the interest articulation of minorities. On the one hand, it is evident that at provincial level – due to their numbers – they have a greater power to enforce interests, e.g. at this level they can more easily become communities providing relevant parties. On the other hand, from a minority aspect, the authorization of the so far formal autonomy of Vojvodina with real competences of self-government does not mean territorial autonomy. This holds true even if the minorities themselves did not (or not properly) emphasize this. The generalization between the regional and the ethnic-minority autonomies of Vojvodina in the political communication may be the result of the fact that the present president, the former vice president, of the provincial assembly came from the dominant Hungarian minority party, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians. This fact could easily generate the idea that the autonomy effort had a minority character, from which the minority only tried to distance itself in the last months of the intensification of the statute-debate, and even then not very firmly.

\(^{13}\) The last time it was in 2005 when the professional debate on the status of Vojvodina became passionate. Comp.: the special issue of the specialist journal NSPM (New Serbian Political Thinking) entitled VUKANOVIC–SAMARDZIC [2005]: The issue of Vojvodina, and the work of Jovanov (2005): Vojvodina – the decline of a region.

\(^{14}\) Formally, autonomy did not end in the era of Milosevic.

\(^{15}\) This was finally done in the November-December period of the 2009 session. The ratified statute was promulgated at the festive session of the assembly of VAT on 14th December 2009.
4.3. The effect of regionalization on minority roles

However, the new statute of Vojvodina undoubtedly includes chapters which can influence the relationship between majority and minorities in a positive direction. We would like to draw the attention to Article 40 of Part IV, which could mean the establishment of an innovative negotiation [deliberative] conciliation mechanism. However, these ideas appear only at the level of declaration. There is no knowing of what content the parties will be able to provide for the new forms. For the time being both the majority and the minority parties are occupied with the takeover of the scopes of authority and the political ‘penetration’ in the new dimension. It is to be feared, though, that this political game also rather tends to narrow down than consummate the deliberative potentials inhering in the new provincial institutions.

As we stated in connection with national councils, the independent, from daily politics distanced scientific and social-theoretical examination of the possibilities inhering in institutional frameworks and of the expectable difficulties would be needed also in regard of provincial autonomy. Unfortunately, neither in the country, nor within the region a special institutional infrastructure is disposable for this research, the drawing up of the potential outcomes and the objective judgement of the actual achievements, which is free from party-political commitments.

5. SUMMARY

Our raising of the issue intended to demonstrate the process in the course of which the minorities (in a political sense) which came into being by the change of form within the medium of power, create territorial separation movements (secession/federalization/zoning) as a result of the logics of the same form. The primary purpose of this is to get rid of their own minority existence, i.e. to be able to gain influence in at least some segments of politics beside the principle of majority. This state can only be realized partially beside the present political forms: by the establishment of corrective institutions. The next step could be a future deliberative form of rule. Some elements of its properties can be found at the level of declarations in the statute of Vojvodina. The social-theoretical thinking about deliberative power and its application on specific situations is also crucial: it may facilitate the institutionalization of the forms of enforcement of ethnic/minority interests in consensus with the majority society throughout Europe and the world.

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*The researches were supported by the NATIONAL SCIENTIFIC AND INVESTIGATIONAL FUND (ORSZÁGOS TUDOMÁNYOS ÉS KUTATÁSI ALAP) (application number: PD 76004),


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