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**Eastern Slovakia, Kosice and Spiš in the autumn of 1918.
Northeast Hungary in a governmental and regional approach**

Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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I. The subject of the dissertation

In my dissertation I examine the linguistic-cultural and political identity of the “eastern Slovak” (Slovak) ethnic group living in the counties of Sáros, Szepes and Abaúj-Torna in north-eastern Hungary, the appearance of Hungarophilic aspirations among them and the intensified identity-political struggles in the months of the 1918 imperial change. I also show how the Ministry of Nationalities of the Károlyi government and the minister without a portfolio, Oszkár Jászi, reacted to the ethnoregional movements that envisioned their future within the historical Hungarian state framework during the months of the dissolution of the Hungarian state.

Thus, through the double focus, I approach the events and alternatives of the change of empire in Košice, Prešov and Keszthely in the autumn of 1918. On the one hand, the movement of Slovaks of the Catholic, to a lesser extent Greek Catholic, similar to the Ruthenian (Ruthenian) nationality, speaking the Slovak dialect, its formation, the Hungarian-oriented orientation of their intellectual leaders who became Hungarian, and their partial, micro-regional self-determination aspirations contrary to the founding of the Czechoslovak state. On the other hand, I follow the development of Oszkár Jászi's views on the issue of nationality and their impact on the conditions in Sárosi, Spiš and Abaúj-tornna. The events of these two threads came together at several points in the fall of 1918, when the winners and losers of Central Europe hoped for the implementation of the Wilson principle of national self-determination, as imagined differently by all concerned.

The reason for my choice of topic is that the above questions rarely arose in Hungarian historiography, most of the previous works provide a simplistic picture. The collapse of the empire of 1918 and the centenary of the Treaty of Trianon drew attention to the question of the identity of Eastern Slovakia (in the Hungarian language of the time: “Eastern Lake”), which is largely characteristic of Sáros County, and especially of the 1918–1919 context. The same can be said about the Spiš and Košice aspects of the 1918 change of empire.

During the birth of modern Slovak nation-building nationalism, little attention was paid to these north-eastern counties in the movement's centers in northwestern Hungary - Turócszentmárton, Rózsahely, Vágújhely or even in Zvolen and Banská Bystrica. It is hardly a coincidence that Milan Hodža, who is most committed to mobilizing Slovak peasant-dominated society, referred to this region as, for example, “Slovak Macedonia”, a space of uncertain identity. The news of the Czech-Slovak unity movement, which intensified at the

beginning of the century, appeared in these Slovak counties at most among returning Americans and in the period before the First World War.

This was largely the reason why the patriotic social and cultural associations that set Hungarianization on their flag - with the powerful support of the Hungarian governments - using the local, regional dialect, tried to establish a partly independent, Hungarian-friendly Slovak identity in these three counties in the post-turn of the century.

The question arises, to what extent did the local Slovak elite, which was already trying to make the Sárosi dialect independent, think that their ethnoregional identity was a “natural” process? Just as it is worth examining in detail the extent to which the activities of the county's social associations have contributed to the separation and separation of "eastern Slovakia" using this specific dialect, which is somewhat connected between the Ruthenian and Slovak languages. on the literary Slovak language version recorded by the Štúrček. They realized that if they wanted to influence Slovakia, they could do it through the press. It is a question, for example, of how much *Naša Zastava*, written in the Eastern Slovak dialect, was read and whether he was able to make a serious impact in this region.

On the other level of analysis of the dissertation, I examine the nationality policy of Oszkár Jászi. Jászi, who was one of the leading figures of the progressive Hungarian intelligentsia that developed at the beginning of the 20th century, soon realized that the issue of nationality had become the Achilles heel of historical Hungary. Jász has been accused many times in the past and today of accusing that his work contributed to the disintegration of historical Hungary. In my reading, it is much more about this, and I would like to prove this in my work that, like István Tisza, who is committed to a dualistic system and well perceives the weight of the country's ethnic problems, Jászi was aware of the contradictions . However, in the last year of the First World War, the Károlyi government in Hungary, which became dependent on the development of peace agreements ending the conflict, had a much narrower margin of maneuver than the pre-war or even post-war Tisza administration.

Despite the failure of negotiations with the nationalities, Jászi persisted throughout the alternative of self-determination, which he considered to be the only one, to the principle of a referendum, which he later intended to be the most important element in preparing for the peace conference.

In the autumn of 1918, Viktor Dvorčák (Dvortsák) and the Slovak-speaking elite in Prešov, who had largely been Hungarianized, tried to reinterpret the former patriotic, cultural-assimilation movement of eastern Slovakia as a regional political movement. Despite the shortness of time, Dvorčák managed to create a political movement and tried to get involved in

the efforts to preserve the territorial integrity of the historical Hungarian state. The question arises as to whether the movement was backed by substantial social support or was it just an attempt by local elites to save the position?

The movement itself reached the creation of an “independent East Lake Republic,” and in its statements it referred to the Wilson idea. Why was this “begging state”, which could be documented for a few days in December 1918, thought viable, if at all, and how far did it go in organizing it? Within the region of north-eastern Hungary - examining the circumstances of the establishment of the Eastern Lake People's Republic - I found it useful and important to examine another pro-integrity experiment in the region, the Zipper Republic "proclaimed" by the Hungarian-philophilic group of Spiš. I was looking for the answer to what similarities and differences were observed in the creation of the two “states”. To what extent was the change of main power different in Spiš County than in Sáros and Abaúj-Torna County, where the situation and fate of Košice emerged as a key issue of national significance from the very beginning from a Hungarian point of view?

Košice is also partly related to the 1918 history of the Eastern Slovaks. In connection with the centenary, Slovak and Hungarian historiography also dealt intensively with the events of the city in 1918–1920, and examined how the leadership and population of Košice experienced the disintegration of the historical Hungarian state and the Czechoslovak military occupation. In my dissertation, I placed special emphasis on the activities of the city's government commissioner, Miklós Molnár, who played a key role in relaunching the city's post-war life. Remaining within the framework of the analysis I have outlined, I mainly examined how Miklós Molnár tried to meet the Hungarian needs and expectations expressed in Budapest at the head of the city moving to Czechoslovakia on the basis of international, great power and military decisions, and how the Eastern Slovak movement supported the idea of Hungarian integrity. Seeing the increasingly hopeless events, how did you prepare the city and its population for the Czechoslovak occupation? What measures and negotiations did you have with the Hungarian government and with the commander of the occupying Czechoslovak troops? By analyzing its activities, can we get an answer to the big question, how did the Hungarian Košice become the Czechoslovak Košice?

II. Research sources

The dissertation builds on three major source types. Documents from Eastern Slovakia can be found in several archives. In the course of my research, I had to face the fact that the amount of already fragmented source material is quite limited. First, I conducted systematic research in the Prešov State Archives (Štátny archív v Prešove). Here I mainly reviewed the documents of the Széchenyi Circle in Prešov and the Hungarian Public Cultural Association of Sárosvármegye. These two foundations provided an opportunity to gain an insight into the activities and history of Hungarian social associations embracing the identity of Eastern Slovakia. In addition, I reviewed the documents of the chief panic and subspecies of Sáros county covering the period 1906–1918. However, these funds contained only a small amount of documents relevant to me.

I carried out my research on Spiš in the archives of Levoča and Spiš. In Levoča, I reviewed the administration of the Alispán funds in the state archives. This contained most of the documents relating to the events of 1918. In Spišská Nová Ves I reviewed the minutes of the city of Kežmarok.

I also conducted research in Košice, in both the state and city archives. Here, too, the Alispán documents and city minutes were reviewed. It was the documents related to the change of empire in 1918 that were important for the dissertation.

My research in Hungary focused primarily on the funds of the National Archives of the Hungarian National Archives, which preserves the records of state bodies. In connection with the ministry of Oszkár Jászi, the documents of the ministry without portfolio entrusted with the preparation of the right of self-determination of the nations living in Hungary were unavoidable. In connection with the Eastern Slovaks, the 1918 and 1919 Highland archives preserved far more records than the Slovak archives. Here I found the memorandum of the Eastern Slovaks and a description of the most important events related to the autumn of 1918. In addition, I also researched the centrally filed documents of the Prime Minister's Office and, of course, thoroughly reviewed the minutes of the Council of Ministers. The latter provided important additions to the differences of opinion between the members of the Károlyi government regarding Oszkár Jászi's negotiations with the Slovaks.

The study of the contemporary press helped to fill the gaps in the archival sources and to fill in and understand the missing details. Therefore, I also relied heavily on contemporary Hungarian, German and Slovak newspapers. It should be mentioned that Jászi's ministerial statements and accounts of his activities appeared mainly in the columns of the *World and in the Twentieth Century*. For the Dvorčák movement, the Prešov Papers and their own

newspaper, *Naša Zastava*, contain the most contemporary information and reflections. I could choose from several press products about the events of 1918–1919 in the Highlands: thanks to the newspapers, the events of the Košice City Assembly could be reconstructed. Mainly *Košice Workers*, *Upper Hungary* and *Kassai Hírlap* proved to be important press sources. In connection with Spiš County, I used both Hungarian and German press products: *Spiš Hírlap*, *Szepesi Lapok* and *Karpathen-Post*.

III. The main results of the dissertation

Through the social life organized on the basis of the Eastern Slovak dialect of the counties of north-eastern Hungary, I examined the decisive role of the Hungarian (Hungarophile) political and intellectual elite in the community-forming role. The local Hungarianized Slovak elite, organized around Viktor Dvorčák, tried to support this mixed ethnic region with government support, taking advantage of the specific dialect and lack of contacts with the Slovak national movement, to form its own national identity and start a Hungarian-friendly movement. All this in order to direct the speakers of the Slovak dialect to the path of Hungarian assimilation by strengthening Hungarian patriotism, even in the face of strong American emigration.

The other aspect of the analysis is the examination of the autumn 1918 collapse of the multi-ethnic Hungarian Kingdom, which broke away from the dualist Monarchy, the policy of the Károlyi government regarding the separation of ethnic regions, including the ministerial actions of Oszkár Jászi. In Jászi's theoretical work, I follow his mental development on the issue of nationality, his ideas about possible solutions. He insisted on the principle of territorial integrity, although during his ministry he was clearly confronted with the fact that the integrity of a historic country would not be salvageable.

The defeat of the First World War created a new political framework, which was initially considered temporary and solvable by the members of the Hungarian political elite. This determined the possibilities of the Dvorčák movement, the room for maneuver of Miklós Molnár, the government commissioner in Košice and the shoes of Spiš, and the achievable goals. Through internal self-determination and the protection of the territorial integrity of the historical, multiethnic Hungarian state, the cantonal plan of Jászi and the partial ethnoregional political movement of the region developed at that time.

Jászi was well aware that these ethnoregional movements in northeastern Hungary were weightless in their own right. Their social base was weak. In both Sáros and Spiš counties, it was a gentry movement that was afraid of their largely lost positions, which only tried to use the given historical moment to save its way of life, wealth and influence. At the same time, the activities of Kassa and Miklós Molnár, government commissioners, were also acknowledged in Budapest, but they were forced to face the shortcomings and weaknesses of the Hungarian nation-state, which was about to disintegrate.

I also tried to prove with concrete data that the two cities, Košice and Prešov, were linguistically and religiously diverse social media at the beginning of the 20th century and even

before that, neither of which could be considered exclusively Hungarian or Slovak cities. The fate of the cities with a glorious Hungarian historical past was determined by the decisions of the great powers as well - in the words of Bibó - by the dusty villages. Paradoxically, this multiethnic medium, the many contacts of the nationalities of the counties proved to be suitable for the development of the peculiar ethnoregional identity of the Slovaks and the shoemakers in Sáros, Spiš and Košice, which tried to maintain its separation from the great power for some time.

We can say that the counties of the studied region tried to get involved in the research of local history and the self-representation of history within the framework of dualism. At the same time, the Hungarian intellectuals of Sáros, Spiš and Košice at the beginning of the 20th century tried to establish a separate identity in the county of Ajlov, based on the linguistic uniqueness of the counties, ie multilingualism and the Eastern Slovak dialect.

The Prešov Széchenyi Circle, which was established as a county initiative, partly nurtured the traditions of Prešov multilingualism, but also tried to serve the aspirations of the assimilation policy started in the Kálmán period of Tisza to promote Hungarianization. Nevertheless, the Circle worked hard among the urban bourgeoisie and the rural peasant population to promote cultural and intellectual development in the Hungarian language, by providing books and periodicals in Hungarian, by giving readings, and by holding music and poetry evenings.

The Slovak, returning from the United States, tried to join the Slovak national movement at home, using the experience of associations and politics abroad. It became more and more identified with its goals, the building of a unified Slovak national consciousness. All this prompted a reaction from the Hungarian leaders of the counties. One such counter-reaction was the establishment of the Sáros County Public Cultural Association. The main goal of the association was to counterbalance the sharply opposition Slovenský týždenník published by Milan Hodža in Budapest and to publish a weekly newspaper in the patriotic spirit, in Eastern Slovak. Naša Zastava was designed and published under the midwifery of the county chief, and its distribution was given greater weight in those districts in which the subscribers of the Slovak opposition newspapers lived in greater numbers.

The “eastern slovak” political action launched from the center of Sáros county and Prešov between 1907 and 1917 enjoyed the support of the other three counties of the region (Szepes, Abauj, Zemplén) and the central Hungarian government. During the change of empire after the First World War, only the Széchenyi Circle of social associations could continue to operate. The reasons for this are to be found in the fact that while the Széchenyi Circle was

fully established by the county society and organically helped its development regardless of nationality, apart from the intention of assimilation, it was positive even for the local Slovaks. The Hungarian Public Cultural Association of Sárosvármegy, on the other hand, was established with a strong Hungarianization intention and a purely political purpose in order to divide and counterbalance the Slovak national movement.

However, from the turn of the century, Hungarian nationality policy recognized that national movements based on ethnic regions in Hungary could not be counteracted by negative steps, prohibitions, or Hungarianization policies, and therefore tried to limit and influence ethnic movements through regional agricultural support actions.

At the end of the war, the idea of national self-determination, an important part of the peace plan referred to as Wilsonism, became widespread. The losers, including the entire Hungarian political elite - from Tisza to Károlyi and even Béla Kun - thought that this idea applied to them as well, that they could express their views at the peace conference and apply the principle of self-determination to them. In the fall of 1918, in the desire of the masses and in the orderly will of the victorious great powers, the feeling of revenge and the short-sighted idea of ruthless punishment glowed there.

The coalition government at a time Hungarianizer came to a dead end, in his critique of negativistic national politics, Tisza and Oszkár Jászi, undoubtedly one of the best national politicians of the period, came to more or less the same position. The differences between them did not affect the integrity of the country, but the way and goal of increased cooperation with nationalities.

In the fall of 1918, he fell to pieces of the Monarchy. At the end of 1918, with the defeat of the war and the end of dualism (mutual termination), a whole new situation emerged. The Károlyi government, appointed after the asteroid revolution, found itself in an insurmountable situation, both domestically and foreignly, mainly in such a way that the newly formed independent Hungarian state was not recognized by the victors. The government's Minister of Nationalities tried quickly and decisively to develop a rescue program that could have slowed down, mitigated the collapse process and, in principle, laid the foundations for long-term cooperation in Central Europe.

During the negotiations with the nationalities, Jászi's person was the guarantee of a possible successful agreement. Throughout, Jászi kept in mind territorial integrity, economic and social unity. It never occurred to him to cede the empire to foreign powers with a provisional solution offered to nationalities. He believed that his plans were only temporary and that they could then show common ground at the peace conference and, in controversial cases,

use the plebiscite, that is, the referendum. Jászi interpreted Wilson's self-determination as guaranteeing the most rights to nationalities in addition to integrity.

Neither Tisza ("penny comedy") nor Jászi (internal self-determination in the form of cantonization) recognized the impact of the founding of the Czechoslovak state on Hungary. In the situation following the recognition of the Czechoslovak state by the great powers, he first sought a fair ethnic segregation with the Slovak National Council and then with the representatives of the Prague government, but even after the Károlyi government, hoping for a democratic peace conference, resigned from continuing military resistance in the Highlands in early November. In this situation, the government's embrace of the partial Hungarian-friendly ethnoregional movements in north-eastern Hungary would have only further enhanced the territorial goals of the Czechoslovak military actions supported and directed by the Entente

The Eastern Slovak movement appeared in the autumn of 1918, partly based on the local, Slovak regional identity. The Dvorčaks wanted to use these roots to forge the Slovaks into an independent national movement in the critical months of the historical Hungarian state in November. As we can see, the initiative started in Prešov, but it reached its peak in Kassa. Even then, the role of the city of Košice in the region was unquestionable.

The Eastern Slovaks were not considered a serious negotiator by the Minister of Nationalities of the Charles Government, and the Eastern Slovak Republic was considered a flawed movement. In his leaders he saw the survivors of the old power and did not regard them as democratic representatives of the new, popular and local will. By proclaiming their unregistered and unrecognized "state" on behalf of the Eastern Slovaks, the Dvorčaks actually accelerated the Czechoslovak military occupation of the region even further.

In the autumn of 1918, the self-determination of the Spiš shoes appeared partly based on the identity of the local Germans and the Hungarians (assimilated Judaism). The action against the Czechoslovak goals started in Kežmarok, but it was also joined by the county, the towns with the orderly councils and the municipalities. By falling under the "Lake Empire" and then demarcating the demarcation line, the Hungarian government lost these territories and did not even try to retain the military.

The Hungarian government, including Jászi, dealt with the short-lived self-determination of Szepes and Sáros counties. Oszkár Jászi gave an interview to the World on December 25th. In the case of the Germans' self-determination, he was also in the same position as in his negotiations with the Romanians and Slovaks. At the same time, he noted that Germans do not live in a single closed area, but in different parts of the country, so in his view, completely different directions and different rules should be followed for their self-determination.

Following the Swiss model, the German-speaking islands should be offered the fullest autonomy. According to Renner's idea of personal autonomy, the German bodies thus endowed with self-government should be united into a unified German National Assembly, and all German-inhabited regions of Hungary would be represented in proportion to their population.¹

The cooperation between Jászi and Károlyi was harmonious in October and November 1918. Prior to the formation of the government, Károlyi defined Jászi's ministry as a "conditio sine qua non". Károlyi Jászi was his main adviser not only in matters of nationality policy belonging to his ministry, but also in foreign policy.

Jászi first tried to resign from the leadership of the Ministry of Nationality Affairs, more precisely from his direct participation in the work of the government, at the end of November, ie after barely three weeks of ministry.

The cumulative failures and with them the failures associated with the creation of Eastern Switzerland have endured. We cannot be surprised by the seizures of despair at that time. In his memoir, Ernő Garami writes that "*Jászi was utterly desperate [...] His policy of nationality proved utterly unsuccessful [...] as a result of his coming to power, he became simultaneously responsible for the sins of all the governments he [...] fought against.*"²

After he resigned, he felt that his life had reached a turning point. The official letter dated 19 January 1919, in which he relieves Jász Károlyi Mihály of his ministerial office at his own request, and at the same time expresses his appreciation and gratitude "*For his excellent services in exceptional circumstances*".³

In his diary, Jászi describes that during their last official meeting (March 1919) he presented to the President the tactical idea of step-by-step concessions in peace negotiations (Danube Confederation - free trade with the former Hungarian territories - referendum as the final compromise). "If the Entente does not do this, it must be denied the signing of peace, appealing to Wilson principles and the work of the world."⁴

Viktor Dvorčák and Károly Bulissa moved to Hungary after the occupation of Prešov and Košice, where, according to a report by Austrian ambassador Hans Cnobloch, a new Slovak National Council was established, in the name of which anti-Czech propaganda material flooded the Highlands. Based on the assessment of the situation of the government of Mihály Károlyi, Jászi, who did not work as a state official at that time or came to Budapest in the

¹ A magyarországi németek önrendelkezési jogáról. *Világ*, 1918. dec. 25. 33.

² Garami Ernő: *Forrongó Magyarország. Emlékezések és tanulságok*. Pegazus Kiadás, Leipzig–Wien, 1922. 85.

³ Litván György (szerk.): *Károlyi Mihály levelezése*. I. k. 1905–1920. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1978. 392.

⁴ Jászi Oszkár: *Magyar kálvária...* i. m. 94.

meantime, saw no serious alternative in the situation of the government of Mihály Károlyi. During the Soviet Republic, no one was involved with the Dvorčák in attempts to reconcile with nationalities. Dvorčák himself moved temporarily to Poland, from where he only returned to Hungary after the fall of the Peidl government. The government of Friedrich, which came to power, appointed Jakab Bleyer of German descent to head the Ministry of Nationalities, who reorganized the internal structure of the ministry and created a system of departments, where each department was responsible for the affairs of one nationality. In practice, this meant liaising with national leaders and seeking reconciliation, ongoing intelligence and press reviews, and the development of new laws and possible concepts of autonomy. Bleyer asked Zoltán Szviezsényi to organize and lead the Tót department. Finally, with the ratification of the Treaty of Trianon, the Ministry of Nationalities was abolished in Hungary.

IV. Related publications

- Kassa helyzete és sora 1918 őszén. In.: Hajdú Anikó (szerk.): Multietnikus világok Közép-Európában, 1867–1944 - Multietnické prostredie v Strednej Európe, 1867 – 1944. Szlovákiai Magyar Fiatalok Tudományos és Kulturális Társulása. 2016. 109-130.
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- Föderalizmus helyett felbomlás. Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia nem domináns nemzetjeinek államépítő törekvései az első világháború éveiben. Valóság 2017. 8. szám 50-63.
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- Változatok az önrendelkezésre Sáros és Abaúj-Torna vármegyében. Esettanulmány az 1918. végi magyar összeomlás és csehszlovák államalapítás regionális vonzatairól. Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle. 2021. XXIII. évfolyam 1. szám 63-96.
- A Jászi-féle nemzetiségi minisztérium 1918 őszén. Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle. 2021. XXIII. évfolyam 3. szám 21-42.

Lectures given at the conference on the topic of the dissertation:

- Dr. Szarka Lászlóval közösen: Föderalizmus helyett felbomlás - Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia nem domináns nemzetének államépítő törekvései az első világháború éveiben. Szegedi Társadalomtudományi Szakkollégium és SZTE BTK Történeti Intézet szervezésében, 1914-2014 Társadalmi törésvonalak a Kárpát-medencében. 2014. november 12. Szeged
- Keleti szlovák kérdés és Kassa városa. Adalékok a Jászi Oszkár vezette Nemzetiségi Minisztérium történetéhez. „Tér-idő-közösség: a felföldi és kárpátaljai magyarság a társadalomtudományok tükrében“ címet viselő konferencia. 2015. január 23-24, Tornaalja.
- Dialektus, kontaktusjelenség vagy magyar propaganda? A keleti szlovák (szlovjak) etnikai tér értelmezése három magyarországi népszámlálás nyelvi adatai alapján Házi konferencia Eger, 2015 május 14.
- Kosice in the autumn of 1918. Modernizációs folyamatok a multietnikus nemzetállamokban. Mentalitás-, társadalom- és művelődéstörténeti megközelítések című konferencia. A kassai Pavol Jozef Šafárik Egyetemen. 2015. május. 20.
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- Középeurópa vita 100 éve a Huszadik Században ; Német Középeurópa és a Dunai Egyesült Államok koncepciója Jászi Oszkár gondolkodásában. Domus Café. 2016. július 1.
- Jászi Oszkár minisztériuma és az Északkelet-magyarországi parciális mozgalmak 1918 őszén. TéKa konferencia, Komárno. 2018. május 22-23.
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- Sáros vármegye társadalmi- és történettudományi önreprezentációja a dualizmus kései időszakában. XXII. Tavaszi Szél konferencia. Debrecen 2019. 05. 04.
- Az önrendelkezés, mint alternatív út az összeomlás után – Szepes vármegye kísérlete az impériumváltás ellen. Kérészállamok a történelmi Magyarország területén (1918–1921) című konferencia. Budapest. Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem. Eötvös József Kutatóközpont, Közép-Európa Kutatóintézete. 2020. 02. 25.