

Iván Gyurcsík

## Introduction

The Minority Policy Research Group of the Ludovika University of Public Service was established in October 2022 by scholars and researchers – lawyers, historians, sociologists, social scientists – of our university who are interested in minority policy studies.

Several members of our research group are working on the issue of collective guilt in our region from a legal, historical and social science perspective. This was one of the reasons why we decided to organise an international experts conference on the issue of collective guilt in our region after the Second World War and to examine how it was dealt with in the different states after the democratic changes of 1989–1990.

The other reason was that, besides good practices of reconciliation and cooperation, there were cases where shadows of the past appeared in different forms, reflecting elements of collective guilt. Therefore, we thought that it would contribute to the academic discourse to invite experts and ask for their views on different aspects of collective guilt and on specific cases in our region.

We focused on issues related to the Hungarian minority communities in former and current neighbouring countries, Czechoslovakia/Slovakia, Romania, Yugoslavia/Serbia and the Germans in Hungary.

Allow me to make a few introductory remarks. Since biblical times, we have witnessed various forms of collective guilt, collective responsibility and collective punishment, which have appeared through the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present, in world wars and post-war periods, and have been particularly linked to totalitarian regimes.

After 1989, with the joining of the countries of the region to the Council of Europe, the signing of bilateral treaties and the accession to the EU and NATO, the issue of minority rights was officially considered largely settled.

With the help of invited experts, we would like to present some examples of the implementation of the principle of collective guilt against certain communities in the region, from the post-World War II period to the difficult reconciliation process after the democratic changes of 1989–1990.

What happened after 1945 and then after 1989, and where are we now?

Majority nations and national minorities experienced freedom in 1989 together rather than apart, in opposition to each other in Central Europe. During the past hundred years, for the first time, an unprecedented opportunity has arisen to settle and rethink the relationship between majority nations and national minorities within the framework of freedom and democracy.<sup>1</sup>

I would like to raise three issues connected to the question of collective guilt: the need for apology, the practices of reconciliation and addressing the issues of the past.

## APOLOGIES

We would like to bring examples of apologies from the region, without going into the types, forms, limitations, advantages and disadvantages of such acts. We should be clear that if well prepared and accepted by all parties, it can be the first step on the long road to reconciliation. Prior to an apology, it is important that the party/parties acknowledge their own responsibility for past grievances and contribute to the mutual building of trust through the act of apology. Depending on societal, political or the historical context in case of severe past grievances and wrongdoings, the failure to apologise may perpetuate conflicts into the future.

I picked 5 examples from the region: from Hungary, Serbia, the Czech Republic and Slovakia:

<sup>1</sup> GYURCSÍK 2021.

1. The Hungarian National Assembly expressed its apology concerning collective grievances of the German minority in Hungary (1990).<sup>2</sup> Katalin Szili, Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament, in November 2007 in the Parliament, apologised for the deportation of Germans in Hungary.<sup>3</sup> The National Assembly's Resolution on the Day of Remembrance of the Deportation of Germans in Hungary No. 88/2012 declared 19 January as the day of remembrance.<sup>4</sup>
2. The Statement of the Serbian Parliament on 21 June 2013 condemned the atrocities committed against the Hungarian civilian population of Vojvodina in 1944–1945.<sup>5</sup>
3. The President of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel's address at Charles University, Prague (17 February 1995) "Czechs and Germans on the Way to a Good Neighbourship", on the transfer of the German population.<sup>6</sup> On 24 August 2005, the Czech Government of Jirí Paroubek passed a resolution apologising to all those who "actively fought fascism or suffered under Nazi rule" during World War II.<sup>7</sup>
4. The Slovak National Council adopted a Declaration on the expulsion of Carpathian Germans (12 February 1991).<sup>8</sup>

<sup>2</sup> 35/1990. (III. 28.) OGY határozat a magyarországi német kisebbség kollektív sérelmeinek orvoslásáról [Parliament Resolution 35/1990 (III. 28.) on the redress of collective grievances of the German minority in Hungary].

<sup>3</sup> Museum Digital 2021.

<sup>4</sup> 88/2012. (XII. 12.) OGY határozat a magyarországnémetek elhurcolásának emléknapijéről [Parliament Resolution 88/2012 (XII. 12.) on the day of remembrance of the deportation of Germans in Hungary].

<sup>5</sup> *Šesto vanredno zasedanje Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije u 2013* [Sixth Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2013], 21 June 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Václav Havel s. a.

<sup>7</sup> Deutsche Welle 2005.

<sup>8</sup> *Vyhlasenie Slovenskej národnej rady k odsunu slovenských Nemcov* [Schválené Slovenskou národnou radou uznesením z 12. februára 1991 číslo 78] [Statement of the Slovak National Council on the expulsion of the Slovak Germans approved by the Slovak National Council by Resolution No 78 of 12 February 1991].

5. The letters of the Hungarian and the Slovak Catholic Bishops' Conferences was read out during the Holy Mass on reconciliation and cooperation in Esztergom on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2006, the main message of the letters was: "We forgive and ask forgiveness."<sup>9</sup>

The apologies of Presidents, Parliaments, Prime Ministers or church authorities were important symbolic gestures. The time that has passed since these decisions showed us their practical contribution to the reconciliation process.

### PRACTICE OF RECONCILIATION

After 1989, parallel to the processes of economic and political integration in Western Europe – after German unification and the break-up of the Soviet Union – the Central European system of basic treaties and bilateral minority treaties came into existence, in which Hungary sought to secure and expand the minority rights of Hungarians living in neighbouring countries.

Reconciliation programmes initiated with neighbouring countries in the context of Euro-Atlantic integration have been inspired by the experience of the French–German reconciliation process<sup>10</sup> (cross-border economic cooperation; compiling a joint history textbook; youth links; networks of twin settlements, etc.) and also by the Austrian–Italian type of solution, which resulted in the South Tyrol model.<sup>11</sup> But because of different historical and structural conditions, foreign examples of reconciliation were applicable only partially.

Since the 1990s, these initiatives have been based on three pillars on the Hungarian side:

<sup>9</sup> Mátraverebély–Szentkút Nemzeti Kegyhely 2006; Magyar Katolikus Püspöki Konferencia 2006; ENRS 1965; Polish History 1965; *Reconciliation for Europe* s. a.

<sup>10</sup> Chemins de Mémoire 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Autonome Region Trentino–Südtirol 1946.

1. mutual historical reckoning
2. mutual recognition of the collective rights of minorities
3. elaboration of historical apologies, rehabilitation and restitution<sup>12</sup>

We expect with great interest the views of our experts on these issues as well.

The steps taken to reach this objective shows also a variety of possibilities, let me mention one of them.

The Czech–German Future Fund started its activities in 1998 with the aim of promoting mutual trust, meetings and cooperation between Czechs and Germans. It was established by the German–Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development of 21 January 1997.<sup>13</sup> It launched a program for the Compensation of forced labourers and for the victims of National Socialism. They had Working Groups e.g. on “Social and Economic Policy”, “European and Foreign Policy”, “Dialogue without Taboos” and “Places of Memory”, organised the by Czech–German Discussion Forum.

Other possible programs to increase mutual knowledge about the neighbours, trust-building focusing on the younger generation, Joint Committees of Historians, Cross Border Cooperation, partner cities, intense, civil dialogue, joint history books could contribute to the process. We have to realise that reconciliation is a long term process and it may take several years to reach the satisfactory positive results.

#### TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES OF THE PAST

Let me give you only one quotation in conclusion from the complex set of issues of the region:

“It is impossible to live freely, equally and fully with the feeling of unjust punishment and wrongful accusation. Re-legitimising the post-war collective

<sup>12</sup> BÁRDI 2023: 382.

<sup>13</sup> German–Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development of 21 January 1997.

punishment of our ancestors is not conducive to the desire to build a harmonious country together, and this resolution will only create one dysfunctional unworkable pseudo guarantee to a non-existent threat.”<sup>14</sup> These are the words of one of the Hungarian politicians from Slovakia expressed in 2007 after the National Council of Slovakia adopted its resolution on the inviolability of post-war documents on the post-World War II settlement in Slovakia.<sup>15</sup> The document, which condemned the principle of collective guilt but stated that the post-war decisions of the representative bodies of the Czechoslovak Republic and the Slovak National Council – which formulate collective guilt of the Hungarians as well – are not the cause of discriminatory practice and no new legal relations can arise on their basis today.

The representatives of the Hungarian minority suggested the adoption of a similar document of moral apology as happened in 1991 in the case of the Carpathian Germans by the Slovak National Council,<sup>16</sup> and suggested in 2007 the adoption of a document on mutual reconciliation<sup>17</sup> by both the Hungarian and the Slovak Parliament to overcome the grievances of the past. This step is still missing.

This is the case not only in Slovakia, we can find unsettled questions also elsewhere.

There is room for the academic discussion to elaborate and contribute to the creation of mutual conditions to help it happen. These steps can strengthen our cooperation, our region as well during these challenging times.

Thank you for your kind attention, I wish you a fruitful discussion and inspiring conference.

<sup>14</sup> József Berényi's statement. See ČTK–SITA 2007.

<sup>15</sup> Resolution 533 of the National Council of the Slovak Republic of 20 September 2007 on the inviolability of post-war documents on the post-World War II settlement in Slovakia.

<sup>16</sup> See *Új Szó*, 1 April 1992: 4; see also *Az MKDM és az Együttélés képviselőinek nyilatkozat-tervezete a kollektív bűnösség elvének elítéléséről*, Pozsony, 1992. január 31: 427–428.

<sup>17</sup> Infostart 2007.

35/1990. (III. 28.) OGY határozat a magyarországi német kisebbség kollektív sérelmeinek orvoslásáról [Parliament Resolution 35/1990 (III. 28.) on the redress of collective grievances of the German minority in Hungary]

Autonome Region Trentino–Südtirol (1946): *Gruber–Degasperi–Abkommen*. Online: [www.region.trentino-s-tirol.it/codice/accordo\\_d.aspx](http://www.region.trentino-s-tirol.it/codice/accordo_d.aspx)

BÁRDI, Nándor (2023): Historical Reconciliation. In BÁBA, Iván (ed.): *An Encyclopaedia of Diplomacy. A Hungarian Handbook of International Relations*. Volume I. Budapest: Kairosz, 382–383.

Chemins de Mémoire (2019): *A Story of Franco-German Reconciliation*. Online: [www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/story-franco-german-reconciliation#:~:text=The%20signatories%20of%20the%20Franco,the%20purposes%20of%20an%20exemplary%20reconciliation](http://www.cheminsdememoire.gouv.fr/en/story-franco-german-reconciliation#:~:text=The%20signatories%20of%20the%20Franco,the%20purposes%20of%20an%20exemplary%20reconciliation)

ČTK-SITA (2007): *Benešove dekréty sú nedotknuteľné*. 20 September 2007. Online: <https://domov.sme.sk/c/3495979/benesove-dekrety-su-nedotknutelne.html>

Deutsche Welle (2005): Prague Apologizes for WWII Expulsions. *DW*, 25 August 2005. Online: [www.dw.com/en/prague-apologizes-for-wwii-expulsions/a-1690921](http://www.dw.com/en/prague-apologizes-for-wwii-expulsions/a-1690921)

ENRS (1965): *Letter of Reconciliation of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops*. Online: <https://enrs.eu/news/letter-of-reconciliation-of-the-polish-bishops-to-the-german-bishops#:~:text=Letter%20of%20the%20Polish%20Roman,history%20of%20Polish%2DGerman%20reconciliation>

German–Czech Declaration on Mutual Relations and their Future Development of 21 January 1997. Online: [www.mzv.cz/file/198499/CzechGermanDeclaration.pdf](http://www.mzv.cz/file/198499/CzechGermanDeclaration.pdf)

GYURCSÍK, Iván (2021): Minority and Democracy? In BÁBA, Iván – GYURCSÍK, Iván – KISS Gy., Csaba (eds.): *Central Europe 2020. A Hungarian Perspective*. Kőszeg: Institute of Advanced Studies, 89–121.

- Infostart (2007): Kevés az esély a Magyar–szlovák megbékélési nyilatkozat elfogadására. *Infostart*, 12 September 2007. Online: <https://infostart.hu/kulfold/2007/09/12/keves-az-esely-a-magyar-szlovak-megbekelesi-nyilatkozat-elfogadasara-148101>
- Magyar Katolikus Püspöki Konferencia (2006): „*Megbocsátunk és bocsánatot kérünk*” – *Szentmise a szlovák–magyar kiengesztelődésért* [“We forgive and ask forgiveness” – Holy Mass for Slovak–Hungarian Reconciliation]. 29 June 2006. Online: <https://regi.katolikus.hu/cikk.php?h=577>
- Mátraverebély–Szentkút Nemzeti Kegyhely (2006): „*Megbocsátunk és bocsánatot kérünk*”. Online: <https://szentkut.hu/megbocsatunk-es-bocsanatot-kerunk>
- Museum Digital (2021): *A magyarországi németek elűzése a 2. világháború után* [The Expulsion of Germans in Hungary after World War II]. 19 January 2021. Online: [https://hu-themator.museum-digital.org/ausgabe/showthema.php?m\\_tid=818&tid=826&ver=standalone](https://hu-themator.museum-digital.org/ausgabe/showthema.php?m_tid=818&tid=826&ver=standalone)
- Polish History (1965): *Letter of Reconciliation of the Polish Bishops to the German Bishops*. Online: <https://polishhistory.pl/letter-of-reconciliation-of-the-polish-bishops-to-the-german-bishops/>
- Reconciliation for Europe* (s. a.). Online: <https://reconciliation.eu/reconciliation-for-europe/>
- Resolution 533 of the National Council of the Slovak Republic of 20 September 2007 on the inviolability of post-war documents on the post-World War II settlement in Slovakia. Online: [www.nrsk.sk/web/?sid=nrsk/dokumenty/vyhlasenia](http://www.nrsk.sk/web/?sid=nrsk/dokumenty/vyhlasenia)
- Šesto vanredno zasedanje Narodne skupštine Republike Srbije u 2013 [Sixth Extraordinary Session of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia 2013]. 21 June 2013. Online: [www.parlament.rs/%C5%Aoesto\\_vanredno\\_zasedanje\\_Narodne\\_skup%C5%A1tine\\_Republike\\_Srbije\\_u\\_2013.\\_godini\\_.18947.941.html](http://www.parlament.rs/%C5%Aoesto_vanredno_zasedanje_Narodne_skup%C5%A1tine_Republike_Srbije_u_2013._godini_.18947.941.html)
- Václav Havel (s. a.): *Selected Speeches and Writings of Václav Havel*. Online: [http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/index\\_uk.html](http://old.hrad.cz/president/Havel/speeches/index_uk.html)
- Vyhlásenie Slovenskej národnej rady k odsunu slovenských Nemcov Schválené Slovenskou národnou radou uznesením z 12. februára 1991 číslo 78 [Statement of the Slovak National Council on the expulsion of the Slovak Germans approved by the Slovak National Council by Resolution No 78 of 12 February 1991]. Online: [www.nrsk.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/v\\_k-odsunu-nemcov.htm](http://www.nrsk.sk/web/Static/sk-SK/NRSR/Doc/v_k-odsunu-nemcov.htm)