

# **To Be or Not to Be in the EU that is the Question**

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Following the Serbian democratic elections, the leadership stirred the wheel of its government toward Euro-integration processes. Such a shift became evident and paramount when it appeared in the programs of major Serbian political parties (A VMSZ programja, [2013]). The role of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, as a constituent part of Serbia, in the on-going integration processes, has raised crucial questions whose major stations and dilemmas are attempted to be answered in the following research paper.

The autonomous province of Vojvodina counts a population of 1 931 809 of which 253 899 is of Hungarian origin (Census data..., 2011). Minority status plays a considerable dominance over self-determination, personal decision-making on migration, employment, and education. Communities living in minority face serious difficulties in prevailing in a milieu where the majority of people are evidently of so different cultural and religious background. Knowing this, there should be put more emphasis on identity change in the process of integration when dealing with its opportunities and obstacles.

Since the beginning of the '90, the structure of the Hungarian population in Vojvodina underwent major changes leading to their primary representation in Bačka in the north. Despite such modifications, the Hungarian diaspora strives to preserve its culture and identity. The '90 and onward brought about a significant political intimidation for the province, which enjoys only a cultural autonomy; consequently it cannot live up to the cultural objectives of the native Hungarians, obstructing their employment and educational opportunities. Though, the Hungarian language has been listed among official languages and the repertoire of the Hungarian departments in secondary schools is enriched every year, the establishment of a Hungarian university still remains a utopian dream.<sup>1</sup> Such phenomena and attitude strengthen migration toward the European Union especially to Hungary as one of the member states.

This paper intends to map the attitude of Hungarians in Vojvodina toward and in the course of the accession to the European Union.

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Tamás Korhecz: A szabadkai magyar nyelven (is) oktató egyetem. (University of Subotica with a Hungarian curriculum.), He gave a personal exposé with the title – Utopia or bold vision? – presenting his ideas on a higher educational institution established by the government with a Hungarian curriculum in Subotica, with a special focus on its advantages, drawbacks, opportunities, and dangers. Presented at: VMAT conference, Subotica, April 13, 2013.

## *Hungarians of Vojvodina in numbers*

In recent years in Serbia - with regards to European tendencies - the ageing of the population has been a common fact, which according to the figures of 2002, severely affected the Hungarian population of the province. On one hand, a significant wave of migration occurred, on the other the number of the new-born is in reduction, which pushed the Hungarian minority to an ageing phase. Figures from the census of 2002 show that 37.6 per cent of this minority live in diaspora while 62.2 constitute one block. Those in diaspora are dispersed in large areas. The average age, counted on the total, is 43.1, while those living in one block is 42 years and 44 for those living in diaspora. The population density is 84.48 person/km<sup>2</sup>. According to some estimates, the number of Hungarians in Vojvodina is decreasing with 1.5 per cent. Migration has also a huge impact on this phenomenon, since 500 to 1000 people actually leave the country on a yearly base. Migrants to other countries do not count as such, though they were taken into evidence during the census. They will still be recorded as employees according to employment data (Badis, 2012), due to the fact that the unemployment rate in Vojvodina has reached 27 per cent. Hungarians inhabit mostly the rural areas (except for Subotica with the largest ethnic block of 57 thousand people). Their primary occupation is agriculture, fishery, and forestry, while they are only secondarily represented in industry as: mining, construction, and handicraft; and lastly in services. From the '90, those working in the agricultural sector shifted their activities to the domain of industry. Major contributing events to this structural change were the privatisation processes between 1991 and 2007 (Gazdaság és foglalkoztatás, [2013]). In recent years, a considerable change occurred in the employment structure of Hungarians in Vojvodina; namely, re-organisation measures were induced that led to the development of losing positions. The ratio of Hungarians in favourable positions is much lower, especially in case of qualified personnel and civil servants (Gábrity Molnár, 2008:13-30).<sup>2</sup>

## *Hypothesis*

In politics and among the Hungarian population in Vojvodina, the integration to the European Union raises serious dilemmas. The youth seeking persistence and livelihood has given nuanced but a decisive answer to political events. Information<sup>3</sup> derived from this research provides not only existential answers, but also reasons of mobility and/or migration. Furthermore, their doubts regarding their identity are brought to the surface.

## *Applied methods*

I applied various research and data collection methods with the intention to respond to these problems. On one hand, I used data analysis to unfold the process of negotiation with the institutional system of the EU affecting Hungarians and other

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<sup>2</sup> The qualified represent the future. The background of the adult education in the school networks of northern Bačka.

<sup>3</sup> The value of citizenship among Hungarians in Vojvodina- on-line personal questionnaire.

nationalities; on the other, I performed a questionnaire based survey on expectations laid toward the European Union.

### *Expectations and doubts with regards to the EU*

In recent years, a survey was carried out among the majority of the population about the willingness and opinion to join the EU. The survey was queried on an internet portal, where the results show that 47 per cent of the interviewed would rather not join the EU, while 31.5 per cent gave a positive answer. It suggests that two-thirds of the questioned have a resolute answer. A massive proportion of the interviewed declared that Serbia would never access the EU (Tvoj stav, 2010). Both nations - the Serbs and the Hungarians - are divided into the party of those who support and those who are against the accession; though, the resistance of the majority, based on data from opinion polls, seems more pervasive. Constant demands on behalf of the EU toward Serbia left their unfavourable marks on popular opinion. Based on data, Hungarians in Vojvodina responded differently and developed a milder reaction about the integration process. Through macro-statistical data, we must unwillingly raise the question of why there are opinion differences among the majority and minority population about expectations toward the EU.

### *Research*

In a short questionnaire based survey among the Hungarian youth in Vojvodina, I attempted to find an answer to the question of Serbia's joining the EU. During my research, I used the method of random sampling. The gender distribution showed that (42.6 %) are men and a decisive proportion is women (57.4 %). The ratio of intellectuals and students were significantly higher (94%) than of the labourers (6%). Out of 309 people 160 hold a diploma in higher education, a bigger proportion (30%) obtained a secondary school qualification while the rest has only a primary school degree. The most motivated about giving an opinion were young people between the ages of 18-35. This is explicable with the fact that this age group is still ahead of making important decisions (their ratio is 71.3%), the middle-aged (36-55) form one-fifth of the sample (21.3%), and finally the ageing group (56 and older) were more restrained in responding, constituting a percentage of (8.4%).

83.2% of these people support Serbia's EU integration, 16.8% of the Hungarians, 52 people precisely, expressed definite negation regarding the accession process. The youngest, especially men, those who would seek their prosperity on their own, firmly distanced themselves from the EU (Table 1.)

We reach similar results, i.e. strong correlation using the five-scale accession attitude measurement, transformed to a three-scale system. 17.6 % is definitely not satisfied with joining the EU, 21.3%, one-fifth of the surveyed are of mild opinion, and 61.1% are fully satisfied with Serbia's integration intentions.

Such a difference in attitude inclined us to research the causes of positive and negative opinion formation. Those who responded negatively to the questions about integration did not share their reasons. Those people in Vojvodina who have a positive attitude toward the survey showed palpable reasons and hope why the European Union seems to be attractive. Half of the Hungarians, with an affirmative attitude toward the question await direct or indirect existential betterment from

Serbia's joining the EU. To their judgment, their standard of living and everyday livelihood would be eased; their financial situation and employment opportunities would improve with this scenario. The economic, infrastructural growth and other investments of the country indirectly could bring about existential improvement. Those who responded positively to the integration process and opening, base their attitude on their residence, Hungarian identity, language, community and environmental protection including public security, mobility opportunities, political legitimacy and need for democracy.

Table 1. Expectations of the Hungarian minority toward the EU

<i>Attitudes with regard to the accession to the EU</i>	<i>What are your three wishes/expectations about the accession to the EU?</i>	<i>Number of respondents (person)</i>
S U P P O R T E R S	Financial, income situation, existential questions, change in the standard of living, quality of life.	65
	Employment opportunities, employment, changes on the labour market, raise in the value of work.	78
	Mobility: no borders, freedom of travel, brighter future, rebirth.	15
	Security issues, public security, stability.	8
	Economic, free market, infrastructural development, tenders, vitalization of the entrepreneurship, growth in foreign investments, rise in prices, inflation, belonging to the Schengen zone, introduction of the euro.	58
	Political opening, opportunities: individual and state level, shift in the opportunities of Vojvodina, strengthening of the political legitimacy, legality, alignment of law, Schengen.	20
	Change in public services: healthcare and education.	7
	Educational opportunities, equivalence of the diploma, cultural recovery.	6
NON-SUPPORTERS	Do not wait anything from the European Union, scepticism.	52
<b>Total</b>		<b>309</b>

In the course of our pre-study, strong expectations were predominant, mostly regarding the EU on change in the quality of living conditions. Circumstances leading to a shift to better livelihood and its improvement are bases on personal needs, since unclear visions about the future unintentionally raise the question of what sort of problems and worries occupy the mind of the Hungarian minority. Related answers show that these are mostly financial, fear of impoverishment, and problems with employment, especially for Hungarians in Vojvodina (see Table 2). A good proportion of respondents expect solutions to the above mentioned problems.

Table 2. Problems affecting the quality of life of the Hungarian minority

<b>What is the most pressing issue related to the quality of living you are occupied with?</b>	<b>Number of respondents (person)</b>
Financial, (existential problems, low standard of living, the quality of life, lack of savings, problems of livelihood, debt/loan/interest rate, low income, problems of survival, poverty income/wage/scholarship, finances for founding a new home.	108
Work related, labour market, job opportunities.	83
Lack of safety, insecurity, public security, peace, tranquillity, stability, social unrest.	24
Predictability, hopelessness, visions for the future, learning and insecurity regarding one's own future.	30
Corruption, economic crisis, rises in prices, manipulation with inflation, provocations, and laws.	14
Macro-political questions, crisis of legitimacy of parties and political organisations, limited opportunities in Serbia, negative effects of multi-globalisation, the future of the country is uncertain.	6
Racism, hatred, aggression, discrimination, impoverishment of Vojvodina, "crimes by gipsies", ethnical differences, questions of human rights, situation of Hungarians.	7
Environmental issues.	2
Questions regarding the educational system.	9
Health, healthcare problems.	3
Mobility: school, cultural, within borders- between settlements, across the borders, repatriation, migration.	3
Other	8
Satisfied, cannot give an answer.	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>309</b>

Answers to these questions clearly reveal the impoverishment and bleak vision on future. In connection with previous answers, the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina expects solutions from the integration to the EU.

## *Conclusion*

In current situation, the European Union cannot provide a clear vision on preserving minority groups by law, institution, economic vision, and guarantees. The prevailing situation is beneficial for the majority in their political assessment based on "case management," which had been and stayed a perilous existential challenge for the minorities. In such situations, issues related to minorities cannot become a cardinal question in or after the integration process. In this respect, there is a ground for scepticism because the EU does not function as a shield for the minorities.

The dynamics and course of Serbia's accession was determined by the status of Kosovo; presumably, it will further define the scenario of the integration process. Based on future projections, after the accession of Croatia, we cannot expect additional expansion of the EU in this decade. According to the most optimistic prognosis, this will not occur before 2020; until then, we cannot speak of a unified Europe without the integration of the West-Balkans.

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