

Generational Differences and Political Activism among the German Speakers in Spiš during the Interwar Era

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Abstract | Background: The paper presents the socio-political conditions that characterised the population of Slovakia before and after 1918. The paper hypothesises that the German-speaking youth of Spiš could be compared with the Hungarian minority youth movements of Czechoslovakia, as the causes of the differences and their approach to minority nation-building are similar. Objectives and methods: The paper aims to present and analyse generational differences among German-speaking residents of Spiš during the inter-war era and to explore how these differences influenced their attitudes towards minority nation-building and political activism. The research is conducted by comparing distinct viewpoints according to two press debates taking place at different time periods (1929, 1938). Results: The paper offers an explanation of the historical development of the Spiš region and why, before 1918, the German-speaking elites nurtured emotional ties to the integrity of the Hungarian state, fusing it with the Zipser identity. Before introducing the arguments of the participants of the first debate, the paper provides context on the younger debater. The debate was between a student of literature and his former teacher. While the former criticised the literary works of a well-respected Kežmarok figure, the latter interpreted this as an attack on the Zipser identity. The student compared the two generations, explaining that while the elderly nourished historical, Burgher-like ties, the younger generation wished to rebuild their life in the spirit of national identity. The second debate took place amid a dynamic political atmosphere, following the events of the Anschluss and the local elections held in Czechoslovakia in May and June 1938. One of the participants was an unknown author who wrote for a Hungarian language weekly newspaper printed in Levoča, who promoted the slogans and the political concepts of the United Hungarian Party. His claims that the members of the young generation of German speakers were traitors were challenged by someone who signed himself as An Aging Zipser. He argued that the Zipser identity and the pro-Hungarian attitude should be given new, more realistic content that can adapt to contemporary conditions, become more appealing to young people and compete with national exclusivity and German National Socialist ideology. Conclusion: The operational framework of the Czechoslovak nation-state urged young minority intellectuals to develop a new concept of nationhood that could mobilise as many people as possible for political rallies or declarations on censuses. They often accused the generations of the 'fathers' of being 'delusional', meaning they prioritised passiveness and failed to acknowledge the 'realities' of the nation-state. The historically and socially constructed Zipser category was thus challenged by German and Hungarian nationalism and national exclusivity.

Keywords | generational differences, socialisation, political activism, inter-war Czechoslovakia, German speakers of Spiš, nation building

Background

The fall of Austria-Hungary and the rise of nation-states in East-Central Europe were not fully accepted by all as a 'rightful' change or a positive outcome of the peace treaties signed near Versailles. Some of the population living in the northern counties of the former Hungarian Kingdom, which felt loyal to the idea of the country's integrity, and felt this way after the annexation by the Czechoslovak army in 1918–1919. The process of realisation was not easy, since most of the towns and regions of today's Slovakia nurtured economic and cultural ties with Budapest, the centre of the former state. Pál Szvatkó, a Hungarian journalist in interwar Czechoslovakia, reflected on the regional differentiation of Slovakia: *"Before the war, a citizen from Pozsony^[1] had no idea about those from Kassa, just as a citizen from Trencsén knew nothing about people from Huszt. Sometimes they met in Pest, they tended to be more like the people from Pest, but they never visited each other's towns, since it was not even possible to get there by train without travelling through the capital."*^[2] Those who remained loyal to the Hungarian language or the idea of Hungarian territorial integrity and decided to remain on the territory of the newly founded Czechoslovak Republic, started to organise institutions and mobilise people, intending to 'defend the Hungarian cause', i.e., protect the political and economic interests of Hungarian minority elites.^[3]

Due to regional and social differentiation and the change of political systems, minority mobilisation and the devising of nation-building strategies encountered some difficulties. The instalment of the category of nationality (or mother language)^[4] in the Czechoslovak population census and the application of language rights dependent on the percentage 'achieved' by a nationality^[5] urged minority elites to convince as many people as possible to identify as Hungarian, German etc. Czechoslovakia, a democratic republic with universal suffrage and a secret ballot, differed from pre-1918 Hungary, with its limited voting system giving priority to the wealthy and privileged social strata. The experience of belonging to the ruling nation or a minority was also an important socialising factor, which (often) politically divided 'fathers' and 'sons'. The fate of Hungarian youth in Czechoslovakia was a topic frequently discussed on the pages of the Hungarian language press published in the country, for example, the *Prágai Magyar Hírlap*. Many intellectuals attempted to analyse and categorise the Hungarian youth movements in Czechoslovakia as early as the 1930s,^[6] and more thorough research has since been conducted by Tamás Gusztáv Filep and Ildikó Bajcsi on two ideologically opposed, but with regard to their goals similar movements: the Sarló^[7] and the Circles of Ottokár Prohászka.^[8]

Regional and social heterogeneity accelerated political activism in the Czechoslovak nation-state not only among the Hungarians of Slovakia, but among the Germans as well. Over 3 million citizens considered themselves German by nationality, app. 140,000 on the territory of today's Slovakia, according to the population census conducted in 1930. Despite the 'Germans' being the most populous category after the 'Czechoslovaks', those who claimed German nationality were not a homogeneous group. While the German language was preferable for them in public spaces, identifying as 'German' was not self-evident; more precisely, the meaning of ethnic-linguistic identification differed. The everyday experiences of a German industrialist from Liberec could not be compared to those of a German trader from Kežmarok. Despite the pre-1918 socialising conditions determined by differing political systems in the Austrian provinces and Hungary, German political parties, as representatives of the largest minority, significantly influenced the form of minority politics in relation not only to the Czechoslovak government, but the Hungarian parties as well.^[9]

Objectives and methods

I believe it is advantageous to examine how German and Hungarian minority activism interacted and what ideological patterns could be identified. Not only concerning political parties, but also in youth movements. From this point of view, the German speakers of Spiš are significant, and this paper attempts to explain the key socialising factors that influenced the generation of young German speakers from Spiš who were born in Hungary, but completed their education under Czechoslovak administration and studied at Czech- and German-language universities in Prague and Brno. The paper seeks to answer questions such as how the fall of Austria-Hungary and the founding of Czechoslovakia influenced the thinking of young German-speakers of Spiš, whose parents nurtured an emotional attachment to the idea of the integrity of the Hungarian Kingdom. More specifically, how did their concepts of nationality, ethnicity, or patriotism differ from their parents', and how did these influence their methods of minority nation-building, political activism. This is why, under the term of 'generation', I refer to the definition used by Karl Mannheim, who described generation as a localised social identity embedded in the social framework and is foremost formed by shared experiences and thoughts.^[10]

The attempt includes the contextualisation of two debates from different periods (1929, 1938) and the comparison of the articles published by the debaters in the regional German and Hungarian language newspapers (*Karpathen-Post*, *Szepesi Híradó*).^[11] The two debates provide insight into the differences that arose between 'father' and 'sons', mainly on their interpretation of ethnicity, nationality and patriotism.

Briefly about Spiš

A brief historical introduction to the Spiš region is necessary to explain why it stands out amongst the other surrounding regions. The German Hospes (guests) hailing from the territories of the Holy Roman Empire, Halych-Lodomeria, and the Balkan Peninsula migrated to the northern regions of the Carpathian Basin in various time periods. The most massive wave of colonisation took place between the 12th and 14th centuries and after the Mongol invasion, the new settlers founded their homes not only in the Spiš region, but also in the areas around Bratislava and Trnava and established the mining towns in central Slovakia.^[12] For example, these new residents founded the town of Kežmarok in 1251–1252, when King Béla/Belo IV granted them numerous privileges.^[13] These privileges were confirmed and expanded by the kings of the House of Anjou, and local mayors even administered the so-called Province of 24 Towns of Spiš according to their own legal system, known as Zipser Willkür. This legal system was used until the 15th century, when Sigismund of Luxembourg sold 13 towns and 3 estates in Spiš as a loan to King Władysław II of Poland in 1412.^[14] The 16 settlements were reinstated under Habsburg rule in 1773 during the reign of Maria Theresa. The reintegration was not easy after 360 years of Polish administration, so in 1778 the Province of 16 Towns of Spiš was founded as an autonomous administrative unit under the governance of a count, who was appointed by the towns.^[15]

These historical experiences had a profound influence on the thinking of the political elite of Spiš about independence, autonomy, and self-government, a concept further enriched by the presence and organisation of royal free cities. The high degree of sovereignty enjoyed by these cities is evident in the rivalry between Kežmarok and Levoča during the 16th–17th centuries. The burghers of Kežmarok sympathised with the new Lutheran teachings, while Roman Catholic, Habsburg-aligned Levoča took a different path, resulting in several years of warfare between the two towns. Since public transportation did not yet exist in the second half of the 19th century, before the change of labour division, and mobility was low, no close political, economic, or cultural ties were established between the cities and regions in the northern part of the Carpathian Basin. As Szvatkó

pointed out above, this did not change significantly during the period of Austria-Hungary and industrialisation, and the only thing they had in common was that German was the language that enjoyed priority in public use. As László Bóna writes, it is questionable whether we can refer to 'Germans of Hungary' as a category,^[16] since there is no evidence to suggest that the German-speaking people of Bratislava, Nitrianske Pravno, or Spiš were bound together by any sense of solidarity before 1918. However, this does not mean that certain intellectuals did not attempt to foster this feeling. One such person was Edmund Steinacker, born in Debrecen, who used his connections in Germany to try to politically organise the geographically fragmented and culturally heterogeneous German-speaking societies in Hungary on an ethnic-linguistic basis. However, this initiative was unsuccessful, not only because of the fragmentation, but also because while the Transylvanian Saxon elite was hostile to the Magyarisation tendencies, the German burghers of Spiš, unlike the local Slovaks, saw economic advantages, social mobility, and integration.^[17]

A deep sense of autonomy, significance and local patriotism ('Zipser' identity) fused with loyalty towards the Hungarian state, caused the German-speaking political elites of the region to oppose Czechoslovak territorial aspirations in the northern counties from October 1918 onwards. However, the failed attempt to establish the so-called Zipser Republik and the invasion of Czechoslovak military troops prompted Theodor Sauter, leader of the Social Democratic Party of Kežmarok (Keszmarker Sozialdemokratische Partei) and owner of the *Karpathen-Post* weekly newspaper, to collaborate with the Czechoslovak administration in order to secure language rights and self-government for the German-speaking clergy and representatives of the town councils.^[18] After the signing of the Treaty of Saint-Germain, which consolidated the position of the new Czechoslovak state in the international community, the first political parties, associations and institutions of the Sudeten Germans^[19] gradually formed in the border regions of Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia.

Following the establishment of the first German and Hungarian political parties, Sauter and the initiators of the Zipser Republik (Julius Andreas Hefty and Tibor Kéler) followed suit. On 24 January 1920 they issued a call for the creation of a unified German party in Spiš. The ceremonial founding of the Zipser Deutsche Partei (Spiš German Party, ZDP) was held two months later at the Merchants' and Artisans' Casino in Kežmarok on 22 March 1920. At this meeting, the leaders of the party announced that they would be running in the upcoming parliamentary elections alongside the opposition party Országos Keresztényszocialista Párt (National Christian Socialist Party, OKP). Of course, they acknowledged that, in doing so, they had also become citizens of the new state, just like the more than three million Germans living in Bohemia and Moravia, and they established contact with their political leaders, including Rudolf Lodgman von Auen and Gustav Peters.^[20] The backbone of the ZDP was formed by a network of organisations and institutions in the region, which had played a traditional role in the everyday life of the regional German-speaking community for decades. These included volunteer fire brigades (Freiwillige Feuerwehrverein), choirs (Gesangverein), agricultural casinos, the Carpathian Association (Karpathenverein), etc. In addition to the formation of new organisations, which had a significant impact on the German youth of Spiš, after graduation, it was no longer Budapest, but the German universities of Prague and Brno that offered new opportunities. Here, German students coming from Spiš encountered a new world.

“They did not think anyone would understand or be glad to see them.”

Although there were examples of citizens from Gelnica or Smolník whose children finished their university studies in post-Trianon Hungary,^[21] they were few and far between. The children of Hungarian- and German-speaking parents primarily attended German-language universities in Prague and Brno. While the prestige of these institutions may have attracted students from Spiš, it was the uncertainty of the nostrification process – especially for Hungarian degrees – that mainly

drove them to seek domestic opportunities.^[22] Since this applied also to the children of parents who were members of the ZDP, it is not surprising that the party's headquarters in Kežmarok published an announcement in 1923 about providing advice on academic matters and college admissions.^[23] The students studying in Brno were the first (October 20, 1923), while those in Prague were the second (26 January 1924) to announce the formation of the Verein Zipser Hochschüler in Brünn^[24] and the Landsmannschaft Zipser Deutscher Hochschüler "Zips" in Prague.^[25] These organisations were modelled on the traditions of the German Burschenschaften, which played a major role in promoting national ideology before the First World War.^[26] While the former consisted almost exclusively of engineering students from the Německá vysoká škola technická (German Technical College),^[27] the latter was a gathering place for aspiring doctors, literary scholars, historians, and lawyers.^[28] They held readings, educational lectures, commemorations, singing parties, and similar events with varying regularity.^[29] Irma Förster, a young lady from Spišská Nová Ves who was studying in Prague, wrote personal accounts of these gatherings, which were published as articles in the *Szepesi Híradó - Szepesi Hírlap* newspaper. On 16 October 1927, she wrote the following about an evening event that included a cabaret show: *"I sensed the great struggle, the spiritual turmoil that these boys went through until they arrived at their current convictions. I sensed and understood these German Zipsers, even though I am a Hungarian Zipser, with Hungarian as my mother tongue and Hungarian sensibilities. Their ideals are truly genuine, their path may lead to their goal, and there is no question of them being Hungarian haters, even if they may have gone to extremes during the Sturm und Drang period years ago. They are Germans, but Germans with Hungarian chivalry, in whom I see the preservers and maintainers of the Zipser culture."*^[30]

At the turn of 1923–1924, members of the student associations organised a ball on New Year's Eve under the name "Heimatabend" at the Merchants' and Artisans' Casino in Kežmarok, where the opening speech was given by Andor Nitsch (1883–1976), leader of the ZDP.^[31] Besides this, they organised a dance party called "Heimatfest" every year in a different town in Spiš, the first of which took place in Levoča on 3–4 September 1927, where they allegedly sang German student songs and danced the Hungarian csárdás. Elemér Kőszeghy-Winkler (1882–1954), painter and museum director from Levoča, who later became editor-in-chief of the *Szepesi Híradó* newspaper, published an extensive report on the event organised under the patronage of Andor Nitsch: *"They came to us fearfully, as one of their speakers admitted. They did not think, anyone would understand or be glad to see them."*^[32] According to the article, one of the leaders of the student association in Prague explained *"the difficult spiritual struggle"* they *"went through before deciding whether to identify as Germans or Hungarians at the German university"*. Kőszeghy-Winkler comments that *"we do not know whose interest it was to confront you with this 'Entweder-oder',"*^[33] *but since you have declared yourselves to be Germans on the basis of your ethnic origin and the mother tongue of the majority, you should now honourably cultivate German virtues in yourselves."*^[34] The articles by Förster and Kőszeghy-Winkler reflect on the socialising impact of the environment of the university cities. Children, whose German-speaking fathers had positive emotional ties to pre-1918 Hungary, encountered the exclusivity of monolingual nationalism through Sudeten German professors and students. Friedrich Gretzmacher (1905–1985), a medical student in Prague and the son of Julius Gretzmacher, former district notary in Huncovce, expressed his thoughts on this subject in Prague and Levoča as well, alongside Edmund Fischl and Gustav Posch, sons of Tobias Fischl and Gustav Adolf Posch, pastors of Veľká and Dobšiná.^[35]

The widening generational gap was publicly manifested in a press debate that took place in February and March 1929 between Eugen Binder (1862–1933), a teacher from Kežmarok, and Aurel Emeritzky (1906–1982), a literature student in Prague, originally hailing from Vrbov. The teacher's

anger was fuelled by one of Emeritzky's critical approaches, in which he spoke negatively about the literary works of Friedrich Scholcz (1831-1911), former principal of the Lutheran Lyceum of Kežmarok. Emeritzky's criticism was interpreted not only as an attack on Scholcz, but also as an attack on the Zipsers' identity. According to Binder, the Zipsers *"never forgot that they were Germans from Spiš. In other words, they were Germans without being Großdeutsch. Germany could never forgive them for this, so they were accused of being renegades. We, the people of Spiš, are a special German-speaking enclave that has never been ashamed of its German culture, which was not only tolerated but also recognised. Today we must not forget that Divine Providence has decided in the manner that we are the citizens of another state, not the German Reich."*^[36] In his reply, Emeritzky explained that, with regard to Scholcz's dramatic poem in question, he still maintained his opinion that *"the work is a chaotic apocalypse, a jumble, a big salad. [...] I cannot agree with those who can only praise, even in cases where contempt should be more fitting."* However, he responded to Binder's comments about the Zipser identity: *"Today's young Germans have realised that they want to rebuild their lives on the basis of national identity rather than a historical, Burgher-like identity (without being 'Großdeutsch' in Binder's sense)".*^[37] Although the process of socialisation among German students from Spiš proved to be quite fluid during the 1920s, it is certain that the 'Zipser idol', as portrayed with romantic exaggeration by Kőszeghy-Winkler, had not touched them, since they had not become Germans *"like your Kuruc ancestors, who fought the Labanc, like your great-grandfathers, who were Honvéds in 1848, like your grandfathers who wore Hungarian clothes in the Bach era, and Germans like your fathers who triumphally brought the ashes of Thököly to Késmárk."*^[38]

"We demand, for our fathers to acknowledge the fact: we are German again"

The development of a sense of belonging to the German Volksgemeinschaft cannot be attributed solely to the university milieu in Prague and Brno. The younger generation, born during the First World War, could sing German folk songs and perform in German plays in German-language elementary schools. These songs and plays were taught and directed by people who had come to Spiš from beyond the river Morava, including, for example, members of the Wandervogel movement, who spent two to three weeks each summer in Spiš municipality to organise activities for the children of German-speaking parents. A youth home (Jugendherberge) was also established in Stará Voda near the river Hnilec, built to accommodate Sudeten German students coming from afar. The application for construction was submitted to the District Office by Karl Manouschek (?-1942), an Olomouc-born industrialist, who also acted as district chairman of the Deutscher Kulturverband (German Cultural Association, DKV).^[39] The DKV operated as the legal successor of the Deutscher Schulverein (German School Association), which was involved in financing and expanding the German-language school network and spreading German national ideology in Austria-Hungary.^[40] Since many who worked as civil servants under Hungarian rule had fled after 1919, a shortage of personnel arose not only in public administration, but also in education. The schools in Spiš that used Hungarian or German as the language of instruction before 1918 became exclusively German or Slovak language schools. The DKV tried to compensate for the shortage of professionals by not only providing financial support for the operation of church schools, but also by assigning Sudeten German teachers to particular municipalities in Spiš. However, these teachers represented a fraction of German society living in Bohemia and Moravia, whose interest was to spread German nationalism, and who raised and educated the children of German-speaking parents in this spirit.

German nation-building in Czechoslovakia, which gradually expanded eastward, was also aided by the "silent approval" of the Czechoslovak government. While the primary goal in areas beyond the

River Morava was to reduce German political and economic influence, the goal in Slovakia was to reduce Hungarian influence, and therefore, it was advantageous for them not to hinder the work of the DKV in Spiš.^[41] Moreover, in October 1926, the Bund der Landwirte (German Smallholders' League, BdL) joined the government led by Antonín Švehla, alongside the Deutsche Christlichsoziale Volkspartei (German Christian Social People's Party, DCV), and the former found a suitable ally to extend its influence in Slovakia. This political grouping was organised by Karl Manouschek in the village of Švedlár, in 1928, it took the name Karpathendeutsche Partei (Carpathian German Party, KDP) and joined forces with the governing BdL in the parliamentary elections held the following year.^[42] From the 1930s onwards, the KDP became the ZDP's main rival: the KDP promoted the ideology of the Volksgemeinschaft, meaning that all German-speakers in Slovakia belong to one unified national community, while the latter sought to form a Slovakian 'united front' of 'indigenous Germans' (bodenständigen Deutschen) in cooperation with the Hungarian opposition parties. The development of these two concepts was significantly influenced by the fact that, while the leaders of the KDP received financial support through the German consulate in Bratislava, Andor Nitsch maintained closer ties with Hungarian governmental circles in Budapest. Among other things, the KDP's commitment to Germany resulted in the formation of an electoral coalition with the Sudetendeutsche Partei (Sudeten German Party, SDP), which received more than 300,000 Reichsmarks (three million Czechoslovak crowns) from Hitler's Germany during the campaign period.^[43] It was not only the KDP that was attracted to German National Socialist ideology; radicalised young people who sympathised with the party were also drawn to it, raising worrying questions for their parents.

In the critical year of 1938, especially after the Anschluss, there were more and more cases every month in various parts of Spiš, where young people in their twenties marched wearing uniforms of the Deutscher Turnverein (German Turner Organisation) in orderly rows through the streets, singing German military songs or shouting 'Heil' while saluting.^[44] The swastika also appeared more and more frequently on the walls of public institutions, private homes, either carved or painted.^[45] Tensions escalated day by day, and the relationship between parents and children became increasingly strained. This is evident from the press debate, which attempted to promote a kind of rapprochement between the generations. It started with articles published by the *Szepesi Híradó*, whose authors were not particularly intent on choosing their words carefully when describing young people. *"Young people studying in Prague and other German universities, imbued with German ideas, stirred up strife between children and parents at home. Priests and teachers with foreign sympathies broke our unity of Szepes, and their slogan was that Zipsers could be either Hungarian or German, but not both. Poor young people! They have no tradition and do not know on what moral basis their fathers became great."*^[46] It should be added that the *Szepesi Híradó* published in Levoča was a newspaper supporting the Hungarian opposition parties, and the Opposition Press Department – established in the parliamentary club of the OKP – provided the editorial office with various information related to violations of minority rights.^[47] Since many young Germans in Spiš were keen to promote the KDP, often with a degree of aggression, journalists loyal to the Egyesült Magyar Párt (United Hungarian Party, EMP) were not hesitant to respond in a similarly combative tone, calling them traitors: *"There have always been Ocskays,^[48] and there always will be. It is good that they show their true colours; at least we know who they are. (...) They will never become the leaders of the Zipsers, because the strength of the Zipser people is rooted in the past, in the Hungarian past, and whoever cuts off these roots will lead the entire Zipser people to havoc."*^[49]

Two weeks later, a response to the previous sentences arrived from a person hiding behind the name 'Egy öregedő cipszer' (An Aging Zipser), who criticised both the ZDP and the nostalgia towards the pre-1918 Hungarian state, arguing that *„it is insensitive to expect a young generation*

that is completely detached from the past, with no traditions of its own, to feel its roots in the Hungarian past". The Aging Zipser blamed his own generation and those 'empty party frames' – referring to the ZDP – for failing to instil the 'Zipser spirit' in younger generations: "If we want to participate in the domestic party struggles unfolding under the influence of the events in Germany, if we want to weaken the cadres on the other side, then let's not beat our chests with grandiose rhetoric, let us not rely on outdated truths that are no longer compatible with our current outlook on life, because they have no dynamic power and will not sweep away the opposition; these truths will not defeat or morally destroy the opponents. (...) Let us not talk about 'profit-seekers', but show that we understand those who have strayed; that we can read the signs of time. Let us not gallop around in costumes of the era of Matthias Corvin on the principle of German-Hungarian fraternity, but let us draw into our worldview those for whom this is incomprehensible today." He calls on the elderly to be open to the younger generation and to develop a modern political and cultural plan, a vision. A plan "that would make these small people endure the ideological streams of race coming from the tremendous blood kin, encouraging them to take a more conscious hold of their position in the Tatras, continuing to connect their life to the Hungarian spirit and the economic circulation of their environment, in accordance with their historical calling."^[50]

The article published in the following issue of the *Szepesi Híradó* was also a response to the Aging Zipser, which used standard political slogans of the EMP about Spiš ('eight-hundred-year-old tradition' and 'shared destiny with Hungarians', etc.). The unknown author believed that it could not be said that young people have no traditions, because "*young people have as many traditions as their parents instill in them. It is not the fault of young people if they seek paths that are dangerous to tread, but of parents who, out of convenience or opportunism, do not take the trouble to acquaint their children with the past.*"^[51] In his response, the Aging Zipser, who took the name Studiosus, attempted to explain that the idea of Zipser identity should be made attractive to young people: "*It cannot be blasphemous if today, when our pro-Hungarian attitude is being attacked by insensitive and ignorant words from the West, while we romantically dream our Zipser dreams, we try to find a realistic basis to make this tie appealing, instead of dreaming and dwelling on the past.*"^[52] However, he was well aware of the obstacles to the marketability of the 'Zipser' brand: "*Let us look around us... under the influence of this German way of thinking, the Magyar people have also fallen into a fever of complete – not to say glorious – national exclusivity. Just look at the election results. (...) Many of us, who have increased the proportion of the German minority in elections, censuses, and declarations for the sake of our Hungarian identity, will henceforth only be able to serve this goal by voting for Magyar lists and declaring ourselves Magyar. It is a significance of politics that the German Weltanschauung^[53] compels us to do so. The streams of history are relentlessly dividing us; to the horror of a few timid people, they are separating not only the Zipsers from each other, but even fathers from their sons.*"^[54]

In light of the preceding lines, we need to reflect on several things. The concept of national exclusivity means that the SDP and the EMP acted and presented themselves as the sole representatives of a particular ethnic-linguistic community. The results mentioned are precisely related to this process, since he writes about the local elections held in May and June 1938. Although the Hungarian opposition parties, primarily the OKP, established their own party branches in various towns in Spiš (Levoča, Spišská Nová Ves, Gelnica, Podolíneč, etc.), these did not threaten the ZDP organisations' positions before 1938, provided that local interests desired it. Immediately before the elections, EMP party branches were formed in towns in Spiš, where only the ZDP had previously competed with other parties.^[55] The 'exclusively Hungarian' and 'exclusively German' characteristics also affected civil organisations, since many German speakers who were members of the DKV decided to leave, due to the ever-growing influence of the KDP, and joined the local

branches of the Szlovenszkói Magyar Kultúregylet (Hungarian Cultural Association of Slovakia, SZMKE), founded in Kežmarok, Poprad, and Gelnica.^[56] However, the decision in this 'Entweder-oder' situation, to use Kőszeghy-Winkler's expression, was born of coercion and uncertainty.

A week later, another article was published by an unknown journalist who now claimed that the issue of German youth in Spiš was temporary: *"Our standpoint is clear, when we say, there is an artificially inflated 'Spiš problem', which is, in reality, nothing more than a passing breeze, and cannot be illuminated or substantiated by historical-philosophical reasoning. (...) The blinded youth shall find their way back to us in their mature years, but they would never have strayed from us if soulless and selfish political opportunists had not turned their heads."*^[57] The title of Studiosus's response suggests that he wishes to end the debate, as he believes that *"the conflict between us seems irreconcilable. I agree that we do not need to lift a finger for a Zipser, who has proven his worth. (...) We should be interested in young people; even the Zipsers, who have stood the test of time, will agree with this. Our future does not depend on these Zipsers, but on the 'foggy' youth."* Regarding the emotions of young people, he wrote the following: *"I cannot help it: old Hungarian hospitality and chivalry are no arguments against the ones brought up by the Sudeten Germans."*^[58] In other words, he believes that the grandiose slogan of 'eight hundred years of tradition' should be given concrete meaning, and the term 'Zipser' should be filled with a definable, modern, community-building content that he would introduce to the younger generation.

On the very day, when Studiosus wanted to end the debate, the thoughts of another participant appeared on the pages of the *Karpathen-Post*. Writing under the name 'Ein junger Zipser' (A Young Zipser), the author responded to the debate in the *Szepesi Híradó*, stating that he did not support the KDP and could not remain silent about the 'disgraceful article' published there. *"We did not become Germans because 'soulless and selfish political opportunists twisted our heads', nor because we discovered German blood in ourselves, but because we are guided by the sacred conviction that it is our mission to preserve our German nationality."* The author wanted to make it clear that *"we do not hold a grudge against our fathers and grandfathers who became Magyars; we take this for granted. But we demand, for our fathers too to acknowledge the fact: we are German again"* On the one hand, he explains his sense of belonging to the Volksgemeinschaft, but on the other, he mentions his relationship with the Hungarians: *"And on the topic of the 800-year-old tradition: I am convinced that we will be just as friendly towards the Magyars as our ancestors were, and that the '800-year-old tradition' and Hungarian hospitality oblige us to do so."*^[59] Whoever was hiding behind the pseudonyms Studiosus and Ein junger Zipser, these people envisioned a 'common path' for generations. The idea of 'Zipser renewal', which they could not have foreseen, was doomed to fail. This was not only because, in autumn 1938, European diplomatic processes led to the signing of the Munich Agreement, but also because these two individuals were exceptional, meaning that there was no widespread willingness among the German-speaking society in Spiš to seek consensus and agree on values as they proposed. Not to mention that the operational framework of the Czechoslovak nation-state, Hungary's revisionist priorities, and the expansion of the German Reich pushed the so-called 'Zipser policy' into a dead end. And the consequences of the Second World War then wiped it off the face of the earth...

Conclusion

Although there were ideological and personal differences between the members of the Sarló and Prohászka Circles, they had one thing in common: they all identified themselves as Magyars, meaning they belonged to the Hungarian national minority in Czechoslovakia. For those living in Spiš, this was not so obvious; in fact, it was more apparent that those who had been socialised on the periphery of pre-1918 Hungary had developed multiple allegiances. We are primarily thinking of

those for whom Austria-Hungary meant socio-economic advantages. This group included the German-speaking Burghers of Spiš, who, in order to achieve social mobility, not only mastered the Hungarian language perfectly, but also developed an emotional attachment to the Hungarian state, [60] which was also linked to the tradition of regional autonomy. For this reason, in Hungarian literature and public consciousness, the 'Zipser' is portrayed – almost mythically – as a tradition-loving, Burgher idol, German ethnic group unconditionally loyal to Hungary.^[61] As Aurel Emeritzky put it: a historical, Burgher-like category. However, it was not only the merchants of Kežmarok, the lawyers of Levoča, and the industrialists of Gelnica who encountered the troops of the Czechoslovak army, but also the smallholders of Rakúsy, the factory workers of Matejovce pri Poprade, and the woodcutters of Švedlár. What they had in common was that they all preferred to use the German language, and in fact, the majority of the latter three probably did not even learn Hungarian. In other words, the 'urban Zipsers' were not the only ones affected by the events of 1918–1919, since the German-speaking society of Spiš was much more socially diverse.

With the framework of the new nation-state that created the 'Czechoslovaks' as the state-forming nation, everyone who did not belong to this category automatically became a minority.^[62] The political self-organisation of minorities partly took place in the spirit of mutual dependence; more precisely, it entailed the marginalisation of differences between the historically privileged classes and rural society. In other words, urban Burghers and agricultural proletarians became 'equal' in the spirit of national ideology. For members of the Sarló and the Prohászka Circles, it therefore became important to develop a new concept of nationhood that also included folk culture, to incorporate the People (nép, ľud, Volk) into the Nation (nemzet, národ, Nation).^[63] The leaders of the Burschenschafts, founded in Prague and Brno, had similar goals. In the central cities of Bohemia and Moravia, they listened to lectures by professors and talked to fellow students within the walls of German universities, where it was obvious that they belonged to the German Volksgemeinschaft. At the end of the 1920s, this did not necessarily mean that every member of the student circles sympathised with National Socialist ideology or harboured pan-German illusions. In the lower part of Spiš, for example, some young German-speakers joined the Komunistická strana Československa (Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, KSČ), demonstrating that the path from Volksgemeinschaft to National Socialism was not linear and that some were more interested in class, rather than national mobilisation. The Great Depression and Hitler's rise to power set new processes in motion. More and more young people were impressed by Germany's recovery from the crisis, in contrast to Czechoslovakia, which not only failed to solve the problem of deprivation, but also banned the parties of the Sudeten German opposition. The KDP and the associations linked to the party through personal connections created an enemy image for young people, whom they could blame for both deprivation and the lack of social mobility: the Czechs, the Hungarians, the Jews, and the Zipsers. The Zipsers, or those parents who sympathised with Andor Nitsch's party based on regional interests and cultural identity. The German-speaking society of Spiš had already been politically divided into 'Zipsers' and 'Carpathian Germans' for years when Studiosus spoke out in the *Szepesi Híradó*. If we believe that Ein junger Zipser was indeed young, then we must conclude that he wrote in the plural for nothing. The seeds of the idea of a 'common path', that is, the mission of sharing a common destiny with the Magyar people while preserving the German nationality and the reconciliation of the two, could not find fertile ground. These examples also raise the question about the limitations of (ethnic)regional concepts in nation-states, and also how generational conflicts serve as driving forces of internal development within these minorities.

[1] For the sake of simplicity, the names of municipalities will be written in their contemporary official versions. Exceptions are quotations, where places will be written in the form, as their author presented them.

[2] SZVATKÓ, Pál. Szlovenszkói városok. In *Tátra-almanach: Szlovenszkói városképek*. Bratislava - Pozsony : Tátra, 1938, p. 27.

[3] More on the political activity of the Hungarian minority of Czechoslovakia during the inter-war era: ANGYAL, Béla. *Érdekvédelem és önszerveződés. Fejezetek a csehszlovákiai magyar pártpolitika történetéből 1918 - 1938*. Galánta - Dunaszerdahely : Fórum Intézet - Lilium Aurum, 2002.

[4] SZEGHY-GAYER, Veronika. A szlovák-magyar-zsidó-cseh Kassa a 20. század első felében. In *Korall*, 2017, vol. 68, pp. 107-110.

[5] SZALAY, Zoltán. Kisebbségi nyelvi jogok Szlovákiában az 1918 - 1968 közötti időszakban. In *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*, 2011, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 81-89.

[6] For example: DUKA-ZÓLYOMI, Norbert. A magyar ifjúsági mozgalmak története Csehszlovákiában. In *Magyar Írás*, 1932, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 109-113. SEMETKAY, József. Csehszlovákiai magyar ifjúság. Salgótarján - Turul Nyomda, 1932. KRAMMER, Jenő. *A szlovenszkói magyar serdülők lelkivilága*. Budapest : Merkantil, 1935.

[7] In English: Sickle

[8] BAJCSI, Ildikó. A Prohászka Ottokár Körök Szövetsége az első Csehszlovák Köztársaságban: Generációs önszerveződés a keresztényszocialista ideológia jegyében. In *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*, 2015, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 61-86. FILEP, Tamás Gusztáv. Az „Új Élet” című folyóirat ideológiája a harmincas években. In BÁRDI, Nándor - FILEP, Tamás Gusztáv - LŐRINCZ, D. József (Ed.). *Népszolgálat: A közösségi elkötelezettség alakváltozatai a magyar kisebbségek történetében*. Kalligram : Pozsony, 2015, pp. 114-136. BAJCSI, Ildikó. *Kisebbségi magyar küldetés Csehszlovákiában. A sarlós nemzedék közösségi szerepvállalása Trianon után*. Budapest : L'Harmattan - Impulzus, 2021.

[9] On Hungarian governmental politics in Czechoslovakia and the political coalition formed by the Hungarian National Party and the Bund der Landwirte: SIMON, Attila. *Az elfeledett aktivisták. Kormánypárti magyar politika az első Csehszlovák Köztársaságban*. Somorja : Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2013.

[10] MANNHEIM, Karl. The Sociological Problem of Generations. In CORNELL, Lauren - GIONI, Massimiliano - HOPTMAN, Laura - SHOLIS, Brian (Ed.). *Younger than Jesus. The Generation Book*. New York -Göttingen : New Museum - Steidl, 2009, p. 170.

[11] Both weekly newspapers were affiliated with the Opposition Press Department set up in Prague by the Hungarian opposition parties, though while the *Karpathen-Post* was linked first of all to the Zipser Deutsche Partei, the *Szepesi Híradó* was more of a regional 'spokesman' of the Hungarian opposition. More on the differences between the Zipser Deutsche Partei and the Hungarian opposition concerning their political communication: CZÁBOCZKY, Szabolcs: „Keine Farbe bekennen, das ist doch sehr auch zipserisch?!” Jelzőhasználat és értékrend-interpretáció a szlovákiai német pártok kommunikációjában. In ÖLLÖS, László et. al. *A szlovákiai magyarok értékrendje és annak változásai*. Somorja : Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, 2025, pp. 121-138.

- [12] HORVÁTHOVÁ, Margaréta. *Nemci na Slovensku: Etnokultúrne tradície z aspektu osídlenia, remesiel a odievania*. Komárno – Dunajská Streda: Fórum inštitút pre výskum menšín – Liliium Aurum, 2002, pp. 9–10.
- [13] ĎURKOVSKÁ, Mária. História nemeckého osídlenia na území Slovenska do začiatku 19. storočia. In *Človek a spoločnosť*, 2007, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 2. Online: <https://individualandsociety.org/journal/2007/2/historia-nemeckeho-osidlenia-na-uzemi-slovenska-do-zaciatku-19-storocia>
- [14] The 13 towns of Spiš (contemporary names in Slovak): Spišská Nová Ves, Ľubica, Spišská Belá, Ruskinovce, Tvarožná, Vrbov, Spišské Podhradie, Spišské Vlaky, Poprad, Veľká, Spišská Sobota, Stráže, Matejovce pri Poprade. The 3 estates: Hniezdne, Podolíne, Stará Ľubovňa.
- [15] ĎURKOVSKÁ, M. *História nemeckého osídlenia ...*, p. 7.
- [16] BÓNA, László. Alkalmazkodási stratégiák, értelmiségi asszimilációs életutak: Adalékok a dualizmuskori Késmárk etnikai történetéhez. In *Fórum Társadalomtudományi Szemle*, 2020, vol. 22, no. 2, p. 59.
- [17] ĎURKOVSKÁ, Mária. Proces maďarizácie spišských Nemcov a ich postoj ku vzniku Československej republiky. In *Slezský sborník*, 2009, vol. 12, no. 1, p. 4–5.
- [18] CZÁBOCZKY, Szabolcs. Career Paths of Zipser Deutsche Partei Mayors in Interwar Spiš. In SZEGHY-GAYER, Veronika (Ed.). *Civil Servants under Changing Regimes in Central and Eastern Europe in the First Half of the 20th Century*. Košice : Institute of Social Sciences CSPA – Slovak Academy of Sciences, 2024, p. 60.
- [19] The term ‘Sudeten German’ (Sudetendeutsch) was first used in 1902 by Franz Jesser journalist, a teacher, became a generalising term to define the German-speaking population living in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia. The Sudety mountain range is located in the northern part of the Czech Republic, which was also a natural border between Czechoslovakia and Germany in the inter-war era. By Sudeten German I mean ‘German-speakers living in Bohemia and Moravia’, which does not mean, that all of these individuals identified themselves as ‘Sudeten German’.
- [20] CZÁBOCZKY, Szabolcs. A Deutscher Kulturverband és a Deutscher Turnverein korai tevékenysége a Szepességen (1922–1935), *Regio*, 2024, vol. 32, no. 1, p. 4–6.
- [21] Štátny archív v Košiciach (hereinafter ŠA KE), pobočka Spišská Nová Ves (hereinafter pb. SN), fond Okresný úrad v Gelnici (hereinafter f. OÚ GL), krabica (hereinafter kr.) 24, 589/1928. prez. 6511/27.
- [22] As Minister of Education, Milan Hodža banned the nostrification of degrees handed out by Hungarian universities by regulation in 1928. POPÉLY, Gyula. A magyar iskolaügy kálváriája (Cseh)Szlovákiában 1918 –1945. In FILEP, Tamás Gusztáv – TÓTH, László (Ed.). *A (cseh)szlovákiai magyar művelődés története 1918 –1998*, II, Budapest : Ister, 1998, p. 43.
- [23] *Karpathen-Post*, August 4, 1923, no. 31, Zipser Deutsche Hochschüler in Prag und Brünn, p. 4.
- [24] During the second half of the decade, they changed their name to „Verein Deutscher Studenten »Zips« zu Brünn”.
- [25] *Karpathen-Post*, October 27, 1923, no. 43, Verein Zipser Hochschüler in Brünn, p. 8., *Karpathen-Post*, February 16, 1924, no. 7, Landsmannschaft Zipser Deutscher Hochschüler „Zips” in

Prag, p. 5.

[26] HOREL, Catherine. *Multicultural Cities of the Habsburg Empire. Imagined Communities and Conflictual Encounters*, Budapest – Vienna – New York : Central European University Press, 2023, p. 202.

[27] Between the beginning of the 1918/1919 and the 1939/1940 school year overall 80 students coming from Spiš studied at the German Technical College in Brno. BERNÁT, Libor. Študenti zo Spiša na technických vysokých školách v Brne v medzivojnovom období. In CHALUPECKÝ, Ivan (Ed.). *Z minulosti Spiša*, 2014, vol. 22, p. 68.

[28] The first leadership of the student association in Brno: President: Stephan Payer engineer-candidate, Secretary: Ladislaus Thern engineer-candidate, Cashier: Koloman Münnich. The first leadership of the student association in Prague: President: Julius Zwick medical student, Deputy president: Matthias Schneck medical student, Secretary: Gustav Maurer engineer student, Cashier: Adalbert Schwartz engineer student. In the 1920s, members of the student association in Prague held their gatherings in a basement under 16 Krakovská, Prague near Wenceslas Square. *Karpathen-Post*, November 15, 1924, no. 46, p. 4, Die Landsmannschaft Zipser Deutscher Hochschüler.

[29] *Karpathen-Post*, April 17, 1926, no. 16, p. 1, Deutsche Kulturfragen; *Karpathen-Post*, February 19, 1927, no. 8, p. 6, Ernst Lindner-Feier in Prag; *Karpathen-Post*, June 11, 1927, no. 24, p. 6, Landsmannschaft Zipser Hochschüler „Zips“ in Prag.

[30] *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, October 29, 1927, FÖRSTER, Irma. Zipser összejevetel Prágában.

[31] *Karpathen-Post*, January 5, 1924, no. 1, p. 5, Heimatabend der Zipser Deutschen Hochschüler.

[32] *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, September 10, 1927, K[ÖSZE]GH-Y [WINKLE]-R [Elemé]-r. Szepesi Burschenschaftok.

[33] In English: Either-or situation.

[34] *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, September 10, 1927, K[ÖSZE]GH-Y [WINKLE]-R [Elemé]-r. Szepesi Burschenschaftok.

[35] At the time of the Heimatfest held in Nálepkovo, the student association in Prague was led by Posch and the association in Brno by Fischl. *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, September 1, 1928, no. 35, p. 3, G. Diákgyűlés Merényben.

[36] *Karpathen-Post*, February 23, 1929, no. 8, BINDER, Eugen. Betrachtungen über einen Zeitungsartikel, p. 4.

[37] *Karpathen-Post*, March 2, 1929, no. 9, EMERITZY, Aurel. An die Leser der „Karpathen-Post“, p. 7.

[38] *Szepesi Híradó – Szepesi Hírlap*, September 10, 1927, K[ÖSZE]GH-Y [WINKLE]-R [Elemé]-r. Szepesi Burschenschaftok.

[39] ŠA KE, pb. SN, f. OÚ GL, kr. 93., 14188/29. admin.; ŠA KE, pb. SN, fond OÚ GL, kr. 95, 3387. admin.

- [40] KOVÁČ, Dušan. *Nemecko a nemecká menšina na Slovensku (1871 – 1945)*. Bratislava : VEDA, 1989, p. 20, 74.
- [41] CZÁBOCZKY, S. *A deutscher Kulturverband és...*, p. 9.
- [42] *Tagesbote*, October 6, 1929, p. 1, Die Deutsche Wahlgemeinschaft.
- [43] SCHVARC, Michal. Len „podpora práce nemectva“? K otázke skrytého financovania aktivít nemeckých politických zoskupení na Slovensku Nemeckom, 1933 – 1941. In VÖRÖS, László (Ed.). *Politická korupcia na území Slovenska a Čiech v 19. a 20. storočí*. Bratislava : VEDA, 2020, p. 188.
- [44] For example: ŠA KE, pb. SN, f. OÚ GL, kr. 140, 7295/1938. admin. 1199/1938.
- [45] For example: Štátny archív v Prešove (hereinafter ŠA PO), pobočka Poprad (hereinafter pb. PP), fond Okresný úrad v Kežmarku (hereinafter f. OÚ KK), kr. 31, 1060. prez. 2836/1938.
- [46] *Szepesi Híradó*, April 16, 1938, Feltámadunk!
- [47] Národní archiv České republiky (hereinafter NA ČR), fond Předsednictví ministerské rady (hereinafter f. PMR), kr. 577, svazek (hereinafter sv.) 1537, 19/pres/1922.
- [48] The author is referring to László Ocskay, who was a general in the army of Ferenc Rákóczi II during the Independence War between 1703–1711. Ocskay, because of his change of sides to the imperial army, is often portrayed in Hungarian national canon as an archetype of national treason.
- [49] *Szepesi Híradó*, May 7, 1938, Nehéz idők közepette.
- [50] *Szepesi Híradó*, May 21, 1938, EGY ÖREGEDŐ CIPSZER. „Nehéz idők közepette...”
- [51] *Szepesi Híradó*, May 28, 1938, Ez a mi hitünk!
- [52] *Szepesi Híradó*, June 25, 1938, STUDIOSUS, az öregedő cipszer. Nehéz idők közepette...
- [53] In English: worldview
- [54] *Szepesi Híradó*, June 25, 1938, STUDIOSUS, az öregedő cipszer. Nehéz idők közepette...
- [55] *Szepesi Híradó*, June 4, 1938, Poprádon megalakult az Egyesült Magyar Párt helyi szervezete; *Szepesi Híradó*, June 4, 1938, Az Egyesült Párt.
- [56] ŠA PO, pb. PP, f. OÚ KK, kr. 31, 1422/1938. prez. Kežmarok založenie maďarského kultúrneho spolku. ŠA PO, pb. PP, f. OÚ KK, kr. 30, 109/1938. prez. 1547/38.
- [57] *Szepesi Híradó*, July 2, 1938, Kedves öregedő cipszer.
- [58] *Szepesi Híradó*, July 9, 1938, STUDIOSUS. Fejezzük be...
- [59] *Karpathen-Post*, July 9, 1938, no. 28, p. 1, EIN JUNGER ZIPSER. Zum Zipser Problem.
- [60] More on the ‘hungarus’ concept: MISKOLCZY, Ambrus. A „hungarus-tudat” a polgári-nemzeti átalakulás sodrában. *Magyar Kisebbség*, 2012, vol., no. 3–4, pp. 163–204.
- [61] For example: SZALATNAI, Rezső. Utazás a Szepességen. In FILEP, Tamás Gusztáv – SZÖKE, Edit (Ed.). *A tölgyerdőre épült város: Felföldi tájak, városok*. Dunaszerdahely : Lilium Aurum, 1996, pp. 40–54.

[62] On minority nation-building and political activism in Czechoslovakia: Lichtenstein, Tatjana. *Zionists in Interwar Czechoslovakia. Minority Nationalism and the Politics of Belonging*. Bloomington-Indianapolis : Indiana University Press, 2016.

[63] BÁRDI, Nándor. A népszolgálat genezise és tartalomváltozása. In BÁRDI, Nándor – FILEP, Tamás Gusztáv – LÖRINCZ, D. József (Ed.). *Népszolgálat: A közösségi elkötelezettség alakváltozatai a magyar kisebbségek történetében*. Kalligram : Pozsony, 2015, p. 35.

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