Perception of Inter-Ethnic Relations of Slovaks, Hungarians and Roma 2004 – 2017

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Abstract:
The aim of the contribution is to analyse interethnic relations between Slovaks, Hungarians and Roma people in 2004-2017 based on empirical research data focused on the theoretical, methodological and practical aspects of ethnicity and ethnic relations. The issue of interethnic relations, or to be more precise the relations between the majority and minorities in the central Europe area, represents not only a past concern but also currently one of the priorities for the countries of central and Eastern Europe. The character of contemporary interethnic relationships is becoming more and more a subject of scientific research whose results are being translated into practice. These results contribute to solutions to possible inter-ethnic conflicts that arise from the interaction of different cultures in today's society. After November 1989, the social significance of interethnic relations has been marked by ethno-identification processes in the Slovak republic. The primary interest of individual minority representatives is to improve their position and secure the enactment of their rights. At the centre of societal interest in Slovakia are a part from economic and social issues also minority issues. Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918 as a state of Czechs and Slovaks with many minorities. Today, the Slovak Republic, one of the successor states of Czechoslovakia, is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous countries in central Europe. During the last century, the national composition in Czechoslovakia significantly changed through the influence of World War II and population transfers or migrations. After the fall of the communist regime in November 1989, the legislative framework for the protection of the rights of national minorities gradually changed. Slovakia entered the European Union in 2004, and before that it had to meet the Copenhagen criterion in the area of protection of rights and national minorities. One of the main issues in the near future is the ability to accept the heterogeneity of Slovak society as a normal standard. Roma and Hungarian minorities are an indicator of the problem in Slovakia, today. The problems and status of minorities are a long-term priority of the Slovak political agenda. Today, Slovakia ranks among European countries with relatively advanced legislation for the protection of national minorities. Through its approach to minorities it meets the criteria of international organizations for a modern European and liberal democracy. Data was collected in the second half of 2004 and 2017 in all regions of Slovakia. In 2004, a total of 480 respondents were surveyed for the needs of our study. The subjects of the survey were Slovaks (160) and the two most numerous minorities living in Slovakia: the Hungarians (160) and the Roma (160). The selection criteria for the research sample were: nationality indicator, t. j. public declaration of belonging to the minority; gender, age and education. In 2017 the total quota sample in our research consists of 487 adult respondents: 162 Slovaks, 165 Hungarians and 160 Roma. Several conclusions follow from the presented results of intra-ethnic and interethnic relations. The evaluation of intra-ethnic relations has produced mixed results. While in 2004 Hungarians were more positive about the relations inside their ethnic community, in 2017 it was Slovaks. The Roma assessments didn’t change over these two rounds. However, all intra-ethnic
evaluations were positive. The situation was different in the area of interethnic relations. The evaluations of Roma people, except self-assessment, were mostly neutral to slightly negative character. It relates to the Slovaks evaluation of Roma people as well as Roma people of Slovaks. What is interesting is Slovaks evaluations towards the Roma people and the change from the negative zone to the neutral one. For both evaluations relatively large differences apply in 2004 and almost identical values in 2017. Hungarian respondents rated the Roma people slightly negative, approximately the same in both rounds of research. In relation to Hungarians, the ratings were generally more positive, although the trend between the evaluation rounds shows a decreasing trend. While from the point of the minority view, the Slovaks' relationship to the Hungarians cannot be deduced from the downward trend yet; the relations between Hungarians and Slovaks confirms this fact. The relations of Slovaks and Hungarians showed relatively large differences in 2004 but were very similar in 2017. Even the Roma ratings to the Hungarians had a decreasing trend from positive to neutral. Even though this contribution doesn’t analyse the reasons for evaluating interethnic relations, the 2017 ratings show less variability among the different ethnic group ratings. It is related to the stabilization of interethnic relations, a more peaceful political dialogue and the presence of an external ethnic threat in the form of a migratory crisis. If we ignore the well-known fact in literature of a more positive self-image and a more critical assessment of others, the relations between the Roma people and the Slovaks are at a maximum neutral value now. Vice versa, Hungarian relations still have positive characteristics.


Introduction

There are diverse approaches to studying inter-ethnic relations in research literature. Some focus on relations between particular minorities (Ortakovski, 2001; Demjaha, 2016), others on minority interactions with the majority (Titzman, 2014). There are also approaches which monitor the growing ethnic diversification (Craig, Rucker, Richeson, 2018). However, more and more attention is paid to interdisciplinary research into inter-ethnic relations in the current socio-political context (Verkuyten, Zaremba, 2005). In this context, the authors point to the need to reflect the current political, economic as well as social changes in the study of inter-ethnic relations, despite the lack of consensus as to how and to what extent these factors influence the nature of inter-ethnic relations. Another research challenge is the relatively high ethnic closeness in the time of increasing ethnic and cultural heterogeneity of individual countries. This is a phenomenon called ethnic homophily (Titzmann, Serwata, Silbereisen, Davidov, 2016). The principle of homophily means that people tend to associate themselves with those whom they "resemble". McPherson, Smith-Lovin, and Cook (2001) state that while homophily works in different dimensions, it has been shown that race, language, religion, and ethnicity are commonly known as the basis of similarity leading to ethnic homophily.

Historical connections of inter-ethnic relations in Slovakia

When analyzing inter-ethnic relations, it is necessary to reflect the continuity of the socio-historical development of particular minorities, which also determines their current development. Czechoslovakia was founded in 1918 as the state of Czechs and Slovaks, but with many minorities. The most numerous ethnic minority was the Germans, followed by the Hungarian, Russian, Jewish and Polish minorities. Czechoslovakia disintegrated into two states on January 1st 1993 and, while the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland are, nationality-wise, a relatively homogeneous country, there is a significant Hungarian minority in Slovakia

1 Under this label, the Ukrainians, the Ruthenians and the Carpathian Ruthenians were included.
In spite of the transfer and displacement of the population during totalitarian regimes (fascist and communist) and the immediate post-War, as well as the Holocaust, Slovakia is currently the most ethnically heterogeneous country in Central Europe. Officially, more than 10% (unofficially almost 20%) of the population in Slovakia are national minorities. According to the latest population census in 2011, Hungarians numbered 458,467, Roma 105,738, Ruthenians 33,482, Ukrainians 7,430, Czechs 30,367, Germans 4,690, Poles 3,084, Croats 1,022, Serbs 698, Russians 1,997, Jews 631, and Bulgarians 1,051. (Population and Housing Census, 2011)

In most countries of the European Union, the original minorities were, to a large extent, assimilated. After the Second World War, new minorities started to emerge as a result of migration and displacement. This trend, however, did not concern the newly created Eastern Bloc. In these, small communities of the new minorities formed primarily as an aid to the Cominform countries with Marxist orientation, or later to the developing countries. At the same time, after 1945, many communist states had significantly changed their ethnic structure. Also in Czechoslovakia – and post-separation - the composition of the population has changed dramatically, which has also led to the frustration of minority members and the strengthening of xenophobic attitudes on both sides (from 2015 onwards, the European migration crisis has also been adding to this phenomenon). At present, the Roma and the Hungarian minorities are the indicator of problems in Slovakia. Integration is the main issue among the Roma, but there is also social and economic marginalization. Among the Hungarians, it is primarily about cultural and ethnic seclusion (Lelkes, Tóth, 2006).

The issue of national minorities is perceived as a problem when a majority (or a national majority) consciously or unknowingly excludes other groups from the decision-making process. Despite many objections to the nationalist politics of the communist regime, the rights of the recognized national minorities in Czechoslovakia were protected by the state even during the period of real socialism (Kuklík, Petráš, 2013, p. 26). The Czechoslovak Communists did not view the minorities equally – some of the currently existing national minorities were not formally accepted during the communist regime (for example Roma or Ruthenians).

Since the fall of the communist system, a comprehensive state program has not been prepared in the national policy of Slovakia. The national policy was implemented through partial measures reflecting the current issues of the intra-political development, responding to the Slovak foreign policy objectives related to its membership in transnational European structures, or responding to the standards and documents adopted by these organizations. In the new situation, after the collapse of the communist regimes in Europe, the search for and the creation of the identities of nations and national minorities acquired a well-defined and in some groups of the population also a confrontational form. (Šutaj, 2005)

After the dissolution of the Czechoslovak federation, 14.15% of the Slovak population was represented by ethnic minority members. The proportion of the Hungarian minority rose from nearly 4% of the former Czechoslovakia to almost 12% in the new Republic. Similarly, its geopolitical significance also increased threefold. The Roma’s situation, however, was more fluid, with them migrating consistently between Slovakia and the Czech Republic, concentrating mainly in Eastern Slovakia. (Kusý, 1994)

After the fall of the regime, the legislative framework for the protection of the rights of national minorities gradually changed. Before joining the European Union in 2004, Slovakia had to fulfill the Copenhagen Criteria in the sphere of protection of rights and national minorities; with the emphasis on accepting the heterogeneity of Slovak society as a normal standard.

Slovakia has ratified the vast majority of relevant UN documents as well as the Council of Europe documents that have become part of the legal system. Today, Slovakia is among the
European countries with relatively advanced legislation on the protection of national minorities. With its approach to minorities, it meets the criteria of international organizations for modern European and liberal democracy.

Public opinion

Relations between the majority and minorities are influenced daily by social and political events. The issue of the Hungarian minority has become one of the important topics of public life in Slovakia, which after November 1989 has been the subject of political debates that has polarized the minority internally as well as between those of the Slovak majority. The period from the beginning of the Slovak Republic to the parliamentary elections in 1994 was characterized by the deepening of the cooperation of the Hungarian political parties in enforcing the requirements of the Hungarian community. In particular, it was the requirement to designate municipalities in the Hungarian language, to prevent the introduction of alternative education, and to build a territorial division in accordance with the ethnic distribution. Although, according to Šutaj (2005), the Slovak–Hungarian relations managed to overcome various problems (the Slovak-Hungarian Treaty of 1995, entry into the European structures), possible sources of instability in relation to the Hungarian minority appeared again later. This included, in particular, the promotion of nationalist political subjects in the two countries, the adoption of double citizenship laws in Hungary, and the reciprocal adjustment of the Slovak legal norm. A source of tension was also the revelation of Hungarian statues in the Slovak public space (Štefan, 2009). After 2010, there has been a relative harmonization of the relations between the two states and the avoidance of the sources of potential conflicts (Marušiak, 2011, Strážay, 2013).

The Roma are the most visible and one of the most important national minorities of Slovak society and, at the same time, they belong to the marginalized groups. The Roma issue is a multidimensional problem. It is likely that even in the future it will be the Roma who will be the biggest challenge for minorities politics in Slovakia. Within the next two decades, the Roma issue will most likely remain the most discussed one. Between 2004 and 2017, poverty, discrimination, racism, education, and social issues were the most widely discussed in connection to the Roma. In recent years, there have been several cases during which the Roma have come to the forefront of political and public interest, and again they have begun to draw attention to the issue of poverty and segregation in the Roma settlements. The huge problem that the Roma have to face is stereotyping on the part of the majority population. The Roma are often perceived as people avoiding work and civil duties, and who abuse social benefits. It has a historical legacy based on when the term Roma was interpreted as a person recoiling from work (Nečas, 1994). Today, the Roma are more or less rejected by the majority community, often through racial aversion. (For more about the stereotypes and image of the Roma in the majority society see the publication Čierno-biele svety [Black and white worlds], 2016.), many Roma children are growing up in institutions, and the relationship between the majority and the Roma are often tense, sometimes with open hostility.

After the accession of the Slovak Republic to the European Union, the Roma were in an unusual situation – their standards were not always completely in line with the normative and value system of the surrounding majority population. The Roma have always lived in closed groups. The distancing of the majority population from the Roma minority has caused even greater closure in the minority's inner world. Thus, the majority community remains a foreign group for the Roma, as it rejected them in the past. Another change after Slovakia's accession to the EU was the introduction of social reforms that curtailed state forms of support and caused a wave of social unrest. It was followed by extensive migration abroad, especially to
Western European countries (Grill, 2016). In recent years, the issue of ethnicity and inter-ethnic relations among minorities has been at the forefront due to the influx of migrants and refugees to Europe. These frameworks of inter-ethnic relations have also found their reflection in the opinions and attitudes of the population surveyed through public opinion research. Several qualitative research studies focusing on the opinions of the Roma (such as the 1996 InfoRoma Oral History research and the 2001 World Bank research on Poverty and Welfare of Roma in the Slovak Republic) concluded that the Roma perceive the majority community in a considerably more favorable way than themselves. In addition, the World Bank research of 2001 points to the fact that the stereotypes, animosities, and conflicts within the Roma community are much more significant than the social distance of the Roma from the majority community. Among the Roma, the sub-ethnic differences, regional affiliation and, above all, the degree of integration in society play a much more important role than the partitioning of the majority and the Roma. (Vašečka, 2001).

As Bahna (2015) points out, according to the results of the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), the Slovaks' relations with the Hungarians between 1996 and 2014 have undergone a significant change. While in 1996, 40% of the respondents identified Hungary as the biggest threat, in 2014, it was only 5%. According to the ISSP 2009 survey, conflicts between the Slovaks and the Hungarians were considered to be acute or very acute by 35.6% (22) of the Slovak respondents; similarly the conflicts between the Slovaks and the Roma were assessed negatively by 47.4% (23.5) of the respondents (Džambazovič, Zeman, Pikulík, 2010).

According to the findings of the Institute for Public Affairs in 2015, in the V4 countries in the ranking of trust, according to the opinions of the Slovak public, the Poles (40%) ranked third after the Czechs (78%). The Hungarians were in ninth place (30%). The Hungarians trusted Germans (62% of the respondents) the most. Germans were followed by Poles (58%); the Czechs and Slovaks shared fourth and fifth place (40% each) (Gyárfášová, Mesežnikov, 2016).

**Objective of the contribution**

The objective of the contribution is to analyze the inter-ethnic relations between the Slovaks, Hungarians and Roma in 2004 and 2017 based on the data of empirical research aimed at the core theoretical, methodological and practical issues of ethnicity and ethnic relations (using the methodological procedures applied in the empirical research of 2004).

**Method**

The data are from two rounds of the national minority research that took place in 2004 and 2017. A structured questionnaire was used in both rounds of the research, the content of which was in 2017, for the sake of comparability, essentially identical to the original questionnaire but supplemented by some other topical questions. In 2004 a research file was created consisting of a total of 480 respondents. The subjects of the research were the members of the majority of nationality-mixed areas, Slovaks (160), and members of the two most numerous minorities living in Slovakia: the Hungarians (160) and the Roma (160). The selection criteria for the research sample were: nationality indicator, i.e. public declaration of belonging to the minority; gender, age and education. In 2017, the
Among Hungarians the proportion was 49.4% men and 50.6% women; among Hungarians the proportion was 49.4% to 50.6%; among Roma it was 47.5% to 52.5%. In 2017, there were 46.9% men and 53.1% women in the Slovak group; 43% to 57% among Hungarians; and 50 to 50% among Roma.

In 2004, in terms of age, there were 49.4% of the Slovak respondents up to the age of 45, and 50.6% were and over 45 years. 24.4% of the Hungarian respondents were up to 45 and 75.6% were over 45 years. Among the Roma, 50.6% of the respondents were up to 45 years and 49.4% were over 45 years of age. In 2017, 58% of the Slovak respondents were up to the age of 45, and 42% were over 45 years. Among the Hungarians, 49.1% were up to 45 years, and 50.9% were over 45 years. 71.8% of the Roma respondents were up to 45 years and 28.2% were over 45 years of age.

In terms of education, between 2004 and 2017 there was a slight difference. In 2004 the research file consisted of representatives of the majority and the minorities who had at least a secondary education with a school-leaving certificate (with at least an apprenticeship education for the Roma). However, higher or university education was preferred. In 2017 respondents with primary education were also included in the research. In the 2004 data, 83.6% of Slovaks had passed university education, and 16.3% had a higher qualification. In the Hungarian minority, 3.7% had full secondary education, 84.4% had university education, and 11.9% had a higher qualification. 90% of the Roma had secondary education, 8.7% had university education, and 1.2% had a higher qualification. In 2017 the research file contained 18% of Slovaks with primary education, 66% with secondary, and 16% with university education. In the Hungarian minority, it was similar; 18.2% had primary education, 70.9% had secondary education, and 10.9% had university education. 60% of the Roma had primary education, 38.1% had secondary, and 1.9% had university education.

For the purpose of assessing relations within the ethnic community, the relation of the minority to the majority, and the majority to the minority, the following questions were used: If you were to evaluate the current relations (1. within your minority, 2. of your minority to the Slovaks, 3. of the Slovaks to your minority in the region (in your village, city) in which you live, how would you say they are? The score was calculated from a 7-point scale; where 1 was very bad and 7 was very good. Similarly, relations within the majority and to the minorities were also examined: If you were to evaluate the current relations (1. among the Slovaks, 2. of the Slovaks to the other ethnic minorities in the region (in your village, city) in which you live, how you would say they are? The score was calculated from a 7-point scale, where 1 was very bad and 7 was very good. The relations between the minorities were studied by means of the question: If you were to evaluate the current relations of your minority to the other ethnic minorities living in Slovakia, how would you say they are? The score was calculated from a 7-point scale, where 1 was very bad and 7 was very good.

**Results**

*Evaluation of the relations within own ethnicities*

In the first part we analyzed the relations within the individual ethnic communities, including the majority. Using the two-factor analysis of variance, we compared the evaluations of the individual ethnic communities as well as the changes in their evaluations over time (Figure 1). All effects were statistically significant. The ethnicity effect was at $F(2, 954) = 20.41, p < .001$, and the data collection year effect achieved $F(1, 954) = 6.20, p = 0.013$. The ethnicity
and the data collection year interaction effect was also statistically significant $F (2, 954) = 10.88, p < .001$, while in 2004 the average evaluations of relations among the Hungarians were significantly more positive (M = 5.54, SD = 1.13) than the Slovaks' evaluations (M = 4.82, SD = 1.10), or the Roma (M = 4.81, SD = 1.08). The interaction also revealed a significantly more positive evaluation of relations among the Slovaks in 2017 (M = 5.49, SD = 1.19) compared to 2004 (M = 4.82, SD = 1.10). In contrast, the Hungarian respondents' evaluations slightly decreased, but the difference was not statistically significant. The Roma respondents showed almost identical evaluations in both data collection rounds. The evaluations of all ethnicities achieved relatively positive values, despite the abovementioned differences.

Figure 1: Average evaluations of relations within ethnicities (1 – very bad 7 – very good)

Evaluation of the relations with the majority and among ethnicities

In the next section we analyzed the inter-ethnic relations of the Hungarians and the Roma with the Slovaks. The minorities first assessed Slovaks' relations with the minorities (Figure 2) and, subsequently, they evaluated the minority's relations with the majority. In evaluation of the relations of the majority to the minorities, the results of the two-factor model confirmed the statistical significance of the effect of nationality $F (1, 632) = 103.42, p < .001$, where in both cases the Hungarian respondents rated the relations of the Slovaks with their minority significantly more positive than the Roma. The effect of the collection year $F (1, 632) = 8.30, p = 0.004$ was reflected in the average evaluations of the Slovaks' relations with the Roma (from the point of view of the Roma). These were significantly more negative in 2017 (M = 3.81, SD = 1.55) than in 2004 (M = 4.16, SD = 0.90). In contrast, there were no significant differences between the Slovaks' relations with the Hungarians. The interaction effect of these factors was not statistically significant.
The findings from the evaluations of the minorities' relations with the majority were similar (Figure 3). The effect of the nationality $F(1, 634) = 99.89, p < .001$, the effect of the year of collection $F(1, 634) = 9.65, p = .002$, and their interaction $F(1, 634) = 4.57, p = .033$ were significant. The evaluations of the Hungarian respondents in both rounds were significantly more positive than the Roma evaluations. The Hungarian evaluations were significantly more negative in 2017 ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.22$) than in 2004 ($M = 5.54$, $SD = 1.04$) In contrast, the Roma evaluations did not differ statistically.
Mutual evaluations of the Hungarian and the Roma relations are illustrated in Figure 4. The Hungarian respondents' evaluations in relation to the Roma were practically identical in both rounds, with a slightly negative connotation. In contrast, evaluations of the Roma participants in the 2004 research were significantly more positive in relation to the Hungarians than in 2017, when only the average of the evaluation scale was reached.

Figure 4: Average evaluations of the Hungarian and the Roma relations (1 – very bad 7 – very good)

A different view of the abovementioned issue was represented by the evaluations of the Slovak respondents (Figure 5). While the minority evaluations of the Slovaks’ relations to the minorities were more positive in 2004, the Slovaks’ evaluations of the minorities were more negative. In contrast, in 2017 the evaluations of the minorities and the Slovaks were almost equal. For both evaluations (the minorities and the majority) there is a relatively large difference in 2004, and almost no difference in 2017. The Hungarian minority was evaluated by the Slovaks significantly more positively than the Roma one.
Figure 5: Average evaluations of the Slovaks’ relations to the minorities (1 – very bad 7 – very good)

Discussion

The presented results on the evaluation of the intra-ethnic and the inter-ethnic relations lead to several conclusions. Evaluation of the intra-ethnic relations has produced mixed results. While in 2004, the Hungarians were more positive about the relations within the ethnic community; in 2017 it was the Slovaks. The Roma evaluations did not change over the two rounds. However, all intra-ethnic evaluations were of a positive nature.

In the area of inter-ethnic relations, the situation was different. The evaluations connected to the Roma, apart from self-evaluation, were mostly neutral to slightly negative; this concerned the opinion of the Slovaks on the Roma from the point of view of the Roma, as well as the evaluations of the Slovaks. Of interest was the evaluation of the Slovaks towards the Roma and their change from the negative zone to the neutral one. In both evaluations, relatively large differences in 2004, and almost identical values in 2017 are valid. The Hungarian respondents evaluated the Roma slightly negatively; approximately the same in both rounds of the research.

In relation to the Hungarians, the evaluations were generally more positive, although the trend between the evaluation rounds showed a decreasing tendency. While the evaluation of the Slovaks’ relations with the Hungarians from the minority point of view does not indicate a downward trend, the Hungarians’ relations with the Slovaks does. The mutual evaluations of the Slovaks and the Hungarians showed relatively large differences in 2004 but were very similar in 2017. The Roma evaluations of the Hungarians had a decreasing tendency from the positive to the neutral values.

Even though the presented study does not analyze the reasons for evaluating the inter-ethnic relations, the 2017 evaluations show less variability among the different ethnic group evaluations. This is related to the stabilization of the inter-ethnic relations, more peaceful political dialogues, and the presence of an external ethnic threat in the form of a migration
crisis. If we ignore the well-known fact of a more positive self-image and a more critical evaluation of others, the relations between the Roma and the Slovaks are now gaining a maximum neutral value while the Hungarian relations still have positive characteristics.

When considering the ethnic relations in Slovakia, it is also necessary to take into account the "historical heritage" which influences the fact that the fear for the fate of one’s own ethnicity dominates within the leadership of the ethnicities living in the territory of Slovakia, and the threat to another ethnicity on the part of the minority is not considered to be so real. This situation is also characteristic of the Slovak-Hungarian relations, where hypersensitivity and mutual suspicion needs to be considered (Šutaj, 2017). The issue of Slovak-Hungarian relations was supposed to be resolved definitively after the Second World War with the re-establishment of the nation state (when the population was exchanged and re-Slovakization was introduced). Many of the measures applied during Czechoslovakia were to the disadvantage of the Hungarian minority, but as illustrated by international surveys on national pride this minority could not be weakened as was planned after the Second World War (Petráš, 2007; Marušiak, 2003). The Hungarians were recognized as a national minority during the communist regime; they had their own schools and the chance to use their native language in official relations. For more, see Act no. 144 of 1968, Article 3.

According to Kusý (1994), the basic problems of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia were more or less of an administrative nature. This does not mean that these problems do not have a more visible element, but many of the causes are resolvable through more effective administrative action. The basic precondition is primarily the goodwill of political representatives on both sides. Naturally, tensions exist in the relations between the Slovak government and other official Slovak institutions on the one hand, and the political representation of the Hungarian minority on the other. However, to a large extent, this is not an ethnic conflict between the Slovaks and the Hungarians. These ethnicities have lived in this territory for centuries not only as two separate ethnic groups, but also as groups largely mixed, with a high proportion of mixed marriages.

In greater contrast, the main problems of the Roma minority are not of an administrative nature. The essence is predominantly of an economic and social nature. The Roma culture, traditions, customs, symbols, and intra-group relations are perceived as different from the majority culture. The majority often rejects the Roma, does not have a good experience with them while the minority feels segregated and often suffers from prejudice. Mixed marriages are much rarer than in the case of the Hungarian minority. The communist regime unsettled their social structure, eliminating their natural leaders and authorities. According to

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2 It can be, therefore, said that in the set of the analyzed European countries, the greatest nationalists or, better said, chauvinists are mainly Austrians, and then Norwegians and Britons, while the biggest patriots are, according to our analysis, Hungarians, Poles and Slovenians (Vlachová, Reháková, 2004, p. 502-503).

3 Since the end of the Second World War, the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia has gone through many stages. In the first years after the war there were efforts to remove the Hungarian minority (the same principle as with the German minority). However, no international support has been obtained. Under the contract with the Hungarian government, the exchange of the population was carried out. The procedure with the Hungarian minority in the first post-war years was almost as hostile as it was with the German minority. Due to the failure of the removal, other methods were used to weaken the minority – namely the transfer of part of the Hungarian population to the Czech part of the common state). Another intervention was re-Slovakization. While in the period right after the war, an attempt was made to eliminate the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, after the establishment of the communist regime, this policy was revised and a more inclusive recognition of the existence of the minority began. A fundamental reason for this change was brought about by the fact that Hungary was included in the states of the Communist Block. Other reasons included the promotion of bilingualism in mixed areas and the restoration of school education.
Pavelčíková (2015), the communist solution of the so-called Gypsy issue was based on the idea that the "cultural differences" were the result of the previous exploitative regimes. Politicians at that time assumed that the Roma would assimilate voluntarily and become enthusiastic supporters of the regime. It was not about a policy of recognizing equivalence, but aggressively suppressing the difference. Until 1989, violent assimilation methods of repression and deprivation of manifestations of their own identity were applied to the Roma. At present, the Roma issue remains very open. This is also reflected in the perception of the status and relations between the majority and the Roma as a social problem, which is one of the main topics of political and social discourse in Slovakia.

In the past, public, media, and political discourse around the Roma has been construed as an international-political issue (conditional entry of Slovakia into the European Union through fulfillment of the so-called Copenhagen criteria, introduction of a visa requirement by countries in which the Slovak Roma have applied for political asylum), and a socio-economic issue (dependence, or even parasitism on the social system). Following the introduction of new social policy in 2003 and 2004, which included the reform of social assistance and family support, and the reform of employment policy, in the perception of the Slovak public the so-called Roma issue began to be increasingly connected with crime (Kollár, Mesežníkov, 2003; Kollár, 2005). In 2010, there was an increase in populist anti-Roma manifestations from parts of the political and radical groups, which responded to the strong public frustration of not addressing the problem of socially excluded and extremely poor groups of the population, and the deterioration of Roma-non-Roma coexistence (see Figure 2 – evaluations of the relations between the Slovaks and the Roma (from the point of view of the Roma), which were significantly more negative in 2017 than in 2004). These facts increase the future risk of the outbreak of inter-ethnic violence, as well as the promotion of radical solutions which would not comply with the EU political and human rights standards (Bútora, Kollár, Mesežníkov, 2010). However, the basis for addressing the Roma issue is, in any case, different from the one relating to the other minorities living in Slovakia. Addressing the issues of the Roma minority requires specific projects, which is not primarily a question of good political will, but a question of social strategy, available resources and their adequate use. The Roma issue cannot be resolved without the state having reliable data on this minority. Also, this situation cannot be resolved without the Roma being actively involved in this solution.

The Hungarian minority demonstrates a great connection with the political context of the time (and especially in recent times). Ten years ago, relations between the majority and the Hungarian minority were tense. It was very closely related not only to the inter-state policy, but also to the national policy. In 2008, the strengthening of the national nature of the state continued, but the social atmosphere in relation to the Hungarian minority deteriorated. The air of relations between the government policy and the Hungarian minority was unsettled by the unsolved case of H. Malinová, the statements of SNS leader J. Slota, some representatives of the SMK party, and more especially the absence of Slovak-Hungarian international-political dialogue. The development was also affected by other cases4. Dialogue was also absent between the ruling coalition and the Hungarian minority, as it was with the other minorities, because, in addition to the well-functioning systems, the institutionalized forms of dialogue with the minorities at various levels of public administration were not able to be established (this was reflected, for example, in the adoption of the School Act and the Law on Geographical Names in Textbooks), which would be in line with the domestic habits and the European legislation. The Slovak government policy still lacks comprehensive material and a concept of addressing minority issues. It was not possible to change the political rhetoric,

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4 For example, issues of autonomy, geographical names in textbooks, and international political factors (Forum of MPs of the Carpathian Basin, issues of the Hungarian Guard, extremist manifestations).
which, apart from the clearly ethnic focus, also repeatedly gained an aggressive or vulgar form, irrespective of the ethnicity of the politicians. (Šutaj, Sáposová, 2009). Today, the Hungarians’ relations with the Slovaks are good, which is related to the fact that the ruling parties (both the Hungarian and the Slovak) focus on other issues (e.g. the European migration crisis).

Intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relations are a complex set that is, inter alia, influenced by the surrounding environment. The results of the 2004 and 2017 questionnaire surveys show that the political climate and societal changes have an impact not only on the perception of the majority itself, but also on the surrounding minority groups.

The presented study represents a contribution to the knowledge of inter-ethnic relations between the majority as well as the ethnicities from the point of view of public opinion research. This research shows the perceptions of inter-ethnic relations even when they are not at the center of political interests. However, inter-ethnic relations must also be considered in the context of relevant events, such as the migratory crisis, which can cause associations of ethnic threats from other ethnic groups in the perception of the respondents. Limitations also arise from this approach. They are primarily about the composition and the size of the research file, the limitations in the level of its selection in terms of representativeness, as well as the relatively small number of indicators for the evaluation of the inter-ethnic relations.
References


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