

studie

Andrej Tóth
Miroslav Šedivý
Martin Boček
Barbora Pásztorová
Pavel Král
Ivan Ramadan
Martin Pitař, Sandra Štollová
Kateřina Sv. Gillárová

Andrej Tóth

**Count János Esterházy
(1901–1957) – short political portrait
of leading figure of Czechoslovak
Hungarian minority in the Thirtieths
of the 20th Century¹**

Abstract

The study presents a brief political survey of one of the most significant personalities of the Hungarian minority in interwar Czechoslovakia of the 1930's, Count János Esterházy. The article summarizes Esterházy's political career and political attitudes not only in interwar Czechoslovakia where in 1932 he, as a politically completely unknown personality, became leader of the Hungarian Provincial Christian-Socialist Party, assuming later, in 1936, as one of the best known figures of the Czechoslovak Hungarian minority political scene already, the position of executive president of the sole central party of the Hungarian minority in the Czechoslovak state, the United Hungarian Party. The article summarizes also his second period of political career in the separated Slovak Republic (1939–1945) when he led the only permitted political party in the Slovak State, the Slovak Hungarian Party, being at the same time the sole representative of the Slovak Hungarian minority in the Slovak parliament. Attention is paid also to his tragic fate after World War II when he was first carted off

1) This study was written within the Programme for the Development of Fields of Study at Charles University, No. P12 History from the interdisciplinary perspective, sub-programme Shaping and development of national identities in Central Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries.

to GULAG work camps in the Soviet Union and subsequently sentenced in his absence in Czechoslovakia to death by hanging.

Key words: history, 20th century, politics, Czechoslovakia, Slovak Republic, Hungarians, János Esterházy

1. Introduction

The Hungarian minority constituted one of the strongest national minorities in the First Czechoslovak Republic. As compared to the German minority² comprising more than three million people and constituting, in percentage, almost a quarter³ of the total number of the about 13 and a half million⁴ inhabitants of the state, the Hungarian minority amounted to less than one million, with almost 750 thousand⁵ members, constituting 5,6 percent from the total number of inhabitants, but it was anyway the second largest national minority of the First Czechoslovak Republic. Similarly to the German minority in the historical countries, i.e. in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia, the Hungarian minority was the most significant national minority to the east from the Morava River, i.e. in Slovakia and Carpathian Ruthenia. Based on the census of 1921, the Hungarian minority in Slovakia constituted 21,5%⁶ and in Carpathian Ruthenia 17%⁷ from total number of population of those regions.

The Hungarian minority was represented in the Parliament of the First Czechoslovak Republic, in the National Assembly consisting of two chambers, the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, in all of its four terms of office⁸ by two political subjects, the Provincial Christian-Socialist Party (*Országos Keresztény Szocialista Párt*;

2) Based on the census of 1921, there were 3 123 568 Germans in total living in Czechoslovakia as a whole. *Československá statistika – Svazek 9. Řada VI., Sčítání lidu v Republice Československé ze dne 15. února 1921, Part I., Praha: Státní úřad statistický 1924, Chart 50, Národnost československých státních příslušníků. I., p. 60*.*

3) 23,4 %. *Ibidem.*

4) Based on the census of 1921, there were 13 374 364 inhabitants in total living in Czechoslovakia as a whole. *Compare ibidem.*

5) In 1921, there were 745 431 inhabitants of Hungarian nation in total living in Czechoslovakia. *Compare ibidem.*

6) In 1921, there were 637 183 Hungarians in total living in Slovakia. *Compare ibidem.*

7) In 1921, there were 102 144 Hungarians in total living in Carpathian Ruthenia. *Compare ibidem.*

8) The election for the National Assembly of the First Republic (to its both chambers) took place in 1920, 1925, 1929 and 1935.

OKSzP) and the Hungarian National Party (*Magyar Nemzeti Párt*)⁹ that in June 1936 merged into one political subject, the United Hungarian Party (*Egyesült Magyar Párt; EMP*), as its abbreviated name ran. Count János Esterházy established himself at the Hungarian minority political scene as the third president of the Hungarian Provincial Christian Socialists, leading them from December 1932.¹⁰ In 1936 he became executive president of EMP.¹¹

Although János Esterházy was a significant political representative of the second largest national minority of the First Czechoslovak Republic, that political figure is minimally known in the Czech Republic. Professional public knows about the figure of Esterházy, but they criticize him *a priori* virtually without exception as minority politician, imputing him share in the destruction of the First Czechoslovak Republic in cooperation with the political representatives of the Sudeten Germans. We can many times meet even the completely erroneous parallel putting Esterházy as politician on a par with Konrad Henlein, the leader of the Sudeten German Party. But lumping the minority Hungarians together with the Sudeten Germans without deeper examination of the historical-political and socio-cultural context of the political line of the opposition representatives of the Hungarian minority has its cause in the fact that the primary interest of the Czech historiography, related to the First Republic, is focused exclusively on the issue of the German minority with its three million members. The Czech historical provenience does not deal with János Esterházy and the Hungarian minority, interwar or postwar, almost whatsoever, even after the place of burial of Esterházy's remains was found in the Motol cemetery of Prague in 2007 (*see below*).¹²

2. Who was János Esterházy?

By his origin, János Esterházy belonged to the county Csesznek¹³ branch of the Galanta¹⁴ Esterházy family. He was born in the village of Velké Zálužie (in Hungarian: *Nyitraújlak*;

9) Until 1925, the Provincial Hungarian Party of Smallholders and Farmers (*Országos Magyar Kisgazda és Földműves Párt*), in short the Hungarian Smallholder Party (*Magyar Kisgazda Párt*).

10) After Jenő Lelley (1920–1925) and Géza Szüllő (1925–1932).

11) For summarizing information on the political scene of the Hungarian minority in the First Czechoslovak Republic see Tóth, Novotný and Stehlík 2012, 76–101 or Tóth 2010b, 169–193.

12) Except for several studies of the author of this article and the monograph on national minorities in the First Czechoslovak Republic, stated in previous comment, with the author of this article as main author.

13) Csesznek: a village in the northern part of the Veszprém County in Hungary.

14) Galanta: a town in south-western Slovakia.

called *Ujlak pri Nitre* in the period of the First Czechoslovak Republic) near the town of Nitra (today in the Slovak Republic) on 14 March 1901. His father was János Esterházy (1864–1905), member of the Upper Chamber of the Parliament of the dualistic Hungary, and his mother was the Polish Countess Elżbieta (Erzsébet) Tarnowska (1875–1956), daughter of Count Stanisław Tarnowski (1837–1917), a Polish literary historian, conservative politician, rector of the Krakow University and President of the Krakow Imperial Academy of Sciences. Additionally to János Jr., János Esterházy Sr. and Elżbieta Tarnowska had also two daughters, Lujza (1899–1966) and Máaria (1904–1975).¹⁵

Esterházy grew up in the family castle residence from the 18th century in his home village, i.e. Veľké Zálužie, a village with mixed Slovak-Hungarian population, and he received traditional aristocratic upbringing in the spirit of Hungarian patriotism and in conservative-catholic spirit. His father died in September 1905 at an age of only 42 years and Esterházy was brought up only by his mother from his four years. As an aristocratic son, he had his resident teacher who gave him lessons until the fifth grade of multi-year grammar school. He continued his grammar school studies in Budapest with subsequent three years of business college. In 1923, after his studies, he returned to the family property and dedicated himself to the management of the family homestead that originally amounted to 3 122 cadastral morgens in total, but due to the land reform was reduced by 2 300 morgens. In spite of the difficult economic situation caused to the family homestead by the land reform, the family stayed in Czechoslovakia and tried to consolidate their homestead financially. In 1924 Esterházy married Countess Lívia Serényiová and had two children with her, the son János (1929) and the daughter Alice (1932).¹⁶

Esterházy did not engage in politics in his youth. But at the end of 1918, as a seventeen-year old student, he expressed actively the resistance against occupation of his native land by the Czechoslovak army. He joined an insignificant group of Hungarian soldiers who, on their way back from the battlefield, tried to prevent the Czechoslovak soldiers from crossing the Váh River and from moving further into the Slovak interior. But that resistance action did not have significant character. Besides, the Hungarian army was later withdrawn from the defined demarcation line by the Budapest Government, so

that the occupation of whole Slovakia by the Czechoslovak army ran without considerable complications. But Esterházy suffered the consequences of his patriotism a year later when he was detained by the police for eight days for singing patriotic songs in one of the Bratislava cafés. In summer 1921, Esterházy also participated in armed resistance action in western Hungary (today the Austrian *Burgenland*) aimed against its annexation to Austria. The Hungarians perceived very emotively the need of cession of western Hungary to the Austrian state. That follows from Esterházy's later statement at police questioning in 1949, after he had been extradited by the USSR authorities to Czechoslovakia. Esterházy allegedly stated at the questioning that they had not been touched as much by the annexation of Upper Hungary to Czechoslovakia and of Transylvania to Romania as by the fact that even Austria, i.e. the state that had dragged Hungary into the preceding fatal war conflict, would get a part of former Hungarian territories.¹⁷

After finishing his studies, Esterházy concentrated his attention exclusively on the management and financial recovery of the family homestead in Veľké Zálužie. But due to the obligations related to the administration of the family property, he often stayed outside his home village, having to leave it for necessary negotiations with agrarian and financial authorities and lawyers in Bratislava and in Prague. At such occasions, he started meeting the representatives of the two main political parties of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. Those contacts gradually resulted in his active engagement in the political life of OKSzP.¹⁸

Nevertheless, Esterházy did not intervene in high party politics in the course of the Twentieths yet. But at the beginning of the Thirtieths, he unexpectedly became, also thanks to support of Budapest, one of the top representatives of the incoming new, young generation in the Christian-Socialist Party in place of the leaving political crew that had founded, built and stabilized the party system of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia in the course of the Twentieths. His career started rising quickly from mid-1931. First, in June of that year, he took the position of president of the Czechoslovak Hungarian League for the Association of Nations (*Csehszlovákiai Magyar Népszövetségi Liga*), and about one and a half year later, on 14 December 1932, he was elected president of the Hungarian Christian Socialists.¹⁹

15) Molnár 2010, 17–19; Balassa 1994, 12 and 105.

16) Esterházy, L. 1991, 26 and 60; Balassa 1994, 13 and 25; Molnár 2010, 23–24; Esterházy spoke about that period of life, including the property conditions, after being extradited by the soviet authorities back to Czechoslovakia during the police questioning at the Regional Headquarters of State Security in Bratislava, compare Archiv bezpečnostních složek (Archive of Security Services, Prague; hereinafter referred to only as "ABS"), S/2 (215) – 51 – 81, Zápisnica napísaná dňa 25. apríla 1949...; the document constitutes a part of the court files on János Esterházy, or annex to the sentence over his person, TnLud 19/27/47 (Tn Lud 19/47 27.) from 16 September 1947, fol. 12–13.

17) Esterházy, L. 1991, 39, 53 and 55; ABS, *ibidem*, last cit. doc., fol. 13.

18) Compare ABS, *ibidem*; Balassa 1994, 25; Molnár 2010 24; Esterházy, L. 1991, 60–61.

19) *Angyal* 2002, 182; Molnár 2010, 28–29 and 32–34; for the election session of the party committee of OKSzP from 14 December 1932 see *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* (hereinafter referred to only as "PMH"), 1932, volume XI, No. 285 (3098), 15 December, 3 (Egyhangúlag Esterházy Jánost választották meg...) or *Angyal* 2004, doc. No. 94, 422–424 or the Slovenský národný archív (Slovak National Archive), Policajné riaditeľstvo Bratislava (the fund of the Police Direction of Bratislava), box No. 238, doc. No. 16034/32 pres.,

3. At the front line of the Hungarian minority political scene

Esterházy, as president of OKSzP, continued the opposition political line of the party. He identified opposition policy without compromises as the only possible alternative, with regard to the effort of the party to provide better fate to Slovakia and all its inhabitants. He pointed out simultaneously that Christian Democrats were democrats too, but opposing the corrupt and clientelistic “pseudo-democracy” revealed by the consequences of the economic, social and societal crisis of the turn of the Twentieths and Thirtieths. Esterházy criticized the social-political system of that time, governed by the rules of predatory and asocial capitalism, within which, according to his words, only those who “has big mouth and is pushy” can assert themselves. With regard to his aristocratic origin, Esterházy defended the conservative orientation of the party, but refused rigid conservatism. He did not see the character of the conservative policy of OKSzP in no case in obstinate clinging to everything old, but in salvation and application of everything that had value and that had proven useful in the past.²⁰

Esterházy was an autonomist politician, identifying one of his basic political goals as achieving of autonomous statute of Slovakia within the Czechoslovak state. He refused the statements of the governmental circles that Slovakia was not mature yet to introduce its own political autonomy. He considered such declaration of responsible places inadmissible depreciation of all inhabitants of that part of the republic. Esterházy also demanded practical implementation of autonomy in Carpathian Ruthenia, to which Prague was obliged by its international-legal commitments. As political leader of a large national group, he refused at the same time the division of the society from national perspective into majority and minority. He considered denomination of the Hungarians a “minority” nation humiliating, and that is why his political program focused on full emancipation of all nations living in the republic.²¹

Esterházy, as political leader of the Hungarian minority, did not agree with the generalized automatic accusation of the Hungarian Christian Socialists of subversive activity only because they belonged to Hungarian minority opposition. He pointed

out that a party with its policy based on the papal encyclic *Rerum Novarum*, or the principle of pure Christian love to the neighbour cannot constitute danger to the state just out of principle. He pointed out to the political opponents that he himself saw much greater danger for the state in a policy that perceived current social-political issues through the lens of Marxist ideas, i.e. was based on hostility against individual social classes and on class war. It should be stressed that Esterházy was advocate of policy respecting legal limits. Therefore he asked the members of the Hungarian minority to cope with all problems of the economic-social and national-political life with regard to the traditional religiousness of the Hungarian nation, i.e. to observe always the principles of religious moral and to apply self-discipline, loyalty to laws and to avoid always any disruption of order and peace when fighting for their rights.²²

Esterházy saw the main task of the Provincial Christian-Socialist Party not only in strengthening the national self-confidence but also the Christian views in the society. OKSzP became a real christian-socialist party only under his guidance in fact. Esterházy declared in his initial speech already, after being elected president of the party, that under his guidance, OKSzP would keep standing unshakably on the foundations of Christian world view, opposing the political directions and efforts that were in contradiction with Christian perception of the world, i.e. social democracy and communism and all efforts directed against faith and religion. Esterházy saw the consequent application of Christian values in political and everyday life also as guarantee of full assertion of national particularities of each nation and as guarantee of peaceful coexistence among nations, without one nation trying to destroy another. Also under Esterházy's guidance, OKSzP focused primarily on voters of Catholic religion and presented itself as protector of interests of the Catholic Church. But Esterházy pointed out that the Christian-Socialist Party represented and supported also other Christian churches, wishing to cooperate closely with them at implementation of common goals.²³

The Church and the religion constituted integral part of Esterházy's life; Esterházy was deeply believing Catholic and he also practised the religion. We can find references to Christian traditions and values or appeals for consistent application of Christian view of all components of the social-cultural and political life in virtually each Esterházy's speech, interview or newspaper column. But he refused political Catholicism or political misuse of Catholicism in interest of purposeful dulling of national

Krajinská kresťansko-sociálna strana, informácie), fol. 546–560, and 549 / particularly p. 4.; on the issue of arrival of János Esterházy to the top of OKSzP compare in summary Tóth 2010a, 77–101 or 88–95.

20) PMH, 1932, volume XI, No. 286 (3099), 16 December, 3 (Esterházy: *fő feladatunk a nemzeti öntudat...*) or *Angyal* 2004, doc. No. 95, 425–428, or 428 and 427 and PMH, 1933, volume XII, No. 146 (3256), 29 June, 3 („A meg nem alkuvó ellenzéki politika...”) or Esterházy, J. 2000, 21–23, and 21.

21) PMH, 1932, volume XI, No. 286 (3099), 16 December, 3, *ibidem* or *Angyal*, doc. No. 95, 425–428, or 426 and PMH, 1933, volume XII, No. 146 (3256), 29 June, 3, *ibidem* or Esterházy, J. 2000, 21–23, and 22.

22) PMH, 1934, volume XIII, No. 76 (3407), 1 April, title-page (*Mi nem tekinthetjük...*) or Esterházy, J. 2000, 32–34, and 33; PMH, 1934, volume XIII, No. 218 (3549), 23 December, title-page, („Tiltakoznunk kell minden oly kísérlet ellen...”) or Esterházy, J. 2000, 38–40, or see 40.

23) PMH, 1932, volume XI, No. 286 (3099), 16 December, 3 (Esterházy: *fő feladatunk a nemzeti öntudat...*) or *Angyal* 2004, doc. No. 95, 425–428, or 426–427.

awareness of national minorities. Esterházy stated that “supranationalism of Catholicism never signified suppression of national awareness, national language, but on the contrary, free assertion of national idea,” and stressed that “we must protest against all such attempts that would like to redirect Catholicism to the rails of political war.”²⁴

Esterházy applied the political line outlined above also later as executive president of the United Hungarian Party created – as stated above – in summer 1936 by merger of both central opposition political parties of the Hungarian minority.

4. In the National Assembly

During a few years, János Esterházy became one of the leading political figures of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. After the fourth parliamentary election in May 1935, he sat also on the parliamentary bench of the National Assembly. He was member of four parliamentary committees in the Chamber of Deputies: the budget, constitutional-legal, foreign and agricultural committee. Esterházy ranked among active “speakers” of the Hungarian minority in the parliament and was always among the first deputies demanding word. He ranked among speakers whose speeches regularly provoked lively response among the other deputies. He presented twenty-four interpellations in total in the Chamber of Deputies, spoke fifteen times in the debate, submitted one initiative proposal and posed one factual comment. At the same time, the Chamber of Deputies had to deal with seventeen requests in immunity matters in connection with Deputy Esterházy. He was also called to order twice.²⁵

Esterházy introduced himself in the Chamber of Deputies for the first time on 25 June 1935 at its fifth session in the fourth term of office of the National Assembly in ordinary debate on the policy statement of the re-elected government of Jan Malypetr, an agrarian party member. The OKSžP president defended the opposition and negativist political line of his party in his speech, criticizing categorically the approach of the state towards national minorities. The first words of the president of the Hungarian Christian Socialists provoked spontaneous responses of the deputies already. At the beginning of his statement, Esterházy attacked sharply all preceding Czechoslovak coalition governments for not having observed the rights of national minorities in the state strictly according to the wording of the peace treatments. He stated verbatim: “[...] For 16 years, the Hungarians here have had complaints that have not been rehabilitated by the relevant

coalition government majorities in a manner guaranteed by peace treaties to us, the local Hungarians [...] I am paying taxes in this state, I am paying taxes together with my Hungarian brothers, and therefore I cannot allow and tolerate that majority parties who are sitting at the meat pot today simply trample our human rights with their feet.” The party chief of OKSžP reminded the newly commencing government cabinet in his speech, in the context of his criticism of the Czechoslovak governments, also of the involuntary annexation of the Slovakian Hungarians to Czechoslovakia after World War I, stating: “They incorporated us, without asking us, into the Czechoslovak Republic not in order that our minority, cultural, language and economic rights are not observed by the Czechoslovak governments at 100%.”²⁶

In his initial parliamentary speech, the OKSžP president also refused any allegations on subversiveness of the Czechoslovak Hungarians in connection with their declared support to the Slovak autonomists in their political fight for autonomy of Slovakia. He protested against the qualification of the political representatives of the Czechoslovak Hungarian minority as subversive only based on the fact that they acted in the interest of the inhabitants of Slovakia, i.e. that they pointed out the heavy unemployment in Slovakia, its burdensome economic situation and that they blamed the Prague government for favouring the Czech and Moravian industry to the detriment of the Slovak industry or, in other words, he refused, similarly to his previous extra-parliamentary speeches and statements, that the Czechoslovak Hungarian politicians were called subversive only because they stood in opposition against the government.²⁷

In his initial statement in the Parliament, he also declared distinctly that the existing autonomist position of the political representatives of the Czechoslovak Hungarian minority did not change regardless of how the new government remunerated the requirements of the Hungarians, because, as he literally stated at the end of his statement: “[...] we will never give up one thing, the autonomy and independence of Slovakia.” By that declaration, the OKSžP president manifested unambiguously to the government that the Hungarians were not ready to agree to any compromise in that issue. The autonomist position of the Hungarian Christian Socialists was emphasized by Esterházy in the Parliament also at the end of spring of the year 1938, a fatal year for the First Czechoslovak Republic, just before Prime Minister Milan Hodža announced the new government program of national policy in the radio on 28 March 1938; the policy was to

24) PMH, 1934, volume XIII, No. 218 (3549), 23 December, title-page, („Tiltakoznunk kell minden oly kísérlet ellen...”) or Esterházy 2000, 38–40, or see 39.

25) Index k těšnopiseckým zprávám o schůzích Poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění republiky Československé, I., osobní rejstřík, II. výbory, IV. volební období. Od 18. června 1935 do 21. března 1939, Praha 1950 (Sestavil Archiv Národního shromáždění), 70–72.

26) For the first Esterházy’s statement in the Chamber of Deputies of the National Assembly compare Poslanecká sněmovna, Těšnopisecké zprávy (hereinafter referred to only as “PS TZ”), IV. volební období, 1.–2. zasedání, 1935–1936, schůze 1–30, Těšnopisecká zpráva o 5. schůzi Poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění republiky Československé dne 25. června 1935, 52–54, for quotation see 52.

27) Ibidem, 53.

be completed by the issue of a national statute that would define legislatively the position of national minorities in the republic comprehensively anew. The message of Esterházy who at that time acted already as executive president of EMP and spoke on behalf of the unified party of the Hungarian minority was explicit: the Hungarians would keep fighting for their permanent primary political goal, for the autonomy of Slovakia and for their full equality of rights with the national majority or, in other words, that under the current situation, the basic precondition of rehabilitation of the national issue in the country consisted for them in constitutional reorganization of the republic, or in revision of the constitution. But Esterházy emphasized at the same time that the fight of the Hungarians for the autonomy of Slovakia and for equality of rights of the Hungarians with the majority Czechoslovak nation would run exclusively on legal foundations under the direction of EMP.²⁸

In connection with the autonomist attitude of the Hungarians, it must be pointed out that the Hungarians stood officially on the base of the requirement of administration of their own matters within the territorial autonomy of Slovakia in the whole first half of the year 1938, characterized by very strong internal and external political tension. The requirement of own territorial autonomy of Hungarian language regions was expressed by EMP only at the end of summer 1938. Until then, the party defended consistently the requirement of mere autonomy of Slovakia and of practical implementation of autonomy of the eastern tip of the republic, Carpathian Ruthenia. The 17 September 1938 constituted an important milestone in the policy of EMP; its legislators in the National Assembly and the deputies of the Slovak Land Council issued an official declaration in Bratislava, asking for award of right to self-determination and right to plebiscite for the Hungarian regions. With regard to the current internal and external political atmosphere, the 17 September 1938 constituted a final separation of EMP, the political speaker of the Hungarian minority, from the Czechoslovak Republic. It was obvious that the Hungarian language territories were not sustainable any more within the Czechoslovak state. It was confirmed also by the establishment of the Hungarian National Council on 7 October, or by the requirement of its representatives, including János Esterházy, on participation in the unsuccessful Czechoslovak-Hungarian talks on the revision of the common state border that took place from 9 to 13 October 1938 in Komárno.²⁹

28) *Ibidem*, p. 54. PS TZ, IV. volební období, 6. zasedání, 1937–1938, schůze 112–142, Těsnopisecká zpráva o 138. schůzi poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění republiky Československé dne 10. března 1938, 23.

29) *Compare PMH, 1938, volume XVII, No. 214 (4657), 18 September, title-page (Az önrendelkezési jog alapján békés megoldást kíván a magyarság); Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (The State Archive of the Hungarian National Archive; hereinafter*

Also the first Esterházy's speech in the Chamber of Deputies during the Second Republic, in mid-December 1938, i.e. after Munich and signature of the first Vienna Arbitration deserves attention; it was at the same time his very last speech in the central Czechoslovak legislative body. He responded in it to the gradual liquidation of democratic structures in the country in autumn 1938 due to application of national elitist tendencies in the political life of the state under the direction of the Party of National Unity, dominated by ex-members of the agrarian party, or by their right-wing fraction led by Rudolf Beran, the president of the party who became Prime Minister on 1 December 1938. Let's remember here that, due to territorial losses of the Czechoslovak state caused by the Munich Agreement and the first Vienna Arbitration, all legislators whose permanent residence finished up outside the territory of the curtailed state lost their mandate. Therefore only three deputies of EMP stayed in the Chamber of Deputies (instead of the original 14, without Karel Kostka),³⁰ but only János Esterházy was of Hungarian nation among them.³¹

The last Esterházy's parliament speech in the National Assembly was presented at the occasion of the debate of the deputies on the policy statement of the government of Prime Minister Beran with regard to the bill of so called empowering law that should suspend temporarily the activity of the Parliament, on 14 December 1938 at the 157th session of the Chamber of Deputies. Esterházy's speech in the debate on the government proposal of the bill constitutes in his case a proof of preservation of certain realistic political perception of the current social-political events even in the time of growing fashionable national-authoritative trends that affected even some significant Czechoslovak political parties. Esterházy spoke in the debate of the deputies on the side of the minority, i.e. on the side voting against totalitarization of

referred to only as "MNL-OL"), K (Külügyminisztérium; Ministry of Foreign Affairs) 64 (Politikai Osztály Reservált Iratai; Reserved documents of Political Section) – 75. csomó (hereinafter referred to only as „cs.”) – 1938 – 7. tétel (hereinafter referred to only as „t.”) – 1455/res. pol./1938, fol. 163.

30) *In the election of 1935, also the Sudeten German election group (Sudetendeutscher Wahlblock, SdW) ran through the joint Hungarian list of candidates in the historical countries and one mandate fell on Karel Kostka, the mayor of Liberec.*

31) *Almost until the end of January, Károly Hokky, elected to the second Chamber of the National Assembly in the electoral district No. XII Užhorod, sat in the Senate for EMP, but he lost his mandate due to the dissolution of political parties in Carpathian Ruthenia on 20 January 1939; nevertheless, the National Assembly, although dissolved only 21 March 1939, had not held any sessions more for about one month already.*

the power in the state and even asked to speak as the first in the debate of the deputies on this government bill³²

Esterházy refused to vote for the government bill of so called empowering law with reference to the fact that *"it contradicts the ideas of parliamentarism and provides individuals with so far unprecedented full power and rights of broad extent, which equals in fact a certain sort of dictatorship."* Esterházy expressed distrust of the new political system that restricted the parliament democracy in the country; he spoke on behalf of the remaining Czechoslovak Hungarian minority but did not exclude the possibility that the Hungarians could rehabilitate their opinion based on acts. As Esterházy declared: *"We expect without condition from today's power holders that they will not commit errors of the preceding governments, that they will not repeat those errors but prove by their acts that they consider every citizen of the state evenly valuable and equal, regardless of their claimed national allegiance, and that the classification of citizens in the first, second or third rank will finally stop."* But on the other hand, it must be added that Esterházy acknowledged approvingly the critical words of the new political elite of the Post-Munich republic, expressed with regard to the leading political officials of the state of the preceding twenty years, seeing in them the rehabilitation of twenty years of opposition political line of the Czechoslovak Hungarian minority. He even expressed certain hope of real purgation of public life from everything that had led to the destruction of the First Republic.³³

Esterházy's critical evaluation of the effort of Beran's governmental course to put the parliamentarism in the country temporarily aside was based on national-conservative but not extremely national-right-wing attitude. Due to curtailment of the democratic structures, Esterházy feared mainly the misuse of the authoritative mandate of the government against national minorities. Therefore he declared even now the readiness of the approximately 65 thousand Hungarians³⁴ who had remained in the Post-Munich republic to keep fighting for their absolute emancipation with other nations in each area of public life, so that the situation from not very distant past would not

32) Four deputies spoke on the against side in the debate. Additionally to Esterházy, they were the deputies of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Antonín Zápotocký and Jaromír Dolanský, and an unclassified deputy, or former deputy of the National League, František Schwarz. PS TZ, IV. volební období, 7.–8. zasedání, 1938, schůze 143–159, Těsnopisecká zpráva o 157. schůzi poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění republiky Československé dne 14. prosince 1938, 5.

33) Ibidem, 5 and 6.

34) The number of members of the Hungarian minority dropped, due to the shift of the Czechoslovak-Hungarian border to the north from the former almost seven hundred fifty thousand to the "negligible" 65 780. Compare Purgat 1970, 118.

repeat because, according to Esterházy's words, it had created a dissatisfied and unsettled national block in the state.³⁵

5. Esterházy's negotiations with leading political representatives of Czechoslovakia in the second half of the Thirtieths

Esterházy, as leading political representative of the Hungarian minority political scene, had also negotiations with top representatives of the First Republic in the politically dramatic years of the second half of the Thirtieths. The very first meeting of János Esterházy with a top political official of the state took place in connection with the presidential election at the end of 1935, on 15 December when he met Edvard Beneš, presidential candidate and long-time foreign minister. The meeting was initiated by Beneš who wanted to find out from the OKSžP president the opportunity of support of his presidential candidacy by opposition Hungarian legislators.³⁶

Let's add here that the talks of Esterházy and later of other political leaders of the Hungarian minority with Beneš as presidential candidate, held in December 1935 (see below) constituted the very first factual talks of the representatives of the Hungarian minority with a top representative of the state from 1918, disregarding the activist intermezzo of the Hungarian National Party at the beginning of the first half of the Twentieths when the party got virtually to the threshold of the Kolovrat Palace, the seat of the council of ministers, i.e. the cabinet office of that time, in the course of which it was in contact with Antonín Švehla, the Prime Minister of that time.

35) PS TZ, IV. volební období, 7.–8. zasedání, 1938, schůze 143–159, viz TZ o 157. Schůzi poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění republiky Československé dne 14. prosince 1938, 5–6.

36) Compare here MNL–OL, K 64 – 62. cs. – 1935 – 7. t. – 872/res. pol./1935, or 869/res. pol./1935, Szüllő's aide mémoire, fol. 4–6, (pp. 1–3), see fol. 4. (p. 1); *ibidem*, 872/res. pol./1935, or 252/pol./1935, Bonyodalmak a magyar pártoknak a köztársasági elnökválasztáson tanúsított magatartása körül, fol. 1–3 (pp. 1–6), or fol. 1 (p. 1), the OKSžP President Esterházy is mentioned in the envoy's report under the code-name of „Asztalos”; *ibidem*, 872/res. pol./1935, ad 840/res. pol./1935, fol. 8–9 (pp. 1–2), or fol. 8 (p. 1); Masarykův ústav a Archiv Akademie věd České republiky, v. v. i. (Masaryk Institute and Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v. v. i.; hereinafter referred to only as "MÚA AV ČR"), Archiv Ústavu Tomáše Garrigua Masaryka (Archive of the Institute of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk; hereinafter referred to only as "AÚTGM"), f. Edvard Beneš, Department I (hereinafter referred to only as "f. EB I"), cart. No. 45, sign. R/1340/136, Slovensko – Fotokopie – 1930–1938, photocopy of the document of the President of the Republic T. 1002/35 (sign. of President Office), 1–2.

Two days later, in the afternoon of 17 December, Esterházy held new talks with Beneš, that time together with other leaders of the opposition Hungarian minority political scene. The meeting of the presidential candidate with the top representatives of OKSzP and MNP took place in spite of the fact that it was virtually sure at that time already that he would be elected successor of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk to the presidential office. But Beneš wished maximally transparent support and unambiguous victory in the presidential election in the first round already, which would guarantee him the desired strong political mandate not only on the internal political scene, but also on the foreign political scene. Although Beneš's position was even more strengthened in the night from 17 to 18 December, to the day for which the presidential election had been called, and it was obvious that he would be elected in the first round already, he sent a message through his fiduciary to the Hungarian legislators just before the presidential election, stating that in spite of the fact that he had become the only coalition candidate to the position of the head of state, he remained on the basis of the joint talks from the preceding day. And it was again Esterházy to whom Beneš's affirmation about the loyal political line in the Hungarian issue was communicated.³⁷

In the end, the legislators of both Hungarian minority political parties, under the influence of Esterházy, the OKSzP president and particularly of Géza Szüllő, the president of their joint deputy club, did not take negativist attitude at the election of the president of republic for the first time and voted for Edvard Beneš, unlike the strongest political representative of the largest, also negativist-oriented national minority, the German minority, the Sudeten German Party that had expressed its traditional ostentatious disinterested attitude also in the presidential election in 1935 and whose deputies and senators cast empty ballot papers in the election.³⁸

37) MNL-OL, K 64 – 62. cs. – 1935 – 7. t. – 872/res. pol./1935, or 252/pol./1935, fol. 1 (p. 2) and *ibidem*, 869/res. pol./1935, Szüllő's aide mémoire, fol. 4 (p. 2); MÚA AV ČR, AÚTGM, f. EB I, cart. No. 45, inv. No. R/124/2 (R 94), Vnitropolitické záležitosti. Volba prezidenta 1935, fol. 72. Cited Beneš's message through Rückl, his fiduciary, addressed to János Esterházy, is cited by the Bratislava Hungarian language newspaper *Esti Újság* in its issue from 20 December, see *Esti Újság*, 1935, volume 3, No. 294, 20 December, 1–2, or 1 (*Benes köztársasági elnök... – Benes levele Esterházyhoz*). Beneš's letter, formulated by Rückl, addressed to the Hungarian legislators, was published, based on *Esti Újság*, also by the central newspaper of HSLŠ, *Slovák*. Compare *Slovák*, 1935, volume 17, No. 288, 20 December, 2 (*Prezident dr. Beneš a naši Maďari. Čo sa dialo v zákulisí pred voľbou.*); Klimek and Hofman 2002, 343 or Klimek 1998, 432.

38) For more details on the attitude of the Hungarian minority parties in the presidential election 1935 see Tóth 2012, 157–201. For the above stated, compare further *Die Zeit*, 1935, volume 1, No. 68, 19 December, first, second or third edition, 3 (*Aufschlußreiche*

It should be pointed out that Beneš considered Esterházy the most trustworthy partner for negotiations on the Hungarian issue from among the opposition political leaders of the Czechoslovak Hungarian minority. It is supported by the fact that later, in September 1936, during their meeting in the Slovak town of Topolčianky, President Beneš offered Esterházy even the position of minister without portfolio. But at that time already the executive president of EMP rejected the position in the government, with reference to the fact that from the presidential election, nothing had been done by the state to improve the situation of the Hungarian minority, in spite of the promise given to the Hungarian politicians.³⁹

Before the meeting with Beneš at Topolčianky, Esterházy passed a memorandum of the Hungarian opposition legislator to the Czechoslovak government, demanding full respecting of the language law and of its operating order and lowering of the condition of at least twenty-percent share of national minority in the population in court districts for the use of a minority language in official contact to ten-percent limit.⁴⁰

President Beneš kept in contact with Esterházy also in the following year. Beneš's meeting with Esterházy, held from the President's initiative on 11 February 1937, deserves attention; the head of state asked the executive president of EMP, among other things, that if he was approached by Jan Šrámek, long-year minister for unification of laws and organization of administration and president of the Czechoslovak People's Party, he should definitely meet the minister. Šrámek really asked Esterházy for a meeting on 12 February 1938 and both politicians met the same day. At that occasion, the minister asked Esterházy that EMP should submit him the "*demands, wrongs and its suggestions in that connection, recorded exactly in written*", with regard to the Hungarian minority, stating that he would try to assert them in the government.

Wahlziffern).

39) Esterházy met President Beneš at Topolčianky on 11 September 1936. For Esterházy's talks with Beneš in September 1936 see MNL-OL, K 64 – 70. cs. – 1937 – 7. t. – 128/res. pol./1936, Mátyás látogatása Benesnél és tárgyalásai Sramekkel, fol. 6–7 („Mátyás" was one of the code-names of János Esterházy in the correspondence of the Hungarian Foreign Ministry), or Esterházy's minutes of meeting with President Beneš, held in Topolčianky on 11 September 1936, fol. 9–20 (pp. 1–12). The document No. 128/res. pol./1936 was, together with doc. No. 273/res. pol./1936 (Esterházy's report of the meeting with President Beneš on 23 April 1937, MNL-OL, K 64, *ibidem*) kept at the Foreign Ministry of the Hungarian Kingdom under No. 606/res. pol./1936 (see empty file designated 606/res. pol./1936, MNL-OL, K 64, *ibidem*).

40) MNL-OL, K 64 – 66. cs. – 1936 – 7. t. – 593/res. pol./1936, Előterjesztés a magyarságot képviselő törvényhozóknak a kisebbségi nyelvhasználati sérelmek és követelések tárgyában, fol. 1–10 (pp. 1–10).

In the background of such helpfulness, Šrámek demanded from Esterházy that the Catholic representatives of EMP made use of their influence at the Holy See in favour of possibly quick implementation of the *modus vivendi* between Vatican and the Czechoslovak Republic. Šrámek asked Esterházy at the same time that the United Hungarian Party should approach also Prime Minister Hodža and submit him proposals for solution of the Hungarian issue.⁴¹

Esterházy rejected both Šrámek's request for mediation in Vatican, both his call that the EMP representatives should approach the Prime Minister with regard to the Hungarian issue. Nevertheless, although Esterházy emphasized to the minister that Hodža already had their memorandum containing the Hungarian demands about which they were ready to negotiate with the Prime Minister at any time, if he approached the EMP leaders, the opposition representatives of the Hungarian minority elaborated another, more extensive and more comprehensive memorandum called "Wrongs made to the Czechoslovak Hungarians", concerning the cultural, church, economic and political life. Another extensive and comprehensive memorandum of EMP, co-signed by Esterházy, followed up that document in spring of the following year; it was passed to the government at the occasion of the jubilee, twentieths year of existence of the Czechoslovak Republic.⁴²

János Esterházy attended later, of course, also the negotiations of the top representatives of EMP with Prime Minister Hodža on the issue of the Hungarian minority. But those negotiations took place only in 1938, a year characterized by very strong internal political tension. But the first factual negotiation between EMP and the Prime Minister were even held only in the middle of that year, very dramatic for the republic, specifically on 29 June. Nevertheless, neither that negotiation, neither the subsequent negotiations of the EMP representatives with the Prime Minister, held on 20 July and 1 September, at which the EMP leaders including Esterházy tried to achieve emancipation of the Hungarian issue with the German issue, satisfied the opposition Hungarian minority politicians, leading in the end to their final breakup with the republic.⁴³

41) MNL-OL, K 64 – 70. cs. – 1937 – 7. t. – 128/res. pol./1937, fol. 6–7, or 7.

42) MNL-OL, *ibidem*, 128/res. pol./1937, fol. 6–7; MNL-OL, *ibidem*, 280/res. pol./1937, *A csehszlovákiai magyarság sérelmei*, fol. 1–17, or 3–17, or 16 (pp. 1–14); *Národní archiv (National archive, Prague)*, f. *Předsednictvo ministerské rady (Collection of Presidium of Council of Ministers)*, Box No. 218, without sign., without fol., a document of sixteen pages in Hungarian language, labeled as "MEMORANDUM" and signed personally by Andor Jaross and by János Esterházy, dated 5 April 1938, with enclosed abbreviated official translation (compare the document of eleven pages, without fol., labeled as *Memorandum maďarských opozičních stran*).

43) Compare here MNL-OL, K 64 – 79. cs. – 1938 – 65. t. – 597/res. pol./1938, or 18/

With regard to the escalated internal political crisis of the First Republic at the turn of summer and autumn 1938, the considerable merit of János Esterházy on the fact that the Czechoslovak government was not forced to declare the state of emergency on the Hungarian language territory, as opposed to the Sudeten German territories, must be emphasized. The executive president of EMP was against all mass manifestations and demonstrations and kept reminding his co-members of the party that the Hungarians could apply their rights only in democratic and parliamentary way.⁴⁴

6. In the separated Slovak Republic

János Esterházy was forced to continue his political role of defender of rights of the minority Hungarians even after the declaration of independence of Slovakia by the Slovak autonomous parliament on 14 March 1939. But let's add here that Esterházy did not attend that critical session of the Bratislava autonomous parliament, to which he had been elected at the end of 1938 (see here below). A day before, on 13 March, he left for Budapest to negotiate, at request of Karol Sidor, the then president of the Slovak autonomous government, with the government representatives of Hungary in favour of the Slovak policy independent of Germany. Sidor, who was in office of president of autonomous government only three days, refused to declare independent Slovakia in spite of strong pressure of the Nazi Germany. Bratislava was blackmailed intentionally by Adolf Hitler, the Reich Chancellor, by intimidation with alleged prepared military attack of Budapest against Slovakia, in order to achieve breakage of Czechoslovakia through separation of the Slovak part of the republic. At that occasion, Esterházy also celebrated his birthday in family circle in Budapest on 14 March.⁴⁵

Even after 14 March 1939, Esterházy stayed on the territory of the state to which his family property fell (in spite of the fact that in Budapest he would become member of the Upper Chamber of the Hungarian Parliament and minister) and on 20 January 1939, he was confirmed as leader of the party by the remaining members of the controlling bodies of EMP. Nevertheless, with regard to the fact that the Slovak autonomous government prohibited the activity of all political parties, except for Hlinka's Slovak People's Party (hereinafter referred to only as "HSLS") even before the declaration of independence of Slovakia, EMP in fact could not perform any full-blown

főn./1938, Bizalmas iratok felterjesztése, or annex to document B./ Melléklet a 18/főn. 1938 sz. jelentéshez, fol. 92–95; *ibidem*, K 64 – 75. cs. – 1938 – 7. t. – 777/res. pol./1938, *A Magyar Párt vezetésének tárgyalása Hodža miniszterelnökkel, or annex to document 28/főn. 1938, fol. 3–4.*

44) Popély 2001, 180.

45) Čarnogurský 1992, 226, 244 and 249; Esterházy 1991, 105; Kamenec 1992, 21, 20 and 23–24.

party's official political activity. Therefore the party focused mainly on economic-cultural activities in the interest of the Slovak Hungarian minority. The Hungarian minority in Slovakia, similarly to the German minority, was awarded the right to be represented by one political party; but the new party formation of minority Hungarians that was to result from the EMP party structures was expected, in the new internal political atmosphere, to be based on totalitarian and anti-Semitic foundations and to become a reliable support to the state apparatus with fascistizing tendencies that was fully subject to HSL'S governed by national-socialist ideologies. HSL'S became the only allowed Slovak party in the Slovak Republic and its leading role in the government and power system of independent Slovakia was anchored in § 58 of the Slovak constitution, adopted by the Slovak parliament on 21 July 1939. Thus the registration of the party political formation of the Hungarian minority by the state apparatus was postponed during a long time. The Slovak Ministry of the Interior registered the Hungarian party only in December 1941, not long after the conclusion of the Hungarian-Slovak agreement of mutual cooperation in national-minority and cultural field, signed in November 1941 in Berlin by the prime ministers of both countries, László Bárdossy and Vojtech Tuka.⁴⁶

The Slovak Hungarian Party (*Szlovenszkói Magyar Párt*), legal successor of EMP, acting usually under its abbreviated name of Hungarian Party (*Magyar Párt*, MP), became the official political party of the Hungarian minority in the Slovak State. It was led by János Esterházy during the whole time of its existence, i.e. until Spring 1945. But the political activity of MP kept being very complicated in the totalitarian state. Its allowed legal existence resulted *de facto* from reciprocity, i.e. it was tolerated in return for allowed activity of the Party of Slovak National Unity in Hungary, particularly in the former southern areas of Slovakia. The party congress, top body of MP, could not be convoked a single time and the party was not allowed to organize events at national level. Thus its activity kept being restricted only on regional level, particularly in social, economic and cultural area. The political activity of the party at party's level was possible only under very strict supervision of state authorities.⁴⁷

János Esterházy, one of the former most significant leaders of the Hungarian minority in the First Czechoslovak Republic, became also the only representative in the sixty-three member Parliament of the Slovak Republic of about 65 thousand minority Hungarians who had stayed on the Slovak territory after the Vienna Arbitration. Esterházy came to the Slovak Parliament, initially only the autonomous parliament, in the

election of 18 December 1938 from the list of candidates of HSL'S, the only allowed political party in Slovakia of that time. Representation in the Slovak Parliament was provided also to the German minority through the list of candidates of HSL'S. But with regard to the national-socialist orientation of the only political party of the German minority in the Slovak Republic, the Deutsche Partei (DP), the political weight of the German minority was, of course, different. While a state secretariat, led by Franz Karmasin, the DP president, was established in the top state administration, establishment of a state secretariat of the Hungarian minority was refused due to the rejection of the national-socialist ideology by its political representatives under Esterházy's guidance.⁴⁸

Esterházy rejected decidedly the ideology of National Socialism at the beginning of the second stage of his political career already. At the end of autumn 1938, he pointed out publicly in press that National Socialism was a German product that could not be considered an export article and rejected categorically the replacement of Christ's cross in the party's emblem by the fascist sign of arrow. In April 1939, i.e. at the very beginning of existence of the independent Slovak republic, Esterházy emphasized through the press unambiguously again that the Hungarian party never had and would have anything in common with National Socialism. The political leader of the Slovak Hungarians pointed out that even Hungary did not recognize national-socialist ideology as state ideology and warned the representatives of the Hungarian minority that anybody who opposed the policy of the Hungarian party would endanger not only the unity of the Slovak Hungarians but also general Hungarian interests, as well as interests of Hungary. At the same time, Esterházy declared clearly that the party would hold continuity in the political line and would avoid consistently everything contradicting the tradition of the Hungarian nation and its ideological world.⁴⁹

As the Hungarians constituted a second-rate national minority in the totalitarian Slovak State, thanks to MP not submitting to the national-socialist ideology under Esterházy's guidance, János Esterházy acted even in the independent Slovakia as consistent defender of rights of members of the Hungarian minority. Thus even in the era of the Slovak State, Esterházy asserted the right of every national group to its full national self-realization even under the circumstance that it was not allowed national existence within their own independent state, and he asserted that right officially in the Slovak Parliament, in opposition against the state policy. But Esterházy demanded that right not only for the Hungarians living in Slovakia but simultaneously also for the Slovaks who had fallen under Hungarian state administration after the Vienna Arbitration. The main motive of his policy during the Slovak Republic consisted in the effort to convince the

46) Popély 2001, 181; Molnár 2010, 136–138, 132 and 214; Balassa 1994, 60; Kamenec 1992, 25 and 29.

47) A (cseh)szlovákiai magyarok lexikona 1918-tól napjainkig (internetový projekt), Fórum inštitút pre výskum menšín, Šamorín, Slovensko, <http://www.foruminst.sk/>, Lexikon, password: Szlovenszkói Magyar Párt, 9. 1. 2013; Molnár 2010, 223; Kamenec 1992, 33.

48) Molnár 2010, 131–132; Balassa 1994, 58 a 57; Kamenec 1992, 26 and 33; Slovák, 1938, volume 20, No. 289, 20 December, 3 (Kto bol zvolený?)

49) Molnár 2010, 234–235.

Slovak political representation about the mutual dependence of the Slovaks and Hungarians and to assert mutual political-national reconciliation between both nations he considered a historical need. Attention should be paid to Esterházy's public speech at the beginning of the second stage of Esterházy's political career, given on 11 November 1938 at the occasion of ceremonial reception of the Hungarian army led by Regent Miklós Horthy in Košice, awarded to Hungary by the Vienna Arbitration. In his speech, Esterházy asked Horthy in public that Hungary should provide the Slovaks who, due to the modified borders, had ended up inside the Hungarian state as a national minority, with the same rights as those demanded by the minority Hungarians in Slovakia.⁵⁰

But János Esterházy made himself visible under the independent Slovak State particularly by his courageous attitude in the Parliament of the Slovak Republic on 15 May 1942 at its 87th session, when he, as the only deputy, did not vote for the bill of the constitutional act that should legalize the deportation of the Slovak Jews that had been taking place from the beginning of the year already (Act No. 68/1942 on cancellation of citizenship of evicted Jews). Esterházy's constant sober political attitude, persisting even under the atmosphere of the national-socialist hysteria, intensified by the fascist overtones, is documented also by the newspaper of Hlinka's Guards, the *Gardista*, stating clearly with regard to the circumstances of voting about the bill in question that it had been evident much time in advance in the lobby of the Slovak Parliament that Esterházy would not vote for it. The newspaper even speaks about the bets made by the guardists on Esterházy's voting against the bill. Subsequently, when substantiating his action to the Hungarian government, the MP president acknowledged not to be, personally, friend of Jews, but he nevertheless emphasized that he could in no case support by his vote a legislative norm that trampled every divine and human right. Esterházy rejected the anti-Semitic act from May 1942 also from the position of member of a minority nation, i.e. on behalf of the whole Hungarian minority, declaring it personally also to the president of the Slovak Parliament. According to Esterházy, it was absolutely unthinkable for the Slovak Hungarians as national minority to acknowledge an act that authorized the majority to evict a minority.⁵¹

7. GULAG and Czechoslovak imprisonment (1946–1957)

Thanks to his unyielding political attitude, Esterházy logically got under the focus of the gestapo at the end of the war and had to be hiding in his friends' home in the country. He returned to Bratislava only after gestapo had left it when the battlefront was approaching

and he stayed there although his surroundings recommended him to escape the approaching Soviet army to the West. That is why he was detained soon after the war and extradited by Gustáv Husák, the representative of the Board of Commissioners, commissioner for interior matters in Bratislava at that time, to the authorities of the Soviet state security (NKVD) who carted him to the Soviet Union on 29 July 1945. But it must be emphasized that Esterházy was detained during his voluntary visit to the commissioner for interior matters whom he went to see to tell him that he was not hiding and was fully available, which happened after his preceding detention by the Soviets who had released him after several days as they did not find affirmative proofs against him. Less than a year later, on 24 June 1946, Esterházy was condemned in Moscow, based on trumped-up charges, to ten years of penal servitude and subsequently, on 13 July 1946, he was taken with a transport to the GULAG work camps in the Soviet autonomous republic of Komi. First he was brought to the town of Kniashpogost, from there he was moved to Rakpas on 15 August 1946 and finally to the camp of Sangradok-Protok to which he was transported on 7 March 1948. In that camp, Esterházy's stay in the Soviet work camps ended prematurely because, in connection with the subsequent decision of the Soviet authorities about his extradition to Czechoslovakia, he was forgiven six years from the sentence. He was passed to the Czechoslovak authorities on 20 April 1949.⁵²

On 16 September 1947, Esterházy had been condemned by the National Court of Bratislava to death by hanging in his absence (*"in contumaciam"*) for high treason. But after his extradition from the Soviet Union, Klement Gottwald, the President of the Republic changed his death penalty to life imprisonment in 1950, thanks to assistance of his family and friends. Five years later, in 1955, Esterházy's life imprisonment was changed to 25 years of prison. Esterházy had allegedly committed the crime of high treason, according to the National Court, on the basis of the Decree of the Slovak National Council (*Slovenská národná rada; SNR*) No. 33/1945, as amended by Regulation No. 58/146 of the Collection of Decrees of SNR.⁵³

Esterházy served his sentence in several Czechoslovak prisons. In the time from 24 June 1950 to 29 July 1953 in the Formation of Penal Institutions (Útvar nápravných zařízení; ÚNZ) of Mírov. From there he was relocated to the hospital ward of ÚNZ of Ilava due to lung disease, staying there until 12 March 1954. From that prison he was escorted to the hospital of the prison of Ročov where he stayed until 13 April 1955.

50) Popély 2001, 182–183 and 180–181.

51) Popély 2001, 184–185; Molnár 2010, 244 and 243; Kamenec 1992, 113–114; Slovák, 1942, volume 24, No. 111, 17 May, 3 (Snem schválil zákon o zrušení štátneho občianstva vystahovaných Židov).

52) Compare ABS, S/2 (215) – 51 – 81, doc. No. 9695/06–E–1949 from 26 April 1949, document of Board of Commissioners, Department of State Security, fol. 2 and 3. Compare *ibidem*, above cit. doc. Zápisnica napísaná dňa 25. apríla 1949..., fol. 12–19, or 19; Popély 2001, 185–186; Molnár 2010, 308.

53) Compare ABS, *ibidem*, decision of National Court of Bratislava from 16 September 1947, Tn L'ud 19/47 27., fol. 2–11, or 2–5. Molnár 2010, 338–339, 345 and 357.

Then he was relocated to the ÚNZ of Plzeň-Bory to subsequent hospital stay. On 28 May 1955 he returned to the hospital of ÚNZ Mírov. In the time from 28 May 1955 to 2 May 1956 he served his sentence in ÚNZ Leopoldov. There he was placed in Department II of the castle in building No. 20. On 2 May 1956 he was relocated back to Mírov on 2 May 1956, dying there of pulmonary tuberculosis on 8 March 1957. János Esterházy's mortal remains were transported to the municipal crematorium of Olomouc where they were cremated on 12 March 1957 at 12 o'clock and his urn marked with number 9181. The place of placement of the urn with Esterházy's remains was found only fifty years after his death, in 2007.⁵⁴

Esterházy's daughter Alice Esterházy-Malfatti who is living in Rome has been striving, together with the political representatives of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, under significant support of top political representatives of Hungary, for rehabilitation of her brother, in vain since the beginning of the Ninetieths. The elementary obstacle to legal rehabilitation of János Esterházy consists in the fact that it cannot be started, based on the provision of Act No. 119/1990 Coll., on legal rehabilitations, because this legal norm of the former Czechoslovak Federative Republic, still valid both in the Czech Republic and in the Slovak Republic, covers only court decisions given from 25 February 1948 to 1 January 1990. Therefore, while the Russian Supreme Court rehabilitated Esterházy in 1993, the Slovak Supreme Court refused, one year later, to reopen the case of the former political representative of the Czechoslovak Hungarian minority. Due to the persisting tense Slovak-Hungarian relations and the highly sensitive perception of the Hungarian national issue by current Slovak (and Hungarian) politicians, even mere moral rehabilitation of János Esterházy is difficultly imaginable in Slovakia at present. Also a "compromise" solution of the whole matter that could come into question and would compensate the best for the impossibility of opening the whole cause in court, i.e. the solution in form of a parliamentary resolution, adoption of so called Lex Esterházy, compensating the negative consequences of the justice decision from 1947 at least from moral-political perspective, is completely unrealistic too. The fact is that the means of legal determination how to perceive and interpret some historical events or historical figures is perceived as everlasting dilemma of the history among the members of the international professional historical community. Thus, the different view on Esterházy's political personality keeps and will keep dividing the Slovak and Hungarian professional and broad public for some time more.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Kafková 2007, 31–33, or 31–32.

⁵⁵ Molnár 2010, 388–390.

References

Literature

- ANGYAL, Béla (2002): *Érdekvédelem és önszerveződés. Fejezetek a csehszlovákiai magyar pártpolitika történetéből 1918–1938*. Galanta – Dunajská Streda: Fórum Intézet, Lilium Aurum Könyvkiadó.
- BALASSA, Zoltán (1994): *Pilóta a viharban. Gróf Esterházy János és kora*. Budapest: Magyar Honvédség Oktatási és Kulturális Anyagellátó Központ.
- ČARNOGURSKÝ, Pavol (1992): *14. marec 1939*. Bratislava: Veda.
- ESTERHÁZY, Lujza (1991): *Szívek az ár ellen*. Budapest: Püski.
- KAFKOVÁ, Alena (2007): Místo posledního odpočinku Jánose Esterházyho. *Historická penologie. Časopis pro historickou penologii*, No. 2, pp. 31–33.
- KAMENEC, Ivan (1992): *Slovenský stát (1939–1945)*. Praha: Anomal.
- KLIMEK, Antonín (1998): *Boj o Hrad /2./ Kdo po Masarykovi? Vnitropolitický vývoj Československa 1926–1935 na půdorysu zápasu o prezidentské nástupnictví*. Praha: Panevropa: Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku.
- Klimek, Antonín and Hofman, Petr (2002): *Velké dějiny zemí Koruny české, svazek XIV., 1929–1938*. Praha, Litomyšl: Paseka.
- MOLNÁR, Imre (2010): *Esterházy János élete és mártírhalála, Šamorín: Méry Ratio*.
- POPÉLY, Gyula (2001): *Esterházy János emberi és politikusi pályája. Esterházy János emlékkönyv, Alice Esterházy-Malfatti, Bálint Török*. Budapest: Századvég Kiadó.
- PURGAT, Juraj (1970): *Od Trianonu po Košice*. Bratislava: Epona.
- TÓTH, Andrej (2010a): Nástup hraběte Jánose Esterházyho do čela maďarské Zemské křesťansko-socialistické strany v Československu na sklonku roku 1932. *Moderní dějiny*, Vol. 18, No. 1, pp. 77–101.
- TÓTH, Andrej (2010b): *Political Parties of Hungarian Minority in Interwar Czechoslovakia (1918–1938) – Brief Summary and Outline of the Issue. Őt kontinens*, Budapest: Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem, Bölcsészettudományi Kar, pp. 169–193.
- TÓTH, Andrej (2012): Maďarské menšinové politické strany v Československu a volba Masarykova nástupce do úřadu prezidenta republiky v prosinci 1935. I. díl. *Moderní dějiny*, Vol. 20, No. 1, pp. 157–201.
- TÓTH, Andrej, NOVOTNÝ, Lukáš and STEHLÍK, Michal (2012): *Národnostní menšiny v Československu 1918–1939. Od státu národního ke státu národnostnímu?* Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy.
- Unpublished Sources**
- Archiv bezpečnostních složek (Archive of Security Services), Prague, Czech Republic, S/2 (215) – 51 – 81.
- Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (The State Archive of the Hungarian National Archive), Budapest, Hungary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, K 64, Politikai Osztály Reservált Iratai (Reserved documents of Political Section), 62. csomó [hereinafter "cs."], 66. cs., 70. cs., 75. cs., 79 cs.
- Masarykův ústav a Archiv Akademie věd České republiky, v. v. i. (Masaryk Institute and Archive of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, v. v. i., Prague, Czech Republic), Archiv Ústavu Tomáše Garrigua Masaryka (Archive of the Institute of Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk), Edvard Beneš, Department I, cart. No. 45.
- Národní archiv (National Archive), Prague, Czech Republic, Předsednictvo ministerské rady (Presidium of Council of Ministers), Box No. 218.
- Slovenský národný archív (Slovak National Archive), Bratislava, Slovak Republic, Policajné riaditeľstvo Bratislava (the fund of the Police Direction of Bratislava), box No. 238.
- Published Sources**
- Československá statistika – Svazek 9. Řada VI., Sčítání lidu v Republice Československé ze dne 15. února 1921, Part I. (1924). Praha: Státní úřad statistický.

Dokumentumok az Országos Keresztényszocialista Párt történetéhez 1919–1936, Angyal, Béla (ed.) (2004). Šamorín – Dunajská Streda: Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Liliom Aurum Könyvkiadó.

ESTERHÁZY, János (2000): A kisebbségi kérdés. Válogatott írások, beszédek, interjúk, Molnár, Imre (ed.). Budapest: Ister.

Index k těsnopiseckým zprávám o schůzích Poslanecké sněmovny Národního shromáždění republiky Československé, I., osobní rejstřík, II. výbory, IV. volební období. From 18 June 1935 to 21 March 1939 (1950). Praha.

Poslanecká sněmovna, Těsnopisecké zprávy (1935–1936), IV. volební období, 1.–2. zasedání, 1935–1936, schůze 1–30, Praha: Státní tiskárna v Praze.

Poslanecká sněmovna, Těsnopisecké zprávy (1937–1938), IV. volební období, 6 zasedání, 1937–1938, schůze 112–142, Praha: Státní tiskárna v Praze.

Poslanecká sněmovna, Těsnopisecké zprávy (1938), IV. volební období, 7.–8. zasedání, 1938, schůze 143–159, Praha: Státní tiskárna v Praze.

Newspapers

Prágai Magyar Hírlap

Slovák

Internet sources

A (cseh)szlóváki magyarok lexikona 1918-tól napjainkig (internetový projekt), Fórum inštitút pre výskum menšín, Šamorín, Slovensko, <http://www.foruminst.sk/>, Lexikon, password: Szlovenszkói Magyar Párt, 9. 1. 2013.

Resumé

Hrabě János Esterházy patřil od první třetiny třicátých let 20. století k předním představitelům maďarské menšinové politické reprezentace v první Československé republice. Koncem roku 1932 byl jako politický nováček zvolen do čela jedné ze dvou parlamentních stran maďarské menšiny, Zemské křesťansko-socialistické strany (Országos Keresztény Szocialista Párt; OKSzP). V předsednickém křesle OKSzP navázal Esterházy na dosavadní opoziční politickou linii strany. Esterházy byl autonomistickým politikem a za jeden ze svých základních politických cílů proto označil dosažení autonomního statutu Slovenska v rámci československého státu. Esterházy se aktivně domáhal i provedení autonomie Podkarpatské Rusi v praxi, k němuž byla Praha povinována svými mezinárodněprávními závazky. Po čtvrtých parlamentních volbách v květnu 1935 usedl i do poslaneckých lavic Národního shromáždění, kde patřil k aktivním „mluvčím“ maďarské menšiny na parlamentní půdě. V létě 1936 se stal výkonným předsedou Sjedenocené maďarské strany (Egyesült Magyar Párt; EMP), utvořené sloučením obou ústředních opozičních politických stran maďarské menšiny, křesťanských socialistů a Maďarské národní strany.

Esterházy jako přední politický zástupce maďarské menšinové politické scény jednal rovněž v politicky dramatických letech druhé poloviny třicátých let několikrát i s čelnými představiteli první republiky. Vůbec první schůzka Esterházyho s vůdčím politickým činitelem státu se odehrála v souvislosti s prezidentskou volbou koncem roku 1935, 15. prosince, kdy se sešel s prezidentským kandidátem, dlouholetým ministrem zahraničních věcí Edvardem Benešem. Právě i díky Esterházymu nezaujali zákonodárci obou opozičních maďarských menšinových politických stran při volbě prezidenta republiky negativistické stanovisko a hlasovali pro Beneše. Na rozdíl od nejsilnějšího politického reprezentanta největší,

taktéž negativisticky zaměřené národnostní menšiny, menšiny německé, Sudetoněmecké strany. Za pozornost zde stojí skutečnost, že Esterházy byl Benešem považován z opozičních politických lídrů maďarské menšiny za nejdůvěryhodnějšího partnera pro jednání o maďarské otázce. Dokladem tohoto je mj. i skutečnost, že později, v září 1936, prezident Beneš nabídl Esterházymu během jejich společné schůzky ve slovenských Topoľčiankách i post ministra bez portfeje.

János Esterházy pokračoval ve své politické roli obhájce práv menšinových Maďarů i po vyhlášení samostatnosti Slovenska slovenským autonomním sněmem 14. března 1939. Esterházy i nadále zůstal na území toho státu, do kterého připadl jeho rodový majetek, přitom v Budapešti by na něj čekalo členství v horní komoře maďarského parlamentu a ministerský post. Ve Slovenském státu se stal předsedou jediné povolené politické strany maďarské menšiny, Slovenské maďarské strany (Szlovenszkói Magyar Párt). Esterházy se za samostatného slovenského státu zviditelnil především svým odvážným postojem ve Sněmu Slovenské republiky 15. května 1942, kdy jako jediný poslanec nehlasoval pro návrh ústavního zákona, který měl legalizovat již od počátku roku probíhající deportaci slovenských Židů (zákon č. 68/1942 o zrušení státního občanství vystěhovaných Židů).

Po druhé světové válce čekala na Esterházyho krutá léta strávená nejprve v sovětských gulazích a později v československých věznicích. Esterházy zemřel dne 8. března 1957 na tuberkulózu plic ve věznicí Mírov. V roce 1993 Ruský nejvyšší soud Esterházyho rehabilitoval, Slovenský nejvyšší soud však o rok později odmítl případ bývalého předního politického představitele československé maďarské menšiny znovuotevřít.