CHAPTER 5

FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF YUGOSLAVIA
AND THE HUNGARIAN MINORITY

The southern settlement of Hungarian minorities in the Carpathian Basin falls in the former State of Yugoslavia and in today's Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. At the time of the last Yugoslav census in 1991, 370,000 people declared themselves to be Hungarians in these territories.¹ This chapter focuses on the plight of Hungarians in the aftermath of systemic change which swept away not only the communist regime but led to dismemberment of the state. In such times of violent change and uncertainty minority rights are easily ignored and much of the Hungarian population of Serbia has been forced to flee. Prior to focusing our eyes on contemporary developments the rights that Hungarians enjoyed in Tito's Yugoslavia is discussed. Next, the rise of Serbian leader Milosevic and the collapse of the state is discussed for it gives us a fair idea of what Milosevic had in store for the minorities. The policies of Milosevic in Vojvodina are then discussed to assess their impact on Hungarians.

¹ K. Kocsis and E. Kocsis - Hodosi Hungarian Minorities in the Carpathian Basin (Matthias Cornivus Publishing: Toronto - Buffalo) 1995, p.84.
Despite all odds, the Hungarians have managed to organise themselves. The Democratic Community of Vojvodiona Hungarians (DCHV) was founded in April 1990 which has drawn the attention of international community and Hungary to the atrocities the Vojvodian Hungarians face daily. The DCHV has put forth its proposal for self government of Hungarians which is also discussed here. What emerges from the discussion in the following pages is that the situation of Hungarians in Serbia is fundamentally different from their counterparts in Romania and Slovakia. In Romania and Slovakia they may be the target of assimilationist policies but here in Serbia they are clearly unwanted. Threat, violence and intimidation are used against Hungarians forcing them to leave, their property and territory is then used to resettle Serbs.

I. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

World War I ended Austrian rule in the Balkans and culminated in the creation of a new state in 1918: the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovens. According to the decisions made at the Paris Peace Conference by the Treaty of Trianon 1920, 21,000 sq. km. of Hungarian territory in the South was ceded to the kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovens with 1.5 million inhabitants, 1/3 of them being
ethnic Hungarians.\textsuperscript{2} Being the largest nation in the kingdom with 39 per cent of the population and a leader in the struggle for South Slav liberation, Serbia assumed a dominant position in the new political entity.\textsuperscript{3} Belgrade became the capital, and Serbs occupied important positions in the armed forces and the civil bureaucracy. A centralist constitution was adopted in 1921 despite strong opposition from Croat politicians. With growing internal political turmoil the Serbian king Alexander abolished the constitution in 1929 and imposed a personal dictatorship over the renamed Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{4}

The chief source of conflict in the inter-war years was between differing Serb and Croat approaches towards the state structure. Serbian leaders sought a unitary centralized state while Croat representatives preferred a dualistic or federal system.\textsuperscript{5}

The 1931 constitution provided a quasi-parliamentary system subordinate to the king, this further alienated Croat

\begin{itemize}
  \item ibid.
  \item ibid.
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representatives. King Alexander was assassinated in Marseilles in 1934 by Croatian and Macedonian terrorists reportedly sponsored by Mussolini's Italy. A regency of the minor king Peter II was subsequently imposed which lasted until the Nazi conquest.  

In 1941, Germany invaded Yugoslavia, leading to its complete dismemberment. Serbia - Sumadija was placed under German military command, a large portion of Vojvodina was occupied by Hungary, Macedonia and a part of South east Serbia was placed under Bulgarian administration, Kosovo was occupied by Albania under Italian control, and Montenegro was occupied by Italian forces. Things were doubly complicated by the ongoing civil war between Serbian Cetnik and Croatian Ustasa and communist partizan forces of Marshall Tito.  

At the close of war communist forces seized power in the country with Soviet and allied blessing. Post war Yugoslavia had its pre-war borders restored and gained some additional territories from Italy in the northwest corner of the country.

6. ibid.
7. ibid.
8. ibid., p.135.
The foundations of the post-war state were laid during the war at the second meeting of the anti-Fascist Council at Jajce on November 29, 1943. Two years later the communist dominated Constituent Assembly abolished the monarchy and proclaimed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia and on 31 January, 1946, the country's first communist constitution was unanimously approved. The constitution structured the Yugoslav state as a federation of six Republics - Serbia, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia, Montenegro and Bosnia - Herzegovina and the autonomous province of Vojvodina and autonomous region of Kosovo within Serbia.

The division into federal units was aimed at creating as equitable a balance as possible between Yugoslavia's peoples and to prevent conflict over disputed territories. The system of government was intricate and complex but designed to be manifestly fair. No nation was allowed to dominate the Federal Republic, the way the Serbs had dominated the first Yugoslav experiment. Discouraging parochialism the republic aimed at creating an Yugoslav identity.

9. ibid.


11. ibid.
Yugoslav's peoples were split into nations and national minorities. Initially nations corresponded to those peoples who had a home republic - Slovenes, Croats, Serbs, Macedonians, Montenegrins. Albanians and Hungarians were classified as national minorities. Officially both nations and national minorities had the same rights and duties. Vojvodina, where the main concentration of Hungarians are found has been a prosperous agricultural region with a multiethnic population since the late seventeenth century. No single ethnic group dominated the province since the Habsburgs acquired the region from the Ottoman Empire in 1699. At the end of World War I entire German and Hungarian communities opted to leave the region. They were replaced by large number of Serbian immigrants. The end of World War II also witnessed major social dislocation. A decree signed by the partizan leader Tito on October 17, 1945 declared Muslim Slovs to be constituent nation.

12. In 1971 Muslim Slovs were declared to be constituent nation.
13. Christopher Bennett, n.10, pp. 53-55.
14. RFE/RL Research Report Vol. 2, no. 46, 19 November, 1993, p.13. When the Habsburg established their rule they sought to repopulate the region whose inhabitants had significantly diminished during nearly two decades of warfare. They encouraged migrations, especially farmers and merchants to settle in the area. In the seventeenth century yhus times there was an influx of Serbs and in the eighteenth century of Croats, Germans, Slovaks, Ruthenians this region. The different ethnic groups learnt to be to learnt and lived in harmony without any major tensions revolving around identity.
1944 introduced a 'military administration' in Vojvodina which unleashed terror, violence and intimidation on the German and Hungarian inhabitants. The total war related losses of the Hungarian population in Vojvodina is estimated about 75,000 including 16,000 Jews. Another 30,000 Hungarians fled across the border to Hungary.15

Following World War II and for a decade or so there after, relations between Hungarian and Serb communities were strained. During the war some Hungarians had cooperated with the invading Third Reich forces. The war time activities of these collaborators continued to taint the image of the entire community well into post-war years. Many Hungarians on their part also had memories of the 'liberation' in 1944-45 when terrible atrocities were committed against innocent people treated as fascist collaborators by Yugoslav forces. However, as the socialist period wore on, tension eased.

II. CONSTITUTIONAL SAFEGUARDS FOR MINORITIES UNDER COMMUNISM

Paragraph four of the second AVNOJ Assembly which proclaimed the Federation of Yugoslavia and the creation of multi-ethnic autonomous regions in Serbia stated that 'national minorities in Yugoslavia shall be granted all

national rights.' These principles were codified in the 1946 and 1963 constitutions. The 1974 federal constitution reaffirmed this commitment in greater detail. It declared that the nations and nationalities should have equal rights (Article 245). It further stated that "... each nationality has the sovereign right to freely use its own language and script, to foster its own culture, to set up organisations for this purpose, and to enjoy constitutionally guaranteed rights (Article 247). Article 243 stated that "... in the armed forces of the SFRY ... the languages of the nationalities may also be used for orders and in basic training." 

In Vojvodina, twenty laws regulated the ways and means of equal use of all the five local languages - Serbian, Croatian, Hungarian, Slovak, Ruthinko - Ukrainian in the fields of education, information, socio-political organizational activities along with economic and administrative units of 'self-management', registration of births, marriages, and deaths, and the naming of settlements. 

16. ibid, p.3.
17. ibid.
18. ibid.
19. ibid.
Education

Two areas where the constitutional provisions found practical application were education and information. After the war Hungarian language education had to be restarted from scratch in 1944-45. Majority of the teachers had been evacuated or had fled. The ones who remained were imprisoned or executed, labeled as 'fascist collaborators.' As a result at the end of the 1944, there were only two Hungarian teachers in Vojvodina qualified to teach in a secondary school.20 The authorities to cope with the situation introduced abbreviated courses for training teachers in a couple of months. The four to six grade elementary schools reopened in 1945. The secondary and teachers training schools followed suit gradually. A University of Vojvodina was established in Novi Sad in 1954 with schools of arts and sciences, and agriculture. The language of instruction was Serbian. By the end of the fifties it became a full scale university with schools of law, medicine, engineering etc. and departments of minority languages and literatures. In these departments host of Hungarian, Slovak, Romanian and Rutheno-Ukrainian teachers, cultural and mass-media professionals, translators interpreter have been trained. In the

20. ibid.

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decade of 60s a chain of research groups broadened and enriched the activities of these institutions, with research and wide-scale publication in the fields of literature, linguistics and ethnography Pre-school education was fairly organised in Vojvodina. In the 1970s 17.6% of the children went to the 161 Hungarian language nursery schools and kindergartens and another 5.6% attended bi-lingual day care centres. Of the 188 secondary schools in Vojvodina in 1970, 31 were bilingual, only 4 had Hungarian as the language of instruction. 21

In 1977 a nation-wide educational reform program was introduced aimed at improving and modernizing vocational and professional secondary schools. This resulted in the closing down of traditional schools which in turn meant an increase in the number of minority students attending majority language schools. Vojvodina's education law stipulated that education in mother tongue had to be organised and provided at college and university level if requested by at last thirty minority students. Though this provision was never whole heartedly implemented - school of economics, electrical engineering college in Subotica and law school in

21. ibid.
Novi Sad provided education in minority language. As a general rule one could graduate only from a Serbian language college and university in Vojvodina.

*Intellectual, cultural, literary activities and mass media.*

In the communist regime the daily *Magyar szó* (Hungarian Word) of Novi Sad was the third to start publication. By the 1970s it became the best and most interesting Hungarian daily with a circulation of 30,000 in week day and 70,000 on Sundays. Another daily *7 Nap* (seven Days) was published in Subotica. In 1978, 45 Hungarian language newspapers and 15 journals were published in Yugoslavia. Literary monthlies *Hid* (Bridge) and *Uj Symposium* (New Symposium) were also published. Since 1971, *Letunk* (our Existence) published the best studies depicting and analyzing the material and intellectual situation of Hungarians in the Vojvodina. Forum Publishing House in Novi Sad at its zenith published over 150 books per year, ten to fifteen of

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22. ibid.
23. ibid. p.4.
24. ibid.
25. ibid.
26. ibid.

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them being original works of local Hungarian writers.\textsuperscript{27}

Public library stocks of Hungarian reading material especially technical literature, however, was nothing but poor. Most of the publications were obsolete dating back to 1945 or even 1918. An academy of Sciences and Arts of Vojvodina was established in 1980s with minorities members but no fruitful scientific activity or research was undertaken.\textsuperscript{28}

Two Hungarian theater companies based in Subotica and Novi Sad existed but lacked their own premise. No museums exhibiting Hungarian historical or cultural artifacts were there.

Radio Novi Sad aired non-stop in five languages of which fifteen hours per day were allotted to Hungarian programs. Minority programs were telecast on television for eight hours a day, half of these were in Hungarian. Moreover radio broadcast and television telecasts from Hungary could be clearly received.\textsuperscript{29}

It appears thus that Hungarians in Yugoslavia compared to their co-nationals in other countries of the Carpathian

\textsuperscript{27} ibid., p. 5.
\textsuperscript{28} ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} ibid. p.4.
basin enjoyed a favourable fate. After 1952-53 there was no forceful collectivization and private farms dominated. After both world wars land redistribution and resettlement campaigns took place in Vojvodina and Slavonia. Between 1945 and 1948, 385,000 hectares of arable land adjacent to Hungary formerly belonging to ethnic Germans was distributed to strengthen Serb population. But at the same time 18,000 landless Hungarian families were also given 38,500 hectares creating a legion of small holders. Initially in areas of Hungarian habitation in Vojvodina investment level was poor. In the late 1960s and 1970s reindustrialization drive in the region also meant influx of Serbians in these areas. The overall effect of both economic and social under development and industrialization has been one of assimilation. Virtually everybody was allowed to go abroad and millions worked temporarily, in western Europe in the 'golden' sixties and seventies. Hungarians, as noted earlier, were allowed have contact with Hungary. In the 1970s hundreds of Hungarian students from Vojvodina attended colleges and universities in Hungary. Wide scale cooperation flourished in industry, agriculture and commerce. Delegations of state and party organs, educational and

30. ibid., pp. 1-3.
cultural institutions, sporting and hunting clubs frequently visited the neighbouring regions from across the border.

III. **1990s A TURNING POINT**

The minorities were hard hit by the sudden bloody collapse of the system in the 90s. What provoked this collapse needs to be looked into for it gives one a fair idea of things in store for minorities.

(i) **The Yugoslav Collapse**

Considering the many differences between Yugoslavia's various regions it was inevitable that republics regularly fell out over development strategies and allocation of scarce resources. Nevertheless the second Yugoslavia was not an unmitigated failure as critics claim. the country could boast of high living standards. the health and life expectancy of Yugoslavs improved dramatically. Schooling became universal and illiteracy was virtually wiped out. Urbanisation after 1945 led to migration of workers to cities and produced generations which were more aware of their urban roots than their national origins. Inter-marriage became common and the offsprings tended to identify as Yugoslav nationals.\(^{31}\) Indeed, in Yugoslavia's last census, carried out months before fighting broke out there was an

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31. Inter marriage is common among Hungarians which has meant greater assimilation.
increase in the number of people who considered themselves primarily as Yugoslavs - a noteworthy achievement for a multiethnic state.

As evident from the way events unfurled the rise of Slobodan Milosevic to power in Serbia was critical for Yugoslavia's disintegration. Within months Milosevic changed the face of Serbia. By revamping communist authority with nationalities Milosevic soon led Serbs to believe that they were surrounded by enemies and were permanently under siege.

However, Milosevic could not have succeeded without the failings of Yugoslav economy which became too apparent to ignore. The failings of the Titoist state was, as Christopher Bennett puts it primarily economic. It was against a background of declining living standards that Milosevic launched his assault against the federation.

"...the economic and political failings of Marxism-Lennism were as great in Yugoslavia as anywhere else in the communist world and Yugoslavia's home grown communism could not survive the demise of communist authority in the Soviet Union and the rest of Eastern Europe ... as communism collapsed in the rest of Eastern Europe and the threat of Warsaw Pact invasion disappeared, Yugoslavia lost the unique geopolitical position it had occupied in world politics for more than four decades. Diplomatic activity and foreign investment shifted away from Yugoslavia towards eastern Europe's emerging democracies and without the Eastern bogey to bind the country together and western money to bail out the economy, Yugoslavs found themselves for the first time
entirely on their own."\(^{32}\)

At the inter-republican talks on Yugoslav's future which preceded the outbreak of war the republics had different perceptions of the increasingly by dominating Serbian voice. For Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia integrated Yugoslavia provided security for which they were prepared to accept reduced autonomy. Slovene leaders, on the other hand came to view Yugoslavia as a liability in which they had little to gain and a great deal to lose. They, therefore took steps to extricate themselves. Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovania soon followed suit. Serbia having secured the backing of the Yugoslav National Army was in no mood to negotiate. Recourse to armed intervention by Serbia Shalt-tered the Yugoslav equation and hardened attitudes on all sides. Yugoslavia fell apart amidst violence and bloodshed.

(ii) Milosevic's Policy in Vojvodina:

Milosevic's incessant use of the nationalist card had paid him rich dividends in terms of unchallenged popularity in Serbia but as noted it also destroyed the state. Naturally it had enormous impact on the minorities in Serbia - Hungarians, Albanians, Croats, Ruthenians. When Milosevic entered office Vojvodina enjoyed an autonomous status grant-

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32. C. Bennett, n., p.11.
ed by 1974 socialist constitution. The ethnic relations in the province was characterized by an absence of inter-ethnic conflict and five languages were recognized by the local authorities - Serbo-Croatian written in both Cyrillic and Latin, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian and Slovak. Ethnic groups exerted control over institutions such as the regional media.33

In his attempt to control Vojvodina, Milosevic initially encountered a population that valued its multi ethnic composition. Nenad Cenak, a politician of Serbian descent and the leader of Vojvodina's social Democratic Party, observed that

Vojvodina means one cosmopolitan way of thinking. there's a big difference between Hungarians in Hungary, Slovaks here and in Slovakia, Coats here and in Serbia .... Vojvodina was never a part of Serbia. After 1945 the Communists attached it to Serbia because there were no cetniks here and Vojvodina's Serbs were meant to dilute the royalism that was still strong in Serbia. Serbs are obsessed with 'United Serbia', but United Serbia doesn't exist, or only in the sense that the Third Reich existed in 1944, because you have tanks and police in Kosovo, and you have a tough regime in Vojvodina. We can be three in one, but we cannot be just one.'34

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34. ibid., pp. 14-15.
Undeterred Milosevic devised strategies as the 'anti bureaucratic revolution', aimed at progressively undercutting the autonomy of both Vojvodina and Kosovo. Essentially, the anti bureaucratic revolution involved paying groups of unemployed youth from Serbia proper to travel to the provinces to take part in nationalist rallies. Milosevic's principal method was intimidation through demonstration, the streets became his corridor of power.35 In October 1988, when Milosevic was the president of the League of Communists in Serbia, the Presidium of the League of communists was forced to resign when an estimated 1000,000 protesters called for an end to Vojvodina's autonomy. By virtue of his position, Milosevic exerted influence over the reconstituted Vojvodina authorities.36

By September 7 1990 the Serbian parliament adopted a new constitution. It described Serbia as "Sovereign, integral, and unified" and specified that federal control could be exerted over the autonomous provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina.37 the degree of centralization could be assessed by the provision that specified that in case of regional

35. ibid., p. 15.
36. ibid., p. 15.
37. ibid.
authorities failure to implement legislation passed by the Serbian National Assembly, Belgrade had the right to intervene in local affairs to guarantee that the directives were carried out. In 1991 a law was passed which made Serbian the sole official language of the republic and prohibited the use of Hungarian in official business. In 1992 a law followed which substantially reduced the number of Hungarian language classes and empowered the Ministry of Culture to decide where and how many Hungarian language classes should operate. Under this legislation, principals of elementary and high schools and colleges were to be appointed directly by the minister of culture. The intention of the government to exercise total control on minority life was obvious. In Back Topola, for instance, the Minister of culture has not appointed a single ethnic Hungarian to the boards of the town's three high schools, even though Hungarians comprise some 60 per cent of the population. Hungarians have been removed from influential public positions, many ethnic Hungarian directors of state-run enterprises and law enforcement officers have also been dismissed. Since the


39. ibid.

40. ibid.
imposition of the UN embargo against the rump Yugoslavia in 1991 state subsidies to all media organisations have been reduced. Hungarians complain that Hungarian language media has been singled out for the largest reduction. The popular Hungarian - language daily Magyar Szo had to stop publication for lack of money.\(^{41}\)

A major sore in Serb-Hungarian relation is the latter's unwillingness to fight Serbia's war with Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia - Hercegovina. The DCHV leader Andras Agostan, alleged that Hungarians were being deliberately drafted in greater number than their proportion of the population. More than 10 per cent of conscripts in Serbia were Hungarians, he said.\(^ {42}\) The figure was refuted by the Vojvodina Territorial Command which stated that just over 7 per cent of Hungarians eligible for conscription had been drafted.

One Hungarian report alleged that women in ethnic Hungarian families in which husband eligible for military service had fled were also drafted disregarding the rule that mothers with children under seven were ineligible. Hungarians eligible for conscription fled the country in thousands mainly to

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\(^{41}\) ibid., SWB reports indicate that the decision to stop publication was not merely on grounds of financial crunch.

neighboring Hungary. More than 35,000 Hungarians have fled to Hungary from Vojvodina since the outbreak of the civil war in 1991.43 In 1992 the Serbian authorities began to settle Serbian refugees in houses left behind by Hungarians.44

The distress of Vojvodina's minorities are exacerbated by activities of Serbian Radical Party Leader Vojislav Seselji. Seselji, an ultranationalist, has shown no respect for minority rights. The municipal government in Novi Sad and the Councils in several towns and villages around Novi Sad controlled by politicians loyal to Seselji or Milosevic has spelt disaster for minorities. Marches have been organised through out non-Serb neighborhoods to whip of nationalist sympathies and harass non-Serbs. In August 1993 he organised a series of such marches in Hungarian inhabited Subotica. Serbian media has also joined the attack accruing Hungarians as secessionist desiring to break away from rump

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43. ibid.

44. SWB 2 September 1992 EE/1475 C176 and SWB 3 September 1992 EE/1476 C1/4 - reported ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina's concern over resettlement of Serbian refugees. SWB November 2, 1992. EE/1527 C1/6, reported about reports in Magyar Szö of the threatening letters addressed to Hungarian inhabitants of subotica 'get out of here, otherwise we will hack you and your families to pieces.' Hungarians the report stated had turned to Mayor Jozsef Kasza and observers of the CSCE for protection.
Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{45}

(iii) **Serbian Political Parties:**

Political parties which dominated Serbia at the end of 1980s all appeared to be of the same nationalist hue. The Serbian Socialist Party created in July 1990 from the amalgamation of the League of Communists of Serbia and the Serbian socialist Alliance headed by Slobodan Milosevic was a party with nationalist agenda. Milosevic contended that Serbia had been deliberately weakened by the Tito regime. The 1974 Yugoslav constitution, he alleged, undermined Serbia's sovereignty over its two autonomous provinces, Vojvodina and Kosovo, which hard equal representation in the federal administration and enjoyed the power to veto decisions in the Serbian National Assembly.

The SSP gained 194 of 250 seats in Serbia's first multi party elections in December 1990.\textsuperscript{46} Milosevic himself was elected president of Serbia gaining 65 per cent of the popular vote.\textsuperscript{47}

Founded originally during, 1990 as the Serbian Freedom


\textsuperscript{46} SWB EE/0937 B/16 3 December 1990 SWB EE 0956 B/13 28 December 1990.

\textsuperscript{47} SWB EE/0947, B/12, 14 December 1990.
Movement and later renamed the Serbian Cetnik Movement the SRP an ultra nationalist party was sponsored and blostered by the Milosenic regime. The SRP was, as noted earlier, led by Vojislav Seselji. Campaigning in May 1992, Seselji summarized the party's militant position: "Albanians should be driven from Kosovo to Albania, similar actions should be taken with the Muslims in Sandzak, Hungarians who were our brothers-in-arms may remain, but the Hungarians who follow Agostan have no place in Serbia, (and) all Croats must be expelled from Serbia." 48 The radicals maintained their position as the second largest force in the Serb assembly by gaining 73 out of 250 seats in the 1992 elections. They were outspoken supporters of creation of a Greater Serbian state. Their persistent criticisms of President Cosic for his moderating influence culminated in a successful vote of no confidence in May 1993. 49 Another party founded in January 1990, the Serbian National Renewal aimed to 'preserve historical truth, the Serbian language and the Cyrillic alphabet. An offshoot of the Serbian National Renewal was the Serbian Renewal Party founded in August 1990. Led by a charismatic orator and writer Vuk Draskovic the party

49. ibid., p. 150.
maintained an overall pan-Serbian goal. Draskovic finished second to Milosevic in the Serbian presidential race of 1990 capturing 16 per cent of popular vote but gained only 19 seats in the parliament. 50

The Homeland Non-party Serbian Association (HNPSA) was formed in early 1991. As a Serbian ultra-nationalist organization it was based in Pristina, Kosovo. It regularly called on citizens to defend the Serbian people and Serbian territories 'with weapons in hand.' In particular it was concerned about the 'genocide threat' posed by the Croatian Ustasa and Albanians separatists in Kosovo. 51

Another organisation Association of Serbs from Croatia was created in January 1991. under Milosevic's sponsorship. 52 As a 'nonpartisan' organisation it was committed to helping Serbian compatriots in Croatia, whose cultural and social development was claimed to be endangered by Croatian state.

Given this blatant nationalist leanings of the majority of the parties in post-communist Serbia, minority rights appeared to be doomed. Voices of moderation were drowned in

50. SWB EE/0947 B/12, 14 December 1990.
52. ibid., pp 152-153.
this nationalist pandemonium. Nenand Canak's Social Democratic Party of Vojvodina cast itself as a multi ethnic organization seeking autonomy for Vojvodina in a tripartite Serbian federation - consisting of Vojvodina, Kosovo and Serbia - Sumadija. Canak was perhaps the most outspoken Serbian politician advocating continuation of the centuries old tradition of tolerance and inter ethnic harmony in Vojvodina. He maintained that most of Vojvodina's Serbs did not support the nationalist views of Milosevic or Seselji. The League of Social Democrats cooperated with all parties that shared its view on Vojvodinian autonomy and stood for democracy. However, in 1992 in coalition with the Civic Alliance its performance was dismal. It gained only one seat in the Federal Assembly and five in Serbian Assembly.

IV. DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY OF VOJVODINA HUNGARIANS AND THE TASK OF REPRESENTATION

The weakness and lack of popular base of the civic and democratic opposition has meant that the burden of representing minority demands, highlighting the grievances is shouldered by ethnic minority parties. The interests of Hungarians is looked after by the Democratic Community of

53. ibid., p. 160.
54. ibid.
Vojvodina Hungarians (DCHV).

Founded in early 1990 the DCHV became the largest and most active of the Hungarian organisations in former Yugoslavia. It aimed at securing the following individual and collective rights for Hungarians in Vojvodina.

(i) the right of proportional representation in the elected, administrative and jurisdictional bodies

(ii) free use of mother tongue in connection with the aforementioned authorities and in public life in general

(iii) public information in mother tongue

(iv) Equal opportunities in economic and social life.

(v) education in mother tongue from elementary to university level.

(vi) the right of establishing ties with institutions in the mother country and with international minority organisation.55

By the end of 1990 thirteen district branches were in action. The stronger and more viable in Backa assisted the weaker ones in Banat. the organisation held its first congress inAda on 29 September 1990 and the 400 delegates representing 20,000 or 90 DCHV members decided to seek

55. Lajos Arday, n. 2, p.5.
cultural autonomy for Vojvodina.  

For the December 1990 election the DCHV ran candidates in every constituency with a Hungarian or Hungarian Croat majority. But it failed to form any election alliance with democratic opposition forces. There may be some truth in the contention that the opposition parties were unwilling to accept the unpopular charge of minority protection. However, the DCHV managed to get 80 per cent of the Hungarian vote and had 49 deputies in the Vojvodina Assembly and 8 deputies in the Serbian Assembly and two DCHV deputies in the Federal Assembly despite Milosevic's propaganda and intimidation and the 'election geometrics' which worked openly against a fair representation. However, where the DCHV failed, was in having representatives in the elected bodies they were powerless to stop the Serbian leadership from stripping the province of its autonomy.

In response to the increasing centralizing measures adopted by the Serbian government the Hungarian representatives developed the concept of autonomy in 1992. The DCHV's concept was outlined in the Vojvodina Hungarian

56. ibid.

Autonomy Memorandum' adopted at its general assembly in April 1992. The Hungarian minority demands are no more or no less than the Serbs in Croatia. The memorandum states that for national minorities only the attainment of collective rights offers a real opportunity for freedom and determination. The document stated that autonomy would not violate the sovereignty of the state and could be reconciled with the Serbian constitution.

Agoston argued that Hungarians should be granted a special status similar to that of Serbs in Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina under the peace plan presented by the European community negotiator Lord C Barrington in 1991-1992. DCHL envisaged a three tier autonomy system - personal, territorial and local.

At the personal level 58 Hungarians who were a minority of the population in the locality where they lived would establish a minority council to represent their collective interests. This Council would take over the ownership of minority educational, cultural and social institutions from the republican government'. The Council would operate these institutions with funds provided by the Serbian government. Members of the minority council would be elected by ethnic

Hungarians or by any one, regardless of nationality, who financially supported it and used the facilities run by it. What form such financial support would take, however, is not clear from the proposal.

At the territorial level\textsuperscript{59}, autonomy meant creation of a Hungarian Autonomous District. It would be composed of administrative areas where Hungarians were in the majority including Kanjiza, Senta, Ada, Coka, Becej Serbotica, Backa Topola and Mali Idjos. The autonomous district with its head quarters at Novi Sad would encompass 56 per cent of Vojvodina's Hungarians. Public education, economic and social affairs, the judiciary, the police, local finances and administration would fall under the districts jurisdiction. The district, moreover, would have its own coat of arms and its own flag with red, white and green Hungarian colors. Hungarian, Serbian and Croatian would be the three official languages.

The local level\textsuperscript{60} of autonomy would cover some fifteen Hungarian settlements isolated from the territory of Hungarian Autonomous District, in the Banat, the northern region of Vojvodina where they were in majority. The local self

\textsuperscript{59} ibid.

\textsuperscript{60} ibid.
governing bodies would look after their linguistic and cultural interests.

DCHV's proposal was condemned by almost all political parties. Nanad Cenak argued that the Hungarian proposal could destroy Vojvodina's effort to regain the kind of regional autonomy it enjoyed before 1989. The autonomy plan was also criticised by ethnic Hungarians. Reportedly groups of Hungarian intellectuals and managers who occupied leading positions under communist rule opposed the plan. The federal minister of human rights and minority affairs Margit Savovic, herself an ethnic Hungarian, severely reprimanded DCHV for its alleged 'separatist' tendencies and 'anti-Serbian' position. Tibor Varadi, another ethnic Hungarian argued that since Hungarians made up only 3 per cent of Serbia's population they had to present a realistic plan acceptable to all nationalities in Serbia.

In May 1993 the Socialist Party of Serbia in Vajvodina changed the demand for tripartite autonomy as 'unfounded,

61. ibid.
62. They were members of Hungarians for the Fatherland, Yugoslavia and Serbia.
64. Tibor Varady - Former Federal Minister of Justice. ibid.
provocative separatistic and unacceptable. On 15 May 1993 Margit Savovic revealed that the rough draft on national minorities had been completed. The bill guaranteed the right of national minorities to preserve their identity she said. But it had no provisions for national councils, special statuses or territorial autonomy she specified.

CONCLUSION:

The minority situation in Vojvodina reflects an open case of human rights violation. The major cause of the increasing deterioration has been the rise in Serbian nationalism, manipulated and exploited from Belgrade by the regime of Slobodan Milosevic. Vojvodina has been stripped of its autonomy and as a result of the ongoing war basic right to life let alone educational and other rights were flagrantly disregarded. The authorities have admitted to the problems and taken measures to check the situation. Such measures can at best be termed 'cosmetic'. On 4 August 1993, Federal Minister of Justice, Dr. Tibor Varady admitted 'serious minority rights problem' but said that these could be solved internally. On 3 July 1993 the Serbian government


set up a commission on the rights of minorities. The Vojvodina government also set up a Secretariat of Human Rights. Such efforts appear to be aimed at deflecting outside pressure, possibly from the OSCE visiting delegation or resolutions of Council of Europe condemning Serbia for failure to guarantee basic liberties of Hungarians and other nationalities in Vojvodina. The official ploly was to portray a picture of tolerance. Thus, for instance a huge three day festival of Slovak Culture was held in Backi Petrovac, while 10 km. away in the village of Glosan during the festival hand grenades were thrown in Slovak yards by Serbian refugees. Hungarians also had similar experiences. Results of 3 November, 1996, elections of Federal Republic of Yugoslavia does not appear to indicate any positive change for minorities in near future. The Helsinki Human Rights Committee in Serbia (HOPS) made a rather pessimistic assessment of the last elections. HOPS observed that nothing pointed out that FRY was on a democratic track. The power struggle that unfolded was based on a 'vulgar understanding' of national interest and no democratic alternative had emerged.


68. SWB/EE/2765 A/10-11, 9 November, 1996.
Figure 5. The largest Hungarian communities beyond the borders of Hungary (around 1990)