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Myths in Action:
Two Cases from southern Slovakia

Introduction

The transitive periods from one political regime to another, which are accompanied by political and economic instability and social insecurity, are favorable for different kinds of myths to occur. The old, so-called "traditional" myths, even those from ancient times are re-invented, while at the same time new, "modern" myths appear in the discourse. In relation to post-communism, myths might be responses to the sentiments of discontinuity, fragmentation, and the overall confusion of the post-communist stage. Myth has the power not only to offer relatively facile explanations for perceived victimhood and failure but also to mobilize, energize, and even instigate large groups into action.[1] This explains not only the attractiveness of myths for political leaders, but also the effectiveness of populist leaders and political parties in all countries of East-Central Europe. Especially those myths that are connected with ethnic origin and the history of particular nations and ethnic groups have been flourishing throughout the region over the past fifteen years.

Southern Slovakia is a region of longitudinal coexistence of various nationalities. It is a place where the mythology of one nation is confronted with the mythology of others, while sometimes these mythologies are in real contrast. The paper points to some widely spread, ethnically based myths and contra-myths held by the Slovaks and Hungarians. These myths are instrumentally used by the ruling elites in order to mobilize popular support for their political purposes. The two cases I will examine not only demonstrate the power and longitudinal viability of myths in the collective memory of the population, but show also their adaptability to different circumstances and discourses. By pointing at the close interconnection of local and state ruling elites, the paper also contests a widely spread thesis that inter-ethnic problems and tensions (in Slovakia) are centralized on the state rather than at the local level.

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[1] V. Tismaneanu, *Fantasies of Salvation. Democracy, Nationalism and Myth in Post-Communist Europe.* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press 1998)

Myths: Looking for a short Definition

The purpose of this paper is not, however, to interfere with never-ending discussions over definitions of terms like 'ethnicity', 'nation', 'nationality', or 'nationalism'. Rather it keeps the discussion open. The position of the author is close to those who perceive nations both as communities of people that "share" history, language, culture and sentiment, as well as communities "unified" by political will, or, sometimes, by conquest and political calculus. Also nationalism as such can be characterized by a dual identity – as a peculiar and explosive combination of interests and affective relationships.[2] National identity can be therefore described as a mix of expressive relations and feelings, which exist side by side with instrumental and calculated political interests. Not surprisingly, both the ethnic and the instrumental perspective have emphasized that traditions, stories, myths and symbols are powerful generators of feelings of affinity or exclusion, of proximity or hatred among groups and successive generations. They are manipulated and reproduced over time by nationalist elites in order to build an insider and outsider, indigenous versus alien – or even friend and foe – dichotomy.[3] It can be suggested that people's identities in East-Central Europe are still being defined in strict relation to unacceptable "others" whom one excludes from one's moral, or, for instance, ethnic community. Also local historiographies, as Katherine Verdery writes, represent nations as innocent victims, victimized nearly always by other nations, rather than by their own members.[4]

Although it is difficult to find a universally valid definition of a myth, the majority of social scientists would probably agree on some postulates that will be helpful while thinking about the substance and characteristics of this phenomenon. For instance, a myth can be understood as a body of traditional beliefs. Myths serve our current beliefs with the evocation of the past. Myths are narratives, stories, legends, sagas, which connect us with the transcendental world, where the substance, the unquestionable truth lives and which gives us a sense of our origin, our identity and our purpose.[5] The truth is not abstract, but understood as a leading principle in the life of a particular community. It is rather the content of the myth that is important, not its accuracy as a his-

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[2] See J. Rothschild *Ethnopolitics.* (New York: Columbia University Press 1981)

[3] See R. Máiz, "Politics and the nation: nationalist mobilization of ethnic differences," *Nations and Nationalism,* Vol. 9, Part 2 (April 2003), pp. 199–200.

[4] K. Verdery, "Nationalism and National Sentiment in Post-socialist Romania," *Slavic Review* 52, No. 2 (Summer 1993), p. 194

[5] E. Kovacs, "From the Turul Bird to the Image of the Finance Minister: The Role of Myths in the Post-Communist Transition, Hungary 1988–1996."(The School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London; *www.ssees.ac.uk/kovacs1.htm*)

torical account.[6] The truth of a myth is not as important as its ability to attract people's thoughts. On the one hand, the myth has a strong capacity of integration and simplification; on the other hand, it is strongly linked with the fundamental values of the community and with the purpose of ensuring the cohesion of the former.[7]

Each generation forms its own "cognitive map" of the nation. But it does this in the midst of inherited notions surrounding a series of specific sets of myths and symbols. Using these "raw materials", nationalists proceed to 'rediscover' and 'reinterpret'[8] their national ideological capital in accordance with the diverse political requirements and urgencies of each moment.[9] By focusing on concrete cases, I will show how political actors instrumentally exploit 'myths', whose role is rather to stress the "natural", primordial character of the nation.

Myths: Traditional and new

The ongoing process of political and economic transformation in Slovakia in the post-communist period has been complicated by the parallel process of building a nation state. After the split of the Czech and Slovak Federative Republic, a newly created state started to look for an identity on which its existence would be grounded. It happened for the first time in history.[10] In this regard Slovakia differs from its neighbors – perhaps with the exception of Ukraine – who overcame similar processes many decades ago. The Slovak Republic has therefore often been pushed into an unfavorable position as a "young" state with weak historical traditions and a lack of historical personalities. Last but

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[6] G. Schőpflin, "The Functions of Myth and a Taxonomy of Myths," G. Hosking, G. Schőpflin (eds.) *Myth and Nationhood.* (London: Hurst & Co. 1997)

[7] C. Tanasiou, "Post-Communist Political Symbolism: New Myths – Same Old Stories? An Analysis of Romanian Political Mythology." (School of Politics, University of the West England; Paper for the *Political Studies Association-UK* 50th Annual Conference, April 10–13, 2000)

[8] See Smith, A. D. *The Ethnic Origins of Nations.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986),
Smith, A. D. *Nationalism and Modernism.* (London: Routledge 1998)

[9] See A. D. Smith *The Ethnic Origins of Nations.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1986),
A. D. Smith *Nationalism and Modernism.* (London: Routledge 1998); also R. Máiz, "Politics and the nation: nationalist mobilization of ethnic differences," *Nations and Nationalism,* Vol. 9, Part 2 (April 2003), p. 201.

[10] The Slovaks experienced their own statehood for a short period in World War II. However, the so-called Slovak State was rather a kid of "para-state" created under the protection of Nazi Germany and its sovereignty was therefore significantly limited.

not least, an influential factor that has impacted on all of the aforementioned processes is the significant ethnic heterogeneity of the country.[11]

All of these factors serve as favorable spawn not just for recalling "traditional" myths, but also for creating new ones. This claim concerns both Slovaks and Hungarians as nationalities that have relevant political representation. In the forthcoming paragraphs I definitely do not present an exhaustive list of all myths, but I rather concentrate on those that have a particular role to play in the examined cases.

Where the Hungarians are concerned, there are several myths that can be characterized as "traditional" or "old." Among them, especially the myth of ethnogenesis and the so-called Trianon myth, occupy important places.

There are actually two myths of ethnogenesis: the *Legend of the Miraculous Stag* and the *Legend of the Turul Bird*. In both of these myths the Hungarians are related to the Hunnish Leader Attila. However, while according to the *Legend of the Miraculous Stag* the Hungarians were one of the two related tribes (the Magyars and the Huns), in the *Legend of the Turul Bird* the Magyars were themselves the Hunnish tribe. Both myths demonstrate that Hungary has more than thousand year history and that Hungarians are "a nation with history", as they like to say with a parochial pride.[12] However, this pride has often led them to express certain superiority over "younger" nations like, for instance, Slovaks or Ukrainians, who lack experience with their own "nation" states.[13]

The so-called Trianon myth is named after the place where the Treaty of Trianon was signed. The consequences of World War I, which marked the end of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, were disadvantageous for Hungarians. Two thirds of the territory of historical Hungary and half of its population were passed to neighboring countries: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later named Yugoslavia). In the public, as well as in the minds of political elites, the Treaty of Trianon was reflected as a fundamental trauma, as the death of the Hungarian nation. As a con-

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[11] According to the last census gathered in 2001, approximately 14,2 % of the total population of Slovakia declare other than Slovak nationality. If mother tongue is selected as a criterion, the number of people with other than Slovak mother tongue will reach 16,1 % of the total population. See www.statistics.sk/webdata/slov/scitanie/namj.htm.

[12] E. Kovacs, "From the Turul Bird to the Image of the Finance Minister: The Role of Myths in the Post-Communist Transition, Hungary 1988–1996."(The School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London; *www.ssees.ac.uk/kovacs1.htm*)

[13] Another myth that is closely connected to the myth of ethnogenesis is the myth of conquest. According to this myth the ancestors of Hungarians conquered the Carpathian basin at the end of the 9th century, but actually nobody knows which year should be defined as the year of the conquest.

sequence, there were several attempts to establish a politics of grievance and the quest for revenge in the interwar period.[14] The idea of Great Hungary re-appeared in the Hungarian political discourse shortly after the beginning of the transformation process. The first Hungarian post-communist conservative government, led by Prime Minister József Antall, for example, openly flirted with the idea of a "Great Hungary". At the first plenary session of the new Parliament Antall said that spiritually he would be a Prime Minister of the whole Hungarian nation, meaning 15 million Hungarians living all around the Globe, but mostly in neighboring states.[15] Viktor Orbán, the leader of the *Fidesz* Party and the former Prime Minister of Hungary in 1998–2002 successfully adopted Antall's rhetoric. In election rallies, for example, the representatives of Hungarian minorities from neighboring states, usually the most radical ones, had the opportunity to give a speech.

These two "traditional" myths are accompanied with newer ones, which could be named as the fear of "assimilation" and "forced *slovakization*". These fears are partly based on real experience. In interwar Czechoslovakia, members of the Hungarian minority were subjects of several assimilation tendencies. After World War II one of the most convincing ways to declare loyalty to the newly reestablished state was the change of national identity. Although later on the situation became more favorable for national minorities and consequently Hungarians could freely declare their national identity, these fears rooted in their collective memory. The break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993 and the forthcoming creation of the independent Slovak Republic triggered another wave of fears of Slovak revenge for historical maltreatment. These fears, however, rested unfulfilled despite openly anti-Hungarian attitudes declared by the nationalist populist government led by the former Slovak Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar. Because of negative experiences from the past, occasionally reinforced by various manifestations of anti-Hungarian sentiments, it is possible that the fears of "assimilation" and "forced *slovakization*" will become a "traditional" myth soon and will serve as a tool for ethnic mobilization for the radical representatives of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

The Slovak myths can also be divided into similar groups. The Slovak myth of ethnogenesis says that the ancestors of the Slovaks, ancient Slavs, were united

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[14] One of the slogans of expansive nationalism was "Rump Hungary is no Hungary, greater Hungary is heaven". See Kovacs, E., "From the Turul Bird to the Image of the Finance Minister: The Role of Myths in the Post-Communist Transition, Hungary 1988–1996."(The School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London; *www.ssees.ac.uk/kovacs1.htm*)

[15] The population of the Republic of Hungary itself is around 10,5 million. The largest Hungarian minority lives in Romania (2,5 million), Slovakia (550 000) and Serbia and Montenegro (500 000).

in a *quasi-state* called Great Moravia, with its "capital" in Nitra, the town locat-
ed in Western Slovakia. The myth says that Christianity was brought to Great
Moravia in 863 AD by two missionaries – Constantine (Cyril) and Method –
who came from the town of Thessalonica. The two brothers not only brought
Christianity to ancient Slavs, but also created the alphabet called *hlaholika*[16]
understandable for the majority of the population. This era of rapid develop-
ment for ancient Slavs was, however, replaced by a 1000 years of "darkness",
starting with the arrival of the Huns (Magyars) to the Carpathian basin and
the forthcoming creation of the Kingdom of Hungary.

The myth of ethnogenesis is therefore closely connected with the myth of
the Hungarian threat. The Huns (Magyars) not only conquered territories in-
habited by the Slavs, but also ruled them for more than one thousand years.
Negative experience with Hungarian rule was even strengthened after the rec-
onciliation between Austria and Hungary in 1867. The reconciliation was soon
followed by forced *magyarization*, which was perceived very negatively by the
Slovaks. After the creation of Czechoslovakia in 1918, the myth of Hungarian
threat was kept alive not only by the Czechoslovak/Slovak political elites, but
was also sustained by the Hungarian reactive and nationalist politicians. As a
result of its friendship with Nazi Germany, Hungary was given southern parts
of Slovakia after the Munich arbitrage.[17]

Historical experience with Hungarians serves as the basis for another myth
that has developed since 1993, which marked the creation of the independ-
ent Slovak Republic. While in Czechoslovakia just 3 % of the overall popula-
tion declared their Hungarian origin, in an independent Slovakia this number
increased to 11 %. The nationalist populist government of the former Slovak
Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar often demonized Hungarians and their polit-
ical representation in order to get votes in elections. The so-called "playing the
Hungarian card" can be, however, considered also in terms as a reaction to the
behavior of nationalist conservative politicians in Hungary itself. Especially in
the time before general elections the leaders of Hungarian parties (united in
the Party of Hungarian Coalition – SMK) were blamed of irredentism. Any at-
tempts to create autonomy on any level, or any steps leading to the introduc-
tion of collective rights to political discourse have been considered as a proof of
irredentism. These fears have spread through the population regardless of the
ideological or party affiliation of the people.

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[16] After St. Cyril's death *hlaholika* was on the honor of St. Cyril renamed to *cyrilika*.
[17] Negative experience with foreign domination on the other hand strengthened the myth
about the "pigeon" character of the Slovak nation. According to this myth the Slovaks are
extremely friendly and hospitable to any strangers, even to those who later on abuse their

Two Cases

Both cases that serve as a certain kind of proof of "myths in action" are connected with the town of Komárno. The town has several favorable preconditions for such cases to occur. First of all, it is located at the most sensitive border of Slovakia, which is the Southern one with Hungary. Actually the Danube river divides the historical town of Komárom into two parts – Komárno, which is on the Slovak side, and Komárom, a smaller part on the Hungarian side of the border. The majority of the town's population is of Hungarian ethnic origin. Last but not least, the deputies nominated by the Hungarian ethnic party dominate the City Council.

Case number one: erection of the St. Cyril and St. Method's statue

St. Cyril and St. Method came to Great Moravia in 863 with a mission to educate domestic priests in a language that could be understandable for the majority of the Slavic population. The importance of the mission of St. Cyril and St. Method for the Slovaks increased significantly after the split of Czechoslovakia in 1993. A newly created state was looking for historical symbols and personalities on which it could build its new identity. Therefore, apart from being co-patrons of Europe and especially of Slavic nations, St. Cyril and St. Method were *slovakized* to some extent. They were declared to be defenders of Slovak (Slavic) identity, and protectors of the ancestors of the Slovaks. Symbolically, July, 5[th,] known as the St. Cyril and St. Method Day in the Church calendar, became also a state holiday in Slovakia. The symbolic power of the "message" of St. Cyril and St. Method has been stressed not only by the erection of numerous monuments all around the country, but, for instance, by the visualization of their faces on the 50 crown banknote.

The celebration of St. Cyril and St. Method Day in Komárno, a small town in Southern Slovakia, usually concerns only more or less quarter of the town's population: only those who have Slovak ethnic origin. But the 2003 celebration of St. Cyril and St. Method Day in Komárno differed from previous ones for other reasons.

On July 5th, 2003, the local branch of *Matica slovenská*, an organization financed by the state and dedicated to the dissemination of Slovak language

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hospitality. Preferring peaceful solutions, the Slovaks do not like to fight and rather prefer to be passive than resistant.

and culture in general, decided to erect a monument dedicated to St. Cyril and St. Method in the center of the town. One of the supporting arguments for its erection was that Komárno was the place where St. Cyril and St. Method crossed the Danube River on their trip from Thessalonica to Great Moravia. In the last decade, *Matica slovenská* has continuously tried to erect the monument in the town's center, however, members of the City Council repeatedly refused its effort. After several loud protests *Matica* got an agreement to erect the monument in the yard of an old "military" church. Later on, another place for the statue was found in the garden of the pastorate of the Evangelic church. The representatives of *Matica* openly disagreed with both emplacements of the statue and declared their will to move it to a more appropriate place in the town's center.

For *Matica*, an official holiday seemed to be a good time for such a move. However, representatives of the city council led by the mayor Tibor Bastrnák, an ethnic Hungarian, pointed out the lawlessness of such an operation. The mayor ordered the town's police to guard both the entrance to the Evangelic Church pastorate, as well as the building of *Matica slovenská* in front of whose façade the statue was supposed to be re-erected. He argued that the installment of the monument would significantly change the façade of the building and therefore an official building permission is required. The supporters of *Matica*, led by its spokesman Stanislav Bajaník argued that the erection of the statue is in accordance with "public interest" and therefore no special permission is needed.[18] Finally, the representatives of *Matica*, guarded and protected by numerous supporters, managed to remove the statue despite the blockade and erected it on a special balcony belonging to the *Matica's* building.

One week later, the archbishop of the Catholic Church Ján Sokol accompanied by the general bishop of the Evangelic Church Július Filo officially blessed the illegally erected statue. Also the apostolic nuncios in Slovakia, archbishop Henryk Józef Nowacki took part in the ceremony. Some politicians, mostly from the nationalist-oriented opposition, participated in the ceremony as well. The mayor Tibor Bastrnák kept claiming that *Matica* broke the law and fined it 1, 5 million Slovak crowns (about 37,000 Euro). Moreover, a report in August 2003 claims that an anonymous offender damaged the statue in four places.

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[18] See *Sme* (July 5, 2003) and *Sme* (July 14, 2003)

Case number two: closing down Slovak schools

The second case is more recent, however, the main actors are the same. In April 2004 the City Council of Komárno approved a decision concerning closing down two Slovak elementary schools in the territory of Komárno. They argued that besides the lack of finances, the number of pupils was decreasing year by year. In the town of a population of 37000 inhabitants there were four Slovak and three Hungarian elementary schools, plus one parish school in which the educating language is also Hungarian. The number of students is 1500 in the case of the Slovak schools and 1700 in the case of the Hungarian students.

The news that the City Council wanted to close two of the four Slovak schools mobilized not just *Matica slovenská* and its supporters, but also the Slovak ministry of education led by Minister Martin Fronc from the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH). *Matica slovenská* organized a protest meeting in the center of Komárno and its spokesman Stanislav Bajanik not only refused the decision of the City Council saying that "it was not objective but discriminatory and tendentious."[19] Morever, *Matica* pointed at the different standards in Slovak and Hungarian schools (in Komárno) that clearly favoritise the Hungarian ones. The decision of the City Council was interpreted by *Matica* as an attempt by Mayor Tibor Bastrnák, as well as other deputies, to destroy the Slovak schools in Komárno.

Minister Martin Fronc issued a statement that the Ministry will not agree to the unreasonable liquidation of Slovak schools on ethnically mixed territory.[20] He said that despite the fact that the Ministry of Education recently applied a strategy that resulted in liquidation, or eventually unification of many schools and kindergartens around the country. Official figures presented in August 2004 show that by September 1, 2004, at least 700 schools were closed or merged.[21]

Myths in Action: explaining the Cases

The case of the installation of the monument dedicated to St. Cyril and St. Method show how myths, both traditional and new, have been employed by local elites under specific circumstances. Although politics seems to play only a marginal role in this case, actually the opposite might be true.

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[19] See http://mesto.sk/prispevky_velke/komarno/maticaslovenskaje1082570880.phtml
[20] See http://město.sk/prispevky_velke/komarno/ministerfroncnepri1081940340.phtml
[21] See *Pravda* (August 30, 2004)

On the one hand, *Matica slovenská* can be described as a primarily cultural institution that focuses on the improvement and propagation of Slovak culture and Slovak language. However, some of its leaders have identified themselves with political parties, which can be characterized as "radical", primarily with the nationalist Slovak National Party (SNS).

On the other hand, from 24 deputies elected to the City Assembly, the Party of Hungarian Coalition (SMK) nominated 20. The primary goal of SMK is to protect the interests of the Hungarian minority living in Slovakia and therefore SMK is an example of an ethnic political party. Although SMK has twice been a part of the governmental coalition, it is often accused of anti-Slovak tendencies and activities, mostly by the nationalist-oriented opposition. Though the leadership of the party has openly refused any nationalist, pro-irredentism tendencies, one of leaders of the so-called radical stream, Miklós Duray, is one of the most influential personalities in the party hierarchy.

The first years of building the new Slovak state, especially the period 1994–1998, were marked by the efforts of the government to stress the role of the majority (in ethnic terms Slovak) population that was considered to be the state-creating object. The representatives of ethnic minorities had been perceived rather as the state-destructing instrument, who should be excluded from the politics of the country. In reality, the state's objective was to forge a 'nationalizing' state that serves one dominant ethnic group and its interests. According to some scholars, under such circumstances, an argument stressing the process of ethno-political mobilization becomes valid. Nagel, for instance, points out that ethnic mobilization becomes more likely when political access and participation structures are organized along ethnic lines, or when public policies that are implemented 'recognize' and institutionalize ethnic difference.

From this perspective, an effort to erect the statue of St. Cyril and St. Method could have been perceived by the Hungarians as a symbol of forced *slovakization* of "traditional" Hungarian territory. Moreover, the fact that St. Cyril and St. Method crossed the Danube in Komárno would imply that the border between Slovakia and Hungary is a historical one. Such a claim obviously contests the so-called Trianon myth, according to which the Slovak-Hungarian border is an artificial one, imposed by the superpowers at the peace conference after the World War I. It also contests the myth of ethnogenesis according to which the Carpathian basin has been a natural homeland of Hungarians for more than thousand years. In other words, it touches the emotionally sensitive question about *Who was first? The Slovaks or Hungarians?*

From the Slovak perspective, the erection of the monument can be perceived with a certain kind of satisfaction: it not only keeps the myth of ethnogene-

sis, which says that Great Moravia is a motherland of the ancestors of Western Slavs, alive. It can also serve as a symbol of justice – the monument symbolically marks the borders of the ancient motherland of the forefathers of the Slovaks. *(We want to make US sure that WE really got back what had been stolen from US)*. The negative standpoint of the City Assembly and the mayor of Komárno towards the installment of the monument can be read by the Slovaks as proof of the durability of the Hungarian threat myth *(The Hungarians are attacking US on OUR own territory)*, but also as evidence of the so-called irredentism myth *(By refusing OUR monument, THEY want to disconnect US from the rest of Slovakia)*.

The second case concerns more myths, which are spread among the Slovaks. The decision of the City Council to close down two Slovak schools in Komárno can be perceived, once and again, as proof of the Hungarian threat and possibly also as the tool for forced *magyarization*. (The flow of ideas might go in this direction: *By closing down two Slovak schools, opportunities for pupils to be educated in Slovak language will be much more limited and Slovak children will have to go to Hungarian schools*.) On the other hand, the Hungarians might understand the decision of the City Council as a confirmation of the traditional myth of ethnic descent (*Traditionally Hungarian territories will remain Hungarian*.) It should not be forgotten that the Minister of Education, Mr. Martin Fronc, comes from a traditional, conservative and nationalist oriented party – Christian Democratic Movement (KDH). His decision to meet Mayor Batrnák might have been influenced by his colleagues from the party. Perhaps he was advised to defend Slovak national interests in Komárno and in ethnically mixed territories in general, just because the party likes to present itself in this way to voters.

These two cases show only limited numbers of actors involved on both sides of the conflict. However, the political preferences of *Matica slovenská,* and the political affiliation of the City Council of Komárno, as well as the party affiliation of Minister Fronc, allow us to summarize that these actors represent the opinion of much larger entities: political parties – or at least significant platforms existing within these parties – and also a significant number of voters.

Concluding remarks

These two cases can serve as examples of the instrumental usage of myths by different kinds of political actors in order to mobilize the population (or its parts) on an ethnic/national basis. The cases also underline the importance of symbols and myths in collective memory and secondary also in political and social life of a particular community.

It seems quite obvious that myths do not exist separately, but are likely to be connected with other myths, as well as anti-myths. This applies to traditional, as well as newly created myths. For instance, the Hungarian myth of ethnogenesis somehow contradicts its Slovak counterpart. The same applies to the myth of Hungarian threat and the myth of assimilation and forced *slovakization*.

Another important fact to be stressed is the durability and longitudinal viability of myths. Of course, they do not survive *per se*, but are sustained by local (national) cultures as well and different kinds of elites and activists. Some of these myths are used or, better say, abused by political elites to maintain the *status quo* (in a sense of the support of the contemporary social and political order), others are instrumentally used in order to change the circumstances. The use of particular myths depends on its actual attraction for political leaders, but also on its attraction for voters who are expected to support their leaders. Myths are flexible in their adaptation to different circumstances. Therefore even quite old, traditional myths are often likely to be used in present day circumstances. The myth of ethnic descent, for instance, is instrumentally used to legitimize the belonging of particular territory exclusively (primarily) to one ethnic group/nation. As David Brown says, ethnic consciousness, and the formulation of nationalist responses to ethnic grievances, needs to be articulated and transmitted by activists who can show the link between the present threats, the authentic past, and the future destiny.[22] Apart from the past these activists can, however, appeal to the mythological version of the past, including myths about ethnic descent and national heroes. The success of mobilization might not only be proof of authenticity of the ethnic past, but also about the rooting of myths in the collective (historical) memory of the population (nation).

In this paper, another reference was made to point at the interconnection of the local and state elites. My aim was to contest the already developing myth about the centralized character of inter-ethnic tensions. The case of the St. Cyril and St. Method statue in Komárno shows that as well as ethnic tensions concentrated at the state level, there exist a number of other conflicts on a local or regional level, while both levels might be closely interconnected.

To summarize, the prospects of elimination or marginalization of ethnically based, exclusivist myths are quite poor. Persisting cleavage along ethnic lines that is additionally stressed by political actors on both sides, the unfinished process of democratic consolidation and the deep roots of prejudice and stereotype serve as the ground for various kinds of myths to flourish. In the future,

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[22] David Brown *Contemporary Nationalism: Civic, Ethnocultural and Multicultural Politics*. (London and New York: Routledge 2000)

some recently created myths will possibly become traditional ones, there will also be a number of new myths introduced into the discourse. And the Slovaks and Hungarians in Southern Slovakia will continue to live both together and apart at the same time.

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