

# LATEST EVENTS AFFECTING SITUATION OF MAGYAR MINORITY IN YUGOSLAVIA

BY

IMRE PROKOPY

**N**ovember 24th., 1940, was a great day for the Magyars of Yugoslavia, particularly for the Magyars of the Voivodina directly concerned in the events of the day. For it was on that day that, after twenty years of struggle and many a bitter disappointment, there was established at Ujvidék, the Capital of the Danube Banate, the "Cultural Union of the Magyars of Yugoslavia". This event had been rendered possible by the government authorities having — subject to certain amendments — approved the Statutes previously submitted to them and at long last granted permission for the convening of the constituent General Assembly. This General Assembly was attended by the leaders of the Magyars of Yugoslavia and by members of the presidential boards of the various Magyar cultural and social organisations of Yugoslavia, the number of persons present being about 250. The chair was taken by Senator *Imre Várady*, from whose opening speech we quote certain interesting and characteristic passages throwing light on the situation: — "I must admit" — he said — "that it was no easy matter to secure permission to convene the General Assembly. There were depressing periods in which our associations were dissolved, the Nagybecskerek (Petrovgrad) Cultural Association — an organisation with a past of nearly seventy years behind it — being suspended and numerous other associations sharing the same fate these associations including the Szabadka (Subotica) People's Circle too, which, as is well known, is the Magyar association in Yugoslavia with the largest membership. All these facts pained us deeply, but we did not falter or abandon hope in a better and brighter future. With untiring effort we continued the work of dancing attendance on authority and refused to relinquish our

efforts to improve the lot of our associations; for we cherished the hope that the attitude displayed towards the Magyars would change. We were greatly assisted by the fact that *in the Banate of Croatia the Statutes of the Magyar Cultural Association established last March were approved without any attempt being made to temporise...* And when we had this precedent to refer to, we resumed our preparatory and pioneer work with renewed energy and zeal. *The Prime Minister, M. Tsvetkovitch, himself* declared that what had been accorded in the Croatian Banate to the Magyars living in that province, could not be refused the Magyars of the Danube Banate either. . . . *There must not be any factiousness within the Cultural Union itself.* We are Magyars and all belong to the same people. All social walls of division must be pulled down. We are all the children of one mother; and we cling to our culture with our whole being. Whatever we may lose, we shall never for anything in the world sacrifice our Magyar tongue and our Magyar culture. We see that the two neighbouring countries are also preparing to bring about a rapprochement primarily in the cultural field. . . . After the recent exchange of visits we cannot but hope that the two countries which are dependent upon one another for the maintenance of peace will find the path leading to a rapprochement in other fields of public life too. On the occasion of the celebration of my seventieth birthday I made a speech containing what was veritably my political last will and testament when I stressed that the dearest wish of my soul and the most fervent desire of my heart was that in the Magyar ethnic group — whose destiny binds it to this country — I might see Magyar working shoulder to shoulder with Magyar and hand in hand moving towards the final goal."

After the opening speech made by M. Várady, who from the very outset has been one of the most eminent leaders of the Magyars of Yugoslavia, for the purpose of informing and encouraging the audience, the General Assembly unanimously passed the Statutes and elected the Members of the Presidential Board and Executive Committee of the Cultural Union of the Magyars of Yugoslavia. The main results of this election were as follows: — honorary president, *Dr.*

*George Sántha*, former President of the Magyar Party of Yugoslavia dissolved on January 6th., 1929; president, *Gyula Krämer*, manufacturer in Ujvidék; vice-presidents, Alexander *Agoston*, reformed bishop, Dr. *Elemér Koráni*, Catholic rector of the parish of Ujvidék-Rókus and Count *Ernest Bissingen*, landowner. The Executive Committee consists of 70 Ordinary and 35 Supernumerary Members, most of the Members elected being leaders of the provincial Magyar cultural and social associations.

*Magyars of Yugoslavia Delighted at Conclusion of Hungarian-Yugoslav Agreement.*

*The establishment of the Union involves the fulfilment of a long-cherished wish of the Magyars of Yugoslavia; and that after so many unsuccessful attempts and so arduous a struggle it has at last become an accomplished fact, is to be undoubtedly attributed very largely to the constant improvement of the relations between the two neighbouring States which eventually led to the conclusion at Belgrade, on December 12th., of a treaty of amity and consultation. From this treaty signed for the purpose of consolidating peace in this part of Europe the Magyar ethnic group of Yugoslavia expects an improvement of its lot and the immediate radical redress of many painful injuries and wrongs, as well as the fulfilment of the numerous legitimate wishes put forward by the Magyars which have not yet been dealt with favourably. According to the relevant statement made by Senator Imre Várady, "the historical change affecting the two nations concerns the Magyar ethnic group of Yugoslavia directly and profoundly. And it is to be hoped that the Magyar minority will benefit by this change... And I must add, though not by way of reproach" — continued Senator Várady — "that very many legitimate wishes of the Magyars are still awaiting adjustment. Now there is also a sentimental reason for trusting that our wishes will be fulfilled without delay within the limits prescribed by the laws". Dr. Leo Deák, another eminent representative of the Magyar minority of Yugoslavia, in the December 17th. issue of the Szabadka "Napló" declared that "the principal reason why the Magyar ethnic*

*group of Yugoslavia is delighted to welcome the friendship between Hungary and Yugoslavia is that it expects that friendship to lead to an improvement of its lot as a minority. We trust"* — continued M. Deák — "that as a consequence there will be an end also to our consciousness of being a minority and that the principle of equality and of unrestricted vital rights will be enforced in practical life also for the benefit of our people. We are firmly convinced that *this friendship will not demand of us any sacrifices or the renunciation of our traditional folkic character and of many other things.* We hope implicitly that all the difficulties that have arisen in connection with the question of instruction in the mother tongue will be eliminated and that in future we shall be able undisturbed to continue the cultural work for which we have made so many sacrifices."

#### *"Minority" Cases.*

Now, if we draft the balance-sheet of the events occurring on the Magyar minority front since the appearance of our last issue, we may book as assets the granting of permission to establish the Cultural Union and also the treaty of amity, which it is to hoped will have beneficial effects. We may include as an item on the Assets side also the fact that immediately prior to the events in Belgrade on December 12th. *the "Pester Lloyd" and two other papers appearing in Hungary — the "Magyarország" and the "Esti Ujság" — were granted by the Yugoslav authorities admission into Yugoslav territory and their delivery by post permitted, as also the fact that in terms of his Ordinance No. 68.517 ex 1940 the Minister of Education has made possible the opening of the parallel Magyar elementary school section at Cservenka, the opening of a similar Magyar section at Torzsa being permitted in terms of Ordinance No. 60.915 ex 1940 of the same Minister. And that closes the list of "active" items. As items on the Liabilities side of the balance-sheet we must take into account — 1. the transfer, on the basis of "name analysis" and in terms of a warrant No. 938 issued by the competent chief constable, of 11 pupils from the Magyar parallel section of the State elementary school at Uj-*

*verbász* to the school in which the language of instruction is the State language, this step being taken by the head teacher himself despite the parents of all 11 children alike having declared themselves to be of Magyar nationality. The parents appealed to the Banate authorities for redress of the grievances arising from the arbitrary measures taken by the chief constable and by the head teacher. 2. At *Szabadka (Subotica)*, at the beginning of the school year, in terms of the Ordinance of the Minister of Education dealt with in our October issue (No. 26,323), which — as is well known — affords an opportunity for the enforcement of the parents' will in connection with school registrations, *those Magyar pupils who during the previous school year had been compelled to attend the schools in which Serbian is the language of instruction, were by request of their parents transferred to the parallel Magyar section.* Later on, however, despite the protests of the parents, these pupils were sent back to the classes in which instruction is given in Serbian („Napló”, November 8th, 1940). 3. In the frontier village of *Őrszállás (Stanišić)* the Magyar parents last August already appealed to the Inspectorate for the opening of a parallel Magyar section for the 56 Magyar pupils who had applied for admission. No answer has yet been received. („Uj Hírek”, November 13th. and „Középbácska”, November 16th.) 4. At Ludaspuszta (homestead) belonging to the jurisdiction of *Szabadka* the two Magyar elementary school sections have for years past not had a teacher. Though the Minister of Education has ordained the establishment of a further parallel Magyar section within the confines of *Szabadka*, there is still no teacher to function in that section, — that being the case with the recently established parallel German elementary school section too. And in any case the parallel Magyar sections of the *Szabadka* State elementary schools are threatened with the danger involved by the pensioning off of some twenty of the Magyar teachers functioning there who will within the next two years reach the age limit, — a circumstance which, in view of the impossibility of providing adequate substitutes, makes the maintenance of some of the parallel sections problematical („Napló”, November 15th). *There is a very considerable*

*shortage of teachers also in the Banate — particularly of Magyar teachers.* According to a report published in the November 14th. issue of "Obzor" the number of teachers needed in that Banate is about 800, — a circumstance diametrically contradicting a statement made on November 28th. by the Ministry of Education which asserted that the shortage of teachers had been practically eliminated. 5. One of the chief grievances of the national minorities of Yugoslavia is that their interests are by no means satisfactorily or adequately represented on the Commissions for the assessment of taxes and for hearing appeals against the taxes imposed, a circumstance that leads to their being made to bear disproportionately heavy charges under the head of taxes and imposts. That this complaint is fully justified, is shown — *inter alia* — by the composition of the Assessment Commission at Óbecse, only 2 of its 20 members being Magyars, though at least 49% of the inhabitants of the parish are Magyars ("Reggeli Ujság", December 1st, 1940). 6. A painful impression has been caused among the Magyars of the Voivodina also by the fact that at the vestry elections of the Roman Catholic parish of Zombor the name of *M. Leo Dedk*, one of the eminent leaders of the Magyars, was omitted from the list of candidates on the ground that no persons of prominence in the political world must be nominated. And nevertheless — despite this proviso — *Dr. Grga Vukovitch*, a lawyer who is one of the leaders of the peasant party in the Bácska district, was placed at the head of the parish. 7. The now notorious land purchase Order in Council has given rise to fresh troubles too. Owing to the untiring efforts made to enlist support — though chiefly to the energetic attitude of the German ethnic group — the minorities succeeded in securing considerable facilities in respect of the transfer in the land registers of landed property. But this favourable change was very short-lived — lasting indeed only a few days; for the President of the *Ujvidék* Court of Appeal again intervened, issuing a circular ordinance instructing all courts of law subject to his jurisdiction — i. e. all courts in the Voivodina — as land registration authorities *not to effect any transfer not previously approved by the Ministers for War and for the Interior.* In practice this means

that Yugoslav citizens belonging to the national minorities will again be deprived of the possibility of purchasing land or acquiring leases.

As may be seen from this sketchy description of the situation, the "passive" items of the balance-sheet are still — at least numerically — far in excess of the "active" items. We would fain believe that the influence of the treaty of amity concluded between the two countries will lead to an improvement in the ratio of these items augmenting the assets and decreasing the liabilities.

OSZK  
Országos Széchényi Könyvtár