

Hungary Voted.

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The formerly Soviet satellite countries of Romania, Ukraine, Serbia and Slovakia granted dual citizenship to their compatriots living outside of their borders. However, the present post-communist government of Hungary hesitated to give dual citizenship to the three million Hungarians who live in the neighboring countries, pursuant to the Treaty of Trianon at the end of the First World War. The World Association of Hungarians, a government supported organization, demanded a country wide plebiscite in this matter. Let the people vote: "Yes" or "No". The "Yes" vote would have meant that the parliament would be entrusted to work out the details of the dual citizenship legislation.

The intention of those supporting the dual citizenship was to bring about the spiritual unity of all Hungarians living in the Carpathian basin, and at the same time to encourage all Hungarians who were forced to live under foreign domination to remain on their ancestral land. The previous administration of Hungary had already formulated a so called Status Law, which would have given certain privileges to these compatriots living outside the borders of Hungary, but that was watered down by the post-communists. The dual citizenship, which is in complete accord with the laws of the European Union, would have made up for the loss of the Status Law. The leaders of the Hungarians outside of Hungary proper, headed by the Reformed Bishop Laszlo Tokes of the Partium Diocese of Transylvania, and by Miklos Duray, leader of the Hungarians of Slovakia, came over to Hungary to encourage the population by television and radio appearances to vote "Yes" for dual citizenship, pointing out what this meant not only for the spiritual but also for the economic well-being of their people. They were joined by more than 500 clergymen, who also emphasized the importance of dual citizenship rights. That would mean, they said, that the curse of Trianon, which dismembered the Hungarian nation, would come to an end (at least in a spiritual sense). They assured their listeners that they would not be invaded by a flood of immigrants. Those who wanted to leave had already done so. They repeated again and again that the spiritual, cultural and economic cooperation of the nation was the goal. Let all Hungarians, wherever they may live, in Transylvania, in the Upper Land, in the Carpathian-Ukraine, in Moldova or in Voivodina, feel that they are members of one nation in which every member is responsible for the well-being of every other member. And even in the case that 40,000 mobile Hungarians would leave the Carpathian-Ukraine, and another 40,000 the Voivodina in the next three years, they would only replace the void, that the natural shrinkage of the population is creating. They should not worry about pension payments either, for according to EU laws the pensions are the responsibility of those countries where it was earned. The well-being of the almost two million Hungarians in Transylvania, whose number has decreased by 200,000 in the past decade, can be secured only if they are aware of the fact that they constitute an organic part of the entire Hungarian nation and can count on its spiritual and cultural support. For the Hungarians in Moldova, who are on the brink of extinction, the dual citizenship right would be their only hope of salvation.

The post-communist socialist government and its social democratic coalition partner conducted a very forceful propaganda against the dual citizenship. They threatened the population with the possible invasion of 800,000 immigrants who, like a gang of greedy marauders, would destroy the welfare net, the pension fund, and the health organizations of the country forcing the workers out of their employment and increasing enormously the tax burden. The prime minister, Ferenc Gyucsany, was personally in front of the campaign, declaring openly that he was against a political course based on national interests. He is not interested in the nation's past and the concern for the fate of the Hungarians beyond the country's borders is only a sentimental nostalgia, resurrecting the illusion of Great Hungary. He personally visited the Vatican also to complain about the Hungarian Roman Catholic Church which was for the "Yes" vote. The Vatican had to rebuke him sternly pointing out that the church is acting according to the accord made with the state which even encourages such activity.

The result of the voting was painfully sad. The lies of government propaganda and the fear of possible economic loss appeared to be more important than the interests of the entire Hungarian nation. Only 37.35% of the eligible voters took the trouble to vote. The Yes vote amounted to 52%, and the No vote to 48%. However, since the Yes vote was only 18% of all the eligible voters, and the rest was No vote or absent, the plebiscite was declared void. According to the regulations, the Yes vote should have reached to 25% in order to be valid.

Needless to say, the result was devastating for the three million Hungarians living outside of the borders. They were living under the illusion that the sense of national identity in the people of Hungary proper was just as strong as their own. They had hoped that the fraternal love and the national responsibility had not disappeared completely in the so called "motherland." The revelation was brutal. They had been struck down many times and suffered many indignities and hurtful oppression from their new rulers, but the refusal of their own brothers and sisters was all too painful. The national anthem was suddenly frozen on their lips and the strength of their arms to carry the flag waned.

The result of the voting appeared to them a heartless act of ingratitude. They always followed with pride the events of Hungary. The success of the country was their success. The achievements of the scientists, the victory of the athletes at the Olympic Games, the advancements of commerce and industry was their own achievement, their own victory, their own advancement. It was difficult to swallow the fact that the people of Hungary could say a loud "No" with their vote to the brothers and sisters of the great Hungarian writers like, Ferenc Kazinczy, Janos Arany, Endre Ady, Lajos Aprily, Aron Tamasi, Jozsef Nyiro, Zsigmond Kemeny, Sandor Remenyik, Jenő Dsida, Zoltan Jekely, Sandor Kanyadi, Andras Suto, Albert Wass, Gyorgy Beke, Dezso Kosztolanyi, Kalman Mikszath, Sandor Marai and so many others all of them born outside the borders of the amputated Hungary who make out the very best portion of Hungarian literature.

The Transylvanians have always been ready to receive the people of Hungary with open hearts and hospitable minds. They welcomed into their homes the hungry children of Budapest at the end of the Second World War. Their tables have always been set for the visitors even if they had to give the last portion of their cupboard. The Hungarians of the West would send hundreds of thousands of gift parcels and millions of dollars to Hungary yearly during the 50 year Soviet occupation. They often did this not out of their riches but out of their own necessities. The veteran associations of various cities alone would send tens of thousands of dollars yearly for the help of war widows and orphans. The Hungarian churches and clubs received the immigrant groups diligently and joyously securing for them homes and jobs and language classes. The Hungarian lobby worked selflessly and yet very effectively in Washington for the interest of the old homeland and its people. The clergy people and commentators on Radio Free Europe contributed greatly to the defeat of Communism. And now the indifference and thanklessness demonstrated by the results of the December 5th voting was extremely disappointing.

And yet the result was to be expected. Those who were encouraging the plebiscite had not counted the consequences and had not been aware of the lack of national identity of the people of Hungary. In the eyes of the American-Hungarian community this has been evident ever since the end of the nineteesixties. Among the newcomers of those days there were many who had not possessed any kind of national consciousness. They knew nothing about our history, literature, folk customs and music. They had no sense of responsibility for the community at large and no knowledge of religion. The church interested them only until the church members secured them jobs and the minister secured them a drivers license. Soon they would quickly disappear only to rediscover the church many years later when they had to stand before a court. Some of them even had the temerity according to litigious society customs, to sue the sponsoring church which had provided them with housing and work. When we talked about these experiences in Budapest following the liberation of the country many would not believe their ears. The voting in December revealed the truth. They themselves offered the information and the judgement.

How different were the previous immigrant groups. They possessed a very strong national identity and fraternal responsibility. They built churches and schools and insurance companies and orphanages and old folks homes. They built the church first, before they would build or buy their own home, observed the national customs and celebrated their national holidays. Educating their children to be good Americans and also good Hungarians, they elevated them to middle class status within one generation.

Communism devastated the national consciousness of the people. They inculcated into them the idea that we are a sinful nation, the "last satellite" in war, which cannot be proud of its ancestry and past history. With the cooperation of the pedagogic class, they succeeded in convincing the young generation that it is not proper to be patriotic, to emphasize the fact that they are Hungarians, for that is not only a sin but a crime against the state. They would not listen to the warning of the great Hungarian writer Gyula Illyes who said that without patriotism (the creative building block of a nation) one cannot sustain a state. While in the neighboring countries a nationalistic form of Communism was cultivated to destroy their minorities. In Hungary the ruling authorities would not allow anyone to intervene on their behalf. This attitude has become ingrained into the minds and hearts of Hungary's citizenry. No one should be surprised about this. The professors of the Summer University of Debrecen (established for western students) would refer to the Hungarians of Transylvania as "Hungarian speaking Romanians" right to the end of the nineteeneighties. Even professors of theology and their students visiting in America would call the Hungarians of Transylvania, Romanians. And they would not correct it. Even after we demanded it.

One cannot explain away the result of the plebiscite. Some try to excuse it by saying that it was caused by a "lack of economic security." Those who came to America helped those in the old country generously in spite of a sense of constant economic insecurity. The Ukrainians and the Romanians live in far greater insecurity, but granted without reservation their compatriots dual citizenship.

There are others who invoke the warnings of the great Governor of Transylvania and Hungary Istvan Bocskai: "I charge both the Transylvanians and the Hungarians to maintain brotherly love and unity. I enjoin the Transylvanians never to separate themselves from Hungary (even if they have to live under foreign domain) and the Hungarians never to shove away the Transylvanians but rather consider them their own brothers and their own blood." The only problem is that the Hungarians in Hungary have shrunk to a very small minority. Very few are left, who could consider the Transylvanians their own blood. Only a miniscule minority of 18% would accept fraternal relationship. Hungary could hardly be called truly Hungarian. At the same time when Ukrainians were braving subzero weather for weeks to vote for national justice and integrity, and at the same time when Iraqis braving blood-curdling threats of mayhem and warnings of slaughter, streamed to polling booths in Bagdad and Fallujah, 82% of the inhabitants of Hungary stayed home or voted "No" to the Hungarians outside their borders. The people themselves declared with their attitude that they do not wish to be a part of the Hungarian Nation of the Carpathian Basin and refrain from assuming all kind of responsibility. They dare to remain (as they declare) a "Small Country." And what shall we call its inhabitants? We cannot call them cosmopolitans. This is what the members of the post-communist ruling administration call themselves. The truth is that even they cannot call themselves cosmopolitan because they too have a close affinity to a nation and even to a race but not to the Hungarian nation. But the average citizen has no such affinity except to its own shortsighted selfishness. For this reason we cannot call them anything.

The Hungarian nation exists mainly outside of the borders of Hungary. The value of the plebiscite helped us to erase the illusion of a "motherland." Those who live outside its borders need not aspire to move to Hungary because they are not wanted. It is indeed outrageous, the inimical contempt with which the authorities of the amputated country treat outside Hungarians calling them Romanians, Ukrainians, Serbians, Slovaks. The Hungarians of Transylvania, the Ukraine, Slovakia and Serbia have to learn to build up their own economic structure. They cannot rely on the "motherland." It would have been in the interest of its citizens to strengthen the economic and commercial ties with the outside Hungarians, to gain markets and business partners, but their plain ignorance prevented them from doing so. Those of us, who live in the West, should do everything within our power to support the outside Hungarians financially and politically, and to bring about the entry of Romania, the Ukraine and Serbia into the European Union. In order that the Hungarians under their domain (but under safer judicial conditions) could maintain their own economic and cultural life.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

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About AHF: The American Hungarian Federation (AHF), a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization, was founded in 1906 in Cleveland, Ohio. AHF's Motto, "Faithful Unto Death," was taken from a letter written by former Hussar Officer Mihaly Kovats to Benjamin Franklin. Kovats, known as Father of the US Cavalry, offered his sword in service to the United States and died in battle against the British in Charleston, S.C. in 1779. Just as Kovats' life and service is celebrated annually by US Military Cadets at the Citadel, the motto reflects AHF virtues, and historically and inextricably ties Hungarians and Americans together while symbolizing Hungarians' contributions and sacrifices to America's beginning. Among the oldest ethnic organizations in the US, AHF was established as an association of Hungarian societies, institutions and churches to "defend the interest of Americans of Hungarian origin in the United States."

All are encouraged to join. Tax-deductible donations are also welcome. Join and contribute through our Website or mail. See www.americanhungarianfederation.org

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