



Institute of Social and Political Science

**Impact of educational instruments of Hungarian kin-state policy on  
the identity of Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia**

CEERES Master's Thesis

Munkhtamir Damdinsuren  
Student ID number: J2P51C

Supervisors:

Dr. József Dúró, Corvinus University of Budapest  
Prof. David Smith, University of Glasgow

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*Munkhtamir Damdinsuren,*

*20/08/2025*

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## Abstract

The thesis examines the impact of Hungarian kin-state educational support on the self-identity of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. This study addresses a gap in the literature on kin-state politics through how educational instruments of kin-state policy and support impact a kin-minority's self-identity. The main research question is 'How do kin-state educational interventions serve as sites of identity contestation and production, influencing the identity of a kin-minority?' In doing so, the research employs an interpretivist single case study design and a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative methods. Data was collected through document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and passive anthropological observation. The participants were university students, high school pupils, teachers, experts and officials.

The research results utilise the multifaceted identities of Hungarians in Vojvodina, who convey a low level of identification not only with the majority Serbs but also with the kin-state of Hungary. The research has shown that while Hungary's educational instruments are actively engaged with and highly regarded by the community, the impact on self-identity is not direct or straightforward. The findings show that the community does not merely adopt a singular "Hungarian" identity as designed by the kin-state's policies. Instead, the community's self-identification is a complex and negotiated outcome, interpreted through the lenses of shifting local contexts and individual agency. The fact that identity persists is not an indication of failure of the policy but simply a recognition of the complexity and mediated nature of the outcomes. Instead, it shows that identity is not a straightforward cause-and-effect relationship. It serves as an important reminder for researchers and policymakers that the understanding of relations between kin-states, kin-minorities and host state requires a greater understanding of how minority group agency and local contexts mediate the political effect of these policies.

Keywords: *kin-state policy, national identity, minority, Hungary, Serbia, Vojvodina*

## Absztrakt

A dolgozat a magyarországi anyaország oktatási támogatásnak a vajdasági magyar kisebbség önazonosságára gyakorolt hatását vizsgálja. A tanulmány a kin-state politika szakirodalmában meglévő hiányosságot pótolja azzal, hogy feltárja, az anyaországi szakpolitika oktatási eszközei és támogatásai hogyan befolyásolják egy kisebbség önazonosságát. A fő kutatási kérdés: „Hogyan szolgálnak az anyaországi oktatási eszközök identitásviták és identitáskialakítás helyszíneiként, befolyásolva a kisebbség identitását?” A kutatás ennek érdekében interpretatív esettanulmányi megközelítést és vegyes módszertani megoldást alkalmaz, amely kvalitatív módszereket ötvöz. Az adatok gyűjtése dokumentumelemzéssel, félig strukturált interjúkkal és passzív antropológiai megfigyeléssel történt. A résztvevők egyetemi hallgatók, középiskolás diákok, tanárok, szakértők és hivatalos személyek voltak.

A kutatási eredmények a vajdasági magyarok sokoldalú identitását mutatják be, akik alacsony szintű azonosulást mutatnak nemcsak a szerb többséggel, hanem az anyaországgal is. A kutatás bebizonyította, hogy bár Magyarország oktatási eszközeit a közösség aktívan használja és nagyra értékeli, az önazonosságra gyakorolt hatás nem közvetlen vagy egyértelmű. Az eredmények azt mutatják, hogy a közösség nem egyszerűen egyetlen "magyar" identitást fogad el, ahogyan azt az anyaország szakpolitikája elképzeleli. Ehelyett a közösség önazonossága egy összetett és kialakult eredmény, amelyet a változó helyi kontextusok és az egyéni cselekvőképesség lencsén keresztül értelmeznek. Az identitás fennmaradása nem a politika kudarcát jelzi, hanem egyszerűen csak az eredmények összetettségének és közvetett jellegének elismerését. Ehelyett azt mutatja, hogy az identitás nem egy egyértelmű ok-okozati viszony.

Fontos emlékeztetőül szolgál a kutatók és a politikai döntéshozók számára, hogy az anyaország és a határon túli kisebbségek és a befogadó állam közötti kapcsolatok megértéséhez jobban meg kell érteni, hogy a kisebbségi csoportok és a helyi kontextusok hogyan befolyásolják ezen a szakpolitikák politikai hatását.

Kulcsszavak: *kin-state policy, nemzeti identitás, kisebbség, Magyarország, Szerbia, Vajdaság*

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## List of acronyms

Acronym	Definition
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CEE	Central and Eastern European
CoE	Council of Europe
EU	European Union
FCNM	Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HCNM	OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities
IOM	International Organisation of Migration
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KCSP	Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program
KMKF	Forum of Hungarian Representatives in the Carpathian Basin (Kárpát-medencei Magyar Képviselek Fóruma)
KMV	High School Arts Competition (Középiskolások Művészeti Vetélkedője)
MÁÉRT	Hungarian Permanent Conference (Magyar Állandó Értekezlet)
MNT	Hungarian National Council (Magyar Nemzeti Tanács)
MTTK	Faculty of Teacher Education in Subotica of University of Novi Sad (Magyar Tannyelvű Tanítóképző Kar)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NKE	National Public Service University ( <i>Nemzeti Közszolgálati Egyetem</i> )
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PSP	Sándor Petőfi Program
SFRY	Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia
SNS	Serbian Progressive Party ( <i>Srpska Napredna Stranka</i> )
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
VMSZ	Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians ( <i>Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség</i> )
WW	World War

## INTRODUCTION

*Magyar szív, magyar szó<sup>1</sup>*

In the last decade, our world has faced important historical events like the COVID-19 pandemic, the USA-China trade war, the Russia-Ukraine war, the USA's protectionist and nationalist policy, and rising nationalism across the globe. Therefore, scholars in many fields have even raised the question "Is globalisation coming to an end?" and have sparked academic debates, raising the issue of nations' interests and sovereignty (Hameiri, 2021; Yip, 2021). Thus, this study on kin-state policy and identity is more relevant now.

Particularly, scholarly interest in kin-state politics and kin-state policy practice remains a focal point in Central and Eastern Europe because of its historical complexity, ethnic diversity, and changing geopolitical environment. The volatile political circumstance within CEE makes kin-state politics especially sensitive and important. The region's post-imperial fragmentation of ethnic groups, relative instability, and external interventions make minority protections and border crossing ethnic nationalism highly politicised.

After WW1, the Treaty of Trianon divided ethnic Hungarians, leaving huge numbers in Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine, besides Hungary proper (Olszewski & Hejj, 2015). These Hungarians abroad or ethnic Hungarians outside Hungary are called "Külhoni Magyarok" in Hungarian, primarily referring to Hungarian communities in the above-mentioned states. Each national context is unique, particularly when considering minority rights and kin-state policies. However, Serbia represents a special case uniquely textured in several ways: a positive context for minority rights, stable bilateral relations with Hungary, and distinctiveness related to identity.

Therefore, this study examines the complex interrelation between Hungary's kin-state policies and the self-identity of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. While scholars have examined Hungary's kin-state policy in detail, its educational instruments have been less explored. However, education is a powerful tool for developing national identity, a formal and informal system of learning which transmits knowledge, values, and cultural norms (Altugan, 2015; Novoa, 2000). Thus, this research works to explore this gap in the kin-state politics literature by analysing how these educational tools affect kin minorities' self-identity, using the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia as the case. Since this research only included participants from Vojvodina and considered Vojvodina especially, the spatial definition of Hungarians in Serbia was narrowed

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<sup>1</sup> A proverb mentioned during the interview, which translates as Hungarian heart, Hungarian word, means that wherever you live, if you know your mother tongue, you are Hungarian.

down to Hungarians in Vojvodina, Serbia. In fact, 99% of Hungarians in Serbia live in Vojvodina, a small community exists in Belgrade and some cities.

Sociological studies show the Hungarian minority in Serbia has low identification with both the majority Serbs and the kin-state (Hungary), but combined with a hampered sense of regional identity. In a survey about national attitudes, Veres (2013) found a surprising distance in identification: only 22-34% of respondents from the Hungarian minorities in Ukraine (21.9%), Romania (21.9%), Serbia (25.5%), and Slovakia (34.6%) saw themselves as sharing same attitudes of Hungarians in Hungary. This raises the question of whether kin-state policies that have sought to encourage a single identity can be deemed successful. In addition, Veres's survey found that Hungarians in Serbia identified the most distantly with the national majority (Serbs), with 69% stating they had a distance in national identity. This was larger than in Slovakian (60%), Ukrainian (65.8%) and Romanian Hungarians (66.8%) (Veres, 2013). Another survey results reinforce that Hungarians in Serbia show the highest propensity to identify regionally, with 73.8% identifying as "Vojvodinian" or "Vojvodinian Hungarian"; only 16.4% identified as Hungarian. This compares to 65.7% regional identity in Ukraine, 44.5% in Romania, and 48% in Slovakia (Veres, 2015). These identity patterns do not provide concrete identity markers (low identification with the majority and the kin-state, combined with an increased sense of regional identity), which constitutes the primary puzzle. Moreover, the validity of this puzzle is compounded by Smith's suggestion of emigration and depopulation, which was accelerated by dual citizenship and passportisation policy. Which means Hungarian kin-state policy may be at cross-purposes to the unique cultural identities of minorities in Serbia (Smith & Dodovski, 2023, p. 5), indicating that the implementation of a kin-state policy may have an unintended consequence.

Therefore, this interpretivist single case study seeks to consider these complex interrelated dynamics. Again, Serbia is an interesting case for a number of its unique attributes: first, it has a permissive legal context for minority rights; second, it has a relatively good and stable bilateral context with Hungary, which is important for Hungarian minorities; third, it has its distinct socioeconomic context. As Fedotov (2017) states, kin minorities are more likely to pursue kin-state support when their host state is of a lower economic status. Serbia's GDP per capita is currently less than that of its EU-member neighbours, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania, meaning that kin-state educational support may be highly attractive for pragmatic reasons. These circumstances provide a unique opportunity to examine the impact of Hungarian kin-state educational support on the self-identity of Hungarian minorities in Serbia.

Accordingly, this research addresses this gap in the literature by examining and identifying the extent to which kin-state policies' educational instruments in Hungary affect the self-identity of

the Hungarian minority in Serbia. Having achieved this, the findings of this research also contribute to an understanding of kin-state policies, national identity and education in the CEE context.

### **Research questions**

Therefore, this thesis aims to answer the main research question: “How do kin-state educational interventions serve as a site of identity contestation and production, influencing the identity of a kin-minority?”

Since the main question is broad and complex, the following sub-questions are designed to deconstruct the main research question in a logical, step-by-step manner:

Sub-question 1: “What specific educational instruments are being employed in Hungary’s kin-state policy towards the Hungarian minority of Serbia?” This question is the start of the research. Before analysing the effects of the policy, I must first understand the causes and mechanisms of the policy at a more basic level. This sub-question necessitates identifying and describing the specific tools in Chapter 3, including scholarships for study in Hungary, funding for local Hungarian-language schools, additional support for curriculum, etc. This question allows for contextualising analysis with a specific understanding of the instruments of the policy rather than some ill-defined generalisation.

Sub-question 2: “How do members of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia, perceive the effects of these education policies on their identity?” This sub-question transitions us from understanding the structure of the policy to understanding the lived experience of the policy. It forms the backbone of interpretive research in Chapter 4. I aim to go beyond measuring effect, and I am interested in how these individuals experience, conceptualise and language these policies. Are these individuals engaged in a cultural affirmation of their identity, are they seeing their path as one to a better future, or do they see the support as an encroachment upon their identity? This sub-question is very important because it embraces the important subtleties and complexities of identifying oneself as both a social and psychological process.

Sub-question 3: “To what extent do these educational instruments foster, or challenge the national identity of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia?” This final sub-question synthesises the first two answers. Now that we know the tools of the policy and the community’s perceptions, I can respond to the sub-question and draw some conclusions with this broader question. The issue is no longer just “how” but to what extent?” It allows me to thoroughly answer the puzzle whether the policy preserves the unique, regional identity or leads to a paradoxical degrading of it for the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. The premise of the fostering or challenging split gives

me enough to provide a complete and evidence-based answer to the puzzle of the main research question.

These sub-questions are structured to provide a clear and logical research pathway. I will start by identifying the policy's instruments, then analyse the community's views of them, and finally assess their overall impact on identity. This organised approach will ensure that the final answer to the principal research question will be solid, evidenced and nuanced, with details drawn from the experiences of the research context's participants.

### **Thesis structure**

This thesis is structured across four main chapters, introduction, conclusion and appendices, to examine the complex interrelation between Hungary's kin-state educational support and self-identity of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. The first chapter provides a theoretical framework for the study of kin-state policy, which emphasises the aspects of identity, nationalism, and education in kin-state policy. The second chapter outlines the methodological approach. It explains the choice of single case study design and the use of qualitative methods, including semi-structured interviews, document analysis and passive observation. Also, it addresses limitations and ethical concerns of research. The third chapter provides crucial context through document analysis on Hungarian kin-state policy and identity of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. Based on secondary sources, it covers Hungarian kin-state policy in general and especially in Vojvodina, the Serbian case. Finally, the fourth chapter presents primary research findings based on interviews and passive observation. It explains how research participants articulate their national identity. Also, it explains in detail how and what tools of Hungarian kin-state educational supports are implemented in Vojvodina, and how Hungarians in Vojvodina perceive them. The thesis concludes with a discussion and a summary of the main findings.

## **CHAPTER 1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Identity, Nationalism and Kin-state policy**

#### **1.1. Identity and nationalism**

Identity is a broad concept in social sciences, so as this thesis focuses on national identity issues, I will employ the concept of identity as a sense of belonging to a group.

Earlier, psychologist Erik Erikson used identity as an individual's conscious sense of self, which develops throughout life and social experience. However, the term identity is emphasised by sociologists on collective identity as sameness with others and a sense of belonging to a group. Since social interactions and socio-cultural factors play a pivotal role in identity construction, a sense of belonging to a group and membership are strongly connected (Burke, 2020). Therefore, the term identity refers to characteristics similar to and different from others (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). One of the most common examples is national identity, one of this thesis's main concepts. The concept of national identity is often used synonymously with nation and nationalism. National identity refers to characteristics that make a nation cohesive and shared, which also differ from those of other nations (Guibernau, 2004). However, we should be careful that the earlier concept of the nation referred to as an ethnic group, but now it means a state or political unit. National identity is the individual sense of belonging to one or more states. Currently, few key theoretical frameworks explain the emergence of national identities and the concept of a nation.

Earlier, primordialism held that a nation is natural and that ethnicity-based identity is static and fixed. However, the primordial approach is broadly criticised by scholars of ethnicity and nationalism, as a nation is not natural and fixed (Eller & Coughlan, 1993). Therefore, two main theoretical approaches, modernism and ethno-symbolism, are central to the study of nationhood and will be considered in this thesis.

In the modernist approach, nationalism is defined by Gellner (1983) as the process of building and maintaining nations through cultural homogeneity and similarity. Gellner emphasises the role of industrialisation and modernisation in forming national identity and argues that nationalism arises when the harmony between culture and the state is essential for social functioning. Identity, particularly national identity, is often shaped by a shared sense of history, language, culture, and collective memory (Anderson, 1983). Anderson's (1983) concept of the "imagined community" suggests that nations are socially constructed entities in which individuals perceive themselves as part of a larger community, even if they do not recognise each other. This shared imagination fosters the sense of unity and solidarity that is essential to nationalism.

Meanwhile, Anthony D. Smith's (1991) ethno-symbolic approach focuses on the historical and cultural roots of nationalism and the importance of myth, symbol, and tradition in forming national

unity. Both ethnosymbolism and modernist approaches reject the idea that nations are natural and fixed, agreeing instead that nations are constructed and shaped through symbols, memories, political and economic factors, etc. Consequently, national identity is continuously constructed and negotiated if nations are constructed.

Following national identity building and formation, Stuart Hall (1996) argues that identity is not static but fluid and continuously negotiated. Particularly, national identity has become more negotiated in multi-ethnic and multicultural societies, where competing identities often coexist and intersect. Further, Eric Hobsbawm (1990) points out the “invention of tradition”, whereby nations create and institutionalise practices that establish continuity with their historical past. The process of reinventing practices is important to national identity. The state, or its elite, encourages shared histories and narratives that may consist of language preservation, memorial practices, and educational interventions to create a sense of belonging to a nation.

Therefore, in this thesis, the nation is shaped by shared histories, myths and state-building institutions like education. National identity is fluid and changeable, constructed through such factors. However, national identity is not only constructed through shared, complex factors like history, language, and myth. Michael Billig’s (1995) notion of “banal nationalism” explains that everyday practices reinforce national identity. Although individuals might not consciously think of nation and nationalism, they experience small, unconscious reminders of their national identity through banal cues like flags, media and advertising, currency, and sports events as part of their quotidian life. All these modernist and constructivist ideas of national identity-building mainly focus on the top-down national identity-building process. Even though this thesis is also focused on top-down identity building, it should be noted that, as national members, individuals also contribute and engage in identity formation processes. National identity is actively discussed, expressed, or contested by individuals daily as everyday nationalism (Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008). Following the national identity, its formation is often characterised by two main models: civic nationalism and ethnic nationalism (Gellner, 1987). Civic nationalism defines national identity based on shared political values, citizenship and institutions rather than ethnicity. It reinforces loyalty to institutions, equal rights, and a common ideal of citizenship to unite a diverse population under one state, like the USA, Canada and India (Habermas, 1996). This approach directly opposes ethno-nationalism, based on lineage and culture, where distinct nations can look similar but are not ethnically homogeneous. On the other hand, ethnic nationalism emphasises the idea that a nation is based on shared history, culture, language and common ancestry. Where nation-building is based on ethnic factors, one ethnic nation dominates culturally and politically within the nation-states such as Estonia, Japan and Hungary (Connor, 1994). However, when an ethnic nation is fractured into multiple countries, the states that embrace ethnic nationalism often expand their

policies to include ethnic groups living abroad, reinforcing a sense of transnational identity, such as Hungarians in the Carpathian basin and Russian speakers in former Soviet states. This is typical of policies such as dual citizenship, diaspora programs, cultural exchange initiatives and other forms of soft power.

Following the ethnic nation, Barth (1969) argues that ethnic identity is not only about cultural content but about maintaining boundaries between “us” and “them”. He highlights that cultural contents like language and customs can be changed, but the boundary remains stable. However, in today’s world of state systems, this ethnic boundary does not always cross with sovereign states’ territorial borders. Therefore, some ethnic groups are divided by political borders, and some states include multiple ethnic groups. These politically divided ethnic groups can be (sovereign) stateless nations like Kurds and Tibetans, or have a sovereign state which they dominate, like Hungarians, Mongols, and Azerbaijanis.

These sovereign states claim connection and share common historical, ethnocultural and linguistic identities with ethnic groups residing beyond their borders, which are defined as kin-states (Brubaker, 1996; Smith, 1999). Kin-states actively maintain cross-border ethnocultural ties with these groups and may act in their interest (Brubaker, 1996; Singh, 2006; Waterbury, 2010). There are also a few concepts in social science discussions that have similar meanings to kin-state. For instance, in international relations and security studies, the “patron state” concept often refers to a state that supports an ethnic or political group outside its borders (King, 1999; Wolff, 2010). Gabriel Sheffer (2003) uses the term “homeland state” to describe a country considered to have historical and ethnic ties with a population abroad, which is widely used in diaspora studies. However, as this thesis is focused on the national identity of the Hungarian community in Vojvodina and is not a study of diaspora or security, I employ the concept of kin-state. Kin-state activities, including official policies to support and maintain ties with ethnic kin abroad, are defined as kin-state politics. Kin-state politics is a broader concept that encompasses not only the kin-state but also actors such as ethnic minorities abroad and the countries in which they reside.

## **1.2. Kin-state policy and education**

According to Waterbury (2014, p. 36), politics employed by the kin-state are actions to engage and protect the so-called ethnic kin communities in neighbouring or nearby states, which are kin-state politics. These actions include political, legal, economic, cultural and symbolic activities (Waterbury, 2010). Also, Singh (2006) asserts that kin-states actively preserve shared ethnocultural and ethnoreligious ties with their ethnic-kin across state borders.

The terms “kin-state politics” and “kin-state policy” are often interchangeable in the literature (Brubaker, 1995; Kovács, 2020; Lesińska & Héjj, 2021; Tátrai, Eróss & Kovály, 2017; Waterbury, 2020). However, kin-state politics refers broadly to all activities and policies, and kin-state policy

refers to official documents, legal frameworks, and regulations related to kin minority engagement. Thus, I employ the term kin-state policy in this thesis since it is based on Hungarian government documents and regulations on Hungarian minorities abroad, especially in Vojvodina.

Although kin-state policy is a policy of the Hungarian Government, it is necessary to consider the actors of kin-state politics in a broader context, including the activities and programs that implement it, and kin-minorities that benefit from its impact. Relating to kin-state politics, Brubaker (1996) noted that kin-state politics involves at least three actors: the external homeland (kin-state), the national minority and the nationalising state as a triadic nexus. Brubaker's (1996) triadic nexus is particularly relevant to understanding the interplay between identity and nationalism in the context of kin-state policy. Employing this triadic nexus concept in our case, the kin-state is the Hungarian state, the host state is Serbia, and the kin minority is ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina, Serbia.

Brubaker (1996) used the term nationalising state, as a state promotes the culture, identity and interest of the dominant ethnic group. His employment of nationalising state terms explains ethnic conflicts and nationalism in post-Soviet and Eastern European contexts. However, other scholars use another term, host state, which generally refers to host minorities and migrants (Kymlicka, 1995; Cohen, 1999; Schick, 2009). The concept of a nationalising state emphasises activities to promote the dominance of a particular ethnic group. In contrast, the concept of a host state does not focus on whether to nationalise. Therefore, I employ the concept of host state in this thesis since I am not focused on Serbian nationalising policy or policy on nationality.

Then, several terms refer to minorities living outside the kin-state, including national minority, kin-minority, ethnic community, and ethnic group, etc. First, transborder (national) minorities and ethnic diasporas should be differentiated, as Pogonyi (2011) classified the ethnic groups involved in kin-state politics into these two categories. Since Hungarian kin-state politics generally encompasses both the diaspora and kin minorities, it is often used interchangeably. However, these two are different concepts. The definition of diaspora is still arguable, and our study does not aim to participate in this discussion. However, Shain and Barth defined the diaspora as “people with a common origin who reside, more or less permanently, outside the borders of their ethnic or religious homeland—whether that homeland is real or symbolic, independent or under foreign control” (Waterbury, 2010, p. 19). In addition, International Organization of Migration (IOM) defines diaspora as “migrants or descendants of migrants, whose identity and sense of belonging have been shaped by their migration experience and background”, focused on migration (IOM Glossary on Migration, 2019). Therefore, the Hungarians who remained outside the borders of Hungary according to the Treaty of Trianon are not a diaspora; they did not migrate. Further, Walzer (1983) considered kin minorities as ethnic relatives of the kin-state, while Waterbury

(2010) used the term of ethnic kin communities. However, the term “kin” minority or community is a designation by the kin-state to emphasise its cultural and ethnic ties. Therefore, in this thesis, I use the term national minority rather than kin-minority, as I am conducting the research from the perspective of an individual researcher rather than the perspective of the Hungarian kin-state.

### **Objectives of kin-state politics**

Kin-state politics seeks to maintain ties with ethnic groups that transcend national boundaries for historical, cultural, political, and strategic reasons. The main objectives of kin-state politics are to protect minority rights and preserve cultural and linguistic heritage and national identity. However, it can also serve domestic political interests and as a geopolitical tool to influence regional affairs. First, as the most attractive and justified objective, identity and cultural and linguistic preservation. Brubaker (1996) notes that kin-states often justify their kin-state activities by assuming a responsibility to protect and promote the rights, culture, and identity of their external kin minorities. Kin-states often seek to maintain linguistic and cultural ties with their diaspora or external kin minorities through educational programs, dual citizenship policies, and financial support for cultural initiatives (Waterbury, 2010). Smith (1991) also highlights that historical claims and national identity construction often drive kin-state policies. Kin-states view their relations with kin minorities as part of broader nationhood and historical goals, sometimes linked to memories of past territorial settlements.

Second, for a more realistic approach, gaining domestic political support and geopolitical interest in the region are objectives behind the cultural and linguistic preservation objectives. Political parties in kin-states may use kin-state policies to appeal to nationalist sentiment among domestic voters. Granting external kin-minorities the right to vote or dual citizenship can affect the outcome of a country’s elections at some level (Csörgő & Goldgeier, 2004). Furthermore, kin-state politics can serve as a soft power tool for geopolitical interest, allowing kin-states to extend their influence to neighbouring countries through kin relationships in the region. This can shape foreign policy dynamics and create leverage in regional and bilateral relations (Koinova, 2013; Kymlicka, 2007; Udrea, 2025).

### **Implementation instruments**

Kin-states employ different strategies and mechanisms to achieve their objectives, such as strengthening national identity, maintaining cultural and linguistic ties, and increasing political influence. This consists of employing legal, political, economic, cultural, and even diplomatic instruments to sustain and engage with and support their external kin-minorities, including, where necessary, support for cultural-language institutions, providing economic assistance, diplomatic advocacy, dual citizenship and sometimes even security guarantees.

Kymlicka (2007) outlines cultural and educational programs, including funding language courses, cultural institutions, and media to maintain language and cultural ties. Kin-states also often provide direct financial assistance, scholarships, and economic investments to solidify ties with their ethnic minorities (Smith, 1991). Economic support and development assistance are considered to support the livelihood of kin minorities, but also essentially fund cultural and educational programs. These tools of kin-state support fit into soft power strategies, which are designed to foster goodwill and influence among kin minorities. Accordingly, Joseph Nye's (1990) concept of soft power refers to the ability of a state to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than through coercion or force.

Another tool is political and institutional support, which includes diplomatic channels, legal and institutional policies, and the granting of citizenship and political rights. As kin-states mostly border with countries where kin minorities reside, they often use bilateral treaties, diplomatic pressure, and international mechanisms to protect the rights of their ethnic minorities (Kymlicka, 2007). Some kin-states have established special government agencies to oversee minority issues, like the State Secretariat for National Policy in Hungary. Furthermore, kin-states offer dual citizenship or special residency rights to external kin minorities. This legal framework strengthens the political and symbolic ties between the state and its external kin minorities (Waterbury, 2010). Further, the kin-state grants its external kin minorities the right to vote, allowing them to participate in national elections and influence domestic politics (Csergő & Goldgeier, 2004). Political parties in kin-states often use nationalism to mobilise voters, campaigning for kin minorities (Brubaker, 1996).

In some cases, the kin-state is aimed at providing security guarantees, military intervention, or supporting separatist movements of kin minorities (Zevelev, 2008). However, this type of security and military influence is often condemned as interfering in the host country's internal affairs and sovereignty. Therefore, in implementing its kin-state policy, kin-states tend to use soft power tools that create less conflict with the host country and do not violate international norms and principles. Implementing educational programs is the most effective soft power tool for national identity and culture and language preservation objectives of a kin-state policy. Because education is an important space for constructing national identity (Novoa et.al, 2000, p. 46).

## **Education**

Education is a powerful tool for promoting national identity, as it is a formal and informal learning system that transmits knowledge, values, and cultural norms (Altugan, 2015). Anderson (1983) also acknowledged education's role in fostering national identity in its role in language, history, and belonging together. One of the main ways of this was through print capitalism, which allowed

the mass-production of books, newspapers, and educational materials in vernacular languages, allowing people from different regions to read the same literature and develop a collective national consciousness. Schools reinforced this process as the education system standardised language and promoted a common history, literature, and geography, allowing students to see themselves as belonging to a national community.

However, Smith (1991) argues that nations are not modern constructs but are rooted in historical ethnocultural communities. Education transmits these cultural practices and reinforces collective identity across generations. Official education and school curricula shape national consciousness by teaching national myths, national symbols, and shared histories. This underpins a sense of belonging and provides historical purpose.

Therefore, education plays an important role for national minorities. It serves as a vehicle for the host country to legitimise the dominant language and culture through the formal education system and as a vehicle for minorities to preserve their language and identity. This dual function makes education a key issue in kin-state politics.

Kin-state support in minority education often manifests through language promotion, financial assistance, curriculum development, teacher training, and institutional support (Brubaker, 1996; Smith, 2002). The most common form of support is the promotion of minority languages through education. Kin-states often provide textbooks, curricula, and standardised tests in minority languages, which allows students to maintain linguistic and cultural ties to kin-state (Csergő & Goldgeier, 2004). In addition, direct financial assistance to schools, scholarships for minority students to study in kin-state, and grants for educational projects are the most attractive mechanisms for kin minorities.

Overall, conceptualisations of imagined communities and ethnosymbolism can assist in explaining how kin-states instrumentalise educational policies to maintain influence over external kin minorities. As we move to a broader discussion of kin-state politics in CEE, these theoretical frameworks provide a lens through which to examine how education functions as a cultural and geopolitical mechanism.

### 1.3. Kin-state politics in CEE

As this thesis examines the kin-state policy of Hungary and its relationship with the ethnic Hungarian community in Serbian Vojvodina, it is important to place it within the complex and broader context of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) region. Indeed, the CEE remains a focal point for scholars studying kin-state politics and the application of kin-state policies, given its historical complexity, ethnic diversity, and changing geopolitical realities.

Regionalisation of CEE is widespread, but it is often defined differently in historical, political, or geographical senses. There is little agreement on boundaries among scholars and international organisations. Put simply, CEE reflects the post-communist countries that transitioned from Soviet influence since 1989 (Berend, 2016). However, Kamusella (2009) argues that CEE is a geopolitical concept mainly used in Western discourse, which often does not clearly distinguish between many internal regions. Other regionalisations, like Eastern Europe, East Central Europe, Southeastern Europe, or the Balkans, define more specific and narrow regions and do not cover Hungary and its neighbours together. Therefore, CEE is defined as the broad region covering Visegrad, Baltic, Balkans and former socialist states in the Eastern Bloc in this thesis.

As kin-state politics is one of the key issues of CEE, stemming from a complex history of shifting regional borders, ethnic diversity, and contested national identities. Unlike Western Europe, where nation-state boundaries have remained relatively stable, CEE has experienced multiple waves of territorial change, from the collapse of empires to the post-socialist transition (Brubaker, 1996; Smith, 1998). In CEE, citizenship is framed according to ethnic, cultural and linguistic loyalties, or ties, rather than by residence or place of birth. This is primarily a product of nation-building and conceptualising the state as belonging to the “titular nation” (Culic, 2019).

These historical shifts have led to millions of ethnic minorities living outside of their kin-state’s borders and creating kin-state politics. The significance of kin-state politics in the CEE is deeply rooted in national identity, minority rights, and geopolitical competition. Kin-states like Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Russia have actively implemented policies to support their ethnic communities beyond the border, using tools ranging from educational and cultural support to citizenship laws and diplomatic advocacy (Csergő & Goldgeier, 2004; Waterbury, 2014).

The political situation in the CEE makes kin-state politics particularly sensitive and consequential. The post-imperial fragmentation, ethnic conflicts, and external interventions have made minority protection and cross-border nationalism highly politicised. In addition to regional politics and interstate relations, minority protection, cross-border nationalism, and kin-state politics have profound implications for European integration, EU enlargement, NATO security strategy, and regional stability (Fowler, 2019; Udrea & Smith, 2020). The involvement of kin-states can foster cultural ties and minority rights. However, it can also fuel diplomatic disputes, nationalist

mobilisation, and, in extreme cases, territorial conflict, as demonstrated by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 (Waterbury, 2014). Therefore, to understand kin-state politics in CEE, it is essential to consider the involvement of external actors. Smith (2002, 2023) suggested the quadratic nexus instead of Brubaker's triadic nexus to analyse the complex interactions between kin-states, kin-minorities, host states, and international actors, considering CEE's ethnopolitical feature. Smith (2002) highlights the importance of international organisations such as the EU, the OSCE, the Council of Europe, and the UN in balancing state sovereignty with protecting minority rights and mediating regional tensions.

For example, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) "The Lund Recommendations on the Effective Participation of National Minorities in Public Life" (1999) and "The Bolzano/Bozen Recommendations on National Minorities in Inter-State Relations" (2008) provide guidance on how states can engage with minority populations while respecting the sovereignty of host states. They recommend that kin-state support should not violate another state's sovereignty or territorial integrity, so political or territorial claims are not allowed. The Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM, 1995) is one of the most comprehensive legal instruments regarding minority protection in Europe. This convention recommends bilateral and multilateral agreements in minority protection between states where minorities belong. However, the EU does not have a particular legal framework for kin-state engagement; it applies general principles of non-discrimination, minority rights, and respect for sovereignty through its documents. For example, the Copenhagen criteria for candidate states included specific references to respecting and protecting minorities and acts as one of the criteria for EU accession (European Council, 1993). Hence, international conventions allow kin-state engagement in cultural, educational, and economic support; they must respect sovereignty, avoid political interference, and remain legitimate under international law and bilateral agreements.

To summarise, kin-state politics in CEE is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, shaped by historical legacies, identity politics, geopolitical and international legal framework. By integrating constructivist, realist, and liberal institutionalist perspectives, the motivations, mechanisms, and consequences of kin-state politics in the region could be understood better. This framework provides a basis for analysing a case study of Hungarian kin-state policy and its kin minority in Vojvodina, Serbia.

## CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Research design

A single case study design is used in this research, with the target of investigating the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. The reasons for selecting Serbia as the case are plural in nature, based on both practical reasons and its applicability to the research topic of interest that addresses the impact of Hungarian kin-state education policies on kin-minority identity.

#### **Rationale for case selection: Serbia**

Divided by the Treaty of Trianon after WW1, ethnic Hungarians are found predominantly in Hungary proper as well as in neighbouring countries such as Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, Ukraine and other (Olszewski & Hejj, 2015, p. 505). Differing circumstances in these host states regarding minority rights and the exercise of kin-state policies make Serbia a reasonable case. Because of its unique combination of the following characteristics, including a conducive environment for minority rights, stable and constructive bilateral relations with Hungary, identity dynamics and practical considerations.

Compared to other neighbouring countries with significant Hungarian minorities, Serbia has overall maintained a relatively permissive legal and institutional environment for minority rights in general as well as in school provisions. On the contrary, Slovakia (2009) and Ukraine (2017) enacted legislation that curtailed minority education rights in Hungarian. The relatively accommodating environment in Serbia presents the intriguing possibility of studying the effects of kin-state educational measures in relatively favourable application circumstances.

Political relations between Hungary as a kin-state and host states, where Hungarian minorities belong, are important for implementing and achieving Hungarian kin-state policies. The contemporary political interaction between Hungary (as a kin-state) and Serbia (as the host-state) is characterised by high levels of cooperation and cordiality, especially between Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and President Aleksandar Vučić. Such a high level of bilateral relations supports the proper functioning and continued existence of favourable policies for the Hungarians in the latter state, thus creating an auspicious environment for research on the impact of kin-state engagement.

Also, it is reported that Hungarians in Serbia show a specific identity different from the majority, ethnic Serbians and Hungarians in Hungary (Veres, 2013, pp. 94-100). This unique regional identity construction offers an interesting empirical context through which it is possible to examine the process of minority identity formation through the influence of education tools backed by a kin-state in one geopolitical-socio contextual environment.

According to an instrumentalist viewpoint, kin minorities tend to use kin-state support, in this case, particularly in education, to gain a range of benefits such as better socioeconomic conditions, better employment opportunities, and access to further education. It is argued that kin minorities would be more likely to request and be able to gain such support when the host state is in relatively weaker socioeconomic and political circumstances compared to the kin-state (Fedotov, 2017). In the case of the Carpathian Basin, Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania are EU members, while Ukraine and Serbia are not. In addition, based on GDP per capita, one of the main factors of economic condition, Serbia's economic status is relatively weaker compared to Hungary, Slovakia, and Romania (though stronger compared to Ukraine), making it an interesting case to consider the take up and effect of kin-state support in circumstances that could make its reception appealing.

In addition to theory and politics, practical possibility was the basis for Serbia's choice. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine makes it inadvisable and impossible to conduct research in Transcarpathia (Zakarpattia Oblast) at present. Serbia is thus the best available and possible case in which necessary field research and in-depth analysis in this thesis will be conducted to investigate Hungary's kin-state policy in-depth, with its education support systems and its effects on the Hungarian minority identity.

## **2.2. Research methods**

The research utilises the mixed-methods approach, which is combined with qualitative methods, to present an in-depth and multifaceted analysis. These qualitative methods include document analysis, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and passive anthropological observation. The gathering of the primary data was done systematically using three main methods:

### **Document analysis**

Relevant policy reports, official statements and documents regarding Hungarian kin-state policy, as well as minority rights to education in Serbia, were carefully examined. Analysis was used to create the policy environment, determine the main instruments, and chart formal frameworks of education provision. This document analysis data was then utilised to set the terms for developing an interview process through which initial findings could be validated, elaborated upon, and contextualised.

### **In-depth semi-structured interviews**

A core component of this qualitative research, semi-structured interviews were used to collect richer, first-hand accounts and perceptions. The interviews shed light on the lived realities of Hungarians within the minority in Vojvodina, Serbia and the views of experts and actors involved in kin-state policies in Hungary. This method allowed flexibility to explore emergent themes while

ensuring that important issues like identity formation, the perceived effects of educational support, and interplay between kin-state and host-state policies were covered. Since interviews were semi-structured, 20 questions in 3 groups were prepared. However, the questions were slightly varied and added depending on the participants. The data collected through interviews was complemented and triangulated with anthropological observation.

### **Passive anthropological observation**

The researcher was in Budapest, Hungary, but undertook passive anthropological observations during a brief field study in Vojvodina, Serbia. This research method contextualised the interview data by providing immediate insight into the quotidian lives of the research subjects, cultural practices, and public expressions of Hungarian identity in minority status communities. Observations specifically emphasised linguistic use in public places, public expressions of Hungarian origins, and research participants' overall nature and dispositions while discussing the sense of home and identity—this direct involvement in the research setting aimed to test and cross-validate the qualitative data collected through interviews.

Aside from these qualitative methods, quantitative data in an illustrative form were included. This will be tangible numbers like funding spent on education programs within Hungarian kin-state policies and the number of kin-minority people accessing higher education in Hungary. This is not the primary emphasis, but these quantitative observations will be included to empirically anchor the qualitative findings and contextualise the scale and reach of kin-state interventions.

### **Sampling strategy**

The sampling design for this research used purposive sampling and snowball sampling to create an appropriately diverse and relevant sample pool. The goal was to gain an adequately balanced sample of demographics and professional backgrounds between those living in Vojvodina, Serbia, and Hungary. Through purposive sampling, experts and scholars with specialised knowledge in the Hungarian kin-state policy and officials from Vojvodina, Serbia were recruited. They were mainly drawn from expert institutions like the Institute for Minority Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and the National Policy Research Institute based on scholarly work in kin-state policy research. Then, snowball sampling was used for recruiting university students and most possibly other community segments using personal contacts to locate potential participants among the kin-minority communities in Vojvodina, Serbia, who migrated to Hungary.

### **Target population and sample size**

16 in-depth interviews were conducted, with eight collected in Budapest, Hungary, and eight in Vojvodina, Serbia. In addition, an attempt was made to secure some degree of gender balance with

eight interviews with women and 8 with men. Participants were chosen to reflect a range of backgrounds based on such factors as:

- Educational background
- Gender
- Profession
- Age
- Family ethnic background
- Proficiency in both Serbian and Hungarian languages
- Geographic origin within Vojvodina (hometowns) and current place of residence

Considering the unique traditional regions in Vojvodina, utmost care was taken to ensure representation of Bačka and Banat, particularly. Because these regions have a long historical background, this led to 10 interviews gathered from Bačka and five from Banat, emphasising the most populous areas with Hungarians.

### **Breakdown of interview participants by type**

The participant typology was designed to reflect different views about kin-state education policies and identity:

- University students in Hungary (originally from Vojvodina): 4 participants
- High school pupils in Vojvodina, Serbia: 4 participants<sup>2</sup>
- Experts and professors: 3 participants.
- School teachers in Vojvodina: 2 participants
- Officials in the education sector in Vojvodina: 2 participants
- Worker in Hungary (originally from Vojvodina): 1 participant

### **Field research**

Research work in Budapest was done on-site with direct supervision of a university supervisor to facilitate institutional backing and scholarly guidance. Fieldwork in Vojvodina, Serbia, included individual research of 8 days between March 31, 2025, and April 25, 2025. Public transportation was used alone to travel between Budapest and Vojvodina to reduce transportation hazards. Before the trip to Vojvodina, important local contacts in Vojvodina, Serbia, had already been initiated through both the researcher's and supervisors' channels. Supervisors were frequently informed of

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<sup>2</sup> All participants in this research are adults, 18 years or older, including both high school and university students.

fieldwork progress before leaving for and while in Serbia. Field trip itinerary to Hungarian-inhabited cities in Vojvodina, Serbia:

- March 31 - April 1: Subotica
- April 10 - April 11: Belgrade
- April 22 - April 23: Subotica
- April 24: Temerin and Novi Sad
- April 25: Palićs

In addition to interviewing people during these field trips, the researcher visited several high schools, universities, and cultural centres. One of the opportunities included visiting Temerin and attending the High School Arts Competition (KMV). This competition for Hungarian high school youngsters was sponsored by the Hungarian National Council (MNT), as it involved direct empirical observation of the preservation of folk songs, dances, and musical practices among young Hungarian minority high schoolers. The trips to Belgrade and Novi Sad were merely observational, emphasising language use, visibility of Hungarianness, and the overall status of minorities in the public domain.

### **2.3. Limitations**

This research, like any other empirical study, had some limits which influenced the scope and process of data collection. They are primarily attributed to unforeseen external factors and language barriers.

Firstly, the socio-political context in Serbia during the fieldwork posed an unplanned limitation. Anti-corruption protests started in November 2024 and disrupted the original fieldwork timeline. While the northern part of Vojvodina, where Hungarians are mainly settled, was relatively less impacted than many other Serbian cities, it still operated within an environment of sensitivity. As the protests were driven by students, talking about education, universities, and schools with participants had to be negotiated cautiously to avoid any perception of political activism. Planned interviews with officials and representatives of educational institutions in Novi Sad were cancelled because research meetings were either unavailable or closed during the protests. Thus, the range of institutional opinions gathered from Novi Sad was limited.

Secondly, one of the major methodological constraints was that the researcher had minimal knowledge of Hungarian. While nearly all interviews had been conducted successfully in English, a crucial subgroup of interviews with administrators and education officials utilised Hungarian. To obviate this, assistance was necessitated from a trilingual co-worker from Vojvodina who spoke Hungarian, English, and Serbian easily and served as an interpreter. Along with that, for the translation of the official documents, artificial intelligence (AI) based translation software

(Gemini) was used to translate the relevant documents from Hungarian to English. Despite these efforts to mitigate, the very nature of interpretation and translation of languages offers a window for lost subtlety, implied contextual detail, or misinterpretation of some Hungarian terms, names, or cultural ideas for which there are no direct equivalents in the English language. While every effort was made to ensure accuracy, the unattainability of total linguistic immersion is a recognised constraint on the wealth of information available through direct speech and documentation examination.

Finally, one consideration regarding the convention for naming requires clarification. While reviewing the literature, inconsistencies were observed in English translations of organisational identities, names of events, and titles of documents that might generate confusion. Original Hungarian names and titles are included in parentheses at the first mention to promote clarity. For toponyms (cities such as Subotica in Serbian/Szabadka in Hungarian, Novi Sad in Serbian/Újvidék in Hungarian), although the researcher met with Hungarian speakers and worked with documents using the Hungarian nomenclature, the thesis employs uniformly the English translation of official Serbian names. It was created to maintain academic uniformity in an English-language thesis and to follow official host-state nomenclature to offer greater accessibility and understandability for the international academic audience while maintaining respect for the local language diversity.

#### **2.4. Ethical considerations**

The nature of this research, being concerned with ethnic identity and minority matters, necessarily raises potentially sensitive subjects. Thus, strict ethical standards were in place to protect all participants' safety, privacy, and welfare. Foremost among these was the assurance of participant anonymity and confidentiality. The private identification details of research participants were protected and, at participants' request, withheld from the written thesis to protect their privacy. Individual interviews were conducted to provide a safe and confidential environment, hence eliciting honest and open responses free from third-party influence or interference. The only exception was when an interpreter was required, whose only purpose was to facilitate communication. Moreover, all interview questions were carefully prepared and asked respectfully, with none likely to prove distressing or intrusive. It is further worth mentioning that the study strictly excluded vulnerable individuals and minors to avoid any additional ethical implications. Participation in the research was voluntary, and participants still had the right to withdraw at any point. The confidentiality of all sensitive data provided by participants was maintained at all points during the research process and while reporting results.

In alignment with scholarly integrity and institutional requirements, official research ethics approval was obtained from the University of Glasgow, numbered

PGT/SPS/2024/208/IMCEERES, before initiating data collection procedures. The ethical approval process was designed to align all aspects of the research plan and its implementation with strict ethical principles. Above all, informed consent was obtained from all study participants. This necessitated providing participants with clear notice of the purpose of carrying out the research, the nature of participation, their rights of anonymity and to withdraw, and how they would be processed and protected.

Finally, the researcher's non-Hungarian, non-Serbian and "third country" standing is an important part of the ethical approach. It helps to narrow down any inevitable bias or conflict of interest produced by shared ethnic or national identifications. While an external viewpoint might occasionally indicate a lack of inbuilt knowledge of cultural sensitivities in the local area, in this case, it was employed strategically to carry out the research from a more objective, removed, and academically neutral standpoint, concentrating on gathering and examining data.

## CHAPTER 3. DOCUMENTS ANALYSIS

### 3.1. Hungarian kin-state policy

#### The origin of Hungarian kin-state policies

The origin of today's Hungarian kin-state policies is deeply rooted in the history of WW1 and the Treaty of Trianon. Hungary was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which was on the war's losing side and an ally of the Central Powers. After WW1, the geopolitics of CEE were sharply altered, particularly with the Treaty of Trianon signed on June 4, 1920, at the Grand Trianon Palace in Versailles, France.

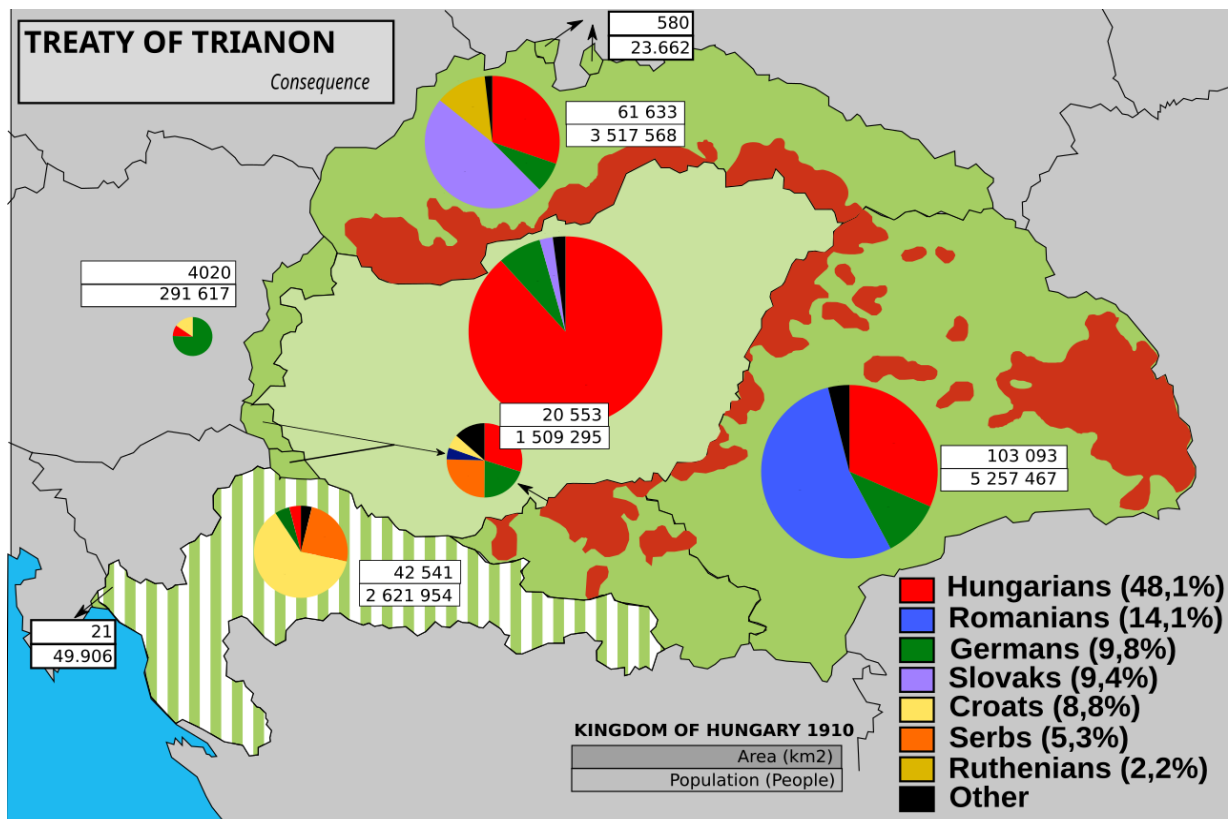


Map 1. Dissolution of Austria-Hungary. Source: (Burton, 2010)

The Treaty of Trianon led to significant territorial and population losses for Hungary. Hungary's new independent state lost 70% of its pre-war territory and sea access. While non-Hungarian ethnic groups inhabited most of the lost territories, significant Hungarian communities also found themselves outside the border of the new Hungarian state. Specifically, there were about 3.3 million ethnic Hungarians who comprised 31% of the total Hungarian population at that time, who became minorities in newly established or expanded neighbouring countries in the Carpathian basin (Olszewski & Hejj, 2015, p. 491). These states were Romania and Czechoslovakia<sup>3</sup> (today's

<sup>3</sup> Between the world wars, Czechoslovakia included both areas of today's Zakarpattia oblast of Ukraine and the southern part of Slovakia, populated by Hungarian minorities.

Slovakia and the Czech Republic), Yugoslavia (today's Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Slovenia and Kosovo<sup>4</sup>) and Austria.



Map 2. Treaty of Trianon result, Source: (Qorilla, 2010)

The Treaty of Trianon is one of Hungary's most traumatic and defining experiences. Its profound effect on the nation's political environment and population structure richly shaped Hungarian national identity and historical consciousness. Consequently, reunifying divided Hungarian communities became a high-ranking theme of Hungarian internal politics and diplomacy since that time (Menyhért, 2016). Even now, the Hungarian state actively promotes linguistic and cultural integration and unification of ethnic Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. This is reflected both in domestic and foreign policy, and cooperative arrangements of the state echo support for Hungarian ethnic minorities of the neighbouring countries of Hungary. Therefore, Hungary acts as a kin-state, taking policies to benefit and support ethnic Hungarians residing outside its borders.

After the Treaty of Trianon, Hungary's kin-state policies were influenced and, in turn, influenced by the policies toward the respective minorities of its neighbouring nation-states and multinational states. For instance, as Kovács (2019) notes, the reality that over 3 million ethnic Hungarians were left beyond Hungarian borders following WW1 directly influenced sovereignty issues when Hungary affirmatively supported such minorities with its policy of kin-state. This historical

<sup>4</sup> Kosovo has declared itself independent, and 108 United Nations member states recognise it. However, Serbia does not recognise its sovereignty.

context is important for understanding the enduring significance and complexities of Hungary's kin-state policies nowadays.

### **Development of kin-state policy**

This part provides a brief understanding of the evolution of Hungarian kinship policy, ranging from the interwar period's overt territorial revisionism to the post-communist period's culturally driven approach.

The break-up of the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire in the early years following WW1 led to the beginning of the doctrine of self-determination in CEE and the creation of new states. The interwar period reinforced national identity and encouraged nationalism, especially in states that lost significant territory, such as Hungary. For Hungary, the interwar years were defined by a desire to revise the Treaty of Trianon (Olszewski & Hejj, 2015).

The short-term, but significant, steps towards the unification of Hungarian territory were achieved by a pro-German foreign policy, ending in the First and Second Vienna Awards of 1938 and 1940. Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy brokered Arbitrator rulings allowed for the peaceful recovery by Hungary of a considerable amount of territory (Körtvélyesi, 2020). By the First Vienna Award in November 1938, Hungary recovered Southern Slovakia. Then, through the Second Vienna Award in August 1940, Hungary recovered the scarcely inhabited northern Transylvania from Romania. Besides these arbitral awards, Hungary recovered lost ground through direct military action. In 1939, Hungary recovered Transcarpathia, often known as Carpatho-Ukraine, by military action from Czechoslovakia. Hungary officially joined the Axis states in November 1940 during WW2, participated in the invasion of Yugoslavia, and regained most of the lost southern regions, including Bačka and Baranya in 1941 (Chernin, 2024). This action emphasised the overtly revisionist and irredentist nature of Hungarian kin-state policy in those times.

However, the defeat of the Axis powers in WW2 again radically changed the borders of Hungary, abolishing the territorial gains of the Vienna Awards and other annexations by military operations. With the emergence of a bipolar world order after WW2, Hungary and its CEE neighbours became a Soviet sphere of influence. By the socialist ideology, which invoked "equal nations" and peaceful coexistence among people, Hungary's revisionist political program was repressed. Any articulation of openly propagating territorial objectives and the reunification of the sundered Hungarian people was seen as contrary to socialist internationalist principles and post-war established norms. Therefore, explicit territorial, kin-state policies were scarcely to be found in the official discourse and foreign policy of communist Hungary.

After the collapse of the socialist bloc at the end of the 1980s and the subsequent democratisation process, Hungarian kin-state policy experienced a fundamental shift in its orientation. The collapse of the socialist system restored nationalist precepts to political discussion, including concern for

the divided Hungarian people. While the memory of the Treaty of Trianon and the need to promote national unity were still major themes, the strategic impetus transitioned from interwar territorial revisionism to a more sophisticated approach based on culture, language and identity. This shift explained the consensus that a new international political order had been established and that Hungary's aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration.

During the transitional period, successive Hungarian governments prioritised democratic consolidation, economic liberalisation, and most importantly, the Euro-Atlantic foreign policy priority to join NATO and the EU. These general foreign policy objectives directly influenced the strategy of the kin-state, and multilateralism and bilateralism were favoured over unilateralism that might jeopardise Hungary's accession to the Euro-Atlantic integration. The 1989 Constitutional Amendment (Amendment to Act XX of 1949), particularly Article 6(3), reflected on Hungary's commitment to well-being of Hungarians abroad, declared that "the Republic of Hungary shall be responsible for the fate of Hungarians" and that it will be responsible for Hungary's relations with them, and with them beyond its borders. This provision highlighted the nation's cultural and non-territorial character and paved the way for the kin-state initiative that followed (Kovacs, 2019, p. 57). Later, the new Fundamental Law of Hungary was passed in 2011, emphasising that Hungary is responsible for all ethnic Hungarians beyond its borders and preserves Hungarian identity.

*Bearing in mind that there is one single Hungarian nation that belongs together, Hungary shall bear responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living beyond its borders, shall facilitate the survival and development of their communities, shall support their efforts to preserve their Hungarian identity, the effective use of their individual and collective rights, the establishment of their community self-governments, and their prosperity in their native lands, and shall promote their cooperation with each other and with Hungary. (Article D, The Fundamental Law of Hungary, 2011)*

Hungary actively concluded bilateral fundamental treaties with neighbouring countries. Notably, two treaties were the 1995 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation with Slovakia and the Fundamental Treaty with Romania in 1996. These treaties were significant for Hungary's accession to both NATO and the EU because they required historical grievances to be settled and not to infringe upon existing borders. More significantly, provisions to protect the rights of national minorities were included and, once again, were consistent with international law. These treaties did not involve any territorial claims and were focused instead on the cultural autonomy and linguistic rights of ethnic Hungarians (Jaskula, 2017, p. 139).

The most important development during this time was the adoption of the "Act on Hungarians living in Neighbouring Countries" or the "Status Law" in short in June 2001. The proposal was

for preferential treatment for ethnic Hungarian individuals living in the neighbouring countries of Croatia, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. The benefits envisioned were free access to Hungarian public transportation, educational benefits and scholarships, textbook subsidies, and easier access to some Hungarian services. Though the goal was to enhance cultural cohesion and limit cultural assimilation and adverse effects on minority communities, many neighbouring governments, especially Romania and Slovakia, condemned the law as violating the principle of sovereignty. The Venice Commission of the CoE noted that there was nothing illegitimate about supporting ethnic minorities but insisted that if there were to be support measures, they should be based on a bilateral agreement. Accordingly, Hungary signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Romania and Slovakia to coordinate the law's implementation and facilitate some easing of diplomatic tensions (Council of Europe, 2001).

Following legislation, Hungary organised institutional networks for ethnic Hungarians. The following representative organisations lead in caring for all Ethnic Hungarians. The Hungarian Government established the Hungarian Permanent Conference (Magyar Állandó Értekezlet, MÁÉRT), from Hungarian political parties in the Carpathian basin and diaspora associations in 1999, which focuses on broader, general policies (Political Capital, 2001). Then, in 2004, the Forum of Hungarian Representatives in the Carpathian Basin (Kárpát-medencei Magyar Képviselők Fóruma, KMKF) was established by elected representatives from ethnic Hungarian parties in the Carpathian Basin, which focuses on more regional concerns (Országgyűlés, 2024). Later in 2011, the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad inaugurated the Hungarian Diaspora Council, which acts as the umbrella institution for Hungarian diaspora organisations worldwide.

This formative phase of the kin-state policy demonstrated a real pragmatic and integrative position, by selecting issues involving the recognition of a minority context with the potential implementation of minority rights within minority rights promoted through international law, instead of pursuing more controversial unilateral measures.

### **The Fidesz era, 2010-present**

2010 was a watershed moment for the Hungarian state, led by Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, from the Fidesz– Hungarian Civic Alliance party, which began a more uniform and ideologically driven kin-state policy than in previous decades. The Fidesz-led government articulated a national program based on the notion of “cross-border national unity”. This notion was based on a unified Hungarian nation that was not bound by borders, specifically to achieve “national spiritual and cultural unity” (Orbán, 2012). Current policies, legal frameworks, and institutions were mainly formed and restructured after 2010; therefore, this thesis study also focuses on and considers Hungarian kin-state policy after 2010.

As mentioned before, the new Fundamental Law of Hungary was adopted in 2011 and was one of the main steps to legalise Hungarian kin-state policy more actively. Just after the 2010 elections, the Hungarian parliament adopted the Simplified and Dual Citizenship (Law XLIV of 2010), which allowed ethnic Hungarians abroad to become Hungarian citizens through a simplified process that did not require residency in Hungary or the renunciation of other citizenships. All the applicants had to demonstrate Hungarian ancestry and basic knowledge of the Hungarian language (Körtvélyesi, 2020). To this point, Hungarian citizenship has been extended to more than 1.1 million people from neighbouring countries, most of whom extend what is called “the Hungarian political community” (Kovács, 2019, p. 111). This new citizenship policy led to significant diplomatic objections from its neighbours, which viewed this as an infringement on their sovereignty and a possible security threat. Croatia, Romania, and Serbia accept dual citizenship, but Slovakia and Ukraine do not. In 2010, the Slovak Government issued a law stating that a Slovak citizen would automatically lose their Slovak citizenship if they voluntarily took on another citizenship (Štefančík & Berecz, 2020, p. 102). This measure put ethnic Hungarians living in Slovakia in a precarious position by compelling them to choose between their Slovak and Hungarian citizenship.

Along with the dual citizenship reform, Hungary offered voting rights in national elections to ethnic Hungarians living abroad who have obtained Hungarian citizenship (Act CLXII of 2010). This was significant in expanding the electoral base and allowing non-residents to have a direct voice in shaping the domestic political environment of Hungary (Bózóky, 2021, p. 136). However, Salat (2014, 138) argues that Hungary’s 2010 citizenship law and extended voting rights are evidence of a loss of confidence in the Hungarian communities in finding an institutional solution, any form of autonomy, particularly territorial autonomy.

Adding to these important legal steps, the Hungarian Government has actively supported cultural, religious, and educational organisations for the Hungarian minority in neighbouring countries to preserve the Hungarian language, tradition, and identity. Also, significant state funding is allocated to Hungarian-language media, such as newspapers, radio stations, television, and internet platforms. These media organisations are also essential to preserving linguistic and cultural continuity. This entails economic support for Hungarian schools, cultural organisations, and public bodies. As Prime Minister Viktor Orbán mentioned in his speech at the 22nd session of the Hungarian Permanent Conference (MÁÉRT) in November 2024, since 2010, Hungary has spent 1,374 billion forints [~3.4 billion euros] on policy on Hungarian communities abroad, except business investments (Cabinet Office of the Prime Minister, 2024). These significant financial supports and investments aim to improve economic conditions and strengthen the Hungarian language and culture. These financial supports are often justified as a strategy to reduce emigration

and support the demographic vitality of the Hungarian population in neighbouring countries. However, the basis of such support has been criticised for its lack of transparency and political motivation, which has led to criticism that it could consolidate Fidesz support networks and create economic dependency (Papp & Vizi, 2020).

Under the guidance of political platforms, like MÁÉRT, KMKF, and Diaspora Council, with related legislations and financial support mainly from the Hungarian Government, several key state institutions are responsible for Hungarian kin-state policy today. First, the National Assembly (Parliament), particularly its Committee on National Cohesion, forms the legislative basis and adopts important laws on Hungarians abroad. Then, for implementation, the State Secretariat for Hungarians Abroad of the Government is the primary executive body that governs kin-state policy and liaises with related minority organisations. In addition, the state-owned company Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Plc. plays a key role by allocating state budget funds to support cultural, educational and economic initiatives of Hungarians living abroad.

Another key document for Hungarian kin-state policy is “Policy for Hungarian communities abroad: strategic framework for Hungarian communities abroad”, which guides the relations between Hungary and Hungarians living abroad and determines the principles and forms of support the Hungarian state provides. It was jointly drafted and adopted by the Hungarian Permanent Conference (MÁÉRT) and the Government of Hungary in 2011 (MPAJ, 2013, 3). This strategy documents and justifies that Hungary has a kin-state policy, as all European states support their communities abroad (MPAJ, 2013, 11). Therefore, besides national legislations, the legal framework governing the activities of kin-minorities, such as international conventions, recommendations, and bilateral agreements between Hungary and neighbouring countries, is important in shaping the parameters for minority protection.

Moreover, Hungary and its neighbours are mostly involved in regional integration through institutions such as the CoE, the OSCE, and the EU. These institutions give regions recommendations to frame their countries’ participation in ensuring and protecting what they refer to as minority rights. For example, the CoE’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Bolzano Recommendation on National Minorities in Interstate Relations outline how countries can cooperate to protect minority rights. The Bolzano Recommendation emphasises that cooperation, respect for sovereignty, and protecting minority rights are essential elements for developing positive relations between countries and their home states (OSCE, 2008).

Kin-state engagement is considered effective in protecting minority rights, preserving national languages and cultures, increasing the political and economic resources of kin minorities, and

providing support and cooperation in protecting minority rights in their own countries. Then, examining the economic and political benefits of both kin-state and minority groups, a complex network of advantages emerges from the kin-state's active engagement. Kin-states benefit from increasing their economic resources, diplomatic influence, and cultural ties with minorities (MPAJ, 2013; Udrea, 2025). Investing in cultural initiatives also increases a kin-state's soft power and strengthens cultural ties with minorities, translating into political goodwill. In protecting minority rights, a kin-state can also gain political weight in international forums and heighten its diplomatic influence. Hungary plays an active role in addressing minority rights at the international level.

In short, Hungary has supported Hungarians abroad through international declarations, recommendations, treaties, national legal systems, and institutions in different ways to preserve their language, culture, identity and improve their living conditions. Among these, education has always been important in preserving the language and culture, especially their national identity and unity. Therefore, the activities and support in the field of education in Hungary's kin-state policy were specifically examined in the next section.

### **3.2. Education instruments of policy**

Hungary's kin-state policy is a cornerstone of its approach to maintaining and strengthening ties with Hungarians living abroad. A main aspect of this policy is providing educational support, a key driver of these communities' identity formation and social cohesion. However, since there is no single and straightforward policy, complex support system, or unified strategy in the Hungarian kin-state education policy, this study summarises and analyses the educational instruments in the Hungarian kin-state policy. Therefore, it is appropriate to refer to it further as an educational instrument of Hungarian kin-state policy. Through scholarships, teacher training, and funding for Hungarian language schools and universities, Hungary is trying to promote access to quality education for Hungarian minorities and allow these individuals to continue their cultural and linguistic practices. These efforts strengthen Hungary's cross-border identity in CEE.

After studying the educational policies and programs actively implemented and funded by Hungary, the following institutions are the main ones implementing Hungarian educational support policies for Hungarian minorities abroad. Leading actors in Hungarian education support:

- State Secretariat for National Policy
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
- Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Plc. (Bethlen Gábor Alapkezelő Zrt.)
- For Minorities - Pro Minoritate Foundation
- National Policy Research Institute (NPKI)

- National University for Public Service (Nemzeti Közzolgálati Egyetem, NKE)
- National Talent Support Council (Nemzeti Tehetségsegítő Tanács)
- Rákóczi Association (Rákóczi Szövetség)
- Mathias Corvinus Collegium Foundation
- Hungarian Youth Council (Nemzeti Ifjúsági Tanács, NIT)

Education, an important avenue of transmission for cultural heritage and collective identity development, has been an essential component of these missions. The educational programs central to Hungarian kin-state policy are organised by the stages of education: preschool, primary and secondary, post-secondary and adult education. All the initiatives aim to enhance access to education in their mother tongue, claim cultural identity, and assert transnational ties.

### **Preschool education support**

Hungary recognises the importance of early childhood education in language retention and has funded several kindergartens that allow bilingual or Hungarian-only education. This initiative helps children from minority communities start their education in Hungarian, fostering early language acquisition and cultural identity. Also, Hungary supports early childhood development programs that include Hungarian cultural education, such as folk music, stories, and national holidays. These programs help children develop a strong sense of Hungarian heritage early on. For example, the Kindergarten development (Óvodafejlesztési) Program has been set up to help early childhood education organisations access money and support to allow them to integrate elements of Hungarian culture, including music and dance (Szécsi, 2008).

Significantly, the Carpathian Basin Preschool development project (Kárpát-medencei Óvodafejlesztési Program), launched in 2016 with a budget of 38.5 billion forints (around 100 million euros). This program is focused on constructing and renovating kindergartens, nurseries, and educational institutions while ensuring teacher training, cultural education and recreation enhancement. It aims to increase the number of Hungarian-speaking kindergarten pupils abroad from under 48,000 to 60,000, preserving and strengthening Hungarian identity. By 2018, the program had built 70 new kindergartens, renovated or expanded over 200, and created more than 1,500 “Hungarian corners” supporting the inclusion of cultural education. In its second phase, initiated in 2017, the program expanded with 21.5 billion forints (approximately 53 million euros) in funding, enabling the construction of 77 new kindergartens and nurseries and the renovation of over 200 institutions by the end of 2019. Significant development occurred in Transylvania, the Uplands, and Subcarpathia, creating thousands of new daycare spots (Ovodaprogram, 2019).

Another crucial actor, the Rákóczi Association (Rákóczi Szövetség), has been implementing the following two programs for Hungarian kindergarten children, including the Newborn Greeting Program (Gólyahír) and the Kindergarten gift giving (Óvodai ajándékozás). Gólyahír or Newborn

Greeting Program establishes early contact with Hungarian families living abroad by giving them a “My First Book” (Első könyvem) baby diary when their child is born. The diary serves as a guide to development and a creative space for personal documentation while introducing Hungarian culture, tradition, and folk art. Includes stories, poems, and folk songs in Hungarian, connecting children’s history with national and religious traditions. The association distributed about 10,000 books last year. Moreover, Óvodai ajándékozás or Kindergarten gift-giving program, addresses 22,000 Hungarian-speaking kindergarteners during the Advent period with a symbolic gift, a message and arguments encouraging parents to choose a Hungarian school.

### **Hungarian-language school’s support**

Hungary provides financial and operating support to maintain Hungarian-language schools in formal education in locales with a concentration of Hungarian ethnic minorities. This funding may defray running costs, and contribute to textbooks, teaching materials and teachers’ salaries, making sure Hungarian-language education is available (Papp et al., 2018). This includes books for curriculum subjects taught in Hungarian and resources on Hungarian literature, history, and culture to develop a curriculum that helps reinforce the Hungarian identity.

Besides funding schools, cultural exchange and heritage programs like “Without Borders” (Határtalanul) sponsor educational trips for ethnic Hungarian students to visit Hungary and engage in cultural activities, tours, and workshops. This promotes attachment to Hungary and the Hungarian nation, as well as events and cultural heritage sharing within their own country. For example, the Rákóczi Association organises school trips to Hungary and student exchange programs for high school-age youth between 14 and 18 to strengthen their Hungarian identity and friendship. Their Student Travel Programme reached 22000 pupils from over 600 secondary schools travel to another Hungarian community. In 2019, the association purchased the Várhegy Üdülő resort in northeastern Hungary, with funding from the Government of Hungary and held an opening ceremony with 1000 high school pupils from the Carpathian Basin and beyond (Rakoczi szövetség, 2024). Following the school trips, Hungary has facilitated partnerships between schools in Hungary and neighbouring countries. The partnerships consist of student exchanges, collaborative projects, and events that highlight Hungarian language and culture, allowing students from minority communities to connect with peers in Hungary.

Another supporting program, Welcoming School Starters program (Iskolakezdők köszöntése), the Rákóczi Association provided complimentary schoolbags to 9000 children enrolled on Hungarian-language schools at over 400 locations in 2019. This program supports Hungarian and partially Hungarian families abroad to enrol their children in Hungarian-language schools (Rakoczi szövetség, 2024). The option not only maintains Hungarian language and culture in the local area

but also provides bilingual education for the children, broadens the cultural understanding, and links their social and professional networks.

### **Supports and scholarships for higher education**

Hungary has few scholarships for all ethnic Hungarian students who want to pursue higher education in Hungary. For example, Stipendium Hungaricum and Hungarian Diaspora Scholarship, which provide tuition, accommodation, and living costs so students from minority communities can have an economically viable option of studying in Hungary. Due to dual citizenship, Hungarian minority students are being afforded access to the education and mobility pathways to study and work in the EU. Thus, they are linking students to Hungary and the Hungarian education system.

Degrees for minority communities also involve teacher training programs for the students, so that Hungarian minority educators are provided with educational opportunities based on Hungarian language teaching pedagogy, history, and various subjects. These teacher training programs enhance education quality in Hungarian minority language schools. In addition, the Government of Hungary continually supports and resources Hungarian-language teachers abroad with professional development, conferences, and educational resources. These programs prepare teachers to provide Hungarian language instruction and help preserve and promote Hungarian culture.

The most significant development is that the Hungarian Government supports the maintenance of Hungarian-language higher education outside of Hungary. Specifically, some universities have been created for higher education in Hungarian, including the following: Ferenc Rákóczi II Transcarpathian Hungarian college of higher education in Ukraine, 1996; Partium Christian University in Romania, 1996; Selye János University in Slovakia, 2004; and the Hungarian Language Teacher Training Faculty of the University of Novi Sad in Serbia, 2006. Another form of maintaining higher education institutions in Hungary is support and funding to establish or maintain Hungarian-language programs in already established universities, primarily in Romania, which are Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, and Partium Christian University in Oradea.

### **Youth camps and extracurricular programs**

Hungary sponsor summer camps, language immersion, and extracurricular activities for Hungarian youth from neighbouring countries. Like the well-known Lakitelek camp, these camps allow children to learn about Hungarian history, language and culture, often establishing lasting friendships with their peers. Furthermore, Hungary has language, maths, and science competitions that any ethnic Hungarian student from a neighbouring country can enter. All these events foster educational achievement while allowing students to interact with Hungarian youth.

Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program (KCSP) and Sándor Petőfi Program (PSP) have been instrumental in the branch of Hungary's State Secretariat for National Policy, which aims to help Hungarian communities outside of Hungary. The KCSP, launched in 2013, has an emphasis on the Hungarian diaspora globally, believing that by sponsoring scholarship students to benefit local non-profit organisations and churches. It can ensure cultural preservation and the use of the Hungarian language through various ways, including community events, language learning and youth participation (ELTE, 2025). Throughout the KCSP program from 2013 to 2023, the KCSP has sponsored and placed 710 scholars to benefit communities in many places worldwide. For the 2023/2024 academic year, there are 97 KCSP scholars in 21 different countries (Gazso, n.d.). The PSP launched in 2015 and focuses on Hungarian communities, but only those dispersed throughout the Carpathian Basin. This program aims to strengthen Hungarian identity and community civic life through education and culture. Under the PSP, participants can help support Hungarian-language schools, youth organisations, and local Hungarian media. In total, there have been 308 PSP scholars who have served. There are 36 active scholars serving 43 organisations in 5 countries in 2023/2024 (Petofi program, 2024). Both programs ballpark the ability for Hungary to foster Hungarian consciousness and static cultural ties, beyond its borders.

### **Bálványosi Summer Free School and Student Camp**

Bálványosi Summer Free School and Student Camp, commonly known as Tusványos, has attracted visitors since its inception in 1990 with a unique blend of cultural, academic and social experiences, especially for minority politics. This summer school is organised by the For Minorities - Pro Minoritate Foundation and the Hungarian Youth Council (Nemzeti Ifjúsági Tanács, NIT). It offers a dynamic platform for intellectuals, artists, and enthusiasts. With a more than three-decade history, the camp can accommodate more than 16,000 visitors daily and organises themed days, concerts, theatre performances and discussions in its lively tent. Tusványos embodies the connection, creativity and community spirit for Hungarian youth that thrives in the Olto Valley (Tusvanyos, 2024).

Some programs concerning protecting their minority and language rights can be recognised at this point. Hungary actively lobbies and promotes the rights of Hungarians living in neighbouring sovereign countries in Europe by ensuring their rights to language education and vaguely protecting them from education policies that would restrict their language rights.

**University Courses on Hungarian National Policy and Minority Rights:** Since 2013, the National University for Public Service (NKE) has included Hungarian national policy and minority rights in its public administration bachelor's program. This subject became mandatory in 2014, is supervised by Dr Iván Halász and features lectures by the National Policy Research Institute staff and NKE lecturers. Between 2012 and 2015, courses on Hungarian national policy and minority

rights were also taught at Károli Gáspár Reformed University. Topics such as “Minority sociology”, “National minorities”, and “Minority protection and foreign policy” have been taught at ELTE and in specialised training at NKE. Furthermore, many research institute researchers are also guest lecturers at universities, including at Andrásy University, University of Szeged, University of Pécs, and Babeş–Bolyai University, so they have a broad academic scope with these topics.

**Minority Protection in Europe Summer University:** The Institute for the Protection of Minorities and the Institute for National Policy Research have jointly organised Minority Protection in Europe Summer University since 2013. The purpose of the program is to find those law students, beginning lawyers or doctoral students who are sufficiently dedicated to the topic and want to meaningfully deal with the protection of the rights and interests of Hungarians living abroad in their future professional activities (Bethlen Gábor Fund, 2024).

### **3.3. Hungarian minority in Serbia**

According to the 2022 Serbian census, there are 184,442 Hungarians, representing 2.8% of the population, making them the second largest ethnic group in Serbia after Serbs. They are predominantly concentrated in the Vojvodina Autonomous Province, where 99% of Hungarians live. A tiny number of communities exist in Belgrade and the rest of Serbia (P3C, 2023, pp. 12-26). In Vojvodina, Hungarians primarily occupy the northern Bačka and Banat regions, where they represent majority shares, or large populations, in several municipalities along the Hungarian border, including Kanjiža (85%), Senta (79%), Ada (75%), Bačka Topola (58%) and Mali Idoš (54%). They also have large populations in Bečej (46%), Subotica (36%), Novi Kneževac (29%), Zrenjanin (10%) and Novi Sad (4%) (P3C, 2023). With the natural border caused by the Danube, Tisza and Sava rivers, Vojvodina splits today into three traditional regions: Bačka, Banat and

Syrmia. The basis of the Hungarian community in Serbia is their concentrated settlement in the northern part of Vojvodina, which conceptually belongs to Bačka and Banat.

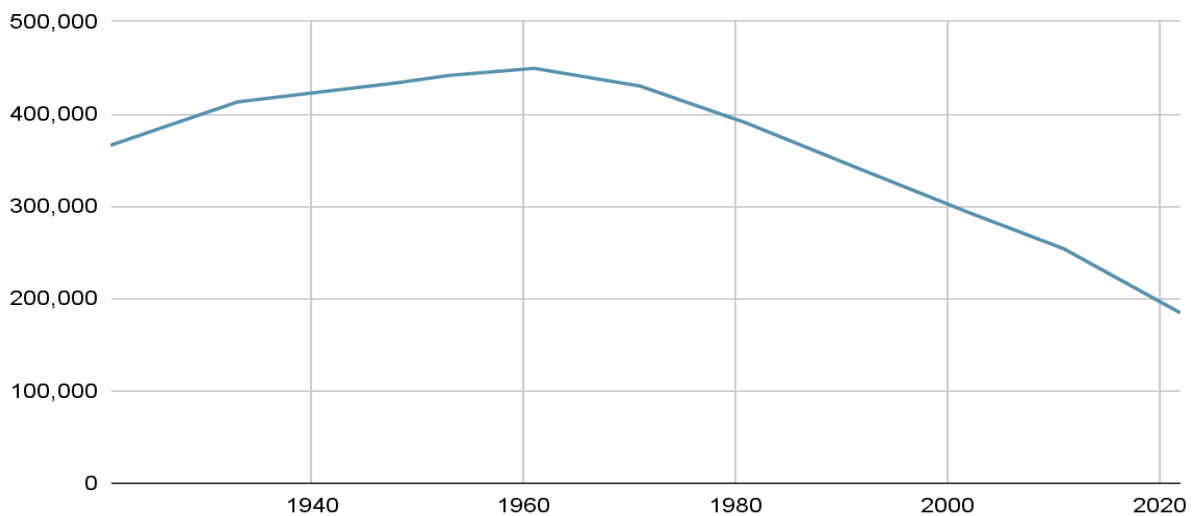


*Map 3. Vojvodina traditional regions. Source: (Denis & Demir, 2007)*

Before WW1, in 1910, Hungarians constituted approximately 28% of the population in the territory that would become Vojvodina, numbering around 420,000 (HUNSOR, 2020). With the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, Vojvodina was severed from Hungary, and included in the newly created Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later known as Yugoslavia), then later, into Serbia. This shifting of borders changed the former Hungarians from a part of a country into a national minority status and presence within a new multi-national state. Thus, the population stagnated during the interwar period but still counted over 363,000 in 1921 and approximately 376,000 in 1931 or around 23-24% of the population of Vojvodina.

The 20th century was marked by significant demographic changes for Hungarians in Vojvodina, often brought about by political events. In the socialist era, while there was a relative stabilisation, the ratio of Hungarians decreased because of a range of factors, including lower birth rates, assimilation, and ultimately internal migration in Yugoslavia. The violent breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s compounded the demographic decline for Hungarians due to the rise of Serbian nationalism, creating an atmosphere of fear and insecurity. This period also coincided with a wave of emigration that sped up the outflow of Hungarians and decreased Hungarian ratios and numbers in the population of Vojvodina (Moró & Reményi, 2024). After 2000, while Serbia's democratic

reforms offered a slightly better legal framework for minority protection, previous trends in emigration continued, notably among younger generations, often using the acquisition of Hungarian (EU) citizenship, after the passage of the Simplified and Dual Citizenship Law.



*Figure 1. Hungarian population in Vojvodina, Serbia (1910-2020). Source: (Lendák-Kabók, Badis and Tátrai, 2025)*

Therefore, Hungarian kin-state policy and its education tools aim to support Hungarian minorities to live in their homeland, Vojvodina. However, maintaining Hungarian identity and culture cannot be the only factor to keep people in Vojvodina, because on the other side, there are several factors to move, such as making a living, education, the right to move, seeking a better job, etc. However, Hungarian support is worth improving the minority situation and minority rights protection. To implement its kin-state policy, understanding each other and relations between the kin-state and the state where the kin minorities belong are crucial. The relationship between Hungary and Serbia regarding minority issues has a solid foundation, including bilateral agreements and political conversations (Petsinis, 2025). Furthermore, the international legal framework on minorities centres on a distinct understanding and collaboration between the states where kin minorities are positioned. As a result, bilateral agreements are the appropriate mechanism through which kin-state engagement can happen and be justified.

### **Agreements**

Initially, in 1996, the Treaty on Friendly Relations and Cooperation between the Republic of Hungary and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro) was signed following the breakup of Yugoslavia. The treaty established the agreement to provide legal protection to national minorities, and reiterated respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and non-interference in the internal affairs of each state. The treaty also laid the legally binding foundations of future

agreements to discuss minority rights, cultural funding, and economic development (Beretka & Korhecz, 2021). It is growing satisfactorily; the agreement may have improved the situation of Hungarians in Vojvodina, who had experienced increasing levels of discrimination and marginalisation during the Yugoslav Wars.

Then, on October 21, 2003, the two countries signed a more detailed bilateral agreement on education, culture, and political representation of minorities, the agreement on the Protection of National Minorities. This document establishes joint minority councils to monitor and promote the implementation of minority rights, acknowledging the MNT in Serbia as the officially recognised representative of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina (ILO NATLEX, 2003). Also, it reaffirms Serbia's dedication to the knowledge of the Venice Commission and EU standards on Minority protection, acknowledges Hungary's agreement to enhance its funding for minority representation, confirms cultural autonomy, and supports Hungarian-language education in Serbia. It worked to help Serbia with fostering its chances of EU accession by suggesting its commitment towards minority rights.

In 2013, Hungary and Serbia signed a more strategic Partnership Agreement that improved economic, cultural, and political partnership, considering their strategic partnership's effect on minorities. Particularly, this agreement means that Hungary can invest in Vojvodina, which could enhance economic opportunities for the Hungarian minority (Beretka & Korhecz, 2021). This indicates more footage for Hungary-Serbia relations and shows from the hardkit onwards, indicating Serbia's commitment to minority rights through its EU accession.

Ultimately, Hungary and Serbia created a stable legal framework for minority protection to resolve relations on minority issues through the various bilateral agreements reached. The agreements enhance the protection of Hungarians living in Serbia, guarantee the rights of Serbs in Hungary, address and diminish ethnic tensions to some extent, and promote regional stability. Most importantly, Vojvodina Hungarians receive many rights based on cultural autonomy, participatory political representation, and Hungarian-language education policy that are legitimate based on Serbian domestic law and the Serbia-Hungary bilateral agreements. Hungary's kin-state policy, including educational assistance to Hungarians in Serbia, is legitimised through the bilateral agreements. Hungary has also strongly supported and committed to Serbia's accession to the European Union (Petsinis, 2025). Furthermore, through a bilateral agreement and a joint declaration, Hungary can demonstrate Serbia's commitment to these rights standards, further strengthening Serbia's argument for EU accession. It also indicates to Brussels that Serbia is addressing the issue of minority rights with a key EU member state.

## **Hungarian education in Vojvodina, Serbia**

### *Serbian education system*

To analyse Hungarian education in Vojvodina, Serbia, it is necessary to understand the education system and the legal framework for education in Serbia. The overall development and implementation of education policy in Serbia are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Serbia (UNESCO, 2021). The formal education system in Serbia is organised at these levels: preschool education (ISCED level 0); first cycle of primary education (ISCED level 1); second cycle of primary education (ISCED level 2); secondary education (ISCED level 3); three or four years of basic academic and professional studies (ISCED level 5 or 6); master's academic and professional studies, and specialised studies (ISCED level 7); and doctoral studies (ISCED level 8)(Marušić & Kartal, 2015). Preschool education is provided in nurseries (6 months - 2 years) and kindergartens (3 - 7 years). Preschool education institutions develop their programs based on the common core principles of the preschool education curriculum. Since 2006-2007, preschool education has been compulsory for at least nine months. Primary education is compulsory and free and consists of two stages: general classroom teaching in grades 1-4 and subject teaching in grades 5-8, a total of nine years of compulsory education. Children enter first grade between the ages of 6 and 7. Secondary education is free, lasts 3-4 years, and occurs in secondary schools. After students complete their fourth year of secondary school, they take the Matura exam<sup>5</sup>, which is for admission to higher education institutions. Higher education includes basic academic and professional studies for three to four years. Students may continue their formal education with master's (1-2 years) and doctoral studies (3 years) that prepare them for independent scientific research. In public universities, undergraduate students can study for free (Marušić & Kartal, 2015).

### *Languages of instruction*

Education in the Republic of Serbia is conducted in Serbian. However, Article 79 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia establishes the right of national minorities to preserve their identity. It also established the right to education in minority languages at all levels of education. Also, in all municipalities where the minority language is officially recognised, and/or the subject of classes in the learners' language at all educational levels, the minority languages of Serbia are Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Wallachian, Hungarian, Macedonian, German, Romani, Ruthenian, Slovak, Ukrainian, Croatian, and Czech. If at least 15 students whose mother tongue is a minority language enter the first grade of primary education, classes will be taught in the

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<sup>5</sup> Matura exam (državna matura) is a standardised and obligatory state-administered exam at the end of secondary education.

minority language. According to 2011 data, primary school classes were conducted in Albanian, Hungarian, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovak, and Croatian (Goncz & Ivanovic, 2011).

The Rules on the Implementation and Evaluation of Individual Education Plans recommend overcoming barriers for children whose mother tongue is not Serbian. In 2002, Serbia adopted the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, which legally provided the framework for minority protection in agreement with European and global standards. Plus, the Law on National Council for National Minorities was adopted in 2009, which defines the role of the national councils in various sectors; in the field of education, this includes the establishment of educational institutions, mother tongue education programs, and the provision of special education programs for national minorities.

### **Hungarian minority education situation**

As almost all Hungarians (99 per cent) in Serbia are residents of the Vojvodina, the provincial ethnic diversity and autonomous character affect Hungarian minority education in Serbia. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006) and Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (2014)<sup>6</sup> are the legal basis of Vojvodina's autonomy and recognition of multilingualism and multiculturalism. It states that Vojvodina shall promote and help preserve and develop the cultural heritage of national minorities. Based on Vojvodina's autonomy and following the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities and the Law on National Council for National Minorities, the Hungarian National Council (MNT) was established in 2009. The MNT is responsible for self-governance in the Hungarian community's culture, education, media and language in Serbia, and practically enjoys cultural autonomy (Korhecz, 2015). In short, Hungarian education in Vojvodina, Serbia, is a collaborative effort in which Serbia provides the comprehensive legal framework and empowers the MNT to manage this education system, while Hungary significantly contributes funding and support as part of its kin-state policy.

As a first stage of official education, preschool education is considered an important part of the system and attracts a lot of funding and support. In the 2012/13 academic year, 87% of 1921 Hungarian children attended Hungarian or Hungarian-Serbian, Hungarian-German bilingual kindergartens in Serbia. However, due to the Hungarian minority population decreasing in Vojvodina, the number of children attending kindergarten in the Hungarian language is decreasing. In 2010, the number of children enrolled in Hungarian-language kindergartens was 2,084; in 2019, it decreased to 1,466. (Patrick et al., 2022, 84).

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<sup>6</sup> The current Statute was adopted in 2014, following a previous Statute from 2009, which was deemed unconstitutional by the Constitutional Court of Serbia.

<https://www.skupstinavojvodine.gov.rs/Strana.aspx?s=statut&j=EN>

According to MNT, 833 elementary and secondary classes operated in Hungarian in Vojvodina (National Council of the Hungarian National Minority Statistics, 2019). Between 2010 and 2019, Hungarians in Vojvodina faced the most significant decrease, with around 30%. Besides emigration and low birth rate, mixed marriages are one factor contributing to lower attendance in Hungarian schools. Particularly, small villages with small populations face sharp decreases, such as Szilagyi's number of students decreased from 48 to 3, Piros from 22 to 4, and Kutaspuszta from 28 to 7, between 2010 and 2019. However, there was a case of newly established schools in Maradek, and the number of primary school students increased. Another important topic is the number of first graders. Choosing a Hungarian school is the most important step in youth development and strengthening identity. However, first-graders decreased from 433 to 200 between 2010 and 2019 (Patrick et al., 2022, pp. 94-100). Therefore, several programs and activities support Hungarian schools for their children, with only 768 Hungarian first-year students per 1000 Hungarian kindergarten attendances, which shows a low ratio. In 2002, 3670 (16.1%) of 22,402 Hungarian primary school students studied in a non-Hungarian language; in 2012, 3295 (19%) of 17,317 students studied in a non-Hungarian language. There are two main reasons for choosing a non-Hungarian school: 25% of students live in a municipality where a Hungarian language school is unavailable, and over 70% of students are from mixed families. The use of the native language by students studying in the Serbian is declining. The language of education became Serbian, and Hungarian was mostly limited to the family circle. Therefore, it is moved to the back and restricted to a more "limited area" (Trombitás & Szügyi, 2019).

Higher education in the Hungarian language is limited in Vojvodina, Serbia. No higher education institution offers programs in the fully Hungarian language. However, the University of Novi Sad has a Hungarian language Teacher Training faculty in Subotica. Due to the disorganised nature of Hungarian-language higher education in Serbia, Hungarian students have few opportunities to study in their native language at universities. According to Kincses & Papp's (2020) study, 72% of Hungarian students wanted to study in Hungarian higher education institutions.

Another important concern is the student emigration flow. In 2010, 1,385 Hungarian-speaking students (from Vojvodina) studied in Hungary and 3,152 in Serbia. Student mobility between Hungary and Serbia is highly concentrated, leading to a very low return rate (around 30%) of the educated young elite. (Takács & Szügyi, 2015). The paper-based questionnaire was conducted among 2,192 high school students from ethnic minorities who were graduating from high school in their mother tongue. The analysis showed that about 40% of ethnic minority high school graduates planned to leave Serbia and study in their mother tongue in neighboring EU countries. The results of the study show that the main reason for this educational migration is the desire to obtain a diploma from an EU-based institution that provides direct access to the EU's single labour

market, and the perceived social status that would improve after graduation compared to staying in Serbia. Despite this new motivation for educational migration, language barriers have remained relevant in recent times. (Lendák-Kabók et al., 2020)

Hungarian education in Serbia becomes increasingly precarious, with demographic and socio-economic factors playing a part. The decrease in the number of Hungarian school choosers, as can be seen, and a general decrease in the use of everyday language among the younger generations, pose an alarming trend for the linguistic and cultural identity of the community. This is added to by mass student emigration, usually because of a search for better economic prospects or a perceived sense of more accessible and diversified higher education opportunities in Hungary and further afield. Consequently, limited means of obtaining higher education in Hungarian in Serbia lead to a vicious cycle where decreases at the lower levels of mother-tongue education impact the perpetuation of Hungarian intellectual and professional life, thus ultimately endangering the long-term survival of the Hungarian minority's distinct identity in Serbia.

### **3.4. Identity of Hungarians in Vojvodina, Serbia**

The national identity of Hungarians in Vojvodina, Serbia, is not a fixed notion as a concept of identity, but is a dynamic identity construction trajectory, shaped by historical grievances, current political context, kin-state policies, and socio-economic realities. This trajectory demonstrates an ongoing negotiation process, adjustment and assertion of being Hungarian in a multiethnic Serbian context. While the kin-state ties reinforce a single Hungarian identity, the long history of living in Vojvodina, a culturally diverse region, has also fostered a distinct "Vojvodinian Hungarian" identity. This identity recognises their unique historical experiences and cultural adaptations within a multiethnic environment, subtly differentiating them from Hungarians in Hungary (Virág, 2025; Stroschein, n.d.).

Prior to the 1920s, Hungarians in Vojvodina were primarily situated within their national homeland, the Hungarian kingdom. Their identity was rooted in being part of the larger Hungarian kingdom and a common Hungarian national culture. However, the Treaty of Trianon separated Vojvodina from Hungary, producing a large Hungarian minority in the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). Then, during the period of socialist Yugoslavia from 1920, that Vojvodina was characterised by irredentism, pressure to assimilate, and survival through culture. Many felt a profound sense of loss and sought reunification with Hungary. Collective identity was shaped by a feeling of being a "severed" part of the Hungarian nation (Ivanović et.al., 2024). While varying in intensity across Yugoslav periods, there were consistent pressures, both overt and subtle, towards integration into the Yugoslav or Serbian mainstream. Identity was maintained through community networks, Hungarian-language education, churches, and cultural associations,

often operating under challenging circumstances. The focus was on “survival” as a distinct group (Udrea et al., 2023).

The later dissolution of Yugoslavia and the accompanying nationalism of Serbia created insecurity for minorities, including Hungarians, as identity became predominantly based on navigating survival and conflict, creating significant out-migration as communities sought stability. As families left, the community shrank. In response to heightened nationalism, ethnic identity often became more pronounced as a protective mechanism, emphasising distinctiveness from the perceived aggressor (Lendák-Kabók, 2015).

The democratic transition period beginning in the 2000s marks the beginning of a critical juncture, towards institutionalised cultural autonomy and more active engagement with kin-state considerations. The Law on National Councils of National Minorities (2009) created the MNT. It empowered the Hungarian community with autonomy regarding self-governing areas such as education, culture, accessible information, and language (Korhecz, 2015). This politically recognised a legal dimension of Hungarian national identity that could afford some affirmation and expression in Serbia. The MNT became a central actor in identity construction.

Then, Hungary’s simplified dual citizenship law (2010) and voting rights for non-residents fundamentally altered identity. Many Vojvodina Hungarians acquired Hungarian (EU) passports, fostering a transnational national identity. They are simultaneously citizens of Serbia and Hungary, belonging to a local minority community and a broader Hungarian nation (Virág, 2025). Despite identity-preserving mechanisms and efforts, the most critical challenge is the continuing emigration of young, educated Hungarians, often facilitated by dual citizenship. This “brain drain” has a direct effect on the human capital that is needed to support minority institutions and convey identity into subsequent generations, which may undermine the national identity of the community over time (Takács & Szügyi, 2015). Many younger generations are more pragmatic concerning national identity (Williams, 2025). They may take pride in their backgrounds, but their language, education, and career decisions tend to be more consistent with practical considerations and aspirations for social mobility within the EU, resulting in more fluid or situational identity.

In conclusion, the process of identity construction of Vojvodina Hungarians has traversed a route from “cut-off minority” with irredentist aspirations, through states of crisis around cultural survival, to a position of greater power, institutional autonomy, and increasingly transnational national identity. However, that viability is challenged by demographic decline, which raises questions of fundamental importance regarding the feasibility of long-term sustainability for this national identity, with all its historical significance, in its historic homeland.

In short, Hungarians in Vojvodina have a fluid and negotiable identity, rather than a fixed, static one, which is negotiating itself perpetually: at the intersection of historical ethnic legacy, the strategically exploited resources of their kin-state, the policies and circumstances of the state of Serbia, and the multiculturalism of Vojvodina itself. Collectively, this constellation generates an identity that simultaneously is distinctly Hungarian, particularly Vojvodinian, and a part of Serbian society.

## CHAPTER 4. RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1. Identity of Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia

#### 4.1.1. Situation of the Hungarian minority

To better investigate the Hungarian kin-state education support and its impact on their identity, it is important to present a brief historical overview. This is necessary because the idea of “kin-state”, underpinned by education policies, sets itself in the Vojvodina Hungarian community’s historical trajectory and unique situation. Vojvodina had a long and deep historical tie with Hungary before the 1920 Treaty of Trianon. This can help explain how a significant Hungarian population had suddenly severed from the geographical bridge to Hungary. This separation provides a foundation for understanding their continued desire for links and support from their kin-state. Also, the “bitter experience” of the 1990s, when Vojvodina had a withdrawal of autonomy and opportunities to travel to Hungary, was extremely diminished under Yugoslavia and Milošević era. At that time, the fragility of their identity and cultural institutions made them desperate for assistance from outside.

*When I grew up, I did not know why I lived in Serbia because all my surroundings were Hungarian. We only watched Hungarian TVs. But, you know, it is after the NATO bombing. It was pretty in line. Something happened after Milosevic, like a movie, which has a pretty sour taste. It is a pretty bitter experience because when I was a teenager, you did not have the right to go to Hungary. You are Hungarian, live next to Hungary, but you did not have the right. So, you had to buy a tourist visa. (participant SE-05)*

After 2000, significant developments occurred in Serbia, with the enactment of laws related to minorities, in part due to the advocacy of Vojvodina Hungarian politicians. Although territorial autonomy was not achieved, Vojvodina Hungarians achieved cultural autonomy, enabling them to maintain their schools and mass media. The broad legal framing here is important because it prescribes how kin-state support will be able to operate and how it works or aligns with existing minority rights. Understanding the larger connection with kin-state, in which Hungary actively supports the ethnic Hungarian communities through various means, including educational benefits, is also important when analysing the provision of aid to Vojvodina Hungarians.

Additionally, the political compacting of the dominant Vojvodina Hungarian political party, the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (VMSZ), with the Government in Budapest inexorably facilitates kin-state support through educational mechanisms (Egeresi, 2020). The political element extracts the historical model of the ongoing Hungarian preservation campaign as a

minority group. Ultimately, the education offered through kin-state support greatly influences how younger generations shape their identity. Influencing their sense of the Hungarian language, culture, and historical narratives can affect their perceived sense of belonging in Serbia, Hungary, or another hybrid identity. By assessing these historical and political contexts, we can then assess Hungarian kin-state educational support and its diverse impact on the identity of Vojvodina Hungarians.

### **Current situation of minority rights**

The situation of the Hungarian minority community in Vojvodina, Serbia, illustrates a complex case study in the field of minority protection and cultural preservation in a post-conflict, transitioning country. Although legal provisions can be robust protections, their application varies in practice and is influenced by demographic changes and geopolitical factors shaping the community experience.

A striking feature of the current situation is the positive relationship between Serbia and Hungary. Both countries have developed bilateral cooperation characterised by “open policies and lots of support and programs,” which community members see as a reflection of the Hungarian kin-state’s commitment (Jerotijević et.al, 2021). Hungarians in Serbia, which is perceived as better than other Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries where there is less favourable treatment on dual citizenship or linguistic rights, as in Romania or Slovakia. In addition, Serbia’s President Vučić maintains a very positive relationship with Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán, which is perceived as directly linking to their interests to the benefit of the Hungarian community in Serbia (Magyar Nemzet, 2023). The community has a considerable positive sentiment toward this political situation from the kin-state perspective. However, some discuss the level of anxiety in terms of sustainability in case of some upheaval of Serbian political leadership, sentiments may turn upon degree, as expressed by community members of concern on what a change in Serbian leadership may mean for the community.

*I have been to Transylvania before and seen how those people live. I think that Romanians pretty much oppress them. They do not get as much freedom as Hungarians do in Vojvodina. And right now, we have a president in Serbia called Vučić, who has a very good relationship with Orbán Viktor. Therefore, here in Serbia, Hungarians are treated well; they have a lot of financial programs in which they can participate. They are not looked down on as they were before. My parents were just telling me about this, and they said I should be grateful that I live here now because it is very good for Hungarians. (participant SE-01)*

From a political and legal perspective, the described framework for minority protection is considered solid in Serbia. The creation of National Councils for minorities is an important institutional achievement. The Hungarian National Council (Magyar Nemzeti Tanács, MNT) was legally established in 2008. The MNT is legally recognised and is formally charged with oversight of primary issues related to minority life, including media, education, and language (Petsinis, 2025). Although the MNT is a creation of the Serbian political and legal system, it is primarily funded by Hungary. It can receive funding from outside sources, which allows Hungarian kin-state support, but research participants highlighted that Serbia should mainly care for it. The existence of many Vojvodina Hungarian politicians from the VMSZ within the Serbian Government is also viewed as a sort of “positive discrimination”. It legitimises and empowers Hungarian minority issues at the state level, while also helping maintain good relations with the EU and Hungary. Community members often credit VMSZ for many local developments and scholarship programs, which are important in maintaining those relationships.

*I do not think the Serbian Government has these extra sources for minorities. So, we need fundamental rights, such as basic small money. And as a positive discrimination... It is like “you are important as a minority, and we know” because many Hungarians from the VMSZ are in the government. They have some roles there. They need to be there because it looks good and suits the relationship between the EU and Hungary. However, at the low level, there are no significant changes.  
(participant SE-06)*

Despite a solid model of protection and significant political advantages, there are challenges in implementing and operating in practice, including minority rights, especially in terms of language use in some cases. While it is set out in legislation, administrative paperwork is not done in Hungarian in real life. Even though Hungarian is the official language in the region, Hungarian-owned businesses mostly communicate in Serbian. This reality raises several practical problems and suggests that Hungarian language is sometimes dismissed regarding economics or bureaucracy. This type of question illustrates a dilemma of the relationship between de jure and de facto rights. It proposes that while the legal model is sound, its performance is inconsistent in terms of commitments and realities at the local level.

*The legal framework is fine, but in reality, Hungarians put themselves at a disadvantage because of language use. For example, in Sombor, most companies operate only in Serbian, even owner is Hungarian. So, the Hungarian language does not seem valuable, e.g., company logos, etc. Also, most paperwork is handled in Serbian. In Sombor, for example, I had to go back three times to handle my ID card*

*application in Hungarian, but in the end, I could only do this paperwork in Serbian. It was not possible to do it in Hungarian, even though, by law, it should be possible to do official business there. (participant SE-06)*

Demographic and social factors also contributed to the continued sustainability of a Hungarian identity within Vojvodina. There is an apparent decline in the number of constituents in the minority community. Degeneration of cultural autonomy persists, although a degree of assimilation occurs as travel to south past the northern part of Vojvodina, where there may be a substantial population; the realities of Serbian cultural and language in some measure will overwhelm the Hungarian minority. The presence of “illiberal or hybrid regimes” in Hungary and Serbia raises questions about future protection. They may maintain significant rights on paper as well as political representation. However, what exists when the population continues to decline or when non-democratic regimes are simply using minority institutions themselves, and the agency of the community is further lost?

Vojvodina is often mentioned as a multiethnic area of Serbia, with interviewees noting a general atmosphere of coexistence, stating, “we all live together in peace”, while noting that serious inter-ethnic conflict is generally absent from the region. Several ethnic communities have existed together in the same space for centuries. However, the overall perception of peace, some interviewees were able to share less than positive local Serb attitudes towards the Hungarian minority, while significant conflicts may be rare, some covert and overt prejudice may still exist.

Historical grievances and residual nationalist attitudes sometimes result in explicit hostility. According to participant BP-04, some Serbs demonstrate an unabashed xenophobia by telling Hungarians to “move back” or asking, “What are you doing here?” Sometimes this attitude even manifests in physical confrontation. This apparent animosity has multiple and complex roots, including historical grievances, a belief by some Serbs that minorities receive “huge benefits,” and even nationalism, especially when it appears among younger individuals. The phrase “*bad blood*” about Hungarian school seems to illustrate a particular strain of prejudice by seeing Hungarian-language education as a mark of difference or a threat instead of simply an expression of education as a cultural right. This indicates a clash of perceptions between the law concerning minority education at the state level and the socio-cultural perceptions of specific segments of the majority population.

*Here in Serbia, they usually call us the Hungarian school, bad blood. Sometimes getting picked out is a little upsetting because you are from a Hungarian school. But I mean, we learn Serbian here, too, but I think when it comes to languages, it is a*

*personal choice whether you really want to learn this language or not. (participant SE-02)*

The accounts described indicate that while the broader political and legal context in Serbia presently endorses the rights of Hungarians as a minority group, subtlety and hostility can persist on the day-to-day level. This can be illustrated in school settings, where the existence of Hungarian-language schools can attract animosity or misunderstanding from some Serbs despite their legal backing and contribution to multiculturalism. The comments suggesting that this makes “other high schools upset” indicate a perceived claim that, rather than exercising a right as a verdant minority group, Hungarian schools “are trying to be special.” This suggests that, while cultural autonomy is on the legal and institutional level, it is an open question to what extent this can be entirely accepted and integrated into broader society.

These attitudes are not a universal phenomenon, but they contribute to a tension between a broadly favourable situation. These relations highlight some of the complications of fostering relationships on a local and everyday basis, in the context of a statutory, politically supported, and kin-state-guaranteed minority rights. Nonetheless, the chasm or gulf between collective or institutional-narrative and the individual experiences of people reflects an important tension in the protection of minority rights, when so many aspects - historical narratives, national identity, and everyday interactions - shape the experience of the minority in Vojvodina.

Consequently, the context of Hungarians in Vojvodina is situated in a unique junction of circumstances which consist of relatively strong kin-state connectedness and support with strong bilateral relations; comprehensive formal protections of statutory minority rights; and active representation of their interests through a political party. Nonetheless, there are many issues surrounding the effective implementation of minority rights and declining numbers, in addition to ongoing changes in Serbia and Hungary, which will present challenges in the foreseeable future. Taken together, the Vojvodina Hungarian identity comprises historical legacies, formal statutory protections, credible kin-state support, and the everyday realities in a multiethnic society.

### **Hungarian minority politics in Serbia**

Over the last two decades, particularly since the rise of the Fidesz party in Hungary in 2010 and the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) in Serbia in 2012, the political circumstances for the Hungarian minority in contemporary Serbia have witnessed momentous changes. This represents an inflexion point toward what many consider a new chapter of “historical Hungarian-Serbian good relations.” A moment frequently cited as the initiation of this strengthened relationship is the

2013 joint commemoration by the then heads of state, János Áder of Hungary and Tomislav Nikolić of Serbia, where they paid tribute to the victims of historical violence from both parties.

The Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians (Vajdasági Magyar Szövetség, VMSZ) is a key player in fostering these enhanced bilateral relations and representing the Hungarian minority on the political stage in Serbia. The VMSZ is regarded as instrumental in establishing successful channels linking Budapest and Belgrade, which further underpin its political significance. In addition, the electoral law of Serbia incorporates a privileged minority list that helps the VMSZ and other minority parties from meeting the parliamentary threshold, extending guaranteed representation in the Serbian parliament. This allows the VMSZ to form coalitions, primarily with the dominant SNS, which is critical for advancing its programmatic agenda (Petsinis, 2025).

The VMSZ's political strategy typically has an ethnic frame, as they present themselves as a legitimate voice for Hungarians in Vojvodina and request a vote based solely on the ethnic dimension of their identity. This tactic emphasises ethnic mobilisation. However, the decline of the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina, which was a popular regional autonomist party and once the primary challenger to the VMSZ in Vojvodina, aided the VMSZ in this identity and policy shift by causing diminishing competition on its political right. Consequently, the VMSZ has inherited elements of a regionalist and autonomist program, and now, while retaining its ethnic lens, the VMSZ is frequently positioning itself as a representative voice for Vojvodina's broader interests in Belgrade, namely in terms of resources for local authorities and the provincial capital of Novi Sad.

*I would say they are also playing this card, that this party has good ties to both countries' political leaders, and that there is no other option. So basically, the VMSZ is playing this like an ethnic, mostly ethnic card. So basically, the VMSZ says they are a Hungarian party representing Hungarians in Vojvodina. And people should vote for them because they are Hungarians. (participant BP-08)*

A significant ramification of the current conception of the nation-state by the Hungarian Government, one that relies on a vision of a “unified nation without borders,” is that greater ties are being created between Hungarian minorities (including those in Vojvodina) and Hungary. This includes greater preferences for Hungarian media and news, leading to an attachment that participant BP-06 describes as an ever-decreasing attachment to their residency in Serbia. The financial support is also considerable, given that so many minority institutions are funded by Hungary's Government, sometimes at levels greater than the funding they would have received from Serbia. While this external funding helps fill cultural gaps, it perhaps reduces the likelihood

that minority institutions will feel the need to engage with the Serbian Government for support and calls into question the responsibility of the politicians in the Serbian political system.

The complex positioning of VMSZ has created an academic debate on characterising it. VMSZ has become, to an extent, “a part of the political regime in Serbia,” functioning as a facilitator of the current ruling coalition that is primarily regarded as less democratic. The case of VMSZ is paradoxical: a minority party that appears successful in gaining preferential representation and institutional support is functioning within a governance system that has come under attack for its democratic limitations. Although Serbia is directly engaging with the international community and taking advantage of the preferential representation of minorities as a way of signalling its commitment to minority rights, closer scrutiny suggests that these parties are becoming captured by the state and “supporting the ruling regime in return for benefits for their respective minorities” (Petsinis, 2025). However, while the VMSZ is experiencing this entanglement under arrangements that represent a political context that guarantees coordination with an institutional network of self-determined authorities and resources, questions arise about the agency of the minority party in the broader political landscape.

#### **4.1.2. Identity of Hungarians in Vojvodina**

The identity of Hungarians in Vojvodina, Serbia, have a complex and fluid character, which is heavily influenced by historical experiences, linguistic attachments, cultural connections, and historical and political relations between Serbia and Hungary. Instead of being contained within one type or stable identity, people use a hybrid sense of themselves, indicating the dynamic nature of allegiances and cultural connections.

A common theme in the self-identity of Vojvodina Hungarians is a dual belonging, in which individuals sometimes cite robust ties to both Serbian and Hungarian cultural spheres, but in neither do they truly feel at home. This is often expressed as a distinction between their linguistic home and cultural mentality. As one interviewee precisely states, this standard internal division is as follows:

*Where do I see myself closer to? The language, of course, is Hungarian, and my mentality is Serbian. Where is my home? It is Serbia. And I have both citizenships. I look at Hungary as my home, but I was born and raised in Serbia. And Serbia gave me all those years of my life. Hungary is giving me opportunities now, so I was still going to find myself as a Hungarian from Vojvodina. And I cannot decide, because my mother tongue is Hungarian, but again, I am Serbian. (participant BP-01)*

The Hungarian language remains a salient anchor for their ethnic identity, being the mother tongue and primary language of instruction from early childhood, as one individual (participant SE-06) noted, “My Hungarian identity has influenced me since childhood... my mother told me stories in Hungarian, and I watched Hungarian cartoons”. However, being raised in Serbia has actualised an instinctive mental and emotional connection with the Serbian socio-cultural environment. This results in a unique state described as a “homely homelessness”, in which subjects feel a belonging to Vojvodina, but not to Serbia or Hungary proper.

*It is a kind of homely homelessness. This means feeling familiar and attached to a place but never fully at home. You belong but always feel a bit like an outsider - neither in Hungary nor in Serbia do you feel completely “at home”. (participant SE-04)*

The adaptability of identification is also evidenced within situational changes, whereby individuals appropriately change how they self-designate, depending on their social situation. A participant BP-07 articulates this directly: “When I was out with my Serbian friends, I always said that I am Serbian. So, when I am with my Hungarian friends, I say that I am Hungarian”. The changeable identity allows multiple modes of traversing social situations but also creates a sense of incomplete belonging. Additionally, external categorisation plays a considerable role in how one self-identify; one can find themselves labelled as Hungarian in Serbia, while in Hungary they may be from some other neighbouring country or to be “Serbian”, as participant BP-04 states, “in Serbia, they say I am a Hungarian. In Hungary, they call me a Serbian or any Slavic nations, like Slovakia, Croatia etc”. It reflects a position of liminality that frequently precludes even a proper reconciliation of either of the dominant narratives and, thus, many self-designate simply as “from Vojvodina”.

The idea of being “100% Hungarian” or “100% Serbian” is commonly contested by the mixedness of ethnicity in Vojvodina, since the multiethnic and historically situated Vojvodina means that there are often family connections with all the neighbouring countries. As participant BP-03 explains, “My grandfather was Croatian, so it is hard to find someone in Vojvodina who is 100% Hungarian or Serbian because everyone has relatives from other nations.” Additionally, the in-between or hybrid character of Hungarian minorities in Vojvodina makes them neither 100% Hungarian nor Serbian, considering Hungarian language, ethnicity, historical roots, traditions, religion, Serbian socio-economic context, memory and social circle in Serbia, dual citizenship, etc. Also, a distinct Vojvodina Hungarian identity was created with a dialect and a set of local cultural practices and mentality that exist exclusively within the space of Hungary.

*I identify myself as a Hungarian who lives in Serbia. I would rather say I am Hungarian, but I cannot say I am a “100% Hungarian” because I was born and raised in Serbia. I think it is, because we speak Hungarian, but in a dialect different*

*from the standard Hungarian spoken here in Hungary. I would rather say it is a different identity. (participant BP-03)*

Moreover, since 2010, wider political developments have impacted the narratives of belonging. The Hungarian Government has developed an ethno-nationalist notion of a “universal” or “unitary” Hungarian nation which can exist without the boundaries of a state. Which is working to foster an ever-broader notion of belonging to the Hungarian nation through different educational, cultural, economic efforts and political partnerships. This external support is aimed at securing Hungarian identity. However, it also affects people’s perception of attachment to Serbia, particularly during economic difficult times that prompt a desire to leave, forcing a kind of exploration of themselves. As an expert (participant BP-07) notes, “this sort of belonging to the nation has momentum since 2010... the political pact between Fidesz and the VMSZ is a major factor in shaping these ways of belonging. Hungarian minorities tend to be increasingly attached to Hungary... and increasingly less attached to the homeland where they live, to Serbia.”

To summarise, while formal registration of nationality provides a legal box for categorisation, the actual lived identity of Hungarians in Vojvodina is far more complicated. This dynamic hybrid of their linguistic histories, cultural adaptations, political forces, and experiences that create a hybrid and sometimes distinct and layered identity that cannot simply be categorised. They hold on to a significant sense of attachment to their specific regional homeland and an ongoing negotiation between numerous cultural and national processes. For some, this has even resulted in consideration of larger universal human qualities over ethnic labels, demonstrating a movement away from traditional national and ethnic identity.

#### **4.1.3. Vojvodina identity**

The idea of Vojvodina identity has come to represent a strong and unique form of self-identification for the region’s people, especially for its Hungarian minority. This identity is not a simple ethnic or national identification but is deeply rooted in the province’s historical processes and rich multicultural makeup. One of the main features of Vojvodina’s identity is its multiculturalism. Vojvodina is known as a “pretty mixed region” with Serbs, Hungarians, Croats, and Romanians etc and being mixed is not simply a demographic fact. It is a tangible and existing cultural value because the people of Vojvodina expect you to “be open-minded,” which is considered “the key to being Vojvodinian/Vojvodinianness.” It is truly a source of cultural diversity and richness; it enables people to know other cultures and other people.

*In Vojvodina, you must be open-minded; this is the key to being “Vojvodinian/Vojvodinianness”. Multiculturalism gives diversity. Language usage is important,*

*and even within Vojvodina, dialects differ. The mentality is also different; we are more open than Hungarians from Hungary. People are more resourceful here and are more constrained by linguistic and cultural barriers. We have had to get used to making compromises, which brings diversity as an advantage. Hungarians in Hungary are used to a much more homogeneous environment. (participant SE-04)*

The perceived openness and adaptability of Vojvodinians provide additional contours to this regional identity. Unlike Hungarians from Hungary, who at times are labelled as “used to a much more homogeneous environment,” Vojvodinians identify as “more open, more flexible,” and “more authentic.” Adaptability stems from the necessity of negotiating a linguistically and culturally diverse context by being able to “make compromises” and to be resourceful about “linguistic and cultural barriers.” This adaptability and pragmatic skew to inter-ethnic relations is central to the Vojvodinian self-identity.

### **Hungarian dialect**

In linguistic terms, Vojvodina identity is a form of distinctive hybridity. Hungarian still serves as the ‘mother tongue’ of the Hungarian minority, but it is often perceived as a kind of “Vojvodina dialect” with influence of Serbian. This combination reflects a long history of inter-ethnic relation and would be easily identifiable to a native Hungarian speaker from Hungary. In this way, a particular dialect embodies a cultural space for Vojvodina Hungarians, or ‘inside jokes’ and ‘own culture’. It separates them from the usual linguistic practices in their kin-state Hungary. One interviewee (PB-02) stated, “Vojvodina dialect” can generally be recognised from standard Hungarian spoken in Hungary”, and lead to comparative and adaptive configuration on both sides of Hungary-Vojvodina border, as indicated by the participants, with whom since they were in Hungary, “slips” a Serbian word and has to apologise, stating, “this is how we speak at home.”

*We have a little dialect. Yes, when I am speaking here in Hungarian, I speak in my Vojvodina dialect. They will understand it, but they will look at me weirdly. I speak like that back home. The standard dialect is like Hungarian, but we also speak Hungarian with a little Serbian language. (participant BP-01)*



Map 4. Hungarian language dialects, Source: (Kiss, 2001)

Linguistically, the dialect spoken in the Vojvodina region is similar with southern Hungary and around Budapest, which is referred to as the Southern Great Plain (Deli Alföld) or Southern Transdanubia (*Dél-Dunántúl*). However, research participants usually perceive it as a different dialect from all of Hungary because of Serbian influence. Generally, the idea of identity is complex for Hungarians in Vojvodina because they exist within a Serbian state. This language influence is just one channel of connection and influence from the Serbian population that influences Vojvodina Hungarians' self-identity. They inevitably bring individual Serbian words, phrases, and an influence on verbal construction back to the Hungarian language. The strong amalgamation observed is part of their existence in proximity and continual contact with the Serbian language. Once it was laid out, it suggested a strong unconscious sense of amalgamation of these elements.

*But since I grew up there, I learned that dialect, the Hungarian dialect, and I also know this Serbian village Hungarian dialect, and when I go there, I just automatically switch. I do not know how. It is programmed in my brain, but if I do not want them to know I am from Serbia, I just talk in that standard. So, since there are a lot of Hungarians living in Serbia, I feel it is natural that they use Serbian words in their speech because they live so close to each other. (participant SE-01)*

In addition to language, Serbian influence is discernible in the “Vojvodinian mentality” inferred by the interviewees to differentiate Hungarians in Vojvodina from Hungarians from Hungary, usually associated with a greater openness, flexibility, and resourcefulness. As interviewee SE-05

says, “The mentality is also different; we are more open than Hungarians from Hungary. People are more resourceful here, as linguistic and cultural barriers less hamper them.” This flexibility is a function of living in a multiethnic community where it is required to compromise and understand one another from very different cultural perspectives at almost every decision or interaction.

At the same time, a geographical and cultural distance from the “south” or majority part of Serbia leads many Vojvodina Hungarians to have a specific regional identity, even living in a Serbian state. The feeling that “Vojvodina is separate from the southern part” is evident; some even admit to never having visited Belgrade, the capital city of the country. It is focused from a local perspective, and it is noteworthy that there is a geographic and cultural distinction from the “south,” but a less nationalistic framing of self under the more general notion of “Vojvodina” as participant BP-01 states that “stereotypically Serbia is not like Vojvodina. We are not as nationalist as the South”. Although the self-perception of Vojvodina Hungarians places them in the context of Serbia, it also has a characteristically regional conception. The regional characteristics of Vojvodina, also seen as “more developed” and “more civilised” than other regions of Serbia, create collective pride that transgresses the borders of ethnicity.

*“My first time in Belgrade was in December. I went there for a concert. I have not been to Belgrade, so Vojvodina is quite separate from the southern part. It is quite interesting because that is my country, and I have not been there either in my capital city, but only in Vojvodina.” (participant BP-07)*

While the Hungarian kin-state has taken steps to reinforce the singular identity of “Hungarian nation” the prevalence and often unreflective way the Serbian linguistic and cultural environment reflects itself in the lives of Vojvodina Hungarians shapes their lived experiences and how they identify themselves. The result is a multi-layered identity that is distinctly Hungarian, but also considerably “Vojvodina Hungarian” due to the intersections of Serbian social and cultural practices. Despite the emphasis on a unique Vojvodina identity, especially its regionalism and multiculturalism, the prominence of this aspect is in flux. “A Hungarian who lives in Vojvodina” (Vajdasag magyar) is an important descriptor because it captures the complex quality - it conveys ethnic affinity and heritage, and deep identity of place belonging in a distinctive, diverse region. Historical political circumstances and top-down policies also influenced the development of this regional identity.

### **Yugoslavia root**

Understanding the history of Yugoslavia is essential for discussing the evolution and enduring persistence of Vojvodina identity. Within the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) from the mid-20th century onward, there was a systematic attempt to forge regional identities and

safeguard the rights of minorities, all in the name of unifying diversity. Vojvodina was initially granted as an Autonomous Province within Serbia in 1945. However, its status advanced significantly with the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution, which, in effect, bestowed almost federal republic powers to Vojvodina's autonomy. These years actively embraced multicultural and multilingual societies, recognising multiple minority languages as official, including Hungarian (Losoncz & Rácz, 2019).

This Yugoslav construct, which ideologically promoted “brotherhood and unity” among its various nations or “cultural nations,” significantly impacted the construction of a unique Vojvodina identity. It provided an institutional environment where ethnic groups lived in proximity to each other. It could be noted that the regional identity of Vojvodina Hungarians “mainly started to build during the socialist period in Yugoslavia.” It was a combination of the top-down efforts by the Yugoslav authorities to “insist on this local regional identity in Vojvodina, to try to make local peoples less committed to their external kin-state, Hungary”, particularly during the tense spell with the Soviet bloc period (participant BP-02). Moreover, it emerged from the experiences of the many people living there, providing the potential to feel a part of this autonomous region, rather than only committing to a particular ethnic nation or state. For this reason, the multiculturalism, linguistic intermingling, and regionalism of Vojvodina identity were structurally present in the federalism and approach to managing ethnic difference in Yugoslavia.

### **Elites' project of regional identity**

Even today, the construction and maintenance of a “Vojvodina Hungarian” identity is the responsibility of political and cultural elites. Particularly through Hungarian political parties, such as the VMSZ, as a means of holding on to power and assuring the community's existence. The ways that they strategically push a specific identity narrative are clear from several political and cultural dimensions.

The VMSZ is clear in the way it explicitly articulates its remit as representative of the Hungarian community, which calls for ethnic solidarity to gain votes. Interview participants explained that the VMSZ plays an “ethnic, mostly ethnic card,” and “they are a Hungarian party, they are representing Hungarians in Vojvodina, people should vote for them because they are Hungarians” (participant BP-06). This discourse extends a singular, ethnically defined identity and marks the VMSZ as an indispensable voice for the community in Vojvodina.

While the VMSZ is an ethnic party, it has also been able to adopt elements of a regionalist and autonomist movement. Mainly because other regional parties have diminished, as they have widened their remit, when they simultaneously claim to be a Hungarian party and “representing

Vojvodina in Belgrade”, as mentioned by an expert (participant BP-06). It gives the impression that they are even a greater representative for local interests because they advocate for resources or use them for the good of the Hungarian minority, who predominantly live in Vojvodina.

Ultimately, these elites, with the help of political rhetoric and an ancillary media presence, promote and mobilise the historical narrative of persistence and surveillance of Hungarians in Vojvodina. The story of a persistent, unique, and enduring identity and the project of ‘staying in the homeland’, supported by a story of preference, offers a tool for pre-election mobilisation, for sustaining a project that legitimises the VMSZ’s political efficacy. While reflecting on the impact of these elite, top-down narratives on the everyday life of the local Hungarians may be less considerable. The VMSZ’s identity adoption and cultivation strategies of a Vojvodina Hungarian are central to its political survival and its role as a critical link or broker between the local community, the Serbian state and increasingly the Hungarian kin-state.

Top-down political strategies are the mechanisms which actively influence the Vojvodina Hungarian identity, although bottom-up and grassroots methods are also helpful and considerable. This is particularly clear from the community, including examples from outside Vojvodina. A prominent example is Budapest’s “Vojvodina friendship association” (Vajdasagi barati egyesult). Some of the individuals who are members of this organisation emigrated from Vojvodina to Hungary one or two generations ago, and they do not even have any ties to Vojvodina now. Regardless, they are committed to keeping their identity and have an innate desire to “belong to this group and keep Vojvodina identity somehow,” as expressed by an academic (participant BP-02).

This shows that the regional identity is not just a construct handed down by political elites but has a true resonance at the individual and collective level. The association engages in “cultural and networking events” affirms shared Vojvodina Hungarian customs and creates a collective identity based on lived experiences and social relationships. They also provide concrete forms of support to Vojvodina, as they “gather funds for schools or cultural organisations” (SZMSZ, 2025). This demonstrates a commitment to Vojvodina Hungarian cultural continuity, even at a distance, and is an active form of repatriation. These types of organisations’ development and ongoing activities suggest that the Vojvodina identity continues to be “reactivated” and sustained in voluntary, self-initiated actions that show bottom-up, and sometimes complementary, top-down political narratives. The contrast between available grassroots actions and top-down political narratives illustrates a robust regional identity rooted in collective memory, cultural practice, and collective

action that is separate from but may still influence political developments overseeing or restricting political engagement.

### **On the Motherland Hungarians**

On the other hand, there is a perception among some Hungarians in Vojvodina that Hungarians in mainland Hungary misunderstand or even deny their identity. It affects their sense of belonging and creates a feeling of distinctiveness from their “motherland” Hungary. Many of these young Hungarians express a common lament about mainland Hungarians exhibiting a general lack of awareness and knowledge about Hungarian communities existing historically outside Hungary’s current borders. This becomes evident when mainland Hungarians ask questions like “when did you move there?” or “how they learned Hungarian?” - while being born and raised in the Hungarian-speaking community. These types of interactions demonstrate a fundamental misperception regarding the history and contemporary existence of the Hungarian communities.

*There is a little grey cloud in front of many Hungarians. They have no idea how we are Hungarians. “When did you move there?” or “Did you move to Serbia?” questions are always annoying. I think it is the Hungarian education system; they do not educate well about it.” (participant BP-01)*

This lack of knowledge generally manifests as mislabelling and denying their Hungarian identity. Frequently, interviewees report that mainland Hungarians simply refer to anyone from another country as that ethnicity (“Serb”, “Slovak” or “Romanian”). This reduction to ethnicity is often distressing because it denies their “Hungarian-ness” and shows little recognition of the huge Hungarian population residing in Vojvodina, Serbia.

The Vojvodina Hungarians’ feeling of distinctness from Hungary mainly comes from feeling partially accepted as Hungarian. Though they speak Hungarian and share a cultural history, many feel their Hungarian identity is questioned or devalued. They describe instances where they are accepted as Hungarian speakers, but people still identify their overall identity based on their Serbian nationality, labelling them as “a Serb who speaks Hungarian.” Acceptance conditional on their Serbian nationality can cut especially deep, leaving an impression that the motherland is not able to see them as “real Hungarians”.

*Before coming to Hungary, I expected to feel accepted and be considered a Hungarian. But still not. Maybe some people give you props, like, “You are a Hungarian from Serbia”. But many of them just refer to me as, “He is the sort of guy who knows Hungarian, because there is a minority, he is a Serbian.” (participant BP-04)*

In addition, political arguments and debates over voting rights for Hungarians abroad increase this sense of alienation (Körtvélyesi, 2020). That they are “not paying taxes here and do not know the Hungarian situation” reinforces the idea that just because they have a nominal Hungarian identity, their political participation is illegitimate. It serves to deepen Vojvodina Hungarians’ sense that they are outsiders-as a group viewed differently than Hungarian mainlanders, with whom they are trying to connect to their homeland.

*People know a lot about people from Vojvodina or Carpathia, but they cannot accept that we can vote here in Hungary. And that is a political thing that the Orbán regime allowed people outside the country to vote, which they cannot accept. I agree with that because they did not pay taxes here. What do they know about the Hungarian situation when they did not live here? (participant BP-07)*

However, it should be noted that the above conclusions come from interviews of young Vojvodina Hungarians, often newcomers to Hungary and their experiences. Most research participants reported living in Hungary for less than five years. They expressed feelings of being outsiders, and perhaps confusion over being newcomers, pointing to their sense of belonging to an expected ‘home’ culture. Then, expert BP-08 indicate that a sense of ‘otherness’ decreases the longer the residence, and as integration progresses, ethnic origin or homeland identities fade as a larger Hungarian identity emerges. The experiences highlighted, particularly for young people occupying typically the first similar stage of adaptation, suggest a close connection between the perspectives of mainland Hungarians and the identity construction of the Vojvodina Hungarians.

## **Emigration**

The Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia, is undergoing a deepening and accelerating demographic decline, rooted primarily in emigration. This trend is complex, shaped by various intertwined socio-economic factors, historical concerns, and the desire for better prospects. The impact of this emigration is monumental, a significant blow to the community’s actual number, institutional framework, identity and belonging.

Economic factors are overwhelmingly the primary reason for emigration. A participant BP-08 states, “around 50,000 Serbians are going out every year to hopefully better living conditions, especially to western Europe ... mostly Austria and Germany.” This is not just limited to the Hungarian minority but includes all Serbians. Participants BP-03 and SE-01 remarked on the “very, very bad” salaries in Serbia compared to Hungary, where “they get higher salaries there, and it is better to live there.” Participant SE-06 said Vojvodina has an unbearable “lack of economic stability and prosperity” which does not allow people to return even after studying

abroad. This wage disparity is so significant that even if it were only 25% higher than neighbouring countries, it is enough to make people leave.

The introduction of dual citizenship has drastically contributed to accelerating emigration, as a Vojvodina official states, “since the law of getting dual citizenship... 27% of the community has evaporated, so to speak,” from the 2001 census to the 2011 census. Dual nationality offers Hungary’s passports, allowing them the right to work and live in the EU. However, during the interview, an expert BP-06 observes that “mostly the intellectuals” applied for citizenship with the idea to “move to Hungary”, as blue-collar workers “with Hungarian documents usually move further to Austria and Germany or other EU countries.”

*I want to stay here in Budapest because I love the city and living here. I do not want to move from here, at least not in the next ten years. Many people move to other countries from Vojvodina. Students come to Hungary, and others go to Germany or Austria for work. I do not know how it will be in 50 years, but I think it will be the same. (participant BP-03)*

The emigration is heavily weighted in favour of the intellectual and skilled parts of the community. Participant BP-08 informs us that if “the intellectuals leave the country,” the “minority would still need intellectuals” to maintain their institutions. An academic (participant BP-02) explained the personal strain of “leaving Vojvodina for my career,” adding that the loss of scholars and experts represents a “big loss of the Vojvodina Hungarian community.” This brain drain removes significant human capital necessary to maintain and develop community institutions and compounds the minority’s challenges.

The mass emigration of Vojvodina Hungarians has many significant impacts on the identity of the community and threatens its future and distinct cultural identity. The immediate and concrete evidence is clear and still cannot be comprehensively understood: the rapid decline of population. Besides massive emigration, as official (participant SE-07) marks, with “typically a birth rate of around 1.35 children per woman, which simply will not sustain a population of Hungarian minorities.” The reduction in people directly threatens the institutional network that has preserved Hungarian identity in Vojvodina, schools, media and cultural organisations. Significantly, the declining population raises the question, “Why would these institutions be needed if there is no one to consume? as an expert highlight (participant BP-06). Then, the result would be a lack of personnel and funding because of this lack of people, and the future of the Hungarian language education and cultural programmatic consultancy would be under threat if emigration continues in this trend.

The constant outflow of young people is for better opportunities, as most participants mentioned, “Many students go to Hungary and never return. This would lead to the loss of the Hungarian identity and the generational flow of the language. A participant, BP-07, notes that many of the 15–20-year-olds they have worked with are now taking on or thinking in a Serbian identity. Therefore, they are more susceptible to assimilating culturally and linguistically without an active and engaged community. The participant BP-07 is a strong warning and an existential threat for the community, because maybe in “five or ten years, we will collapse or disappear in this way, even people who identify themselves as Hungarian but do not speak the language, do not feel that way”.

Therefore, the demographic crisis further decimated the possibility of a future existence for the Vojvodina Hungarian identity. An expert (participant BP-08) declares, “In the long run, if nothing changes, then there will not be a meaningful engagement with the Vojvodina Hungarian identity, if there are no Hungarians”. The coalescing threats of continued immigration for economic reasons and historical hostility, coupled with the domestic issues of being below replacement birth rate, and the likely consequences of assimilation, all provide an overwhelming challenge that participant BP-06 believes “has no real answers.”

To conclude, the emigration of Vojvodina Hungarians is a complex socio-demographic phenomenon grounded in economic inequity, driven by dual citizenship allowances of the kin-state, and intertwined with historic anxieties. The effects will shape populations, but will have a much larger influence, affecting institutional constructs, language, and cultural specificity of a Hungarian minority in Vojvodina. This anxiety raises serious concerns as to the viability of the community in the long term.

## **4.2. Kin-state education support to Hungarians in Vojvodina**

### **4.2.1. Reality of kin-state education supports**

Education is foundational to identity maintenance and formation, especially for minority populations, which is what this section will examine. To understand the nature and impact of kin-state supports for education, it is first necessary to thoroughly understand the Vojvodina Hungarians' educational context and reality. Thus, this part relies upon empirical studies of the educational situation and educational realities of Vojvodina. Thus, an understanding of the educational situation allows a developed analysis of how the kin-state supports and shapes and seeks to influence the educational landscape of Hungarians in Vojvodina.

The MNT importantly represents and advocates for the educational interests of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. In its official observations on MNT's work, it aims to act against the historic detriment of the community, especially the severing of Hungarian language classes in the 1990s. Whether establishing small class-size regulations or introducing or expanding scholarship programs, MNT's work is framed as a vital element to maintaining Hungarian identity in the contemporary socio-political environment (MNT, 2016). The systemic obstacles to education and the pervasive demographic decline continue to shape the educational context and, therefore, the future of the Vojvodina Hungarian identity.

MNT's Supportive Framework and its Rationale educational policies rest on a proactive support framework, and it involves a conscious shift from the obstacles of the 1990s when many Hungarian-language classes ceased to exist, leaving many to "either finish their education in Serbian or emigrate" (participant SE-07). Today, MNT supports Hungarian-language education from kindergarten onward through higher education. One legislative advantage is the provisions that allow Hungarian-language classes to open with as few as five children, rather than fifteen, and are applicable at all levels, from pre-university onward. This allowance is valuable for retaining access to mother-tongue education, especially in geographically dispersed communities with declining student numbers.

The MNT's support includes material and infrastructural support, providing necessary equipment and resources, and co-founding 8 of the 22 officially recognised "schools of special importance". Furthermore, the MNT's role in approving and forming school curricula and determining where Hungarian-language classes can be opened. This type of holistic strategy highlights the agreement that, "the language of instruction is important. If a child starts learning in Serbian, they will still probably continue their studies in Serbian" according to participant SE-07. Thus, early intervention in a child's education is long-term, as demonstrated through programs like the Mézeskalács

magazine for children, and “schooling packages as a welcome gift” for first graders to achieve the best “linguistic environment”.

Surely, MNT has introduced a complex scholarship and support system to support higher education and keep students in the region. For example, a “MNT Basic Scholarship” (€110-150/month) students who have studied in Hungarian, specialised scholarships for “shortage professions” such as law, medicine, and economics, plus the intensive Serbian language courses made available to students enrolled in Serbian-language programs (MNT, 2024). Also, the “Europe Dormitory” project in Novi Sad, which is aimed mainly at Hungarians and offers language deferments, further highlights the efforts to create an environment for Hungarian higher education in Vojvodina. Noting reimbursement of costs for the recognition of foreign diplomas is aimed at lowering the barriers for those who study abroad and want to return.

### **Ongoing Problems**

Despite the important framework established by the MNT, there are still some significant problems, primarily related to wider socio-demographic trends and infrastructural constraints.

To begin with, it is the existence of the far-reaching support that demonstrates the demographic crisis that lies behind the long-term viability of the Hungarian community. Although the MNT official (participant SE-07) states that it wants to “encourage students to stay in their homeland” and “stop the demographic decline,” the reality is that for many of these students, emigration means that they have “disappeared,” even when they are receiving educational support. The situation is paradoxical; on the one hand, the MNT is providing vital support; on the other hand, the opportunity for the support to be effective is constantly being tested by the declining number of students moving through to receive educational support.

A second, or push-pull factor of Hungarian mainland universities stands in the way of MNT’s retention efforts. MNT advocates education closer to home because it also endorses the Hungarian higher education admission site [felvi.hu](http://felvi.hu), which “at times steers students away from their local institutions”. Hungarian universities actively recruit in Vojvodina with an intensity perceived to be more favourable, with the associated flexibility of varying majors and lower application and bureaucratic hurdles than those available in Serbian institutions. This creates a layer of competitive internal “competition in the Hungarian education market” on talent that draws funds and connections to Hungarian education, and rationale in this period of economic uncertainty, despite a local connection.

Then, diploma applicability and systemic differences between the Serbian and Hungarian educational paradigms are hurdles to students studying abroad and return opportunities. Specifically, although the Bologna process promoted a degree of harmonisation, in fact, cultural and governmental differences meant the hoped-for academic recognition became more difficult due to “institutional differences in both countries”. This means that “without naturalising a foreign degree, you cannot be a legal teacher or work in Serbia, becoming a lengthy and complicated process”.

Particularly in higher education, MNT adopted a new strategy in higher education in 2024 with its 66 ambitious goals. The plan will depend on many factors that are outside of their control (MNT, 2024). The plan’s stated aim of “strengthening the local Hungarian community” is laudable, but since there has been a continuing demographic decline and fear of what has yet to transpire, the “biggest challenge” will continue to be “real answers”, as the expert explained (participant BP-06). The emphasis on the “kindergarten and primary education” is well placed, given the need to acquire language for early identity. Although the MNT’s efforts are commendable and vigorous, the long-term effect of the underlying cause of emigration could threaten the “meaningful discussion about the Vojvodina Hungarian identity”, according to an official (participant SE-08).

#### **4.2.2. Hungarian language education in Vojvodina**

Despite demographic changes, Hungarian-language schooling in Vojvodina still has considerable strengths. Institutions still provide Hungarian classes even for 2 to 3 students, demonstrating a commitment to preserving the language (participant BP-04). In mixed schools, dedicated Hungarian classes enable students to develop their own Hungarian language and identity, while also integrating with the majority Serbian population, as informed by participant BP-03.

Although the MNT provides strong institutional support to schools in Vojvodina, there is a stark reality confronting Hungarian-language education in Vojvodina: declining enrolments and changing educational options are threatening the future of this form of education. The main issue is declining demographics. Local interviewees (participant BP-04, BP-06 and SE-06) report classes with only two students, compared to their memories of “large classes.” This is an astonishing decline, regardless of MNT policies for flexible class sizes; it suggests the school supply of Hungarian-language education in Vojvodina is exceeding demand, and at some point, maintaining supply will become too costly. This demographic issue also influences parents’ decisions. A significant number of parents with their children in Hungarian schools, in villages, are sending their kids to schools in Hungary, or moving to Serbian-language education, due to perceived better opportunities, or due to not having viable Hungarian options near home

(participant SE-01 and BP-04). This out-migration to Hungary is shrinking the student pool in the existing Hungarian schools in Vojvodina.

The mixed-language schools have Hungarian classes, but this potentially narrow range of exposure to the second language of Serbian can slowly shift towards linguistic dominance. In addition to the legacy of the wars of the 1990s, driving many Hungarian teachers away from the region and seeing many schools close, it is educationally challenging to be a Hungarian in Serbia today, as informed by participant SE-08. In the end, while I applaud the MNT's efforts in providing a supportive structure for Hungarian language education, overall, emigration and assimilation are creating an uncertain future for Hungarian identity in Vojvodina, notwithstanding how previously and still strategically committed institutions are focused on preserving a space for Hungarian educational existence.

### **School choice**

The choice of Hungarian-language education for Vojvodina Hungarian students is a complicated decision, nested within family identity, parental preferences, and distinctions of opportunity. While there is generally the possibility of education in Hungarian, where there are many Hungarians, this choice does not always follow a straightforward path.

Most importantly, the decision is about family identity and parental preference. According to participant BP-01, "it is basically what your parents want for you, how we identify ourselves, etc." For many, including participant BP-07, attending a Hungarian-language school was a "normal" life trajectory because "I was born in a Hungarian family, and raised in a Hungarian family." Still, what should seem like a clear direction can become complicated within mixed families, as participant BP-04 describes this as "the battle between your mom and your dad, because they are like half-and-half," which complicated the decision between Hungarian and Serbian language instruction. While starting in Hungarian, the family influence, a stepmother may have led to receiving instruction in Serbian in the case of participant BP-04. This illustrates the unstable nature of the choice of a Hungarian icon based on contextual family influences.

In addition to familial identification, utilitarianism and future possibilities are strong factors. The desire to study in an individual's "mother tongue" is a strong motivating factor, but other factors are likely to interfere. The participant SE-04 from the Hungarian-speaking village, whose family are Hungarian and does not speak any Serbian, explained that while he might have been able to find a form of Hungarian "further studies" in Vojvodina, he could "get the most in Hungary." This demonstrates that even for deeply rooted Hungarian speakers, the perceived quality of educational resources or other opportunities in Hungary was stronger than in Vojvodina. For some students,

such as participant SE-06, the decision to pursue a major in health care in Hungary was motivated by personal interest, and he lacked the necessary Serbian proficiency in specialised subjects. Because “most specialised subjects were taught in Serbian” during the wartime period of the 1990s. This example of utilitarian decision-making can safeguard many Hungarian speakers uncertain of their actual, competent ability in the Serbian language.

On the other hand, while the parents of children in Vojvodina may choose to promote Serbian-language educational opportunities, the father of participant BP-05’s case explains the philosophy of his father: “Wherever you live, you need to learn that language.” The parent clearly wishes the child to be integrated within wider Serbian society through a pragmatic view of education.

### **Difference**

For Hungarian minority families in Vojvodina, school choice is a highly complex decision-making process, often weighing the value of cultural preservation against perceived quality of education and potential prospects. The Serbian legal framework generally supports education in minority languages. However, practical differences due to much larger schools for Serbian-learning students versus Hungarian-learning students make the choice concerning school less consequential in decision-making of families. The ‘difference’ is the difference in the level of education, primarily focused on resourcing and class sizes (curriculum content essentially converges). The example given by one interviewee is illustrative of this point:

*“We are getting taught the same thing, same thing in history, same thing in math, same thing in English.” However, Hungarian-language provision is frequently limited materially, even to a stage where the opportunity for learning is divergent altogether: “Hungarians have way fewer books than Serbians... there are no books for us in first and second grade for geography.” (participant BP-01)*

There is a limited provision of updated materials that identify the broader differences that could potentially influence the breadth of learning experience. On the other hand, qualitative dimensions of teaching may favour Hungarian language education partly because of the smaller class sizes. As participant BP-04 points out, “the Hungarian language classes... had a much better quality of education than the Serbian ones. Because we had books, we learned so much in class, and the teachers/professors could pay attention to us.” This indicates that a smaller learning environment in the Hungarian schools might facilitate passenger attention, resulting in a more effective teaching-learning process, even with fewer available resources. To sum up, the option of an

instruction language choice for Hungarian minority families seems to be a process of weighing and balancing these opposing dimensions of resources versus cultural and individual instruction.

To follow up on the textbook discussion, the issues of less available and outdated textbooks were major impediments to Hungarian-language education in Vojvodina. It represented a significant gap with Serbian-language education in materials, underlying structures, regulation, and funding. Serbian regulations stipulate that Hungarian schools must use locally produced Hungarian textbooks, usually outdated and limited. As participant BP-01 states, “You cannot use Hungarian books from Hungary.” This means teachers are then managing their materials, as participant BP-04’s interview reflects: “a lot of the classes did not have proper books.” Meanwhile, the Serbian-language education sector reportedly uses “new books,” representing a dramatic contrast. Economics is the other factor, as it is simply too unprofitable to run small-run productions of Hungarian textbooks for the Vojvodina population’s small number of learners, according to a Hungarian school official (participant SE-08). This economic aspect returns them to unofficial resources. There are available high-quality Hungarian textbooks produced in Hungary; however, these can only be “supplemental materials” because they do not meet the Serbian laws required for curriculum understanding, according to participant SE-08. These factors mean that while students from Hungarian-language schools have similar curricula, they often learn using fragmented or incomplete materials, which considerably impacts their educational experience.

### **Serbian language**

Understanding the compulsory nature of Serbian language knowledge in the context of Hungarian minority education in Vojvodina presents a complicated relationship that has widely altered in practical terms and implications for student futures. Learning the Serbian language and literature is mandatory from elementary school to high school. Also, a person’s daily life depends mainly on the demographics of where that person lives; in a community such as Zenta, predominantly populated by Hungarians, the Serbian language is not a very integral part of daily life; in mixed cities like Subotica, it plays an important part in daily life.

Most importantly, Serbian language knowledge directly affects students’ choices for further education and profession. For example, many Hungarian students decide to study in Hungary, partly because they feel their Serbian language proficiency is inadequate for university studies in Serbia. As participant SE-01’s decision to study dentistry at the University of Szeged in Hungary, rather than in Serbia, was directly influenced by her self-assessment: “I do not think my Serbian is good enough for me to keep studying in Serbian here in Serbia.” This bodes poorly for the future of students in Serbia, leading to a possible “brain drain.” On the other hand, some students go to

Serbian universities but report the steepness of a linguistic barrier to their education. The case of participant BP-05 expresses a view on this experience: These students are “basically forced into learning Serbian” under intense pressure, indicating that while they may enrol, their foundational language skills are often insufficient, leading to a demanding linguistic barrier in their studies.

Beyond the education trajectory, the extent to which young Hungarians have learned the Serbian language has larger consequences for the future of this community. As a scholar (participant BP-08) warns, consistent migration of young Hungarians who do not speak the Serbian language will threaten their minority status in Vojvodina in the long term. The obligatory Serbian language education is necessary for integration into society and the job market. Lack of the Serbian language leads to individuals leaving the country, which impacts the Hungarian community in Vojvodina.

#### **4.2.3. Studying in Hungary for higher education**

Besides school and further higher education institution choice within Serbia, there is always the option to study in Hungary, “motherland” for Hungarian minorities. There has been a trend of Hungarian youth from Vojvodina enrolling in Hungary for higher education studies. This results from a series of factors, including language, academia, economics, and socio-political factors, which combine to make Serbia less attractive or even viable for many. There are wider implications for not only personal careers but also for the future of the Hungarian minority in Serbia.

The most significant factor behind this decision is wanting to study in their native language. Participant BP-01 recognises the limitations: “I was pretty much limited to what I could choose in Serbia in Hungarian... so, political science is not available in Hungarian in Serbia.” This forces student searching for specific fields, or merely greater options in their language endeavour, to look to Hungary. The significant role of perceived limited Serbian language ability for strenuous academic endeavours is also significant. Participant SE-01 admits, “I do not think my Serbian is good enough for me to keep studying in Serbian here in Serbia,” which translates to the confidence for higher-level academic pursuits in Serbian. An expert in minority studies (participant BP-06) points to a long-standing debate amongst the Vojvodina Hungarian political elite regarding establishing higher education in Hungarian, but it was never realised. The only faculty that offers programs in Hungarian is the MTTK of the University of Novi Sad in Subotica, offering three professions: schoolteacher, kindergarten teacher and communication, as informed by an official (participant SE-06).

Aside from language, multiple respondents highlighted the perception of a better academic system and environment in Hungary. A participant BP-07 said, “I think that the level of education in

Hungary is better.” Experts in minority studies (participant BP-07) also expressed “problems within the universities with the diplomas” in Serbia he experienced during high school (around 2014), and noted these as reasons he chose Budapest; neither he nor his parents wanted to do “this fight” of naturalisation. Likewise, a participant BP-01 noted that more generous scholarships and “bigger opportunities” for students, including part-time jobs, further advance Hungary as a destination.

A major consideration for respondents is the international recognition of their degrees, which will directly affect their future career mobility. According to participant SE-01, a Szeged degree is “universal” and is recognised in any European country, while the Serbian degree is not accepted everywhere, only in Serbia.” Serbia’s non-EU status shapes this perception, and an EU-legitimised degree from Hungary will always be more valuable for international employment, which is reflected in a university’s potential occupational outcomes. Lendák-Kabók’s (2015) data, collected in a survey of Vojvodina Hungarian students in 2015, shows that most high school graduates from Vojvodina Hungarian students wished to obtain a degree in either Hungary or other EU countries for obtaining an “EU recognised diploma,” which demonstrates evidence.

At the base of these practical aspects are deeper socio-political issues and identity matters. A respondent SE-05 points to the historical periods, where it was politically limited to study in Hungary for Hungarians, but recently, the study mobility has changed. This flow of students studying in Hungary is becoming large since Hungary is accepting and welcoming students with its state support. An expert in minority studies (participant BP-08) notes that it is a personal preference; there are also things regarding a tenor in Hungary’s messaging: “You can come to Hungary and study, and you can stay here, you have a passport.” Even though it does not suggest emigration, it does speak to the “cultural preservation of identity” in a complex contradiction of emotional motives for higher education in Hungary. Certainly, students benefit academically and professionally, but there are dynamic consequences related to potential brain drain and demographic shifts within the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina for the longer term.

To conclude, Hungarian youth from Vojvodina’s decision to pursue their higher education in Hungary is the rational choice to make based on limited Hungarian language higher education opportunities in Serbia, perceptions of better educational quality and more systemic advantages in Hungary, and an EU-recognised diploma for potential international career mobility. The other factors influenced by identity issues and the historical failure to create a full Hungarian language university in Serbia push students across the border. It simultaneously shapes future students’ private lives and the public sociocultural formation of Hungarian minority society in Vojvodina.

#### 4.2.4. Kin-state education activities in Vojvodina

Hungary's kin-state policy regarding ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina is complicated and arises from historic responsibility, cultural preservation and pragmatic grounds. It can materialise in various forms, but primarily, and to varying degrees, respondents realised and experienced kin-state support through educational and cultural programs.

A key function of kin-state support, especially in education, is direct financial support. Hungary provides financial assistance through scholarships and student grants, for example, the "Szülőföldön Magyarul" (Hungarian in the Homeland), which provides financial assistance to students in Serbia attending a Hungarian-language school (participant BP-06 said "about 100,000 forints"). Hungarian students studying in Hungarian language programs in Serbian higher education also receive annual financial support (participant BP-07 marks "about 100 euros in a year"). For students studying in Hungary, there are various scholarships with monthly support (participant BP-03 reported "10,000 forints a month"), which are often considered more symbolic but still valuable. Most notably, for respondents, there was the large communal dormitory in Budapest for Hungarians abroad, which helped to lower the costs of living in the country, making their proximity to education in a Hungarian university more affordable.

Besides financial support, kin-state backing encourages cultural and educational initiatives. A respondent BP-01 tells, "Without Borders" (Határtalanul) program designed to connect Hungarian high school students, whose schools have partnerships with schools in Vojvodina and vice versa, through reciprocal visits, cultural exchange, and joint activities, and is "a bit like Erasmus, but for sister schools." According to State Secretary for National Policy, out of 1,510 valid applications for the program, 997 were funded. 72% of the trips were organised in Transylvania (Romania), 14% in Slovakia, 6% in Prekmurje, Slovenia, 5% in Vojvodina (Serbia) and 3% in Croatia (Hungary Today, 2023). Participants SE-02 and BP-03 explain that there are a lot of trips to Hungary and other Carpathian countries and "visits from sister schools", as day or week-long camps, creating connections with and belonging to a bigger Hungarian community. These opportunities sometimes arise through organisations such as the Rákóczi Szövetség, which is a larger support network for Hungarian students throughout the Carpathian Basin.

In addition, kin-state policy promotes competitions and events encouraging Hungarian language and culture. Respondents provide examples of being active in the language competitions in Hungarian (participant SE-01) and of attending specific events, like "Kanizsai Szólás Móviusz" and High School Art Contest (Középiskolások Művészeti Vetélkedője, KMV), (participant SE-02). However, nuances exist in respondents' views on the efficacy and motivations for kin-state

support. A participant BP-04 recognises the value of the financial assistance and cultural programming. However, he identifies deeper motivations for funding: “They are funding it because they want us to stay in the original territory where we live.” He recalls a scholarship system designed to disincentivise leaving, by providing good support for studying in Hungarian in Serbia. However, the desire “to stay in the territory where we live” is misguided, as participant BP-04 remarks and finds that the strategy is “failing”, as “many of the Hungarians are moving out”.

In summary, kin-state education support for Hungarians in Vojvodina through large scholarship programs, subsidised accommodation, active cultural and educational exchange programs, and special competitions is critical for sustaining identity and educational practices. While viewed as applicable for many and engaged with, its aim of keeping Hungarian youth in Serbia is met with serious hindrances posed by perceived limits on Serbian higher education and the appeal of opportunities in Hungary, which is creating a complicated and often contradictory result.

#### **4.3. Education impact on identity**

Education, particularly the Hungarian-language education system in Vojvodina, has a particular significance for youth as they live as “Vojvodina Hungarians” with shifting degrees of Hungarian national belonging in contrast to their social embeddedness in Serbia. Indeed, education and communities that support those connections, which are supported by the kin-state, support the formation of identity, wherein Vojvodina Hungarians have a unique identity separate from Hungarians in Hungary and Serbs.

For many people, being a part of Hungarian schools from elementary to high school gives them a solid sense of belonging to being Hungarian. One respondent (BP-01) stated that her schooling reinforced her national identity as Hungarian, but from Vojvodina. This schooling did not simply stop at the academic; it also teaches how to behave and act. Because students learn behavioural norms and values that are cultural from teachers and the school environment. Education in Hungarian is an important vehicle for cultural and linguistic preservation, and such education is integral to identity formation. As a minority policy official (participant SE-07) articulated, “It is essential for children to be educated in their mother tongue.”

Nevertheless, students’ transition to university and living in Hungary (or even in other countries) usually produces a new self-realisation that they are not Hungarian from Hungary and not Serbs. That is a clear sentiment for participant BP-01: “I would say it would strengthen my national identity as being Hungarian, but from Vojvodina, because I would not identify myself as just Hungarian. As one of my identities, I hold the Hungarian identity in high regard. I am Hungarian

from Vojvodina, and I am holding onto that.” Her ongoing pride in identifying as a Vojvodina speaker, even while learning in Hungary, further reinforces this distinct regional pride. Their slightly different “self” is also made sharper by abroad experiences. Keeping these experiences in mind often gives students a different and more grateful perspective of their unique Vojvodina Hungarian community.

Students’ development of their identity goes beyond formal schooling and education. Kin-state initiatives encourage the developmental components of this “Hungarian” education. For example, whether it be programs in a Mathias Corvinus Collegium branch talent development for high school students, or other academics in a larger local context like Vojvodina Hungarian Scientific Conference (VMTDK) or Hungarian conferences (OTDK) that encourage opportunities for other educational and intellectual activities within the broader Hungarian context. As participant SE-05 highlights, such initiatives allow significant contributions to thought to promote a distinct aspect of identity.

While this educational process provides a strong pathway to develop identity for the individuals who access Hungarian schooling, the impact is less specific for people from mixed families, where identity can be fluid. School may not be a primary determinant. For them, identity construction is often a combination of Hungarian-Serbian influences, and part of the entire educational system, but not limited to any one educational path.

In sum, Hungarian education in Vojvodina is an excellent way to build an identity. It builds a strong sense of belonging to being Hungarian, while also constructing a unique Vojvodina Hungarian identity that has a literal place in Serbia. The process involves the type of quality of education in the mother tongue, supportive teachers, participation in ongoing cultural activities, and the inherent negotiation with the Serbian language and social surroundings; and this will produce a person proud to be Hungarian, but a person, in their uniqueness, from Vojvodina.

### **Kin-state support strengthened Hungarianness**

Hungarian kin-state educational support to Hungarians has undeniably solidified the identity of Hungarian minorities in Vojvodina, simultaneously promoting a strong sense of “Hungarianness” while fostering a Vojvodina Hungarian identity. The kin-state educational support system, including financial support, cultural support programming, and institutional collaboration, has provided numerous methods for cultural preservation, reinforcement, and maintaining identity.

A main aspect of kin-state support in reinforcing Hungarian identity has reinforced national pride and a sense of distinctiveness. An expert on minority studies (participant BP-02) observes that kin-

state support “is boosting the pride of Vojvodina Hungarians and the feeling of being different. This cannot be underestimated in a minority context, where consistent support from the kin-state reinforces their cultural memory in the context of the majority society. Although he connects to the Serbian culture, respondent BP-07 eloquently expresses, “at the end of the day, I will always be a Hungarian, so no matter what, I cannot be a Serbian. So, my Hungarian inside is stronger.” This feeling of belonging is not entirely from kin-state support, but certainly enhanced through the kin-state support, as respondents express.

This process of identity strengthening is also directly supported through processes of direct assistance. According to an official (participant SE-07), the State Secretariat for National Policy, etc, Hungarian institutions are the “main pillars providing 95% of the assistance to the operations and programs of the MNT,” which is a significant investment and more than just a part of investment. This investment supports the operations of Hungarian-language educational institutions and cultural activities in Vojvodina. Secondly, both joint invitations and joint initiatives in all “levels of educational and cultural programming” mean that Hungarian identity is intentionally reinforced consistently and collectively.

*It is the primary source for us. I mean, mostly the culture, and so it is urgent for living. It is like a ventilator (breathing machine). Because the Serbian country does not care about these minority things that much. All these institutions cost a lot. So, because they have much influence here, and they [Hungary]gave us the money.  
(participant SE-05)*

In addition to the previous items, all experiential programs and events involve hands-on interaction with Hungarian culture and community. Respondent SE-02 said that trip support from the kin-state is “really just trying to ease us into more of the Hungarian culture,” even if it is not traditional. The “Without Borders” program, and Rákóczi camps, for example, claimed to be “largely reliant on support from the mother country (Hungary)” and the Hungarian cultural area explicitly being created together, for example, at “Hungarian national holidays” as participant SE-04 mentioned. What is created for these young Hungarians through these activities is an active network of connections (participant SE-05) and the opportunity to participate fully in the Hungarian cultural experiences.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Discussion

This thesis examined how educational instruments of Hungarian kin-state policy affect the self-identity of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. The findings showed that while the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina shows low identification with the Serbian majority and the kin-state of Hungary, they have a high propensity to identify as ‘Vojvodinian’ or ‘Vojvodinian Hungarian’. The participants perceived the educational support from Hungary, whether through scholarships, funding local Hungarian-language schools, or studying in Hungary, as valuable and practical mechanisms to get ahead. However, concerning self-identity, the educational support did not directly reinforce a singular Hungarian identity, which is what Hungarian kin-state policy aims for. Instead, the encounter sometimes strengthened a distinct ‘Vojvodinian Hungarian’ sense. A ‘Vojvodinian’ identity is influenced by a perceived ‘Vojvodinian mentality’, which means Vojvodinians tend to be more open and more flexible and adapt to changes, and have a much more resourceful ‘mentality’ than Hungarians from Hungary and Serbs, besides its historical trajectory of diversity.

The research gives the following intricate answers to the following research questions posited by the thesis:

Sub-question 1: “What specific educational instruments are being employed in Hungary’s kin-state policy towards the Hungarian minority of Serbia?”

The research has identified the specific educational instruments and their implementing organisations, such as the MNT Basic Scholarship or the Europe Dormitory. It was primarily documented after Hungary’s revised kin-state policy from 2010, driven ideologically by ‘cross-border national unity’.

Sub-question 2: “How do members of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia, perceive the effects of these education policies on their identity?”

The results display a mixed bag of perceptions. Some participants utilise the support for practical reasons, such as to access areas of expertise or study absent from Serbian-language education. However, their experience tends to reinforce their ‘Vojvodinian Hungarian’ identity rather than a single Hungarian one. Essentially, this shows that the community actively interprets how the policy impacts their self-identification and does not passively embody a singular national story or narrative.

Sub-question 3: “To what extent do these educational instruments foster or challenge, the national identity of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia?”

The educational instruments embody and therefore both foster and challenge expressions of national identity. They primarily foster Hungarian identity by providing Hungarian language study options and enhancing cultural connections. However, they challenge the singular 'Hungarian' identity by demanding that individuals authenticate their 'Vojvodinian' identity, perhaps of greater significance when the individual arrives in Hungary for the purposes of study. The policies also indirectly support "brain drain" by allowing emigration, which poses a serious long-term threat to the community's survival and, of course, to identity the policies hope to protect.

Theoretically, this thesis contributes to existing literary approaches to nationalism and identity, reinforcing constructivist approaches that identity is fluid and negotiated. Despite the kin-state's intentions, the persistence of a strong "Vojvodinian Hungarian" hybrid identity demonstrates that it is not as simple as a top-down model of nationalism. Instead, it supports a more constructivist perspective; identity is shaped not only by the kin-state's policies, but also by the host state's context, the local context and the myriad factors and complexities involved in being a member of a national minority. Using the relational terms "host state" and "national minority" in this study also has theoretical implications, breaking from the traditional nationalising state idea that presupposes conflict. The study also revealed the significance of local dialects and cultural practices underpinned by the language of the Serbian majority or "Vojvodinian mentality", reaffirming that identity is shaped by "banal nationalism" and "everyday nationalism."

The empirical puzzle of why a strong regional identity persists, despite the objective of the kin-state policy, is answered by the findings of this thesis. The explanation concerns Serbia's unique context. Serbia (unlike other CEE neighbours of Hungary) has a "permissive legal context for minority rights" and "stable and constructive bilateral relations with Hungary". The unique details of these relations allow a distinctive context for kin-state influence. About those details, Vojvodina has an established identity with significant historic roots, and the Hungarian minority can accept kin-state development policies pragmatically - e.g. to access better financial support for the promotion of Hungarian cultural identity, and in doing so, the minority does not need to abandon its local identity. Importantly, kin-state influences do not erase the "Vojvodinian" identity but merely become one of many influences in the continuing construction and negotiation of identity. On the other hand, Serbia is making conditions for the national minority relatively good on paper, but not in reality. Now, as Serbia is catering less to minority rights, Hungary is stepping up as a kin-state for the responsibility of caring for minorities.

It should be noted that this study, as a single case study, has limitations in terms of generalisation. Future research could develop a comparative study of Hungarian minorities within other host

states, such as Romania, Slovakia or Ukraine, to determine whether similar identity dynamics exist, related to kin-state educational support. A longitudinal study could also monitor the long-term impacts of ongoing “brain drain” and change of tradition in the demographic decline of the Hungarian minority community in Vojvodina. In addition, this study could provide a more in-depth examination of the sustainability of their identity and cultural institutions. Additionally, because of the limited nature of the master’s thesis, it did not examine the Serbian perspective/side of the Hungarian kin-state educational support and the identity of the Hungarians in Vojvodina. It only focused on the Hungarian minorities’ perspective. Therefore, expanding a host state’s perspective of Hungarian kin-state policy would be interesting and holistic.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis was motivated by an empirical puzzle: the gap between Hungary’s kin-state policies, which promote a consolidated national identity, and the more complex self-identification of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina. The main research question guiding this thesis is: How do the educational instruments of Hungarian kin-state policies affect the self-identification of the Hungarian minority of Vojvodina, Serbia?

The research has shown that while Hungary’s educational instruments, such as scholarships, institutional support, and opportunities to study in Hungary, are actively engaged with and highly regarded by the community, the impact on self-identity is not direct or straightforward. The findings show that the community does not merely adopt a singular “Hungarian” identity as designed by the kin-state’s policies. Instead, the community’s self-identification is a complex and negotiated outcome, interpreted through the lenses of shifting local contexts and individual agency.

Vojvodina participants do not passively receive the message and then accept it. Rather, they interpret the message and all the messages preceding it about their sense of self, regarding the Hungarian kin-state support. As one student stated of the support from Hungary, “*it is an open door for many, quality education, but does not make us forget who we are here*”. This pragmatic stance underscores how the community relates to the kin-state. The educational resources provided by Hungary are valuable educational opportunities, not a political prerogative of the kin-state, to reflect their identity. This contrasts with the frequency with which Vojvodinians refer to their “Vojvodinian mentality,” referring to their openness and resourcefulness. One participant articulated, “*We are Hungarians, yes, but we are Vojvodinian too. We think and act differently than people in Budapest.*” This illustrates that kin-state activities provide resources. However, they also serve as a reflection, which provokes individuals to think and articulate their unique identity.

In conclusion, this study's main contribution is its use of empirical evidence to resolve the outstanding puzzle. The fact that identity persists is not an indication of failure of the policy but simply a recognition of the complexity and mediated nature of the outcomes. Serbia's broader legal and social context, which was unique and accommodating, offered a space where Hungarians could comfortably benefit from Hungary's kin-state policy. It enabled them to receive support without choosing between transferring their loyalty or asserting a local identity. The study claims, as is probably clear, that kin-state policies need not be understood as top-down profiled assimilation policies. However, the timings and political effects of kin-state practices are critically mediated by local contexts and the active agency of the minority group itself. This directly speaks to scholars and policymakers, making an important point that identity is a socially constructed and continuously negotiated outcome, and understanding kin-state relations requires knowledge beyond a simplistic cause-and-effect model.

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Appendix 1: Table of participants

Code	Interviewee	Hometown	Region	Residence	Interviewed date
BP-01	University student	Subotica (Szabadka)	North Bačka	Budapest	March 17 2025
BP-02	Professor/expert	Novi Sad (Újvidék)	South Bačka	Budapest	March 30 2025
BP-03	University student	Senta (Zenta)	North Banat	Budapest	March 26 2025
BP-04	University student	Sombor (Zombor)	West Bačka	Budapest	April 9 2025
BP-05	Worker	Bačka Topola (Topolya)	North Bačka	Budapest	April 17 2025
BP-06	Professor/expert	Pančevo (Pancsova)	South Banat	Budapest	April 22 2025
BP-07	University student	Subotica (Szabadka)	North Bačka	Budapest	March 30 2025
BP-08	Professor/expert	Hungary (Magyarország)		Budapest	April 8 2025
SE-01	High school pupil	Horgoš (Horgos)	North Banat	Subotica	April 23 2025
SE-02	High school pupil	Subotica (Szabadka)	North Bačka	Subotica	April 23 2025
SE-03	High school pupil	Čantavir (Csantavér)	North Bačka	Subotica	April 23 2025
SE-04	High school pupil	Mali Idoš (Kishegyes)	North Bačka	Subotica	April 23 2025
SE-05	Teacher	Horgoš (Horgos)	North Banat	Subotica	April 25 2025
SE-06	Professor/teacher	Sombor (Zombor)	West Bačka	Subotica	April 25 2025
SE-07	Official	Senta (Zenta)	North Banat	Subotica	April 1 2025
SE-08	Official	Bačka Topola (Topolya)	North Bačka	Subotica	April 23 2025



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### Participant Information Sheet

Hello, thank you very much for voluntarily participating in my master's thesis research titled "Impact of educational instruments of Hungarian kin-state policy on the identity of the Hungarian minority in Serbia". I am Munkhtamir Damdinsuren, a master's student of Central & Eastern European, Russian and Eurasian Studies, at the University of Glasgow and Corvinus University of Budapest.

This research is part of my master's thesis, and it aims to examine the impact of educational instruments of Hungary's kin-state policies on the self-identity of the Hungarian minority in Vojvodina, Serbia. As part of this, I would like to discuss your opinion and experience on education and identity with you. The interview can last anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. Your participation in the study is entirely voluntary, and you can stop the interview at any time if you want. Also, you do not need to answer any questions you do not want to.

I would like to remind you that the College Research Ethics Committee has considered and approved this research project. The information you give will be used for my master's thesis research, and my master's thesis will be open to scholars and the public in digital form. However, your personal data collected during this research can be de-identified, and your given data can be released anonymously if you prefer.

If you have any further questions or comments related to this research, please contact me through email: [2676828d@student.gla.ac.uk](mailto:2676828d@student.gla.ac.uk) or my supervisors through email [David.Smith@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:David.Smith@glasgow.ac.uk) and [jozsef.duro@uni-corvinus.hu](mailto:jozsef.duro@uni-corvinus.hu).

Also, if you have any complaint about the conduct of the research: please contact the College of Social Sciences Lead for Ethical Review, email [socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk)

Thank you very much for your participation and cooperation in this research.

**Tájékoztató a felmérésben résztvevőknek**

Üdvözlöm, és nagyon köszönöm, hogy önkéntesen részt vesz mesterszakos dolgozatom kutatásában, amelynek címe: **“A magyar nemzetpolitika oktatási eszközeinek hatása a szerbiai magyar kisebbség identitására”**.

Nevem **Munkhtamir Damdinsuren**, a **Közép- és Kelet-Európa, Oroszország és Eurázsia tanulmányok** mesterszakos hallgatója vagyok a **Glasgowi Egyetemen (Egyesült Királyság)** és a **Budapesti Corvinus Egyetemen**.

Ez a kutatás a mesterdolgozatom része, és célja, hogy megvizsgálja, hogyan hatnak Magyarország nemzetpolitikai oktatási eszközei a vajdasági magyar kisebbség önazonosságára. Ennek keretében szeretnék Önnel beszélgetni az oktatással és identitással kapcsolatos véleményéről és tapasztalatairól. Az interjú körülbelül 30 perc és 1 óra közötti időtartamú lehet. A kutatásban való részvétel teljes mértékben önkéntes, bármikor megszakíthatja az interjút, ha úgy kívánja. Továbbá, nem köteles válaszolni olyan kérdésekre, amelyekre nem szeretne.

Szeretném tájékoztatni, hogy a kutatási projektet a **Kar Kutatásetikai Bizottsága** megvizsgálta és jóváhagyta. Az Ön által megadott információkat kizárólag a mesterdolgozatomhoz használom fel, amely nyilvánosan hozzáférhető lesz digitális formában tudományos és társadalmi célra. Ugyanakkor, az interjú során gyűjtött személyes adatai anonimizálhatók, és kérésére az adatokat névtelenül használom fel.

Amennyiben bármilyen további kérdése vagy észrevétele lenne a kutatással kapcsolatban, kérem, forduljon hozzám bizalommal az alábbi e-mail címen: **2676828d@student.gla.ac.uk**

vagy a témavezetőimhez: **David.Smith@glasgow.ac.uk** és **jozsef.duro@uni-corvinus.hu**

Ha panasszal kíván élni a kutatás lebonyolításával kapcsolatban, kérjük, lépjen kapcsolatba a Társadalomtudományi Kar Etikai Felülvizsgálatért Felelős Vezetőjével az alábbi e-mail címen: **socsci-ethics-lead@glasgow.ac.uk**

Nagyon köszönöm, hogy részt vesz a kutatásban, és hozzájárul munkám sikeréhez!



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### Consent Form

Title of Project: Impact of educational instruments of Hungarian kin-state policy on the identity of the Hungarian minority in Serbia

Researcher: Munkhtamir Damdinsuren, master's student at the University of Glasgow

Supervisors: Dr David Smith, professor at the University of Glasgow

Dr Dúró József, assistant professor at the Corvinus University of Budapest

I confirm that I have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

I acknowledge that participants will be referred to by a pseudonym based on the participant's preference. Therefore, all names and other material likely to identify individuals will be anonymised. However, all material will be destroyed once the project is complete.

I acknowledge that there will be no effect on my grades/employment arising from my participation or non-participation in this research.

I acknowledge the provision of a Privacy Notice in relation to this research project.

I consent/ do not consent to interviews being audio-recorded.

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Participant .....

Signature .....

Date .....

Name of Researcher .....

Signature .....

Date .....

**Hozzájárulási Nyilatkozat**

**A kutatás címe:** *A magyar nemzetpolitika oktatási eszközeinek hatása a szerbiai magyar kisebbség identitására*

**Kutató:** Munkhtamir Damdinsuren, mesterszakos hallgató, Glasgow-i Egyetemen és Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem

**Témavezetők:** Dr. David Smith, professzor, Glasgow-i Egyetemen (Egyesült Királyság)

Dr. Dúró József, egyetemi adjunktus, Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem

Ezúton igazolom, hogy elolvastam és megértettem a kutatás résztvevői tájékoztató lapját, és lehetőségem volt kérdéseket feltenni. Tudomásul veszem, hogy a kutatásban való részvételem önkéntes, és bármikor indoklás nélkül visszaléphetek a részvételtől.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy a résztvevőket álnéven említik, az egyéni preferenciák alapján. Minden olyan név és információ, amely alapján a résztvevő azonosítható lenne, anonimizálva lesz. A kutatás befejezését követően minden anyagot megsemmisítenek.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy a kutatásban való részvételemnek vagy nem részvételemnek semmilyen hatása nem lesz a tanulmányi eredményeimre vagy a munkaviszonyomra.

Tudomásul veszem, hogy a kutatási projekt kapcsán Adatvédelmi Tájékoztatót kaptam.

Hozzájárulok / Nem járulok hozzá az interjúk hangfelvételéhez. *(a megfelelő rész aláhúzendó)*

Hozzájárulok, hogy részt vegyek a fenti kutatásban.

A résztvevő neve: .....

Aláírás: .....

Dátum: .....

A kutató neve: .....

Aláírás: .....

Dátum: .....

## Appendix 4: Interview questions (English and Hungarian)

### Interview Questions

#### Educational experience:

1. How long have you been involved with the educational system, either as a student, parent, or educator?
2. What was the primary language of instruction at the school you attended?
3. What were the reasons you attended schools in the Hungarian/Serbian language?
4. Can you describe your experience with education instructed in Hungarian?
5. Did you study your native/Hungarian cultural or traditional things in school? What was it?
6. Are there particular aspects of Hungarian culture that you feel are emphasised or valued more through the educational programs?
7. How do you think the quality of education provided in Hungarian compared to that provided in Serbian language?
8. How do you think the quality of higher education provided in Hungary compares to that provided in Serbia/Vojvodina?
9. Do you think about further studies? If yes, where to study?

#### Hungary's Kin-State Policies:

10. What do you think about the Hungarian government's support for Hungarian minorities in Serbia?
11. How much/do you know about any educational programs and supports provided by Hungary to Hungarian minorities in Serbia?
12. Have you ever engaged with any kind of educational/cultural programs or support from Hungary? (or your family/friends)
13. Do you feel that the educational support from Hungary strengthens your Hungarian identity (or being Hungarian)? How?

#### Self-Identity:

14. What do you think about the local differences between Vojvodina and other areas in Serbia?
15. Do you feel closer to/associated with Hungarians in Hungary or local Serbians?
16. How do you feel about being part of a Hungarian-speaking community in Serbia?
17. How do you identify your ethnic nationality? (Hungarian, Serbian, or?)
18. Do you think the education you gained impacted your identity? (what you learnt from school, language, etc.)

19. How has your personal identity evolved over time, and what role has education played in this evolution?

20. How do you see the Hungarian community's future in Vojvodina regarding language and cultural preservation?

Additional questions from educational officials and experts:

21. How much benefits Hungarians in Vojvodina from Hungarian education support compared to other Hungarian communities in the Carpathian basin?

22. In what ways do you think the educational strategies from Hungary impact the language and culture preservation of the Hungarian community in Serbia?

23. Do you think these educational initiatives will long-term affect the status of the Hungarian minority in Serbia? How?

24. Can you discuss any challenges or criticisms regarding the current education situation in Vojvodina?

25. How do you see yourself/your role in the local Serbian and broader Hungarian communities?

## Interjúkérdések

### Oktatási tapasztalatok:

1. Mióta van kapcsolatban az oktatási rendszerrel – akár diákként, szülőként vagy pedagógusként?
2. Mi volt az oktatás elsődleges nyelve abban az iskolában, amelyet Ön látogatott?
3. Miért járt magyar/szerb nyelvű iskolába?
4. Hogyan írná le a magyar nyelvű oktatással kapcsolatos tapasztalatait?
5. Tanult-e az iskolában valamit a saját nemzeti/magyar kultúrájáról vagy hagyományairól?  
Ha igen, mit?
6. Vannak-e olyan elemei a magyar kultúrának, amelyeket az oktatási programok hangsúlyoznak vagy kiemelten értékelnek?
7. Hogyan látja a magyar nyelvű oktatás minőségét a szerb nyelvű oktatáshoz képest?
8. Hogyan látja a magyarországi oktatás minőségét a szerbiai/vajdasági oktatáshoz viszonyítva?
9. Gondolkodik további tanulmányokon? Ha igen, hol szeretne továbbtanulni?

### Magyarország nemzetpolitikai támogatásai:

10. Mit gondol a magyar kormány bármilyen jellegű támogatásáról a szerbiai magyar kisebbség számára?
11. Ismer oktatási programokat vagy támogatásokat, amelyeket Magyarország nyújt a szerbiai magyar kisebbség számára?
12. Részt vett már Ön (vagy családtagja/barátja) bármilyen magyarországi oktatási vagy kulturális programban, illetve támogatásban?
13. Úgy érzi, hogy a magyarországi oktatási támogatások erősítik az Ön magyar identitását?  
Hogyan?

### Önazonosság:

14. Mit gondol a vajdasági és más szerbiai területek közötti helyi különbségekről?
15. Közelebb érzi magát a magyarországi magyarokhoz vagy a helyi szerbekhez?
16. Milyen érzés egy magyar nyelvű közösség tagjának lenni Szerbiában?
17. Hogyan határozza meg nemzetiségét? (magyar, szerb, más?)
18. Úgy gondolja, hogy az iskolai oktatás (pl. nyelv, tananyag) hatással volt az Ön identitására?
19. Hogyan alakult személyes identitása az idők során, és milyen szerepet játszott ebben az oktatás?
20. Hogyan látja a vajdasági magyar közösség jövőjét a nyelv és kultúra megőrzése szempontjából?

Kiegészítő kérdések oktatási szakértőknek és hivatalos személyeknek:

21. Milyen mértékben részesülnek a vajdasági magyarok az oktatási támogatásokból más Kárpát-medencei magyar közösségekhez képest?
22. Milyen módon befolyásolják a magyarországi oktatási stratégiák a szerbiai magyar közösség nyelvének és kultúrájának megőrzését?
23. Úgy gondolja, hogy ezek az oktatási kezdeményezések hosszú távon hatással vannak a magyar kisebbség helyzetére Szerbiában? Hogyan?
24. Tudna beszélni a vajdasági oktatási helyzettel kapcsolatos kihívásokról vagy kritikákról?
25. Hogyan látja saját szerepét a helyi szerb közösségben és a tágabb magyar közösség