Ethnic symbiosis—*spolužitie* on the way to a democratic state: Perspectives regarding "ethnic conflict" by Hungarian minority elites in southern Slovakia[1]

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1. Introduction

The Slovak Republic is home to a Hungarian minority group which composes 8.48% of the country's population,[2] and is regarded as a significant ethnic minority group in Slovakia. Most of these Hungarians live in the southern part of the country, because present Slovak territory had been Hungarian territory for 1000 years until the independence of Czechoslovakia. The image of "ethnic conflict" between Slovaks and the Hungarian minority has been promulgated in recent decades; one of the most famous cases involved the ban of Hungarian President László Sólyom from entering the Slovak border city of Komárno as a private person in 2009 to attend the unveiling ceremony for a statue of St. Stephen (*Štefan* in Slovak, *István* in Hungarian), who was the first Hungarian king. The Slovak government

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1 This paper is the developed and revised version of my earlier study written in Japanese [Kambara 2014b].

2 According to the national census from 2011 [Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky 2012].

gave two reasons for this ban:[3] 1) the day marked the memorial day for the end of the Prague Spring when Czechoslovakia was invaded by members of the Warsaw Pact, including the Hungarian army; and 2) the notice of his visit was given too late to prepare security measures for him from extreme anti-Hungarian activists. This Slovak response was criticized by both Hungarians and Slovak anti-nationalists. [4]

These Slovak antagonistic tendencies toward Hungary are related to the longstanding arguments between Slovak nationalistic politicians and Hungarian minority politicians on the Slovak minority policy; the latest controversial arguments regard the adoption of the language law in 1995 and its revision in 2009—which aim to strengthen the status of the Slovak language as an official language(*štátny jazyk*)—and the revision of the citizenship law in 2010. The revision of the citizenship law was an antagonistic political action established in response to the revision of the citizenship law in Hungary, which was done to make it easier for people of Hungarian descent living in neighboring countries to acquire Hungarian citizenship. Other cases of ethnic tension are often reported at the community level, including graffiti on bilingual signs [Orosz 2012] and negative messages on the Internet [Jablonický 2009].

However, previous ethnographic studies described a different reality in southern Slovakia [Kambara 2014a], as most researchers concluded that there have never been any serious ethnic conflicts there [Frič 1993, Lukácsová and Kusá 1995, Škovierová and Sigmudová 1981, Šoucová 1994]. For example, Torsello conducted fieldwork as a cultural anthropologist in an ethnically mixed Slovak-Hungarian village from 2000 to 2001 by examining everyday life there. He emphasized that its bilingual inhabitants could succeed in co-existing peacefully:

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3 Slovak newspaper *Pravda* Aug. 21, 2009, *Sólyom:Do Komárna prídem*. <http://spravy.pravda.sk/> (10/25/2014).

4 See also the Slovak newspaper *Slovak Spectator* Oct. 22, 2012, *ECJ backs Slovakia in Sólyom case*, and [Petőcz and Kolíková 2010].(EUJ= the European Court of Justice)

The fifteen percent that constitute the Slovak portion of the village's population do not feel threatened or isolated in the community today. The reasons for this are various: on the one hand, many Slovak nationalities are able to communicate in Hungarian because they come from ethnically mixed families. On the other hand, Hungarians never make use of their language as a means of ethnic exclusion in public; they are ready to switch to Slovak as soon as a non-Hungarian speaker is in their company [Torsello 2003:213].

Torsello did not deny the existence of any ethnic discrimination in this area; however, there was a huge gap between the results of these previous studies and the widespread images of "ethnic conflict." Local inhabitants are also aware that many people regard them as having ethnic problems, so they explain these "ethnic conflicts" with the phrase "politicians bring us ethnic problems" [Frič 1993:53].

Frič's analysis clearly explains why both local ethnic symbiosis and the widespread image of "ethnic conflict" can co-exist in southern Slovakia. However, it also brings further questions: if there really are no serious conflicts at a community level, for what reasons do minority politicians haggle? What is the foundation for their advocacy? Politicians need voter support under the democratic system implemented after the end of socialism, but actually local Hungarians' lack of involvement in minority politics contradicts the democratic system.

The aim of this paper is to consider how the Hungarian minority's political attitudes are constructed in the present Slovak democratic society from an anthropological viewpoint. This paper examines minority elites in order to investigate this theme, as there are many minority leaders and educated people in addition to politicians who can present and consider opinions regarding minority issues. The study of elites provides a useful basis for considering core anthropological and sociological concerns, including social identity and boundary maintenance, social structure and change, and power

relations [Shore 2002:9]. Although these topics are closely connected to minority issues, previous studies have not found Hungarian minority elites to be a foundation of minority politics; therefore, this paper focuses on the advocacy of minority rights by Hungarian minority elites embedded in communities.

This study is based on data from interviews with Hungarian minority elites and participant observation at public events in a Hungarian city in Slovakia. Specifically, mayors, members of the city council, members of the national assembly, teachers, leaders of NGOs, and managers of cultural institutes were targeted as informants for my research. All interviews were conducted in Slovak. Although the first language of most informants was Hungarian, it did not influence the results of this study because Hungarian elites who are able to participate in the Slovak political world speak Slovak as fluently as Slovak native speakers.

There are several Hungarian cities in southern Slovakia, however, large cities with high proportions of ethnic Hungarians are few (Table 1). My field research was conducted in Dunajská Streda and Komárno in September 2013 and September 2014 because Hungarian minority elites mainly reside in these cities or in Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia. Therefore, these cities were judged to be the most suitable places to understand the engagement of Hungarian minority elites in their communities.
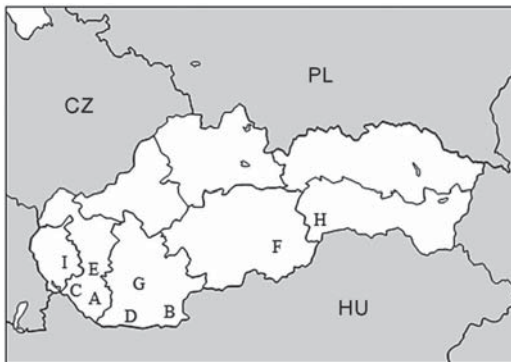
Map 1. Main Hungarian Cities in Slovakia

	City	Hungarians（%）	Slovaks（%）	Population
A	Dunajská Streda	79.75	15.26	23000
B	Štúrovo	68.74	28.13	12000
C	Šamorím	66.63	30.96	12000
D	Komárno	60.09	34.68	37000
E	Galanta	36.8	60.35	16000
F	Rimavská Sobota	35.26	59.28	25000
G	Nové Zámky	27.52	69.67	42000
H	Rožňava	26.8	69.27	19000
I	Senec	22.12	74.76	14000

Table 1. Main Hungarian Cities in Slovakia (2001)[5]

2. Emphasis on *spolužitie* instead of ethnic conflict

2-1 *Spolužitie* as used by the minority elite

The widespread image of "ethnic conflict" contrasts with previous ethnographies that described peaceful bilingual conditions and inter-ethnic cooperation in rural and smaller communities where inhabitants create social ties regardless of ethnicity [Lukácsová and Kusá 1995, Škovierová and Sigmudová 1981, Šoucová 1994].[6] Slovak sociologist Frič analyzed this perception among those who live in such heterogeneous communities and suggested three "myths" concerning ethnic relationships in southern Slovakia: 1) ordinary people are good-

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5 This statistical data is cited from the Urban and Municipal Statistics by the Statistical Slovak Office of the Slovak Republic <http://app.statistics.sk/ mosmis/sk/run.html> (10/25/2014).

6 Of course there are some exceptions. For example, in Šamorín (Table 1 and Map 1) some ethnic conflicts were reported which were caused by urbanization and the increase in new Slovak inhabitants who did not understand the Hungarian language [Botíková et. al 1994]. The condition of ethnic co-existence is changing, particularly in Slovak urbanized areas and Hungarian heterogeneous areas.

natured (*dobráci*), but are manipulated by politicians; 2) politicians are not aware of the reality in southern Slovakia, where people suffer more from economic problems than ethnic problems; and 3) there have never been any ethnic problems between Hungarians and Slovaks except for the ethnic problems that politicians create [Frič 1993]. These myths could result in local people feeling disconnected from the outside political discourse and the image of "ethnic conflict."

However, according to the results of my interviews, even Hungarian political elites share the image of peaceful heterogeneous communities, at least at the community political level.

Interview 1[7]

> *Slovak nationalists often say that some of shop staff do not speak Slovak in southern Slovakia, but this is not true. It is impossible for them to be engaged in their jobs without the Slovak language.*
> -Exactly, I only speak Slovak, but I can still communicate with them here.
> *You know our reality here. ... We are eager to live here peacefully. At least there are no serious problems between Hungarians and Slovaks, although we cannot live here without any problems. We have the same religion and share the church and Father. Our Father holds Mass in both languages.*[8]

Interview 2[9]

> *We do not want to be against Slovaks, and just want to live*

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7 The interview was conducted on Sept. 24, 2013 with the director of a Hungarian high school in Komárno (he is also a member of the city council in Komárno).

8 This informant did not mention specific religious sects. However, the Catholic Church in Komárno employs Slovak priests and Hungarian bilingual priests to hold both a Slovak and Hungarian Mass. Bilingual priests can hold Mass in both languages when Slovak priests are absent (from the interview conducted with a priest of the Catholic Church in Komárno on Sept. 20, 2014).

9 The interview was conducted on Sept. 12, 2013 with the mayor of Dunajská Streda.

> *in Slovakia as a Hungarian minority. Hungarian schools are necessary for us because we are equal partners with Slovaks. Hungarian education can foster ethnic pride for Hungarians. We are not migrants, as we have lived here for generations. Only the national border has changed.*

Local minority elites also tended to insist on the existence of a peaceful ethnic symbiosis in everyday life, even when they talk about politics. Many informants used the Slovak word *spolužitie/ spolunažíanie* in order to explain ethnic symbiosis. This word usually means living (*žiť*) together (*spolu*) with others. However, elites' use of the term *spolužitie* takes on a slightly different meaning than when used by ordinary people, as minority elites use the word *spolužitie* to refer to maintaining an ethnic identity that is an equal partner with Slovaks. While it is natural for elites to insist on the need for collective cultural rights with *spolužitie*, ordinary people tend to regard the term *spolužitie* as referring to a non-conflict situation and regard demands for cultural rights as the cause of conflicts.

The use of the word *spolužitie* is related to another controversial issue of distinguishing from the idea of integration, which is debated in minority studies around the world. This paper uses the word *spolužitie* because the term integration is not suited to the Slovak situation. Although the idea of integration is used when expressing the improvement of social equality between the majority and minority, the Hungarian minority does not regard itself as facing serious social inequalities. Most Hungarians in Slovakia speak Hungarian and Slovak, and the ethnic disparity between them is smaller than between other ethnic groups (e.g., Roma). Although Feldman used the term integration with regard to the Russian minority in Estonia [Feldman 2005], there are obvious differences compared to the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, including the fact that there are more Russians in Estonia who do not speak the predominant language.

Minority cultural rights are important to minority elites because the official recognition of the Hungarian minority hinges on them.

There is no need to explain that the concepts of ethnicity and nation are theoretically understood with instrumentalism. Yet, national minority policy practically needs an ethnic minority category in order to focus on whom the minority policy affects. That is why the Hungarian minority population is important for minority elites; nevertheless, they know that this ethnic category itself is not stable. Interview 3 concerns ethnic identification, and the informant mentioned that even some ethnic Hungarians may declare themselves as Slovaks in surveys.

Interview 3[10]

-How do people decide between the ethnic identity of Slovak or Hungarian?
It depends on the person. We do not know.
-Do you have any opportunities to declare your ethnic identity?
Sometimes the state makes surveys in schools, but schools do not use the survey results for their curriculums. So, we cannot believe the results of these surveys because people know that they are just for statistics. Some people do not answer the questionnaire with regard to ethnic identity.

Table 2. The population of the Hungarian minority in the Slovak Republic

	1910	1921	1930	1950	1961	1970	1991	2001	2011
Population of the Hungarian minority	884,309	650,567	592,337	354,532	518,782	552,006	567,296	519,775	458,384
Population of the Slovak Republic	2,918,512	2,998,004	3,327,735	3,442,958	4,183,725	4,524,639	5,252,741	5,358,505	5,404,322
Hungarian minority percentage (%)	30.29	21.68	17.79	10.3	12.43	12.17	10.76	9.66	8.48

Source: [Liszka 2003:117] and [Štatistický úrad Slovenskej republiky 2004, 2012].

The decreasing Hungarian minority population is a fear of minority politicians, who are afraid of assimilation (Table 2). This

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10 The interview was conducted on Sept. 25, 2013 with the deputy mayor and former director of a high school in Dunajská Streda.

decreasing population brings another handicap because permission to use bilingual signs and minority languages in city hall/public depends upon the percentage of the minority population. Inter-ethnic marriage is one of the symbols of peaceful ethnic symbiosis, although it also threatens Hungarian ethnic solidarity because children from these marriages usually attend Slovak elementary schools and speak Slovak more fluently than Hungarian.

Interview 4[11]

> *According to statistics, 100,000 people of Hungarian ethnicity have disappeared these past two decades. If people really decide to change their ethnic identity from Hungarian, we respect their decision. However, we know a part of the reality is that many Hungarians cannot maintain their Hungarian identity because they have lost opportunities for a Hungarian education and right to contact to public administration in Hungarian in small multi-ethnic villages. The reason for this is not due to individual decisions, but rather the national minority problem.*

These feelings of crisis from gradual assimilation result in demands for the protection of Hungarian cultural rights. This demonstrates a significant difference between ordinary people and political elites, even though they are all eager to live peacefully in Slovakia. It is not regarded as a serious problem by ordinary people if their Hungarian ethnic identity is eroded by the Slovak one on a statistical level because they understand that this is also a kind of *spolužitie* whereby the roots of ethnic conflict vanish.

2-2 *Spolužitie* as regard for others?

Dunajská Streda is an outstanding city where 80% of the population

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11 The interview was conducted on Sept. 13, 2013 with the former head of SMK (Party of the Hungarian Community).

is of Hungarian ethnicity, enabling Hungarian inhabitants to speak only Hungarian. Local Hungarian politicians such as the mayor and most members of the city council are of Hungarian descent and respect bilingualism for the city's Slovak minority. The mayor of Dunajská Streda explained the regard for non-Hungarian speakers with bilingualism, rather than the language law, as an example of *spolužitie*.

Interview 5[12]

> *Before the revision of the language law in 2009 we had translated most official documents, news, and information into Slovak for non-Hungarian inhabitants. Bilingualism is needed to show our regard for our Slovak neighbors and in order to communicate with them. We would use both languages even if we did not have the Slovak language law.*

According to the present language law in Slovakia, the official language of Slovak must be used in the public sphere. Announcements, official information, and commemorations must use Slovak, and minority languages are only allowed to be used with the accompanying Slovak translation.[13] The establishment of the language law resulted in serious opposition to it among minorities at that time. In actuality, the mayor and moderators used both languages in addresses at the traditional market days (*Jarmok*) of Dunajská Streda in September 2013. The mayor views bilingualism not as a requirement in the face of the language law, but as regard for non-Hungarians.

One exception of using the Slovak language is at minority

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12 The interview was conducted on Sept. 12, 2013 with the mayor of Dunajská Streda.

13 The revised language law of 2009 (Zbierka zákonov č.318/2009 Zákon, ktorým sa mení a dopĺňa zákon Národnej rady Slovenskej republiky č 270/1995 Z.z. o štatnom jazyku Slovenskej republiky v znení neskorších predpisov a o zmene a doplnení niektorých zákonov).

cultural events. Ideally, the moderator should speak both languages even in minority cultural events for respecting the language law.[14] However, some cultural event organizers mentioned that some local minority cultural events are held only in Hungarian, especially in small cities. They explained the reason for this as "non- Hungarian speakers do not attend Hungarian historical and cultural events." This phrase brings questions regarding the idea of *spolužitie*. Are non-Hungarian speakers not interested in Hungarian culture? Do inhabitants not concern themselves with promoting an understanding of each other's culture in this ethnically heterogeneous area? Or, do they already know each other through everyday life? One of the actual influencing factors in this small city is that many cultural events are not able to gather enough participants and supporters, and it makes people lose the opportunity of engaging with other ethnicities, even in this heterogeneous area. Without actual communication with each other it becomes difficult to imagine the existence of the other. Understanding the other's language is important for understanding the other, but at first the regard for the other is necessary rather than enforcement by law.

3. *Spolužitie* as a part of the democratic state

The idea of cultural rights has not been present in Slovakia for a very long period of time. The Hungarian minority has had the rights of local public office affairs and an education system conducted in the Hungarian language and bilingual signs in minority areas since the socialist era; however, these are not regarded to be the same as current cultural rights. With the end of socialism and the formation of an independent Slovak Republic the minority elite faced anxiety over losing their vested rights as a Hungarian minority because Slovak nationalists became engaged in constructing their own state. The socialist legacy lost their efficiency after socialism, therefore the

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14 The revised language law of 2009 (op. cit.).

minority elite also had to rebuild the foundations of their advocacy for cultural rights.

The Hungarian minority's advocacy for cultural rights is likely influenced by the minority policy of the European Union (EU). The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe in 1992 at a time when many people struggled with the transition from socialism. The preamble of the Charter suggested these three ideas: 1) the protection of historical, regional, or minority languages of Europe; 2) the right to use a regional or minority language in both private and public; and 3) the protection and promotion of regional or minority languages in different European regions represents an important contribution to the construction of a Europe based on the principles of democracy and cultural diversity. This latter idea is common among Hungarian minority elites as according to this charter, the demand for cultural rights could represent the demand for democracy.

Minority problems occur not only in Slovakia, but are also common in Eastern and Central Europe, as was the case in the first decade after the political change of 1989. At that time, these ethnic conflicts were understood as a substitute for incomplete democratization and inadequate economic development by Western countries [Kymlicka 2001:84]. This is why the Dzurinda government, which formed with the Hungarian minority party (SMK[15]) in 1998, has been regarded as revitalizing democratic consolidation in Slovakia [Duin and Poláčková 2000], as tolerance for ethnic minorities is a symbol of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe [Vizi 2011]. The Dzurinda government also ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2001.

Hungarian elites believe their claim for cultural rights is constructed in the EU's style of democracy. They deny any

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15 Hungarian minority party has been named SMK, *Strana maďarskej koalície* (=the Party of Hungarian Coalition) until 2012, and changed the name to *Strana maďarskej komunity* (=the Party of Hungarian Community).

antagonism toward Slovaks and emphasize belonging to the Slovak Republic and *spolužitie* with Slovaks as state members. However, this interpretation of this minority's insistence for cultural rights is not shared among ordinary people in Hungarian minority areas. On the discourse of *spolužitie*, elites and ordinary people share common idealistic images of everyday life; however, they possess entirely different approaches toward this ideal image. While ordinary people manage to be unconscious of ethnicity in everyday life, elites are engaged in improving their minority status in order to become an equal partner in the Slovak Republic.

The political elites of Slovakia have had to be conscious of democracy since the end of socialism, whether they really seek it or not. It is natural for minority elites to refer to European democracy in order to demand cultural rights. Certainly, it marked significant progress for the Slovak government to ratify the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. However, the EU does not have the power to solve concrete problems because the Charter does not conceptualize the relationship between official languages and regional or minority languages in terms of competition or antagonism.[16]

On the other hand, the protection of minority rights results in the dilemma between the construction of a Slovak nation state and that of a democratic tolerant country, especially for Slovak nationalistic politicians. Feldman stated that the diplomatic macrostructure influences minority-state relations [Feldman 2013], and sometimes Hungary's policies influence Slovakia's policies regarding the Hungarian minority. For example, Hungary's policies for those of Hungarian descent residing in neighboring countries, specifically the status law (2001) and amendments to the citizenship law (2010) stimulated Slovak nationalists. They oppose minority politicians and their policies for the protection of minority rights due to their fears

16 The official introduction of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages by the Council of Europe < http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/aboutcharter/default_en.asp> (10/25/2014).

regarding Slovakia's national security.

4. Separation from politics

Hungarian minority elites tend to regard themselves as living peacefully in heterogeneous communities. However, differences in the use of the term *spolužitie* result in differences in political attitudes among Hungarian minorities. Even some elites do not share the same attitudes as political elites. In particular, minority elites engaged in cultural activities feel separated from minority politics, as shown in interviews 6 and 7.

Interview 6[17]

> We have never experienced ethnic conflicts between Hungarian and Slovak folk-dancing members. <u>It is just politicians who bring problems.</u> Our Hungarian team has won the Slovak folk-dance festival. They can evaluate us, but Slovak nationalistic politicians have never acknowledged the excellent Hungarian teaching method of folk-dance.

Interview 7[18]

> We are a cultural institute. Sometimes we contact politicians in order for the local community to connect with the Slovak national sphere. However, <u>we do not have a relationship with any political parties directly because politics have often changed and split communities.</u> Since culture combines people, we need a culture for life as the Hungarian minority.

Generally, the Hungarian minority's cultural activities are often related to minority politics because they represent Hungary's

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17 The interview was conducted on Sept. 17, 2013 with the director of a Hungarian folk-dancing group in Dunajská Streda.

18 The interview was conducted on Sept. 6, 2013 with the director of a Hungarian cultural institute in Dunajská Streda.

traditional culture. However, leaders of cultural organizations want to distance themselves from politicians. It is rational for them to do this because of the changing political conditions regarding the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Many cultural organizations operate on a voluntary basis, thus their financial foundations are more vulnerable than those of educational institutions. They are scared of disadvantages caused by something other than "ethnic conflict." This attitude stems not only from the difference in the use of the term *spolužitie* by minority political elites, but also from widespread mistrust or abandonment of Slovakia's national politics. This means that peaceful *spolužitie* can be supported through political neglect by ordinary people in this area.

On the other hand, other groups of people have started to engage in empowering the Hungarian minority community; the establishment of the Hungarian NGO network *Roundtable for the Hungarian minority in Slovakia* is a significant example of this. This network has been in operation since 2007, and 104 NGOs organized by the Hungarian minority joined it in 2013.[19] The spokesperson for the network explained that the purpose of it is to create opportunities for discussion on the various problems facing the Hungarian minority, with an emphasis on their status as citizens rather than politicians. The spokesperson stated that "many people are not interested in whatever politicians talk about, so this network was established in order to share how citizens of the Hungarian minority feel about our problems."[20] The network also includes voluntary committees with experts who share their opinions regarding the minority problem and sometimes carry out advocacy activities.

This network is not directly connected to any political party. Although some members have petitioned minority politicians for improvement of the Hungarian minority's status, their attitudes are different from those of politicians and do not originate from

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19 The interview was conducted on Sept. 16, 2013 with the spokesperson of this NGO network.

20 *Ibid*.

political mistrust or abandonment. One active member mentioned that "many people do not regard political advocacy by the party as reflective of the opinions of ordinary people. We have to represent the Hungarian minority's opinion as citizens."[21] This attitude, which is present in the minority policy through means of civic engagement, is a typical response to political mistrust under the democratic system that emerged after socialism. Citizens also seek another method of *spolužitie* in Slovakia in order to present their opinions directly.

Slovak society has been influenced by more than minority issues from civic engagement in Slovakia in recent decades [Majchrák 2004, Plichtová 2010]. The social power granted by civic engagement contributed to the end of socialism in former Eastern Europe, and is viewed as the basic condition of membership to a democratic Western country. Civic activists became definitive elites, particularly those concerned with minority issues, because their actions had an impact on society.

While the emergence of these new types of elites is a typical phenomenon of democratic societies which allow for the existence of social movements, it can become difficult to distinguish elites from ordinary people because elites who work in the field of community activism tend to strongly regard themselves as ordinary people. Of course, the term "elite" is usually used as a term of reference rather than self-reference [Salverda and Abbink 2012:7]. However, it is obvious that this category of elites can become enlarged with the progression of voluntary activities in minority communities. The present Slovak situation is changing the boundary implied in previous studies between the image of political elites and ordinary people.

5. Conclusions

Just as Slovak society changed after socialism, the Hungarian

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21 The interview was conducted on Sept. 6, 2013 with a board member of this NGO network and the leader of NGO on minority media.

minority society has also changed. According to Frič, Hungarian-Slovak mixed communities were regarded as peaceful communities removed from political talks [Frič 1993]. However, the foundation of this community discourse has changed from 20 years ago.

When Frič analyzed the image of ethnic conflict in southern Slovakia in the early 1990s people still shared the image of a boundary between political elites and ordinary people. Consciousness for a Slovak ethnic identity made it easy to generate support for Slovak independence, which the majority of the Hungarian minority was anxious about. Civic engagement was not very popular at this time among ethnic minorities, although it has now made its way into the Slovak public sphere. People's image of the structure of minority communities has not changed from 20 years ago and therefore, many people still conceptualize an image that is different from that of politicians. There are two reasons why this differing image loses effectiveness within the present minority society.

First, minority political elites share the image of *spolužitie* with ordinary people, which they use in the context of collective cultural rights throughout the EU and other democratic countries. They know they sometimes affront Slovak nationalists because of this advocacy. This is different from the attitudes of ordinary people in southern Slovakia, who manage to mask their differences inside ethnicity using the shared image of *spolužitie*, which is made possible due to the outstanding existence of extreme Slovak nationalists outside southern Slovakia and extreme Hungarian nationalists in Hungary. Many local people mentioned that ethnic conflicts were caused by politicians and their supporters, but they could not name any in their community. Most of them agreed that this was only the case for extreme nationalists.

Second, the model constructed by politicians and ordinary people is too polarized and simplified to reflect the present minority society where layers of non-political elites and their supporters emerged as civic activists. This differential model is influenced by local people's mistrust and abandonment of politics, which formed during the

socialist era. People used to negotiate informally rather than air their opinions in the public sphere and this tendency is still strong, although people have become able to influence society as citizens. The category of political elites has become enlarged in this present democratic society, because people are easily able to participate in activities for minority rights.

Understandably there are still many elites and ordinary people who want to be non-political or ignore ethnic consciousness in the community. The idea of *spolužitie* is a kind of compromise of various attitudes regarding minority issues. People might decide to select their ethnic identity based not just on language or family relations, but by a consciousness for minority issues if the differing idea of *spolužitie* between ordinary people and elites loses its effectiveness. It is necessary for citizens of Slovakia to regenerate the idea of *spolužitie* by basing it not on political mistrust, but with regard for their different ethnic neighbors in urbanized or personalized communities.

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