

## SLOVAKS IN ROMANIA – THE PAST AND THE PRESENT

Ivana Šusteková

Mobility is a basic assumption of a human existence. Migrations as social processes are in the majority of cases the answers to economical, ecological, social, ideological and cultural conditions of the sending area. Each definitive migration (emigration/immigration) causes the inevitability of adaptation to a new natural environment and socio-cultural milieu. The history of migration becomes thus a part of the general (and also national) history, no matter whether it is so called subsistence migration, betterment migration, career migration or a migration caused by natural disaster, religious pursuit, etc.

The paper provided focuses on several circumstances of Slovak migration to the area of present Romania; it focuses on outlining the major sources of living in certain areas; brief remarking on cultural life and education of Romanian Slovaks in both the past and present. The article itself is being drafted out with the help of special literature study as well as information gained during the research realised among the Slovak inhabitants in Bihor (with the focus on communities of Borumlaca – *Borumlak* a Vărzari – *Varzari*) in May of the last year.

Migration of Slovaks into the Romanian territory needs to be perceived in the context of Slovak emigration to the so-called “Dolná zem” (Low Land – the Slovaks themselves called so the territories of the Kingdom of Hungary to the south of Slovakia).<sup>1</sup> Slovaks have inhabited mainly the following four parts of Romania: the plain areas of the province Arad and Banat; mountainous woodland of the province Bihor and Sălaj; lowland and mining settlements of the province Satu Mare and Maramureş and finally the northeast Bucovina. This settlement began in the second part of the 18th century and increased in the first half of the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> While discussing the immigration to Arad and Banat, it was the case of the secondary and tertiary colonization mainly from the Slovak settlements of the Békés area (Hungary) and Vojvodina (Serbia); colonizing the mountainous Transylvania by Slovaks may be perceived as a primary colonization. According to the population census in Romania in 2002 there were 17,199 of Slovaks, and out of this there were

---

<sup>1</sup> By the end of the 17th century there were departures for seasonal agricultural works to the territory of contemporary Hungary registered. But there are also huge mass escapes of the serfs to the territories between the rivers Danube and Tisa observed. Till the beginning of the 18th century we meet landlord actions focused on colonizing the depopulated territory by Slovak settlers. Along with the Hungarian territories it was also the case of Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian as well as Romanian territories. Vide Ján Sirácky et al., *Slováci vo svete 1*, Martin, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Ondrej Štefanko, *O Slovákoch v Rumunsku*, Nadlak, 2004, p. 16.

7,361 Slovaks in the province Bihor, 5,761 in the province Arad, 1,845 in the province Timiș, 1,371 in the province Sălaj, 344 in the province Caraș-Severin, 107 in the province Hunedoara and 164 in the province Satu Mare.<sup>3</sup>

The majority of Slovaks settled in the province Arad and Banat were of protestant Evangelical Church.<sup>4</sup> Their arrival in the 18th century was definitely of a confessional character (they had escaped because of the religious persecution); lately economical factors became dominant. On behalf of cultivating the rarely populated fertile land the landlords provided several advantages for the colonists with own agricultural equipment and horse or oxcart, such as temporary freedom from the liege and servile works, confessional freedom, material for church and school building, the right to own dry and water mills, etc.<sup>5</sup> Thus in the year 1747 the first Slovaks came to the settlement Mocrea (*Mokrâ*). Apart from the Slovak settlers from Békés Csaba (*Békéška Čaba*) and Szarvas (*Sarvas*) there were also inhabitants from Slovak regions Novohrad, Gemer and Hont. In 1803 a large group of Slovaks came to Nădlac (*Nadlak*) mainly from Tótkomlós (*Slovenský Komlós*) but also from Békés Csaba and Szarvas, lately from *Slovenská Stamura*. In 1819 the Slovak inhabitants from Békés Csaba, Orava (Slovak region) and the province Nitra settled in Semlac (*Semlak*).<sup>6</sup> In the 70's of the 19th century nearly 300 Greek-Catholic Slovaks came to live here, however they became quite fast Romanized (became Romanians). In 1827 a large group of Slovaks from the town Veľký Krtíš inhabited the village Vucova (*Vuková*). They came here within the state (governmental) colonization. In 1828 the Slovak colonists from Novohrad, the Trenčín surrounding and Nitra (in 1847 also from Békés Csaba) settled in Brestovaț (*Brestovica*). Together with them there were also members of other nations: Hungarians, Germans, Romanians and Czechs.<sup>7</sup> At the beginning of the 19th century some Slovaks settled in also the villages Teș, Berzovia and others. In 1853 groups from Šariš (Slovak region) settled in Peregu Mare (*Veľký Pereg*), in 1883 Slovaks from Békés Csaba, Orava, and Nitra district came to Țipar (*Cipâr*),<sup>8</sup> where the Hungarians and Saxons lived along with them.

---

<sup>3</sup> Ján Jančovic, *Z kolísok na Dohnú zem*, Martin, 2004, p. 131.

<sup>4</sup> Roman-Catholic confessioners have also resettled Brestovaț (*Brestovec*) and partly Țipar (*Cipâr*). Colonists from Eastern Slovakia settled in Scaiuș (*Skajus*), Peregu Mare (*Veľký Pereg*) and also in Nădlac (*Nadlak*) were of Greek-Catholic confession. Ondrej Štefanko, *O Slovákoch*, p. 16-17.

<sup>5</sup> Ján Svetoň, *Slováci v európskom zahraničí*, Bratislava, 1943, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Ondrej Štefanko, *Slovenské osídlenie v Rumunsku*, in *Atlas ľudovej kultúry Slovákov v Rumunsku*, Nadlak, 1998, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Ján Sirácky et al., *Slováci*, p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> Ondrej Štefanko, *Slovenské osídlenie*, p. 15.

Agriculture was the basic source of living for the immigrants. Low and middle freeholders were the most common. Handicrafts (woodworking, carpentry, wheelwrighting, blacksmithing, tailoring, boot-making and shoe-making, slipper-making, furriery, butchery, miller's trade, bakery and others) have developed in Nădlac. Liberalization in agriculture became significant for the territory of Arad district from the 2nd half of the 19th century, which was connected with the prevailing confession of the Slovaks as well as good land evaluation which enabled the transformation from the extensive to the intensive farming.<sup>9</sup> These favourable conditions have led in Nădlac to the establishment of economical institutions.<sup>10</sup> In such a way the community was ranked among the most economically flourishing Slovak communities in Low Land. Also the cultural and social life has developed (e.g. "Slovenský ľudový kruh" (Slovak Public Society) – 1904 (Nădlac); "Zväz Čechoslovákov v Rumunsku" (Union of Czechoslovaks in Romania) – 1930 (Nădlac; since 1938 renamed as "Zväz Čechov a Slovákov v Rumunsku" – Union of Czechs and Slovaks in Romania); "Česko-slovenský kultúrny spolok" (Czecho-Slovak Cultural Society) in Arad and Peregu Mare).<sup>11</sup>

Also in the territory of Transylvania – Mountain Plopiș (Munții Plopișului), which was covered by a thick forest until the end of the 18th century, became a new home for a large Slovak enclave. Being invited by the landlords, Slovaks from regions Orava, Kysuce, Gemer, Zemplín, Šariš and Zvolen were coming here gradually in order to live out of woodcutting and potash production. As a reward they could use the deforested land.<sup>12</sup> In such a way, the Slovak villages Budoj (*Bodonoš*) (1785-1803), Borumlaca (1790-1833) and Vărzari (1790-1836) occurred. Another group of wood-cutters came here during the period 1810-1836 and settled the higher situated areas where the following highland hamlets were established: Făget (*Gemelčíčka*) (1801-1811), Șinteu (*Nová Huta*) (1812-1817), Valea Tarnei (*Židárenň*) (1817-1820), Huta Voivozi (*Stará Huta*) (1830) and Socet (*Sočet*) (1830).<sup>13</sup> The low land evaluation and relatively high density of the population (which was caused by high birth-rate and lack of employment apart from only a little productive farming) led in the following decades to an inner migration. Till 1918 Slovaks from the

<sup>9</sup> Ondrej Štefanko, *O Slovákoch*, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> In 1865 "Cirkevná obilnica" (The Church Granary) was originated, in 1876 it changed into "Vzájomná pomocnica" (The Mutual Helper), lately "Nadlacká sporiteľňa" (Nădlac Saving-Bank), out of which "Nadlacká ľudová banka" (The Nădlac Public Bank) was created in 1903 – one of the most powerful Slovak banking institutions in Hungary. Vide *ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 55.

<sup>12</sup> A question of land-use in Slovak villages of Bihor is solved in Peter Chrastina, Kateřina Křováková, Vladimír Brůna, *Kultúrna geografia, in Borumlak, Vărzaľ. Spôsob života a kultúra Slovákov v Bihore*, Nadlak, Nitra, 2006, p. 22-46.

<sup>13</sup> Gustáv Rončák, *Svadba biborských Slovákov*, Nadlak, 2005, p. 11.

previously settled hamlets inhabited also the settlements Boiana Huta, Groși, Șerani (*Șarany*), Sacalăseu Nou (*Nový Šastelek*), Valea Cerului (*Čerpotok*) and others.<sup>14</sup>

The main source of living was the woodcutting and farming the mountain fields. Part of the Slovaks joined the local glassworks (Huta Voivozi, Șinteu, Pădurea Neagră (*Bistra* or *Čierna Hora*; German: Schwarzwald) or they joined the asphalt mining, lately the lignite mining.<sup>15</sup> After the World War II had finished, part of the inhabitants started to work in oil wells or in oil refinery in Suplacu de Barcău (*Siplak*). Gradual mining depression and the following close down of the coal mines at the beginning of 1990's caused the savage unemployment increase, emigration and leaving for jobs to Austria, Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, Switzerland, Spain, but also Slovakia. In the 60's of the 20th century there has already been noted migration of the Slovak inhabitants into industrial centres such as Oradea, Aleșd, Derna, Voivozi or Marghita (*Margeta*), but also into larger agricultural areas such as Aștileu, Varasău, Loranta, Urvind, Mădăras, Foglaş or Tileagd,<sup>16</sup> where they became employed as industrial or agricultural workers. Re-settling the Arad-Banat area was no exception (mainly the villages Nădlac, Butin (*Butín*) and Vucova).

Constant movement, mixture of the cultural phenomena brought by immigrants from several Slovak regions and mutual contacts with the surrounding Hungarian and Romanian ethnic have gradually caused the combining of several ethno-cultural elements into one unit. In such a way a unique cultural system characteristic for the Romanian Slovaks has been created. Significant isolation of the Slovak hamlets in the province Bihor and Sălaj has led to preservation of ethnical independency and Slovak identity of the inhabitants.

Settling of the Slovaks in villages of the province Satu Mare and Maramureș is less known. Inhabitants from the eastern Slovakia came here to work in agriculture. In 1787 they settled in village Livada on call of the Hungarian magnates Károly and Pereny. In 1840 Slovak workers were called to Huta-Certeze for the demands of the local glassworks. Since the end of the 18th century until the first half of the 19th century qualified Slovak miners from Spiš (Slovak region) came to mining villages Baia Sprie, Ocna Slatina or Ocna Șugatag.<sup>17</sup> As a result of the lack of Slovak schools and increasing Hungarization (an attempt to turn non-Hungarian ethnics into Hungarians,

---

<sup>14</sup> Ondrej Štefanko, *Slovenské osídlenie*, p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Mining history in Sylvan valley goes back to the second half of the 19th century. Coalmines in Budoii were opened in the period of 1888-1891, but in Borumlaca (*Ritoblaga*) and in Vărzari the mining started only in the 1940's and 1950's.

<sup>16</sup> Ondrej Štefanko, *Slovenské osídlenie*, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Ondrej Štefanko, *O Slováckoch*, p. 24.

which was done by means of Roman Catholic Church) the Slovak inhabitants became assimilated.

Slovaks from the surrounding of Čadca (North-West of Slovakia) went to the fourth part – Southern Bucovina at the end of the 18th century. The landlords from Bucovina invited them to work in brand new smelteries. They settled in Solonc (*Nový Solonec*), Pleș (*Pleš*) and Poiana Micului (*Malá Poľana*). Part of them lived in ethnically mixed (Polish-Romanian) villages Alhuta, Davideni, Mold-Banilla, Panca, Petrinoasa and Țereblești where lately also the German immigrants have settled. According to the religious point of view the Bucovinian Slovaks belonged to the Lvov's Roman Catholic Church and thus they were given German as well as Polish priests. In such a way the Slovaks became Polonized (they were turned into Polish). The situation had lasted until 1936 when the Slovak school was established in Poiana Mucului. After the German army had burned down the village in 1944 the inhabitants moved to the inland of Romania. In 1947-1949 a great part of the Slovaks have returned to Slovakia and the rest of them are reported to as Polish nationality.<sup>18</sup>

Until 1918 the separate Slovak communities from the above mentioned four Romanian parts were in no contact. The situation has changed thanks to "Slovenský kultúrny spolok" (the Slovak Cultural Society) establishment in Nădlac (1924) and publishing the Slovak periodicals *Slovenský týždenník* (The Slovak Weekly, 1923-1932) and *Naše snahy* (Our Efforts, 1936-1941; being a monthly since 1990 up to the present). There is also a journal in the present published for the Slovak national minority in Serbia, Croatia, Hungary and Romania named *Dolnozemskej Slovák* (The Low Land Slovak). Due to the Ivan Krasko publishing house (Nădlac) there are also many publications published in Slovak.

The social life of both the Roman Catholic and protestant Evangelical Slovaks was in the beginning definitely connected with the church.<sup>19</sup> The church organised not only the religious life but also the schools, different supportive societies and national-cultural societies. In 1939 the law about organising and acting of public schools and teacher colleges was adopted. It was a great input into the Slovak education development in the first half of the 20th century. The law enabled teaching of almost all the school subjects in mother tongue (Slovak) except of Romanian language, history and civics.<sup>20</sup> With the help from the Czechoslovak state in the period between the two world wars the net of Slovak schools has been created in areas with a greater

---

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 24-25.

<sup>19</sup> A question of role priests and teachers in Slovak villages of Bihor is solved in Boris Michalík, *O inštitúte farára, učiteľa a starostu, in Borumlak, Varșal. Spôsob života a kultúra Slovákov v Bihore*, Nadlak, Nitra, 2006, p. 52-62.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 42.

amount of Slovak population (mainly teachers from Slovakia worked there initially). The tradition goes on nowadays and consists in sending the Slovak teachers of Slovak language into Romania.<sup>21</sup>

An important event in the Slovak educational development in Romania was the first Slovak grammar school establishment in Nădlac, which functioned as Slovak pedagogical school in the period of 1948-1956.<sup>22</sup> In 1995 there was also established another Slovak secondary school – Jozef Kozáček Lyceum in Budoï (“Lýceum Jozefa Kozáčka”). And the Department of Slovak Language and Literature establishment at the university in Bucharest (1949) must be mentioned here as well. In total there are 2 lyceums, 4 basic schools with eight classes and 16 schools of a lower rank (I-IV classes) in Romania with a Slovak teaching language. Slovak young people can also continue in their education at universities in Slovakia (mainly Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Comenius University in Bratislava or Matej Bell University in Banská Bystrica). However a great deal of graduates returns into their birthplace rarely. Many of them work in non-Slovak areas in Romania eventually abroad.

It is also important to mention the acting of the Democratic Union of Czechs and Slovaks in Romania (“Demokratický zväz Čechov a Slovákov v Rumunsku”). The organisation was established in 1990 and its primary task is to maintain and develop national identity of the Slovak and Czech inhabitants and to represent them. Local offices belonging to the organisation are created in the four autonomous territories: Slovak territory Bihor-Sălaj, Arad, Banat and Czech territory South Banat. It covers cultural activities of a national, regional, local and international scope, activities of folk and theatre bodies, and publishing periodicals in Slovak and Czech languages.<sup>23</sup>

#### *Conclusion*

The Slovak minority in Romania lives in present mainly in the countryside (villages). Where there are Slovak schools and church representatives actively join the cultural and national life (both protestant Evangelical and Roman Catholics) the ethno-cultural profile stays almost unchanged. This might be proved by an active Slovak language acquisition among the youngest generation. However the political, economical and social changes after 1945<sup>24</sup> and 1989 have caused multiple shifts and constant overlapping of traditional and new forms. They subverted the system of values

---

<sup>21</sup> Nowadays there are Slovak teachers in the grammar school in Budoï and in the primary school in Făget. A teacher is going to come to a primary school in Şinteu.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 80-81.

<sup>24</sup> Repatriations (1947-1949), new working possibilities in industry, collectivization and similar have led to a serie of both endogeneous but mostly exogeneous cultural changes.

present at that time; on the other hand they have contributed to their rebirth. The high fluctuation of a working population leads to a continual depopulating of the Slovak areas and their replacement by Romanian inhabitants fastens the assimilation and irretrievably changes their cultural profile.



SLOVACII DIN ROMÂNIA – TRECUT ȘI PREZENT

Rezumat

Contribuția de față subliniază unele informații privitoare la așezarea slovacilor pe teritoriul de astăzi al României (cauzele fiind sociale și confesionale). Autoarea identifică principalele surse de hrană din diferite regiuni – câmpia din zona Aradului și Banatului; dealurile și pădurile din Bihor și Sălaj; câmpia și localitățile miniere din Satu Mare și Maramureș, ca și Bucovina de nord-est. Se face o succintă prezentare a vieții culturale și situației școlare a slovacilor din România în trecut și în prezent. O importanță deosebită o are școala, deoarece acolo unde au funcționat școli slovace și reprezentanții Bisericii (evangelice și catolice) au contribuit la viața culturală a națiunii slovace, profilul etno-cultural al populației a rămas neschimbat. Modificările sistemului politic, economic și social dintre anii 1945 și 1989 au contribuit la transformarea și suprapunerea formelor tradiționale cu noi forme ale vieții. Puternica fluctuație a populației active a dus spre depopularea localităților slovace și înlocuirea slovacilor cu populație românească, ceea ce a cauzat și asimilarea slovacilor, profilul cultural al acestora schimbându-se definitiv.