

STRUGGLE FOR A BORDERLAND.
THE ECCLESIASTIC AND CIVIL AUTHORITY IN
MEĐIMURJE (MURAKÖZ) BETWEEN 11TH AND 20TH
CENTURY

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Introduction

It is almost impossible to find an equivalent to the Polish term *kresy* (confines, borderland). Still, maybe it is not without a reason that we think that a somewhat similar notion of “confines” also existed in the Hungarian Kingdom and its partner country, Croatia, being in a similar geopolitical region, as our countries were also considered to be the confines of Western civilization and the Eastern borders were often held to be a dangerous zone as far as the security of the country was concerned.¹

As Csaba Gy. Kiss describes, Međimurje may be seen as a transitional region between Hungary and Croatia. Between 1102 and 1918, Croatia had a federal relationship with Hungary as a part of the Lands of the Holy Crown of Saint Stephen. The common state of Hungary and Croatia functioned as a personal, and also as a real union.² Even though Croatia was slightly restricted in the process of the national development in consequence of the union, it could preserve comprehensive autonomy within the frame of the Kingdom of Hungary. This situation resulted in the development of a very specific relationship between the two states.

¹ Cs. Gy. Kiss, *Understanding Central Europe: Nations and Stereotypes*, Budapest 2013, p. 169.

² D. Sokcsevits, *Horvátország a 7. századtól napjainkig*, Budapest 2011, p. 102.

The name of Međimurje comes from the word *Međimorje*. According to Zvonimir Bartolić, this was used as a synonym for *island* in old Croatian. The Hungarian name is Muraköz (or *Murasziget*) and bears the same meaning. In the Medieval Ages, the Latin names of the region were *Muram et Dravam*, *Insula Muro Dravana*, or *Insula Murinsel*, which mean “Mur island,” referring to it as a peninsula between the Mur and the Drava River.³ Međimurje (or Muraköz) is one of the best examples of transitional borderlands in East-Central Europe. Subjected to competing interests of Hungary and Croatia, just like most borderlands, it owns a troubled past with shifting borders and changing rulers. Nowadays, Međimurje is the northernmost county of Croatia between the Mur and the Drava River, surrounded by four main ethnographic regions: the Slovene Hills (Slovenske Gorice), Prekmurje (Muravidék/Mura mente), the Zala Hills (Zalai-domtság, Hungary), the Mur valley, and the Zagorje region with the centre of Varaždin. Thanks to the confluence of the Mur and the Drava Rivers, Međimurje is in fact a triple border between Slovenia, Hungary, and Austria, as the Austrian border (Bad Radkersburg) is only 35 kilometres away. Geographically, we can consider this region as a border area as well, because this is the meeting point of the Alps region and the Pannonian Basin.

Međimurje is the most densely populated region compared to the neighbouring regions (except Zagreb, nowadays the ratio is 165 inhabitants per km²). According to the census in 2011, 113,804 people live in the county of Međimurje.⁴ Historically this region is 880–883 km², nowadays it is only 730 km² because the separation of Legrad in the south (in 1931, before that it was part of the Nagykanizsa district), and Rackrižje in the north (in 1945). Međimurje belongs to the Kaj regional dialect. Throughout the centuries the closeness to Croatia was very important. Varaždin is less than fifteen kilometres away from Čakovec; it was a multifunctional city, where the Jesuits established a high school in 1636. The villagers from Međimurje often went to the market not only to Čakovec, but also to Varaždin. Even across the Drava River, Varaždin had a cultural impact on Međimurje, because it was easy to acquire Croatian newspapers, books, and commodities therefrom. There were also pilgrimages to Maria Bistrica from Međimurje.

In the following paper I will mostly use Croatian place names, but for the period prior to 1918 I will mention them in Hungarian as well

³ Z. Bartolić, *Sjevernohrvatske teme*, t. 5, Čakovec 1998, pp. 281–307.

⁴ *Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske*, Zagreb 2018, p. 126.

(except for villages) because of the controversial Magyarization of toponyms in the 1880s.

Problems of dual authority during the Medieval and Early-Modern period

King Ladislaus I the Saint established the diocese of Zagreb in 1090/1091 and Međimurje became part of the newly created bishopric within the archdeacon of Bekšín (Bekcsény). The name of Međimurje was firstly mentioned in 1203, and from the 11th century it was part of Zala county within the Kapronak district. At the beginning this dual authority resulted in administrative (firstly with the diocese of Veszprém), later in political problems too. The borders of the diocese of Zagreb often changed, also Hungarian settlements (Lenti, Páka, Alsólendva) and Slovenian villages (Bogojina, Beltinci) paid tithe to the bishops of Zagreb, so Hungarian priests served in the bishopric territory. From the medieval period, Štrigova was an ecclesiastical centre. According to the legend, Saint Jerome, the translator of the Bible into Latin (Vulgata), was born here, and it was one of the oldest parishes in Međimurje.⁵ In 1447, Pope Nicholas V gave privileges (remission of sins, additional graces) for the local shrine.⁶

The appearance of the famous Zrinski/Zrínyi family in Međimurje was coincidental with the spread of the Protestant faith in Transdanubian Hungary. In 1546, Nikola IV Zrinski (Zrínyi IV. Miklós) gained the domain of Čakovec (Csáktornya), which overlapped with the area of Međimurje. The Zrinski family originated from Dalmatia, early on they became part of the Hungarian aristocracy. Thanks to the new domain, they had close connection with the Hungarian aristocracy, especially with the Batthyány, Nádasdy, and Bánffy families, meanwhile Zrinskis also became Croatian bans. At that time Međimurje were among the richest domains of Hungary due to the fertile soil and its position. Furthermore, the population density of Međimurje was 30–40 people per km², which was double of the Hungarian rate. Nikola IV Zrinski settled peasants from his Croatian estates alongside the Una River, which effected the ethnic composition of Međimurje

⁵ J. Požgan, *Stridóvár plébánia a 19. század végétől a 20. század 20-as éveinek kezdetéig*, [in:] *Pomurje 1914–1920, Mura mente 1914–1920*, ed. B. Bunjac, Čakovec–Csáktornya 2011, p. 93.

⁶ V. Kalšan, *Iz vjerskog života Međimurje*, Čakovec 2003, p. 218.

deeply.⁷

Juraj IV Zrinski (Zrínyi IV. György, 1549–1603) introduced the Lutheran confession at about 1570, but the local Pauline Saint Jelena monastery of Šenkovec maintained the Catholic faith. Juraj IV was buried in the mausoleum of the Zrinski family, which belonged to the monastery. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, approximately twenty Lutheran congregations functioned, which were part of the Transdanubian church district and the diocese of Zala and Somogy.⁸ Nonetheless, Juraj V Zrinski (Zrínyi V. György, 1599–1626) converted back to the Catholic faith, which strengthened the connection between Međimurje and the bishopric of Zagreb, meanwhile the relationship with the Hungarian Protestant regions was halted. Considerable Hungarian population remained only in Legrad.⁹ The affiliation of the Saint Jelena Pauline monastery was also questionable, because the Croatian Pauline Province was established in 1684, and the bishopric of Zagreb tried to separate it from the Hungarian ecclesiastical authority.¹⁰

Nikola VII Zrinski (Zrínyi VII. Miklós, 1620–1664), poet and military leader, established a Franciscan monastery in Čakovec in 1659.¹¹ The Zrínyi family successfully developed a unique border-defending structure alongside the Danube and the Mur River. The peasant soldiery was used as a special defence system against the Ottoman incursions.¹² The name of the Zrinski family is strongly connected with the struggle against the Ottomans and the idea of self-denial.¹³ Petar

⁷ F. Végh, *Négy ország határvidékén: a Muraköz a 17. században. Történeti áttekintés*, [in:] *Határok fölött. Tanulmányok a költő, katona, államférfi Zrínyi Miklósról*, eds. S. Bene, P. Fodor, G. Hausner, J. Padányi, Budapest 2017, pp. 265–267.

⁸ F. Végh, *Egy különleges határrégió (A Muraköz a 17. században)*, [in:] *A horvát–magyar együttélés fordulópontjai. Intézmények, társadalom, gazdaság, kultúra*, eds. P. Fodor, D. Sokcsevits, Budapest 2015, pp. 527–528.

⁹ In 1910, 2,896 people lived in Legrad (32.5 percent Hungarians, 65 percent Croats). It was an important fortification against the Ottoman Empire; the Zrinski family head used the title of the Captain of Légrad and Muraköz. *Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények. A magyar szent korona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása*, part 1: A népesség főbb adatai, vol. 42, Budapest 1912, pp. 86–87. See more: D. Feletar, *Legrad*, Čakovec 1971; J. Haller, *Légrád története*, Eszék 1912.

¹⁰ R.A. Kann, V.D. Zdeněk, *The Peoples of the Eastern Habsburg Lands, 1526–1918*, Washington 1984, p. 171.

¹¹ V. Kalšan, *Iz vjerskog života*, op. cit., p. 70.

¹² F. Végh, *Society in the Duty of Defence: The Muraköz as a Peculiar Border Region in the Early Modern times*, [in:] *Specimina Nova Pars Prima Sectio Mediaevalis VIII*, eds. G. Barabás, G. Kiss, Pécs 2015, p. 193.

¹³ Nikola IV Zrinski defended the castle Szigetvár against the Ottomans in 1566. Thanks to this event, he has become a national hero for Croats and Hungarians. Sz. Varga, *Leónidász*

Zrinski's possessions were confiscated in 1671 because he took part in the so-called Magnate conspiracy (Zrinsko-Frankopan Conspiracy). The Zrinskis held the estate of Međimurje for 125 years. Nevertheless, the memory of the family was important on a local and national level as well. Thanks to the Croatian origin of the Zrinski family, they were always seen as national heroes at the same time Hungarians also empathize with their legacy. Hungarian historians tried to demonstrate their Hungarian affiliation, especially the figures of Nikola IV Zrinski and Nikola VII Zrinski, who were authors of books in Hungarian.

After confiscation of the domain of Čakovec, the *Hofkammer* and later the Althan family became the owners of the estate of Međimurje. Finally, György Festetics bought it in 1791 and his family possessed the land until 1923.¹⁴

Conflicts between authorities and the spread of nationalism (1791–1918)

The majority of the lower clergy of Međimurje completed their studies in the seminary of Zagreb, which meant that they supported the Croatian language and culture in Međimurje. After the establishment of the bishopric of Szombathely, the bishopric of Zagreb lost territories over the Mur River, so it became more homogeneously Croatian. In 1785, Joseph II created districts instead of the historical counties (*vámegye*, *županija*). According to the Croatian historiography, the emperor separated Međimurje from Hungary in 1785 when the whole of the Zala county became part of Zagreb district, although the king withdrew this decree on his deathbed.

After the Germanization attempts led by Joseph II, on 13 February 1793 György Festetics (1755–1819), the member of the general assembly of Zala county, proposed that Međimurje should be separated from the bishopric of Zagreb and be annexed to the newly established diocese of Szombathely. Furthermore, he stood for introduction of the Hungarian language in the local schools and choosing Hungarian notaries in the local towns and villages. We can interpret this proposal as a reaction against the earlier Germanization attempts, but also as a first step to Magyarize this region. Although, it is absolutely clear, that this

a végeken Zrínyi Miklós (1058–1566), Pécs–Budapest 2016, p. 39.

¹⁴ B. Bunjac, *Pregled Povijesti Međimurja*, Čakovec 2003, p. 95.

was the starting point of the unbroken struggle for the ecclesiastical separation of Međimurje from the bishopric of Zagreb, which continued until 1945.¹⁵

The Hungarian assimilation in Međimurje attempts started with the activity of the Educational Committee of Zala County (*Zala megyei Népnevelési Választmány*), which introduced the Hungarian language in the local schools. According to the *canonica visitatio* in 1846, written in Latin and Hungarian, the language of the schools were Hungarian: “The priest should be active in religious, moral affairs, who teach the students in Hungarian language.” The canonical visitation was carried out by bishopric of Zagreb.¹⁶

During the campaign of Josip Jelačić (ban of Croatia) in 1848–1849 in Hungary, the Croatian soldiers often looted the locals who opposed ban. The most famous person among them was the Franciscan Márk Gasparich (1810–1853), who was born in Međimurje, and fought against the enemies of the Hungarian revolutionists. Due to his actions, later the Hungarians tried to portray him as a local hero, as an example, who should be followed by the citizens of Međimurje. During the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in 1848–1849, Međimurje was occupied several times, finally, Josip Jelačić annexed Međimurje to Croatia with a ban decree of 18 September 1848. Within the Bach era, Međimurje was part of Croatia under the jurisdiction of the Varaždin county. The schools which worked in Croatian were subordinated to the Croatian-Slavonian Royal Council of Governor and the Archbishopric Consistorium. In 1861, as results of the negotiations between the Emperor and the Hungarian political elite Međimurje became part of Zala county and therefore Hungary too.

The Franciscan Monastery of Čakovec was erected in 1790 (the previously one was burnt down in 1699). At that time Čakovec was a slowly developing market-town. Its rapid growth started in the second half of the 19th century, after finishing the South Railway (Déli vasút) in 1873, which linked Budapest and Rijeka/Fiume. In 1883, the city already had electric lighting, three decades later the number of the citizens was 5,213. “The society and the language used in schools in Csáktornya (Čakovec) was completely Croatian half a century ago, this

¹⁵ Cs. M. Sarnyai, *Politikai és/vagy egyházkormányzati konfliktus? Megjegyzések a Muraköz zágrábi egyházmegyéjétől való elcsatolásának 1848-as történetéhez*, [in:] *Magyar Egyháztörténeti Vázlatok*, vol. 1–2, Budapest 2008, p. 131.

¹⁶ Nadbiskupski Arhiv u Zagrebu (Later: NAZ), Kanonske Vizitacije Arhidakonat Bekšin, Protokoli Broj 86/XVII (without number).

has fully changed by now. The Hungarian language is gaining ground fast in its society.”¹⁷ – Ferenc Gönczi (1851–1948), ethnographer and teacher of the primary school of Kuršanec, described this process which occurred in Čakovec in the late 19th and early 20th century. Only 21.73% of the city’s inhabitants were Hungarians in 1881, meanwhile in 1910, their percentage was doubled: 46.67% meant relative majority of Čakovec.¹⁸ Hungarian officers, teachers, soldiers, and craftsmen came to settle down in the city, which was easily accessible by train from Nagykanizsa or Zalaegerszeg. The Hungarians were overrepresented in specialist professions. In 1879, a state teacher-training college was established in Čakovec, which was meant to promote the Hungarian education and teachers in the border regions (like Međimurje and Prekmurje), to aid the Hungarian schools in Croatia (*Julián schools*) as well. The initial aim was to employ local Croats (or Slovenes) and teach them Hungarian, but mostly Hungarians later became local teachers. The first women teachers of Zala county appeared here as well, because the authorities tried to aid the lack of school staff.

Notwithstanding, the Hungarians remained minority in Međimurje, their ratio was only 8.26%, meanwhile the Croats gave 90.83% of the region’s population in 1910. During the Dualist period, one of the most complicated questions was the jurisdiction of schools. In 1910, more than half of the schools of Međimurje became state schools: 24 of 41 (13 were denominational and 4 community schools). Usually state schools functioned in the bigger towns and villages. Croatian remained the language of teaching only in one school of Međimurje in the school year of 1907/1908.¹⁹

The local Croatian lower clergy tried to make up for the lack of Croatian intellectual presence. Ivan Novak (1884–1934) who was born in Međimurje and later became a Croatian publicist and politician wrote his famous book titled *Justice for Međimurje* in 1907.²⁰ Novak tried to awake Croats to take actions towards the cause of Croats in Međimurje, to help them to throw off the “Hungarian yoke.” The Croatian Party of Rights claimed that the unification of Međimurje with Croatia was the

¹⁷ F. Gönczi, *Muraköz és Népe*, Budapest 1895, p. 28.

¹⁸ *A magyar korona országában az 1881. év elején végrehajtott népszámlálás főbb eredményei megyék és községek szerint részletezve*, vol. 2, Budapest 1882, p. 375; *Magyar Statisztikai Közlemények*, part 1, vol. 42, op. cit., pp. 78–96.

¹⁹ F. Bauk, *Povijest školstva i prosvjete u Međimurju*, Čakovec 1992, pp. 75–76.

²⁰ I. Novak, *Istina u Međimurju*, Zagreb 1907.

first point of their program published on 26 June 1894.²¹ The Hungarian government tried to maintain a good relationship with Croatia and with the help of the ban could influence the Croatian internal affairs. The leaders of Zala county protested in vain, the Hungarian government did not support to dis-annexation of Međimurje from the Archbishopric of Zagreb fearing that the Croatian-Hungarian relations would get worse. We should keep the crucial fact in mind that the national awakening in Croatia was widely against the Hungarian-Croatian union—in the late 19th and the early 20th century, the leaders of the Croatian movement supported either the union of the South Slavic nations or the establishment of the Independent Croatia.

The local Croatian clergy represented the most significant resistance against the Hungarian assimilation attempts. The Hungarians often accused the archbishopric of Zagreb that it employed foreign priests instead of locals (which was not true).²² The local clergy was divided by the question of spreading of the Hungarian language in the churches. For example, Ivan Ivko, parson who was born in Međimurje, protested against the Magyarization of public life in Međimurje, he was denounced several times to the police, because of speaking against denationalization.²³ In fact, Croats could use their language publicly and legally in churches.

Luka Purić (1881–1914) was one of the most important activists against Magyarization. He was born in Hodošan (Međimurje) and graduated from the high school in Keszthely (Hungary). After that, he studied theology in the University of Zagreb and became a parish priest in Belica. He reminded Croats about the importance of the process of denationalization in Međimurje and tried to introduce methods to avoid assimilation. Firstly, he recommended establishing libraries, cooperative saving banks, and agricultural cooperatives. Purić published his writings in the journal of Varaždin, “Naše Pravice.”²⁴

²¹ G. Kemény, *Iratok a nemzetiségi kérdés történetéhez Magyarországon a dualizmus korában*, vol. 2: 1892–1900, Budapest 1956, p. 288.

²² In 1910, there were 22 parish priests in Međimurje: 10 was born there, 3 came from Hungary (over Mur River), and 8 priest from Croatia (over Drava River), so this accusation was not correct. *NAZ Schematismus cleri Archi-Diocesis Zagradiensis*, Zagreb 1910, pp. 80–90, 284–301. There is no data about a birthplace of a Franciscan in Čakovec.

²³ J. Požgan, op. cit., pp. 99–100.

²⁴ In 1904–1907, he published four main brochures in “Naše Pravice”: *Kako je našoj hrvatskoj braći u Medjumurju, Put k slobodi i sreći, Živila Hrvatska, Napried u Medjumurje i O ljubavi domovine, Ban Jelačić i 1848*. Z. Bartolić, *Sjevernohrvatske teme*, vol. 4, Zagreb 2001, p. 9.

Juraj Lajtmann (1883–1964) finished the high school in Nagykanizsa and studied theology in Zagreb. As Luka Purić, he became an important leader of the Croatian national movement in Međimurje. Lajtmann worked as a parish priest in Kotoriba, where he tried to stop the spread of the Hungarian language, presented a social and agrarian programme to culturally and economically strengthen the Croatian community, and organized a woman choir and theatre. In 1912, he published with Ivan Kuhar and Ignacije Lipnjak the book *Jezuš ljubav moja* (*Beloved Jesus*, Zagreb 1912). Juraj Lajtmann actively participated in the organization of the military occupation of Međimurje by Croatian volunteer troops in 1918, when he was imprisoned in Nagykanizsa for a short time.²⁵

The intensifying interests towards Međimurje was significant in Croatia. Rudolf Horvat, a Croatian historian wrote a book about the region in 1907, in which he claims that after the Lex Apponyi in 1906, the parish priests of Međimurje remained loyal towards the Hungarian authorities. Consequently, Croatian priests also preached in Hungarian, at the beginning only on speech-days in schools, later every month they gave sermons in Hungarian as well.²⁶ We also have to mention Vinko Žganec (1890–1976), who was born in Vratišinec. He was an ethnographer and later a jurist who finished the high school in Varaždin and studied theology in Zagreb. He became a parish priest in Dekanovec and supported the annexation of Međimurje to Croatia during the World War I. In 1916, Žganec published the book about the folk Croatian songs in the region on the south to the Drava River.²⁷

Many priest actively participated in the fostering of the Croatian language and culture, some of them more radical than others. The priests of Međimurje supported the military occupation of Međimurje in 1918, many of them were members of the National Committee of Međimurje (*Narodno vijeće za Međimurje*). Juraj Lajman took part in the organization of the Croatian public education in the region. The Hungarian authorities achieved that Ignacije Lipnjak was temporarily transferred from Međimurje, furthermore, the Croatian priests were often accused by the Hungarian press with seditious acts.²⁸

During the World War I, the economic and social difficulties increased, especially in 1918, when the whole of Međimurje was fac-

²⁵ "Zalai Közlöny" 22.09.1920, vol. 59, no. 190, p. 3.

²⁶ R. Horvat, *Poviest Međimurja*, Zagreb 1944, p. 275.

²⁷ V. Žganec, *Hrvatske pučke popijevke iz Međimurja*, Zagreb 1916.

²⁸ V. Kalšan, *Iz vjerskog života*, op. cit., p. 23.

ing chaotic circumstances. The local notaries and landlords were persecuted, Jewish shops and communities were attacked, and the local priests were threatened.²⁹ Hungarian authorities killed more than one hundred people in the villages.³⁰ Croatian volunteer troops led by Dragutin Perko and Slavko Kvaternik occupied Međimurje on 24 December 1918. Many Hungarian state officers and teachers had to flee to Hungary, meanwhile, many welcomed the Croatian soldiers, it seemed as this event was a liberation of Međimurje, the joining with their motherland. On 9 January 1919, the Great National Assembly (*Velika narodna skupština*) declared the final separation of Međimurje from Hungary, referring to Woodrow Wilson and the right of people to self-determination.

Interwar period (1918–1941)

Međimurje belonged to the county of Varaždin between 1919 and 1922, then it was annexed to the Maribor Oblast. After 1929, Međimurje was a part of the Sava Banovina (with the centre of Zagreb). During the period of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, there were problems with the administrative integration, for example, the Hungarian civil and criminal laws remained in power in some aspects.³¹

In 1931, Štrigova was separated from the District of Čakovec and added to the Drava Banovina, within the District of Ljutomer. The community of Razkrižje consisted of several smaller settlements (among others, Globoka, Veščica, Razkrižje, Šafarsko) were separated from Štrigova because of the hilly environment.³² It was noticeable already at the turn of the century that the north-western villages were different from other parts of Međimurje. Ferenc Gönczi wrote that:

The language of the highlands of Međimurje is a hybrid of the dialects of Lower-Međimurje, Styrian Slovenian, and Slovenians of Zala (Vends), besides this, there are also some German and

²⁹ I. Puzak, *A plébániai krónikákban lejegyzett élet a Muraközben 1914–1920*, [in:] *Pomurje 1914–1920*, op. cit., pp. 132–141; Z. Paksy, *A Muraköz és a Muravidék megszállása 1919-ben*, “Pannon Tükör” 2009, vol. 14, no. 1, p. 89.

³⁰ V. Kapun, *Međimurje 1918*, Čakovec 1982, p. 19.

³¹ L. Bíró, *A jugoszláv állam 1918–1939*, Budapest 2010, pp. 124–136.

³² S. Grgić, *Accepting the Border, Choosing the Border: The Štrigova and Razkrižje Micro-region in the First Half of the 20th Century*, “Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino” 2017, vol. 56, no. 3, p. 40.

Hungarian appearing in it. Therefore, this dialect developed from five languages and it is a mixture of them to a greater or lesser extent; but there are also slight differences within this dialect as well. There are only few, two-three communities, or Hill Districts, where inhabitants would speak the same language. In the villages along the bank of the Mur River, locals are speaking partly Slovenian (Vend).³³

There were the territorial disputes between Croats and Slovenians about Štrigova. Slovenes accused Croats of Croatianization carried out by the teachers and priests in Razkrižje, meanwhile Croats blamed local leaders for separatism and leading to that the north-western border of Međimurje was under the Slovenia's influences. According to the census of 1921, the local population of Štrigova district were 6,076, from which 98% declared themselves as Croats. Notwithstanding, they preferred to use the Slovenian language.

On 23 August 1935, the Eucharistic Congress was held in Čakovec, in which ten thousand people participated, among others archbishop of Zagreb Antun Bauer, coadjutor archbishop of Zagreb Alojzije Stepinac (later the archbishop of Zagreb, 1937–1960), the archbishop of Belgrade, and Franciscan provincial August Šlibar. There were holy mass served not only in Croatian, in Slovenian and Hungarian as well. The congress was a prominent event in Međimurje. The locals decorated streets with Croatian flags, although it was forbidden to use national flags instead of the Yugoslavian one. In September 1935, Alojzije Stepinac visited parishes in Međimurje.³⁴ He blessed the renovated church of Štrigova and he tried to reconcile Croats with Slovenes.³⁵

From ecclesiastical point of view, Catholics represented overwhelming majority. In 1910, 93,283 people lived in the region, 98.15% of which were Catholic, 1,086 Jewish (1.16%), other religions represented only 0.96%. In 1921, 97.49% of the population were Catholic; in 1931, 98.28%. In 1941, there were 22 parishes in Međimurje, one of them was a Franciscan monastery in Čakovec, altogether 35 priests served in the region.³⁶

According to the previously mentioned census of 1931, the total population of Međimurje was 96,499, of which 93,690 were Croats

³³ F. Gönczi, *Muraköz és Népe*, op. cit. p. 106.

³⁴ V. Kalšan, *Iz vjerskog života*, op. cit., pp. 24–27.

³⁵ Idem, *Gradansko društvo u Međimurju*, Čakovec 2000, pp. 72–73.

³⁶ Idem, *Međimurje u drugom svjetskom ratu*, Čakovec 2015, p. 59.

and 1,297 Hungarians (1.4%).³⁷ Nonetheless, Hungary maintained the territorial claims to Međimurje during the interwar period. The Association of Muraköz (*Muraközi Szövetség*) was established in Budapest, one year after the occupation of Međimurje on 24 December 1919.³⁸ The honorary president of the association was István Zadravecz Uzdóczy (1884–1965), who was born in Čakovec and was a retired bishop of the Hungarian Armed Forces. They tried to support the revisionist movements and to influence internal policy-making to regain Međimurje to Hungary. There was an opinion among the revisionists that the local population trying to reunite with Hungary. Misunderstandings and illusions resulted in huge troubles during the World War II in the region. Hungarians emphasized the historical rights in contrast to the Croats who referred to the ethnic composition of Međimurje (the right of the people to self-determination). The two different point of view clashed over Međimurje. We should keep in mind that during the interwar period the Hungarian government supported the Croatian separatist movements because it weakened the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and—as a result—Little Entente. The main goal of the Hungarian government was to regain the lost Hungarian territories with peaceful methods: With help of the Hungarian communities of Transylvania, Slovakia, and Vojvodina. Compare to these lost Hungarian territories, the significance of Međimurje was important only to citizens of Zala county, especially for those people who had to flee to Hungary after the World War I. In Prekmurje, the situation was a bit different, because there was a strong Hungarian community along the border (especially in the town of Lendava—Alsólendva). The authorities of Zala county tried to link the problem of Međimurje with Prekmurje, meanwhile the situation was sufficiently different. At that time the “Muraközi–Vend theory” was spread among Hungarian intellectuals: According to it, the population of Međimurje and Prekmurje was Hungarian (despite the fact that they spoke Slavic languages) and that people suffered in the Yugoslav state. They tried to emphasize the differences between the official Croatian and Slovenian language and the local dialects of

³⁷ R. Horvat, op. cit., p. 300.

³⁸ Cs. Csóti, *A trianoni döntés és Zala megye*, [in:] *Zala Megye Ezer Éve. Tanulmánykötet a magyar államalapítás millenniumának tiszteletére*, eds. L. Vándor, Zalaegerszeg 1996, p. 217; Idem, *A Mura–Dráva határ néhány történeti problémája, 1910–1955*, [in:] *Ahol a határ elválaszt. Trianon és következményei a Kárpát-medencében*, eds. C. Pásztor, Balassagyarmat–Várpalota 2002, p. 543.

Međimurje and Prekmurje.³⁹ Many Hungarian intellectuals and political leader agreed with this theory, especially in Zala and Vas counties.

The World War II (1941–1945)

During the World War II, we can find similar (but more intense) tendencies occurring in comparison with the Dualist Period. On 7 April 1941, the German troops arrived in Čakovec and on the following day the Ustaša general staff of Međimurje was established in head of Teodor Košak, a local pharmacist.⁴⁰ The official proclamation of the Ustaša Independent State of Croatia occurred on 10 April in Zagreb. Ante Pavelić formed a cabinet on 16 April,⁴¹ on the same day when the Hungarian Army started the occupation of Međimurje and Prekmurje.⁴² The occupation was the topic of the Croatian-Hungarian peace negotiations but finally thanks to diplomatic help of Germany the region became part of Hungary.⁴³ The Hungarian civil administration was introduced in the District of Čakovec (Csáktornya) and Prelog (Perlak) on 21 August 1941.⁴⁴

The regained territories were reincorporated to the Hungarian Church organization, just as it happened with Prekmurje—the bishop of Szombathely József Grösz became the apostolic administrator of this region.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, the Hungarian occupation of Međimurje and the introduction of the Hungarian civil administration was questionable until the summer of 1941. The authorities of Zala county did not describe it as a military occupation of Međimurje, but as political and administrative re-annexation. Papal prelate József Pehm (after 1943 József Mindszenty, in 1945 the archbishop of Esztergom and primate of Hungary) was in charge of the Međimurje questions and induced the Hungarian government to keep the separate status of the region.

³⁹ I. Puzak, op. cit., p. 139.

⁴⁰ V. Kalšan, *Međimurje u drugom svjetskom ratu*, op. cit., p. 16.

⁴¹ P. Adriano, G. Cingolani, *Nationalism and Terror. Ante Pavelić and Ustasha Terrorism from Fascism to the Cold War*, Budapest–New York 2018, p. 178.

⁴² K. Vladimir, *Muraköz történelme*, Csáktornya 2014, p. 310.

⁴³ A. E. Sajti, *A magyar–horvát határtárgyalások és a lakosságcsere kudarca (1941–1944)*, vol. 81, Szeged 1985, pp. 3–18.

⁴⁴ L. Göncz, *Felszabadulás vagy megszállás? A Mura mente 1941–1945*, Lendva 2006, pp. 64–65; A. Kovács, Á. Tátrai, *Magyarok a Muravidéken 1918–1945 Kronológia*, Lendva–Ljubljana 2013, p. 86.

⁴⁵ A. Kovács, Á. Tátrai, op. cit., p. 203.

The Hungarian Government was reluctant to do it because of the overwhelming majority of the Croats there, moreover, Budapest wanted to maintain a good relationship with Croatia as a German ally. However, the Independent State of Croatia protested against the Hungarian occupation of Međimurje. When it became clear that Zagreb could not regain Međimurje, the offices of the Čakovec and the Prelog districts in Varaždin were established to maintain the symbolic Croatian authority in the region.

On 8 May 1941, a delegation from Međimurje came to the meeting of the municipal board of Zala county to present the position of loyalty to Hungary and Regent Miklós Horthy in the name of 12,501 inhabitants of the region.⁴⁶ According to the Croatian historiography, initially Hungarians collected the signatures for the detachment of Međimurje from the Archbishopric of Zagreb offering people bribes (flour, salt, and petroleum). Beyond that they forged thousands of signatures with the leading role of Ottó Pecsornik, the mayor of Čakovec.⁴⁷

“Međimurje is Hungarian, because it feels Hungarian”—József Pehm said during the extraordinary general assembly of Zala county on 15 July 1941.⁴⁸ In the next months, the Hungarian and Croatian side could not agree with each other on the jurisdiction of Međimurje. Due to the changes of the international politics and the activity of the authorities of Zala county and József Pehm, in July 1941, the Hungarian government introduced the civil administration and integrated Međimurje with the Hungarian state.⁴⁹ Firstly Germans occupied Štrigova but Hungarians took over the town on 11 July 1941. Therefore Hungarians controlled the whole territory of historical Međimurje.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Ibidem, p. 57.

⁴⁷ J. Drvoderić, *Generalni Vikarijat za Međimurje*, Zagreb 1996, p. 19. The author refers to the following book: N.N., *Međimurje 1919–1959*, Čakovec 1959, pp. 62–64.

⁴⁸ L. Göncz, *Felszabadulás vagy*, op. cit., , p. 61.

⁴⁹ About the activity of József Pehm: M. Balogh, *Mindszenty József (1892–1975)*, vol. 1, Budapest 2015, pp. 254–282; L. Nagy, *Mindszenty József szerepe Muraköz visszacsatolásában*, “Zempléni Múzsá” 2016, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 19–30; L. Göncz, *A területi integritás szellemében. Pehm (Mindszenty) József megnyilatkozásai a visszacsatolt Muramentéről és Muraközről*, “Vasi Szemle” 2005, vol. 59, no. 4, pp. 415–423.

⁵⁰ Z. Bartolić, op. cit., vol. 4, p. 7.

The archiepiscopal vicariate of Međimurje

Croatian civil servants, teachers, and people who settled down in Međimurje after 1918 were expelled from the region in 1941. They were replaced by the Hungarian officials and teachers. Only Croatian priests could stay in Međimurje. The archbishop of Zagreb and primate of the Croatian Catholic Church Alojzije Stepinac established the archiepiscopal vicariate of Međimurje on 13 August 1941. Ignacije Rodić, the parish priest of Selnica, was ordered to administrate the vicariate and conduct the parishes of Međimurje fearing that the Hungarian authorities would make difficulties in functioning of the Croatian Church in the region. In the circumstances of the Hungarian occupation, the archiepiscopal vicar could represent the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Zagreb in Međimurje. Rodić made arrangements about the celebratory masses for soldiers, appointments of teacher of religion, the right to confess; he kept contacts with the archbishopric of Zagreb and with the Hungarian civil and Church authorities. Furthermore, Rodić was responsible of the certificates of baptism and marriage, the minutes of the archiepiscopal vicariate as well.

Alojzije Stepinac gave spiritual and political support to the local clergy of Međimurje. He could prevent serious conflicts between the Hungarian authorities and Croatian priests. On 21 August 1941, the clergy would have to take an oath on Hungary and Regent Miklós Horthy. Furthermore, in the oath it was mentioned that (1) they could not admit any appointment from the archbishopric of Zagreb or the archiepiscopal vicar of Međimurje, (2) they could not keep contact with the archbishop of Zagreb (because the archbishop would interfere in local citizens' affairs), (3) priests from Croatia could not come to Međimurje, (4) the priests of Međimurje would be supervised by the bishop of Szombathely.⁵¹ Alojzije Stepinac warned the priests of Međimurje that they should swear an oath, otherwise the local communities would remain without spiritual leaders. However, the archbishop protested against the ecclesiastical detachment of Međimurje and interceded in the Holy See thanks to which the region would not be approved as a part of the Hungarian Catholic Church until the end of the war. Moreover, he said that: "Until the war continues the only thing what they [Hungarians] can gain is not more than temporary administration."⁵²

⁵¹ J. Drvoderić, op. cit., p. 27.

⁵² NAZ, Fond Generalni Vikarijat za Međimurje, MV/129/1941.

On 21 August 1941, eighteen priests of Međimurje took an oath (according to the Croatian sources eleven, without Franciscans), while eight priests did not swear on Hungary and the Regent. Until a set date, the Hungarian authorities guaranteed the protection of those clerics, who took an oath—they obtained a Hungarian citizenship.⁵³ Nonetheless, Alojzije Stepinac could induce Croatian and Hungarian diplomats to permit to those Croatian priests who did not take an oath to be able to stay in Međimurje and continue their service.⁵⁴

The anxieties of the ecclesiastical detachment were not baseless because in the 19th century there were several attempts to ecclesiastically separate Međimurje from Zagreb and to integrate it with the bishopric of Szombathely (perhaps with the archbishopric of Veszprém). During the introduction of the Hungarian civil administration in Međimurje, József Pehm wrote an article about the religious life of Međimurje: “Now the solution of the issue is in Budapest and Rome. Croatia went his own way, there is not any reason why a foreigner prelate should have a claim here.”⁵⁵ Basically the Hungarian Catholic Church tried to expand in Međimurje with support of the authorities of the county and József Pehm. Several articles and books were dedicated to this matter.⁵⁶ As Haller Laposi Jenő wrote:

The Croatian priests incite more in interest to separate Međimurje from Hungary. Nowadays, also these restless people eat Hungarian bread, nevertheless they are trying dismember Hungary. They could educate anti-Hungarian xenophobe priests in Zagreb and Varaždin, and from women of Međimurje anti-Hungarian xenophobe nuns. After finishing their studies they were sent back to their homeland, where they fight as janissaries against us. If we would like to keep peace and order in Međimurje, it is absolutely necessary that the Croatian priests should be removed immediately.⁵⁷

⁵³ “Muraköz–Megyimurje” 11.09.1941, vol. 36, no. 1, p. 2.

⁵⁴ V. Kalšan, *Međimurje u drugom svjetskom ratu*, op. cit., p. 62.

⁵⁵ “Zalamegyei Újság” 19.07.1941. On the other hand József Pehm had proposed on the municipal assembly in 1942 that the civil servants in Međimurje should study Croatian language and in this case he supported to establish language courses. L. Göncz, *A területi integritás*, op. cit., p. 422.

⁵⁶ M. Kring, *A Muraközi országhatár a magyar–horvát viszony történetében*, Budapest 1942; J. Muravölgyi [J. Margitai], *Muraköz és a horvátok*, Budapest 1929; J. L. Haller, *Igazságot Muraköznek*, Budapest 1938; It was published in Italian also: J. L. Haller, *La Giustizia del Muraköz, Giustificazione della sua Riannessione All’Ungheria*, trans. G. Brunner, Budapest 1941.

⁵⁷ “Zalamegyei Újság” 25.10.1941, vol. 24, no. 244, pp. 4–5.

In article entitled *Hungarian Muraköz* in the daily paper of "Zalai Magyar Élet Ujság" Ferenc Kelemen wrote that: "As soon as possible, we have to ecclesiastically reannex (sic!) Međimurje, if we would like to remain there, which was a Hungarian territory by one thousand year, and after two decades of oppression would stay in the heart of hearts Hungarian."⁵⁸

On 22 May 1942, Archbishop Alojzije Stepinac sent a letter to Ignacije Rodić, in which he confirmed that until the war continued, Međimurje would not be under Hungarian ecclesiastical jurisdiction. Furthermore, he drew the Croatian priests attention to maintain their ecclesiastical functions and convinced them to not give up to the Hungarian authorities. Moreover, he emphasized the importance of preaches in churches and schools. As Stepinac wrote, in another case they would be expelled from Međimurje and therefore it would be disagreeable consequences to the Croatian nation. According to the report of Ignacije Rodić, 35 priest served in Međimurje in 1942. Eight priest had Slovenian origin (five from the neighbouring Prekmurje), which presence in the region was the initiative of Stepinac archbishop.⁵⁹

Hungarians tried to send Hungarian priests to Međimurje. Firstly, in 1942, two Franciscans came from Hungary to the Franciscan monastery of Čakovec to teach catechism in the local schools. Géza Fekete became the headmaster of the local primary school.⁶⁰ Thirteen Hungarian priests from Levenete (a military youth organization of Interwar Hungary) arrived in Međimurje on 13 December 1943. However, they could not serve in the local parishes because the archiepiscopal vicar Ignacije Rodić did not let them to push the local Croatian priests out of Međimurje. Referring to canon law he successfully defended their sphere of authority against the Hungarian attempts. The Levente institutions were established in Međimurje and tried to teach Hungarian history and strengthen Hungarian identity among the local pupils during the meetings. They also improvised military tactics.

Hungarians tried to establish congregations in Međimurje, however, with the leadership of Ignacije Rodić the local Croatian clergy was against the congregation because they were worried about the fact that the Hungarians would interfere in the church affairs. Several congregations were established in Međimurje and the majority of the members were Croats. On 20 August 1943, the State Foundation Day of Hun-

⁵⁸ "Zalai Magyar Élet napilap" 4.09.1941.

⁵⁹ NAZ, Fond Generalni Vikarijat za Međimurje, MV 221/1942.

⁶⁰ "Muraköz–Megyimurje" 13.11.1941, vol. 36, no. 10, p. 2.

gary, the mayor of Čakovec Ottó Pecsornik led a pilgrimage to the Hungarian village, Búcsúszentlászló—the Hungarian press represented this event as a patriotic act of Croats from Međimurje, since they went to Hungary instead of the Croatian pilgrim centre of Maria Bistrica.⁶¹

Several punishments were imposed on priests and civilians because of their resistance against Magyarization. There are available documents about that phenomenon in the Archbishopric Archive of Zagreb and the State Archive of Međimurje in Štrigova.⁶² Within the frame of this paper, there is no possibility to list all of the sources about the repressions in Međimurje during World War Two. Notwithstanding several clashes occurred between local Croats and Hungarian settlers and priests. The main cause of conflict originated from the language of the mass.⁶³ For example, the Hungarian Levente priests served masses in Hungarian only for soldiers and local students. Except for Čakovec, the liturgy was held in Croatian, meanwhile settled Hungarians tried to sing in Hungarian during the sermons. It was a completely new phenomenon for the local Croatian priests. There were conflicts between a new Hungarian choirmasters and the local Croatian priests too.⁶⁴ Lots of priests were accused or reported for smuggling Croatian books from Croatia. The parish priest of Nedelišće was accused because he did not distribute Hungarian prayer books among people.⁶⁵ In Pribislavec, a local threw a stone at the Hungarian teacher on the street when he heard that she sang along with the children in Hungarian.⁶⁶ It was a divisive question of whether locals cooperate with the Hungarian authorities or resist them. The situation also resulted in several clashes between locals during the Hungarian occupation and after the Second World War.

As the frontline approached Međimurje in 1944, the situation deteriorated. The deportation of 605 Jews from Međimurje via Nagykanizsa to Auschwitz-Birkenau was carried out by the Hungarian authorities on 21 May 1944. From the Jewish Community of Čakovec (800 people) only 70 people survived the war. It is important to mention that several Jews in Međimurje supported the unification with Hungary.

⁶¹ "Muraköz–Megyimurje" 20.08.1942, vol.38, no. 33, p. 2.

⁶² Državni Arhiv za Međimurje (Later: DAM), Kotarski sud Čakovec, 1941–1945; Kotarski sud Prelog 1941–1945.

⁶³ NAZ, Fond Generalni Vikarijat za Međimurje, MV 37/1944.

⁶⁴ NAZ, Fond Generalni Vikarijat za Međimurje, MV 282/1943.

⁶⁵ DAM, Kotarski sud Čakovec 1942, B 4101-4200, III/26.

⁶⁶ DAM, Kotarski sud Čakovec 1942, Pl. 4001-4100/1942 II 27.

There were also partisan actions in Međimurje after the second half of 1943. The partisans attacked railways, oil wells, and police stations. The Hungarian authorities accused Croatian priests of collaboration with communist partisans. The Hungarian soldiers killed several partisans and condemned those people who allegedly collaborated with them. On 6 April 1945, the Bulgarian Communist troops liberated Čakovec, thereafter the Soviet soldiers and the members of the Kalnik Partisan squad arrived. The fights in the territory of Međimurje continued until 12 April 1945 when Štrigova was also liberated from Nazi troops.

Međimurje after World War Two

After the end of War, those who allegedly collaborated with the paramilitary Ustasha Crusaders (Križari) were detained, among them, several local priests were under suspicion. The new authorities prevented the clerks from fulfilling their duties. As an example, they could not visit the villages because of the vicinity of borderline.⁶⁷ They did not have permission to teach in the local schools and to get passports. Initially Yugoslavia and the Croatian Border Commission had territorial claims in Hungary (along the Raba, Mur and Drava River until spring 1946). The authorities in Belgrade tried to convince South Slavs still living in Hungary to join to Yugoslavia. However, later Tito strived for establishing good relationship with Budapest.⁶⁸ The ethnic conflicts erupted between Croats and Slovenians regarding to the Štrigova Municipality—the official government proposed Slavic unity, so it was very important for the communist leadership. The Štrigova Municipality was finally split between the Socialist Republic of Slovenia and the Socialist Republic of Croatia in 1946. Surprisingly, the local Croats referred to the period of the Hungarian rule because at that time the border of Međimurje was not changed.

During the alienation period (as a consequence of Tito–Stalin split), the bridge of the Mur River was closed in August 1948. Croats from Međimurje could not cultivate their vineyards in the “Hungarian” riv-

⁶⁷ V. Kalšan, *Muraköz történelme*, Csáktornya 2014, pp. 378–379.

⁶⁸ Á. Hornyák, *Határkijelölés, határsáv és a magyarországi délszlávok. Vitás kérdések a magyar–jugoszláv kapcsolatokban a második világháború után*, [in:] *Magyarok és szerbek a változó határ két oldalán, 1941–1948. Történelem és emlékezet*, eds. Á. Hornyák, L. Bíró, Budapest 2016, p. 320.

erside of Mur River. It was common for Croats in Eastern Međimurje because Eastern Međimurje was very flat, meanwhile the hills of Letenye were very close to Croatian settlements. This caused several problems, for example, their lands were confiscated by local Hungarians or collectivized by the state.

A 15 km-wide border zone was formed in the summer of 1950 with an increased number of border-guards. Within the “South Defence System”, more than 5,000 bunkers, shelters, and firing positions were built until 1955. During this period, there was a massive propaganda campaign between Hungary and Yugoslavia. Both government punished the respective Croatian and Hungarian minorities. The border zone was temporarily abolished in January 1956, and finally in 1965. In February 1957, it was reintroduced thanks to the events of 1956. During these years the size of the zone changed.⁶⁹

At the beginning of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956, Tito was well-disposed towards the events in Hungary but he rapidly changed his mind (he worried that the revolution would spread over to Yugoslavia). Only the Croatian exile press supported the Hungarian Revolution openly. However, the official press condemned the events, yet, Tito accepted the Hungarian refugees. Firstly, the agents and leaders of the political police came to Yugoslavia, than the civilians followed them; twenty eight camps were created (twelve in Croatia). Twenty thousand Hungarians fled to Yugoslavia and 642 people were in the temporary camp of Čakovec, in the castle of the Zrinski. Later on, almost all of the refugees fled to Western Europe.⁷⁰

Not just the physical border was closed, but the Croatian–Hungarian relations touched bottom as well. At that time, it was difficult to talk openly about the conflicts between local Croatian priests and Hungarian authorities during World War Two. As like in the every socialist republic of Yugoslavia, the role of the partisan movement was highlighted in Croatia. The Museum of Čakovec, which was opened in 1954, organized a permanent exhibition about the partisan actions against Hungarians during World War Two. Until 1990, there were foottraces organized every year on 6 April in Čakovec in memory of the liberation from Hungary. This date is celebrated as a day of the liberation of Međimurje from Nazi occupation. Then, Čakovec played an important role during the Croatian War of Independence, since Međimurje was the first county which was liberated from the Yugoslav

⁶⁹ Ibidem, pp. 328–335.

⁷⁰ A. Hegedűs, *Az 1956-os forradalom és Jugoszlávia*, Budapest 2010, p. 62.

People's Army in 1991.⁷¹ 7,700 people from Međimurje fought in this war. On 23 September 2005, the Croatian Sabor declared 9 January as a memorial-day for the events of 9 January 1919 when Međimurje was separated from Hungary.⁷² According to the official website of the Parliament in Zagreb, this date represents the unity of the Croatian territories.⁷³ The War of Independence triggered a tangible shift in the Croatian historiography, therefore, there are fewer anti-Hungarian sentiments in the local historiography of Međimurje also.

However, the public discourse about the Hungarian legacy has only been started recently. The memory of Hungarian authority is still present in Međimurje and regularly recalled in the form of memorial days (9 January, 6 April). Moreover, the contemporary intellectual cooperation between Croatia and Hungary is very fruitful (for example, the researches about the Zrinski/Zrínyi family).⁷⁴

Summary

Međimurje (Muraköz) administratively belonged to the Hungarian Kingdom from the 11th century until 1918 (except between 1848–1861), it was part of the Zala County. Nevertheless, from the perspective of Church administration, it belonged to the archdiocese of Zagreb. Before the 18th century, the dual suzerainty in Međimurje was not a political problem because Hungary and Croatia were under the same crown. After the birth of nationalism, it became an urgent ques-

⁷¹ Collection about the Croatian War of Independence (*Zbirka Međimurje u Domovinskom ratu*) was organized by Ana Šestak, Muzej Međimurje Čakovec, <https://mmc.hr/zbirka-medimurje-u-domovinskom-ratu/> [access: 29.11.2019].

⁷² *Domorodci! Medjimurci! Suženjstvu je našem kraj! Izložba povodom 100. obljetnice odcjepljenja Međimurja od mađarske države*, eds. A. Šestak, Čakovec 2019, p. 59. In January 2019, there was 100. anniversary of the estrangement of Međimurje from Hungary. The Museum of Međimurje with the Nikola Zrinski Library and the State Archive of Međimurje organized an exhibition with the title "Exhibition about the 100 anniversary of the split from Hungary". According to the work plan of the Museum, the aim was to show the historical process of how Međimurje estranged from Hungary and joined the "mother" Croatia and to introduce the exhibition to the wider public especially for students.

⁷³ <https://www.sabor.hr/hr/o-saboru/povijest-saborovanja/vazni-datumi/9-sijecnja-dan-donosjenja-rezolucije-o-odcjepljenju> [access: 29.11.2019].

⁷⁴ D. Sokcsevits, *A Zrínyiek helye és emlékezete az újkori (XIX–XX. századi) horvát történelmi és nemzeti tudatban*, [in:] *Határok fölött. Tanulmányok a költő, katona, államférfi Zrínyi Miklósról*, eds. S. Bene, P. Fodor, G. Hausner, J. Padányi, Budapest 2017, pp. 225–237.

tion that how can acquire both authorities in Međimurje. The contradiction increased because the absolute majority of the population spoke in Croatian but the territory administratively belonged to Hungary. During the Dualist period, the leaders of Zala County had many attempts to assimilate the Croats of Međimurje but merely the town of Čakovec (Csáktornya) started to be Magyarized. Only the Croatian lower clergy could resist forcefully against Hungarization attempts. The end of World War I resulted in a chaotic situation in Međimurje, then the arrival of Croatian–Serbian troops changed the political situation in the region.

Hungarians maintained the historical claim to Međimurje until World War Two. In 1941, Hungary took advantage of the opportunity and occupied Međimurje with the consent of Germany. Even though they militarily occupied Međimurje, the future of the region was remained uncertain, because the Independent State of Croatia also laid claim for this territory. Finally, Hungary introduced civil administration in Međimurje in July 1941. Similar to the Dualist period, only the local clergy could defend the Croatian interests in Međimurje (with the help of the archiepiscopal vicariate). During the war, several clashes occurred between Hungarian authorities and local Croatian civilians. Nevertheless, after 1945, it never became a serious question of whether Međimurje was an integral part of Croatia. Despite ethnic tensions in the past, contemporary intellectual cooperation between Croatia and Hungary is very fruitful and hopefully, it will attract more attention to the region.



Fig. 1: Topographic map of Međimurje/Muraköz in 1750, source: Országos Széchényi Könyvtár, TK 354, Hungaricana, Térképek és építészeti tervek, <https://maps.hungaricana.hu/hu/OSZKTerkeptar/353/> [access: 29.11.2019].

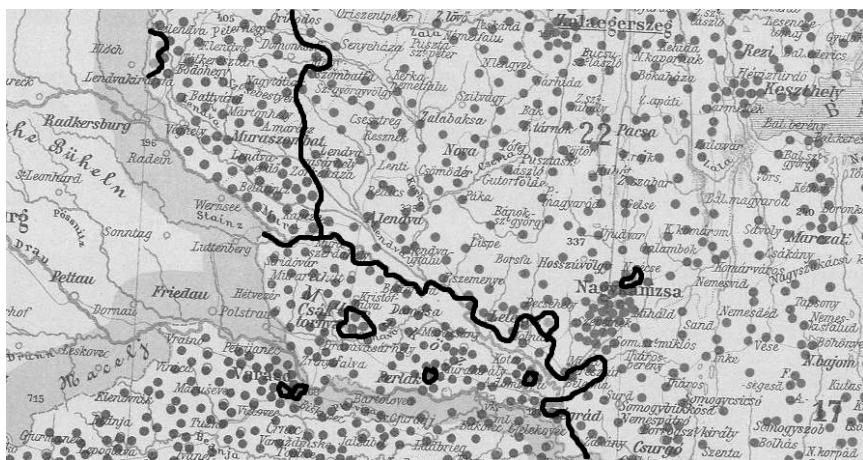


Fig. 2: The ethnic composition of Međimurje in 1910, source: Klösz György és fia, Budapest, Magyarország néprajzi térképe az 1910. évi népszámlálás adatainak alapján, Hadtörténeti Intézet és Múzeum, B IX c 1041, <https://maps.hungaricana.hu/hu/HTITerkeptar/2727/> [access 29.11.2019].



Fig. 3: Hungarian irredentist posters by A. Helbing about the separation of Međimurje from Hungary in 1918–1920, source: Bessó Károly Grafikai Műintézet, Muzem Međimurje Čakovec, 11640.



Fig. 4: Hungarian irredentist posters by A. Helbing about the separation of Medjmurje from Hungary in 1918–1920, source: Kellner és Mohrlüdler Nyomda, Budapest, 1921, graphic A. Helbing, Pomurski Muzej Murska Sobota, 510:MUS-Z-2050.

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Abstract

Until 1918 Međimurje belonged to Zala County, Hungary (except between 1848–1861) but ecclesiastically the region was a part of the diocese of Zagreb (since 1852 archdiocese). This situation induced dual authority in Međimurje. In the second half of 1918, the region had to face chaotic circumstances—on 24 December 1918, Croatian volunteer troops moved into Međimurje. Between 1941 and 1945, Međimurje once again was a part of Hungary but only for a short period of time. After the World War II, it became clear that Međimurje would be a definitive part of Croatia. The paper highlights the role of

the Catholic Church in the “dual authority” of the region throughout the centuries.

Keywords: Medimurje (Muraköz), regional history, Central Europe, border studies, Croatian–Hungarian relations

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