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Autonomy draft Bill delayed “for tactical reasons”

The Szeklerland territorial organizations of the Transylvanian Hungarian People’s Party (EMNP) are urging public debate of a draft Bill for Szeklerland autonomy being prepared by experts from the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (RMDSZ). In an announcement sent to the Hungarian news agency MTI, the leaders of the EMNP in Szeklerland recalled that in May 2013 the RMDSZ had adopted a decision at their congress to present a Bill to the Romanian legislature for the territorial autonomy of Szeklerland. The opposition party has complained that leading politicians from the RMDSZ promised to present the draft Bill for public debate at the end of 2013, but “they postponed the deadline first to January, then to February, and finally to May.” According to Hunor Kelemen, the completion of the RMDSZ’s draft Bill on autonomy for Szeklerland has been delayed for tactical reasons. On Thursday the leader of the RMDSZ informed MTI that the draft could be released for public debate the next day, but they were waiting to see whether a version adjusted to the current constitution would be needed, or a new version adjusted to the constitutional amendment now under preparation. Mr. Kelemen added that the two versions are slightly different. The new version based on the planned new constitution focuses mainly on that article of the constitution relating to potential establishment of administrative sub-units in Romania. The leader of the RMDSZ said that his party wants to wait to see whether or not the Romanian Constitutional Court approves their constitutional amendment or sends it back to Parliament before putting the draft to public debate.

He also added that first they would present the draft to the Hungarian Civic Party (MPP), enabling the party to develop its opinion. Previously the MPP made its entry into an agreement with the RMDSZ – including joint participation in the European Parliament elections – dependent on the draft Bill on autonomy. Mr. Kelemen emphasized that during the spring Parliament session they would definitely present the Bill, after having presented it for public debate.

Constitutional Court rejects amendments important for Hungarians

On Sunday the Constitutional Court of Romania announced that it had ruled as unconstitutional 26 points from the draft amendment to the Constitution prepared by the Parliamentary Special Committee, including modifications important for Hungarians that had been suggested by the RMDSZ. During the constitutional review started on Friday, the Constitutional Court found that the amendment proposals on minorities’ right to use their symbols, the principle of cultural autonomy and the establishment of administrative sub-units within traditional regions are beyond the scope of a constitutional amendment, and that by accepting them Parliament would be in violation of the Constitution.

One of the RMDSZ’s proposals – suggesting acceptance of minority languages as regional languages in Romania – has not even been accepted by the Parliamentary Special Committee. The only amendment concerning Hungarians living in Romania that has not been rejected by the Constitutional Court is the one stating that Romania recognizes the historic role of the royal family, national minorities, the Orthodox



church of Romania and the other religious denominations in the formation of the state of Romania.

Progress in the Beneš Decrees issue

On Tuesday the European Parliament's Committee on Legal Affairs (JURI) declared in Brussels that the controversial Beneš Decrees are still part of the Slovak legal system, and therefore their further examination is necessary. It depends on the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament whether it formulates any suggestions for Slovakia. Progress in the Beneš Decrees issue has been acknowledged in a joint declaration by three Hungarian Members of the European Parliament: Alajos Mészáros (MKP/ Slovakia), József Szájer and Zoltán Bagó (Fidesz/ Hungary). According to the three – who are all members of the European People's Party in the EP – the Committee's document will serve as an important reference: although not all its points are unambiguous, it criticizes the Beneš Decrees and states that they are still part of the Slovak legal system, and therefore need further examination.

Citizenship law sees no amendment

A proposal from representative of the Freedom and Solidarity Party Peter Osuský that would have moderated the Slovak Citizenship Act was rejected at a parliamentary sitting on Tuesday. According to his proposal, Slovak citizenship could only have been taken from those who had applied for it themselves. Therefore Slovak citizens acquiring the citizenship of another country could have not been deprived of their original citizenship. According to the legislation in force, citizens who acquire the citizenship of another country lose their Slovak citizenship. This legislation in its current form was adopted in June 2010 under Robert Fico's previous government as a reaction to the Hungarian parliament's moves to facilitate acquisition of Hungarian citizenship. As a result of the Slovak legislation, up until 8 January 2014 701 citizens – among them 47 citizens of Hungarian ethnicity – were stripped of their Slovak citizenship.

The majority of candidates in the March presidential election consider that citizens who acquire the citizenship of another country should not be punished – this was the summary of the candidates' answers to questions from the Slovakian daily SME, published on Tuesday. When asked if sanctions should be imposed on those who obtain other citizenships, none of the fourteen presidential candidates gave an affirmative answer: six gave neutral answers, one supported case-by-case decisions and six did not answer clearly; Prime Minister Robert Fico – the favorite for the presidency – failed to respond, in keeping with his long-time refusal to reply to questions from the Pozsony/ Bratislava newspaper.



Text of the draft Vojvodina Charter completed

Speaker of the Vojvodina/ Vajdaság Assembly István Pásztor has told the Serbian newspaper Beta that the text of the draft Vojvodina/ Vajdaság Charter has been completed in essence, with only editing and proofreading left. By 10 March the text will be completed and it will be presented to the members of the Assembly. It seems highly probable that by 6 June, when the decision of the Serbian Constitutional Court becomes final, the Vojvodina Charter will be adopted. The Charter must also be voted on by the Serbian National Assembly.

In a lecture at the Hungarian Institute of Foreign Affairs on Thursday, Professor at the Central European University and Emory University (Atlanta) Tibor Várady said that the reason for objections to the Vojvodina Charter and the national councils is the fear of losing Serbian territories. Mr. Várady emphasized that the “Kosovo Tragedy” has been a huge trauma for Serbia, since this territory has always had a strong symbolic meaning. Serbians cannot forget the loss of Kosovo, and this feeds their fear of losing the territory of Vojvodina. However, he added, the proportion of Hungarians in Vojvodina is only around ten percent, so this fear is unfounded.

According to the decision of the Serbian Constitutional Court made in December, two-thirds of the Vojvodina Charter is incompatible with Serbia’s constitution, thus the former needs to be revised or rewritten. The body gave six months for these procedures to take place. The Serbian Constitutional Court ruled some sections of the legislation on national councils to be unconstitutional, thus curtailing several of the rights acquired by these bodies (MTI).

