

THE „PÁSZTOR AFFAIR”

One of the basic tasks of a modern State is to guarantee social integration, i. e. to contribute to a civilized resolution of social conflicts. Therefore if a conflict situation is created by the dysfunctionality of a State organ's operation, this has to be considered as serious perturbation of the State's functioning. One of the most typical examples of this phenomenon was the press conference held by police colonel Dr Albert Pásztor on 30 January 2009 in connection with a series of robbery, at which he stressed ethnic aspects when speaking about the crimes committed.

As a liaison officer at the National Police Headquarters I have been dealing, as part of my job, with issues deriving from the relationship between Hungarian Roma/Gypsies¹ and the police between 2003 and 2009.

In line with the cooperation agreement between the Police and the Roma, my task was to keep contact with Roma organizations, to analyze conflicts between Roma and the police, to attract Roma youth to the police forces and, on the basis of the cooperation agreement, to manage local and regional police authorities.

During my studies at the defence and security policy major of the Zrínyi Miklós National Defence University (ZMNE), I got aware that it would be worth examining the situation of the Roma ethnicity within the European Union, and particularly in Hungary, as well as to study in details its security policy and law enforcement implications. I set the objective to research and scientifically study this topic within my doctoral studies at the Military Science PhD School of the ZMNE. This article is part of this effort.

INTRODUCTION

At the press conference held on 29 January 2009 in Miskolc on unveiling a series of thefts and robbery, he stated: street robbers have attacked during the past 2 months several passers-by. They took bags, mobile phones and wallets from the victims. *“My colleagues had to take measures in 8 such street attacks”* – announced at a Friday morning press conference Albert Pásztor, Chief of the Miskolc Police. *“Passers-by were attacked in bus stops and on the pavement. Criminals also used violence in many of the cases. Some of the victims were hit by hand, others by a stick. My colleagues detained 11 criminals, most of them in their twenties. We can state that perpetrators of such public area robberies, which are violent ones, are Gypsies. In fact, I have to say that in Miskolc, Hungarians may only rob banks or gas stations, while all other robberies are committed by them”*².

It was not the first time dr Albert Pásztor made such announcements, although not in public. That is proved by the declaration of Miskolc local government representatives made to the newspaper *Heti Válasz*: the police chief started his speech several times during the last year, for example at a session of the legal committee with the following words: *“I will tell, even if it will cost me my job, that...”* and continuing with describing to the representatives crimes committed by Gypsies and the difficulties of everyday coexistence.³

¹ Gypsies have been more and more frequently referred to in specialist literature as well as in everyday life as “Roma minority” or “Roma population”. In this study, I use both the “Roma” and the “Gypsy” terms.

² <http://index.hu/belfold/cigbun090130/>

³ <http://hetivalasz.hu/reflektor/vastaps-21305/>

REACTIONS-COUNTERACTIONS

Upon an initiative by dr. Tibor Draskovics, Minister for Justice and Law Enforcement, the national police chief, József Bencze ordered to carry out a prompt investigation related to the declarations of Albert Pásztor at the press conference. Simultaneously, he ordered to deploy him to another position for the time of the investigation.

On Saturday, 31 January 2009, Sándor Káli, the mayor of Miskolc city, belonging to the MSZP political party held a press conference⁴: “I asked for an appointment with Minister Tibor Draskovics, at our meeting on Monday both the Head of the National Police Headquarters and the County Police will be present” – said the mayor. According to Káli, the Roma issue is not specific to Miskolc, this has become “a crucial question in North Eastern and Southern Hungary”. According to the mayor, Albert Pásztor announced facts and data, he should be supported rather than dismissed. By the way, Pásztor participated at today’s general assembly aimed at renewing mandates of the socialists of Borsod County, where, as one of our local sources say, he had long discussions with the county’s MSZP leaders who also support that he keeps his position.

Miskolc members of the SZDSZ party have a similar opinion: in their letter addressed to the Minister of Justice they write: *Liberals from Miskolc were shocked to learn about the dismissal of Albert Pásztor. We know the work of the police chief, we respect his correct and honest way of thinking, pursuing to solve, rather than to hide a problem. The chief have talked several times about criminal attitudes in Miskolc, their social background, but unfortunately in today’s hypocrite world he did not receive much feedback or help from those who judge them now. The step of the Minister only contributes to the strengthening of extremist attitude, instead of helping the dialogue that Albert Pásztor intended to strengthen through his work.*⁵

The Gypsy voivod⁶ (leader) Attila Lakatos supported the Miskolc chief of police and declared that he was extremely upset about what happened with Albert Pásztor. “We are talking about a man who sacrificed his life for police work, carried out his tasks with integrity and honour, he should not have been suspended, this should not have been done with the police chief of Miskolc, because he only communicated facts, this had not been a manifestation of racism.”⁷

Interestingly, the Miskolc fraction of Fidesz-KDNP and that of SZDSZ which hardly ever agree politically, concerted with the mayor and did not deem the words of Pásztor concerning such interpretation of criminal habits shall be condemned. Evaluating this affair deeply divided Hungarian society. In Miskolc, political forces of whom no-one would have thought that they would appear in public in favour of the same matter, organized a joint sympathy protest. Members of the later forbidden Hungarian Guard which openly speaks about Gypsy criminality with an intimidating outlook and ideology and of the National Protection Force demonstrated together with local politicians of the MSZP, Fidesz and SZDSZ and their adepts.

According to other opinions, considering the events from the Romas’ point of view, this day (the sympathy protest) made a game of Hungarian democracy.

While some stated Albert Pásztor was communicating facts and data (“Albert Pásztor did nothing but to express facts well known to the inhabitants and the leaders of the city. He named those phenomena that citizens of Miskolc themselves experience day by day” – wrote for example Géza Pongó, secretary-general of the Independent Police Trade

⁴ <http://index.hu/belfold/msk0131/>

⁵ The letter of Ildikó T. Asztalos, president of the Miskolc branch of SZDSZ <http://hetivalasz.hu/itthon/az-szdsz-is-kiall-a-miskolci-rendorkapitany-mellett-21221/>

⁶ I believe that those persons who consider themselves as voivod ought to read the Constitution and the law on minorities which accurately regulate the protection of minorities. Such a title does not exist in Hungarian law and it is not known who authorized them to express themselves on behalf of Gypsies

⁷ <http://kuruc.info/r/35/34354/>

Union in the Union's communiqué), others like experts of legal defence, some lawyers and the National Association of Roma Policemen have another view on this situation.

POSITION OF THE NATIONAL POLICE HEADQUARTERS (ORFK)

„The Department for Control of the National Police Headquarters (ORFK) found out that the police chief did not impeach any legal regulations, but his declaration can produce generalizations. Even from a declaration communicating facts one can draw unjustified consequences or generalization, given that a short media appearance is not in all cases suitable for giving information on all the aspects of a certain state of play. Taking into consideration the above, the chief of the national police admonished the chief of the city police and warned him to respect the rules of in the future. Albert Pásztor accepted this – writes the communication of the ORFK.”⁸

If we examine the background of the retreat of the minister, we can affirm that there are some simple political facts: the MSZP organization which rose up against him is one of the largest in the country. Probably this fact was considered, although not only local Socialists and liberal democrats, but also the opposition and Attila Lakatos, Gypsy voivod of Borsod County supported the police chief of Miskolc.

Questions remained without answer:

Did dr. Albert Pásztor really say the truth at his press conference on 29 January 2009? Have experts providing legal defence or journalists asked dr. Tibor Draskovics, ex-minister of justice or dr. József Bencze, ex-chief of the ORFK if it has undoubtedly been proven that in Miskolc in December 2008 and January 2009 only Hungarians with Roma origins robbed Hungarians who are not Roma? Or maybe not? Did the fact finding mission of the ORFK cover these circumstances?

CONCLUSION

At last, the “Pásztor affair” has ended when the national police chief replaced in his position the police captain of Miskolc, upon a pressure by society and politics, there were no criminal procedure launched against him and his disciplinary procedure ended with an admonition.

In my opinion, this case has to be regarded as an ethnic and value based conflict involving many people and dividing society, in which, from liberty of expression (freedom of speech) through professional conduct rules till regulations in force concerning handling personal data on ethnicity, several conduct rules of our legal system were confronted with each other in a way that the responsibility of the person who was at the origin of the events was understated, according to my point of view, in order to calm public opinion down.

Keywords: Roma criminality, dr. Albert Pásztor, conflict, police

⁸ <http://www.stop.hu/articles/article.php?id=446153>