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► **To cite this version:**

Aliaksandr Piahanaŭ. A Priest at the Front. Jozef Tiso Changing Social Identities in the First World War. *Revue des études slaves*, 2017, 1914, l'Autriche-Hongrie entre en guerre. Récits de soldats et de civils, 88 (4), pp.721-741. 10.4000/res.1324 . hal-01792245

**HAL Id: hal-01792245**

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Submitted on 27 Apr 2019

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# REVUE DES ÉTUDES SLAVES

TOME QUATRE-VINGT-HUITIÈME

Fascicule 4

**1914, l'Autriche-Hongrie entre en guerre**  
**Récits de soldats et de civils**



PARIS

2017

## A PRIEST AT THE FRONT. JOZEF TISO CHANGING SOCIAL IDENTITIES IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

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*Where am I? What is happening here? With compassion, I let myself approach (the wounded soldiers) and one shows me his arm torn away, and complains: What will my two little children do? Another, who was injured by a bullet in his nose, flaps his arms and asks for water: I could barely place a piece of sugar in his mouth, as it was so foaming with blood.*

Tiszó József, 23 August 1914, *Battle of Krasnik*.<sup>1</sup>

### JÓZSEF TISZÓ: CAUTIOUS SLOVAK OR MODERATE MAGYAR NATIONALIST?

The Catholic priest Dr. Jozef Tiso (1887-1947) is commonly known as President of the Slovak republic in 1939-1945, the first independent Slovak state. During the last two decades he has probably been the most discussed historical figure in this Central European country. Debates focus on Tiso's political responsibilities during the Munich crisis of 1938 and especially during the Second World War, when Slovakia became a Nazi Germany satellite. The ensuing state-sponsored anti-Semitism campaign and the deportations of Slovakia's Jews to the death camps ultimately worsened Tiso's image.<sup>2</sup>

Jozef Tiso is usually studied in the context of his activities in the Slovak autonomous movement after 1918. Indeed, Tiso himself dated the starting point of his political career in 1918, when he joined the Slovak People's Party (Slovak "Slovenská ľudová strana", hereafter – SLS) and publicly appeared as a "Slovak

1. Tiszó József dr., "Napló az északi harcterről," Part XI, *Nyitramegyei szemle*, XXIII évf., 13. szám, 28 March 1915, p. 2; Miroslav Fabricius, Ladislav Suško (eds.), *Jozef Tiso. Prejavy a články*. Zv. 1. (1913-1938), Bratislava, Academic Electronic Press, p. 31.

2. Jan Rychlik, "Jozef Tiso: My Enemy – Your Hero?", in: Michal Vit, Magdalena M. Baran (eds.), *Transregional versus National Perspectives on Contemporary Central European History. Studies on the Building of Nation-States and Their Cooperation in the 20th and 21st Century*, Stuttgart, *ibidem*-Verlag, 2017, p. 189-214.

patriot.” Tiso quickly climbed up the party hierarchy ladder and soon headed its group in the Czechoslovak parliament (between 1927 and 1929, when the SLS entered the government coalition in Prague, he even served as the Minister of Health). While the SLS leader—Father Andrej Hlinka was aging, Tiso’s influence was rising. In October 1938, two months after the death of Hlinka, Tiso became the head of autonomous Slovakia inside the federalized Czechoslovakia; the next autumn he was elected President of the independent Slovak republic.

Even before 1918, the young Tiso was politically active. In fact, for many years before Tiso, had cooperated with the largest Catholic party of the Hungarian kingdom—the People’s Party (Hung. “*Néppárt*”).<sup>3</sup> Even though other Slovak patriots cooperated with the *Néppárt* in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, including Hlinka itself,<sup>4</sup> Tiso’s involvement in *Néppárt* activities during the 1910s caused a number of charges against him in the following decades: Tiso was blamed for being a “*Maďaron*” (self-assimilated Magyar) and this accusation played an important role during his Czechoslovak trial in 1946, which sought to prove Tiso’s political murkiness as well as his “betrayal” of Czechoslovakia in 1938-1945). Found guilty, Tiso was executed in the spring of 1947.<sup>5</sup>

While some historians believe that J. Tiso was close to considering himself or pretending to be a “Magyar” before 1918,<sup>6</sup> other historians argue that Tiso always associated himself with the Slovak national aspirations.<sup>7</sup> Engaging in this debate, this paper aims to explore the manifold identity of the young Jozef Tiso. Not reducing this topic to only the ethnic-national component, we strive to

3. Hungary’s People’s Party (Hung. *Magyarországi Néppárt*) was established in 1894 as a part of Catholic reaction against the liberal reforms in Hungary in the 1890s (namely, the introduction of the free exercise of religion, civil marriage and registration, but also the official recognition of the Jewish religion) that reduced the Church influence. The *Néppárt* basically opposed the policies of the governing Liberal party, but in 1905-1910 and 1917-1918 its representatives took part in the governmental coalitions. Apart from the Magyar Christian activists, the party comprised Catholic clerics and the representatives of national minorities, including the Slovaks. The leadership of party was in hands of Zichy aristocratic family, whose members (the counts Nándor Zichy, then, János Zichy and, later, Aladár Zichy) presided over the party from 1894 until its dissolution in 1918. The initial cooperation with the national minorities was based on the common struggle for the practical implementation of the Hungarian law of nationalities of 1868, which had guaranteed the equal rights for all Hungarian citizens, disregarding their language, race or ethnic distinctions. Prominent Slovak Catholic politicians, like Fathers Andrej Hlinka, František Jehlička and Ferdiš Juriga were temporarily People Party members. However, as they became convinced that the *Néppárt* chiefs were not protecting the Slovak interests enough, they quit the party. In 1911 Hlinka, Juriga and Jehlička founded a separate Slovak People’s Party.

4. The Slovak National Party (Slovak “*Slovenská národná strana*”), the largest and oldest Slovak ethnic political party, which was traditionally dominated by the Lutherans. It supported the *Néppárt* in the parliamentary elections of 1896, but in the following years their cooperation ceased.

5. Konstantín Čulen, *Po Svätoplukovi druhá naša hlava. Život Dr. Jozefa Tisu*, Bratislava, Garmond, 1992, p. 46-49.

6. James Mace Ward, *Priest, Politician, Collaborator: Jozef Tiso and the Making of Fascist Slovakia*, Ithaca – London, Cornell University Press, 2013, p. 21-29.

7. Ivan Kamenec, *Tragédia politika, kňaza a človeka (Dr. Jozef Tiso 1887-1947)*, Bratislava, Premedia, 2013, p. 22; Róbert Letz, “Vývin slovenského povedomia u Jozefa Tisu do roku 1918,” in : Valerián Bystrický, Štefan Fano (eds.), *Pokus o politický a osobný profil Jozefa Tisu. Zborník materiálov z vedeckého sympózia Časťá-Papiernička, 5-7 mája 1992*, Bratislava, Historický ústav SAV, 1992, p. 44-61.

detect if there were other important elements in Tiso's personal identity (such as religious, professional, geographic, political etc.). While Tiso publicly revealed his Slovak leanings only at the end of the Great War, we seek to shed light on Tiso's identity in the early years of the war and how it was affected by the ongoing conflict. Questioning the importance of "national identity" for Tiso before the establishment of the Czechoslovak state, we argue that he, like some other Catholic activists from multilingual and multiethnic border regions in Central Europe,<sup>8</sup> was rather "a-national" or "nationally ambivalent": a person who refused to permanently consider himself inside one particular "nation" and who prioritized other (traditional) types of group belongingness. It seems that the young Tiso upheld, first and foremost, the religious and supranational class identification—that of a Catholic priest from the Habsburg Empire.

The "nationally indifferent" type of worldview, as the historian Tara Zahra convincingly argues, was a widespread phenomenon in the late Habsburg Monarchy. Nevertheless it greatly suffered from the expansion of nationalist ideologies during the Great War and the ensuing creation of nation-states on the remnants of old empires. As regional societies were exposed to the imposed policy of nationalization, each person was practically forced to choose his own "nationality" and to keep it for life. Consequently, ambivalent national self-identification was perceived as illegitimate and renegade.<sup>9</sup> As this paper will show, during the early stages of the First World War, Jozef Tiso (or "Tiszó József" as he usually spelled his name in Hungarian at the time) behaved as a patriot of the Dual Monarchy and abstained from excessively stressing his Slovak origins and Hungarian citizenship. Quite the contrary, Tiso regularly expressed his loyalty to the Emperor-and-King Franz Joseph and Austria-Hungary. Furthermore, during the course of the Great War, Tiso firmly supported his imperial "motherland". Approving the hostilities against the Entente, he justified them with patriotic and religious arguments. He shared the belief that the Monarchy was in legitimate self-defense or even accomplishing a special mission (this idea was widespread among Habsburg clerics and maintained by the higher Catholic hierarchy<sup>10</sup>). Naturally enough, Tiso's allegiance to the Habsburg dynasty and their realm disappeared with the collapse the Dual Empire in late 1918.

8. James E. Bjork, *Neither German nor Pole. Catholicism and National Indifference in a Central European Borderland*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2008.

9. Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review*, vol. 69, no. 1, spring 2010, p. 93-119.

10. In the early 1915, Primate of Hungary, the Archbishop of Esztergom János Csernoch (who, like Tiso, was of Slovak ethnic origins), issued a pamphlet *Church and War*, where he justified the Austro-Hungarian declaration of war on Serbia, stating that "the self-defense is our right and even, in special circumstances, our duty". Csernoch dialectically claimed that "we wage the war in order to ween a durable and honorable peace", hinting that this conflict could be viewed as a search to the world domination by a Christian Emperor, which would assure the universal peace (See: J. Csernoch, *Egyház és háború*, Budapest, Pallas részvénytársaság, 1915).

Jozef Tiso proved his fidelity to the cause of the Austro-Hungarian Empire's "Just War" by joining the ranks of the Imperial and Royal (the so-called "k.u.k.") troops as well as by writing many newspaper articles. Tiso's military experience was quite brief: mobilized in August 1914 as field chaplain, Tiso was discharged a year later. The hardest part of this service was spent in Galicia during the first two months of the war, when Tiso witnessed the first battles on the Austro-Russian front. The young chaplain recorded his impressions of the frontline in his personal diary, which was published under the title *Diary from the Northern front* (Hung. "Napló az északi harctérről") in the provincial People's Party weekly *Nyitramegyei Szemle* throughout 1915.<sup>11</sup> This diary is a unique source in helping to clarify Tiso's views at the beginning of the Great War. The diary was undoubtedly revised before publication, but its content still offers many insights into how Jozef Tiso perceived the collapsing world around him as well as his place in it. When confronting this diary with the affidavit<sup>12</sup> that Tiso provided to the Czechoslovak interrogators in March 1946 about his pre-1918 personal and public activities,<sup>13</sup> we raise the following questions: How did Tiso perceive the war, its antagonists, its victims and his own position? Which were the burning issues in his view? How did the war affect his sense of belonging? While the 1946 affidavit is clearly marked by Tiso's desire to prove his "Slovakness" to the Czechoslovak court and contains some degree of intended misinformation, this document provides many interesting biographical details that Tiso reveals about his pre-1918 life, including his cooperation with the *Nyitramegyei Szemle*.

#### THE GOOD PRIEST TISZÓ BEFORE AND DURING THE WORLD WAR

Jozef Tiso was born on 13 October 1887 in Nagy Biccse [Veľká Bytča], a small town in the North-Western corner of the Hungarian Kingdom, the eastern half of the Habsburg Dual Monarchy. As Tiso revealed in 1946, his family was among the richest in Nagy Biccse; his parents were Slovak and Catholic. The family belonged to the intimate circle of the local politically active priest Jozef Teselský (Hung. József Teszelszky), whom Tiso nevertheless labelled as a "Maďaron". Tiso pretended that his parents did not know Hungarian at all but that he learnt the basics of this language, as well as German and Slovak grammar in primary school. In the following years, Tiso continued his multilingual

11. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy a články...*, p. 17-84; Gabriela Dudeková, "Protirečivé spomienky?," *OS. Fórum občianskej spoločnosti*, no. 1-2, 2006, p. 102-115.

12. The reader should bear in mind that most often, we use the slovak translation of the diary (Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy a články...*), comparing its crucial parts with the original version, published in *Nyitramegyei szemle*. Also, in order to emphasize the unclear character of the national self-identification of Tiso before 1918, we use alternatively Hungarian and Slovak spellings of his name.

13. Slovenský národný archív v Bratislave [SNA, Bratislava], F. Nár.sud, k. 52, *Zapísnica v trestnej veci proti dr. Jozefovi Tisovi*, 8 mars 1946.

education, first, in the nearby city of Zsolna [Žilina], then, at 15, at the Piarist seminary in Nyitra [Nitra], which was located in the mixed Slovak-Magyar speaking area.

Seen as an intelligent, talented and reliable student, who learnt Hungarian and German well, Tiso was recommended, after graduation in 1906, to the prestigious Collegium Pázmáneum in Vienna, the main seminary for Hungarian theological candidates. Life in the imperial capital profoundly affected the young student. Austria was introducing universal male suffrage and the political scene in Vienna was marked by the competition between the rising Christian Social Party, the Social Democrats, various national movements and the beginning of political anti-Semitism. Thirty years later, Tiso evoked that, among the Pázmáneum professors, Father Ignaz Seipel, a prominent Catholic politician (who had served as Austria's Chancellor in the 1920s) made the deepest impression on him. Tiso was ordained into priesthood in 1910 and the following year he received a doctoral degree in theology. Studying in Vienna acquainted Tiso with the lifestyle and ideological conflicts of the Habsburg Monarchy as well as strengthening his linguistic skills (Tiso became fluent in Slovak, German, Hungarian and Latin). It also introduced him to the lower levels of the imperial ecclesiastic elites.<sup>14</sup>

From 1910 to the summer of 1914, Tiszó served as a priest in three small Upper Hungarian towns: Oscad [Oščadnica], Rajecz [Rajec] and Bán [Bánovce nad Bebravou]. As a priest, Tiszó was in almost constant contact with politically involved Church fellows and the main Catholic political organization in Hungary – Néppárt.<sup>15</sup> In those years, Tiszó vigorously engaged in local NGO initiatives, like banking, cooperatives and public lectures, which operated in the Slovak language. Nevertheless, these activities could be interpreted as something other than just proof of Tiso's "Slovak self-consciousness." As one recent study has demonstrated, the Catholic Church in Upper Hungary, despite accusations of Pan-Slavism by Magyar nationalists, had little choice in running many activities in the Slovak language in order to provide religious services to the local population. Apparently, the language used by the church to communicate with the locals could hardly be viewed as an indicator of national loyalty.<sup>16</sup> Also, Tiso's enthusiasm in developing local culture could be seen as part of the Catholic anti-Semitic campaign. As the historian Miloslav Szabó demonstrated with the example of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Nyitra county, the establishment of "Christian" associations was often a response to the appeal of "practical anti-Semitism," a phenomenon that was equally shared by the anti-government oppositional forces, like the People's Party activists and the Slovak nationalists. On a rhetorical level,

14. SNA, Bratislava, F. Nár.sud, k. 52, *Zapisnica...*; W. Lukan, "Študentské roky Jozefa Tisu vo Viedni (1906-1911)", in: Bystrický, Fano (eds.), *Pokus...*, p. XX.

15. Kamenec, *Tragédia...*, p. 22-31.

16. Fr. Henschel, "Religions and the Nation in Kassa before World War I," *Hungarian Historical Review*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2014, p. 850-874.

the creation of local credit unions and cooperatives was aimed against the Jews, who “parasited” on the Christians by providing cheap credits and alcohol for the local population.<sup>17</sup> In the light of the above, Tiso’s activities, between 1910 and 1914 tell us little about his “national conscience”.

Before 1918, part from preaching, Tiszó was a productive columnist. His first series of journal articles published between February and March 1913 were devoted to the spread of alcoholism among Slovak men and women. The series of eight articles, entitled “This and that about alcohol” (in Slovak “*To i to o alkohole*”), appeared in the weekly *Krest’an* (“The Christian”)—the Hungary’s People’s Party official paper in the Slovak language. Alcoholism, Tiso claimed, negatively impacted Slovak health, contributed to deformations in children and led to economic impoverishment and religious decline.<sup>18</sup> What is interesting in this essay is how Tiso pictured the problem of alcohol consumption. On the one hand, he portrays “our Slovakdom” (“*Naša Slovač*”) and “our people” (“*Náš ľud*”) as victims of alcoholism while on the other, he holds the “omnipotent State and the Jewish tavern-keepers” (“*všemohúci Štát a židia-krčmári*”) responsible for it. Thus, according to Tiso, the fight against alcohol consumption could be seen partly through the prism of an ethno (racial?)-religious conflict: the (Catholic) Slovaks against the Jews. Tiso claimed that tavern-keepers were protected by the State and the ruling Liberal party. Allegedly, the governing groups were making a profit from the alcoholization of the population, because tavern-keepers campaigned for the Liberals during the elections. For Tiso, the State, the government and the ruling party as well as the Jews opposed Slovaks.<sup>19</sup> In general, this narrative was not unusual in the Catholic milieu of Upper Hungary and the weekly *Krest’an* traditionally devoted a lot of its pages to different anti-semitic articles, which denounced the “Jewish-Freemason conspiracy” against “Catholic Hungary.”<sup>20</sup>

After the general mobilization at the beginning of August 1914, Tiso joined the Austro-Hungarian common army, which was basically viewed, to borrow the words of the historian, István Deak, as “the most important all-monarchical institution in the realm.”<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Tiso, who, like other Catholic priests, mobilized as field chaplains, was enlisted as an officer corps member, which in turn, could be viewed as a special corporation deeply loyal to the monarchy. Thus, by the autumn of 1914, being a Catholic Church priest and a *k.u.k.* army officer, Tiso became personally affiliated to the two crucial institutions, which energetically promoted the Habsburg empire unity and supranational solidarity.

17. M. Szabó, “‘Because words are not deeds.’ Antisemitic Practice and National Policies in Upper Hungary around 1900,” *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, no. 3, July 2012, p. 164-181.

18. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 7-17.

19. *Ibid.*

20. Szabó, “Rasa, národ alebo ľud? Reflexie maďarizácie v prostredí Starej školy, slovenského katolicizmu a hlasistov,” *Forum Historiae*, no. 2, 2013, p. 106-110.

21. István Deak, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848-1918*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990, p. 1.

As the historian Ernst Bruckmüller argues, both these institutions, the joint army officer corps and the Catholic Church, were the two most important structures of “Habsburg society” that undermined the nationalist divisions that were chipping away at Austria-Hungary’s stability from within.<sup>22</sup>

Unlike many *k.u.k.* troops, the 71<sup>st</sup> infantry regiment of Trencsén [Trenčín], to which Tiso was commissioned, was quite homogeneous. Its rank and file came mainly from three North Hungarian counties (Trencsén, Túróc [Turiec] and Arva [Orava]), 85% of them were Slovaks, thus, making the 71<sup>st</sup> regiment the most Slovak unit of the Habsburg army.<sup>23</sup> While the officers were mostly Austrians and spoke German amongst themselves, Slovak was the language of instruction. During his services at the 71<sup>st</sup> regiment, as Tiso recalled in 1946, “we did not speak Hungarian there, because we didn’t have anybody with whom to speak it.”<sup>24</sup> In August, the regiment took part in the attack on Russian Poland, where it experienced the first hardships of modern warfare. However, as the Austro-Hungarian army lost the Battle of Lemberg in early September, the regiment retreated to the River San, where it tried to stop the Russian advance. Then, in early October 1914, the *k.u.k.* troops went into a new counter-offensive, but soon Tiso was diagnosed with nephritis and was sent to the rear. Thus, by the middle of October 1914, Tiso’s service at the frontline came to an end. As the historian Ivan Kamenec ironically noted this episode of two-month Galician preaching was the greatest combat experience that the future Supreme Commander of the Slovak army during the Second World War had ever had.<sup>25</sup>

However short-lived, and despite officer privileges (including a personal servant and a horse) together with a noncombatant status, Tiso’s service was not easy and filled with the hardships and horrors of war. Tiso records his experiences in his 1916 essay *The Priest at the Front* (Hung. “*A pap a harctéren*”). He describes how the field chaplain would perform mass for the regiment, confess soldiers, care for the sick, bury the dead and carry out administrative tasks (for example, he would register dead soldiers). The most demanding part of his service occurred during battle. The chaplain would pray with the soldiers before they went to battle. Then he would help the medical unit to treat for the wounded and confess the dying. When the battle was over, the chaplain would bury the dead, often in mass graves. If the regiment had to advance or retreat immediately after battle, Tiszó adds, dead soldiers would be left in the field, unburied.<sup>26</sup>

22. Ernst Bruckmüller, “Was there a ‘Habsburg society’ in Austria-Hungary?,” *Austrian History Yearbook*, no. 37, 2006, p. 1-16. Bruckmüller identifies the Habsburg society as “a key class or a combination of social groups that in effect ensured the Habsburg Monarchy’s existence as a state and social structure” (Ibid., p. 2).

23. Peter Chorvát, “Slováci v Rakúsko-Uhorskej armáde počas prvej svetovej vojny”, *Vojenská osveta*, no. 2, 2014, p. 45.

24. SNA, Bratislava, F. Nár.sud, k. 52, *Zápisnica...*

25. Kamenec, *Tragédia...*, p. 29.

26. Dr. József Tiszó, “A pap a harctéren”, Part I, *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 27 February 1916, p. 1-2; Ibid., Part II, 5 March 1916, p. 1-2; Ibid., Part III, 12 March 1916, p. 1-2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavny...*, p. 89-95.

Tiso's 71<sup>st</sup> regiment attracted attention on two occasions in WW1: firstly, at the beginning of the war, during the Krasnik battle in August 1914 in Russian Poland. It displayed courage, discipline and self-sacrifice. The regiment lost half of its officers and over two hundred men within a few days.<sup>27</sup> The "heroic" conduct of "Slovak soldiers" in the Galician battlefields was widely echoed in German and Magyar-speaking journals (for example, *Reichspost*, *Die Neue Zeitung*, *Alkotmány*, *Nagyszombat és Vidéke*, *Liptó*, *Vágvölgyi Lap*).<sup>28</sup> However, the military determination of the Trenčsén regiment declined as the war continued. At the end of war, its Slovak soldiers revolted while the regiment was located in the Serbian city of Kragujevac, in June 1918. Apparently, they were disagreeing with the order to move to the Italian front. These two episodes tend to illustrate the weakening of the (not only) Slovak soldiers' loyalty towards the *Ancien régime* from 1914 to 1918: if, by the beginning of the war, the Slovaks were regarded by the *k.u.k.* intelligence as the staunchest ethnic group in the Austro-Hungarian army at the front,<sup>29</sup> by the end of the war they became apparently the most unreliable element of the Habsburg troops.<sup>30</sup>

The expectation of waning discipline among (the Habsburg) ethnically mixed troops (and among society, in general), and the challenge posed by nationalist ideologies, were nowhere more present than in the minds of the Habsburg elites and the Catholic clergy right from the outbreak of the war. Reflecting on these perspectives, in May 1915, the Bishop of Székesfehérvár, Otokár Procházka, a key personality in the Hungarian political Catholicism movement, wondered in his personal diary, "How is it possible to have an army without national conscience, which is neither German, nor Magyar, nor even Slovak!"<sup>31</sup> Yet Procházka, who, like Tiso, was of Slovak origin, became a Magyar nationalist (and notorious anti-Semite) in the post-Great War period. The change of Tiso's loyalty towards the Monarchy seems to have undergone a similar path, but in another direction: from a fervent supporter of the multinational Austro-Hungarian Empire and its victory in 1914, he evolved into an initiative promoter of the "ethnicist" Czechoslovak State four years later.

27. Ward, *Priest, Politician...*, p. 25-31.

28. Chorvát, "Slováci v Rakúsko-Uhorskej armáde...", p. 47; Ladislav Vörös, "The social representation of the Slovaks in the north Hungarian Magyar Regional Press in the Years 1914-1918", *Historický časopis*, no. 56 (Supplement), 2008, p. 55-56.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

30. Marián Hronský, "Slovensko za prvej svetovej vojny a vznik Československého štátu", *Historický časopis*, vol. 27, no. 2, 1970, p. 262. It should be noted that the previous Slovak historiography inclined to include the WWI Slovak soldiers in the «disloyal» narrative that portrayed the Slavic population of the Habsburg Monarchy oppressed by the German and Magyar ruling elites.

31. Quoted in: Antal Schütz (ed.), *Procházka Ottokár összegyűjtött munkái*, 22/1 kötet (*Soliloquia*), Budapest, Apostoli szentszék, 1929, p. 287.

PERCEPTION OF THE GREAT WAR IN TISO'S DIARY  
FROM THE NORTHERN FRONT

As Tiso recalled in 1946, he had kept writing notes during his service in Galicia, which he later used for his publications in the Catholic weekly of the Nyitra county *Nyitramegyei Szemle*.<sup>32</sup> The first diary entries appeared in this weekly in January 1915. At the same time, Tiso was dispatched to the Komárom [Komárno] garrison, and stayed until February 1915, when he was released for convalescence. From August 1915, Tiszó served in Slovenia for a few weeks, but he soon left the army definitively thanks to two teaching appointments in Nyitra. There, Tiso became a teacher at the Piarist high school. In addition, he was given the position of spiritual director of the Diocesan Seminary. As the owner and editor of the *Nyitramegyei Szemle*, Dr. Lajos Franciscy, was also the Nyitra seminary rector.<sup>33</sup> The second appointment could hypothetically be connected to the success of the published war diary. The *Nyitramegyei Szemle* finished the publication of the diary, Tiso continued to regularly contribute to this newspaper until May 1916. Tiszó remained in Nyitra until the end of the war, becoming more and more involved in politics. In late 1917 he even joined the city Néppárt branch, headed by the same Franciscy.<sup>34</sup>

All identified articles of Tiso published before the dissolution of the Dual Empire in 1918 appeared in the press of People's Party. But if in 1913 he published in Slovak, between 1914 and 1917 Tiszó attached his name in Hungarian articles, while his texts in Slovak appeared anonymously.<sup>35</sup> Most often, Tiszó would contribute to the *Nyitramegyei szemle* with a series of essays. His *Diary from the Northern front* was the longest one. In its published form, it was composed of 53 parts, which appeared right below the editorial column in nearly each issue of the *Nyitramegyei Szemle* from January 1915 to January 1916. As the historian László Vörös notices, Tiso's diary was the longest series in the articles from the frontline published in the Upper Hungary Magyar-language periodicals.<sup>36</sup>

The diary describes more than two months of Tiso's military service at the 71<sup>st</sup> Trencsén regiment of the *k.u.k.* army. It begins with the mobilization in

32. *Nyitramegyei szemle* [The Nitra County Review] was a Hungarian-language Catholic political weekly published in Nyitra in 1895-1941. The review was addressed primarily to the Catholic clergy of the Nyitra's diocese. *Nyitramegyei szemle* plaid an important role in the beginning of the 20th century as it was for a moment the only local opposition press. Its rhetoric was close to the Néppárt program and the weekly supported this party during the election campaigns (Michal Potemra, *Bibliografia inorečových novín a časopisov na Slovensku do roku 1918*, Martin, Matica slovenská, 1963, p. 125-126). Interestingly, the review was banished by the authorities of independent Slovakia, when Tiso became its President.

33. Ward, *Priest, Politician...*, p. 32.

34. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

35. SNA, Bratislava, F. Nár. sud, k. 52, *Zápisnica*... During his interrogation, Tiso explained that he anonymously contributed with religious and non-political articles to the Slovak-speaking review *Duchovný pastier* ("Spiritual shepherd").

36. Vörös, "The Social representation...", p. 55.

August 1914. The first date mentioned is 8 August. The last entry was on 18 October 1914, when he left his regiment for convalescence. Tiszó centered his narration mainly on the three broad processes: the Austro-Hungarian victorious attack until Lublin in August and the disastrous retreat to the San River in September and the new counter-attack in October.

Why did Tiso write the diary? In the first part of his *Napló* (published in January 1915), Tiszó claims that he aimed to bear witness to the events of the war. Tiso pretends that the idea to record his military life appeared to him at the moment when the military cap was put on his head during the August mobilization. Here, Tiszó states that the diary is based on his own impressions and the information he got from the medical unit, to which he was affiliated. Also, Tiso compares his diary to a travelogue, which contains the description of the spiritual state of a man caught up in the hardships, the dangers and the calamity of war.<sup>37</sup> A year later, when the last entries had been published, Tiso's rhetoric changed. It became less personal and more collective and patriotic. In the last part of *Napló*, published in January 1916, Tiszó noted that the diary was aimed at glorifying the huge efforts of physical and moral sacrifices, which everyone paid all the while performing their duty. "Their names will remain forever, time will not destroy their memory" is the last sentence of the diary.<sup>38</sup>

30-years later, in 1946, when Tiso was giving testimony before the Czechoslovak prosecutors, he admitted that the diary was prepared at the request of the *Nyitra megyei Szemle* editor Franciscy. Tiso even acknowledged that his publications in this review were aimed to please "Magyar circles."<sup>39</sup> The historian Ivan Kamenec suggests that thanks to his regular patriotic contributions in the *Nyitra megyei Szemle*, Tiso enjoyed the trust and the support of Nyitra bishop and local administration.<sup>40</sup> It could be also supposed that Tiszó's regular contributions to the review were paid. Finally, we cannot exclude the possible link between the diary's appearance on the pages of Franciscy's review and Franciscy's input in providing an appointment to Tiszó in the Grand Seminary in autumn 1915 that secured his release from military service.<sup>41</sup>

In the *Napló*, Tiso provided a lot of factual information. His narration follows the movements of his military unit. The young chaplain paid attention to the places that the regiment had passed through, the people they had met (locals, refugees or Russian POWs) and whether there had been a church or not. Tiszó recorded the conversations he had had with some Polish Catholic priests. He usually gives information about the weather, especially if it was rainy or cold. Physical and health conditions, the lack of sleep (disturbed by fighting, marches,

37. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 17-18.

38. Tiszó, "Napló az északi harctérről", Part LIII, *Nyitra megyei szemle*, 23 January 1916, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 83.

39. Ward, *Priest, Politician...*, p. 32.

40. Kamenec, *Tragédia...*, p. 30.

41. Ward, *Priest, Politician...*, p. 32.

the cold, lice or rats) were another important part of the diary. The *Napló* contains evidence on some battles. The description of the first regiment combat, which took place close to Krasnik in Russian Poland is very impressive, emotional and realistic. Tiszó noted not only wounded soldiers' suffering, but also two cases of panic in his regiment during the battle<sup>42</sup> and a massacre of one local village by his comrades.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the *Napló* describes Tiso's professional activities in a chaotic way. Despite his religious function, during his two months' service at the 71<sup>st</sup> regiment, Tiszó rarely led the Catholic mass for soldiers: three times in August (on the 9<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>), three times in September (on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and twice on the 27<sup>th</sup>) and none in October.<sup>44</sup> As the diary confirms, most of the time, apart from the few hours of sleep, chaplain Tiszó followed his regiment through Austrian and Russian territories.

What did Tiszó think of the war? When reading Tiso's press contributions, we can observe various expressions of his views as well as how they evolve. In *Priest at the Front* he writes that "probably no one could explain to themselves in a straightforward manner why they bear these spiritual and material hardships!"<sup>45</sup> Following this declaration, Tiszó's attitude on the war was quite patriotic and he remained loyal to the Monarchy throughout the period in question. In the entries of early August 1914, he noted that:

[...] everybody was pronouncing his oath in the belief that victory was certain and would soon be reached... ready to die for the king and for the motherland.<sup>46</sup>

According to Tiso, Austria-Hungary was engaged in a "just war."<sup>47</sup> In another entry, Tiszó wished the Monarchy and its allies success, because it would ensure, as he wrote, "the victory of truth and moral order."<sup>48</sup> Tiso upheld his pro-Habsburg patriotic opinion throughout all the pages of the diary: the entry from 1 October contains the phrase "Every patriot should sacrifice for the motherland by order of the king."<sup>49</sup> In other diary entries, Tiszó calls the *k.u.k.* army a "heroic army,"<sup>50</sup> and its dead soldiers "heroes" and "martyrs".<sup>51</sup> Words like "sacrifice" and "martyrs" were not accidental in Tiso's vocabulary. As could be expected from a clergyman, Tiso interpreted the war through an ecclesiastical discourse. A mid-August diary entry has Tiso writing that "Providence" (Hung. '*Gondviselés*') assisted the *k.u.k.* command to start the war:

42. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 36-37.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 37, 39.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 19, 25-26, 58, 61.

45. Tiszó, "A pap a harctéren – I," p. 1-2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 90.

46. *Ibid.*, "Napló... – I", *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 10 January 1915, p. 2. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 18.

47. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 22.

48. Tiszó, "Napló... – XLVI", *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 12 May 1915, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 75.

49. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 66.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

Only two weeks ago the general mobilization posters appeared and today we are already standing before the Russians' gate.<sup>52</sup>

Despite his belligerent diary entries, Tiso also criticized the *k.u.k.* military command, but such criticism never ran very deeply. For example, when the officer corps of his regiment occupied a clergyman's house for their accommodation, Tiszó wrote in a protest that "this shelter, where previously one elaborated the plans aimed to save the souls and to care for people, will be, from now and for a while, the center of a bloody procession, which breathes vengeance and demands blood".<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Tiszó was quite skeptical about the information, that the *k.u.k.* command transmitted to its soldiers, especially if it concerned the successes of the Central Powers. Tiso asserts that this information was not always correct and that this was intentional in order to keep *k.u.k.* morale high.<sup>54</sup> For example, he strongly doubted that the great retreat of the Habsburg army from Galicia in September 1914 was a prepared operation. When the commander declared that the *k.u.k.* army beat the Russians at the battle of Lemberg and took 200 000 POWs, Tiszó wrote that "to our surprise, we cannot feel the influence of this splendid victory and we are withdrawing back now the same as before."<sup>55</sup>

Tiso targeted far more critical remarks towards the harsh realities of war. Most of all, the young priest was shocked by the horrific damage and suffering the war had caused. After his regiment's first serious battles, Tiszó very realistically portrayed bleeding soldiers missing arms and legs or with injured faces. In his diary Tiso asks himself "Where am I? What is going on here?"<sup>56</sup> The next day, when Tiszó visited the wounded, he allegedly could not rid himself of these dark thoughts: "how much maimed young energy lies here, how many bread-winners, the pride and joy of their poor families, are waiting here to die!"<sup>57</sup> Tiszó's anti-war rhetoric further strengthened when he describes the brutal actions of the Russian army. After mentioning that the Cossaks had cut the entire reconnaissance unit of his regiment into pieces, Tiso states that:

The brutality of war could only increase human savagery. One breaks and smashes everything that was built over centuries of arduous work; people's thinking misrepresents the murder that earlier was considered a crime and implies punishment, but is now regarded as heroism, for which one expects a reward.<sup>58</sup>

52. Tiszó, "Napló... – IV", *Nyitra megyei szemle*, 31 January 1915, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 22.

53. *Ibid.*; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 21.

54. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 25, 51-52.

55. Tiszó, "Napló... – XXX", *Nyitra megyei szemle*, 15 August 1915, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 54.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

57. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 35-36.

Tiszó approves of the severe measures that the Habsburg army inflicted on civilians, as the *k.u.k.* forced requisitions of food or property.<sup>59</sup> Also, he finds “not inconvenient” that every civilian person, who was found close to the advancing army is immediately arrested as a spy (that could lead to a death sentence).<sup>60</sup> The most striking example of Tiszó’s approval of ruthless military justice is in the case of the destruction of Bystrzyca, a village in Russian Poland. According to Tiszó, someone fired from this village at the advancing *k.u.k.* soldiers, killing one of them. In response, the army surrounded the village and set it on fire, all escaping persons were shot. Tiso writes:

The military judge its enemies rapidly, not caring how many innocent people will die together with the perpetrator, because the extraordinary circumstances do not permit a more accurate investigation.<sup>61</sup>

How did Tiszó portray the antagonists of the war? On a semantic level, Tiso divides them into two wartime categories: “us” and “our enemies.” The borders between these groups are fluid and “civilians” could be described as a transit group, who are not “us,” but neither “enemies”. Among social categories, Tiszó refers most frequently to the “Russians,” the “Cossacks” and the “Poles.” In contrast, how he understood “we” is not always clear. While referring to individuals, Tiso usually did not provide their names, but used ethno-professional labels: “a Polish priest”, “a captain,” “a colonel,” “Jews,” “a Cossack.” Basically, in order to describe a person or group, Tiso provided a mix of different social markers: state belonging, geographic origin, ethnic background, religious affiliation as well as professional and class identities.

Among the “enemies,” Tiszó described the Russians, especially the Cossacks, in the most detailed way. As a noncombatant, Tiso only faced them directly in captivity. He met a Cossack POW for the first time on 16 August 1914. Tiso apparently feels empathy towards this “pale and weak young man [...] (who) looks like ours and maybe he looks even more deplorable.”<sup>62</sup> However, as the war went on, Tiso tended to show the Romanov regime and army as less civilized and more authoritative. Tiszó blamed the Russians for disrespecting the Geneva Convention, which forbade the use of force against noncombatants (civilians, medical personnel, religious units and POWs). Medical units, Tiso noted, were often under fire, some Austro-Hungarian POWs and civilians were also murdered by the Russians.<sup>63</sup>

The topic of Russian policy on occupied Austrian Galicia is of special importance for Tiszó. He notes that the Cossacks were burning the towns and

59. Tiszó, “Napló... – XXX”..., p. 35.

60. Ibid., p. 36.

61. Tiszó, “Napló... – XVII”, *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 9 September 1915, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 39.

62. Ibid., “Napló... – VI”, *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 21 February 1915, p. 2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 24.

63. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 35, 44.

villages on their way into Galicia.<sup>64</sup> He regularly records that the Russian army practiced forced requisitions or even that tsarist soldiers plundered civilians, taking food, clothes and shoes from them.<sup>65</sup> In October 1914, when the 71<sup>st</sup> regiment passed through the liberated Galician territories, Tiso notes that the Russians even robbed a church. Thus, he concludes that:

Truly, there is no wonder that with news about the Russian advance, people as a whole and priests are escaping.<sup>66</sup>

In another liberated village, he notes that:

The locals complained a lot about the Russians, calling them common criminals, who did not come to fight, but to loot.<sup>67</sup>

Describing Russian troops, Tiszó tries to estimate their military strength. On the one hand, he recounts various instances which prove the weaknesses of the tsarist army: when the Cossacks were sent before its army to buy the meat, Tiso interprets it as a sign of Russia's lack of food supplies;<sup>68</sup> when Tiszó observes that the abandoned corpses of tsarist soldiers in the trenches have no shoes, he tends to believe that the Russians are badly equipped,<sup>69</sup> when the *k.u.k.* forces capture an 18 year old Russian soldier, Tiszó concludes that the tsarist army must be in a difficult position if it sends such a young person to the front-line.<sup>70</sup> On the other hand, Tiso does not hide that the Russians fought bravely, that they had good fortifications<sup>71</sup> or that their artillery surpassed that of the *k.u.k.* artillery in power.<sup>72</sup> After the battle of Krasnik, Tiszó noted that:

So far we have only underestimated and been disparaging about the Russians, whom we will beat easily. But the resistance they have put up has now shown that they are, at least, honorable enemies.<sup>73</sup>

With regards to the civilians, either from the Habsburg or the Romanov empires, Tiso discerns the Poles and the Jews as being two different categories. Tiszó express sympathy for the former, but dislikes the latter. Tiso mentions several times and with noticeable pleasure that the Poles are earnestly religious Catholics and, even in their poor villages, they build new churches. Pointing out that the tsarist regime in Russian Poland is not popular,<sup>74</sup> Tiszó cites Polish Catholic priests, who look forward to the "liberation" by the Habsburg army.

64. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavý...*, p. 56.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 72.

66. Tiszó, "Napló...– XL", *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 24 October 1915, p. 3; *Ibid.*, p. 66-67.

67. *Ibid.*, 28 November 1915, p. 2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavý...*, p. 73.

68. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavý...*, p. 62.

69. *Ibid.* p. 73.

70. *Ibid.* p. 68-69.

71. *Ibid.* p. 36, 40.

72. *Ibid.* p. 46.

73. Tiszó, "Napló...– XIX", *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 23 May 1915, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavý...*, p. 41.

74. *Ibid.* p. 47.

As Tiso concludes, “intellectual elements, and first and foremost, Polish priests, will gladly change their masters.”<sup>75</sup>

In August 1914, Tiszó notes that the Austrian as well as Russian Poles welcomed the *k.u.k.* army.<sup>76</sup> Tiso “delightedly” listened to a Polish priest on the Austro-Russian frontier that “he wished Russians death in the same manner as the inhabitants of Budapest or Vienna.”<sup>77</sup> Another local clergyman confirmed to Tiszó that Congress Poles were praying for the success of the Habsburg army, hoping that it would bring the reunion of the dismembered Polish nation. The priest adds, “we are zealously praying for the victory of the Monarchy.”<sup>78</sup>

Unlike in Tiso’s pre-war articles, the *Napló* did not criticize Jews overtly. Only in the last entry, which describes Tiszó’s return from the frontline, Tiso shames the “parasites” in the rear zone,<sup>79</sup> probably, meaning, among others, the Jews.<sup>80</sup> Nevertheless, in *Napló*, the general attitude towards the Jews is quite distanced. Tiszó’s interactions with them are reduced to a minimum: only when he needs something (like accommodation or food), does he venture to approach the Jews.<sup>81</sup> However, one thing is common, when Tiso describes the Poles and the Jews: both groups are maltreated by the Russians. On 9 September Tiszó recorded the words of a Polish priest that the Cossacks, “a merciless and blood-thirsty people,” “hate Poles the most, after the Jews.”<sup>82</sup>

Civilians, according to Tiso, were not always pleased with the *k.u.k.* army’s presence. At the end of the *k.u.k.* advance into Congress Poland in September 1914, Tiszó noted: “as we are advancing farther inside interior Russia, the population become more mistrustful and flee the villages.”<sup>83</sup> Moreover, when the 71<sup>st</sup> regiment marches, local inhabitants hide inside the houses,<sup>84</sup> fearing requisition.<sup>85</sup> A few cruel incidents are noted by Tiso during the Krasnik battle. On 27 August Tiszó mentions a village, which was burnt from two corners by the Habsburg and the Romanov troops. The inhabitants, writes Tiso, “if these poor devils do not lose their lives, they do lose their property and family nests, they lose everything—probably completely innocently!”<sup>86</sup> The same day, when

75. Tiszó, “Napló... – LI”, *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 16 January 1916, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 81.

76. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 21, 29.

77. *Ibid.* p. 21.

78. Tiszó, “Napló... – LI”, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 81.

79. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 83.

80. As the historian Péter Bihari illustrated, the anti-Semitic campaign was accelerated in Hungary during the Great War primarily by the Néppárt members and its press as well as the members of the Independence Party. These oppositional parties claimed that the “Jewish capitals” abused the war needs of Hungarian people and its army. Moreover, they compared the Jewish refugees coming to Hungary from Galicia to “infection”, which are replacing the “worthy Hungarian peasants,” leaving for the front (P. Bihari, “Aspects of Anti-Semitism in Hungary 1915-1918”, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, no. 9, October 2016, p. 58-93).

81. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 20-21.

82. *Ibid.*, p. 49.

83. Tiszó, “Napló... – XXV”, *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 4 July 1915, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 47.

84. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 34-35.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

86. Tiszó, “Napló... – XVII”, p. 2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 38.

Tiszó passes through the Bystriczka village, burnt by his comrades, the image of kneeling villagers, asking for mercy, push him to comment in his diary:

We stare at them with helpless compassion, but we do not dare to think what these temporally cowed people would undertake following the desire for revenge in case of our possible retreat.<sup>87</sup>

As the war continued, Tiso noted the decline of Austria-Hungary's prestige among the civilians. When the *k.u.k.* army reenters Congress Poland in October 1914, Tiszó observes the turn in Polish pro-Habsburg sentiments—"every sign confirms that their hearts incline to the Russian side," he notes on 14 October. Locals explain that they do not need to be "liberated" from the Romanovs, instead the *k.u.k.* soldiers should free the Habsburg Poles.<sup>88</sup> Tiszó affirms that Russia earns even some local support in Galicia. He gives an example of a local forester, who joyfully admits a possible Russian annexation of his region. Tiso explains the Galician support of Russia by the poverty. "*Paupertas maxima meretrix est*", he notes, adding that "[...] the spies are indeed recruited from these poor people, whom a few sparkling rubles bring to betrayal."<sup>89</sup> At that moment, Tiso felt the repugnance for the Austria-Hungary subjects, who showed disloyalty towards their sovereign and dynasty.

#### TISO'S SOCIAL IDENTITIES: THEIR INTERSECTIONS, CONTRADICTIONS AND LIMITS

The attribution of ethnic or national identity to Jozef Tiso before 1918 is not an easy task. The protagonists of the Magyar identity of the young Tiso point out the fact that before 1919, Jozef Tiso most often spelled his surname in its Magyarized form—"Tiszó," even when he was writing in Slovak. Tiso himself explained it by the pressure of the Hungarian authorities. Apparently, even though his father was called "Tiso," the local priest Telesky issued to the young Jozef the birth certificate with such a Magyarised version that forced him in the following years to use this official form.<sup>90</sup> Also, before 1918, Tiso never openly claimed to be "a Slovak." In his social relations, Tiszó kept a distance from other Slovak national activists: already in Nagy Biccse, his family, as well as Jozef Tiso, boycotted the local Slovak nationalists, that were in the vicinity of the local doctor;<sup>91</sup> while studying in Vienna, Tiso kept silent about the Slovak

87 Ibid.; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 39.

88 Ibid., "Napló... – LI", p. 2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 81.

89 Ibid., "Napló... – VI", 31 January 1915, p. 3; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy...*, p. 22.

90. SNA, Bratislava, F. Nár.sud, k. 52, *Zapísnica...* As the historian Walter Lukan shows, Tiso had quit a flexible approach to his first name too: during the studies at Pázmáneum, his personal signature evaluated from "Jozsef Tiszó," to a more Hungarian "Tiszó József," but later he replaced it by the Latin form "Josephus Tiszó". See: Lukan, "Študentské roky...", p. 75.

91. SNA, Bratislava, F. Nár.sud, k. 52, *Zapísnica...*

cultural or political problems,<sup>92</sup> and, when he was sent preaching to Bán, he distanced himself from the local attorney Dr. Janko Jesenský, later a famous Slovak writer, known in those times as “a public Pan-Slav.”<sup>93</sup>

On the other hand, Tiso registered “*slowakisch*” as his mother tongue at the Pázmáneum and, later, between his graduation and the Great War, preached and published not only in Magyar, but also in Slovak.<sup>94</sup> The historian Michal Potemra suggests that Tiszó’s social conduct was characteristic for the “quiet and cautious” Slovak-born intelligentsia, who were not necessarily “Mad’arons.”<sup>95</sup>

The practice of hiding “true” national identity and pretending to “belong” to another one was familiar to Tiso, but he acknowledged such “national duplicity” far later. In October 1938, when Tiso had just taken the lead of the Slovak government, he confirmed to Hungarian diplomats during the negotiations at Komárno that “from personal experience he knows that under the previous regime many Slovaks temporarily detached themselves from their race and professed to be Magyars.”<sup>96</sup> In his 1946 affidavit, Tiso reaffirmed that he also concealed his ethnic origins before 1918. Thus, during his professorship at Nitra in 1915-1918, Tiso endeavored to prevent any suspicion about his Slovak feelings:

I had to pay attention to myself in order to avoid suspicions that I am a Pan-Slav [Slovak nationalist–A.P.], because in those times it was easy to declare cultural activists the Pan-Slavs and those, who were declared such, were thrown in a godforsaken village and were deprived of the possibility to continue any activity... If he [Tiso’s superior–bishop Batyáni–A. P.] knew that I am a Slovak, then, he would not make me a Spiritual [director at the Seminary of Nitra–A. P.]<sup>97</sup>

Tiszó writings published before 1918 allow us to clarify how he understood the position of Slovaks in Hungary. Apparently, the Slovaks were poorer, less educated and Slovak soldiers fought even less bravely than the Magyars.<sup>98</sup>

92. As one of Tiso’s Pázmáneum schoolmates wrote in his memoirs, “Tiszó József [...] behaved quietly and never said anything about the matters of the Slovak minority.” Cited in: “Czapik Gyula pazmanita főpap visszaemlékezése egykori intézetére,” an appendix to the PhD thesis of Beke Margit (B. Margit, *Fejezetek az új- és legújabbkori elitképzéshez. A katolikus egyház szerepe a modern magyar értelmiségi elit nevelésében a bécsi Pázmáneumban, Akadémiai doktori értekezés*, Budapest. 2010), p. 379.

93. SNA, Bratislava, F. Nár.sud, k. 52, *Zapisnica*... In his memoirs, Jesenský also recalled the boycott of the local intelligentsia against him. The reason was, according to Jesenský that he spoke Slovak in public places and it was apparently enough for creating him a reputation of “a Pan-Slav” and “an enemy of the Hungarian homeland.” See: Ján Jesenský, *Cestou k slobode*, Martin, Matica slovenská, 1936, p. 1-10.

94. Ward, *Priest, Politician*..., p. 21-29; Lukan, “Študentské roky...,” p. 62-75; Letz, “Vývin...,” p. 44-61.

95. M. Potemra, “Publicistická verejná činnosť Jozefa Tisu pred rokom 1918”, in: Bystrický, Fano (eds.), *Pokus*..., p. 33-43.

96. Zsigmond László (ed.), *Diplómáciai iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához. 1936-1945*, vol. 2, *A Müncheni egyezmény létrejötte és Magyarország külpolitikája. 1936-1938*, Budapest, Akadémiai, 1965, p. 749.

97. SNA, Bratislava, F. Nár.sud, k. 52, *Zapisnica*...

98. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy*..., p. 55.

Nevertheless, while Tiso sought to improve the situation of the Slovaks, he never denounced Magyar nationalism, but condemned state corruption, police abuses, non-democratic systems of governance and Jewish capitalism.<sup>99</sup> If Tiszó indeed aimed to support the Slovak people against the “Magyar” state, his criticism was always hidden between the lines. The historian Róbert Letz supposed that in the diary, Tiso drew parallels between the image of Poles, oppressed and Russified by the tsarist regime, and the Magyarised Slovaks in Hungary.<sup>100</sup> Tiszó indeed manifested attachment to the idea of promoting the Slovak culture in his May 1916 article in *Nyitramegyei szemle*. There Tiso spoke for an increase in the literature available in Slovak. However, the danger in the absence of “good” (meaning – Catholic) Slovak books, according to Tiszó, lay not in the Magyarisation (which Tiso never mentioned), but in the possible turn of the Slovak audience to the Lutheran books in Slovak.<sup>101</sup>

Despite Tiso’s evident attention to Slovak issues, his relation to the Slovak and Magyar nationalisms is unclear. The question if Tiszó considered himself in the frame of one or the other ethno-national category before 1918 is impossible to answer for sure. Perhaps too cautious to openly affirm his Slovak identity, there is no evidence to suggest that Tiso had ever firmly claimed (except during the dubious 1910 census) to be a Magyar. It seems that Tiso, like other Catholic activists, was in favor of the 1868 Nationality Act in Hungary, which stated that:

[...] all citizens of Hungary form one nation in the political sense: the indivisibly united Hungarian nation of which every citizen is an equal member, regardless of his nationality he belongs to.<sup>102</sup>

In 1946 Tiso proclaimed that during the First World War:

I did not agree with the Magyar understanding of the issue of minorities. I never considered a Slovak, Romanian, Croat, Serb or German a Magyar speaking another native language. I considered a member of a separate nationality a member of an ethnic group, but at the same time a Hungarian citizen.<sup>103</sup>

Even though this affidavit is clearly marked by Tiso’s desire to distance himself from Magyar nationalism, it seems probable that Tiso considered himself originally ethnic Slovak (which, however, did not exclude his support for Magyarisation), but he apparently did not attribute too much importance to it. Probably the causes of this “national unconsciousness” could be explained, at least partly, by the natural contradiction between the universalist and transnational features of Catholicism and the exclusive assumptions of nationalism.<sup>104</sup> Maybe,

99. Ibid., p. 96-97.

100. Letz, “Vývin...,” p. 53.

101. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavý...*, p. 97-98.

102. Quoted in: Vörös, “The social representation...” p. 44-45.

103. SNA, Bratislava, F. Nár.sud, k. 52, *Zapísnica...*, p. 13.

104. Henschel, “Religions and the Nation...” p. 858.

Tiso's national ambiguity could be partly explained also by his multilingualism. As Tara Zahra argues, the knowledge of different regional languages was a key characteristic of "nationally indifferent" persons in Central Europe in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>105</sup> Jozef Tiso's ability to speak and write not only in Slovak and Magyar, but also German (and Latin), could be an important factor, which undermined a narrow allegiance to the Slovak or Magyar nations.

If initially Tiso was cold to nationalist appeals, what kind of identity did he possess? As the entries to his Galician diary show, the ecclesiastic position, either in its military or civilian framework, played the most important part in Tiszó's self-perception. On the pages of his diary Tiso speaks about himself as "a regiment cleric" ("*ezred tábori lelkésze*,"<sup>106</sup> "*ezred papja*"<sup>107</sup>) or "Catholic priest" ("*katholikus pap*").<sup>108</sup> In one diary entry Tiso called himself "Hungary's Catholic priest" ("*magyarországi katolikus pap*"), which refers to the country / state, but not to the ethnicity.

Apart from this ecclesiastic identity, Tiszó tends to speak in the diary pages as a "patriot" of Austria-Hungary and its ruler Franz Joseph. Apparently Tiso's allegiance towards the Monarchy occupies a more important place than towards Hungary alone. For example, while Tiszó crossed the frontier between Hungary and Austria in the middle of August 1914, he dryly wrote, "We had left the Carpathians (Hungary–AP) and then quickly galloped on the Galician plain (Austria–AP)."<sup>109</sup> But when Tiso crossed the Austro-Russian borderline on 23 August, his thoughts were more excited:

During peace one crosses in awe the frontier of another country, now it is not the same, it is not a tourist trip, but an armed intrusion!<sup>110</sup>

After the return to Austria–Hungary on 12 September, Tiso shares the general relief of his regiment:

A profound sigh went out from the chest of many people: Thank God, we are home!<sup>111</sup>

In the *Napló*, Tiso refers to Austria-Hungary as to a virtually ideal political entity. The young priest hopes that the Monarchy could overcome its internal ethnic conflicts thanks to the solidarity born in the Great War trenches. On 3 October, Tiszó describes in his diary some workers rebuilding a bridge:

105. Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities...", p. 93-119.

106. Tiszó, "Napló... – I", p. 3.

107. Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy*, p. 18, 47; Tiszó, "Napló... – XXV", p. 2.

108. Tiszó, "Napló... – IV", p. 2; *Ibid.*, Part LI, p. 2.

109. *Ibid.*, "Napló... – III", p. 2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy*..., p. 20.

110. *Ibid.*, "Napló... – X", *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 21 March 1915, p. 2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy*..., p. 29.

111. *Ibid.*, "Napló... – XIX", p. 2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavy*..., p. 52.

Almost all peoples of the Monarchy are upon the fallen bridge—and we are getting along with one another.

Writing that here the Monarchy's Germans, Magyars, Slovaks and Romanians are "standing together and helping each other like brothers", Tiszó wishes that this tolerance would continue after the war. Why, he asks, would this cooperation be impossible in peace time too?<sup>112</sup> Here, Tiso clearly reveals his all-Monarchy loyalty, which, in our view, surpasses narrow Hungarian citizenship. This attitude resembles the "multi-ethnic nationalisms" (aimed at the union of Habsburg Christians and the exclusion of Jews), which Miloslav Szabó has found among the Slovak Catholic activists.<sup>113</sup>

Finally, when Ernst Bruckmüller provided examples of different supranational "Habsburg societies," he pointed that such all-Monarchy identification was mostly spread among the members of the following groups: the nobility, the common officer corps, the diplomats and other *k.u.k.* bureaucrats, the Catholic Church, the inhabitants of Vienna, peasants and the Jews.<sup>114</sup> Jozef Tiso was obviously not a Jew, neither aristocrat and nor a diplomat, but he could be put in relation with all other categories: a Catholic priest, born in a peasant family, who received his university education in Vienna and temporarily attached to the *k.u.k.* officer corps.

Concluding the paper, we could confirm that Tiso's war diary reveals different personal characteristics of its author. The diary (as well as other examples of his publications in Néppárt press) shows that Tiszó distanced himself from the ethnic divisions in Hungary, but stressed the common features among the Austro-Hungarians, and the Catholics. In general, the social identity of Tiszó in 1914-1915 included several intersecting categories: a Catholic, a priest, a soldier, a Slovak sympathizer, a Hungarian citizen and a Habsburg subject. Each of these identities coexisted with others and could become for a while the dominant social mask. The paper highlights that Tiso had great sentimental bind to the Dual Monarchy as a whole. Perhaps this was due to the dominance of the pro-Habsburg atmosphere in the Catholic Church and the common army of the Monarchy—two strongholds of the stability of the Danube Empire. Thus, when the Monarchy collapsed in 1918, the crisis of the pro-Habsburg political loyalty was almost unavoidable. As earlier Tiso did not manifest particular allegiances to "historical Hungary", his sudden public appearance as a "Slovak" could be viewed not only as an example of opportunism, but as an almost natural development. A better understanding J. Tiso's personality and his social identities during the Great

112. Ibid., "Napló... XLI", *Nyitramegyei szemle*, 31 October 1915, p. 2; Fabricius, Suško, *Prejavý...*, p. 68.

113. Szabó, "Rasa, národ..." p. 108.

114. Bruckmüller identifies the Habsburg society as "a key class or a combination of social groups that in effect ensured the Habsburg Monarchy's existence as a state and social structure." See: Bruckmüller, "Was there a 'Habsburg society'..." p. 2.

War probably could also cast light upon the attitude of “Slovakia’s” intellectuals to the late Habsburg Empire<sup>115</sup>.

115. This paper was originally prepared for the international conference “Writing at war, writing the war. Soldiers and civilians of Austria-Hungary at the Great War” (on 13-14 October 2016 in Paris, France). I feel indebted to Gabriella Dudeková, Bohumila Ferenčuhová, Dušan Kováč and Juraj Marušiak from the Slovak Academy of Sciences, to James Mace Ward from Rhode Island University, and Étienne Boisserie from the National Institute for Oriental Languages and Civilizations (Inalco) for their critical feedback on the draft of this paper that helped me to nuance some conclusions, while Mathieu Laflamme from the Ottawa University and the translator Alice Orlova pointed out some misspellings and grammar mistakes. I want to express my deepest gratitude to Dinah McCarthy from the Toulouse University, who graciously agreed to improve stylistic shortcomings of the paper. Special thanks also go to the Toulouse University, Framespa laboratory, the Slovak National Scholarship Board and the Erasmus+ Programme, which enabled me to travel to Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary and explore its archives and libraries in early 2017 which proved indispensable for the finalization of this research.