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Conditions of Minorities

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‘There Are Always More Round Pegs Than Round Holes’

A Survey Report at the Turn of the Millennium on the Labour Market of Dunaszerdahely District

INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the Forum Institute for Social Studies participated in an international research project entitled ‘The Challenges of Labour Market at the Turn of the Millennium’ and co-ordinated by the Márton Áron Szakkollégium in Budapest. Within the framework of the research, we examined the circumstances on the labour market in regions of primary importance inhabited by Hungarians in the Carpathian Basin. We examined two regions in detail in Slovakia: the district of Dunaszerdahely (Dunajská Streda) in western Slovakia and the district of Tőketerebes (Trebisov) in eastern Slovakia. We worked using two methods:

- on the basis of the figures of the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, we prepared a detailed analysis on the changes of the demographic, economic, and labour market situation of the two districts between 1989 and today,
- we conducted a total of eighty–four in each district–autobiographical interviews with the three main actors of the labour market, that is, with employers, employees, and the representatives of intermediate recruitment institutions, which provide for the flow of information between the first two.

The first analysis of the abundant material was ready by the spring of 2001.¹ The following study, which outlines the situation of the labour market in Dunaszerdahely district, is based upon this work. First, we present it with the help of a short statistic general survey, that is, indicating its macro-aspects and second, with autobiographical interviews², that is, from the point of view of the active actors of the labour market.

I. THE LABOUR MARKET OF THE DUNASZERDAHELY DISTRICT IN THE LIGHT OF STATISTICS

Unemployment went through a twelve-fold increase in ten years in Slovakia. Unemployment rate was 1,55% in 1990, 16,7% in the first half of 1999, and 17,73 in November 2000. This means that besides the 2.694.634 economically active inhabitants of the

¹ The complete analysis will appear in the Autumn, in the Tempora Series of the Forum Institute for Social Studies.

² There were 10 employers, 27 employees, and 3 labour market mediators among the subjects of the 40 interviews conducted in the Dunaszerdahely district.

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country, 477.770 unemployed were kept on file at the end of last year. In that period, employees were dismissed primarily from the construction industry and agriculture.

When we break down the data according to districts, it becomes evident that with the exception of Pozsony (Bratislava), where unemployment rate fell by 0,2%, the ratio of unemployed increased in every district of the country. It surpassed the national average of 17,73% in the majority of the districts inhabited by Hungarians at the end of 2000. The ratio of the unemployed was the lowest in the Szenc (Senec) district (8,17%), and it was just below the national average in the examined Dunaszerdahely district (17,65%)

Unemployment is not a recent phenomenon in the Dunaszerdahely district. For the sake of an easier comparison, the following table presents the tendencies of the phenomenon in a national and district breakdown for the past ten years.

The unemployment tendencies (see Table 1) of the Dunaszerdahely district went parallel to the national tendencies and came close to these especially at the beginning and end of the examined period. In the years in between, the figures of the district were always above the national average with as much as 6 percent before 1995. Both the number of the unemployed (10.395), both their proportion (17,65%) cut any previous records in 2000. Several companies laid off employees and the bad economic performance of the agriculture further aggravated the situation. Many employees are merely registered at a number of workplaces, given that in reality the employers are able to give them work only in certain periods.

Table 1.

Tendencies of unemployment

| Year | Unemployment | | | |
|--------|--------------|------|-------------------------|-------|
| | Slovakia | | Dunaszerdahely district | |
| | Total | % | Total | % |
| 1990 | 39.603 | 1,5 | 766 | 1,6 |
| 1991 | 301.951 | 11,8 | 8.012 | 16,9 |
| 1992 | 260.274 | 10,4 | 7.231 | 16,3 |
| 1993 | 368.095 | 14,4 | 10.025 | 20,4 |
| 1994 | 371.481 | 14,8 | 10.465 | 20,9 |
| 1995 | 383.291 | 13,1 | 9.573 | 16,6 |
| 1996 | 329.749 | 12,8 | 9.052 | 15,2 |
| 1997 | 347.753 | 12,5 | 9.229 | 14,4 |
| 1998 | 428.209 | 15,6 | 9.474 | 16,4 |
| 1999* | 469.143 | 16,7 | 10.366 | 17,2 |
| 2000** | 477.770 | 17,7 | 10.395 | 17,65 |

* The statistic figures of 1999 refer to the first half of the year

** Figures of November 2000

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40% of the inhabitants live in the chief town of the district, Dunaszerdahely, and in the two other cities of the district, in Somorja (Samorín) and Nagymegyér (Vel'ky Meder), while the rest in smaller and larger villages. There are fewer work opportunities in the countryside, so the labour force migration is relevant within the district. However, this phenomenon concerns not only the inhabitants of the villages, but also those living in the cities: 25% of the inhabitants of Dunaszerdahely are commuting daily, mostly to Pozsony, which is fifty kilometres far from Dunaszerdahely.

There are settlements where unemployment was well above the average rate of the district: Nagyudvarnok (Velké Dvorníky) and Nagymagyár (Zlaté Klasy-Rastice) have the worst conditions as far as the labour market is concerned. The unemployment rate was 41,36% in Nagymagyár and 30,51% in Nagyudvarnok. One of the reasons of this situation in Nagymagyár is that the preponderant majority of the Roma community of the district lives in this village. On the one hand, employers are reluctant to employ them because of the low level of their work culture and on the other, they themselves do not insist on employment either.

Besides the Roma, the greatest proportion of the unemployed is made up of the following:³

- persons who are not able to find a job within half a year,
- those released from prison,
- those with partial capacity to work, especially the ones treated with psychiatric diagnoses (549),
- the inhabitants of peripheral areas. Taking up a new job is hindered for the unemployed by the fact that there are no adequate bus connections from several settlements, and the train (one gauge, not electric) crosses the district only at the Komárom–Nagymegyér–Dunaszerdahely–Pozsony track. The expensive fare is a further problem.
- mothers with small children and housewives (5.177),
- persons of basic level qualifications,
- minors (497),
- young persons at the beginning of their careers (654). The successful employment of young people who have finished their studies runs into serious difficulties. Most of them obtained a qualification from some vocational school where they did not have to pass the maturity exam. The demand for this kind of labour force is rather low from the beginning. The lack of work experience is an additional factor, which further reduces their chances. At the same time, the rapporteurs of the employment office often point out that part of these young persons do not even really want to find a job. Persons taking up distance learning whose afternoon and weekend schedules are not respected by the employers constitute the smallest group of those unemployed, who have graduated from some school. Most of these inhabitants of the Dunaszerdahely district end up finding work only in Pozsony.

³ The numbers in parentheses reveal in how many they were in December 1998—this figure could not be obtained for all of the groups.

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Although the above enumerated factors contribute to the growth of the number of the unemployed, the oversupply evolved on the labour market of the district has its roots in the lack of sufficient adequate workplaces.

II. THE LABOUR MARKET OF THE DUNASZERDAHELY DISTRICT ON THE BASIS OF INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED WITH RECRUITMENT AGENTS, EMPLOYERS, AND EMPLOYEES

1. Recruitment agents

From among the representatives of the National Employment Agency, we conducted an interview with three. Two pronounced their opinion in the name of the office in the Dunaszerdahely district, the third person represented the office of Pozsony IV district.⁴

The National Employment Agency is engaged in keeping records on the unemployed, searching for and registering vacant posts, and recruiting employees. Its additional tasks are: the organisation of labour force expos, spiritual and mental care of the unemployed, and the organisation of various clubs. The advisory divisions provide personal counsel beyond group counselling upon the demand of the unemployed person. The person whom we interviewed in Pozsony told us that their office established a separate club for young unemployed who had just left school, another one for unemployed mothers with small children, and they attend to those separately who had not managed to find a job for over a year. The unemployed are required to visit the employment office once every three weeks and in addition, they have to participate in the programmes of one of the clubs. This is important because *'the clubs offer us the opportunity to get to know our clients better, first of all as far as their demands and abilities are concerned. If a suitable workplace pops up, we call and inform them'*.

Those unemployed, who do not co-operate with the employment office, do not go to the counsel meetings, do not show up at the club programmes, are stroked off from the register of the employment office and their case is handed over to the department of social issues of the district authorities.

The institution of public utility employment has been functioning since August 1, 2000 and this too belongs to the sphere of authority of the employment offices. The offices have taken a dim view on this institution from the very beginning.⁵ Only certain employers, e.g. foundations and other non-profit organizations, district offices, and health care organisations can offer public utility employment. The National Employment Agency

⁴ We asked a recruitment specialist also from Pozsony because there are many commuters from the Dunaszerdahely district to Pozsony. Besides, the employment office of Bratislava IV has achieved good results in labour force recruitment. This can be seen in the fact that according to the latest reports, this district has the lowest unemployment rate (below 5%) in whole Slovakia.

⁵ Pavel Tomasta, analyst of the National Employment agency, declared the following at the end of 2000: 'All of our pessimistic forecasts came true. Beyond the public utility jobs set up artificially by the State and regarded to be of a temporary character, the economy is unable to create workplaces'. They worked for the public good. *Új Szó*, January 11, 2001.

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received 2 billion korunas for public utility jobs in 2000. From this SKK 1,4 billion were used while the remaining 600 million were transferred back into the central budget. A public servant working eight hours a day received SKK 4537 per month.

The description on the labour market provided by the interviewed persons covers it fully what we have written about in the first part. The pace of the establishment of new workplaces and the number of newly created jobs cannot offset the anomalies of the labour market and especially those ones, which came upon the district in 1998. Namely, that year masses were laid off at the Poľnohospodárske stavby company, the KABÁT Ltd., the PVT, Inc., the BELAR-DUNAJ, Inc. in Dunaszerdahely, at the co-operative in Mad, and at the VARIAPROGRES Ltd. in Nagymagyar.

There are not enough vacant positions on the territory of the Dunaszerdahely district, which would provide a work to every unemployed according to their qualifications. Thus, persons looking for a job can choose from the following:

- undertake a work which does not fit their qualifications,
- apply for public utility employment,
- go to work in some other district.

Usually, it is the most difficult to find employment for those, who *contract to do work which does not fit their qualifications*. It is mostly men above 50 and women above 40 who belong to this group. Many of them have a maturity exam, some of them even a university degree but still, they do not find a job. All three of the interviewees affirmed this unanimously. Finding work is a problem also for those women, who would like to return after the termination of their maternity leave. In their case, the employers fear the longer absences of the mother because of the illness of the children. At the same time, these mothers cannot tackle a work to which they would have to commute daily. Thus, they often have to content themselves with jobs that our employee informants described as 'inferior' and 'dirty' work.

Only those can apply for *public utility employment*, who have spent at least one year as unemployed without interruptions. Also those so-called permanently unemployed persons belong here, who have not found a job for over two years. The experiences vary in the Dunaszerdahely district in connection to their work. There were 60 public utility workers employed under the supervision of the municipality in Dunaszerdahely but their work was not satisfactory. Thus, only 11 were offered a contract in 2001. In Bős (Gabčíkovo), the local municipal council hired 36 public utility workers to eliminate the illegal dumps and keep the village clean. As they carried this out properly, their contracts were renewed for 2001. In Nagymegyér, 88 persons worked at the maintenance of the city, the bath, and the forest belonging to them and they did a good job as well.⁶

The interviewee of Pozsony told that they received money for the formation of 120 public utility workplaces but only 60 unemployed made use of the offered opportunities. *'For the inhabitants of Pozsony, this salary is very low as compared to the costs of subsistence at the poverty line which are considerably higher here than in rural areas. Thus,*

⁶ Ibid.

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people feel it is not worth for them to work for this amount. But there were not enough convenient workplaces either. As we were unable to fill up our quota, the National Employment Office redistributed the rest of the sum which had been appropriated to us.'

The commuters come, in general, from among the youth. Our informants revealed that *'it is very difficult for those, who finish their studies in certain schools, to find a job'*. One of them added that *'sometimes I have the feeling that our school system does not take into consideration the demands of the labour market at all.'*

Unfortunately, some does not even have the aforementioned opportunities either. It is just impossible to find a place for about 15% of the unemployed. *'Often, this is their fault and they are the ones we can see searching for food in the garbage'*. There are unemployed who have unrealistic ideas: some would want to earn much money with little work, others would want a place demanding a skill which they do not have, still others do not want a job at a state institution because they find the salary too little, and there are others who do not want to work at a private company and complain about being exploited there. All three interviewees called our attention to this phenomenon and the director of the office in Pozsony illustrated this with examples too: *'A curiosity of our city district is that the Volkswagen Inc. can be found here. It offers some 7000 workplaces but only 2000 were recruited from Pozsony and from this, 800 from our district. And all this in spite of the fact that this plant pays more than the average salary and provides a noteworthy social benefit program. At the same time, though, it demands strict work ethic and it seems, this does not suit the wishes of many'*.

The group of the permanently unemployed causes further problems. On the one hand, they became unused to regular work and it is more difficult to get a job for them with this. On the other hand, their self-confidence has withered and this affects not only their chances to find employment, but also their whole life and relations network which gradually becomes more and more narrow.

Another headache is caused by illegal work at the so-called black-market. One of the interviewees talked about that like this: *'There are employers who are speculating, who employ unemployed persons contracting them or just giving them work and paying them in cash so that they would not have to pay taxes and obligatory contributions after the employees. What can we do about this? We carry out inspections, we have a mailbox through which anybody can inform us about such cases. However, our competences are limited, e.g. we do not have the authority to ask for the papers of the citizens to check their identity. Many unemployed and employers have gotten to know the opportunities offered by the black market really well and they know what and how they have to do in order to keep their activities in secret'*.

2. Employers

2.1. Main characteristics of the companies

We conducted an interview with ten employers. One represented a state institution, the others talked to us as the owners and directors, or managers of their companies.

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From among the private companies, three have one owner. Six companies—among them one is a Slovak-Hungarian joint venture—have more owners. It is typical of these latter companies that the co-owners have known each other from earlier times, e.g. they studied together at the university or were colleagues at a former workplace. However, none of the companies is a family venture, that is, the owners are not related to each other. Although this subject matter was not included in the research, it turns out from some of the interviews that the co-owner status is the result of the circumstances (presumably financial circumstances), let us say, the result of some pressure. Some interviewees directly or indirectly revealed it that it would have been much better for them to become owners on their own:⁷ *'We are in three as owners and we are not planning to change this. It is a custom to say that the best ltd. is the one with an odd number of directors. But three might be a little too much. The best would be to have only one.'*

Those whom we asked and are the sole owners of the company are completely satisfied with their status and do not want changes in the sense of getting co-owners into the company:

'I am the only owner. And there will be no change in this. I have had a co-owner but it was enough to have one once. I trust myself the most and I can handle the work, so why would I need anybody in the business as a co-owner?'

'I own the company. It was my idea, I built it, I developed it virtually from nothing, and I am very proud of this. I do not want to change anything regarding proprietorship, I will remain the only owner in the future too.'

The companies we examined can look back to pasts of varying length. The company, which has been operating for the longest period, was founded in 1990 and it is engaged in agricultural production. Five companies were established between 1995 and 1998, we could practically consider them as tried and tested businesses. The remaining four are truly new ventures or a recently established institution (the state-owned institution was established in 2000): one was founded in 1999 and the rest in 2000.

The state institution is a central state organ and its sphere of authority extends to the supervision of public procurement. From among the private businesses, only one is engaged in production, in fact, in agricultural production, while the others work in the fields of trade and services. More exactly, their activities are: trading and in cases maintenance and repair of electronic devices (computers and accessories, household appliances, and consumer electronics); catering, typographic, tourist, and cosmetics services; mental counselling.

Although we did not ask questions in connection to the history of their business and thus, we are unable to define the reasons of the establishment of the ventures, it is certain that none of the examined companies was created under some kind of pressure. There is one company, which was established during the privatisation of the one-time co-operative of the village: the current owners bought up the property shares of part of the former co-operative members and the other owners of previous periods. The other

⁷ We noted the tendencies aiming at the simplification of the proprietary structure during our previous researches too. See Lampi, Zsuzsanna, *Vállalkozások és vállalkozók 1989 után* [Enterprises and entrepreneurs after 1989]. Lilium Aurum, Dunaszzerdahely, 1999. pp. 58–64.

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companies are legal entities of free enterprise (the ones engage in trade) or legal entities performing an activity entailing some licence (the catering enterprises, the hair-dresser's and cosmetics shops, the travel agency, etc.)

With the exception of three, the qualification of the owner(s) is a significant factor for all of them: they have started the ventures in a field closely related to their qualification. For example, the programmers with university degree are engaged in the commerce of computer technology equipment, the owner of the creperie is a trained cook, and the owner of the beauty shop is a cosmetologist. It is striking in case of these businesses that the entrepreneur is not 'searching for him/herself'. It seems they know it from the moment of the establishment of the business what they want and also that they would like to work in the given field in the close future. They do not plan changes and 'trips' to any other field. This is different in case of those interviewees, who have started their business not in the field of their qualification: the wholesaler who graduated from high school, the economist who organizes festivities, and the interpreter with university degree who owns a snack bar. Their businesses are flexible in the sense that they have turned to a field other than the one in which they are qualified, following the changing demands of the market (today they are engaged in something else than at the beginning of their enterprise). According to what they revealed to us, they were planning to move according to the requirements of the market also in the future. I do not intend to examine this phenomenon here in depth, so all I would like to point out is that its essence is not the divergence between 'rigid' and 'flexible' ventures. For also those are flexible, who work in the field of their qualification. It seems plausible that they will be able to make innovations and adjust to the changing market circumstances within the same field exactly because of the thorough knowledge of their profession. At the same time, those who became entrepreneurs outside the field of their profession or do not have qualifications at all, might change the field of their venture more often because their experience, that is, their knowledge learned in the course of the work of the enterprise can offer a less sound basis for them for a deeper exploitation of the opportunities of the given field.

Three interviewees did not want to furnish figures on the turnover of the year before. The majority gave us a figure, which, taking into account the signs of non-verbal communication, might not have corresponded to the real facts. However, as these were given as answers to the question, in theory and formally they can be evaluated. According to these, the annual turnout of the examined companies ranged from SKK 1 million to 60 million last year. The one that declared the greatest turnout is the oldest, the agricultural company. With respect to the others, the turnout does not really have a connection to the date of foundation, the field of activity or the number of employees. The state institution (106) and the agricultural production company (72) from among the private businesses have the most employees. The number of employees of the other companies is between 2 and 12, that is, they are micro and small businesses.

2.2. Labour market characteristics of the companies

A fundamental trait of every examined company in relation to the labour market is that they employ workers, that is, they function as employers.

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In the following, we will look for answers to the following questions:

1. Is there enough unemployed labour force on the market upon whom the examined companies can count as potential employees?
2. What do the companies expect from their current and prospective employees? To what extent do the current employees meet their requirements?
3. What do the companies offer to their current and future employees?

Labour force supply

As we have mentioned it in the first part of the study, we can clearly talk about an over-supply of labour force in the Dunaszerdahely district. From the point of view of the employers, this is a favourable phenomenon, for they can really choose from the unemployed work force.

Also the interviewees confirmed that there was a large number of unemployed labour force on the territory of the district. Several of them expressed it almost with the same words: *'it is not a problem to find new people'*, *'it is not a problem to find new workers'*, *'it is not difficult to fill the places'*.

Or, much more like this: *'many experts are applying and also housewives'*, *'there are more applications than what we need'*, *'there is no lack in colleagues, they are trained locally, and not all of them can even find a job'*, *'there are too many applicants, many young people cannot find employment'*. Or, the most telling opinion: *'we cannot complain about the scarcity of labour force, there are always more round pegs than round holes'*.

Thus, the interviewees answered a unanimous 'yes' to the question on whether there are enough potential employees on the market in the Dunaszerdahely district. At the same time, they added that they do not have the intention to employ new workers because the 'house is full to capacity'. In order that they could hire new employees, they would have to fire some of the old ones. However, as all of the informants were satisfied with their current employees, there was no reason to dismiss any of these colleagues.⁸ The other chance for hiring new workers would be if the company expanded or if the number of its customers grew considerably—but none of them expected to see any of this. It was only the catering businesses which counted upon a seasonal-type increase in customers but they would solve the shortage by hiring seasonal workers instead of hiring permanent employees.

Consequently, it seems that the questioned employers will not be able to contribute actively to the easing of the problems on the labour market of the Dunaszerdahely district. Nevertheless, it is a reassuring fact that we are talking about stable, well-functioning, what is more, successful companies, which probably will be able to keep their employees.

⁸ There was only one employer who, independent of being satisfied with the employees, thought that the business would be better off if their number was decreased: *'If we want to increase efficiency, we need even fewer persons. But now that they are here, we are trying to give them work to do. We have never fired anybody, we could always find some work for everybody. However, right now it would be better if we could finally buy modern equipment to increase productivity. And in that case, fewer workers would be needed'*.

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What the employers expect from their employees

'Here, there is no lack of labour force indeed, it would be possible to hire any number of workers. It is another question then what they are like' said one of the interviewees. This opinion shows it once more that there are people to choose from but it is indeed necessary to go through the selection, as not everybody fits the requirements of the employer. What these requirements are?

Employees often complain that employers discriminate on the basis of sex and age the ones applying for a given position: they prefer to hire men as compared to women and especially so when these latter ones have small children and they are still young. They do not want to hire young people because they do not have experience, and do not want the old because they cannot bear so much work any more. The employees' grievances are much more multifold than this, I referred to this only for the sake of showing the contrasts. That is, because the employers we talked with declared that the age and sex of the employee does not matter to them. Even if they have expectations in connection to this, it depends more from the work itself: *'With regard to these kinds of goods, like electronics, customers place their confidence much more willingly in men because generally they know machines and appliances better. Well, this is what I think too and this is why we have salesmen. However, our typographical service is provided by a woman because there it is somehow better if the employee smiles and women are much better in that'*. Or: *'Age does not matter, the youngest employee is 18, the oldest lady 52'*; but: *'At the counter, the customer would much rather see a nice slim blond girl than some ugly person weighing 150 kilos. And she should be smart too. By the way, we higher not only girls to the counter but also an equal number boys too'*.

Here, we do not have enough space to analyse the inherent contradictions of the interviews and the differences between the declared and real actions of the respondents. However, even these two examples illustrate that the decisions of the employers are heavily dependent on their own prejudices and ideas—based on imagined or possible experiences which cannot be made general though—on what the customers would like to get.

Ethnicity is not a decisive criterion in case of employment—say the employers and the employees in complete agreement. However, it becomes evident from the interviews that the Hungarian ethnicity of the person looking for a job is an important factor for the employers of Hungarian nationality of the Dunaszerdahely district—at least for those to whom we spoke. Employers express this in different ways:

- A) There are those, who hire people from the surroundings and the inhabitants of those areas are Hungarians almost all. There might be various reasons for this choice:
1. some employ persons of Hungarian nationality to lessen the number of unemployed ethnic Hungarians,
 2. some hire persons from the surroundings, from their own village to improve the employment situation in the district and the village,
 3. some attain cheaper labour force this way than what they could get hiring persons from the surroundings of Pozsony.

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If the latter aspect would be the most important one, employers could hire employees even from eastern Slovakia, which is cheaper even than the local supply (there are examples for their employment in the Dunaszerdahely district but not in case of Hungarian entrepreneurs). However, it is without doubt that in this field, ethnicity and the preferential treatment of locals is the most decisive aspect.

- B) There are some, who declare it openly that they employ primarily Hungarians: *'I would not hire a Slovak person in Szerdahely. (...) This is not discrimination but (...) it is enough to go out to the loo and it is there written on the walls that fucking Madari. It is not really ethnicity what is important to me but that the person speak Hungarian. And who speaks Hungarian in Szerdahely is surely a Hungarian even if that person denies it. (...) However, I would not hire a resolute Slovak. A person who does not like Hungarians.'*

- C) There are those, who would like, first of all, employees who can speak Hungarian. As it is not very typical for an employee of Slovak nationality to speak it⁹, the employer is looking for Hungarians: *'Ethnicity was not a requirement but we have Hungarian employees because they are the only ones to speak Hungarian. And the knowledge of Hungarian was a requirement of ours.'*

The next requirement of the employers is in connection to *language*. We have touched upon it in part with the previous criterion when we presented the ethnic requirements. In general, language figures as a very important factor in the mind of the employers and it means usually the knowledge of some foreign language (English, German). Language is important also for the employers whom we interviewed but they generally meant the knowledge of Hungarian and Slovak at it, which is no wonder given that the examined companies work in a mixed language area. The ability to communicate in spoken (in cases written) Hungarian and Slovak is a significant criterion on the part of the interviewees almost without exception. The knowledge of other languages is required only in case of those positions in which the employee might have to get in touch with foreign persons (the driver transporting goods abroad, in a snack bar, which serves foreign guests too, in a travel agency).

The requirements of the employers we have mentioned so far touched factors, which can be examined with a single question. However, there are other criteria, in case of which one's suitability cannot be determined at first sight. Moreover, in reality, employers focus primarily on these requirements: *skill and motivation in connection to the given job, conduct and appearance, the relationship to the employer, the workplace, and the clients.*

Skill and motivation in connection to the given job do not necessarily mean qualifications and experiences. Even though it always depends on the given job, we can say that

⁹ For that, there are cases like that too, e.g. *'the employees are usually Hungarian; there are two Slovaks but they can speak Hungarian as well. Actually, they are kind of like Hungarian Slovaks'*.

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if there is a qualified applicant for a place, then the chances of that qualified person are better in getting the job.

'It depends on what they are hired to do. If they are hired to work with the machines, they better be competent because the equipment are expensive'; 'As long as there are prepared persons, why would I hire someone who does not know anything? The young do not have experiences, it is true. But this does not mean that they do not know a thing. I am not talking about experience but about skill. That is, whether or not that person is skilled in what he or she is doing'.

The higher qualifications a job requires, the more important it becomes for the employer to have a skilled employee. But there are exceptions even to these cases if the prospective worker shows willingness to learn the task and convinces the future employer that he or she would really like to get that job. *'It is not really school that matters but that the person should like the job, like to work and do his best to solve all kinds of situations'.*

In sum, the most important requirements of the employers are the following:

- employees should like the work, want to work, and be competent in the work,
- employees should like their own work, and do it with all their heart and soul,
- employees should want to develop; if they have no qualifications, they should strive to get it; if they do have it, they should be willing to improve.

Experience counts only after one has satisfied the criteria above.

'Not even experience is a guarantee that one is a good cook. A cook has to be one, who wants to work. There is a girl who does not have much experience but we hired here as a cook. We could see after only a day that she would really like to work, she poured all kinds of questions at me (...). She became an excellent cook in a month'.

'There are qualified ones among the cooks too with an experience of over thirty years and accustomed to have always someone do the work for them and then they would do only the finale. Problems come though when they are left alone and they cannot prepare the meal'.

'When I hired them, they had already had experience because both of them had been working in their profession. However, there they merely carried put the orders and could not let their imagination soar'.

The most frequent criteria in connection to *behaviour* and *appearance*:

- civilized behaviour, good manners,
- civilized manner of speaking,
- smartness,
- creativity,
- disposition to co-operate with others.

'Good appearance was important because if we have pretty saleswomen, customers will come also because of them and they will purchase things. They look really good and they are polite too'.

'Also neatness counts, the hairdresser should have a nice hairdo, the cosmetologist neat skin, for it is very repellent if, for example, hairdresser's hair has damaged and ragged ends'.

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In case of *relationship to the employer, the workplace, and the clients*, we can find the following requirements:

- reliability, honesty,
- loyalty to the company,
- good manners,
- kind manners, friendliness
- maintaining the neatness and order of the workplace.

'The employee should be honest, neat, reliable so that I should not fear that the place will be robbed if I have to go somewhere—I have had such problems. Not only handing out the food is important but also keeping the counter in order'.

'They should have civilized manners, the ability to satisfy the customers the best possible, to answer no matter what they are asked. Besides, I expect them to keep the shop clean at all times'.

Thus, these are the most important things that employers expect from their employees. The asked employers do not have the intention to dismiss anybody, from which the next question comes logically: do their current employees satisfy all of the requirements described above?

Most of the interviewees are satisfied with the skills and qualifications of their employees and their attitude to the work, the company, and the clients. There are employers who pronouncedly speak highly of their employees:

'I am satisfied with my current employees. All of them like their job and our guests return to us, and this is the best advertisement.'

'The employees are charming and young. A lady said she came to us because the salespersons were so nice'.

Naturally, there are employers who are familiar with the defects of their employees. However, as these do not disturb the successful operation of the enterprise, they are tolerated—at least for the time being.

'I do not agree with the personal things of one or two. For example, one girl has two boyfriends. (...) Or that the boys seem to be rooted here all day. (...) The other one is lamenting about things (...). But I am satisfied with their skill. It is only that a few of them have whims deriving from their character. (...) But all is right on the whole'.

'The work ethic could always be better than how it is. It can always be improved how a sales person talks to the customer; some are truly unrefined'.

What can employers offer to their employees?

In spite of the fact that the employers of the Dunaszerdahely district are in a favourable situation, as they can choose from a number of employees, it is not irrelevant for them whether they can count upon a good employee in whom they would even invest money, or they would have to live knowing that the competitors could win the qualified employee over at any time. What do the employers do in order to keep the employee with them, what do they offer to them?

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Several of the asked employers are aware of the fact that as far as the salaries of their employees are concerned, they cannot always compete with the rival firms. But they do not want it either because that could endanger the future of their enterprise. The operation of their company in the long run is what is of primary importance to them. In fact, they emphasise that in reality, their strategy provides the most important thing to their employees as well, for they grant them *secure, stable workplaces*.

'There is another co-operative not far from here, (...) they earn twice as much as here only that it is not sure that that co-operative will exist next year too. (...) if we go on like this, we think about the future too, we might have the near future secured and also the distant future, so they will not have to go elsewhere to look for a job'.

'One more thing I can offer is security. Those, who work here, know it. They have experienced that the swings of the market could not surprise me. I am able to adapt. (...) they do not have to fear that if there are no customers who would wanted to buy microwave ovens from tomorrow on, we will be closing. We will have something else! I believe, security is important to people today'.

It is becomes manifest from the interviews that the employers are familiar with the requirements and ideas of the employees. They know that good salary is a relative concept. Not only with regard to the amount of the monthly salary but also to the other requirements of workers as well. For this reason, their way of thinking is this: if the employee does not have to commute, if the colleagues are good, if they can perform a work they are interested at and do it with pleasure, if they are trusted by the employer, they might not leave them for some other rival company. Then, they might earn more but their other wants would not be satisfied. The interviewees do not talk much about salaries but they dwell lengthily on compensating factors:

'The colleagues are good, you do not die of work, the burden of others does not fall upon you, and you have a flat and a job'.

'I give the opportunity for the employee to tell what he or she wants to do. I planned the working hours on the basis of our agreement, that is, they work twelve hours and then they get two days off. (...) The meal is free of charge, everybody eats when, where, and what he or she wants to'.

'It is good that they can work locally and do not have to commute. (...) I offer them a living. They can do what they like to do. (...) They have a nice and clean workplace, it is perfumed and modern, a place where women like [to work at]'.

'I treat my employees fairly'.

'At the first place, it is an advantage already that they have a place to work at. What I offer beyond this, is freedom in the work, independence; I allow them to be creative, actually, I expect this from them. (...) A company could be my rival if it paid more. But with the cooks' profession, one would have to work a lot to be able to pay more. I think, my employees would think twice before they would go from the three-four weekly work-days, from which two are rather stressful, to sweating seven days a week'.

Contemporaneously, some of the interviewees remark that the salary of employees is not bad either: *'They have a fix salary and the tip is theirs too. So far, nobody has asked for a rise'.*

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In conclusion, the 'palette' of what the employers can offer can be characterised like this from the point of view of the employers:

- *secure workplace* (leadership, which concentrates primarily on continuity and not on momentary success in their business)
- appropriate working conditions (working hours, the colleagues, distance, workplace, salary)
- respect for the personality of the employees (they are trusted, they can work independently and creatively)

2.3. Labour market strategies of the employers

I understand under labour market strategies of the employers the long-term ideas of the employers on whom and how they would like to employ; where do they get the information on unemployed labour force; from among whom and how will they select the workers; will they do anything to improve the skills of their employees which would in turn contribute to the further stabilization of their position on the market. Therefore, the following questions will be examined in the next section:

1. Whodo the employers hire?
2. What is their method to search for and pick the suitable workers?

Forms and strategies of labour force employment

The asked employers do not have *full time employees* only. Other forms of employment can be delineated on the basis of the interviews: *specialists*, *seasonal workers*, and *illegal workers*.

Those workers who have a daily task at the companies, come exclusively from the rows of those employees who are permanently employed.

Specialists¹⁰ are persons who are in the employment of some other employer or they are entrepreneurs or even employers themselves. They are commissioned by the interviewees to carry out important temporary tasks, which require specialised knowledge and none of the permanently employed workers of the company could carry that out.

It is beyond doubt that the payment of the specialists is higher than the average too.

'By today, there are a lot of companies that would give us pieces of good advice. What is necessary to us is to know whom we should follow. We have very good external sources, who supply us with great fodder'. Or: 'Vets come to us from as far as Kassa'.

'A chef came from Budapest to help us out. He opened several centres like these, for example in the Westend and the Pólus Center in Pest, and we asked him to teach various dishes to our cook'.

'My husband does the accounting, this is his profession'.

¹⁰ It is probable that every company works with specialists even if the interviewees did not mention it, since it is usually not the employees of the company who provide the accounting and legal counsel services.

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'We have a tax consultant and a lawyer but they are not employees. We contract them as entrepreneurs. They invoice the completed work and that is it. (...) We do not need workers with university degree (...) If we needed such employees, I would solve the problem as I do in case of the tax consultant and the lawyer. I would pay for the work but I would not employ that person. But this way it is better for them too'.

Almost all of the employers give work also to seasonal workers.

The interviewees reacted differently when we raised of the question of illegally employed workers. Most of them denied that they were employing workers in that way, for example *'Some believe that you can give work to an unemployed illegally but this does not work. You have to be careful to hire a person who has the documents on leaving the previous workplace, the years that count, so that you would be protected and nothing could surprise you like, for example, that your employee is receiving welfare payments or something else. Illegal work is excluded because I will not let my head chopped off because of ten thousands korunas saved on bagatelles. I think it is dangerous'.*

At the same time, we talked to employers who were running the risk of giving work illegally: *'I have an unemployed girlfriend, she does the cleaning and I trust her. But it would not be worth hiring her as a cleaning lady neither for me nor for her'.*

'I do not employ workers illegally in the sense that this is a seasonal work. But many work for me on single occasions (...) There are some, to whom I pay in cash...'

I believe that the latter interview fragment proves it that it is very difficult to make a clear-cut division within the question of seasonal worker and illegally employed labour force. It can be assumed that even if not always or frequently, occasionally these two forms of employment coincide. Moreover, we have actual examples showing that certain forms of unemployment might swap with time (e.g. a specialist or a seasonal worker becomes a full-time employee).

The employment strategies of the employers can be summarized as follows:

- the employers hire only as many full-time employees as they need for certain, never more and possibly not less,
- they prefer to hire specialists–experts who are not their employees–to carry out non-routine work,
- they give work to new employees only in case of permanent labour shortage. They prefer to employ seasonal workers to do the periodic additional work, and whom they can employ legally but also illegally.

Strategies for finding employees

Searching for employees is a very conscious activity and its aim is to help employers pick those workers from the unemployed labour force at their disposal, who could meet their requirements. As it became evident from the interviews, this is not an easy task at all—not even in a region which has such a numerous free labour force as the Dunaszerdahely district. For this reason, the asked employers have developed their own reliable and practical 'head-hunter strategies'. We can divide them into two groups on their basis:

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- a) *those employers, who rely predominantly on formal channels,*
- b) *those employers, who rely predominantly on informal channels.*

These two groups are represented among the interviewees almost in equal numbers. Those *employers, who rely predominantly on formal channels*, use the institutionalised channels of the labour market in their search of employees. They place ads, most frequently in the *Új Szó*, and also in the district paper, the village broadcast programme, and on the Internet. They believe the ads to be a very good strategy because they get a great number of applicants for each, so there is really a choice to choose from. Even if they cannot hire everybody, they keep records of the data of the applicants. Thus, when they need new employees again, they do not have to place ads but it is enough to turn to the list of the previous applicants.

It is noteworthy that the employment offices and recruitment offices and agencies, that is, those institutions which deal with the regulation of the labour market by occupation, are not very popular among employers. On the contrary, some had a rather poor opinion on the institutions in question.

'The recruitment agent is unnecessary'.

'I have no experiences about recruitment agencies (...), if I need employees I do about it at once. I do not know how quickly they could react. (...) Moreover, there are negative experiences, that they get the money of they people and do not recruit anybody in exchange'.

'I have not been to a recruitment office (...) why should I make something more complicated if I can handle it more easily. I am not interested in the employment office. I reckon most of the unemployed there are idle, lazy, and drunkards. Why should I employ such a person? Only to get the benefit after him or her and then to have that employee take multiples of that amount from me?'

It might happen in case of employees using predominantly formal channels that they employ an acquaintance through somebody they know. They are different from the group of those employees who rely predominantly on informal channels in this respect basically in that they never employ their own friends or acquaintances. They take a great care not to do this. It turns out from some of the interviews that they have a good reason for that.

'I would like to maintain the friendly and family relationships with the relatives, friends, and acquaintances. I do not want to ruin them because of the work'.

'I do not have any of my acquaintances in the company. One of my good friends was my partner for two years but, at the end, I could hardly get rid of him. But if we had remained partners, this company would not be here today. I decided then that no acquaintance, friend or relative could come here. So that they just would not think that it is them who are doing a favour for me by working here'.

Those *employers, who rely predominantly on informal channels*, are searching for employees by making use of their acquaintances. They inform their friends when they need workers and they choose from among their acquaintances. Those whom they pick

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are not necessarily their personal acquaintances but they are surely the acquaintances of some person whom the employer believes to be reliable (e.g. a tried and tested employee). The starting point of these employers is that they can get information on an acquaintance more easily, they are more reliable than a completely unknown worker who reveals only as much about him or herself as he/she deems good.

'The employees are my personal acquaintances. I studied informatics, I have many acquaintances from there, and if they would not be able to come, they could surely recommend people. It seems more reliable to search for employees through acquaintances. I have more confidence in those, whom others have recommended to me'.

'I hired my personal acquaintances to be my employees because I wanted to work with people whom I know and know to be reliable. Because there is a lot of money at stake here'.

It is a special case when the employer has the occasion to get to know the worker not as an employee and thus, when it comes to employing that person, he or she is already an acquaintance: for example when the employer chooses from the interns working at the company.

Naturally, it can happen also in case of these employers, who rely predominantly on informal channels that they turn to formal channels because e.g. they cannot find suitable workers through their acquaintances. However, they put their confidence really only in their acquaintances. According to our previous researches¹¹, we can take a chance and presume indeed the possibility of the disappointment of these employers with their employees and thus, their joining the camp of those employers, who rely predominantly on formal channels.

3. Employees

The very detailed and thorough interviews conducted with employees shed light upon the interrelatedness of needs and expectations at the labour market and the qualifications of the employees. The field in question is so complicated and varied that its complex analysis would exceed the length of the study. Thus, all I can undertake is a concise analysis of a few aspects of these issues.

3.1. Education and qualifications of the interviewees

From among the interviewees of the Dunaszerdahely district, two have primary school and four professional training school education. Six passed the maturity exam in a vocational secondary school and ten in a high school. Five interviewees have a university degree.

The two young man *with only primary education* continued their studies after primary school in the Hungarian high school in Pozsony but one left it, while the other one was expelled because he was absent a lot. Then, he went on studying in a vocational secondary school but he was thrown out and again for skipping school.

¹¹ Lampl, Zsuzsanna, *Vállalkozók és vállalkozások 1989 után* [Enterprises and entrepreneurs after 1989]. See *Emberi kapcsolatok a vállalkozásban* [Human relations in the enterprise].

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One of the boys is unemployed, the other one has been around a few workplaces. Currently, he is a salesman in a bookstore. Although the position would require the maturity exam, he can still work there but evidently merely because his mother is his boss. Both of the boys made it clear that they do not have much chance on the labour market with only primary education and they could only get works for unskilled labour. Exactly because of this, they plan on taking the maturity exam. One in the Hungarian high school of Pozsony, the other one in the well-known, I even dare to say, infamous Slovak private high school of Pozsony which offers the opportunity mostly for the sons and daughters of well-to-do families who have failed in other high schools, to take the maturity exam. The latter interviewee would like to go on then to work for the family enterprise of his father.

From among those, who studied in a *school of professional training*, two represent the younger and two the generation just on the threshold of retirement. In their case, we are talking about completely different paths of life. The two elder women did not choose this school out of their free will. One wanted to become a kindergarten teacher and the other one a nurse. However, the situation of their family did not make it possible for them to attend high school. What remained was the vocational school which they could handle easily but they always longed for something more. One of them tried to change her situation and seized every opportunity to continue her education and improve. She is satisfied with her current workplace, in fact, she feels that finally that is a really good place for her and it is close to her qualification too. The other person did not manage to go on studying or complete any courses which could have given her some qualification because she did not have the time for this beside the family. Yet, she could never find a work in her profession with the exception of the beginnings. She had to change places a lot, she was unemployed for a period but now she has a job again.

The sadness because of the wasted opportunities is manifest in the 'confessions' of both interviewees. Maybe because of this—and, of course, because of their experiences on the labour market—they consider qualifications to be very important. Their children climbed higher on the social ladder. At the same time, the optimism of the two women is apparent: they do not fear unemployment, they believe to possess enough positive qualities, power, and an ability to adapt on the basis of which they take it almost for granted that they would be able to get a job at any time—even if it might not correspond to their qualifications. However, it is a more important factor for them to have a work at all.

The two interviewees with professional training school are two young man. One is a promising entrepreneur by today, at least this is what we can assume considering that he likes his work, he is skilled, he has a positive attitude toward his own course of life, and he is disposed to continue studying. Currently, he is doing distance learning because he wants to take the maturity exam and at the same time he is working for an entrepreneur. Thus, he acquires work experience to go with his knowledge. The other interviewee attended vocational secondary school at the beginning but he left it before he would have been thrown out on account of his misconduct. He studied in the professional training school after that. He has not found a job in the field of his profession. Now, he is employed as a stoker which is completely outside his field but he is satisfied with it because *'I do not have to work much and the salary is quite good as compared to that'*.

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This sentence is enough to reveal that there is a difference between the outlooks of the two young man upon their life. While the first one is consciously preparing to get ahead, the second (for the time being) is only tacking about, 'living off' of the help of his acquaintances and, in reality, without knowing what he would like to do.

All of the interviewed persons with a vocational secondary school education managed to find a job in the field of their profession—with the exception of one. Those, who work in their profession are still praising the quality of the education in their schools and confessed that they would choose the very same school again had they have another chance. To be more precise, these are engineering, health, and catering vocational secondary schools. The most successful among them is the person who attended a bilingual business academy. Although he is young—under the age of thirty—he has already attained a leading position with the paths of promotion open in front of him. Beside his professional knowledge, his perfect knowledge of both Hungarian and Slovak has a great role in this.

Also the others are satisfied with their workplace, even the interviewee who is not working in a job corresponding to his qualifications. Although it is true that it was a conscious choice on the part of this person. This interviewee left his original profession because he had never been interested in it and he had ended up in the vocational secondary school because he could be accepted only there. However, he has participated in various continuing trainings at his current workplace, learned various skills, and now he stands more firmly on the ground than after the graduation from the secondary school.

Most of the interviewees graduated from high school after having passed the maturity exam. The majority studied in the high school of Pozsony in the Duna street where the language of instruction is Hungarian. All of the interviewees would choose their former high school again.

Every one of those who passed the maturity exam wanted to continue studying. One man did studies on superstructures, received a qualification in that field, and has been working in that profession every since. The rest applied to university. Some were not accepted, while the others who had made it left the university because they found it difficult. No matter how it went, all of these interviewed persons would like to get a degree and, in order to achieve this, they are planning to apply to the university again. It is varying how they are spending the in-between period: some are unemployed because they do not want to get a work without qualification for all they could get would be some unskilled job. On the one hand they are reluctant to accept this, on the other they are preparing for the university entrance examinations. Also, there are young people, who found employment, they were trained at their workplace, and now they feel quite good. Still, they do not feel like baking pizza or being a driver all their life.

The interviewees above forty and with a maturity exam from high school, work in jobs corresponding to their qualifications with the exception of one of them. They can be considered satisfied but they said they would try going on studying if they had a chance to start their life over.

The odd one out among these interviewees is the person who is doing some other work than what could be expected on the basis of her education. Although she has 'fall-

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en' in the eyes of certain people, she feels happy to have a job at all. According to her, a forty-year-old woman with a high school maturity exam does not often have the ball at her feet on the labour market in these days.

Almost all of the interviewees *holding a university degree* came from the generation of the forty year old. Thus, their stories reveal already complete paths of life.

The elder respondents did not regret that they chose their profession. We can find a teacher, a pharmacist, a speech therapist, and a journalist among them. All of them work in their profession and they feel they have already managed to achieve something. Financially, these occupations are not among the best ones, but they offers to them an opportunity for self-realisation. They believe this to be just as important as the financial side. They continuously improve themselves through self-instruction and training courses and so far they do not feel to be among the losers of the labour market. Nevertheless, they are aware of the fact that, in theory, also they are exposed to the danger of unemployment.

There is a university degree holder respondent under the age of thirty. He studied pedagogy but he has not been able to find such an employment for a long while. Currently, he is unemployed. Although he drafts his views in a sarcastic manner, bitterness can be felt in his words. His hopes and plans regarding his profession are not dim yet, he is still confident that he will get lucky and receive the position of some retiring teacher. However, also doubts are manifest in his concise but very apt phrases.

3.2. Attitudes to unemployment

We have examined the attitudes of employees from different angles. This time, however, I present only two sections of this complex set of problems:

1. The opinion of the interviewees on whether or not unemployment, as a social phenomenon, is an inevitable concomitant trait of societies based on market economy?
2. What influence does unemployment have on the individual and the society?

Is unemployment inevitable or not?

Not everybody could answer this question and the response of those who did is not unanimous either. We can identify three groups of opinions:

- a) According to the majority, unemployment is not a characteristic only of societies based on market economy but of every society. The difference is that it becomes manifest in different ways. Unemployment is a natural state because the number of the workplaces is not as numerous as the unemployed population. Thus, unemployment has always existed and it will exist in the future too. The following statements illustrate this opinion well:

'Unemployment is inevitable from a certain aspect, it is brought about by the dynamics of economy'. 'I believe there was unemployment before too. Hidden unemployment, they say, but this is perhaps natural given that there aren't as many

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positions as people'. 'It is there also in countries more developed than Slovakia'. 'There will always be people who would not want to work'. 'It is a necessary evil but it is present in every democratic country'.

- b) According to the opinion of the second group, unemployment is inevitable but it is a transitory state both from the point of view of the individual and the society. *'Unemployment is a transitory phenomena in this country due to the fact that small enterprises have not really gotten going yet'. 'There must be a rate which is normal with respect to unemployment. For example, if you want to change jobs, you are unemployed for some time. In the meanwhile, you prepare yourself and then find work in some other field'.*
- c) According to the views of the third group, unemployment is not necessary at all. It is the result of the bad social circumstances—and bad can bring forth only bad things. Thus, unemployment is a pathological symptom. *'Unemployment is the fault of the state, it is not natural'. 'We are in a crisis and we have been too'. 'Unemployment cannot be inevitable because even if there are no jobs, you still have to make ends meet somehow'.*

The influence of unemployment on the individual and the society

Although opinions differ with regard to the inevitability of unemployment, every interviewee agrees that unemployment has a negative effect on the individual. At the same time, the majority classifies its influence as unfavourable also on the society. In what does this influence become evident?

- a) In case of the individual, the symptoms are depression, sense of ill-being, resignation in connection to the work, nervousness, quarrels in the family, divorces,
- b) In case of the society, all this influences the general conditions, the quality of life, there is an increase in criminal offences, many live on public benefits.

3.3. Future expectations

We can divide the interviewees into two groups with respect to the examined question: *the hopeful ones and the gloomy persons, in other words, those, who have an optimistic and those, who have a pessimistic view of the future.* The pessimists are in more, they constitute about two thirds of the respondents. The number of those, who are neutral, is insignificant.

What can explain that the majority of the interviewees is not hopeful of the coming of a better future in the country in four or five years? *'There is nothing and nobody to expect anything from', 'some unfavourable political change might come about', 'there is no union and common interest', 'every party is steeling, they just want to become rich', 'everything becomes more and more expensive', 'there are no workplaces', 'the state is unable to solve the problem of unemployment'*—say the recurrent answers, which reveal that the respondents do not feel the country secure with regard neither to politics nor to economy. They believe that politicians (of all times) focus primarily on their own interests

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as opposed to the interests of the population. It is because of this that they are unable to solve the urgent economic and social problems.

The optimists cannot enumerate actual reasons which make them hopeful. There was only one person who said that *'this government is finally doing something for the country'*. The optimism of the rest has causes which are unfathomable and almost impossible to define. Perhaps they believe in fatefulness the most, that is, that *'after all the bad things, it is inevitable that something good should come'*. At this point, the optimist do not differ much from the pessimists, for they cannot see the signs of improvement either. They do not believe it either that they can expect the fulfilment of improvement strategies from the consumers of the country. The question arises whether or not we can talk about such optimists at all, whose hopes have a realistic basis.

However, everybody is confident to see changes coming within a longer period, in 10–20 years. At the same time, they do not connect improvement to some timeline but instead to actual conditions: the change of the political and economic situation (it was not mentioned which direction they would prefer), the EU accession of Slovakia, the influx of foreign capital, the appearance of foreign investors on the Slovak market, an increasing number of foreign employers. The majority of the respondents expressed that they believed only the presence of foreign companies could guarantee the decreasing rate of unemployment because the country would not be able to solve it exclusively from its internal resources.

'If some foreign investor would really move in here and would pay well too, I think everybody would perform well because people would be concerned for their job. They would appreciate their workplace. It would be sort of mutual, the employer would appreciate the worker, the employee the employer. And if the employee gets a good pay for the work, then there are no more problems, it is heaven itself'.

The pessimistic forecasts regarding the future of the country are not present at all in the opinions on the future of the family. At least not in the outlook of the families of the respondents. As if they were thinking: 'perhaps it will be difficult for others, but it surely won't be to us, we will be better off for sure!'

There was only one interviewee who feared that the situation of his family would get worse. Many thought that no significant changes could occur in the life of their family. They have made it somehow so far and they will be fine in the future too. They will live as before.

'It has been difficult up to now and it will not get any better. We will toil for the daily food as before. One could not really save much and this will not change. But if I can spare a little and I will be healthy, I will be satisfied'.

However, most of the people are convinced that there is no reason to be worried about their future or the future of their family. The younger interviewees believe that after having graduated from school, they will get a good job or they will obtain a higher-level position at their current workplace. That is, their intention to make a professional career forms the basis of their positive prospects for the future. The older respondents are confident practically for the same reason: their children become independent, have a qualification, find employment, and the burden on the family budget will decrease accordingly.

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As far as the near future of the country is concerned, pessimism is predominant in the circle of interviewees. With respect to the distant future, they can see a promise of prosperity only if foreign investors enter the Slovak market and create new jobs. On the other hand, the interviewed persons expressed more optimistic ideas on the future of their families. In the best case, they expect to rise, in the worst case they count upon maintaining the achieved living standard. What can guarantee this? According to them, their own person and their families. Which means, that they are still confident in themselves. Or, here and now they can put their faith only in themselves?