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A Cold War Humanitarian Action: The Western Admission of 1956 Hungarian Refugees*

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The story of the refugees who fled Hungary following the Soviet suppression of the 1956 Revolution and the coordinated international humanitarian operation launched to receive them is an outstanding chapter in the history of emigration. These refugees received far more favorable treatment than earlier Hungarian expatriates or other European refugees had been given. With a total of 200,000 refugees, their successful transportation to host countries and their subsequent integration represented an exceptional success for international aid efforts. How can this efficiency be explained? Trends in humanitarian sentiment in world public opinion, influenced in part by the horrors of World War II, and the increasingly precise formulation of the rights of the refugees were just as important, as factors, as the supportive attitude of the populations of Western countries, who empathized with the suppressed revolution. The exceptionally favorable composition, from the perspective of the labor market, of the mass of people who fled in 1956 coincided with Western economic prosperity, producing economic "miracles." However, even these favorable initial conditions would not have led to such a swift and successful settlement in the West of nearly 200,000 Hungarians had it not been for the Cold War rivalry between the Eastern and the Western blocs. As a consequence of the ideological and propaganda conflict with the Soviets, the NATO governments had the necessary political will to give effective support for a resolution to the Hungarian refugee problem, even after emotional support among the public opinion had waned.

Keywords: humanitarian action, 1956, Hungarian refugees, United Nations, UNHCR

The story of the refugees who fled Hungary following the Soviet suppression of the 1956 Revolution and the coordinated international humanitarian operation launched to receive them is an outstanding chapter in the history of emigration. These refugees received far more favorable treatment than earlier Hungarian expatriates or other European refugees had been given.[1] With a total of 200 000 refugees, their successful transportation to host countries and their subsequent

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1 Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció életrajza*, 408–9.

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integration represented an exceptional success for international aid efforts. According to Peter Gatrell, "the outbrake of revolution in 1956 produced the most dramatic refugee-generating crisis in continental Europe between the end of the Second World War and the collapse of Yugoslavia in 1991."[2] Gatrell's monograph on the World Refugee Year (1959–1960) also emphasizes this assessment.[3] In her classic book, Louise W. Holborn summarizes in depth the situation of European refugees and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) on the eve of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.[4] In his masterpiece on the history of the UNHCR, Gil Loescher emphasizes the importance of the Hungarian refugee crisis in extending the scope of this organization.[5] The official historical review published on the fiftieth anniversary of the establishment of the UNHCR (2000) also characterizes the emergency relief for Hungarian refugees as an event of outstanding significance.[6]

How can the significant success of the admission of the Hungarian refugees be explained? What changes did it lead to in the development of the international asylum system? The Hungarian refugee crisis of 1956, as one of the basic stories of international refugee admission, is a frequently told and retold chapter in the history of the postwar era. However, there is no detailed work that has analyzed the full dimension of the international humanitarian action in support of Hungarian refugees. Only a fraction of the available archival sources has been revealed in the existing research. Thus, for example, the archives of NATO and the two Geneva-based international Red Cross organizations, as well as the Hungarian archives, have hardly been studied in this respect. In this paper, I intend to draw general conclusions, pulling together threads not always linked in the secondary literature. In explaining the reasons for the successful and rapid admission of the refugees, I underscore the importance of humanitarian culture, contemporary economic growth, and the Cold War and anti-communist sentiment. Some elements of this argument have already been mentioned in the secondary literature, but this study provides a multifactorial explanation that draws on a much broader source base than the previous work on the topic. I also call attention to the changes to which the Hungarian case gave rise in the international treatment of refugees.

2 Gatrell, *The Making of the Modern Refugee*, 111.

3 Gatrell, *Free World?*

4 Holborn, *A Problem of Our Time.*

5 Loescher, *The UNHCR and the World Politics.*

6 *The State of the World's Refugees*, 2000.

The Challenge of the Hungarian Refugee Crisis

After the bloody suppression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution, about 200,000 people left the country. More than 11,000 of these people returned to Hungary, taking the opportunity of the amnesty proclaimed by the Kádár government.[78] The demographic effect of this emigration, which involved 1.5–1.7 percent of the population of the country, is well reflected in the fact that the resulting population drop exceeded the natural increase of the population in 1956 by 70 percent. The gender composition of the population also changed. As two thirds of the people who left the country were men, the preponderance of women in the population reached the level it had been at in 1949. There was a perceptible increase in the average age of the population, because the majority of the refugees belonged to the younger generations. We know from the statistics provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), published on March 11, 1957, that Austria provided the first asylum for about 173,000 of the refugees and Yugoslavia provided the second for about 18,600.[9]

The transport of these people to further countries began in November, 1956, because a large majority of the refugees regarded these states only as their first stop in a longer journey, and they wanted to move on. By April 1, 1957, 135,417 persons (70 percent) of the 193,805 refugees registered by the refugee office of the UN had been transported to 29 different countries, 14 of which lay outside of Europe. 78,574 (40.5 percent) of the refugees had been moved to other countries in Europe, and 56,843 (29.3 percent) had gone to countries which lay outside Europe.[10] By the end of December 1957, about 90 percent of the refugees registered in Austria had arrived in their new homeland. Most of

7 "KSH-jelentés." According to a report of the Austrian Ministry of Interior, by April 6, 1957, 174,704 Hungarian refugees had arrived in Austria, and according to the Yugoslav Ministry of Interior, 19,181 Hungarian refugees had crossed the border into Yugoslavia by May 26, 1957. The Hungarian authorities estimated the number of former 1956 refugees who had returned to Hungary by 1961 at 40,000. ("The exact number cannot be determined, as no record of returns was established in the few months after the counter-revolution."). MNL OL: M−KS 288. f. 5/232. ő. e. Note of the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party, Report on the main features of life in emigration and proposals for improving propaganda towards emigration (June 6, 1961).

8 Puskás, "Elvándorlások Magyarországról," 247; Puskás, "Magyar menekülők, emigránsok," 67−102.

9 NA: Note by the Chairman of the Committee of Political Advisers (signed: A. Casardi): Report on Hungarian refugees. This study is based on the statistics published on March 11, 1957, by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, C-M (57) 65 (April 17, 1957).

10 Nations Unies, Comité de l'UNREF, A/AC. 79/73 (May 8, 1957).

them settled in the United States (35,026), Canada (24,525), the United Kingdom (20,590), the West Germany (14,270), Switzerland (11,962), France (10,232), and Australia (9,423).[11]

The total cost of the action came to more than 100 million dollars, or more than one billion dollars at the present value, which far exceeded the amount paid into the United Nations Refugee Found, established in 1954, for the solution of the problem of World War II refugees,[12] though in the middle of the 1950s, there had been more than 70,000 "hard core" refugees who, since the late 1940s, had been in more than 200 refugee camps in Austria, West Germany, Italy, and Greece.[13]

The earlier results of fundraising campaigns for the solution of the problems of the refugees didn't give much cause for optimism. Myer Cohen, the leader of the section of the UN Secretariat in charge of the coordination of aid for the Hungarian refugees, bitterly complained in a confidential letter dated November 17, 1956: "Ten days ago there were some 15,000 refugees in Austria. I understand there are now 30,000. Who knows how many there may be a month from now? For the first time since the virtual liquidation of the large care programme of the IRO,[14] governments are facing the problem of providing substantial funds for the care of refugees."[15] The contributions paid by governments into the United Nations Refugee Fund usually fell short of the envisaged amounts, as indicated by the High Commissioner to the Secretary General of NATO. On January 1, 1955, 293,450 refugees were under the care of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The implementation of the four-year-long program elaborated for the solution of their situation required about 16 million dollars. However, from the amount envisaged for 1955–58, only 10.2 million dollars were available through payments and bonds. Thus, more than 36 percent of the necessary amount was lacking.[16] The paralyzing effect of narrow

11 Report of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration on the Hungarian Refugee Situation (Austria, December 31, 1957). USA Senate Report, n° 1815, 1958, quoted by Puskás, "Elvándorlások Magyarországról," 249.

12 Loescher, *The UNHCR and the World Politics,* 87.

13 Ibid., 89. For a detailed overview of the refugee situation in the European countries after World War II, see Holborn, *A Problem of Our Time,* 331–46.

14 The International Refugee Organization was a special institution established by the UN to deal with the mass refugee problem caused by the World War II. It was active from 1946 to 1952.

15 UNARMS: Letter from Myer Cohen, Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People to Pierre Obez, Liaison Officer, Technical Assistance Board, Geneva, SO 534/1, strictly confidential, UN-S-445-0197-3 (November 17, 1956).

16 AMAE: Note de la Délégation francaise auprès des Nations Unies, New York, Assemblée généreale. XIème session. Point 30: Réfugiés, no. 37/CES, série: Nations Unies et Organisations Inteernationales,

financial capacity is made clear by the fact that, in the autumn of 1956—thus after almost two years of operation according to the analysis of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs—"none of the problems were solved," not even that of the refugees from Greece, who were relatively few in number. On January 1, 1955, 2,700 of these people lived in refugee camps, and one year later, 2,400 of them still lived in camps.[17] But the situation of the 1956 Hungarian refugees was quite different. The financial amount transmitted through the UNHCR for the solution of the Hungarian refugee problem also seems enormous compared to the later budget of the institution. For example, in the August 1958 session of the working group dealing with international aid for refugees, only four million dollars was proposed for the 1959 for the purposes of the organization.[18] The success of mobilization of infrastructure and funds for the resettlement of the Hungarian refugees is explained by a shift in the international refugee situation: the rise of humanitarianism, the consolidation of the postwar economic boom, the social composition of the Hungarian refugees, and the increasing strong anti-communist political cultures in the West, spurred by the geo-political rivalry of the Cold War, reshaped the international institutionalization of the refugee crisis.

The Development of Humanitarian Culture and the Concept of Refugee Rights

At roughly the same time as the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention,[19] the world climate of opinion was characterized by a sensible, humanitarian attitude which wanted to prevent at all costs anything resembling the horrors of World War II. Although the world still seemed to be an imperfect place, the international

Cote: 372QO, carton 300, dossier 3 (October 8, 1956).

17 AMAE: Note de la Direction des Affaires administratives et sociales pour le Secrétariat des conférences, Réfugiés – Point 30, no. CA3, très urgent, série: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, Cote: 372QO, carton 300 dossier 3 (October 29, 1956).

18 AMAE: Comité exécutif de l'UNREF, Rapport sur la première session du Groupe de travail pour la continuation de l'assistance internationale aux réfugiés, du 21 au 27 août 1958, A/AC/79WP. 1/R. 10 (September 1, 1958), restreinte, série: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, Cote: 372QO, carton 300, dossier 4.

19 The 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees defines the concept of the "refugee," the rights of the refugees, and the legal obligations of the states toward refugees. According to Chapter 1, paragraph 1 A (2), a refugee is a person who "As a result of events occurring before 1 January 1951 and owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country." https://www.unhcr.org/protection/basic/3b66c2aa10/convention-protocol-relating-status-refugees.html Last accessed on December 2, 2020.

community aspired to ensure at least the human treatment of people who had been forced to flee their country of birth because of oppression and persecution. This is why the right to asylum was incorporated as a fundamental human right in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[20] There was also a determined effort for the practical realization of the fundamental human rights and freedoms formulated in the UN Charter too. Thus, the first paragraph of the Preamble of the 1951 Refugee Convention states, "the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights… have affirmed the principle that human beings shall enjoy fundamental rights and freedoms without discrimination."[21] The Refugee Convention was applied by most of the states in a fundamentally liberal and humanistic spirit.[22] Thus the fact that, in the Geneva Convention, there is a definition of the status of "refugee" only for individuals did not prevent its application to groups when this seemed necessary.[23] This was true in the case of the Hungarian refugees. At that time, it became a generally agreed principle of international law that states may not send "bona fide" refugees to countries where they are in danger:

> a resolution unanimously… adopted at the United Nations Conference on the Status of Stateless Persons in 1954 is of relevance. The Conference stated that it was "of the opinion that the Article 33 of the Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees of 1951 is an expression of the generally adopted principle, that no State should expel or return a person in any manner whatsoever to the frontiers of the territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion.[24]

Paul Weis, who was perhaps the most outstanding jurisprudence authority of his age on the questions of the rights of the refugees, also confirmed in the April 1954 issue of the *American Journal of International Law* that this was a legal

20 Quoted by Jackson (Jackson, "The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees," 403). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the UN (December 10, 1948, GA resolution 217 A) says: (Article 14, paragraph 1): "Everyone has the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution."

21 Jackson, "The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees," 403.

22 Ibid., 408.

23 Jackson, "The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees," 409.

24 UNARMS: Letter from Egon Schwelb, Deputy Director, Division of Human Rights to Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, Aide-mémoire on the attitude of Yugoslavia to the problem of refugees, UN-S-445-0199-4 (November 12, 1956).

principle that enjoyed widespread, almost universal support.[25] This view is well illustrated by the ruling of the Bavarian Administrative Court at Ansbach, which was responsible for examining rejected asylum applications in the Federal Republic of Germany: "In order to do justice to the spirit of the Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, its provisions must be interpreted sympathetically, in a humanitarian manner, and therefore liberally." Given the plight of the refugees, the Court recommended that "considerable understanding" be shown when examining applicants' statements regarding evidence of persecution.[26]

Raphael Lemkin and Hersch Lauterpacht, who had already emphasized the importance of the protection of human rights in international law between the two world wars, were major pavers of this humanitarian attitude. The terrors of World War II, in particular the Holocaust, which was directly experienced by both Polish Jewish jurists and/or members of their families,[27] also highlighted the need, in public opinion and in political decision-making, for the most accurate codification of human rights. Lemkin wanted to ensure the international legal protection of entire peoples and ethnic groups by creating the concept of the crime of genocide. As a lawyer on the staff of the Nuremberg Attorney General for the conviction of Nazi war criminals, he was disappointed that the term genocide, which first appeared in his 1944 book *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe*,[28] was included neither in the Nuremberg Charter nor in the final judgment. Faced with the devastation caused by the war in Europe, he decided to propose an international convention banning genocide at the United Nations. His persistent efforts contributed greatly to the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly on December 9, 1948 of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide,[29] which came into force on January 12, 1951.[30]

Lauterpacht, who was also present on several occasions during the Nuremberg trial and provided advice to the British special prosecutor, suggested in the background that the concept of "crimes against humanity" be introduced

25 Ibid. The document refers to Weis, "The International Protection of Refugees," 198–99.

26 Weis, "The concept of the refugee in international law," 986, 988. The author refers to the order of the Bavarian Administrative Court (Ansbach) of July 4, 1956, no. 2174-II/55.

27 For the personal experiences and involvement of the two lawyers and the impact of these factors on their work, see Vrdoljak, "Human Rights and Genocide."

28 Lemkin, *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe.*

29 See *United Nations,* https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/atrocity-crimes/Doc.1_Convention%20on%20the%20Prevention%20and%20Punishment%20of%20the%20Crime%20of%20Genocide.pdf Last accessed on March 4, 2021.

30 See Bieńczyk-Missala, "Raphael Lemkin's lagacy in international law," 3–4, 6.

at the London conference preparing the trial. After World War II, he sought to compile a list of human rights and make it part of international law.[31] He repeatedly stressed that individuals are the ultimate subjects of the relevant rights and duties. This also led to support for the trials of Nazi leaders, as Lauterpacht considered individual criminal responsibility to be essential. As he had already stated in his famous article published in 1944, "The rules of law are binding not upon an abstract notion of Germany, but upon members of the German government, upon German individuals exercising governmental functions in occupied territory, upon German officers, upon German soldiers."[32] He believed war crimes were acts punishable by international law. According to him, it is not necessary to punish a state collectively, but to punish persons acting on behalf of the state.[33]

The Economic Boom in the West and the Integration of Hungarians

Hungarian refugees arrived in the West at the beginning of a period of great economic prosperity, when the demand for labor was increasing.[34] As the sources unanimously indicate, people at the time, including the responsible experts on the refugee question, were fully aware of this. "The world was in a favorable economic situation to absorb these people," UN High Commissioner for Refugees August Rudolph Lindt said to the participants in the Geneva coordination committee dealing with the Hungarian refugees in January 1957, when both the financial means for the solution of the Hungarian refugee problem and the willingness of states to admit the Hungarians was temporarily flagging.[35] The aforementioned Paul Weis, leading legal expert to the High Commissioner, said during the May 6, 1957 session of this body that, "owing to the favorable economic conditions

31 Lauterpacht, *An International Bill of Rights of Man*; Lauterpacht, *International Law and Human Rights*, cited by Koskenniemi, "Hersch Lauterpacht and the Development," 813. Jessup–Baxter, "The Contribution of Sir Hersch Lauterpacht," 99.

32 Lauterpacht, "The Law of Nations," 64. Cited by Koskenniemi, "Hersch Lauterpacht and the Development," 819.

33 Koskenniemi, "Hersch Lauterpacht and the Development," 810–14, 819.

34 Loescher, *The UNHCR and the World Politics,* 87; Cseresnyés, "A nemzetközi menekültjog alkalmazása," 172. See also: LIOM: Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, Statistical report, Report for the year 1957 (Extracted from the Annual Report of the Director to the Eighth Session of the Council of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration – May 1958), 5.

35 UNOG Archives: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Co-ordination Committe for Assistance to Refugees from Hungary. Summary record of the third meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, January 10, 1957, restricted (January 15, 1957).

the situation in most countries could be considered as satisfactory; the refugees gradually being given the right to work in the same manner as nationals."[36]

According to a letter of the Belgian government sent to the Secretary General of the UN in December 1957, "It would seem that, within four or five weeks, virtually all the refugees will have found work and will have been integrated in the Belgian community."[37] According to a speech given by a British representative during a session of the Executive Committee of the UNREF in January 1958, of the 15,000 Hungarian refugees in the United Kingdom, only 600 were unemployed.[38] And in Switzerland, by the end of August 1957, 72 percent of the Hungarian refugees were already gainfully employed, mainly in industry.[39] In France, the last statistics released by the Ministry of the Interior on the Hungarian refugees was prepared on December 15, 1957. In the first months of 1958, they were of the opinion that "all new Hungarian refugees are considered integrated into the French community."[40] According to one of the contemporary studies quoted above, in the United States, many representatives of the major industrial firms came to the central refugee admission station, Camp Kilmer in New Jersey, to hire skilled Hungarian refugees. Representatives of every sort of interest group, including the entertainment industry, made visits to Kilmer.[41] The success of integration into the American economy is characterized by the fact that, at the end of 1957, 65.7 percent of Hungarians who had come to the

36 UNOG Archives: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Co-ordination Committe for Assistance to Refugees from Hungary. Summary record of the ninth meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, May 6, 1957, restricted, HCR/SVA/SR. 9 (May 10, 1957), GI/30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures, Refugees) Jacket n° 2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures, Refugees).

37 UNARMS: Question considered by the Second Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly from November 4 to 10, 1956. Humanitarian activities to assist the Hungarian people. Note by the Secretary-General. Replies received from December 18, 1956 to January 10, 1957, 2. Belgium (December 18, 1956), A/3456) distribution: General, UN-S-445-0200-l (January 10, 1957).

38 ICRC Archives: Service de l'information. Office européen des Nations Unies à Genève, communiqué de Presse NO REF/402, Septième session du Comité executif de l'UNREF, Séance de l'après-midi, lundi 13 janvier 1958 (January 13, 1958).

39 Piguet, *L'immigration en Suisse,* 74.

40 UNHCR Archives: Lettre de Henri Trémeaud, Délégué pour la France, Office du Haut-Commissaire pour les réfugiés à Colmar, Conseiller juridique, Statistiques des nouveaux réfugiés hongrois en France, HCR/P – 44 (February 28, 1958), dossier: 20-HUN-FRA Statistics – Hungarian refugees in France (February 1957–February 1958).

41 UNHCR Archives: Report of Fact-finding Committee of the Committee on Migration and Refugee Problems on the Hungarian Refugee Program, American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service Inc., 6/9 HUN GEN (April 21, 1958).

United States after the Hungarian Revolution were in wage-earning positions.[42] The Hungarians had good chances of finding employment in part because other refugees and guest workers from the area around the Mediterranean Sea didn't had not yet arrived in the countries to the west.[43] According to a survey of 151,731 persons over the age of 15 by the Central Statistical Office, the Hungarian authorities also concluded that "most of the people who have left Hungary can be useful in Western economic life." [44]

Anti-Communist Culture

However, as the once secret documents of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) reveal, the decisive factor behind the international decisions which exerted such a positive influence on the fate of the Hungarian refugees was the powerful political will of the Western governments. The NATO member states, especially the United States, which was the determining force in the alliance, considered the *en masse* admission of the Hungarians an extraordinary possibility for international propaganda in the ideological battle against the Soviet bloc.[45] The need for closer cooperation among Western states in dealing with refugees from the Soviet bloc had been observed since the Prague coup of February 1948. Emmanuel Comte considered the adoption and rapid entry into force of the 1951 Refugee Convention to have been a key element in this effort. We can agree with his statement that the smooth cooperation among the Western governments in the reception of the Hungarian refugees of 1956 was the

42 At that time, only 40.7 percent of the U.S. population had a paid job. See Markowicz, "Humanitarianism v. Restrictionism," 46–47. Cited by Loescher and Scanlan, *Calculated kindness,* 60.

43 Cseresnyés, "A nemzetközi menekültjog alkalmazása," 172. The author furthermore explains: "There was then no serious competition on the labor market. When there began to be some competition in the early 1960s, the Hungarians already had a considerable advantage over their competitors: they were structurally integrated in the Western societies, they spoke the language of their new countries, they had completed their professional or university studies. Thus, it was almost impossible to catch up to them."

44 "More than half of the dissidents are under the age of 25 (83,000 people), almost 1/3 are aged 25–29 (47,500 people), less than 12 percent are aged 40–59, and the proportion of people aged 60 and over is less than 1 percent. Most of the dissidents are skilled workers, technicians, engineers, doctors, etc." MNL OL: Az MSZMP KB Politikai Bizottság elé terjesztendő jelentést előkészítő tanulmány, Magyar emigráció a kapitalista országokban [Study preparing the report to be submitted to the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist People's Party, Hungarian emigration in the capitalist countries], XIX-J-1-j, TÜK Vegyes, 1945−1964, box 116 (April 25, 1961) [Date of László Surányi's comments]).

45 On the NATO negotiations concerning the admission of Hungarian refugees see (Kecskés D., *La diplomatie francaise et la révolution hongroise,* 324–28).

culmination of this deepening cooperation.[46] I also share Peter J. Verovšek's assessment of the US refugee admission system for the period of the early Cold War, according to which migration was one of the fronts of the geopolitical struggle between the United States and the Soviet Union.[47]

Both the written sources and the oral history documents unanimously clearly indicate that Western public opinion, which followed with eager attention the life-and-death struggle of the Hungarian revolutionaries and was shocked by the brutal military intervention of the Soviet Union, received with particular compassion the Hungarian refugees who arrived in their lands.[48] As Gyula Borbándi, a Hungarian writer and historian who worked for decades at Radio Free Europe, observed, "The Hungarian emigrants of 1956 arrived abroad as the participants in the glorious revolution and as heroes of a national fervor which elicited the admiration of the world. The Western citizens in many places deemed it almost an honor to meet with the Hungarian freedom fighters, the earlier feelings of aversion, for example in Switzerland, were replaced by feelings of sympathy and empathy."[49] This attitude characterized both the official government declarations and the feelings among the civilian populations and also the conduct of the authorities who came into direct contact with the refugees. The propaganda of the leading power of the Western world, the United States, gave the impression even in 1956 that the fate of the Eastern European countries was important to the West, which, if given the opportunity, would be ready to help the peoples of the region free themselves of Soviet rule. As historian Csaba Békés notes, "Understandably thus, the Western public was stunned to witness the plight of the Hungarian people, who could never have expected much sympathy because of Hungary's role in the Second World War, as they revolted against the immensely superior power of a world empire, jeopardizing their lives, existence and families in a heroic, tragic, and—according to political logic and common sense—irrational struggle for freedom."[50] Békés also notes that they made this sacrifice "For an idea which was the most abstract and the most important one at the same time." He adds that Western public opinion had to recognize that their governments were unable to intervene effectively to save

46 Comte, "Waging the Cold War," 1–2, 16–18.

47 Verovšek, "Screening Migrants."

48 For the reaction of French society, on the basis of the sources of the French Ministry of the Interior, see Kecskés D., *La diplomatie francaise*, 144–50. See also: Dreisziger, "The Hungarian revolution of 1956," 199.

49 Borbándi, *A magyar emigráció életrajza*, 408.

50 Békés, *The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and World Politics*, 26.

freedom in the realms under Soviet influence.[51] Thus, the government measures in the interests of Hungarian refugees enjoyed widespread social support, and they strengthened the position of the governments or governing parties.[52] As a thoroughgoing report at the time stated, "The Free World reacted so generously and spontaneously to the plight of Hungarian refugees that quick action was necessary to satisfy popular feeling in countries of potential asylum."[53] The report further noted that emotional identification with the Hungarian cause among the civilian populations in the West had a decisive impact on the willingness of the authorities to admit the refugees.

In the Cold War conflict between the Soviet-led Eastern and the American-led Western blocs, the question of the Hungarian refugees became part of the peaceful ideological struggle between the two camps. When on the Western side the politicians spoke about the moral responsibility of the West towards the refugees, they emphasized the fact that, "Along with the factory workers, the Hungarian students were the principal group keeping political opposition to the regime alive (Kádár government). They were the spearhead of the October revolt."[54] As we have seen above, if the Hungarian refugees had returned *en masse* to their homeland because of difficulties faced in the process of integrating into the countries and societies in the "free world," this would have been a political and moral defeat for the West. The importance of the ideological component is also proved by the fact that, already during the first session, dealing with the Hungarian refugee students, of the Committee on Information and Cultural Relations (held on December 18, 1956), the representative from Great Britain remarked that, because the center of the World Federation of Democratic Youth was in Budapest, the Hungarian refugee students would be excellent ammunition for the propaganda against this organization and the next World Youth Festival, which was planned to take place in Moscow.[55] But the Western leaders, when

51 Békés, *Az 1956-os magyar forradalom a világpolitikában*, 133.

52 For example, in France the Ministry of the Interior organized, on the basis of a meticulously detailed plan, a "national day" "for the Hungarian population." On the use of the question of the Hungarian refugees as an instrument in French domestic politics, see Kecskés D., *La diplomatie francaise*, 225–28.

53 UNHCR Archives: Report of Fact-Finding Committee of the Committee on Migration and Refugee Problems on the Hungarian Refugee Program, American Council of Voluntary Agencies for Foreign Service, Inc., 6/9 HUN GEN (April 21, 1958).

54 NA: Report by the Committee on information and Cultural Relations, Hungarian refugee students, C-M (57) 89 (June 1, 1957).

55 NA: Procès-verbal de la réunion du Comité de l'information et des relations culturelles tenue au Palais de Chaillot, Paris, le 18 décembre 1956, AC/52-R/67 (January 8, 1957).

they organized the reception of the Hungarian refugees in a generous way, took into account the spontaneous sympathy and solidarity of their own citizens towards the suppressed revolution. And when this wave of emotions diminished, the NATO Council asked the allied governments to mobilize public opinion in their countries and not to cease in their efforts in the interests of the Hungarian refugees. However, the public knew nothing about the secret work to harmonize government efforts done behind the scenes in the Chaillot Palace in Paris, which at the time was the headquarters of NATO. The visible central agent of the fundraising activities for the refugees and of the informational activity and propaganda campaign closely related to it was not NATO, but the United Nations.[56] UN intervention was legitimated by international law and by the resolutions of the UN General Assembly calling for aid for the Hungarian refugees. The highest consulting and decision-making organ of the UN took a stand in the first days of the refugee crisis in support of humanitarian assistance for the Hungarian people, which meant helping both the Hungarian population in Hungary and the Hungarian refugees.[57]

The show of compassion in Western public opinion in the mid-1950s was not yet characterized by the fatigue of the mediated crisis situations of later decades.[58] The proposals of the report accepted on the April 24, 1957 session of the North Atlantic Council (the primary political decision-making body within NATO) called upon the governments of the member states to receive Hungarian refugees in growing numbers from Yugoslavia and Austria and also to shoulder the costs of their settlement too. These governments were also called on to participate in the measures that had been already begun, the purpose of which was to get all the Hungarian refugees to their chosen new country by the end of 1957. They were also asked to respond generously to the summons of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and

56 On the fundraising campaign organized by the UN for the benefit of Hungarian refugees, see Kecskés D., "Collecting money at a global level."

57 The first resolution of the General Assembly, condemning the Soviet intervention of Hungary, (accepted on November 4, 1956), deals with the humanitarian aspect of the Hungarian crisis and asks the Secretary General, "in consultation with the heads of appropriate specialized agencies to inquire, on an urgent basis, into the needs of the Hungarian people for food, medicine and other similar supplies, and to report to the General Assembly as soon as possible." See: Resolution (1004 (ES-II), 564th plenary meeting of the General Assembly of the United Nations (4 November 1956).

58 Loescher, *The UNHCR and the World Politics,* 82.

the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM) for funds necessary for the settlement of the Hungarian refugees.[59]

The Atlantic Alliance treated the question of aid for the Hungarian refugees as a separate issue. NATO member states contributed on a large scale to the success of the international humanitarian action undertaken in the interests of the Hungarian refugees. Responding to the UN summons, the US government, for example, gave 5 million dollars for this cause in 1956. The overwhelming majority of the Hungarian refugees settled in one of the NATO countries, where they received considerable government support. Although the UN and its refugee organization began and directed the humanitarian programs, cooperating with the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, with the League of Red Cross Societies and private organizations, the implementation of these programs was made possible first and foremost by the generous donations of the NATO member states. Thus, the role of NATO in this international action was to motivate the governments of the member states to take measures to help the refugees and to push them to coordinate their efforts. Nevertheless, despite an American proposal made in December 1956, NATO did not make the efforts it was taking on behalf of the Hungarian refugees public, as it did not want to organization to become a convenient target of Soviet propaganda.[60]

Thus, the political will of the NATO countries, which were in an increasingly direct confrontation with the Soviet Union, played a decisive role in the successful admission and integration of Hungarian refugees in the West in 1956–1957. The funds that were used to address the refugee crisis were largely provided by the governments, primarily those of the NATO states. The significance of government contributions us clearly revealed by the fact that the costs of the care provided for Hungarian refugees in Austria were covered to a large extent from the funds paid by individual governments to the UN and other organizations. Although important, the contributions made by private organizations were only supplementary as a fraction of the overall cost.[61] This

59 NA: Procès-verbal de la réunion du Conseil atlantique tenue au Palais de Chaillot, Paris, le 24 avril 1957, à 10 heures 15 minutes, C-R (57) 25 (April 29, 1957).

60 NA: Procès-verbal de la réunion du Comité de l'information et des relations culturelles tenue au Palais de Chaillot, Paris, le 18 décembre 1956 à 15 heures, AC/52-R/67 (January 8, 1957).

61 UNOG Archives: United Nations General Assembly, UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth Session, Standing Programme Sub-Committee, Fourth Session, Report on the Fourth Session of the Standing Programme Sub-Committee, Geneva, 23–28 January, 1957, A/AC.79/53, A/AC.79/PSC/5, general (28 January 1957). G. I. 30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures, Refugees), Jacket no. 2 (11 January–11 November 1957).

distribution of inflows fully supports Michael Barnett's contention that, in what is known as the new humanitarian regime ("neo-humanitarianism") which arose in the wake of World War II, resources from states are crucial to resolving humanitarian crises.[62] Peter J. Verovšek also emphasizes the importance of government will in his discussion of the US asylum system in the early Cold War. As Verovšek observes, immigration policy and related political and social mobilization are "primarily the products of the state responses" to challenges from the international system.[63]

Although NATO countries played a crucial role in providing the financial means and reception facilities for the international admission of the 1956 Hungarian refugees, it is important to underline the roles played by some of the neutral European countries in resolving the crisis. In terms of population and territory, relatively small neutral European countries such as Austria, Switzerland, and Sweden resettled more Hungarian refugees than many NATO member states. These countries were among the first in the international community to decide to take in refugees who were fleeing the events in Hungary. The positive attitudes of the governments enjoyed the enthusiastic support of the public in all three cases. The humanitarian aspect, as a clearly emphasized element of foreign policy, can be observed in the Austrian, Swiss, and Swedish cases. The Swiss and Swedish admission decisions were also motivated by the desire to help Austria, which was serving a growing mass of refugees. Although the governments of the three neutral countries did not explicitly include anti-communist arguments directly linked to the Cold War confrontation, Austria and Switzerland clearly showed that the admission of Hungarian refugees was an opportunity for them to express their belonging to the West.[64]

The Hungarian refugees were also an "ideal" group of new arrivals to the countries in which they sought refuge in that they were young, healthy, well-educated single men who could be put to work almost immediately, and this was unquestionably a factor which contributed to the warm and enthusiastic welcome they were shown.[65] Their anticommunist political leanings were beyond any doubt, which was clearly a factor from the perspective of the United States,

62 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity,* 124.

63 Verovšek, "Screening Migrants," 158.

64 On the attitude of Austria, see Gémes, *Austria and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution*; Granville, "Of Spies, Refugees and Hostile Propaganda"; Murber, *Flucht in den Westen 1956*; Murber, "Österreich und die Ungarnflüchtlinge 1956." On Switzerland, see Kecskés D., "Die Aufnahme der 1956er Flüchtlinge." Robert, *Des migrants et des revenants*. On Sweden, see Wigerfelt-Svensson, *Ungrare i Folkhemmet*.

65 Loescher, *The UNHCR and the World Politics,* 87.

which was the largest financial power among the countries that supported the international refugee care system. The United States was interested primarily in refugees who were fleeing communist countries and therefore could be useful for the purposes of the Cold War propaganda.[66] The weight of the security dimension of US foreign policy is shown by the fact that refugees from the Soviet bloc were objects of constant political consideration.[67] Race was undoubtedly also a factor. The Hungarians were white, and there were not that many of them in total, at least not as a fraction of the populations in the countries in the West.[68] For example, in the Federal Republic of Germany, on January 1, there were 216,000 refugees in the charge of the UNHCR. Thus, the arrival of 15,000 new Hungarian refugees did not constitute a dramatic change.[69] In October 1956, 375,000 people were registered as refugees in France,[70] so the roughly 10,000 Hungarians who settled there also did not amount to a large number.

Reshaping International Refugee Mechanisms

The help provided on the international stage for Hungarian refugees in 1956– 1957 is one of the defining moments in the history of refugee assistance. It was the first time in the history of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees that this office had been appointed by the international community as a leading agency in a large-scale emergency relief operation. Indeed, UNHCR has played a central role in coordinating the activities of governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental organizations involved in humanitarian action. UNHCR then became a key player in the international asylum system. The strengthening of the

66 Ibid., 51, 53–54. Washington's significant financial commitment is evidenced by the fact that more than 60 percent of the International Refugee Organization (IRO) budget was paid for by the U.S. See Goodwin-Gill, 2008. 10.

67 As a result, all but 925 of the 233,436 refugees admitted to the United States between 1956 and 1968 came from communist countries. See Loescher and Scanlan, *Calculated kindness.*

68 Cseresnyés, "A nemzetközi menekültjog alkalmazása," 172–73. Cseresnyés, referring to the study by Dietrich Thranhardt (Thranhardt, "Entwicklungslinien der Zuwanderungspolitik," 58–59), distinguishes three criteria of the Western admission of the refugees in the Cold War age: the anticommunist political character, the "racist" point of view, and the "quantitative" criteria. Cseresnyés states that the 1956 Hungarian refugees were ideal from the perspective of each of these three categories, because they were a strongly anticommunist, white, and not too large as a group.

69 Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, General Assembly, Official Records: Twelfth Session, Supplement No. 11 (A3585/Rev.1), New York, 1957. 14.

70 AMAE: Note de la Délégation française auprès des Nation Unies, New York, Assemblée générale. XIème session. Point 30: Réfugiés, no. 37/CES, série: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, Cote: 372QO, carton 300, dossier 3 (October 8, 1956).

international prestige of the office and the expansion of its room for maneuver made it possible to broaden further the responsibilities of the institution. In 1957, under new UN General Assembly resolutions, the organization was given a broader and more flexible mandate. It was able to take an active and successful role in solving the European refugee problem that has been going on since World War II. By 1959, the World Refugee Year had been declared with the full support of the United Nations. It expanded its activities to the Third World, providing assistance for Algerian war refugees in Morocco and Tunisia, which marked a turning point in the institution's emergence as a global organization.[71]

The cooperation among the main institutional participants in the Hungarian refugee crisis continued later. Instead of the mood and tone of rivalry which had prevailed before, cooperation among the UNHCR, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM),[72] the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the League of Red Cross Societies came to the fore.[73] The relationship between the High Commissioner and the League was also strengthened.[74] The volume of studies edited by Lina Venturas explores in detail the functioning and significance of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (ICEM), which has played a key role in the institutionalization and international regulation of migration since the early 1950s. The founders of the organization, which also played an important part in resolving the 1956 Hungarian refugee crisis, wanted to build a bridge between the countries that were issuing a surplus population and the host states overseas.[75] Through the roles that it played in addressing the Hungarian refugee problem, this institution became one of the most important components of the international humanitarian system dealing with refugees.

The growing role of information and press activities in humanitarian institutions is also a partly new phenomenon in the management of Hungarian case.[76] In

71 Loescher, *The UNHCR and the World Politics,* 82, 91.

72 Élie, "The Historical Roots of Cooperation," 351, 354–55; Élie, "Interactions et filiations," 49.

73 Perret and Bugnion, *De Budapest à Saigon,* 598–99.

74 IFRC Archives: Letter from A. R. Lindt, UNHCR to Count B. de Rougé, secrétaire-général, League of Red Cross Societies. A 1023, box 3, dossier 22-1-2 Hongrie, Office du Haut commissaire pour les réfugiés, 1956–1960. (18 January 1957).

75 *International "Migration Management,"* 6.

76 Some example: concerning the UNHCR: AMAE: Comité exécutif du programme du Haut-Commissaire, Première session spéciale, Évaluation des programmes, 1959−1964, A/AC.96/25/Rev.1, générale. Série: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, Cote: 372QO, carton 300, dossier 4. (July 6, 1959). With regards to the ICEM: NARA: Report of the Director [ICEM] on Progress since the Sixth session, Covering the period from March 1 to June 30, 1957. RG 469, Records of the U.S. Foreign

parallel with the increasing emphasis on media work, the activities of humanitarian institutions have become increasingly professional. The level of organization has improved, and international centers and secretariats have been strengthened. This development fits in well with the trend described by Michael Barnett, who points out that, in this "neo-humanitarianism," humanitarian organizations which became increasingly dependent on states also became increasingly bureaucratic, with a growing emphasis on long-term planning.[77] Several institutions, including the UNHCR, the ICEM, and the League of Red Cross Societies, emerged as strong global humanitarian organizations in no small part because of the roles they played in addressing the Hungarian refugee crisis in 1956.[78]

The Hungarian refugee crisis also provided an opportunity to introduce new methods. Telex was used for the first time to facilitate communication among the units of the League action[79] and the aid teams of the same nationality,[80] and new accounting procedures were introduced in the refugee camps.[81] The International Committee of the Red Cross used the radio wavelength assigned to it for the first time in connection with the Hungarian emergency.[82]

Conclusions

The explanation for the extraordinary success of the Western resettlement of the 1956 Hungarian refugees is multi-faceted. The humanitarian sentiment of world public opinion, which still vividly remembered the horrors of World War II, and the increasingly precise and definite formulation of the rights of the refugees

Assistance Agencies, 1948–1961, Office of the Director, Subject Files Relating Primarily to Hungarian Refugees, 1956–1961, Hungarian Refugees – General, to FY 1958 Mutual Security Program, Box 5, ARC ID 3000028, Entry P 216. (July 31, 1957). In respect of the League of Red Cross Societies: SACRF: Nouvelles Press Internationales, Ligue des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge, Genève – Suisse, Communiqué de presse No 1956-55, Le premier convoi de réfugiés hongrois organisé par la Croix-Rouge arrive aujourd'hui d'Autriche – De nouveaux secours de la Croix-Rouge destinés à la population hongroise sont en route pour Vienne. 3 O 64 – Hongrie, insurrection, octobre 1956, Octobre 1956 - Août 1957. (November 9, 1956).

77 Barnett, *Empire of Humanity,* 107–8.

78 Ducasse-Rogier, *The International Organization for Migration*, 40; Gémes, "Political Migration in the Cold War," 177.

79 *Hungarian Refugee Relief,* 28.

80 During the Palestinian refugee aid campaign in 1949–1950, aid workers sent by national Red Cross societies were divided into multinational teams based on their qualifications. See Reid and Gilbo, *Beyond conflict*, 174.

81 ICRC Archives: Ligue des Sociétés de la Croix-Rouge, Exposé des opérations entreprises par la Ligue en faveur des réfugiés hongrois en Autriche, février 1957. B AG 234 094-008. (28 February 1957).

82 *Annual Report, 1957* (Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross 1958), 51, 71–72.

were just as important factors as the supportive attitude of the populations of Western countries who empathized with the suppressed revolution. The exceptionally favorable composition, from the perspective of the needs of the labor market, of the 1956 refugees as a group coincided with western economic prosperity, producing economic "miracles." However, these favorable initial conditions certainly would not have led to such a swift and successful Western resettlement of nearly 200,000 Hungarians had it not been for the Cold War rivalry between the Eastern and the Western blocs. Because of the ongoing ideological and propaganda war against the Soviets, the NATO governments remained firm in their commitment to address the Hungarian refugee crisis, even after the emotional support among the civilian populations had waned.

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