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László Szarka

## **Significance of Czechoslovakian–Hungarian Population Exchange in the History of Intended Elimination of Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia**

### **Abstract**

*The Hungarian government seemingly facilitated the resettlement of Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia. Diplomatic opportunities – provided by the treaty – were used to execute the population exchange in an orderly, financially settled way, as far as it was possible within the framework of the exchange quota. The other option of minority Hungarians to stay in their native land was reslovakization, which was treated as the lesser of two evils and chosen consciously as the only means to it.*

The Czechoslovakian government tried to get free a hand from the winner great powers to expatriate the German and Hungarian nationals from Czechoslovakia. Since the cease-fire agreement with Hungary did not allow the realization of a process, a solution similar to the expelling of the Sudeten Germans was also considered<sup>1</sup>. In order to succeed in evacuating the greatest possible proportion of the two minorities, foreign secretary Vladimír Clementis handed over a memorandum to the government of the powers on the 3rd of July 1945, asking for permission to transfer i.e. for a one-sided expulsion of 2-2,5 million Germans and 400 000 Hungarians. According to the Clementis memorandum, the representatives of the Czechoslovakian government could have consulted the Allied Control Commission in Budapest over the question of the transferring of the greater part of the Hungarians living in Slovakia as part of a population

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<sup>1</sup> Vavro Šrobár the Czechoslovakian finance minister of Slovakian birth proposed a plan to expel 70% of Hungarians from all the localities with Hungarian inhabitants leaving them to rely only on their own transport and means to move to Hungary. Vadkertý, Katalin: Maďarská otázka v Československu 1945–1948. Dekréty prezidenta Beneša a ich dosledky na deportáciu a reslovakizáciu. Kalligram, Bratislava, 2002. 579–582.

exchange for the 345 000 Slovaks of Hungarian citizenship, who should repatriate to Slovakia.<sup>2</sup>

To justify the deportation plans the Czechoslovakian secretary referred to the “conviction of the Czechoslovakian nation” that without the deportation of the Germans and Hungarians from Czechoslovakia it would not be possible to ensure the normal and peaceful development of the state nor the permanent peace and stability in Central Europe.<sup>3</sup> The memorandum presented to the great ambassadors of the great powers in Prague was a last effort of persuasion before the Potsdam conference. The deportation of the two minorities was introduced as the “most pressing problem” and stressed that any delay in solving it would seriously trouble every Czech and Slovak citizen. Of the three great powers only the Soviet government supported the request without reservation; the Brits kept raising more and more objections, while the Americans were from the start out against the suggestion of extending collective guilt to any other people except the Germans. Article XII. of the Potsdam conference protocol authorized only the orderly and humane transfer of Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary to Germany, prohibiting any further expelling of Germans from their native country. After the Potsdam conference the Prague government together with the Slovakian representative corporate could not but accept that they had no permission for the one-sided deportation of Hungarian minority.<sup>4</sup>

### **The road to a “pure Slav nation-state”**

The Kassa government programme of 5 April 1945 set the aim at a Slav nation-state. In order to achieve it the Czechoslovakian authorities had to reach back to the treaty with Hungary about population exchange. The laws on the deprivation of civil rights were applied against the Hungarian minority communities. The edicts and national council regulations

<sup>2</sup> Churaň, Milan: Postupim a ěeskoslovensko. Mýtus a skutečnost. Nakaladatelství Libri, Praha, 2001. 109–110.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 110.

<sup>4</sup> 2. August, 1945, the last day of the Potsdam conference is the date of President Beneš’s edict, 1945. no 33., on the regulation of Czechoslovakian citizenship of German and Hungarian nationals. The Czechoslovakian citizenship of German and Hungarian nationals who became the citizens of another state in 1938–39 or later was cancelled from the date of their new citizenship, and that of other German and Hungarian nationals from the date of the edict. Thus a legal background has been created for the eviction and deportation of Hungarians and Germans. Szarka László ed.: Jogfosztó jogszabályok Csehszlovákiában 1944–1949. Elnöki dekrétumok, törvények, rendeletek, szerződések. [Laws for deprivation of civil rights in Czechoslovakia. Presidential decrees, laws, regulations, treaties] MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet – Kecskés László Társaság, Komárom, 2005. 122.

deprived minority Hungarians of their civic, economic, social and nationality rights.<sup>5</sup>

Economic interests also motivated the measures against Hungarians in Slovakia. The February 1945 regulation of the Slovakian National Council ruling the confiscation of the land-property of Hungarians and Germans claiming the act as “giving back the land to Slovakia”, was actually a radical nationalization of land-property. The first really concise presidential edict of Edvard Beneš against the two minorities was No.5, issued on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1945 which, together with regulation No. 50. 1945 of the Slovakian National Council especially referring to the territory of Slovakia, ruled for the appointment of Czech and Slovak national trustees respectively to oversee the land-properties, factories, buildings and other valuables of Hungarian owners. A week later, regulation No. 51. dissolved all the Hungarian associations in Southern Slovakia and confiscated their possessions. This was the end of Hanza co-operative, founded in 1925, the Béla Bartók choir in Pozsony, even the Masaryk Academy, which was founded by the donation of President Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovakian state, and several hundred other institutions in Hungarian towns, villages, settlements.<sup>6</sup>

In their consequence the presidential edicts and the additional Slovakian National Council regulations seriously aggravated the situation of the Hungarian minority. The severest was the presidential edict of the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1945, on the day of the signing of the Potsdam protocol, which deprived automatically Hungarians and Germans of their citizenship, with the exception of active anti-fascists. This edict became the source of every later deprivation of civil rights and grievances because the loss of citizenship by definition excluded the members of the two minorities from employment, compensation for nationalized property, pension and other state benefits.<sup>7</sup>

With the loss of their civic, minority, economic and social rights the Hungarians of Slovakia got into total legal and social void. The plan of

<sup>5</sup> Šutaj, Štefan – Mosný, Petr – Olejník, Milan: Prezidentské dekrty Edvarda Beneša v povojnovom Slovensku, Veda, Bratislava, 2002; Jech Karel (red.): Němci a Maďari v dekretch prezidenta republiky. Studie a dokumenty 1940–1945. Die Deutsche und Magyaren in den Dekreten des Präsidenten der Republik. Studien und Dokumenten 1940–1945. Nakladatelství Doplňek, Brno, 2003; Šutaj, Štefan (ed.): Dekréty Edvarda Beneša v povojnovom období, Universum, Prešov, 2004; Szarka László (szerk.): Jogfosztó jogszabályok, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Szarka László ed.: Jogfosztó jogszabályok... pp. 93-99, 182-188.

<sup>7</sup> Analysing the phases of the composition of the edict, the final version clearly appears to be the medium of deprivation of civil rights because only those Hungarians and Germans could keep their citizenship who officially registered as Czechs or Slovaks during the “increased danger of the republic”. Szarka op.cit. pp 122-124. On the preliminaries and alternative text variants cf. Jech Karel (red.): Němci a Maďari v dekretch prezidenta pp. 313–349.

the authorities was to fill the place of the deported Hungarians by repatriating Slovaks from other countries and totally disrupt the Hungarian communities by relocating Slovaks from the northern regions of Slovakia, all this being part of the battle for political power; the radical solution of the Hungarian question was to strengthen the position of the Slovak Communist Party.<sup>8</sup>

During the last phase of World War II. the Czechoslovak army, the Slovak resistance, later the Czechoslovakian government and the Slovakian National Council were considering to deport the Hungarians, similar to the Germans, with army assistance, or as an alternative, expelling them “spontaneously”.<sup>9</sup> Immediately after the front having left the area the Czechoslovakian military and civil authorities were keen on creating an atmosphere for the Hungarians to flee to Hungary. However, the Hungarian inhabitants who had lived there for several hundreds of years did not show any remorse when the Czechoslovakian authorities returned. Though the 1945 spring plan of Czechoslovakian finance minister Vavro Šrobár was accepted by the Slovakian National Council as its programme to deal with the Hungarian question, the brutal deportations suggested by the plan were carried out at some Hungarian villages in the neighbourhood of Érsekújvár: in Andód, Udvard, Tardoskedd only, during the months immediately after the end of the war. Most of the families dumped at the Hungarian border soon returned to their homes.<sup>10</sup>

Extremist plans were also made for Pozsony and Kassa. On the 5 May 1945 extensive anti-Hungarian measures were introduced in Pozsony with reference to the 1945 No. 131 State Security Law; the ultimate aim was the deportation of the complete German and Hungarian communities.<sup>11</sup> The greater part of the members of the two communities were crowded into an isolated camp in Ligetfalu only accessible across a temporary pontoon bridge or were expelled from the country at short notice. The internment camp at Ligetfalu – there was another one established in the earlier lager for Jews at Szered – was cleared in August 1946. The Hungarians were

<sup>8</sup> Kaplan, Karel: Csehszlovákia igazi arca, Kalligram Kiadó Budapest–Pozsony, 1995. pp. 108–112. [Showing the true colors of Czechoslovakia]

<sup>9</sup> Baláz Július: Maďarská otázka v prvom povojnovom desaťročí povojnového Československa (1945–1948) Kandidátska práca. FF Karlovy Univerzity. Katedra československých dejín, Praha, 1991. Kézirat, MTA KI Archivum 1/161 [Unpublished dissertation].

<sup>10</sup> Vadkerty, Katalin: A belső telepítések és a lakosságcsere. Kalligramm Könyvkiadó, Pozsony 1998. pp. 86–87. [Internal settling and population exchange].

<sup>11</sup> Ibid. p. 88; Salner, Peter: Premeny Bratislavy 1939–1993, Veda, Bratislava 1998. 38–43. Salner cites the 1945 protocol decisions of the Pozsony National Committee against the Germans and Hungarians. Thus the proposal of Sekáč MP about the special marking to be worn by the members of the two communities was accepted on 22. June. However, the regulation had to be withdrawn because of local and international uproar. Ibid. p.41.

under constant control, either doing communal work or locked in the camp. Similar conditions were created for the Hungarians at Kassa too. Those Hungarians who settled down in the region re-annexed to Hungary after the 1938 were forced to leave the country in May; the same methods were tried out at settlements with autochthon population too, however, without success thanks to the resistance of the Hungarian government and the border-defence authorities. Together with the civil servants, teachers, etc. coming from the mother country thousands of repatriated working people of Upland origin became the first displaced persons as a result of the decisions made by the Czechoslovakian authorities.<sup>12</sup>

Preparations were started to deport the Hungarian nationals to community labour to Czech land on the basis of the presidential edicts Nos. 71 and 88. 1945. This was a means started in November 1945; first men of working age were deported to the Sudeten area in need of work force.<sup>13</sup> The authorities instigating and executing these actions had threefold aims: to force the Hungarian government to sign the population-exchange treaty; to settle Slovaks from northern Slovakia to the southern Hungarian inhabited areas; and with the inside relocation radically change the ethnic character of the area bordering Hungary. The social and ethnic considerations were obvious from the start out, the Slovaks from the northern mountainous areas, strife with unemployment and difficult living conditions, had the task to change the region with compact Hungarian population into a Slovak one.<sup>14</sup> They were joined by ‘repatriating’ Slovaks from Romania, Hungary Yugoslavia and Transcarpathia, the largest group being the

<sup>12</sup> János Kövesdi – Mayer Judit (szerk.): *Edvard Beneš elnöki dekrétumai avagy a magyarok és németek jogfosztása, Pannónia Kiadó, Pozsony, 1996. pp. 131-136* [The presidential edicts of E.B., or the deprivation of civil rights of Hungarians and Germans]; Kaplan, Karel: *Csehszlovákia igazi arca*, pp. 110-117; *Vadkert* Katalin: *Németek és magyarok Pozsonyban 1945–1948. között* [Germans and Hungarian in Pozsony 1945-1948]. In: *Czoch Gábor – Kocsis Aranka – Tóth Árpád* (szerk.): *Fejezetek Pozsony történetéből magyar és szlovák szemmel* [Chapters from the history of Pozsony from Hungarian and Slovak point of view], Kalligram, Pozsony, 2005. 473–486; *G. Vass István: A menekültügy kezelése Magyarországon 1945–1946-ban* [The treatment of the refugee question in Hungary]. In: *Molnár Imre – Szarka László: Otthontalan emlékezet. Emlékkönyv a csehszlovák – magyar lakosságcsere 60. évfordulójára* [Memory without home – on the 60 anniversary of the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian population exchange]. MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Kecskés László Társaság, Kompress, Komárom, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> For the obvious nationalistic aims of the settlements in Czech land with the purpose of providing man-power for reconstruction cf. *Šutaj, Štefan: Nútené presidieľne Maďarov do Ľiech*, *Universum, Prešov, 2005. pp. 20-24*; For the consequences of the deportations cf. *Helena Nosková: A magyarok és Csehország. A tolerancia eltűnése az autoritatív csehszlovák rendszerből* [Hungarians and the Czech land. The disappearance of tolerance from the authoritative Czechoslovakian system]. *Prágai Tükör, 2005. 3–4–5. <http://www.pragaitukor.com/archive/index.php>*;

<sup>14</sup> As a result of inland migration 5011 Slovakian families, i.e. 23 027 persons, settled down in 260 localities of Hungarian, 13 of Slovak and 8 of German majority population. In addition 12274 Slovaks, already inhabiting the places, were given land, house or other real estates.

Slovaks coming from Hungary under the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian population-exchange agreement.

### **Deportation to Czech-land and population exchange**

After not having received the complete support of the allied powers for the solution of the Hungarian question, i.e. one-sided deportation similar to the action against their German minority, the Czechoslovakian government was faced with the renewed question whether to prefer inside means (forced relocation, reslovakization) or one-sided deportation (“transfer”, “odsun”) and population exchange in order to ‘globally’ solve the problem. Karel Kaplan was the first to reveal the fact that in September 1945 Voroshilov, the president of the Allied Control Commission in Hungary, had encouraged Czechoslovakian foreign secretary Clementis to deal with the Hungarian question internally. In his notes Clementis claims that Voroshilov had been of the opinion that since 3 million Sudeten Germans had already been ‘shoved across the borders’ it would be easy to relocate 300 000 Hungarians.<sup>15</sup> The deportation of Hungarians from Slovakia was carried out on the strength of presidential edict No. 81 and according to the plans worked out by Slovakian and Czech authorities. Between 25. October and 4. December 1945 9274 persons, during the second phase between 19. November 1945 and 22. February 1946 6510 Hungarian families, i.e. 41 666 persons were deported.<sup>16</sup> The difference between the two phases of deportation was not only in the number of the persons concerned but in character and means too. In 1945 mainly single working age Hungarian men were taken to work in Czech-land, the second phase on the other hand was carried out as a systematic deportation with military and police forces in the villages marked down for evacuation and deportation to Czech-land. In the meantime the Czechoslovakian and Slovakian authorities were in the hope that by these actions they could force the Hungarian government to negotiate over the population-exchange treaty and to agree in carrying it out in 1947. In consequence those persons were deported to Czech-land who were meant to participate in the population-exchange and also those who were ‘reslovakized’ as a means to increase the pressure on the

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<sup>15</sup> Cited by Kaplan from the account of Clementis at the 11. September 1945 meeting of the Czechoslovakian government. Kaplan: Csehszlovákia igazi arca, p.135.

<sup>16</sup> Šutaj, Štefan: Nútené práce, pp. 28, 66-67.

Hungarian government which had indeed to succumb to the open extortions of the Czechoslovakian government.<sup>17</sup>

The deportations were concentrated in the villages in the districts of Komárom, Dunaszerdahely, Ógyalla, Somorja and Galánta including the Hungarian population of 220 villages who were relocated to the districts of Kolín, žatec, Mladá Boleslav, Pilsen and Kladno. They left behind 6602 houses and 3884 hectares of arable land. The thus emptied houses were given into the charge of 2667, the land to 1703 Slovak and Czech national custodians. The valuables of the deported were finally confiscated later, on the strength of the 19. March 1948 governmental decree in May–June 1948. In answer to the notes of protest of the Hungarian government the Czechoslovakian government made it clear that they would stop the forced labour programme if only Hungary acted willingly in the immediate realization of the population exchange.<sup>18</sup>

The cruel and inhumane deportation into Czech-land has left deep impressions in the consciousness of Hungarians in Slovakia. The villages surrounded by police and armed forces, the people locked in ice-cold railway wagons, the terrible scenes at the Czech railway stations resembled to the worst period of Hungarian history during the Turkish occupation, as has been described in contemporary memoirs. József Mindszenty, cardinal of Esztergom as well as the leaders of the Slovakian Catholic church, the bishops and the episcopate severely condemned the ruthlessness of forced labour. Bishop Jantausch sent a memorandum to the presidium of the Slovakian National Committee, to president Beneš and foreign minister Jan Masaryk in the name of all the bishops of Slovakia, in which he pointed out that when the Jews had been taken from their homes they dissociated from those actions conflicting with humanity and Christian love; they did it repeatedly as the methods of the actual actions were very similar to the ones objected to earlier.<sup>19</sup>

In September – October 1945 the Czechoslovak and Slovak authorities started the deportation of working age Hungarians to Czech-land and Moravia with the openly declared intention of forcing Hungary to the treaty about the relocation of Hungarians from Slovakia to Hungary. In December 1945 Hungarian foreign minister János Gyöngyösi, who

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<sup>17</sup> Vadkerty, Katalin: A deportálások. A szlovákiai magyarok csehországi kényszermunkája 1945–1948. között [Deportations. The forced labour of Hungarians in Slovakia 1945–1948]. Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony 1996. 28–29. Vadkerty: Maďarská otázka, pp. 89–97; Kaplan, Karel: Csehszlovákiai igazi arca, pp. 138–140.

<sup>18</sup> Štefan Šutaj: Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948 (Východiská a prax politiky k maďarskej menšine na Slovensku), Veda, Bratislava, 1993. 63–66.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. pp.105–106.

opposed any kind of acceptance of collective guilt in the case of the Germans and Hungarians – with the Hungarians in Slovakia in mind, – remarked at the negotiations between Czechoslovakia and Hungary in Prague that the Hungarian government could and would take in the Hungarians not acceptable in Czechoslovakia only together with their region.<sup>20</sup>

The issue of the Hungarians hauled away to forced labour by police – army force induced strong resistance, organized counter-actions, international protestations among the groups of Hungarians relocated from the Upland into Hungary and left-wing Hungarian intellectuals in Pozsony. The events prompted young Hungarian clergymen and students to found a movement named Hungarian Democratic Popular Association (Népi Szövetség) in Czechoslovakia with the task of documenting minority grievances and inform the deprived themselves and the authorities in Hungary.

Kaplan's assessment is correct that the deportation was a cruel but unsuccessful attempt at wiping out the Hungarian minority. It resulted not only in Hungarians fleeing to Hungary but seriously harming the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian relations.<sup>21</sup> It can be added that in the memories of the Hungarian minority the experiences and narratives of the deportations has meant the greatest trauma; also have been the most difficult conflicts to absorb and amend in the political aftermath of the whole situation.

### **Enforced population exchange as the means of deportation**

The population exchange treaty was signed by foreign minister János Gyöngyösi and Vladimír Clementis in Budapest on the 27. February 1946. It was enforced by various diplomatic, foreign political, discriminative minority political means and from the start the parties interpreted it differently. While the treaty represented “the most reasonable solution of the Hungarian question”, the “punishment of the Hungarian minority in

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<sup>20</sup> He declared that the proposition represented by him naturally contained a revision of the borders. It goes without question. However, no other solution seemed conceivable than the population exchange, which would satisfy the requirements of the times and democracy. Cited from confidential Czechoslovakian governmental material by Kaplan: Csehszlovákia igazi arca. p.120. Cf. also Tóth, Ágnes: Telepítések Magyarországon 1945–1948. között. A németek kitelepítése, a belső népmozgások és a szlovák–magyar lakosságcsere összefüggései. Bács-Kiskun Megyei Önkormányzat Levéltára, Kecskemét, 1993. p.43 [Settlements in Hungary 1945-1948. Relationship between the deportation of Germans, inland relocation and the Slovak – Hungarian population exchange].

<sup>21</sup> Kaplan: Csehszlovákia igazi arca. P. 138.



keeping with international resolutions” a “prudent settlement” for Prague and Pozsony, for the Hungarians it remained an unequal agreement enforced upon Hungary by the deportations to Czech-land. By signing the treaty, however, Hungary succeeded in slowing down the confiscation of the valuables of the Hungarian minority members, their deprivation of rights and the scattering of the Hungarian communities in the country. For those Hungarians who had already been designated for exchange the Hungarian government assured the preservation of their movable possessions as well as their ordered settlement in Hungary.

Since the Potsdam conference had not allowed the one-sided transfer as the solution of the Hungarian question, leading Czechoslovakian politicians regarded the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian population exchange as the most important means of deportation from autumn 1945; also, they were in the hope of persuading 300 000–400 000 Slovaks living in Hungary to participate in the exchange.

The Czechoslovakian authorities had compiled a list of about 450 000 Slovak nationals or persons of Slovak descent allegedly based on historical studies in 1946.<sup>22</sup> The Czechoslovakian special committee, which agitated among the Slovaks in Hungary, had to understand that the figures were unreasonable. Between 4. March and 27. May 1946 as the result of the recruiting allowed in the population exchange treaty, there were 90 090 persons who signed up for resettlement in Slovakia. Later this was increased by further 7520 Slovak applicants.<sup>23</sup>

The signing of the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian population exchange treaty on the 27. February 1946 was enforced by the deportation to Czech-land and the continued confiscation, deprivation of rights of Hungarians; it was indeed an unfavourable agreement for Hungary. The Czechoslovakian government had seized the right to recruit re-settlers in Hungarian territory; they also were given free hand in choosing the Hungarians to move to Hungary as set in the population exchange treaty. By mid-August 1948, the Czechoslovakian authorities completed the list of Hungarians in Slovakia to be deported. The list contained 181 000 names of which 105

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<sup>22</sup> The 1941 census registered 270 000 persons speaking Slovakian in the post-Trianon territory of Hungary, of whom 76 000 claimed to have Hungarian as their mother tongue and only 17 000 to be Slovak nationals. The Czechoslovakian transfer committee on the other hand reckoned with 450 – 475 000 Slovaks by special historical – demographic and religious statistical counts. Cf. Kugler, József: *Lakosságcsere a Délkelet-Alföldön 1944-1948*, Osiris – MTA Kisebbségkutató Műhely, Budapest, 2000. 28-34 [Population exchange on the south-eastern part of the Great Hungarian Plain].

<sup>23</sup> The representatives of the Czechoslovakian transfer committee handed over the Hungarian government the list of applicant from Hungary on the 27 June 1946. Bobák, Ján: *Madarská otázka*, id. m. 84–86.

047 answered the requirements of the category defined by Article V. of the treaty, the rest the so-called criminals of war according to Article VI.<sup>24</sup> The treaty, however, enabled the Hungarian government to become an equal and determining party in the organization, control and transaction of the exchange.<sup>25</sup>

In the 14 months prior to the signing of the population exchange treaty and the first transports, the Czechoslovakian authorities regarded the deportation to Czech-land, the scattering of Hungarians in the territory as the best inner solutions of the Hungarian question. Since the processes met severe objections from the Hungarian government and public, even from international public, the Czechoslovakian and Slovakian authorities decided upon forcible assimilation.

### **Reslovakization as the means of forcible assimilation**

The Slovakian office representing internal affairs regarded the so-called reslovakization and the re-settling of Slovakian nationals into the properties left behind by Hungarian nationals the best internal means of the final solution of the Hungarian question.<sup>26</sup> There followed a process during which applications for reslovakization were handed in in the name of more than 400 000 persons.<sup>27</sup>

Originally reslovakization was planned on a smaller scale by Slovenská Liga and the representatives of the Slovakian regional government and meant to gain the persons with double, uncertain and alternating national identity. Between 17. June and 1. July 1946, during the fortnight for handing in applications; there were 108 387 families, 352 038 persons

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. pp.87-88. According to the Hungarian records the Czechoslovakian list handed over in Pozsony the 26. Augustus 1946 contained the data of 106 398 persons as described in Article V. Popély Árpád: A (cseh)szlovákiai magyarság történeti kronológiája 1944–1992. Fórum Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Somorja, 2006. 105. [Historical chronology of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia].

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Bobák Ján: Maďarská otázka v Ľesko-Slovensku 1944–1948, Matica slovenská, Martin, 1996; Kugler József: lakosságcsere a Délkelet-Alföldön, id. m.; Szarka László (szerk.): A szlovákiai magyarok kényszerkitelepítésének emlékezete 1945-1948, MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet -- Kecskés László Társaság, Komárom, 2003; Uő.: Jogfosztó jogszabályok,; Vadkerty Katalin: A belső telepítések és a lakosságcsere,; Vadkerty: A kitelepítéstől a reszlovakizációig. Trilógia a csehszlovákiai magyarság 1945–1948. közötti történetéről, Kalligram Könyvkiadó, Pozsony, 2001 [From deportation to reslovakization]; Vadkerty: Maďarská otázka v Ľeskoslovensku.

<sup>26</sup> A Šutaj, Štefan.: Reslovakizácia. Zmena národnosti èasti obyvateľstva Slovenska po II. svetovej vojne. Košice, 1991. pp. 23-28.

<sup>27</sup> Vadkerty, Katalin: A reszlovakizáció. Kalligram Kiadó Pozsony 1993. pp.31-36.

applying. In 1948, by the end of the process 282 594 persons were granted Slovakian nationality out of 410 820 applicants.<sup>28</sup>

The written accounts of the history of the 1946-47 reslovakization indicates that in the personal and collective memory of Hungarians in Slovakia reslovakization has been a kind of community taboo due to complex mass psychological processes. At the time fear was the most characteristic feeling of the entire Hungarian community: fear of the total loss of civil rights, of being scattered geographically, of the loss of home, land, possessions, etc.

The reslovakization process introduced in June 1946 promised redemption for abandoning Hungarian nationality and applying for the Slovak one; reslovakized people got back their Czechoslovakian citizenship together with their civil rights, could keep their houses land and possessions and, at least according to the early promises, were not threatened any longer by deportation to Czech-land or to Hungary. Reslovakization originally was for those persons who claimed to be Slovaks, however. Between 1946 and 1948 it became the means of the most ruthless pressure against Hungary and the Hungarians living in Slovakia. Hungarians in Slovakia wanted to keep their rights, homes, possessions, the land of their birth; the political power aiming at the ethnic reorganization of the southern Slovakian region blackmailed them through one of their basic rights, that of their declaration of national identity.

As during the August – September 1946 peace negotiations in Paris the Czechoslovakian delegation had proved unsuccessful in making accepted the unilateral deportation of those Hungarians, who were not reslovakized neither belonged to the categories of the population exchange, the Czechoslovakian politicians started decisive preparations for the so-called “global solution” of the Hungarian question. They planned to relocate all the reslovakized persons and the Hungarians remaining in Slovakia to Czech-land to be forcefully assimilated.

All the steps of the Czechoslovakian and Slovakian authorities against minorities of the period had the resolute aim of the total liquidation of the Hungarian minority communities; therefore the research and analysis of the processes should also be made in context. The procedures, actions and plans towards the cleansing of southern Slovakia of minorities were closely connected to one another; the Slovakian settlement office, corporation of representative and the Interior as well as the Foreign Ministry in Prague decided upon the measures to be taken with a keen eye being kept at the reactions in Hungary.

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<sup>28</sup> Popély Árpád: A (cseh)szlovákiai magyarság történeti kronológiája. p. 99.

### Forced re-settlements and their consequences

The forced re-settlement of the Hungarians within Czechoslovakia and to Hungary had grievous consequences. The losses through migration and assimilation became apparent through the data of the 1950 census.<sup>29</sup> In addition to the – temporary – population decrease the Hungarian communities suffered serious material losses too. Those returning from Czech labour could not always move back to their old homes; the confiscated land properties given to foreign settlers, the unsolved circumstances of the population exchange, etc. caused heavy material damage.<sup>30</sup>

The basic principle of economic parity stipulated in the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian population exchange was constantly breached, the range and number of the so-called Hungarian war criminals in Czechoslovakia was unjustifiably increased and added as surplus to the agreed exchange quota; the Hungary had no other means of legal protection than to procrastinate the execution of the population exchange till April 1947. However, the hand of the Hungarian government was forced by the mass deportations to Czech-land by armed-force assistance.

The ethnic composition of the towns and villages in southern Slovakia was fundamentally changed by the inland re-settling of 590 Slovakian families and the 9200 households coming from Hungary, altogether 65 000 Slovak nationals who took the place of 110 – 130 000 Hungarians deported to Czech-land or fleeing to Hungary.<sup>31</sup>

There was also the plan to turn the southern Slovakian region monolingual by re-educating the 300 000 odd reslovakized persons linguistically and thus nationally. It was accompanied by the re-naming of the settlements, giving Slovak form of the family names, prohibition of earlier bilingualism, the expelling the use of the Hungarian language in school and church, paralysing every form of Hungarian communal life and punishing all public use of the Hungarian language and culture.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The number of Hungarian population in Czechoslovakia decreased from 592 000 in 1930 to 355 000, the their proportion in Slovakia from 17,8% to 10,3%. Popély Árpád: A (cseh)szlovákiai magyarság történeti kronológiája. p. 177.

<sup>30</sup> The possession left behind by Hungarians relocated to Hungary had a value of 72 million dollars more than that of the Slovaks relocated to Czechoslovakia. Szabó, Károly: A csehszlovák magyar lakosságcsere gazdasági vonatkozásai, [The economic aspects of the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian population exchange] In: Szarka László (ed.) *Otthonatlan emlékezet*, pp. 92–100. Cf. Vadkerty Katalin: A belső telepítések és a lakosságcsere, pp. 166–169.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Szarka, László: *Jogfosztó jogszabályok*, pp. 230–251.

### Protests and organizations against the deprivation of civil rights by Hungarians in Czechoslovakia

The existence of the Hungarian minority community, which was self-confident and well organized in the first twenty years of its existence, was present only in separated actions against the deprivation of rights. The Hungarians in Slovakia, even those who declared resistance, expected the protection of their minority rights from Hungary. Though Hungary had lost the war its government tried to use every possible means of protest to protect Hungarians since the first appearance of Czechoslovakian breach of law. By sending repeatedly memoranda it drew the attention of the representatives of the Allied Control Commission in Hungary, the western members of the allied powers as well as the Soviet government to the atrocities against the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia.<sup>33</sup>

1946 was the year of hope and great ordeals for the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. During the Hungarian preparations to the peace negotiations there were promises of fairer and more lasting solutions, that the great powers would correct the mistakes committed when delineating the state borders and would consider the ethnic borders between Hungary and Czechoslovakia. The year started with Czechoslovakian – Hungarian population exchange treaty signed in Prague on the 27. February causing great disappointment and even greater fear.<sup>34</sup>

Objections against the population exchange treaty were most concisely summed up in a 1946 memorandum of unknown origin addressed to Foreign Minister János Gyöngyösi, which expressed fears about the escalation of steps aiming at the liquidation of the minority; therefore regarded the treaty a mistake: after the signing of the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian treaty it was noticed that not only were there no improvements in the

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<sup>33</sup> Földesi, Margit: Kitelepítés, lakosságcsere és a Szövetséges Ellenőrző Bizottság, In: Szarka, László (ed.): Otthontalan emlékezet, pp. 127–132 [Deportation, population exchange and the Allied Control Commission]

<sup>34</sup> The Hungarians, who were attached to their birth country, had to understand that the government of Ferenc Nagy was forced to agree about the exchange of those Hungarians in Slovakia who had already been assigned for re-location and the free applicant Slovaks in Hungary. Nevertheless, the Népi Szövetség [popular association] sent a letter to Minister President Zoltán Tildy on the 24. January 1946 and a month later to Foreign Minister János Gyöngyösi to express their reservations about the preparations and the logic of the population exchange treaty. Tóth László (szerk.): „Hívebb emlékezésül...” Csehszlovákiai magyar emlékiratok és egyéb dokumentumok a jogfosztottság éveiből 1945–1948, Kalligram Kiadó, Pozsony, 1995. 112–115 [For better remembrance. Hungarian memoirs and other documents from the years of deprivation of rights in Czechoslovakia]. The treaty was criticized within the Hungarian foreign ministry too. Cf. the memorandum by János Vájlók, the referent of the ministry, by birth a Hungarian from Slovakia. *Ibid.* pp.116–118.

national, economic and personal existence of the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, their entire human life faced new ordeals.<sup>35</sup>

It is known that it was the veto of the US peace delegation that checked the plans of total liquidation of Hungarians in Slovakia; the Czechoslovakian – Hungarian borders, however, have not been changed. Neither the compensatory regional modification urged by the Hungarian delegation, nor the plans of the Népi Szövetség for a referendum to newly defined border was considered by the great powers directing the decisions of the peace conference. The rejection of the Czechoslovakian demands for mono-lateral transfer and the determined repetition of the claim for “people together with land” resulted finally in the decision that the peace conference delegated the solution of the problem to the treaty between the two states; in the given situation that was possibly the only success of the Hungarian diplomacy.

### **The balance of the population exchange**

In spite of the speed of the necessary preparations of the transactions, the population exchange could not start earlier than April 1947, with the exchange of the Slovaks from the southern part of the Great Hungarian plain and the Hungarians from Mátyusföld in Slovakia. When carrying out the directives of the treaty so unadvantageous for Hungary, the Hungarian party was keen on observing personal and property parity from the outset thus trying to prevent the Czechoslovakian intentions to use the population exchange to liquidate the Hungarian communities in Slovakia. In spite of the constant complaints on the Hungarian side again disparity, it proved to be impossible to adhere to the parity of property: the 76 616 Hungarians from Slovakia had to leave behind over 8000 hectare arable land and 15 700 houses, while there remained 7500 hectare arable land and 4400 houses from the Slovaks in Hungary.<sup>36</sup>

The population exchange was completed from April 1947 to the summer of 1949; after 22. December 1948 only those were relocated who were in existential danger, applied for family re-unification or volunteered to participate in the procedures. The protocol of Csorbató of 25. July 1949 provided for the material differences resulted due to the exchange. The two parties considered their respective claims – the Hungarian claims for the losses of the exchange, the Czechoslovakian ones: damage caused by the republic of councils, damage during World War II, the 30 million dollar

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 119.

<sup>36</sup> Vadkerty, Katalin: A belső telepítések és a lakosságcsere, pp. 166–169, 194–197..

reparations to Hungary according the decisions of the Paris conference as well as the collective value of the Czechoslovakian property nationalized in Hungary).<sup>37</sup>

The two negative aspects: the population exchange treaty and the massive reslovakization could, however, be one of the reasons of the survival of the Hungarian community in Slovakia between 1945 and 1949, reinforced by various other aspects e.g. the support of the western democracies, that the western allies had refused the Czechoslovakian claims at the Paris conference aiming at the liquidation of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. On the surface, the signing of the population exchange treaty by the Hungarian government opened free way to the deportations. However, it was successful in using the possibilities of diplomacy in opposition to the Prague government as well as the soviet government that supported the complete liquidation of the Hungarian communities in Slovakia during the Paris conference; it could also maximally use diplomatic means to assure the population exchange – keeping within the minimal limits of the exchange quota – to be carried out under orderly economic conditions. The bilateral population exchange treaty ensured that Hungary was able to prevent the realization of the mono-lateral deportation and the Paris treaty obliged the two states to bilateral agreement concerning the future of the Hungarians remaining in their birth place in Slovakia.

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<sup>37</sup> For the text of the protocol see Balogh, Sándor – Földesi – Margit (eds.): *A Magyar jóvátétel és ami mögötte van... Válogatott dokumentumok 1945–1948.* Napvilág Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest 1998 [The Hungarian reparations and their background].