

# Collecting money at a global level. The UN fundraising campaign for the 1956 Hungarian refugees<sup>1</sup>

Gusztáv D. KECSKÉS \*

## Abstract

*The present study examines the role that the UN played in providing the financial means for the international reception of the 1956 Hungarian refugees. According to the author's conclusions, through the coordination of money-raising efforts, authorised by international law (that is, by the UN General Assembly's decisions) and the professional and trustworthy documentation of humanitarian needs and activities, the institutional network of the UN contributed considerably to the formation and practical implementation of Western governments' international humanitarian action aimed at solving the crisis of the 1956 Hungarian refugees. This study is based on documents in the UN archives (New York, Geneva), the Swedish National Library (Stockholm), the UNHCR Archives, the Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, (Geneva) and the NATO Archives (Brussels), and in the Diplomatic Archives Center (La Courneuve, Nantes), Diplomatic Archive (Brussels) and the Hungarian National Archives (Budapest).*

**Keywords:** United Nations, UNHCR, humanitarian action, refugee, 1956, Hungarian.

## 1. Introduction

The great wave of Hungarian migration which followed the suppression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution by the Soviets, and the international rescue movement organised for its reception, is an outstanding chapter in the history of migrations in Hungary and the world alike. The provision of the some 200 thousand people, their transport to the host countries, and their integration there, was a conspicuous success of the international organisation of migrant assistance

---

<sup>1</sup> My research in Hungary has been supported by the National Scientific Research Programs, under Contract no. 68767.

\* Gusztáv D. KECSKÉS is a senior research fellow at the Research Centre for the Humanities, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of History; e-mail: kecskes.gusztav@btk.mta.hu.

service. The institutions of the UN family played a decisive role in this affairs. The present study, which is part of a research project aimed at discovering the entire international background of the assistance offered to the post-1956 Hungarian emigrees, examines the UN role in providing and dealing with the financial means which formed the basis of this miraculous series of events.

After the bloody repression of the 1956 Hungarian revolution – there is general agreement regarding this matter between the contemporary published Western statistics, and the Hungarian ones, kept secret until 1989 – about 200 000 people left the country, of which more than 11,000 returned to Hungary, taking the opportunity of the amnesty proclaimed by the Kádár government (Regio, 1991).<sup>2</sup> We know from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) statistics, published on March 11, 1957, that the first asylum for about 173,000 of the emigrants was provided by Austria, and for about 18,600 by Yugoslavia.<sup>3</sup>

The transportation of these people to further countries, crowded in Austria and Yugoslavia, had already started in November 1956, because the large majority of the refugees regarded these countries only as a temporary stage and wanted to go further. Until April 1, 1957, 135,417 persons, i.e. (70%) of 193,805 emigrants registered by the UN refugee office were transported to 29 different countries – 14 outside of Europe. 78,574 (40.5%) people arrived in European countries, and 56,843 (29.3%) in countries outside of Europe.<sup>4</sup> By the end of December 1957, about 90 percent of the refugees registered in Austria had reached their new country. Most of the emigrants settled in the United States (35,026), Canada (24,525), Great Britain (20,590), the FRG (14,270), Switzerland (11,962), France (10,232) and Australia (9,423).<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> According to a report of the Austrian Ministry of the Interior, until April 6, 1957, a total of 174,704 Hungarian refugees arrived in Austria, and according to the Yugoslav Ministry of the Interior, 19,181 Hungarian refugees crossed the border of the country until May 26, 1957. Pursuant to Hungarian official sources, 30,000-40,000 persons returned to Hungary until 1960. See Hungarian National Archives (Budapest): M-KS-288. f. 7/78. ö.e. Verbatim record on the meeting of the Secretariat of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, Appendix (17 May 1960).

<sup>3</sup> NATO archives (Brussels, hereinafter: NA): C-M (57) 65 (17 April 1957). 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.

<sup>4</sup> Nations Unies, Comité de l'UNREF, A/AC. 79/73 (8 May 1957).

<sup>5</sup> Report of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration on the Hungarian Refugee Situation (Austria, 31 December 1957). USA Senate Report, no. 1815, 1958, quoted by Puskás (1985).

The solution to the Hungarian refugee crisis was an outstanding project of the international humanitarian aid. These new refugees got a much better treatment than the former Hungarian emigrants (Borbándi, 1989) or than other European refugees at the time. Except for some isolated negative cases, the 1956-1957 Hungarian refugees' integration in Western societies should be regarded as a very successful action! The total cost of the action was more than one hundred million dollars, thus more than one billion dollars at the present value, which far exceeded the amount paid to the United Nations Refugee Fund, established in 1954, for the problem of Second World War refugees, albeit in the middle of the 1950's, there had been more than 70 000 "hard core" refugees in more than 200 refugee camps, in Austria, BRD, Italy and Greece, since the end of 1940's (Loescher, 2001; Holborn, 1975).

The extraordinary success of the Western admission of the 1956 Hungarian refugees had a multi-faceted explanation. The humanitarian sentiment of the world public opinion remembering the horrors of the Second World War and the more and more precise and definite formulation of the rights of the refugees was just as important as the supportive attitude of the Western population empathizing with the suppressed revolution. The exceptional favourable composition of the 1956 emigration with regard to the labour market coincided with the western economic prosperity, producing economic "miracles". However, these favourable initial conditions could certainly not lead to such a swift and successful action without the Cold War rivalry between the Eastern and the Western blocs: the political will of the NATO-governments – because of the ideological fight with the Soviets – forcefully supported the resolution of the Hungarian refugee problem, after the diminishing of the emotional support of the public opinion too (Kecskés, 2005). However, the public opinion was not aware of the secret harmonizing work behind the scenes, in the Chaillot Palace in Paris, the NATO headquarters at the time. The central actor in the fundraising process for the refugees and in the informational activity and media campaign closely related to it appeared to be the United Nations and not NATO.

## **2. The beginning of the humanitarian intervention**

The international legal basis for the UN intervention was created by the General Assembly's resolutions, requiring help for Hungarian refugees. The highest consulting and decision making UN entity had already taken a stand for humanitarian assistance to the Hungarian people in the first days of the refugee crisis, which meant both a support to the Hungarian population and Hungarian refugees. According to the resolution 1006 (ES-II), made on November, 9 in the Second emergency special session, the General Assembly:

Considering that, as a result of the harsh and repressive action of the Soviet armed forces, increasingly large numbers of refugees are being obliged to leave Hungary and to seek asylum in neighbouring countries, (1) Requests the Secretary-General to call upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to consult with other appropriate international agencies and interested Governments with a view to making speedy and effective arrangements for emergency assistance to refugees from Hungary; (2) Urges Member States to make special contributions for this purpose.<sup>6</sup>

Faced with the challenge of a dramatically increasing number of Hungarian refugees, the XIth session of the General Assembly made a new resolution on November, 21 (1129 (XI) resolution) which:

Requests the Secretary-General and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to make an immediate appeal to both Governments and non-governmental organisations to meet the minimum present needs as estimated in the report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to the Secretary-General and authorises them to make subsequent appeals on the basis of plans and estimates made by the High Commissioner...<sup>7</sup>

Through these decisions the international community trusted the Secretary General of the UN, thus his New York Secretariat, and the High Commissioner for Refugees – also subordinated to the Secretary General – with the organisation process of helping Hungarian refugees. The later resolution particularly dealt with the fundraising problem. How was the responsibility divided between the Secretary General, the Secretariat and the Office of the High Commissioner?

The first resolution of the General Assembly condemning the Soviet intervention in Hungary (1004 (ES-II)), accepted on November 4, 1956, deals with the humanitarian aspect of the Hungarian crisis calling upon the Secretary General that:

in consultation with the heads of appropriate specialised agencies to inquire, on an urgent basis, into the needs of the Hungarian people for

---

<sup>6</sup> The 571<sup>st</sup> plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly, 9 November 1956 (resolution 1006 (ES-II)).

<sup>7</sup> The 587<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly, 21 November 1956 (resolution 1129 (XI)).

food, medicine and other similar supplies, and to report to the General Assembly as soon as possible<sup>8</sup>

– the UN Secretariat immediately set to work. On November 4, Dag Hammarskjöld, secretary general, assigned Philippe de Seynes, deputy secretary-general<sup>9</sup> dealing with economic and social affairs, as the person responsible for the execution of the prescriptions for humanitarian aid of the UN resolutions, and called upon James Morgan Read deputy high commissioner for refugees, to consult the appropriate international agencies and the interested governments on the needs of the refugees, and informed him that the member states' special contributions for this purpose would be at his disposal.<sup>10</sup> On November 5, a plan of action was outlined for the practical execution of the mentioned resolution of the UN General Assembly. In this plan, it was asserted that, among the special UN organisations, the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) were in charge of the Hungarian refugee question, and that – in the family of institutes around the UN – the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund and the High Commissioner for Refugees were also interested. Then, it was still Adrian Pelt, the director of the European Office of the United Nations, the one, as the representative of the Secretary-General to immediately begin consultations with the WHO and FAO leaders, and with inter-governmental, and non-governmental organisations, especially with the International Committee of the Red Cross, and the League of the Red Cross Societies.<sup>11</sup> On November 10, de Seynes held a more exclusive consultation, in which – besides those who were competent in the Secretariat – the representatives of various UN specialised agencies, among them, the International Labour Organisation, the United Nations' Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO), the WHO and FAO participated. The deputy secretary-general promised again the urgent contact with the deputy high commissioner for refugees, for the sake of the execution of the UN resolution concerning Hungarian refugees, calling upon him "to assume responsibility

---

<sup>8</sup> The 564<sup>th</sup> plenary meeting of the UN General Assembly, 4 November 1956 (resolution 1004 (ES-II)).

<sup>9</sup> After the death, in July 1956, of the High Commissioner for Refugees, Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart (who was of Dutch origin) the Office of the High Commissioner had been led by the American deputy high commissioner James Morgan Read, as managing director until the Swiss High Commissioner August Rudolph Lindt entered his office in January 1957.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations – Archives and Records Management Section (New York, hereinafter: UNARMS): Question considered by the Second Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly from 4 to 10 November 1956. Interim report of the Secretary-General on refugees from Hungary, A/3371 (19 November 1956). UN-S-445-0198-5.

<sup>11</sup> UNARMS: The Situation in Hungary. Proposals to implement paragraphs 7 and 8 of the resolution contained in A/3286 (5 November 1956). UN-S-445-0197-6.

immediately for co-ordinating emergency assistance to refugees from Hungary”<sup>12</sup>. De Seynes, according to his mandate, gave accounts in regular reports to the Secretary General about the tasks accomplished for the humanitarian aid of the Hungarian people, the first of which was made on November 12, 1956. From this document, we acknowledge the further organisations partaking in the resolution of the Hungarian refugee question, thus about the activities of the Austrian and Yugoslavian governments, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, the United States Escapee Program and the activity of voluntary organisations; the document also indicates that in Austria, “The High Commissioner’s Office in Vienna is serving as a Chairman of a Co-ordinating Committee of all concerned with this operation.” De Seynes also negotiated with national UN-delegations, and reported on the actual situation of the offers of the countries receiving the Hungarians, concerning both the financial contribution and the number of refugees to be received.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the French origin deputy secretary-general, leading the economic and social department of the UN Secretariate, was one of the key actors in the matter of aid for Hungarians, who, accordingly, held the title of “Under-Secretary for Relief to the Hungarian People”. On the other hand, Hammarskjöld, the Secretary General, appointed by the General Assembly as the main responsible leader, only seldom appeared in public, exclusively on some “unavoidable” protocol events relating to the Hungarian refugee question. For example, he handed over to the representative of the Austrian government a cheque of 500,000 dollars on November 14, 1956 and about 300 thousand dollars to the UNHCR on November 19.<sup>14</sup> The explanation for this was rather simple: in the autumn of 1956, two turbulent crises shook the international scene: the Hungarian events and the Suez War, involving Egypt, Israel, Great Britain and France, and the Secretary General unanimously concentrated his attention on the Near Eastern crisis. He supposed that if he had exerted forceful activity in the Hungarian question, which was politically insoluble, because of the weight of interests of the Soviet superpower, the chances of his successful action in the Egyptian case would have been reduced<sup>15</sup>. Hammarskjöld ordered

---

<sup>12</sup> UNARMS: Relief for the Hungarian People. Note on meeting held on Saturday, 10 November 1956, 11 a. m. UN-S-445-0197-1.

<sup>13</sup> UNARMS: Note of Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for economic and Social Affairs, United Nations (further abbreviated as UN), New York to Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General, UN., New York, The situation in Hungary (12 November 1956). UN-S-445-0199-11.

<sup>14</sup> UNARMS: Question considered by the Second emergency Special Session of the general Assembly from 4 to 10 November, 1956. Interim report of the Secretary-general on refugees from Hungary, A/3371 (19 November 1956). UN-S-445-0198-5.

<sup>15</sup> National Library of Sweden (Stockholm, hereinafter: NLS): Outgoing code message from Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary General, UN. (in Cairo actually) to Andrew Cordier,

the accountancy of the Secretariate, that all the payments of the account opened for the humanitarian aid of the Hungarian people should be directed by de Seynes, whom the accountancy had to inform in daily reports regarding the financial contributions and the promised donations<sup>16</sup>.

As we have seen, the competence of the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees had already been referred to in the resolutions of the General Assembly. The legitimating role of this document was shown by the fact that, on the first coordination meeting of the organisations interested in the aid for Hungarian refugees, held in Geneva on November 13, 1956, James Read deputy High Commissioner began the collective work by the reading of just this document<sup>17</sup>. The legal background of the role of the High Commissioner for Refugees and the United Nations' Refugee Fund was examined also by the General Legal Department of the United Nations Secretariat: they found that the UNHCR mandate – following from the statute of the Office too – really extended to the Hungarian refugees case. The Office had the legal authority to provide legal defence for the refugees and to promote their settlement and to help the coordination of non-governmental organisations' efforts in the interest of the provision of the refugees. The Office also had the right to administer the financial means provided for the refugees, distributing them among the humanitarian organisations<sup>18</sup>. According to the Statute, the Office also had the right to make diplomatic steps for the practical promotion of the humanitarian activity, to work for the improvements of the refugees' life conditions – for example, their housing, to control the voluntary character of their repatriation, to urge the legal provisions regarding the international free travel of refugees, and to bring their legal status and situation on the labour market closer to the one of the citizens of the receiving states, until the acquisition of the citizenship (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 1957). Thus, a part of the “classical”

---

Assistant Secretary General, UN, New York, UNEF-4 (16 20Z), restricted (16. nov., 1956). Dag Hammarskjölds samling [Collection], Hungary, 1956-1957 (chronologic), 1 November 1956 – 31 January 1957.

<sup>16</sup> NLS: Interoffice memorandum from Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General, UN, New York to William McCaw, Acting Controller, UN, New York, The situation in Hungary (13 November 1956). Dag Hammarskjölds samling, Hungary, 1956-1957 (chronologic), 1 November 1956 – 31 January 1957.

<sup>17</sup> Archives of the International Committee of the Red Cross (Geneva, hereinafter: AICRC): Notes sur la réunion convoquée par le Haut Commissariat pour les Réfugiés à Genève le 13 novembre 1956 à 11 heures (18 November 1956) B AG 234 094 001.

<sup>18</sup> UNARMS: Note from Oscar Schachter, Director of the General Legal Division, UN, New York to Ralph Townlay, Special assistant to the Under-Secretary, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, UN, New York, Role of High Commissioner for Refugees and UNREF with respect to refugees from Hungary (15 November 1956). UN-S-445-0197-4.

sphere of action was the search for long-term solutions: that is, the transportation of refugees from the first asylum states, the repatriation and integration into the local communities. The Geneva-based international organisation had possibilities to practice all these functions in the course of the Hungarian refugee question resolution.

Although the Secretariat, one of the main UN entities stands higher in rank than the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, and the resolutions of the General Assembly also refer unanimously to the subordination to the Secretary General, tensions about the scope of authority emerged between the two institutions from the first days: we read in a letter of the Secretariat, qualified as strictly confidential:

With regard to the refugee problem, we are up against difficulties of a jurisdictional character vis-à-vis the UNHCR's Office which must be resolved without further delay. It is our conception that the resolutions of the General Assembly dealing with the Hungarian refugee problem place special responsibilities on the Secretary General. While the Secretary-General has called on the UNHCR to co-ordinate activities with respect to emergency assistance to refugees, this does not mean that the Secretary General has abrogated his entire responsibility by turning over the UNHCR all of the action contemplated under the General Assembly resolution. It is at this point that we are not in agreement with the UNHCR, since the letter is of the opinion that the entire responsibility is his and that, for example, any money received by the Secretary General for assistance to refugees (whether for care or for resettlement) should be turned over to the UNHCR forthwith without any discussion of the purposes for which it is to be used<sup>19</sup>.

Although, as we will see, differences emerged between the Secretariat and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees later too, the fundraising related to the Hungarian refugees was dominated by the intent of cooperation and not by conflict.

The provision and transportation to the countries of their final settlements of the refugees in Austria, which reached tens of thousands and more, made necessary the collection of huge amounts of money. On November 5, 1956, Austrian government turned with an urgent call for help to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, asking that other states receive temporarily as many refugees as possible, and offer financial help to the provision of the refugees residing in Austria, too. The UNHCR immediately transmitted the

---

<sup>19</sup> UNARMS: Letter from Myer Cohen, Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York to Pierre Obez, Liaison Officer, Technical Assistance Board, UN, Geneva, Strictly confidential (17 November 1956). UN-S-445-0197-3.



Austrian request to the member governments of the Executive Committee of the UNREF and to other states showing interest in the refugee question.<sup>20</sup> That the problem of Hungarian refugees was something of a shock is indicated by the fact that the number of refugees arrived in Austria during the 1952-55 period was about 2000 people annually and, in 1956, it reached – besides those who arrived after November – about 5000 (UNHCR, 1957). Nevertheless, Austria, considering its size and population, took care of an important number of refugees before the arrival of the Hungarian wave of refugees following the oppression of the revolution: on November 1, 1956, there were about 114,000 refugees under the mandate of the UNHCR, of whom, according to estimations, about 20,000 lived in camps<sup>21</sup>.

The financial possibilities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, established in the framework of the UN in 1951, were considerably limited by the fact that the most financially powerful sponsor of the international refugee care system, the United States of America, strived to force it into a marginal role. The Americans treated the UNHCR in a hostile manner because – contrary to the IRO – they could not hold it under their total control. It was not their candidate who was elected the leader of the organisation. Furthermore, those who were placed under the authority of the Office of the High Commissioner, were the “hard core” of the refugees, those people who became displaced persons as a consequence of the Second World War, and whose settlement – owing to old age, illness or the little demand for their occupation – was the most difficult task. On the other hand, Washington was mostly interested in those categories of refugees who emigrated from the communist countries and who were thus available for the purposes of the emerging Cold War propaganda (Loescher, 2001). Although in 1954, a détente in the relation between the UNHCR and the American State Department began, the relationship became settled only at the time of the Hungarian refugee crisis, especially after the Swiss August Rudolph Lindt was elected to High Commissioner in December 1956<sup>22</sup>.

---

<sup>20</sup> UNARMS: Question considered by the Second Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly from 4 to 10 November 1956. Interim report of the Secretary-General on refugees from Hungary, A/3371 (19 November 1956). UN-S-445-0198-5.

<sup>21</sup> UNARMS: Report submitted by the High Commissioner, The problem of Hungarian refugees in Austria. An assessment of the needs and recommendations for future action, UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth Session, A/AC. 79/49. (17 January 1957). UN-S-445-0199-11.

<sup>22</sup> UNHCR Archives (Geneva, hereinafter: UNHCRA): Transcript of the Interview of August R. Lindt, by Bryan Deschamp, 4. February 1998, Sound Recording, UNHCR Oral History Project, Fonds 36, Records of the Archives. 7. Lindt forcefully sought to eliminate the tensions between the UNHCR and the Americans.

Besides the tension between the huge, expanded Austrian mass of Hungarian refugees and the insignificantly small financial means momentarily available for their provision, there were two further factors, which urged the fast collection of new financial resources. On the one hand, those who made the decisions in the refugee problem were afraid that the Western public opinion's enthusiasm in receiving Hungarian refugees would peter out in a few months and that governments' support would thus be reduced even before the resolution of the Hungarian refugee crisis. James Read, deputy high commissioner for the refugees, drew the attention to this danger on November 13, 1956, emphasising the importance of the quick transportation of refugees from Austria: "He feared that once the impetus given to world sympathy was lost, the acceptance of refugees might become a slow labour selection scheme"<sup>23</sup>. As seen above, one of the main factors which contributed to the fast Western reactions was that the population emotionally identified to a great extent with the Hungarian case. Beginning in 1957, the public opinion's falling interest in the Hungarian question actually went hand in hand with the governments' weakening inclination to donate<sup>24</sup>. Thus, it came as no surprise that, in January 1957, on the session of Standing Programme Sub-Committee of the UNREF Executive Committee, some governments began to forcefully urge the exact assessment of the voluntary organisations' offers before the publishing of the new call for donations<sup>25</sup>. From that moment on, the states' willingness to receive refugees also diminished. Those who were competent in the refugee question also worried about the danger that Hungarian refugees might despair if the final resolution of their fate lasted for too long, and they would be forced to spend a long time in the hard camp conditions. Charles H. Jordan, who interceded on behalf of the Standing Conference of Voluntary Agencies Working for Refugees, expounded

---

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Office at Geneva, Archives (Geneva, hereinafter: UNOGA): Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Summary record of the Co-ordination Meeting on the Question of Refugees from Hungary, between Governmental and Intergovernmental Organizations and Voluntary Agencies working for Refugees, held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 13 November 1956, restricted (21 November 1956). G. I. 30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures, Refugees), Jacket n°1 (29 October – 14 December, 1956).

<sup>24</sup> UNOGA: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Co-ordination Committee for Assistance to Refugees from Hungary, Summary record of the ninth meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 6 May 1957, HCR/SVA/SR.9, restricted (10 May 1957). G. I. 30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures, Refugees), Jacket n° 2 (11 January – 11 November 1957).

<sup>25</sup> UNARMS: United Nations Refugee Fund, Executive Committee, Standing Programme Sub-Committee, Fourth Session, Provisional summary record of the seventy-second (?) meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 25 January 1957, restricted. UN-S-445-0199-11.

on the meeting of the Co-ordinating Sub-Committee on the Question of Refugees from Hungary on November 20, 1956: "The refugees must not be allowed to become disillusioned with the West; and the whole world must be called upon to help if necessary"<sup>26</sup>. The once confidential NATO documents, originated in the spring of 1957 examined this challenge from the point of view of the struggle on the ideological front of the Cold War. They emphasise the danger enabled by the political and psychological failure of the West if these refugees massively returned to Hungary as a consequence of their difficult situation<sup>27</sup>. Lindt, the High Commissioner for Refugees, argued in favour of closing the Hungarian question by the end of 1957, therefore, for a very fast settling as compared to earlier solutions, concluding that the integration of the refugees, who became indifferent and in their morals shattered from the long camp life, would have required much more money than an immediate solution.

### 3. The fundraising process and its results

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, sent as early as November 5 its first summon to the states, thus transmitting the Austrian government's request. And on November 29, according to the resolution of the General Assembly on November 21, the secretary general and the High Commissioner for Refugees published a common summon with a projected 10 million dollars amount. Further, they urged governments to make offers for admitting Hungarian refugees to their countries<sup>28</sup>. Many times, the UNHCR called upon governments to accelerate the process of receiving the refugees<sup>29</sup>.

---

<sup>26</sup> UNARMS: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Co-ordinating Sub-Committee on the Question of Refugees from Hungary, Summary record of the first meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 20 November 1956, restricted (21 November 1956). UN-S-445-0198-5.

<sup>27</sup> NA: Avant-projet de rapport du Comité politique sur les réfugiés hongrois. AC/119-WP/22 (2 March 1957). The leaders of the Office of the High Commissioner also were afraid from the frustration of the earlier refugees: some of them waited for visa for eight years, while the Hungarian refugees got it almost immediately. See: UNARMS: United Nations Refugee Fund, Executive Committee, Standing Programme Sub-Committee, Fourth Session, Provisional summary record of the eighteenth (?) meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 25 January 1957, restricted (25 January 1957). UN-S-445-0199-11.

<sup>28</sup> UNARMS: UN Press Release SG/567. Secretary General and High Commissioner for refugees make further appeal to assistance to Hungarian refugees (12 March 1956). UN-S-445-0195-8.

<sup>29</sup> UNOGA: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Coordinating Sub-Committee for Assistance to Refugees from Hungary, Summary record of the second meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 28 November,

On November 29, a document signed by Philippe de Seynes, as a representative of the UN Secretariat, and by James Read, as a representative of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees turned to NGOs in order to protect the interest of Hungarian refugees<sup>30</sup>. As a result, according to the press statement of the Secretariat published by the UN, donations of 6,926,767 dollars (including gifts) arrived until March 1, 1957. A further amount of 415,615 dollars was transmitted directly to the Austrian government. Thus the total donations reached 7,342,382 dollars, out of which 6,647,143 dollars were sourced by governments and 695,239 dollars by non-governmental organisations. This financial support was partly provided to the Office of the High Commissioner, and partly transferred directly to Austria for urgent aid, housing, and provision of Hungarian refugees. The donations above did not include the national and international voluntary organisations' contribution or that of private persons (food, medical care and other forms of support), and excluded the donations made through the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration or in any other way for the transportation of the refugees.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, according to the UNHCR calculations, in January 1957, 26,347,000 dollars were still missing from the amount for the provision of Hungarian refugees necessary until the end of 1957.<sup>32</sup> Seeing the fast increase in the Hungarian refugees' number in Yugoslavia, on January 14, 1957, the High Commissioner published a new summon in which he called upon many European and overseas governments to receive Hungarian refugees from Yugoslavia. After thorough calculations, on the March 11, 1957, the second joint summon of the UN Secretary General and the High Commissioner was issued: they requested 23,153,425 dollars to ensure the provision of the refugees in Austria and Yugoslavia. At the time, there were still 53,349 Hungarian refugees in Austria and 15,874 in Yugoslavia<sup>33</sup>. Although not

---

1956, HCR/SVA/SC/SR. 2, restricted (29 November 1956). G. I. 30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures, Refugees) Jacket no<sup>o</sup> 1 (29 October – 14 December 1956).

<sup>30</sup> UNARMS: Letter from Myer Cohen, Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York to Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs. Under-Secretary for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN., New York (7 December 1956). UN-S-445-0195-7.

<sup>31</sup> UNARMS: UN press Release SG/567. Secretary General and High Commissioner for refugees make further appeal to assistance to Hungarian refugees (12 March, 1957). UN-S-445-0195-8. See above the data about the success of the admission of the Hungarian refugees.

<sup>32</sup> UNARMS: Report submitted by the High Commissioner, The problem of Hungarian refugees in Austria. An assessment of the needs and recommendations for future action, UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth Session, A/AC. 79/49 (17 January 1957). UN-S-445-0199-11.

<sup>33</sup> UNARMS: UN Press Release SG/566. Secretary-General and High Commissioner for refugees make further appeal to assistance to Hungarian refugees (12 March 1957). UN-S-445-0195-8.

as generous as in the beginning, some of the summoned governments responded. Out of the few official answers arrived until April 10, the American and the Dutch offers were prominent: the United States promised 3 million dollars, out of which 2 million dollars were assigned for the transportation of 10,000 Hungarian refugees from Yugoslavia, and 1 million for the emigration of 5,000 refugees living in other countries. Holland subscribed 3.5 million (according to other sources, 2.7 million<sup>34</sup>) dollars for similar purposes<sup>35</sup>.

The UN-organisms' appeals to collect financial donations and to receive refugees were characterised by three factors: they gave a response to the requests for help coming from the first asylum countries, they emphasised the "principle of the sharing of the burdens", accepted by the whole international community, and they were based on the precise calculations and estimations of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees.

Faced with the Hungarian refugee crisis, both the Austrian and Yugoslavian governments turned to the UN and the international community for support. Vienna formally appealed to the UNCHR and ICEM as early as November 5, in order to ask for immediate help from their member governments, i.e., to temporarily accept as many refugees as possible and to offer Austria financial support (Cseresnyés, 2007). The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees immediately transmitted the request to the member countries of the UNREF Executive Committee and to many other countries who showed interest in resolving the refugee problem.<sup>36</sup> Through its UN representative in New York, the Austrian government announced the most necessary forms of international aid for their country. On November 15, 1956, Franz Matsch, ambassador, sent a letter and a memo to Philippe de Seynes, the responsible for Hungarians' humanitarian aid. The Austrian demanded the admittance of Hungarians without selection, financial help and gifts in kind alike<sup>37</sup>. And the Austrian diplomat required in his November 26 letter that European countries immediately send trains directly to the Austrian-Hungarian

---

<sup>34</sup> UNARMS: UN Press Release REF/122. High Commissioner's Office reviews Hungarian refugee situation (11 April 1957). UN-S-445-0195-8.

<sup>35</sup> UNARMS: Interoffice memorandum from K. W. Taylor, UN, New York to Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, Under-Secretary for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York, Hungarian relief (10 April 1957). UN-S-445-0200-1.

<sup>36</sup> UNARMS: Question considered by the Second Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly from 4 to 10 November 1956. Interim report of the Secretary-General on refugees from Hungary, A/3371 (19 November 1956). UN-S-445-0198-5.

<sup>37</sup> UNARMS: Letter from Franz Matsch, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations to Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, Under-Secretary for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York and aide-mémoire (15 November 1956). UN-S-445-0199-3.

border to ensure the immediate transport of the refugees abroad. Furthermore, he proposed to create receiving centres and camps in other European countries, too.<sup>38</sup> Despite the considerable amount of aid provided to the Austrian government, the UNCHR investigation in January 1957 asserted that most of the financial burden implied by the Hungarian refugees' reception was taken on by the Austrian government,<sup>39</sup> irrespective of the fact that significant financial support had resulted from international cooperation. According to estimations, 4,209,050 dollars were delivered into the accounts established by the Austrian government for the help of Hungarian refugees. This amount did not include the money (about 384,610 dollars) that the Austrian government contributed with. From the foreign contribution, 3,100,540 dollars came through the UN institutional system<sup>40</sup>.

Seeing the significant increase in the number of Hungarian refugees, the Yugoslav authorities also decided to ask for international help. On December 21, they informed the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees regarding this issue. After the number of Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia had reached 1227 by December 26, two days later the Yugoslavian government declared his willingness to receive the representative of the UNHCR, in order to make it possible for the world organisation to acquire direct information regarding the needs of the refugees (UNHCR, 1957). Jože Brilej, Yugoslav UN-delegate, handed over a „Memo” to the UNHCR representative in New York, regarding Yugoslavia's demands concerning the treatment of the Hungarian refugee question: the Yugoslavs mainly required financial aid and the reception of the refugees wanting to emigrate.<sup>41</sup> Beginning in January 1956, since it was more and more difficult to go to Austria, an important increase in the number of Hungarian refugees was registered in Yugoslavia. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees report, based on Yugoslav sources, the Belgrade government spent 529,214 dollars on the Hungarian refugee problem

---

<sup>38</sup> UNARMS: Letter from Franz Matsch, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations to the UN Secretary-General, to the attention of Philippe de Saynes, and note entitled Situation of Hungarian Refugees in Austria as of 26 November 1956 (26 November 1956). UN-S-445-0199-3.

<sup>39</sup> UNARMS: Report submitted by the High Commissioner, The problem of Hungarian refugees in Austria, An assesment of the needs and recommendations for future action. UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth Session, A/AC. 79/49. (17 January 1957). UN-S-445-0199-11.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> UNARMS: Interoffice memorandum from Aline Cohn, Representative of the UNHCR to Philippe de Saynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, Under-Secretary for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York, Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia, and Pro Memoria On the Question of Hungarian Refugees in Yugoslavia (31 December 1956). UN-S-445-0199-4.

until January 15, 1957. The editors of this document estimated the average number of refugees between January 15 and June 30, 1957 to 22,000, and were of the opinion that the cash amount necessary for their provision reached 12,803,640 dollars<sup>42</sup>. Despite the fact that up to that point, Communist states displayed a rather hostile attitude towards the refugee care organisation, High Commissioner Lindt wanted to assist Yugoslavia. He believed his mandate was of a humanitarian nature, and he did not mention anything about the political character of the states to be helped.<sup>43</sup> Visiting Yugoslavia, Lindt had a long negotiation with Josip Broz Tito, the Secretary General of the League of Communists of Yugoslavia and president of the Republic. The Yugoslavs had two conditions: firstly, the refugees had to leave the country for a while [within some months for example], and secondly, they made a claim for the repayment of the money spent on the refugees. Lindt answered that he could not make any promise regarding the latter issue, but that he would do everything for the case<sup>44</sup>.

In the course of later developments, both Austria and Yugoslavia intervened in the most resolute manner for financial compensation. Oskar Helmer, Austrian Minister of the Interior, expounded on the fourth session of the Executive Committee of the UN Refugee Fund, held between January 29 and February 4, 1957, that “all freedom-loving countries should accept Hungarian refugees from Austria on a quota system and that funds should immediately be raised to reimburse Austria for her care and maintenance costs on the same quota basis.” (UNHCR, 1957) Moreover, in the Standing Programme Sub-Committee of the organisation, the Austrian representative had emphasised some days earlier, that:

only the prompt and generous assistance of the governments and people of interested countries... had enabled Austria to withstand an economic catastrophe... Austria had, in fact, born over 40 per cent of the burden imposed by the influx of refugees and the rest of the free world had assumed less than 60 per cent.

which, according to him, was an “unbalanced situation which contained serious political dangers for the future in view of Austria’s geographical situation”.<sup>45</sup>

---

<sup>42</sup> UNARMS: Report submitted by the High Commissioner. The problem of Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia. An assesment of the needs and recommendations for future action, UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth Session, A/AC. 79/54. (30 January 1957). UN-S-445-0199-11.

<sup>43</sup> UNHCRA: Transcript of the interview of August R. Lindt by Bryan Deschamp, 4. February 1998. Sound Recording, UNHCR Oral History Project, Fonds 36, Record of the Archives. 10, 12.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>45</sup> UNOGA: United Nations General Assembly, UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth Session, Standing Programme Sub-Committee, Fourth Session, Report on the Fourth

The Yugoslav government also expressed forcefully its financial demands. On March 17, 1957, Brilej, the permanent representative of Yugoslavia to the UN, turned with a letter and a memo to the UN Secretary General. He asked resolutely to have the costs spent on the refugees compensated to Yugoslavia. According to the well-documented Yugoslav statistics, the state spent 2,269,530 dollars for the provision of Hungarian refugees until March 1, 1957. We read in the document that the government had to borrow three billion dinar from the Yugoslav National bank and to pay a 6% interest. They wanted to repay the loan from the compensations from abroad<sup>46</sup>. The Yugoslav observer, Anton Kacjan, who took part in the seventh session of the Executive Committee of the UNREF in January 1958, strongly indicated again his government's request to repay the expenses: "The expenditures of the Yugoslav government mount to 7,686,694 dollars, while hitherto only 1,035,664 dollars have been repaid" – he said. The Yugoslav diplomat further emphasised that his government could not bear this heavy burden without effective international help. He hoped that the international community "will do everything to eliminate this injustice"<sup>47</sup>. Both the apparatuses of the UN organisms and the governments interested in helping the refugees admitted that Austria and Yugoslavia accepted a huge burden considering their size and economic possibilities. This particular aspect turned out to be one of the most important arguments for the later appeals to donate.

In the Hungarian case, the fair distribution of the refugees' admittance costs became a basic principle of the international help. The resolution, unanimously agreed on February 1, 1957 on the fourth session of the UNREF Executive Committee, stipulated:

The fate of the Hungarian refugees constitutes a challenge to the conscience of humanity, ...1. Declares that the care of the refugees is a burden to be shared by the whole world in accordance with the capacities of the respective countries... 2. Supports the appeals made by the High

---

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 n° 2 (11 January – 11 November 1957).

<sup>46</sup> UNARMS: Letter from Joza Brilej, Permanent Representative of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia to the United Nations to Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General, UN., New York and aide-mémoire (14 March 1957). UN-S-445-0199-4.

<sup>47</sup> AICRC: Service de l'information. Office européen des Nations Unies à Genève, communiqué de Presse No REF/402, Septième session du Comité exécutif de l'UNREF, Séance de l'après-midi, lundi 13 janvier 1958. B AG 234 094 001.



Commissioner for Refugees in order that countries of first asylum be enabled to meet the costs of the Hungarian refugee problem<sup>48</sup>.

The UN organisations' appeals for help in the Hungarian refugees' matter were based on the thorough, internationally accepted calculations of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees. According to the resolutions of the General Assembly, the UNHCR assessed the refugees' needs, made precise statistics about them and sent reports to the General Assembly and other concerned organisations. Thus, for example, the Office described – in accordance with the resolution 1039(XI) accepted on January 23, 1957<sup>49</sup> – in a detailed way the needs of the Hungarian refugees residing in Austria and Yugoslavia (UNHCR, 1957). In the case of Austria, they approximated that, in the first six months of 1957, there were about 70,000 Hungarian refugees on the realm of the country, and in the second half of the year – based on the predictions of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration – they reckoned about 35,000 persons<sup>50</sup>. The UNHCR proposals elaborated for resolving the Yugoslavian situation regarding the Hungarian refugees also included estimations which proved to be correct<sup>51</sup>. Besides for the support of fundraising appeals, the data collections of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees were used for the elaboration of the part related to the Hungarian refugees' helping process in the Secretary General's annual report<sup>52</sup>.

---

<sup>48</sup> UNARMS: United Nations Refugee Fund, Executive Committee, Fourth Session, Resolution no. 4 on the problem of Hungarian refugees adopted at the 33rd meeting on 1 February 1957, general (7 February 1957). UN-S-445-0199-11.

<sup>49</sup> The 4<sup>th</sup> clause of the resolution of the General Assembly reads: "Requests the High Commissioner, in consultation with the Secretary-General and with the Government concerned, to develop a comprehensive assesment of the needs, both material and financial, of the Hungarian refugees, to be submitted to the United Nations Refugee Fond Executive Committee for its approval at the earliest possible date". 1039 (XI.) Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. A, 643<sup>rd</sup> plenary meeting, 23 January 1957.

<sup>50</sup> UNOGA: United Nations General Assembly, UNREF Executive Committte, 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).

<sup>51</sup> UNARMS: Report submitted by the High Commissioner, The problem of Hungarian refugees in Jugoslavia. An assesment of the needs and recommendations for future action, UNREF Executvie Committee, Fourth Session, A/AC. 79/54 (30 January 1957). UN-S-445-0199-11.

<sup>52</sup> UNARMS: Referral sheet from K. W. Taylor, UN, New York to Ralph Townley, UN, New York, Annual Report of the Secretary General: Humanitarian assistance to the Hungarian people (30 April 1957). UN-S-445-200-1.

Among the organisations of the UN family, besides the institutional system of the Secretariat and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, the World Federation of United Nations Association (WFUNA) displayed more intensive activity in fundraising for Hungarian refugees. The organisation, which had been a supporter of international aid for refugees in earlier times too, proved to be especially active in the case of Hungarian emigrants in 1956, as well. In general, the World Federation and its member organisations did not have experience in the collection of donations and in the field of refugee care; therefore, the centre proposed the cooperation between member organisations and other NGOs, which were better prepared for these tasks by publishing appeals for donations and emphasizing that this was an important way of supporting the UN. Nevertheless, the UN Association of Great Britain and Northern Ireland donated 35,000 pounds for the urgent help of Hungarian refugees in Austria. From this amount, 20,000 pounds were collected through the summons of the *News Chronicle* and 15,000 pounds through the special Hungary-appeal of the UN Associations<sup>53</sup>. There were similar actions in other countries. Lobbying was also attempted in order to increase the willingness of individual states to receive the refugees. The Austrian UN Association made an appeal to the other associations to call Hungarian immigrants to their countries, and to help their settlement by providing dwelling-places. And the World Federation proposed its member organisations to urge their governments to admit as many refugees as possible<sup>54</sup>. The organisation later took part in the spreading of a documentary film about Hungarian refugees, made for the purpose of collecting donations<sup>55</sup>.

The UN Secretariat in New York and the Centre of the United Nations' Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva cooperated closely in dealing with the financial means received for the Hungarian case. As early as November 29, 1956, on the day of the publishing of the first common appeal of the UN Secretary General and the High Commissioner for the Refugees, Philippe de Seynes consulted with James Read, the deputy of the High Commissioner for Refugees. They made an agreement that the contributions for the Hungarian refugees, sent to the Secretary General would be immediately transferred to the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, which would

---

<sup>53</sup> UNARMS: Press Release REF/99. High Commissioner's London Office Announces Contributions for relief of Hungarian refugees (22 November 1956). UN-S-445-0195-8.

<sup>54</sup> UNARMS: World Federation of United Nations Association. Aid for Refugees from Hungary, HCR/SVA/SR.2, Annex 15. UN-S-445-0198-5.

<sup>55</sup> UNOGA: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Co-ordination Committee for Assistance to Refugees from Hungary, Summary record of the fifth meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 19 February 1957, restricted (21 February 1957). G. I. 30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures Refugees). Jacket no. 2 (11 January – 11 November 1957).

transfer them further, according to the needs and to the principles established by the Executive Committee of the UNREF. According to the agreement, confirmed by a memo on the following day, the High Commissioner was obliged to give account to the Secretary General on the spending of the amounts arrived to him through the Secretary General. The office of the Secretary General took upon itself to inform regularly, on a weekly basis, the UNHCR about the contributions arrived for the purpose of helping the Hungarian refugees. The agreement also set out that the High Commissioner for Refugees would send his syllabus about the material and financial needs to the Secretary General for opinion before submitting it to the UNREF Executive Committee.<sup>56</sup> A really vivid communication process developed between New York and Geneva. Thus, for example on December 4, Read, the deputy High Commissioner, asked De Seynes to urgently send 100,000 dollars to the account of the UNHCR, the remnant of the contribution of the USA: because the Office of the High Commissioner wanted to send this amount to the Austrian government, for the support of the provision of the refugees in December<sup>57</sup>. However, de Seynes informed Read in his letter of December 6, 1956, that he would leave 50,000 dollars at the disposal of the Secretary General with regard to a possible unforeseeable case of emergency and would immediately send only 50,000 dollars (and later 15,000 English pounds)<sup>58</sup>. In February 1957, the UN representative of the Republic of China offered a cheque of 30,000 dollars, collected from private contributions, which was – after its deposition – transferred to the no. 2 account of the UNREF<sup>59</sup>. But smaller amounts also

---

<sup>56</sup> UNARMS: Letter from James Read, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees to Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, Under-Secretary for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York (30 November 1956). UN-S-445-0199-8.

<sup>57</sup> UNARMS: Letter from James Read, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees to Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, Under-Secretary for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN., New York (4 December 1956). UN-S-445-0199-8. However, de Seynes informed Read in his letter on December 6, 1956, that he would reserve 50,000 dollars.

<sup>58</sup> UNARMS: Letter from Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, Under-Secretary for Relief in the Hungarian People, UN, New York to James Read, Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees (6 December 1956). UN-S-445-0199-8.

<sup>59</sup> UNARMS: Note from Myer Cohen, Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York to William McCaw, Deputy Controller, UN, New York, Cheque for \$ 30 000 for assistance to Hungarian refugees (12 February 1957). UN-S-445-0199-8.

played an important role: for example, 5000 dollars were sent at the beginning of March 1957<sup>60</sup>.

The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees played a central role not only in the refugees' needs' assessment, but also in the utilisation of the collected financial means. The General Assembly of the UN urged in its resolution that governments and non-governmental organisations coordinate their aid programmes by consulting with the Office of the High Commissioner, and hoped that this proposal would be accepted in the case of donations based on bi-lateral agreements. On the mentioned fourth session of the Executive Committee of the UNREF, held at the end of January and the beginning of February 1957, it was accepted that the donations arriving to Hungarian refugees should be used to help both Austria and Yugoslavia and the financial means distribution was entrusted to the High Commissioner. This, "of course" only applied to the donations not expressly aimed at and labelled for Austria or Yugoslavia.<sup>61</sup> The role of the UNHCR in coordinating the financial means was illustrated by the fact that it could make proposals regarding the priorities in the use of the amounts received after the repeated appeals for money: UNHCR proposed this two decisions. After his election, Lind had a talk to the Austrian government, and handed over the official letter about the 2 million dollars aid sent to Austria through the UNHCR<sup>62</sup>.

Besides the close cooperation, some differences burdened the relationship between the UN Secretariat and the UNHCR: namely, the question of the the distribution of money for the humanitarian aid for Hungarian people between the two designed aimed groups: the population in Hungary and Hungarian refugees. The Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees rather prioritised the latter, while the New York centre, partly with the aim of restoring balance, the former. On December 3, 1956, an inter-office memorandum was prepared in the UN Secretariat for the conceptual clarification of the question in order to obviate confusion in communication. They proposed that the new report of the Secretary

---

<sup>60</sup> UNARMS: Note from Myer Cohen, Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York to William McCaw, Deputy Controller, UN, New York, United Nations Fund for assistance to Hungarian refugees (4 March 1957). UN-S-445-0199-8.

<sup>61</sup> UNARMS: UN Press Release SG/567. Secretary-General and High Commissioner for refugees make further appeal to assistance to Hungarian refugees (12 March 1957). UN-S-445-0195-8.

<sup>62</sup> NLS: United Nations, Department of Public Information, Press and Publication Division, UN, New York (for use of information media – not an official record), Press Release REF/102, UN High Commissioner arrives in Vienna. Informs government of \$ 2, 000, 000 Contribution for Hungarian Refugee Relief (The following was received here from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Geneva) (20 December 1956), Dag Hammarskjöld samling, Hungary, 1956-1957 (chronologic.) 1 November 1956 – 31 January 1957.

General to be prepared for the General Assembly should indicate clearly the demarcation line between the two issues<sup>63</sup>. The report of the Secretary general on December 12 began with this topic indeed: „In the resolutions recently adopted by the General Assembly with regard to humanitarian activities to assist the Hungarian people, two distinct types of assistance were envisaged, namely (a) assistance to refugees from Hungary; and (b) relief to the Hungarian people in Hungary”<sup>64</sup>. On December 5, 1956, in the presence of deputy High Commissioner Read, a conference was held in the Secretariat, under the chairmanship of Myer Cohen, the director of the department of the UN Secretariat, trusted with the coordination of the relief of the Hungarian people. In the course of this discussion, the participants decided to concentrate the resources for the appeals in the interests of the refugees, until they had no further information about the need for help in Hungary.<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, the differences prevailed. Cohen wished to publish a common appeal regarding the demands of humanitarian aid, saying that “most donors can not or do not wish to draw a distinction between the types of help to be offered to the Hungarian people.” He was further of the opinion that the press campaign organised by the UN would be more effective in this way. The UNHCR argued for a distinct appeal.<sup>66</sup> Pierre Obez, the liaison officer working for the European Office of the UN, who kept in touch with the New York Secretariat of the UN regarding the process of helping Hungary, openly wrote in his strictly confidential letter of December 7, on the rivalry concerning the distribution of the donations for Hungarian people:

unless something more drastic is done in terms of fund raising campaigns specifically for U.N. relief in Hungary itself, I doubt very much that we shall be able to do anything substantial to help CICR nor that the needs of the Hungarian people can be met to any adequate extent. | The situation with regard to refugees is entirely different. [...] ... the resources are still such that at least for the two or three monts to come the situation seems to be well in hand. The UNHCR and the League are in a very advantageous

---

<sup>63</sup> UNARMS: Interoffice memorandum from Mary Jeffreys, UN, New York to Myer Cohen, Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York, Report to the General Assembly (3 December 1956). UN-S-445-0200-1.

<sup>64</sup> UNARMS: Question considered by the Second emergency Special Session of the General Assembly from 4 to 10 November 1956, Humanitarian activities to assist the Hungarian people. Interim report of the Secretary-General, A/3443 (12 December 1956). UN-S-445-0200-1.

<sup>65</sup> UNARMS: Note on meeting to consider channeling of contributions from NGOs and fund-raising activities (5 December 1956). UN-S-445-0199-8.

<sup>66</sup> UNARMS: Letter from Myer Cohen, Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York to Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, Under-Secretary for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York (7 December 1956). UN-S-445-0195-7.

position with regard to financial and other resources to be earmarked for refugees because they have permanent delegations in many countries. *It is in the capitals of the countries which are willing to help that the decisions are taken to make funds available and to finally earmark them* [underlined in the original text – GDK] for aiding either refugees or the Hungarian populations. HCR delegates and National Red Cross Societies are well placed to see to it that in those capitals action is taken in favour of their programme. | I am not sure that through the permanent delegations in New York with whom you are dealing any effective results can be obtained with regard to raising funds for relief in Hungary itself or for appropriate earmarking of funds already offered. [...] | I wish to stress again that unless we approach those Governments in their capitals as the HCR and the League of Red Cross Societies can do and are doing quite rightly, it will be difficult to obtain adequate resources for relief in Hungary itself and also to make sure that the earmarking of funds by Governments, or the U.N., is made in a suitable manner, in the light of the resources available for both purposes and the relative importance and dimension of both programmes<sup>67</sup>.

László Hámori, the Hungarian origin official working for the UN Secretariat department for relief asked several donating governments to specify for which of these two purposes they send the contribution. The report of the Secretary General to the UN General Assembly drew attention to the fact that:

to the desirability of maintaining the greatest flexibility in the allocation of funds as between the refugee programme and the programme of relief within Hungary respectively. By contributing through the United Nations, Government will ensure that their contributions for and to the Hungarian people will be allocated in such a way as to reflect sensitively the changing needs of the programmes<sup>68</sup>.

---

<sup>67</sup> UNARMS: Letter from Pierre Obez, Liaison Officer for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN. Geneva to Myer Cohen Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian people, UN. New York, strictly confidential (7 December 1956). UN-S-445-0197-7. The idea of the direct negotiation with the member countries of key importance in the interest of promoting the Hungarian relief was accepted on the UN Secretariat. In this spirit Myer Cohen negotiated in the Washington Department of State in the beginning of January 1957. See UNARMS Interoffice memoranda from Myer Cohen, Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People, UN, New York to Dag Hammarskjöld, Secretary-General, UN, New York, Hungarian relief (4 January 1957). UN-S-445-0197-6

<sup>68</sup> UNARMS: Question considered by the Second emergency Special Session of the General Assembly from 4 to 10 November 1956. Humanitarian activities to assist the Hungarian people. Interim report of the Secretary-General, A/3443 (12 December 1956). UN-S-445-0200-1.

Most member states rather contributed for Hungarian refugees than for the relief in Hungary: according to the summary of the answers sent to the appeal of the Secretary General, only Japan was an exception among the 13 responding countries.<sup>69</sup> The United Kingdom and United States were afraid that the economic aid would strengthen the position of the Hungarian Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government instead of serving humanitarian purposes<sup>70</sup>.

The leaders of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees very successfully applied the techniques of both the public and the "behind-the-scenes" lobbying for the purpose of collecting the amounts of money necessary for the provision of Hungarian refugees. The deputy of the High Commissioner and, after his election, High Commissioner Lindt personally appeared on many international forums dealing with the Hungarian refugee question, among them, the General Assembly of the UN and its Third Committee, responsible for social questions. They strove to acquire new financial support for the relief of Hungarian refugees on the debate of the usual activity of the Office of the High Commissioner<sup>71</sup>. In the sessions of the Executive Committee of the UN Refugee Fund, Lindt not only gave a detailed account on the development of the Hungarian refugee crisis, but – placing the question in the framework of the whole activity of the office – stressed the central importance of the Hungarian question<sup>72</sup>. The newly elected High Commissioner delivered a very effective speech on the session of the Executive Council of the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration too. According to the account of the French delegate, the speaker made a very favourable impression to the audience with his

---

<sup>69</sup> UNARMS: Question considered by the Second Emergency Special Session of the General Assembly from 4 to 10 November 1956. Humanitarian activities to assist the Hungarian people. Note by the Secretary-General. Replies received from 18 December 1956 to 1 January 1957. A/3464, general (10 January 1957). UN-S-445-0200-1.

<sup>70</sup> NA: C- R (57)5 (28 janvier 1957). Procès-verbal de la réunion restreinte du Conseil atlantique tenue au Palais de Chaillot, Paris, le 24 janvier 1957, à 15 heures 30. See also: Diplomatic Archive, Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, Kingdom of Belgium (Brussels): 15097, dossier « Intervention russe... 1956/1957 », Courrier NATO n° 7 (25 janvier 1957). Télégramme d'André de Staercke, représentant permanent de Belgique au Conseil de l'OTAN.

<sup>71</sup> UNOGA: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Co-ordinating Sub-Committee for Assistance to Refugees from Hungary, Summary record of the second meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 28 November 1956, restricted (29 November 1956). G. I. 30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures Refugees), Jacket no. 1 (29 October – 14 December, 1956.).

<sup>72</sup> Report of the UNREF Executive Committee, Fourth session, Geneva, 29 January to 4 February 1957 (UNHCR, 1957).

sincerity and obvious benevolence.<sup>73</sup> The other organisations participating in the coordination committee and sub-committee organizing the aid for Hungarian refugees were informed on the Austrian and Yugoslavian developments mainly by the representatives of the UNHCR<sup>74</sup>. The representative of the High Commissioner in Vienna<sup>75</sup> and Belgrade<sup>76</sup> played a decisive role in both informing the agencies working on the field and in making the local decisions. Lindt acquired an important personal authority as a result of his successful public appearances and the efficient work of the organisation controlled by him<sup>77</sup>. By means of this, he strove to get some messages to the government with great emphasis: thus, in 1957, he still held the solution to the Hungarian question to be very important in, and strongly believed that the impulse coming from the Hungarian case should be employed for the solution of further European refugee problems<sup>78</sup>.

---

<sup>73</sup> Diplomatic Archive Center of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs (La Courneuve, hereinafter: DACMFEA): Rapport de E. de Curton, Représentant permanent de la France auprès de l'Office Européen des Nations Unies, Genève à Christian Pineau, ministre des Affaires étrangères, Direction des Affaires administratives et sociales, Paris Sixième session (spéciale) du Comité exécutif du C. I. M. E., Annexe II.: Comité intergouvernemental pour les migrations européennes, Exposé de M. August Lindt, Haut Commissaire des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés à la quarante-sixième séance du Comité exécutif, le 14 janvier 1957 (22 January 1957). Série: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, carton 301, dossier 7.

<sup>74</sup> UNARMS: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Coordinating Sub-Committee on the Question of the Refugees from Hungary, Summary record of the first meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 20 Novembre 1956, restricted (21 November 1956). UN-S-445-0198-5.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> UNOGA: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Coordinating Committee for Assistance to Refugees from Hungary, Summary record of the seventh meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 27 March 1957, HCR/SVA/SR7, restricted (29 March 1957), G. I. 30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures, Refugees) Jacket no.2 (11 January – 11 November 1957).

<sup>77</sup> For example in the debate of the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly in November 1957 about the report of the High Commissioner and the destiny of the Office of the High Commissioner a great part of the delegates expressed their high esteem towards the activity of the High Commissioner and his Office, and they proposed the prolongation of his mandate with a further five years. See DACMFEA: Rapport de Guillaume Georges-Picot, Ambassadeur et Représentant permanent de la France auprès des Nations Unies, Genève au Ministre des Affaires étrangères, Secrétariat des Conférences, Paris, Assemblée générale – XXe Session – 3ème Commission – Points 30 et 31 (le 15 novembre 1957). Série: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, carton 300, dossier 4.

<sup>78</sup> DACMFEA: Rapport de E. de Curton, Représentant permanent de la France auprès de l'Office Européen des Nations Unies, Genève à Christian Pineau, ministre des Affaires



As we have mentioned above, according to UN sources in Geneva, the UNHCR urged in its confidential discussions that the individual government “in the humanitarian activities to assist the Hungarian people” should rather make donations for the solution of the refugees’ than for the aid within Hungary. In this activity, the UNHCR was supported by its branch office network. Perhaps it could be related to the fact that after a few weeks of the oppression of the Hungarian revolution, “The representative in the United Kingdom of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees announced today that a check for pounds sterling 75,000 has been received this morning from the Lord Mayor of London. This money, which is from the Lord Mayor’s National Hungarian and Central European Relief Fund, is to be used for immediate accommodation of Hungarian refugees who have just arrived in Austria”.<sup>79</sup> The leaders of the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees strove, in the interest of the monetary funds necessary for the functioning of the organisation, to form an intimate relationship between the major powers, primarily with the main sponsor of the international refugee care, the United States of America. Although, as we have mentioned earlier, the warming of the initially cool relationship since 1954 had started, after the sudden death of Gerrit Jan van Heuven Goedhart the Dutch High Commissioner for Refugees in July 1956, the deputy High Commissioner James Read, acting as a managing director, took several actions for building a relationship and cooperation with the USA. He met Tracy S. Voorhees, a member of the staff of the American president responsible for the refugee affairs. At his request, he sent him a memorandum about the situation of Hungarian refugees, especially about Austria’s and other receiving states’ needs. In the document, Read put the main emphasis on the financial support of the Austrian reception of the Hungarians. He ordered the Vienna representative of the UNHCR, Dr. Beermann, to immediately contact the American responsible authorities coming to Vienna<sup>80</sup>. Lindt, immediately after his appointment to High Commissioner, began negotiations with the officials of the American State Department dealing with the question of refugees. They assured him, that “there was no misunderstanding between us”. The new High Commissioner forcefully

---

étrangères, Direction des Affaires administratives et sociales, Paris, Sixième session (spéciale) du Comité exécutif du C. I. M. E., Annexe II: Comité intergouvernemental pour les migrations européennes. Exposé de M. August Lindt, Haut Commissaire des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés à la quarante-sixième séance du Comité exécutif, le 14 janvier 1957 (le 22 janvier 1957). Série: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, carton 301, dossier 7.

<sup>79</sup> UNARMS: Press Release REF/99. High Commissioner’s London Office Announces Contributions for relief of Hungarian refugees (22 November 1956). UN-S-445-0195-8.

<sup>80</sup> UNARMS: Letter from James Read, Deputy High Commissioner for refugees to Tracy S. Voorhees, Special Representative on Refugee Problems. White House, Washington (8 December 1956). UN-S-445-0198-5.

aspired to the elimination of tensions with the Americans<sup>81</sup>. And the responsible authorities in Washington expressed their full support to the activity of the UNHCR through the United States Escapee Programme (USEP). On the 10<sup>th</sup> of January, Hughes, their representative in the coordination committee in Geneva, “wished to assure the High Commissioner of the full co-operation of USEP in the future and was confident that the excellent relations between the two offices would continue”<sup>82</sup>. French diplomatic sources seem to know that, in October 1957, the principles of the American resolution proposal were inspired by Lindt’s Washington negotiations, thus widening the field of action of the High Commissioner for Refugees<sup>83</sup>. The close cooperation further continued within the UN<sup>84</sup>. The American government resources actually had a decisive importance in the elimination of the Hungarian refugee crisis: out of the 6,926,767 dollars collected until March 1, 1957, as a result of the summons of the UN Secretary General and the UNHCR, 6,171,528 came from government resources, out of which 5 million dollars were from the American government<sup>85</sup>.

#### 4. Conclusions

We may conclude that the members of the UN “family of institutions”, especially the Secretariat in New York and the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees based in Geneva, played an important role in the successful Western reception of the large majority of about 200,000 Hungarians leaving

---

<sup>81</sup> UNHCRA: Transcript of the Interview of August R. Lindt by Bryan Deschamp, 4 February 1998, Sound Recording, UNHCR Oral History Project, Fonds 36, Records of the Archives. 7.

<sup>82</sup> UNOGA: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Co-ordination Committee for Assistance to Refugees from Hungary, Summary record of the third meeting held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, 10 January 1957, restricted (15 January 1957). G. I. 30/2 (Situation in Hungary, Relief measures, Refugees), Jacket no. 2 (11 January – 11 November 1957).

<sup>83</sup> DACMFEA: Rapport de Guillaume Georges-Picot, Ambassadeur et Représentant permanent de la France auprès des Nations Unies, Genève au Ministre des Affaires étrangères, Secrétariat des Conférences, Paris, Assemblée générale – XIIe Session – III<sup>ème</sup> (Sic!) Commission – Points 30 et 31 Haut-Commissariat des Nations Unies pour les réfugiés (le 10 octobre 1957). Série: Nations Unies et Organisations Internationales, carton 300, dossier 4.

<sup>84</sup> Nantes Diplomatic Archives Centre (Nantes): Télégramme au départ à chiffrer de la Représentation de la France aux Nations Unies, New York au Ministère des Affaires étrangères, Paris Assemblée générale – XII<sup>ème</sup> session, 3<sup>ème</sup> Commission – Point 30: réfugiés, n° 3282-3286, urgent (5 November 1957). Série: Représentation permanente de la France à l’ONU, New York, carton 113, dossier Réfugiés et apatrides (1954-1966).

<sup>85</sup> UNARMS: UN Press Release SG/567. Secretary-General and High Commissioner for refugees make further appeal to assistance to Hungarian refugees (12 March 1957). UN-S-445-0195-8.

Hungary following the 1956 Revolution. These institutions took part in the collection of money necessary to handle the refugee problem, from its dealing to the organisation of its use alike. The documentation of the international humanitarian action had to be largely accomplished by them. And their complex media campaign to support the UN General Assembly's summons for donations shared the news about the needs of the mass of refugees crowded in Austria and Yugoslavia with the rest of the world.

As we have expounded above, the political will of the NATO countries confronting the Soviet Union played a decisive role in the successful Western reception of Hungarian refugees in 1956. The financial means for resolving the refugee crisis largely originated in governments' resources and primarily in the North Atlantic bloc states. The great importance of governmental contributions could be illustrated by the fact that the costs of the Austrian provision of Hungarian refugees were extensively covered from the amounts paid by individual governments to the UN and other organisations. Although important, the private organisations' offerings were merely accidental as compared to the whole cost<sup>86</sup>.

Nevertheless, the institutional system of the UN – through the coordination of the money-collecting efforts with international legal authorisation (by the resolutions of the UN General Assembly), the professional and reliable documentation of the humanitarian needs and activities, and the excellently organised and arranged media campaign for the support of the fundraising call-ups – all contributed significantly to the formation and successful realisation of the Western governmental will.

## References

- Borbándi, G. (1989), *A magyar emigráció életrajza, 1945-1985* [Biography of the Hungarian emigration, 1945-1985]. Vol. 1. Budapest: Európa.
- Cseresnyés, F. (2007), A nemzetközi menedékjog alkalmazása: Ausztria és az '56-os menekültek, *Múltunk*, No. 1. pp. 169-186.
- Holborn L. W. (1975), *Refugees: A Problem of our Time. The Work of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1951-1972*. Vol. I. Metuchen: N. J. The Scarecrow Press, Inc.
- Kecskés, D.G. (2005), *La diplomatie française et la révolution hongroise de 1956*, Paris–Budapest–Szeged: Publications de l'Institut hongrois de Paris en

---

<sup>86</sup> UNOGA: 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).

- collaboration avec École doctorale Espace Européen Contemporain (EEC) de l'Université Paris III Sorbonne Nouvelle. (série: Dissertationes, vol. III)
- Loescher, G. (2001), *The UNHCR and the World Politics. A Perilous Path*, Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press.
- Puskás J. (1985), Elvándorlások Magyarországról 1945 óta és a magyar diaszpóra néhány jellegzetessége az 1970-es években [Migrations from Hungary since 1945 and some characteristics of the Hungarian diaspora in the 1970's], *Tanulmányok a magyar népi demokrácia negyven évéről* [Studies about the forty years of the Hungarian people's democracy], Budapest: MSZMP KB Párttörténeti Intézete – MTA Történettudományi Intézete, pp. 236-259.
- Regio (1991), KSH-jelentés az 1956-os disszidálásokról. Az illegálisan külföldre távozott személyek főbb adatai, 1956. október 23- 1957. április 30. [KSH-report about the 1956 fleeing. The main data of the persons leaving the country illegally, 23 October 1956 – 30 April 1957], *Regio*. vol. 1991. issue 4., pp. 174-211. (It was published also as an offprint by the 1956 Institute, Budapest, 1992.).
- Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (1957), General Assembly, Official Records: Twelfth Session, Supplement No. 11, A/3585/Rev. 1, New York, 1957.