

In the Margins of a Party Resolution. The 1968 Resolution of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on the Situation of the Nationalities in Hungary

Abstract: After World War II, the political elite in the communist countries called for the assimilation of national minorities (the “nationalities”) into majority society. A change of approach came only in the latter half of the 1960s. With a focus on Hungary, the study examines the foreign and domestic political factors that led to a review of the earlier doctrinaire policies towards the minorities. It presents the political regime’s altered stance on the nationalities question and the reasons for the change.

Keywords: Hungary; nationalities policy; situation of minorities; liberalization.

After World War II, the policy on nationalities in the communist countries was entirely defined by the adoption of the Soviet model and the application of the principle of automatism, according to which the national minorities would sooner or later assimilate into majority society. Citing proletarian internationalism, the political leadership emphasized that an individual’s identity was largely determined by his or her social class. As a result, while promoting civil equality, the authorities addressed the needs and demands of minorities only for tactical reasons and only until the consolidation of the regime.

In Hungary, a correction to the Stalinist nationalities policy began to be implemented in the latter half of the 1960s based on the catch phrase “national form, socialist content.” Changes in the domestic and foreign political situations as well as the process of European *détente* enabled, or indeed required, this policy shift.

In domestic political terms, a particularly significant factor was the consolidation of those who had attained power after the Hungarian Revolution of 1956. By the early 1960s, members of this elite group had consolidated their power by means of “institutional restoration,” retribution (reprisals and retaliatory measures), measures to secure the support of certain groups in society, and the collectivization of agriculture. The Kádár regime also unilaterally “normalized” its relations with the churches and their members (many of whom had shown passive resistance) and with leading intellectuals. Between 1958 and 1961, the regime subdued the country’s peasant farmers, who had been resisting the communist authorities for a decade. The collectivization of agriculture directly impacted Hungary’s minorities, as most people from ethnic minority backgrounds lived in rural areas. Owing in part to collectivization, large numbers of people,

especially the young, abandoned the villages. Internal migration further weakened communities. Despite these trends, the party leadership was forced to acknowledge that, contrary to expectations, the assimilation of the nationalities in Hungary had failed to take place during the preceding decade and a half. There was a realization that these groups could not be integrated into society by negating or denying their ethnic identity. Moreover, the deteriorating situation of the Hungarian minorities in the neighboring countries spurred the party leadership to reconsider its domestic nationalities policy. The regime's passive stance in this field had caused discontent among the country's intellectuals and in other sections of society. Indeed, the Kádár party leadership was facing pressure from the leaders of the minority communities in Hungary and from the broader Hungarian public. (Bárdi 2004: 91-94; Dobos 2011: 84-85; Egrý 2010: 38-39)

Concurrently, major changes were underway in the foreign policy arena. Indeed, the mid-1950s saw the beginning of a gradual transformation of the bipolar world that was based on a fateful confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union. Cold War tensions were gradually replaced by a realization that neither superpower could impose its will on the other. Their only remaining option was "coexistence" and cooperation. This change of attitude was first seen at the Geneva Summit of July 18–23, 1955. Although in the Paris Treaties of October 1954 the three Western Powers had committed themselves to the cause of German reunification, in Geneva they gave way to the intransigence of the Soviet side. That is to say, they acknowledged that the Soviet Union would not enter into talks on German reunification in view of the exclusively Western European orientation of the Federal Republic of Germany (the FRG, or West Germany), its membership of NATO, and its rearmament. Rather than pressing for German reunification, the Western Powers began prioritizing a broader European security framework. (Fischer 1992: 152-169; Görtemaker 2003: 324-328; Békés 2004: 136-141)

During discussions in Moscow (September 9–13, 1955), Konrad Adenauer was likewise forced to abandon his original ideas. He was seeking – in exchange for the establishment of diplomatic relations – both Soviet recognition of the reunification of Germany and the release of more than 90,000 German nationals who were still being held captive in the Soviet Union. The Soviet side rejected both demands. Ultimately, Adenauer was forced to agree to the establishment of diplomatic relations in exchange for an informal commitment from the Soviet party leadership to facilitate the repatriation of German citizens. By seeking this measure, however, Adenauer himself strengthened the Soviet side's theory of "two German states," for the accord recognized the other Germany. To mitigate the negative impact of this forced concession, the Hallstein Doctrine was formulated. Under the doctrine, the FRG claimed to speak for all Germans (as their sole legitimate representative), while West Berlin was considered a part of the country. The FRG also made it clear that it would refuse to maintain diplomatic rela-

tions with any country that recognized the German Democratic Republic (the GDR, or East Germany).¹

With the progress of détente in Europe, it became increasingly obvious that the two opposing camps could not avoid economic cooperation and political dialogue. Concurrently, the fault lines within the Soviet Bloc became ever clearer, with each of the various countries seeking to realize their own national interests more effectively.

Both phenomena were reflected in Hungary's foreign policy. On the one hand, the government declared its willingness to cooperate with the Western countries where such cooperation was not directed against a third party. This opening was assisted by the establishment, in late 1966, of a grand coalition in the FRG, whereupon the new foreign minister, Willy Brandt of the Social Democratic Party, abandoned the Hallstein Doctrine, the cornerstone of West German foreign policy. Meanwhile the Hungarian party leadership took a firmer stand within the Eastern Bloc. The regime more forcefully and consistently represented the country's interests in Comecon talks. Kádár also gave in to external and internal pressures in the nationalities question, which had overshadowed Hungarian–Romanian relations. In talks with the Romanian and the Soviet leaders, Kádár mentioned on several occasions the various grievances of the Hungarian minority in Romania, including the abolition of the Maros-Hungarian Autonomous Region and the deplorable state of native language instruction and the system of Hungarian institutions. At the same time, he firmly reminded those intellectuals who had been advocating on behalf of the Hungarian ethnic minorities that nationalism could not be met with nationalism, as this would further inflame sentiments. He argued, moreover, that there were no grounds in international law for action on the part of Hungary, and that such action could well boomerang. A firmer stand might even worsen the situation of Hungarians living outside Hungary. Third, he stressed that if socialist development in Hungary were to unfold in a positive manner, this would have a positive knock-on effect on the domestic nationalities and on the Hungarians living outside Hungary. (Földes 2016: 77-98)

The changes in Hungary's nationalities policy in the latter half of the 1960s should be analyzed as part of, and in interaction with, the process outlined above. Foreign policy considerations – the situation of the Hungarian minorities abroad and relations with the divided Germany – were more influential on nationalities policy than had been the case previously. At the turn of the 1960s, the policies of countries in East-Central Europe towards their German minorities were seen as part of the broader German question in Europe.

By the mid-1960s, the different levels of development within the Eastern Bloc had led to economic conflicts of interest among the Comecon countries. Discord on ideolo-

1 With reference to the Hallstein Doctrine, West Germany broke off relations with Yugoslavia in 1957 and with Cuba in 1963, as both countries had sent ambassadors to East Berlin. The Hallstein Doctrine was, however, effective in the Third World; many countries refrained from establishing diplomatic relations with East Germany in order to preserve economic relations with West Germany. Görtemaker 2003: 328-332.

gical and strategic issues then led Romania and Yugoslavia to distance themselves (for different reasons) from Moscow and from the other Eastern Bloc countries. In relations between the various states, the frozen conflicts of earlier decades (including the situation of the minorities) resurfaced.

After 1956, the situation of the Hungarian political leadership was peculiar in several respects. First, the Kádár regime had branded the independence goals of the revolutionaries as nationalistic, thus defining itself as anti-nationalist. Second, in view of the legitimization and support received from the other communist countries, the regime could not opt for a specifically national form of communism. Reflecting these constraints, the Hungarian leadership declared on several occasions that in its relations with other states it considered the nationalities issue to be a domestic matter. It thereby accepted that policy towards the minority Hungarian communities should be defined by internationalism and the principle of automatism. In the mid-1960s, however, the processes outlined above compelled the Hungarian party leadership to reconsider both its national policy and its nationalities policy.²

The leadership cited the economic and social changes of the preceding 10 years as justification for a review of policy. Indeed, it claimed that such changes necessitated a revision of the Political Committee's (Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, HSWP PC) 1958 resolution on the situation of the nationalities. There was a need not only for policy changes but also for the addition of new tasks. The Ministry of Culture drafted the new policy position, but the county council and party apparatuses also contributed to the work, as did several other government ministries, the nationality associations, and various minority policy experts, among them László Kővágó, Endre Arató, and G. Gábor Kemény.³

The decisions were prepared with far greater academic rigor than in earlier years. László Kővágó was asked to compile a study titled "The nationalities question in the People's Republic of Hungary," concerning which a series of debates was held at the Institute of Social Science of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers'

2 On March 25, 1966, the Cultural Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP CC) proposed an amendment to the 1958 resolution of the Agitation and Propaganda Committee. – Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára (MNL OL) Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Kulturális Osztálya 1964-1966 (M-KS 288. f. 35. cs.) 6. őrzési egység (ő. e.) and Tóth 2003: 382–384.

3 MNL OL Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Tudományos, Közoktatási és Kulturális Osztályának iratai 1967-1988 [Papers of the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Department of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party 1967–1988]. (M-KS 288. f. 36. cs.) 12. ő. e. 1967. október 30 [October 30, 1967], and Tóth 2003: 392-396. The report was to be completed by June 30, 1968. During the preceding years, several preparatory reports had been compiled concerning a revision of the 1958 party resolution. See the note of the Subdepartment for Folk Culture of the Cultural Department of the HSWP CC on the current issues of nationalities policy, July 26, 1965. – MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 35. cs. 9. ő. e., and Tóth 2003: 375-381. Concerning preparatory work for the 1968 party resolution, see also Dobos 2008: 390-400.

Party (HSWP CC) between July and December 1967. At the institute, the study formed part of a research program on “socialist patriotism and socialist internationalism.” During the debates, however, it became clear that a focus on the nationalities in Hungary made it possible to reflect upon a series of questions – assimilation, bilingualism, and institutional provision – that were also relevant when drafting policy towards the minority Hungarian communities.⁴

All participants in the debate emphasized that the foreign policy aspects of the issue had to be considered when elaborating new guidelines relating to nationalities policy. For instance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs underlined that the nationalities policy in Hungary obviously influenced the situation of the Hungarian communities in the neighboring countries where the governments often viewed Hungary’s nationalities policy as a benchmark and were seeking to adhere to the principle of parity in respect of rights and opportunities. Staff at the ministry argued that a generous nationalities policy in Hungary would serve as an indirect incentive to neighboring countries in their policies towards the Hungarian minorities. In their view, it was detrimental to argue – as was often done particularly in the lower levels of public administration – that the nationalities issue was no longer significant in Hungary in view of advanced assimilation.

In preparation for a new nationalities policy, it was deemed necessary to explore, in the light of the equality of citizens, whether or not the ethnic rights of the nationalities were being implemented in the cultural, economic, and political fields. It was proposed to regulate contacts between the nationality associations and the foreign embassies in Budapest and to establish a scholarship policy that would enable study at higher education institutions in the neighboring countries, thereby increasing the supply of native language teachers.

To facilitate the learning of the languages of the neighboring peoples, support was given to ensuring that children of Hungarian ethnicity who were attending nationality schools could study the given minority language if they so desired. Special mention was made of the German minority. In view of the size of the minority and the danger of Western influence and mischief-making, there was a request for more intensive involvement from the East German embassy.⁵

The above is contradicted, however, by a statement given by the legal department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in late January 1968, which did not consider it expedient for the government to mention the situation of the Hungarian minority in Romania during negotiations on the signing of a Hungarian–Romanian treaty of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance. Ministry staff argued that the constitutions of the two

4 For a summary of the debate, see Csatóri 1968; Kósa 1969: 12-22; Kóvágó 1976: 28-29; Kóvágó 1981: 73-76; and Niederhauser 1987: 62-69.

5 MNL OL Külügyminisztérium Német Demokratikus Köztársaság Titkos ügykezelésű iratok 1945–1964. [Confidential files of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the German Democratic Republic 1945–1964] (XIX-J-1-j-NDK) II-725-004370/1967.

states and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which had been adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1966, declared the equality before the law of members of minorities as well as guaranteeing the collective rights of minorities, although they acknowledged that the covenant had not come into force.⁶

During these months, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs probed the opinions and views of several neighboring countries concerning the draft resolutions on nationalities policy. On June 13, 1968, György Zágor discussed the matter for more than three hours with the Yugoslav ambassador, Geza Tikvicki. The discussions took place at the request of the Hungarian side. The ambassador explained that he personally was “surprised that we Hungarians show complete indifference to the Hungarians living abroad even though a third of our people are living outside the country’s borders. He greatly esteems the profound internationalism of the HSWP, but this does not have to be accompanied by such disinterest. [...] he very much endorsed what was recently said in this regard at the Writers’ Association. This subject matter is more important for us Hungarians than for the Romanians or the Slovaks. [...] The best way to proceed would be resolve the nationalities issue as generously as possible here in Hungary, thereby establishing a situation in which our neighbors are required politically and morally to proceed in a similar manner,” wrote György Zágor in his notes.⁷ Regarding Yugoslavia, Tikvicki stated that a functioning nationalities policy was a condition for the country’s very existence. He made self-critical remarks concerning centralism and then praised the self-administrative model. He evaluated the principles of nationalities policy in Hungary as generally good, which, however, “were being distorted at the bottom.” Among the complaints of the South Slavs in Hungary, he focused on some problems in the cultural field – a lack of books, constraints on the import of cultural goods from Yugoslavia, and Radio Pécs broadcasting just a half-hour-long program daily. He considered it misguided for the nationality associations to be established as political organizations “because they could easily slip up due to their tendency to align with the mother country and to regard the mother country as their protector. The better and closer the relationship between the two affected socialist countries, the greater this danger would be.”⁸ He thus suggested that the work of the associations should be limited to the cultural field alone. Tikvicki’s statements are noteworthy because they contradict the process that was underway in Yugoslavia during these months. For the first time since the war, the minorities in Yugoslavia could establish organizations with vertical structures organized from the bottom up.

6 “In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right in community with the other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.” – MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-NDK II-27-00981-1/1968.

7 MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-NDK II-27-00981-4/1968.

8 MNL OL XIX-J-1-j-NDK II-27-00981-4/1968.

On June 6, 1968, Hungarian Minister of Culture Pál Ilku sent a detailed report compiled by the ministry on the domestic nationalities and on the implementation of the 1958 resolution of the Political Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP PC) to the Agitation and Propaganda Committee of the Central Committee. Compared with earlier reports, the report was more professional, making specific suggestions on the functioning of nationalities policy and supporting evidence-backed policy rather than empty political formulas.⁹

The political committee's resolution of September 17, 1968, on the situation of the nationalities in Hungary set out positions that were more doctrinaire in numerous respects than the contents of the report.¹⁰

The most obvious difference is that whereas the ministry's report considered it necessary to elaborate new guidelines for the nationalities policy, the political committee put the emphasis on continuity. Like previous such reports, the document was classified as "top secret," with access being limited to a narrow group. This demonstrates that attitudes towards the nationalities question had remained unchanged. The resolution asserted that the principles of the 1958 resolution had been correct, meaning that in principle there was no need for a new resolution. The task was to resolve deficiencies

9 MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 36. cs. 14. ó. e./1968. Concurrently, the nationalities issue was also addressed in *Népszabadság*, a major Hungarian newspaper. Between 1965 and 1970, the newspaper published more than 50 articles on the nationalities in Hungary and on the Hungarians living in the neighboring countries. The following are primary examples of such articles: Pál Tóth: A „berényi gátak” helyén. Országos értekezlet Szabadkán a nemzetiségi oktatásról [In place of the “Berényi dams.” A national conference on the education of the nationalities in Subotica], *Népszabadság*, April 8, 1965, p. 6, November 17, 1965, p. 2; Imre Vértes: Soknemzetiségű állam – nemzeti kisebbség nélkül [Multinational state – without national minorities], *Népszabadság*, 13 March 1966, p. 2; Csehszlovákia népeinek és nemzetiségeinek fejlődése a társadalmi egység erősítésének fő tényezője [The development of the peoples and nationalities of Czechoslovakia is the main factor strengthening social unity], *Népszabadság*, June 30, 1966, p. 1; Jenő Faragó: Három nyelven egy akaráttal [In three languages with one will], *Népszabadság*, November 5, 1966, p. 5; Gazdag programmal rendezik meg az idei délszláv kulturális napokat [This year's South Slav cultural days are being held with a rich program], *Népszabadság*, January 22, 1967, p. 5; László Rózsa: Mit ér az ember, ha sokac? [What is a person worth if a Šokci], *Népszabadság*, July 21, 1968, p. 5; László Medveczky: A háromnyelvű rádió [Trilingual radio], *Népszabadság*, November 16, 1968, p. 7; Sadovsky a nemzetiségek helyzetéről [Sadovsky on the situation of the nationalities], *Népszabadság*, January 10, 1969, p. 2; Szerb-horvát nyelvű felszólalás a nemzetiségek jogairól [A speech in Serbo-Croatian on the rights of the nationalities], *Népszabadság*, March 6, 1970, p. 2.

10 MNL OL MSZMP KB PM Titkárság (IB SZB) nyomtatott határozatai 1957–1989 [Printed resolutions of the HSWP CC PM Secretariat (Executive Committee, Organizing Committee) 1957–1989]. (M-KS 288. f. 20. cs.) 548. ó. e./1968. In the following, I draw attention to the main differences between the report and the resolution. On the differences between the report and the resolution, see also Föglein 2000: 79-84.

in the practical implementation and to meet new needs stemming from recent economic and social changes. Among the reasons justifying the adoption of a resolution, no reference is made to the international significance of the nationalities question. On this point too, the resolution differs from the report. The resolution was also lacking some of the self-critical observations made in the report, which included a critique of the dismantlement of the nationalities department and of obstructionism at the lower levels of the party and state apparatus (resulting in a failure to implement the resolution of 1958). The resolution also omitted the proposals for an analysis of the economic and social situation of the nationalities and for a rethinking of the legal status of the associations. It did so, even though these elements had been formulated as basic conditions of the new nationalities policy.

The report demonstrated a considerably more nuanced and structured approach to the theoretical and practical questions. Among the latter, nationality education was a central issue in both documents. This also indicates, however, a reluctance to extend nationalities policy to other areas, such as self-organization. The report mentioned countless problems affecting the newspapers and radio broadcasts of the nationalities, bilingual signs, the registering of ethnic forenames, and the expansion of libraries. Concerning these issues, the resolution responded by mentioning merely general tasks. Yet, the resolution also prescribed that the county party committees and councils should debate the situation of the nationalities living within the given counties and that they should ensure that the specific tasks were defined at the level of the various municipalities. In theory, the Ministry of Finance was required to provide funding for the outlined measures.¹¹

Among the theoretical issues, in both documents the phenomena of assimilation and nationalism were given special attention.

Regarding assimilation, the HSW PC's resolution emphasized the following: "Our nationalities policy clearly and decisively rejects the concept of the accelerated assimilation of the nationalities. Some, however, are against this correct principle. Indeed, there have been isolated attempts at 'Hungarianization' in bilingual schools; often the parents of nationality students too easily accept the indifference that is – on occasion and in places – shown to their children being taught in the nationality language, which is mostly a result of funding considerations."¹²

The PC's resolution thus blames the assimilation of the nationalities in Hungary on individuals who are seeking "to speed things up" at the local level of nationality edu-

11 MNL Bács-Kiskun Megyei Levéltár (BKML) [Bács-Kiskun County Archive]. A Bács-Kiskun Megyei Tanács VB. Titkárságának iratai. Bizalmas és titkos ügykezelésű iratok 1950–1989. (XXIII. 2. a). 001/1968 [Papers of the Executive Committee Secretariat of Bács-Kiskun County Council. Confidential and secret files 1950–1989. (XXIII. 2. a). 001/1968]. Fehér Lajosnak, a Forradalmi Munkás-Paraszt Kormány elnökhelyettesének bizalmas utasítása a megyei tanácsoknak, 1968. november 5. [The instruction of Lajos Fehér, vice-chairman of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, to the county councils, 5 November 1968].

12 MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 20. cs. 548. ő. e/1968.

cation and on the indifference of parents. By taking this position, the PC evaded the need both for a multifaceted interpretation of a complex process and for an acknowledgement that the speeding up of assimilation was due to the application of the theory of automatism and the partiality of nationalities policy. The PC evaluated the process of assimilation as positive and as solely the consequence of the economic and social transformation. In its view, there was no question of mitigating or slowing down assimilation. This interpretation of events was echoed for the most part in the appraisals and reports issued by the counties.¹³

For instance, at a joint meeting of the Bács-Kiskun County Executive Committee of the HSWP and the Bács-Kiskun County Council, Imre Pozsgay stated the following: "People can freely choose to which nationality they belong. [...] It is unconstitutional and unlawful to force someone to assimilate, but we should not consider this process to be a social evil or detrimental to society, for there have been basic and essential structural changes in Hungary, and this process cannot be held back by force."¹⁴

Imre Pozsgay, who at the time was the head of the Bács-Kiskun County Agitation and Propaganda Department of the HSWP, underlined that only a nationalities policy that was grounded in principle could influence the situation of Hungarians outside Hungary: "The nationalities and the various ethnic groups should not be viewed as walls of separation. On the contrary, they should be regarded as bridges that connect us. In the history of Central and Eastern Europe, this has rarely been the case, and we must now pursue a nationalities policy in a Marxist fashion, satisfying the demands of

13 In the following, I summarize – based on the minutes and resolutions of the county and district joint party and council executive committee meetings held in the various counties in the autumn of 1968 and the summer of 1969 – the various opinions formulated in connection with the CC resolution. See MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 36. cs. 11. ó. e., 12. ó. e., 14. ó. e., MNL BKML MSZMP Bács-Kiskun Megyei Bizottságának iratai 1956-1990 [Papers of the Bács-Kiskun County Committee] (XXXV. 1.) 3. csoport (cs.) 336. ó. e., MNL Baranya Megyei Levéltár (BML) [Baranya County Archive] MSZMP Baranya Megyei Bizottsága iratai [Papers of the HSWP Baranya County Committee] (XXXV. 1.) 1. cs. 4. ó. e., MNL Békés Megyei levéltár (BéML) [Békés County Archive] MSZMP Békés Megyei Bizottsága iratai 1957-1990. [Papers of the HSWP Békés County Committee] (XXXV. 1. 3. f.) 16. ó. e./1969., MNL Tolna Megyei Levéltára (TML) [Tolna County Archive] MSZMP Tolna Megyei Bizottsága iratai 1957-1989. Végrehajtó Bizottság ülés jegyzőkönyvei [Papers of the HSWP Tolna County Committee 1957-1989. Minutes of the Executive Committee meeting] (XXXV. 1. a) 3. cs. 326. ó. e., and Tóth 2003: 485-492. The county press reacted indirectly to the resolutions. In 1969 and 1970, several articles were published on the situation of the nationalities living in the various counties. See Halványuló hagyományok – négy falu szövetsége [Fading traditions – an association of four villages], *Dunántúli Napló*, 5 March 1969, p. 3; A hazai délszlávok (részletek egy készülő tanulmányból) [South Slavs in Hungary (extracts from a study in progress)], *Dunántúli Napló*, April 20, 1969, p. 5; Hazai németységünk [The Germans of Hungary], *Dunántúli Napló*, April 27, 1969, p. 6; Mikor lesz német múzeum [When will there be a German museum?], *Dunántúli Napló*, January 12, 1970, p. 3; A nemzetiségek helyzete a siklói járásban [The situation of the nationalities in the district of Siklós]. *Dunántúli Napló*, June 4, 1970, p. 3.

14 MNL BKML XXXV. 1. 3. cs. 336. ó. e.

every citizen. Having viewed the Hungarian press outside Hungary, we can conclude that they are watching with a critical eye the development of nationalities policy in Hungary.”¹⁵

The resolution mentioned in general terms the needs of the nationalities but offered no normative definition of such needs. Once again, any conflicts arising in connection with specific needs were shifted to the county or local levels. At the regional level, the emphasis was on a “do not overdo it” position. Institutional provisions were applied to education and, possibly, to libraries. The placement of bilingual signs was considered superfluous or excessive in every county. Such an interpretation was facilitated by the vagueness of the resolution, which failed to address the details. Thus, for instance, it stated that “in municipalities inhabited by a larger group of nationalities, and especially in border areas – depending on local needs – the issue of bilingual signs and announcements must be resolved.”¹⁶ According to the instruction of Lajos Fehér, the vice-chairman of the Revolutionary Worker-Peasant Government, on the implementation of the various points of the party resolution, the nationalities could only request the placement of bilingual signs in those villages where their share of the population was 50% or more. This general rule could be disregarded only in justified cases, primarily in border areas. Requests for the placement of bilingual signs had to be approved by the party and council leadership at district, municipal, and county levels.¹⁷

In several counties, requests from the nationalities were rejected with reference to the reciprocity principle – as the right was not being guaranteed to the Hungarian minority communities in the neighboring countries. László Kővágó, who attended a meeting of Bács-Kiskun County Council, argued against this practice. He pointed out that the needs of the nationalities should not be judged based on reciprocity, for the circumstances of the nationalities differed in every country. Indeed, there were minority communities in different situations even within individual countries. He emphasized that the nationality question should not be viewed in isolation, for the integration of the minorities was a prerequisite for Hungary’s economic and social development.¹⁸

The resolution made emphatic mention of the issue of nationalism. Unlike previous documents, however, the resolution ignored nationalistic phenomena in Hungarian society. Instead, it limited itself to the foreign policy aspects of nationalism, especially its growing presence in the communist countries. As specific examples, it mentioned the hostile propaganda disseminated by the FRG among ethnic Germans in Hungary, the nationalistic newspaper articles that were appearing in Slovak newspapers in 1968, and the renewed interest in the nationalities in Hungary expressed by certain

15 MNL BKML XXXV. 1. 3. cs. 336. ó. e.

16 MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 20. cs. 548. ó. e/1968.

17 MNL BKML XXIII. 2. a 001/1969.

18 MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 20. cs. 548. ó. e/1968.

organizations in the neighboring countries. At the same time, it regretted that “Hungarian initiatives aimed at the inclusion – in the cultural conventions – of measures promoting the cultural development of the nationalities based on reciprocity, have been rejected. Romania in particular has immured itself.”¹⁹

As an example of the disruptive activities pursued by the FRG among the ethnic Germans of Hungary, it mentioned the payment of pensions to widows of former SS members. Such criticism ignored the fact that the Hungarian state had agreed in 1964 that those affected could and should take advantage of this opportunity.²⁰

The nationalistic phenomena seen in local society in earlier years had – according to the county reports – ceased or subsided. At the same time, it was emphasized in the Tolna County report that efforts by ethnic Germans to keep in contact with those who had been resettled in Germany reflected a natural human need. For this reason, it was damaging to brand such efforts as nationalistic or chauvinistic. The report also included the following statement: “At the same time, I would mention that I have spoken with Hungarian comrades living in Romania, in Transylvania, and it is my view that the Hungarians there are fostering Hungarian nationalism to the same extent at least.”²¹

In his summary report compiled for the Scientific, Educational and Cultural Department of the HSWP CC,²² László Kővágó concluded that the county reports supported the findings of the HSWP Political Committee’s resolution. That is to say, between 1958 and 1968, the county apparatus had barely addressed the problems of the nationalities. There had been little progress in terms of providing libraries with nationality books, and bilingual signs had been placed in only a few settlements. There were only isolated examples of streets or institutions being named after people from ethnic minority backgrounds. In the educational field, owing to a lack of nationality kindergarten teachers, a general problem was an inability to organize nationality groups at the kindergarten level despite requests from parents for such groups. With the expansion of school catchment areas, many nationality schools had ceased to operate. There was a lack of teachers

19 MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 20. cs. 548. ő. e/1968.

20 According to the resolution, the number of pension recipients had increased from 100 to 1000 in the space of a year. The counties likewise failed to acknowledge the legal nature of the pension payments: “The incubation beneath the surface of the disappearing ethnic differences is being instigated – especially in villages with mixed populations – by West Germany paying pensions to the family members of SS men killed in World War II. According to the 1969 data of the Banking Centre, 1897 persons in Baranya County are receiving pensions worth in total 578,789 forints per month.” – MNL BML XXXV. 1. 1. cs. 4. ő. e.

21 MNL TML XXXV. 1. a 3. cs. 326. ő. e.

22 Összefoglaló jelentés a megyei párt és tanácsi vb-üléseken 1969-ben tárgyalt nemzetiségi előterjesztésekről, 1970. május 22. [Summary report on the nationality proposals discussed in 1969 at meetings of the county party and council executive committees, May 22, 1970] – MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 36. cs. 12. ő. e. and Tóth 2003: 485-492. I summarize the main findings of the report. I do not note each finding separately.

speaking the minority languages, and the standards of teacher training and further training were unsatisfactory. The county and district council apparatuses were incapable of addressing the various issues of nationality education in a professional manner.

László Kővágó highlighted the inconsistency of the reports, complaining that most of them were limited to factual accounts and failed to interpret the processes or explain the negative phenomena. He condemned the lack of practical measures. Only in the Szombathely and Körmend districts of Vas County had a nationality committee been established with consultation rights. Here, bilingual signs had been placed in several settlements.

In several counties, a link was drawn between the nationalities question and the problems of the Hungarian communities in the neighboring countries. The general view was that “in Hungary there is no nationality problem; we should not make one for ourselves by inflating things.”²³ In view of such attitudes, Kővágó emphasized that “it would be desirable to develop a uniform interpretation and practical application of some principles.”²⁴

As outlined above, in the latter half of the 1960s, the HSWP Political Committee’s resolution of 1968 arose against a background of the process of European détente, the changed nature of relations between the Eastern Bloc countries, and the economic and social transformation. The resolution formulated guidelines for a new nationalities policy or at least for a policy that was different in terms of its essential elements.

The resolution emphasized continuity, underlining the correctness of the principles of the HSWP Political Committee’s resolution of 1958. Thus, the party leadership refused to undertake any real change and gave the impression that it was only seeking to promote the more effective practical realization of the principles. If, however, we disregard this message and focus instead on the content of the text and on the everyday impact of the resolutions, a change in attitude can be observed on several important issues.

An important change, in relation to earlier documents, was the assessment/appraisal of the process of assimilation. The regime now rejected the principle of automatism. That is to say, it did not formulate as an expectation the assimilation of the nationalities into majority Hungarian society. There was an acknowledgement that the social integration of the nationalities could not be realized without the preservation

23 Összefoglaló jelentés a megyei párt- és tanácsi vb-üléseken 1969-ben tárgyalt nemzetiségi előterjesztésekről, 1970. május 22. [Summary report on the nationality proposals discussed in 1969 at meetings of the county party and council executive committees, 22 May 1970] – MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 36. cs. 12. ő. e. and Tóth 2003: 485-492.

24 Összefoglaló jelentés a megyei párt és tanácsi vb-üléseken 1969-ben tárgyalt nemzetiségi előterjesztésekről, 1970. május 22. [Summary report on the nationality proposals discussed in 1969 at meetings of the county party and council executive committees, 22 May 1970] – MNL OL M-KS 288. f. 36. cs. 12. ő. e. and Tóth 2003: 485-492.

of their national identity. At the same time, the state's role in, and responsibility for, the accelerated assimilation of the minorities was brushed aside. Although the analyses written in preparation for the resolution noted the links between the assimilation trends and the state-sanctioned repression of certain groups – the resettlement (expulsion) of the Germans, the population exchange between Slovakia and Hungary, and the retaliatory measures against the South Slavs – these explanations and factors were omitted from the resolution. It was claimed in the resolution that accelerated assimilation could be explained by the nationalities policy of the interwar period and by the natural impact of economic and social changes after World War II. The dilemma was no longer whether the state should slow down or speed up assimilation and what measures were at its disposal. Instead, the focus was on what circumstances and institutions were needed to ensure that a given individual could preserve and freely express his or her national identity.

Another important aspect of the resolution was that it ended the distinctions made by the state between the various minorities. Although from the 1950s onwards the regime had emphasized the existence of a sole criterion for assessing the nationalities, namely the manner in which “its members fulfil the tasks assigned to them in the course of socialist construction,” this had not applied to members of the German and South Slav communities. The discriminatory treatment and political stigmatization of those latter groups were maintained until the mid-1960s, despite formal assurances of civil equality. Only then was the notion of collective guilt abandoned. An important first step in this process was the differentiated assessment of the activities of members of the German and South Slav nationalities. The community's stigma of guilt was transferred to the Volksbund leaders, the SS members, and the South Slav leaders who were supporting Tito's third-way policy. Although this message had collectivist elements, for members of the various communities it was obvious that the regime no longer considered them guilty and hostile by definition.

The resolution's third important element comprised the foreign policy aspects, with considerably greater attention being given to the situation of the Hungarian communities in the neighboring countries. There can be no doubt that in the decades after the Treaty of Trianon the nationalities policies of Hungarian governments and Hungary's relations with the neighboring countries were influenced – in different ways and to a varying extent – by the situation of the Hungarians living beyond the borders. It is important, however, to examine in each case the extent and means of this interaction.

In the immediate aftermath of World War II, the situation of the Hungarian minority communities played a minimal role in relations between Hungary and the neighboring countries and in the development of policy towards the nationalities in Hungary. For the Hungarian party leadership, it was only from the mid-1960s onwards that the situation of the Hungarian minorities abroad took on a greater value in view of the domestic and foreign political aspects. Undeniably, the reaction to the deteriorating situation of the Hungarian communities outside Hungary contributed to a reconsideration of the principles of nationalities policy within Hungary. Nor should one ignore the fact that

increased attention was being given to national and minority issues in various international organizations and in European academic circles and the public debate. In other words, the various aspects of the national question were once again the focus of attention. The political regime needed first and foremost to find answers to the unresolved problems of the minorities in Hungary, which necessarily required an adjustment of post-war nationalities policy.

A change in attitude was signaled by the involvement of academic researchers in the decision-making process and by a more open and specific dialogue between the various state and party organs.

At the same time, a negative aspect of the HSWP Political Committee's resolution of 1968 was its delayed and – in many respects – ambiguous nature. That is to say, it contained both liberal and dogmatic elements, while denying the need for change. The latter is also indicated by the fact that textually the resolution emphasized continuity rather than new attitudes. The unaltered nature of the approach is further illustrated by the resolution's "top secret" classification. The publication of the resolutions – for the county, district, and local apparatuses – was merely a formality. Moreover, the resolution was an uneven document, comprising a mixture of theoretical explanations and practical terms of reference.

There was considerable confusion and puzzlement among attendees at county council and party apparatus meetings. Although the attendees perceived a more open policy towards the nationalities, they were nevertheless unsure how to respond to the new expectations, particularly given that the issue had been suppressed for a decade and a half. Thus, they in part neglected the tasks assigned to them in the resolution, while also waiting for instructions from above.

A substantive change in attitude was confirmed by practice. The first half of the 1970s saw a cautious democratization of the nationality associations. Members of the various communities could elect a third of the participants in the workshops, the space for action of editorial boards of the nationality newspapers increased, and when appointing staff members' attention was given not only to political reliability but also to professional skills. More often than before, state and party organs at various levels addressed the situation of the Hungarian communities outside Hungary and the nationalities within Hungary. Nationality committees could be established within the regional organs of the Patriotic People's Front. To improve the scientific basis of decision-making, research groups studying the nationalities were established, and the basic documentation relating to nationality institutions was drafted.²⁵ Even so, it was only in conjunction with the democratization of Hungary in the latter half of the 1980s that a radical overhaul of ethnic minority policy could begin.

25 For appraisals of the 1968 party resolutions, see also Kővágó 1981: 78; Dobos 2011: 87-90; Seewann 2016: 392.

Literature

- Bárdi, Nándor 2004. *Tény és való. A budapesti kormányzatok és a határon túli magyarság kapcsolattörténete*. Pozsony [Bratislava], Kalligram Kiadó.
- Békés, Csaba 2004. *Európából Európába. Magyarország konfliktusok keresztjében, 1945–1990*. Budapest, Gondolat Kiadó.
- Csatári, Dániel (ed.) 1968. *Nemzetiségi kérdés – nemzetiségi politika*. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó.
- Dobos, Balázs 2011. *A kisebbség joga. Kisebbségi törvénykezés Magyarországon (1988–2006)*. Budapest, Argumentum Kiadó.
- Egry, Gábor 2010. *Otthonosság és idegenség. Identitáspolitika és nemzetfelfogás Magyarországon a rendszerváltás óta*. Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó.
- Fischer, Ferenc 1992. *A megosztott világ. A Kelet-Nyugat, Észak-Dél nemzetközi kapcsolatok fő vonásai 1945–1989*. Budapest, Ikva Kiadó.
- Föglein, Gizella 2000. Nemzetiségpolitika a Kádár-korszakban Az MSZMP PB. 1958. és 1968. évi nemzetiségpolitikai határozatai. In: Föglein, Gizella: *Nemzetiség vagy kisebbség? A magyarországi horvátok, németek, románok, szerbek, szlovákok és szlovének státusáról 1945–1993*. Budapest, Ikva Kiadó, 17–25.
- Földes, György 2016. *Kádár János külpolitikája és nemzetközi tárgyalásai 1956–1988. I.* Budapest, Napvilág Kiadó.
- Görtemaker, Manfred 2003. *A Német Szövetségi Köztársaság története. Az alapítástól napjainkig*. Budapest, Korona Kiadó.
- Kósa, László 1969. Nemzetiségek Magyarországon. *Valóság*, Vol. 12. Nr. 4. 12–22.
- Kóvágó, László 1976. *Nemzetiségeink jelene*. Budapest, ELTE BTK Kelet-Európai és Nemzetiségi Kutatócsoportja.
- Kóvágó, László 1981. *Nemzetiségek a mai Magyarországon*. Budapest, Kossuth Kiadó.
- Niederhauser, Emil 1987. Nemzetiségi politika Magyarországon a felszabadulás óta. *Társadalmi Szemle*, Vol. 42. Nr. 11. 62–69.
- Seewann, Gerhard 2016. *A magyarországi németek története 1860–2006. 2.* Budapest, Argumentum Kiadó.
- Tóth, Ágnes (comp.) 2003. *Pártállam és nemzetiségek 1950–1973*. Kecskemét, Bács-Kiskun Megyei Önkormányzat Levéltára.