

Hungarian Population in the Czech Lands Between 1945 and 1949: A Traditional Minority or a New One?¹

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A small Hungarian minority was formed in the Czech lands between the First and Second World Wars as a consequence of constituting a common Czechoslovak state. Censuses taken in 1921 and 1930 suggest that the number of Hungarians varied between 7 and 11 thousand persons.² The life of this community was substantially affected by the tragic events of 1938 and WWII, as were the lives of other minorities. Some Hungarians returned to Hungary, others chose to leave the country and stay in exile.

The Czechoslovak Government in exile planned, during WWII, to restore Czechoslovakia within its pre-Munich borders, i.e. in relation to Hungary within the borders before the First Vienna Arbitration; such plans naturally invoked the necessity to resolve the issue of German and Hungarian minorities.³ As early as in February 1941, Beneš in his memorandum entitled “Czechoslovak Peace Aims” presumed “the relocation of population to the maximum possible extent” with respect to Hungarians, in addition to the transfer of Germans.⁴ Czechoslovak demands against Hungary were based on the fact that Hungary ended up as a German ally, i.e. an enemy if considered from the perspective of the Anti-German allies. However, in the case of Hungary, the Czechoslovak Government in exile preferred a combination of transfer and exchange of population as a more feasible solution.⁵ One of the reasons for such preference was the position of Britain in this respect, which was gradually more positive about trans-

- 1 Drafted within the research project NAKI of the Czech Ministry of Culture - Problémy právního postavení menšin v praxi a jejich dlouhodobý vývoj (Code Number DF12P01OVV013).
- 2 On the formation of the Hungarian minority in pre-WWII Czechoslovakia see Gál, E.: *Maďari v Česku* [Hungarians in Czechoslovakia], In: *Souvislosti*, 3-4/ 98. www.souvislosti.cz/398gal.html, and Nosková, H.: *Maďarská menšina v České republice ve 20. a 21. století* [The Hungarian minority in the Czech Republic in the 20th and 21st century]. In: Bittnerová, D. – Moravcová, M. (eds.): *Kdo jsem a kam patřím?. Identita národnostních menšin a etnických komunit na území České republiky* [Who am I and where do I belong? Identity of minorities and ethnic communities in the Czech Republic], Praha: Sofis 2005, pp. 96 and following. Holas, J.: *Maďarská menšina v České republice - zpráva z výzkumu* [The Hungarian minority – research report]. In: *Lidé města. = Urban People*. Praha : Fakulta humanitních studií Univerzity Karlovy, 2010 1212-8112 12, No 3, (2010), pp. 609–611.
- 3 In more details see Kuklík, J. – Němeček, J.: *Frontiers, Minorities, Transfers, Expulsions, British diplomacy towards Czechoslovakia and Poland during WWII*, Volume I. Plans, Prague 2015, especially pp. 13–26.
- 4 Vondrová, J.: *Češi a sudetoněmecká otázka* [The Czechs and the Sudeten German Question]. Praha: Ústav MZV 1994, doc. No. 88.
- 5 See a report by Czechoslovak diplomat J. Císař 30.5.1941, Archive of T.G. Masaryk Institute, Prague, BA, f. EB-V, Box No. 177.

fers as one of the alternatives for solving the minority situation in Central Europe; however, the British diplomacy clearly supported transfers only in relation to German minorities in Poland, Czechoslovakia and South-East Europe.⁶ In the case of Hungary territorial concessions were advocated with a possible exchange of population.⁷

More radical positions in both the Czechoslovak and Polish exile environment were maintained by military representatives. In August 1943 General Bedřich Neumann-Miroslav proposed to Beneš to “get rid of approximately 2 million Germans and 400,000 Hungarians in four modifications: Plan A – Resettlement of minorities agreed by Allies without territorial compensation, Plan B – Combination of cession of territory with transfer, Plan C – Exchange of populations with Germany and Hungary and Plan D – Expulsion of minorities from Czechoslovakia during “commanded revolution”.⁸ After discussion with Beneš the Czechoslovak commanders-in-chief agreed on the preference of a nationally homogenous state with a minority population of at most 10%.⁹

Beneš brought in a more lenient standpoint. In his article for “The Foreign Affairs” he pleaded for the transfer of minorities and emphasised that Czechoslovakia did not wish to restore the international system of protection of minorities under the auspices of the League of Nations, but it would accept solutions agreed during a peace conference.

On the 5th January 1944 Hubert Ripka, State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, spoke “informally” on the transfer of German and Hungarian minorities with William Baker¹⁰ from the Foreign Office Research Department.¹¹ For the Hungarian minority (because of the claim for pre-Munich borders) Ripka advocated the combination of transfer with an exchange of populations (700,000 Hungarians in Slovakia and 350,000 Slovaks in Hungary). The Czechoslovak Government was also prepared for small rectifications of the pre-Munich borders in the case of Hungary.

The Czechoslovak demands for the transfer of the German and Hungarian minorities were finally formulated in the context of negotiations on conditions of an Allied cease-fire with Germany. Beneš told British Ambassador Nichols on the 23rd May 1944 that, apart from border issues, the Czechoslovaks wanted the question of an internationally conducted transfer to be directly included in the conditions for the cease-fire.¹²

6 See Kuklík, J. – Němeček, J.: *Frontiers, Minorities, Transfers, Expulsions, War Cabinet conclusions*, July 2, 1942, doc. No. 4.

7 See John Mabbott’s memorandum on the transfer of minorities prepared for the Royal Institute of International Affairs in May 1940. Ibidem, doc. No. 1.

8 Vojenský ústřední archiv – Vojenský historický archiv [Central Military Archives – Historical Military Archives – VÚA-VHA], Prague, fund Štáb pro vybudování branné moci, box 3, Meeting between Beneš and Czechoslovak commanders-in-chief, August 3, 1943.

9 Ibidem.

10 The National Archives, London, (TNA), Foreign Office (FO) 371, 38928, C 643.

11 Royal Institute of International Affairs Archives, London, 2/i/7.

12 Diary by E. Tábořský. Hoover Institutions Archives, Stanford, Tábořský Coll., Box 2, record of March 23, 1944.

The Czechoslovak Government's proposal for an internationally approved transfer of the German and Hungarian minorities was contained, along with proposals for repatriation, retribution and property issues, in the *aide mémoire* of the 24th August 1944; the document outlined conditions for a cease-fire with Germany to be discussed by the European Advisory Commission.¹³ Further details of the transfer itself were not discussed by the Government until the 7th November 1944, when it debated this matter in connection with a memorandum on transfer which the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry intended to submit to the Great Powers and the European Advisory Commission in order to clarify the details of the principles set out in the *aide mémoire* of the 24th August 1944.

The Memorandum on transfer was submitted to the Great Powers and the European Advisory Commission on the 23rd November 1944. In the Memorandum the Czechoslovak Government required that the Allies should accept a proposition that those Czechoslovak citizens who had lost their citizenship as a result of having accepted citizenship of enemy states should be moved into Germany. Czechoslovakia undertook to keep a maximum of 800,000 Germans and requested the transfer of approximately 1,600,000 members of the German minority. In the case of the Hungarian population the Czechoslovak Government envisaged the application of the principle of exchange of population. The Memorandum stated that the whole issue of persons to be transferred must depend on the Czechoslovak legislative regulation of citizenship.

The Government in exile decided in 1944 that the problem of the Hungarian minority should be treated separately from the German minority. Considering Hungarians, the exchange of population as well as assimilation were considered; moreover, the Czech politicians took into account a substantially different position with respect to the Hungarian issue expressed particularly by the American¹⁴ and British sides.¹⁵

Not until February 1945 did the British side recognise Czechoslovak state power over the whole pre-Munich territory, i.e. within the borders between the Czechoslovak Republic and Germany as on the 31st December 1937, explicitly including territories taken by Poland and Hungary. Britain considered it likely that if the Soviet Union would liberate these territories they would be rendered to Czechoslovakia. The pre-Munich borders (including the borders with Hungary) were proposed by Stalin in his talks with A. Eden as early as in December 1941. Before the end of WWII it was quite clear that the position of Hungary would essentially differ from that of Germa-

13 TNA London, FO 1079/2.

14 The Americans in their plans presumed that the pre-Munich borders between Czechoslovakia and Hungary would be restored, although with some rectifications, and they preferred the exchange of population. See the proposal of the Advisory Committee of the State Department regarding the negotiations with Hungary of the 1st May 1944; Romsics, I. (ed.): *Wartime American Plans for a New Hungary: Documents from the U.S. Department of State, 1942-1944 (East European Monographs)*, Columbia UP, 1993, Part IV. Document 1.

15 See Ban, A.D. (ed.) *Pax Britannica: Wartime Foreign Office Documents Regarding Plans for a Post-bellum East Central Europe*, Boulder and Highland Lakes: Columbia University Press, 1997.

ny. This was shown during the negotiations with Hungary on the conditions for armistice concluded between the Hungarian Interim Government and representatives of the USSR, USA, and Great Britain on the 20th January 1945 in Moscow.¹⁶

The Czechoslovak exile diplomacy intended to enforce an adjusted version of conditions for armistice, which was debated in November 1944; diplomats tried to emphasise that Czechoslovakia as a victim of Hungarian aggression should be entitled to restore the borders before the First Vienna Arbitration and to receive reparations. The transfer of the Hungarian minority was mentioned as preference, combined with a relevant exchange of population. All Czechoslovak requirements were comprised in the despatch by H. Ripka addressed to Z. Fierlinger from the 30th December 1944, clarified on the 8th and 9th January 1945.¹⁷ A Czechoslovak diplomatic note addressed to the Governments of the Big Three for their negotiations with Hungary referred to the *aide mémoire* of the 24th August 1944.¹⁸ Ripka primarily emphasised the fact that the outcome of the negotiations with Hungary would constitute a precedent for negotiations between the Allies and Germany, particularly on the issue of transfers.

Czechoslovak as well as Yugoslavian conditions for armistice with Hungary were debated during negotiations held in Moscow on the 15th January 1945, chaired by V. Molotov and with participation of US Ambassador W. A. Harriman, British Ambassador J. Balfour and Czechoslovak Ambassador to Moscow Z. Fierlinger. The formulation of an explicit principle of transfer and exchange of population was not included in the armistice conditions due to the negative position of both American and British representatives; however, it was admitted that the issue might be debated later.¹⁹

Despite this partial failure, the armistice conditions nevertheless contained items important for Czechoslovakia. The Hungarian Government terminated the state of war with respect to the Allies and expressly with Czechoslovakia. Article 2 contained the essential Hungarian waiver of territorial benefits resulting from the Hungarian annexation of neighbouring states' territories in 1938; Hungary undertook to terminate the validity of all legal and administrative measures relating to its annexation of these territories. Article 19 declared the First Vienna Arbitration Award to be null and

16 See *Agreement, with annex and protocol, signed at Moscow January 20, 1945; Executive Agreement Series 456*. In: *Treaties and Other International Agreements of the United States of America 1776-1949*, compiled under the direction of Charles I. Bevans, Volume 3 Multilateral 1931-1945, Department of State Publication, Washington, DC : Government Printing Office, 1969.

17 Němeček J., Nováčková H., Štoviček I., Tejchman M.: *Československo-sovětské vztahy v diplomatických jednáních* [Czechoslovak – Soviet relations in diplomatic negotiations], Prague, vol. 2, doc. No. 206, pp. 426 and following, and No. 225, pp. 465 and following.

18 See also TNA London, FO 371, 47130, N 1017. J. Balfour addressed in this sense the Soviet People's Commissariat of Foreign Affairs on the 9th December 1944.

19 See Šutaj, Š.: *“Akcia Juh” - odsun Madarov zo Slovenska do Čiech v roku 1949* [“Action South” – the transfer of Hungarians from Slovakia to Bohemia in 1949], Praha, 1993, p. 7; Kaplan, K.: *Československo v poválečné Evropě* [Czechoslovakia in after-war Europe], Karolinum 2004, p. 99; Čierna-Lantayová, D.: *Podoby československo-maďarského vzťahu 1938-1949 (Východiská, problémy a medzinárodné súvislosti)* [Forms of Czechoslovak-Hungarian relations 1938-1949. (Background, problems and international contexts)]. Bratislava, Veda, 1992, p. 61.

void. Issues regarding a Czechoslovak share in Hungarian reparations for war damage and Hungarian occupation of the Czechoslovak territory, as well as compensation of various property losses were solved. An Allied Control Commission was established to supervise the fulfilment of the armistice conditions. The Commission was chaired by Marshal K. J. Voroshilov, and was to solve certain issues regarding Czechoslovakia, such as repatriation and complaints raised by the Hungarian Government against “persecution” of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.²⁰

On the 3rd July 1945, the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs submitted memoranda to the Allies with respect to the transfer of German and Hungarian minorities.²¹ The Ministry referred to the above-mentioned memoranda and the *aide mémoire* from 1944. The Czechoslovak Government proposed that talks should be held with the Allied Control Commission in Budapest to debate the Hungarian issue; the transfer was proposed to be pursued by means of the exchange of population since the Czechoslovak estimate suggested that about 345,000 Slovaks living in Hungary wished to return to Czechoslovakia. Under the memoranda, Czechs and Slovaks considered the transfer to constitute “the basis for the future safety of the State” and to contribute to “the preservation of peace in Central Europe”. The future of the Hungarian population living in Czechoslovakia and other countries neighbouring Hungary was not debated during the Potsdam Conference, nor was a final determination of borders. The Hungarian question was reserved for solution at a separate peace agreement, similarly to the question of Italy and other satellites of Germany. It was clear that a more preferred solution would rather be a bilateral agreement on the exchange of population endorsed by the Powers. After the publication of the outcomes of the Potsdam Conference Vlado Clementis informed the British, US and Soviet Embassies in Prague on the 16th August that he intended to commence direct negotiations with the Allied Control Commission in Budapest regarding conditions for potential exchanges of population with Hungary.²²

Unlike the German population, with respect to which the Czechoslovak Government quite successfully managed to agree on conditions of its transfer to the Allied Zones in Germany, persons of Hungarian origin were not subject to a similar solution. On the 27th February 1946, Czechoslovakia and Hungary signed an agreement on the exchange of population (published as No. 145/1946 Sb. to take effect on the 15th May 1946); the agreement was to apply to Hungarians having lost their Czechoslovak citizenship under Constitutional Decree No. 33/1945 Sb. The principle of transfer was rejected at the Peace Conference held in Paris in July and August 1946. The Czechoslovak Government reserved its right to relocate to the Hungarian territory population above the mutually agreed number with reference to Article VIII

20 See for example diplomatic notes of the 26th July and 23rd August 1945 by the Hungarian Government to the Allied Control Commission. Besides, the Hungarian Government filed six other protests against allegedly bad treatment. TNA London, FO 371-48488.

21 TNA, London, CAB 121, 359.

22 TNA London, FO 371 – 48488, C 4830.

of the Agreement; the Article allowed for the relocation of those persons who had committed a crime under the Retribution Regulation of the Slovak National Council No. 33 of the 15th May 1945. However, such possibility was limited as to the number of potentially relocated people.

Due to the fact that the Agreement affected only about 71,000 Slovaks and 89,000 individuals of Hungarian nationality²³, other modes of solving the minority issue were applied. The so called *reslovakisation* enabled Hungarians who were, or discovered they were, of Slovak origin to apply for Slovak nationality. If their application was decided affirmatively (their loyalty to the Czechoslovak State was primarily considered) these persons were not subject to deprivation of citizenship and to confiscation of property. Such policy resulted in that the number of those claiming their Hungarian origin in Czechoslovakia temporarily went down one third compared to the pre-WWII situation. The Government debated *reslovakisation* in June and August 1946; the relevant directions were passed on the 27th February 1947 (with stylistic modifications made in March). The policy was prepared and implemented by the Ministry of the Interior in agreement with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Interior Ministry Representative for Slovakia and the Settlement Office in Bratislava.²⁴

The legal status of the Hungarian minority was primarily settled by the Slovak National Council (SNC). Under legislation adopted by the Slovak National Council the property issues of Hungarian population were primarily treated. On the 27th February 1945, the Council Presidium issued a Regulation for confiscation and swift redistribution of agricultural property of Germans, Hungarians, as well as traitors and enemies of the Slovak people (No. 4/1945 Sb.n., SNC). Slovakia, several months before the adoption of a proposed national law, applied its local law which was even retroactively amended as of the 1st March 1945 by Regulation SNC No. 104/1945 Sb. of the 23rd August 1945.²⁵ According to this Regulation agricultural property was confiscated immediately and without any compensation. Hungarians under this Regulation were divided into two groups: (a) those having Czechoslovak citizenship before the 1st November 1938 (i.e. one day before the First Vienna Arbitration Award); confiscation applied only to their property exceeding 50 hectares of land; and (b) persons without Czechoslovak citizenship who had arrived in the territory of Slovakia as part of the occupation administration; confiscation applied to all their property without any exception. Confiscated agricultural property (land) was under administration of the Slovak Agricultural Fund; it was included in the land reform and as such distributed among agricultural labourers, workers and small farmers. Preference was given to persons having participated in the “National Liberation Movement”, particularly

23 Popély, Á.: *Case studies 1944-1948. Czechoslovakia = Minority Hungarian Communities in the Twentieth Century*, Bardi, N. – Csilla, F. – Szarka, L. (eds.), New York: Columbia University Press 2011, pp. 302 and 303. See also The National Archives (NA) Praha, fund Československý úřad zahraniční, Maďarsko, box 41.

24 NA Praha, fund Československý úřad zahraniční (ČuZ), box 87.

25 For details see Beňa, J.: *Vývoj slovenského právneho poriadku* [Development of the Slovak legal order], Banská Bystrica: Iris 2001, pp. 175–180.

soldiers and partisans (resistance fighters). An amendment of the Regulation from August 1945 expanded the scope of persons to be subject to confiscation, thus including persons politically unreliable in the meaning of SNC Regulation No. 50/1945 Sb.n. Citizenship of persons of Hungarian nationality was governed by Constitutional Decree No. 33/1945. However, agricultural property of persons of Hungarian nationality who decided to accept a job offer in the Czech lands, was not subject to confiscation and their estate was temporarily managed by administrators under SNC Regulation No. 50/1945 Sb.n.

The general duty to work owed by persons having lost their Czechoslovak state citizenship under Presidential Decree No. 71/1945 Sb. applied to Hungarians staying in the Czech lands on the date of effect of the Decree. We have already noted that according to the pre-war census of 1930 their number was about 11 thousand although it may be reasonably assumed that the number significantly decreased during the period between 1938 and 1945.

However, between 1945 and 1948, considerable numbers of Hungarians arrived in the Czech lands who were not included in the exchange of population with Hungary, transferred or deprived of citizenship, and whose immovable property was subject to forced administration. These people were involved in internal relocation or so called diffusion (also with reference to Act No. 52/1935 Sb. on residence and work permits for aliens!) and were supposed to be offered jobs in the Czech lands.

In Slovakia, the Hungarian population was obliged to labour service under Presidential Decree No. 88/1945 Sb. governing the general labour service. According to SNC Regulation No. 105/1945 Zb. of the 23rd August 1945 establishing labour camps, Hungarians could be subject to forced labour in those camps if they failed to start, or stopped performing, their assigned work under the general labour service ordered by Presidential Decree.²⁶ The Slovak National Council passed Implementing Regulation of the SNC Board No. 37/1946 Sb. (25th February 1946) governing the employment of Hungarians and Germans who lost their Czechoslovak state citizenship under Presidential Decree No. 33/1945 Sb. The main purpose of this regulation was to ensure that Hungarians deprived of their Czechoslovak citizenship would not be covered by legislation governing employment of aliens (in particular Act No. 333/1939 Sl.z.); on the contrary, they were subject to Decree No. 88/1945 Sb. This is how the legal position of Hungarians was different from that of the German population. It was also to ease their difficult situation until a decision on their citizenship was made. Within the general labour service Slovak Hungarians were offered jobs in the Czech lands from Autumn 1945, in particular in the borderlands. The objective was to supply a labour force in agricultural districts in regions from which Germans had been transferred or were preparing for transfer. Until the end of 1945 the procedure affected several thousands of Hungarians.²⁷

26 Varinský, V.: *Nútené práce na Slovensku v rokoch 1945-1948* [Forced labour in Slovakia in 1945-1948]. In: *Soudobé dejiny*, č. 6, 1994, pp. 724–736.

27 Nosková, H.: *Maďarská menšina v Českej republike ve 20. a 21. století*, pp. 104 and following.

After the above-mentioned Agreement on the exchange of population with Hungary came into effect and it became quite clear that a transfer of Hungarians would hardly be enforced, the Czechoslovak Government decided to more extensively relocate Slovak Hungarians to the Czech lands for work. This policy was considered by the Government on the 16th July 1946, and later in August in the light of news from the Paris Peace Conference. Relocating for the purposes of work in the Czech lands was closely linked with the policy of *reslovakisation*, which was acknowledged during Government meetings in February and March 1947.²⁸ The whole initiative was implemented in the form of recruitment (on a voluntary basis), as a temporary measure (initially for one year) and was managed by the Government Representative for the recruitment of labour in cooperation with the Ministry of Social Affairs, the Board of Representatives of the Slovak National Council and the Settlement Office in Bratislava.

On the 26th February 1947 the Government approved a resolution on the work of Hungarians in the Czech lands; it emphasised that further legislative measures should be taken, for example with respect to compensation for property, and acknowledged the voluntary basis of the action. However, the period of work of Hungarians was intended to be extended by 6 months. On the 17th March 1945, the Government, relying on the report of its representative Okáli, confirmed the link between difficult talks with Hungary on the exchange of population on the one hand, and “work mobilisation” of Hungarians suitable for *reslovakisation* or not included in the exchange on the other. The Government Representative even suggested that a monthly contingent of recruited Hungarians for work in the Czech lands should be set. The whole issue was to be solved by the Ministry of the Interior, Agriculture and Work Protection.

A comprehensive report of Deputy Prime Minister V. Široký for Rudolf Slánský of the 3rd February 1949 states that 44,000 Hungarians from 17 districts and 393 municipalities primarily from Southern Slovakia²⁹ (in reality it was an even higher number – up to 60,000)³⁰ were relocated to the Czech lands for work between 1946 and 1948.³¹ This measure was related to Presidential Decree No. 27/1945 of 17th July 1945 on the uniform governance of internal settlement. The Decree was applicable to the whole country and instituted so called Settlement Offices located in Prague for the Czech

28 Národní archiv (National Archives), Praha, fund ČUZ, box 87.

29 Ibidem. The recruitment between November 1946 and February 1947 affected 9,600 families and about 41,500 persons. Another 2,500 persons left for the Czech lands voluntarily. About 22,000 persons had worked in areas other than agriculture before their relocation; the others were small farmers and agricultural labourers. See also Šutaj, Š.: *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945-1948. (Východiská a prax politiky k maďarskej menšine na Slovensku)* [Hungarian minority in Slovakia in 1945-1948. Backgrounds and practice of the policy towards the Hungarian minority in Slovakia], In: *Veda*, 1993, pp. 186–189.

30 Křen, J. – Lemberg, H. – Kováč, D.: *V rozdelenej Európe: Česi, Slováci, Nemci a ich štáty v rokoch 1948-1989* [In a divided Europe: Czechs, Slovaks, Germans and their states in 1948-1989], Bratislava: AEP, 1998, p. 70.

31 See also Čapka, F. – Slezák, L. – Vaculík, J.: *Nové osídlení pohraničí českých zemí po druhé světové válce* [New settlement in the borderlands of the Czech lands after WWII], Brno: Akademické nakladatelství Cerm, 2005, pp. 2–4.

lands including Moravia and Silesia, and in Bratislava for all of Slovakia. Settlement procedures in the country were governed by the Central Commission headed by the Minister of the Interior. However, the Czechoslovak Foreign Institute claims that assigning Hungarians to the Czech lands covered also some of those who moved to Czechoslovakia within the exchanges of population with Hungary.³²

Hungarians from Slovakia headed primarily to the borderlands. Most of them settled in the regions of Cheb, Sokolov, Loket; several hundreds of Hungarians were employed at farms in the inland regions of Kolín, Nymburk, Poděbrady, Mělník, Mladá Boleslav, Hradec Králové, Jičín, Slaný, Žatec, Podbořany and Tábor. Even 131 economic units in Prague were interested in employing Hungarians. In the beginning of 1948 the total number of economic entities employing Hungarians reached 6,843. Significantly fewer Hungarians were accepted in Moravia (96 entities in the region of Olomouc, about 50 in Moravský Krumlov, Moravské Budějovice and Ostrava).

Under Decree No. 88/1945 Sb. the position of Hungarians as employees was to be identical with that of persons of Czech or Slovak origin who were subject to labour service. However, the reality was often different. H. Nosková describes difficulties in the organisation of recruitment itself, the subsequent journey and assignment to work on site.³³ The report of the District National Committee in Loket from December 1946 drafted for the Czechoslovak Foreign Office suggests that Hungarians were not equipped with adequate clothing and shoes. However, they were provided with housing they chose. They were not in a “bad position” in terms of money. They received wages: CZK 96 up to 250 for one 8-hour working day depending on the type of work. The lowest rate was provided to those who were unable to perform the minimum standard of work. The report also stated that problems occurred with working discipline and alcohol.³⁴ The situation of Hungarians relocated to the Czech lands to work was debated by Hungarian delegates attending a conference of socialist parties in December 1946. The delegates visited several Hungarian agricultural families in the region of Kolín; the families confirmed that they were looked after and their work was paid, but complained of the recruitment conditions and poor allotments of clothing. As a result the Ministry of Social Care formulated a recommendation that recruitment should be pursued with diligence and in consideration of foreign propaganda.

Complaints of Hungarian labourers against treatment by their employers due to their Hungarian origin, against insufficient nutrition and clothing, etc., were considered by the Czechoslovak authorities more seriously particularly from the beginning of 1948 in order to keep as many Hungarians as possible as workers in the Czech lands.³⁵ The biggest disappointment on the part of Hungarians was the fact that they

32 NA Praha, fund ČuZ II, box 41 Maďarsko.

33 Nosková, H.: *Maďarská menšina v České republice ve 20. a 21. století* pp. 104–109.

34 NA Praha, fund ČuZ II, box 41 Maďarsko.

35 See for example a letter of Imrich Sila, employee of the Ministry of Agriculture, to the Central Committee of the Communist Party from the 31st August 1948 referring to complaints of Hungarian labourers. *Ibidem*.

were not released after the expiry of one year of employment in Bohemia and sent back to Slovakia, but their employment was extended.

The situation of the Hungarian population, including those Hungarians relocated to work in the Czech lands, significantly changed after February 1948. The Government Resolution of the 19th March 1948 endorsed further extension of the stay of Hungarian workers in the Czech lands, which the Ministry of Agriculture supported by assigning parts of land, if possible. On the other hand, Slovak authorities completed the process of confiscation of Hungarian agricultural estates under Regulation No. 104/1945 Zb.n. SNC, and the confiscated property was assigned to its administrators having managed the individual estates until then.

The policy of the USSR and the membership of both Czechoslovakia and Hungary in the Socialist Block resulted in an even more substantial shift in the approach to the Hungarian minority. "Higher foreign and political interests" expressed during meetings in Bratislava on the 16th July 1948 chaired by Deputy Prime Minister V. Široký, and debated by the Presidium of the Central Committee of the Communist Party (CCCP), gave rise to a new Government resolution and to the draft of new legislation. The essential change was to offer members of the Hungarian minority to resume their citizenship, not to confiscate their land smaller than 50 hectares, and to arrange for their national insurance and social security.³⁶ The Hungarian minority was awarded the right to associate (including trade unions) and the right to be taught and to publish in their mother tongue.

The Communist Party and Government authorities also debated potential changes in their approach to Hungarians employed in the Czech lands under Decree No. 88/1945 Sb. They decided to gradually relieve Hungarians from labour service; however, until the final arrangements were made (particularly the adoption of implementing laws and solution of property, transport and social issues linked with their potential return to Slovakia), the authorities decided that the labour service should be extended by 6-12 months so that "disorganised return would be prevented". Legislatively, a swiftly prepared amendment of Decree No. 88/1945 Sb. by Act No. 175/1948 Sb. was passed and became effective on the 29th July 1948. On the other hand, the Government agreed that members of the Hungarian minority, along with their resuming state citizenship, should be offered to return to their original profession or vocation. The Ministry of Social Care and the relevant executive body of SNC were to offer them work "according to their abilities and economic needs".

On the 2nd August 1948, a meeting was held attended by representatives of the Ministries of Agriculture, National Defence and Social Care to debate the situation of Hungarian workers in the Czech lands. Participants were trying to find suitable arrangements in order to keep Hungarians as workers, including settling them in the

36 The issue of social security was debated since December 1947 when a proposal of the Ministry of Social Care was submitted for comments; it dealt with interim insurance of persons who had been deprived of their citizenship. In June 1948, a decision was adopted that the draft law on national insurance should not tie the entitlement to benefits to Czechoslovak citizenship.

Czech lands by swiftly administering their citizenship and assigning some land to them. However, those Hungarians who possessed immovables in Slovakia, were not interested in settling themselves in the Czech lands and were returning to Slovakia in massive numbers, in particular after they were notified that their duty to work in the Czech lands was temporary under Decree No. 88/1945 Sb. The meeting concluded that some employers failed to observe wage legislation and that other problems had occurred, such as with the distribution of clothing. At the same time, the meeting noted poor attitude of some Hungarians to their work. A representative from the Nymburk region described their local situation with 300 Hungarians relocated to work there: 106 had returned to Slovakia and the majority of the remaining persons intended to return as well, despite being threatened with punishment.

In September 1948, the Ministries of the Interior, Agriculture and Social Care attempted to prevent Hungarians from leaving the Czech lands and to persuade them to permanently settle there as there was “satisfaction with their work”, necessity to solve insufficient numbers of labour in agriculture, and Hungarians “were massively running to Slovakia”. In this respect, there was a circular prepared for Chairpersons of District National Committees (DNC) and Police Headquarters compelling them to administer Hungarian applications as swiftly as possible and to return their state citizenship. DNCs were appealed to behave properly to Hungarians, observe wage legislation and to arrange for decent accommodation and catering. There was an intention to provide special vouchers for clothing and shoes. However, this was not implemented since the Government decided, on the 30th September 1948, to support the return of Hungarian workers to Slovakia. Those with resumed citizenship under Act No. 245/1948 Sb., governing state citizenship of persons of Hungarian nationality and effective on the 25th October 1948, were to return between the beginning of January and the 1st May 1949. Details were provided by directives of the Ministry of Social Care and organised transport back to Slovakia started in the beginning of January 1949. Only 126 families from the first half of returning Hungarians remained voluntarily in the Czech lands. In February 1949, Deputy Prime Minister V. Široký estimated that the whole return would take four more months with 15 transports every month and about 80-100 families per transport. The whole procedure prevented the pursuance of the “Action South” which planned to relocate more Hungarians from Southern Slovakia to the Czech lands.³⁷ In addition, the Slovak National Council adopted Regulation of the SNC Executive Authority No. 26/ 1948 Zb. n. SNC from the 4th November 1948, governing the protection of property of persons of Hungarian nationality from confiscation; this enabled the restitution of not yet confiscated immovable property to their original Hungarian owners and possibly to assign small parts of land to Hungarians returning from the Czech lands.

37 Šutaj, Š.: *“Akcia Juh” Odsun Maďarov zo Slovenska do Čiech v roku 1949* [“Action South”. Transfer of Hungarians from Slovakia to the Czech lands in 1949], Praha: Ediční řada-Sešity Ústavu pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1993.

On the 1st May 1949, 24,000 Hungarians (6,138 families) returned to Slovakia.³⁸ In the end, the majority of Hungarians relocated under Decree No. 88/1945 Sb. returned to Slovakia although the statistical data from 1950 suggest that several thousands of them settled in the Czech lands. The data show about 13,000 Hungarians in the western part of the country. Centres of their settlement were Karlovy Vary, Chodov, Loket, and also Brno and Ostrava; local organisations of the Cultural Union of Hungarian workers in Czechoslovakia – CSEMADOK – were established in these centres.³⁹ However, their further development goes beyond the scope of this paper.

In conclusion, the circumstances between 1938 and 1948/49 gave rise to establishing a small (in numbers) Hungarian minority in the Czech lands; its roots can be traced back to inter-war Czechoslovakia, and then continued during the time of extreme national passions of WWII and immediately after the war. It is an important reminiscence of historical roots as well as the current status of minority issues in the Czech Republic not only for members of the minority but also for the majority Czech population.

38 Kaplan, K.: *Poválečné Československo: Československo 1945-1948. Národy a hranice* [After-war Czechoslovakia: Czechoslovakia 1945-1948. Nations and frontiers], München, 1985, p. 128.

39 Gál, E.: *Maďari v Česku* [Hungarians in the Czech lands], www.souvislosti.cz/398gal.html,