

LÓRÁND UJHÁZI¹**The Hungarian Catholic Church in the Current Migration Crisis²****A magyar katolikus egyház szerepvállalása a migrációs válság kezelésében****Abstract**

Due to the Balkan route and the geographical position of Hungary, the country became one of the most important stops of the current European migration crisis. Those asylum seekers who entered the EU in Greece continued their way via Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary towards Western Europe. The Hungarian Parliament amended certain penal and constitutional acts and the government completed the construction of a border fence in September 2015. These measures were highly criticized by some European politicians. Sometimes, even the Hungarian Catholic Church and its leaders were chastised for not doing enough for the migrants.

In this paper I briefly present the policies of the Hungarian Catholic Church towards the migrants past and present. I will show the constraints which the church had to take into consideration and finally I will refute claims that the Hungarian Catholic Church did not do enough to help the migrants by examples of humanitarian assistance provided by the church and other ecclesiastical organizations.

Keywords: Migration, Catholic Church, State-Church relation, charity organizations, refugees

Absztrakt

A migránsok által igénybe vett nyugat-balkáni útvonal és Magyarország földrajzi elhelyezkedése miatt az ország fontos állomása lett a Nyugat-Európába tartó migránsoknak.

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A magyar kormányzat megelőző intézkedéseit köztudottan számos nyugati politikai erő kritizálta. Kevésbé ismert tény, hogy a Magyar Katolikus Egyházat is elmarasztalták. Ahhoz, hogy jobban megértsük a katolikus egyház álláspontját, érdemes azokat a huszadik századi, magyarországi menekültválságokat is megvizsgálni, amelyek kezelésében a katolikus egyház részt vett. A jelenlegi válságnál pedig nem lehet figyelmen kívül hagyni azokat a korlátozó tényezőket és biztonsági kockázatot jelentő szempontokat, amelyek a katolikus segítség-szervezetek tevékenysége kapcsán is jelentkezhetnek. A tanulmány ezeket a szempontokat vizsgálja.

Kulcsszavak: migráció, Katolikus Egyház, állam-egyház kapcsolat, segítség-szervezetek, menekültek

Due to the Balkan route and the geographical position of Hungary, the country became one of the most important stops of the current European migration crisis. Those asylum seekers who entered the EU in Greece continued their way via Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary towards Western Europe, especially Germany. The Hungarian Parliament amended certain penal and constitutional acts and the government completed the construction of a border fence in September 2015.³ These measures were highly criticized by some European politicians. Sometimes, even the Hungarian Catholic Church and its leaders were chastised for not doing enough for the migrants.⁴

In this paper I briefly present the policies of the Hungarian Catholic Church towards the migrants past and present. I will show the constraints which the church had to take into consideration and finally I will refute claims that the Hungarian Catholic Church did not do enough to help the migrants by examples of humanitarian assistance provided by the church and other ecclesiastical organizations.

I. HUNGARIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND MIGRANTS – A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The Current migration crisis is not the first one in Hungary's history. After the First World War, Armenian Christians fled to the country from Romania⁵ and Turkey. Between 1867 and 1918 the foreign policy of Austria-Hungary was directed from Vienna. Thus, Hungary could not officially react to the Armenian Genocide during the First World War. When after the war Hungary became fully independent, she actively helped the Armenian refugees who reached Hungary.⁶ Although the Armenian Catholic Church has been present in Hungary since 1690,

³József, Padányi: Műszaki zár a határon. *Műszaki Katonai Közlöny*, 2015/3, 21–34.

⁴Hans Schelkshorn: Zur Ideologie der Neuen Rechten in Ungarn. <http://www.zeitgemaess-glauben.at/cms/auslese/266-zur-ideologie-der-neuen-rechten-in-ungarn>. (Downloaded: 16 Mar 2016.)

⁵Miklós, Gazdovits: Az erdélyi örmények története. Kriterion, Kolozsvár, 2006.

⁶Péter Pál, Kránitz: Az örmény népirtás menekültjei Magyarországon. In: Újkor.hu <http://ujkor.hu/content/az-ormeny-nepirtas-menekultjei-magyarorszagon>. (Downloaded: 16 Mar 2016.)

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the modification of the borders of Hungary meant that most of the Armenian Catholic parishes became part of Romania. Because of the influx of large numbers of Armenian Catholics to Budapest, the Catholic Church had to set up new institutions for their spiritual needs. In 1922 a chaplaincy was founded and in 1924 the construction of the Armenian Chapel of Budapest was also completed. This holy place has served the needs of Armenian Catholics of Budapest ever since.

After the German and Soviet occupation of Poland, more than thousands of Polish refugees found protection in Hungary.⁷ The Hungarian Catholic Church took an active part in providing spiritual and humanitarian assistance to the refugees.⁸ In the October of 1939 Karol Radonski, diocesan bishop of wloclaweki, arrived to Hungary to organize the pastoral activity of Polish priests in Hungary. The bishop was able to work freely and with the permission of the Cardinal-Primate Jusztinán Serédi. Cardinal Serédi also subsidized the operations of the Polish Chaplains' Office from 1940, and the publishing of Polish religious books and church newspapers. All Hungarian diocesan bishops gave jurisdiction to Polish priests to work in their territory and provide spiritual assistance to the migrants. Priests working in the Polish military refugee camps were subordinated to the Hungarian Military Chaplaincy. Therefore these chaplains, from the financial aspect at least, had enjoyed the same rights as the Hungarian military chaplains.⁹

In 1940 the dioceses set up the committees for the Polish priests' relief organisations for the Polish priests, which raised funds for food, clothes, praying books and fuel among the chaplains.¹⁰ Furthermore, the single dioceses and bishops supported the Polish priests with a certain amount of money too. But the Conference of Bishops had to warn these committees to consider that Hungary was a German ally therefore they should act as unobtrusively as possible. After the German occupation of Hungary, Cardinal Serédi attested Hungarian church offices to some Polish priests to protect them from arrest and deportation.¹¹

This historical example also helps us to understand that the possible activities of the church and its institutions have always been limited by civilian, political and security circumstances outside the church's control. Not only the hierarchy of the Church, but the faithful of parishes helped the Polish refugees. The Hungarian state was unprepared to deal with the

⁷ The certain number of the Polish refugees is debated. Gyula Juhász: *Diplomácia iratok Magyarország külpolitikájához 1936–1945.* (DIMK) IV. kötet; *Magyarország külpolitikája a II. világháború kitörésének időszakában.* Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 1962; Gyula Juhász: *Magyarország lengyel politikája a második világháború alatt.* In: Antal László (ed.): *Barátok a bajban. Lengyel menekültek Magyarországon, 1939–1945.* Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1985, 7–32.

⁸ Imre, Molnár: *A magyar katolikus egyház és a lengyel menekültek.* *Magyar Szemle*, 2007/7, 103–119.; *Magyar Egyháztörténeti vázlatok*, 2009/1–4, 247.

⁹ Pál, Halmágy: *Lengyel katonák Magyarországon 1939-ben.* In: Pál, Halmágy (ed.): *Lengyel katonai menekülttábor Magyarországon.* Makó, 2003.

¹⁰ Gábor, Adriányi: *Lengyel menekültek és a magyar katolikus egyház 1939–1945.* *Magyar egyháztörténeti vázlatok*, 1999/3–4.

¹¹ Erzsébet, Csombor: *A lengyel lelkészi hivatal működése Magyarországon a második világháború idején.* In: István, Bárdos – Margit Beke (eds.): *Egyházak a változó világban.* Tatabánya, 1992.

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migration crisis, thus the Red Cross, the Catholic Church and its parishes and organizations were mobilized to ensure the reception and the sustenance of the refugees.¹²

In the above mentioned crisis, the hierarchy of the Church mainly focused on pastoral assistance and other aspects were not as important. During the last years of communist rule and immediately after the collapse of the regime, the Hungarian Catholic Church faced another migration challenge. This crisis was different, because the humanitarian aspects became the central element of the assistance provided by the church. In the second half of the 1980s numerous, mostly ethnic Hungarian refugees arrived from Romania into the country.¹³ This was the first occasion after the Second World War when the Catholic Church played a role to ease the problem. The state apparatus again was not prepared to deal with the migration crisis; moreover there were some political difficulties because the refugees were fleeing another communist country. The churches were the only non-state actors which were capable of helping the asylum seekers, they had international contacts and they were the only semi-independent organizations with the necessary expertise in Hungary.¹⁴ In 1988 the new Archbishop of Esztergom, László Paskai, supported this approach, and also wrote a letter to the president of the European Parliament about the Catholic Church's activities providing assistance to approximately five thousand people. Because of its vicinity to the Romanian boarder, the Saint Anne Parish in Debrecen became a centre of this effort. Despite the church being under overt and covered state control the results were impressive and the church earned a lot of prestige in the country and abroad. However, the support for the church's actions was not universal because the issue of Transylvania was controversial in Hungary.¹⁵

The other mass migration event started during the summer of 1989 due to events in the German Democratic Republic. This crisis was as tricky politically as the Transylvanian one because the country of origin of these migrants was also a socialist country. The Holy Family Parish in Budapest, which has close links to the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, reacted quickly and provided shelter to thousands of East German refugees. The parish priest, Father Imre Kozma, helped to set up camps for more than forty thousand people. The cooperation with the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta was important,

¹² Imre, Molnár: A magyar katolikus egyház és a lengyel menekültek. *Magyar Szemle*, 2007/7, 103–119.

¹³ Endre, Sik: Erdélyi menekültek Magyarországon. In Rudolf, Andorka – Tamás, Kolosi – György, Vukovich (eds.): Társadalmi Riport. TÁRKI, Budapest, 1990, 516–533; György, Csepeli – Endre, Sik – József, Tarjányi – Tibor, Závecz: Jelentés az erdélyi menekültekről. Gyorsjelentések. TÁRKI, Budapest, 1989.

¹⁴ Veronika, Kaszás: Magyarországi egyházak az erdélyi menekültekért 1987 és 1989 között. *Egyház-történeti Szemle*, 2012/4, 70–89.

¹⁵ Endre, Sik: A menekültekkel kapcsolatos előítéletesség növekedésének elkerülhetetlensége a mai Magyarországon. In: Endre, Sik: (ed.): Menekülők, vándorlók szerencsét próbálók. Nemzetközi Migráció Kutatócsoport Évkönyve, MTA Politikai Tudományok Intézete, Budapest, 1992, 59–64.

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because this was the only large charity organization free from direct state interference in those days.¹⁶

This charity organization provided a lot of assistance during the wars in the former Yugoslavia because in that period tens of thousands of refugees entered the country from the region. One way the volunteers of the Catholic organizations helped, was by assisting the admittance of ill and wounded people to Hungarian hospitals in the 1990's. In 1992 more than sixteen thousand new refugees arrived, forty-eight percent of them Bosnian Muslims. The influx of refugees continued in the following years so in 1994 the Hungarian Catholic Church and other Catholic NGOs increased their charity operations by creating soup-kitchens and distributing clothes in the large cities of Southern Hungary where most of the refugees lived.

These historical events share some similarities. First, the state alone was unable to handle the mass refugee situations because of political complexities and structural shortfalls. Second, the Catholic Church and the faithful have always actively helped the refugees in need. However, the freedom of the church to act was constrained by internal and external political circumstances.

II. HUNGARIAN CATHOLIC CHURCH AND THE CURRENT MIGRATION CRISIS

In this crisis Hungary is just a transit country for the vast majority of migrants,¹⁷ who would like to find asylum in Western Europe.¹⁸ Therefore the main responsibility of catholic charity organizations is limited to providing humanitarian care such as food, shelter and medical assistance.¹⁹ Thus there is no need to set up programs which offer long term support and integration programs for these migrants.

The Hungarian Catholic Caritas, which was re-established in 1991 as the formal charity organization of the Hungarian Conference of Bishops, played a very important role in this effort.²⁰ It was assisted by the volunteers of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, the Sant'Egidio community and other private associations of faithful and the members of religious orders.

Two years before the main crisis in Hungary, in 2013 the Catholic Caritas signed a cooperation agreement with the Hungarian Office of Immigration and Nationality, which included distributing clothes, beddings and toiletries to the refugee centres in Bicske, Balassagyarmat

¹⁶ Rendszerváltók – Kozma atya. <http://kozmaimre.hu/archivum/category/ujsgacikkek> (Downloaded: 22 Mar 2016.)

¹⁷ Europe's refugee summit: Do not send me your huddled masses. <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21649712-emergency-meeting-brussels-produces-inadequate-plan-save-migrants-do-not-send-me-your>. (Downloaded: 22 Mar 2016.)

¹⁸ <http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21662597-asylum-seekers-economic-migrants-and-residents-all-stripes-fret-over-their-place-looking>. (Downloaded: 22 Mar 2016.)

¹⁹ Ungarn: Kirchen in Asylhilfe aktiv, jedoch keine Quartiergeber. <http://kath.net/news/51919> (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

²⁰ Homepage of the Hungarian Catholic Caritas <http://www.karitaszkozpont.hu/> (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

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and Debrecen.²¹ The humanitarian assistance provided by the Hungarian Catholic Church was not focused just on those people who reached Hungary because the Conference of Bishops has already transferred quick financial aid to the Caritas of Iraq to ease the crisis caused by the growth of the Islamic State.²²

In 2015 the scope of the 2013 agreement with the Office of Immigration and Nationality was expanded to include the refugee centres in Nagyfa and Kiskunhalas too. At other locations the Catholic Caritas distributed food, baby formula, toiletries and thousands of bottles of mineral water to the refugees.²³ Furthermore the Catholic Caritas also signed a cooperation-agreement with the Istvan Károlyi Children's Home in Fót. This institution is responsible for looking after refugee children who arrive without parents into Hungary. Here, Caritas volunteers provide psychosocial and free time activities to children.²⁴

During the summer of 2015 the Catholic Caritas and the Order of Malta participated in easing the conditions of the migrants who were stuck in Budapest. The Order of Malta moved one of its ambulances to the Keleti Railway Station which had become a hub for the migrants.²⁵ Members of the Sant'Egidio Community played a useful role during the crisis because their interpreters speaking Eastern languages made communication with the migrants more efficient.²⁶ The doctors belonging to the Order of Malta and other volunteers gave medical help in Budapest, Szeged, Győr and later Rösztke. Volunteers distributed toys and other donations for children as well. However helping these people was not easy because lots of refugees were distrustful of Christian relief organizations. Therefore, these institutions decided to operate undercover, without wearing the symbols of their organizations. Rösztke was also the focus for refugees coming to Europe. Many refugees were sleeping outdoors. So the volunteers of the Catholic Caritas distributed blankets, sleeping bags and baby formula. Over a week church organisations provided medical care for more than 1000 refugees and they distributed 7000 packs of medicine.

When the government decided to provide transportation to the Austrian-Hungarian border for the refugees same local chapters of the Caritas started their own programs in

²¹ Enikő, Nagy: Menekültügy: összefognak a karitatív szervezetek.

<http://ujember.hu/a-katolikus-karitasz-a-menekultekert/> (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

²² Gyorssegelyt küld Irakba és imanapot hirdet a Magyar Katolikus Püspöki Konferencia.

<http://www.magyarKurir.hu/hirek/gyorssegelyt-kuld-irakba-magyar-katolikus-puspoki-konferencia> (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

²³ <http://www.karitasz.hu/aktualis/adomanyok-a-menekultlaboroknak> (Downloaded: Mar 2016.)

²⁴ Adományok a fóti Gyermekotthonnak. <http://karitasz.hu/korabbi-hirek/adomanyok-a-foti-gyermekotthonnak> (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

²⁵ Így segíti a menekülteket a Magyar Máltai Szeretetszolgálat. <http://www.maltai.hu/?action=new&newid=1731> (Downloaded: 13 Mar 2016.)

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²⁶ Zsuzsanna, Thullner: A Szent Egyed közösség is segíti a menekülteket. <http://www.magyarKurir.hu/hazai/a-szent-egyed-kozosseg-is-segiti-a-menekulteket-2015> (Downloaded: 13 Mar 2016.)

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Nagykanizsa, Körmend and Szentgotthárd. For example the Caritas of Szentgotthárd raised more than 16 000 Euros for food, blankets, water and medicine.²⁷

Besides the official charity organizations same catholic parishes expressed their willingness to help in this effort by providing food and accommodation. For example the parish of Röske offered a shelter and collected food for the migrants. The Abbey of Pannonhalma opened its doors to a few families travelling west to Austria.²⁸ However, only a few migrants accepted these offers because the goal for most of them was to cross Hungary as quickly as possible.

After the construction of the border fence on the Hungarian-Serbian and the Hungarian-Croatian border, the number of refugees entering Hungary become almost zero. The Hungarian Caritas supported the work of the Slovenian and the Croatian Caritas. For example a medical team of Caritas Hungary assisted Caritas Slovenia's relief effort in Dobova.²⁹

In January 2016 the Conference of Bishops ordered a Sunday collection to be held in every Hungarian Catholic Church for the benefit of the Christians in the Middle-East.³⁰ Besides the nationwide fundraising, the diocese of Szeged-Csanád organized a donation campaign to help Syrian Christians.³¹ The Caritas also set up a charity phone number and dialling this number donated 1.5 Euros per call for the refugees.

Besides organizing these actions, the Hungarian Catholic Bishops also expressed the importance of the humanitarian aspects of the migration crisis at multiple national and international forums. For example, on 20 August 2015, Cardinal Erdő's Saint Stephens day's homily was dedicated to the migration crisis. He analysed its causes and expressed the importance of finding just and fair solutions to this challenge. He also thanked the various catholic institutions for their participation in this process. Other Hungarian bishops and the Conference of Bishops itself also expressed similar thoughts about the problem.³²

Finally, to understand the underlying issues of migration, an international conference was organized with the support of Cardinal Erdő and the National University of Public Service.

²⁷ Karitás a határokon. <http://karitasz.hu/aktualis-hirek/karitasz-a-hatarokon> (Downloaded: 13 Mar 2016.)

²⁸ A pannonhalmi apátságban is menekültek vannak. http://keresztény.mandiner.hu/cikk/20150906_a_annonhalmi_apatsagban_is_menekultek_vannak. (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

²⁹ Caritas Hungary medical team supports Caritas Slovenia's relief effort with refugees. <http://www.caritas.eu/news/caritas-hungary-medical-team-supports-caritas-slovenias-relief-effort-with-refugees>. (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

³⁰ Gyűjtést hirdet az MKPK a közel-keleti keresztények megsegítésére. <http://www.magyarKurir.hu/hazai/az-uldozott-kozel-keleti-keresztenyek-megsegitesere-magyar-katolikus-puspoki-konferencia> (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

³¹ Pasztorális levél a Szeged-Csanádi Egyházmegye minden közösségének és tagjának. <http://www.magyarKurir.hu/nezopont/pasztoralis-level-szeged-csanadi-egyhazmegye-minden-kozossegenek-es-tagjanak>. (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

³² György, Farkas: A magyar püspök Ferenc pápa mellé állt Orbánnal szemben. <http://24.hu/belfold/2015/12/18/a-magyar-puspok-ferenc-papa-melle-allt-orbannal-szemben/>. (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

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The keynote speaker at the conference was Cardinal-Prefect Filoni, the head of the Congregation for the Evangelisation of Peoples.³³ When the most serious period of the crisis was over, the Catholic charity organizations held a round table about their roles and responsibilities in similar events.³⁴

Another consequence of the crisis was that the well-known Jesuit Refugee Service set up a Hungarian branch. This organization has lots of international experience about how to integrate and educate asylum seekers.³⁵ The services they provide include training sessions and raising funds for refugee centres. Their refugee policy supports setting up transit corridors, the closer cooperation with churches and civil rights organizations. They urge the governments and main political forces within the EU to find such a solution to the migration crisis that is in accordance with human rights and European values.³⁶

SUMMARY

Hungary faced multiple migration crises in the twentieth century mainly due to her geographical position. The Hungarian Catholic Church has always taken an active role during these times. Its actions included providing many types of spiritual and humanitarian support. The current attitude towards the Hungarian Conference of Bishops is in harmony with the social teaching of the Church and the official policy of the Vatican

Hungarian Catholic Organizations actively helped the refugees but there were some constraints that they could not ignore. First, the level of popular support for helping the refugees was significantly lower than in the past.³⁷ Second, neither the state nor the ecclesiastical authorities were ready to quickly assist so many migrants. Third, the actions of the church institutions were also hindered by financial limitations and lack of expertise in some areas. Fourth, charity organizations have to be aware of national security aspects of mass migration and the operation of state authorities in this field. Finally, they must respect the relevant laws and regulations.

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³³ <http://www.magyarKurir.hu/esemenyek/a-bevadorlas-vallasi-es-etnikai-hatasai-az-europai-tarsadal-makra--nemzetkozi-tudomanys-konferencia-es-hallgatoi-forum>. (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

³⁴ Milyen választ adhatnak a szeretetszolgálatok a menekültkérdésre? <http://bpfialok.maltai.hu/milyen-valaszt-adhatnak-a-szeretetszolgalatok-a-menekultkerdesre/#more-1221>. (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

³⁵ Jezsuita Menekültszolgálat. <http://www.jezsuita.hu/cikk/hospes-jezsuita-menekultprogam-indul>. (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

³⁶ Jezsuita Menekültszolgálat – evangéliumi érték a vendégszeretet. <http://www.magyarKurir.hu/hirek/jezsuita-menekultszolgalat-evangeliumi-ertek-a-vendegszeretet> (Downloaded: 30 Mar 2016.)

³⁷ Béla, Katona – László, Gyömbér: A nemzetbiztonsági hivatal feladatai a migráció biztonsági kockázatainak felderítésében és elhárításában; együttműködési kérdések az uniós integráció tükrében. *Pécsi Határőr Szemle*, 2004, 117–120; József, Gubicza – Balázs, Laufer: Az illegális migráció aktuális trendjei nemzetbiztonsági szemszögből. *Pécsi Határőr Tudományos Közlemények*, XV (2014), 287–295.

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