

THE HUNGARIAN DIASPORA'S KIN-STATE

This brief analysis will reflect the kin-state policies toward Hungarian diaspora communities, giving a general view of its background, institutions and specific programs.

The Hungarian communities abroad came into being – small and large in number – all over the world as a consequence of the vicissitudes of Hungary's modern history. The border changes of the 20th century (particularly following the peace treaty of Trianon signed in 1920, in consequence of which two-thirds of the territory of Hungary was ceded to other countries), the wars that have devastated the Carpathian Basin, as well as drastic political regime changes and economic crises have pushed millions of Hungarians beyond Hungary's borders either as national minorities in newly created states or as immigrants. They and their descendants (the Hungarians abroad) collectively have preserved their national identity to a lesser or greater extent by maintaining their ethnic boundaries across generations within the societies of which they became a part. These communities have sustained to the present a widespread institutional network.

From a scientific point of view, the indigenous (*autochthon*) and migrant (*allochthon*) communities cannot be sharply differentiated, since on occasion the so-called autochthonous communities may have replaced earlier inhabitants in their place of settlement. In spite of this, the present Hungarian government (as opposed to the dominant practice in East-Central Europe) treats differently the kin-minorities living in the neighboring countries as a consequence of the altered state borders and those diaspora communities which have been produced by migration movements. Our assessment will be directed to this latter category.

To clear up any confusion, we [define diasporas](#) as (1) geographically dispersed macro communities of migratory origin (2) which have integrated into the society surrounding them, but have not fully assimilated, and (3) which have symbolic or objective relations with kin communities living in other areas, but believed to be of identical origin, and with their real or imagined ancestral homeland or kin-state. This general definition

should be supplemented by the observation, that the diaspora's origin in migrations, does not mean the personal migration of any one individual, but the emergence of a collective consciousness of the migration, with both symbolic and community shaping force.

A Brief History of the Hungarian Diaspora

In the assessment of diaspora communities one of the first considerations is their numerical size. However, in the assessment of the Hungarian diaspora a number of difficulties exist. On the one hand, in many of the receiving countries ethnic or nationality origin was not recorded in the census data. In this regard they took into account only the place of birth or citizenship. These records do not indicate the descendants of a Hungarian immigrant even when many among them have preserved their Hungarian identity. On the other hand, we do not have accurate data on the number of Hungarians who left the Carpathian Basin with the emigration waves of the 20th century. This too is a consequence of numerous causes. In the years preceding First World War the mass migration – which left entire regions of historic Hungary depopulated – were ethnically mixed (because of the fact that the population of the Kingdom of Hungary was ethnically highly heterogeneous as well). Then during the interwar years the vast majority of emigrating Hungarians came from those areas of the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy which had been ceded to the neighboring successor states. Thus, they were recorded as citizens of Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later called Yugoslavia).

During and after the Second World War religious and political segregation produced a division in the 20th century evolution of Hungarian diaspora communities. On the one hand, Hungarian-speaking Jewish organizations associated Hungary's memory with Nazi domination and this strengthened their orientation toward an Eastern European Ashkenazi alliance. On the other hand, Roman Catholic Hungarian organizations in diaspora ignored the Jewish emigration and defined themselves as a national emigration. This religious separation was reinforced by the question of political loyalties after 1945.

Even if the divisive nature of this time period is still evident in the life of Hungarian diaspora communities, nowadays these conflicts have been ameliorated significantly. In

more and more local organizations the integrationist diaspora character has become pervasive, making the unification of older organizations possible, without regard to religious or political affiliation. Beyond these organizations, the preservation of the Hungarian language and culture, its instruction as well as strengthening community solidarity is a major objective of the Hungarian media, week-end schools, Hungarian churches and the scouting movement as well. These institutions have been assisted by such cross-border umbrella organizations like the Hungarian World Federation (Magyarok Világszövetsége, MVSZ) founded in 1938, the Hungarian Scout Association in Exteris (Külföldi Magyar Cserkészszövetség, KMCSSZ) founded in 1950, the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (Magyar Emberi Jogok Alapítvány, HHRF) established in 1976, and the Hungarian Diaspora Council (Magyar Diaszpóra Tanács, MDT) founded in 2011.

The contemporary Hungarian emigration (since the 1989 regime change, and Hungary's 2004 membership in the EU) should be treated differently from the previous Hungarian emigrant waves. This contemporary migration is not a consequence of force or coercion, either political or religious persecution, or starvation destitution or extreme poverty, but is based on voluntary, economic reasons. Furthermore, it is too early to tell whether or not they will opt to become part of the diaspora, or whether or not they will opt to assimilate into the new host society or whether they will opt to change their host country or return to Hungary.

Hungary as a Kin-State in the 21st Century

After the 1989 regime change the national question – that is the problems arising out of the non-coincidence between the territorial borders of the state and the imagined boundaries of the nation – became (again) a central concern of Hungarian political life. Therefore, through the process of democratic transition it became necessary to reconsider the country as a kin-state under the new social, political and economic conditions. The main kin-state stance was stated in an unequivocal way in Article 6(3) of the new [1989 Constitution](#) (revision of the Act XX of 1949): “*The Republic of Hungary bears a sense of responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living outside its borders and shall promote and foster their relations with Hungary.*” The designation of a kin-state stance in this way was not an exception, but a general tendency in East-Central Europe.

The Romanian, Slovenian, Croatian, Ukrainian and Polish Constitutions contain similar references to their ethno-national kin-communities living beyond their borders. However, these kin-state commitments – based on the conception of cultural nation divided by states borders – led to debates and caused a great deal of re-thinking both domestically and on the international level. Opinions vary regarding the policies that best serve the responsibilities that the state bears for the fate of its kin-communities abroad.

In Hungary's case, initially bilateral agreements served these objectives. During the 1990's the Hungarian government signed bilateral treaties with its neighbors which emphasized the protection of the rights of national minorities. At this time (during the Horn administration) the so-called "Hungarian-Hungarian Summits" were created as well in order to establish and maintain the relations between kin-minority organizations and the Hungarian government. For their institutionalization and the expansion of their role in 1999 the Hungarian Standing Conference (Magyar Állandó Értekezlet, MÁÉRT) was founded. Five years later, in September 2004 (as an extension of MÁÉRT) a new advisory body was brought into being called the Forum of Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin (Kárpát-medencei Magyar Képviselők Fóruma, KMKF). The importance of the latter increased since MÁÉRT was put on hold from 2004 to 2010. Parallel to this (during the first Orbán government) to expand and implement legislatively kin-state aid to kin-minorities abroad the National Assembly passed in 2001 the so-called status law (Act LXII of 2001) which extended benefits to Hungarians who lived in neighboring states.

As these measures show, initially the Hungarian kin-state policies after the 1989 regime change were mainly concerned with supporting the autochthonous kin-minority populations living in neighboring states. [After 2010](#) this changed significantly. At present Hungary's kin-state policies have shifted toward the diaspora communities in numerous ways. In the following we will examine this shift at three different levels: (1) on the level of legislation; (2) on the level of decisions-making bodies and consultative forums; and (3) on the level of aid policy and programs.

Legislation

In 2010 (the first year of the Second Orbán government), as a logical follow-up to the status law's national unification objective, the National Assembly endorsed the law on dual citizenship (Act XLIV of 2010). This offered a preferential process of naturalization to "*non-Hungarian citizen whose ascendant was a Hungarian citizen or whose origin from Hungary is probable, and whose Hungarian language knowledge is proved*" – as it is prescribed in Article 2(2). According to this law which went into force on January 1, 2011, more than 770.000 applied for Hungarian citizenship, and 740.000 of them have already taken the oath of citizenship. In 2011 the National Assembly also adopted a new electoral law (Act CCIII of 2011) which gives the right to vote for Parliamentary representatives to Hungarian citizens living beyond the state's borders. According to the law makers, this kind of legislation makes it possible for Hungarians abroad – either in the neighboring countries or for those living outside the Carpathian Basin in diaspora – to become active parts of the "Hungarian political community". It is important to note, however, that this way to unify the nation is neither new nor unique in East-Central Europe. [Similar laws](#) exist in the majority of the countries in this region.

Beyond the institutionalization of a simplified naturalization procedure and the extension of suffrage, during the past five years a number of other laws have been adopted in Hungary, which emphasizes kin-state commitments formed under the ideal of unified cultural nation. An example is the law that provides Testimony for National Cohesion (Act XLV of 2010), which in its Article 3 states: *„The Hungarian National Assembly declares that all members and communities of the Hungarian nation, subjected to the jurisdiction of other states, belong to the single Hungarian nation whose cross-border cohesion is a reality and, at the same time, a defining element of the personal and collective identity of Hungarians.”* Also, Article D of the [Fundamental Law of Hungary](#) adopted in 2011 states: *„ Bearing in mind that there is one single Hungarian nation that belongs together, Hungary shall bear responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living beyond its borders, and shall facilitate the survival and development of their communities; it shall support their efforts to preserve their Hungarian identity, the assertion of their individual and collective rights, the establishment of their community self-governments, and their prosperity in their native lands, and shall promote their cooperation with each other and with Hungary.”*

Decisions-Making Bodies and Consultative Forums

Decisions in the field of policy for Hungarian communities abroad are made by the Hungarian National Assembly and Hungarian–Hungarian forums. The former has witnessed significant change after the 2010 election, when the central ministerial system came into being. In this new context the issues related to Hungarians abroad was raised to a higher level and became co-equal with any other policy sector. For these responsibilities execution is under the direction of the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad (which was established in 2010 within the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice, and after the latter's termination, in 2014, it was merged under the Prime Minister's Office). In order to centralize and unify the aid policy for Hungarians abroad the Bethlen Gábor Fund was created (according to Act CLXXXII of 2010) as the successor of the Homeland Fund (Szülőföld Alap). The management of funds is performed by the Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd.

Regarding the Hungarian–Hungarian forums new opportunities have emerged to strengthen relations with the diaspora. Although previous efforts existed (first of all in the meetings of MÁÉRT, KMKF and MVSZ where diaspora concerns received a hearing), until 2010 there was no forum or programs that focused explicitly on their support.

In October 2011 the Hungarian Government launched the [Hungarian Register](#) (Nemzeti Regiszter) website with the aim of addressing the Hungarian diaspora directly and keeping track of their activities. Also during this year the already mentioned Hungarian Diaspora Council (MDT) was formed on the model of MÁÉRT with which it closely cooperated. The major objective of this offline forum was to provide Hungarian leaders of diaspora organizations a channel to communicate and exchange experiences with each other and with the Hungarian government. The MDT has meetings once a year. The last one took place in Budapest on December 2nd, 2015.

In addition to the above presented decision-making bodies and consultative forums at least two other institutions should be also considered: one in the scholarly sphere and another one in the political sphere. On the one hand, the Hungarian Science Abroad Presidential Committee (Magyar Tudományosság Külföldön Elnöki Bizottság) established in 1996 by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia, MTA). On the other hand, the Parliamentary Committee on National

Cohesion (Nemzeti Összetartozás Bizottsága) which was founded in 2011. Both of these institutions deal also with Hungarian diaspora questions.

Aid Policy and Programs

At the tenth session of MÁÉRT in November 2011, a [strategic framework for Hungarian communities abroad](#) was adopted. Although this document did not deal specifically with the support for diaspora communities, the kin-state new diaspora forums and programs undertaken in the last few years are structurally linked to one another.

According to the [Founding Declaration of the MDT](#) dated on November 17, 2011: *“Twenty years after the political transition of 1989/90, the interests of the Hungarian Diaspora are receiving due attention in policies affecting Hungarian communities abroad. The government of national priorities is also committed to meeting the responsibilities expressed in the Fundamental Law regarding the Hungarian Diaspora.”* To this end, the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad brought into being the Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program which serves the preservation of Hungarian identity, culture and language skills of diaspora Hungarians, as well as encourages their community activity and strengthen their relations with Hungary. To accomplish these objectives, in the first year, in 2013, the Program sent fifty, then in the following years one-hundred interns for six, and then nine month residencies with Hungarian diaspora organizations, to further their community work in various countries throughout the world.

At its second convention on October 8, 2012, the MDT adopted the establishment of the [Julianus Program](#), whose goal is to create a comprehensive register of the Hungarian material heritage located in the diaspora (Hungarian related buildings, statues and other memorials, including plaques, streets, libraries, archives and museums), and create broad access to its data. This constantly growing register represented on a world map is easily accessed on the National Register’ web page.

One year later, on November 6, 2013 at its third convention, the MDT accepted the [Mikes Kelemen Program](#), which focuses on preserving the diaspora’s material heritage (especially its library materials), collecting its elements in a systematic manner, transferring them to Hungary and making provision for their appropriate utilization. Under the administration of the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad

and the National Széchényi Library the program began its operation on January 1, 2014. On three continents (North America, South America and Australia) in seven countries collection points have been established, where up to the present 100 m³ library materials have been accumulated.

Last year, the closing declaration of the fifth Convention of the MDT lauded the success of the above mentioned programs and the progress made in the naturalization of Hungarians abroad. In addition this document included the establishment of a new knowledge center (called Emigration and Diaspora Center) as well as support for the Re-Connect Hungary – Magyar Birthright Program, and the recognition of the role Hungarian churches have in the preservation of national identity. Beyond this the representatives of the Diaspora organizations called for the extension of the Mikes Kelemen Program to Western Europe and the Without Borders Program (Határtalanul!) – through which since 2010 students from Hungarian schools receive state support to organize class visits to Hungarian inhabited regions of neighboring countries – to all regions of diaspora Hungarians.

In addition to the programs undertaken by the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad financed by the Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd. other Hungarian institutions also provide support for those who live in the diaspora. One of the most significant examples of this is the scholarship program launched by the Balassi Institute in cooperation with the Ministry of Human Capacities. Also significant is the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Momentum Program (Lendület Program), whose objective among others is to reverse the brain drain of young researchers as well as attracting back to Hungary internationally recognized researchers who had previously left the country.

Regarding kin-state policies toward the diaspora it is important to be aware – beside the differentiation between autochthon and allochthon origins – that all Hungarian communities dispersed throughout the world live in very unique circumstances. Kin-state policies cannot be successful without taking into account their local cultural loyalties. It is also important to know how the communities in question relate to the kin-state's assistance both at the symbolic and practical levels. For creating and maintaining contacts and permanent consultation with Hungarian organizations and political parties



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abroad, forums like MÁÉRT and MDT prove to be best practices in this area. Moreover, for oriented development of Hungarian kin-state policies it is necessary to own deeper and more comprehensive knowledge about the affected communities in terms of their everyday diaspora or minority existence, local requirements and needs. The collection, organization and structural description of this information is the responsibility of the researchers and specialists in the field.

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