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HUNGARIAN DIASPORA ADVOCACY IN THE UNITED STATES: RECENT CHALLENGES, FUTURE STRATEGIES¹

Abstract: Over the past decades, Hungarian American diaspora organizations have played a significant role in advocating for the human rights of ethnic Hungarian minorities outside Hungary's borders. While these organizations have engaged in a broad range of issues—including NATO enlargement and the U.S. Visa Waiver Program—this study focuses specifically on their sustained efforts to protect minority rights. The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF) has been the primary organization leading these initiatives. By situating Hungarian diaspora advocacy within the broader framework of ethnic interest representation in the United States, this study explores contemporary challenges, such as the decreasing prioritization of minority rights in U.S. foreign policy and the shifting geopolitical landscape in Central and Eastern Europe. Drawing on insights from academic literature, the study proposes strategic responses to ensure the continued effectiveness of these advocacy efforts.

Introduction

Hungarian American organizations have long-standing engagement in advocating for the human rights of ethnic Hungarian minorities outside Hungary's borders. This issue also enjoys broad, cross-party support in Hungary, suggesting that it is likely to remain a key concern for the Hungarian American diaspora in the coming decades, despite not being among the most salient topics at present. The Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF) is the primary organization dedicated to this issue, collaborating closely with Hungarian diaspora umbrella organizations. Consequently, this study will focus primarily on the activities of the HHRF. The objective is not to provide a comprehensive account of the HHRF's activities—an area already extensively covered by numerous scholars in recent

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years²—but rather to situate Hungarian diaspora advocacy within the broader framework of ethnic interest representation in the United States. By adopting this perspective, the study aims to identify the contemporary challenges facing Hungarian diaspora advocacy in recent years and propose strategic responses to address them.³

The study first provides an overview of the distinctive characteristics of ethnic-based advocacy in the United States, outlining the key themes and actors of Hungarian diaspora advocacy, while it also examines the activities of other Central and Eastern European ethnic organizations, assessing how their advocacy efforts differ from those of the Hungarian advocacy. Following this, the study analyzes the challenges that have increasingly complicated Hungarian diaspora advocacy in the United States, particularly over the past few years. These include the declining prominence of minority rights issues on the U.S. foreign policy agenda and the impact of the shifting geopolitical landscape in Central and Eastern Europe following Russia's aggression against Ukraine, which has further complicated advocacy efforts in this domain. In addressing these challenges, the study draws on insights from academic literature on effective human rights and diaspora advocacy to identify potential strategies for overcoming and mitigating these difficulties.

Diaspora advocacy in the United States

The American political system was designed to provide interest groups with access to policymaking processes. James Madison, one of the Founding Fathers, warned about the dangers of factions in *Federalist No. 10* and argued for structuring the political system to control their effects.⁴ The United States hosts an extensive array of interest groups addressing a broad spectrum of issues. This paper focuses on a specific type of interest representation: groups organized around ethnic identity, also referred to as diaspora advocacy.

- 2 Read more: Eszter Herner-Kovács, “*Theory meets practice – Challenging the Conventional Wisdom on Ethnic Lobby Success in the United States*,” BA Thesis, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 2013; Eszter Herner-Kovács, “The power of second-generation diaspora: Hungarian ethnic lobbying in the United States in the 1970–1980s,” *Diaspora Studies* 11, no. 2 (2018): 171–188.; Andrew Ludanyi, “Hungarian Lobbying Efforts for the Human Rights of Minorities in Rumania: The CHRR/HHRF as a Case Study,” *Hungarian Studies* 6, no. 1 (1990); Norbert Tóth, “Posztmodern lovagok, avagy a Hungarian Human Rights Foundation és a nemzetközi szervezetek kapcsolata 1976 és 2000 között,” *Kisebbségvédelem* 4, (2021)
- 3 In 2021, the author of this paper was Hungary Foundation’s visiting research fellow at the University of Notre Dame. His research topic was human and minority rights advocacy and ethnic lobbying in the U.S. He made over 50 interviews, online and offline, with human rights experts and advocates, academics, foreign policy experts, researchers and representatives of mayor American human rights and public policy institutes, Congress advisors, diplomats, and representatives of different American ethnic advocacy groups.
- 4 James Madison, *Federalist No. 10*, 1787.

The United States has a long history of diaspora groups attempting to influence foreign policymaking. Tony Smith has noted that in addition to the social fabric of the U.S. as a ‘nation of immigrants’, it is “the structure of American democracy that allows ethnic communities, and a much wider range of civic interest groups in general, access to policy-making.”⁵ While some scholars argue that ethnic groups play a significant role in shaping American foreign policy, viewing this influence as a potential threat to national interests,⁶ others contest this position. They suggest that the influence of ethnic lobbies is often overstated and, in some cases, aligns with the promotion of American values internationally.⁷ The 1999 expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to include Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic exemplifies ethnic groups influencing U.S. foreign policy as a clear example of ethnic American groups driving U.S. foreign policy.⁸

Diaspora advocacy groups adopt various strategies depending on their objectives. Some focus on fostering and maintaining strong bilateral relations between the United States and their ancestral homelands (e.g., Irish American groups), others act against neighboring or regional rivals (e.g., Armenian, Greek, and Taiwanese organizations), others oppose the ruling political regimes in their ancestral countries.

Throughout different historical periods, specific ethnic organizations gained prominence depending on how their issues aligned with the domestic and international political agendas of the time. The significance of the topics represented by these organizations, *topic saliency* is thus a crucial factor in assessing their activity and effectiveness.

Among ethnic advocacy groups, the Israeli,⁹ Armenian,¹⁰ and Cuban¹¹ lobbies are often cited as wielding disproportionate political influence. However, the extent of their influence is difficult to quantify due to a lack of comprehensive data. Historically, other ethnic groups, such as Irish and Italian Americans, also played significant roles in shaping U.S.

5 Tony Smith, *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000): 86-89.

6 Samul P. Huntington, “The Erosion of American National Interests,” *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 5 (1997); George Kennan, *The Cloud of Danger: Current Realities of American Foreign Policy*, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1977); Smith, *Foreign Attachments*.

7 David M. Paul and Rachel Anderson Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009); Yossi Shain, *Marketing the American Creed Abroad. Diasporas in the US and Their Homelands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 8.; Herner-Kovács, “Theory meets practice,” 7–11.

8 Paul and Paul, *Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy*, 1.

9 John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008).

10 Raoul Lowery Contreras, *The Armenian Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* (New York: Berkeley Press, 2017).

11 Henriette M. Rytz, *Ethnic Interest Groups in US Foreign Policy-Making. A Cuban-American Story of Success and Failure* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

foreign policy. Especially groups exercised more influence with large block of unified voters.¹² However, as these communities assimilated into the broader American society, their political influence in foreign policy has diminished.

It is important to note that diaspora advocacy is just one voice among many in the policy-making process. Business groups, human rights organizations, and other interest groups also seek to influence U.S. foreign policy. Ethnic organizations, however, possess a distinct advantage: the ability to mobilize grassroots networks of concerned voters.¹³ Unlike business groups, whose primary resource is often financial capital, ethnic organizations tend to be mass-based entities reliant on public participation and civic engagement.

In the United States, most ethnic advocacy groups operate as non-profit organizations under the 501(c)(3) tax code. Such organizations are permitted to engage in lobbying and advocacy activities, provided these efforts do not require significant direct expenditures. Activities such as meeting with members of Congress and their staff are common examples of permissible advocacy efforts.¹⁴

Most diaspora organizations use the following tools: lobbying of Congress, the President and the administration, as well as state senates, local municipalities; persuading their active members to vote for candidates that seems sympathetic to their issues; raising funds to support these candidates (and finance their own activities); mobilizing public demonstrations; providing information to all those who are interested; organizing trips for politicians and bureaucrats to the diasporas' homelands, as well as trips for local politicians and bureaucrats to the hostland (fly-ins and fly-outs).¹⁵

Hungarian and the Central Eastern European diaspora advocacy in the United States

The establishment of Hungarian diaspora institutions in the United States began in the early 20th century. However, organized advocacy efforts became prominent primarily in the 1970s with the founding of the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF). Following the Helsinki Process of 1975, the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

12 James A. Thurber et al, *Congress and Diaspora Politics: The Influence of Ethnic and Foreign Lobbying* (New York: Suny Press, 2018) 2.

13 Paul and Paul, "*Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy*", 23

14 Paul and Paul, "*Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy*", 97.

15 Gabriel Sheffer, "The Effects of Diasporas' Nature, Types, and Goals on Hostland Foreign Policies" In: *Diaspora Lobbies and the US Government: Convergence and Divergence in Making Foreign Policy*, ed. Josh De Wind, Renata Segura (New York: New York University Press, 2014) 51.

in shaping foreign policy expanded significantly. In 1976, the HHRF, then known as the Committee for Human Rights in Romania (CHRR), organized a protest in front of the Romanian delegation to the United Nations to highlight human rights violations against the Hungarian minority in Romania. This event marked the beginning of a sustained institutional advocacy effort, which would go on to achieve significant successes over the subsequent decades.

A focal point of CHRR's activities was advocating for the suspension of Romania's Most Favored Nation (MFN) trading status. To draw attention to the oppressive nature of Nicolae Ceaușescu's regime, the organization regularly published advertisements in major newspapers such as *The New York Times*. Over time, CHRR shifted its strategy to focus on direct engagement with U.S. policymakers. It organized letter-writing campaigns, provided oral and written testimonies to Congressional committees, and arranged meetings between policymakers and representatives from their constituencies. With these efforts, an increasing number of U.S. Congress members supported the suspension of Romania's MFN status.¹⁶ From 1976 until 1986, CHRR presented more than 1,000 pages of written testimony and testified orally on 27 separate occasions before U.S. Congressional committees, where the organization documented the Rumanian regime's non-compliance with human rights norms. The culmination to this period of HHRF's efforts occurred in 1987, when the Congress voted on four separate occasions to suspend Rumania's Most-Favored-Nation status.¹⁷ In subsequent years, CHRR broadened its scope to address human rights violations faced by Hungarian minorities in other neighboring countries, including Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine. Reflecting this expanded mission, the organization adopted the name Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF). The primary focus of the HHRF became the protection of the human and minority rights of ethnic Hungarians living outside Hungary. Over several decades, the HHRF successfully carried out its mission, establishing itself as the foremost organization for minority advocacy in the United States.

The success of the HHRF can be attributed to several factors. First, its advocacy was grounded in the universal principle of human rights, a topic that aligned closely with the priorities of U.S. foreign policy in the 1970s and 1980s. This human rights-focused approach resonated with American public and political discourse.¹⁸ Importantly, the organization did not center its arguments on Hungary as the ancestral homeland but instead criticized neighboring states for their treatment of Hungarian minorities. Second, the HHRF's leadership primarily comprised second-generation Hungarian Americans, who were socialized in the

16 See more: Herner-Kovács, "Theory meets practice", 35–45; Herner-Kovács, "The power of second-generation diaspora", 171–188.

17 Available at <https://hhrf.org/about/mission-statement/>.

18 Herner-Kovács, "Theory meets practice", 45.

United States. Their ability to present the distant issue of Hungarian minorities in Romania in a manner that was both comprehensible and compelling to American policymakers was instrumental to the organization's success.

HHRF is a private, independent, 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation, operating from its New York headquarters. Currently HHRF's major activities are a) documenting and reporting on the human rights conditions of these Hungarian minority communities; b) providing in-depth analyses for decision makers and expert testimony before U.S. and international forums; c) facilitating meetings for representatives of Hungarian minority communities in the U.S.; and d) various youth-focused initiatives.¹⁹ HHRF also serves as a source for media agencies and other major human rights organizations regarding the violation of human rights of Hungarian minorities in Europe.²⁰

While human rights of ethnic Hungarian minorities living beyond the borders of Hungary used to be and also remained in the center of the Hungarian diaspora advocacy, even in the past few years when declining salience could be witnessed in relation to this topic in the American foreign policy, the most successful ethnic advocacy groups from Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have tended to focus on geopolitical issues. Over the past 10–15 years, the dominant topic shaping U.S. foreign policy toward Central and Eastern Europe has been managing Russian influence, particularly since 2014, when the annexation of Crimea and the de facto occupation of Donbas created a new geopolitical landscape. This focus on Russia has significantly influenced the advocacy agenda of ethnic organizations from the region, as U.S. actions in this area have largely been shaped by responses to Russian activities.

During the Cold War, Baltic (Estonian, Latvian, and Lithuanian), Czech, Hungarian, Ukrainian and Polish ethnic groups actively lobbied in the United States for a hardline stance against the Soviet Union.²¹ Following the fall of communism, these groups remained engaged in advocating for their ancestral countries' accession to NATO and inclusion in the Visa Waiver Program. However, as Paul and Paul note, once these goals were

19 Available at <https://hhrf.org/about/mission-statement/>.

20 The HHRF is not the only organization addressing the human and minority rights of ethnic Hungarians in the United States. The American Hungarian Federation (AHF), one of the oldest Hungarian American organizations, has been active on a national level for decades. Since its establishment in 1991, the Hungarian American Coalition (HAC) has also been a significant player in this field. These organizations have cooperated with the HHRF over the years, with HAC maintaining particularly close ties. Given its prominent role and decades-long record of effective advocacy, the HHRF remains the central actor in Hungarian minority advocacy in the United States.

21 Maciej Olchawa, "The Polish and Ukrainian Lobby and U.S. Policy toward the Soviet Union and Russia," PhD Dissertation, Faculty of International and Political Studies Jagiellonian University, Kraków, 2022.; available at <https://ruj.uj.edu.pl/server/api/core/bitstreams/40ad92bd-d315-4f04-ad44-720623e5babd/content>; Stephen A. Garrett, "Eastern European Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy," *Political Science Quarterly* 93, no. 2 (1978): 301-323, available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2148611>.

achieved, the relevance of these lobbies appeared to diminish due to the lack of pressing foreign policy issues to mobilize their ethnic communities.²² This trend, however, was reversed in 2014 with Russia's annexation of Crimea and the subsequent conflict in Donbas, which created new priorities for the region and reinvigorated advocacy efforts. Since then, Baltic, Polish, and Ukrainian advocacy has received heightened attention in Washington. It is important to note that this increased prominence does not necessarily mean these advocacy organizations have taken on formal roles in foreign policymaking or dramatically increased their public visibility. In many cases, these actors exert influence directly within the policymaking process, including through think tanks and other knowledge-based institutions engaged in foreign policy discussions.

Among the noteworthy advocacy networks is the Central and East European Coalition (CEEC),²³ an umbrella organization comprising 18 diaspora groups from the region. Members include Baltic, Ukrainian, Armenian, Belarusian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Slovak, Georgian, Croatian, and Polish organizations. Through joint statements and shared policy positions, the CEEC amplifies the region's voice in Washington. Hungarian organizations, such as the American Hungarian Federation (AHF) and the Hungarian American Coalition (HAC), are also members of the CEEC. While the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF) is not a formal member, its expertise contributes to the coalition's activities. The CEEC's efforts primarily focus on countering Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe, with Baltic and Ukrainian organizations playing a particularly influential role in shaping its agenda.

Another notable organization is the Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc. (JBANC),²⁴ which represents the American Latvian Association, the Estonian American National Council, and the Lithuanian American Council. JBANC's mission is to advocate for unified Baltic interests, and its activities closely resemble those of the CEEC. According to its own statements, JBANC has been deeply involved in legislative efforts and activities supporting democracy and freedom in Ukraine, especially following Russia's 2014 invasion. Its advocacy includes promoting reassurances for Baltic countries and other NATO members, as well as securing continued funding for the European Deterrence Initiative, launched in 2014.

22 Paul and Paul, "Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy", 45.

23 Available at <https://ceecadvocacy.org/about/>.

24 Available at <https://jbanc.org>.

Contemporary challenges and possible strategies of the Hungarian diaspora advocacy

Focusing on annual human rights country reports: expanding inside advocacy tools

Over the past 10–15 years, concerns about the human rights of ethnic Hungarians living beyond Hungary's borders have gradually diminished on the American foreign policy agenda. One notable manifestation of this trend—whether as a consequence or even a cause—is the omission of references to human rights violations against Hungarian minorities in Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Serbia from the U.S. Department of State's annual human rights country reports,²⁵ both in the period 2011–2015²⁶ and 2016–2020.²⁷ Despite ongoing violations documented by organizations such as the HHRF,²⁸ these reports have largely ignored such issues in recent years.

A primary strategic goal in Hungarian diaspora advocacy should be to ensure that these human rights concerns are reintegrated into the U.S. annual human rights reports. These reports serve as a crucial reference point for advocacy efforts, and their omission of such cases significantly weakens advocacy work. The reports help American foreign policy actors contextualize these violations and acknowledge them as genuine and pressing issues requiring intervention.

According to the relevant scholarly literature on the methods and tactics of advocacy, the most effective means of achieving this goal is through 'inside advocacy' methods, tools and tactics of traditional advocacy targeting multilateral international organizations, decision-makers, and human rights institutions.²⁹ Advocates may monitor the violations of human and minority rights and inform the relevant decision-makers and the wider public about these breaches. Organizations like the HHRF already engage in such activities, but further

25 Available at <https://www.state.gov/reports-bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/>.

26 Research Institute for Hungarian Communities Abroad, "The Annual Reports of the United States State Department for the countries of the Carpathian Basin (Slovakia, Ukraine, Romania and Serbia) Compared and Analyzed for the years 2011–2015," available at https://bgazrt.hu/wp-content/uploads/NPKI_Analyses/Annual%20Reports_US.pdf

27 Nicole E. Nemeth, "In the Eyes of the Beholder: Analysis and Impressions of U.S. State Department Human Rights and Religious Freedom Reports for Serbia, Slovakia, Romania and Ukraine (2016–2020)," *Hungarian Journal of Minority Studies* 4, (2021), available at <https://bgazrt.hu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/6.Nemeth.pdf>.

28 Available at <https://hhf.org/on-our-radar/>.

29 Christine Mahoney, *Brussels versus the Beltway: Advocacy in the United States and the European Union* (Georgetown University Press, 2008).

efforts are needed. Advocates may also prepare periodic reports for decision-makers, directly provide them with information on the status of the respective minority group at personal meetings and hearings or send them letters and background materials with information on the violations of human and minority rights. However, this approach requires a permanent advocacy structure in Washington, which demands significant financial and logistical resources.

The primary target of these efforts is the U.S. Department of State, specifically its Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor,³⁰ which oversees the reporting process. Local U.S. embassies provide inputs for these reports, drawing on sources such as NGOs, media reports, academic studies, and government data.³¹ Additionally, Congress plays a crucial role in shaping the agenda of the State Department and local embassies. Relevant congressional targets include the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, and individual representatives and senators influential in foreign policy decision-making. Beyond Washington-based advocacy, local structures in the affected states—Romania, Slovakia, Serbia, and Ukraine—must also maintain continuous contact with U.S. embassies. These embassies contribute significantly to the human rights reports, necessitating cooperation with reliable experts and human rights defenders on the ground.

When studying inside advocacy strategies, analyzing best practices is essential. Becker identified several advocacy tactics as effective practices when examining various human rights advocacy campaigns.³² Firstly, she found that the involvement of NGOs and experts from the respective states is crucial both for uncovering and identifying human rights violations and for preparing briefings and letters addressed to political and policy decision-makers. Secondly, local NGOs and experts should be engaged in international alliances, leveraging their credible expertise in conjunction with the advocacy capabilities inherent in international networks. Thirdly, the documentation of human rights violations is of paramount importance, necessitating professionally balanced monitoring. This documentation can take the form of reports, briefing papers, press releases, web postings, newsletters, or even complaints submitted to the United Nations.

From the perspective of the Hungarian diaspora advocacy in the United States, particularly the activities of HHRF, these aspects merit closer examination. The HHRF documents human rights violations affecting Hungarian minorities, primarily through web posts and

30 Available at <https://www.state.gov/bureaus-offices/under-secretary-for-civilian-security-democracy-and-human-rights/bureau-of-democracy-human-rights-and-labor/>

31 Congressional Research Service: Global Human Rights: The Department of State's Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF10795>.

32 Jo Becker, *Campaigning for Justice. Human Rights Advocacy in Practice* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).

newsletters. These materials reach the American Hungarian community, ensuring that they remain informed on the issue. Additionally, HHRF provides briefings to congressional decision-makers; however, since these comprehensive reports are not publicly available on its website, it is unclear how frequently this occurs, and which local experts and NGOs contribute to the process. Furthermore, it remains uncertain whether the HHRF successfully disseminates these reports to Washington-based NGOs specializing in human rights and influencing U.S. foreign policy. Questions also arise regarding whether collaboration, regular consultations, and expert discussions on specific human rights violations take place with these organizations.

It is not entirely clear either which Hungarian NGOs and experts from neighboring countries (Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, and Ukraine) the organization cooperates with and, if such collaboration exists, what its frequency and format are. It is crucial that these experts be internationally recognized scholars and human rights advocates, and that the organizations involved possess genuine social embeddedness within the communities under examination. According to its own reports, the HHRF has facilitated visits to Washington for several political leaders representing Hungarian minority communities. During these visits, these individuals engaged with congressional decision-makers, administration officials (primarily from the State Department), and Washington-based think tanks. While the presence of legitimate political representatives of minority communities in Washington is important, it is equally essential to ensure that expert circles involved in documenting human rights violations also have a presence in Washington.

Focusing outside advocacy on selected minority rights violations

As discussed earlier, the Russian strategic threat has become an unavoidable factor in Central and Eastern Europe, leading to the increased influence of organizations that prioritize this issue. Consequently, less salient topics, such as the human rights of ethnic minorities in countries like Slovakia or Romania, have been pushed to the background.

Moreover, Hungarian advocacy has also been hampered by the contentious perception of Hungary's foreign policy among Washington's foreign policy circles. Many actors portray Hungary as 'Putin's Trojan horse',³³ a narrative also closely tied to the Hungarian government's advocacy for the rights of the Hungarian minority in Transcarpathia, Ukraine.

33 Ariel Cohen, "Viktor Orban's Goulash Energy Policy Makes Hungary Putin's Trojan Horse In Europe," *Forbes.com*, May 17, 2022, available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/arielcohen/2022/05/17/viktor-orban-goulash-energy-policy-makes-hungary-putins-trojan-horse-in-europe/>; Amanda Coakley, "Putin's Trojan Horse Inside the European Union," *Foreignpolicy.com*, August 3, 2022, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/08/03/hungary-orban-russia-conservative-politics/>.

Traditionally, the representation of ethnic minority rights in the U.S. has been spearheaded by civil society organizations, human rights groups, and advocacy networks, rather than by respective kin-states, like Hungary. However, since 2017, when Ukraine's amended education law stripped ethnic minorities of existing rights,³⁴ Hungary's government has pursued unusually assertive government advocacy for the restoration of these rights.³⁵ While ethnic minority rights have thus remained on the agenda, this has been driven by government actions from an administration that has faced widespread criticism in Washington, particularly from influential non-governmental actors in foreign policy.³⁶

Nevertheless, Hungarian organizations cannot afford to sideline the topic; it must remain central to advocacy efforts. In Hungary, the protection of the rights and interests of ethnic Hungarians abroad is one of the few issues that enjoys bipartisan support.³⁷ Given the large number of Hungarian organizations in the United States, most of which are culturally focused and not directly engaged in political advocacy, the shared pursuit of ethnic Hungarian rights has historically been a unifying theme. It is essential for this topic to remain a focal point of collective advocacy efforts moving forward.

Amid these challenges, Hungarian diaspora advocacy should strive to maintain the issue of ethnic Hungarian minority rights violations within public discourse by consistently informing the American Hungarian community while also raising awareness among the broader public. When key issues affecting an ethnic community are not widely recognized or sufficiently publicized, effective advocacy becomes significantly more difficult, as it lacks the necessary pressure from both the media and public opinion.

A potential future strategy could involve concentrating 'outside advocacy' efforts on select cases of Hungarian minority rights violations that are both comprehensible to the American public and salient enough to generate public attention. Outside advocacy methods aim to enhance public awareness of specific issues through various tactics, including mobilizing supporters at both the organizational and mass levels, organizing public events and

34 Balázs Tárnok, "Why Is Hungary Blocking" Ukraine's NATO Accession?" *The Washington Times*, 27 June 2021 (print edition), available at www.washingtontimes.com/news/2021/jun/25/why-is-hungary-blocking-ukraines-nato-accession/; Balázs Tárnok, "Suppression by the Suppressed: Ukraine's Restrictions on Minority Rights," *Newsweek*, 10 February 2023, available at <https://www.newsweek.com/suppression-suppressed-ukraines-restrictions-minority-rights-opinion-1779946>.

35 Available at <https://hhrf.org/on-our-radar/hungarians-in-ukraine/>.

36 See, among others: Péter Krekó and Patrik Szicherle, "Why Is Hungary Blocking Ukraine's Western Integration?" Atlantic Council UkraineAlert, January 16, 2018, available at <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/why-is-hungary-blocking-ukraine-s-western-integration/>.

37 For example, the *Minority SafePack* initiative was endorsed unanimously by Hungarian MEPs in the European Parliament and nearly unanimously by members of the Hungarian National Assembly. See: European Parliament resolution of 17 December 2020 on the European Citizens' Initiative 'Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe' (2020/2846(RSP)), available at https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0370_EN.html.

protests, and fostering a strong media presence. The latter is less relevant in the Hungarian context. Even though in 1976 HHFR initially began its activities in this manner,³⁸ the issue currently is not salient enough for mobilization.

Outside advocacy efforts should focus on issues that are comprehensible to the American public. For instance, while the Slovak language law poses a significant—perhaps the most critical—threat to the survival of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia, it is challenging to explain its implications in the United States, where minority language use is not a matter of daily concern as it is in Central Europe. This is especially true in the current international legal climate, when, for instance, the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) in 2023, in the case of *Valiullina and Others v. Latvia*,³⁹ ruled that there was no European consensus with respect to minorities' rights in the field of education, and several European states implement policies that legitimize restrictions on minority language use.⁴⁰ This, of course, does not mean that these issues are acceptable from a human rights perspective—they must continue to be addressed. However, they should primarily be tackled through inside advocacy efforts aimed at clarifying their fundamental rights implications.

For American diaspora advocacy organizations, outside advocacy efforts would be more effective if they focused on violations of fundamental rights that hold significant importance in the United States. One such issue in Slovakia is the continued application of the Beneš Decrees in Slovakia, which clearly infringe upon the rights to private property and human dignity, since in Slovakia the confiscation of private property solely on the basis of an individual's Hungarian or German ancestry is still an existing legal practice, which is in direct violation of legal certainty, due process, and the principles of the rule of law, too.⁴¹

38 Since its founding in 1976, the HHFR has organized 12 demonstrations, including a global protest on November 15, 1988, spanning 36 cities across 17 countries, opposing Ceausescu's plan to demolish over 7,000—more than half—of Romania's 13,000 villages.

39 *Valiullina and Others v. Latvia* 56928/19, 7306/20, 11937/20. Judgment 14.9.2023, available at <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:%5B%22002-14185%22%5D%7D>.

40 See the legislative trends in the Baltic states, for instance in Latvia: Cecilia Frego, "Latvian language policies and the Latvian Russian speaking communities," Eurac Research, 7 January 2025, available at <https://www.eurac.edu/en/blogs/midas/latvian-language-policies-and-the-latvian-russian-speaking-communities>; Nicolas Camut, "UN experts slam Latvia for clamping down on Russian-language minorities," Politico.eu, 8 February 2023, available at <https://www.politico.eu/article/united-nations-experts-latvia-russian-language-minorities/>.

41 János Fiala-Butora, "Current confiscations of property based on collective guilt under the Beneš Decrees in Slovakia as a violation of international norms – when the past haunts the present," *EJM Europäisches Journal für Minderheitenfragen* 17, no. 1–2 (2024) available at <https://doi.org/10.35998/ejm-2024-0009>; János Fiala-Butora, "Evidence about the Application of the Beneš Decrees in the 21st Century," Report of the Lajos Mocsáry Institute, 8 December 2023, available at <https://hhfr.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Annexes-Report-on-the-21st-application-of-the-Benes-Decrees-Lajos-Mocsary-Institute-issued-12-8-23.pdf>; Balázs Tárnok, "Why Is Ethnic Discrimination Still Legal in Slovakia?," *Foreign Policy*, 12 March 2022, available at <https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/03/12/slovakia-benes-decrees-ethnic-discrimination/>.

Similarly, in Romania, the issue of church property restitution remains a pressing concern, as it infringes upon the right to private property while also constituting discriminatory treatment based on religious affiliation, thereby threatening the right to religious freedom. For the past 48 years, this issue has been at the core of HHRF's advocacy efforts. The organization has actively campaigned for the restitution of 2,140 Hungarian religious and community properties that were unlawfully confiscated under communism in Romania.⁴²

According to scholarly literature on effective human rights advocacy, publishing op-eds in high-profile media outlets is a particularly valuable tool for outside advocacy. Over the past decades, Hungarian advocacy efforts have employed this strategy to varying degrees. Op-eds provide a unique opportunity to raise international awareness of specific issues by combining elements of academic research, politics, and media engagement.⁴³ Opinion pieces published in leading newspapers and specialized policy magazines can achieve substantial outreach, helping to bring critical public policy issues into mainstream discourse. Moreover, they reach Washington-based experts on Central and Eastern Europe, who may hold significant influence over the development of U.S. foreign policy. According to Becker, engaging well-known figures to author op-eds is an especially effective human rights advocacy strategy. Allocating resources to secure contributions from widely respected individuals is far more beneficial than relying on paid placements of op-eds by lesser-known figures. Given their credibility and influence, prominent individuals are more likely to have their op-eds accepted by major newspapers. While engaging such figures may require financial investment, their words carry greater weight and are more effective in shaping public awareness.⁴⁴

Conclusions

Hungarian diaspora advocacy in the United States faces significant challenges, particularly in ensuring that the human rights violations against ethnic Hungarians in Central and Eastern Europe remain on the American foreign policy agenda. The declining prominence of minority rights in U.S. foreign policy, the shifting geopolitical landscape, and Hungary's complex perception in Washington have all contributed to the diminishing effectiveness of advocacy efforts. However, strategic adjustments in both inside and outside advocacy can help mitigate these challenges and revitalize Hungarian diaspora engagement.

42 In pursuit of this goal, the HHRF has facilitated multiple visits to Washington, D.C. for Hungarian minority leaders from Romania and has published reports highlighting this severe human rights violation.

43 Larry Kirkman and Karen Menichelli, ed., *Op-Eds: A Cost-Effective Strategy for Advocacy* (Washington, DC: Benton Foundation, 2000).

44 Becker, *Campaigning for Justice*.

Hungarian diaspora advocacy must adopt a dual approach—leveraging inside advocacy to ensure Hungarian minority rights remain part of official U.S. human rights discourse, while employing targeted outside advocacy to raise awareness of select human rights violations that align with American policy priorities.

In terms of inside advocacy, a key priority should be reintegrating references to Hungarian minority rights violations into the U.S. State Department's annual human rights reports. These reports serve as an essential reference for policymakers and significantly influence U.S. foreign policy discourse. Achieving this goal requires a well-structured advocacy infrastructure in Washington, continuous engagement with decision-makers in the U.S. Congress and State Department, and closer cooperation with local experts and NGOs in the affected countries. Additionally, ensuring the professional documentation of human rights violations and integrating these findings into international human rights networks will enhance the credibility and reach of Hungarian advocacy.

Outside advocacy efforts, on the other hand, should focus on issues that resonate with American audiences and align with fundamental rights principles widely recognized in the United States, highlighting human rights violations with clear legal and moral implications, such as property rights infringements under the Beneš Decrees in Slovakia and church property restitution in Romania. An important tool in outside advocacy is strategic media engagement, particularly through op-eds in influential policy and news outlets. Publishing well-researched opinion pieces in high-profile newspapers can significantly increase awareness of Hungarian minority rights issues among U.S. policymakers and experts. To maximize impact, respected international figures should be engaged as authors, as their credibility enhances the reach and influence of advocacy efforts.

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