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János Kádár's Government and the Refugees of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956

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Abstract: During and following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, approximately 200,000 people fled the country, the majority of them to Austria and others to Yugoslavia. After the suppression of the Revolution, the Hungarian authorities targeted the refugees with two simultaneous measures: on the one hand, they sought to persuade those who were willing and those whom the official propaganda considered as "misguided" to repatriate; and on the other hand, the said authorities did everything in their power to compromise "hostile" emigrant circles and persons, thereby weakening their influence among the refugees. In order to encourage and facilitate the repatriation, Hungary proclaimed amnesty and established a Hungarian–Yugoslav joint committee as well as a repatriation office in Vienna; however, the widespread repatriation propaganda of the Hungarian government was largely unsuccessful. Moreover, those returning after 31 March 1957 were meticulously screened and many repatriation requests were rejected, mostly for fear that Western intelligence might have planted spies among the applicants and repatriates. Initially, Hungarian leaders regarded the emigration of 1956 as a threat for fear that Western propaganda might use the migrants to influence Western public opinion and the foreign policy of other governments towards Hungary; they only changed their stance in the summer of 1958, when the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party established a commission in charge of emigration affairs, which was to pay particular attention to financially supporting the repatriation of certain categories of 1956 emigrants. In 1960, "consular passports" were introduced to enable the relatives of "dissidents" to go abroad for family visits, and under certain conditions, "dissidents" were also allowed to visit Hungary. In 1963, the Hungarian repatriation policy reached a turning point with János Kádár's proclamation of a general amnesty. From that period onward, maintaining relations with Hungarian emigration became an integral part of government policy, and the political system made concessions with regard to the perception and treatment of emigration circles, which were also showing signs of division.
Keywords: Hungarian Revolution of 1956, refugees, emigration, amnesty, repatriation propaganda, state security bodies

Following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, approximately 200,000 people chose to expose themselves to all the uncertainties of escape and fled Hungary through Austria and Yugoslavia; they thus became the third wave of refugees to leave the country since the end of World War II, and this wave was even more heterogeneous than any other

before it, as 1956 saw the departure of not only those who had participated in the Revolution and rejected the communist system but also people whose prospects in Hungary had been bleak for some time.[1] Unlike the first two waves of 1945 and 1947, the third wave of dissidents, to use a contemporary term, could no longer be labelled fascist" or reactionary" masses, especially considering the large number of young emigrants who only reached adulthood after World War II. Beyond having social and demographic consequences in the long run,[2] the third wave of emigration caused considerable problems in the short term due to the great number of specialised workers and university students leaving the country; therefore, it was in the best interest of communist leadership to convey the impression of consolidation by persuading these refugees to repatriate.

After the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the communist authorities targeted the third wave of refugees with two simultaneous measures: on the one hand, they sought to persuade those who were willing and those whom the official propaganda considered as misguided" to repatriate; and on the other hand, they did everything in their power to compromise hostile" emigrant circles and persons, thereby weakening their influence among the refugees.

As early as its 19 November 1956 session, the Hungarian government issued a decision on devising measures that would facilitate the repatriation of those who had fled abroad following the suppression of the Hungarian Revolution. Hungarian leadership also decided to establish a Hungarian–Yugoslav joint committee to manage the affairs of Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia, as well as establish a repatriation office in Vienna to facilitate the return of Hungarian refugees from Austria.[3]

Three days later, on 22 November 1956, the Hungarian–Yugoslav Joint Committee initiated negotiations in Zagreb, and as early as 29 November, the relevant protocol was signed in Belgrade, resulting in an agreement that regulated the return of those wishing to repatriate and recorded the intentions of those wishing to travel onward. The Joint

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1 Julianna Puskás, "Elvándorlások Magyarországról 1945 óta és a magyar diaszpóra néhány jellegzetessége az 1970–es években," in *Tanulmányok a magyar népi demokrácia negyven évéről*, ed. János Molnár, Sándor Orbán, and Károly Urbán (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1985), 236-259. Julianna Puskás pointed out that "according to social psychological studies by Western researchers, the percentage of those who had participated in the armed struggle and therefore fled to escape the reprisals was less than five per cent. Political motivations arising from the general situation before the outbreak of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 were more common, such as the fear or actual experience of social and economic discrimination, persecution, and incarceration". See: Ibid., 251.

2 László Hablicsek and Sándor Illés, "Az 1956–os kivándorlás népességi hatásai," *Statisztikai Szemle* 85, no. 2 (2007): 165–166.

3 Magdolna Baráth, ed., *Kádár János első kormányának jegyzőkönyvei. 1956. november 7. – 1958. január 25.* (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár 2009), 59–60.

Committee also arranged a meeting with the refugees and attempted to persuade them to repatriate by promising impunity, with no great success.[4]

At its 6 December 1956 session, the Council of Ministers entered on the agenda a proposal for granting amnesty to persons who had left the territory of Hungary after 23 October 1956, which was submitted by Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs István Sebes on the grounds that it was in Hungary's best interest to repatriate "the persons deceived by hostile propaganda and those fearing reprisal" and set them to "work in production". The first prerequisite of granting amnesty was ensuring the impunity of the repatriates, and it was likewise proposed that the government should order the directors of corporations and the management of offices, factories, and institutions to reinstate in their original positions any workers who had left Hungary between 23 October 1956 and that the relevant Decree Law on Amnesty would be proclaimed if they returned by 15 March 1957. They also suggested that those who repatriated by the designated deadline should be restored to their dispossessed apartments or agricultural property.[5]

The abovementioned proposal was debated and rejected by the Hungarian government because on 1 December 1956, the Presidential Council issued Decree Law no. 27 of 1956 which granted impunity to those who had left the territory of Hungary by 29 November 1956 and would return by 31 March 1957.[6] The suggestion to reinstate workers in their former positions was also rejected on the grounds that at a time when people who remained in Hungary and wanted to work were dismissed from their jobs en masse due to the lack of raw materials and electricity, any positions could not be reserved for dissidents or ensure their return to their former place of employment.[7]

At the 28 December 1956 session of the Council of Ministers, the members issued the decision that in order to accelerate the process of repatriation, the Hungarian foreign representations in the countries concerned should increase their efforts to facilitate the repatriation of refugees.[8] Accordingly, at the beginning of 1957, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established the then Independent Help Desk for Hungarians abroad comprised of employees from the Ministry of the Interior.

Following the proclamation of Decree Law no. 27 of 1956, which was issued to grant refugees the opportunity to repatriate quickly, collectively, and without formalities, Hungarian political leadership expected refugees to return en masse, and the Hungarian

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4 Enikő A. Sajti, "Ötvenhatos menekültek Jugoszláviában. A magyar-jugoszláv hazatelepítési bizottság tevékenysége 1956–1957–ben," in *Az 1956–os forradalom visszhangja a szovjet tömb országaiban. Évkönyv XIV. 2006/2007*, ed. János M. Rainer and Katalin Somlai (Budapest: 1956–os Intézet, 2007), 205–206.

5 Baráth, *Kádár János első*, 107–108.

6 *Hungarian Gazette*, no. 98/1956, December 1, 1956, 1.

7 Baráth, *Kádár János első*, 97.

8 Ibid., 137.

press continuously reported on the increasing number of applicants. However, when these efforts failed, the Hungarian government sought to blame the Western countries, and in particular the Austrian government, for throwing impediments in the way of free repatriation.[9]

On 1 January 1957, the Hungarian Mission to the United Nations submitted a memorandum to the Secretary–General of the organisation on the issue of Hungarian refugees, requesting that the Secretary–General forward the memorandum to all Members and to call the attention of their governments and of the Commissioner for Refugees to the severity of the issue. The memorandum contained the Decree Law on Amnesty issued by the Presidium and pointed out that several receiving countries were actively hindering Hungarian citizens from repatriating, taking retaliatory measures against those wishing to return, and failing to facilitate the repatriation of minors who had left Hungary without their parents. The memorandum stated that the initiatives of the Hungarian government to resolve these problems had not yet produced results, and considered it desirable that the receiving countries should facilitate the repatriation of Hungarian citizens and especially of minors.[10] The memorandum also provided examples of the receiving countries hindering the repatriation of refugees, and the various retaliatory measures taken against those wishing to return, particularly in Austria.[11]

One of the speakers at the session of the Executive Committee of the United Nations (UN), High Commissioner for Refugees in Geneva, was Hungarian delegate József Marjai, and in the spirit of the memorandum discussed above as well as the propaganda issued by communist leadership, he first enumerated the measures taken by the Hungarian government to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of refugees, and then talked of the Western states hindering the repatriation efforts of refugees. Marjai claimed that among other measures, these countries prevented the Hungarian foreign representations from contacting the refugees.[12]

On 29 March 1957, two days before the deadline for repatriation stipulated by Decree Law no. 27 of 1956, the *Hungarian Official Gazette* proclaimed Decree Law no. 24 of 1957 of the Presidential Council "on facilitating the repatriation of persons who illegally left Hungary". This Decree Law granted impunity to those who had illegally left

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9 Ferenc Cseresnyés, "A nemzetközi menekültjog alkalmazása: Ausztria és az '56–os menekültek," *Múltunk* LII, no. 1 (2007): 184–185.

10 "A magyar ENSZ–küldöttség memoranduma a menekültek kérdéséről," *Népszabadság*, January 17, 1957, 9.

11 Memorandum on the issue of Hungarian citizens fleeing abroad due to the events that began on 23 October 1956, Issued on 15 January 1957. [Copy], OL XIX-J-36a. 13. d., Documents of the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna, National Archives of Hungary [Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár – MNL].

12 "Marjai József nyilatkozata az ENSZ menekültügyi bizottságában a hazatérni vágyó menekültek visszatartásáról, a kiskorú menekültek helyzetéről," *Népszabadság*, February 2, 1957, 1, 4.

the country between 23 October 1956 and 31 January 1957 if they applied for repatriation at any Hungarian foreign representation or any repatriation body established by the Hungarian People's Republic by 31 March 1957. The Decree Law also granted impunity to minors under the age of eighteen who had illegally crossed the border in the period between 23 October 1956 and the proclamation of Decree no. 24 of 1957. As for those who decided to apply for repatriation after 1 April 1957, the Decree Law stated that they might be granted impunity based on individual assessment of their cases.[13]

In January 1957, due to the closing of the Hungarian–Austrian border, the number of refugees fleeing to Yugoslavia increased significantly, which prompted the representatives of the two countries to resume negotiations and their joint repatriation efforts. Minister of Foreign Affairs Imre Horváth appointed a repatriation commission headed by Miklós Barity, the Embassy Secretary of the Hungarian Embassy in Belgrade and consisting of two representatives sent by the Ministry of the Interior and another two representatives by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.[14] The Commission, which operated until 31 March 1957 and was overseen by the Yugoslav internal affairs bodies as well as the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, spent three weeks visiting refugee camps in order to persuade "dissidents" to repatriate. However, their repatriation propaganda failed for several reasons, including the fact that at one of the refugee camps, one of the members of the Commission was recognised as a state security officer, who was an interrogator at the former State Security Authority which cast serious doubt on the Commission's credibility.[15] Nevertheless, according to the reports of Lajos Cséby, the Hungarian Ambassador to Belgrade, 2,124 persons had repatriated by 6 April 1957, and between April and September, an additional 203 persons chose to return as well.[16]

In August 1957, to facilitate the repatriation of refugees returning from Yugoslavia, a new commission was established headed once again by Barity and tasked with supporting the repatriation of refugee applicants under the provisions of Decree Law no. 27 of 1956, but through a more accelerated procedure. In their case, the Hungarian government refrained from submitting their repatriation requests to the Ministry of the Interior for prior approval and allowed them to return collectively after making a declaration in front of the Repatriation Commission; however, only 30–35 persons took advantage of this opportunity.[17] According to Yugoslav internal affairs data from the beginning of December 1957, there had been 19,851 Hungarian refugees in the country following the

13 *Hungarian Gazette*, no. 37/1957, March 29, 1957, 1.
14 Sajti, "Ötvenhatos menekültek Jugoszláviában," 207.
15 Ibid., 208.
16 Ibid., 209–210.
17 Ibid., 210–211.

Hungarian Revolution of 1956, of which 2,327 persons repatriated, while most refugees travelled on towards the Western states, and 620 persons settled in Yugoslavia.[18]

Unlike in Yugoslavia, where the efforts of the Repatriation Commission of the Hungarian government were supported by the local authorities, in Austria Hungary found it more difficult to pursue its repatriation policy. On 29 November 1956, the Hungarian government requested permission from the Austrian government to send a repatriation commission to manage the repatriation affairs of refugees, and after lengthy negotiations and with the approval of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, a joint repatriation commission was established in Austria, with an Austrian official serving as Chair of the Commission, two members delegated by the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and one member representing the UN High Commissioner. The two members appointed by Hungary were Embassy Secretary Ferenc Esztergályos and Attaché József Hámori, both of whom were covert state security officers. The commission was also assisted by an interpreter and an employee from the Directorate of Public Security of the Austrian Ministry of Internal Affairs.[19]

In accordance with the decision issued on 28 December 1956 by the Hungarian government, the Hungarian Embassy in Vienna also designated the facilitation of the repatriation efforts of Hungarian refugees as one of its key tasks. According to Envoy Frigyes Puja, "the Embassy must support the work of the Repatriation Commission and play an active role in the repatriation of Hungarians. At the same time, the Embassy must also devote greater attention to the discovery and repatriation of more prominent Hungarian persons. To this purpose, we must develop appropriate plans and ensure the appropriate human resources".[20]

On 15 January 1957, after some difficulties regarding Austria's approval of the requests of the Hungarian members of the Repatriation Commission to enter the country, Esztergályos and Hámori arrived in Vienna. With regard to their plans, Esztergályos, the Head of the Commission informed the correspondent of the daily newspaper *Népszabadság* that they intended to visit camps housing Hungarian refugees in order to inform them of the Decree Law on Amnesty and "give a completely honest account of the current state" of the country, including their difficulties. They also professed that they wished for the refugees "to make their decision on a completely voluntary basis, and return home

18 Ibid., 211–212.

19 Ibolya Murber, "Ungarnflüchtlinge in Österreich 1956," in *Die ungarische Revolution und Österreich 1956*, ed. Ibolya Murber and Zoltán Fónagy (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2006), 363-364.

20 "Puja Frigyes követ jelentése a magyar-osztrák kapcsolatokról, Bécs, 1957. január 24," in *Iratok Magyarország és Ausztria kapcsolatainak történetéhez 1956–1964*, ed. Gecsényi Lajos (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2000), 49.

with all their heart".[21] According to Esztergályos, 50–60 refugees applied for repatriation at the Hungarian Embassy every day, and their numbers were bound to increase.

Regarding the procedure of repatriation from Austria, Esztergályos told *Népszabadság* that those wishing to repatriate had to fill out a questionnaire to receive the necessary Hungarian travel documents, after which the Commission would secure exit permits from the Austrian government. According to their plans, the repatriating refugees were collected by the Austrian authorities at a designated place, from whence they started their journey to the Hungarian border and to the first Hungarian train station, where their travel documents served as valid train tickets to their final destinations.[22]

A few days later, the Hungarian Embassy issued another statement on the procedure of repatriation to refute the claims of the Austrian press that Hungary imposed various conditions on the reception of refugees and emphasised that the operation of the Repatriation Commission served to accelerate the process.[23] Understandably, the Embassy omitted to mention that the repatriates would be registered by the internal affairs bodies and then subject to observation for years following their return.

On 7 February 1957, the members of the Repatriation Commission visited the refugee camp in Mödling, and on 9 February, they also visited a camp in Stockerau. In Mödling, the residents of the refugee camp hurled insults at the Hungarian members of the Commission, waved banners with skulls on them and threw rocks at cars with Hungarian license plates until the local gendarmerie arrived and restored order.[24]

The processing of repatriation requests usually took six to eight weeks, during which time every single person concerned was obliged to appear before the Repatriation Commission. According to Austrian information, approximately 500 Hungarian refugees had applied for repatriation before the Repatriation Commission had arrived, and the Austrian state acknowledged their requests.[25] After these preparations and despite their lengthy course, the Commission managed to repatriate almost 4,000 persons by 31 March 1957. According to the data of the Hungarian Refugee Service for the year 1958, 8,109 persons had repatriated from Austria by that time, and 3,774 persons had repatriated from other countries and through Austria, adding up to a total of 11,883 repatriates. According to the data of the Central Statistics Office, however, the actual number was 11,447 persons, of which 9,126 had repatriated from Austria.[26]

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21 "Hogyan működik majd Ausztriában a magyar hazatelepítési bizottság? Beszélgetés a bizottság vezetőjével," *Népszabadság*, January 20, 1957, 6.

22 Ibid.

23 "A bécsi magyar követség nyilatkozata a magyar menekültek hazatéréséről," *Népszabadság*, January 24, 1957, 8.

24 "Provokáció a magyar hazatelepítési bizottság ellen egy ausztriai táborban," *Népszabadság*, February 8, 1957, 6.

25 Cseresnyés, "A nemzetközi menekültjog," 184–185.

26 Murber, "Ungarnflüchtlinge in Österreich 1956," 366.

During the early stages of the repatriation process, the Hungarian government's propaganda efforts intensified with a strong appeal to emotions. For instance, the National Council of Hungarian Women addressed a letter to the Women's International Democratic Federation, in which they requested the Federation's help so that their "sons and daughters could return to their homes, to their families." And it continued with the appeal, "please help them learn the truth: let them know that they are anticipated and shall come to no harm, just as those who had already returned came to no harm (...) We promise to help build a country that the best of them would want".[27] The letter primarily referred to minors under the age of eighteen who had left without their parents, and whose fates were the subject of years of lengthy and ultimately futile debates between the governments of Hungary and Austria. In September 1957, the Inter–Parliamentary Union organised a conference in London, where Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs János Péter appealed to the humane instincts of his hearers by saying, "let them decide freely whether they want to go home or not".[28]

The decisions issued by the Hungarian government and their widespread repatriation propaganda gave the impression that communist leadership was actually interested in facilitating the repatriation of refugees regardless of their motives for leaving the country. In practice, however, those returning after 31 March 1957 were meticulously screened and many repatriation requests were rejected, mostly for fear that Western intelligence might have planted spies among the applicants and repatriates. At any rate, it was evident that the refugee propaganda of Hungarian party leadership was not much influenced by First Deputy Premier Anastas Mikoyan's remark to Envoy Puja during his visit to Vienna, which Puja had relayed to Budapest as follows: "Comrade Mikoyan also noted that we should not bother so much with the refugees and whoever goes out should stay out".[29]

Initially, Hungarian leadership regarded the emigration of 1956 as a threat for fear that Western propaganda might use them to influence Western public opinion and the foreign policy of other governments towards Hungary. When the discussion of tasks related to the Hungarian emigration were placed on the agenda of the 15 October 1957 session of the Collegium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the proposal claimed that those who were not "won over by the Motherland or, at the very least, neutralised" would "go down the pipeline of the imperialist spy organisations and serve their propaganda

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27 "Segítsetek, hogy fiaink és lányaink visszatérjenek otthonukba," *Népszabadság*, January 18, 1957, 2.

28 "Péter János felszólalása a menekültekről," *Népszabadság*, September 19, 1957, 6.

29 "Puja Frigyes követ jelentése az Anasztasz Mikojan szovjet miniszterelnök–helyettes bécsi látogatása alkalmával folytatott beszélgetéséről, 1957. április 26," in *Iratok Magyarország és Ausztria kapcsolatainak történetéhez 1956–1964*, ed. Gecsényi Lajos (Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, 2000), 56.

machines, and shall be used against [the Hungarian regime] at every opportunity".[30] It was no coincidence that those attending the meeting, including the representatives of the Ministry of the Interior, were in a hurry to know the stance of political leadership on the issue. The representative of the Ministry of the Interior claimed that they only rejected the repatriation requests of criminals and those who had actively participated in the "counterrevolution"; however, these rejections contradicted the statements made by the diplomats delegated to international organisations, who claimed that in theory, every single Hungarian citizen would be allowed to repatriate.

The heads of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs accepted the fact that the measures taken by the Ministry of the Interior regarding refugees "played a role in purging society", but they objected to the exclusive competence of the Ministry of the Interior on the issue of Hungarian emigration and of "dissidents". According to József Első, a state security officer and head of the Independent Help Desk for Hungarians Abroad, resolving these issues was one of the most important tasks of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the embassies abroad, and István Sebes was also of the opinion that most of the "dissidents" were not hostile and therefore might be persuaded but in the course of their repatriation efforts, they would have to take into account that the majority of refugees had no wish to return to Hungary.[31]

The issue of refugees was also placed on the agenda of the envoy meeting of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs held between 8 and 11 July 1958, where several speakers, including Oslo Envoy János Beck and Stockholm Envoy Lajos Bebrits, emphasised that handling the issue of the Hungarian emigration and "dissidents" belonged to the competence of foreign affairs, and it would be a mistake to confine the issue and the approval of repatriation requests to the scope of internal affairs only. According to Bebrits, that was an eminent foreign affairs task and should have been treated as such; and a definite plan should have been presented to the envoys as to what policies they should pursue in that regard.[32] Meanwhile, the Hungarian diplomats serving in the Western states believed most of the "dissidents" were not consciously hostile, but if left to themselves, "they would drift over to the conscious counterrevolutionary factions" and the Hungarian authorities would be

30 Juliet Szabó, "Fellazítási politika a Kádár–rendszerben. Az MSZMP propagandatevékenysége 1958 és 1963 között," *Múltunk* LIV, no. 2 (2009): 184-185.

31 October 1957 session of the Collegium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, OL XIX–J–1–o 5. d. 17, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Collegium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, MNL.

32 Minutes of the envoy meeting of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian People's Republic, 8-11 July 1958, OL M-KS 288. f. 32/1958/7. ő. e., Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. The International Relations Department of the CC of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, MNL.

"serving them to the enemy on a silver platter," and that would also affect their relatives and friends in Hungary.[33]

Recalling their earlier request at the October 1957 session of the Collegium of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the heads of the Ministry repeated the request for a political statement regarding Hungary's policy towards Hungarian emigrants and dissidents, but one of the participants, Dezső Szilágyi, Head of the Foreign Affairs Department of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party more or less echoed the opinion of First Deputy Premier Mikoyan when he said he did not understand why the issue had been given so much importance:

> The issue of counterrevolutionaries is not a central problem for our government and for our Party. To my mind, it was unexpected that the comrades had made such a critical issue of a matter that is not an actual problem to us or merits hours of debate. The agenda of the Hungarian dissident press is to send these people home. "Do you want to liberate Hungary? You can only do that at home." That is their motto, and we have no right to fail to take this into consideration. We have paid quite enough in October for having been so naive. Our Party has no interest in escalating the class war on the home front (...) There are plenty of recruited individuals who are trying to mislead us. Therefore, everyone must be individually screened, and then you must decide whether they can come home or not.[34]

Dezső Szilágyi's opinion was shared by the heads of the Ministry of the Interior, and as it was also supported within the ranks of Hungarian leadership, it determined the perception and treatment of the Hungarian emigration for years to come.

Although the issue of Hungarian emigration was not central to Hungarian party leadership, its significance is evident from the fact that between 1958 and 1963, the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party placed the issue of propaganda efforts targeting the Hungarian emigration on its agenda four times in total. Initially, the "target groups" were almost exclusively the "fifty–sixers" or "dissidents", which caused the political organs dealing with emigration affairs – and particularly the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign Affairs Department of the Central Committee – to believe that "analysing the situation, influence, and flow of counterrevolutionary dissidents" was the only way to "realistically assess the situation of the emigration" and designate all relevant tasks.[35]

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33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 Proposal on the propaganda activity targeting the Hungarian emigration. Appendix 35R. / Debate on the proposal on the propaganda activity targeting the Hungarian emigration, OL M-KS 288. f. 5/88. ő. e., Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. Minutes of the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, MNL.

The first revival of the issue of Hungarian emigration was at the 29 July 1958 session of the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, where a proposal previously submitted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Foreign Affairs Department of the Central Committee served as the basis for examining the situation of Hungarian emigration and designating the aims and principles of propaganda efforts targeting the emigration. By that time, Hungarian leadership had accepted that most refugees would remain abroad for a longer time or permanently and therefore sought to seize every opportunity of increasing the ranks of emigrants who remained loyal to Hungary. According to the authors of the proposal, the World Federation of Hungarians (which was supposed to implement the emigration policy of the Hungarian government through social means) had to carry out its propaganda efforts in a way that would win "dissidents" over to progressive movements, thereby reducing as much as possible the ranks of the emigration that "could serve as a base for incitement by the enemy's intelligence bodies and rightwing emigration".[36] At the abovementioned session, the Political Committee decided to appoint a commission tasked with devising a detailed plan for propaganda efforts targeting Hungarian emigration, keeping in mind that due to the revolutionary events of 1956, most "dissidents" were "misguided but honest people," therefore the need to assess the means available for financially supporting the repatriation of certain categories was emphasised.[37]

It was János Kádár himself who suggested the possibility of offering financial support to refugees who wished to return to Hungary and raised the question of reintegrating repatriates according to their respective categories, and the tone of the Political Committee's decision was largely set by his remark that dissolution was the natural development of the emigration, and so whatever dissolved them had marked out the correct policy for the authorities while "baiting them with the question of repatriation and offering opportunities for it" would have been "the most disruptive thing". In the following years, repatriation requests continued to be assessed individually, and as per Kádár's suggestion, approval was more readily granted to skilled workers, engineering intellectuals, doctors, and "public figures" who could be "constructively utilised from a political perspective".[38]

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36 The situation of Hungarians residing in capitalist countries and the social and political work to be carried out among them. Proposal submitted to the Political Committee, OL M-KS 288. f. 32/1958/11. ő. e., Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. International Relations Department of the CC of the Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, MNL.

37 Proposal on the propaganda activity targeting the Hungarian emigration. Appendix 35R. / Debate on the proposal on the propaganda activity targeting the Hungarian emigration, OL M-KS 288. f. 5/88. ő. e., Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. Minutes of the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, MNL.

38 Ibid.

In the wake of the decision issued in July 1958, a commission was established, and on 3 February 1959, the Political Committee discussed the commission's proposals. At that session, the Political Committee issued a decision to foster distrust in the honest and "recoverable" ranks of the emigration towards dominant emigrant leaders and support the repatriation efforts of those with "good intentions".[39] To this end, on 18 October 1960, the Political Committee issued a decision on issuing consular passports and granting exit permits to the relatives of "dissidents".[40] According to the decision, to gain the loyalty of as many emigrants as possible, the authorities had to pay special attention during the assessment of passport and visa requests not to reject the requests of persons showing a friendly disposition. When the time was deemed right from a foreign affairs perspective, they would publish a call to the effect that if any persons who had left Hungary without permission – including the refugees of 1956 – wanted to retain their Hungarian citizenship, they were to apply at a Hungarian embassy for registration within the next two years. Applicants who had not committed any crimes and whose conduct did not injure Hungary's interests would receive Hungarian travel documents, which could be used within one year of the date of their application to visit their relatives in Hungary.[41]

The decision of the Political Committee and the decision issued by the Presidential Council based on the former were implemented starting April and May 1961 and following Government Decision no. 3082/1961 on the passport and visa system of the Hungarian People's Republic, the assessment process for visa applications had to take into consideration the motivation and circumstances of the applicant at the time of leaving Hungary. In other words, they had to determine whether the applicant was a member of some hostile emigrant group or organisation, and if they showed a favourable disposition towards the Hungarian People's Republic.[42] In 1961, only 65 individuals applied for a consular passport, but in the following year, an additional 719 took advantage of the opportunity.[43]

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39 Ibid., 116.

40 The first item on the agenda: A report on certain issues of the passport and visa system of the Hungarian People's Republic, OL M-KS 288. f. 5/205. ő. e., Hungarian Socialist Workers Party. Minutes of the Political Committee of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, MNL. Consular passports were accepted as valid Hungarian travel documents by the majority of capitalist countries (such as England, Italy, France, Belgium, and Austria), but in certain countries (such as Switzerland, Sweden, and the United States), those arriving with consular passports were sometimes faced with threats from the authorities that their refugee rights would be revoked should they use their consular passports to travel to Hungary.

41 Ibid.

42 Non–public Regulation no. 3082/1961 of the Council of Ministers, OL XIX–A–83–b–3082/1961. 285. d., Materials of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic, MNL.

43 Report of the Agitation and Propaganda Department of the Central Committee on the execution of the Political Committee Decision of 6 June 1957 on emigration propaganda, OL M-KS 288. f. 5/300. ő. e.,

In 1963, the history of Hungarian emigration reached a turning point: simultaneously with the thaw in internal affairs policy in Hungary, maintaining relations with the Hungarian emigration became an integral part of the government's policy, and after 1963, the political system also made concessions regarding the perception and treatment of emigration circles, which were by this time showing signs of division. At any rate, it was evident from the changes discussed above that the Political Committee was not only determined to increase the number of Hungarians visiting or returning to Hungary but also that it assessed the means of enabling the children of Hungarians abroad – including those who emigrated in 1956 – to vacation or study in Hungary.[44] And these efforts marked a new phase in emigration policy.

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