

Hungary's Kin-State Politics, 2010–2014

There are several countries in which the borders of the state and those of the nation do not coincide. The treatment of this situation constitutes a political task for countries and governments which offer very different solutions to this problem. The model of taking responsibility for people belonging to the same nation but living abroad was established in Western Europe in the period after the Second World War. In the Central European region the supporting of compatriots living abroad – either in neighboring countries (traditional national minorities/communities) or in any other parts of the world (diaspora) – became a norm after the change of regime. Today it is considered natural that the kin-state provides some kind of assistance to its compatriots living beyond its borders.

The principle of supporting people belonging to the same nation but living in different (neighboring or not neighboring) countries is often included in constitutions. With some rare exceptions, the constitutions of the majority of states located in the region contain the so-called responsibility-clause. In the period after the regime change, Central and Eastern European Countries supported their compatriots living abroad politically, by means of declarations and programs. States have gradually established those mechanisms and institutions which operate aid policy. Nevertheless, there is no coherent model concerning this field; countries are using different solutions, have different objectives and established different institutions. The relations with nation parts (communities) living abroad depend on the financial possibilities and political priorities of the kin-state as well as the situation of people living abroad. As a basic rule, we differentiate between the supporting of people living in neighboring countries and of those living in the diaspora.

The Venice Commission, the High Commissioner on Minorities of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – partly as a result of the impact of Hungarian initiatives – consider kin-states' bearing responsibility for compatriots abroad and its practical consequences accepted. Within Europe Hungary has the most complex and most active policy for its communities abroad. This is reflected in its legislation, the institutionalized forums of Hungarian-Hungarian relations, the high-level (ministerial and state secretariat) governmental presence of the policy for Hungarian communities abroad and the aid

policy as well (in particular in targeted programs). This is – first of all – due to the fact that there are large Hungarian communities living in neighboring countries (they are politically active communities, defining themselves in national terminology and having endeavors for autonomy), secondly, it is a result of the fact that the government formed after 2010 treats the policy for Hungarian communities abroad as a priority.

The level of principle

The policy for Hungarian communities abroad is Hungary's policy towards Hungarians living in neighboring countries and other countries of the world, which is aimed at strengthening the relations of the kin-state with Hungarian individuals and communities living abroad in order to achieve the prosperity of the unified Hungarian nation. Its objective is to preserve the identity of Hungarian communities living abroad, and to pass it on to future generations. The policy for Hungarian communities abroad means nation-building, society-building and institutionalization.

It is an evident aim for Hungary that, as the kin-state, it has to support the enhancement of ties between the parts of the nation, the unity of Hungarians living in the kin-state and those living abroad and their responsibility for each other. The Act on the Testimony for National Cohesion (2010) states that *“Every member and community of the Hungarian nation thrown under the jurisdiction of different states is part of the unified Hungarian nation, the beyond borders unity of which is reality, and is also an important element of Hungarians’ personal and community identity.”*¹

Actions connected with the policy for Hungarian communities abroad are included in the document entitled *Policy for Hungarian Communities Abroad – Strategic framework for Hungarian communities abroad* (2011).² The document systematizes Hungary's policy for its nation parts abroad, summarizing the strategic aims, leading directives and fields of action both for Hungary's politics and public administration and for Hungarian communities abroad. The *Strategic framework for Hungarian communities abroad* affects every field of Hungarian politics and public administration, therefore, due

¹ <http://www.vajma.info/docs/Nemzeti-osszetartozas-torveny.pdf>

² Hungarian Communities Abroad - Strategic framework for Hungarian communities abroad. State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad. [http://www.nemzetiregiszter.hu/download/9/a2/00000/Magyar%20nemzetpolitika%20A4.pdf](http://www.nemzetiregiszter.hu/download/9/a2/00000/Magyar%20nemzetpolitik%C3%A1.pdf) (see excerpts in English: https://www.nemzetiregiszter.hu/download/b/12/10000/policy_2013.pdf)

to its horizontal nature, every actor at the levels of decision making and execution has to take it into account.

From the point of view of the reproduction of Hungarians living abroad, the strategy for Hungarian communities abroad considers autonomy the most important objective. This objective is based on the conviction that the long-lasting permanence and prosperity of Hungarians can only be achieved by means of autonomy. Consequently, the short-term aim of the policy for Hungarian communities abroad is society-building. Therefore, *institutionalization* is a key concept of the strategy for Hungarians abroad. National reproduction can be realized if the policy for Hungarian communities abroad focuses on areas in which the dense and high-quality network of institutions provides an opportunity for Hungarians to be in contact with the Hungarian language, culture and community throughout their whole life. The aim of the strategic framework is to achieve the numerical growth of Hungarian communities (the number of community members grows, the community is not assimilated, it is characterized by a positive population growth and a good quality of life), their intellectual growth (the identity of community members is strong, they regard community norms as their own, they have a competitive knowledge, preserve and develop the cultural treasures of the community), economic and legal growth (in the latter case the members of the community are confident in exercising, protecting and – if necessary – expanding their rights.)

The level of legislation

Most European states grant citizenship for their compatriots living abroad by means of a simplified naturalization procedure, and – as a basic rule – provide them an opportunity to participate in the kin-state's elections. Almost every state supports its compatriots living abroad by means of laws similar to status law and different aids connected with it.³

Even after the adoption of the amendment to the Hungarian Constitution in 1989, the Basic Law of Hungary stated that “*The Republic of Hungary feels responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living beyond its borders, and shall promote the fostering of their links*”

³ See: European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), ‘Report on the Preferential Treatment of National Minorities by their Kin-State,’ adopted by the Venice Commission at its 48th Plenary Meeting, (Venice, 19–20 October 2001).

with Hungary".⁴ This statement opened a new chapter in the relations between the kin-state and Hungarians living beyond its borders. This responsibility is defined in the Basic Law of Hungary in the following way: "*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, shall facilitate the survival and development of their communities, shall support their efforts to preserve their Hungarian identity, the effective use 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*"⁵

The Act on Hungarian Citizenship and its amendment adopted in 2010, the status law (2001) and its amendment (2010), the extension of the right to vote to Hungarian citizens living abroad (2012) strengthened the ties between Hungary and Hungarians living beyond its borders – either in neighboring countries or in the diaspora – and transferred the cultural ties which had existed before into a relation under public law.

On 26 May 2010 the National Assembly of Hungary adopted the Amendment to the Act on Hungarian Citizenship and on 1 January 2011 the application of the act – the simplified naturalization procedure – began. The amendment states that one can acquire Hungarian citizenship without permanent residence status in Hungary and taking a citizenship test; it is enough to have a command of the Hungarian language and to have one ancestor who was a Hungarian citizen. The amendment of the Act on Citizenship is based on the conception that although Hungarians living abroad are the citizens of other countries, they belong to the same – Hungarian – nation, regardless of which state they live in. This concept is in line with that of Hungarians living in neighboring countries or in the diaspora.

The level of decision-making bodies

Decisions in the field of policy for Hungarian communities abroad are made by Hungarian National Assembly and Hungarian–Hungarian forums. Earlier, the issues concerning Hungarians abroad were discussed by the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian

⁴ http://www-archiv.parlament.hu/fotitkar/archiv/a_magyar_koztarsasag_alkotmanya.pdf

⁵ <http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/02/00000/The%20New%20Fundamental%20Law%20of%20Hungary.pdf>

National Assembly (between 2006 and 2010 its name was Committee on Foreign Affairs and Hungarian communities abroad). On 1 January 2010 the *Committee on National Cohesion*⁶ was established which focuses specifically on the issues of Hungarians abroad. The establishment of the Committee on National Cohesion is an integral part of Hungary's strategy for Hungarian communities abroad. The establishment of the committee has a symbolic significance, as since the period of the regime change the Hungarian Parliament has not had any independent committee specified exclusively on the questions of Hungarians abroad. Within the framework of the Committee on National Cohesion a subcommittee named Autonomy Subcommittee was formed which deals with transborder Hungarians' aspirations for autonomy. Besides, the Foreign Affairs Committee continues to operate and the current issues of foreign policy are regularly on its agenda, including issues concerning Hungarian communities abroad. Other questions regarding Hungarians living beyond borders – like constitutional, budgetary, educational and ecclesiastical issues – are also discussed by other parliamentary committees.

Close relations with Hungarians living abroad, the establishment of dialogue with them and the presentation of their standpoints in the Hungarian Government's decision-making procedure are important elements of the government's policy for Hungarian communities abroad. The Hungarian Standing Conference (Magyar Állandó Értekezlet – MÁÉRT) is the most important Hungarian-Hungarian political forum which – after a six-year break – started its operation again on 5 November 2010. The MÁÉRT as an institutionalized forum of dialogue between legitimate Hungarian organizations representing national interests plays an important role in joint thinking and decision-making on issues concerning the Hungarian nation. The MÁÉRT has at least one session every year, and its midyear work is assisted by different specialized committees. The MÁÉRT consists of representatives of the Hungarian Government, Hungarian parliamentary parties, Hungarian organizations operating outside Hungary with parliamentary or provincial representation and the representatives of the Western Hungarian diaspora. Currently, the Hungarian Standing Conference has 4 working committees: Committee on Foreign and Legal Affairs, Committee on Education and Culture, Committee on Economy and Local Government and Diaspora Committee.

⁶ The Committee on National Cohesion maintains relations with Hungarian political and social organizations abroad, monitors the events of Hungarians living abroad and the work of institutions connected with the policy for Hungarian communities abroad. Since its establishment, it has had several extramural sessions at different venues within the Carpathian Basin.

The Hungarian Diaspora Council is a forum of Hungarian organizations from all over the world focusing on the special needs and interests of Hungarians living in diaspora, and creating an independent representative body for the global Hungarian diaspora. The Hungarian Diaspora Council works in close cooperation with the Hungarian Standing Conference.

The Forum of the Hungarian Representatives of the Carpathian Basin (Kárpát-medencei Magyar Képviselők Fóruma – KMKF) is a forum supplementing the Hungarian Standing Conference with the dimension of parliamentary cooperation. The aim of the body, which was first convened in 2004, is to make the cooperation between Hungary's parliamentary parties and the representatives of Hungarian organizations abroad regular, and, consequently, more successful. From 2010, the activity of the KMKF was completed with a new content: while MÁÉRT deals with political and governmental communication and sectoral policies, the KMKF focuses on the establishment of long-term strategies, besides dealing with parliamentary communication. The KMKF is the forum of Hungarian representatives of neighboring countries elected at national, provincial or county level and Hungarian members of the European Parliament.

The level of governmental structure

The concept of bearing responsibility for persons belonging to the same nation but living in other countries is present in the governmental structure of several countries. Solutions are different: there are countries in which the department or office dealing with compatriots living abroad belongs to the ministry of foreign affairs, in others – to the Parliament, but there also are countries in which it is part of the President's Office.

In Hungary the Secretariat for Hungarians Living Abroad was established in 1990, after the regime change. Two years later it became a body with national competence under the name Office for Hungarians Living Abroad (Határon Túli Magyarok Hivatala – HTMH) and came under the supervision of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. During the socialist-liberal government of Gyula Horn, the HTMH was placed under the supervision of the Prime Minister's Office, while from 1998 – under the first, right-wing conservative government of Viktor Orbán – it became part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In 2002 – under the socialist-liberal Medgyessy-government – the HTMH was returned to the Prime Minister's Office again, and in 2006 – during the administrative reform which took place under the socialist-liberal government of Ferenc Gyurcsány, the office was

ceased. Between 2007 and 2010 the issues of Hungarian communities abroad belonged to the Department of Affairs of Hungarians Abroad which was a department of the State Secretariat for Foreign Relations and Affairs of Hungarians Abroad at the Prime Minister's Office.

The governmental structure established after the 2010 election brought significant changes. It was the year when the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad was established within the Ministry of Public Administration and Justice. By this change the issue of Hungarians living outside the kin-state was raised to a higher level and became equivalent with any other sectoral policy. Operative policy work is performed by the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad.

The State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad coordinates the Interministerial Committee for Hungarian Communities Abroad (Nemzetpolitikai Tárcaközi Bizottság – NPTB), which was established by the Government in order to harmonize the activity of different governmental units touching upon issues of Hungarian communities abroad, based on the principle of mutual responsibility and attention. The president of the Committee is the Deputy Prime Minister, while its vice-president is the parliamentary state secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The NPTB has at least two sessions per year, but it is convened whenever it is required. The tasks of the committee – among others – is to realize mutual information exchange supporting the Government's activity for Hungarians abroad, the coordination and evaluation of tasks concerning this policy, and the harmonization of other ministries' strategic activity affecting Hungarians abroad. At the same time, the Committee is also responsible for ensuring the most effective possible way of using budgetary resources allocated to the realization of targets concerning the policy for Hungarians abroad.

Since 2010 the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad continues its work under the Prime Minister's Office.

The level of aid policy

The Bethlen Gábor Fund⁷ was established in 2011 as a successor of the Szülőföld Alap, managing the financial assistance provided by Hungary for Hungarians living abroad. Its tasks cover three main areas: the payment of aids, the operation of the House of Hungar-

⁷ www.bgazrt.hu

ians (Magyarság Háza) and the Research Institute for Hungarian Communities Abroad⁸. The purpose of the restructuring of aid policy was to transfer financial flows which had been multicentric and non-transparent into a centralized, simple and transparent system. The management of funds is performed by the Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd. In 2011 the Hungarian Standing Conference decided to lay emphasis on long-term, predictable and normative aids instead of tender-like, occasional ones for institutions of national importance (institutions that play an outstanding role in the preservation of the given Hungarian community, e.g. educational institutions, cultural associations, etc.).

The most important tender of the Bethlen Gábor Fund is the assistance named *Szülőföldön magyarul* – also called educational aid – designated for Hungarian children living abroad and studying in Hungarian-language educational institutions. In 2011 the educational aid was extended to nursery school children as well. Besides, the Bethlen Gábor Fund provides assistance to natural and legal persons, local governments, civil organizations, cultural institutions etc. under an open tender system and also decides about the awarding of individual aids.

Beside the coordination of aids for Hungarians abroad, since 2011 the Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd. has also been responsible for the realization of the visitor and educational-methodological center *House of Hungarians (Magyarság Háza)*. The House of Hungarians operates as a public educational institution presenting Hungarian communities living abroad. The *Research Institute for Hungarian Communities Abroad* operates within the organizational framework of the Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd. Its primary objective is to conduct research in the field of minorities, to harmonize and encourage research on minorities and Hungarian communities abroad and to process the research findings for further policy implementation.

The level of programs

In order to transform the policy for Hungarian communities abroad into a field policy, several programs have been established. The Hungarian government enhances the prosperity of Hungarians abroad by means of well-formulated, realizable programs.

Institutions – educational institutions in particular – play a very important role from the point of view of the permanence and pros-

⁸ www.npki.hu

perity of Hungarian communities abroad. In light of this, the State Secretariat for Hungarian Communities Abroad launched thematic programs in 2012 and 2013: in 2012 it launched the programs entitled *2012 – the year of Hungarian nursery school children abroad*, while one year later – the program *2013 – the year of Hungarian junior elementary school children abroad* began. The *Dr. Szász Pál Scholarship* was founded in 2012 to support highly qualified young jurists who have outstanding results in the field of economic law and might contribute to the legal and economic prosperity of Hungarians abroad.

The program *Határtalanul!* (Without borders!) is aimed to provide an opportunity for every Hungarian student studying in public education to make at least one state-funded visit during their studies to Hungarian communities living in neighboring countries, and to give an opportunity for Hungarian students living abroad to visit Hungary by means of student exchange programs. The Without borders! program helps young people to experience and understand national unity through education.

There are different governmental projects targeting specifically the Hungarian diaspora in the West. In October 2011 the Hungarian Government launched another initiative, the *Hungarian Register* website which was created in order to realize a direct contact with Hungarians living in different parts of the world. The aim of the *Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Program*⁹ is to develop the Hungarian language skills of diaspora Hungarians, encourage their community activity and strengthen their relations with Hungary. Within the framework of the program, Hungary sends interns to the diaspora to aid Hungarian communities with the preservation of various levels of Hungarian culture, and fostering Hungarian organizations' ties to the motherland.

The objective of the *Julianus program*¹⁰ is to create a comprehensive register of the Hungarian material heritage located in the diaspora and create broad access to its data. The aim of the program is to present Hungarian material heritage which are to be found in the diaspora territories, and giving an overview of how Hungarian communities living in diaspora have contributed to the universal Hungarian culture. The *Mikes Kelemen program*¹¹ focuses on preserving the diaspora's material heritage, collecting its elements

⁹ <https://www.nemzetiregiszter.hu/korosi-csoma-program>

¹⁰ <https://www.nemzetiregiszter.hu/julianus-program-en>

¹¹ <https://www.nemzetiregiszter.hu/mikes-kelemen-program-en>

in a systematic manner, transferring them to Hungary and making provision for their appropriate utilization.

Summary

Hungary's policy for Hungarian communities abroad integrates into the system of European trends, but it has its own peculiarities. The aim is the supporting of the prosperity of compatriots living abroad and the enhancement of their relations with the kin-state. Nevertheless, concerning the level of state policies supporting communities living abroad, Hungary does not only belong to the most active countries, but it is the country which has one of the most complex state administration designed for the support of co-nationals abroad. This is reflected both at the level of legislation and decision-making (joint state forums and Hungarian-Hungarian forums established specifically for this purpose). Considering the process of this policy's transformation into an independent sectoral policy area, Hungary is also on the top – compared with other Central and Eastern European states.

The objective of the harmonized policy for Hungarian communities abroad is to integrate individuals – by means of institutions – into communities, into the nation, and to integrate communities into the political system of the concerned state. Institutionalization provides a basis for the multilevel national integration of the Hungarian nation:

1. at the level of individuals: strengthening the ties of Hungarians living abroad both with Hungary (citizenship, right to vote) and their own community (institutionalization);
2. at community level: strengthening the links of Hungarian organizations abroad with the kin-state (for instance: MÁÉRT, KMKF, etc.) and – as a community – with their own country (collective recognition and rights, autonomy);
3. the integration of the unified Hungarian nation – integrated both individually and collectively – into the European Union.