



THE POLITICAL HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE 1989 GDR REFUGEES PASSING THROUGH HUNGARY

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Raising awareness on the political-historical background of the popular movements of the 20th century is very important because behind the stories there were often ill-considered political decisions. It is interesting to see how the last century leaders of the great powers represented their self-interests, and what political games they had developed to achieve their political goals.

The interests of nations living in countries were often not interesting to take into consideration. The Soviet Union was not a nation-state, but neither was the United States of America, while at that time most of the European states were nation-states, and along this were nations that sought to assert their national interests, by force when necessary. However, the post-World War II political settlements did not serve the interests of the German nation, but divided its population and turned them against one other. This is why the movement of German citizens within Germany has occurred.

Keywords: *emigration; migration; dictators; Cold War; regime change.*

Introduction

The aim of the current study is to revive one of the refugee waves in the twentieth century that took place within Germany, which was “divided into two states” (Federal Republic of Germany – FRG and German Democratic Republic – GDR). Between 1945 and 1990, the refugees had tried to migrate from East

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Germany to West Germany. On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall collapsed, the first brick of which, according to Helmut Kohl, was demolished by the Hungarians. Personally, I would like to clarify the facts behind this viewpoint. The Hungarian State and the Hungarian Maltese Charity Service had also played a major role in this process.

History

The “division command”¹ for the German State dates back to 1943, when the EAC² (European Advisory Commission), led by Cordell Hull³, stated in October that after defeating Germany, the Allies, besides preserving the country’s economic unity, have the duty to “denazify”, demilitarise, and democratise. The design of its territorial structure was discussed at the 1943 Tehran Conference. Based on the proposals of the meeting leaders, the notion of imperialism was to be deleted from the German minds. Roosevelt had suggested to divide Germany into five parts. After another official meeting taking place in January 1944, interestingly, instead of the idea of disintegration, occupation came to the fore. In September 1944, a protocol was drawn up in London, which stipulated specific boundaries, stating that the eastern part of Germany would be a Soviet occupation zone, the western part an occupation zone of the USA, of Great Britain (and later, of France). The lines of the western borders were agreed upon only at the meeting of the heads of government in Québec. Shortly afterwards, France also applied for membership in the ranks of the Allied Powers and claimed a zone of occupation. After all, the Allied Powers agreed on the following guidelines: Germany, as a threat to peace, must be excluded from the ranks of great powers, its economic hegemony must be abolished, and the nest of Nazi ideology must be deprived of its power. At the Yalta Conference in February 1945, the great powers agreed on the following four points:

1. Germany was divided into four occupation zones, which meant that the five provinces in the eastern part of the country would be Soviet occupation zones, in which Berlin was located as well, and apparently Berlin was also a common occupation zone, thus creating the GDR in which the westernmost state of the Soviet communist state system could operate.

2. A Berlin-based Audit Committee was set up, to which each major power delegated one member. Moscow will later leave this committee with the intention of making it impossible to function, but the committee will continue its work nonetheless.

¹ A.N: Around 1943, the great powers only discussed the disintegration of the Third Reich, and only in 1944 did they begin to talk about the occupation.

² European Advisory Commission, established at the Moscow Conference on 30 October 1943, seated in London to ensure the settlement of post-war Europe.

³ A.N: Between 1933-1944 he was Secretary of State of the United States of America.



3. The abolition of national-socialism and demilitarization is a principled and moral duty in the often-proclaimed criminal promises of the great power leaders of the age.

4. Determining reparations in proportion to destruction. At the time, they were still talking about 20 billion dollars, 50% of which would have been given to the Soviets, the other 50% would have been shared by the US, France and Britain. Three forms of recovery were already assessed at this time: the first from national wealth, the second from the annual transport of goods and current production, and the third from the use of German labour.

Even after Hitler's suicide, the great powers only wanted an unconditional full capitulation. The capitulation took place on May 7, 1945, at 2:41 A.M., at Reims, Eisenhower headquarters, where the signatory was Alfred Jodl. The Soviets insisted that they sign the capitulation document separately, that is, to lay down their arms separately in front of them, this was a sign of significance. Thus, on May 8, the capitulation was signed in Berlin-Karlshorst, where the signatories were Keitel, Friedeburg and Sumpff. The capitulation took effect on May 9, and then, on September 2, Japan was forced to its knees, as a result of which the world-political triangle: Berlin-Rome-Tokyo was defeated.

World War II, which ended with 55 million dead, and bled everyone who took part in it. Not even the joy of the victorious great powers could be cloudless, and even if they had celebrated themselves as victorious, the joy of victory was bitter for all.

1. The Division of Germany after the Second World War

The period between 1943 and 1949 reveals the most questionable moments of world history. The forced trajectory of the formation of a "coalition" against Hitler's aspirations for world domination amazed the world as well. The US, which calls itself the most democratic nation, had to sit at a conference table with a country that had executed its sacred ruler and his family a few years earlier, sought legitimacy for its new system of power by dictatorial means and swept the misery of large masses under the carpet⁴. The Soviet Union, shaped by Lenin's worldview, arrived on the brink of the Second World War, not hoping to face one of the hungriest dictators in Europe at the time. The constitutional kingdom of the British Isles, known as the United Kingdom in Europe; this formation of power also called itself a democratic state formation. It had a king who had no longer ruler power, but it had a Prime Minister who, as head of government, was practically entirely in control of his country. He also had to sit at a table with the leader of the Soviet Union, Stalin.

⁴ A.N: The Tsarist family was executed in 16.07.1918, on Lenin's instructions. In: *History of Soviet Union*.



Two democracies (the US and the UK) and a federation blessed with dictatorial aspirations for great power (Soviet Union) form a coalition that seemed appropriate to stop Hitler. France, which was at that time fully occupied by Hitler, joined this triple coalition later⁵. The first meeting of the countries' foreign ministers took place in Moscow, where the London-based AEC⁶ organization was set up. Churchill's reservations and concerns, Roosevelt's occasional naiveté reinforced Stalin in keeping only the interests of himself and his empire in mind in this situation. He wanted to expand his empire, pushing the Soviet Union empire as far to the West as possible, while England sought to maintain the continental geopolitical balance. The same did the US, after the disappearance of a German state with a strong economy would have created a significant power vacuum. The Tehran conference, the Yalta conference and then the Potsdam conference were all meetings where the great powers leaders played serious "chess games" with everyone, striving to move their pieces on the chessboard to reach the best possible solution. Their German policy was also very different and we can already trace this from the size of the army that occupies the acquired territory. All the ideas of the Western powers were aimed at democratizing the German state and maintaining – even strengthening – its economy. The Soviet Union wanted to make up for its own losses at all costs, and it did everything it could for the sake of it⁷. The Western powers aspired to allow German citizens to lead their own lives, while Stalin wanted to keep everything under control and refused to make any compromise on his political system. All these directives will largely determine the fate of European peoples, as it was also determined by the peace treaties and demarcations of the First World War (Treaty of Versailles - 28.06.1918, Treaty of Trianon - 04.06.1920). The redrawing of the borders of Central Europe back and forth resulted in very serious migrations. Perhaps we can also state that it also was the cause of the outbreak of the Second World War. But the great power agreements of 1945-1949 did not bring any relief either. The division of Germany into two parts represents the beginning of very serious migrations from east to West, which will not stop until 1989. But not only did the German citizens migrated to the West from the Eastern part of the Germany, but some German nationals trapped in the socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe had also migrated to the Western part of the German state.

The formation of the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and its fate were well established.⁸ The three occupying powers were not as greedy as their Eastern counterpart. The democratic but controlled measures did not bring the FRG to the fate of the eastern part of the country. The Marshall Plan, the Adenauer era are all

⁵ ***, United Nation 01-02.01.1942 (U.S, U.K, Soviet Union), later added France.

⁶ European Advisory Commission – October, 1943.

⁷ István Németh, *History of Germany*, Aula Publishing House, 2004, pp. 315-365.

⁸ Norman Davis, *Europe: A History*, Budapest, Osiris, p. 200.



fortunate historical moments in the history of West Germany that also benefited the bloodstream of the world economy, not just the German people⁹. The eastern part of the country, whose name was GDR from 1949, unfortunately did not have such luck. The integration efforts of the West German state brought the expected results very soon. They were able to reconcile with France, and the US defence guaranteed helping the country regain its freedom of action. The FDR's accession to other European alliances established after the Second World War had such great impact on state formation that it was no accident that the Adenauer era was called an economic miracle. Fewer and fewer factories were dismantled and restitutions began to be curtailed.

As for the *Berlin situation*, after 1945, the city could not be attributed to any of the occupation zones. The victorious great powers agreed that Berlin would come under joint administration, in which the occupying powers had the same rights. Here was the Allied Control Council (persons delegated by the victorious states that were the following: the Soviet Union, Great Britain, the USA and France). All the powers insisted on Berlin because it formed the legal basis for their being there, even though Stalin wanted to abolish it¹⁰. Although Moscow did everything it could to bring all of Berlin under its control, the election showed that the population was more attracted to the direction of the Western occupiers¹¹. Stalin instructed, "it has to seem democratic, but we must control everything." In March, 1948 the Soviet Union withdrew from the Allied Control Council, so instead of the four-power occupation of Berlin, 3 or 1 power(s) shared the city, respectively. The Soviet Union remained in the eastern sector of the city, while the Western states dominated the western sector, and although they all voiced the possible unifying role of Berlin, the Allied Control Council decided to relocate the capital of the FRG to Bonn. In the eastern sector of Berlin, the capital of the GDR was established. We know that both state formations claimed the capital, but unlike the FRG, the Soviet Union fully integrated the eastern part of Berlin into the GDR and declared: "Berlin is located in the Soviet occupation zone and is also economically part of the Soviet occupation zone."¹² The two spheres of power protected their own interests, the Westerners insisted on West Berlin by invoking their rights enshrined in the treaties, while the Soviet sphere did everything it could to discourage Western states from staying in the city. Obviously, Stalin wanted to make the Eastern sector a model city for Soviet socialism; as a result of which many people migrated to the western sectors, so it

⁹ A.N.: *Marshall Plan*: From 1948, \$ 14 billion was distributed to European states. For example: U.K received 25%, France 22%, Italy 11%, Austria 5%, West Germany 10%, etc.; *Konrad Adenauer*: 1949-1966. The first Chancellor of West Germany after Second World War. This period is called an economic miracle.

¹⁰ István Németh, *History of Germany*, *op. cit.*

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 369-414.

¹² *Ibidem*, pp. 560-574.



was not surprising that in 1961 Khrushchev issued instructions to build the wall by emphasizing the importance of “preventing the outflow of assets.”¹³ Now it was not just a virtual border, but a physical wall dividing the city into two parts. Although treaties regulated and allowed relatives to visit, the crossings were both difficult and rigorous until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

2. The Formation of the GDR and the Escape of Its Citizens

What is a human being? Many philosophers have asked this question, including Karl Jaspers himself, one of the great existentialist thinkers of the 20th century, and as he went on to explain the question, he realized that although human being is unknowable, we still have some basic knowledge. We know they have a body and this is dealt with by the science of physiology, they have a soul and this is what psychology is acquainted with, a societal and social being (*zoon politikon*)¹⁴, and this is sociology’s field of interest, but all of these cannot exhaust the essence of man.¹⁵ It is at this point he realizes that most importantly a human being is also freedom. Without their freedom, they are just distorted beings who can never be fulfilled in the absence of freedom. East German citizens, deprived of their freedom for 40 years, also longed for this fulfilment. In order to regain their freedom, they were able to risk their lives.

Where from? The answer to this question is the GDR. The date of the GDR’s formation was the autumn of 1949, after the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany) had been formed in the spring of the same year as a consequence of decisions based on the consensus of the Western Allies, where even an election is held, with Mr. Konrad Adenauer becoming the first chancellor and Theodor Heuss¹⁶ President of the state. In the autumn, the Soviet Union appoints Mr. Otto Grottel as interim Head of government and later on, Mr. Wilhelm Pieck as Head of state. Thus, the alliance that had defeated Hitler suddenly became enemies for one another, and culminated with the decades of Cold War.¹⁷

It is not simple to look back on what happened in Eastern Europe after the Second World War from the perspective of thirty years, to understand, through the mirror of Western societies, why the political situation has evolved in this form. All basic interpretations of the events are a process that requires deep reflection, which

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Since Aristotle, the human being has been a communal being living in polis with *logos* (animal rationale)

¹⁵ A.N.: Karl Jaspers is one of the leading individuals of 20th century existentialism. See: Karl J. Man, translated by Simonivits Istvánné

¹⁶ István Németh, *Germany Divided. In the Shadow of Two World Systems*, in *Rubicon*, no. 5-6 (Europe), 1997, p. 5.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 6.



is very timely to do after so many years. It is very difficult to understand how a European citizen from the middle of the 20th century was able to work diligently for a happy Europe with that divisive acceptance, while knowing that after the overthrow of Hitler's totalitarian power, they watched almost idly as another inhuman dictator was the lord of life and death within their empire. The Soviet empire, though playing a major role in overthrowing Hitler's rule, was aware that its aims and methods were not much different from the one it had defeated.¹⁸ And this was also known to those who willingly or unwillingly took advantage of its support. Stalin did everything he could to play the role of a "good liberator" in the territories he occupied, and there were people who believed this, but Churchill knew it and saw through Stalin. Stalin needed East Germany like he needed air because he knew that only Berlin and its surroundings could provide him with a legitimate legal basis to be close to the citadel of the Western world.¹⁹ He clung tooth and nail to this area and did his best, despite voicing his opinion at the end of the war that he did not want to divide Germany; his intention to lay his political foundations in the whole country was obvious. This intention was well known to the Westerners as well, no one would have dared to interfere with the agreements reached at the conferences in Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam. Stalin and his system had a tough foot in the eastern part of the defeated and humiliated Germany; he wanted Berlin almost completely, but his intention did not materialize, since the Western powers tried to keep what they could already save from Stalin's clutches. The citizens of East Germany, along with East Berlin came under a dictatorial communist regime operating in the form of a one-party system, a part of the population perceiving the lurking danger in time and setting off. The relocation did not take much effort until 1949, but people had to leave their past and home behind, so most of them were still waiting. According to researchers, 1.6 million East Germans (FRG) fled towards the west until 1961.²⁰ Border violation was then a serious criminal offense, despite the fact that even the 1949 constitution of the GDR gave citizens the right to move freely, that is, they were free to choose their place of residence. The section on emigration was fully removed from the 1968 constitution. The form of government and its leadership increasingly encouraged those living in the eastern part to move to the FRG, an area ruled by Western powers. After the border closure and the construction of the Berlin Wall, more and more people tried to flee to the West through a third country, very often through Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria. That is why the cooperation of state security agencies of the states belonging to the Soviet bloc worked very well together. The official GDR state security agency

¹⁸ Davis Norman, *Europe: A History, op. cit.*, pp. 995-1012.

¹⁹ Smith, Joseph, *The Cold War 1945-1965*, IKVA, Budapest, 1992.

²⁰ Ádám Masát, *The Role of the Refugee Problem in the Progress of the Regime Change in the GDR. Analysis Based on Historical Diplomatic Data*, Foreign Affairs Review, 2014.



(commonly known as the Stasi) was founded in 1950, which had a quite extensive domestic and foreign network and sought to capture and deport anyone who had committed the crime of “Republikflucht” (escape from the Republic)²¹. The action against emigrants was crucial because it threatened the state’s labour market, since according to the reports of the Stasi since most of doctors, intellectuals and people with technical knowledge left the country, which had a serious impact on projected economic performance, even if the political propaganda of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (SED) wanted to convince people that the declining West was not performing better than their model socialist economy. Family members, relatives, friends and acquaintances living in the western part recounted it differently and at times they were also able to prove it. The leadership of the SED was composed of members of an older generation, and starting reforms was not an option for them because they feared their legitimacy, rightly so. Despite the prohibitions, emigration did not decline; in fact, it became more intense. There are no accurate statistics on the number of refugees who fled in the period between 1961 and 1989. We certainly know that Hungary was a popular destination for East German citizens from the 1960s onwards, but German citizens from the FRG were also glad to come to Hungary to spend their holiday. The area of Lake Balaton was a meeting place for the citizens of the two countries. Eastern Germans were able to obtain all forbidden information here from their compatriots living in the West, no longer being affected by the false propaganda of their homeland. In 1966, the number of holidaymakers in the Lake Balaton area exceeded 100,000, both in terms of Eastern and Western German citizens. According to statistics, about half a million Eastern German tourists arrived in Hungary in 1980, many of whom were already trying to get to the FRG through the western Hungarian border²². Many succeeded, but many were captured and extradited to the Stasi by the Hungarian security agencies²³. A lot of these citizens lost their jobs, even at the risk of isolation, and their family members were likely to face serious retaliation. A higher proportion of attempts to flee to the western part of the country were still in Hungary, but not only did they try to flee towards Austria, also Yugoslavia seemed an easy target, as there was no border barrier. Those people who wished to dissident were able to obtain a passport at the West German consulate in Belgrade, so they could easily get to the FRG²⁴. Storming to the West German consulates proved to be a fashionable method in the 1980s, and the rapid growth in passport applications generated increasing tensions between the

²¹ A.N.: Republikflucht: “desertation from the republic” – was the official termin the GDR (East Germany) used for illegal emigration to West Germany, West Berlin. See URL: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Republikflucht>

²² Ignác Romsics, *The History of Hungary int he 20th century*, Osiris Publishing House, Budapest, 2005.

²³ István Németh, *German question: collection of dokumentis 1945-1990*, Budapest, 1993.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.



two German states.²⁵ Erich Honecker, the GDR President at that time, had refused to make any concessions to ease tensions, stating that they must defend their own sovereignty and the fled, dissident citizens were perpetrators of crime, so they should be deported as soon as possible to receive their punishment in accordance with the law. Many times the family members of the refugees who remained at home were punished for this. The Stasi also blamed the West German media, saying that these press outlets reporting successful escapes as a sensation, and painted the false image that “the Hungarian border guards would not use weapons to stop border violators”.²⁶ Towards the end of the 1980s, escape attempts became more frequent, after which a higher number of people managed to flee and these processes can be attributed to contemporary factors. The last decade of Hungary’s „Goulash Communism”²⁷ started significant softening and loosening processes. A younger group of political leaders from 1987-88-89, such as Miklós Németh, Imre Pozsgay, Gyula Horn, the Opposition Round Table and some others, embarked on the reform efforts required by the current historical era,²⁸ as opposed to Grósz’s perception of the older generation. This young political group is missing from the GDR in 1989. Honecker does not want to hear about any reform, they are very skeptical about the Hungarian events and they say that Hungary wants to leave the Soviet bloc by introducing these measures. They knew that their citizens were constantly fleeing towards the FRG, and this tendency intensified year after year in the 1980s, yet they did not comprehend the essence of the historical moment and were stubbornly clinging to their ideas. The passports of West Germany that were received through the embassies of the various countries in the FRG, and then the multitude of prohibited border crossings, should all have served as a sign to the leaders of the GDR that could have made them change their behaviour. But they did not do so: the mass protests that began in October, nonetheless, resulted in the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989.²⁹

3. Where They Were Taken In and Let Them Pass?

*Annus mirabilis*³⁰: in order to understand the arrival of the year of miracles, the most interesting thing is to recount the story of a contemporary, local family living in the western borderland: “The series of the ‘Years of Miracles’ began in 1986. In the autumn of the previous year, the electric fence between Brennborg and

²⁵ Masát, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Ugron Imre: Interview, 14.01.2020.

²⁸ Ignác Romsics, *Revolution with Negotiation*, *op. cit.*, p. 540.

²⁹ Davis Norman, *op. cit.*, pp. 995-1120.

³⁰ Ignác Romsics, *The History of Hungary in the 20th century*, *op. cit.*, Chapter VIII, System Change, p. 537.



Görbehalom was demolished and the entire signalling system was moved over the village, under the New Heremes part of the settlement, so there was free admittance for most of Brennbergbánya. In August of the same year, the first Formula 1 auto racing took place in Mogyoród – the first one of the Soviet bloc countries – and word spread that, given the large crowd of Western tourists arriving at the event, controls at the western border were expected to be looser. It was proven and all this resulted in the arrival of many Transylvanians in the autumn and early winter, whose family members had already left with the Formula 1 “traffic” in the summer, but the border was already closed to them. Well, “let’s help somehow” was the sentence that was articulated by us. We did not want to cause inconvenience to anyone – especially our border guard friends – for whom it would have been very dangerous to be in contact with those who might be helping border trespassers. So we were in great trouble that we wanted to help, but we also had our hands tied. We came up with the idea of leading our university groups to the forests along the “sharp border” and there were always “guest lecturers” among them, for instance Hungarian, Romanian (Transylvania) and German (GDR) speakers, who then somehow “dropped behind” the group, but on the way back they were not missed by anyone. For our part, the trust from the Hungarian Border Patrol was complete; we did not put anyone in an inconvenient situation and we did not overthrow anybody.

It happened in 1988: our two-story apartment faced the Main Square (Kohlplatz) next to the church and the children’s aquarium stood in front of one of the windows. It was lit by a small burner that was visible through the window, and it seemed that our apartment was bright to those walking through Kohlplatz at night. Perhaps it was a rainy night in May...

Some people downstairs were knocking on our front door. My wife wakes up; I run down the stairs, open the door... “Ist es schon Österreich? (Is it Austria yet?)” – comes the question from the mouth of a drenched, intellectual-looking man. “Nein! Das ist noch Ungarn, Brennbergbánya, die Grenze liegt ungefähr 400 m von hier. (No! This is still Hungary, Brennbergbánya; the border is about 400 m from here.)” – I answer. A woman screams! Someone collapses. Our night visitors were a doctor couple from Berlin. We had invited them in the apartment, giving them food and water, continuously reassuring them, putting them to sleep. The next day, they were also “guest lecturers” at a field practice made up of forest engineering students... And so it went from week to week, month to month until the spring of 1989.

Then came the real “Year of Miracles”, 1989. In the spring, the electrical signalling system was abolished. They turned the power off and began to dismantle the fence. The latter was done by the border guard in a traditional “Hungarian” way. They scattered! Whoever could get close to it got a pole, a wire... everything went into the vineyards, the fences of the weekend houses, and so on. So by the time the demonstrative political dismantlement took place, there was not even a fence for



the most part; the presented section had to be rebuilt. There was a deed recorded both on photographs and TV, when Gyula Horn, Hungarian foreign minister and Alois Mock, Austrian foreign minister cut the barbed wire fence between Sopron and Klingenberg (Kelénpatak) in a spectacular action to prove the good relations between the two countries.” Dr. László Kárpáti – Dr. Anikó Kárpátné Ugron (January, 2020)³¹

Hungary was not left out of the events of the world in 1989. In order to comprehend the motivation, behaviour and departure of Eastern German citizens from their homeland, we need to have a look at the Hungarian events of this year, because only in this way can we reach an understanding of mass migration. In Hungarian history, this year entered public consciousness as the ‘Year of Miracles’. Regime had changed (by this concept we mean the political and social transformation that took place at different times and in different forms in the states that came under Soviet control from a one-party dictatorship to a multi-party democracy)³² took place in various forms in the countries of East-Central and Southeast Europe in 1989. That year, the Hungarian society was able to benefit from the lucky historical grace that the transformation was miraculously not accompanied by a single shot, a single human life, unlike in Romania. Thanks to the economic reforms, cultural liberalism, political tolerance and more and more significant embourgeoisement of the Kádár era, Hungary and Poland were at the forefront of change. The exact date of the beginning of the regime change cannot be determined and neither can we link its end to any date. The “*annus mirabilis*” for Hungary was brought about by free elections, the rule of law, democracy, neutrality, the national coat of arms, the withdrawal of Soviet troops and the advent of the division of Europe. In 1988, Kádár utterly handed power over to Károly Grósz, who willingly or unwillingly entrusted Miklós Németh, the young economist, with the duties of prime minister. From the beginning of 1989, the processes that led to the collapse of the party state progressed rapidly. The most important events were the following: the Act on Strikes is passed on March 22, the Hungarian Young Communist League ceases to exist on April 22, the dismantling of the border barrier on the Austro-Hungarian border begins on May 2 (this date plays an important role in the departure of GDR refugees), János Kádár is exempted on May 8, the members of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences who have been deprived of their membership are rehabilitated on May 8-9, Miklós Németh reshuffled his government composed of young and dynamic reformers on May 10, the construction of the Nagymaros dam is suspended with immediate effect on May 13, Hungary accedes to the Geneva Convention (convention concerning the status of refugees), the reburial of Imre Nagy and his fellow martyrs on June 16,

³¹ A.N.: Dr. László Kárpáti and Dr. Anikó Kárpátné Ugron moved to the Hungarian-Austrian border in the 1970s with the intention of conducting research.

³² Ignác Romsics, *The History of Hungary in the 20th century*, *op. cit.*, p. 439.



János Kádár died on July 6, a Pan-European Picnic was held at Sopron on August 19, the negotiations of the Opposition Round Table were held with the exclusion of the public from June to September, all GDR citizens were allowed to leave the FRG via Austria, from September 10.

The political elite that came to power (by free elections) in 1990 sought to bring about regime change in all areas of life, such as the economy, culture and foreign policy, if it was peaceful and non-violent in its methods.³³

4. “The Spirit of the Place” – Zugliget

The place and date of the foundation of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta is very interesting. The part of Buda, which is called Zugliget (zug = a place that is difficult-to-reach, out-of-traffic – Interpretive dictionary of the Hungarian language), is now a large part of the 12th district, played a crucial role in agriculture and animal husbandry in the 18th century. This role stretches all the way out to the 20th century.³⁴ A Pauline monastery was also built here in the 14th century, which was razed to the ground by the Turks, and after the expulsion of the Pauline order their manors were sold. Much of this area was bought by a royal prosecutor, József Laszlovszky³⁵ (the family is from northern Hungary) at the end of the 18th century. The Laszlovszky-manor was built in 1822, which is one of the centers of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta today. An increasing number of people picked up on the area in the 19th century; the proliferation of romantic vineyards and summer houses, the beauty of the mountainous landscape even inspired Sándor Petőfi (Between the Mountains, September 8, 1848). It was famous for its hospitality and reception facilities; Lajos Kossuth was also arrested here in 1837, but the wife of Franz Joseph and his two children spent their holidays here as well.³⁶ At the beginning of the 20th century, it was a sparsely populated area, so it was very suitable for hiding, the “zug” cottages – although they were summer houses without all the modern conveniences – from evictions, for instance, the horticultural outbuildings were indeed very good. The Loreto Sisters³⁷ homed in on this area and bought it from Laszlovszky’s last descendant, Flora Hegyessy. The Parish Church of the Holy Family was built in this area between 1913 and 1917 according to the plans of Dezső Hüttl, and then the convent and the boarding school were built between 1920 and 1926, which joined the side of the church. The nuns

³³ *Ibidem*, pp. 544-549.

³⁴ Nemessányiné Csepreghy, Éva: *The Parish Church of the Holy Family in Zugliget – study*.

³⁵ József Laszlovszky, Senator of Buda, Judge of the City, County Judge and Mayor. 1737-1818, Oszlány.

³⁶ Nemessányiné, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Jeszenkovits, Teréz, *Pearls of Our Mountains*, The Zugliget Institute of the Loreto Sisters, 2001.



worked here for educational purposes. The church institutions were nationalized from 1948, the convent was also disbanded, and then the building was completely evacuated on June 18, 1950 and the nuns, who were still living here, were interned. According to legends, only four elderly sisters could remain in their cell in the building. Following that, the building of the convent got into the handling of the National Child Protective Service, and the sisters who remained here could continue to work in its laundry and sewing room. The name of the institute was to be Erzsébet Szilágyi Nursery Home, for 180 girls, aged 10-14, and the institution got hold of the orchard. It is part of this garden's history that the orchard maintained by the Loreto Sisters was cultivated for educational purposes in cooperation with the pupils and its crop was used for charitable purposes.³⁸ (A more detailed exploration of the topic will be published in book format). The convent got it back in 1990, where the Jesu Congregation³⁹ Home for the Elderly operates today. The spirit of the place also includes the following organizations founded there: Károly Kiss founded the Caritas Association and the Pauline St. Vincent Association in 1905 (1,500 Catholics live here at this time), The Jesus Heart Association of Women from Zugliget, St. Sanssouci's Youth Congregation, St. Stephen's Male Congregation, Bálint Árvay Nagy's Scout Team, Many Jews are rechristened during the persecution of Jews, Several Actio Catholica groups were established in the 1930s, The Heart Guard of 1944⁴⁰.

The church was transformed into an independent parish church from 1970, although it did not have its own parish building, the local parson lived in the Laszlovszky-manor building. Father Imre Kozma was transferred here to the post of parson as a punishment from 1977. And what is punishment to man is a blessing from God. With the relocation of the Father, a spiritual movement appeared in Zugliget that would have an impact on Europe as well. At the initiative of Father Imre and with the unity of the faithful, the Temple was first put in order, and then the Father began to build souls. The year of 1983 was also decisive for the parish; Roger Schütz, the leader of the Taizé Community visited here.⁴¹ From then on a lot of people, especially the youth, joined the Taizé prayer chain on Friday nights. As a result, a group of mostly young people was formed, who would lay the foundation of a charitable - Christian non-governmental organization founded at the beginning of the regime change's year, called the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta. This Christian charity took care of the provision of about 48,600 Eastern German refugees in Hungary, between August 14, 1989 and November 14, 1989.

³⁸ Nemessányiné, *op. cit.*

³⁹ A.N.: The Loreto Sisters changed their name in 2002 and has been known as Congregatio Jesu [The Congregation of Jesus] ever since.

⁴⁰ Nemessányiné, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ *Ibidem.*



Conclusions

The year 1989 entered the books of history as the year of border openings. The constantly observed lives of the GDR citizens, previously described, have not come to an ease this year either, and the deceiving political leaders, which at the time had an average age of 67, did not notice the winds of change. The Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta was established at a time when Europe was in dire need of such an organization. The exact date of the formation: 10 February 1989.

The Knights Hospitaller of Malta was established during the Crusades in the 11th century, named after St. John the Baptist (Johannites), even with the intention of caring for the poor and sick knights and pilgrims. The order appeared in Hungary as early as the 12th century. The order functioned almost smoothly in the country until the middle of the 16th century, but after the country was divided into three parts, it crumbled. It was legally abolished in the early 19th century. They set up their embassy in Budapest in 1925, then in 1928 the Hungarian Association of the Order of Malta was formed again. After 1945, their operation was impossible, they were forced to emigrate, so they did not relocate their headquarters to the Buda Castle until 1996. Their motto was “Tuitio fidei et obsequium pauperum”, which is also the motto of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, i.e. “Defence of the faith and assistance to the poor”.

The towers of the church in Zugliget meant greater security for many because, as they said, they provided the residents of the camp “not only with food and drink, but also with encouragement and understanding”⁴². Since many people did not dare to leave the Zugliget camp, Dr. Alexander Arno, Ambassador of the FRG, asked Father Imre Kozma, the founding President of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta in 1989, to allow the embassy to move to the camp. Father Kozma did not give an immediate answer “because I was thinking from a charitable point of view, and this issue was already political,” he nevertheless allowed, so the courtyard of the Zugliget church became the scene of political events at the time. Father Imre also consulted regularly with the Hungarian government, and the Prime Minister Miklós Németh frequently visited in the Zugliget camp, but not only him. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, then Foreign Minister of the FRG, was there, Chancellor of West Germany, in 1989, Mr. Helmut Kohl himself, and some members of the Hungarian government. It could even become a place for diplomatic meetings between the GDR and the FRG for a few moments. GDR diplomats asked Father

⁴² A.N.: The first refugee camp was set up in the courtyard of the Roman Catholic Church in Zugliget. The head of the West German consulate asked Father Imre Kozma, president of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta to set up the camp, and the camp opened its doors on August 14, 1989. The next camp was opened in the building of the pioneering camp in Csillebérc. Interview: Imre Ugron, January 14, 2020.



Imre Kozma why he liked the West Germans more, Father Imre replied that this was not the case, on the contrary, he liked the East Germans more, but they did not understand that at the time. Of course, while life was going on in the camps, some left, others moved in, and those who left the camp hoped to cross the border, some political work was going on in the background. Miklós Németh visited Chancellor Kohl in West Germany to announce his government's wonderful decision to open the borders and allow East German citizens to go west. The date for opening the border was announced on 10 September and already entered into force on the 11th. The crowd in front of the translator in the camp, Csilla von Boeselager, the founding Member of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta, burst into joy, some cried in joy, some opened champagne. The Zugliget camp remained open even until November 14. According to Father Imre, 48,600 East German citizens were cared for in the camps of the Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta.

In its first year, the newly formed Hungarian Charity Service of the Order of Malta was facing historical tasks that they did not dare to dream of when the service was established. The tasks were enormous, and although the organization seemed small at the time, we can safely say that these tasks set the path to becoming what the Service means to Hungarian society and the world today. Honecker, being sick at the time, would not have thought that Hungarian society, its government and, through it, one of the youngest but Christian organizations in the country, would leak the GDR's seemingly unsinkable socialist ship. If Imre Kozma and Csilla von Boeselager had traveled to the GDR at this historic moment, they would probably have been arrested, but the Hungarian government had not stolen themselves in their hearts either, because by joining the Geneva Convention, they had practically backed away from bilateral agreements. This made it possible for East German citizens to stay in Hungary with asylum. The GDR, which subsided in early November, very quickly put the tireless members and volunteers of the Charity Service to another humanitarian test, as the Romanian revolution erupted on 17 November. And after that too had subsided, the Southern War broke out, which also set off a great wave of fleeing. Even then, the Charity Service was not idle, while at the national level it took up the fight to improve the fate of the people who drifted to the periphery of the Hungarian population. When I asked Imre Ugron whether the Charity Service and the Order of Malta had fulfilled their "duty" at this historic moment, he replied, "my answer is yes, without question mark"⁴³, and its international echo was so great that it still resonates today in people's ears.

On 19 August 2019, German Chancellor Angela Merkel visited Hungary for the 30th anniversary of the Pan-European Picnic to thank the Hungarians for playing a very important role in the reunification of Germany and thus the unification of the whole of Europe.

⁴³ See: Interview with Mr. Imre Ugron, Ambassador of the Hungarian Order of Malta, 14/01/2020



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