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The Issue of Responsibility for the Expulsion of Ethnic Germans from Hungary

In the period between 1946 and 1948 approximately half of the Germans of Hungary (220,000 people) were settled to the American and Soviet occupation zones of post-war Germany. These events were part of a larger international process in which millions of Germans were forced to flee their homes in Northern and Eastern Europe, as well as Poland and Czechoslovakia. Post-war Hungary, as one of the countries on the losing side of the war, after 1945 was in a ceasefire status, accordingly was not a sovereign state. As a result, the expulsion of the Germans from Hungary could take place only with an international mandate under the supervision of the Allied Control Commission. International politics played a key role in the preparation and the authorisation of the expulsions, and this was no different in the summer of 1946, during the execution of the expulsions. Furthermore, international politics was decisive also in the context of the tense relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, when the expulsions were temporarily retarded. Finally, international politics had influence on the expulsions also in the summer of 1947, when forced migration to the Soviet occupation zone of Germany began without the consent of the Western Allied Powers. The aim of the study is to present and analyse these complex processes.

INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the forced migration of Germans in the territory of Central and Eastern Europe was carried out in the name of post-war retribution. The Allied Powers had been planning to solve the issue of minorities this way since

the outbreak of World War II.¹ In a 1943 report on the peace negotiation attempts of Kállay's Hungarian Government, the British Foreign Secretary praised Hungary for stroking a blow against the German minority in Hungary by depriving SS volunteers of their Hungarian citizenship, and thus shifting them to Germany.² However, the expulsion of Sudeten Germans and Silesian Germans in particular had already been discussed and supported by both the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. In this context, it is clear that the post-war expulsion of the Germans occurred both in victorious and defeated states. The main concern was revenge and the prevention of future problems.

During the war, it was the Soviet Union that suffered the greatest financial and human losses. As outlined from 1943 onwards and stipulated in the Percentages Agreement of October 1944,³ this area would inevitably become part the Soviet sphere of influence. In the autumn of 1944, as the Soviet troops advanced massively, the post-war fate of the Germans became clear: at the political rally of the Smallholders' Party (Kisgazdapárt) held in Pécs, Hungary on 28 November 1944, Ferenc Nagy was the first of the party leaders to raise the issue of the expulsion of the Germans.⁴

THE ROAD TO THE POTSDAM CONFERENCE

However, this issue only came to the foreground in the spring of 1945, after the German troops had been driven out of the country. It was mainly in

¹ SEEWANN 2000: 183–198.

² Memorandum by the Head of the Department for Central Europe of the British Foreign Office on the principles of British policy in terms of Hungary (London, 22 September 1943). See JUHÁSZ 1978, document no. 71; GECSÉNYI–MÁTHÉ 2008: document no. 92.

³ In October 1944, Churchill met the Soviets in Moscow and proposed a division of control over Eastern European countries, dividing them into spheres of influence. Churchill and Stalin agreed that there would be a 90% British influence in Greece, a 90% Soviet influence in Romania and an 80% Soviet influence in Hungary and Bulgaria. For Yugoslavia, they agreed on 50–50%. CHURCHILL 1949.

⁴ Kis Újság 1945: 3. See ZIELBAUER 1996: 154.

the press that the parties demanded a radical solution to the German issue, namely expulsion. At the time of the first press releases of these statements, the Department for Ethnicities and Minorities of the Hungarian Prime Minister's Office warned that such press releases should be banned, as they could be very damaging to the foreign affairs of the country:

"The issue of expelling an ethnic group living in a particular country is never to be solved by the host country alone. Unilateral expulsion or even population exchange – a possibility and even a necessity in Hungarian–German relations – is only possible with the consensus of the two countries involved; moreover, expelling the Germans can only be carried out with the prior consent of the victorious Allied Powers. It is possible that the removal of the Germans from the Carpathian basin is also on the political agenda of the victorious Allied Powers. Therefore, before implementing the Hungarian initiative, it would be useful to find out the relevant intentions of the Allied Powers in advance and wait for them to take the lead, or at least the Hungarians should try to act together with the other interested states in the Danube Basin in this very important matter and submit a joint request to the Allied Powers."⁵

The issue of the expulsion of Germans from Hungary was discussed at the inter-party meeting on 14 May.⁶ Minister of Foreign Affairs János Gyöngyösi explained that it was absolutely necessary to know whether the Allied Powers regarded the responsibility of the Germans to be an international issue or an internal matter of the affected countries. Gyöngyösi hoped that a resolution of the Allied Powers would shift the responsibility away from the Hungarian Government. Following the inter-party conference, the Hungarian Government appealed to the Allied Powers for the expulsion of the Germans;

⁵ Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár Országos Levéltára [National Archives of Hungary] (hereinafter: MNL OL) XIX-A-1-n Miniszterelnökség Nemzetiségi és Kisebbségi Osztályának iratai [Documents of the Nationality and Minority Department of the Prime Minister's Office], box 1, 530/1945.

⁶ The minutes of the inter-party meeting was published in HORVÁTH et al. 2003: 46–69, and recently in MARCHUT–TÓTH 2022: 166–190.

however, according to a British report of 9 July, on 12 May, Minister of Foreign Affairs János Gyöngyösi had already asked Sir Alvary Gascoigne, the British diplomat then serving in Budapest, about his government's opinion on the expulsion of some 200,000 Swabians.⁷ At that time, London had not yet made a statement on the issue. Gyöngyösi also contacted Arthur Schoenfeld, the U.S. representative in Hungary, who told Gyöngyösi that although he did not know the U.S. Government's position, it would certainly not agree with any mass deportation, only with the punishment of war criminals.⁸

After the meeting, historian and publicist István Borsody published in *Szabad Szó* an article entitled "A sváb kitelepítés nemzetközi szempontjai" [The International Aspects of the Swabian Resettlement], in which he wrote that the resettlement of the Germans was a matter of domestic politics; the only subject of debate is which category of Germans it should apply to. "It would be absolutely advisable" – Borsody wrote – "to handle the resettlement of the Hungarian Swabians not only as a Hungarian matter, but as a general international matter."⁹

After the meeting, Minister of Foreign Affairs Gyöngyösi raised the issue of expulsion to the Allied Control Commission orally and later in writing; he called for the expulsion of 200,000 to 300,000 Germans to the Soviet occupation zone of Germany.¹⁰ On 24 May, the British Government expressed the view that

⁷ According to the 1941 census, there were 477,491 native German speakers and 303,419 persons of German nationality living within the Trianon borders of Hungary. See KSH 1976.

⁸ BIEWER 1992: 983–993.

⁹ BORSODY 1945. Three and a half decades later Borsody published an article in *Új Látóhatár* (BORSODY 1981). Based on the comparison of these two writings, we can say that Borsody took a very consistent position in this matter (the rejection of collective responsibility, the resettlement is primarily a matter of foreign policy, as well as the decisive role of the Soviet Union). First among Hungarian historians, Borsody described that Hungary came to the intervention of the Czech Edvard Beneš to deport the Germans; however, he wrongly considers that all this happened regardless of the request of the Hungarian Government.

¹⁰ MNL OL XIX-J-1-j Külügyminisztérium Békeelőkészítő Osztályának iratai [Documents of the Peace Preparatory Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs] II/28. In BALOGH 1982: 85. See the minutes of the oral meeting sent to the Soviet Government in MARCHUT 2014: 352; see also: FÜLÖP 2011: 51; TÓTH 2018: 297–298.

the expulsion of Germans from Hungary was less urgent than their expulsion from Poland and Czechoslovakia. Then, on 14 June, Gascoigne reported in a telegram that, although some members of the Hungarian Government would have wished to expel the whole German population of Hungary, still, only the fascist Germans were to be expelled.¹¹

From the head of the U.S. political mission in Budapest, Gyöngyösi had received a memorandum of the U.S. Government on the issue of expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia. In this, the Americans stated that any expulsion of any group of people could only be carried out on the basis of international conventions and that Washington disapproved any expulsion based on collective guilt.¹² In its reply to the memorandum, the Hungarian Government opposed the collective persecution of Hungarians in Slovakia, while stressing the need to severely punish war criminals.¹³

On 9 July, Gyöngyösi negotiated with Soviet Ambassador Georgy Maximovich Pushkin in Budapest – the latter claimed that the expulsion of the Germans was a difficult task because Germany was in a difficult economic and demographic situation. Gyöngyösi was surprised by the hesitation of the Soviet Union, because, as he said, it contradicted the Soviet suggestions presented until then.¹⁴ In his 1953 memoirs,¹⁵ István Kertész, then Head of the Peace Preparatory Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, also referred to the strong Soviet pressure, tangible in the first months of 1945. However, no reference was made to this in the sources published after the Potsdam Conference, since if there had been any pressure, it would certainly have served as a reference to the Hungarian Government. Yet, even if there was no coercion or pressure, there must have been a suggestion, as we have a number of other

¹¹ BIEWER 1992: 983–993.

¹² MNL OL XIX-J-1-n Külügyminisztérium Gyöngyösi János irathagyatéka [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Archive of János Gyöngyösi].

¹³ MNL OL XIX-J-1-n Külügyminisztérium Gyöngyösi János irathagyatéka [Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Archive of János Gyöngyösi].

¹⁴ MNL OL XIX-J-1-j SZU Tük. [Confidential documents of the Soviet Union] 1945 – IV-100.2. In BARÁTH–CSEH 1996: 86; SZŰCS 1997: 58–74.

¹⁵ KERTÉSZ 1953: 8.

sources suggesting this fact.¹⁶ The aforementioned British report of 9 July stated that according to the position of the Soviet Government, the expulsion should be as broad as possible. In one of his notes, Geoffrey Wedgwood Harrison, a member of the German Department of the British Foreign Office, wrote that the Soviet Union considered the expulsion of the Germans to be its historic mission. As Harrison wrote, the Anglo-Saxon position was quite different, “however, we must admit that we are not in a position to prevent it [i.e. the expulsion – author’s note]. The best we can do is to try to ensure that it is well organised and as humane as possible, without imposing an intolerable burden on the occupying authorities in Germany”.¹⁷ Harrison’s position was supported by, among other historians, Theodor Veiter and Alfred-Maurice de Zayas. According to Veiter, the Soviet Union’s interest was the resettlement of the Germans, to create a cordon sanitaire on the occupied territories.¹⁸ Zayas also confirms this in his works.¹⁹

THE ISSUE OF GERMAN MINORITIES AT THE POTSDAM CONFERENCE

The Allied Powers made it clear that they were the only ones to decide about the expulsion of the Germans. In Potsdam, the issue of the Germans from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary was indeed discussed together. The expulsion of the Germans was opened for discussion by Churchill at the ninth meeting. Naturally, the situations of the Germans in Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary were given a different priority. The main focus of the negotiations was on Czechoslovakia and Poland, discussing Hungary only additionally, as there “the matter was obviously less urgent”.²⁰ According to the minutes of the

¹⁶ British report of 9 July 1945. In BIEWER 1992: 983–993.

¹⁷ BIEWER 1992: 1003–1004. The quote is the author’s translation from German.

¹⁸ VEITER 1987.

¹⁹ DE ZAYAS 1987; DE ZAYAS 1989.

²⁰ BIEWER 1992: 979–982.

conference, the expulsion of Germans from Hungary was clearly negotiated upon the request of the Hungarian Government. In Germany, the refugees and the expelled from Czechoslovakia and Poland were already creating a difficult situation, mainly due to supply problems, so the Anglo-Saxons were not interested in forcing Hungary to carry out the expulsion. According to the minutes written by the Soviet delegation, Sir Alexander Cadogan, British Permanent Under-Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs made the following statement on the issue of Germans in Hungary: "There is another issue of minor importance: the issue of the expulsion of a certain number of Germans from Hungary. I understand that the Hungarian Government wishes to relocate a certain number of Germans living in Hungary to Germany."²¹ So, the British acknowledged the legitimacy of the Hungarian request; however, they themselves did not force the expulsion.

On 28 July, the American delegation raised the issue of the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia. The British delegation indicated that the question was not only the expulsion of Germans from Czechoslovakia, but also from western Poland and Hungary. The Soviet delegation proposed to present the issue to the three ministers after its pre-processing by a preparatory committee. In accordance with this proposal, a corresponding committee was formed, with the participation of George F. Kennan (United States of America), Geoffrey W. Harrison (United Kingdom), Arkady Sobolev and Vladimir Semyonov (Soviet Union).

On the third staff meeting of 31 July, the U.K. was represented by Prime Minister Clement Attlee and Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin. The sixth item on the agenda was the expulsion. The attendees agreed to try to get the British proposal accepted by the Soviets at the Foreign Ministers' meeting in the afternoon. Thus, the part of the document on the expulsion of Germans was drafted by the English-speaking countries and this is what they wanted to get approved by the Soviets. Initially, the Soviets objected to the British proposal, which would have imposed an expulsion moratorium until the German Allied

²¹ BIEWER 1992: 1729.

Control Council would examine the situation. Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov pointed out that the document could easily be misunderstood by the governments concerned and that the issue could not be decided without these. Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin also expressed his doubts concerning the proposal, saying that it was not enforceable. The Anglo-Saxons, on the other hand, insisted that the expulsions had to be halted until the German Allied Control Council discussed the issue.²² After a lengthy debate, the proposal was adopted on the same day. On the following day, Harrison wrote about the negotiations to the Foreign Office: "The negotiations were not easy – negotiations with the Russians are never easy."²³ He also reported that Sobolev had called the expulsion of the Germans from Czechoslovakia and Poland a historic mission, which the Soviet Union did not wish to prevent at all. Cannon and Harrison rejected this, stating that since they could not prevent mass expulsions [in German terminology: "wilde Vertreibung" – author's note], they sought to make sure it would be carried out in an organised and humane manner.

It is clear from the wording that – though the resolution does not stipulate collective punishment – it does allow both individual and collective evaluation. This decision was obviously adopted in this form because there was no consensus among the Allied Powers on this issue, and there was a great tension between the Soviet and Anglo-Saxon positions.

THE INTERPRETATION OF THE POTSDAM AGREEMENT

Considering the interpretation of the tripartite pact, its coercive or permissive nature was unclear to Hungary. One question was whether the expulsion was the implementation of the Potsdam decisions or rather an act requested by the Hungarian Government, approved by the Allied Powers. The other question

²² BIEWER 1992: 1948–1992.

²³ Public Record Office London FO 371/46811. Published in DE ZAYAS 1987: 126–127.

was whether the resolution forced a collective judgement. The answer to these questions was crucial in terms of both interior and foreign affairs.

From the point of view of the interpretation of the decision, the period between 1945 and 1948 can be divided into three periods:

1. August 1945 – December 1945 (Potsdam – expulsion decree): a period of dilemmas, clashing positions
2. January 1946 – August 1946 (beginning of the implementation of resettlement – American–Hungarian agreement of 22 August 1946): a period of warning by the Allied Powers
3. September 1946 – June 1948: Potsdam as reference to continue the expulsion

Deciding whether the Convention was coercive or permissive was a problem only for Hungary. In Czechoslovakia and Poland, this was not a matter of discussion, as in both countries, the expulsion of the Germans had already begun long before the Potsdam Conference. Having been victorious countries, both could act as judges, while Hungary, as a defeated country subject to cease-fire, could take foreign affairs decisions only with the consent of the Allied Powers. An essential provision of the Potsdam Agreement was that, while in Czechoslovakia and Poland the national governments were in charge of the expulsion, in Hungary it was the Allied Control Commission. The Allied Control Commission of Hungary was established by the armistice agreement of 20 January 1945 and guaranteed Soviet hegemony by stipulating that its chairman could only be a Soviet (as Hungary was at war directly with the Soviet Union), thus Moscow had the final word in important political issues. This is why, following the Potsdam mandate, the Allied Control Commission did not even negotiate with the Minister of Foreign Affairs – the competent authority, given the international nature of the issue – but with Minister of the Interior Ferenc Erdei.

Radio Prague stated in relation to the Potsdam Agreements, that the verdict of the three powers on the resettlement of Germans from Czechoslovakia was a resounding triumph of Czechoslovak politics. There was no such manifestation on the Hungarian side. The most radical press release on the positive nature of

the Potsdam decisions was published by the peasant politician Imre Kovács, entitled “Gyönyörű elégtétel” [Beautiful Satisfaction]:

“In Potsdam, at the conference of the leading statesmen of the Allied Powers, it was decided to resettle the Germans in Hungary to their homeland, Germany. This issue can no longer be politically categorised. Now it is no longer a question of expelling only the volksbundist, fascist Germans from the country, but all Germans, in accordance with the Potsdam decisions, regardless of their political views, whether they were loyal, whether they followed Hitler or tried to resist the Third Reich’s temptations. [...] The National Peasants’ Party received a beautiful satisfaction. Here, on this crucial question, too, its position was correct. The Hungarian people can also see from this that their interests are defended and served to the fullest extent, so let them trust the National Peasants’ Party, because it will never deviate from the path of historic Hungarian politics.”²⁴

There is a fundamental difference between the Czechoslovak radio broadcast and the statement of the Peasant Party: while the Czechoslovak Government credited the Potsdam decision as its own success, Imre Kovács only indicated that his party’s position is the same as that of the Allied Powers, and therefore his party shows the right way. It is important to consider this together with the fact that Hungary was facing elections in that autumn, and this line of thought was a powerful argument in the National Peasants’ Party campaign.

The communist press organ, *Szabad Nép* also supported the binding nature of the Agreement and emphasised with pleasure that the Allied Powers’ decision must be enforced. They wanted to get rid of not only the “volksbundists” – using the terminology of the time – but also the Swabians, collectively.²⁵ In the social democrat *Népszava* we can read that the Potsdam decision obliged the countries concerned to resettle the Germans living on their territory.²⁶ At the same time, in another article, it was noted that the Potsdam Final Act facilitated the Hungarian Government’s work, and that “the Hungarian

²⁴ KOVÁCS 1945: 1.

²⁵ Szabad Nép 1945: 3.

²⁶ SZILÁGYI 1945.

nation, the new Hungarian democracy, is deeply pleased to welcome the historic decisions of the Potsdam Conference. We all turn with a sense of gratitude to the peace of the world, to democratic progress, great and wise champions of human rights and freedom: Stalin, Harry S. Truman and Attlee.”²⁷ The Smallholders’ Party and the Civic Democratic Party did not take a position in August regarding the three power decision.

Two days after the Potsdam decision, the British Foreign Office sent a telegram to the Embassy in Budapest stating that, though it had been agreed at the Potsdam Conference that the expulsion of the Germans from Poland, Czechoslovakia and Hungary had to be carried out, the Czechoslovak Government, the Polish Provisional Government and the Allied Control Commission in Hungary was requested to cease any further expulsions until an appropriate notice from the German Allied Control Council to the governments concerned. The text of the agreement had to be officially handed over by General Oliver Pearce Edgcumbe.²⁸

As stated in the aforementioned memoirs of István Kertész, the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs received the text of the Potsdam Agreement only much later, we do not know exactly when.²⁹ All we know is that the final draft was not known at the session of the Council of Ministers held on 13 August, which obviously made the adoption of the agreement considerably more difficult. The first official notification was received by the Hungarian Government on 9 August from Marshal Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov, through the intermediary of the Chairman of the Allied Control Commission, Lieutenant General Sviridov.³⁰ The fact that the first information came from the Soviets clearly showed that Hungary was under the rule of the Soviet Union and not the U.S. or the U.K. Voroshilov said that 400,000–450,000 Germans were

²⁷ *Népszava* 1945a: 1.

²⁸ BIEWER 1992: 1012.

²⁹ KERTÉSZ 1953: 11.

³⁰ MNL OL XIX-A-1-n Miniszterelnökség Nemzetiségi és Kisebbségi Osztályának iratai [Documents of the Department of Ethnicities and Minorities of the Prime Minister’s Office] box 2, 970/1945.

to be expelled from Hungary and that the Hungarian Government had to present an appropriate schedule within 2–3 days.³¹ The Marshal also said that though selecting the individuals to be expelled was at the sole discretion of the Hungarian Government, the Soviet Government called for a rigorous procedure. Evidently, this instruction was very ambiguous. Considering the fact that the government did not know the exact wording of the Agreement, the weight of the decisions made by the Council of Ministers is obvious. While before the Potsdam Agreement, the Hungarian negotiator had been Minister of Foreign Affairs Gyöngyösi, after its ratification, the Soviets negotiated the matter of the expulsion only with Erdei. On 10 August, Erdei drafted a proposal to the Council of Ministers, stating the following:

“In accordance with the decisions made at the Potsdam Conference and, more specifically, considering Marshal Voroshilov’s message, the possibility of a more rapid and radical procedure has arisen. Hungary has now an opportunity to get rid of the ethnic group – which has played an important role in bringing the country to its present state – more thoroughly and faster.”³²

So Erdei was talking about an opportunity. The preparatory material for Minister Gyöngyösi was written by István Kertész. In his note, Kertész called for caution. He pointed out that the position of the Allied Powers was unclear. If the decision insisted on collective retribution, the Allied Powers were to communicate this in writing, in a reference document.³³ Kertész’s arguments were very similar to those of Gyöngyösi, proclaimed at the 14 May inter-party meeting, i.e. the Hungarian Government was not in a position to take responsibility. Of course, this did not mean that the government did not want the expulsion, just that it did not want to

³¹ MNL OL XIX-A-1-n Miniszterelnökség Nemzetiségi és Kisebbségi Osztályának iratai [Documents of the Department of Ethnicities and Minorities of the Prime Minister’s Office] box 2, 970/1945. See also TÓTH 1993: 21; ZINNER 2004: 62.

³² MNL OL XIX-A-1-n Miniszterelnökség Nemzetiségi és Kisebbségi Osztályának iratai [Documents of the Department of Ethnicities and Minorities of the Prime Minister’s Office] box 2, 970/1945.

³³ Minutes of the Council of Ministers, 13 August 1945. In SZÜCS 1997: 58–74.

take sole responsibility for it. This was also the view of Minister for Reconstruction Ferenc Nagy: "It is our long-standing wish to get rid of the harmful masses of Swabians and Germans as soon as possible and I am glad that we now have this opportunity at an international level."³⁴ In May, State Minister Mátyás Rákosi stated that the expulsion of the Germans from Hungary could not be brought into line with the fate of the Hungarian minority in the neighbouring countries. Later, at the August session of the Council of Ministers, he called attention to the need to avoid such a connection. As everyone but him had claimed the same thing in May, we can conclude that this connection had always been a great fear of all realistic Hungarians – not without any reason. Although at the Potsdam Conference, the Allied Powers did not discuss the possibility of expelling Hungarians from Czechoslovakia, after the conference, the Czechoslovak Government claimed that after the expulsion of the Germans from Hungary, there would be space enough for ethnic Hungarians designated to be expelled from Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimír Clementis told Soviet Deputy Foreign Affairs Minister Andrei Vyshinsky: "The Hungarian Government claims that Hungary is technically unable to find a place for 200,000 Hungarians from Czechoslovakia. We find this argument incomprehensible [...]. According to the Potsdam Agreement, Hungary can expel 400,000 Germans to Germany without paying reparations for their property."³⁵ Vyshinsky replied: "Will there be enough space for 200,000 Hungarians from Czechoslovakia in Hungary if they expel 500,000 to Germany? I think so."³⁶

The decision of the Council of Ministers of 13 August was that the Hungarian Government considered the expulsion of the Germans to be necessary of its own free will. However, in his notes, István Kertész wrote that the Hungarian Government would carry out the expulsion of the Germans upon Soviet request. The headcount reported by Voroshilov – 400,000–450,000 – was interpreted as a ukase.

³⁴ Minutes of the Council of Ministers, 13 August 1945. In SZÜCS 1997: 58–74.

³⁵ BORSODY 1981: 104.

³⁶ BORSODY 1981: 104.

On 18 August, Minister of the Interior Erdei and State Secretary Mihály Farkas met Sviridov, who complained that the Hungarian cabinet had attributed the need for the expulsion to Voroshilov, and he tried to shift the responsibility to the Hungarians. In Sviridov's opinion, the expulsion of the Swabians was a Hungarian issue, its method and extent were to serve the benefit or the detriment of Hungary. As he stated, all those claiming to be German had to be expelled, irrespective of what party they belonged to – previously or at the time. “Do not show any mercy in this issue! They must be swept out with a steel broom!” – said Sviridov.³⁷ The lieutenant general demanded a strong-arm policy from Erdei and put him in charge of the implementation. He also made Erdei understand that he would negotiate in the future only with him:

“The expulsion of the Swabians is the task of the Minister of the Interior; ultimately, the Minister of the Interior cannot solve too many issues by listening to all opinions, but must indeed consistently follow his own political agenda; thus, the Ministry of the Interior is not a democratic body, but a revolutionary and dictatorial one.”

Lieutenant General Sviridov also noted that “too much discussion will not lead to an end, as the more you discuss an issue, the less you decide”.³⁸ The lieutenant general also assured Erdei that the expulsion of the Germans would not entail the expulsion of the Hungarians from the Felvidék (the former Upper Hungary), i.e. Czechoslovakia.

THE DECISION OF THE GERMAN ALLIED CONTROL COUNCIL AND THE EXPULSION DECREE

However, the forthcoming elections overshadowed the expulsion of the Germans. The next significant step was the decision of the German Allied Control

³⁷ MNL OL XIX-B-1-n 1945 – 6 – 20290. In BARÁTH–CSEH 1996: 88–92.

³⁸ MNL OL XIX-B-1-n 1945 – 6 – 20290. In BARÁTH–CSEH 1996: 88–92.

Council of 20 November 1945, setting the number of people to be expelled from Hungary to the U.S. occupation zone of Germany to 500,000. Note that both Hungarian politicians and Hungarian historiographers refer to a resolution or decision, whereas German historiographers use the term 'plan' or 'draft'. This high headcount meant an upper limit of the Germans to be expelled, so the Allied Powers did not take a clear position on collective retribution this time either, but rather left the possibility open.

Népszava reported on the content of the decision two days after it was adopted.³⁹ On the same day, Imre Csátár in *Szabad Nép* emphasised that the Swabian question demanded a solution: "According to the decision of the Potsdam meeting of the Allies, the German minority must be deported from our country. The decision of the Allied Powers therefore makes it mandatory for us to solve this issue at its root, which cannot tolerate postponement from a special Hungarian point of view."⁴⁰

On 30 November, the Hungarian Allied Control Commission informed the Hungarian Government of the German Allied Control Council's decision. At the meeting of the Allied Control Commission held two days earlier, Voroshilov had said that the Hungarians would probably expel 500,000 Germans. The representatives of the Anglo-Saxon powers – notably Lieutenant General William Key and General Edgcumbe – did not object to this at all.⁴¹ In his note to the Allied Powers of 30 November, Minister of Foreign Affairs Gyöngyösi stressed that in Hungary, the principle of individual assessment was to be applied and that they were to expel only just over 200,000 Germans. The note from the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that "it would be against the convictions of the government of democratic Hungary to expel Hungarian citizens purely on ethnic grounds. The government deplores this as well as

³⁹ *Népszava* 1945b: 1.

⁴⁰ CSATÁR 1945: 3.

⁴¹ Minutes, 28 November 1945. In FEITL 2003: 111–112.

any and all forms of collective punishment.”⁴² However, the position of the Minister of Foreign Affairs was not shared unanimously by all Hungarian decision-makers. On 10 December, the Allied Control Commission met to discuss the practical steps of the expulsion. On the next day, Voroshilov handed over Key’s letter to the Hungarian Government, in which the headcount of the expelled was set to 300–400,000.⁴³ Some representatives of the Hungarian Government understood this figure as the number of those to be expelled to the American zone, while the rest of the Germans had to be transferred to the other occupation zones. Obviously, this interpretation was wrong, because the November draft clearly stated that all Germans from Hungary would be transferred to the U.S. occupation zone of Germany.

At the government session of 22 December 1945, the advocates of collective retribution prevailed, and thus, on the basis of collective assessment, Decree 12.330/1945 M.E., the expulsion decree was issued. Its preamble included the following: “In its capacity stipulated in Article 15 of Act 1945:XI, the Ministry, in implementation of the decision of the Allied Control Council of 20 November 1945 on the resettlement of the German population of Hungary to Germany, has issued the following decree: [...]”⁴⁴ Thus, the Hungarian Government issued the decree referring to the decision of the German Allied Control Council.

The U.S. Government protested immediately after the publication of the decree. This protest was accepted by Voroshilov, and the government was ordered to amend the preamble, however, without any effect. On 30 August 1946, the Hungarian Government was forced to issue a government statement, claiming the following:

⁴² MNL OL XIX-A-1-n Miniszterelnökség Nemzetiségi és Kisebbségi Osztályának iratai [Documents of the Department of Ethnicities and Minorities of the Prime Minister’s Office] box 2, 970/1945.

⁴³ Minutes, 10 December 1945. In FEITL 2003: 116–117; TÓTH 2018: 485.

⁴⁴ Decree 12.330/1945 M.E. of the Provisional National Government on the resettlement of the German population of Hungary to Germany. *Magyar Közlöny*, (211), 29 December 1945.

“The Potsdam Agreement gave the Hungarian Government the opportunity to resettle the German population to Germany. The Hungarian Government, wishing to use the opportunity, has reached an agreement with the interested American military government, under which the resettlement will be carried out in an organised and humane manner.”⁴⁵

THE CHANGE IN THE ATMOSPHERE OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

International politics played an important role not only in the preparation of the expulsion, but also in its implementation. The expulsion of the Germans from Hungary is usually divided into two phases: the first phase lasted from January 1946 to June 1947, when the Germans were expelled to the American zone of Germany; the second phase took place from August 1947 to June 1948, when the expulsions targeted the Soviet occupation zone of Germany. These two waves of expulsions were not simply the results of domestic affairs, but were shaped rather by the international political forces and processes.

In Potsdam, in the summer of 1945, the Allied Powers considered cooperation to be important and did not want to risk it. By early 1946, the momentum for wartime cooperation had been broken in a growing atmosphere of antagonism. This was clearly expressed in Churchill's speech held in Fulton on 5 March of the same year, in which he made it clear that the Iron Curtain was coming down in Europe. In the international situation of the second half of 1946, the issue of minorities was no longer being discussed, due to conflicting interests. This situation served as a background for stopping the expulsion of the Germans from Hungary to the American zone.

In this light, we can see the truth of the summary report of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs prepared in October 1946, which reads as follows:

⁴⁵ Szabad Szó 1946: 1.

“Raising the problem of international minority protection faced countless obstacles [...]. A more serious obstacle was the reluctance of the Allied Powers from any kind of minority guarantee [...]. Each Allied Power individually sought to exclude the influence of the other Allied Power as much as possible within its own sphere of interest. However, placing the protection of minorities on an international basis would have opened up a wide space for the mutual intervention of the Allied Powers.”⁴⁶

Obviously, one could not speak about international minority protection at a time when there was forced migration of the order of millions in Europe, all this with the full agreement of the Allied Powers. At the same time, in the second half of 1946, the international situation was already such that this issue was not disturbed by the tensions between the spheres of interest, and this process explains the halting of the resettlement of Hungarian Germans to the American zone, as well.

In June 1946, a Hungarian delegation led by Ferenc Nagy visited Washington. Of Germany's former allies in Central and Eastern Europe, the United States' government received only the Hungarian delegation. Why? Because the communist takeover had already happened everywhere in the region, but for Hungary. On 22 August, the Hungarian Government could still reach an agreement with the Americans on the continued expulsion. However, the speech made by U.S. Secretary of State James F. Byrnes in Stuttgart (6 September 1946) marked a turning point in Washington's attitude towards Germany, in which he restated the aims of the U.S. occupation of Germany. In his speech, Byrnes declared that the American occupation would last as long as it was necessary.⁴⁷ Then, the 76-page Clifford–Elsey report of 24 September 1946 stated that the maintenance of the alliance with the Soviet Union was impossible and outlined the possibility of a third world war.⁴⁸ This report had a great impact on Truman. In this light, it is fully understandable that the Americans refused to accept further Germans from Hungary, a part of the Soviet sphere of influence.

⁴⁶ GECSÉNYI–MÁTHÉ 2008: 1252–1260.

⁴⁷ HORVÁTH et al. 2013: 50–51.

⁴⁸ Clifford–Elsey Report 1946.

Three days after issuing the Clifford–Elsey report, Soviet Ambassador to the United States Nikolai Novikov telegraphed Molotov that the United States was preparing for war, and that the possibility of war against the Soviet Union had been raised.⁴⁹ By the autumn of 1946, the idea of taking united action against the Germans, conceived during World War II, had radically changed. By then, Washington had abandoned its isolationist foreign policy, which was most evident in the German issue.⁵⁰ The point was not to accept the “guilty” Germans any more, but rather to maintain the dividing line, the Iron Curtain, as Churchill had put it. Even though the agreement of 2 December 1946 to create the Bizone was still conceived in the spirit of the Potsdam Conference, in fact, it was the first step in the process of dividing Germany into two parts. Thus, the American zone, to which the German Allied Control Council allowed the expulsion of Germans from Hungary in November 1945, ceased to exist economically on 1 January 1947.

Nevertheless, the views of the Hungarian political elite on foreign affairs were insufficient to understand the altered state of international affairs. This explains why, even in the spring of 1947, the Potsdam Agreement and the agreement of August 1946 were still the main reference points for the negotiations of the Hungarian Government with the U.S.

Important reasons for the suspension of the expulsion were, in addition to the changes in large-scale politics, the difficult economic and social situation of Germany – results of the war losses and the forced migration of millions of Germans. In 1946, the U.S. Government commissioned former U.S. President Herbert Hoover to assess the pressing economic problems. Hoover produced dozens of reports, mainly on famine and serious agricultural problems. He pointed out that millions of Germans were dying of malnutrition.⁵¹ These reports justified the economic unification of the British and American zones and served also as a preparatory material for the Marshall Plan, announced in mid-1947. Just as the suspension of the expulsion of the Germans from Hungary

⁴⁹ NOVIKOV 1946.

⁵⁰ BORHI 2005: 87–88.

⁵¹ HOOVER 1949: 83–97.

should not be seen as a mere decision of the participants of large-scale politics, neither is it sufficient to consider the Marshall Plan to be a result of an economic decision. Obviously, its direct antecedent was the Truman Doctrine, announced on 12 March 1947, which aimed to strengthen Washington's position in Europe by means of an aid programme for Greece and Turkey, in order to limit the influence of the Soviet Union.

All the aforementioned political and economic reasons led to the suspension of the expulsion of the Germans. However, the U.S. authorities had always referred only to economic reasons and, in the winter of 1946–1947, to humanitarian reasons – the latter was obviously a pretext, since in January 1946, they did not feel that starting the expulsion was inhumane at all.

This led to a vast domestic and international political pressure on the Hungarian Government. On the one hand, the Paris Peace Treaty of 10 February 1947⁵² had confined the country to a territory smaller than that declared in the Treaty of Trianon; on the other hand, the practical implementation of the Czechoslovak–Hungarian population exchange agreement of 27 February 1946 began in the spring of 1947, while internal, land-reform-related resettlement was still underway. Partly due to this and partly due to the expected continuation of the expulsions, the Germans to be expelled were forced to live together, causing a lot of tension in the settlements concerned. Thirdly, the arrest of Béla Kovács, the Secretary General of the Hungarian Smallholders' Party on 25 February 1947 indicated that the Soviet Union was no longer waiting for Hungary and wanted to Sovietise the country. The government had to prove that it wanted to get rid of the “fascist elements”. It was the combination of these processes that prompted the Hungarian Government to resume the expulsion.

Between December 1946 and August 1947, the issue of ethnic Germans in Hungary was discussed six times at the sessions of the Allied Control Commission.⁵³ Contrary to large-scale politics, there was an Anglo–Soviet agreement on this issue that prevailed over the American position. With the exception

⁵² About the Paris Peace Treaty see FÜLÖP 2011.

⁵³ FEITL 2003: 23 December 1946, 10 February 1947, 4 March 1947, 20 March 1947, 16 April 1947, 15 August 1947.

of the session of 15 August, Edgcumbe very sharply criticised the attitude of the American authorities and repeatedly called on Brigadier General George Weems to lobby at his government for continuing the expulsion. This was not the only issue in which the British foreign policy did not support the Americans at the Allied Control Commission in Hungary. This was the case with the change of government in June 1947, as well. The reason for this was the sympathy of the British Labour Government with the Soviet Union. When Britain sent troops to fight the Greek communists, the British public and press protested.⁵⁴

On 10 February 1947, Sviridov mediated between the Hungarian Government and Weems. When he asked about the resumption date of the expulsion, Weems replied that he had no information on the matter and would check with the American authorities. After doing so, in a letter of 17 February, Weems wrote that the Americans were proposing a Hungarian–American conference on the issue in Berlin.⁵⁵ That was a very telling proposal: it showed not only that the Americans considered the government of Ferenc Nagy to be their negotiating partner, but it also evidenced that the Americans wanted to reach an agreement excluding the Soviets and the British, and that the only way to do this was to hold the conference in Berlin, not in Budapest. Obviously, both the British and the Soviets objected to this and were extremely indignant; as the possibility of a conference was raised, they proposed to hold it in Budapest, with the presence of the British and the Soviets, which, of course, the Americans did not agree to. The issue was only raised at the session of the Allied Control Commission held on 20 March, but the prime minister also wrote directly to Weems, requesting resumption of the expulsion as soon as possible, as “[the] Potsdam decision gave the Hungarian Government the right to expel the native Swabian population to Germany, specifically, to the territory occupied by the USA”. In this letter, Nagy applied for a meeting to be held in Budapest. On the other hand, General Weems, in his reply to the Allied Control Commission written on the same day and to the Hungarian Government on 27 March, rejected the idea of a Budapest conference and considered the resumption

⁵⁴ BORHI 2005: 126–127.

⁵⁵ FEITL 2003: 313; ZINNER 2004: 105.

of the expulsion to be unfeasible within a year.⁵⁶ A day later, the German Allied Control Council informed Sviridov that the expulsion would be halted indefinitely.

The last session of the Allied Control Commission to discuss the expulsion of Germans to the U.S. zone was held on 16 April 1947. However, no decision was taken – neither at this meeting, nor at the Moscow Conference of the Council of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs. The United States' negative position was strongly influenced by the unfolding conspiracy against the political elite of the Smallholders' Party of Hungary.

The turning point of the events was the visit of State Minister Mátyás Rákosi to Moscow on 27 April. The communist leader made a specific request to the Soviet Union to contribute to the expulsion of the Germans to the Soviet zone. Molotov was surprised by the request, but did not decline it.⁵⁷

By May 1947, Ferenc Nagy was naturally no longer interested in the restart of the expulsion, he rather focused on the attack against his party. On 2 June, the Prime Minister resigned, and so did his Minister of Foreign Affairs János Gyöngyösi. This prevented the resumption of the expulsion to the U.S.-controlled zone.

THE NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE SOVIETS

On 10 June 1947, the Prime Minister of the newly-formed government, Lajos Dinnyés suggested that his government should file requests concerning the resumption of the expulsion to the authorities of the other German occupation zones. On 11 June, Minister of the Interior Rajk wrote to the Allied Control Commission requesting the expulsion of the Germans not only to the American

⁵⁶ MNL OL XIX-A-1-j Miniszterelnökség iratai [Documents of the Prime Minister's Office] box 116, 4223/1947. See also ZINNER 2004: 106.

⁵⁷ ZINNER 2004: 108–110.

zone of Germany, but also to the Soviet zone.⁵⁸ At the session of the Council of Ministers held on 12 June 1947, Rajk announced that he had submitted a request to the Soviets to allow the expulsion to the zone occupied by them.⁵⁹ The Soviets did not decline the request, but required the Hungarian Government to submit a written justification to the Allied Control Commission. This was then written by Prime Minister Lajos Dinnyés. Against this backdrop, General Edgcumbe's lack of information is completely incomprehensible, as at the meeting of 15 August he was surprised to learn that Hungary was going to expel 45,000–50,000 Swabians to the Soviet occupation zone of Germany and that the Soviet Government had agreed to this. The previous united position of the British and the Soviets came to an end. At the meeting, Edgcumbe wished to monitor the implementation of this process, following the practice from the previous expulsion operations. General Sviridov dismissed the request in a single sentence: "[...] there is no need for the British and American representatives to control the expulsion of the Swabians to the Soviet occupation zone of Germany, as this expulsion is being controlled by the Soviet military authorities."⁶⁰

Even though the Potsdam Agreement clearly stipulated control by the Allied Control Commission, in August 1947, this was no longer of any importance. Controlling the implementation of the expulsion by the Allied Control Commission was problematic also due to the fact that the Commission was dissolved on 15 September 1947. This raises the interesting question of international law as to whether the expulsion had to be halted after that date or not. At that time, law did not matter anymore – it was power that was decisive.

⁵⁸ MNL OL XIX-A-1-j Miniszterelnökség iratai [Documents of the Prime Minister's Office] box 116, 7384/1947.

⁵⁹ ZINNER 2004: 110.

⁶⁰ FEITL 2003: 360.

CONCLUSIONS

The numerical balance of the expulsion is as follows: about half of the Germans in Hungary (180,000 to 220,000) were expelled to Germany, of which 50,000 were resettled to the Soviet occupation zone and the rest to the U.S. one. Hungarian sources confirm the smaller data, and the German sources the larger. The Hungarian number is closer to reality, because the German figures include the refugees and evacuees in 1944, because from their point of view they and the expelled were considered “*Flüchtling*”.⁶¹

After all, the Hungarian Government’s intention to expel the Germans from Hungary met the will of the Allied Powers, and after the Potsdam Agreement, the question was “only” who should bear the responsibility. It would have been embarrassing for the Hungarian Government to take the responsibility for the expulsion openly, mainly because it would have served as a real precedent for the fate of the ethnic Hungarians of Czechoslovakia. The country’s leaders had no choice but to emphasise the coercive nature of the Allied Powers’ decisions. They had to cling to these arguments to spare the Hungarians living abroad from collective punishment. Looking back over the past decades from a historian’s perspective, it is evident that the Potsdam Agreement was not binding, but the then Hungarian politicians could not publicly acknowledge this. The Potsdam Agreement was an opportunity to expel the Germans preserving the ambiguous nature of the positions of the Allied Powers.

The question of responsibility tends to come up in different discourses. Is it the Hungarian Government or the Allied Powers that are responsible for the expulsion? I think the question is much more complex than that. The main responsibility lies with the National Socialist Germany, which, in order to implement its own concept of “living space” (*Lebensraum*), used the Germans of Southeastern Europe. I agree with Finnish historian Pertti Ahonen, who wrote:

⁶¹ MARCHUT 2014: 259.

“Admittedly, two wrongs do not make a right, and even the enormity of Nazi crimes by no means morally justifies the excesses of the expulsions. But in the end it would be difficult not to agree with Wolfgang Benz’s conclusion that ‘the National Socialist policy was the cause of the misfortune that befell upon the [German] victims of flight and expulsion at the end of the Second World War.’”⁶²

National Socialist Germany could have done so because the post-war peace treaties – made by the Allied Powers – shaped the European borders in such a way that the possibility of the next world war was encoded in them. The governments of the Horthy regime subjected everything to their revisionist goals, including the Germans in Hungary. The enormous social and political upheaval between the two world wars reinforced the so-called “kuruc”⁶³ historical-political thinking, and made a large part of the society anti-German. This stratum provided the social basis of the new system established in 1945, which made them economically interested in the expulsion. Responsible were the Germans in Hungary, who were in favour of the National Socialist ideology and Adolf Hitler. And, of course, a serious responsibility lies with the post-World War II Hungarian governments and the Allied Powers who saw the solution to the “German question” in forced migration.

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⁶² AHONEN 2003: 24, where he refers to BENZ 1995: 55.

⁶³ Kuruc refers to a group of armed anti-Habsburg insurgents in the Kingdom of Hungary between 1671 and 1711. The term “kuruc” is used in the patriotic and chauvinistic sense, as well.

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