

**GOVERNMENT OFFICE FOR HUNGARIAN MINORITIES ABROAD.
REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE POLITICAL TASKS
CONCERNING THE HUNGARIANS ABROAD, WITH PARTICULAR
ATTENTION TO THE HUNGARIAN STANDING CONFERENCE
(NOVEMBER 1999)**

**Main Problems of Hungarian Foreign Policy, with Particular Attention to Hungarians
Abroad**

There are three main directions for action in Hungarian foreign policy since 1990: Euro-atlantic integration, policy toward neighboring countries, and national policy (the latter includes policy related to the Hungarian minorities abroad). In connection with these directions, there is agreement on the main issues between the Hungarian parliamentary parties. This fact is also reflected in the closing document of the Second session in November 1999 of the Hungarian Standing Conference.

In many respects integration has a strong effect on regional policy, and within it on the policy related to the Hungarian minorities abroad. In this context, one of the most important issues is that of the accession to the Schengen Agreement, whose explanation and discussion is also made possible in the Hungarian Standing Conference and its six specialized committees (on culture, education, the economy, EU integration, citizenship and local governments, and social and health matters). The new quality of relations with Hungary's neighbors influenced to a large extent not only the achievements of Hungarian foreign policy but also the domestic political changes taking place in the neighboring countries (Slovakia, Romania). The risks inherent in the domestic policy changes in those countries have, however, not disappeared. For example, according to the news from Romania, the domestic policy events of this year (parliamentary elections) may seriously put to the test Hungarian-Romanian relations and thus the relations between the Hungarians living in Romania and Hungary.

A survey of the situation of the region will highlight the most important events in each country.

Yugoslavia – Voivodina

From the beginning, the Hungarian government has been especially active in the formulation and implementation of the objectives of the Southeast European Stability Agreement. The first important event of the Stability Agreement was the Szeged conference, where the leaders of Serbia's opposition self-governments could meet with the representatives of the governments, institutions, and West European local government organizations participating in the Stability Agreement. The Hungarian government also joined the foundation proposed by the Szeged local government. The \$1.5 million fund set up with the help of the government aims at assisting Serbia's opposition local governments, with particular regard to humanitarian aid. The „Szeged trend” launched in this manner is also important to demonstrate Hungary's commitment to the future of Hungarian-Serbian relationship. Hungary wishes to further play a major role in the work of the Stability Pact, and fills in the first half of this year the post of co-chairman of the working group dealing with human rights.

Hungarian foreign policy took a firm stand for the common three-tier autonomy concept (personal, provincial and Hungarian autonomous district autonomy) of Voivodina's Hungarian parties, and we are working to obtain the necessary international support for this concept. Among the many positive reactions from Western public opinion, the draft legislation of the US Senate stands out, with one of its articles calling upon the American government to support the above mentioned concept worked out by Voivodina's Hungarians.

As is the case with other countries, relations with Serbia must be placed on new foundations following a change of regime in that country. The condition for this, however, is the satisfactory settlement of the situation of the Hungarian minority in Voivodina.

Romania – Transylvania

The Hungarian government welcomes and supports the initiative of Transylvania's historic Churches for the establishment of a foundation-based Hungarian university. The creation of elementary, secondary, and higher education in the mother tongue within Romania is a basic condition for the survival of the Hungarians living in that country. The majority of the young people from abroad who complete their university studies in Hungary never return to their place of birth. We shall in the future not renounce the creation of a Hungarian state university but we see that administrative obstacles are still delaying its establishment. Therefore, the Hungarian government will support with 2 billion forint (1 \$ = cca. 250 forint) from this year's budget the creation of a foundation-based university.

The Hungarians in Transylvania must decide what kind of higher education structure they want to create. However, one must promote the teaching of trades and sciences which will enable Transylvania's Hungarians to successfully face the challenges of the 21st century in their own place of birth.

The Hungarian government welcomes the proposal of the EU Commission to begin accession negotiations between the European Union and Romania.

Slovakia

Slovakia's Euro-atlantic integration must also be assisted and Hungary has initiated the enhancement of the Visegrad cooperation framework.

The passage of the law on the use of minority language in official dealings, however, signals that anti-Hungarian reflexes are still deep in political life. We received a promise that the Hungarians' rightful demands for the use of their language will be met in the chapters of other laws.

The administrative reform and the demarcation of the regions now on the agenda in Slovakia is giving cause for concern. According to some plans, the new administrative boundaries would disadvantageously divide the areas where Hungarians constitute a majority, thus reducing their opportunities for asserting their interests. We have voiced our concern at the relevant forums but the government's possibilities in this regard are limited.

Ukraine – Transcarpathia

The worse living conditions are those of the Hungarians in Transcarpathia. They were hit last year by very severe floods and the Hungarian government tried to extend concrete assistance to them.

The Hungarian government gives special financial support to the college of Beregszász (Berehovo), and helps about 12,000 persons with major financial funds to acquire productive land, thus helping Transcarpathia's Hungarians to remain in their place of birth.

A new difficulty is the elimination in Ukraine of the state committee coordinating minority-related affairs. Thus in the near future, decisions will be taken at a lower level of the official hierarchy.

Croatia

In the Hungarian-inhabited areas along the Danube ravaged by the war, the Hungarian government has assumed an important responsibility and burden with regard to reconstruction. It has accepted a role in supporting church institutions (reconstruction of the churches at Kopács and Kórógy), cultural institutions (reconstruction of the culture houses at Újbezdán and Vörösmarti), and educational institutions (opening of the education and culture center at Eszék). The linking of the Croatian and Hungarian electricity networks can also be called an important result.

Slovenia

Slovenia will presumably become a member of the European Union together with Hungary, therefore the signing by both of the Schengen agreement will mean that no difficulties in the permeability of borders will affect Slovenia's Hungarians to maintain contacts with their motherland.

The joint reconstruction of the railroad line between Zalaegerszeg in Hungary and Muraszombat in Slovenia, and the establishment of cultural institutions (culture house and Hungarian cultural center in Lendva) are among the most important achievements.

Hungarians in the West

There is no substantial change in the situation of the Hungarians living in Austria and in Europe, and overseas. There is a growing need among Hungarians living in the West for the services of the mother country to help them preserve their mother tongue and their national identity. As a first step in giving instruction to Hungarians abroad, the János Apáczai Public Foundation is training ten teachers for educational work among scattered Hungarians.

Evaluation of the State Administrative Changes and the Role of the Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad.

Since 1998 following the present government taking office, the supervision of the GOHMA has been transferred from the Office of the Prime Minister to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the supervision of the Foreign Minister. This supervisory right is exercised by the political state secretary. At the same time, the public law status of the Office has not changed and it continues to function as a body with national authority. The experiences of the cooperation with the Foreign Ministry are positive. The quantity of information being exchanged has considerably increased and the Office can also obtain information through diplomatic channels. The Chairman of GOHMA regularly takes part in the meetings of the leaders of the Foreign Ministry. There is a lively working relationship between the Foreign Ministry and GOHMA's territorial departments (Romania, Slovakia, Voivodina and Bácska, Transcarpathia, and Hungarians in the West), and its functional department (Analysis, Documentation, Press and Information, and Coordination and Legal Affairs). The linking of GOHMA's computer system to the Foreign Ministry's information system is under way.

The internal organizational changes, such as the creation of a Legal and Coordination department, and the appointment of a deputy chairman for economic affairs, have met the expectations hoped for.

The government decree on the tasks and authority of ministers and ministries has opened new opportunities for the increased effectiveness of inter-ministerial coordination work. The law set as a task for every minister the implementation of that part of the government program related to Hungarians living abroad which affects his or her own ministry. On the basis of the government decree, organizational units and individuals responsible for affairs related to Hungarians abroad have been designated in all 13 ministries to cooperate under the coordination of the GOHMA. Main departments are functioning in the Ministry of Education and the Ministry for National Cultural Heritage, and the Ministry of Youth and Sports will soon entrust a separate official with the coordination of affairs related to Hungarians abroad.

In that connection, GOHMA's inclusion in the public administration system and the representation of the issues concerning Hungarians abroad within Hungary's state administration have become much more effective, and the related work of the specialized ministries, much more substantial. All this made it possible to enforce the 1992 government decree on the Government Office for Hungarian Minorities Abroad, which designated the coordination of government work as one of the most important tasks of the Office.

The Standing Hungarian Conference

One of the main tasks of the GOHMA is to maintain contacts with the Hungarian organizations abroad. We aim at maintaining also in the future regular, daily partner relations with the leaders of the Hungarian minorities abroad while respecting their autonomy.

The establishment in February 1999 of the Hungarian Standing Conference (HSC) basically opened a new chapter in the field of contact maintenance.

National Assembly resolution 26/1999. (III.26.) welcomed the setting up of the HSC and called upon the Government to ensure the conditions for the functioning of the HSC, to formulate its tasks and work out the mechanism of its implementation. In its government resolution 1079/1999 (VII.7.), the Government took measures for the establishment of experts' committees aimed at the carrying out of the tasks. Subsequently, six committees of experts were created. The committees were chaired by the territorially competent ministries' state secretaries, deputy state secretaries and in the case of the education ministry, the ministerial commissioner. The secretariat work and the coordination of the activities are carried out by the GOHMA's staff workers. The committees are made up of government experts, and of experts delegated by the organizations of the Hungarians abroad and by the Hungarian parliamentary parties. The committees held in September and October 1999 their statutory meetings, determined their work agenda, and the tasks judged to be the most important. Beyond organizational questions, concrete questions are also discussed in the majority of the committees and the first results whose contents can be evaluated have already been achieved.

This was followed by the second meeting of the HSC on 11-12 November 1999. Following lectures by Prime minister Viktor Orbán, Foreign Minister János Martonyi, Political State Secretary for Foreign Affairs Zsolt Németh, and GOHMA Chairman Tibor Szabó, the chairman of the specialized committees reported on the work done until then. Representatives of the Hungarian organizations abroad represented in their respective national parliaments, of the Hungarian government, and of the Hungarian parliamentary parties also took part in the meeting.

The Chairman of the EU Integration Committee of Experts informed the meeting that the committee will examine the following issues as its permanent topics: the general situation of the integration process of the Central-East European region, with particular attention to the accession negotiations under way with the European Union and their effects on the Hungarians living abroad; visa policy; and regional cooperation. In addition to these topics, the committee also put the following issues on its agenda: citizenship policy, including matters related to the legal status of the Hungarians abroad; immigration policy and settlement; refugee affairs; and questions related to the employment in Hungary of Hungarians from abroad.

The chairman of the Committee of Experts on Citizenship and Local Government reported that the statutory meeting had begun to outline the legal notion of the "Hungarian abroad." In the course of defining the legal notion of "Hungarian abroad," the committee members proposed several conceptual elements: they suggested linguistic proficiency, origin, and entry in church records as among the elements of a definition.

Those present had differing opinions about dual citizenship. Some were of the opinion that it was desirable to provide Hungarians abroad with Hungarian citizenship. According to others, the matter of dual citizenship should not be linked with the question of the legal status of Hungarians abroad. At its next meeting, the committee of experts will continue its discussion of these questions and will also invite experts on the subjects.

The chairman of the Committee of Experts on the Economy spoke about the proposals worked out by the committee for the Government for the purpose of making economic and trade relations more intensive.

The statutory meeting reviewed Hungary's trade relations with its immediate neighbors. The development of economic ties with these countries where the majority of the Hungarians abroad live is a natural and important goal of the Hungarian government's strategy.

The participants in the committee of experts judged that the development of more intensive economic relations creates opportunities for the improvement of the economic situation of the Hungarian national minorities. Regional cooperation across borders will be given particular emphasis in the development of economic relations. Increased working capital exports by Hungarian entrepreneurs can strengthen the development of these relations.

The chairman of the Committee of Experts on Education reported that concrete proposals were made at the statutory meeting about the tasks connected with the development of education for Hungarians abroad.

The Hungarian educational, cultural, and scientific workshops are part of the universal Hungarian world of science, thus their aim and task is to promote their preservation and development.

In the interest of the above goal, the Committee reached an agreement on the following proposals, namely the need to:

examine the operational effectiveness of the Hungarian background institutions and organizations supporting Hungarian education and science abroad,

carry out a cadaster-like survey of the Hungarian scientific and educational institutional system abroad for the purpose of making available a data base suitable for drawing a map of these educational and scientific institutions and workshops which would also solve the problem of continuous maintenance and updating.

Launch a research program for the comparative examination of the situation of human resources among the Hungarians abroad.

The chairman of the Committee of Experts on Culture let it be known that the Committee set as its goal the preparation of comprehensive analyses covering Hungarian literature, arts, public collections, general culture, and art-supporting movements abroad. On that basis, it will accurately formulate the main suggested direction for the development of Hungarian culture and its institutional system.

The chairman of the Committee of Experts on Social and Health Affairs stressed in his report the need to thoroughly prepare the mechanisms dealing with the labour laws, employment policy, and health and social insurance matters of the Hungarians abroad.

The Committee decided to set up a working group on health and one on employment policy. It agreed that one of the most timely issues was the solution of the medical treatment in Hungary of Hungarians living abroad.

It established that in the case of each concrete measure, the burden-carrying capacity of the budget and the present level of tolerance of Hungarian society had to be taken into account.

The Hungarian Standing Conference approved a Closing Document commemorating the 1000th anniversary of the founding of the Hungarian state and its Christianization by King St. Stephen. In connection with Euro-atlantic integration, it welcomed Hungary's membership in NATO, and the proposal of the EU Commission to start accession negotiations with Romania and Slovakia.

The second session of the HSC took an unequivocal stand in support of Voivodina's autonomy model.

Circumstances making it possible to improve the situation of Hungarians abroad, such as participation in the government, have developed in a few neighboring countries. In spite of the actual positive changes, there have also been a series of events giving cause for concern (law on the use of the minority languages in Slovakia, nationalist wave in Romania, and so on.)

The acceptance of the need for the legislative regulation of the legal status in Hungary of Hungarians abroad represents a major step toward achieving Hungarian-Hungarian integration.

At the same time, the drafting of the law on the legal status in Hungary of Hungarians abroad is a very complex task, and makes it necessary for the HSC's committees of experts to assume a large part of this work.

The speeches of the participants made it quite clear that the creation of the committees of experts, the beginning of their functioning, and the HSC itself as the institutional framework for dialogue, were judged to be of great importance both in Hungary and among Hungarians abroad.

Financial Support of Hungarians Abroad

In accordance with the government program, the Government in 1999 considerably increased the financial support of the Hungarian communities abroad. Thus, the so-called "minority coordination funds" (the amount for the support of the Hungarians abroad, under the supervision of the foreign minister) amounted to 83 million forint (1 \$ = cca. 250 forint), compared to 25 million in 1998, and the funds available to the Illyés Public Foundation were raised to 817.9 million forint from 506 million in 1998. Budgetary support for the New Handshake Public Foundation decreased slightly. The reason for this was the fact that a partial modification of the support system was on the agenda in 1999, and a complex review of the economic aid going to the region had to be done. The financial increase compared to the existing needs, however, was of a smaller size. For example, during the first 10 months of 1999, 2,892 applications were submitted to the Illyés Public Foundation, compared to 1,940 during the entire year 1998. The public foundation supported 1,358 applications in 1999 versus 1,182 in 1998.

The increase of the amount available to the Illyés Public Foundation made it possible to finance strategic investments (aimed at creating basic institutions) for the development of educational and cultural institutions. 47% of the 400 million forint central funds out of the 1999 increase was spent on infrastructural investments, 40% on the development and operation of institutions, and 13% on the financing of events and publications.

We have kept and wish to continue to keep in the future the ruling system by sub-boards of trustees (the applications are judged with the assistance of sub-boards of trustees functioning in the various regions and their economic, scientific, educational, cultural and other specialized bodies), in the knowledge that in the future, the central board of trustees must continue to be responsible. We are examining the possibility of further decentralizing this two-tier system.

The New Handshake Public Foundation, which operated with a capital of 302.3 million forint in 1999, will also start with a new strategy in 1999. It wanted to modify the high operational costs, dispersed aid, and limited knowledge existing until now. The introduction of a cost-saving operation of the organization, the establishment of relations with specialized organizations at home and abroad, and the setting up of new priorities have changed the mechanism of assistance. Instead of smaller amounts of aid, the creation of a background for assistance, the search for sources, and the obtaining of information have been given priority. The public foundation is emphasizing cost-free basic services and financing possibilities for macro- and micro-economic programs. Making use of the advantages of Hungary's European integration, it is supplying information and experience to Hungarian entrepreneurs abroad. In this manner, it can assist in the creation of a middle class of Hungarian entrepreneurs abroad in possession of modern knowledge. The strategic goals of the public foundation further include the improvement of the operational conditions of Hungarian enterprises abroad, the increase of their ability to compete, the strengthening of economic ties between the given country and Hungary, know-how and technology transfer, and the promotion of the inclusion of additional sources. One of the most important programs of the public foundation is the land and agricultural property privatization program in Transcarpathia, which aims at helping Hungarians living there to acquire land by making use of the possibilities offered by Ukraine's legal framework.

Resolution 1162/1998. (XII.17.) created the Apáczai Public Foundation to support education for Hungarians abroad. The goal of the foundation is to promote and assist the higher education, technical training, and teachers' advanced training in Hungarian communities and among scattered Hungarians abroad.

The Lajos Mocsáry Foundation, which serves social and charitable purposes, and the Helping Right Hand Foundation, specialized for health care, organically supplement the aid given by the public foundation. The Pro Hungaris Cultural Value Transfer Foundation has specialized in supplying Hungarians abroad with books. Hungarian communities abroad can count on additional and hopefully increasing assistance on the part of the civilian sphere, the local government, and the Churches in Hungary. The sums donated by private individuals, mainly in connection with natural disasters, are also significant.

An important part of the budgetary support reaches the Hungarians abroad through the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage. The allocation is done with the participation of the recipients involved.

The Hungarian Youth Conference (with the inclusion of the organizations of the young people of Hungarians abroad and of the mother country) was established on 27 November 1999. At the same time, the Ministry of Youth and Sports decided to set up in 2000, depending on the ministry's budget, a 71 million forint fund to finance youth programs for Hungarians abroad.

The 2 billion forint provided to finance the investments for a private university in Transylvania will be managed by a bureau within the GOHMA.

Minority Joint Commissions

The GOHMA will be joining bilateral diplomatic work mainly through the joint commissions. The chairman of the Office will act as the Hungarian co-chairman of the Hungarian-Slovenian and Hungarian-Croatian joint commissions, and of the minority sub-committee of the Hungarian-Romanian joint commission.

The GOHMA chairman holds the post of Hungarian deputy co-chairman in the Hungarian-Ukrainian and the recently created Hungarian-Slovak joint commissions. The Office, in close cooperation with the Foreign Ministry's competent territorial main department and of the specialized ministries involved, prepares the sessions of the joint commissions.

During 1999, minority joint commission negotiations took place with Croatia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. The functioning of the Hungarian-Slovak Minority Joint Commission which began in 1999 can be called effective, as it also serves as the base for the work of the joint educational, cultural, and regional committees. The parties submit the proposals approved by the joint commission to their respective governments, which can be considered a step forward in the implementation of the tasks listed in the basic state treaties. At the same time, the Slovak side is still exercising caution when it comes to minority affairs, as shown by the Slovak government resolution which speaks primarily of the evaluation and the study and not of the implementation of the proposal. Because of the shortcomings in the partner's readiness to cooperate, the work of the Hungarian-Romanian Minority Joint Commission is not as effective as we would like it to be and is limited for the time being to formal elements.

[Quelle: <http://www.htmh.hu/archivum/reports/ogyangol.htm>]