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20th c. organisations of the Hungarian diaspora in Belgium

Abstract

The Hungarian Social Committee in Belgium (HSCB) was created in 1934 and its organization in Brussels has founded the Hungarian House in 1936. HSCB oversaw all the the cultural sport and social organisations in Belgium. The Communist political takeover resulted in changes in the lives of the Hungarians in Belgium too. Hungarians arriving from the mother country started the Hungarian Movement of Independence (HMI) – with a strong anti-communist programme which from the start was in conflict with HSCB. Thanks to the fugitives arriving after the defeat of the 1956 revolution the life in the movement intensified: new organizations were founded which eventually gained influence in 'traditional' Belgian institutions, e.g. at universities.

The term diaspora has been used so frequently in the past decades that it developed such a widening of its field of meaning that some authorities are of the opinion that it has almost become useless;¹ but thanks to increasing interest its research has enjoyed its renaissance and also could enrich other fields with new ways of analysis.² Using the notion of diaspora in a historically based research of the organizations of Hungarians living in Belgium helped revealing such reasons, motivations and relationships that threw new light upon the importance of those organizations. First it is going to be discussed why the Hungarian groups arriving to Belgium in the 20th c. can be treated as a diaspora and what kind of analysis can be applied to their research. Next following the various waves of migration those circumstances

¹ Brubaker, Rogers: The 'diaspora' diaspora. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 1. (2005 January) p-3.

² E.g. Chander, Anupam: Diaspora bonds. *New York University Law Review*. (2001 October) pp.1005-1099.

and motivations will be summed up that had led to the creation of these organizations and defined their characteristics.

The groups Hungarians as diaspora

Referring to the Hungarians in Belgium as diaspora raises the question: what is diaspora indeed? The basic question of diaspora research has divided the scholarly world as the scholars widen or narrow the semantic range of the term giving a great variety of characteristics to the definition of diasporas.

Early views of diaspora were based on the Jewish paradigm. It has so strongly defined the theories that in dictionaries it was not simply an illustration but served as the definition of term itself.³ It turned out that during the research of other people that the Jewish archetype can serve as a non-normative starting point;⁴ but the concept of diaspora needs further theoretical groundwork.⁵ New approach can be observed in the works of Gabriel Sheffer, who has rejected the Jewish paradigm to be exclusive and pointed out that the term could have been used to various groups of people even earlier than the Jews.⁶ Another pioneer of the new diaspora approach is John Armstrong who studying the German and Jewish communities in tsarist Russia referred to some other historical examples as well and differentiated between mobile and proletarian diasporas; highlighting their importance in the societies he explained that diaspora is more than a groups of people distinguished by secondary features, e.g. the persons in Wisconsin with a Scottish name; that mobile diaspora was a separate society or quasi-society within a greater society for several centuries⁷.

William Safran's attempt at definition counted as a milestone of diaspora studies. It has started a research tendency that considers important how identity is manifest in the relationship to the mother

³ Brubaker 2005.p.2.

⁴ Clifford, James: Diasporas. *Cultural Anthropology* 3. (1994) 306. p.

⁵ Brubaker 2005. p.4.

⁶ Anteby-Yemini, Lisa and Berthomière, William: *Diaspora: A Look Back on a Concept*. 263. p. In URL: <http://bcrfj.revues.org/docannexe312.html> (2009.03.15)

⁷ Brubaker 2005. p.6

country and its traditions. Home country for the diaspora is a faraway, longed for enigmatic place that the diaspora left physically behind. The receiving country can become a home but never the mother country.⁸ Robin Cohen has characterized diaspora as being placed between nation states and 'travelling cultures', in their physical existence in the nation state, spiritually they are travelling in the zone of space and time between nation states.⁹ Stuart Hall has separated himself from the Anglo-Saxon idea of home and claimed that diaspora existence is essentially a special identity, that the acceptance of necessary otherness and diversity is part of it.¹⁰

There is still no consensus in the basic question: what is diaspora? The various theories and approaches prove that diaspora is different and more than migrating, escaping from the mother country, or living away from it for any other reason. It is a special emotional, mental state and identity as John Armstrong and Stuart Hall has pointed out from their respective points of view.

The questions concerning the concept of diaspora raised by international scholars motivated the research into the Hungarian aspects of the problem. Diaspora has proved to be useful tool when analysing the situation of Hungarians beyond the borders of the state (within the Carpathian Basin, and world-wide). The unclear terminology in the Hungarian research results in the opinion that Hungarians living outside the Carpathian Basin are diaspora, but those, who live outside the borders Hungary but inside the Carpathian Basin, are not. The scholarly reason is that this group cannot be characterized by migration, the only consensually accepted criterion of diaspora.¹¹

⁸ Biczó Gábor: A nemzetközi diaszpóra-kutatás eredményeinek gyakorlati jelentősége a magyar szórványkutatásban. In *Regionális identitás, közösségépítés, szórványgondozás*. (Szerk. Balogh Balázs, Bodó Barna, Ilyés Zoltán). Lucidius Kiadó, Budapest. 2007. 17. p. [The practical importance of the results of international diaspora research in the Hungarian diaspora research].

⁹ Anteby-Yemini, Lisa and Berthomière, William: *Diaspor: A Look Back on a Concept*. 263. p. In URL: <http://bcfrj.revues.org/docannexe312.html> (2009.03.15)

¹⁰ Biczó 2007. p.18.

¹¹ Sík Endre: Kezdetleges gondolatok a diaszpóra fogalmáról és hevenyészett megfigyelések a diaszpórakoncepció magyar nézőpontból való alkalmazhatóságáról. In *Diskurzusok a vándorlásról* (Szerk. Sík Endre, Tóth Judit) MTA Politikai Tudományok Intézet, Budapest. 2000. 166. p.[Rudimentary thought on the concept of diaspora and haphazard observations on adaptability of the diaspora concept I the Hungarian situation].

The use of the term diaspora has been accepted in the case of the Hungarians living in Belgium according to the consensus in Hungarian research. The phenomenon is worth considering in the study of the system of institutions, cultural life and social role of this group. The French authors Gérard Chailand and Jean-Pierre Rageau summed up the criteria of diaspora and claim that the identity and motivation of the diaspora play an important role in the creation and functioning of the organizations, influencing the attitude of the members and the development of their cultural life. They describe how frequently religious or ethnic groups become a diaspora through political cataclysms. The criterion of migration appears with a negative connotation. Diaspora is also defined by the force of the collective memory holding it together, and preserving the common past, the shared traumas; in a wider sense it is the cultural heritage frequently of religious character. The third characteristic is the wish to preserve identity and hand down the heritage; it is achieved by the creation of active and wide range networks of societies, organizations and communication. Based on historical experience they mention time as one of the most important criteria of diaspora existence, whether the diaspora can preserve the wish of survival.¹²

Hungarian scholars regard the Hungarian groups living in Belgium in the 20th c. as diaspora. It is a valid name according to the above criteria since it is a migrant community that had to leave its mother country because of political or economic reasons. The common past, the mythical image of the mother country appears as a force that holds the communities together and supposes the wish to hand down the cultural heritage brought from home and survive as a minority group. This is carried out through organizations, and has been realized in various ways among the members of various migration waves since the diaspora identity is continuously reproduced, renewed through changes and difference.¹³

¹² Cf. Fejős Zoltán: Diaszpóra és az „amerikai magyarok“- háttér egy fogalom alkalmazhatóságához. In *Tanulmányok a diaszpóráról* (Szerk. Kovács Nóra) Gondolat, MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet, Budapest. 2004. 13-15. p. [Diaspora and the 'American Hungarians' background to adaptability of a concept. In: Studies on diaspora]

¹³ Hall, Stuart: *Cultural identity and diaspora*. P. 235. In URL: <http://www.lwbooks.co.uk/ReadingRoom/public/IdentityDiaspora.pdf> (2009.03.02)

Hungarian organisations in Belgium between the World Wars

In spite of the considerable distance, relationship between Hungary and Belgium is almost a millenium old; it started with the westward orientation of the Arpads, and since Sigismund of Luxemburg became king of Hungary it has been thriving.¹⁴ Besides migrations and economic relationships there were dinastic connections too. In the 20th c the cooperation between Belgian and Hungarian Christian – especially Roman Catholic – Churches was important especially in helping emigree Hungarians. According to ambassadors' reports the Belgian ecclesistical leaders e.g. Cardinal Mercier and Vicar General Janse were the most important authorities during the period between the two World Wars, and through their interventions they greatly improved the situation of Hungarians then in Belgium.¹⁵

The first group of he Hungarian diaspora in Belgium consisted of those children who arrived there thanks to child saving initiatives. Some of these childred stayed with their Belgian forsterparents, or remaining in contact, later settled down as job seekers.

During WWI. Hungary and Belgium fought on opposing sides, thus at first the charity initiatives were received with suspition. After the arrival of the childre, however, Belgian society changed its attitude, that according to Bishop László Ravasz of the Reformed Church did more toward understanding and benevolence between the nations than hundreds of piece conferences and proganda for disarmament.¹⁶ The action for organized holiday for Hungarian children had been initiated by the Catholic Church already before the new interstate relationships were established, to help the children suffering from the hardships caused by the war. Archbishop János Csernoch turned to Cardinal Mercier first in letter than through official visitors on behalf of the children; Bishop Mercier was all the more ready to help, as being in great reverence of the Virgin Mary, when he had

¹⁴ De Kun, Nicolas: *Onze siècles de relations belgo-hongroises et luxembourgo-hongroises*. Magyar Ház, Bruxelles. 1999.

¹⁵ Magyar Országos Levéltár (MOL), 22. csomó, K63, 4.Tétel, 4/7, 22/a/1447/1931. 1931.április 2. Document in the Hungarian National Archive

¹⁶ Ravasz, László: *Emlékezéseim*. Református Egyház Zsinati Irodájának Sajtóosztálya, Budapest. 1992.p.224. [Memoires]

learned that the were images of the Virgin Mary on Hungarian coins and postage stamps, he used his authority and influence to help the Hungarians devoted to the Virgin Mary.¹⁷ Though there arrived orphans and children selected according to social considerations since 1919, documentation is only available since 1923. Till 1930 there were 21 542 Hungarian children staying with Belgian fosterparents.¹⁸ Belgian – Hungarian cooperation is also attested by the organizations coordinating the actions: (Comité Belgie en Secours aux Enfants de la Hongrie) and its partner in Hungary the Hungarian Committee with Vicar General János Mészáros and the Secreteriaat der Hongaarse Kinderen in Turnhout, also the Belgische Kinderhusingesting en Plaatsin in the vicinity of Limburg.¹⁹ The last train carrying children started from Budapest on the 7th of July 1927; the important action remained in the memories Hungarians for a long time.²⁰

The second large group were the job seekers who profited from the positive view formed earlier of the Hungarians and the connections resulting from children's action. During the Horthy era the Hungarian Royal Ministry of the Interior initiated negotiations with French and Belgian authorities for the employment of Hungarians because of lack of jobs in Hungary.²¹ In post war Europe many working hand were necessary to rebuilding and Hungarian work force was sought after.²² This is how Hungarians arrived to the silk factory in Tubize, to the mines at Limburg, to Hal, Charleroi, Antwerpen, Buysinghen to build canals and many other places. Migration ended when due to the 1931 economic depression several Belgian firms closed down and the work at the world exhibition that employed about 80-100 thousand people was also ended.²³ Hungarian craftsmen, however, were so

¹⁷ Borovi, József: *A belgiumi magyar katolikusok lelki gondozásának története*. Szent István Társulat, Budapest. 2002. p.17. [The history of the intellectual care of Hungarian Catholics in Belgium]

¹⁸ Hermán, M. János: *Gyermekmentés Belgiumban (1923—1930)*. *Korunk* 12. (1998 december) p. 120. [Rescuing children in Belgium].

¹⁹ Borovi 2002. pp. 256-270.

²⁰ Borovi 2002. p.18.

²¹ Szántó, Miklós: *Magyarok a nagyvilágban*. Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest. 1970. pp. 101-103. [Hungarian in the wide world].

²² *Belgiumi magyar könyv*. Magyar Szociális Misszió, Brüsszel. 1934. p.47. [Hungarian Book of Belgium]

²³ MOL, K71, 1931, I/4, 624, 20138/28

popular and appreciated so much that in spite of the depression most of them could keep their jobs; after the lessening of the crisis new groups of Hungarians arrived to Belgium.

As part of the second wave of migrants belonged the third source of the Belgian diaspora, those young women who came to find work too as single persons, and worked mainly in households. P. Károly Kipper Hungarian and P. Valér Fallon Belgian fathers took care of the women. At first it was the *Ligue des Familles Nombreuses* that helped them finding jobs, later the *Hivatalos Belgiumi Magyar Leány-Iroda* [Official Hungarian Women's Office] took over the task under the management of Margit Bezsilla and also the *Euvre de Servantes Catholiques*

Supervised by *Foyer du Sacré-Coeur* with the participation of Marica Hayas. The young women belonged to different social classes with different level of education but most of them were keen on education and community life. The office created homes for them in the towns where Hungarian lived that organised shows that even the members of the Belgian royal family attended.²⁴

At the time the number of Hungarians was estimated at 6000.²⁵ The organizations were important means of identity for the Hungarian diaspora surrounded by foreign culture. They were also a manifestation of their attachment to and longing for the home left behind. For the individual they meant points of comparison and feeling of belonging to a community like strongholds for Hungarians living in foreign countries.²⁶

Religion was an important feature in the development of the network of organisations and communication. Between the two world wars several organizations were created with Christian orientation. These were supported by the foreign representations too, since according the embassy reports, there were Communist agitators and

²⁴ *Belgiumi magyar könyv* 1934. pp. 55-56.

²⁵ *Belgiumi magyar könyv* 1934. p. 49.

²⁶ *Belgiumi magyar könyv* 1934. p. 69.

propaganda increasingly present,²⁷ especially among miners;²⁸ under such circumstances the activity of Christian organisations proved to be useful against such movements.²⁹ To balance the activities of groups describes as Communists by the reports it was important for the embassy to be familiar with the situation of the Hungarians in Belgium³⁰. The reports reveal which organisations were supported by the Hungarian state. Sometimes problematic cases were mentioned too, that throws light on which were the initiatives looked at suspiciously by the Hungarian government. Though there is no wide-range overview offered by these documents, they allow to recognize certain tendencies that characterize the Hungarian organisations in Belgium between the two World Wars.

In addition to the organisations responsible for the care of children and young women respectively, one of the earliest organisations was the *Keresztény Magyar Bányászok Egyesülete* [Christian Hungarian Miners' Association], founded by György Beller Premonstrant father in Winterschlag and the *Római Katolikus Férfiszövetség* [Men's Roman Catholic Association] founded by Pater Sándor Horváth in Eysden. The Hungarian workers frequently joined Belgian organisations, e.g. the Centrale Syndicate Regionale des Mineurs du Limburg.³¹ György Beller and Sándor Horváth helped the work of the embassy by their diplomatic missions too, thus from the earliest initiatives on there was cooperation between the Christian organisations and the official Hungarian foreign representations, most importantly with the *Belgiumi Magyar Szociális Bizottság* [Hungarian Social Committee in Belgium (HSCB)].

²⁷ The Hungarian Royal ambassador reports that since the Tardieu government in France put Cists under strict surveillance, the Hungarian Communist moved in to Belgium and Brussels became the centre of their activities, remarking that the Italian ambassador had made similar observations.). MOL, K71, 1931-I/4-624, No. 20138/28.

²⁸ In Belgium there is one more aspect that should be considered, i.e. in the small territory of Belgium there are several spying organizations active because here such information is available that cannot be collected elsewhere or only with great difficulty.' .Appendix to144/1931. res. sz. . (Brussel). MOL, 11. bundle, 1931, No.I/4.

²⁹ Borovi 2002. p. 36.

³⁰ Borovi 2002. p. 37-49.

³¹ Borovi 2002. p.p. 25-30.

The HSCB was founded in 1934³² with the aim at helping the Hungarians in Belgium in every kind of economic, charity, cultural, social and religious matters and coordinating social work.³³ The organisation symbolically stood above all the Hungarian organisations in Belgium thanks to its strong contact with the embassy. It was founded by Antal Szántó dr., Erward Vandervoort Catholic priest in Winterslag, the social workers Margit Bezilla and Erzsébet Kuttner. In order to fulfil the aims the organisation rented a house in 1936, and the Hungarian House operated there as a cultural and intellectual centre. It was officially supported by Count Woracziczky Olivér, ex ambassador representing the official foreign representation.³⁴

The connection of HSCB to other Hungarian organizations in Belgium is shown by the fact that the *Magyarok Világszövetsége* [World Federation of Hungarians]³⁵ kept contact with them through HSCB. The foundation of organisations had to be reported to the embassy as well as the Federation; they looked into the statutes and the lists of officials and members. Both the embassy and the Federation then placed the organisations under the command of HSCB. The embassy considered it as a collective institution responsible of coordination, supervision and direction of the other associations.³⁶

For this reason the organisations created after 1936 will be discussed in their connection to HSCB without any intention of being comprehensive due to the manifold activities. Among the cultural organisations, also offering social and economic support to their members, the activities of the women's organisations had wide range influence. Such organisations were active in Zwartberg, Winterslag, Eysden, and since 1934 in Zolder.

Besides the women's associations there also operated the Hungarian Catholic Men's Association in Waterschei and Zwartberg

³² *Belgiumi magyar könyv* 1934-1937

³³ *Belgiumi magyar könyv* 1935. p. 23.

³⁴ *Belgiumi magyar könyv* 1937. p. 29

³⁵ The World Federation of Hungarians is a social organisations founded in 1938 with the aim to help every kind of activity that aims at the preservation of the Hungarian language and culture of Hungarians abroad; develop and keep up contact between Hungarians in the old country and abroad, to keep an interest in the life and achievements of Hungarians living abroad. Statute Chapter II.§ 2.18th of August 1938.

³⁶ Cf. Attachment to No. 144/1931. res. MOL, 11.bundle, 1931, I/4 item

becoming popular for their grape harvest festivals. The Hungarian band of Vilvorde supplied the music at the feasts, or the Waterschei – Zwartberg Hungarian bands. The Vilvorde Hungaria male choir and the mixed choir of Wintershlag at Limburg had important role in making Hungarian songs popular because the Belgians enjoyed the Hungarian melodies. Cultural life was organized by *Magyarok és Barátaik Egyesület* [Association of Hungarians and Friends in Belgium], the Hungarian Sports Club in Brussels and the *Szent István Egylet* [St Stephen Association] in Wintershlag. The activities of the women's hostels contributed an important part of Hungarian cultural life; their programs were given a legal basis in January 1936, and with Margit Bezsilla as leader the *Árpádházi Boldog Margit Köre* [Circle of St Margaret of the Arpads] was created with 170 members and the Protestant *Lorántffy Zsuzsanna Nőegylet* [L.Zs. Women's Society] in 1938.³⁷

The embassy regarded organisations outside the HSCB with mistrust³⁸ and there were some which were considered to be instruments of communist propaganda. Such was the Esperanto Society mentioned as the meeting place of Communists³⁹ and also the *Magyar nyelvű Munkások Kultúr Egyesülete* [Cultural Association of Hungarian speaking workers].⁴⁰ These associations did not meet the measures set by the embassy therefore had to go without its assistance.

The embassy had successful and coordinated cooperation with ecclesiastical persons and institutions. The officially appointed Hungarian clergymen (e.g. Antal Szántó Dr., Árpád Szabó Dr., Antal Molnár and others), were responsible for the direction of schools and associations besides their work as pastors, as were the social workers, Margit Bezsilla and Erzsébet Kuttner too, who had leading roles in religious and secular fields in the lives of Hungarians in Belgium.

³⁷ *Belgiumi magyar könyv 1934-1938.*, MOL, K85, bundle 22., item 12., Ruling 338/adm. resp., 9, ill. 484/193.

³⁸ E.g. the *Hungarian Circle* founded by Vilmos Grünfeld and asked for acceptance only later on the 20. of March 1931; the office called *Secour Hongrois National* in Moudon whose managers were lacking warranty; *Fraternitas* in Utrecht wanted to spread propaganda in Belgium too. Attachment to item no.144/1931. res. (Brüsszel), MOL, 11 bundle, 1931, item I/4 .

³⁹ MOL, K85, bundle 22., item 12., regulation 338/adm. resp., 9, and 484/193.

⁴⁰ Borovi 2002. 48-49. p.

The HSCB could be described as the most important Hungarian organisation in Belgium between the two World Wars because it represented the cooperation between the civilian, ecclesiastical and state spheres and also how bonded they were. Since the organisation enjoyed the support of the Hungarian embassy⁴¹ and that of the Catholic Church, it could operate as the representative of interests of several Hungarian organisations in Belgium.

Between the two World Wars there was a lively social life in the organizations and the maintenance and representation of Hungarian culture also came into the foreground. A special diaspora identity developed that corresponds to the religious interpretation of diaspora. Religion gained an important role as part of culture; the diaspora, thanks to its connections to civilian, ecclesiastical and state spheres could remain in close contact with the old country and thus was reinforced and obtained new cultural supply.

Changes in organized life during and after World War II

At the beginning of WWII Belgium wanted to remain neutral but Germany broke into the country without declaration of war on the 10th of May 1940. This was the beginning of the phase of the war the Germans referred to as offensive. The Belgian army got help from France and Great Britain but the Germans forged ahead to the English Channel isolating the French troops from the units in the north thus they had to withdraw. King Leopold III capitulated on the 28th of May 1940. While the Belgian government was in exile in Great Britain, Leopold III remained as the prisoner of the Germans

⁴¹ Thanks to the bond the embassy could also enjoyed ecclesiastical support with profit. "We can thank our excellent position in Belgium to the Church. I was told in the immediate surroundings of the Cardinal of Malines that the Holy Father had sent a message to the cardinal through the papal legate that everything should be done for Hungary and the Hungarians; that the cardinal had relayed it to the deans, the deans to the parish priests. I saw the confirmation of this communication by the observations of Professor Hévey in the local colonies. As Hévey reported, there is strong propaganda against us through Czech emissaries and propaganda-leaflets in the mining regions and the industrial centres, their being unsuccessful is entirely due to the fact that the priests are openly oppose it." "MOL, bundle 22., item K63, 4., 4/7, 22/a/1447/1931. 2. April 1931.

in Belgium. Hitler appointed General Alexander von Falkehausen, who had great international experience, to military government of Belgium. The German national socialists were supported by two national political movements: Vlaams Nationaal Verbond led by Staf de Clerq and the Vallon Royalist Party led by Léon Degrelle.⁴² After the war the king was accused of collaboration with Hitler and dethroned and his brother Prince Charles was appointed Prince Regent till 1950. Leopold left with his family to Switzerland in exile.⁴³

The diplomatic relationship between Hungary and Belgium was started on the 20th February 1922 when Governor Miklós Horthy appointed Kornél Török, former chairman of the aid service after WWI., to honorary consul in Brussels. The first Hungarian Royal chargé d'affaires was Count Olivér Woracziczky who was installed on the 20th February 1922. Foreign representations were in office till the German occupation, till May 1940, and from 1941, with the consent of the occupying Germans, continued as a consulate. This state of affairs was kept up till the liberation of Belgium in February 1945.

Hungarian – Belgian diplomatic relationships were resumed on the 16th April 1947 with the opening of the embassy. The first post-war ambassador was Count Gobert D'Aspremont Lynden.⁴⁴ Later Zoltán Virágh was appointed to stand in for the task. He turned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the suggestion that the Brussels embassy should belong to the one in Paris under Mihály Károlyi because in his opinion Károlyi's prestige would enhance the reputation of Hungarians in Belgium. The decision took a long time, finally the Political Committee of the Hungarian Communist Party led by Mátyás Rákosi accepted the suggestion on its 7th of May 1948 meeting. Károlyi, ambassador in Paris represented Hungary

⁴² The Belgian royalist party was founded at the early 1930s and existed till 1944. It was a monarchist, clerical later openly fascist party. The movement developed after Hitler's obtaining power and collaborated with the NZ during German occupation. Its leader, Léon Gedrelle was sentenced to death in his absence at end of the war. *Larousse Universel (Dictionarie Encyclopédique en Deux Volumes)*.(Szerk. Paul Augé) Libraire Larousse, Paris. 1949. 663. p.

⁴³ *Az emberiség krónikája*. (Szerk. Bodo Harenberg et al.) Officina Nova, Budapest. 1990. 1137. p.

⁴⁴ Ct Gobert D'Aspremont Lynden was born in 1892, started his diplomatic carrier in 1918; Bern, Stockholm, Vatican, Luxemburg and Rome. Cf. Fejérdy 2002.p. 237.

in France, Belgium and Luxemburg till Septemner 1949; because of his indignation over the legal action agains László Rajk he went in exile, the second time. His withdrawal, however, did not cause any change in the Brussels embassy because Zoltán Virág took over as chargé d'affaires, as he actually acted since June 1947. It was in 1955 that the diplomatic representation of the two countries was elevated to the level of embassy. After the defeat of the 1956 revolution the diplomatic relationship had to be started almost anew.⁴⁵ After WWII and after the Hungarian Communist Party seized power there was a new wave of immigrants arriving to Belgium too and the Hungarian community received new members. Though the newcomers had different political orientation soon anti-communism became the main characteristic of the diaspora that became a force of bonding. Of the masses of post revolution refugees 10000 Hungarians were accepted into Belgium, the Netherlands and Sweden.⁴⁶ They were of strong political and Hungarian identity bringing fresh life into the existing Hungarian organisations and communities. The 1956 migration wave has redefined the character of the Hungarian diaspora in Belgium. The major element of this diaspora –identity was the opposition against the Hungarian system and its representatives, where the striving for the well-being of the mother country (opposition against the political system and a wish of the representation of culture) and the identification with the accepting society (the economic advantages of a western country) could exist side by side.

During WWII. Hunarians living the in Belgium participated in the Belgian resistance too. At the end of the war several members of the Hungarian partisan unit that fought together with the Belgians founded the *Magyar Függetlenségi Mozgalom* [Hungarian Movement of Independence; HMI]. The organisation was created under French initiatives and model and had close contacts with communist and

⁴⁵ Fejérdy 2002.pp. 232-255.

⁴⁶ Kovács Ilona: Magyar szórványközösségek a Kárpát-medencén kívül. In *Kisebbségi magyar közösségek a 20. században*. (Szerk. Bárdi Nándor, Fedinec Csilla, Szarka László) Gondolat Kiadó, MTA Kisebbségkutató Intézet. Budapest. 2008. 439. p. [Hungarian diaspora outside the Carpathian Basin]

socialist parties.⁴⁷ Among the leaders was József Csatári Kálcsics,⁴⁸ who became a secret member of the communist party in 1937 but was given the instruction to keep working in the Social Democratic Party. He was a co-founder of HMI and after his return to Hungary in 1947 acted as a well known social democrat. Being in connection with László Rajk, he was imprisoned for several years but later was released and rehabilitated.

HMI had important international and political connections, practically acted as a Hungarian foreign representative of political matters. When HSCB lost its embassy backing it could only refer to its activities organizing church services, education and cultural event in contrast to MHI's military and political merits. At the end of the war of course the latter became of greater importance. The organisations of the diaspora were characterized by the conflicts of these two groups before the change of system in 1990.⁴⁹

The antagonism between HMI and HSCB became especially strong over the case of the Hungarian POWs. According to the 19th of November 1945 report of the Hungarian consulate in Brussels there were 3700 Hungarian POWs in Belgium.⁵⁰ Though the datum is not unambiguous it makes clear that Hungarian POWs were in considerable number in Belgium. Antal Molnár priest, Margit Bezsilla and Erzsébet Kuttner mission workers tried to help them by religious, spiritual and economic assistance. They also found them jobs and tried to get the prisoners released by the help of work in the mines as their repatriation took years. The HMI too, was in contact with the POWs but owing to its well-known Communist connections could not get into British camps. The British requested information from HSCB about the Hungarians. But while the British trusted HSCB, Belgian authorities favoured HMI.

The Hungarian embassy could not properly represent Hungarian interests in Belgium and HMI tried to act as a foreign representative.

⁴⁷ Fejérdy 2002. p. 247.

⁴⁸ In URL: http://www.natarch.hu/archivnet/rovat/cikk.phtml?cikk_kod=300#-vissza9 (2009.02.06)

⁴⁹ Borovi 2002. 95.

⁵⁰ Cited by Hortobágyi, Péter: Magyar hadifoglyok Belgiumban a második világháború után (1945–1947). *Valóság* 12 (2002). P.39. [Hungarian POWs in Belgium after WWII (1945-1947)].

Its goal was opposed by the workers of the Hungarian Red Cross and *Magyar Szociális Misszió* [Hungarian Social Mission] who explained the political and economic situation in Hungary on their visits to the POW camps and revealed the Communist connections of HMI before the Belgian authorities. These activities might have been the cause of the aggravation of the relationship between the two groups and HMI started attacks against the members of HSCB and its initiatives. Even the personnel of the consulate were used in order to reach their goals;⁵¹ at the time they still treated the question from the basis of coalition.⁵² After the replacement of the representatives of the coalition the Christian based organisations were left without support.

HMI and its successors shared the opinion of the left-wing periodical *Világosság* that in whole Europe it is the clergy that is fighting most vehemently against democracy,⁵³ and started attacking the leaders of right-wing organisations and their activities. The most outstanding case was the slander against Antal Molnár and Margit Bezsilla. Soon after the publication of the above statement, the 25. August 1946 issue of *Világosság* published the slander written by Imre Gergely that Molnár and M. Bezsilla, the leaders of HSCB, had sold Hungarian POWs to Belgian mining enterprise for 6000 Francs, falsified contracts and misled the miners with alarming tales and dissuaded them from returning to Hungary; they had been collaborating with the Nazis and were financing their unpatriotic campaigns from the profit made on the human market.⁵⁴

M. Bezsilla and A. Molnár did not believe it necessary to deny the accusations because of the publication it appeared and also that they were unfounded and were confident that people would not believe the

⁵¹ In a proposal to the Hungarian minister of Foreign Affairs they suggest the suspension of the personnel of the Brussels consulate as well as those of the Social Mission and the recognition of the HMI as cosial representative of the new democratic Hungarian. MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 6., 9/a/100305/1945 Pro domo.

⁵² Accordinto the embassy secretary in Belgium Catholicism is strong and part of the Hungarian colony are devout members of the Church thus they are in constant political conflict with the leaders of HMI. The actual accusations could not be reconstructed because there equal statements against both organizations. MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 6. 20/d/851001/1946

⁵³ *Világosság : a Szociáldemokrata Párt napilapja*, 1946. augusztus 17.p. 3. [V. The daily paper of the Social Democratic Party].

⁵⁴ *Világosság : a Szociáldemokrata Párt napilapja*, 1946. augusztus 25.p. 7.

slander. The case, however, gained increasing publicity and explanation became unavoidable. In the 1. November 1946 issue of *Belgiumi Magyar Közlöny* they explained that they had dropped the matter with clear conscience because they were of the opinion that the accusations would fall back on their instigators; they firmly believed in the democratic legislation of Hungary not like those who believed that persons could be made condemned by foolhardy slander.⁵⁵

Magyar Segélyakció [Hungarian Aid] also dealt with the matter because there was a libel case following the complaints of both parties. On the 5th October 1946 meeting of Hungarian Aid József Kálcsics declared that the slanders were not his or the *Világosság* or the Brussels group of HMI, that he did not identify himself with them but condemned them and claimed to ready to orientate the periodical in these veins. However, the correction never appeared, Kálcsics did not report the journalist thus the readers of *Világosság* were left in the belief that the statements of the writing were true. Bezsilva and Molnár added to the incident that they renounce all the accusations of the article because it was not HSCB's fault that the minors and POWs could not return back to Hungary for lack of transportation till August 1946.⁵⁶ The case continued in the Hungarian press; the paper *Győri Munkás* [Workers of Győr] reprinted the slandering article in its 2. April 1946 issue. In the libel suit a journalist called Polgár was found guilty and fined for Ft 3000 with three years suspension.⁵⁷

There were several similar attacks against persons; Antal Molnár was accused with collaboration during the German occupation of Belgium;⁵⁸ that he perfidiously tried to persuade a lady referred to as Mrs Claes, who was imprisoned by the Gestapo⁵⁹, to collaborate with the Germans. Erzsébet Kuttner was also accused with collaboration.⁶⁰

Besides the organisations created in Belgium, the representatives of the international organisations of the Hungarian emigration were also present, e.g. *Magyar Szabadság Mozgalom* [Hungarian Freedom

⁵⁵ *Belgiumi Magyar Közlöny* 1. (1946 november) p. 2.

⁵⁶ *Belgiumi Magyar Közlöny* 1. (1946 november) p. 2.

⁵⁷ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 7. , item 126. 15/b/04935/1950

⁵⁸ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 6., 20/d/020610/1950, 1950. 14.

⁵⁹ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 6. 20/bd/2856/1947, BMDE letter to the embassy, 21.May 1947.

⁶⁰ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 6. 20/bd/2856/1947, 21. May 1947.

Movement] or *Magyar Harcosok Bajtársi Közössége* [Fraternal Community of Hunarian Warriors]. The embassy gave special scrutiny to the activities of the Belgian section of the *Magyar Nemzeti Bizottmány* [Hungarian National Committee]. József Hausler counsellor of legation and chargé d'affaires reported that not only does the organisation act as a government but is one of the major informer of international reactionary spy system.⁶¹

Though the communist system having gained ground supported economically the left-wing organisations in the west but the HMI was dissolved after the affair about the ownership of Hungarian House.⁶² Its role was taken over by the newly founded (in 1948) *Belgiumi Magyarok Demokratikus Egyesülete* [Hungarians' Democratic Union in Belgium] which thanks to Hungarian state support was active till its dissolution in 1953;⁶³ although its prestige and activities fell short of those of the Catholic congregation. State support brought state subvention but even that could not assure the open assistance of the embassy.⁶⁴

The follower, *Belgiumi Magyarok Kulturális Egyesülete* [Hungarians' Cultural Association in Belgium] became more influential.⁶⁵ Its activity was also characteristically attacking and it tried to keep up with the more popularity and better frequented Catholic organisations. Though HCAB was successful in its activities, the Hungarian government needed a friendship-organisation to widen Hungarian – Belgian relations; this was the Belgian – Hungarian Society. It organised sports and cultural events to help introducing and 'unbiased' portrait Popular Democratic Hungary, and offered useful propaganda service.⁶⁶ The trust of the Hungarian embassy was laid besides HCSB and Belgian – Hungarian Society also in the group of *Belgiumi*

⁶¹ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 6. 020610/1950.

⁶² Hungarian Catholic Mission claimed back Hungarian House owned by the organisation in 1947. Fejérdy 2002. pp. 247-248

⁶³ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 6. 20/d/2302/1949

⁶⁴ According to the consul the embassy limited personal assistance to DAHB, they wanted to avoid exposing themselves too much. MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, 6.doboz,5/d/0837/1951

⁶⁵ The Belgian authorities did not succeed in preventing repatriation of Hungarians. HCAB used films to achieve amnesty. . MOL, XIX-J-1-j, Belgium, box 5. 78/szt./1956. 22.

⁶⁶ Fejérdy 2002. pp. 249-251.

Magyar Önkéntesek és Ellenállók [Hungarian Volunteers and Resistants] too.⁶⁷

The communist organisations did everything to become influential among Hungarians but the earlier ones with Christian orientations remained firmly embedded. The latter were directed by Belgian Catholic religious organisations with important traditions thanks to the relative continuity of their work of spiritual assistance. The activity of the Hungarian Catholic Parish in Brussels expanded beyond ecclesiastical functions and cultural events as the leaders of intellectual life belonged to this circle. In 1955 Béla Déri Dr. Hungarian pastor in Belgium renewed the activity of Hungarian House as a religious and cultural centre; it was the venue of the Congress of European Writers and books were also published by *Magyar Ház Kiadóvállalat* [Hungarian House Publishers].⁶⁸

After the arrival of the 1956 refugees organised life was given a new impetus as it had to fulfil manifold requirements. The *Benelux Államok Magyar Comitéja* [Hungarian Committee of the Benelux states] and the *Szabad Magyarok Belgiumi Szervezete* [Organisation of Free Hungarians in Belgium] had the task of coordinating the organisations but joint representation could not be arrived at because of conflicting personal ideas and preferences as well as the wide social range.⁶⁹ The *Magyar Szabadságharcosok Szövetsége* [Association of Hungarian Freedom Fighters] propagated the necessity of armed intervention; the *Szabad Munkások Szervezete Belgiumban* [Free Workers' Organisation in Belgium] collected the social democrats living in Belgium; *Keresztény Szakszervezeti Szövetség Magyar Irodája* [Hungarian Office of the Christian Union] could reach large groups; it was founded by Ernő Töttösy in aid of Hungarian job holders;⁷⁰ Töttösy was also a leader of the intellectual life of the period. The *Belgiumi Magyar Értelmiségiek Társasága* [Association

⁶⁷ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 8. Tük/1945-64, 110. tétel, 27/c/001704/1957.

⁶⁸ Borbándi, Gyula: *A magyar emigráció életrajza 1945-1985*. Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest. 2.kötet. 1989. 234.[the biography of the Hungarian emigration 1945 – 1985].

⁶⁹ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 8. Tük/1945-64, item 110. 20/b.

⁷⁰ Ernő Töttösy fled to the west at the end of 1956 and settled down in Belgium. In Brussels he was the head of the Hungarian Offices of Christian Unions. In 1968 he received the silver medal of the French Society of Arts and Literature for his novel *Téboly*. Borbándi, Gyula: *Nyugati magyar irodalmi lexikon és bibliográfia*.

of Hungarian Intelligentsia in Belgium] also known as *Bende Klub* was short lived just as *Les Amité culturelles*. The *Nagy Imre Politikai és Társadalomtudományi Intézet* [N.I. Institutes of Politics and Social Sciences] was created with American support in 1959 it dealt with the activity of Imre Nagy and the events of the revolution till discontinuance in 1963, organizing scholarly research and conferences.⁷¹

The most active group was that of the young emigrees who studied at the Belgian educational institutions. The international *Magyar Egyetemisták és Főiskolások Egyesületeinek Szövetsége* [association of Hungarian University and College Students Unions] was also present but the Christian organisations, e.g. *belgiumi Keresztény Ifjűmunkások Országos Egyesülete* [Christian young workers' national association in Belgium] or the *Katolikus Magyar Egyetemi Mozgalom* [Catholic Hungarian University Movement] were more popular.⁷² In 1960 *Európai Magyar Ifjúsági Konferencia* [European Conference of Young Hungarians] was created, in 1968 *Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem* [European Protestant Free University].⁷³

Of the youth initiatives those student organisations were the most important that were in connection with the University at Leuven that also acted as the intellectual centre of the diaspora and earned international acclaim. The first community was created on the 2nd of January 1949 by Pater Rajmund Sigmond as part of the Hungarian congregation and was a group of Hungarian intelligentsia with its own aims and sphere of competence. They founded *Mindszenty Diákotthon* [M. Student Hostel] (Archbishop Mindszenty had a great cult among Flemish Catholics) that became the centre of everyday life and also offered students economic help and organized cultural events. Already the first generation gave such excellent scholars as Sándor Lámfalussy, Gyula Deutsch, Rudolf Rezsőházy, Dénes Szabó. In 1955 István Muzslai Jesuit father became the leader of the community and

Mikes International, Hága. Hollandia. 1992. 275. [Hungarian Literary Eyclopedia ad bibliography of the West].

⁷¹ MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, box 8. Tük/1945-64, item 110. MOL, XIX-J-1-k, Belgium, 8. doboz, Tük/1945-64, 110.tétel, 27/c/001704/1957 27/c/001704/1957

⁷² Later changed its name to *Katolikus Magyar Értelmiségi Mozgalom* [Catholic Movement of Hungarian Intelligentsia].

⁷³ Borbándi 1989. 240. p., Muzslay István Sj.: *Magyar diákok a Leuveni Katolikus Egyetemen. 1532-2000*. Márton Áron Kiadó, Budapest. 2000. 15. p. [Hungarian students at the Catholic University at Leuven].

created Collegium Hungaricum for student refugees;⁷⁴ it became the intellectual flagship and explained the Belgian people and western Hungarian emigrants what losses the Hungarian society had suffered in the 1956 revolution. Many of its initiatives, e.g. the Béla Bartók Choir, the periodicals *Belgiumi Magyar Ifjúság* [Hungarian Youth in Belgium] or the *Virrasztók* [Vigilants], the Mózsai Ferenc literary prize were favourably received. The Belgian people were moved by the fate of Hungarians showing it by social solidarity and aids; the Catholic University at Leuven put one of its building at the disposal of the Hungarian students and its teachers stood up for the Hungarian ideas. The activities of collegium Hungaricum was highly praised; its importance in the life of the Hungarian diaspora would merit an independent study. At present it is under the auspices of Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Hungary).⁷⁵

Hungarian women were taken care for by *Magyar Lányok Árpád-házi Boldog Margit Köre* [Circle of St Margaret of the Arpads] till the death Margit Bezsilla in 1984, when it ceased to work. One of the important initiatives of the 1970s was *Corvina Kör* [Corvina Circle] in Brussels founded in 1978 that organised events with well known authors, scholars and researchers. The activities were popular among the Hungarians living in Belgium and was regarded as their cultural centre till its 1990 closing down. Its head was Oszkár Kállay, the most active fellow workers Judith Ivánkay, Károly Hámori dr., László Mechler dr.⁷⁶

The present of the Hungarian diaspora in Belgium

There has been a change of generations in the organisational life of the Hungarians in Belgium. The 1956 generation has been supplanted by the job seekers arriving after the change of regime coming already from a democratic country were entirely differently motivated. The

⁷⁴ Halmai Katalin: *84 évesen eltávozott Muzsly István atya emlékére*. 2007.06.06. [In memory of Father M.I. who departed at the age of 84]. In URL: <http://www.hungarianculture.be/index.php?lang=HU&p=view.news&id=1181141917.6400> (2009.02.02)

⁷⁵ Muzsly 2000. p. 54.

⁷⁶ Borbándi 1989. p. 278

clerks of the European Union constantly commuting between their home and workplace means considerable migration, the mobility programs for students and researchers too result in great numbers of Hungarians being employed in Belgium.⁷⁷

Under such circumstances Hungarian House could preserve its leading role as a cultural and intellectual centre; if necessary *Belgiumi Magyarok Szövetsége* [association of Hungarians in Belgium] with the leadership of Oszkár Kállay can also step in; *Magyar-Flamand Kulturális Baráti Kör* [Hungarian – Flemish Friendship Circle] and *Collegium Hungaricum* are also active. In the neighbourhood of Liege there is lively religious cultural life led by the Hungarian Church in Liege and the *Liège Megyei Magyarok Szövetsége* [Hungarian Association in Co. Liege]; the Hungarian state is represented by *Brüsszeli Magyar Kulturális Intézet* [Brussels Hungarian Cultural Institute]. Talking to the representatives of Hungarians in Belgium it became evident that the job seekers arriving after the change of regime and those working for the EU do not frequent the organisations as did earlier those who left for Belgium because of the Communist regime. Thanks to the new devices of communication the newcomers can more readily keep contact with their home country and thus their need for finding a ‘home away from home’ is less urgent than was earlier. This may be due to globalisation and certainly is an important field for research into connective and trans-national networks.

If the societies are not necessary any more to preserve and hand down the cultural heritage and identity, the emigrants have no collective memory that represents a bonding force, then a mere community of emigrants is left that are merely characterized by the length of time they are living abroad, without the special identity that told them apart from the receiving society. It raises the question whether the groups of Hungarians arriving after 1990 could be regarded

⁷⁷ On the initiative of the *Nyugati Magyar Tudományos Tanács* [Hungarian Scientific Council in west] there was a research that found that 40% of the graduates do not plan to return to Hungary, 30% plan to continue their studies abroad. This migration phenomenon closely concern the Hungarian diaspora in Belgium because of the diplomatic role of the country as it requires a vast bureaucratic system. Many Hungarians work in international institutions who usually migrate with their families. Kucsera Tamás Gergely: *Erőforrás vagy veszteség?* 2008.04.28.[Work force or loss?] In URL: http://www.mta.hu/index.php?id=634&no_cache=1&backPid=417&tt_news=8455&cHash=0ab94ba3f8 (2009.03.02)

diaspora? The answer should start out from the fact that diaspora research has already recognised the changed circumstances and the analyses will have to consider new points of view and tendencies.

The present paper tried to point out tendencies and characteristics revealed by the research into the Hungarian organisations in Belgium. The overview is sufficient to merely point out the possibilities of analysis offered by diaspora research.

Borbándi 1989. 278. p.