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## Documents of Passage, Travel Opportunities and Border Traffic in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Hungary<sup>1</sup>

Passable borders is a term that has been often used in recent years. Its significance, however, is important not only for the present and the future (cf. EU accession, Schengen, etc.), it also played an important role in everyday life in the past. People crossed borders for different reasons in certain eras and naturally the number of those crossing a border was different. Mass border crossing appeared in Hungary in modern times. Traditional agricultural societies generally have a low level of geographical mobility. Before the development of the railway system masses of people did not have the opportunity (except for military reasons) to travel a long distance outside the country. Consequently, there was no need for a large number of standard-issue passports. A reference written on a sheet of paper was widely accepted in the 1870s and that is where the Hungarian word for passport, *útlevel* (literally ‘travel letter’)<sup>2</sup> comes from.<sup>2</sup> These traditional travel

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<sup>2</sup> Originally a travel letter, i.e. a letter which one takes along when travelling. Such travel letters can be found in the Hungarian National Archives (further: HNA) R212–1. (packet 1) The travel document called passport for the first time must have been issued in 1856. It contained two sheets (four pages) in Hungarian and German. Simola, Ferenc: “Az első magyar úti okmány” (*The first Hungarian travel document*). *Országhatár*, 1996, No. 18., 43. See the history of passports of earlier times by the same author: “Az első úti tanúsítványtól az útlevelig” (*From the first travel document to the passport*). *Országhatár*, 1996, No. 7., 32–33.

letters were later replaced by small books consisting of several pages,<sup>3</sup> which contained a personal description and, unlike previous documents, were valid not just for a single journey but several. It is worth mentioning that a passport was not necessarily related to foreign travel in the middle of the 19th century but was used inside the country.<sup>4</sup> Bourgeois development established the right of free movement within the country and thus passports then became connected with foreign travel. However, it is important to note that a passport was not always needed even for going abroad at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The period of sporadic regulation, which ended in 1903, can be characterised by the fact that rules relating to travel passes were based on common law, no detailed written regulations existed; or where they did, they did not represent acts of parliament but rather regulations, which referred to practical problems.

The modern Hungarian passport first appeared in 1903. Law No. VI of 1903<sup>5</sup> on the passport matter was adopted that year, and it was valid not only until the break-up of the Monarchy but was also in force during the Horthy era. Moreover it was theoretically annulled only in 1961.<sup>6</sup> Beside the law on passports other important measures were adopted in 1903. Law No. VIII of 1903 on the border police<sup>7</sup> and Law No. IV of 1903 on emigration.<sup>8</sup> The latter was replaced by another act in 1909 (Law No. II of 1909),<sup>9</sup> which was also theoretically in force until 1961. Thus issues concerning passports were first regulated in 1903. The period since then, the time of modern passports, will be discussed in the following.

Five significant periods, disregarding the years of war, can be identified in the 20th century history of Hungarian passport administration. Each pe-

3 The exercise-book format was ordered by the minister of the interior in 1877. Dienes, Istvánné: "Az útlevel hazai története" (*The story of passports in Hungary*). *Rubicon*, 1993, No.3., 26.

4 *Ibid.*, p. 23., where a photograph from a passport valid from Szamosújvár to Kolozsvár in 1856 and several more documents can be found in: HNA R212-1. (packet 1.). Ferenc Simola refers to it in an already mentioned article "Az első úti tanúsítványtól az útlevegig", 32-33.

5 Law No. VI of 1903 on passports. (Further: law on passports) In Márkus, Dezső (ed.): *1903. évi törvénygyűjtemények*. (Laws of 1903) Corpus Juris Hungarici. Magyar Törvénytár (*Hungarian Laws*). (Further: HL.) Budapest: Franklin társulat. 1904, 78-84.

6 Decree No. 10/1961 (III.31.) of the Government. In: *Törvények és Rendeletek Hivatalos Gyűjteménye* (*Official Collection of Laws and Decrees*) (further: OCLD), 1961, p. 207.

7 Law No. VIII of 1903 on border police. HL. 1903.... op. cit., 89-94.

8 Law No. IV of 1903 on emigration. HL. 1903.... op. cit., 45-69.

9 Law No. II of 1909 on emigration HL. 1909.... op. cit., 4-29.

riod has at least one characteristic feature, which makes any one period special as compared to the others. The periods were the following:

1. 1903–1914: the first attempt to regulate the passport issue; a period of travel without a passport and of mass emigration.
2. 1914–1948: passports and visas generally become necessary; the period of short-distance close border travel.
3. 1948–1961: secret measures, almost complete closure of borders; the period of official trips and political emigration.
4. 1961–1987: the period of duality of ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ passports.
5. 1988–today: the period of world-wide passports.

What follows is a summary of the most important features of the first four periods. The aim is not to be comprehensive, rather to highlight the principle characteristics of each period.

#### *The period of travelling abroad ‘without a passport’, 1903–1914*

The first paragraph of the 1903 law on passports stated that a passport was not usually required for travelling abroad. However, the minister of the interior had the right to make passports compulsory if necessary for certain countries or even as a general requirement. Up to 1914 a partial passport obligation was in force for Romania and Serbia (on the order of the Hungarian government)<sup>10</sup> and for Russia and the Ottoman Empire (whose governments demanded a visa, which of course was only available with a passport). Hungarian citizens could enter any other state without passports. This favourable picture seems idyllic today. However, the fact that Hungary was part of the Monarchy at the time puts it in a different light. Hungary had borders with foreign states only with Romania and Serbia, i.e. she had common borders with these states where travel was only possible with a passport. At that time the vast majority of Hungarians travelling abroad went to neighbouring countries, but Croatia,

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<sup>10</sup> The introduction of passports to be used for travel to Romania and Serbia was first mentioned by Decree No. 117.121/1898 of the Minister of the Interior. In *Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára (Collection of Decrees in Hungary)* (further CDH.), 1899. I., 1–13. After the adoption of the law on passports, this measure was reinforced by two further measures: Decree No. 3.456/1904 of the Prime Minister (CDH 1904, 604.) and Decree No. 71.500/1904 of the Minister of the Interior. (CDH. 1904, 716–729.) Passports were not obligatory for Serbia temporarily between 1910 and 1912. See Decree No. 5.380/1910 of the Prime Minister. (CDH. 1910, 603.), and Decree No. 5.951/1912 of the Prime Minister. *Béligyi Közlöny (Journal of Interior Affairs)* (further JIA), 1912, 429.

Austria and Galicia, which were part of the Monarchy, were not considered foreign countries. Travelling further distances, except for emigration, was still rare and only the social elite were able to afford it.

Contrary to the above, the 1903 law on emigration (passed on the same day as the law on passports) made a passport compulsory for crossing the border and in that sense it regarded the Hungarian-Austrian border (moreover the Hungarian-Croatian border line, too) as a state border.<sup>11</sup> There was obviously an irresolvable contradiction between these two laws. The traveller who was able to pretend that he was not crossing the border in order to emigrate could leave without a passport. Many took advantage and evading the measures of the law on emigration left the country illegally (i.e. without passports). The vast majority of emigrants left for the United States.

The Hungarian government did not want to limit emigration before 1914, it only wanted to have control over it, and in the interest of the emigrants themselves. However, the attempt failed because the government's action interfered with the market relations of trans-Atlantic shipping, whereby the mainly German shipping lines (Norddeutscher Lloyd, HAPAG), whose interests were violated, responded adversely.<sup>12</sup> In reality, factors outside the country (US immigration policy and the interests of shipping companies) largely influenced the regulations on emigration. The Hungarian government fought a strong battle with foreign companies who illegally recruited emigrants between 1903 and 1914. The state was to lose the battle from the very beginning, since it did not have the means to prevent illegal emigration. Border security was not effective, although, due to the illegal emigration, it was significantly developed before 1914, primarily by the establishment of the border police in 1903.<sup>13</sup>

11 2§ Law No. IV of 1903 and 2§ Decree No. 40.000/1904 of the Minister of the Interior (CDH 1904, 670.) reinforced the view that Austria was also considered abroad in terms of emigration. See Decree No. 33.926/1906 of the Minister of the Interior, op. cit. Homér, Imre: *A kivándorlásra vonatkozó törvényes jogszabályok kézikönyve (Handbook of laws with reference to emigration)*. Second enlarged edition, Budapest, 1910, 342–343.

12 The best source summarising the issue: HNA K150-1928-V-20.t. (packet 3610.), 96-page study on the history of the case of Hungarian emigration (1879–1909), without reference number.

13 See Parádi, József (ed.): *A magyar rendvédelem története. (The history of the protection of order in Hungary)*, Budapest, 1996, 79–86, and the same author: "A magyar királyi határrendőrség, a magyar határőrizet szakmai vezető testülete" (*The Hungarian royal border police, the professional leading board of Hungarian border protection* In *A dualista Magyarország rendvédelme (The protection of order in dualistic Hungary, Scientific Conference)*. ORFK OKK, Budapest, 1992, 21–50.

Between 1903 and 1914 Hungarian emigration reached the peak of its history. The number of emigrants amounted to an annual one hundred thousand and a significant part of those left the country illegally. If only the legal emigrants are taken into account, it can be stated that the vast majority of passports were applied for by them. No wonder, contemporary public opinion practically considered emigration and passport issues as going together. This is also supported by the fact that most legal measures concerning passports adopted in that period were connected to emigration. Emigration did not, however, mean what it does today. Staying abroad for the purpose of employment for longer than a year was considered emigration in every case.<sup>14</sup> Thus the present notion of ‘guest worker’ was included in this category. This interpretation was unchanged up to 1945 and 1948.

However, emigrants even then made up only a fraction of those who crossed the border. Traffic near the border accounted for the largest part of border crossings on the borders with Romania and Serbia. Although more people applied for passports to emigrate, these passports were (theoretically) valid for a single crossing only. Bearers of near border certificates crossed the border several times a day and thus a far larger traffic was conducted in total in this way as compared with emigration.<sup>15</sup> Close border traffic was usually made possible by international agreements concluded by the concerned neighbouring countries.

### *Passports and visas become generally compulsory, 1914–48*

This period is far more heterogeneous than the previous, since it is divided into several sub-periods with major differences among them,<sup>16</sup> despite that fact that they share common features which justifies their discussing them together.

- Travel opportunities became difficult, but except for the war years, were not absolutely impossible. Travelling without a passport was no longer possible; moreover visas became generally necessary.

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<sup>14</sup> The two laws on emigration stipulated what an emigrant meant.

<sup>15</sup> See Bencsik, Péter: “Határforgalom Magyarország és a Balkán között. 1. rész (*Border traffic between Hungary and the Balkans. Part 1*) (1903–1914)”, *Limes*, 2000, No 1., tables on p. 80–81.

<sup>16</sup> The two world wars are included, when due to military operations temporary restrictions and special regulations were enforced. Significant differences are seen between the 1920s and 1930s as well as from 1945 to 1948, which is considered as a sub-period.

- Opportunities for emigration were restricted and by the end of the period emigration with the purpose of work ended completely. At the same time political emigration (later called defection) appeared, although it was not dominant. After 1948 the notion of emigration was limited to defection, which was insignificant in the beginning, having had a secondary significance between the two world wars.
- Close border traffic with an economic purpose made up the dominant cause for crossing the border in this period.

During and after World War I drastic restrictions came into effect and passports and visas became entirely compulsory.<sup>17</sup> The outdated passport law was amended by several measures, but the county, area and local authorities which implemented the passport regulations were unable to follow their quick changes and the measures had to be constantly repeated. The League of Nations played an important role in solving the passport issue. International conferences on passport and emigration matters were held under its auspices from 1920 with the aim of making border crossings easier and standardising the format of passports. The attempts were crowned with some success – an international type of passport was produced, an attempt was made to introduce uniform visa regulations, etc.<sup>18</sup>

In the inter-war period the general political atmosphere exerted the decisive influence on border crossings with a non-emigration purpose. Smaller states born after the dissolution of the Monarchy wanted to prevent border crossings in the interest of their territorial stability (also for political reasons).

<sup>17</sup> Compulsory use of passports was enforced by Decree No. 285/1915 of the Prime Minister (CDH. 1915. I., 38–40.). Visas were introduced on the basis of reciprocity with a separate measure for each country. Measures were reinforced following a war or a revolution see Decree No. 8.720/1922 of the Prime Minister (CDH. 1922, 187–188.); see HNA K72-circular and interior measures-1922 (packet 146.).

<sup>18</sup> Bencsik, Péter: “A határátkelés szabályozása hazánkban és környező államokban (1903–1941)” (*Regulation of border crossing in our country and the neighbouring states*), In: Szemere Bertalan: *Az 1000 éves magyar rendvédelem (1000 years of protection of order in Hungary)*. Budapest: Magyar Rendvédelem-történeti Tudományos Társaság, forthcoming. (conference lecture 8 November 2000). Original documents see HNA K72-1926 Geneva international conferences on passports (packets 143–144.) See special international conferences on emigration *ibid.* and HNA K60-1926-I/1. (packet 1.) and HNA K60-1928-I/1. (packet 14.). Contemporary information: *Magyarország és az 1924. évben Rómában tartott “Első Nemzetközi Kivándorlás- és Bevándorlásiügyi Értekezlet” határozatai. (Hungary and the Decisions of the “First International Conference on Emigration and Immigration” in Rome, 1924)* (Foreword: Count János Hadik). Budapest: Kivándorlási Tanács (Emigration Council), 1928, 74–75, and 91.

The best way was the introduction of a very strict visa policy, with which the Little Entente states tried to discourage people from travelling. Their goal was to reduce the relations between the Hungarian minority and the motherland to a minimum, thus reducing the danger of revision.<sup>19</sup> The Hungarian government applied or tried to apply a more liberal visa policy than any of the neighbouring states. However, the reason behind this was that the Hungarian side could lose more with the restrictions than the neighbouring countries. Owing to this Hungary was obviously more vulnerable and could not always apply strict responses because those would have only helped the neighbouring countries, which, referring to Hungarian counter-measures, could have introduced further restrictions. The Hungarian authorities immediately realised this and acted accordingly. This shows that the domestic political set-up of a country did not affect (or hardly affected) the practical application of passport policy. Czechoslovakia with a more democratic domestic set-up had a Balkan-type visa policy for example in the 1920s.<sup>20</sup>

Political consolidation achieved encouraging results by the 1930s; due to the interim stability neighbouring countries established a more liberal visa regime and close-border policy. The necessity of visas began to be lifted between certain states.<sup>21</sup> These alleviations, however, only lasted as long as the political stability. With the appearance of another crisis restrictions were again introduced and by the beginning of World War II passport and visa obligations were again in place.<sup>22</sup>

Concerning emigration, the largest 'pull country', the USA, began to strongly restrict immigration from 1921, introducing strict quotas for every

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19 See in detail Bencsik, Péter: "A határátkelés szabályozása..." op. cit.

20 *ibid.* and HNA K72 – Our passport and visa connection with Austria, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia (packets 141.-142.)

21 Bencsik, Péter: "A határátkelés szabályozása ..." (*Regulating border crossing*) op. cit. The following measures abolished visas: Italy: Decree No. 1.730/1930 of the Prime Minister (CDH 1930, 370.); Germany: Decree No. 1.731/1930. of the Prime Minister (*ibid.*, 370–371.); Austria: Decree No. 1.732/1930 of the Prime Minister (*ibid.*, 371–373.); Switzerland and Liechtenstein: Decree No. 2.260/1930 of the Prime Minister (*ibid.*, 374–375.); Spain: Decree No. 3.980/1930 of the Prime Minister (*ibid.*, 462.)

22 HNA K72-1939. res. (packet 196.) – Decree No. 286/1939 of the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Re-endorsement was enforced with all the states on 15 September. The decision was explained by the international political situation, namely with the outbreak of the war on the one hand, and on the other with reciprocity, since the other states also started to reintroduce a comprehensive visa obligation.

country.<sup>23</sup> During World War I emigration stopped and owing to the American quota did not approach pre-1914 quantities later. Moreover, the world economic crisis and general unemployment reduced it to zero after 1929; every state introduced protective measures in the interest of its own labour force.<sup>24</sup> It is interesting to note that the state paid disproportionately larger attention to the post-1918, far smaller emigration as compared with that of the pre-1914 era. Emigrants enjoyed appropriate state protection and supervision (i.e. via the Office for the Protection of Hungarian Emigrants and Returnees,<sup>25</sup> in contrast with attempts before World War I.

Before 1914 close border traffic took place only on the borders with Romania and Serbia. Following the Trianon Treaty, however, traffic began on the entire borders of Hungary. Unlike the pre-1914 situation when the depth of the close border amounted to 40 km, in the Horthy era only those who lived in a 10–15 km vicinity of the border were able to take advantage of this border crossing opportunity. After the war local agreements between the close border areas were concluded in the beginning, but later a government decree regulated the traffic.<sup>26</sup> Close border traffic was significant because the new border cut estates in two in many cases, but the original owners continued to have the opportunity to cultivate their land over the border. It was also

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<sup>23</sup> Commager, Henry Steele (ed.): *Documents of American History*. Fifth edition. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1949, 316. and 372–374. The preparation and contents of the law are presented by HNA K71-1924-I/1.-79.533. (packet 3.). The full English text is also issued (ibid. Decree No. 64.125/1924 of the Minister of Foreign Affairs). The 1921 American legislation on immigration essentially stated that the annual number of new immigrants from any one nationality cannot exceed 3% of their compatriots already living in the USA in 1910. This was reduced to 2% in 1924 with the intention to relate the quota as compared to 1890 instead of 1910 so as to restrict further the number leaving from Central and Eastern Europe.

<sup>24</sup> In 1929, still before the economic crisis, nearly all the European countries stipulated that an official employment contract was required as a precondition of being granted a passport, which entitled the person to work (i.e. to employment) and the Hungarian representation abroad had to endorse it. Decree No. 287.823/1929 of the Minister of the Interior (JIA 1929, 732.) In addition, several measures were issued for the protection of the labour market in certain European countries.

<sup>25</sup> The earlier name was Congregational Foreign Employment Office (between 1930–1935). HNA K150-1937-V-20 (packet 3611.) - Decrees No. 114.079/1937 and 173.368/1935 of the Minister of the Interior. See also HNA P1256, its history: ibid. packet 1, lot 1.

<sup>26</sup> Decree No. 5.300/1923 of the Prime Minister. (CDH 1923, 260–273.) This was a temporary regulation. It was valid as long as inter-state agreements managed to regulate close border traffic.



important for Hungary that these so-called double landowners were mostly Hungarians, thus close border traffic played an important role in maintaining relations between Hungarians over the border and the motherland. Thus the Hungarian government was politically interested in keeping close border traffic as strong as possible. Close border traffic was regulated primarily by inter-state treaties beside various measures.<sup>27</sup> The Hungarian state did its best to ensure that borders were passable both before 1941 and after 1945. Neighbouring states (with the exception of Austria) hindered economic and passenger traffic even with close border traffic for political reasons. In many cases their goal was to force mainly Hungarian owners to sell their estates on the other side of the border. Hungary had an international dispute with Yugoslavia, which was the most determined to do away with the double-ownership system. The dispute was won by Hungary in 1934, following a decision of the League of Nations.<sup>28</sup>

Hungary managed to conclude a number of new agreements despite the fact that her borders were modified several times or that several neighbouring countries bordering Hungary ceased to exist and thus new neighbours appeared on the other side of the border (Germany, Poland, Slovakia, the Soviet Union, etc.).<sup>29</sup> After World War II local agreements were first made on the basis of earlier unrepealed inter-state treaties. The locations for border crossing were fixed in every case. Dual owners continued to be allowed to cross in order to cultivate their land.<sup>30</sup>

The anti-liberal shift in passport legislation in the second decade of the 20th century was clearly the consequence of World War I and the dissolution and change of central European states. Thus nationalism defeated liberalism in the matter of passports, too. Hungarian governments (at least regarding their declarations) tried to do away with restrictions but neighbouring states

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27 It is impossible to list all the international agreements. See Bencsik, Péter: *A kisebb határszéli forgalom Magyarország és a szomszédos államok közt, 1898–1941, (Close border traffic between Hungary and neighbouring countries)*. *Magyar Kisebbség* (Kolozsvár), 1999, No. 2–3. (V. year., Nr. 16–17.), 357–372.

28 Bencsik, Péter: “Határforgalom Magyarország és a Balkán között. 2. rész (1914–1941)” (*Border traffic between Hungary and the Balkans. Part 2., Limes*, 2000, No. 2–3, 311–312., and by the same author: *A kisebb határszéli forgalom... (Close border traffic...)* op. cit.

29 *ibid.*

30 Sallai, János: “The Schengen system and close border traffic”, In *Schengen. Hungarian-Hungarian relations in the shadow of EU visa obligations*. Budapest: Lucidus Kiadó, 2000, 56–57. Agreements on close border traffic: see HNA XIX-B-10-VI.-1945 and 1946 (boxes 1.-2.).

were not partners to that and thus on the principle of reciprocity Hungary also introduced restrictive regulations. The difference in the passport policy between Hungary and the neighbouring countries was not, however, determined by their liberalism or anti-liberalism but by their political-nationalistic interests (the maintenance of earlier intensive relations between the parts of the Carpathian basin on the Hungarian side and its thorough obstruction on the neighbours' part). Of course Hungary cannot be said to have pursued a liberal passport policy in every respect. Among the contemporary secret measures, regulations referring to the obstruction of 'undesirable persons' travelling into the country grew as early as the 1920s. These concerned Jews in word or by implication, and following the Nazi assumption of power in Germany openly anti-Jewish passport regulations already appeared.<sup>31</sup>

### *The period of secret regulations and closed borders, 1948–1961*

The period of the Rákosi dictatorship and the post-1956 Kádár reprisals is characterised by the complete lack of known passport regulations. The passport office was moved from the Ministry of the Interior to the ÁVH (*Authority of State Defence*) in September 1948 and from then on its documents are actually irretraceable. If legal measures were taken referring to passports at all, they were not published, the files of interior orders disappeared or possibly even perished. That is the reason why research into the period is so difficult and it can only be hoped that so-far shelved documents will sometime be found.

Therefore it is possible to characterise this period only briefly. The borders were tightly closed and it was practically impossible to cross into Austria via the Iron Curtain except for 1956. A broad border zone was set up towards Austria and Yugoslavia, and permission was required to enter the zone from inside Hungary. The movement of the population living in the border zone was also made rather difficult. The guarding of the borders was very strong everywhere. The opportunity for legal travel abroad reached an unprecedented low. Crossing the border from both directions was extremely difficult. Hardly 40,000 foreigners came to Hungary annually up to 1955 and fewer than 25,000 Hungarians were able to travel abroad. Official trips accounted for a significant proportion of travel and it was extremely difficult to obtain a passport for private purposes. There was no marked difference

<sup>31</sup> Bencsik, Péter: "A határátkelés szabályozása ..." (*Regulating border crossing*), op. cit. Original measures can be found: HNA K72 reserved documents (packets 188–197.)

whether one wanted to go to a socialist or a western country; even 'friendly' countries demanded visas.

Close border traffic died out completely and neighbouring countries closed areas along their borders hermetically. Dual ownership of land completely ceased, the population of villages streamed into industry and Hungarians living near the border moved to towns further away. Due to the sharp political differences, close border traffic with Austria and Yugoslavia was out of the question and the same was true for the Soviet Union due to the different political culture. Even so, during the period no agreement was concluded with Romania either<sup>32</sup> and the only exception was Czechoslovakia with which an agreement was signed in 1952.<sup>33</sup>

In late 1956 and early 1957, with the disintegration of the ÁVH border guarding activities, more than 200,000 Hungarians fled abroad (primarily to Austria) across the unguarded borders. The Kádár regime interpreted this as illegal departure, but for political reasons it promised impunity to those who left illegally before 31 January 1957 but announced their intention to return before 31 March. During the time of reprisals no public measures were passed about passports, while at the same time the border traffic significantly rose. Exploration of these few years is also still ahead.

### *The period of two types of passports, 1961–1987*

During this period legal measures concerning passports became public again. Unlike before 1948, tiny modifications of current regulations were relatively rare although passport rights were regularly re-regulated every few years. These new regulations were mostly passed as new edicts<sup>34</sup>, government and/or Interior Ministry Decrees<sup>35</sup> in a uniform structure. Thus this period differs from that of before 1948 when the theoretically unchanged law

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32 Sallai, *op. cit.*, 57.

33 Decree No. 01730/1955 of the National Commander of the Border Guard, HNA XIX-B-10-1955-VI-22 (packet 23)

34 Edict, or 'legislative measure' (Hungarian "törvényerejű rendelet", literally a 'decree with a force of a law' was used from 1949. It was issued by the Presidium of the Hungarian People's Republic instead of the Parliament and filled the role of laws.

35 Decree is a legal measure issued by a minister or the Council of Ministers. It can be 'circular decree' (körrendelet), 'implementing decree' (végrehajtási rendelet), a direction (utasítás) etc. (Further I mention it as 'decree', regardless of its type). The terms 'edict' and 'decree' are used by Sólyom-Fekete, William: *Travel Abroad and Emigration under New Rules adopted by the Government of Hungary*. Washington D.C., Library of Congress, 1979.

on passports was constantly amended by modifying measures. Getting a passport was gradually becoming less difficult and travelling abroad again became possible for large masses of people. From then on the majority of trips had no economic purpose, i.e. crossing the border to work in another country stopped nearly completely. Up to 1948 both emigration and close border traffic were motivated by economic considerations. Emigration meant permanent employment abroad, and close border traffic meant that dual landowners commuted over the border daily. From 1961 the majority of those crossing the border were tourists or travellers with the purpose of visiting friends and relatives. Close border traffic appeared again under a slightly modified name. That also had an economic aspect so far as it meant shopping tourism for many.

However, the most characteristic feature of the period was the existence of two different passports according to the destination of the trip. The 'eastern' (red) passport for socialist countries was easier to obtain and had fewer limitations than the (blue) passport valid for the rest of the world. At the beginning (until 1972) there was only one type of private passport, which was valid for both directions for a year only and allowed a single journey. Visas were needed for socialist countries just like for trips to the west.<sup>36</sup> However, in practice it was already easier to travel to socialist countries due to collective passports and passport sheets valid with identity cards. Both were either on a reciprocity basis or due to international agreements, and although they were valid for a single journey only, they made travelling to European socialist countries significantly easier.<sup>37</sup>

In 1964 applying for a passport was made easier (primarily when one wanted to travel to certain socialist countries), passports and passport sheets valid with identity cards could be applied for at the area, town and district police stations and not only at the county police office. The validity of passports was extended to two years, however they were still only for a single journey a new exit visa had to be applied for any further trips.<sup>38</sup>

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36 Visas to socialist countries were abolished in the 1960s; for example, to Yugoslavia in 1966. See Romsics, Ignác: *Magyarország története a XX. században. (The 20<sup>th</sup> century history of Hungary)* Budapest: Osiris, 1999, 422.

37 Decree No. 1/1961 (III. 31.) of the Minister of the Interior OCLD 1961, 425–426.

38 Decree No. 6/1963 (XII. 21.) of the Minister of the Interior OCLD 1963, 206–207.

Passport matters were regulated by an edict in 1970.<sup>39</sup> Its most important statement, Par.(1) §3, stipulates that every Hungarian citizen has a right to a passport and travel abroad provided he or she satisfied the conditions determined by legal measures. Details, however, were regulated by government and ministry of interior decrees.

The validity of passports was extended to five years, trips to five socialist countries were possible several times a year (with a passport sheet valid with the identity card on the basis of bilateral agreements). However, to other countries it was possible to travel with the purpose of visiting bi-annually and with the purpose of tourism once every three years. The restriction that passport applications had to be judged by employers (the educational institution in the case of students and the interest representative organisation in the case of a self-employed person) was very important. So-called private passports could be issued for business trips, travel with the purpose of visiting (provided the inviting person ensured the financial conditions), for organised package tours, individual tourist trips with the hard currency exchange permission of the currency authority or for study trips, and employment or medical treatment.<sup>40</sup> Area, town and district police stations were able to issue passport sheets and collective passports for five socialist countries (Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, the German Democratic Republic and Romania). Passports could only be used for a single trip without a special permission; for a new journey a repeated exit visa had to be applied for (even to the listed five countries).<sup>41</sup>

Separate passports valid for socialist countries appeared from 1 January 1972. At the same time, passport sheets valid with identity cards filling that function before were withdrawn. The 'eastern' private passport could be valid for all the five listed countries or only for one of them; this was shown by the exit visa stamped in the passport. Several trips could be made with this passport. However, its territorial validity could not be extended to any other country. Area, town and district police stations could issue these passports.<sup>42</sup>

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39 Edict No. 4 of 1970 on passports OCLD 1970, 53–55. It was indicated by the fact that the increased demand to travel abroad was connected to the political, social and economic development of the country and with the advance of inter-state relations; agreements concluded especially with European socialist countries enabled large masses of people to travel abroad. Therefore it became necessary to regulate the issue at a higher level, i.e. by an edict.

40 Decree No. 4/1970 (III. 3.) of the Government on passports. OCLD 1970, 184–186.

41 Decree No. 2/1970 (III. 3.) of the Minister of the Interior. OCLD 1970, 315–318.

42 Decree No. 6/1971 (XII. 30.) of the Minister of the Interior. OCLD. 1971, 604.

From 1 January 1977 Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union were added to the above-mentioned five countries and thus the eastern passport was valid for all the European socialist countries except Albania.<sup>43</sup>

Regulations referring to passports were comprehensively revised for the third time in 1978 (after 1961 and 1970).<sup>44</sup> Passports continued to enable one to cross the border only with an exit visa; the regulations did not change concerning western countries, i.e. one trip with the purpose of visiting bi-yearly and with the purpose of tourism once every three years, but only one private trip was allowed annually irrespective of the purpose of the trip.<sup>45</sup> That did not refer to the passport to the seven socialist countries; several trips a year could be made. It was new that exit visas could be obtained for several trips primarily in passports for socialist countries. Other above-mentioned rules did not change, rather the earlier modifications were summarised in a uniform structure and stipulated in detail.<sup>46</sup>

The possibility of an annual trip to the west from 1982 meant a further liberalisation.<sup>47</sup> It also became possible for those with a hard currency account to be entitled to travel to the west without having to have a separate hard currency allowance.<sup>48</sup> Collective passports were withdrawn in 1984.<sup>49</sup> Edict No 25. of 1987 was the next change to follow, which came into force in 1988 and introduced the world passport, i.e. withdrew the two types of passport.

During this period, legal emigration lost its significance completely. Earlier, the main reason for emigration was getting a job abroad but the free

43 Decree No. 7/1976 (XII. 11.) of the Minister of the Interior. OCLD. 1976, p. 405–406.

44 Edict No. 20 of 1978 on travelling abroad and passports. OCLD 1978, 327. The new regulations came into force on 1 January 1979.

45 Decree No. 53/1978 (XI. 10.) of the Council of Ministers on travelling abroad and passports. OCLD 1978, 476–477.

46 Decree No. 6/1978 (XI. 10.) of the Minister of the Interior. OCLD 1978, 580–583.

47 Decree No. 60/1981 (XI. 27.) of the Council of Ministers. OCLD 1981, 297. Until then, as we saw, it was possible to travel every other year for the purpose of visiting and once every three years for the purpose of tourism, on one occasion a year. Thus in a six-year period a maximum of five trips were allowed, i.e. three times with the purpose of visiting and twice as a tourist. However, from 1982 we could travel every year and did not even need an invitation letter to prove the purpose of visiting.

48 Decree No. 4/1981 (XI. 27.) of the Minister of the Interior. OCLD 1981, 435–436. Tightly regulated hard currency caused the greatest restriction on travelling to the West. The annual limit was only \$70 a year for a long time.

49 Edict No. 19 of 1982 on modification of Edict No. 20 of 1978 on travelling abroad and passports. OCLD. 1982, 219; Decree No. 38/1982 (VIII. 26.) of the Council of Ministers, *ibid.*, 353–354; and Decree No. 8/1982 (VIII. 26.) of the Minister of the Interior *ibid.*, 625–627. Despite their 1982 issue they were introduced only on 1 January 1984.

choice of employment was not ensured entirely even within the country after 1948. There were, of course, people who left the country illegally. After 1961 illegal emigration did not amount to a significant number, while in a surprising way legal measures regulated the possibilities for legal emigration. However, the theoretical possibilities most probably remained on paper only, for one thing is sure – legal emigration took place only to a negligible degree. A pre-visa from the receiving country was required for an emigration passport, while the actual emigration required a separate border crossing certificate in addition to the emigration passport.<sup>50</sup> Later on emigration was allowed only for those who were over 55 and were to live with a direct relative abroad and did not have any liability to maintain someone; in addition to a preliminary visa an invitation by the relative living abroad had to be attached to the passport application.<sup>51</sup> The emigration passport was withdrawn in 1978; in its place an emigration licence or a private passport for emigration could be applied for.<sup>52</sup>

Concerning close border traffic there continued to be no agreement with Austria. However, agreements were concluded with Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. A rather complicated institution, albeit entitled ‘simplified border crossing’, was introduced between Hungary and the Soviet Union. The agreements referred to the population living within a 10–15 km border zone. Crossing the border was only possible at designated border crossings (unlike the pre-1948 dual landowners’ close border traffic) and it was strongly restricted by allowing only 4–12 trips a year. Close border traffic was significant mainly to Yugoslavia, due to shopping trips and the possibility of leaving for the west.<sup>53</sup>

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50 Decree No. 1/1961 (III. 31.) of the Minister of the Interior OCLD 1961, 425–426. A border crossing certificate was granted provided the person did not have any public liabilities.

51 Decree No. 4/1970 (III. 3.) of the Government on passports OCLD 1970, 184–186.; and Decree No. 2/1970 (III. 3.) of the Minister of the Interior OCLD 1970, 315–318. An emigration passport was granted to those who gave up their Hungarian citizenship. If a person left Hungary for a long time while keeping citizenship a consul’s passport was granted. A border crossing certificate was still required.

52 Decree No. 6/1978 (XI. 10.) of the Minister of the Interior OCLD 1978, 580–583. Certificates specified by earlier conditions had to be acquired for both documents. The emigration licence required the person to give up Hungarian citizenship. Settlement abroad was possible while keeping Hungarian citizenship. From 1984 a travel document with a new name, a passport for living abroad, had to be applied for.

53 Agreements were concluded with Czechoslovakia in 1962, Yugoslavia in 1965 and 1967, Romania in 1969 and the Soviet Union in 1965 and 1969. Sallai, *op. cit.*, 57–58.

*Border traffic expressed in figures between 1903 and 1989*

How did the rapidly changing conditions and regulations effect the number of border crossings? The question can be answered with the help of statistical data. Unfortunately, however, during the long, nearly 100-year period there was not always a great care paid to the proper collection of data and they were processed from different points of view in each period. In addition, several unpublished documents must have perished during the stormy events of the 20th century, the two world wars, dictatorships and then the 1956 Revolution. Therefore a complete picture of the size of border traffic cannot be drawn.

Interestingly, the first and the last of the four periods reviewed above provide a relatively complete picture; all data characterising the periods before 1914 and after 1960 are available. For the period between 1914 and 1941 the available data concern emigration only, data from the 1940s are completely absent and from the 1950s only the number of border crossings is available, although this is for each border section.

Problems concerning pre-1914 data concern the fact that passports were compulsory only for Serbia and Romania and therefore data were collected for these border crossings. Only emigration was measured at the other borders, but the number of emigrants leaving without passports was so significant that those data cannot be considered representative. However, this is the only period whereby data on the number of issued passports are at our disposal. The number of non-emigration passports approximately amounted to an annual 50,000 and the number of emigration passports strongly fluctuated between 40 and 180 thousand, the annual average being 100,000.<sup>54</sup> The number of those entitled to travel was somewhat higher, since a whole family was able to travel on one passport at the time. An annual average of 80,000 was entitled to cross the border with non-emigration passports, while an average of 125,000 had the opportunity to emigrate. The majority of non-emigration passports concentrated on the borders with Serbia and Romania, while emigration passports were more scattered. The real number of emigrants always lagged behind the number of those who were issued passports; only 70–80% emigrated on average. Considering the volume of illegal emigra-

<sup>54</sup> Data do not include Croatia. The source for pre-1914 data if no other source is indicated: *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv. Új folyam (Hungarian Statistical Yearbook. New series) IX.-XXIII. year (1901–1915)*. Budapest: KSH (*Royal Hungarian Central Statistics Office*), 1902–1918.



tion, a comparison between overseas emigration statistics of Hungarians and the data of European ports is significant. Between 1903 and 1913, during 11 years an annual average of 95,000 Hungarians left the country legally for other continents. However, 126,000 Hungarians a year were registered in west European ports during the same period of time.<sup>55</sup> That is, illegal emigration accounted for about 25% of the total.

Between 1902 and 1914 the turnover at the Hungarian-Romanian and the Hungarian-Serbian borders was the following: the number of border crossings in total exceeded 11 million in 12 and a half years, i.e. it amounted to 907,000 a year. More than half of this number was attributable to Hungarians crossing the border (an average of half a million people a year). The number of Romanian citizens reached 138,000, the number of Serbs was 128,000, the rest was accounted for by citizens of other Balkan states and citizens of other states equally. Naturally there are significant differences between annual averages. The turnover evenly increased until 1910, then due to the temporary lifting of compulsory passports with Serbia and the Balkan war there was a significant drop. Zimony and Predeal were the busiest border crossing points.<sup>56</sup>

From 1914 emigration and some of the close border traffic stopped and as a consequence statistical data were not recorded. Unfortunately this was not reversed after the war. Emigration data are again at our disposal from 1921. From then on the number of emigrants slowly increased from 1,500 a year to 10,000 (until 1929) and then fell to approximately 1,000 a year again. The majority emigrated overseas and in the 1920s in addition to the USA, Canada and partly South America were also important objectives.<sup>57</sup> Illegal emigration in the 1920s must have been quite significant according to the

55 Mitchell, B. R.: *International Historical Statistics*. Europe 1750–1988. New York: Stockton Press, 1992 (Third edition), 130.

56 *Statisztikai Havi Közlemények (Monthly Statistical Reports)* VI.–XVIII. Years (1902–1914). Budapest: KSH (Royal Hungarian Central Statistics Office). The 1914 data refer to the period between January and July, therefore this period covers 12 and a half years. The data are somewhat distorted since passports to Serbia were not compulsory for two years. Thus no statistical data were registered on this section between 1910 and 1912. Calculating the average by 10.5 years, Serbian citizens made 152,000 border crossings, i.e. they exceed those of Romanian citizens.

57 Thirring, G.: “Hungarian Migration of Modern Times”, In Willcox, Walter F. (ed.): *International Migrations. National Bureau of Economic Research*, New York, 1931, Vol. II., 435.; *Magyar Statisztikai Évkönyv. Új folyam (Hungarian Statistical Yearbook)* New series. XXVI.–L. year. (1928–1942). Budapest: KSH (Royal Hungarian Central Statistics Office), 1929–1943; HNA K60–1928–I/1.-20.457 asz. (packet 14) – Decree No. 17.101/1926 of the Minister of Foreign Affairs

data of European ports, since the number of registered Hungarians was 2–3 times as many as that of the official data.<sup>58</sup>

Apart from the above, only the number of passports issued in Budapest between the two world wars is known. Before 1914, 5–7,000 passports were issued annually in the capital and emigration passports made up the majority. From 1919 the number of issued passports increased to 100,000 in 2–3 years and then it gradually fell to 22,000 until 1936. It is also true that passports could be extended from 1929, which meant 50–70,000 a year. Thus the number of valid passports was always above 70,000 in Budapest until 1939 (except for 1927–28). Then, owing to the consequences of restriction because of the war, it started to drop sharply.<sup>59</sup> Naturally, from the municipal data far-reaching conclusions cannot be drawn for the whole country, especially if we take into account that most border crossings were effected by close border traffic, which Budapest's population could not take advantage of.

Statistical data on border traffic are available again from 1951 and they are at our disposal ever since.<sup>60</sup> Since earlier data go back to pre-1914, when passports were not compulsory at all the Hungarian borders, and also the borders changed entirely, the two sets of data can only be compared with utmost care. After 1951 the available data are only partial because they register Hungarians travelling abroad and foreigners coming to or crossing into Hungary. That is another reason why the pre-1914 and post-1951 data cannot be compared.<sup>61</sup>

The number of foreigners entering Hungary in 1951 totalled a mere 37,000 and remained thus for a few years. Then it increased to 100,000 in 1955 and 200,000 in 1956. Between 1958 and 1963 it increased by about 100,000 annually (921,000 in 1963) and from then on it dramatically grew. 1.8 million in 1964, 4.3 million in 1967 and more than 6 million visitors entered Hungary annually between 1969 and 1972. There was another significant increase between 1973 and 1978, when the number of foreigners enter-

58 Mitchell: op. cit., 130. The proportion of illegal emigrants dropped to 20–30% in the 1930s.

59 *Budapest Székesfőváros Statisztikai Haviüzetei (Budapest Municipal Statistical Monthlies)*. XXV.-LIX. years. (1907–1941). It is noticeable how few owned a passport in the inter-war period in Budapest's more than 1 million inhabitants.

60 All further data can be found in the volumes published between 1958 and 1989 of the *Statisztikai Évkönyv (Statistical Yearbook)*. Budapest: KSH (Central Statistics Office), 1960–1990.

61 The entry by Hungarians and the exit of foreigners would be included in the whole border traffic. No such data exist, therefore it is only possible to estimate that the number of Hungarians equals those returning and also that foreigners who entered Hungary also left. (Data registered before 1914 included Hungarians who returned and foreigners who left.)

ing Hungary reached 16 million. Then it fluctuated between 10 and 16 million when it started to grow again (19 million) in 1987.

Except for 1956, the number of Hungarians travelling abroad was always smaller than that of foreign visitors. Between 1951 and 1954 it was between 18 and 25 thousand while in 1955 it was 100,000 and in 1956 it sharply increased to 270,000 (partly due to emigration). Following a temporary fall-back it amounted to 570,000 by 1963 and then in 1964 the number suddenly jumped to 1.4 million. Then there was a dramatic fall and it reached one million again only in 1970. The figures show a dynamic growth until 1978 (then 5.4 million Hungarians travelled abroad), followed by a stagnating period until 1985. A steady increase began in 1986 (7.2 million in 1987 and 10.8 million in 1988 – that was the year when the world passport was introduced).

From 1958 data are available on whether foreigners arrived from socialist or other countries and also whether Hungarians travelled to socialist countries or others. Until 1981 socialist countries accounted for 80% in both respects. Moreover, concerning Hungarians travelling abroad, the proportion going to socialist countries fell under 80% only in 1988 (then, however, it fell under 70%, which was also the result of the introduction of the world passport). Since 1956 data have been registered on the number of travellers from and to more important countries. Data show the monthly border traffic since 1957 and the number of tourists within the total of travellers since 1966. 30% of foreigners entering Hungary arrived from Czechoslovakia on average. It is striking that citizens of the Soviet Union and Romania representing over 10% from among citizens of other socialist countries earlier reached a decreasing proportion from 1964; for decades their share was 3–5%. The proportion represented by Yugoslavia sharply fluctuated between 1.6% and 30%, but it was around 10% on average. From the 1970s, citizens of the GDR and Poland reached a proportion of over 10%. Until 1970 most visitors arrived from Austria from among western countries, following that year a turn was made in favour of citizens coming from the FRG. These two countries took up the first two places among visitors arriving from the west.

More than 30% of Hungarians going abroad travelled to Czechoslovakia for decades. No other country reached a proportion higher than 10% continuously, only for some time (i.e. Yugoslavia from 1966 to 1980, Romania between 1981 and 1987, and Poland and the GDR for shorter periods of time). Austria's share of 25% in 1988 is striking (the beginning of Hungarian shopping trips). Political effects can be seen in certain cases; i.e. more than half

a million Hungarians travelled to Poland in 1980, but only 180,000 in 1981 and 50,000 in 1982. This was obviously the result of the state of emergency there and the political crisis.

In summary, it can be stated that the general political situation has influenced border traffic more than regulations concerning passports in the narrow sense. Between 1903 and 1948 external effects were the most important factors – in the beginning the American immigration laws and the emigration publicity of the western shipping lines, later the discriminative visa policy of the Little Entente countries afraid of revision. After 1948 the restrictive factors were partly exterior and partly domestic – the dictatorship did not allow the movement of large masses across the border. During the soft dictatorship factors restricting travel abroad gradually disappeared and that led to a rapid growth in border traffic. Of course, other reasons played a role in all this: society has completely changed and modernised, and international tourism gained great importance from the 1960s, something which would have been unimaginable in the Monarchy and also during the Horthy era.

#### ABBREVIATIONS

- HNA – Hungarian National Archives (Magyar Országos Levéltár, MOL)  
 HL – Hungarian Laws (Magyar Törvénytár)  
 CDH – Collection of Decrees in Hungary (Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára)  
 JIA – Journal of Interior Affairs (Belügyi Közlöny)  
 OCLD – Official Collection of Laws and Decrees (Törvények és Rendeletek Hivatalos Gyűjteménye)  
 HOP – National Commander of the Border-Guard (Határőrség Országos Parancsnoka)  
 KSH – Central Statistics Office (Központi Statisztikai Hivatal)