



The Nature of Administrative Activities Related to Hungarian Communities Beyond the Borders

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Abstract. Despite Hungarian intellectuals – both within Hungary and abroad – having hoped that multiculturalism and Euro-Atlantic integration would bridge ethnic divides, debates about constitutional issues, autonomy, and language use have often contradicted this expectation. As a result, there is an increasing recognition of the Hungarian government’s role in providing various forms of support to Hungarians living beyond its borders. This study aims to present a comprehensive overview of the benefits and assistance available to these individuals, including their evolution and political context. It is essential to distinguish between political and cultural concepts of nationhood, as conflating these could significantly affect the functioning and democratic legitimacy of Hungary’s public law system.

Keywords: Hungarian communities beyond the borders, national identity, support system, educational and cultural institutions, collective rights

1. Introduction

The legacy of the 20th century saw a significant portion of historical Hungary’s territory lost, resulting in millions of Hungarian-speaking inhabitants falling under the sovereignty of neighbouring states. Subsequent population movements – such as deportation, defection, the *Málenkij robot*, and foreign employment –

led to the migration and resettlement of many members of the nation.¹ In 1920 alone, approximately 3.3 million Hungarians found themselves living beyond the present borders of the country. Today only around 1.8 million Hungarians reside outside these borders, within the Carpathian Basin.² These circumstances imbue Hungarian nation-building with inherent dualities and tensions.³

Since 1989, there has been significant support and institution building for Hungarian communities abroad, facilitated by the Hungarian state. However, debates surrounding the Status Law, dual citizenship, and simplified naturalization procedures have increasingly divided Hungary's political elite, though this division has diminished in recent years.

To foster the development of a common Hungarian identity and related policies, it is crucial to conduct regular and reliable assessments of Hungarian communities beyond the borders. This involves addressing emerging issues and trends and understanding the perspectives of new generations. The current research does not undertake this task; thus, it neither aims nor is able to provide comprehensive solutions for the complex challenges faced by Hungarian communities abroad.⁴ Instead, it aims to illustrate the shifts in emphasis within Hungarian nation-building, elicit the rationale behind state engagement, and outline the key principles guiding state initiatives concerning Hungarians beyond the borders. Additionally, it seeks to discuss the evolution of the national policy support system and the framework of available subsidies and benefits. The study employs a jurisprudential methodology, focusing primarily on the examination of the regulatory framework and the dogmatics of these rules.

2. Dilemmas of the Cultural and Political Dimensions of the Concept of Nation

The discourse surrounding cultural communities played a defining role in the system of legitimization and public discourse of the Horthy era. However, during the state socialist period, issues concerning Hungarians beyond the borders were

1 Gáva et al., 2017, 19.

2 The significant population decline among non-Hungarian communities after the turn of the millennium led to a somewhat slowed shift in ethnic relations in the region, previously observed in the 1990s, to the detriment of the Hungarian community. Thus, over the two decades following the millennium, there was a somewhat paradoxical shift towards the stabilization of the proportion of Hungarians, alongside an acceleration in the decline of the population of the Carpathian Basin. See: Kapitány, 2013, pp. 61–62.

3 In social science literature, the concept of nation is fundamentally interpreted in two distinct ways: firstly as a political or state-based entity and secondly as a cultural-linguistic community. See, for example: Kiss, 2015, pp. 110–115; Romsics, 2004.

4 In this regard, see, for example: Bitskey, 2010; Bárdi et al., 2008; Közigazgatási és Igazságügyi Minisztérium, Nemzetpolitikai Államtitkárság (2011–2013).

subject to a prolonged and enforced silence. It was only from the 1970s onwards that debates and research on national consciousness gradually re-emerged in the public sphere.⁵ Following the transition to democracy, achieving consensus among political parties on issues of identity politics remained elusive. This led to increasingly contentious debates regarding the Hungarian state's obligations towards Hungarians residing beyond its borders, particularly from the latter half of the 1990s. Nevertheless, there was a general agreement that preserving the well-being of Hungarians living beyond the borders was both in Hungary's interest and constituted its responsibility.⁶ This consensus was notably enshrined in a constitutional provision for the first time in Hungarian history, which stated, 'The Republic of Hungary bears a sense of responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living outside its borders and shall promote and foster their relations with Hungary.'⁷ Building upon this national responsibility clause, Act LXII on Hungarians living in neighbouring countries was enacted in 2001 (hereinafter: the Status Act).

However, with the adoption of the Fundamental Law, a re-evaluation of the concept of nationhood took place. While elements of the cultural nature of the nation as a concept were retained, the emphasis shifted towards a political definition.⁸ The redefined national responsibility clause in Article D) reflects a stronger political concept of the nation, stating,

Bearing in mind that there is one single Hungarian nation that belongs together, Hungary shall bear responsibility for the fate of Hungarians living beyond its borders, shall facilitate the survival and development of their communities, support their efforts to preserve their Hungarian identity, ensure the effective use of their individual and collective rights, assist in the establishment of their community self-governments, and promote their prosperity in their native lands, as well as foster their cooperation with each other and with Hungary.

Furthermore, Act XLV of 2010 on national unity states, 'All members and communities of Hungarians are part of the united Hungarian nation, whose unity across state borders is a reality.'

Although addressing these issues is challenging given the historical context of the Central European region, it remains essential to distinguish between the two concepts of nation to avoid conflating them, as this could have serious implications for the functioning and democratic legitimacy of the Hungarian public law system.

5 Ablonczy and Bárdi, 2010, p. 13.

6 For further details, see Kukorelli, 2018, pp. 8–9.

7 Article 6 (3) of Act XX of 1949 on the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary.

8 Kukorelli, 2013, pp. 11–12.

The Preamble of the Fundamental Law, titled 'National Avowal', begins with the declaration: 'WE, THE MEMBERS OF THE HUNGARIAN NATION, at the beginning of the new millennium, with a sense of responsibility for every Hungarian, hereby proclaim the following: [...]' The capitalized wording in the Preamble specifically refers to the political interpretation of the nation in addition to the cultural one. This could pose difficulties of interpretation if the cultural concept of the nation had not become predominant among the Hungarian population over the past century, as it has in many Central and Eastern European countries.

The elevation of the 'one single Hungarian nation that belongs together' to a constitutional subject suggests that the scope of the Fundamental Law extends to the entirety of historical Hungary, particularly to those areas where Hungarians still reside today.⁹ This formulation can be attributed to the intention of the Hungarian Parliament, which drafted the Fundamental Law, to assert the Hungarian nation's right to self-determination. However, it is important to note that the Fundamental Law pertains to a state, not to a cultural nation.

It is also worth considering that when the preamble speaks of responsibility, it refers specifically to responsibility for 'all Hungarians' and not 'all citizens'. While the responsibility for Hungarian citizens does not exclude concern for all other Hungarians, it does so within the framework of an additional responsibility.¹⁰ The phrase 'We, the citizens of Hungary' at the end of the 'National Avowal' attempts to clarify the conceptual confusion outlined above, and the remainder of the sentence also signals that national minorities in Hungary are not merely objects of national cooperation but rather its subjects.

The original provisions of the Status Act were primarily aimed at facilitating prosperity within one's homeland. This is evidenced by the fact that Hungarian citizenship regulations at the time were based on the premise that relocation to Hungary was a prerequisite for naturalization. However, the 2010 amendment to the Citizenship Act significantly altered the course of Hungarian national policy. Simplified naturalization without relocation now offers far more opportunities to those who choose it, compared to obtaining a document identifying one as being an ethnic Hungarian or the relative of an ethnic Hungarian under the Status Act. According to the amended rules of the Status Act, Hungarian citizenship is no longer a disqualifying factor in the process of obtaining an identification document that ascertains that a person is an ethnic Hungarian. The crucial distinction now lies in whether someone has relocated to Hungary or remains an ethnic Hungarian living abroad.

In an effort to create new national identity politics, the Fundamental Law has moved beyond the concerns associated with the cultural nation's integrating function and its tendency to separate from the majority. However, the definition

9 Fleck et al., 2011, p. 63.

10 Halász and Horváth, 2018, p. 145.

of nation remains contradictory: the Fundamental Law does not clearly identify the political community to which it applies, as the concepts of political and cultural nation are ‘inconsistently and contradictorily presented in the text’.¹¹

3. The Principal Justifications for the Hungarian State’s Responsibility

The justification for the state’s responsibility regarding the fate of Hungarians living beyond the borders is presented based on five perspectives.¹²

1. *Historical considerations.* The presence of Hungarians beyond the borders serves as a reminder of historical Hungary, where the cultural heritage of the Hungarian national communities remains a legacy of the former state.

2. *Social aspects.* Tens of thousands of families in Hungary maintain familial ties across the border, making the State’s attention not only a national imperative but also a social one.

3. *Labour market and economic interests.* In the context of current migration trends, it is in Hungary’s interest to attract skilled workers of Hungarian ethnicity. The immigration of Hungarians from abroad also helps mitigate the country’s demographic decline. Additionally, Hungary needs to encourage a reciprocal process where temporary work and residency allow individuals to accumulate knowledge and capital that can be reinvested in other regions of the Carpathian Basin, thereby supporting internal reintegration. A similar pattern exists in the market for cultural and educational goods driven by the Hungarian language. Hungarians living beyond the borders are not only consumers in this market but also contributors as producers of cultural goods.

4. *Moral arguments.* After the First World War, certain ethnic groups sought independence from the Hungarian state, a desire that became realized through international relations. The Hungarian state has a responsibility towards those Hungarians who, along with their homeland, were separated from Hungary and subjected to foreign rule in 1918 and 1945 due to erroneous political decisions.

5. *Political considerations.* The Fundamental Law no longer requires residency in Hungary to vote in parliamentary elections, and Act CCIII of 2011 on the Elections of Members of Parliament similarly imposes no such restriction. However, a distinction is drawn between Hungarian citizens residing in Hungary and those living abroad. The former may cast two ballots in parliamentary elections: one vote for a single-member constituency and one for the national party list. Citizens living abroad may only cast one ballot for the national party list, which can be submitted via postal vote. Consequently, Hungarian citizens living

11 Chronowski, 2015, p. 7.

12 See the first four aspects in more detail: Ablonczy and Bárdi, 2010, pp. 25–26.

outside the country's borders, i.e. without residency in Hungary, now participate in Hungarian political affairs, although a vote in a single-member constituency carries approximately three times the weight of a vote for the national party list.¹³ This change presents a paradigm shift in Hungarian electoral regulations, potentially impacting the image of the Hungarian political community.

4. The Fundamental Principles Guiding State Efforts

Below we summarize the generally accepted principles of political responsibility assumed for Hungarians beyond the borders:

1. *Breaking down barriers to cooperation and communication posed by borders.* This principle involves reinforcing the sense of belonging to the global Hungarian community while maintaining the territorial *status quo*. Partial realization of this goal has been achieved through European integration. Except for two regions (Vojvodina in Serbia and Transcarpathia in the Ukraine), most Hungarians live within EU borders. A historical region within the EU with a significant Hungarian population – Transylvania, in Romania – has been admitted to the Schengen area as recently as 2025. It is important to recognize that Hungarian communities outside the EU are often considered disadvantaged. Even within the EU, border regions may face developmental challenges due to limited resources such as language proficiency, education, and institutional advocacy. Moreover, the distribution of EU funds tends to favour national centres, potentially exacerbating the disadvantages faced by these border regions.¹⁴

Since 2011, the simplified naturalization process has strengthened the right to belong to the broader Hungarian community. It facilitates the free resettlement of Hungarians abroad and their participation in Hungarian education and the labour market. However, this development raises the question of whether the Hungarian state is taking adequate and appropriate steps – beyond emphasizing the historical obligation to remain in one's homeland – to ensure that Hungarians living beyond the borders can thrive in their native regions.

2. *Representation of the interests of Hungarians beyond the borders in the European Union.* Implementing this principle remains a significant task for the current Hungarian government. This is particularly challenging in the light of the EU's lack of a comprehensive and consistent minority policy, which often fails to distinguish adequately between immigrant communities and historically indigenous nationalities. Moreover, the EU does not possess explicit legislative authority to enact laws specifically concerning the protection of

13 For previous election results in this direction, refer to: www.valasztasirendszer.hu/?p=1943608.

14 Ablonczy and Bárdi, 2010, p. 23.

national minorities.¹⁵ Member States are currently debating the very necessity of regulations concerning national identities. It is noteworthy to mention the 2013 European Citizens' Initiative, Minority SafePack, which sought to incorporate specific aspects of national, ethnic, and linguistic minority protection into EU law. The European Commission is required to address a citizens' initiative substantively once it manages to gather over one million valid signatures across at least seven EU Member States.¹⁶ The European Commission dismissed the registration of the European initiative, as it determined that the proposed regulation falls outside the scope of the EU's legislative competence and asserted that it should be implemented at the level of the Member States. However, the initiators contested the decision of rejection before the Court of Justice of the European Union,¹⁷ citing that the Commission had failed to consider the package of measures submitted as annexes to the initiative, as well as the safeguard clause enabling the utilization of the various elements of the measure. The European Court of Justice annulled the previous decision,¹⁸ and in 2017, the European Commission passed a favourable decision regarding the partial registration of the European citizens' initiative. Subsequently, more than 1.1 million authenticated signatures were collected in 11 Member States, meeting the required number of signatures for validity. The initiators submitted the draft legislative proposals to the European Commission in early 2020.¹⁹

It is also noteworthy that in May 2020, the Forum of Representatives from the Carpathian Basin issued a call to the parliaments of Central and Eastern European nations to collectively advocate for the recognition of the right to national identity as a fundamental human right within the UN and European organizations. In 2023, the focus shifted towards highlighting the integral nature of minority rights to European values, emphasizing their significance as Ukraine pursues European Union membership.

3. *The 'expectation' of securing local self-government rights.* Hungary expects the administrative decentralization of neighbouring countries, hoping this will

15 Article 19 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union can offer protection against nationality-based negative discrimination in certain circumstances: '[...] the Council, acting unanimously in accordance with a special legislative procedure and after obtaining the consent of the European Parliament, may take appropriate action to combat discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation.' Based on this authorization, the Council issued Directive 2000/43 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons regardless of racial or ethnic origin, aiming to establish a framework for combating discrimination based on racial or ethnic origin within the Member States. The Directive applies to all individuals in both public and private sectors, including governmental bodies, within the scope of the powers granted to the Union.

16 Refer to Article 11 of the Treaty on European Union for further details.

17 Hungary intervened in support of the plaintiff, while the Slovak Republic and Romania intervened in support of the defendant.

18 T-646/13 – Minority SafePack – one million signatures for diversity in Europe v Commission.

19 See in this context: Manzinger, 2020, p. 7–30.

address a significant portion of the minority issues. One of the objectives of decentralization was to enhance the chances of individuals belonging to minority groups to preserve their identity, especially in situations where coexistence with the majority and sharing a common social existence clearly lean towards assimilation. The introduction of the local self-government system in 1990, with its extensive tasks and powers, and the minority self-government system, legitimized in 1993 with special preferences, were partially intended to create 'exportable' systems of self-government. These could serve as references in debates on the situation of Hungarian minorities beyond the borders: the local self-government system could have been exemplary in settlements where the Hungarian population is the majority, while the minority self-government system could serve as a model where the minority population is in the minority. However, it has become evident that this 'exemplary' approach has been largely disregarded by neighbouring states as a comparative model of self-government and minority rights.²⁰ A psychological barrier to Hungary's current cooperation policy may stem from the expectation of reciprocity from the other side in all matters, which leads to the rejection of unilateral initiatives. Rather than relying on often unproductive persuasion and symbolic gestures, it is crucial to articulate the Hungarian position in the language of the neighbouring countries without expecting immediate reciprocity.²¹ When appointing Hungarian ambassadors to neighbouring countries, emphasis could be placed on their ability to present the Hungarian position regularly and effectively in the media using the language of the country in question.

4. *The right to maintain an autonomous institutional system.* Hungarians living in neighbouring countries undoubtedly have the right to uphold an independent system of institutions – administrative, political, ecclesiastical, educational, cultural, etc. – necessary for preserving their identity and social acceptance. However, they often lack the financial resources to support these institutions independently.²² These collective rights also imply territorial and/or cultural autonomy, which is a primary reason why many states pre-emptively reject the idea of financing these institutions. This issue is closely tied to the inapplicability of the nation-state concept in the Central and Eastern European region, a situation that will persist as long as regional states continue to view themselves in terms of homogeneous nations.²³ If multinationalism is a reality, the only appropriate response is a 'multinational' state. The establishment, maintenance, and support for educational, cultural, and religious institutions is indispensable and non-negotiable. This also applies to political representation

20 For further details, refer to: Kovács, 1996a, pp. 200–201.

21 See: Ablonczy and Bárdi, 2010, p. 27.

22 For instance, if the ethnic community is impoverished and unable to sustain its own schools, the general education system must meet their needs.

23 Kovács, 1996b, pp. 28–39; Pierré-Caps, 1995, p. 66.

through national minority parties. Today, achieving linguistic and cultural autonomy must be a realistic goal. This entails creating a state-funded system of linguistic and cultural institutions, proportionally supported by the budget, over which the respective national minority organizations have the right to exercise control and decision-making.²⁴ Securing funding for these institutions, which perform state functions, is a strategic objective for most Hungarian organizations beyond the borders. Until this goal is achieved, governmental subsidies from Hungary can help sustain the operation of these institutions.²⁵

5. *Supporting the Hungarian organizational and NGO sector beyond borders.* The combined effects of reduced political barriers, advances in information and communication technologies, decreased transportation costs, and the proliferation of democracy have created a fertile environment for NGOs to expand their influence and establish cross-border relationships and networks. While these opportunities have made financial support more accessible, they can also undermine internal mechanisms of solidarity, cooperation, and initiative. Building civil society is fundamentally an endogenous process. Donors in Hungary can and should create a framework to support the operation and evolution of Hungarian civil society beyond the borders, but they should avoid directly shaping it themselves.²⁶ This responsibility should rest with local Hungarians. The same principle applies to authorities in neighbouring countries. Their role is to foster the development of civil societies by creating a conducive legal framework, including freedom of association and a free market, which supports the growth of civil society. This issue is particularly sensitive due to the legacy of communist regimes in Eastern Europe, which often controlled civil societies through the establishment of ‘GONGOS’ (government-organized non-governmental organizations) that lacked independence from the state.²⁷

The Hungarian foundations and NGOs beyond the borders primarily aim to strengthen Hungarian identity, preserve the language and traditions, and pursue cultural objectives. This includes activities such as publishing literary works in Hungarian, producing cultural and public journals and magazines for national minorities, and releasing publications necessary for practising religion in the mother tongue. Additionally, they organize conferences related to nationality, events focused on preserving cultural and religious traditions, and programmes aimed at fostering the cultural identity and religious life of Hungarians within the community. They also undertake tasks such as archiving exhibition materials from museums, galleries, local history exhibitions, archives, village halls, and more.

24 For the importance of collective rights in the protection of national minority rights, see in detail Móri, 2023, pp. 453–471.

25 Ablonczy and Bárdi, 2010, p. 23.

26 Rixer, 2013, pp. 14–15.

27 For further details, see Carothers, 1999, p. 411.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that while the institutional system for Hungarians living beyond the borders is more or less established, it faces fundamental challenges related to maintenance and efficiency. The fate of this institutional framework, which requires a concrete action plan, represents the primary concern of the policy activity under discussion. Currently, there is a lack of a mutually recognized set of principles among political parties, resulting in existing support programmes facing criticism from partisan detractors. This dynamic also complicates professional adjustments.

5. The Evolution of Discounts and Subsidies Available to Hungarians Living Abroad

The concept of national, all-Hungarian thinking can be traced back to József Antall's declaration, who, after the 1990 democratic elections and the victory of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF), referred to himself as the Prime Minister of 15 million Hungarians. The Antall government aimed to establish a Central European model for addressing minority issues and initiated the creation of necessary local government institutions and support policies. According to the Antall Doctrine, Hungarian minority policy should adhere to international and minority rights standards, and the opinions of Hungarians living abroad should be sought before decisions affecting them are made in Hungary.²⁸

Subsequently, the institutional framework for Hungarians living beyond the borders began to take shape. Initially, a state secretariat was established within the Prime Minister's Office. From 1992 onwards, the Office for Hungarians Beyond Borders was created to comprehensively address the needs and concerns of Hungarians living outside the country's current borders.²⁹ In 1993, the Hungarian government established the Illyés Public Foundation to create a financial fund dedicated to supporting Hungarians living beyond the borders. Beginning in 1994, the formation of sub-curatoriums allowed for the involvement of local intellectuals in the decision-making process. As a result of these developments, aid policy evolved into a significant social issue, gaining both political and professional legitimacy.³⁰

Later, in preparation for integration into broader European structures, it became necessary to reinterpret the 'Soviet friendship treaties' with newly established neighbouring countries. Hungary clearly communicated that it had no territorial claims and respected the Helsinki Convention.

28 Bárdi, 2004, pp. 139–146.

29 Bárdi and Misovicz, 2010, pp. 201–202.

30 Bárdi and Szarka, 2008, p. 4.

As Prime Minister of the MSZP–SZDSZ coalition from 1994 to 1998, Gyula Horn prioritized a threefold focus in foreign policy: European integration, relations with neighbouring states, and the concerns of Hungarians beyond the borders. One of his most significant tasks was to establish good neighbourly relations and strengthen ties with Western Europe. The Horn government stressed that the issue of Hungarians beyond the borders fell within Hungary's foreign policy sphere and committed to ensuring it did not compromise regional stability. The approach was grounded in European legal norms, viewing Hungarians beyond the borders not merely as a segment of the nation but as a disadvantaged group needing concrete, pragmatic solutions. During this period, there was a notable shift from relief-oriented aid policies towards building an economically sustainable system. This included promoting cross-border cooperation through programmes, training, and developing a network of partners via a cross-border foundation system.

From 1998 to 2002, the Fidesz–FKGP–MDF coalition prepared Hungary for European Union accession, framing it as a means of national reunification. A key development during this time was the establishment of the Hungarian Standing Conference (MÁÉRT) in 1999. MÁÉRT's primary goal was to unite legitimate political organizations from the Carpathian Basin and the diaspora to participate in the preparation and decision-making of Hungarian national policies.³¹

Fidesz perceived the presence of Hungarians living beyond the borders as a natural inheritance rather than a burden. This perspective informed their approach to policy, focusing on integrating these communities into a broader national framework rather than viewing their challenges as obstacles.³²

Through the creation of the Status Act, the Hungarian Parliament aimed to support the retention and growth of Hungarian identity among individuals living beyond the borders, as well as the preservation of their cultural and linguistic heritage. Commonly referred to as the Status Law, this pivotal legislation regulated the relationship between individuals and groups abroad with the Hungarian state and expanded the range of benefits available to them. Under the national policy of the Orbán government, significant efforts were made to bolster the stability and legitimacy of organizations operating beyond Hungary's borders. This approach reinforced individuals' Hungarian identity and reassured them that their homeland had not forgotten them despite decades of isolation.³³

There was no consensus among the opposition regarding the enactment of the Status Act. Critics raised concerns about Hungary's lack of prior consultation with its neighbouring countries before passing the law. Slovakia and Romania were particularly critical during the preparatory stages, expressing dismay over the discriminatory treatment of majority citizens not covered by the law and

31 Kéri Nagy, 2004, p. 245.

32 Bárdi, 2004, p. 145.

33 Kéri Nagy, 2004, pp. 244–245.

considering it offensive to their sovereignty to enact a law that also applied in scope to their citizens.

With the amendments made during the Medgyessy government's tenure, the Status Act became acceptable for the European Union as well. It is noteworthy that the Status Act also brought about a change in international thinking on minority protection: the Venice Commission, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe adopted the concept of the so-called 'kin minority', which asserts the right of the home country to assume responsibility for minorities beyond its borders.³⁴

Following the enactment of the Status Act, the Illyés Public Foundation was given the authority to manage educational support. An extensive network of offices was established with the involvement of teachers' associations from beyond the borders. However, this network was dismantled by the Gyurcsány government in December 2006.

The national policy decisions of the first Gyurcsány government marked a setback for Hungarian communities beyond the borders. These decisions resulted in a decrease in the influence of the Hungarian political elite in those areas and a failure to establish effective cooperation.³⁵ With a shift in rhetoric, assisting individuals to remain in their homeland became a central concept, leading to the discontinuation of the Office for Hungarians Beyond Borders, the Teleki László Institute,³⁶ and MÁÉRT. On a positive note, the merger of the Illyés Public Foundation and the Apáczai Public Foundation into the Homeland Fund unified the support concept for Hungarians living beyond the borders and allocated a separate budget for them. The referendum held on 5 December 2004, concerning the granting of dual citizenship to Hungarians living beyond the borders, underscored the state of Hungary's political elite and public opinion at the time. Expressions from leftist-liberal political circles and intellectuals framed Hungarians beyond the borders as a threat to Hungary's prosperity, casting the relationship with them as a matter of political self-determination. Following the referendum results, minority Hungarian communities felt their connection to the

34 Venice Commission, 2001.

35 See in detail Bárdi and Misovicz, 2010, pp. 206–208.

36 The Teleki László Foundation, established in 1991 by the Government of the Republic of Hungary as the legal successor of the Hungarian Studies Institute founded in 1986, served as the country's sole workshop addressing not only global political issues but also relations with neighbouring states and Hungarians residing beyond the borders. Alongside its roles as a scientific organizer and programme facilitator, the Foundation undertook significant grant and governmental assignments. As part of these efforts, it coordinated the programme 'Survey and Protection of the Hungarian Built Heritage beyond the Border' from 1999 to 2006 under the commission of the Ministry of National Cultural Heritage. In 2006, the Government discontinued the Teleki László Foundation and instead opted to establish the Hungarian Institute for Foreign Affairs.

Hungarian elite and the homeland had diminished, as the issue primarily stirred emotional responses.

This divergence in approach highlights the varying attitudes of the Hungarian political elite towards Hungarians living beyond the borders. Right-wing governments have consistently prioritized the idea of a unified nation encompassing the entire Hungarian population, while left-leaning administrations have focused on maintaining good relations with neighbouring states and aligning with Western Europe. The political discourse has been marked by a tension between national interests and considerations related to neighbouring and European countries. Despite a general consensus on addressing the diaspora issue, the prioritization of these concerns has varied.

Under the second Orbán government, which assumed power in 2010, national policy towards Hungarians living beyond the borders was revitalized. One of the initial measures was the introduction of a simplified naturalization procedure, addressing and healing the discontent resulting from the 2004 referendum among many Hungarians living abroad.

The State Secretariat for National Policy and the Research Institute for National Strategy³⁷ were established, and the government developed the Wekerle Plan, which viewed the entire Carpathian Basin as a unified economic zone.³⁸ However, the Wekerle Plan, launched with the goal of fostering economic integration across the Carpathian Basin to align with national policy objectives, ultimately fell short of its ambitious targets by 2016. Bureaucratic hurdles and resource constraints hindered the full realization of the plan's objectives. Despite its lack of complete implementation, some elements of the Wekerle Plan were successfully integrated into the development strategies of various other regions. This partial adoption demonstrates the plan's influence on shaping broader economic and regional development efforts, even as its comprehensive vision remained unfulfilled.³⁹ Government Decree No. 31/2004 (28.II.)⁴⁰ outlined the rules for granting subsidies under the Act on Hungarian Nationality, establishing a system for Hungarian Nationality applications, including support for education, training, purchasing textbooks and teaching materials, as well as student grants. Currently,

37 For detailed information, refer to Government Decree No. 346/2012 (XII. 11.).

38 The programme named after former Finance Minister Sándor Wekerle articulated development goals by sector, focusing on the coordinated development of automotive and engineering supplier networks, the food economy, the green economy, tourism and health, as well as the creative industries and the ICT sector.

39 The Parliamentary Decision 1/2014 (I. 3.) on the National Development 2030 – National Development and Regional Development Concepts emphasizes the importance of Hungary's role as a bridge and includes territorial cooperation in the Carpathian Basin – strengthening relations with Hungarian regions beyond the borders – and cross-border objectives that also affect national policy.

40 Repealed by Article 15 of Government Decree No. 117/2011 (VII. 7.).

these opportunities are available under the same name within the grant scheme of the Bethlen Gábor Fund.

After the turn of the millennium, significant, systematic, and comprehensive research efforts were initiated to map the social capital of communities beyond the borders,⁴¹ yielding results that aided in defining and refining strategic national policy objectives. While many initiatives, plans, and legislative changes have been proposed and evaluated, what stands out is that the outcomes of these programmes primarily highlight the challenges within the national policy strategy of the era. These challenges were shaped by economic and social processes, budgetary and institutional constraints, and both domestic and foreign policy dynamics.

Concurrently with the adoption of the Fundamental Law, the Bethlen Gábor Fund was established as the legal successor to the Homeland Fund. The Bethlen Gábor Fund aims to support Hungarians living beyond the borders in flourishing within their homeland and to streamline the administration of aid for national policy objectives.⁴²

Alongside financial support, the Hungarian government sought to integrate the issue of Hungarians living beyond the borders into public discourse through thematic years. This initiative was part of a broader strategy to engage various target groups and address their specific needs through dedicated programmes. Since 2012, the thematic years have been:

- 2012: *Year of Hungarian Nurseries Abroad*. This programme focused on improving nursery education quality and ensuring a smooth transition from Hungarian-language nurseries to schools. It included professional development for nursery teachers, methodological resources, and the adaptation of successful Hungarian educational practices abroad.

- 2013: *Year of Hungarian Schoolchildren Abroad*. The emphasis was on encouraging parents to enrol their children in Hungarian-language schools after nursery. The programme supported teachers' professional development and enhanced educational methodologies.

- 2014: *Year of Hungarian High School Students Abroad*. This year targeted students in 5th to 8th grades and aimed to bolster the choice of Hungarian-language institutions. Programmes were designed to support educational continuity and community engagement.

- 2015: *Year of Hungarian Vocational Education and Training Abroad*. The focus was on improving vocational education and training, including internships in Hungarian institutions. The Transcarpathian Social Programme Package was

41 For detailed information on the research, see: <http://www.nski.hu/megalapozo-tarsadalmi-gazdasagi-kutatasok-a-karpat-medenceben.html>.

42 Act CLXXXII of 2010 on the Bethlen Gábor Fund. For detailed information on the tasks and functioning of the Fund, refer to articles 1, 3, and 10.

also launched, offering salary supplements to professionals working in Hungarian and supporting childcare services.

– 2016: *Year of Young Hungarian Entrepreneurs from Abroad*. This initiative aimed to support young entrepreneurs and foster economic integration within the Carpathian Basin. It also included support for youth community programmes.

– 2017: *Year of Hungarian Family Businesses Abroad*. Focused on family businesses, this year provided opportunities for tenders and networking to strengthen economic ties in the Carpathian Basin.

These thematic years were designed to address various aspects of Hungarian life beyond the borders, enhancing educational, economic, and community opportunities while reinforcing Hungarian identity and connections within the broader national framework.

– 2018 marked the *Year of Hungarian Families Abroad*,⁴³ coinciding with the Year of Families programme series in Hungary. Additionally, research efforts were undertaken to understand contemporary notions of family, the process of partner selection, and the future outlook for those in mixed marriages. A crucial aspect of the programme involved fostering collaboration among family organizations across the Carpathian Basin, prioritizing the involvement of healthcare professionals working with families, and supporting the training of paediatricians, child psychologists, and general practitioners. Another key objective was to establish a network of midwives throughout the Carpathian Basin and to provide a starter package for newborns of Hungarian descent living abroad. Through the *Köldökszsinór* [Umbilical Cord] Programme, starting from 2018, Hungarian children born outside Hungary and their families gained access to maternity support⁴⁴ and the ‘baby bond’⁴⁵ for early life expenses.

Importantly, both the maternity allowance and the start-of-life grant are entitlements and are not subject to application procedures: applications can be submitted either in person at Hungarian consulates or government offices in Hungary, via postal services (Hungarian State Treasury), or electronically following registration.

– 2019 was designated as the *Year of Hungarian Children Abroad*. As part of this programme series, 80 percent of the resources are allocated through competitive processes to Hungarian entrepreneurs, religious institutions, and NGOs abroad that focus on assisting children and families. Development grants aimed at

43 For more information on the programme and related applications, please visit: <https://kulhonicssaladokeve.kormany.hu/palyazatok>.

44 A one-time benefit of HUF 64 125 per child in 2024 or HUF 85 500 per child in the case of twins. The allowance is available to the biological mother, adoptive parent, or guardian of a child with Hungarian citizenship or a Hungarian identity card, if the child was born after 30 June 2017.

45 Parents or legal guardians of children born after 30 June 2017, with Hungarian citizenship or a Hungarian identity card can apply. The Hungarian State Treasury credits the start-of-life allowance to the account opened for the child.

Hungarian-speaking kindergartens, schools, and higher education institutions are intended to make the Hungarian institutional system more appealing to parents. A key goal is to ensure that Hungarian national minority kindergartens and schools maintain a higher standard than majority-language institutions. The third phase of the ambitious Kindergarten Development Programme, initiated in 2016, is scheduled for completion in 2021. Its objective is to ensure that every Hungarian child has access to a Hungarian-language kindergarten with excellent pedagogical programmes and attractive infrastructure. The Carpathian Basin Kindergarten Development Programme has facilitated the construction or refurbishment of numerous facilities in neighbouring countries. Additionally, the Hungarian Paediatricians' Association has joined the programme, participating in outreach initiatives targeting Hungarian paediatricians across borders.

– 2020 was designated as the *Year of National Cohesion*,⁴⁶ aiming to symbolize the unity of the Hungarian nation through a series of commemorations, albeit conducted virtually, marking the 100th anniversary of the Trianon Peace Treaty. The substantial volume of expenditure allocated for national policy and transnational tasks underscores the government's commitment to addressing issues concerning cross-border communities as a matter of genuine national importance.⁴⁷

– 2021 was designated as the *Year of National Restart*, during which systemic programmes in education, culture, youth, family, economy, church, sports, and healthcare were renewed and expanded with new elements. Amid the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, efforts to strengthen Hungarian–Hungarian relations and conduct certain programmes and meetings shifted to online platforms. The national policy resources and programmes, which have seen a tenfold increase since 2010, have reached every Hungarian-inhabited settlement and community across the Carpathian Basin.⁴⁸

– In 2022, designated as the *Year of the Active Nation*, certain government programmes disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic were restarted, with a continued emphasis on children and youth. The Kőrösi Csoma Sándor Programme resumed efforts to reach new communities in the diaspora with the help of scholarship recipients. New scout troops were established, and several dozen weekend Hungarian schools were launched. Additionally, the European Hungarian Youth Council (EMIT) was established as an umbrella organization to strengthen the identity of young Hungarians in Europe. Starting in 2022,

46 Parliamentary Resolution 18/2019 (VI. 18.) on the proclamation of 2020 as the Year of National Cohesion.

47 Expenditures (as they were initially planned) for national policy/transnational tasks with a policy objective for 2020 can be found at: <https://www.parlament.hu/irom41/06322/adatok/fejezetek/00nemzetpolitika.pdf>.

48 Year of National Restart: <https://kormany.hu/hirek/2021-a-nemzeti-ujrakezdes-eve-megujult-formaban-folytatodnak-a-nemzetpolitikai-programok>.

the Twinning Programme, which began in 2015, also began supporting the enhancement of economic ties.⁴⁹

– In 2023, designated as the *Year of the Caring Nation*, the concept of mutual support among Hungarians became prominent, particularly in response to the Russian–Ukrainian war, where many rallied to assist the Hungarian community in Transcarpathia. Support for families will continue with a focus on strengthening the network of healthcare professionals. An important objective includes fostering collaboration and professional development for educators abroad, as well as organizing camps for children. The Entrepreneurship Mentoring Programme across the Carpathian Basin will be revitalized, pairing start-up entrepreneurs with experienced professionals and business owners. Additionally, under the Hungarian in the Motherland Programme, support for the education and upbringing of Hungarian children abroad will increase from HUF 22 400 to HUF 100 000. This support will be available to children residing abroad (excluding those in the diaspora), including nursery, primary, and secondary school students, as well as college and university students, who are receiving education in Hungarian within their home country.⁵⁰

– In 2024, designated as the *Year of the Collaborative Nation*, there is a significant focus on supporting programmes that facilitate cooperation and networking across various spheres of life. The Continuity in the Homeland Programme continues to include initiatives such as the mentoring programme abroad, regional economic forums, and the Entrepreneurship Network, which had 3,000 members last year. Additionally, the Carpathian Basin Equestrian Programme supports equestrian associations throughout the region.⁵¹

It is crucial to address, albeit indirectly, the dilemmas associated with this topic. When examining the entire support system and the operations of the Bethlen Gábor Fund, it is necessary to acknowledge certain criticisms and consider potential future directions while highlighting the quantitative data and positive aspects. A fundamental question arises: Are the support initiatives achieving their stated objectives? Despite the considerable investment of funds and effort by the Hungarian government and its people, there is concern that these efforts might inadvertently lead to the creation of a ‘Hungarian enclave’. Such an enclave, lacking adequate proficiency in the majority language, could struggle to successfully integrate into local communities. While the enhancement of education beyond Hungary’s borders is undoubtedly progressive, there is concern that educated youth may contribute their skills primarily to Western Europe,

49 Year of the Active Nation: <https://www.kulhonimagyarok.hu/bla/potapi-2022-a-cselekvo-nemzet-eve-folytatjuk-a-kozos-munkat-a-nyugat-europai-magyar-szervezetekkel>.

50 <https://kormany.hu/hirek/100-ezer-forintra-no-a-kulhoni-magyar-gyermekek-oktatasi-nevelesitamogatasa>.

51 Year of the Collaborative Nation: <https://kormany.hu/hirek/2024-az-egyuttmukodo-nemzet-eve>.

facilitated by Hungarian citizenship easing their access to the EU labour market. Therefore, it is imperative for the system to incorporate post-support follow-up mechanisms, including periodic documentation of utilization (at intervals such as 5, 10, or 15 years) and evaluation of outcomes. This approach would ensure accountability and enable a thorough assessment of the effectiveness and impact of the support initiatives over time.

Another crucial issue pertains to the communication of aid. The national strategy, including aid policies, is intricately linked with the discourse surrounding national identity – a concept fraught with political undertones. The phenomenon of ‘national identity surrender’, stemming from a perceived ‘lack of national identity’ in Hungary’s discourse on the nation and Hungarian identity due to political divisions, is prevalent. Common stereotypes regarding Hungarians residing beyond the borders include perceptions that they are ‘lost to us’, ‘in need of support’, or ‘not truly Hungarian’. Consequently, there should be a greater emphasis on communicating the extent and utilization of aid in a more comprehensible and deliberate manner. Poor communication of subsidies could exacerbate negative perceptions of Hungarians living beyond the borders among certain segments of society, which would be detrimental.

Following a concise overview of the development, history, and progression of the national policy support system, it is imperative to examine the areas, modalities, and frameworks through which support is presently accessible to Hungarians residing beyond the border, and their relatives.

6. The Institutional Framework for Benefits and Support, as Well as the Process of Accessing Them

The four fundamental pillars of Hungarian national policy are: unifying the nation under public law, reinforcing Hungarian identity, maintaining connections with Hungarian organizations abroad, and promoting cross-border economic development.

After 2010, Hungarian aid policy has shifted to focus primarily on supporting the institutional framework of Hungarian communities rather than providing ad hoc assistance. The robust reproduction of identity within these communities underscores the prioritization of strengthening the institutional network.

The cornerstone of this focused aid policy is the Bethlen Gábor Fund. The establishment of the Fund represents a new approach to aid management, aligning national strategic visions with the available resources to support them.⁵²

52 Act CLXXXII of 2010 on the Bethlen Gábor Fund.

The Fund is overseen by a four-member committee (hereinafter: the Committee).⁵³ The Committee operates per the policy guidelines set by MÁÉRT and works closely with MÁÉRT's specialized committees. Since 2011, there has been a shift in emphasis from grant-based funding towards long-term, normative grants. However, opportunities for applications remain available. Support may still be granted to individuals, legal entities, NGOs, cultural institutions, and programmes based on individual assessment.

The Bethlen Gábor Fund provides aid for:

- a. The well-being of Hungarians living beyond Hungary's borders – both individually and collectively. This includes supporting their material and spiritual prosperity, preserving and further developing their language and culture, and maintaining and strengthening their multifaceted relations with Hungary and with each other through initiatives such as the *Szülőföldön Magyarul* Programme (which may be roughly translated as 'In Hungarian in the Land of Birth' or 'In Hungarian in the Homeland' programme; the name refers to the areas where an ethnic Hungarian minority exists outside of Hungary, and not to Hungary as a homeland).
- b. The operation of the *Magyarság Háza* [House of Hungarians] Programme,⁵⁴ aimed at promoting mutual understanding among Hungarian communities living inside and outside Hungary's borders, showcasing key examples of national achievement, and fostering research in Hungarian studies and national policy.
- c. The implementation of the *Határtalanul* [Borderless] Programme,⁵⁵ which focuses on building Hungarian–Hungarian relations.
- d. The execution of economic development and business promotion programmes for Hungarians living beyond Hungary's borders, as well as coordinating support mediation tasks.
- e. Following the aggression of the Russian Federation in Ukraine, targeted support on a large scale is provided to Hungarians living in Transcarpathia.

53 The members of the Commission include the Minister responsible for national policy, the person appointed by the Minister responsible for the organization of public administration, the person appointed by the Minister responsible for public finances, and the State Secretary responsible for national policy.

54 The *Magyarság Háza* Programme was established in 2011 with the support of the Hungarian government within the framework of the Bethlen Gábor Fund Management Ltd. Its mission is to shape a positive image of Hungarian culture through various preservation, entertaining, and cultural programmes, showcasing the unity of the Hungarian people, and fostering identity and connections.

55 The *Határtalanul* Programme makes the goals and values of national policy tangible through the opportunity to develop personal contacts with Hungarians beyond the borders. The programme enables schoolchildren in Hungary to familiarize themselves with a community beyond the border through class trips. For more information about the programme, please visit <https://hatartalanul.net/>.

Additionally, the Fund operates the Research Institute for Hungarian Communities Abroad. It provides support in a broad range of areas, including:

- a. Education, training, continuing education, support for textbooks and teaching materials, scholarships, and community sports activities; provision of student support for those in higher education.
- b. Social assistance.
- c. Development, preservation, enrichment, and promotion of Hungarian culture and science, as well as protection of the traditional Hungarian cultural landscape.
- d. Economic purposes, particularly focusing on tourism, hospitality, environmental protection, and energy efficiency.
- e. Training related to EU membership and the utilization of EU funding.
- f. Mass media purposes, including both print and electronic press.
- g. Allocation to municipalities, associations of municipalities, and municipal federations as beneficiaries.
- h. Cross-border programmes, also supported by the European Union.
- i. Development of shared infrastructure with Hungarian settlements, including road and bridge construction, municipal and communication support, maximizing the utilization of natural resources, establishing and reinforcing twinning relationships, especially cultural and sports ties, creating joint environmental protection programmes, and facilitating conditions for local border traffic along the external border of the European Union.

The concentrated nature of the Bethlen Gábor Fund (BGA) as a nationwide grant manager is highlighted by its assumption of responsibilities previously overseen by the Human Resources Support Management Agency (EMET) regarding coordination with churches and tasks assigned by the Minister responsible for nationality policy, starting from 1 September 2018. It also took over the National Cooperation Fund from 1 January 2019. The CEO of the BGA prepares a tender strategy, based on which the BGA formulates individual calls for proposals and ensures their publication on the Fund's website.

In administering its grants, the Fund identifies and supports institutions of national significance and issues targeted, invitation-only calls for proposals for organizations and institutions tasked with priority national strategic missions.

Applications are processed by the BGA, which compiles a summary and decision proposal to be submitted to the Fund's Board and countersigned by the Secretary of State. Based on this summary, the Board proposes to the Committee regarding the acceptance of the applications and the form and amount of the support. Natural persons residing in neighbouring countries may also receive direct support according to the legislation. The BGA publishes a call for proposals

on its website at least once a year. Following the receipt of the application, the Committee decides on the normative support based on a proposal from the BGA, upon its acceptance.

Normative support is disbursed through collaboration with a financial institution based in Hungary that has a branch in the respective country, either directly or through an agreement made for this purpose.⁵⁶

In practice, it has become necessary to define the objectives, target groups, and instruments at the legislative level to fulfil the principle of responsibility towards Hungarians living beyond our borders, as articulated in the Fundamental Law. The amended Status Act provides detailed regulations concerning the support offered to Hungarians residing beyond the border and delineates the beneficiaries.

Following the amendment to the Act on Hungarian Citizenship, Hungarian citizens living outside the borders of Hungary have become beneficiaries of the Status Act, provided they do not have a residence in Hungary. Importantly, while benefits are granted on a subjective basis, individuals must apply for the support.

The Status Act applies to individuals residing in the Republic of Croatia, Romania, the Republic of Serbia, the Slovak Republic, the Republic of Slovenia, or Ukraine, who declare themselves to be of Hungarian nationality. It also extends to spouses and minor children living with Hungarians abroad, even if they do not identify as Hungarian nationals. Additionally, the law explicitly defines the individuals to whom it does not apply.⁵⁷

Some benefits and discounts are exclusively accessible to individuals holding a Hungarian identity card or to their relatives with a Hungarian relative card.⁵⁸ The Budapest Government Office handles all official matters related to issuing, replacing, or revoking these cards, while applications for identity cards can be submitted at the Hungarian diplomatic and consular missions designated for this purpose in the country of residence.

The entitlements provided by the cards include discounts on the use of services provided by cultural and public cultural institutions,⁵⁹ as well as student⁶⁰ and

56 For detailed information on the operation of the Fund and the procedural rules for grants, please refer to Government Decree No. 367/2010 (XII. 30.) regarding the implementation of Act CLXXXII of 2010 on the Bethlen Gábor Fund.

57 The Status Act does not apply to individuals who have voluntarily renounced their Hungarian citizenship; whose Hungarian citizenship has been revoked due to fraudulent acquisition; who have obtained immigrant, settled, refugee, or asylum seeker status in Hungary. Additionally, individuals of Hungarian nationality residing outside the states listed in Article 1 (1) are not subject to the Status Act; separate legislation governs them and their support.

58 See: Articles 19–22 of the Status Act; Government Decree No. 318/2001 (XII. 29.) regarding the procedure for issuing Hungarian identity cards and Hungarian family members' identity cards.

59 See: Article 4 of the Status Act; Decree No. 18/2003 (XII. 10.) of the National Council of Ministers on cultural benefits for individuals subject to Act LXII of 2001 on Hungarians living in neighbouring states.

60 See: Article 10 of the Status Act; Government Decree No. 319/2001 (XII. 29.) on student benefits for individuals covered by Act LXII of 2001 on Hungarians living in neighbouring countries.

travel discounts.⁶¹ The Status Act also provides for additional benefits and support in the fields of science,⁶² awards and scholarships,⁶³ support for teachers and trainers,⁶⁴ cross-border training,⁶⁵ support for education in neighbouring countries,⁶⁶ employment,⁶⁷ tasks of public service broadcasting bodies,⁶⁸ support for cross-border organizations,⁶⁹ and other areas not linked to identity cards. The Status Act does not cover support for healthcare in Hungary for persons of Hungarian nationality residing in Ukraine who declare themselves to be of Hungarian nationality.⁷⁰

The housing subsidy for the construction or purchase of new homes (CSOK) is available not only to Hungarians living abroad but also to any non-Hungarian citizen⁷¹ who is a registered residence in Hungary, has resided in the country for more than three months, and meets the other conditions set out in the Regulation. However, this possibility may encourage Hungarian families living abroad to leave their homeland, potentially weakening the community that remains in their home country.

The naturalization of foreign language certificates issued abroad, as well as the recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas, applies to both Hungarians living abroad and other foreign citizens.⁷² In the case of Hungarians living beyond

61 See: Article 8 of the Status Act; Government Decree No. 85/2007 (IV. 25.) on public passenger transport travel discounts. Starting from March 2024, MÁV offers free local public transport travel for holders of Hungarian identity cards. Previously, the green book allowed a 90 percent discount four times a year in Hungary. Now Hungarians living outside the country are entitled to unlimited free travel.

62 See: Article 5 of the Status Act; Article 3 (1) point i) and Article 16 of the Act XL of 1994 on the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

63 See: Article 6 of the Status Act; Decree No. 7/2004 (II. 26.) of the National Council of Ministers on Hungarian Literary Awards Beyond the Border; Government Decree No. 241/2016 (VIII. 16.) on the performance of cultural and scientific diplomatic tasks; Article 92 (5) of the Act CCIV of 2011 on National Higher Education.

64 See: Articles 11–12 of the Status Act; Government Decree No. 206/2003 (XII. 10.) on the implementation of the provisions of Act LXII of 2001 on Hungarians Living Abroad concerning teachers and trainers; Government Decision No. 1442/2013 (VII. 16.) on the establishment of the Hungarian Education Council Abroad.

65 See: Article 13 of the Status Act.

66 See: Article 14 of the Status Act.

67 See: Article 15 of the Status Act.

68 See: Article 17 of the Status Act.

69 See: Article 18 of the Status Act.

70 See: Decree No. 59/2007 (XII. 29.) of the Ministry of Health regarding the support of comprehensive healthcare provision to Hungarians living outside Hungary.

71 Article 6 of Government Decree No. 16/2016 (II. 10.) on housing aid for the construction and purchase of new dwellings.

72 See: Act C of 2001 on the recognition of foreign certificates and diplomas; Government Decree No. 137/2008 (V. 16.) on state-recognized language examinations certifying foreign language proficiency and the naturalization in Hungary of language examination certificates issued abroad certifying foreign language proficiency.

the border, the fact that the school-leaving examination in the majority language can be accepted as a language examination at a certain level is a relief.

7. Conclusions

In the decades following the transition from communism, Hungary has, depending on the stance of successive governments towards national policy, endeavoured to implement action plans and support programmes for the preservation and advancement of Hungarian communities beyond its borders. Over the past fourteen years, significant national policy decisions have been made, strategic goals and methods have been refined, and a multi-tiered support system has been established, primarily aiding the development of Hungarian educational and cultural institutions. A comprehensive system supporting scientific life has emerged, allowing education, the realm of science, and the connections it fosters to effectively transcend national borders.

Hungarian communities beyond our borders often face significant challenges, sometimes even the impossibility of asserting their national minority rights autonomously. These rights are crucial for ensuring democratic community governance over their institutions and for maintaining and advancing their institutional framework. These communities are inherently intertwined with Hungarian culture as a whole. Even if the state they reside in were to grant them all the rights they demand, they would still require Hungarian cultural support for their development and national survival.

One of the key tasks of the Fundamental Law and the Electoral Act is to clarify the forms of institutionalization of national existence in relation to Hungarians living beyond the borders and national minorities in Hungary. Within this interpretative framework, it is essential to precisely define the boundaries of the Hungarian public law's conception of the nation and the state's political community.

It is imperative to engage with the societies of neighbouring countries on every current issue pertaining to the relationship between Hungarians and their neighbours, situating these issues within the broader context of Central European interests. In international and bilateral relations, Hungary must take proactive and innovative steps in the field of nationality protection. Regarding the status of the Hungarian language, Hungary should leverage the presence of Hungarian representatives from outside the country in the European Union Parliament.

There is a strong correlation between preserving national identity and receiving education in one's mother tongue, as well as between assimilation and schooling in the state language. It is crucial to prioritize bilingualism in public administration and public services. Our observations indicate a concerning

trend: within Hungarian communities beyond the borders, intergenerational language transmission within families is declining. To reverse this trend, more effective and coordinated Hungarian language policies, language planning, and supportive measures tailored to these needs are imperative.

In response to the question of whether the actual situation of Hungarians living beyond the borders has improved, we can say that it has, albeit not to the extent necessary to halt or significantly diminish demographic, migratory, and assimilation processes. In this regard, it is crucial to consistently implement programmes and provide support for Hungarian communities abroad, while also monitoring and evaluating outcomes. Additionally, in cases where native language services are not guaranteed as a fundamental citizenship right but are managed by capable local communities, the Hungarian government should strive to supplement resources.

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