

Conditions of Minorities

*Pál Péter Tóth***Hungarians in the World**

Due to our dispersion, it is difficult to give an exact answer to the question whether there is a country in the world where no Hungarians live. It is possible that this is the case but it might be that a few of us can be found no matter where we look. It is not easy to give an exact reply but it might not be impossible. We would end up in a much more complicated situation if we had to figure out some accurate answer to the inquiry on how many Hungarians live in the world. The difficulty of the response stems from the fact that—just as in any similar case—it is not simple to define ‘what Hungarian means’.¹ We would like to remind the Reader that we have mentioned it in a demographic retrospection that about half a million persons had arrived into the Carpathian Basin with Chieftain Árpád. Although briefly, we introduced what demographic catastrophes Hungarians suffered and how the population of the country ‘filled up’ and expanded. It would be foolish to seek the descendants of those who arrived here eleven hundred years ago and to see in how many they are by now.² It is problematic to define the number of the Hungarians even when we say that a Hungarian is a Hungarian citizen. It is equally difficult if we say that a Hungarian is someone who declares him/herself to be Hungarian. No matter which approach we choose, we are confronted with an almost inextricable task, as it is not easy to draw a line between Hungarian and non-Hungarian in either of the cases. Anyhow, the safest selection criterion is that all those are regarded as Hungarians who classify themselves as such irrespective of their residence.

It is not very challenging to see that not every Hungarian citizen is Hungarian, for it is well-known that not only ethnic Hungarians live in the country or outside its borders as Hungarian citizens. This ‘approach’ becomes more complicated when we think about the fact that Hungarian citizenship law follows the principle of *ius sanguinis*. According to this, citizenship—irrespective of the place of birth—conforms to the citizenship of the parent. What results from this principle is that also the descendants of emigrant Hungarian citizens—independently of the fact whether their ethnicity was Hungarian or not—are Hungarian citizens. Thus, we can declare with a hint of generosity: the world is full of latent Hungarian citizens. That is, if the birth series is not interrupted, the descendants are Hungarian citizens no matter whether they know about this or not, or they have the relevant documents or not. This applies to all those who belong to the second or third descendant generation of Hungarian citizens living in any of the countries of the world. This is comprehensible on the basis of the *ius sanguinis* principle but anyone who starts out on this ‘track’ to determine the number of Hungarian citizens and their descendants is doomed to failure from the beginning. Apart from this, it would be worthwhile to

¹ Dávid, Zoltán, Ki a szlovák? [Who is the Slovak?] *Hitel*, May 1993, p. 63.

² According to the preliminary figures of the 2001 census, the population of the country is 10.197.119. From this, men are in 4.863.610, women in 5.333.509. The preliminary data reveal that there are 1097 women for 1000 men, 16 more than in 1990.

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think about why we fail to awake the consciousness about this 'situation' here at home and abroad if this could make those, whose family once had to leave the country for some reason, feel that they belong here. Naturally, if a member of the third or fourth generation would decide to travel around the world tomorrow with a Hungarian passport, that person could receive the document only if he or she could demonstrate: the ancestors were Hungarian citizens according to the *ius sanguinis* principle.³

If we would like to follow this 'trail' consistently, we must not forget about the descendants of those late Hungarian citizens either who, likewise, emigrated from the country before World War I but their ethnicity was not Hungarian. (The ethnicity of a little more than 26% of the emigrants was Hungarian between 1870 and 1914.) Something else what we must not ignore is that foreign citizenship or its obtainment does not entail automatically the termination of Hungarian citizenship. Namely, the person concerned has to submit an application for the acquisition or a waiver for the termination of citizenship and the competent authority has to accept it. In our case, naturally, the Hungarian citizenship cannot be called in doubt legally. In spite of this, we would get close to a very sore point if we wanted to consider Hungarian citizens—just because their grandfather was a Hungarian citizen—those who regard themselves as e.g. Slovaks, Romanians, Serbs, etc. (According to the *ius soli* principle, also the following are regarded as Hungarian citizens beyond the citizens by birth: children born in Hungary of stateless persons residing in Hungary and—until the contrary is proved—children born of unknown parents and found in Hungary.)

However, the situation is more complicated even than the picture described above. That is, according to Article 61 of the Peace Treaty ending World War I, those, who were living on July 26, 1921, the day of the peace treaty, in an area disannexed from Hungary to some other country, were deprived of their Hungarian citizenship and, without any naturalization or other official process, became the citizens of the country to which the locality of their residence passed and belonged from then on. (All this happened without the previous termination of their Hungarian citizenship and the consultation and consent of the persons concerned.) For this reason, by right of international law, the 'ius sanguinis' principle of Hungarian citizenship law does not work in their case. Thus, the Hungarian citizens living in the disannexed areas automatically became Czechoslovak, Romanian, Austrian citizens or citizens of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, regardless of their ethnicity.

Let us not extend our train of thought to every one-time Hungarian citizen but instead only to those who were not only citizens of the Hungarian Kingdom but became citizens

³ Without the detailed introduction of the relevant laws, we point out that all those, who had left the country previous to 1929 and did not return, lost their Hungarian citizenship because of their absence. Thus, in their and their descendants' case, the principle of descent is not valid. It is worth knowing also that the principle of descent applied only to the father before October 1, 1957. Since then, this principle has been valid for the mother as well and due to this, the child of a non-Hungarian citizen father and a Hungarian citizen mother is a Hungarian citizen as well. The Hungarian citizenship law did not 'know' the notion of ethnicity, that is, the ethnicity was not taken into consideration during the consideration of citizenship applications. Ever since, those foreign citizens, who are ethnic Hungarians, receive an advantage determined by the law at the consideration of their application for citizenship.

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of the new state formations and Romania, as Hungarian citizens. Let us assume that the citizens of the Hungarian Kingdom of Romanian, Slovak, Serb, etc. ethnicity became the citizens of Czechoslovakia, Romania, etc. gladly. However, we believe it to be unjustified to take this delight for granted in case of those of Hungarian ethnicity. This situation lasted until the eve of World War II when the inhabitants of the reannexed territories became Hungarian citizens again for a few years. The peace treaties after World War II have not yet been signed when the 'order' of Trianon was re-established. All this was not simply confirmed by the Peace Treaty of Paris that ended the war: it expanded the number of the people with the inhabitants of three more disannexed settlements. Moreover, the number of surrounding countries grew with the 'entrance' of the Soviet Union. And this was still not the end. At the beginning of the 1990s, new countries came into the 'possession' citizens of Hungarian ethnicity with the dissolution of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and the Soviet Union. All this rendered the already complicated situation more 'colorful', as nobody could think it seriously that the decision of the great powers could deprive those Hungarians living in the given territories of the neighbouring countries from their Hungarian identity together with their citizenship.

Beyond all this, we have to take into consideration also the fact that since 1921, people emigrated abroad not from Hungary only but also from the neighbouring countries and among these there were numerous ethnic Hungarian persons. They are the ones, who do not figure as Hungarian citizens in the immigration statistics of the given countries any more but as Austrian, Slovak, Ukrainian, etc. citizens. The absurdity of the situation unfolds in fact when we consider Romanian, Serb, Slovak, etc. those ethnic Hungarian persons with an immigrant status in Hungary, who are Romanian, Serb, Slovak, etc. citizens. Perhaps we could conclude the previous reflection like this: even if one is not a Hungarian citizen, he or she could still be a Hungarian and many of them are Hungarians indeed. However, it is next to impossible to establish who those persons are who could be regarded as Hungarians independently of their citizenship.

We have to make it clear that no matter in what way we try to estimate the number of Hungarians living around the world, we will not receive a result which could be scientifically accepted and verified. Despite all this, of what can we be sure granted these premises? We can clearly state that the number of Hungarians living in the world cannot be less than what can be revealed by the censuses from decade to decade. Thus, in case we are not satisfied with estimations, all we can do is to consider Hungarians those, who classified themselves as Hungarians on the occasion of the voluntary census declarations. We can accept this approach as a reasonable starting point also because at the domestic censuses, too, one is classified as Hungarian, German, Slovak, etc., on the basis of voluntary declaration. It can be affirmed with much probability that there are more Hungarians in the world than this but we are not able to establish how many more and we do not even consider undertaking estimations. The inaccuracy originates also from the fact that there are several countries where there is no inquiry about the ethnicity of the recorded person during the census. At other places, only the country of origin is taken into account and here, ethnic Hungarians who emigrated from the neighbouring countries subsequent to World War I, have not been registered as Hungarians.

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From a historical point of view, it can be said that all those who did not follow for some reason the Magyars searching for a new home in the Carpathian Basin, melted into the peoples surrounding them. Presumably, this fate awaits in the long run those and their descendants, who migrated or migrate abroad from the home 'found' in the Carpathian Basin. However, it is difficult to foresee how the fate and number of the Hungarians—and that of their descendants—who ended up in the neighbouring countries and will not emigrate, will develop in the future. If the political transformations at the turn of the 90s had not come about in the region, this would have been a very likely fate for them as well. Namely, for those and the majority of the descendants of those who did not move, did not emigrate and in whose case 'only' the borders migrated about independently of them. It is hardly possible to predict the future with regard to social changes. However, currently it seems probable that the future of national, ethnic minorities living in a given state formation is secured in the long run. This means that it is not sure to happen that ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries and remaining at their native land, lose their Hungarian ethnic identity and assimilate to the majority nation. Yet, it is difficult to estimate what effect all this will have on the assimilation trends and how this will influence the number of those living as a minority. For it is necessary to be aware of the fact that spontaneous assimilation, a natural phenomenon, 'works' also in case of optimal minority circumstances. In its course, the population of the minority might not only decrease but also expand and territorially extend thanks to the mixed marriages. Notwithstanding that, at least experiences show this, in all those cases when the number of the members of a minority does not reach the critical quantity, their assimilation becomes inevitable with the passing of time. When this happens, the links that tie the individual to the original population grow thinner and thinner.

How did the number of Hungarians in the world change if we 'consider' Hungarians only those, who declared themselves ethnic Hungarians at the censuses? We can give the response to this question—however much gloomy the answer is—that according to the data at our disposal, we are in less with each census. Moreover, a further gradual decline of the total Hungarian population can be forecasted on the basis of the decrease in the number and the aging of the population.⁴ In part, this can be explained by the low level of natural growth and, in part, by the naturally present assimilation processes. Besides, a future continuous assimilation into the majority seems inevitable not only in case of those, who live scattered, but also the breaking up of blocks of inhabitants might become increasingly intense.

Beyond the aforesaid, also the migration of ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries has to be taken into consideration. Though, given that the major direction of this migration is towards Hungary, it does not change the total number of Hungarians but only the number of those living in the various countries. This, we have to calcu-

⁴ Szabó A., Ferenc, A világmagyarság számbavételének módszertani problémái egykor és ma [Methodological problems formerly and today in the calculation of the number of the Hungarians in the world]. In: *Migráció* II. Eds. Tóth, Pál Péter and Illés, Sándor. Demographic Research Institute, Central Statistical Office, Budapest, 1999. pp. 21–26.

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late upon a shrinking number of those, who regard themselves as Hungarians and live outside the borders of Hungary. The persons emigrating from Hungary also contribute to this decline. For we have to take into account the fact that the primary goal of those emigrating from Hungary is not to increase the number and strengthen the identity of the Hungarian population of the recipient country but to 'hang on', to create a new home as it happens to any other immigrant. Due to this, a certain amount of time has to pass before they might rediscover those values, which they thought unimportant at the time of the emigration. In case of those, who live in the surrounding countries and the target country of their immigration is not Hungary, we can expect an even greater 'landslide' amongst the new circumstances.

Before talking about actual figures, it is necessary to raise a moral problem. Naturally, it makes a difference to us Hungarians in how we are in our own country and outside it, and the future changes in the number of Hungarians are not irrelevant to us either. In spite of this, after the conditions of free movement has been realised, but even irrespective of it, can it be expected from anybody at all—be that person an inhabitant of Hungary or a neighbouring country—to stay in the native land if he or she wants to leave it? Can an expectation of this nature be formulated in relation to those, who—be they the inhabitants of this country or the disannexed territories—and had enough of being part of a minority and want to migrate? Hardly. It is possible and it is also a must to emphasize the nice, fundamental, and decisive principle of remaining in the homeland. Nobody can be constrained to stay if he/she would like to leave and neither can the opposite of this be demanded from anybody. The attractive force that Hungary exercises upon the members of the Hungarian minority in the surrounding countries will, most probably, become even more explicit than before as the date of the EU accession is approaching. This, together with the prosperity of the Hungarian economy, will have an impact on the migration of the Hungarian minority population most clearly of Romania, Yugoslavia, and Ukraine. This effect is expected to be less intense in case of Slovakia as it has the greatest potential to achieve EU membership from among the neighbouring countries. However, we know neither where we will end up nor where we currently are as far as figures are concerned. This is the truth, given that the last census in Hungary took place almost a decade ago just as in the neighbouring countries and all around in the world. Thus, we can render an account only of the figures of how many considered themselves Hungarians in the surrounding countries about a decade ago.

Let us start the survey with *Austria*.⁵ The Austrian census records not the population's distribution according to nationalities, but instead the usage of the so-called vernacular. We can infer the ethnicity of the respondents from this. At the time of the 1991 census, 33.459 persons told the census takers that they used the Hungarian vernacular. Thus, they are the ones whom we can take into account from among the Hungarians living in Austria on the basis of the above-mentioned criterion. Not more than 6.763

⁵ The number of ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring countries is presented on the basis of the figures of the last census in the countries.

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of them lived in Burgerland, that is, in the stripe that was annexed to Austria after World War I. On occasion of the 1991 census in *Croatia*, 22.355 persons declared they were ethnic Hungarians in this republic born after Yugoslavia had fallen to pieces, while in *Slovenia* 8.503, and in *Vojvodina* 340.946 indicated the same. We underline here that only those are taken into account who live in Vojvodina instead of the total ethnic Hungarian population of the Yugoslavia of today. Although, it is a fact that the number of those, who belong to the Hungarian minority and live elsewhere in that territory, is negligible. The last census in the Soviet Union before the collapse of the Soviet empire was held in 1989. At that time, 155.177 ethnic Hungarians had been counted in Transcarpathia which became part of *Ukraine* in the meanwhile. The census was held in *Slovakia* in 1991 and found that 556.447 persons belonged to the Hungarian minority. The largest Hungarian minority is living in *Romania*. According to the figures of the census held there in 1992, the number of ethnic Hungarians was 1.624.142. Moreover, let us not forget about those 19.932 persons either, whom or whose parents were deported to Bohemia from their homeland at the end of World War II and part of whom preserved their identity up to the present day despite the foreign environment. What all this amounts to is that ten years ago—or more precisely, between 1989 and 1992—2.761.595 persons regarded themselves as Hungarians irrespective of their citizenship according to the census figures of the neighbouring countries. That they were altogether in more in the enumerated countries in the given period is beyond doubt. However, we do not know how many more they were in reality just as we are unaware of the considerations according to which those, who regarded themselves as Hungarians did not feel necessary to declare it during the census. But this is not relevant in the moment. Besides, a very complex and tangled series of reasons might be hiding behind every single personal decision no matter whether we talk about the declaration, denial, concealment or relegation into the background of one's Hungarian identity.

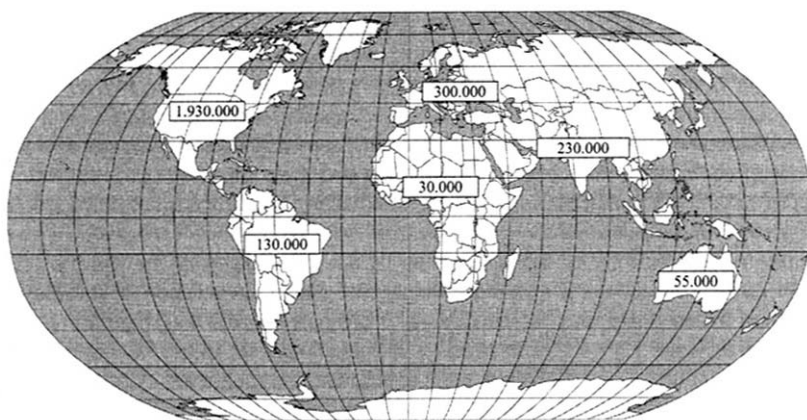
When we leave the Danubian basin and try to examine the number of Hungarians in the rest of the countries of the world, we cannot furnish such unambiguous figures any more. As we do not want to repeat what has been said at the beginning of the subject matter, we present those estimates, which show the approximate number of Hungarians living in the various continents.

1.582.302 persons declared in the United States of America in 1990 that they were of Hungarian origin. However, there were only 147.902 persons among them above the age of five who used the Hungarian language at home.⁶ We do not know where the boundary should be drawn between these two figures and opting for the easier solution, we leave it to the Reader to decide this. In that continent, are about 100.000 more Hungarians with those living in Canada. In South America, the number of Hungarians might be around 100.000–200.000 persons. The number of those living in Western Europe is estimated to be some 250.000 and of those in Australia and New Zealand, about 70.000 altogether.

⁶ Nagy, Károly, Hány magyar él az Egyesült Államokban a XX. század végén? [How many Hungarians live in the United States at the end of the 20th century?] In: *Hitel*, August 1993. p. 39.

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The figures we can find in the publication of the World Federation of Hungarians differs somewhat from these. It indicates that the number of Hungarians living in the Carpathian Basin is 13 million and the number of the rest can be seen in the map below from continent to continent.⁷



Maybe it is of some importance that an earlier publication estimated the number of Hungarians living outside the Carpathian Basin to be 1.850.000.⁸ Dávid Zoltán found 250.000 Hungarians in the countries of Europe, 550.000 in the American continents, and altogether 200.000 in the rest of the world according to what is revealed in his aforementioned study. And we end the enumeration here, for one can find so many kinds of data, which do not differ much from each other, as the number of the authors discussing this field.⁹

⁷ See: *A világ magyarsága. Történeti áttekintés és címtár* [Hungarians of the world. Historic survey and directory]. Back of the publication entitled the United States of America. Published by the Western Region of the World Federation of Hungarians. Ed. Papp, László.

⁸ Szántó, Miklós, *Magyarok Amerikában* [Hungarians in America]. Gondolat Könyvkiadó, 1984.

⁹ See: Nagy, Iván, *A magyarság világstatisztikája* [World statistics on Hungarians]. In: *Jancsó Benedek emlékkönyv*. Királyi Magyar Egyetemi Nyomda, Budapest, 1931. pp. 360–390.; Kovács Imre Kolonto; Szabó A., Ferenc op. cit.; Szántó, Miklós, *Magyarok a nagyvilágban* [Hungarians in the world]. Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1970. pp. 167–169.