

László Sebők

A Few Characteristics of the Population Structure and the Prospects of Hungarians Minorities Abroad

Currently, the number of ethnic Hungarians living in the neighbouring countries amounts to some 2.7 million, which is almost the same figure as in 1910. Dynamic development, significant progress, and positive natural growth characterised Hungarians before WWI. Translated into figures and in a rather simplified way: the population of the Hungarian Kingdom grew from 13.2 million in 1851 to 18.3 million in 1910 (about a 150% increase). At the same time, the number of Hungarians went from 4.8 million to 10 million, which is more than a twofold increase. From this growth of 5 million, natural growth amounted to some 3 million persons, while the rest was a result of assimilation¹.

At the end of the 19th century, the peoples of the Carpathian basin presented demographic indexes corresponding to various stages of demographic transition, with the majority of the Hungarians still being at the second stage: its natural growth rate was one of the highest ones in the region. Nevertheless, certain demographers called attention to the fact already then that this favourable growth tendency might turn. Following the transformation of the empire after Trianon, the successor states' nationalities soon reached the second stage of demographic transition due to the changes advantageous to them and their natural growth rate gradually caught up with and then surpassed that of the Hungarians. In the lack of precise and authentic data, we can only assume that this change took place with respect to the whole of the Hungarian minorities in the neighbouring countries in the first part of the 1930s. Regarding the period of the 20th century subsequent to Trianon – and with an utmost simplification – one can declare that losses due to wars, assimilation, and migration made the natural growth of the Hungarians beyond the borders disappear: generally, the Hungarian population fluctuated around 2.6–2.7 million².

¹ Katus, László. Magyarok, nemzetiségek a népszaporulat tükrében, 1850–1918 [Hungarians, Ethnicities in the Light of Population Growth, 1850–1918]. In: *História*. 1982/4–5. 18–21. Karády, Viktor. Egyenlőtlen elmagyarosodás, avagy hogyan vált Magyarország magyar nyelvű országgá? [Unbalanced Magyarisation, or How Did Hungary Become a Country of Hungarian Tongue?] In: *Századvég*, 1990/2. 5–37.

² In 1910, the number of Hungarian-tongued Israelites was some 250 thousand out of the 3.3 million Hungarians. Subsequently, they did not increase the number of the Hungarians: they figured as persons of Jewish ethnicity in 1930 and almost completely vanished in the neighbouring countries as a result of the Holocaust. Between 1918 and 1924, 350 thousand refugees and transmigrants arriving from the successor states were officially registered in Hungary but the estimate of 500 thousand persons is more accepted in scientific literature. As a result, we get the revised figure of 2.5 million Hungarians for 1910: this is the number of those who can practically be taken into account as a basis for comparison in the case of the figures from around 1930.

Number of Hungarians (in thousands)	Mother tongue	Ethnicity			
	1910	Around 1930	Around 1960	Around 1990	2000*
Slovakia	884	585	519	567	540
Ruthenia	183	124	146	156	160
Transylvania	1662	1481	1626	1604	1500
Vojvodina	420	377	443	340	250
Croatia	121	55	42	22	14
Slovenia	21	8	11	9	8
Burgenland	26	10	6	7	8
Total	3317	2640	2793	2705	2480

* Our estimates.

In the period of almost fifty years following WWII (in the Socialist era), major demographic and social structural changes took place in the Central European region, which resulted in new and, from the point of view of the Hungarians, disadvantageous prospects³. Following the changes of 1989–90 in Eastern Europe, the population increase in the region – which was about +0.7% in the previous decades – dropped from an annual +0.5% to –0.5% after 1993⁴. Hungary was the first state in the so-called East Central European region, in which the natural growth rate of the population turned negative (in 1981). This figure also became negative in the rest of the region's countries at the beginning of the 90s, with the exception of Bosnia, Macedonia, and Albania⁵. From among the ethnic groups living here, only the natural growth of the Roma, the Bosnians (Muslimans) and Albanians remained positive.

The survival of ethnic Hungarians in the neighbouring countries is fundamentally determined by the fact that their natural growth rate is negative everywhere.

It is rather difficult to estimate, first, the lasting effect of migrations during the reannexation of territories between 1938 and 1941 and after 1945 and second, as to what extent the losses of the two world wars affected the population of ethnic Hungarian communities in today's neighbouring countries. The phenomena related to migration in the 1980s and 1990s will be outlined in the section on the respective country. The estimate for the total loss of ethnic Hungarians abroad exceeds the 200,000 persons.

³ The report on 2000 of the Central Statistical Office (Statiztikai Szemle 2000/9. 725–752) points out that "a drop in the natural growth of the population was recorded in 16 countries of Europe in 1998". By 2000, the number of such countries has been more than 20, with the preponderant majority of them situated in our surroundings.

⁴ Monnier, A. La population de l'Europe: 1950–2000. (Population et Sociétés, 2000/353. 1–4).

⁵ More exactly, the natural growth of the population of Slovakia was positive, with a figure of 1000–2000 persons amounting to a few thousandths percent above zero. At present, both values are expected to be very close to zero – the trend forecasts a change into a negative direction here as well.

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This, together with the intensified losses due to migration and assimilation, might lead to a sharp drop in their numbers at all places:

- I In *Slovakia*, the demographic figures of ethnic Hungarians are not too unfavourable. Although the growth rate has been negative since 1996, the decrease in the number of Hungarians amounts to about one thousand persons per year. It might raise ones hopes that among the surrounding countries, the Hungarians of Slovakia seem to be the least inclined to transmigrate and almost all of them live in a block-like contiguous zone where the danger of assimilation prevails less. At the same time, the number of interethnic marriages shows an upward tendency in the past two decades and its negative effects have already emerged⁶.
- I In *Ruthenia*, the actual number of ethnic Hungarians was – realistically – estimated to be around 180,000 persons in 1989⁷. In the lack of reliable data, we do not know whether their natural growth has remained positive. It was certainly so in 1990 but the figure has shifted to negative in Ukraine and in the whole of Ruthenia. As a result of the considerable emigration, a drop in the number of ethnic Hungarians is expected in the near future.
- I *Romania*: The population growth of the Hungarians in Transylvania, and especially in Székelyföld, has been rather significant among the ethnic Hungarians of the Carpathian basin in the greater part of the 20th century. However, this tendency has fundamentally changed in the past three decades. According to István Semlyén, the natural growth of ethnic Hungarians produced figures around the average within the total population growth in Transylvania in the 1960s and 70s⁸. (The little known data supports this.) As compared with the +0.3% average of the Hungarians, the figure for Romania and Transylvania was around +0.6% between 1977 and 1988, but all three figures turned negative by 1992, with that of the Hungarians reaching the –0.6%. Let us put this simply: in the course of the 20th century, the natural growth of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania vanished because of assimilation and emigration and the number of Hungarians was 1.6 million in both 1910 and 1992. Considering the future, it is a rather unfavourable fact that increasingly more Hungarians live in a diaspora, which does not help their chances of survival. Another problem, which might have serious consequences, is that transmigration into Hungary and a longer-lasting stay there

⁶ László Gyurgyík explores the phenomenon (in his PhD dissertation under preparation). The figures of the 2001 census that recorded 520,000 ethnic Hungarians, seem to justify the worries.

⁷ In the case of ethnic Hungarians in Ruthenia, already the definition of their number presents problems: according to the official figures of the 1989 census, they were in 156.000 by ethnicity and in 167.000 by mother tongue. In Ruthenia, nationality is recorded in the ID, so those who had declared themselves to be of a different ethnicity in order to survive after 1945, cannot count as ethnic Hungarians up to the present day.

⁸ Semlyén, István. Országos és nemzetiségi népességyarapodás [National and Ethnic Population Growth]. In: Korunk Évkönyve, Kolozsvár, 1980. 41–55.

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affects primarily those in the productive age group, the multiplying effect of which might cause a further decrease in the natural growth. Currently, the losses of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania due to demographic factors, assimilation, and migration can amount at least to 20–25,000 persons per year.

- I The natural growth of ethnic Hungarians in *Vojvodina* has been negative since 1969 and due to its gradual decline, it had already reached the $-0,8\%$ by 1992. Migration was the first and foremost reason of the decrease: emigration and, starting in the 60s, employment in the West always affected younger generations of the Hungarians. The latter ones often did not return or those who did, settled not in Vojvodina but elsewhere, for example in the towns of the Istrian coast. Later, the age composition also evolved in a way that the process became self-generating and today it seems impossible to stop and reverse it. The drop in the number of ethnic Hungarian population in Vojvodina is of a tragic extent: their number dropped from 443,000 in 1961 to 340,000 in 1991. The Balkan wars between 1991 and 1995 had a particularly serious outcome with respect to the Hungarians in Vojvodina: they fled to Hungary in large numbers and there were times when the number of refugees and those staying here might have been between 60,000 and 80,000. A considerable part of them has not returned home ever since, which results in a further decrease. According to our estimates, the current number of ethnic Hungarians in Vojvodina is around 250,000. According to calculations that the annual drop in their number amounts to 2000–3000 persons.
- I Officially, the number of ethnic Hungarians in *Croatia* was 22,000 in 1991, while estimates indicated 30,000 persons. The Balkan wars gravely afflicted their most important settlement area (Drávaszög [Baranja], East Slavonia): most of them were constrained to flee, in part, to Hungary. Not everybody has returned and there is little chance that the aged Hungarian population of less than 15,000 persons and negative natural growth rate can survive (with the exception of the surroundings of the Drávaszög and Eszék [Osijek]).
- I In *Slovenia*, almost the entire small Hungarian community, the origins of which can be traced back to the Árpáadian age, lives in the small villages of the Muravidék (Pomurje) along the Hungarian border. Their number and proportion are in gradual decrease. The primary cause is the rather high ratio of interethnic marriages, since the children assimilate and become Slovene-tongued more and more. Negative natural growth rate and emigration characterises the whole region and, therefore, the Hungarians of Slovenia are threatened with complete disintegration.
- I In *Burgenland*, the number of those who declared themselves to be of Hungarian “common tongue” has increased according to the census. However, this apparent increase has no demographic causes. Following the political transformation, in 1991, several Hungarians living in Burgenland were not

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ashamed any more to admit that they were ethnic Hungarians. In reality, the natural growth rate of both the Hungarians and the Austrians who live here has been negative for decades and emigration has been significant – though this process might even shift.

Changes in the Settlement Structure

Hungarians and Germans made up the preponderant majority of city dwellers in the territory of historic Hungary. Following the transformations of Trianon, Germans gradually fell into the background or (as a result of forced resettlement and emigration) disappeared.

The extensive period of urban development presented significant differences from country to country in the Carpathian basin: while this process had started in Hungary already prior to WWI, it was characteristic of the period of the so-called Socialist industrialisation – the 1950s and 60s – in the rest of the countries in the region. On the whole, the number of ethnic Hungarian city dwellers generally grew, their proportion became increasingly insignificant both on the whole and in the individual cities as well: they came to form a minority in all of the cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants⁹. Scientific literature dealt with this process rather precisely and exhaustively: in the numerous studies of Károly Kocsis, László Gyurgyík, Árpád E. Varga, Károly Mirnics and László Sebők. For reasons of length, I shall illustrate what has been said above with a few representative data:

I The data of the two largest cities in Slovakia perfectly illustrate how strong the presence of Hungarian city dwellers was at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and how their proportion became negligible following the dissolution of the empire.

In thousands	Pozsony (Bratislava)		Kassa (Kosice)	
	Hungarians	Hung. %	Hungarians	Hung. %
1880	10.8	15.5	11.0	33.5
1910	37.7	35.9	36.1	66.5
1930	27.0	15.8	11.7	14.3
1991	20.3	4.6	10.8	4.6

The proportion of Hungarians at their largest settlement, Komárom (Komárno), where 23.700 Hungarians live, dropped from 91% in 1880 to 64% in 1991.

I The situation is similar in Ruthenia, where the number of Hungarians living in the two largest cities in 1989 was the same as in 1880: there lived 9.000

⁹ Marosvásárhely was an exception back in 1992: ethnic Hungarians made up 51% of the 164.000-person population. Today, Hungarians might be in a relative majority in the town.

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in Ungvár (Uzshorod) and 7.000 in Munkács (Mukachevo). It is the changes in their proportion that are shocking: a drop from 62% to 8% in the case of the first and from 46% to 8% in the case of the second.

I In Vojvodina, as opposed to the cities, in which the proportion of Hungarians dropped considerably¹⁰, the census has revealed that the changes in this ratio are less tragic in the cities of Northern Bácska: the earlier figure exceeding the 90% remained above 80% in Zenta (Senta) and Magyarkanizsa (Kanjiza) even after 1991. It dropped from 59% to 40% in Szabadka (Subotica) but the city has remained of a relative Hungarian majority.

I The changes in the cities can be best followed in Transylvania (in thousands):

	1910	1930	1956	1977	1992	Change 1910–1956	Change 1956–1992
Hungarians	441	432	554	821	898	+113	+344
Romanians	120	331	986	2515	3413	+776	+2427
Others	122	190	214	223	119	+92	–95
Total	683	963	1754	3559	4430	+1071	+2676

In 1910, 12% of the population was city dweller in Transylvania. Out of the 41 cities, Romanians were in a majority in 8, all of which were small towns (with less than 10,000 inhabitants). At the time of the 1992 census, Hungarians formed the majority only in 17 of the 118 Transylvanian cities and all of these – with the exception of Marosvásárhely (Tirgu Mures) – are small towns¹¹.

The proportions developed like this as a result of natural processes and centrally directed population movements. More than 500,000 [Romanians] originating from Regat were recorded in Transylvanian cities during the 1992 census: they were resettled there in the 1950s and 60s and in the last years of the Ceausescu era. According to a decree of 1976, six closed cities were founded in Transylvania, where one could only settle with party or internal affairs permission. In addition, a similar procedure was conducted in the cities by the border as well¹². Further local measures intensified the Romanianising process especially in the case of Kolozsvár (Cluj) and Marosvásárhely¹³.

¹⁰ 16.000 Hungarians amount to 9% in Újvidék (Novi Sad) as opposed to the 40% of the 13,000 Hungarians in 1910.

¹¹ The population of the largest towns exceeds 300,000 inhabitants. Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfantu Gheorghe) is a town of 68,000 inhabitants, where Hungarians are in 51,000.

¹² The enumerated measures concerned 8 of the 9 Transylvanian cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants at present (Marosvásárhely, Kolozsvár, Temesvár [Timisoara], Arad, Brassó [Brasov], Nagyszében [Sibiu], moreover Nagyvárad [Oradea], Szatmárnémeti [Satu Mare]).

¹³ Quotation from a secret document of the Romanian Communist Party's Maros county committee: "In order that the number of Romanians in Marosvásárhely municipium would reach or exceed the 50%

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By today, the majority of the ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania (56% in 1992) live in cities but the rest lives in an expressly minority or diaspora environment.

This phenomenon, however, is connected to the issue of another important problem – the fact that more and more live in a diaspora.

Increasingly More Live Scattered

The fact that an increasingly greater part of the ethnic Hungarians abroad live in a diaspora environment considerably aggravates their demographic situation. However, conducting research on the diaspora is limited from the start: the content of the diaspora – according to Dezső Dányi¹⁴ – is “inoperable”, since the “definition of the quantitative limits of the small and little – proportion or mass – is missing”. Even at present, everybody uses a diaspora definition that is practical from the point of view of his conception, habit, or interests.

By way of introduction, it is proper to briefly outline the research of scientific value on Hungarians who live scattered and the views our ancestors held in connection to the diaspora. The issue of the diaspora came to the limelight of Hungarian public life when a major part of the Hungarians of the Carpathian basin have been assigned a minority role. It is not accidental that the first serious studies¹⁵ on this issue were published only in the 1930s¹⁶. The work of Lajos Szathmáry stands out among them; he qualified every Hungarian community of less than 300 (maybe 400) persons as a diaspora¹⁷. Károly Schneller, on the basis of research conducted in Transylvania similar to Szathmáry, treated Hungarian communities of 51–100 persons as being of key importance¹⁸. According to an important part of his definition, he believes that there is a certain size under which the diaspora’s chances for survival become negligible.

Let us consider the following example: if 10% of a village of 100 persons, that is, 10 persons are Hungarians, it is very likely that there is only one child among

of its total population in the next two years, we have to receive the authorisation of employing about 7,600 persons of Romanian nationality in Socialist units (counting an average of 3 persons per family, which means 22,800 persons) so that the ethnic Romanians would make up 58–60% of the total population of the municipium by the end of the next five-year plan. Marosvásárhely, Nov. 1., 1985”. (Európai Idő, Sepsiszentgyörgy, February 16, 1990). 10,000 Romanians were moved from Regat to Kolozsvár in 1989 only. (Romániai Magyar Szó, February 13, 1990)

¹⁴ Dányi, Dezső. A szlovákiai szórványmagyarság [Hungarian Diaspora in Slovakia]. (Regio, 1999/3–4. 161–206). [This was the last publication of Dezső Dányi prior to his death.]

¹⁵ In reality, the Hungarian diaspora was examined prior to WWI (Kálmán Bélteky, 1910), but this problem did not seem to be of primary importance back then.

¹⁶ Mikó, Imre. Az erdélyi falu és a nemzetiségi kérdés [The Transylvanian Village and the Ethnicity Question] (1932), Földes, Károly. Szórványmisszió [Diaspora Mission] (1934), Szórványainkról [On Our Diaspora] (1935).

¹⁷ Szathmáry, Lajos. Gyakorlati hozzászólás a magyar szórványügyhöz [Practical Remarks on the Hungarian Diaspora Issue]. Magyar Kisebbség, June 16, 1937. Republished: Magyar Kisebbség 2000/3.

¹⁸ Schneller, Károly. Szórványok és szigetek sorsa Kolozs vármegyében [The Fate of Diasporas and Islands in Kolozs County]. In: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület, Booklet 3. Kolozsvár, 1943.

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them. He, therefore, studies (and plays) with non-Hungarian children. The identity and language of such a child is often not clear-cut. As opposed to this, in another village of 2,000 inhabitants, the proportion of the Hungarians is again 10%, that is, the Hungarian community has 200 members. With the help of the Church, they might even be able to maintain a small Hungarian school. Another example: the Hungarian community of 2,500 persons in Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia) has good chances to survive, since the population supply is continuous due to its archbishopric. Moreover, almost the whole of the Hungarian inhabitants of the city live and work in the surroundings of the cathedral and talk in Hungarian among themselves. At the same time, there is a Hungarian community of almost 6,000 persons in Petrozsény (Petrosani), completely scattered, comprising mainly of miners and their children. Their assimilation might take place within a few decades because they do not have Hungarian institutions, they are not in a continuous contact with one another, and they “merely” declare themselves ethnic Hungarians.

Without trying to take a stand in the lack of thorough research, we can safely declare that it is better to take into consideration both the absolute number of the members of a minority group and their proportion. We also have to bear in mind that it is proper to define a lower limit (proportion) in the case of diaspora research, under which the chances for survival are minimal. László Vetési called the latter group “shred Hungarians¹⁹”. (Vetési suggested that ethnic communities under 30% or 300 persons should be called a diaspora).

I believe that it would be practical to start out from the approach of the churches when defining a diaspora, and focus on it from a conceptual, functional aspect instead of the specific definition based on numbers. I consider my following attempt at defining it more like a model introducing a discussion than an elaborate proposal:

“Those minority groups are defined as a diaspora that are constrained to live their minority life within limits, in a functionally crippled way, because of the number of their members and/or their proportion, but they have a chance to survive. The remnants of minority groups smaller than these and which have practically no chance to survive are called shreds”. (I suggest the latter concept accepting the proposal of László Vetési.)

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The following table and diagram present the distribution of Hungarians according to their proportion at the various settlements in a few countries:

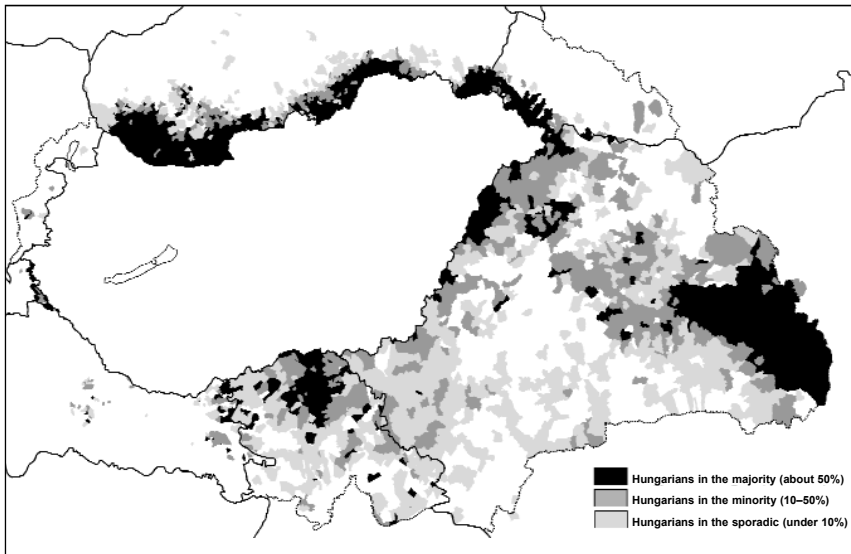
¹⁹ Vetési, László. Szórványstratégia – nemzetstratégia [Diaspora Strategy – Nation Strategy]. In: Magyar Kisebbség, 2000/2.

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	Transylvania 1607	% 100	Slovakia 567	% 100	Vojvodina 339	% 100	Croatia 22.4	% 100
0–1%	3	0,2	6	1	2	1	5.4	24
1–10%	145	9	40	7	48	14	7.8	30
10–30%	309	19	25	5	36	11	3.1	14
30–50%	235	15	58	10	61	18	2.0	9
50–100%	914	17	438	77	192	56	5.1	23

The diagram might illustrate this better:



It can be clearly seen that Hungarians are in the least endangered situation *in Slovakia*, since three-fourths of them live in a locality where their proportion is over 80%.

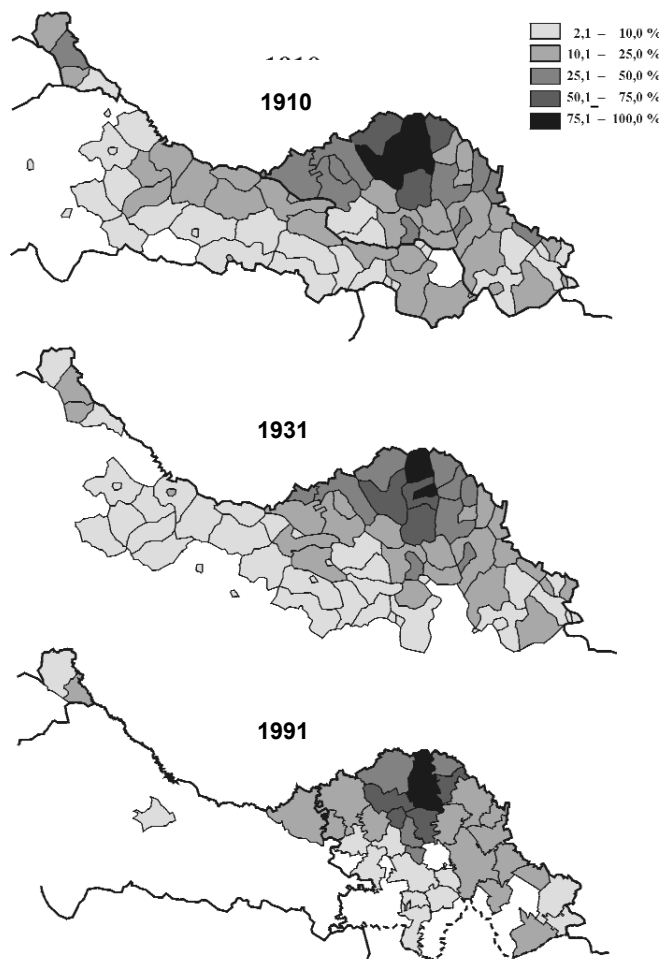
The situation is less favourable *in Ruthenia* but we cannot really establish a precise picture about it in the lack of data.

Reality looks worse than what could be assumed on the basis of the table *in Romania*, since the list was prepared on the basis of data from the level of the community – a rather unfavourable picture can be outlined on the basis of data coming from the various parts of the villages and cities. On the basis of the territorial distribution – see the map –, we can also establish that, as opposed to the Hungarians in Slovakia and (in part) Ruthenia who live in contiguous blocks, con-

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tinuity is true only in the case of one of the two largest blocks of ethnic Hungarians in Transylvania. Consequently, the Hungarian block in the Székelyföld (Székely land) has good chances for survival. The problem is that in-between these two territories, the rest of the Hungarians live in localities in rather varying proportions and scattered. One of the most serious consequences of the diaspora situation is that the opportunities for education in the mother tongue have narrowed down.

The following map illustrates well the process through which Hungarians have come to live scattered in the former Yugoslavia:



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In Vojvodina, ethnic Hungarians form the majority in the northern stripe along River Tisza, while the scattering process is clearly seen towards the South.

The situation *in Croatia* is tragic: there are 983 localities with at least one ethnic Hungarian inhabitant but in 800 of them the number of Hungarians is less than 10. They have almost no chances to survive here – and their fate should serve as a sign of warning.

* * *

In sum, the chances of certain ethnic Hungarian communities in the neighbouring countries have become considerably worse in the course of the past decade. The fact that their natural growth rate has turned negative, their assimilation – which is not discussed here –, and their migration toward the mother country all contributed to this. In the long term, the importance of the problem becomes more manifest due to the more and more markedly emerging scattering processes. Only a carefully examined and well-founded national strategy encompassing all Hungarians can change this situation.