Preface

Our purpose with this book is to inform. We wish to call attention to a serious conflict that exists among the nations of the Danube region about which the people of the world—the younger generations in particular—know little or nothing. One of the main sources of this conflict is the existence of large Hungarian minorities in Hungary's neighbors.

Today one of every four Hungarians lives outside of Hungary. At the time of Hungary's partition after World War I, it was one in every three. The ratio was reduced as a result of concentration and growth of Hungarians in Hungary proper and their stagnation as minorities in the other countries. The Hungarian minority problem is one of sui generis, deserving, we believe, specific attention. It is a suppressed problem which will not politely go away just because it is treated as a nonexistent one. It is intertwined of course with the much broader—and quite well known—problem of half a continent, known since World War II as "Eastern Europe." But, despite the seriousness of the problem, the world seldom hears of the Hungarian minorities. The main reason for that is that the mother country, Hungary, hardly speaks about them. The official silence is imposed on Hungary, a member-state of the Soviet bloc, as a fraternal obligation to Communist solidarity.

Hungary's unfair territorial treatment that created the Hungarian minority problem was originally the work of the Western democracies. And it is not without irony that the status quo of the Danube region, denounced after World War I by the Communists as an evil product

of imperialist bourgeois nationalism, now is regarded as just and in conformity with proletarian internationalism.

We are critical of the territorial settlement in the Danube region because it keeps an unduly large number of Hungarians in the inferior status of minorities. We also are critical of the nation-state policy, not only because it is hostile to minorities but because its ethnocentrism frustrates international reconciliation and cooperation. In our "revisionist" view of the future, we look toward the rise of a Danubian regional community of nations with equal rights for all and discrimination to none. This view may sound extraordinarily utopian, but it will take some unusual thinking to bring real peace to this region of unusual complexities.

In addition to Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Romania, and Yugoslavia, Hungary's fifth neighbor, Austria, too, has a small Hungarian population. In our study, however, we do not discuss the Austrian minorities. Our topic is the Hungarian problem, as an aftermath of Hungary's territorial and ethnic partition. The Hungarians of Austria do not fit in with this theme. The ethnic division between Austria and Hungary is generally fair—with the minor exception of a couple of ancient Hungarian settlements in southern Burgenland. Fair, too, is the treatment of Hungarians in Austria. But, most importantly, the majority of Austria's Hungarians today are recent immigrants, post-World War II refugees. They belong to the Hungarian diaspora, along with countless similar groups of immigrants scattered all over the world. By contrast, the Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Romania and Yugoslavia are ancient inhabitants of historic Hungary. They live where their ancestors had lived for centuries.

Our aim is to offer a fresh look at the Hungarian problem in the light of available information. To the best of our ability, we try to be objective. We also believe that discussing problems, rather than silencing them, serves the cause of peace among nations. Under normal conditions, a book of this sort might have been published long ago by Hungarians at home. Under the present circumstances, only Hungarians living abroad can do it. Whenever feasible, however, we engaged Hungarians living in Hungary as contributors.

As editor, I wish to express, first of all, my thanks to our contributors. To follow a design mapped out by an editor is not an easy way to write a reasonably coherent book. If we succeeded at all, it is due to the spirit of cooperation and the performance of the individual

contributors. Our book has been planned as a collective work to emphasize the collective concern toward the subject. It should be pointed out, however, that the individual authors stand behind their own contributions only, and not necessarily behind the contents of the book as a whole.

Wellfleet, Massachusetts

Stephen Borsody

May 1987

Note on the Reprint Edition

In the wake of the 1989 European revolution, some aspects of the Hungarian problem have changed for the better. Hungary's new democratic regime is now genuinely concerned about the Hungarian people living forcibly divided in five countries. Also, the departure of Nicolae Ceausescu from the scene, the Romanian dictator who harbored genocidal plans against non-Romanians, has literally saved the collective existence of Transylvania's Hungarians, the single largest Hungarian community outside Hungary estimated at close to 2.5 million. But otherwise, there has been no fundamental improvement in the treatment of national minorities in the countries of the Danube region. The Hungarian question as such, which is the focus of this study, remains unchanged.

The Hungarians: A Divided Nation remains as timely today as it was when first published in 1988.

S. B.

Boston, May 1991

Introduction

John C. Campbell

The depth of national sentiments and the endurance of ethnic cultures are permanent facts in the history and life of the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. Political structures may change, boundaries may be redrawn, war and revolution may disrupt societies, but consciousness of nationality, with language as its badge, remains. Nationalism, the exaggerated political expression of nationality, has been the curse of this area, in which ethnic groups are often so intermingled that no clear lines can be drawn between them. It has contributed to two world wars and has not been laid to rest by the two postwar peace settlements. Increasing our understanding of these phenomena helps to define the problem, although it provides no sure key to a solution.

This book should contribute to that understanding. Its focus is on the Hungarians and on their relation to their neighbors. It is in many ways a classic and instructive example. The Magyars of Hungary, after years of dominating other nationalities within the historic Hungarian state, found their own nation divided by the new frontiers drawn after World War I and confirmed after World War II. As a result of the postwar arrangements, many Hungarians now live under Czechoslovak, Soviet Ukrainian, Romanian, and Yugoslav rule. Yet the problem is not merely a Hungarian one; it is more general. In an age of nation-states, no matter where the frontiers are drawn in Central and Eastern Europe, conflict over territory and over the treatment of ethnic minorities is unavoidable. That age has not yet passed into history. The Soviet conquest of the entire area has not disposed of national rivalries. Neither the official cultivation of a common higher loyalty

to Marxism-Leninism nor the emergence of resistance to nationalism based on solidarity against a common enemy have, as yet, successfully overcome national aspirations. In fact, the Communist regimes, particularly in Romania and in Slovakia, have made a point of using nationalism to bolster their own rule.

The political destiny of nations of this area has been determined in large measure by the interlocking of national aims with the policies and conflicts of the Great Powers. It was Hungary's misfortune that her leaders chose association with Germany in two world wars and had no friends among those who made the postwar settlements. The severe Hungarian ethnic and territorial losses inflicted by the Treaty of Trianon following World War I led almost inevitably to a revisionist foreign policy, which could succeed only with the help of the revisionist powers: Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Hungary's conservative leaders of the interwar period feared and distrusted Hitler, but they took what they could get of what they considered their rightful patrimony when Hitler smashed the status quo between 1938 and 1941. They acquired southern Slovakia and Ruthenia from Czechoslovakia, northern Transylvania from Romania, and a number of border areas from Yugoslavia. There was partial justification for these gains on ethnic grounds, but the decisions were fateful ones because, as war engulfed Central Europe, events passed beyond Hungary's control. Hungary could not avoid participation in Hitler's war and was the last of Hitler's satellites to get out. The war and the new configuration of power would determine the destiny of those territories Hungary had regained, and of their inhabitants, and indeed of Hungary itself.

The postwar settlement, which is well described in several chapters of this book, was bound to be unfavorable to Hungarian aspirations for boundaries more just than those of Trianon and for protection of the rights of Hungarians living outside Hungary. There was no conference of fair and like-minded statesmen dedicated to building a new Central Europe based on principles of freedom, justice, democracy, reconciliation, and cooperation. There were two competing forces, the USSR and the Western powers, already at odds over the fate of this part of Europe, and each saw the question of peace terms for Hungary in the light of that struggle. It was an unequal contest in that the Soviet Union was already in the process of establishing political preponderance in the entire area, to which the Western powers could oppose only words.

The Soviet leaders had no reason to be generous to Hungary. They were then trying to consolidate their influence in Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia, and did not wish to weaken the pro-Soviet regimes in those three countries by favoring Hungary against them. Their aims included eventual control of Hungary as well, but that could wait; they did not have to buy it with concessions to Hungary on peace terms. Two issues which came up for decision in the peace negotiations made the Soviet position quite clear. One was the Hungarian claim for a revision of the frontier with Romania; there, after some vague encouragement to the Hungarians, Moscow sided with Romania. The second was the Czechoslovak demand for expulsion of an additional 200,000 Hungarians from Slovakia; that demand was fully supported by the Soviet Union.

American sympathy for Hungary on these issues provided an interesting historical sidelight. Washington toyed with the idea of a minor revision of the Romanian frontier, but never took a firm position on it and eventually abandoned even the anodyne proposition that the two states might negotiate an agreed revision. On the question of population transfer the United States had a momentary success, keeping the Czechoslovak proposal out of the Hungarian peace treaty; but it was then left to be worked out bilaterally by the two states, and the United States by that time had no real influence with either.

The United States' relative benevolence toward Hungary in the peace negotiations of 1946 has two explanations. One had to do with principles. American diplomats believed that a more balanced boundary settlement with Romania, leaving fewer people under alien rule, was justified on grounds of self-determination and would make for greater stability and peace. Washington also took the position that the forcible uprooting and expulsion of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia was wrong in principle and would promote strife rather than peace. The other American motive was more practical and immediate. The Americans were trying to strengthen the position of the existing coalition government of Hungary against the threats and pressures of the local Communist party and of the Soviet Union. They could serve that aim by supporting the Hungarian government on popular national issues such as these.

These were not, however, matters of high priority. American influence in Central and Eastern Europe was limited. There was little point in expanding it except where it might help in the overall effort to save the area from Soviet domination, and in that regard the key issue was national independence for all those nations, not ideal frontiers between them. The United States was also trying to get a general peace settlement in Europe, where Germany and Italy were more important than the states of Eastern Europe. Washington had to decide, in the light of its broad strategy, on what specific matters it would take a stand against the Soviet Union. Territorial revision and protection of Hungarian minorities in neighboring states—sound propositions though they were at the time and have proved to be since—were not major issues for the United States and the West. In any event, when they lost on what was the major issue, that of Soviet domination of the entire area, they (and Hungary) lost on all the minor issues as well.

As after Trianon, Hungarians were bitter at the treatment meted out to their country after World War II. It seemed to belie the pledges of the Atlantic Charter and the bright promise of the newly founded United Nations. Not only were they bitter against the Soviet Union, which was occupying and dominating their country—that was to be expected—but they also resented the apparent indifference of the Western powers. The feeling was evident at the time—and is evident in this book—that the West had betrayed Hungary, and also its own professed ideals.

Hungary was, however, a victim of her own past, as well as of geography, the war, and the new balance of power. The country had been run, in the interwar period, by a reactionary and semi-fascist regime, and by the end of the war it was in the hands of the brutal fanatics of the outright fascist Arrow Cross party. It had, with Hitler's help, taken territory from neighboring states. The Allied Powers of World War II did not recognize those acquisitions and insisted in the armistice terms that Hungary withdraw from them. In theory, the map of Europe was on the table for redrawing in the formal negotiations for peace, and the world's interest in peace and stability might have been served by territorial changes, especially in the contested border areas. But Hungary's case for such changes, reasonable as it might have been, found few sympathetic listeners. Hungary had to pay for her past—and is still paying.

On the question of the protection of Hungarian minorities, the Soviet Union was unconcerned and the Western powers, while sympathetic, were opposed to a return to the old minority treaties of the interwar period. Those treaties had not worked well. They had produced endless bickering and international hearings and appeals, without beneficial results for the minorities. The treaties, moreover, had been imposed on some states and not on others; it would have been a discriminatory folly to recreate such a patchwork. The Western powers decided that it was far better to rely on the human rights clauses of the UN Charter and on the provisions of the peace treaties which incorporated the language of those clauses. Members of an ethnic minority would be entitled as individuals to certain human and political rights, but a minority group as such would have no collective right. It was a way of unhooking the question of minority protection from nationality conflicts and territorial disputes. Unfortunately, when it came to the test of practice, the Communist regimes which came to power in Central and Eastern Europe observed neither the national rights of ethnic minorities nor the human rights of the general body of their citizens.

How can we put in proper perspective this question of the Hungarians living beyond the borders of Hungary? If it is a festering sore, poisoning relations among the nations, what can be done about it? It is hard to deny the logic of a change in the frontiers whereby a substantial number of Hungarians could be reincorporated into Hungary without adding new minority groups to that country's population. At times some of the authors of this book seem to be pleading for that outcome. If we read only superficially, we may imagine ourselves back in the revisionist campaign of the interwar period, in which Hungarians, Czechoslovaks, Romanians, and Yugoslavs carried on their territorial disputes in the press and periodicals of the Western world. But there are significant differences. In the first place, the Western world has no prospect, in the foreseeable future, of playing any real role in these disputes, be it that of arbiter, judge, mediator, or interested party. Second, after two world wars it is clear that all nations will lose by endless agitation and reagitation over Europe's boundaries. A return to prewar revisionist propaganda would be pointless and senseless indeed.

This book is a combined effort by distinguished scholars (some in Hungary, but most of them in the West) to describe the historical

origins of the problem, its changing shape over the years, and its present dimensions. This historical record would surely be written differently by authors from Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, Romania, or Yugoslavia. But the problem in its main lines is there, no matter what differences there may be in describing it. And new ways will have to be found to deal with it.

Today, the West is not the primary actor in this area. The Soviet Union is. But the Soviet Union has failed, both in ideology and in building its "socialist commonwealth," to cope with the problem. The Soviet leaders can contain "bourgeois nationalism" in its gross form by preventing their allies from attacking each other and from openly agitating for territorial change. They consider that to be necessary in order to maintain the solidarity of the bloc. Yet they have left each individual regime free to deal with national minorities as it sees fit. The regimes in Prague (more significantly, in Bratislava) and in Bucharest have seen fit to deal with them very harshly, in ways which do not differ from those of the past. Given the history of conflict among the nations of the region, that is not surprising. What is surprising—to some, anyway—is that the advent of Communist rule, under the aegis of a state that claims to have solved the "national question," has made so little difference. For minorities there is no court of appeal in Moscow.

A solution to the problem, or if that seems utopian, a start toward coping with it, can come only from steps toward reconciliation by the peoples themselves. If governments are incapable of it, then influence and action have to come from the peoples. As foresighted Hungarians (among them, the distinguished editor of this volume) have long seen, the Hungarian nation has no secure or promising future except through the reconciliation and cooperation of the area's peoples. One can argue about political forms and institutions, about what types of federation or confederation might work. The question is academic as long as an outside power has decisive power and makes the rules. Yet, a cultural and spiritual reconciliation can take place even under the hegemony of a foreign power. It is the only sound foundation for a shared political future combining national independence and free association.

Has the common experience of living under Communist rule and Soviet domination created that feeling of reconciliation and solidarity? There is no conclusive evidence that it has. Romanians and Hungarians in Transylvania have not reached deep understanding as the result of common dislike of the Russians or of living side by side under the tough Ceauşescu regime, which by its heavy stress on the themes of Romanian nationalism tends to keep them at odds. If by some miracle Soviet overlordship and Communist rule were suddenly removed, it is not likely that they would work together in harmony; they might well go back to fighting.

Nevertheless, we should not underestimate the possibilities of constructive change in this region where experience has nurtured both idealism and realism. We know that the USSR, while retaining ultimate control and the raw power to enforce it, has failed to impose its own order on Central and Eastern Europe. The regimes there are evolving uncertainly, each in a different way and at a different pace, all of them subject to instincts for self-preservation, to popular pressures for change, and to the facts of economics, as well as to the looming coercive power of the Soviet Union. Hungary has already undergone a transformation in which the regime, without changing its fundamental character, has partially come to terms with the people. Others may follow that pattern. In any event, the future of the region is unpredictable. Change is inevitable, and the peoples, as we have seen in Poland, will influence what form it takes.

They will gain if they can be mutually supportive. That is less likely, of course, if they are embittered by nationality conflicts. A vital question is whether the principle of self-determination can serve the end of reducing Soviet domination without at the same time leading to destructive conflict among the nations of the region. This is not just a theoretical question. The drama of Poland since 1980 has surely been watched with fascination by the other peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. The regimes, especially those dependent for their very existence on Moscow, have been properly scared, as was the case when Hungary erupted in 1956 and when Czechoslovakia tried to go her own way in 1968. But the peoples have not been unaware or indifferent. They are realistic enough to know that Soviet tolerance has its limits, but they have also seen the force which popular movements can generate and are aware of the pressure on governments to take account of such movements. National feeling, however, is often most strongly felt against neighbors, especially if they seem to be playing for their own national advantage.

This is the context in which I have read this volume about the

Hungarian nation and in which I recommend it to others. It should be read, above all, not as a brief for Hungarians subject to oppression or discrimination by other nations, not as a plea for revision of frontiers, but as an effort to expose a problem for all to see and to seek constructive solutions to it.

The West cannot do much about this problem now. The principal actors are the USSR, the Communist regimes, and the peoples of the region. What they do and what they refrain from doing will determine what happens. But the West cannot be indifferent. Western voices, official and unofficial, must speak out against the denial of human rights and of national identity and culture. Words will not change the facts of power, but words which strike a chord in the hearts and minds of those who are contending with the facts of power and creating conditions in which power is exercised may not be uttered in vain. Cultural ties between Western and Eastern Europe have survived the continent's political partition and continue to flourish. And economic crises beyond the curative powers of the existing regimes and of the Soviet Union may indeed bring the West into an unexpected and unprecedented position of influence. Whatever happens, we are well advised to take the long view, especially in these times when it is painfully clear that little can be done in the short term.

The concern of Hungarians, as of other peoples of the region, to preserve and protect their national culture is understandable and commendable. Only if the facts of the past and the present are known and recognized, and only if the need of mutual respect for national cultures is accepted, will there be a chance for these peoples to face and survive their present ordeal and to move forward, someday, into a brighter future.