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**THE REFUGEE PROBLEM IN YUGOSLAVIA**

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## THE REFUGEE PROBLEM IN YUGOSLAVIA

The events of October 1956 caused about 200,000 Hungarian citizens to flee, of whom about 180,000 sought refuge in Austria.<sup>1</sup> After the rebellion was crushed and reimposed controls along Hungary's western border made escape hazardous, about 20,000 people crossed the southern border. According to official data, 19,857 persons fled to the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia between October 23, 1956 and December 31, 1957, of whom 16,374 emigrated to the West, 2,773 were repatriated, and 634 were integrated into Yugoslav society. The whereabouts of 76 was unknown.<sup>2</sup> The Yugoslav authorities managed to solve the refugee problem early in 1958 only with decisive assistance from international organizations, notably the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration (now the International Organization for Migration).

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1 Although these figures are also mentioned in recent literature based on Austrian archive sources (Schmidl 2003, 28.; Soós 1998), Professor Péter Rokay of the University of Novi Sad has expressed doubts about their accuracy, pointing out that thousands of Hungarian refugees in Austria at the time had been there since 1945 and that these too seized the chance to leave Austria with UN help during 1957. It can be assumed that Austria did not make a clear distinction between the two refugee groups, so as to maximize UN financial support. Though Soós does not express such doubts in her paper, analysis of her text and figures at least questions the possibility that 80000 refugees crossed over to Austria between October and mid-December 1956, followed, after closure of the Austro-Hungarian border, by 100000 more, in addition to 20000 Hungarians entering Yugoslavia in the first three months of 1957.

2 Diplomatic Archives of Foreign Ministry of Serbia and Montenegro (Diplomatski arhiv MIP SCG, hereafter DA MFA), PA, 1958, F-71, Mađ-320, No. 31121. Pregled jugoslovensko-mađarskih odnosa. 31 January 1958,

## TREATMENT OF HUNGARIAN REFUGEES

The first newspaper accounts of the Yugoslav-Hungarian border situation reported that rail and road traffic had been interrupted. Once the uprising had started, only one train crossed the border, while a few peasants in carts visited relatives in Hungary. Otherwise Hungary's southern border was sealed. The railway stations at Subotica and Sombor became clogged with rolling stock. Witnesses reported that artillery fire could sometimes be heard from the direction of Baja and Pécs.<sup>3</sup> The first records from the Border Office of the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs refer to people from Hungarian border villages arriving at the border to seek arms for the insurgents. Some of these were disarmed by the Yugoslav authorities and sent to special shelters, while others were handed back directly to Hungarian colleagues. About 1200 were turned back from the border immediately during the entire crisis. These are not included in the total number of Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia given already.<sup>4</sup>

Between the two Soviet military interventions, many inhabitants of the Hungarian border zone—mainly Hungarian Workers' Party members and local officials—tried to flee to Yugoslavia in fear of their lives. The Yugoslav authorities advised them to stay at home and fight for "socialism", although some managed to enter. For instance, 17 officers of the ÁVH (Államvédelmi Hatóság), the Hungarian state security, arrived from Szeged with their families on the night of October 30–31, crossed the border near Horgos and handed in their arms. The same night, 14 ÁVH officials, some with families, crossed the Slovenian section of the frontier, including border-guard officers from Nagykanizsa and party secretaries from Nagykanizsa and Lenti, who were separated from the other refugees and treated as guests. After their return to Hungary, many of them expressed gratitude for the help they had received from the Yugoslav authorities.<sup>5</sup> The first Interior Ministry announcement on refugees was made on Radio Belgrade only on November 4, and no precise information was given.<sup>6</sup> According to daily counts by Department 1 of the Yugoslav political police (Uprava drzame bezbednosti, UDB), only 178 persons, mainly ÁVH officials and soldiers, with family members, had crossed the border by November 3.<sup>7</sup>

3 *Bilten Tanjuga* November 5, 1956.

4 DA MFA, PA, str. pov., 1958, F-149, UN-594, No. 3719. Problem mađarskih izbeglica.

5 Ibid.

6 *Bilten Tanjuga* November 5, 1956.

7 Archives of Serbia and Montenegro, Central Committee of Communist Party of Yugoslavia (Arhiv Srbije i Crne Gore, Centralni komitet SKJ, hereafter ASCG, CC CPY), IX-75/V-62. Emigranti iz Mađarske.

Individual crossings of the Yugoslav border started right after the second Soviet military intervention, although large numbers continued to flee to Austria. Yugoslav policy initially was to turn the refugees back or hand them over to the Hungarian border officials, with no exceptions. The return of refugees from the border was difficult and often followed by incidents. Some refugees lay on the ground, refusing to go back to Hungary. Others simply reappeared in another sector. Experiences at the Yugoslav border were also related by refugees who eventually reached Austria. The fact that the Yugoslav authorities were not admitting refugees soon became public knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Reports of Yugoslav treatment of refugees that questioned official reports appeared in some world newspapers in November and December 1956.<sup>9</sup> When the Yugoslav-Hungarian agreement on repatriation was announced early in December, distrust of the voluntary aspect of the process was voiced in the West. The British Foreign Office voiced its concern over the fact that Western reporters were not permitted to attend the repatriation of the first group of returnees.<sup>10</sup>

By this time, the Yugoslav authorities had direct contacts with Hungarian border officials and with Hungarian embassy officials in Belgrade to pass information on the frequent crossing points and advice on how to secure the border from Hungary's side.<sup>11</sup> The advice was little use: the border could not be sealed. Closure of the Austro-Hungarian border caused a surge of refugees along the Yugoslav-Hungarian border, which precluded turning them all back. By early December, Yugoslavia was forced to accept them, and this applied still more in January and February 1957.

The Federal Government had not published a single report on the number of refugees from Hungary when the UN High Commissioner for Refugees made a formal request for information. Meanwhile on November 6, the UNHCR addressed to the permanent Yugoslav delegate to the UN Nations European Office an offer of assistance in handling the problem.<sup>12</sup> The Yugoslav reply in mid-November stated that the Federal Government had given shelter to about 300 Hungarian refugees and that no international aid was therefore required. Three weeks later, the permanent Yugoslav delegate in Geneva received an aide-memoire occasioned by Western media

8 DA MFA, PA, str. pov., 1958, F-149, UN-594, no. 3719.

9 On November 16, 1956 the Austrian paper *Tagespost* reported on a refugee who had arrived from Yugoslavia. He stated that the Yugoslav-Hungarian border was completely closed by the army; a tank division was used to guard the frontier; fear of the Soviets was so great that Yugoslavs opened fire on anyone who approached the border and many refugees were killed. *Bilten Tanjuga* November 17, 1956.

10 Ibid., December 8, 1956.

11 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-149, UN-594, No. 3719.

12 DA MFA, PA, 1956, F-50, Mad-100, No. 419173.

rumours of severe Yugoslav treatment of refugees and of forced returns: the UNHCR was asking for precise data on the refugees.<sup>13</sup> Continual pressure on the Yugoslav authorities from the United Nations and the Western press eventually forced the Federal Interior Ministry to issue its first official data on the refugee problem, after almost three weeks of avoiding all questions. By November 29, 471 refugees had entered Yugoslavia, followed on November 30 to December 6 by 442. Of these, 141 were repatriated, 302 expressed a wish to go to the West, and the remaining 470 of the 913 refugees were not mentioned in the report.<sup>14</sup> The data surprised Western observers, whose calculations based on accounts of the local population had yielded higher figures of 2000 and 3000.<sup>15</sup>

Yugoslavia finally asked the UNHCR for assistance in mid-December, faced with a markedly higher immigrant flow. The number of refugees almost doubled in the second half of December, from 972 to 1748 on January 1, but the fortnight with the largest increase was January 15 to February 1, 1957, from 5391 to 15,321 (see table):

*The cumulative influx of Hungarian refugees*<sup>16</sup>

|                   |       |
|-------------------|-------|
| November 5, 1956  | 183   |
| November 16, 1956 | 403   |
| December 1, 1956  | 690   |
| December 15, 1956 | 972   |
| January 1, 1957   | 1748  |
| January 15, 1957  | 5391  |
| February 1, 1957  | 15321 |
| February 15, 1957 | 17951 |
| March 1, 1957     | 18313 |
| March 15, 1957    | 18579 |

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13 DA MFA, PA, 1956, F-50, Mađ-100, No. 421778.

14 *Bilten Tanjuga* December 9, 1956. Presumably, the remaining 470 refugees had not passed through the administrative procedures discussed later before the report was submitted, and they were not mentioned in the report for that reason.

15 *Bilten Tanjuga* December 11, 1956. These 1200 returned refugees were not taken into account as most of them were sent back in the first two weeks. If they were included, the total would be similar to Western calculations. Some refugees, especially initially, managed to cross over to Yugoslav territory unnoticed and escape registration by the Yugoslav authorities, so that they did not appear on any official refugee list. This applies mainly to Hungarians with relatives or friends in Vojvodina.

16 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Pregled mađarskih izbeglica u FNRJ.

There was a daily influx of 600–700 in the second half of January and the first half of February. Yugoslav capacity for care and accommodation was about 10,000, and appeals for aid intensified. The number of Hungarian refugees peaked in mid-March, with only 569 resettled in other countries and 1412 repatriated by that time.<sup>17</sup> Luckily, daily influxes fell significantly in the second half of March. Although the UN high commissioner for refugees, Auguste Lindt, had announced at the end of January that the flow of Hungarian refugees into Yugoslavia was an international problem,<sup>18</sup> hardly anything had been done about resettling them. Interior Minister Svetislav Stefanović told Yugoslav journalists in an interview this could be interpreted as pressure by Yugoslavia on the international community to facilitate migration from Yugoslavia of refugees who had expressed a desire to go to a Western country. He stressed that the problem of Hungarian refugees was far beyond Yugoslavia's capacity to solve and had to be addressed by the United Nations. By February 1957, Yugoslavia had still received negligible aid, and he added that many had chosen repatriation only for want of hope of emigrating to a Western country.<sup>19</sup> This explanation may be seen as hypocritical in view of the widely known Yugoslav and Hungarian propaganda for repatriation.

From mid March until the end of 1957, about 1000 more refugees crossed the Yugoslav-Hungarian border, which was negligible in comparison with the influx at the beginning of the year. But the falling flow brought another shift in Yugoslav policy. The authorities ceased to shelter immigrants from Hungary and handed back almost all arrivals to the Hungarian border officials, under a secret Yugoslav-Hungarian agreement at the beginning of September. Nonetheless, a Szeged daily published an article about two returnees who were immediately put on trial.<sup>20</sup>

Yugoslavia's capacity to accommodate refugees was certainly limited, and the demand for such accommodation increased continually in the first two months of 1957. Lack of immigration camps and the mass influx of refugees with a large number of children among them meant that the authorities had to lodge people in vacant tourist resorts. Between December 15, 1956 and early March 1957, the number of camps and facilities increased from 7 to 37: 21 tourist resorts with over 90 buildings, 4 temporary refugee camps, and 12 permanent refugee camps.

The largest camp was at Gerovo in Gorski Kotar, the mountainous region above Rijeka, away from major settlements and roads, but near the Italian border. It had no

17 Ibid.

18 *Bilten Tanjuga* January 25, 1957.

19 *Politika* February 17, 1957.

20 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-149, UN-594, No. 3719.

running water, medical care or other facilities.<sup>21</sup> From the Yugoslavs' point of view, Gerovo was ideal place to assemble arrivals in Yugoslavia in the 1950s—a temporary shelter and transit camp for further emigration to the West. When Hungarian refugees began arriving, they were directed there until it became overcrowded, for instance, with three refugees sleeping in two beds.<sup>22</sup> The very poor living conditions in provisional camps and the start of the tourist season led to 9774 refugees being relocated by April.<sup>23</sup> Six camps were hurriedly restored, four of them being former barracks, at Bizeljsko, near Novo Mesto, Sokolac, near Sarajevo, Ilok on the Danube, and Kučevo in Macedonia. The existing camp at Čakovec was enlarged and the one at Gerovo refurbished with running water and a new kitchen. The adaptations increased camp capacity by another 4700 by April 1957, but the problem of accommodating the 5074 people in tourist resorts remained.<sup>24</sup> They were eventually transferred to camps throughout Yugoslavia, so that some camps remained overcrowded.

The Hungarian refugees were under the jurisdiction of the Federal Interior Ministry, which was responsible for choosing locations for camps, lodging the refugees, prescribing camp rules, etc. When the UN Temporary Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees was established, the Foreign and Interior ministries formed a Joint Commission for Refugees on March 6, 1957. This was supposed to liaise between the Temporary Office and the Yugoslav authorities handling the refugee problem.<sup>25</sup>

Our knowledge of refugee life in Yugoslav camps is based on reports by international organizations and journalists. It can be concluded that the treatment of the refugees was in line with the nature of the communist regime. After crossing the

21 Kosanović 2005, 91.

22 *Bilten Tanjuga* September 12, 1957.

23 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Pregled podataka o mađarskim izbeglicama u Jugoslaviji, 18 March 1957. Dušan Kosanović, employed at the time by the Federal Ministry of Internal Affairs as a medical technician and taking care of refugees on the island of Rab, testified that all hotels on the island were full with 700–750 refugees, although the official count was about 600 Hungarians on the island. There was no resident physician, although there were periodic visits by a doctor from the island Goli Otok (where pro-Soviet communists were held after the 1948 split). All these refugees were relocated to Sokolac, Bosnia at the end of March 1957. Kosanović 2005, 98.

24 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638.

25 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-57, Mađ-100, No. 46590. Among the commission members Olga Milošević, secretary-general of the Yugoslav Red Cross, and Colonel Ljubivoje Stefanović, an Interior Ministry official and high official of the Yugoslav political police.

border, the refugees were placed in nearby transit camps, such as Koprivnica and Palić. There they were registered and interrogated in detail by the Yugoslav political police, then separated: only parents were allowed to remain with their children. Families were usually sent to hotels or similar facilities on the Croatian coast, particularly near Rijeka, or to the country, whereas singles were assigned to less comfortable camps such as Gerovo or Čakovec.<sup>26</sup> Later, depending on the refugees' choice, they were moved to emigration, repatriation or integration centres.

The quality of the camps varied considerably. Most were fenced with barbed wire and under constant police surveillance, with refugees insulated from the local population.<sup>27</sup> Nobody could leave the camp or visit refugees without special Interior Ministry permission. Visits were permitted only in the presence of guards, making open conversation impossible. Furthermore, refugees had no freedom of movement or connection with the outside world; they did not even receive newspapers. Although officials claimed that the food supplied the prescribed 2 600 calories per day, refugees complained of hunger. All this, with the long wait for further migration, weakened their desire to emigrate.<sup>28</sup>

A group of foreign journalists managed to visit refugee camps from May 28 to June 3, 1957 at the invitation of the UN high commissioner for refugees, but as hosts of the Federal Information Ministry. They travelled by bus over Yugoslavia, visiting Bela Crkva, Osijek, Gerovo, Rijeka, and Opatija. They were preceded at each camp by Interior Ministry officials to supervise final preparations for the foreign journalists.<sup>29</sup> Yet the impressions of the group were dismal: the headlines in the Austrian and German press were *Refugee or concentration camps*.<sup>30</sup> Gerovo was judged to have the worst living conditions and Bela Crkva, mainly for children and young people, the best. To keep up the spirits of youngsters waiting for visas, camp officials organized

26 *Bilten Tanjuga* January 31, 1957.

27 Mrs. M. Popović of Slankamen, where some tourist facilities served as provisional shelter for refugees, reported that refugees were not isolated everywhere or all the time. Some were put up in a building near her house. Though the yard was fenced and under surveillance, younger refugees would leave through basement windows facing the street and make contact with locals. She befriended a young man and kept up with him until his departure for Switzerland. Her family later received a gift from Switzerland expressing his gratitude for her help and support during his stay in Yugoslavia. Private communication, January 1994.

28 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Memorandum o zapažanjima jedne američke delegacije, koja je posetila neke izbegličke logore, 22 July 1957.

29 *Ibid.*, Beleške sa sastanka Komisije za izbeglice.

30 *Bilten Tanjuga* June 4, 1957.

classes in English and French, sports competitions with local children, and other entertainments.<sup>31</sup>

According to incomplete ICEM statistics, over 50 per cent of the Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia were 18–35 years old, between the age of 18 and 35, 30 per cent under 18, and a small percentage over 55. A census of about 11,000 refugees showed there to be over 3000 skilled and 1900 unskilled workers among them, along with 500 farmers and 1600 students and pupils.<sup>32</sup> These data are similar to the Yugoslav statistics.<sup>33</sup> Using ICEM forms, Yugoslav officials completed a census of the Hungarian refugees who had expressed a wish to emigrate to the West.<sup>34</sup>

Yugoslavia, as one of the two countries that had accepted refugees from Hungary, undertook a heavy financial burden which it was unable to shoulder in full. At the end of 1956, the Yugoslav government informed the UN European Office in Geneva that \$50,000 a day was being spent, which was \$3 per refugee per day, including not only food and lodging, but clothing, medical aid, border-to-camp transportation, and transportation to the border for further migration.<sup>35</sup> The exceedingly high influx of refugees took the aggregate expenditure to \$1,108,763 by the end of January 1957. For example, the expenses on January 30 came to \$25,000 for 14,105 refugees.<sup>36</sup> In mid-March, the Federal Government authorized the Interior Ministry to borrow 3 billion dinars (about \$5 million) at 6 per cent interest, for financing accommodation and care of refugees.<sup>37</sup> A count of Hungarian refugees made by the Federal Government yielded an estimated expenditure of \$2 million for the March 1–July 1 period, so that the need for the ministry loan was clear. Fortunately, daily spending per refugee had fallen to about \$1, thanks to savings in provisioning and food spending through aid from the International Red Cross and other international organizations.<sup>38</sup> In the first half of 1957, the expenditure was \$5,756,763, while the estimate for the second half of the year exceeded \$8 million. By mid-1957, the United Nations had

31 *Bilten Tanjuga* September 12, 1957.

32 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Izveštaj ICEM direktora, 22 March 1957.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid.

35 DA MFA, PA, 1956, F-50, Mađ-100, No. 422556. Telegram jugoslovenske vlade stalnom predstavniku u Ženevi, 26 December 1956,

36 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-58, Mađ-100, No. 415422. Pitanje troškova i problem emigracije mađarskih izbeglica.

37 ASCG, 130-15-100.

38 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Pregled podataka o mađarskim izbeglicama u Jugoslaviji, 19 March 1957.

reimbursed only 7.4 per cent of Yugoslav outgoings.<sup>39</sup> Financial reimbursement of Yugoslavia remained a central problem related to Hungarian refugees almost a year after their resettlement.

## REPATRIATION OF REFUGEES

From the outset, the Yugoslav authorities sought to repatriate the Hungarian refugees as fast as possible. That seemed to be the best way to resolve an already obvious problem, if the influx could not be stopped. The Yugoslav conduct suggests that they wanted to avoid involving Western countries or international organizations. They turned to the United Nations for aid only under pressure from heavy financial burdens.

The Hungarian authorities first showed interest in their expatriates in the second half of November 1956, when a delegation was formed at the government's request to go to Yugoslavia and discuss the refugee problem.<sup>40</sup> Three meetings with Yugoslav representatives were held: on November 22 and 23 in Zagreb and on November 28 in Belgrade.<sup>41</sup> During the Zagreb negotiations, it was agreed to form subcommittees that would visit the camps and talk to the refugees. These visits took place on November 23–7,<sup>42</sup> after which the delegation members met in Belgrade and compiled a list of 141 persons who had opted for repatriation.<sup>43</sup> On the following day, November 29, an agreement was signed on repatriation and the manner and place of handing over the refugees over to Hungarian officials, in the sectors where joint border commissions had already been formed, at Kotoriba–Murakeresztúr and Horgos–Reska. Initial repatriations occurred on December 7 and 9, and everything the refugees had brought into Yugoslavia was returned, most importantly arms, as the property of the People's Republic of Hungary.<sup>44</sup> The November agreement was also observed for all

39 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-58, Mađ-100, No. 414478. Telegram jugoslovenske vlade stalnoj jugoslovenskoj misiji u Njujorku i Ženevi, 28 June 1957.

40 Ibid., No. 415422. Beleške o pregovorima dve delegacije, 9 November 1956.

41 Ibid. The Yugoslav delegation consisted of Slobodan Šakota (head), Colonel Vice Selak, Anton Kacijan and Milan Milanko, and the Hungarian of Colonel Pál Mányik (head), Elemér Terek and Miklós Barity.

42 Ibid. There is an interesting note by A. Kacijan who visited two camps with Barity, one in Borl near Ptuj with 39 refugees, and the other in Osijek with 65 refugees. Fourteen refugees at Borl, mainly soldiers and officers, opted to repatriate, but none at Osijek, where large numbers of students and workers were held. Most refugees at Osijek refused even to speak to Barity and some threatened to throw him in the Drava. DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-50, Mađ-100, No. 420674.

43 Nine persons later declined.

subsequent repatriations. But the question of whether the repatriations were voluntary arose when Western journalists were not permitted to attend at Horgos on December 7. The news and comments on this were mainly negative. Distrust intensified as the Yugoslavs persistently refused to allow contact between refugees and UNHCR representatives.

Hungary requested a permit to send another commission in mid-December,<sup>45</sup> but nothing happened until the end of January 1957, when the request was urgently renewed by the Hungarian foreign minister, as the numbers of refugees was becoming disturbing. Permission was granted. Miklós Barity was warned that Amir Hoveyda, representative of the high commissioner, was in Yugoslavia and had expressed a wish to monitor further work by the Hungarian Commission for Repatriation.<sup>46</sup>

The first meeting of the new Yugoslav–Hungarian Joint Commission was held on February 1. After the Hungarian representatives had been briefed on the main facts about the refugees, the presence of UNHCR observers was discussed, as well as Yugoslav–Hungarian cooperation on propaganda and cooperation to secure the border. Agreement was reached on attendance by foreign observers. The Hungarians were allowed to show films and distribute newspapers at the camps. Also discussed was exhaustion among Hungarian border units on the frontier with Austria. The southern border was being reinforced at the time,<sup>47</sup> but not enough to stop the mass influx into Yugoslavia, and the Hungarians asked indirectly for stronger border controls of the border from the Yugoslav side. At the end of meeting, five joint sub-commissions were set up to visit the camps again.<sup>48</sup>

The next session of the Joint Commission, on February 12, 1957, was attended by Pierre Bremont, representative of the High Commissioner.<sup>49</sup> Srbobran and Osijek were designated as assembly points for repatriation and it was agreed that the joint border commissions would carry out the repatriation in the Subotica–Kelebia sector on February 14 and at the Beli Manastir–Magyarboly sector two days later.<sup>50</sup> According

44 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F–58, Mađ–100, No. 415422.

45 DA MFA, PA, 1956, F–50, Mađ–100, No. 422203. Beleška o razgovoru između jugoslovenskih i mađarskih predstavnika u Beogradu, 22 December 1956,

46 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F–57, Mađ–100, No. 41685. Beleška o razgovoru načelnika Prvog odeljenja, F. Babića sa M. Baritijem, 23 January 1957.

47 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F–58, Mađ–100, No. 415422. About 2000 people attempting to escape to Yugoslavia were caught in a few days.

48 Ibid.

49 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F–72, Mađ–430, No. 432638. Beleške sa sastanka zajedničke komisije, 14 February 1957.

to a later statement by the Yugoslav interior minister, 753 refugees were repatriated in those two days, making a total of 976 repatriated so far.<sup>51</sup> The Joint Commission continued working in the camps in two groups, first without the UNHCR observers and from February 18 in their presence. The Hungarians made hypocritical-sounding objections to the conduct of the UNHCR observer Victore Jacot des Combes, who openly argued against repatriation.<sup>52</sup>

Pál Mányik, former head of the Hungarian side of the Joint Commission for Repatriation, was in Yugoslavia in the first half of February with a trade delegation. He initiated a long discussion with the head of the First Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Filip Babić, cautiously requesting complete closure of the border with Hungary and the return of all refugees. He also suggested stronger repatriation propaganda for the refugees.<sup>53</sup> However, Yugoslavia did not comply with the Hungarian request to close the border until August 1957. Despite stronger pressure to return home, the repatriation process was hampered when some refugees recognized ÁVH officers on the Hungarian side of the Joint Commission. It was known that the first group of returnees had met with harsh treatment at the border, and emigrants often received letters from relatives and friends in Hungary warning them not to return.<sup>54</sup> Though the Yugoslav and Hungarian authorities expressed dissatisfaction at the weak take-up, published data show that the aggregate number of returnees doubled after Hungarian representatives were allowed to work in the camps, from 976 on February 16 to 2107 at the beginning of April.<sup>55</sup>

After April 1957, the Hungarians did hardly anything more to hasten repatriation. The Yugoslav proposal for a new delegation was only taken up in August. The Yugoslav authorities believed Hungary had missed a great opportunity to increase the number of returnees, as there were few transfers to the West from April to July and many thought emigration to a Western country was impossible.<sup>56</sup> In July, the Hungarian Embassy in Belgrade verbally informed the Foreign Ministry that the Hungarian government had discontinued individual investigation of those who

50 Ibid.,

51 *Politika* February 17, 1957.

52 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Beleške sa sastanka zajedničke komisije, 14 February 1957.

53 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-57, Mađ-100. No. 43759. Beleške sa razgovora između F. Babića i P. Manjika, 7 February 1957.

54 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-149, UN-594, No. 3719. Problem mađarskih izbeglica.

55 *Politika* April 2, 1957.

56 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-149, UN-594, No. 3719. Problem mađarskih izbeglica.

sought repatriation, so as to speed up the process.<sup>57</sup> By that time 2 447 people had repatriated, according to an Interior Ministry report,<sup>58</sup> mainly because they had lost hope. By the time the long-awaited Hungarian delegation arrived in Yugoslavia on August 20, there were some commissions from Western countries working on resettlement, which contributed to the poor results for the new Hungarian Commission for Repatriation.

The Yugoslav authorities cooperated with the Hungarians on this, but there was never any real trust between them on the refugee question. At times, Hungarian intelligence sent agents into the camps disguised as refugees.<sup>59</sup> Hungarian Embassy officials were told, but disclaimed all connection with the agents who were exposed, who were handed over secretly to the Hungarian border officials, as the Federal Interior Ministry did not want the matter made public.

Yugoslavia also took part in repatriating Hungarian refugees from the West. Several refugees who had been detained in Italy with no documents were delivered to the Hungarians through Yugoslav border officials. In some cases the Yugoslav authorities enabled repatriation of Hungarian emigrés who had joined the Foreign Legion in Algeria, shipping them in Yugoslav vessels from Morocco to Rijeka and then by land across Yugoslavia.<sup>60</sup>

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These are only examples of the involved relations between the two countries during the refugee crisis. Hungarian representatives, delegates and embassy officials pressed the Yugoslav side from the outset to supply lists of Hungarian refugees who had gone to the West, including biographies and foreign addresses. The Hungarian ambassador even discussed this with the Yugoslav interior and foreign ministers, who declined to cooperate. It is known that such lists were not provided before September 1958.<sup>61</sup>

Official statistics show there were 835 juveniles among the 2 766 returnees, whereas the total number of unaccompanied children and young people under 18 was 1 545. A specific problem arose with these.<sup>62</sup> The Legal Council of the Foreign Ministry, in line with UNHCR recommendations, advised that the Yugoslav authorities place the juvenile refugees under the care of the Yugoslav Red Cross. The latter would contact

57 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-58, Mad-100, No. 15422.

58 *Politika* July 6, 1957.

59 The Yugoslavs exposed four such agents. DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-149, UN-594, No. 3719. Problem mađarskih izbeglica.

60 Ibid.

61 Ibid.

62 Ibid.

parents through the Hungarian Red Cross and keep the International Red Cross informed. For children under 14, statements were needed from both parents (if alive), as to whether they wanted the children back. Then a decision on repatriation or another solution would be made by a Yugoslav custody body for each case, bearing in mind the wishes and interests of the child. With those aged 14–18, parents were to be informed, but the determining factor would be the youngster's own choice. If parents had objections to the young person's decision, they were to contact the appropriate Yugoslav bodies.<sup>63</sup>

The problem of refugee children was given particular consideration at the repatriation negotiations in January 1957 and especially in February. The Hungarians insisted the juveniles be treated according to Hungarian law: all persons under 18 were incompetent to make decisions or be charged, and so they should all be repatriated.<sup>64</sup> But Yugoslav representatives insisted that these young people were subject to Yugoslav law on Yugoslav territory. In the spring of 1957, all unaccompanied Hungarian minors were assembled at Bela Crkva. The Yugoslav Red Cross set about repatriating them, and all children under 14 were returned without undergoing any procedure, on the written request of their parents. The deciding factors for repatriating those of 14–18 were parental request and own choice. If parents had not contacted the Red Cross within 60 days, the custody body in Bela Crkva would authorize the transfer of the minor in question to a Western country.<sup>65</sup>

In April 1957, a representative of the Hungarian Red Cross visited the youth camp to insist again on the repatriation of all minors and request lists of all children, regardless of their choice on repatriation, but the Yugoslav authorities dismissed both requests.<sup>66</sup> Although the encouragement juveniles received to repatriate was not public, the UN high commissioner for refugees protested to the Interior Minister about disregard for procedure and pressure on Hungarian minors to opt for repatriation.<sup>67</sup>

## RESETTLEMENT OF REFUGEES

Yugoslavia finally requested urgent aid from the UNHCR at the beginning of December 1956.<sup>68</sup> The high commissioner for refugees, Auguste Lindt, appointed a special

63 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Procedure sa mađarskim izbeglicama—decom.

64 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-58, Mađ-100, No. 415422. Beleške sa sastanka zajedničke Komisije za repatrijaciju.

65 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-149, UN-594, No. 3719. Problem mađarskih izbeglica.

66 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Beleška o poseti predstavnika Mađarskog Crvenog krsta, 8 April 1957.

67 Ibid. Pismo Visokog komesara UN jugoslovenskom ministru unutrašnjih poslova, 7 May 1957.

envoy, Amir Hoveyda, to visit Yugoslavia for detailed information on the Hungarian refugee problem. Hoveyda spent two weeks in Yugoslavia visiting the camps and obtaining information on the numbers and conditions of the refugees. He would discuss their further actions before and after his camp visits. He affirmed in conversation with Foreign Ministry representatives that the UNHCR would reimburse all Yugoslav expenses, which particularly pleased his hosts.<sup>69</sup>

In discussions with Yugoslav officials after the camp visits, on January 18 and 19, Hoveyda explained it would be to Yugoslavia's advantage to send observers to the meeting of the Executive of the UN Refugee Fund (UNREF) in Geneva at the end of January, where the Hungarian refugee problem would be given appropriate publicity. On the subject of repatriation, Hoveyda said the high commissioner was interested in participating in resolving the problem, by appointing representatives to the existing commissions. He pointed out that the United Nations handled not only the protection of refugees, but also their migration, and presented two possible ways of resettling the refugees: with the assistance of national commissions or with assistance of the Intergovernmental Committee of European Migration (ICEM). He recommended that Yugoslavia permit the ICEM to participate, as the only organization capable of resolving the problem in its entirety. He initiated the establishment of a temporary UNHCR office in Belgrade, within which the ICEM would operate. The Yugoslav representatives at the discussions, A. Kacijan and S. Šakota, told Hoveyda Yugoslavia could accept up to 10,000 refugees. In the light of this and the daily influx of about 500 at that time, it was clear that Yugoslavia needed urgent financial support for adapting existing facilities to accommodate large numbers of people. Kacijan and Šakota also requested an immediate evacuation of 5000 refugees. They warned Hoveyda that Yugoslavia would be compelled to close the border with Hungary, for lack of space to accommodate further refugees, and that was why it was doing its utmost to encourage repatriation, as there had not been any serious resettlement up to that point.<sup>70</sup>

The high commissioner told the Yugoslav foreign minister that the UN intended to establish the UNHCR Temporary Office in Belgrade<sup>71</sup> and sent a cheque for \$50,000 to the Yugoslav Red Cross for immediate aid. He appointed Pierre Bremont

68 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-57, Mađ-100, No. 421502. Telegram Ministarstva inostranih poslova stalnoj misiji u Njujorku, 7 December 1956.

69 DA MIP SCG, PA, 1957, F-57, Mađ-100, No. 4628. Beleške o razgovorima između Hovejde, Kacijana i Šakote, 9 January 1957.

70 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Beleške o razgovorima Hovejde i jugoslovenskih predstavnika, 18 January 1957.

to head the new office.<sup>72</sup> At the meeting of the UNREF Executive Committee on January 29–February 4, 1957, attended by Yugoslav observers, it was decided that contributions for Hungarian refugees would be used for aid in both Austria and Yugoslavia.<sup>73</sup>

Bremont arrived in Belgrade on January 30, 1957 and the office was formally established by an exchange of letters between the Yugoslav Government and the High Commissioner for Refugees on February 6 and 11, 1957.<sup>74</sup> The office promptly took steps to secure authorizations for resettlement in Western countries for Hungarian refugees who had chosen to do so and sought to resettle them as quickly as possible.

The high commissioner visited Yugoslavia several times while the UNHCR Temporary Office in Belgrade was operating. Lindt was seen by the Yugoslav authorities as a realistic, energetic, and tactful man, who tried harder to resolve the refugee problem than his predecessor had done. On a three-day stay in March 1957, he visited camps and met high Yugoslav officials, including President Tito. Strains in relations between Yugoslavia and the office prompted Lindt to visit Belgrade again in early May, after Bremont had proposed that France and Austria should temporarily take 4000 refugees each. This was rejected: Yugoslavia feared that Austria, as a first-asylum country, would not reimburse Yugoslavia for the expenses it had incurred so far.<sup>75</sup> This rejection was maintained, despite a conversation between Lindt and S. Stefanović on May 11, where Lindt also expressed disapproval of the way Hungarian children were being repatriated, as the International Red Cross had not been allowed to attend. Thereafter, Yugoslavia and the office cooperated without major tensions.

The Yugoslav government gave permission for representatives of various charity organizations and of the UNHCR Temporary Office to collaborate whenever necessary, and the ICEM began to work from the office on April 1957. The high commissioner had informed the ICEM director in January that the Yugoslav government were requesting that an ICEM representative should come to Belgrade and

71 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-12, Mađ-430, No. 41890. Telegram jugoslovenskog predstavnika u Ženevi Ministarstvu inostranih poslova, 27 January 1957. The ICEM agreed to send an administrator to the UN Temporary Office in Belgrade.

72 Ibid., No. 42038. Kacijanov telegram Ministarstvu inostranih poslova, 28 January 1957.

73 Ibid., No. 42805. Beleška sa zasedanja Izvršnog komiteta UNREF-a, 6 February 1957.

74 Ibid., No. 44874. Sporazum o uspostavljanju Privremenog ureda UNHCR.

75 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-58, Mađ-100, No. 41036. Telegram jugoslovenskog predstavnika u Ženevi ministru inostranih poslova.

assess the refugee issue. This happened on February 13–27.<sup>76</sup> Based on his report, the organization gained complete understanding of the situation with Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia. The Sixth ICEM Council session on April 11, 1957 decided, with the support of all national delegations except Austria's, to send a group of ten representatives to join the UNHCR office in Belgrade. The Canadian and Swiss representatives made it known that their countries would accept a certain number of Hungarian refugees, and the Swedish, Norwegian and Australian delegations reported that their commissions were already working on this,<sup>77</sup> and so ICEM participation in the work of the UNHCR Office hastened the resettlement process. The office also supervised the work of organizations responsible for collecting relief for the refugees.<sup>78</sup>

After numerous national commissions had seen the camps and selected potential immigrants, major movements of large refugee groups took place in the spring and summer of 1957. The largest numbers of refugees were taken by France, Belgium, Sweden, West Germany, and Canada. Of some 16,000 refugees in Yugoslavia in mid-March asking for asylum in Western countries, half were resettled within the next four months. According to an Interior Ministry report on July 25, there were still 8320 persons in Yugoslav camps awaiting resettlement.<sup>79</sup> Another 2000 refugees emigrated over the next two months, which left 6264 in Yugoslavia by mid-September 1957, with the US, Latin American, Australian, German, and Danish ICEM commissions still active in the camps.<sup>80</sup>

By October 15, 1957, the UNHCR office had assisted 12,000 refugees to resettle in Western countries. Its representatives served on the repatriation commissions as observers. There was an office representative supervising the distribution of international relief. The High Commission spent \$1,085,646 on Hungarian refugees' needs in that period. Significant progress in resolving the refugee problem had been made by October 1957, when the Yugoslav government agreed to extend the operation of the office until the end of the year, to allow the remaining 4400 refugees to be settled. The Yugoslav government also requested the office to make determined efforts to

76 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Izveštaj direktora ICEM-a, 23 March 1957.

77 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-57, Mađ-100, No. 48445. Beleška sa Šestog zasedanja Saveta ICEM-a, 11 April 1957.

78 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F-72, Mađ-430, No. 432638. Beleška sa sastanka Koordinacionog tela, 11 March 1957.

79 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-116, UN-594, No. 418067. Izbeglice u FNRJ, 8 August 1957.

80 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F-58, Mađ-100, No. 419264. Telegram Ministarstva inostranih poslova jugoslovenskoj ambasadi u Londonu, 11 September 1957.

secure compensation for Yugoslav expenses, which had reached \$6,300,000 by mid-October.<sup>81</sup> News about compensation for expenses was received on November 21, when Bremont mentioned in conversation with Kacijan and Šakota that the US State Department had decided to award Yugoslavia \$3,000,000.<sup>82</sup> He also said that the problem of the Hungarian refugees was almost resolved, and that all the refugees would have left Yugoslavia by the end of the year.

It was concluded at an UNREF Executive Committee meeting on January 13, 1958 that the issue of Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia was resolved, as Sweden had agreed to accept the remaining 31 refugees.<sup>83</sup> As there was no further need for the temporary office, the process of closing it took place in January 1958, and Bremont left Belgrade at the beginning of February. A joint communiqué by the Yugoslav authorities and the UNHCR Temporary Office announced on January 27, a year after the international community had begun to participate, that the problem was over and the last group of refugees were obtaining visas.<sup>84</sup> The European country to accept the largest number was France (2445), followed by Belgium (2376), Sweden (1295), West Germany (1131), and Switzerland (744). Austria accepted 381 refugees, Denmark 212, Italy 170, Holland 80, Norway 344, and the United Kingdom 287. Scandinavian countries accepted 200 tuberculosis patients and other countries accepted all the disabled; 2509 of the refugees settled in the United States, 1765 in Canada and 1500 in Australia.

The final report on Hungarian refugees, composed at the Belgrade UNHCR office, states that Yugoslavia accepted 634 persons. There is no data on these available. They were under the jurisdiction of the Federal Interior Ministry, whose archives are still classified. Dušan Kosanović, a former Interior Ministry employee, stated in his notes that Yugoslavia had accepted over 830 refugees. The actual number cannot be precisely determined. As far as Kosanović knew, Yugoslav intelligence services were interested in Hungarians who had been educated in the Soviet Union and had studied radar systems, as the Yugoslav Army was in need of radar.<sup>85</sup> This is corroborated by telegrams exchanged between the Yugoslav army headquarters and the Budapest

81 ASCG, 130–72–1028.

82 DA MFA, PA, 1958, F–72, Mađ–430, No. 432638. Beleška o razgovoru između Šakote i Bremona, 21 November 1957.

83 DA MFA, PA, 1957, F–58, Mađ–100, No. 426741. Pismo podsekretara Ministarstva inostranih poslova stalnoj jugoslovenskoj misiji u Njujorku.

84 DA MFA, PA 1958, F–72, Mađ–430, No. 432638. Problem mađarskih izbeglica je rešen, 27 January 1958.

85 Kosanović 2005, 108.

Embassy. From these telegrams, it can be seen that Yugoslavs at the Budapest Embassy were under orders not to encourage emigration by their Hungarian acquaintances and friends, but to persuade them to remain at home, although if any of these appeared at the border, they were admitted into Yugoslavia.

The Yugoslav attitude to the refugee problem was in accordance with its reaction to the Hungarian Revolution as a whole. It was modified as Yugoslavia adjusted to the evolving situation in Hungary and according to the international reactions, but it remained characteristically ambivalent. After the failed attempt to close the border and turn the refugees back, Yugoslavia faced large numbers of arrivals, and reluctantly accepted them in response to international public reactions. The international relief and monetary aid received was crucial to resolving the problem.

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