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**FIFTY-SIX IN SUBCARPATHIA**  
**Influences, consequences and lessons**

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## FIFTY-SIX IN SUBCARPATHIA

### *Influences, consequences and lessons*

#### PLACE AND TIME

Subcarpathia, consisting of parts of the four historical counties of Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa and Máramaros, was ceded to the Soviet Union under a “pocket treaty” signed between the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia on June 29, 1945,<sup>1</sup> some time before the peace treaty of Paris was signed by the Allied Powers and Hungary on February 10, 1947. Implementation was not very smooth.<sup>2</sup> The earlier agreement was designed mainly to serve Moscow’s political and military interests. Occupying Subcarpathia gave the land and air forces of the Soviet army direct contact with the army units stationed in Austria, Hungary and Romania, and gained them important strategic positions in relation to the West European powers and the United States, hitherto allies, but soon to become ideological, economic and military foes. The practicality

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1 The writer first heard this somewhat pejorative expression from István Vida, after the 1989–90 change of system in Hungary.

2 “A Soviet–Czechoslovak agreement of May 8, 1944 allowed areas behind the war zone to pass to the control of the Czechoslovak government and Beneš to send government delegations there to reorganize public administration and start life up. On August 21, 1944, a 24-member coalition delegation headed by the social democrat F. Nemeč set from London to Moscow, from there reached Besztercebánya (Banská Bystrica, Slovakia) on October 7, 1944, and on October 27, moved its base to Huszt (Hust) on the ex-president’s orders. Understanding the district would remain part of Czechoslovakia, the government delegation set about reorganizing the pre-1938 public administration in the area under its control, encouraged re-establishment of political parties, and sought to recruit soldiers for a Czechoslovak volunteer army.” Vida–Zselický 2004, 234. The Czechoslovak activity was resisted by the Soviet military authorities, with whose effective support a first congress of delegates of people’s commissions was convened in Munkács (Mukachevo) to elect the People’s Soviet of Trans-Carpathian Ukraine and publish in manifesto form the desire for the territory to “reunite” with Soviet Ukraine. The body sent an ultimatum to the Czechoslovak delegation on December 5 calling upon it to leave Subcarpathia.

of the situation for the Soviets was apparent in 1956 and in 1968, during the invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia respectively.

The first Soviet census after World War II, held in 1959, gave a population of 920,173, of whom 146,247 (15.9 per cent) were ethnic Hungarians.<sup>3</sup>

It soon became clear to the Hungarians of Subcarpathia at the end of the war that they had been detached from Hungary again. In addition, they underwent severe physical and mental traumas, as most of the men of military and working age (a total of 40,000 people) were driven off to forced labour in concentration camps. The Greek Catholic (Uniate) Church, which had some Hungarian members, was banned in 1949; 129 priests who refused to convert to the Orthodox faith were condemned to 25 years in labour camps. With atheism raised to the rank of a state ideology, many of the ministers of the Reformed Church received long penal sentences for anti-Soviet activity, attempting to overthrow people's power, misleading ("stupefying") people,<sup>4</sup> and above all for anti-Soviet propaganda among young people. Many Roman Catholic priests suffered similarly.

There was discrimination against young men of Hungarian and German origin born between 1927 and 1930. They were liable for military service in 1947–52, but they were deemed unreliable for armed service in the Soviet Army, and sent instead for labour service in the Donyets Basin coalmines. Deserters fleeing from the miserable conditions were given prison sentences if caught.

Public education in Hungarian began to revive in 1953–5, when Hungarian middle schools opened again in towns and larger communities. Imports of books, newspapers and periodicals from Hungary, including the general sale of subscriptions, commenced in 1957. Subcarpathian Hungarians were able to keep up with events in Hungary in the early 1950s through radio broadcasts from Budapest, or with heavy interference, from Radio Free Europe in Munich. There were similar reception conditions for Hungarian-language broadcasts from the BBC and Voice of America.

3 The Hungarian census of 1941, based on declarations of native language, found 245,286 Hungarians, 28.8 per cent of the population. The reasons for the decrease after the war include the disappearance of the Hungarian-speaking Jews deported in the spring of 1944, the rounding up of male Hungarians in 1944–5 and consequent losses, and classing as Ukrainian the Greek Catholics among the ethnic Hungarians.

4 From the memoirs of Lajos Gulácsy, a Reformed Church minister convicted on March 19–20, 1949, and a bishop in the 1990s, see Dupka 1993, 97.

## DURING THE REVOLUTION

The Hungarians of Subcarpathia were able to learn from the radio about the events of the Hungarian Revolution almost as they happened. The broadcasts from Budapest and Munich were received the joy and anxiety by most of them. Twelve years before they had still been Hungarian citizens and most of their personal and communal experiences of Soviet rule since had been negative. Even as they witnessed the massive Soviet troop movements, they still wanted to believe that Hungary would soon be independent again. They also nursed a faint hope that Subcarpathia might “return to Hungary again”. as leaflets distributed in various communities put it. Less delighted with the revolution were those who had entered political and public life after 1945 as members of the CPSU or won a middle-management position in a village *kolkhoz*.

Later criminal prosecutions show that anti-Soviet conspiracies were discovered and exposed in three Subcarpathian communities. Intermix published in 2006 a collection of Subcarpathian County Archives documents edited by György Dupka, *’56 és Kárpátalja* (‘56 and Subcarpathia), but in this author’s opinion, they exaggerate in treating as “anti-Soviet youth organizations” what were essentially emotional, sincere, natural manifestations not devoid of an element of the student prank.<sup>5</sup> As a result, and presumably without the editor wishing it, they legitimize the exaggerated court processes and sentences of the time.

The inhabitants of the village of Mezőkaszony (Koson)<sup>6</sup> on the Soviet–Hungarian border did not hear only from the radio about the revolutionary events in Budapest. People from the village of Barabás on the other side came up to the frontier and shouted—in a way difficult to imagine today—for help from the people of Mezőkaszony living under Soviet rule. This persuaded a brother and sister, István and Mária Ormos,<sup>7</sup> and their cousin, Sándor Szécsi, to encourage people to help the Hungarians by making handwritten leaflets and posters, which they posted up in public places. These were soon taken down by the authorities and the case was reported to the KGB office for Beregszász (Berehovo) District. The official report was augmented by a report from a local informant and an investigation into these school-age children

5 Dupka 2006.

6 Subcarpathian place names appear here in Hungarian, followed on the first occasion by a transliteration of the current official Ukrainian name.

7 The children’s father, the carpenter József Ormos, was arrested for being a *kulak* in 1948 and given a long labour-camp sentence in Siberia. The main impulse behind the charges may have been his spacious family house, which was expropriated for “community purposes”.

began. When the evidence had been gathered—by which time Mária Ormos and Sándor Szécsi were students of the University of Ungvár (Uzhgorod)—the three young people were arrested on November 2, 1957, and sentenced on January 2, 1958. In all three cases, the charge was “writing and posting anti-Soviet leaflets”. The first defendant was Sándor Szécsi, who received six years in a labour camp, the second István Ormos, who received four years, and the third Mária Ormos, who also received four years. Szécsi and István Ormos were sent to the Mordvin Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic to serve their sentences, while Mária Ormos was sent beyond the Urals to the women’s political camp at Kemerovo.<sup>8</sup>

In the autumn of 1956 and the spring of 1957, young people in Nagyszőlős (Vinohradiv) who presumably sympathized with the revolution were likewise charged with writing, posting and distributing anti-Soviet leaflets and posters and writings. The five involved in the former seat of Ugocsa County were Hungarian secondary-school students: József Illés, János Varga, Zoltán Kovács, Sándor Milován and István Dudás. They were said to have written leaflets during the revolution calling for the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces from Hungary, and probably influenced by the MUK campaign,<sup>9</sup> “we resumed the activity in March 1957. But this time we made the leaflets using rubber stamps. That was primitive as well, because we first had to cut the letters with a razor blade and then stick them on singly; that’s how we did the sheets, and we posted them up and distributed them in the market place on Thursdays, because that was market day, that was when the most people gathered. The authorities could not imagine where they had come from, but they didn’t have to think very long because there was only one Hungarian middle school, and that’s where they began sounding people,” József Illés recollected in 1992.<sup>10</sup> The sentences announced in August 1957 on the boys, then 19, 17 and 16 years old, were for four years in a remand institution followed by a remand labour camp. All of them but Milován, who was held at Dubno (Rovno District) in Western Ukraine, served their sentences in the Mordvin ASSR, but none of them had to serve in full.<sup>11</sup>

8 All three had part of their sentences remitted. After their release, Szécsi and Mária Ormos completed their university courses in Ungvár and then worked as teachers. They both live in Hungary now. István Ormos works in Subcarpathia in his father’s trade of carpenter.

9 The slogan MUK (the Hungarian initials of “Let’s Begin Again in March”) appeared first in January and February 1957, mainly in Budapest, but spread to communities elsewhere and across the border. Small groups of young people who had fought in the revolution and were unable to stomach its defeat planned to revive the armed uprising against the regime on the March 15 anniversary of the 1848 Revolution.

10 Dupka 2006, 21.

11 After release, József Illés (who died in 1996) graduated in Russian language and literature from Ungvár

The investigating authorities tried in each case to find an intellectual instigator for the actions of the young people, where possible a locally influential member of the intelligentsia, best of all a clergyman of one of the established churches. This, surprisingly, looked most promising in the small Ung village of Gállocs (Haloch), where the ostensible abettor was the native-born Endre Gecse, the Reformed Church minister. He was popular among his congregation for his puritan lifestyle, his sincere commitment to the church, and his work among young people. Three boys from the village—László Molnár and István Pasztellák (13) and Tibor Perduk (14)—were said to have written and distributed leaflets during the time of the revolution and to have concealed arms left over from World War II. According to the sentence on Pasztellák passed behind closed doors in Ungvár on January 30–31, 1959, the charges had included that “in 1957–8, he often visited the minister of the Reformed church of the village of Gállocs in Ung district, Gecse [Geche Andry Geyzovich if the surname/forename/patronymic form used for non-Russian names in official Soviet documents is transliterated], who died on January 4, 1959 while remanded in custody, and who lent him various books of literature and books on the history of bourgeois Hungary. Influenced by anti-Soviet discussions with Gecse [...] the accused Pasztellák embarked on the road of Hungarian bourgeois nationalism and struggle against Soviet power.”<sup>12</sup>

The Gállocs congregation seems to have been unable to support its pastor to Christian standards. Endre Gecse accepted a vacant post Huszt (Hust), where he was inducted in May 1958. But the KGB already showed strong interest in him, and he was not left to minister there for long. Arrested on December 2 that year, he was taken to Ungvár, where he was intended to be the lead defendant in a show trial, as the putative organizer and brains behind an armed anti-Soviet group with American ties, engaged in a broad conspiracy. The “material evidence” for the American connection was a new cope, received from the Huszt congregation, who had sewn it out of fabric that had arrived in a parcel from America. But his captors failed to bring the case to trial. After one month on remand, Gecse died on January 4, 1959, ostensibly

State University as a correspondence student and then taught in the school at Nevetlenfalu (Dakovo) in Nagyszőlős District. János Varga graduated from the Lvov Physical Education College and was at one point mayor of his village of Feketeardó (Chornotisiv). István Dudás worked in trade until his death in 1974. Sándor Milován completed the Munkács (Munkachevo) Technical School and was also in trade until 1989. Then on February 26, 1989, he accepted office in the Subcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association (KMKSZ), of which he is currently general vice-chairman. The author has no information about what happened to Zoltán Kovács.

12 Dupka 2006, 37.

of heart failure, a disease that apparently decimated prisoners at the time. His funeral—simply a burial—was held in secret in the old Kapos Street cemetery in Ungvár. His wife was allowed to attend, but not the minister who was to conduct the service.<sup>13</sup>

But the authorities were not going to abandon the prosecution of the Gálocs boys accused of writing and distributing anti-Soviet leaflets and hiding arms. The first defendant, Pasztellák, received a custodial sentence of six years and the second, Perduk, of two. Molnár spent two days in custody and was then obliged for a year, like some dangerous political enemy, to report weekly at the village hall, with the KGB investigator would come out for the occasion.<sup>14</sup>

To draw some conclusions from these group prosecutions, the acts of anti-Soviet or anti-intervention protest were done by village or market-town children or adolescents, in great naivety and ignorance of the real political world. They follow examples in Hungary, and reflect how the Subcarpathian Hungarians saw themselves as part of the global Hungarian community, an assumption that permeated their ideas. The events that took place and the romantic acts of sacrifice entailed show that the instincts of solidarity with the Hungarians of the whole Carpathian Basin were still little damaged in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Discounting the collaborators in Hungary and beyond its borders, everybody in 1956 wanted Hungarian independence and an end to its satellite status and foreign occupation. The dark side of this glorious episode in history cannot be ignored either. The evidence in almost every trial included reports from informers who flouted ethical norms and betrayed their communities. The volume *'56 and Subcarpathia*, cited already, lists those who likewise wrote leaflets and made anti-Soviet statements in support of the revolution, and received longer or shorter custodial sentences.<sup>15</sup> That fate overtook Ilona Balla of Eszeny (Esen) and Volodimir Margitich, János Dóri and Jenő Melnik of Ungvár.

Suspicion and mistrust of the Hungarians lessened in the early 1950s: young men were conscripted into the army, not sent to the coalfields of the Donyets Basin. When it came to intervening in Hungary, the Soviet command seems to have had no time or showed no interest in “cleansing” the intervention forces of ethnic Hungarians. It must have been hard psychologically for Hungarians enlisted in the Soviet Army to face Hungarian civilians and soldiers struggling for freedom and independence. Desertion or laying down arms is a grave crime for soldiers anywhere in the world, as everybody knew. To present knowledge, that risk was taken by two

13 Gecse was reinterred finally on October 24, 1992 in the cemetery at Gálocs.

14 Pasztellák still lives in his native village and Perduk in nearby Téglás (Tehlash).

15 Dupka 2006.

men of Subcarpathia: Mátyás Lukács of Munkács (Munkachevo) and József Bucsella of Fancsika (Fanchikovo), Nagyszőlős District. They were arrested and given sentences under martial law of four years in labour camp in Lukács's case and 15 in Bucsella's.

## THE OPPOSING SIDE

A stratum of Hungarian “cadres” giving reliable support the communist regime was already developing in Subcarpathia in the 1950s, in agriculture, the arts and the press. The curious logic of the time led to such people being placed in “positions of trust” as farm brigade leaders. That trust took a different importance in the arts and the press, where their task was to turn the Hungarians now under Soviet rule in the “right direction”. They included Károly Lusztig,<sup>16</sup> editor-in-chief of *Vörös Zászló* (Red Flag), the party paper in Beregszász (Berehovo) district, László Balla,<sup>17</sup> editor-in-chief of the Hungarian office of the textbook publishing company in Ungvár, and László Sándor<sup>18</sup> of the Hungarian department of Ungvár Radio. They were given the “honour” of translating from Russian to Hungarian and copy editing, and reading out at dawn on November 4, the appeal of János Kádár's self-styled Hungarian Revolutionary Worker–Peasant Government.<sup>19</sup>

16 Journalist and editor, born in 1922 in Ungvár. An editor, then editor-in-chief of the paper *Vörös Zászló*, then on the staff of the daily *Kárpáti Igaz Szó* (Carpathian Truth) until the early 1990s, he settled in Israel in 1992, but returned to Ungvár in 2005.

17 A poet, author and press editor, born in 1927 in Pálóc (Pavlovce nad Uhom, Slovakia). A hardline communist, he was editor-in-chief of the Hungarian-language party paper *Kárpáti Igaz Szó* until retiring in 1966. In 1992, he made a theatrical resignation from the CPSU in a public press statement protesting at the Baltic secessions from the Soviet Union.

18 A literary historian, critic and translator born in Budapest in 1909. He lived in Ungvár until the 1960s, then in Budapest. He became an editor with the publisher Gondolat in 1962 and curator of the State Gorky Library in 1966–78. He was decorated for his Hungarian (and possibly Soviet) cultural work with an award For Socialist Culture (1966), a gold grade Order of Merit of Labour (1969), an award For a Socialist Hungary (1979), and an Order of the Star of the Hungarian People's Republic with gold wreath (1989).

19 “I learned next day that the Szolnok transmitter was broadcasting the government statement and then I had news from over the border, mainly the Salgótarján and Diósgyőr districts, that big crowds had heard the two radio broadcasts, and what they heard had filled people with confidence in the future.” Reminiscences of László Sándor, see Dupka 2006, 76.

Those mentioned performed their tasks of historical note at work. Others took part in crushing the revolution under party orders. The Soviet army command in Hungary requested that 40–50 reliable party officials from Subcarpathia should be seconded for a few months to work beside the economic and political deputies of the commanders in restoring order. The other important criterion besides reliability being knowledge of Hungarian, this contingent of army officers was made up of ethnic Hungarian cadres. Though they were conscripted for duty, most of them did their task out of conviction and thought of it as an honour. In most cases, it involved translating and interpreting. Service in Hungary gave them added political prestige and a chance of important positions of trust on their return, although with some material privileges. They remained proud of that period in their life and would continue to refer back to it during the Soviet period. They thought it right that the revolution was reversed. They seem to have overcome quite easily any doubts they may have had about helping to crush their fellow Hungarians' revolution and struggle for independence. Among them were Vladimir Mihály, deputy editor-in-chief of *Kárpáti Igaz Szó* (Carpathian Truth), János Nemes, column editor on the same paper, Tibor Barzsó, editor of the publisher Kárpáti Kiadó, Borbála Szala, editor of the paper *Radanska Skola/Szovjet Iskola* (Soviet School), who later wrote children's poetry, and Gábor Veress, first secretary of the Beregszász District Party Committee, who after Ukraine's independence headed the international department in the County State Administration of Subcarpathia.

The positions held gave such people a decisive role in the Hungarian intellectual and cultural life of Subcarpathia. These were centrally controlled, heavily ideologized fields, and it would be hard to present what they did in a positive light. It involved suppressing their national identity and adopting communist ideology with the zeal of converts, so that their semblance of being “comrades of Hungarian national affiliation” became a kind of party assignment. Many examples could be given of how they sought to over-perform, but that would go beyond the purpose of this paper. One, however, is more closely tied to the revolution. Fifty-six was in fact the reason why greater scope came to be given in Subcarpathia to Hungarian book publishing and press imports from Hungary, as local leaders realized the need to popularize communist propaganda in Hungarian.<sup>20</sup> This realization was responsible, for example,

20 “A very important part is ideological work. To raise ideological work to a requisite standard means first reaching a position where all educational work can be done in the language of the people.” Contribution of M. V. Povzik, secretary of the Trans-Carpathian District Party Committee, 12th Beregszász District Party Conference, December 18, 1957. (Subcarpathia was and is known officially in Ukrainian as Trans-Carpathia.)

for the publication of an anthology entitled *Carpathians* by Kárpáti Kiadó in Ungvár in 1958. It contained some lines of verse summing up the aftermath of the revolution as then known, executions and all, written by László Sándor, then living in Subcarpathia, and later enjoying a high reputation in Hungary:

*The nation awakes once more, revives;  
Its better men—on their feet again—  
By the Soviets' side assigning five  
Score lives from the gallows tree to hang.*

That was the year when Imre Nagy was executed by hanging.

## THE CONDUCT OF LOCAL BODIES DURING AND AFTER THE REVOLUTION

The dictatorships of the Soviet satellite countries stood amazed at the events in Hungary, and perhaps aghast, envisioning their own fall. Their anxiety that the system might collapse were compounded by quite unfounded fears of territorial revision in Hungary's favour. These were increased at most on an atmospheric level by the organization, protests and leaflet demands being made by Hungarians. Such activity, mainly in border areas of Subcarpathia and also in Kolozsvár (Cluj) and Marosvásárhely (Tîrgu Mureş) in Transylvania, was met with incomprehension and confusion in local government, the secret services and the police. The incomprehension was partly because those running the local administration, secret service and police came in most cases from distant parts of the country, with high political qualifications but no local knowledge. Subcarpathia suffered the worst effects of that policy during the period of the revolution and subsequent reprisals. Local Ukrainians were also bypassed when the territory was annexed. The only officials thought reliable were ethnic Russians from inner areas of the Soviet Union, whose distorted picture of Subcarpathia and its history was gleaned at most from party pamphlets.

The most heed was paid to the events of the revolution and the political stance of the Subcarpathian Hungarians by the party committee of Beregszász District, where Hungarians formed a majority of the population. Documents in the Subcarpathian Regional State Archives in Beregszász were already warning in October 1956 that many visitors from "people's democratic countries" were distorting Soviet reality, making chauvinistic propaganda, and acting negatively on the feelings of the backward sector of the Hungarian population living in the district. The committee underlined the need to send out lecturers qualified to deal with international issues to deliver lectures in Hungarian to the workers and *kolchoz* members. The "backward

section”, as later historical events would show, had kept their heads and listened to their hearts. They still saw themselves as an integral part of the Hungarian nation.

The confusion is exemplified by the way the central and regional authorities failed to see eye to eye. At the Beregszász District Party Conference on December 1–2, 1956, Comrade Ocheretany, speaking on behalf of the CPSU Central Committee, objected to the existence, even among communists, of conflict between “local and non-local, Hungarian and Ukrainian”. One blow in the struggle against “deviations” was delivered by the Hungarian–Ukrainian paper *Kárpáti Igaz Szó/ Zakarpatska Pravda* (Carpathian Truth), in an article published on February 7, 1957 and entitled “Questions of news and ideological work”. This criticized the Beregszász Hungarian-language paper *Vörös Zászló* for ideological shortcomings. As the minutes of the February 19, 1957 meeting of the Ukrainian Communist Party’s Beregszász District Committee put it, “The materials in the paper dealing with ideological issues lack the requisite precision, party principle, loyalty to principle [...] The paper has not waged any struggle against the damaging ideology of the religions present in our district, it has not revealed the religious obstinacy of some workers, it has quite avoided unveiling appearances of Hungarian and other nationalisms.”<sup>21</sup> The leadership in a resolution ordered “Comrade Lustig” to remedy the mistakes, and we can be sure Comrade Lustig did what he was told.

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Many of those involved in revolutionary activity and later convicted of it were of school age. This turned official attention on schools and teaching staffs as well. Lack of loyalty to the Soviet Union was found in teaching and education work. In a comment on the middle school at Mezőkaszony (Kason), Lieutenant Colonel S. E. Yevdokimov of Beregszász District KGB wrote, “It is impossible to refrain from remarking, in view of what has been said, that the teaching staff in our district includes large numbers of teachers from clerical, *kulak* or trading families, and families that include people convicted earlier of collaborating with the Hungarian occupiers.”<sup>22</sup> The KGB also blamed local revolutionary events on the clergy. Yevdokimov told the district party conference on December 18, 1957 how “clerical ideology sometimes wins battles here; the clergy are so ungovernable they even draw young people into church rituals like confession and communion.”<sup>23</sup>

After the reprisals, executions and consolidation that followed Kádár’s assumption of power, the Subcarpathian KGB found ever less grounds for concern. But mem-

21 Trans-Carpathian Regional State Archives (Kárpátaljai Területi Állami Levéltár, hereafter KTÁL), f. 15, l. 5, No. 36.

22 Ibid., l. 7, No. 36.

23 Ibid., l. 5, No. 28.

ories of the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence were never expunged, much though the authorities wanted to do so.

### ‘REVOLUTIONARY TOURISM’: HUNGARIAN POLITICIANS, ÁVH MEN AND PRISONERS IN SUBCARPATHIA

The sour subtitle calls for some explanation. The Soviet Union in the 1950s was almost hermetically sealed from the outside world. Ordinary citizens could not dream of travelling abroad, even if they possessed a so-called “foreign passport”. There were no opportunities for private travels or visits to relatives, neither to the inimical West European countries or to the United States, or even to the ostensibly “friendly” or “fraternal” socialist countries. This applied also in Hungary, if not with quite such severity. The situation was made worse for the authorities by the fact that any citizen of the Hungarian People’s Republic leaving the country in any direction was likely to meet other Hungarians, as customs officers, or more probably still, simply walking down the street. The government, having given up the Hungarians outside the country entirely, was inclined to see in any such contact a prospect of reviving chauvinism coupled with anti-Sovietism.

Members of the Hungarian government or the Hungarian Workers’ Party politicians visiting the Soviet Union never stopped off in Subcarpathia. The presence there of a section of the Hungarian nation was among many taboo subjects in Hungarian–Soviet relations. No knowledge of them was shown by government or party delegates from Budapest. One incident, now confirmed but long secret, occurred as members of the Kádár government were chosen by the CPSU Central Committee, in the future prime minister’s presence, and the proclamation of the Revolutionary Worker–Peasant Government was prepared. This was read on Ungvár Radio on November 4, as the Soviet attack began. The opinion is still held in Subcarpathia that Kádár was staying then at the county party committee resort at Ókemence (Kamyantsa), near Ungvár, although incontestable evidence is still lacking.

The detested Hungarian State Protection Authority (Államvédelmi Hatóság, ÁVH) the notorious political police and perpetrator of state terror in the Rákosi period, was a major barrier to development and consolidation during the revolution. It was no accident that Imre Nagy remarked in a radio broadcast on October 28, “We will organize a new, unified state police during the restoration of order and disband the State Protection Authority.”<sup>24</sup> In fact the ÁVH fragmented during the revolution.

24 Varga–Kenedi 1989, 132.

Its members went into hiding and many of them fled to Czechoslovakia or the Soviet Union, including Subcarpathia.

The Soviet army command, which distrusted the Hungarians, thought it best to hold those arrested, including several of those had borne arms, in prisons in the Soviet Union, rather than Hungary, arguing that Hungarian prisons were not suitable for conducting “objective” interrogations. General Ivan Serov, who directed KGB operations in Hungary, wrote in the report cited earlier that 4700 people had been arrested during military operations, of whom 1400 had been imprisoned, and 860 transported to Ungvár or to Stribe, beyond the Carpathians. He went on to report, “In the early days, there were cases, as those arrested and imprisoned were being sent on, where commanders of military units sent those in custody to Chop [Csap] without reference to the Special Department or the state security organizations, and the Interior Ministry camps admitted them without consulting us and without their investigation materials. For instance, the commander of the Uzhgorod [Ungvár] concentration camp took in 68 industrial students who had been sent by the commander of a division stationed in Budapest. This group of adolescents was returned to Budapest and released on the orders of S. Konev.”<sup>25</sup>

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Those rounded up had strong recollections of people being taken off for *malenky robot* during and after World War II. Their fears that they were bound for labour camps in Siberia were founded, insofar as they were rounded up in a very similar fashion.

But this time it was different. The captives managed to throw letters out of the goods wagons, telling their relatives where they were. Those in prison in Ungvár and elsewhere soon began to demand an explanation of why they had been arrested. The atmosphere was tense after the Soviet invasion, with absenteeism ubiquitous and strikes in many places. The Kádár government, seen by the public as illegitimate, was having talks with the workers’ councils and much hampered by the tense political situation. The deportations over the Budapest–Debrecen–Nyíregyháza–Záhony railway lines were interrupted several times by the strikes of railwaymen unwilling to see Hungarian prisoners borne off to the Soviet Union. News of the deportations prompted Hungarian revolutionaries to damage the railway tracks between Pásztó and Szurdokpüspöki and sympathetic workers made the rail route unusable. Soviet deportations were the last thing the Kádár government wanted as it tried to consolidate its power, and in mid-November, Kádár and Ferenc Münnich appealed to the Soviet army command and to Serov for an end to the deportations and the release of all such prisoners. The intervention succeeded in that some of the deportees were handed over to the Hungarian authorities.

25 Varga–Kenedi 1989, 132.

The Soviet decision to release the detainees was not motivated only by a desire to help the collaborating Hungarian government and prepare for the consolidation it sought. It was by no means to the liking of Moscow or the Hungarian Revolutionary Worker–Peasant Government that the UN Security Council had been convened in New York and a debate on the Hungarian question had been slated for November 12, 1956. The Soviet Union as a Security Council member was reluctant to see its self-promoted reputation as a “peace-loving country” reduced to tatters in front of the world. It had sensed that the United States did not want to intervene, but it did not want to press matters too far. So it resisted its own reflexes and abandoned plans to bring to the Soviet Union the Hungarians it had taken captive in the revolution.

The volume *'56 and Subcarpathia* quotes from recollections of the revolutionary period by István Árpai, a music teacher and music researcher, who relates how at dawn on November 3 there arrived in Ungvár in tarpaulined army lorries children of kindergarten age, presumably from orphanages in Hungary. This soon became widely rumoured, and members of Hungarian families from Ungvár went to the children’s centre in Szobránc Street, to see if they could foster a child. Nothing came of that, and according to the interviewee, the lorries soon drove off towards the Uzhok Pass. However, the story that Hungarian children were abducted has yet to be confirmed from any other source.

## AFTER THE CHANGE OF SYSTEM

The 1956 Revolution and War for Independence was among the most important political factors legitimizing Hungary’s change of system in 1989–90. Hungary’s swing to democracy was also symbolic, instigating a domino effect in the so-called socialist countries of Eastern Europe. Social and political organizations of Hungarians were involved in the bloodless Czechoslovak and bloody Romanian changes as well. The same applies in Subcarpathia. The changes in the Soviet Union and the change of system in Hungary lent force, courage and enthusiasm for local Hungarians to play a regionally important political role. On February 26, 1989, the first organization for protecting a Hungarian minority in the Carpathian Basin was founded in Ungvár: the Subcarpathian Hungarian Cultural Association, which adopted the spiritual and political message of ’56 as its own. Significantly, the Hungarian Revolution was marked in Ungvár on October 23, 1991, while the Soviet Union was still in existence. Although the empire was on its last legs, those taking part in the event ran a personal risk.

After Ukraine became independent without notable social or political upheaval, the press began to lay the crushing of the revolution at Moscow’s door, as a historical

crime. Several anti-Russian articles sympathetic to '56 were published. Ukrainian national politics has been riven by wrangling in the last decade and a half. No steps have ever been taken to prevent '56 being celebrated. That neutral, unresisting stance shows that Kiev had no interest in event and the Subcarpathian cult of it.

It is welcome, however, that October 23 is marked by Ukrainians and Hungarians together in Subcarpathia (and among the Hungarian diaspora in Kiev), with representations of county, district and local government taking part. That also conveys the political message that the aims of the Hungarian Revolution and its moral impeccability are sincerely respected not only by the Hungarians, but by the Ukrainians and Rusyns. The memory of '56 is upheld in Subcarpathia in the same way as the Rákóczi War of Independence and the 1848–9 Revolution and War of Independence are celebrated.

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