



FROM MIGRANT TO REFUGEE: THE HISTORY OF THE SZEKELYS OF
BUKOVINA DURING AND AFTER THE SECOND WORLD WAR

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Abstract: The topic of the article is the history of a Hungarian ethnic group, the Szekelys of Bukovina during and after the Second World War from the perspective of legal history. The Szekelys, who fled from Transylvania after the massacre of Madéfalva (1764), had lived for almost two centuries in five villages in Bukovina, a province of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. Bukovina became part of the Kingdom of Romania after the First World War, and the Szekely villages became overpopulated and suffered from the increasing Romanian nationalism. Plans to resettle the Szekelys of Bukovina date back to the 19th century when a special act was made, but only a few thousand Szekelys left Bukovina. Hungary and Romania signed an international treaty in 1941 on the resettlement of the Szekelys from Bukovina to Hungary. The settlement was an element of the forced rehungarization of the Vojvodina region occupied by Hungary in early 1941. The migrants of the state enforced settlement action received an evacuation order in October 1944 and came as refugees to the todays Hungary. They were settled in Baranya und Tolna counties in 1945 in the houses and land properties of Danube Svabians.

Keywords: Szekelys of Bukovina, resettlement, forced migration, refugees, 2nd Word War

Zusammenfassung: Der Aufsatz schildert die Geschichte der Sekler von Bukowina, eine ungarische ethnische Gruppe während und nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg aus rechtshistorischer Perspektive. Die Sekler flüchteten nach dem so genannten Massaker von Madéfalva 1764 nach Bukowina, und lebten fast zweihundert Jahre lang in fünf Dörfern dort, bis 1918 eine Provinz der Habsburgermonarchie. Nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg wurde das Gebiet Teil des Königreichs Rumänien, die Dörfer waren überbevölkert und die Einwohner litten unter dem zunehmenden rumänischen Nationalismus. Die ersten Pläne für die Wiederansiedlung der Sekler von Bukowina datieren vom 19. Jahrhundert, es wurde ein separates Gesetz dafür erlassen, aber nur einig Tausend verließen Bukowina. Nach Ausbruch des Zweiten Weltkrieges und nach dem Zweiten Wiener Schiedsspruch unterzeichneten Ungarn und Rumänien ein Abkommen im Frühjahr 1941 über die Übersiedlung der Sekler von Bukowina nach



Ungarn. Diese Siedlungsaktion war Teil der Re-Madjarisierung der Region Wojwodina nach der ungarischen Besetzung 1941. Die Siedler, die im Rahmen einer staatlich durchgeführten Siedlungsaktion hierher gelangten, mussten Anfang Oktober 1944 fliehen. Sie bekamen ein Evakuierungsbefehl und gelangten auf das heutigen Staatsgebiet Ungarns. 1945 wurden sie in den Komitaten Tolna und Baranya angesiedelt, in die Häuser und Besitztümer von Donauschwaben.

Schlüsselwörter: Sekler von Bukowina, Übersiedlung, Zwangsmigration, Flüchtlinge, Zweiter Weltkrieg

1. INTRODUCTION

The topic of my paper is the history of a Hungarian ethnic group, the Szekelys of Bukovina and their fate during and after the Second World War as migrants and refugees. With this example, I demonstrate the role of ethnopolitical aspects in the law and in the activities of the state administration on the topic of migration. The categories of migration, forced migration, migration supported by the state/settlement, evacuation and escape and their regulation by law can all be showed via the history of this ethnic group; however, the boundaries of the categories are often unclear.

At first, we must clarify who the Szekelys of Bukovina are? Where is Bukovina? Why and how did the Szekelys from their original settlement area in Southeast Transylvania got there? The historical region Bukovina is located in Eastern Europe, near to the north-eastern part of the Carpathian Ridge. The region was part of the Habsburg Empire between 1775 and the Peace Treaty of Saint Germain in 1919.¹ In the first decades, it was part of the Province Galicia. In 1849, the Province Bukovina was organised with the governor and the provincial assembly (Landtag) residing in Czernowitz (now: Chernivtsi, Ukraine).² Bukovina was one of

¹ RÖSKAU-RYDERL, I., *Deutsche Geschichte im Osten Europas - Galizien, Bukowina, Moldau*, Berlin 1999, p. 219.

² RÖSKAU-RYDEL, I., *Deutsche Geschichte*, cit., p. 246.



the smallest and economically lesser developed provinces of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, however it was very fragmented ethnically: 38% of the population had Ruthenian as mother tongue (the statistics of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy called all people with an east Slavic native language Ruthenian, in fact the so-called Ruthenians in Bukovina spoke a West-Ukrainian dialect), 34% Romanian, 21% German, 4.6% Polish, according to the census of 1910.³ The Ruthenians lived in the northern, whereas the Romanians lived in the southern part of the province, and the Germans mostly in and around of Czernowitz. Today the region is on the border of Rumania and Ukraine, the northern part of historical Bukovina is the Oblast Chernivtsi of Ukraine, and the southern part is the Judetul Suceava of Romania.

The Szekelys of Bukovina are a small Hungarian ethnic group; however, their existence and fate are not well known even in Hungary. They lived in the middle of Bukovina, along the Sucava river, near to today's border between Ukraine and Romania.

The birth of this ethnic group is a tragic incident, the so-called massacre of Madéfalva on the 7th January 1764. That morning, troops of the Habsburg queen Maria Theresia bombarded the village of Madéfalva by cannons and stormed it causing the death of almost 200 people, many children and women among them.⁴ The Szekelys were at Madéfalva to protest against the planned installation of three boarder guard regiments. The plans endangered the established rights and liberties of the Szekelys, who lived near the south-eastern border of Hungary, and were traditionally responsible for border protection. After the Madéfalva incident,

³ LESLIE, J., «Der Ausgleich in der Bukowina von 1910: Zur österreichischen Nationalitätenpolitik vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg» in *Geschichte zwischen Freiheit und Ordnung. Gerald Stourzh zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. BRIX, E., FRÖSCHL, T., LEIDENFROST, J., Graz 1991, p. 113

⁴ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység tegnap és ma*, Szekszárd 1989, p. 6.



thousands of Szekelys fled to Moldavia behind the Carpathian Mountains, a province of the Ottoman Empire at the time⁵.

The settlement of the Szekelys in Bukovina appeared on the agenda when the area became a part of the Habsburg Empire in 1774, as after the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca between the Russian and the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburgs got the territory as honour of the mediation of the peace treaty. Many settlers arrived to the sparsely populated province, and the governor of the territory, András Hadik had the idea to settle the Szekelys, who fled after the massacre of Madéfalva⁶. Five villages of the Székelys were founded between 1777 and 1786: Istensegíts, Fogadjisten, Andrásfalva, Hadikfalva and Józseffalva (today: Țibeni, Iacobești, Măneuți, Dornești, Vornicenii Mici, Suceava County, Romania)⁷. For the next 150 years, the Székelys of Bukovina lived in the Habsburg Empire (Austrian Empire after 1804, Austro-Hungarian Monarchy after the Compromise of 1867), but not within the borders of historical Hungary, as Bukovina was part of the “Austrian” part of the monarchy (The Kingdoms and Lands represented in the Imperial Council). As they lived in the same country, not very far from the borders of the Hungarian Kingdom, they never fully lost the cultural connections with the Hungarian language area, the priests and some of the teachers came from Hungarian villages. An association called *Szent László Társaság* provided support, they sent Hungarian books and newspapers, founded scholarships and gave financial aid for cultural events⁸. The Szekelys of Bukovina preserved the Hungarian language, the traditional Szekely outfit, and developed a unique culture with Romanian, Slavic and German influence containing traditional elements, especially in dance, music and weaving⁹.

⁵ HALÁSZ, A., *A hazatértek. A bukovinai magyarok kétszáz esztendeje*, Nagyvárad 1941², pp. 14-58.

⁶ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit. p. 16.

⁷ Ivi, p. 12.

⁸ SÁNTHA, A., *Bukovinai magyarok*, Kolozsvár 1942, p. 93.

⁹ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 176.



2. SETTLEMENT OF THE SZEKELYS OF BUKOVINA TO HUNGARY – IDEAS, POSSIBILITIES AND REALITY

The idea of the (re)settlement of the Szekelys of Bukovina to Hungary came up in the 1870's: the Hungarians were the relative majority only in the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy¹⁰. According to the census of 1881, out of the 15.642.000 inhabitants of Hungary, only 6.206.000 had Hungarian as native language, accounting to approximately 40% of the population. At the same time, there were 2.325.000 people with Romanian as mother tongue, 2.325.000 South-Slavic people (the Hungarian statistics did not make a difference between the Serbian and Croatian population), 1.882.000 Germans and 1.779.000 Slovaks¹¹. Therefore increasing the ratio of the Hungarian population was an important goal, and plans were made to achieve it. Two significant Hungarian ethnic groups lived abroad: the Szekelys of Bukovina and the Csango people in Moldavia (part of the Kingdom of Romania at the time).

As the five villages in Bukovina were overpopulated and part of the inhabitants was forced to work seasonally on latifundia in Moldavia, the Szekelys of Bukovina requested for the resettlement to Hungary, even by a petition to the prime minister in 1882. As the Hungarian government did not want to risk a conflict with Austria - let us not forget that the inhabitants of Bukovina were Austrian citizens – the settlement was formally not implemented by the state administration, but by a committee - as the name Csango-committee suggests¹², and further settlements were also planned.

¹⁰ PARRAGI, M., «A magyar állampolgársági jog és a külföldön élő magyarság», in *Kisebbségkutatás* 1 (2000), p. 41.

¹¹ *Az 1881. év elején végrehajtott népszámlálás eredményei némely hasznos házi állatok kimutatásával együtt*, vol. I. Budapest 1882, p. 214.

¹² SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 99.



About 4000 Szekelys were settled from Bukovina to three villages in the Lower Danube region in 1883: Hertelendyfalva (now: Vojlovica), Sándoregyháza (now: Ivanovo, both part of Pancevo, Serbia) and Székelykeve (Skorenovac; Serbia) not organised by the state, however supported by the Hungarian authorities, especially by the government commissioner of the Lower Danube region.¹³ The resettlement caused administrative and legal issues concerning the citizenship of the settlers coming from abroad: they had no Hungarian citizenship, and the rules of Act Nr. 50 of 1879 about the obtainment and loss of the Hungarian citizenship (commonly known as the 1st citizenship act) ensured no privileged obtainment for people with Hungarian ascent. The § 38 of the act regulated the renaturalisation, but only for persons who lost their Hungarian citizenship. This did not apply for the Szekelys of Bukovina because they had left Hungary more than 100 years before, and as the modern law of citizenship evolved, they became Austrian citizens¹⁴. Thus, they had to fulfil the conditions for naturalisation, and had to obtain a place of origin (*községi illetőség*). This process was long, complicated and expensive, and caused many difficulties.

To handle this problem and make repatriation easier, a new law was created, the Act Nr. 4. of 1886 about the naturalisation of repatriated groups, just for the case of organised settlement of ethnic Hungarians to Hungary. According to the justification of the act, the resettlement of the Szekelys and the Csangos was targeted, but the regulation could also apply for the repatriation of immigrants returning from the USA¹⁵. The repatriated groups could apply for the Hungarian citizenship together in a single request, and the place of origin was determined by the Minister of Internal Affairs. For the naturalisation of repatriated groups, the rules of renaturalisation were to be adopted, with the difference that neither a former Hungarian citizenship nor the

¹³ SÁNTHA, A., *Bukovinai magyarok*, cit., pp. 84-99.

¹⁴ FERENCZY, F., *Magyar állampolgársági jog*, Gyoma 1930², p. 68.

¹⁵ FERENCZY, F., *Magyar állampolgársági*, cit., p. 116.



Hungarian citizenship of the forefathers was required as they left Hungary when no modern citizenship existed.

Although a new regulation especially for the settlement was established with the Act Nr. 4. of 1886 and increasing the ratio of the Hungarian population was an important goal still, there were no bigger settlements until the First World War. Nevertheless, about 2000 Szekelys of Bukovina moved to Hungary in small groups to different villages in Transylvania on private initiatives, most of them, ca. 700 persons, to Déva (now Deva, Romania)¹⁶.

This first resettlement of the Szekelys at end of the 19th century was neither forced nor formally organized by the Hungarian (or any other) state, rather the initiative came from the inhabitants of the five villages, however it was supported by the Hungarian government and authorities, financially and legally as well, and it was completely voluntary.

After the First World War, the repatriation of ethnic Hungarians was not a main goal of the Hungarian politics anymore: there was no need, as Hungary lost 2/3 of its territories and became almost a homogenic nation-state as the consequence of the Peace Treaty of Trianon in 1920. The Hungarian refugees from the newly established neighbour states - as the new state borders did not correspond to the ethnic areas - caused major problems as Article 64 of the peace treaty allowed for the so-called ethnic option. This option allowed persons, who became citizens of a country as the effect of the peace treaty where their ethnic group was not in majority, to opt for the citizenship of the state where they ethnically belonged within 6 months¹⁷. The Szekelys of Bukovina became citizens of Romania and the historical Bukovina province became a part of the Romanian Kingdom following the Peace

¹⁶ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 118.

¹⁷ KISTELEKI, K., «Magyar állampolgárság a XX. században», in *Állam- és Jogtudomány* 1-2 (2000), p. 57.



Treaty of Saint-Germain and not as a result of the Peace Treaty of Trianon, as Bukovina was a province of the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Maintaining contact with Hungary became more difficult, as Bukovina was far from the new Hungarian borders and among the 1.5 million Hungarian inhabitants of Romania, the ca. 12000 Szekelys of Bukovina were a small and invisible group.

3. THE SETTLEMENT OF THE SZEKELYS OF BUKOVINA TO THE BACKA REGION – A STATE-ORGANISED, BUT VOLUNTARY MIGRATION

The beginning of the Second World War was a turning point in the history of the Szekelys of Bukovina: during the spring of 1940, the Soviet Army occupied the northern (mostly Slavic inhabited) part of Bukovina and the Romanian population fled to the southern part. The Second Vienna Award on the 30th August 1940 returned the northern Part of Transylvania – a Hungarian territory before the Trianon Treaty – to Hungary. So Bukovina bordered Hungary once again, and many Szekelys of Bukovina, mainly young men crossed the border. They did so to escape from service in the Romanian Army in the Second World War, and to search for possibilities of work, as the landowners in Romania declared to refuse the employment Hungarian season workers on their latifundia as a “patriotic act” after the Vienna Award¹⁸. They were technically refugees in Hungary and at first, accommodated in refugee camps. After the first and second Vienna Award 1938 and 1940 and the occupation of Carpathian Ruthenia 1939 and the Vojvodina 1941, Hungary became a multi-ethnic state again, with non-Hungarian majority in many regions. So, the idea of the settlement of Hungarian inhabitants to mixed-populated regions was discussed again¹⁹ – as in the 1870’s, two Hungarian ethnic groups were considered in

¹⁸ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 125.

¹⁹ GOMBOS, GY., *A bukovinai székelyek hazatelepítése. Újabb tennivalók*, Budapest 1942, p. 7.



particular: the Szekelys of Bukovina and the Csango in Moldavia²⁰, both groups lived in the Kingdom of Rumania.

The program to resettle expatriated Germans within the borders of the German Empire called “*Heim ins Reich*” (“Back Home to the Empire”) was in progress at the same time and the 80.000 Germans of Bukovina (*Bukovinadeutsche*) were resettled to the Posen (Poznan) and Danzig (Gdansk) regions, with an officer of the Hungarian gendarmerie attending the process in Bukovina to “attain experience”²¹.

Everything seemed to be ideal for the resettlement of the Szekelys: the ethnopolitical aspect played an important role again, as the ratio of the Hungarian population in Hungary was to be raised: an expert commission recommended that the government resettles a half million people from abroad²². At this time, after the border revisions, about 2 millions of ethnic Hungarians lived in the neighbouring countries. A humanitarian aspect also played a role: the inhabitants of the Szekely villages in Bukovina faced serious economical problems, they were poor, many families had no land property or a too small one to live off, and an important work opportunity disappeared due to the boycott of the Romanian landowners²³. This was the reason why the resettlement was an interest and desire of Szekelys of Bukovina and they requested it from the Hungarian government²⁴. In particular, Kálmán Németh, the priest of Józseffalva, was in favour of a resettlement²⁵.

²⁰ V. KÁPOLNÁS, M., «A magyar kormány kísérletei a moldvai csángók hazatelepítésére, 1940-1944», in *Történeti tanulmányok Dél-Pannóniából II. A dél-dunántúli történészek II. regionális konferenciájának válogatott előadásai*, ed. VONYÓ, J., FÜLÖP, M., Pécs 1994, pp. 255-261.

²¹ A. SAJTI, E., *Székely telepítés és nemzetiségpolitika Bácskában – 1941*, Budapest 1984, p. 16.

²² KÁPOLNÁS, M., A magyar kormány, cit., p. 255.

²³ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 125.

²⁴ VINCZE, G., «A bukovinai székelyek és kisebb moldvai csángó-magyar csoportok áttelepedése Magyarországra (1940-1944)», in *Pro Minoritate* 3 (2001), p. 147.

²⁵ NÉMETH, K., *Százezer szív sikolt. Hazatért és hazavágyó magyarok verőfényes golgotája*, Bácsjózseffalva 1943, p. 167.



The external circumstances seemed favourable: due to the beginning Second World War, big masses of people were involved in resettlement or escape movements in the region. As already mentioned, the German population of Bukovina was resettled by the Nazi Germany, and the Romanian population of North-Bukovina escaped to the southern part which remained Romanian. The creation of exact boundaries between nationalities and territories populated by one single nationality was a declared goal of the international politics in the first half of the 20th century, in order to avoid minority and nationality conflicts²⁶.

About 3000-4000 Szekelys of Bukovina left Romania from September 1940 to spring 1941 partly as refugees to escape the service in the Romanian army, partly after the Second Vienna award using their right to opt in given by the treaty²⁷: ethnic Hungarians with permanent residence on Rumanian territories “detached from Hungary in 1919” and left under Romanian power after September 1940 could waive their Romanian citizenship, in line with article 4 of the award. The Romanian authorities applied this regulation to the Szekelys of Bukovina, too. However, this was not appropriate as Bukovina was never a Hungarian territory, and the Szekelys of Bukovina were never Hungarian citizens.

The Hungarian population of the five villages wished a resettlement, and the Hungarian government made the decision in the first months of 1941 on it. The remaining question was where they would be resettled. The first idea was North-Transylvania, which “returned” in September 1940 to Hungary and had a mixed population, even though many Romanians left it after the Second Vienna Award²⁸. The Szekelys of Bukovina preferred a territory not close to the borders ore one which returned via the revision of the Trianon Treaty, as they thought that they are not safe

²⁶ SEEWANN, G., «A németek Kelet-Európából való elűzésének tipológiai sajátosságai» in *Népek együttélése Dél-Pannóniában: tanulmányok Szita László 70. születésnapjára*, ed. LENGVÁRI, I., VONYÓ, J., Pécs 2003. p. 343.

²⁷ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 126.

²⁸ VINCZE, G., *A bukovinai székelyek*, cit., p.151.



enough, so they wished a new settlement area in the central part of the country, and they wanted to preserve the village communities as well²⁹.

After the occupation of Vojvodina by the Hungarian armed forces - as part of the military operations of Germany against Yugoslavia - on the 11th of April 1941, the decision was made on the 9th of May to resettle the Szekelys of Bukovina there³⁰, replacing the escaped or banished South-Slavic population, settled there after the 1st World War, called *dobrovoljac*³¹. As Transylvania – still vindicated by Romania – was not affected by the action, Romania agreed with the Hungarian plans and on the 11th May, an agreement between the Hungarian and Romanian governments was signed rapidly³². With to this treaty, the Szekelys of Bukovina lost their Romanian citizenship voluntarily and left Rumania only with their personal belongings, such as clothes, furniture and household items, but without animals and agricultural equipment. The houses and land property were inherited by the Romanian state without compensation³³.

The Szekelys of Bukovina gave an official farewell of their villages and the cemeteries before leaving³⁴. The Hungarian administration assisted the resettlement even in Romania, and organised trains for the transportation, so until the 17th June, when the last transport left, 13000 Szekelys moved from Bukovina³⁵.

In Vojvodina, the Resettlement Commissary and the military administration organised the settlement, and the Szekelys got houses in 28 villages meaning that the inhabitants of the former villages now lived in quite big distances between each other³⁶. They could not preserve the old settlement structures and they arrived in a

²⁹ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 126.

³⁰ VINCZE G., *A bukovinai székelyek*, cit., p.179.

³¹ SAJTI, E., *Székely telepítés*, cit., p. 26-44.

³² GOMBOS, GY., *A bukovinai székelyek*, cit., p. 18.

³³ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 128.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ VINCZE G., *A bukovinai székelyek*, cit., p. 154.

³⁶ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 132.



shortly occupied territory with mixed population under military administration - far away from being safe. 36631 acres of land were distributed³⁷, much more and better quality than in Bukovina, schools were built in the villages, medical care was organised, the settlement commissioners gave help to the settlers, but the integration was not without problems. The new surroundings afforded another way of farming, and the Hungarian - and South-Slavic, mainly Serbian - population of the area was not delighted by the settlements. The settlers got much more support from the Hungarian state than from the original inhabitants.

The resettlement of the Szekelys of Bukovina was a state-organised migration, but could not be declared as forced migration, as the affected population agreed with it. It was not a humanitarian action only, because aspects of ethnopolitics played a role by the decisions of the Hungarian government too. It was a legally regulated procedure: by an agreement between Romania and Hungary and the Act Nr. 4. of 1886 about the naturalisation of repatriated groups applied as well³⁸. The settlement in Backa was regulated mainly by the Hungarian military administration with administrative acts.

4. ESCAPE FROM THE VOJVODINA – REFUGEES IN HUNGARY

In October 1944, only three years after the resettlement, the Szekelys of Bukovina were forced to leave their new homes. As the Red Army and the partisans of Tito approached Backa, the Hungarian authorities gave an evacuation order by the officers on the 8th October 1944 and later by broadcast to the settlers, saying the region is not safe for them anymore. They assessed the situation correctly, as 42 men from settlements deep in the south, in the region of Újvidék (now: Novi Sad, Serbia), couldn't escape fast enough and were arrested in Szabadka (now: Subotica, Serbia)

³⁷ Ivi. p. 128.

³⁸ Ivi. p. 133.



and shortly after killed by the Yugoslavian partisans³⁹. The inhabitants only had a few hours to leave, and they left almost all their belongings there. The order was to escape to Transdanubia, but it was not an organised evacuation, the people were left on their own and fled in small groups. Most of them crossed the Danube in October, and got temporary accommodation in Tolna county, but many of them reached the Hungarian border in the west. They were practically in the front line, as the Red Army arrived in the first days of November the Danube and crossed it on the 7th November. The journey of the Szekelys took approximately 14-17 days, and they had to search for accommodation quickly as the winter was coming⁴⁰.

The Hungarian authorities in southern Transdanubia, where the Szekelys arrived at the end of October, faced the first refugees during the late summer 1944 as the Danube Swabians escaped the Banat, Sathmar and later the Backa moving to the west, followed by Hungarians fleeing from the Red Army. On the 30th October, the Minister of Internal Affairs ordered to establish a local Refugee Commission, but the administration of Tolna county suspended their activities on the 28th November because the state administration was on the decline due to the war and many officers escaped as the front line approached⁴¹. So, the refugees were left alone, or got help from the local authorities and later from the so-called National Committees, which took the role of the local administration in the first month after the passing of the front line. The Armistice Agreement signed in Moscow on the 20th January obliged Hungary to protect all the people on its territory including the settlers, the DP-s and refugees, including the Szekelys of Bukovina as well.

A part of the refugees left Hungary to the west before the Red Army arrived, and another part subsequently returned to their original residence. The Szekelys of

³⁹ SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 155.

⁴⁰ Ivi. p. 141.

⁴¹ TÓTH, Á., *Telepítések Magyarországon 1945-1948 között. A németek kitelepítése, a belső népmozgások és a szlovák-magyar lakosságcsere összefüggései*, Kecskemét 1993, p. 57.



Bukovina refused to go west and there was no hope that they can return to Backa or even to Bukovina. They were refugees with Hungarian citizenship and had to be settled in Hungary. As four years before in Backa, they wanted to stay as near to each other as possible, preserving the village communities⁴².

On the 15th March 1945, the ordinance of a radical land reform was declared (600/1945. M.E.), and at the same time the National Farmer Party made plans of a “Szekely county” for de fled Szekelys of Bukovina in the region around Bonyhád⁴³, Tolna county, where the ratio of the population with German mother tongue was about 75% at that time. The Germans in the Völgység district were Danube Swabians, living in this territory since the first decades of the 18th century. As the land reform started, the lord lieutenant of the county, affiliated with the Communist Party, suggested to settle the Szekelys of Bukovina to the Völgység district (around Bonyhád) and give them the land property and houses of the German population “scheduled” to relocate to Germany⁴⁴. The issue was that there was no decision made on the relocation of the German population, neither on the national nor on the international level. This is not surprising, as the war has not even ended yet in Europa at this time. The questions of who should be relocated, based on which criteria, when and where were all unanswered, and there was no legal regulation on it. But this act demonstrates that the Hungarian government planned the relocation of the German population of Hungary, even before the Potsdam Conference made a decision in August 1945.

On the 25th April 1945, György Bodor, a lawyer of partly Szekely origin - but not from Bukovina - arrived to Bonyhád, declared himself as government commissioner and founded a Settlement Office. The only, but quite big problem with his action was that he was never appointed as government commissioner by the

⁴² SEBESTYÉN, Á., *A bukovinai székelység*, cit., p. 171.

⁴³ SAJTI, E., *Székely telepítés*, cit., p. 57.

⁴⁴ ZINNER, T., *A magyarországi németek kitelepítése*, Budapest 2004, p. 38.



Hungarian government. He had a mandate from Ferenc Erdei, the Minister of Internal Affairs, to support the preparations for a possible future settlement. He disregarded his mandate and organised the settlement of the Szekelys to the houses of the German inhabitants. While according to the law, the property of the members of the Volksbund, a Nazi ethnic group organisation, and the servicemen of the German armed forces should be confiscated, in practice every landowner of German origin and mother tongue could be affected. The German population of the villages was transported to an internment camp in the village Lengyel⁴⁵. Not only the houses and land property, but also the animals, furniture and other household contents were confiscated even though the ordinance about the land reform did not allow for this, only houses, landed property and agricultural equipment were to be taken over. As the activities of Bodor and his Settlement Office were without any legal basis and many complaints were made because of the use of violence against the Germans, the government withdrew the formally never given mandate of Bodor on the 28th May⁴⁶. However, the settlement of the Szekelys progressed, and until June they were settled into 35 villages in Tolna, Baranya and Bács-Kiskun counties, not only in the Völgység district, meaning that the planned “Szekely county” was not realised.

The second relocation of the Szekelys was an uncoordinated event, even if an evacuation order can be seen as an administrative act. The settlement in spring and summer of 1945 in Transdanubia was also more an unintended action carried out by mostly unlawful instruments and by repressing the German population. It was never questioned that the Szekelys should be settled as they were destitute, lost almost all their properties on the escape and needed a new home. However, the Hungarian state was not able to find the legal means, facing many other problems after the war. The

⁴⁵ “Bodor György összefoglaló jelentése a Bonyhád környéki telepítésről (1945)” Published by: KÖHEGYI, M., TÓTH, Á. in *A Völgység két évszázada. Előadások és tanulmányok az 1990. október 20-21-i bonyhádi történetészkonferencián.* ed. SZITA, L., SZÓTS, Z., Bonyhád 1991, p. 129-140.

⁴⁶ BODOR, GY., «Szekely honfoglalás 1945-ben. II. rész», in *Forrás* 4 (1975), p. 64.



Szekelys of Bukovina, the former refugees became settlers again, among many others in the region. As an effect of the land reform, settlers came from other parts of the country and Hungarians arrived from Czechoslovakia in 1948 as a result of the population exchange treaty between the two countries.

5. SUMMARY

The fate of the Szekelys of Bukovina is not unique in Europe in the 20th century – even the relocation two times within 4 years (many German settlers of the *Heim ins Reich* program were forced to leave their new homes in 1944-1945, including the repatriated Germans of Bukovina, *Bukowinadeutsche*), but it is a good example how a small ethnic group was instrumentalised for experiments on ethnopolitics. Their fate was determined by the political circumstances. If the political interests required, they were resettled, and were instruments of the modification of the ethnic ratio in Backa and later in Tolna county as well. If they were endangered, they had to flee on their own, as the young men did from Bukovina in 1940 and the whole group from Backa in 1944. The regulations, if existed, just followed the needs and political orders, however notably during the settlement in Tolna in 1945, this was not the case.