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**From Status Law to Citizenship: The Redefinition of the Hungarian Nation  
Concept**

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## 1 Introduction

In recent years, scholarly research increasingly came to focus on kin state policy which engaged in nation building across borders and sought to reconstruct the nation following the collapse of communism. I intend to contribute to this research by using Hungary as a case study for transnational nation building. Hungary's case is unique in Eastern Europe because it is a largely ethnically a homogeneous country which has a high number of ethnic kin across its borders. Kin state policy takes a special place in Hungarian politics because through the Treaty of Trianon of 1920 Hungary lost two-thirds of its territory and over 3 million ethnic Hungarians who found themselves the citizens of neighboring states often in close proximity to the Hungarian border. The loss of its territory presented a great trauma for Hungary and the situation of the ethnic kin in neighboring countries has since been a source of great concern for all Hungarian governments prior to and after communism.

Since 1990 various Hungarian governments used diverging nation concepts and frameworks for national policy which as a rule were discarded by the next government along with institutions designed to serve the needs of Hungarians abroad. In 2010 the coalition of the Young Democrats Civic Alliance/Federation (Fidesz) and the Christian Democratic People's Party (KDNP) received a two-thirds parliamentary majority and was reelected for two more terms. The coalition government could implement its kin state policy based on the ethno-cultural concept of the nation which included the ethnic kin outside Hungary's borders and served as the basis for reconstructing the nation. The government opted for nation building across borders and institutionalized relations with their ethnic kin through dual citizenship and voting rights. Under the new Hungarian kin-state policy, the nation concept moved to the center of "nemzetpolitika" kin state policy and sought to mobilize political support around a unified nation concept.

In Hungary, the reconstruction of the nation was a long weary process since the political camps could not agree on the concept of nation. At the center of the controversy was whether the ethnic kin belonged to the Hungarian nation or only those who lived on the territory of Hungary. Since the Hungarian political elite regards definition of the nation as vital to its self-definition and vision of the future the controversy was carried out with great intensity and still has not been resolved. The dispute over who belongs to the nation has been repeatedly used to further political interests and to create cohesion in the respective political camps. The Hungarian population was exposed to rival national discourses, one for the inclusion of the ethnic kin into the national community, the other for excluding them. In the past ten years, Hungarian citizenship for the ethnic kin and other measures aimed at nation building across borders has decisively shaped Hungarians' views

about the Hungarian nation and their perceptions of themselves. In Hungary, increasingly not only those came to be regarded as members of the Hungarian nation who lived on the territory of Hungary but also ethnic Hungarians abroad.

The concept of nation also took center stage in the policies of other East Central European nations which embarked on the path to democracy. In these countries, however, there was as a rule consensus between political parties about the place of the ethnic kin in the nation which made the redefinition and re-institutionalization of the nation to include the ethnic kin living outside the country far easier than in Hungary.

I use nationalism as the framework to explain the nation-building processes in Hungary and in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe since it has proven to be one of the fundamental organizing principles of nation states and the most important nation-building force. While in Hungary nationalism was outlawed under communism, in most countries where Hungarian minorities live nationalism thrived and erupted with great force with the advent of democracy. It remained a source of concern for Hungary that the rights of ethnic Hungarians to reproduce their ethnic identity were still not guaranteed in their homelands and that they continued to be subjected to great pressures of assimilation by their home states.

### **1.1 Research Questions and Methods**

At the heart of this thesis is the development of Hungarian kin state policy which led to the institutionalization of relations to the ethnic kin through preferential citizenship and non-resident voting rights. This amounted to a redefinition of the nation to include ethnic Hungarians who live outside Hungary and possess the citizenship of another state.

I argue that since 2010 the kin state policy opened a new chapter in the relations between the Hungarian state and Hungarian ethnic minorities in neighboring states. The offer of Hungarian citizenship institutionalized for the first time since Trianon the relations to the ethnic kin. Most ethnic Hungarians who took advantage of Hungarian citizenship regard it as proof of ethnic Hungarian ethnic identity and compensation for the pressures of assimilation that ethnic Hungarians have been experiencing.

Central to my analysis are the nation concepts used in Eastern and Western Europe at a time when the role of traditional nation states is changing, and transnational forms of nation building are on the rise. One can detect two diverging attempts to redefine the nation in Europe, one along ethno-cultural lines in Eastern Europe where the legitimacy of the nation is derived from cultural traditions and the political nation concept in Western Europe under which those are considered

members of the nation who live on the territory of the state. The latter envisages a post national era where nation states and nationalism no longer play a decisive role.

This thesis seeks to answer the following questions: (1) What was the role of nation concepts in the policy of the various Hungarian governments toward Hungarian minorities? (2) What were the reasons for embarking on a new strategy toward the ethnic kin and redefining the concept of nation? (3) How was the new kin state policy received by ethnic Hungarians, the Hungarian opposition parties and the public, the home states, and international actors? (4) How did the kin state policy usher in a new chapter in relations between the Hungarian state and Hungarian minorities and the diaspora? (5) How does Hungarian citizenship and non-residential voting rights influence the ethnic identity and political activity of ethnic Hungarians in their homelands? (6) What are the chances of success of the kin state policy in the long run?

I examine Hungarian kin state policy on four levels the kin state, the ethnic kin, the home states, and the European Union and international organizations. On the domestic level, since the democratic transformation the kin state has sought to monitor the condition of its ethnic kin and felt obliged to help them reach their basic aspirations, collective rights and a form of autonomy in the region where they live. At the same time, the place of Hungarian minorities in the concept of nation has caused controversy between the political camps and has been used to damage political rivals. Political parties used the issue of ethnic minorities alternately to present themselves as the protector of the interests of the nation or as a threat to the Hungarian population's standard of living.

The situation of ethnic Hungarians in their homelands is crucial to understanding why many of them welcomed preferential citizenship. Ethnic Hungarians are greatly disappointed that democratization failed to bring legal guarantees for basic minority rights and a form of self-government to secure the reproduction of their communities. I examine the situation of ethnic Hungarians in their homelands with attention to their linguistic rights and chances of attaining a form of self-government or autonomy.

A key question is how dual citizenship and voting rights influence the ethnic identity and political activity of ethnic Hungarians in their homelands. The interests of the ethnic kin to build self-standing parallel societies may clash not only with the nation-building efforts of the home state but also with those of the kin state. Another vital question is whether the new kin state policy fulfills the goal of protecting the rights of ethnic Hungarians and sustains them in their homelands. One cannot understand the interactions between the kin state, the ethnic kin, the home states, and international actors without examining the historical background of the region. I look at the interactions in the framework of historical institutionalism which examines how past events

influence current policy and point to signs of continuity and change over time. This approach can be used to examine the Hungarian debate over the concept of the nation, and its historical roots that reach back to the early twentieth century.

The relationship of the ethnic kin and of the home states to the kin state are still overshadowed by the memory of Trianon. For ethnic Hungarians, Trianon is not only a loss of territory but a threat to their existence as Hungarians. Ethnic Hungarians welcomed dual citizenship because they regarded it as the kin state's attempt to compensate for their disadvantaged position in the home states. For the home states the memory of Trianon is omnipresent and explains why they interpret the efforts of the kin state to help the minority in its nation-building as a threat to their sovereignty.

Relations between the home states and the kin state impact the situation of the ethnic kin. The issue of minority rights repeatedly strained Hungary's relations to the home states more so under conservative governments which tended to raise the issue of minority rights more often than left-liberal governments. Tensions occurred when Hungary reacted to measures in the home states that reduced the rights of Hungarian minorities. The home states contended that their treatment of Hungarian minorities is exemplary and regarded measures by the kin state to improve the situation of the ethnic kin as unnecessary interference in their internal affairs. The home states repeatedly used the "Hungarian card" in election campaigns to attract the support of the ethnic majority voters. The dispute in 2010 between Hungary and Slovakia over preferential citizenship created tensions in bilateral relations as well as between ethnic Hungarians and the majority.

The influence of international actors such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, the OSCE was considerable following the collapse of communism when they set conditions for post-communist countries for joining Western organizations. This could be observed in the kin state policies of East Central and South Eastern European states as they delayed or modified the conditions of introducing preferential citizenship and non-resident voting rights. Since then, except for Ukraine and Serbia, the home countries have become EU members, and the EU and international organizations can only exert normative pressure and are not able or willing to enforce laws on minority rights. Although Hungary has since democratization attempted to influence EU law and international legislation to promote the protection of its ethnic kin, it made little headway since the rights of autochthonous minorities were not on the international agenda. There is still no generally accepted definition of minorities which would serve as a basis for working out a minority rights regime.

## **1.2 Research Sources**

I examined a wide variety of data sources, dealing with census, opinion surveys, and election results. An analysis of party documents and government programs as well as parliamentary and political debates throws light on the political processes behind Hungarian kin-state policy. I used numerous publications, programs, manifestos, and statements of various Hungarian governments to evaluate kin state policy. I conducted interviews with members of the political and academic elite in Hungary and in neighboring countries to learn what they expect from the new kin-state policy. I used the numerous surveys conducted by research institutes in Hungary and neighboring countries to show the views of the Hungarian population and of ethnic Hungarians on preferential citizenship and ethnic identity. The backbone of my research are the numerous books and studies which examine the situation of the Hungarian minority. Publications on the concept of nation and nationalism from Hungary and Western Europe are vital sources of information as they examine the topic across disciplines as varied as anthropology, political science, and sociology. Transnational nation-building and preferential citizenship, the core of the Hungarian government's kin state policy, has been the focus of a great number of Hungarian and international studies. Nation-building and preferential citizenship have as a rule been treated from the Western perspective of the political and not of the ethno-cultural nation. Central to the reception of Hungarian kin-state policy on the international level has been the concept of nation that the analysts endorse. The political concept of the nation corresponding to the Western European views of the nation and ethnicity is reflected in the views of EU institutions and influence and the type of minority regime they endorse. These views are also contained in the relevant documents on minority rights by international organizations which at the same time reveals that the EU has used different minority rights standards toward aspiring and member states.

## **2 Overview of the Thesis**

The first part of the thesis is devoted to the concepts of nation, nationhood, and

nationalism because these play a key role in understanding processes surrounding the definition and redefinition of the nation. There is no agreement among scholars about these concepts. Under the ethnocultural concept of the nation, the legitimacy of the nation is derived from cultural or ethnic traditions. Under the civic concept, the emphasis is on loyalty to the common political community which produces a common civic identity which transcends ethnic cleavages. Under the “essentialist” branch of the study of nationalism ethnic belonging is an objective category and inalienable and unchangeable part of human nature. At the other end of the spectrum, the “modernist” view of national identity regards nations as constructs of capitalism and the modern nation state. As a modern political doctrine nationalism aims to connect nation, territory, and state. Many scholars regard nationalism as the construction of political entrepreneurs who use it to gain and hold on to political power. Others associate nationalism with the legitimacy of the executive power which comes from the will of the national community and serves the national interest. The postmodern constructivist strand of research, which dominates the discourse about nations, no longer regards nations and ethnicity as clearly defined existing entities but rather as “constructed” or “fluid.”

Most scholars operate with the ethno-cultural and political or civic concept of the nation when examining nationalism. In contrast to the organic character of the ethno-cultural nation, the political nation is conceived as a nation which is imagined and constructed from above. Under the cultural nation concept, the identity of the national community is substantiated reality based on a common ancestry or culture which forms the basis for the functioning of the nation as a political community. One is born into the nation and does not become a member through requirements of participation in political life. Under the civic concept of the nation, those are the members of the nation who live on the territory of the state regardless of ethnic origin. Each person can become a citizen if he accepts the norms of the state. It is citizenship which determines a person’s nationality and entitles the members of the state to social and political participation. Studies indicating the distinction between the Western “political” nation and the Eastern “ethnic” nation are exaggerated since ethnic identity plays a key role also in the citizenship policies of Western nations.

In East Central Europe, the ethnocultural concept of the nation played a key role in the



reconstruction of the nation while in Western Europe the political concept of the nation dominated nation-building. Hungarians who live their lives as minorities embrace the ethnocultural concept of the nation to survive and are reminded of their ethnic identity in their quotidian struggles with the majority as they seek to exercise their basic rights such as speaking their mother tongue in public.

The development of nation concepts in Hungary historically included both the ethnic and political concepts and the two conflicting concepts and continue to shape scholarly discourses even today. Changes of regime brought with them new interpretations of the identity of the nation which made it difficult to reach consensus over the nation concept and the interpretation of historical events. Hungarian history is characterized by conflicting interpretations of the concept of national identity. There is no consensus among the political camps how the question of who the members of the community are should be answered and how historical events should be interpreted. The notions of nation, identity, and the past are viewed differently which make the creation of common traditions exceedingly difficult. The issue of Trianon and the ways it can be dealt with highlights the vastly different interpretations of history, especially 20<sup>th</sup> century history, among Hungary's political camps.

The concept of ethnic identity and ethnicity is just as controversial as that of national identity. There is some consensus among scholars of sociology and anthropology that ethnic identity involves a process of knowing who we are, and who the others are and plays a key role in how people relate to each other. Ethnic identity is usually regarded as something cultural that relates to a common language and traditions. Educational institutions decide the ethnic identity of children when they teach them early on the national language, national symbols, and national history. Many scholars agree that boundaries play a key role in maintaining the ethnic identity of groups.

The legacy of communism still influences Hungarian society and its relationship to their ethnic kin. The government of János Kádár was the only one in the region which did not pursue a nationalist policy and shunned public discussions about the issue of the nation and ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries. The Kádár government eschewed all forms of nationalism and branded national attitudes as backward. The government subordinated Hungarian policy toward the neighboring states to achieve

internationalism. This “anti-national” attitude was embraced by the left-liberal political elite and still shapes their views on their relationship to the nation. The “anti-national” attitude condemned symbolic politics and national rhetoric. It placed the emphasis on individual rights and opined that the right of association was enough for minorities to articulate their interests.

The “anti-national” and national attitudes still divide Hungarian scholars and political camps. The controversy centers around whether ethnic Hungarians should be considered part of a unified Hungarian nation or whether their interests were better served if they are considered as separate parts of the cultural nation who have historically more in common with their present homelands than with Hungary. The nation concepts discussed encompassed ethnic Hungarians as part of mosaic communities rooted in the Hungarian cultural nation as well as the members of a unified Hungarian transborder nation that is spread out throughout the world.

The nation concepts espoused by the political camps put their stamp on their policy toward ethnic Hungarians abroad. According to the conservative view, nation-building includes all the regions where Hungarians live regardless of borders. This view holds that ethnic Hungarians are part of the unified nation and advocates the institutionalization of relations between them and the kin state. At the other end of the spectrum, there is no unified Hungarian nation with Budapest at the center. This view envisions a trans-ethnic identity for Hungarian minorities based on the political concept of the nation where minorities are integrated into the majority society through loyalty to an overarching political framework, such as the constitution.

I deal with the kin state policies of various governments since the first democratic elections. Prior to and following the 1990 elections, the wish of joining the West and taking over Western solutions to problems, including those in the field of minority rights, was common to both the left-liberal and the conservative camps. Later, however, especially as Viktor Orbán took over the leadership of the conservative camp and following the 1998 elections the goal was not only to follow Western patterns but to shape Western policy in a way deemed favorable to Hungary and the Hungarian minorities. By 2010, it became clear that Orbán rejected Western policies which he interpreted as

damaging to Hungary's sovereignty and sought to shape policy also on the international stage. This came to the fore during the migrant crisis of 2015 when he rejected the Western policy of distributing migrants among EU countries.

While the first democratically elected prime minister József Antall called himself "in spirit" the prime minister of the Hungarian nation including the ethnic kin in neighboring countries, his successor Gyula Horn considered himself only the prime minister of Hungary that is of the people who live on the territory of Hungary. In 1998 a government led by Viktor Orbán came to power, and the unified Hungarian nation became the basis of kin state policy. The first step taken to institutionalize relations with the ethnic kin was the status law which granted ethnic Hungarians an identity card and benefits. The failed referendum of 2004 over dual citizenship deepened the cleavages between the political camps and caused great disappointment among ethnic Hungarians. From 2002 to 2010, the Hungarian government again saw itself primarily as the representative of those who live solely in Hungary.

In the third part of the thesis, I discuss the framework of the new national policy which was introduced in 2010 when the Fidesz-KDNP coalition led by Orbán received a two-thirds parliamentary majority. The new policy placed the concept of nation in the center and enshrined in the new constitution the ethno-cultural nation concept. Preferential citizenship and non-resident voting rights were introduced. The declared goal of the government was to help Hungarian minorities preserve their ethnic identity in their home countries. The government increased financial aid to support ethnic Hungarian institutions in neighboring countries and launched economic programs which targeted the regions where ethnic Hungarians live. The financial aid to ethnic Hungarian communities often exceeded the sum ethnic Hungarians received from their home states.

The most important Hungarian-Hungarian forum, the Magyar Állandó Értekezlet (the Hungarian Constant Consulting Conference -- MÁÉRT) was reconvened in 2010 after a six-year break under Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány. The Conference meets annually and serves as a forum of discussion for Hungarian and ethnic Hungarian politicians. The government introduced various new programs which addressed Hungarians living in the West and also established the Hungarian Diaspora Council.

In the fourth part of the thesis, I deal with the definition of minorities, and the stance taken regarding minority rights in the international arena and the EU. There is no universally accepted definition of minorities which gives states a lot of leeway in adopting their own definitions of what constitutes a minority and which groups they recognize as such. While all countries which joined the European Union had to accept norms on minority protection, after accession, the EU is not able to formulate “demands” on minority rights or to enforce respect for minority rights. International treaties and soft laws on minority rights serve as references and it is up to states to define whom they consider as minorities and what rights they grant them.

I define Hungarian minorities as autochthonous national minorities who were forced into a minority situation because the borders moved around them. Since the separation from the kin state ethnic Hungarians continued to speak the same language and share similar traditions and have continued to maintain a strong sense of national identity.

The fifth part examines the situation of Hungarian minorities in their homelands, their common aspirations, strategies for survival and their quest for autonomy in the preservation of ethnic identity. There is consensus among ethnic Hungarians that they are part of the Hungarian cultural nation because they never abandoned it on their own. The major goals that all Hungarian minority communities deem as essential for their cultural reproduction are language rights and the right to self-government in the areas where they live. Self-government is rejected by most home states because the memories of Trianon are still present and they fear the revival of irredentism.

The strategies for minorities to adopt in relation to the majority can be divided into the integrative and the consociational or accommodational models. The first seeks to integrate minorities into society through participation in the majority government. The integrative approach aims to reduce ethnic cleavages and increase interaction between the majority and minority. The emphasis is on loyalty to the common political community which produces a common civic identity which transcends ethnic identification. The second model seeks to institutionalize the right to ethnic identity and limits the assimilationist pressures of the political elite. Here it is acknowledged that the minority needs protection against the homogenizing

efforts of the majority and can build up its own parallel society where it enjoys some sort of self-government.

The ethnic Hungarian parties are major representatives of minority interests who play a key role in ensuring the survival of ethnic minority communities. Balancing between the two models of survival, integration and accommodation, minority elites seek simultaneously to maintain ethnic boundaries while avoiding marginalization. Ethnic Hungarian parties who have participated in the governments had to reduce or give up the project of achieving autonomy and demands for more minority rights. This created a great deal of dissatisfaction among ethnic Hungarian voters. The frustration only increased when the ethnic parties no longer participated in the governments and were unable to make deals with the majority to increase financial support to ethnic communities. Against this background ethnic Hungarian organizations began to orient themselves more and more toward Hungary even before the election of the second Fidesz government of 2010. The dissatisfaction with the established parties gave leeway to the kin state to support new parties which laid more emphasis on the rights of the minority to self-government. The greatly increased financial subsidies and the financing of the institutional framework for the processing of preferential citizenship led to the growth in the influence of the kin state in ethnic Hungarian communities.

The sixth part looks at the language rights and autonomy aspirations of ethnic Hungarians and the role which they play in the preservation of ethnic identity. The mother tongue is the most important feature of ethnic identity and its usage is essential for the cultural reproduction of ethnic communities. For the preservation of the mother tongue, it is vital that it is spoken not only in private but also in the public arena. Under EU law, language rights fall under national jurisdictions which means that their observance and implementation depends on the will of the home states where minorities live. In most of the states where ethnic Hungarians live the language rights of minorities are construed as individual and not as collective rights and are treated as privileges that can be taken away. Most home states signed international and European agreements on linguistic rights but interpret them in a way that stresses limits and exemptions and they seek to use them to restrict existing language rights. Even in countries where the level of protection of linguistic rights is high only a minority of ethnic Hungarians take advantage of their

language rights because of the obstacles they face when they seek to use their mother tongue in communicating with public authorities. A major problem is the shortage of staff who speak the minority language and the discrepancy between the laws and their implementation.

After the fall of communism, ethnic Hungarian parties and organizations defined self-government as the only way of ensuring the survival of their communities. They worked out numerous autonomy concepts that allow them to manage areas of competence which are essential for maintaining their ethnic identity, such as education, language rights and culture. The home states where sizable Hungarian communities live reject all forms of autonomy because they fear that autonomy, especially territorial, would be the first step toward secession. In these countries, majority nation- and later state-building evolved as a rule against Hungarian nation-building and Hungarians are still regarded as security factors or fifth columns.

The hope of minorities that the decentralization promoted by European integration would result in the territorial devolution of power and allow for a solution of their problems on the regional level, failed to materialize. In Slovakia, Hungarians are not even able to govern themselves in regions where they form a majority because the electoral districts were cut up in a way as to prevent Hungarian self-government.

It has been a subject of heated debate among Hungarian experts how preferential citizenship influences the chances of the minority for autonomy in their homelands. One view regards the influence of dual citizenship on the chances for autonomy in Székelyland “ambivalent” and stresses that Hungarian citizenship strengthens the identity of Hungarian minority communities and helps them keep the issue of autonomy on the agenda. Other scholars fear that preferential citizenship could strengthen the majority’s resistance to autonomy and weakens the ability of the minority to integrate in the political community of the state. Many home countries have preferential citizenship policies which are like that of Hungary and are unlikely to raise objections to Hungarian citizenship. The reactions to the introduction of Hungarian preferential citizenship were muted. Only Slovakia reacted to Hungarian dual citizenship negatively by passing legislation which stripped dual citizens of their Slovak citizenship. In Romania, for example, the acceptance

of Hungarian citizenship among Romanians grew in recent years and Romanians never used the issue of Hungarian citizenship as an argument against autonomy. One reason for this attitude, however, could be that the Romanian perception is that ethnic Hungarians belong to Hungary and they hope that preferential citizenship will make it easier for Hungarians to leave Romania.

In the seventh part of the thesis, a chapter is devoted to the history of dual citizenship from its rejection to its widespread acceptance. Transnational citizenship or preferential citizenship was promoted by the process of disintegration of the traditional nation state based on the trinity of nation, state, and territory. Transnational nation building came into being following the wave of democratization in Eastern European countries in the 1990s and received a boost through European integration and globalization.

In most Western European countries preferential citizenship became the norm and was granted primarily to migrants to promote their integration into Western society. This weakened the ethnic identity of the majority and accelerated the process of de-ethnicization of these countries. In many of these countries, ethnic identity became a topic of public discussions and the issue of “re-ethnicization” was taken up by political parties.

In the eighth part of the thesis, I discuss how the introduction of dual citizenship and voting rights without residence requirements brought a strategic change in the relationship of the kin minorities and the kin state. Ethnic Hungarian parties sought to adjust or readjust their strategy to consider that their voters are also voters of the transborder political nation. While some members of the ethnic Hungarian political elite criticized dual citizenship because of the influence it gave to the kin state over ethnic Hungarian communities, most ethnic Hungarians welcomed it and ethnic Hungarian parties helped in implementing its provisions.

In the next subchapter, I discuss the role of ethnic Hungarians as voters in Hungary. In June 2020 there were 1,1 million new ethnic Hungarian citizens. In the two national elections of 2014 and 2018 in which dual citizens could participate, those who registered to vote and whose votes were valid, circa 200,000 in 2018, they cast their ballots overwhelmingly for Fidesz. A major motive was gratitude for receiving Hungarian

citizenship. Under the electoral system, ethnic Hungarian non-resident voters can only cast their votes for the national list, and they are likely to win only one or two mandates depending on the number of registered voters.

Ethnic Hungarians became potential constituents for Hungarian parties and part of internal Hungarian politics. Most Hungarian opposition parties sought to cater to the needs of ethnic Hungarians to gain their votes. The oppositional party Demokratikus Koalíció led by former Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány opposed voting rights for ethnic Hungarians and used the issue to campaign against the government. This resonated with the followers of the party and even beyond since voting rights for the ethnic kin are still rejected by most of the population. At the same time, an increasing number of Hungarians see ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries as part of the Hungarian nation and most of them approve granting them dual citizenship.

In the concluding part, I discuss the major goals of kin state policy and the extent to which they have achieved the redefinition of the nation.

### **3 Summary of the Major Findings**

In 2010 the government had the parliamentary majority to implement a kin state policy which placed the concept of nation in the center and enshrined in the new constitution the ethno-cultural nation concept of the nation. Fidesz made the rights of ethnic Hungarians part of the core of its policy and Hungarian minorities played a key role in its concept of the “unified nation.” The expansion of the national community to include the ethnic kin aimed to strengthen Hungarian national identity. The new kin state policy was an answer to the failure of previous strategies to stop the rapid population decline of Hungarian minorities. Strategies which placed hopes in international pressure, good neighborly relations, the development of regionalization and local government structures, and the participation of ethnic minorities in majority governments brought no major improvement in the situation of the minorities. The Hungarian kin state employed a new strategy as it reached out to support the minority nation building of ethnic Hungarians against the



nation building of the majorities which sought to assimilate them. Massive financial aid and preferential citizenship with non-residential voting rights were measures that the Hungarian government could use to help Hungarian communities without asking for the permission of the home states.

The large number of ethnic Hungarians who took advantage of preferential citizenship showed the strength of Hungarian ethnic identity even one hundred years after Trianon. Most newly naturalized citizens regarded Hungarian citizenship as proof of belonging and as a form of compensation for the pressures of assimilation that they had endured since the borders moved around them. Ethnic Hungarian dual citizens will also be able to influence Hungarian political actors and politics through their votes. The goal of the political elite in large ethnic Hungarian communities to run their parallel political communities in their homelands is supported by the kin state.

Looking at the four levels of my analysis, the new kin state policy was rejected by Hungarian opposition parties because it went against their view of the nation and they feared that the Fidesz government would gain more ethnic Hungarian votes and control over ethnic Hungarian communities. The “anti-national” versus national attitudes inherited from the communist period proved to be durable among the competing political elites. Most of the Hungarian population came to see ethnic Hungarians in neighboring countries as part of the Hungarian nation and approved their Hungarian citizenship. In the past thirty years it became clear that the major concern of international actors was stability and not protecting the rights of national minorities. The growing migration to Western Europe posed new challenges to Hungarian minorities because EU minority policy came to focus on the human and individual rights of migrants and their integration. While the memories of Trianon are omnipresent in East Central Europe, in the last ten years relations between Hungary and neighboring countries have improved.

Following the collapse of communism, nationalism became a major driving force in Central and Eastern Europe and played a key role in defining and redefining the nation. The revival of ties to the ethnic kin invigorated the nation and strengthened the national identity of post-communist nations. In Western Europe protective nationalism and right-wing radical parties emerged in reaction to the problems associated with migration.

Minority nationalism also came to the fore as regional minorities sought autonomy. The migration crisis of 2015 brought to light deep divisions between East Central and Western European countries over migration from outside Europe. Hungary and other East Central European countries rejected the migrant relocation plans of the EU and stressed their sovereign right as nation states to decide who enters their territory.

A key question is whether the new kin state policy fulfills the goal of protecting the identity of ethnic Hungarians and reducing the wave of emigration toward Hungary and the West. Especially ethnic Hungarians from the non-EU countries of Serbia and the Ukraine often used Hungarian citizenship to leave their homelands which diminished the size of their communities and went against the government's goal of helping ethnic Hungarians stay in their homelands. On the other hand, Hungarian investment and projects in the regions where ethnic Hungarians live supported their economic well-being and created more favorable conditions for staying in their homelands.

Concern is voiced in the scholarly community that dual citizenship and voting rights as well as increased kin state activity will make ethnic Hungarian communities too dependent on the kin state and could reduce their claim-making efforts toward the home state. However, even before the intensive engagement of the kin state many ethnic Hungarian communities were split over the strategy to pursue toward the home state. Ethnic Hungarian elites will have to balance between the conflicting strategies of the kin state and the home state as they seek to formulate claims to maintain their distinct cultural communities.

Surveys on the possible effects of Hungarian citizenship on the ethnic kin show that the development of diasporas which depend on the kin state is not a likely outcome. Both ethnic Hungarians and Hungarians in Hungary perceive themselves as having characteristics which differentiate them from one another. This attitude and the strong attachment of Hungarian minorities to the regions where they live provide a strong incentive for maintaining their own communities. Key to preventing the transformation of the ethnic Hungarian communities into dispersed fragments in the majority is the engagement of the ethnic minority elites for promoting the social cohesion of Hungarian communities. In Székelyland the regional identity and the social cohesion of ethnic

Hungarians has been strengthened as they reached back to historical traditions and symbols. The goal is the creation of a strong civil society that can articulate the demand for autonomy. The belief that autonomy is possible has the capacity to unite the ethnic Hungarian community. Willingness to engage for the community gives hope that ethnic Hungarians will be able to stand up for their rights and work out a clear-cut common political strategy for autonomy. One way of securing support for autonomy on the part of the majority nation is to involve majority experts in the formulation of autonomy concepts. This would serve as the basis for beginning negotiations over autonomy between the minority and majority.

Cooperation between East Central European nations, especially among the V4 countries, increased in such strategic fields as security, migration, and economic development. The cooperation demonstrated that while the individual countries alone carry little weight on the geopolitical stage, they can far better represent their interests as an alliance. Many East Central European countries realized that a united stance is urgently needed in view of the challenges that the EU and Europe face as European political power erodes on the world stage at a time when it faces major crises over migration and the pandemic. The recognition among East Central European countries that they can better represent their interests if they are united brought with it an improvement of relations and more openness toward reconciling differences. Hungarian-Slovakian relations have much improved in the past ten years and relations with Serbia are exceptionally good. Acts of historical reconciliation between Hungary and Serbia demonstrate that rapprochement is possible even if the two sides have grave historical grievances. In an atmosphere of reconciliation, it would be much easier for Hungarian minorities to win over members of the majority to take up their cause. Key to better relations is a regular dialogue between the respective governments about controversial issues and exchange programs between their populations. The ethnic Hungarian political elite can participate in shaping interstate relations between the home and the kin state.

Financial aid from the kin state will not be able to replace the funding of minority institutions by the home state in large Hungarian communities such as Romania and Slovakia. Ethnic Hungarians will have to participate in the politics of their home states to achieve more minority rights such as language rights. In the long run, the success of the

new kin state policy depends on its acceptance by all major Hungarian political actors and their willingness to carry on financing the projects and institutions put in place by the Fidesz government.

#### **4 Publications Related to the Topic**

Oltay, Edith: *Fidesz and the Reinvention of the Hungarian Center-Right*, Budapest: Századvég 2013.

Oltay, Edith: Concepts of Citizenship in Eastern and Western Europe, *Acta Univ. Sapientiae, European Regional Studies*, 11 2017:43–62.

Oltay, Edith: *Hungarian Quest for Autonomy*, Manuscript 2017.

Oltay, Edith: The Use of the Hungarian Language in Public Administration: The Case of Minorities in Hungary's Neighbouring Countries. *Acta Humana – Emberi Jogi Közlemények*, 6(2), 2018:97–118.  
<https://folyoirat.ludovika.hu/index.php/actahumana/article/view/963>

Oltay, Edith: The Redefinition of Hungarian Nation Concepts Part I. and Part II. *Hungarian Review*, March, and June 2021.

