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*My grandpa wasn't a Hungarian!*

*The Stigmata of home comers to Czechoslovakia through the second and third generation viewpoint<sup>1</sup>*

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**Abstract**

After World War II, a population exchange between Czechoslovakia and Hungary was realized. The winning powers denied one-way transfer of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia as it was used at German minority. Therefore, the population exchange was considered as the only option. Some of the Slovaks who had lived in Hungary in diasporas for decades did not receive very well the population exchange report. Others were enthusiastic about it. The fact remains that “returnee Slovaks” were not considered as Slovaks in their homeland in general, and their lives were marked by the exchange forever. How did they identify themselves? How did they talk about the exchange to their children and grandchildren?

The aim of this contribution is to elucidate the collective memory and collective remembering issue with the example of Slovak returnees from Hungary. How much of the population exchange narrative remains in the families from generation to generation? Collective memory is related to common remembering. This contribution focuses on self-identification of population exchange returnees, and in comparison with the second and third generation perception. Has the opinion changed through several generations? What Stigmata caused the population exchange?

Oral history as one of the research methods is suitable to study collective memory. It is a capturing of personal references, which are irrecoverable in population exchange transgenerational memory phenomenon. Thanks to the family memories of individual narrators, we can observe the stories of pleasure, and happiness, as well as haunting, misery and misunderstanding.

**Key words:** population exchange, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, oral history, transgenerational memory

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## **Introduction**

The project *My grandpa wasn't a Hungarian! The Stigmata of home comers to Czechoslovakia through the second and third generation viewpoint* started in the autumn 2017. The aim of contribution is to clarify the collective memory and collective remembering issue on the example of Slovak returnees' descendants from Hungary. How much of the narrative of the population exchange remains in the families from generation to generation? How did they identify themselves? How have they talked about the exchange to their children and grandchildren? The collective memory is related to common remembering. This contribution shall focus on self-identification of population exchange returnees' descendants. Has the opinion changed through several generations? What Stigmata caused the population exchange?

Czechoslovakia was united after World War II. The effort of Czechoslovak political leaders was to create the national state of Czechs and Slovaks; therefore they requested the transfer of other nationalities from the territory of Czechoslovakia. It was German, and with regard to returning the southern regions occupied during the war by Hungary back to Czechoslovakia, and also Hungarian minority. The winning powers denied one-way transfer of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia as it was in case of German minority. Therefore, the population exchange was considered as the only option. A population exchange between Czechoslovakia and Hungary citizens occurred after World War II. Some Slovaks living in diasporas in Hungary for decades (some from the 17<sup>th</sup> century) didn't receive the news of population exchange very well. Others, especially the younger generation, were enthusiastic about it. They expected new life in their homeland.

## Situation after WWII

As part of the integration of southern Slovakia into the Czechoslovak Republic, the Slovak National Council (SNR) began to prosecute war criminals. On 4<sup>th</sup> February 1945, a manifesto announced the return of the Czechoslovak citizenship to be a part of the magyarized population of the Slovak nationality, declaring the departure of anyas<sup>2</sup> (population settled by the Hungarian Horthy regime who arrived at the territory of southern Slovakia after the first Vienna Arbitration on 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1938 and symbolized the element of magyarization of Southern Slovakia). The solution to Slovakia's national problems was later altered on the basis of the Moscow negotiations from 22<sup>nd</sup> – 29<sup>th</sup> March 1945, which resulted in the adoption of the first government program of the National Front of the Czechs and Slovaks. The program was adopted in Košice on 5<sup>th</sup> April 1945, the Košice Government Program (KVP). The temporary government of Edvard Beneš planned to overcome the problems that burdened the first common republic (28<sup>th</sup> October 1918 – 6<sup>th</sup> October 1938), and in the framework of the promises of ethnic homogenization, exchanges as the sole option of dealing with national minorities within the framework of the preservation of the Czechoslovak National State.<sup>3</sup> Article VIII of the KVP also regulated the issue of the nationality of the German and Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, with the exception of citizens with proven anti-fascist activities, Czechoslovak nationality being expropriated.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> However, the Manifesto did not meet the normative scheme that was necessary to carry out the transfer of anyas from the territory of Slovakia. Some local authorities have organized their removal in their own way, but this process has been accompanied by insufficient technical means and problems. The rules for the removal of anyas were set on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1945, by the issue of the circular letter of the Commission of Interior, provided for National Committees and the Administrative Commissions. Transfer of anyas was the first officially prepared resettlement within the Czechoslovak-Hungarian post-war migration. ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948*. Bratislava : Veda, 1993, p. 38 – 39.

<sup>3</sup> At the expense of the idea of the czechoslovakism of the first Czechoslovak Republic, which defined Czechs and Slovaks as one nationality, the tendencies of the creation of the second republic were stipulated on the idea that the Czechs and Slovaks are two separate Slavic nations. BRENNER, Christiane. *Mezi východem a západem: České politické diskurzy 1945–1948*. Praha : Argo, 2015, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> See KOVÁČ, Andrej. *Košický vládný program*. Bratislava : SPN, 1977.

The abolition of citizenship based on ethnicity and its possible conditions for return were declared by the KVP more liberal than in the later presidential decree from 2<sup>nd</sup> August 1945, on Czechoslovak citizenship (No. 33/1945), which legally forfeited the loss of citizens' rights for those of German and Hungarian nationalities.<sup>5</sup> The Košice government program meant for the Slovak political representation adoption of the future political direction of the country, which was agreed in Moscow by the Czechoslovak leaders from London and Moscow.<sup>6</sup>

In the post-war Czechoslovak Republic, in areas with strong Hungarian and German population, national committees were not established, but rather appointed administrative commissions. The gradual limitation of German and Hungarian minorities' rights continued in the social, economic as well as cultural and educational spheres.<sup>7</sup> The people's judiciary was in charge of the persecution of war criminals, and mainly affected the people who collaborated with Germans, members of the Hlinka Slovak People's Party and in the southern regions, members of the Hungarian political parties who helped to join the southern regions to Horthy's Hungary in 1938. Party membership itself was not considered a criminal offense (each individual was investigated on an individual case where specific actions and engagements were taken into account), but often the membership in these parties became a criterion for enrollment in the population exchange or deportation to Czech lands. The post-war reform of land ownership and economic governance was implemented gradually in three phases in Czechoslovakia.

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<sup>5</sup> ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948...*, p. 47; also BRENNER, Christiane. *Mezi východem a západem: České politické diskurzy 1945–1948*. Praha : Argo, 2015, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> POPÉLY, Árpád. Plány na vysídlenie maďarského obyvateľstva v rámci výmeny obyvateľstva medzi Československom a Maďarskom. In *FÓRUM spoločenskovedná revue*. Šamorín : Fórum inštitút pre výskum menšín, 2009, p. 80.

<sup>7</sup> The Commission of Education and Edification planned to maintain Hungarian national schools immediately after the war. The Principles of Preservation of Education were also taken over by the Delegation of the Slovak National Council for the Liberated Territory. The situation has changed with the adoption of the Košice government program and gradual abolition of Hungarian language in schools begun in May 1945. Teaching in Hungarian lasted only until the end of the school year, while another school year 1945/1946 started without Hungarian language. Hungarian societies and educational institutions were abolished, and the use of Hungarian was forbidden. ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948...*, p. 41 – 42, 49.

In addition to the above mentioned anti-minority actions, an action was taken to expel the Hungarian nationality to Bohemia in 1947–1949.<sup>8</sup> The first transfers of the Hungarian minority took place in connection with the restoration of the damaged areas of Czechoslovakia and the “de-magyarization” of some cities (Košice, Trebišov, Michalovce, etc.). The idea of a controlled transfer of Hungarians to Bohemia emerged in connection with the use of unemployed workers from the Slovak territory in Bohemia (after the displaced German population there remained free estates) and on the basis that the Hungarian question would not be solved in the same way as the German – by one-way transfer.<sup>9</sup> This act was often justified by the need (recruitment) of the labour force that was so lacking in the Czech border. But these attempts of clarification weren't really accepted. The real reason was the weakening of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia (especially in southern Slovakia).<sup>10</sup>

The action that attracted public attention was undoubtedly the “re-slovakization”<sup>11</sup> and therefore the administrative return of the Slovak nationality to the magyarized Slovaks. Based on the idea that a large part of the Hungarian minority is in fact a magyarized majority. *“In fact, the whole event was based on a pressure on the Hungarians to declare themselves Slovaks; in return they gained Czechoslovak citizenship and equal rights with other citizens and above mentioned restrictions did not apply for them.”*<sup>12</sup> It remains paradoxical that some

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<sup>8</sup> „The Hungarian government accepted exchange, but no one-way transfer, it was willing to accept only war criminals. This treaty was signed on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1946.“ ŠINDELKA, Jan. *Národnostní politika v ČSSR*. Praha : Orbis, 1975, p. 115.

<sup>9</sup> By Commission of social Affairs 25<sup>th</sup> September 1945, were set statutes governing the transfers of working people (unemployed workers, workers of enterprises planned to relocate to Slovakia and Hungarian workers and families who had citizenship prior to 1938) to Bohemia. ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948...*, p. 63 – 67.

<sup>10</sup> ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Nútené presídľovanie Maďarov do Čiech*. Prešov : Universum, 2005, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> The process of re-slovakization action can be divided into two main stages. The first phase took place from June 1946 to January 1948 and the second continued from February 1948 until the end of the year. During the second phase, the re-slovakization commission mostly dealt with only latecomers who subsequently joined the action and the names of the persons prosecuted or intended for resettlement in Hungary and deportations to Bohemia were erased from the re-slovakization lists. ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948...*, p. 117 – 118.

<sup>12</sup> ŠINDELKA, Jan. *Národnostní politika v ČSSR...*, 1975, s. 116.

Hungarians have volunteered to be a part of the majority after the war, fearing all sorts of restrictions.<sup>13</sup> However, re-slovakization has many white spots: for example, it has not been mentioned, since when is it possible to perceive re-slovakized Hungarians as Slovaks. Moreover, the acquisition of Czechoslovak citizenship did not mean for the Hungarians the return of property. Resolutions and, of course, other interventions against the Hungarian minority have given rise to criticism, instead of removing historical injustices, new ones have emerged.

Implementation of re-slovakization was empowered by the Ministry of Interior in the resolution of Commission of Interior of 15<sup>th</sup> February 1946. Until 28<sup>th</sup> February of the same year, directives to determine the progress of re-slovakization should have been prepared. On 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1946, the plenipotentiary committee set out two groups of population for whom this action was concerned. Inhabitants who claimed to have Slovak nationality in the 1930 census and perceived themselves as Slovaks were the first group, and in the second category plenipotentiary committee included the inhabitants who considered themselves Slovaks after the end of the war and were able to prove it, but had previously been considered Hungarian nationality and at the same time had not committed any atrocities against the republic. For re-slovakization could enroll any individual by the statement which truth was further verified (in essence, there was objective evidence of belonging to the republic, the ability to speak in Slovak, in some cases, surname, religion, graduated schools, etc.). The idea of re-slovakization resonated in the Czechoslovak political circles for a longer period, and two factors influenced the change of its character. The first was the effort to make the southern

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<sup>13</sup> In the territory of southern Slovakia, the process that is typical of the change of state borders took place since the end of the Second World War. The population began spontaneously to join the majority, even though it was formerly a part of the Hungarian nationality. This was reflected, for example, in the fact that parents sent their children to Slovak schools, changed street names (from Hungarian to Slovak), etc. See ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Reslovakizácia (zmena národnosti časti obyvateľstva Slovenska po II. svetovej vojne)*. Košice : Spoločenskovedný ústav SAV, 1991, p. 6.

territories of Slovakia more Slovak, and the second factor was fear of population from population exchange, deportations to Bohemia or property confiscations. The basic document of re-slovakization was the Decree of the Ministry of Interior 17<sup>th</sup> June 1946 (No. 20 000 / I-IV / 1-1946) and on 21<sup>st</sup> June the Central Residency Commission was established, appointed by the Ministry of Interior (from 1947 it was replaced by the commission named by Ministry of the Interior).

The paradox of re-slovakization as noted in a book by Štefan Šutaj remains, that the re-slovakization was originally intended to rescue magyarized Slovaks from the exchange of the population, but instead of this inhabitants destined for exchange who must have been rejected from the list enrolled for re-slovakization.<sup>14</sup> After the dispute over the decision-making powers between Commission of Interior and Ministry of Interior in 1947, a new re-slovakization commission was appointed and the next course of action was updated. The task of the commission was to evaluate the collected material consisting of lists of residents registered for re-slovakization. In general, applications were approved for the whole village, only problematic cases had been the subject of a debate.<sup>15</sup>

The process of resettlement and settlement of Slovakia, population Relocation, re-slovakization action and Population Exchange was organizationally managed by the Settlement Office for Slovakia (OÚ for Slovakia). OÚ for Slovakia founded local offices which managed its activities. The National Refugee Fund was in charge of property-law reconciliation for displaced people of Hungarian nationality. That Fund was established by the Decree of President No. 108/45 of 25<sup>th</sup> October 1945.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948...*, p. 89.

<sup>15</sup> ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948...*, p. 69, 81 – 87, 116.

<sup>16</sup> ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Maďarská menšina na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1948...*, p. 46; also POPÉLY, Árpád. *Plány na vysídlenie maďarského obyvateľstva v rámci výmeny obyvateľstva medzi Československom a Maďarskom...*, p. 82.



## Population exchange

The exchange of the population as a method of solving inter-state conflicts originates in the period after the First World War. Previous examples of population exchanges can be found in the Neuilly Treaty, which, as part of the Paris conference (after the First World War), included a paragraph specifying the reciprocal evictions of minorities for the first time, which became a precedent for later population exchanges as part of ethnic cleansing. Historically, the first exchange of population is considered the exchange between Greece and Turkey after the First World War under the Treaty of Lausanne of 1923. Both treaties (Neuilly and Lausanne) have become a model for solving later intra-political and foreign-political conflicts. In the 1930s, population exchange was recognized as one of the possible ways of solving and peace-building within ethnic relations.<sup>17</sup>

The attitude of the public towards the Hungarian minority was very similar to that of the German minority at the beginning. It was hostile, but unlike the German minority, this aversion did not gain foreign support. Similar to the German minority, Hungarians were aggrieved by some presidential decrees and regulations of the SNR. *“From the Czechoslovak point of view, the prevailing opinion of political representations played an important role, which, in particular, under the influence of Edvard Beneš, claimed that non-Slavic minorities had caused the break-up of the inter-war Czechoslovak Republic. Seeking peaceful future development, therefore, the Czechoslovak political representations ... adopted the concept of building Czechoslovakia as a national state of the Czechs and Slovaks, without non-Slavic minorities”.*<sup>18</sup> Czechoslovak politicians tried to succeed internationally with a proposal to

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<sup>17</sup> THER, Philipp. *Temná strana národních států: Etnické čistky v moderní Evropě*. Praha : Argo, 2017, p. 42, 44.

<sup>18</sup> ŠUTAJ, Štefan. Výmena obyvateľstva medzi Československom a Maďarskom – migrácie a Slovensko – výskum a výsledky. In SÁPOSOVÁ, Zlatica – ŠUTAJ, Štefan (ed.). *Povojnové migrácie a výmena obyvateľstva medzi Československom a Maďarskom*. Prešov : Universum, 2010, p. 10.

expel the Hungarian population. In order to fulfil the vision of state of the Czechs and the Slovaks preferred by the Czechoslovak political elites after the end of the Second World War, an international approval of the Allies was needed for the transfer of the Hungarian population from the territory of Slovakia. This issue was not discussed at the conferences in Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam. That is why a number of national anti-minority measures were implemented during 1945–1948.<sup>19</sup>

In addition to resolving national problems aimed at creating the national state of the Czechs and Slovaks, it was an important goal of population exchange to save as many Slovaks as possible from assimilation in other countries. Prime Minister Zdeněk Fierlinger declared at the re-emigration talks of 31<sup>st</sup> July 1945 that the Czechoslovak government would seek the return of the largest possible number of Slovak and Czech compatriots (from countries such as the USSR, Poland, Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, France, Belgium, Germany, overseas) back home. According to the data, it was assumed that more than 2 million Slovaks lived outside Czechoslovakia (476,000 in Hungary). Within this total re-migration event, 200,000 people returned to the territory of Czechoslovakia (of which approximately 71,787 were Slovaks from Hungary).

In June 1945, the Presidium of SNR held a meeting where members agreed on the urgent need to sign an agreement on the exchange of the population as soon as possible. The adopted ceasefire agreement with Hungary, besides anyas, did not solve the problem of the Hungarian minority, so it was important to start bilateral negotiations and agree on the terms

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<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the Hungarian efforts to return the territory, i.e. the change of borders, did not pass. See ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Nútené presídľovanie Maďarov do Čiech*. Prešov : Universum, 2005, p. 34. The attitude of the majority towards Hungarian minority was not positive after the Second World War, as did of minority towards the state. The Hungarians at that time lost Czechoslovak citizenship, they were withdrawn from agricultural land, they were released from state services, Hungarian education was abolished, Hungarian cultural life was abolished, and efforts were made to resettle the minority with emphasis on future assimilation. PETRÁŠ, René. *Menšiny v komunistickém Československu*. Praha : VIP Books, 2007, p. 102 – 103; also ŠINDELKA, Jan. *Národnostní politika v ČSSR*. Praha : Orbis, 1975, p. 115.

of the exchange. Hungarian foreign policy oriented towards obtaining support for alternatives of the status of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, which rejected the exchange of the population. At the same time, it sought to consolidate its position in the European area. Because of this Czechoslovak diplomacy also tried to speed up negotiations on the exchange. A Czechoslovak-Hungarian meeting took place in Prague on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2, 1945.

Meeting in Prague was unsuccessful and the next meeting took place on 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> February 1946. The agreement on the exchange of the population was signed on 27<sup>th</sup> February 1946 and consisted of 14 articles (see Annex 1). In Article V, it established the principle of reciprocity, on the basis of which as many Hungarians moved from the territory of Czechoslovakia, as many Slovaks and Czechs from Hungary left for Czechoslovakia. For this reason, propaganda in the implementation of the exchange played an important role (see Annexes no. 2 – 5: Promotional and propaganda posters for illustration of propaganda carried out on the territory of Hungary). Article VIII of the Agreement set the resettlement of Hungarians who, in the territory of Czechoslovakia „... *committed crimes under §1-4 of SNR regulation no. 33 of 13<sup>th</sup> May 1945 and according to §5 of this Regulation.*” Two Czechoslovak and two Hungarian representatives were appointed for the Mixed Commission founded under Article X of the Exchange Agreement and its role was to solve all issues in the course of the exchange of the population. As part of the redistribution of tasks related to the implementation of the Exchange Agreement, Commission of Education, Culture and Social Affairs was entrusted with propaganda actions in the territory of Czechoslovakia and Hungary. The preparatory work for the return of Slovaks from abroad (registration for the exchange and collection of applications) was to be governed by the Czechoslovak Resettlement Commission on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1946. The replacement of the Hungarian population from the territory of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic was chiefly entrusted to

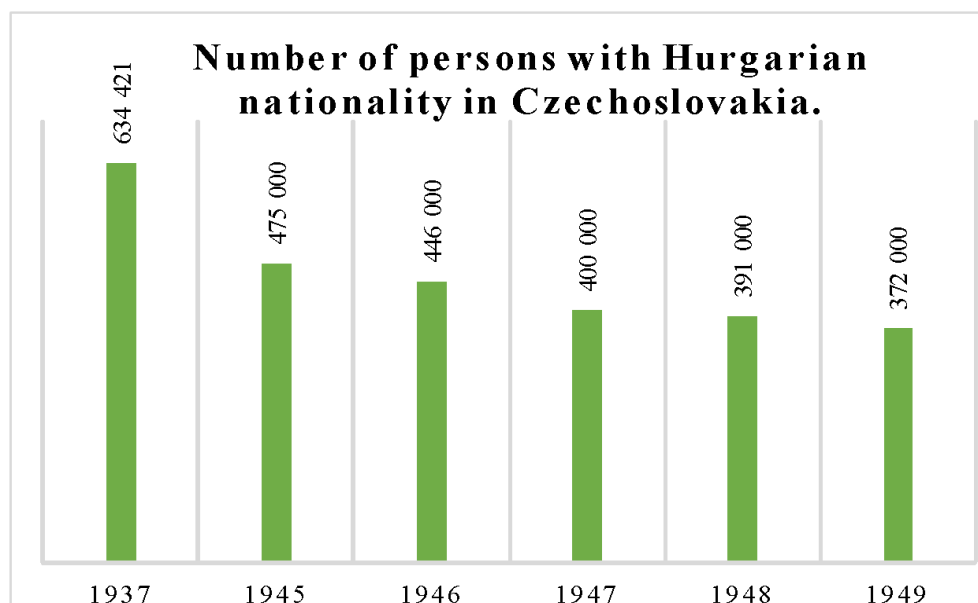
the Settlement Office and Daniel Okáli as a government representative, directly subordinate to the Government and the Board of Commissioners with decision-making powers at the level of ministries and commissions.

By signing the Agreement on Population exchange, the sole exchange process itself did not begin immediately. Hungarian political representatives promised a change in the solution of the Hungarian question in Slovakia from the upcoming conference in Paris. The delay in the exchange was justified by a breach of contractual terms by Czechoslovakia (e.g. non-stop confiscation of property, bad situation of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, persecution of Hungarian citizens). The Slovak officials tried to speed up the exchange, so they organized one-way transports (7,935 Slovaks from Hungary) from 18<sup>th</sup> September to 1<sup>st</sup> December 1946 with the consent of the Hungarian party, aiming help the socially weaker part of the Slovak population in Hungary. The response to unrealized exchange was also the deportation of the Hungarian population to the Czech lands (in the second half of 1946). The beginning of the exchange resulted in the termination of one-way transports and the issue of three protest notes from the Hungarian side. There were many delays and the Czechoslovak Party considered the Hungarian demands as interference in the internal affairs of the state, and on the other side the Hungarian side demanded termination of deportations as a condition for the start of the exchange. However, we can say that the violent deportation of the Hungarian population to Bohemia led the Czechoslovak party to accelerate the fulfilment of the Agreement on the Exchange of Population. The direct connection with its fulfilment was the fifth point of the Peace Treaty signed with Hungary (at the Paris Conference) on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1947, according to which was the duty of Hungarian politicians to start negotiations on the solution of the Hungarian question in Czechoslovakia within six months after signing the treaty. After several sessions and disagreements, the population started on 12<sup>th</sup> April 1947, the first

transports were exchanged. Due to the Christmas holidays, the transports process was suspended on 19<sup>th</sup> December. The course of the exchange was accompanied by insufficient technical, material security, collisions in the train transport, unevenness of the property transported and other problems. An estimate of the statistics suggests 200,000 Slovaks live on the territory of Hungary. On the basis of the population exchange Agreement, 55,487 Hungarians were transferred to Hungary and 59,774 Slovaks to Czechoslovakia.

The interviews were conducted in the form of a biographical narrative. Family memory doesn't represent a clearly defined and directly addressable inventory of events, but it consists of a communicative episode that stands in relation to family members. A young generation has often generalized an image of population change. It is also typical for younger generations that they perceive their (grand) parents as heroes, victims, etc. Younger generations want to be loyal, so they don't describe the image of (grand) parents in negative ways. This may change the meaning of the message. Most research dealing with transgenerational memory struggles with cumulative heroism. We had the same experience when doing this project and some narrators had this tendency too. Collective memory shows generationally the specific concept of personality ration (daughter sees father in a different way than the granddaughter).

Minority policy in Czechoslovakia was on a relatively solid level, but it was not enough for a large Hungarian minority. The minority lived relatively compactly in southern Slovakia (at the border with the mother state).



**Figure 1** – The number of people belonging to Hungarian nationality in 1946 during the population census and statistical calculations of births and deaths of Hungarian nationality based on statistical estimates in 1937 and between 1947–1949.<sup>20</sup>

### Oral history research

Research was focused on transgenerational memory. How do people shape an image of the past? What affects us all? These are issues that few know how to answer.<sup>21</sup> We have tried to answer not only them in our research.

The research itself was carried out on the territory of Slovakia (the Region of Košice, where still live a relatively large Hungarian minority).<sup>22</sup> Our narrators were descendants of

<sup>20</sup> Based on the Historical Statistical Yearbook of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in 1985, elaborated by Klara Kohoutová.

<sup>21</sup> „The ideas that pupils bear in their heads come from places that have little to do with the classroom - from the media, mass culture, church, home. Before we blame the unpreparedness of these historical ideas, we should ask ourselves how they arise and how they are grounded in historical consciousness ... Investigations can tell us what pupils do not know. But they leave us completely in the uncertainty of what they know - and from where.” WINEBURG, Sam. Sin machen: Wie Erinnerung zwischen den Generationen gebildet wird. In WELZER, Harold (ed.). *Das soziale Gedächtnis : Geschichte, Erinnerung, Tradierung*. Hamburg : Hamburger Edition, p. 181.

<sup>22</sup> According to the latest census, 74 743 people subscribed for Hungarian nationality. In Census of inhabitants, homes and flats 2011. Table 115 Population by gender and nationality, Košice region.

exchanged Slovaks. The question of identity played a key role in our research. All of the narrators interviewed by us, consider themselves as Slovaks, so they are part of the majority. But what about their (grand) parents? Oral-historical research was preceded by several basic questions, which we grouped thematically into seven categories:

## 1. FAMILY

- Can you say a few words about the family from which you come from?
- Which environment influenced you personally, culturally, politically?
- Where were you born (in Slovakia or in Hungary?)
- Could you tell me a few words about your parents and siblings?
- From what environment do you come from?
- What language did you speak at home?
- What was the employment of your parents?

## 2. EDUCATION AND WORK

- Where and how did you study?
  - The personality of the teachers who influenced the narrator
  - What did you enjoy or did not enjoy at school or study; favourite or unpopular subjects
  - Assessing the benefits of study or education from the point of view of later profession and life
  - What are you doing; specifics
  - Advantages or disadvantages
  - What do you enjoy or did not enjoy
-

### 3. FREE TIME

- How he spent his spare time, what about his weekends, holidays or feasts
- Hobbies

### 4. EXCHANGE OF POPULATION AND LIFE IN THE SOCIALIST CZECHOSLOVAKIA

- How did the exchange of people affect your family?
- Was the population exchange topic discussed at home?
- Did the (grand) parents remember the exchange (leaving Hungary)?
- How did parents perceive it?
- Was the topic taboo?
- What was their life in socialist Czechoslovakia? (Did they see the difference; compare the situation in Hungary with the situation in Czechoslovakia?)
- How were you and your parents perceived? Was your family perceived as Hungarian?
- What citizenship do you and your parents have?
- What language do your parents speak in ordinary communication?
- Are your parents happy to live in Slovakia?

### 5. PUBLIC SECTOR AND POLICY

- Have you been following the course of events in foreign countries before 1989? What about Hungary?

### 6. ETHICS

- How do you perceive yourself? As a Slovak / Hungarian - and your parents?



- Is it ethnicity and nationality important to you? And for your parents?
- Does anyone in your family associate with a community or organization that connects people with similar historical experience?
- How do you personally perceive the exchange of population?

## 7. CONCLUSION

- How do you personally perceive the exchange of inhabitants?
- How do your parents evaluate the exchange of inhabitants today?
- Do they pass on information further? For example, to your children and grandchildren?
- Do you think that population exchange is a major historical milestone of contemporary history?

Oral historical interviews are always very important for self-identification, which can be manifested by oscillation between “we” and “they.” In a majority, this phenomenon is usually not so obvious. However, in our case, oscillation occurred several times. In some, it is not easy to analyse the true reason for oscillations, as it is related to many factors. One of them may be (not) conscious stigma (the difference from the majority could cause narrator problems in the past, the narrator may not be completely identified with his identity, etc.). Similarly, it may be a cognitive distortion that is close to people – in the case where the narrator speaks “we” he identifies himself, it is usually a positive assessment. On the contrary, when he uses “they: dissociates from what’s said, at the same time it is usually a negative assessment. In some cases, if the narrator deals with the issue of that minority on a professional basis, it may signal some kind of neutrality, that is, the use of “they,” not because he does not identify with the minority. What matters most is what the narrator emphasizes – or the oscillation between “we” and “they” is deliberate or not. In our research, this was

primarily a sign of a clear definition. As mentioned above, neither of the narrators considers himself to be Hungarian, even many of them do not speak the Hungarian language (there are some exceptions). Although their ancestors were born in Hungary, their mother tongue was Slovak.

*“I have spoken to my parents and old parents Slovak, but those who stayed there do not know Slovak anymore and even they are ashamed that they are Slovaks. There is a quite a strong pressure on the Hungarians to be Hungarians.”<sup>23</sup>*

*“My father's family spoke bilingually. Mainly Slovak at home, but they had to learn Hungarian as they worked, lived and went to school there. His father spent his early childhood there. It was a Slovak village in Hungary ... He still has passive knowledge of Hungarian until then.”<sup>24</sup>*

Based on interviews we can say that the information about population exchange was maintained in families, but not to the same extent because of history, stereotyping and sensitivity of this topic.

*“Yes. Indeed, in our family the information of population exchange was maintained. Our family was active, did not want to forget about Hungary. We use to go at memorial celebrations. We meet with the other Slovak returnees. It's alive in our family.”<sup>25</sup>*

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<sup>23</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with M. L., recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

<sup>24</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with J. G., recorded on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2018. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

<sup>25</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with S. S., recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

*“As I said, I know that my grandparents lived in Hungary where they were born and then after World War II. They came to Piešťany in Slovakia. But concerning the exchange, how it was, what it meant for them I cannot remember whether they were talking about it.”<sup>26</sup>*

On the example of the abovementioned citations, it is evident that in each family the information on population exchange was kept individually. While the first narrator comes from a family where the tradition of exchange was passed from generation to generation, even the family is still visiting commemorative acts, the second narrator comes from a family where the information was, but they do not work with it.

The narrators often pointed out that their (grand) parents wouldn't be willing to make an interview. The relevant historical event is not always “opened” by participants, but it is becoming open to members of younger generations. It wasn't a taboo in any of the families. It is an important factor that the population exchange took place 70 years ago. Most of the population exchange participants were young, so they looked at the exchange through the prism of children/teenagers.

Their (grand) parents who came from Hungary have always had Slovak citizenship according to the narrators. Probably the narrators reflected on the citizenship of their ancestors only after the exchange, because by that time the inhabitants were living in Hungarian territory, and so they were members of the Hungarian state. Families spoke the Slovak language at home and some families lived in Hungary in an area with a high concentration of the Slovak population. The population exchange hadn't affected only a close

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<sup>26</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with A. V., recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

family. The entire community was taken from its home and then relocated to Slovakia or to the Czech border region (former Sudetenland).

*“The citizenship of my family is Slovak, I do not know they have different. They were Slovaks living in Hungary, in the Slovak part. They always spoke Slovak language. Grandma used to speak the Slovak dialect that she had learned as a child from her parents who were also born in Hungary. In her dialect there were also Hungarian elements.”<sup>27</sup>*

*“My grandparents always spoke Slovak. They were born in Hungary, but on the Lower Land (Alföld) and it was Slovak part. My whole family has Slovak citizenship. We do not have Hungarians in the family, except those who had stayed in Hungary and already spoken Hungarian. The younger generation no longer speaks Slovak. Nor do I speak Hungarian.”<sup>28</sup>*

The reasons why Slovak families living in Hungary decided to sign up for population exchange were different. Some of the resettled families believed that the conditions would be better in Czechoslovakia. They experienced a strong national pressure during the Second World War in Horthy's Hungary. After the Second World War there was strong propaganda as *“a deliberate attempt to manipulate with attitudes, opinions, or actions of people ... It*

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<sup>27</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with S. S., recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

<sup>28</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with A. V., recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

*spreads positive or negative ideas, arguments or rumours to average public opinion, support it, and ultimately secure or maintain power”.*<sup>29</sup>

*“Under the Fascist Horthy regime, the Slovaks living in Alföld suffered from national pressure. The Hungarians mocked, insulted and humiliated them. By resettlement to Czechoslovakia, they expected a more peaceful life, where they would never be hurt and offended. Compared to Hungary, which was in a very difficult economic situation, the image of Slovakia was much idealized. Czechoslovakia was displayed as the land of prosperity and was tempting for the poorer classes of Slovaks on the Alföld.”*<sup>30</sup>

*“I do not know exactly, but I know that there was a strong propaganda that led them to do it. The whole family also left with their old parents. Grandma left with two siblings. Grandpa left with two siblings so he put the whole family together. Only those who were more closely related to the Hungarians remained there.”*<sup>31</sup>

The significance of propaganda in the process of population exchange came from the mentioned Article V of the Population Exchange agreement about the principle of parity and reciprocity, because for how many Slovaks would be persuaded to sign up for exchange, that many Hungarians would have to leave the territory of Czechoslovakia. The effort was to transfer as many Hungarians as possible. Several forms of propaganda were used in the

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<sup>29</sup> BYSTRICKÝ, Valerián – ROGUEOVÁ, Jaroslava (eds.): *Storočie propagandy. Slovensko v osídľach ideológií*. Bratislava : AEPRESS, 2005, p. 5.

<sup>30</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with H. K., recorded on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2018. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

<sup>31</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with O. M., recorded on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

propaganda of population exchange: leaflet propaganda, verbal propaganda (radio, print, presentations ...), deputing of delegations and whispering propaganda. And there were two main themes used:

1. an emotional appeal to a sense of belonging to the homeland – the action *Mother is calling you*;
2. presentation of the winning Czechoslovakia as an economically advanced region with favourable living conditions.

The reasons why families signed up for exchange were probably plenty. The narrators themselves did not know the true reason. In this case, we can only speculate about the role of propaganda.

*“I do not know how my family was perceived after returning to Slovakia. I did not go through it. But I think the biggest problem was in their heads. They rather had the feeling that someone was looking at them. I do not think people would have badly accepted them, but they rather closed themselves in some sense. But it is about everyone who moves abroad.”<sup>32</sup>*

All narrators told us that they are Slovaks. Every one of them was born in Slovakia. The narrators couldn't tell us how their family was perceived in Czechoslovakia. Today, we would not probably find out whether the majority looked at the resettlement as Hungarians. Many of the resettlers aren't alive today. However, self-perception is identical to all displaced persons. They considered themselves as Slovaks. The family history of each family is

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<sup>32</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with J. G., recorded on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2018. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

different. Some families came to the village, others to the town. That's why we see different perceptions.

We found out two reasons why our narrators had become interested in the exchange topic: First one was that they were interested in family history. The second one was that they participated in memorial acts of piety with the family. In spite of the end of the population exchange in 1948, its consequences were also present in the following period. The process of the exchange was less favourable to the Hungarian minority, but the consequences of the exchange were worse for the Slovaks.

*“I became interested in exchange due to my personal motivation. This topic will be one of the most interesting for me. My family used to talk about the exchange. We also went every year to memorial celebrations, and we also visited Alföld. That's where my old parents lived. My grandmother and mom also took part in a meeting in Pitvaros in 2017. Grandma brought me a book about Pitvaros and its citizens from the memorial celebration. After I read it, I started to take interest in exchange so I found out that also we have our roots in Hungary. That is the reason why my interest in exchange is in my case purely personal motivation.”<sup>33</sup>*

*“It was a coincidence. We had to write a paper at school. And then my grandmother began telling me a story about what happened to them as they were exchanged. I did not hear about it before. It was interesting to me and then I wrote the paper about it. So I asked my grandmother to tell me more about the*

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<sup>33</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with K. D., recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.

*exchange and the story about how they got from Bekesscaba (Alföld) to Slovakia.* <sup>34</sup>

The displaced part of the Slovak minority has often found itself in an unprivileged place, it was not considered to be Slovak, and paradoxically, it has often been Hungarized. The rest of the Slovak minority in the Hungarian territory remained significantly weakened after the population exchange. Intelligence and a conscious part of the Slovaks have been resettled, and the preservation of Slovak enclaves in the Hungarian environment has become difficult and often impossible. Culture, traditions and customs have begun to fall and the Slovak minority has begun to assimilate in Hungary.

## Conclusion

Based on individual testimonies, we can see that remembering the exchange of the population was individual in selected families. Our research focuses on family memory on the example of families that have undergone population change. The aim of the contribution was to point out how information on population exchange is mediated to the next generation, and whether it is re-instrumentalized in families that have undergone exchange. The interviews were conducted in the form of a biographical narrative focusing on the aforementioned population exchange. We were methodologically based on the principles of oral history.

Oral history as one of the research methods is suitable for the study of collective memory. It is capturing personal references, which are irrecoverable in population exchange transgenerational memory phenomenon. Thanks to families' memories of individual narrators,

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<sup>34</sup> Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with Z. F., recorded on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2017. The transcript of the interview is stored in the private archive of interviews.



we can observe the stories of pleasure, happiness but even haunting, misery and misunderstanding.

A certain pattern was German research from Harald Welzer and Sabine Moller.<sup>35</sup> Family memory is not a clearly defined and directly addressable list of events, but consists of communicative episodes that stand in relation to family members. The young generation often has a generalized image of population exchange. In addition, past events are universally standardized through the teaching of history. Typical for younger generations is that they made heroes of their (grand) parents, victims, etc. Loyalty is also included in the description of events where they do not want to portray parents negatively. This may change the meaning of the message. Most of these studies are experiencing cumulative heroisation. Even in our case, some narrators tended to do so. The phenomenon of cumulative heroism shows to what extent an emotionally-based understanding of the individual roles of loved ones creates an individual's historical consciousness. Collective memory shows a generationally specific concept of the personality ratio (the daughter sees the father differently than the granddaughter). In such types of research, researchers must also prepare for the fact that witnesses often act as victims (for example, victims of war). In the case of our research, in the second and third generation, the parents appeared in the memories of the exchange as sufferers. Research has also struggled with the traditional types: justification, distancing, delusions, fascination, overcoming. Occasionally, the frame changed when stereotypical features were used.

On the basis of the interviews, it can be noted that the information on population exchange was maintained in the families. But not at the same degree. It is related to the sensitivity of the subject, the history and the stereotyping of the event.

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<sup>35</sup> WELZER, Harald – MOLLEROVÁ, Sabine – TSCHUGGNALLOVÁ, Karoline. *Můj děda nebyl nácek. Nacismus a holocaust v rodinné paměti*. Praha: Argo, 2010.

The relevant historical event is not always opened by involved persons, but it is becoming open to members of younger generations. This is also the case of our research. The research did not meet that returnees spoke about exchange spontaneously. The descendants learned about the exchange of the population rather through the childhood stories of their parents, the comparison of life in Hungary and Slovakia etc. None of the narrators uttered a narrative that primarily focused on exchange. In none of the families, however, was the subject tabooed. If the narrators asked about the exchange, they were always answered (in some cases in detail, in other briefly). It is more than 70 years from the exchange of the population and that is also an important factor. At the same time, most of the population involved in exchange were children or young at that time, so they looked at the exchange through the prism of children's / teenagers' eyes. But after some time they realized the seriousness of the situation. So we met with three aspects of remembrance:

1. At the time of the exchange when the narrators' (grand) parent was a child and did not see it traumatically, rather on the contrary, found new friends and so on.
2. At the time of maturity under the Communist regime, they began to realize the negative side of things, propaganda, pressure, etc.
3. Nowadays the exchange is being perceived rather positive, it is influenced by the political situation in Slovakia and Hungary.

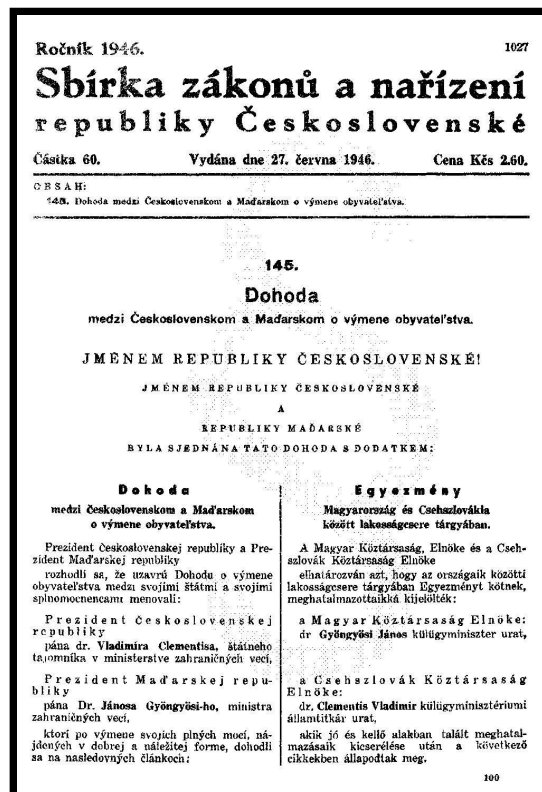
The narrators could not tell us how their family was perceived in Czechoslovakia. Whether the majority were looking at them, we probably do not know about the Hungarians anymore. Many of the displaced people do not live today. However, self-perception is identical to all displaced persons. They considered themselves Slovaks, even though their position after return was not equal to the majority in interpersonal relations. For every

relocated family, the situation was different. While some went to the village, others to the towns. And that's why we see a different perception.

The reasons why the narrators began to become interested in exchange were of a dual type. Either they began to be interested in family history and discovered this topic. Or they had visited together with the family some kind of memorial event.

## Annexes

Annex no. 1 – The first page of the Population exchange Agreement.<sup>36</sup>



<sup>36</sup> The Population exchange Agreement. In GABZDILOVÁ-OLEJNÍKOVÁ, Soňa – OLEJNÍK, Milan – ŠUTAJ, Štefan. *Nemci a Maďari na Slovensku v rokoch 1945–1953 v dokumentoch I*. Prešov : UNIVERSUM, 2005, p. 133; also The Population exchange Agreement. In *Collection of laws and regulations of the Czechoslovak Republic* [online].1946, part 60, issued 27<sup>th</sup> June 1946, p. 1027 – 1035. Available on the internet: <http://ftp.aspi.cz/opispdf/1946/060-1946.pdf> [cit. 17. 11. 2018].

**Annex no. 2** – Promotional and propaganda poster: *Slovakia is calling you.*<sup>37</sup>



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<sup>37</sup> Poster: *Slovakia is calling you.* Source: Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum, Békéscsaba, fund (f.) J. Sekerka, inventory number (i.n.) Hd.28.56.8.

**Annex no. 3** – Promotional and propaganda poster: *The peasant in Czechoslovakia sells its products well and buys cheaply.*<sup>38</sup>



<sup>38</sup> Poster: *The peasant in Czechoslovakia sells its products well and buys cheaply.* Source: Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum, Békéscsaba, f. J. Sekerka, i.n. Hd. 2003.3.5.



**Annex no. 4** – Promotional and propaganda poster: *Return home. You will come to yours.*<sup>39</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Poster: *Return home. You will come to yours.* Source: Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum, Békéscsaba, f. J. Sekerka, i.n. Hd.88.56.10.

**Annex no. 5** – Promotional and propaganda poster: *Slovaks (men) and Slovaks (women)! Your homeland is calling you! You are calling by the Free Czechoslovak Republic! – do not miss the chance of your return!*-<sup>40</sup>



<sup>40</sup> Poster: *Slovaks (men) and Slovaks (women)! Your homeland is calling you! You are calling by the Free Czechoslovak Republic! – do not miss the chance of your return!*-. Source: Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum, Békéscsaba, f. J. Sekerka, i.n. Hd. 88.56.9.

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## **Archive resources**

Munkácsy Mihály Múzeum, Békéscsaba, f. J. Sekerka.

## **Interview**

Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with A. V., recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2018.

Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with H. K., recorded on 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2018.

Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with J. G., recorded on 26<sup>th</sup> April 2018.

Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with K. D., recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with M. L., recorded on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2017.

Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with O. M., recorded on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2017.

Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with S. S., recorded on 15<sup>th</sup> January 2018.

Interview by Lucia HELDÁKOVÁ and Klara KOHOUTOVÁ (SVU CSPV SAV) with Z. F., recorded on 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2017.