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**STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL  
THE TRANSCARPATHIAN HUNGARIANS  
(1944–2022)**



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# VIOLATIONS OF RIGHTS COMMITTED BY THE COMMUNIST REGIME IN TRANSCARPATHIA (1944–1953)

## **1. Occupation and annexation. Mass deportation of Transcarpathian Hungarians**

Transcarpathia, as an administrative unit created in 1919 from the Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa and Máramaros counties of the historical Hungary, was part of several states in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: in 1919 it was acquired by Czechoslovakia, then between 1938–1939 it became part of Hungary again, then in the autumn of 1944 the Soviet occupation followed, and the annexation to the Soviet Union. The frequent changes of power took place due to the peripheral character of the region, as a result of political decisions of great powers, without consulting the local population who always had to adapt to the political system brought by the new state power. (Figures 1–3.)

Among the historical turns of fate, annexation to the Soviet Union had the most serious consequences for the Transcarpathian Hungarians since until 1944 the territory was part of Central Europe and within that the Carpathian Basin in a social, economic and cultural sense; but with the 1944 shift of power, it became part of a dictatorial, class-based empire that was built on the deprivation of rights. Thus, Transcarpathia too became part of a totalitarian empire whose main features, according to Hannah Arendt,<sup>1</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski or Carl Friedrich,<sup>2</sup> consisted in a single mass party led by a dictator, state terror, mass communication monopoly and centrally planned economy. The consequences of all these can still be felt in the region given that – as stated by Mihail Heller and Alekszandr Nyekrics – the overwhelming influence of the ruling party and the regime in all areas of life distorted the normal course of processes characteristic for modern societies and set up a type of state and society unprecedented in history.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> ARENDT, Hannah: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. London: Penguin Books, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> FRIEDRICH, Carl J., Zbigniew K. BRZEZINSKI: *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965.

<sup>3</sup> HELLER, Mihail, Alekszandr NYEKRICS: *A Szovjetunió története*. [The history of the Soviet Union.] Budapest: Osiris Publishing House, 2003. 10.

Figure 1.

*The territory of Transcarpathia within the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, and, within that, in the Kingdom of Hungary<sup>4</sup>*



Edited by: István Molnár D.

Figure 2.

*Transcarpathia under Czechoslovak rule (1919–1939)<sup>5</sup>*



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<sup>4</sup> *Malenkij robot. The 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Deportation of the Transcarpathian Hungarians in 1944.* Ed. Molnár D., Erzsébet. Brussels: European Parliament, 2014. 2.

<sup>5</sup> MOLNÁR D., 2014. 2.



Figure 3.

*Transcarpathia as part of Hungary again (1939–1944)<sup>6</sup>*

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It is indisputable that for the Transcarpathian Hungarians the Soviet annexation brought with it a whole series of individual and community tragedies because the change of regime did not only mean deprivation of rights but also physical annihilation due to ethnic cleansing for tens of thousands of people.

The acquisition of the approximately twelve thousand square kilometers of Transcarpathia was of geostrategic importance for the Soviets given that the region also bordered several countries classified as part of the Soviet block and the railway lines running through it made it much easier for the Soviets to connect with these countries. Though the Soviet annexation of the region was not the least bit legitimate, Stalin, the all-powerful Soviet leader shaping great power politics in this part of Europe, was careful to maintain the appearance of legitimacy regarding the occupation and then the annexation.

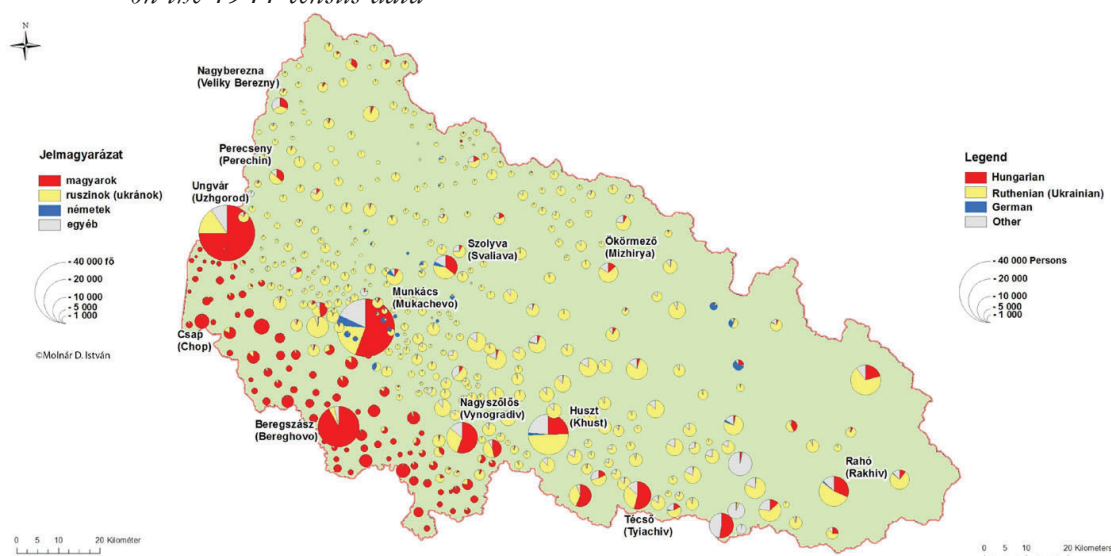
The Soviet period in the history of Transcarpathia started in the autumn of 1944, with the occupation by the Red Army. The ethnic-national composition of the region in this period can be inferred from the 1941 census data. According to these, the number of inhabitants of the region was 853,949, of which more than half, 500,418 (58.1%), declared themselves Ukrainian (Ruthenian). The second largest nationality was Hungarian, which accounted

<sup>6</sup> MOLNÁR D., 2014. 2.

for 27.3% of the total population, which meant 233,875 people. At the same time we have to mention that since, according to the statistical methodology of the time, they did not ask about nationality, but about the mother tongue, a significant number of Hungarian-speaking Jewish residents of Transcarpathia were registered as Hungarians, who later on, in the spring of 1944, became victims of another inhumane dictatorship and of the Holocaust, thus the Soviet occupation did no longer find them in this region.<sup>7</sup> (Figure 4.)

**Figure 4.**

*Nationality (mother tongue) distribution of Transcarpathia based on the 1941 census data<sup>8</sup>*



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In October 1944, the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front of the Red Army took possession of the territory, and on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October the city of Ungvár (Uzhhorod), the center of the region, also fell under Soviet occupation.<sup>9</sup> At

<sup>7</sup> MOLNÁR D., István: Kárpátalja népeisége. [The population of Transcarpathia.] In: *Kárpátalja története. Örökség és kihívások.* [The history of Transcarpathia. Heritage and challenges.] Eds. Brenzovics, László, György Csatóry, Sándor Dobos, Melinda Orbán, László Braun, Imre Szakál, Ibolya Szamborovszkyné Nagy. Beregszász–Ungvár: II. RF KMF – „RIK-U” Kft., 2021. 38–39.

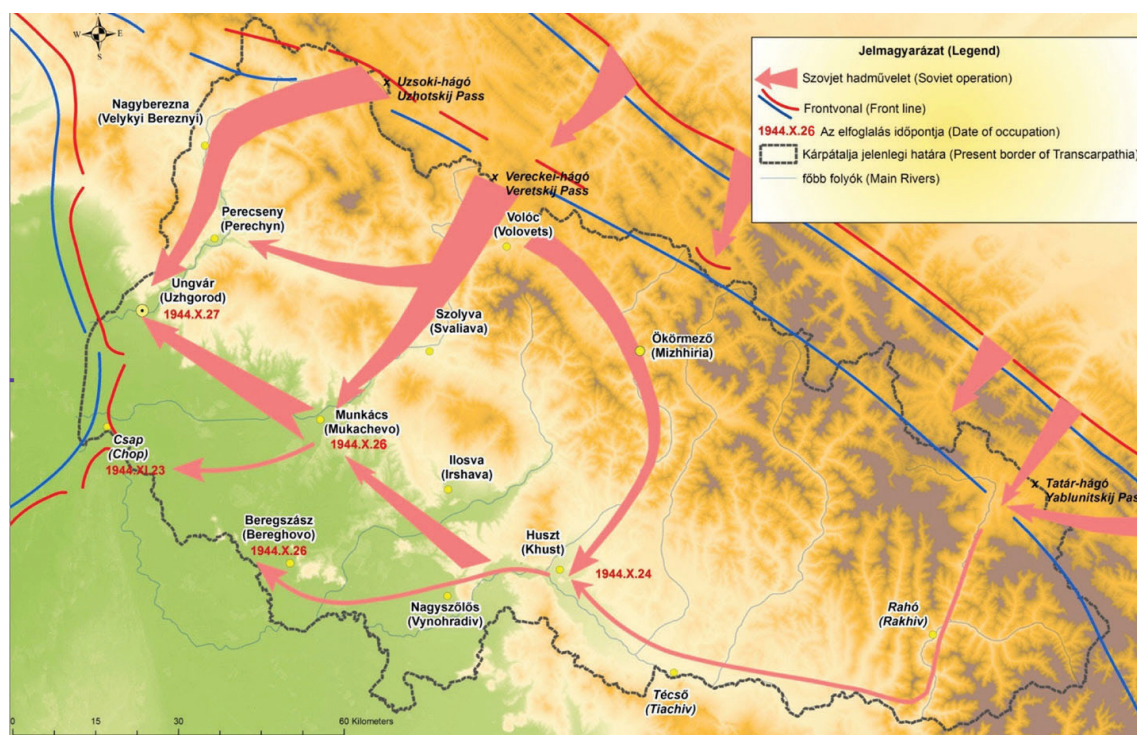
<sup>8</sup> *Nationality (mother tongue) data of Transcarpathian settlements (1880–1941).* Budapest: Central Statistics Office, 1996.; KOCSIS, Károly: *Kárpátalja mai területének etnikai térképe.* [Ethnic map of the present territory of Transcarpathia.] Budapest: Hungarian Academy of Science, Institute of Minority Research, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> BOTLIK, József, György DUPKA: *Ez hát a hon... Tények, adatok, dokumentumok a kárpátaljai magyarság életéből 1918–1991.* [This is homeland then ... Facts, data, documents from the life of Transcarpathian Hungarians 1918–1991.] H.n. 1991. 51.

that time, it was not yet clear to the local population what would happen next, where the area would belong. Among the possible alternatives was that the decision-makers would annul the 1939 reannexation to Hungary, and the right to own the territory would revert to Czechoslovakia, that is, post-World War One conditions would be restored. At the same time, it was undoubtedly necessary to take into account the possibility that the Soviets coming in under the slogan of “liberation” would stay and annex the region to the Soviet Union. (Figure 5.)

**Figure 5.**

*The Occupation of Transcarpathia by the 4th Ukrainian Front of the Red Army*



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The initial uncertainty was also contributed to by the fact that on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October 1944, following the Soviet army, František Němec, Minister of Economy and Reconstruction of the Czechoslovak government in exile in London, showed up in Huszt (Khust) with the aim to organize the administration of Transcarpathia,<sup>10</sup> and he delivered a speech to the locals

<sup>10</sup> BREZOVICS, László: Kárpátontúli Ukrajna, 1944. október – 1945. június. [Ukraine beyond the Carpathians, October 1944 – June 1945.] In: *Kárpátalja*. [Transcarpathia.] Ed. Baranyi, Béla. Pécs–Budapest: MTA RKK – Dialog Campus Publishing House, 2009. 93.



in which he called on them to welcome the Red Army as liberators, and expressed his hope that the population of the area could be reunited with the Czech and Slovak peoples.<sup>11</sup> The Soviet leadership, however, had not the slightest intention of ceding Transcarpathia to Czechoslovakia. This is indicated by the fact that although the area was not yet officially under Soviet authority, in accordance with the Kremlin's directives, the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front began to Sovietize the region at the very beginning of the occupation in order to carry out the annexation as smoothly as possible.

What the locals must have perceived in this uncertain situation was that the Soviets – using the freedom of the occupiers – kept them in constant fear. One of the recurring elements of the reminiscences of the era is the harassing and violent treatment of the Red Army soldiers towards young girls and women in several settlements: “Then they started to chase the girls. The girls had to hide, no girl was able to wear her own clothes, they all had elders [every family had older family members – M.D.E.], so we used their clothes, and we put scarves on our heads [...], so that we would not be conspicuous. Life was extremely sad.”<sup>12</sup> The memory of Soviet soldiers emptying pantries and storerooms is also a common theme of the memoirs. For example, a witness who fled the bombings with his family was greeted by the image below when they returned to their house: “my mother and my brother went home to take some stuff with us, and that is when they learnt that the Russians had moved into our house. The officers were celebrating and they were drunk as a lord, and one of them came out into the yard and he chased my mother and brother away by flailing with his pistol. And when we returned home after the fights, we had to face the fact that the Soviets had completely robbed us. They had eaten up the pigs and the poultry, they had taken our horses with the cart, they had used our furniture as firewood for heating, and they had thrown out our clothes into the mud where rains had soaked them to destruction. We had nothing left, not even as much as a string of matches.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Transcarpathian State Archive/(hereinafter: TSA), FP-14., op 1, od.zb. 6., 1.

<sup>12</sup> Recollection of Irén Gál (born in 1925, in Harangláb). Published by HAJDU, Edit: *Harangláb története a szovjet rendszer kiépítésének idején (1944–1953)*. [The history of Harangláb during the construction of the Soviet regime (1944–1953).] Beregszász, 2019. 16. <http://genius-ja.uz.ua/images/files/hajdu-editdiplomamunka.pdf>. Last accessed on 9<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

<sup>13</sup> Recollection of Kálmán Báthory. Published on: <http://www.karpatalja.com.ua/kmksz/hir115.htm>. Last accessed on 20<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

Merely two weeks after the entrance of the Soviet armed forces, one of the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century tragedies of the Transcarpathian Hungarians started when – on the pretext and lie of only three days of reparation and restoration work – the Soviets took tens of thousands of the civilian male population to war prisons and forced labor camps. A direct precursor to the deportations is known to be the meeting of the Military Council of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front occupying the territory on 12<sup>th</sup> of November 1944. There they adopted a top secret 0036 decree in which it was ordered that conscripts of German and Hungarian nationality aged 18–50 living in the area be enumerated, and then sent in separate squads, according to lists, under convoy, to a collection point for prisoner of war.<sup>14</sup> On the following day, the 13<sup>th</sup> of November, wall stickers appeared all over Transcarpathia with the title City Command Order No. 2, which announced the registration obligation of Hungarian and German males between the ages of 18 and 50 in all major settlements. The order also included that if someone did not comply with the order, they would be court-martialed. The 16<sup>th</sup> of November was marked as the deadline for registration.

Besides the posters, street-criers also announced the order several times a day. One of the survivors of the deportations depicts the conditions of the announcement very vividly: “A street-crier announced that every man between the ages of 18 and 50 should immediately register for three days of work, bringing with them food for three days and blankets... But the announcement was made not only once, but every hour from morning till night, and they even added that if one did not register, they would exterminate any family he had.”<sup>15</sup> In a couple of days, the mass gathering of people, by settlement, began. While gathering them, the Soviets asked the men about their nationality and all those who declared themselves to be Ruthenian, Ukrainian or Slovak, or those who were able to recite Our Father in Ruthenian or Slovakian, received a certificate and were allowed to go home to their families. As opposed to this, people of Hungarian or German nationality were kept there and then on the 18<sup>th</sup> of November the first pedestrian marching columns were started off, accompanied by armed soldiers, towards the concentration camp set up in the city of Svaliava that operated as the largest concentration camp in Transcarpathia.

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<sup>14</sup> DUPKA, György, Alekszej KORSZUN: *A “malenykij robot” dokumentumokban*. [The ‘malenkij robot’ in documents.] Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 1997. 71–73.

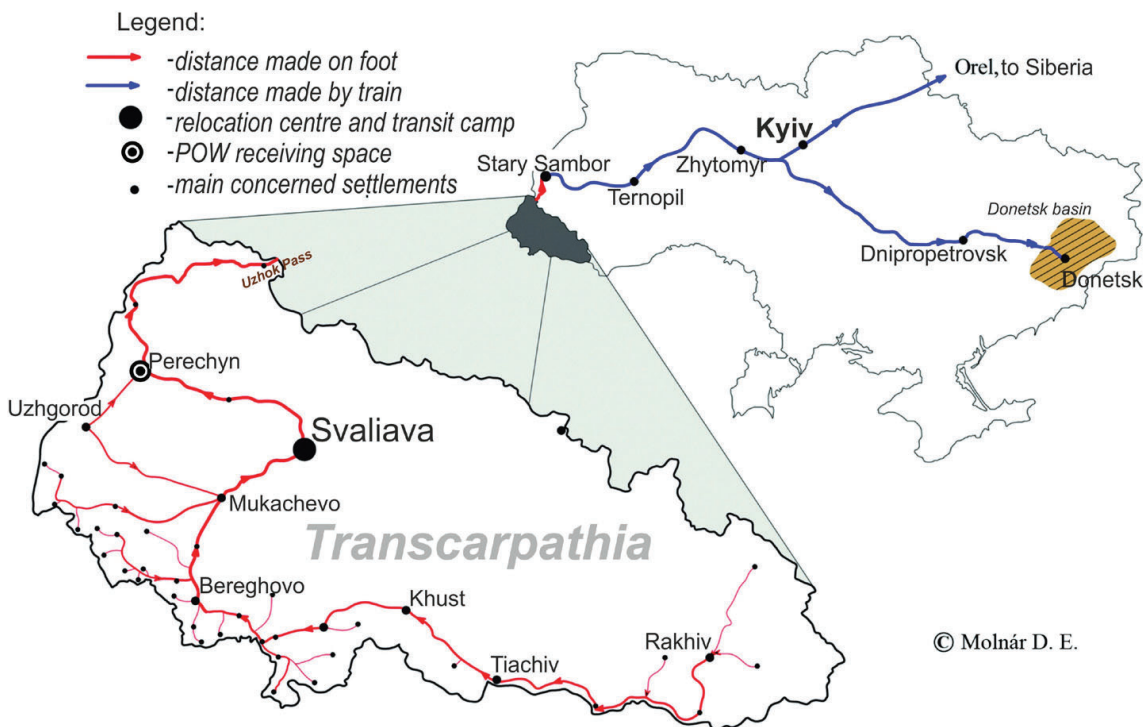
<sup>15</sup> Recollection of András Nagy, deportee from Beregszász. Time of the interview: July 2006.



In the concentration camp of Svaliava, death was taking its toll among the deportees due to the inhumane conditions, starvation, cold weather and epidemics (typhus, dysentery, jaundice). In the winter of 1944–1945, the thousands of prisoners who survived, starving, freezing and humiliated in their human dignity, were driven on through the Uzhok Pass to Stary or Novy Sambor, to the distribution camp of the lager system under the control of the Soviet General Directorate of Prisoners of War and Internment (GUPVI). There they were loaded into cattle wagons and their deportation to various camps in the Soviet Union began, from which most of them never returned. (Figure 6.)

**Figure 6.**

*The route of the deportations*<sup>16</sup>



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People deported within the *Malenkij robot* were taken to the so-called GUPVI-camps<sup>17</sup>, that is, to the camps under the control of the High Command of Prisoners of War and Internment which belonged under the supervision and control of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (NKVD)<sup>18</sup>

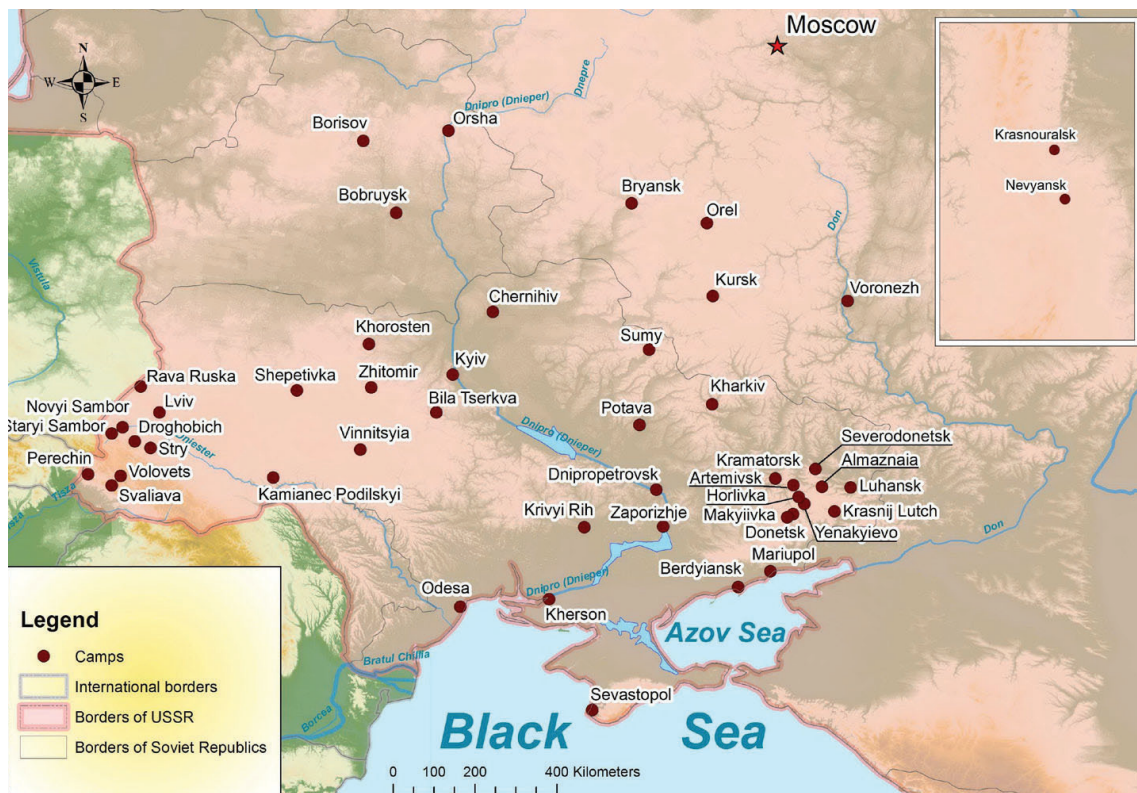
<sup>16</sup> MOLNÁR D., 2014. 4.

<sup>17</sup> In Russian: ГУВПИ – Главное управление по делам военнопленных и интернированных.

<sup>18</sup> НКВД – Народный комиссариат внутренних дел СССР.

and the Red Army. The main feature of GUPVI-camps was that prisoners were taken there in large numbers at a time, without any court sentences. For the Soviet bodies organizing and carrying out the deportations, it was only the number of people that was important or the intention to thus isolate a nationality, as they had done in the case of the Transcarpathian Hungarians.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 7.** *GUPVI-camps, where the majority of Transcarpathian Hungarians were held prisoners<sup>20</sup>*



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Based on available archival sources, we can estimate the number of Hungarians taken from Transcarpathia to GUPVI camps at approximately 30,000<sup>21</sup> (see Figure 8.), a third of whom – even according to the lowest estimates – never returned to their homeland as they did not survive the

<sup>19</sup> BOGNÁR, Zalán: Malenkij robot. In: *Malenkij robot. „Egyetlen bűnünk a származásunk volt...”* [Our only sin was our origin...] Ed. Bognár, Zalán. Pécs: The Pécs-Baranya Ethnic Circle of Germans from Hungary, 2009. 13.

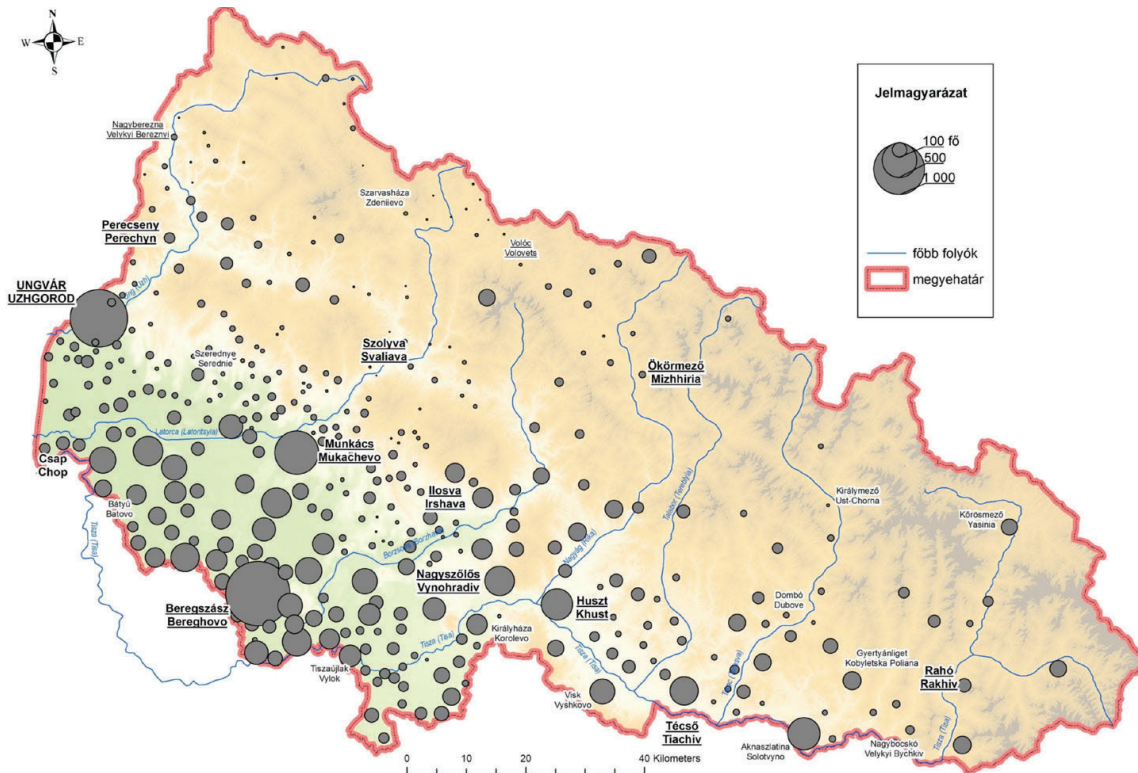
<sup>20</sup> TSA, P-14. fond, op. 1., od. zb. 215–232.

<sup>21</sup> TSA, FP-14., op.1., od. zb. 215–232.

inhumane conditions and treatment. It is indisputable that the deportation of Hungarian men from Transcarpathia happened on an ethnic basis and its implementation meant not only a violation of general human rights, but exhausted the principle of collective guilt as well.

**Figure 8.**

*Territorial distribution of deportees from Transcarpathia<sup>22</sup>*



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Parallel to the deportations, the systematic annexation of Transcarpathia by the Soviets began, and although the fact of violence was obvious, the Stalinist leadership intended to present it as if it were the fulfillment of the locals' will and as if they did everything according to the people's request. In staging this drama and in the further process of Sovietization of Transcarpathia, an important role was played by the group of agents trained in the Soviet Union and sent to Transcarpathia. The leader of the group was Ivan Turjanica, an NKVD agent who had advanced from chimney sweeper to local communist party leader and who had become a member of the

<sup>22</sup> TSA, FP-14., op.1., od. zb. 215-232.



Czechoslovak Communist Party between the two World Wars. At the end of October 1944, Turjanica arrived in Transcarpathia as a member of the Czechoslovak Němec government delegation with a ready-made script for the organization of Soviet power in his bag.<sup>23</sup> It is true that with the liquidation of the Hungarian public administration system, the management of towns and villages was entrusted to local authorities, the so-called local people's committees. However, in reality the decisions were not made by these local-level people's committees, but by the Soviet party leaders who also controlled the local committees.<sup>24</sup> Within a short time, the communists took over the management of the local people's committees in all settlements.

An important stepping stone for the unification of Transcarpathian Ukraine with the Soviet Union was the first Transcarpathian party conference convened by the Communists in Munkács (Mukachevo) on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1944.<sup>25</sup> At the conference, the independence of the territory named Transcarpathian Ukraine was declared, and they formed its Communist Party, which passed a resolution on the "reunification" of Transcarpathian Ukraine with Soviet Ukraine. Despite the fact that, prior to this, the territory had never been part of either the Soviet Union or Soviet Ukraine, Soviet propaganda deliberately used the politically and ideologically charged term "reunification" thus creating a kind of historical legal basis for the annexation. The essence of the historical background that formed the basis of Soviet propaganda and lacked any basis in reality was the argument that in the 9<sup>th</sup> century the Hungarian conquerors subjugated the Slavs living in the region with whom the Slavic population of Transcarpathia shows genealogical identity and continuity, and to whom the arrival of the Soviets gave the opportunity to reunite with their brothers and sisters living on the other side of the Carpathians.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> BOTLIK and DUPKA, 1991. 58.

<sup>24</sup> STARK, Tamás: *Magyar foglyok a Szovjetunióban*. [Hungarian prisoners in the Soviet Union.] Budapest: Lucidus Publishing House, 2006. 52.

<sup>25</sup> MÓRICZ, Kálmán: *Kárpátalja sorsfordulói*. [Turns of fate in Transcarpathia.] Budapest: Hatodik Síp Foundation, 2001. 127.

<sup>26</sup> BOTLIK, József: *Egestas Subcarpathica. Adalékok az Északkeleti-Felvidék és Kárpátalja XIX. és XX. századi történetéhez*. [Egestas Subcarpathica. Additions to the history of North-East Highlands and Transcarpathia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.] Budapest: Hatodik Síp Foundation, 2000. 285.

At the Munkács (Mukachevo) meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> November 1944, a decision was also made to convene a congress of people's committees where the Soviets wanted to legitimize the annexation. Thus a week later, on 26<sup>th</sup> November 1944, the first congress of people's committees of Transcarpathian Ukraine met in Munkács (Mukachevo). To this day, we do not know for sure how the 663 congress delegates were elected since no elections were held. Settlements with Hungarian or German population had no delegates also due to the fact that most of the male population were prisoners of war or held captive in camps. What is certain is that the intimidated and unilaterally influenced attendees had to vote the union with the Soviet Union in the presence of armed soldiers. According to eyewitnesses recalling the event, the NKVD soldiers supervising the voting closed the doors on those present and they were not even allowed to go to the restroom until they voted in favor of the merger with the Soviet empire.<sup>27</sup>

This is how the manifesto on the “reunification” of Transcarpathian Ukraine with Soviet Ukraine was born as the embodiment of “people’s will”.<sup>28</sup> The document also stipulated that Hungarians living in Transcarpathia were the enemies of the local Slavic peoples. Thus, the members of the Hungarian community in the region became stigmatized, second-class citizens in their homeland. The congress also stated that the main body of power and government of Transcarpathian Ukraine was the People’s Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine.

Upon this a signature collection campaign began through which the communists wanted to obtain confirmation of the manifesto requesting unification with the Soviets by collecting signatures from the population. According to Soviet data, by 1<sup>st</sup> January 1945, more than 250,000 Transcarpathian residents “voluntarily” signed the Munkács (Mukachevo) manifesto calling for “reunification”,<sup>29</sup> which Soviet propaganda presented to the West as a regular referendum.<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that due to language difficulties, a significant part of the population in Hungarian-inhabited settlements was not even aware of the content of the document written in Ukrainian, what is more, in some

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<sup>27</sup> ZELEI, Miklós: *A kettézárt falu.* [The village divided into two.] Budapest: Kortárs Publishing House, 2017.

<sup>28</sup> TSA, F.P-14., op.1., od.zb.1., *Zakarpatszka Ukrajina*, no. 7., 27<sup>th</sup> November 1944. P. 2.

<sup>29</sup> BOTLIK, 2000. 284.

<sup>30</sup> BREZOVICS, László: *Kárpátontúli Ukrajna 1944. október – 1945. június.* [Transcarpathian Ukraine October 1944 – June 1945.] In: *Kárpátalja.* [Transcarpathia.] Ed. Baranyi Béla. Pécs–Budapest: MTA RKK – Dialóg Campus Publishing House, 2009. 93.

villages the party activists collecting signatures made it appear as if they were collecting signatures for a petition for the release of the deported men.<sup>31</sup>

After the congress the Soviet type transformation of Transcarpathia followed with even greater intensity. Stalin sent a letter to the Czechoslovak president explaining that he was unable to oppose the popular-national will of the Transcarpathian population.<sup>32</sup> On the 5<sup>th</sup> of December 1944, the People's Council issued an ultimatum to F. Nemeč, the representative of the Czechoslovak government to leave Transcarpathia and ordered the local national committees to cut ties with the Czechoslovak delegation and the organizations it had created. Then they announced that the province would withdraw from the framework of the Czechoslovak state.<sup>33</sup> In light of this, in the course of December 1944 – January 1945, the Czechoslovak delegation left the territory,<sup>34</sup> and then on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1945 in Moscow, the Soviet and Czechoslovak governments signed a treaty on the final transfer of Transcarpathia to Soviet Ukraine.<sup>35</sup>

The “state structure” known as Transcarpathian Ukraine, which was apparently self-governing but, in fact, it was under the control of Moscow, existed between November 1944 and January 1946. The official language of Transcarpathian Ukraine, which actually functioned as a pseudo-state, was Ukrainian and also Russian, which was also indicative in terms of the future development of the area.<sup>36</sup> Referring to the signature collection results and the will of the people related to the November manifesto, Moscow quickly set about implementing the annexation. On 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1946, the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian SSR issued a decree on the basis of which it merged Transcarpathia into its own administrative system under the name Transcarpathian Territory. Thus, the region became the most western county of the Soviet empire and the Soviet Union's strategic plan of entering the Carpathian Basin was fulfilled. (Figure 9.)

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<sup>31</sup> BOTLIK, József: *Gát*. [Dam.] Budapest: Száz Magyar Falu Könyvesháza Kht., 2000. 181.

<sup>32</sup> BREZOVICS, 2009. 95.

<sup>33</sup> VIDA, István, Béla ZSELICZKY: Az 1945. június 29-i szovjet–csehszlovák szerződés Kárpátaljáról. [The 29<sup>th</sup> June 1945 Soviet–Czechoslovak treaty on Transcarpathia.] *Külgügyi Szemle*, 2004. 236. [https://kki.hu/assets/upload/Kulugyi\\_Szemle\\_2004\\_01\\_Az\\_1945\\_jenius\\_29-i\\_szov\\_.pdf](https://kki.hu/assets/upload/Kulugyi_Szemle_2004_01_Az_1945_jenius_29-i_szov_.pdf). Last accessed on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020.

<sup>34</sup> VIDA and ZSELICZKY, 2004. 237.

<sup>35</sup> TSA, F.P–195., op. 23. od.zb. 1.

<sup>36</sup> CSERNICKÓ, István: *Államok, nyelvek, államnyelvek. Nyelvpolitika a mai Kárpátalja területén (1867–2010)*. [States, languages, state languages. Language policy on the territory of today's Transcarpathia (1867–2010).] Budapest: Gondolat Publishing House, 2013. 193.

Figure 9.

*Transcarpathia within the Soviet Union*<sup>37</sup>

Edited by: István Molnár D.

This is how the Soviet annexation of Transcarpathia took place, without any kind of legitimacy, and thus every segment of life in the region came under the control of the communist totalitarian dictatorship. Upon this a totalitarian system was built in the area, which can be perfectly characterized by Ann Applebaum's famous quote: "Strictly defined, a totalitarian regime is one which bans all institutions apart from those it has officially approved. A totalitarian regime thus has one political party, one educational system, one artistic creed, one centrally planned economy, one unified media and one moral code. In a totalitarian state there are no independent schools, no private businesses, no grassroots organizations and no critical thought."<sup>38</sup>

## 2. Social and individual deprivation of rights

One of the fundamental characteristics of one-party totalitarian systems is the political disenfranchisement of society by the fact that the state party exercises state functions without any democratic controls, while the population is not given the option of choosing between several parties. The essential nature of the one-party system of the Soviet party-state can

<sup>37</sup> MOLNÁR D., 2014. 4.

<sup>38</sup> APPLEBAUM, Ann: *Iron Curtain. The Crushing of Eastern Europe 1944–1956*. London: Penguin Books, 2013. 2.



be summed up as follows: “Domination of the country’s political life by a single centralized political party. Prohibition not only of opposition to this party but also of open factional political activity within it... An insistence that all organized group activity take place under the aegis of the Communist party that all organized groups be registered and that no such group be permitted if its expressed purpose is the advancement of the economic or political interests of its members.”<sup>39</sup>

### *2.1. Political disenfranchisement of society*

One of the most important moments in the Sovietization of Transcarpathia was the introduction of the monocacy of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The first so-called “free” elections to the Supreme Council of the Soviet Union were held on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1946 in Transcarpathia. Not surprisingly, during the preparations, special attention was paid to “mass agitation work”, to the preparation of voters for the elections, and to equipping the districts with the appropriate propaganda materials.<sup>40</sup> Special attention was paid to the Transcarpathian Hungarians’ attitude towards the elections given that they were a community decimated by the Soviet power in the fall of 1944, whose members had been taken to war prisons and deported to forced labor camps. An article from the local contemporary press also refers to this: “The Hungarians here might have and do have difficulties and problems, which, however, were brought about by the aftershocks of the war, and which we would not only not heal, but directly spoil and poison by protesting against the Soviet Union because of them. The Russians, Ukrainians and other peoples who have already fit in the Soviet Union are only electing representatives on the 10<sup>th</sup> February, but Hungarians from here are electing something more: Hungarian fate.”<sup>41</sup>

On 9<sup>th</sup> February 1947, new elections were held, this time to the Supreme Council of the USSR, while in December the same year Transcarpathians were also called to elections to vote for the local authorities. Every

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<sup>39</sup> HOUGH, Jerry, Tomoyoshi HIRAI, Hiroshi KIMURA: Evolution in the Soviet Political System. *Acta Slavica Iaponica*, 2. Collegium Slavicum Academiae Hokkaido, 1984. 127–158., 128. <http://hdl.handle.net/2115/7939>. Last accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

<sup>40</sup> TSA, FP-1., op. 1., od.zb. 9., 2.

<sup>41</sup> M. TAKÁCS, Lajos: *Aprópénz a történelem színpadán. A kárpátaljai magyar nyelvű sajtó 1945–1948.* [Change on the stage of history. Hungarian-language press in Transcarpathia 1945–1948.] Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 1994. 78.



time, the elections exemplify the typical case of the “one-horse race”. The zeitgeist is well illustrated by the example of those nominated by the faculty and students of Ungvár (Uzhhorod) State University. The aforementioned voters nominated five candidates to the Transcarpathian County Council: Joseph Stalin, Vyacheslav Molotov, Lazar Kaganovich, Nikita Khrushchev and Vasyl Kuska. The first four candidates were politicians holding leading positions in the Soviet Union and the Ukrainian SSR who obviously did not want to be members of the Transcarpathian County Council; thus, the only name on the list was the last one, the vice chancellor of the Ungvár (Uzhhorod) State University. Although these elections were entirely for show, the authorities were always on special alert. In 1947, for example, in certain villages of Transcarpathia, the polling booths were guarded by armed soldiers in order to avoid any possible problems. In the coming years, the elections took place in a “normal” way, according to the Soviet interpretation, the voting process practically became automatic.<sup>42</sup>

These were sham elections, the whole procedure was a formality, real decisions were taken by the relevant party committees.<sup>43</sup> From then on, elections were held at regular intervals, every four to five years, for the Parliament of the SSR, which met in Moscow, and the Ukrainian SSR (officially called the Supreme Council), which was based in Kyiv, as well as for local councils. All elections were held under the strict control of the Communist Party, and with nearly 100 percent of votes for the candidates of the Communists who had no opponents, as a result of which a monolithic political-power structure typical of the Soviet Union was established in Transcarpathia as well.

The monopoly of the communist party was not limited to political life: the entirety of the economy, the press, education, science and culture was under the control of the party.

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<sup>42</sup> OFICINSZKIJ, Roman: Látszatválasztások. [Elections for show.] In: *Kárpátalja 1919–2009 történelem, politika, kultúra*. [Transcarpathia 1919–2009. History, politics, culture.] Eds. Fedinec, Csilla, Mikola Vehes. Budapest: Argumentum – Hungarian Academy of Science Institute for the Study of Ethnic-National Minorities, 2010. 218.

<sup>43</sup> BREZOVICS, László: Az Ukrán Szovjet Szocialista Köztársaság Kárpátontúli területe, 1945. június – 1991. augusztus. [The Transcarpathian territory of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, June–August 1945.] In: *Kárpátalja*. [Transcarpathia.] Ed. Baranyi, Béla. Pécs–Budapest: MTA RKK – Dialóg Campus Publishing House, 2009. 95.

## 2.2. *Violations of freedom of the press*

Among the liberties, freedom of the press and information was fundamentally damaged. Licensing and supervision of press products came under the control of the ruling state party almost immediately. The publishing of Transcarpathian press products, together with book publishing, was the responsibility of the censorship committee under the control of the Office of Public Education Commissioner of the People's Council of Transcarpathian Ukraine.<sup>44</sup> On 5<sup>th</sup> December 1944, a decree was issued introducing censorship, the violation of which was punishable by a fine or six months imprisonment.<sup>45</sup> Not only writings in Hungarian and German were banned, but also the publications of Ruthenian and other Slavic cultural organizations operating between the two World Wars. The newspapers and other press publications that had previously appeared in Transcarpathia ceased to exist, and the Transcarpathian Hungarian reader had to make do with press products printed in their native language, but whose spirit was completely alien to them.<sup>46</sup> The first newspaper in Hungarian in the region – the Workers' Newspaper – was first published in May 1945, followed by other press products in Hungarian in the next months and years. The majority of these, however, were the translations of Ukrainian and Russian language newspapers and, without exception, functioned as the local Hungarian mouthpieces for communist propaganda. One contemporary newspaper reports on the role of the printed press in Transcarpathia as follows: "On the liberated territory beyond the Carpathians, an exceptionally important role is played by the Bolshevik press. There is no doubt that in the successes we have achieved in the development of our young socialist industry, the organization of our collective farms, and the eradication of capitalist remnants, a part was played by the press which also plays the role of collective propagandist, agitator and organizer."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> FEDINEC, Csilla: Magyar oktatásügy és internacionalizmus. [Hungarian education and internationalism]. In: *Kárpátalja 1919–2009 történelem, politika, kultúra*. [Transcarpathia 1919–2009. History, politics, culture.] Eds. Fedinec, Csilla, Mikola Vehes. Budapest: Argumentum – Hungarian Academy of Science Institute for the Study of Ethnic-National Minorities, 2010. 303.

<sup>45</sup> TSA, FP– 14. op. 1. od.zb. 1 „a”.

<sup>46</sup> KOVÁCS, Elemér: A magyar nyelvű sajtó és sajtószabadságtörténete Kárpátalján 1918–1989. [Hungarian language press and the history of the freedom of press in Transcarpathia.] In: *A határon túli magyar sajtó Trianontól a XX. század végéig. Fejezetek a magyar sajtószabadságtörténetéből*. [Hungarian language press from beyond the borders from Trianon to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Chapters from the history of Hungarian freedom of press.] Eds. Apró, István, Vince Paál. Budapest: Institute of Media Studies, 2014. 77.

<sup>47</sup> Day of the Bolshevik press (the 5<sup>th</sup> of May). *Vörös Zászló*, series 4., no. 38., 4<sup>th</sup> May 1948., 1.

### 2.3. *Violation of private property and transformation of ownership*

The transformation of property relations was an essential part of the Sovietization of Transcarpathia. This meant the trampling of private property into the mud among the population living in bourgeois social conditions until then. According to Soviet ownership rights, that „has been developed to implement the Marxian thesis that political power rests in property rights”,<sup>48</sup> the liquidation of private property was also begun in Transcarpathia. In December 1944, on the basis of a decree, all movable and immovable property of those persons who were considered “accomplices of the Hungarian and German exploiters” was confiscated. The confiscated real estate came under the control of people’s committees and, in concordance with the decree, they were to be handed over free of charge to the homeless and to large families.<sup>49</sup> In reality, these houses later served as residences for the newly settled population of Russian or Ukrainian nationality. The nationalization process was extremely fast, it took place even before the territory officially came under the control of the Soviet Union under the Soviet-Czechoslovak Treaty. With the slogan of ensuring the right to work, factories and plants were confiscated from their previous owners.<sup>50</sup> Many such owners were even worse off given that if they were considered “exploiters”, they were also deprived of their homes and movable assets. Owners of shops and workshops that now became “the property of people” had the same fate; they could consider themselves lucky if they were allowed to continue working on as simple employees.<sup>51</sup>

Given that Transcarpathia was primarily an agrarian territory, the majority of the population was living in villages and were working in agriculture, the transformation was most evident in the Soviet-style reform of land tenure relations. The process took place in several steps. As a first step, at the first congress of the people’s committees held in November 1944, in addition to the manifesto proclaiming “reunification”, they made a decision on the implementation of land reform. On 29<sup>th</sup> November 1944, a decree on land distribution was issued which proclaimed that the properties owned

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<sup>48</sup> HAZARD, John N.: Soviet Property Law. *Cornell Law Review*, Volume 30., Issue 4, June 1945, Article 5., 487. <https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/clr/vol30/iss4/5/>. Last accessed on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2022.

<sup>49</sup> TSA, FP-14. op.1., od.zb. 1.,a”. 10.

<sup>50</sup> *Вістник Народної Ради Закарпатської України, Ужгород, 15 лютого 1945* (Gazette of People’s Committee of Transcarpathian Ukraine, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1945) p. 30.

<sup>51</sup> CSANÁDI, György: *Sorsfordító évek sodrásában*. [In the drift of fate reversing years.] Ungvár: PoliPrint, 2004. 179–181.

by Hungarian and German landowners were to be confiscated, and were to be distributed with immediate effect among the landless, the peasants with small plots of land and the workers.<sup>52</sup> In light of this, in the course of 1945 the land ownership relations were transformed, large estates were liquidated. In every settlement there were set up land distribution committees who registered the lands subject to division and then divided them, wrote reports on the situation of village farmers, issued instructions and supervised the process of land distribution.<sup>53</sup> Soviet army volunteers and partisans, as well as those who settled from the highlands to the lowlands, received priority from the lands to be distributed.<sup>54</sup>

Between 1946 and 1950, they ruthlessly carried out the transformation of agriculture on the Soviet model in Transcarpathia which, by that time, constituted one of the administrative units of the Soviet Union. The next level of collectivization started: the kolkhoz. In 1946, two collective farms were formed in Transcarpathia. However, the top party leadership found the pace of collective farm organization too slow in the area, which they explained by saying that “the local population was not helpful enough.”<sup>55</sup> In order to convince the population, there were meetings organized in the different settlements with presentations on the advantages of collective farming and agitation films were screened. If this did not work, they resorted to more convincing methods: they summoned the farmers to the village hall one by one, keeping them there for several days, proving to them the advantages of collective farming.<sup>56</sup> One of the eyewitnesses remembers it as follows: “My husband was taken to the city hall, they closed the door, they imposed a large tax and said that if we did not pay, they would take him to a camp, though he had just come home from a camp like that. They forced us into the kolkhoz ... he then signed the paper saying that we would join the kolkhoz. And then

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<sup>52</sup> TSA, FP-14., op.1., od.zb. 1. „a”, 5. p

<sup>53</sup> TSA, FP- 14. op. 1., od.zb. 439. 1–48. p

<sup>54</sup> OFICINSZKIJ, Román: Kárpátontúli Ukrajna agrárpolitikája. [The agrarian policy of Transcarpathian Ukraine.] In: *Kárpátalja 1919–2009 történelem, politika, kultúra.* [Transcarpathia 1919–2009. History, politics, culture.] Eds. Fedinec, Csilla, Mikola Vehes. Budapest: Argumentum – Hungarian Academy of Science Institute for the Study of Ethnic-National Minorities, 2010. 275.

<sup>55</sup> TSA, FP-1., op.1., od.zb. 18., 40. P.

<sup>56</sup> KOVÁCS, Elemér: *Élőlátók.* [Seers of the living.] Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 1993. 100.

they came, we had oxen, carts, farm equipment, everything we had, vineyard, everything was taken, and then we went to our own lands to work as slaves, we went day by day to work. We had a bitter life.”<sup>57</sup>

In order to fully break local farmers, a hand-in obligation was introduced<sup>58</sup> which meant that not only the crop but also livestock, wood, ploughs, harrows, seed drills and other work tools were collected from farmers, thus creating the infrastructural basis of the kolkhoz to be set up. The obligation of handing in goods without any kind of compensation caused the resentment of many, but if anyone decided not to comply, criminal proceedings were initiated against them. Agitators were harassing and threatening people in their own homes.

Similar to communist totalitarian systems, the transformation of land ownership relations in Transcarpathia coincided with the class struggle against the kulaks. Stéphane Courtois defines the essence of dekulakization as follows: “The primary objective of the ‘dekulakization’ in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, in accordance with the official order issued for this operation (and the regime propaganda), was to exterminate the kulaks as a class.”<sup>59</sup> The peasant class considered to be kulaks and resisting collectivization was also in the crosshairs of the communist authorities in Transcarpathia, and the elimination of kulaks as a social class rose to the level of official policy in this region as well. All those who insisted on their own property were put on the list of kulaks and became a class enemy. Fundamentally, wealthy farmers were considered kulaks, but even those poorer farmers who did not want to accept the new communist world were seen as “small kulaks”.

The decision of the Council of Ministers of the USSR of 21<sup>st</sup> June 1947 on the taxation of kulak farms was also extended to Transcarpathia, which practically meant that farmers who refused to join the kolkhoz were taxed ruthlessly. Those who tried to evade the impossible tax burden

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<sup>57</sup> Recollection of Irén Imre (1927). The text of the interview was published by Erzsébet MOLNÁR D.: A szovjet rendszer kiépítésének korszaka a kárpátaljai magyarság kollektív emlékezetében. [The age of building the Soviet system in the collective memory of Transcarpathian Hungarians.] *Mediárium. Kommunikáció – Egyház – Társadalom* [Mediarium – Communication – Church – Society.] series V. no. 3. 2011. 51.

<sup>58</sup> CSANÁDI, 2004. 192–194.

<sup>59</sup> COURTOIS, Stéphane: The Crimes of Communism. In: *The Black Book of Communism. Crimes, Terror, Repression*. Eds. Courtois, Stéphane, Nicolas Werth, Jean Louis Panné, Andrzej Paczkowski, Karel Bartošek, Jean Louis Margolin. Cambridge–Massachusetts–London: Harvard University Press, 1999. 9.



were sentenced to forced labor in Siberia or Kazakhstan. In many cases, collective farm organizers wanted to set an example by arresting and deporting farmers who were unwilling to cooperate: “on the 10<sup>th</sup> December ’48 they gathered six people from the village who got taken away that night. We were also among them, that is, my father. They took them away and some of them were taken for 25, others for 15 years, when the collectivization started. [...] That night the whole village immediately signed on. Until then they couldn’t set up the collective farm because there were only three or four people who had signed on. They were not able to organize a collective farm with that. And then the kolkhoz was created.”<sup>60</sup>

#### *2.4. Violations of religious freedom*

The violent spreading of a materialistic and anti-religious worldview, or using the contemporary official terminology, of scientific atheism was an essential component of the establishment of communist ideology in Transcarpathia. “Scientific atheism, the official term for the Communist Party’s philosophical worldview, posited the ultimate purpose of human existence, a moral code of conduct, and created a collection of atheistic rituals and ceremonies that mimicked religious ones.”<sup>61</sup> The local projection of this central ideology into Transcarpathia was characterized by a strong policy of persecuting the church, which disregarded religious freedom.

The Council of People’s Commissars of the USSR established the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults in May 1944 which dealt with the supervision of non-Orthodox confessions. Soviet authorities thought that under appropriate pressure it would be possible to put some historic churches at the service of the state’s interests.<sup>62</sup> The Soviet leadership applied this church policy in occupied Transcarpathia as well, as a consequence of which the fight against religiosity and the beliefs of religious people rose to the level

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<sup>60</sup> P. PUNYKÓ, Mária: *Reggelt adott az Isten. A szenvedés évei kárpátaljai népi elbeszélésekben.* [And the Lord has given us a morning. The years of suffering in folk talks of Transcarpathia.] Debrecen: Ethnography Association of István Györffy, 1993. 118–199.

<sup>61</sup> FROESE, Paul: Forced Secularization in Soviet Russia: Why an Atheistic Monopoly Failed. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 43. No 1. Mar. 2004. 35–50.

<sup>62</sup> SZAMBOROVSKYNÉ NAGY, Ibolya: Magyar reformátusok a Szovjetunióban a hrucsovi egyházüldözés időszakában. [Hungarian reformed believers in the Soviet Union in the time of the Khrushchev church persecution.] *Betekintő. Az Állambiztonsági Szolgálatok Történeti Levéltára negyedéves tudományos folyóirata.* [The quarterly scientific journal of the Historical Archives of the State Security Services.] Series 14. no. 3. 2020. 27–28.

of official politics.<sup>63</sup> The authorities tried to limit religious life and religious activity in various ways: by the end of 1944, they liquidated the different church organizations and associations, on the 5<sup>th</sup> December 1944, mass secularization took place, the separation of the state and the church, and the state and education was announced.<sup>64</sup> In March 1945, the People's Council adopted a decree on family and marriage that further limited the competences of the church and the role it played in society. The decree not only made it possible to skip the church ceremony when getting married, but also stipulated that a church wedding could only take place after a civil marriage ceremony.<sup>65</sup> The decree passed in May 1945 authorized the representatives of the authorities to use property belonging to the church which fundamentally meant the confiscation of these properties. In the course of 1945–1946, they deprived the church of the ownership of its buildings and churches, and nationalized the denominational schools.<sup>66</sup> Nationalized churches could be rented by religious communities, and heavy taxes had to be paid for their use. The closing of churches and their transformation into warehouses, gymnasiums, workshops, and atheist museums became a common phenomenon.

The majority of the Transcarpathian Hungarians belonged to the Reformed denomination.<sup>67</sup> The state authorities carried out a precise survey: data were collected on all pastors, active church members were monitored, and a trustee dealing with the affairs of the Reformed Church was appointed.<sup>68</sup> In February 1946, the Reformed community received an invitation to join the Baptist Church of Moscow. This is how they wanted to extend state control over Protestant denominations. Leaders of the Baptist Church came personally

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<sup>63</sup> MAJNEK, Antal: A kárpátaljai római katolikus egyház története. [History of the Roman Catholic Church in Transcarpathia.] In: *Útközben*. [On the way.] Ungvár: Cultural Alliance of Hungarians in Sub-Carpathia, 1998. 55.

<sup>64</sup> OFICINSZKIJ, Román: Szekularizáció szovjet módra. [Secularization in Soviet Manner.] In: *Kárpátalja 1919–2009 történelem, politika, kultúra* [Transcarpathia 1919–2009. History, politics, culture]. Eds. Fedinec, Csilla, Mikola Vehes. Budapest: Argumentum – Hungarian Academy of Science Institute for the Study of Ethnic-National Minorities, 2010. 288.

<sup>65</sup> TSA, FP–14. op. 1. od.zb. 700., 1–38.

<sup>66</sup> Вісник Народної Ради Закарпатської України, Ужгород, 1 травня 1945 р. (Gazette of People's Committee of Transcarpathian Ukraine, 1<sup>st</sup> May 1945), 113–115.

<sup>67</sup> *Kárpátalja településeinek vallási adatai (1880–1941)*. [Religious data of the settlements of Transcarpathia (1880–1941).] Budapest: Central Statistics Office, 2000. 15.

<sup>68</sup> GULÁCSY, Lajos: A kárpátaljai református egyház múltja és jelene. [The past and present of the Transcarpathian Reformed Church.] In: *Útközben*. [On the way.] Ungvár: Cultural Alliance of Hungarians in Sub-Carpathia, 1998. 48.

to Transcarpathia and they offered their help in case the Reformed community decided to join their church, which was already a registered religious community recognized by the state. The Reformed Church, however, did not accept the suggested “help”. Finally, authorities also gave up on their attempt to merge the two churches reaching the conclusion that it was more reasonable to control the Reformed as a separate denomination since their activities were much easier to monitor than if they had been merged with the Baptists.<sup>69</sup> In the meanwhile, starting from 1946, the wave of arresting Reformed pastors began. Between 1946 and 1951, 18 pastors and assistant pastors were arrested and sentenced to prison terms in Gulag prison camps.<sup>70</sup>

A significant part of the Transcarpathian Hungarian community belonged to the Roman Catholic Church. Regarding the Roman Catholics, the most disturbing factor from the Soviet point of view was them belonging to papal authority.<sup>71</sup> As a result, the Moscow leadership’s strategy regarding church policy consisted in the creation of a so-called autocephalous Roman Catholic Church that would be independent of the Vatican. According to authoritative opinions, this was one of the main reasons for the persecution of the Catholic Church.<sup>72</sup> The state intervened in the internal affairs of the church through the Council for Religious Affairs, they prevented contact with the Roman center, the persons they influenced were recognized as the leaders of the local Roman Catholic Church. A significant number of Latin rite Catholic priests were dragged to Stalinist camps, while those who remained at home were subjected to constant harassment and were under constant surveillance. The supply of a

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<sup>69</sup> SZAMBOROVSKYKYNÉ NAGY, Ibolya: Egyházpolitika szovjet módra. [Church policy in Soviet manner.] In: *Kárpátalja története. Örökség és kihívások.* [The history of Transcarpathia. Heritage and challenges.] Eds. Brenzovics, László, György Csatáry, Sándor Dobos, Melinda Orbán, László Braun, Imre Szakál, Ibolya Szamborovszkyné Nagy. Beregszász–Ungvár: II. RF KMF – „RIK-U” Kft., 2021. 539–540.

<sup>70</sup> FODOR, Gusztáv: *Akik a nagy nyomorúságból jöttek... A sztálini diktatúra koncepciói perei kárpátaljai református lelkészek ellen a KGB ungvári levéltárának dokumentumai alapján. Peranyagok, életrajzi adatok, fényképek.* [Those who came from great misery ... The Stalin dictatorship’s show trials against Reformed Pastors on the basis of archival documents of the KGB’s archives from Ungvár. Court documents, biographical data, photographs.] Debrecen: Transcarpathia Reformed Church – Reformed Public Life and Cultural Center Foundation, 2017.

<sup>71</sup> SZAMBOROVSKYKYNÉ NAGY, 2021. 535.

<sup>72</sup> WYSZKOWSKI, Pawel: *Katolikusüldözés Ukrajnában és Kárpátalján.* [Persecution of catholics in Ukraine and Transcarpathia.] Esztergom: Temesvári Pelbárt Ferences High School and College, 2013. 233.



new generation within the priestly profession ceased almost completely. Many had their licenses revoked or were transferred on the grounds that they “failed to comply with state laws governing the operation of the church”.<sup>73</sup>

Among the historical churches, the greatest blow came to the Greek Catholic Church, which also affected a large part of the population of Transcarpathia, since according to the 1941 census data, 51% of the population was Greek Catholic.<sup>74</sup> In the fall of 1944, the Soviets tried to use the influence of Teodor Romzha, the leader of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo, on the population to legitimize their presence. They wanted to persuade bishop Romzha to welcome the November manifesto and Transcarpathia’s “reunification” with Soviet Ukraine. He was summoned several times in front of the military leadership of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front where they used praises and threats, promises and intimidation to get him to declare in favor of the annexation of Transcarpathia to the Soviet Union. “They physically exhausted the bishop with sophisms, so to speak.”<sup>75</sup> They did not manage to break bishop Romzha, but the pressure from the authorities on the Greek Catholic Church intensified increasingly: between 1944 and 1946 its properties were confiscated in several settlements which then were given to the Orthodox Church,<sup>76</sup> the financial support of the Greek Catholic Church was withdrawn, while that of the Orthodox Church was significantly increased.<sup>77</sup> Attacks against representatives of the Greek Catholic Church by the State Council for Religious Affairs and the Secret Service of the Interior became more and more powerful, arrests started in December 1944. A whole series of written reports were drafted about “the dangers of Greek Catholic agitation and the Greek Catholic priests’ ‘anti-people behavior’”.<sup>78</sup> In August 1945, the episcopal archive and library of the Eparchy of Mukachevo were inspected,<sup>79</sup> and materials undesirable for the system were destroyed.

<sup>73</sup> MAJNEK, 1998. 55.

<sup>74</sup> *Kárpátalja településeinek vallási adatai (1880–1941)*. [Religious data of the settlements of Transcarpathia (1880–1941).] Budapest: Central Statistics Office, 2000. 14.

<sup>75</sup> Bendász István *Görögkatolikus Könyvtár és Levéltár, Chira Sándor hagyatéki iratai. Visszaemlékezés*. 57. [István Bendász Greek Catholic Library and Archives, Chira Sándor’s documents. Memoires. 57]

<sup>76</sup> TSA, F.P–14. op. 1. od.zb. 666. 1–123.

<sup>77</sup> TSA, F.P–14. op. 1. od.zb. 665. 1–22.

<sup>78</sup> TSA, F.P–14. op. 1. od.zb. 662. 1–11.

<sup>79</sup> TSA, F.P–14. op. 1. od.zb. 667. 1.

In addition, seeing how state leadership broke the Greek Catholic Church in the neighboring Galicia, the leaders of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo could foresee what kind of future awaited the Greek Catholics from Transcarpathia.<sup>80</sup> On 8<sup>th</sup>–10<sup>th</sup> March 1946, at the church assembly organized in Lemberg, it was declared that the Union of Brest signed in 1596, which marked the establishment of the Greek Catholic Church, was invalid, and thus the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church was merged into the Russian Orthodox Church. In Transcarpathia, Romzha constantly appealed to the various official bodies in order to overwrite the measures against the Greek Catholic Church. He tirelessly visited the different eparchies and encouraged the priests to persevere. Given that the bishop seemed to be the major hindrance of the merger, the Soviets decided to liquidate him. In October 1947, an assassination attempt was carried out against him (a Soviet military car drove into his horse-drawn carriage on his way home), which he survived, but due to his serious injuries he was taken to hospital where he was poisoned by Soviet agents.

In several settlements, the Greek Catholic clergy tried to resist the merger, to maintain their position, encouraging the faithful to persevere with their church and protect their churches.<sup>81</sup> Upon this the persecution of anti-merger priests started. At the end of 1948, all Greek Catholic priests were summoned to Ungvár (Uzhhorod) where they were informed that their only choice was the unification with the Orthodox church given that the Greek Catholic Church was about to be banned.<sup>82</sup> About 40% (132 people) of the priests of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo converted to the Orthodox religion.<sup>83</sup> Out of the 350 priests of the 265 parishes, 129

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<sup>80</sup> *A Munkácsi Görögkatolikus Egyház 1945. évi szematizmusa.* [Schematism of the Greek Catholic Church in Mukachevo in 1945.] Ed. Marosi, István. Bendász-Series 3. Beregszász, 2020. 25.

<sup>81</sup> PEKAR, Athanasius B.: „Tanúim lesztek.” *Adalékok a kárpátaljai görög katolikus egyház vértanúságához.* [‘You will be my witnesses.’ Additional data to the martyrdom of the Transcarpathia Greek Catholic Church.] Miskolc: Felsőmagyarország Publishing House, 2003. 13–16.

<sup>82</sup> BENDÁSZ, István: *Öt év a szögessdrót mögött.* [Five years behind barbed wire.] Ungvár: Összukrajnai Állami Kárpáti Publishing House, 2012. 15.

<sup>83</sup> OFICINSZKIJ, Román: A görög katolikus püspökség felszámolása. [The liquidation of the Greek Catholic Eparchy.] In: *Kárpátalja 1919–2009 történelem, politika, kultúra.* [Transcarpathia 1919–2009. History, politics, culture.] Eds. Fedinec, Csilla, Mikola Vehes. Budapest: Argumentum – Hungarian Academy of Science Institute for the Study of Ethnic-National Minorities, 2010. 295.

priests who adhered to their faith were taken to forced labor camps.<sup>84</sup> The tragedy of the Greek Catholic Church was fulfilled in February 1949, when the Ministry of State Security of the USSR instructed the authorities in a decree that this church should be liquidated immediately in Transcarpathia.

### **3. Communist terror, criminal procedure law violations, show trials**

The basic characteristic of class-based communist totalitarian systems is that they committed a series of deprivations of rights against entire social strata, and undesirable social elements were removed from the path of building communism. As Anne Applebaum also states: “From the very earliest days of the new Soviet state, in other words, people were to be sentenced not for what they had done, but for who they were. Unfortunately, nobody ever provided a clear description of what, exactly, a ‘classenemey’ was supposed to look like.”<sup>85</sup> According to Courtois, “the Communist regimes, in order to consolidate their grip to power, turned mass crime into a full-blown system of government.”<sup>86</sup>

All these theses were also valid with regards to Transcarpathia: the class-based cleansing wave began immediately after the Soviet occupation. Cleansing was implemented on the basis of practices that had been applied in the Soviet empire for years: show trials were orchestrated for people undesirable for the system. In this sense, the Soviet justice system – applied to the Transcarpathian community as well – sank to being the “handmaiden” of politics in the literal sense of the word.

The primary target group of the trials was the Transcarpathian intelligentsia: all those who had fulfilled some kind of office before the change of power, as well as the representatives of the historical churches. There were fabricated false accusations: treason, espionage, anti-Soviet conspiracy, rebellion and political banditry, being family members of traitors, socially dangerous elements. Based on these, a significant number of members of

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<sup>84</sup> BENDÁSZ, Dániel: A Munkácsi Görög Katolikus Egyházmegye hitvalló és meghurcolt papjainak névsora. [List of the persecuted and martyred priests of the Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo.] In: *Koncepciós perek magyar elítélteji. A sztálinizmus áldozatainak emlékkönyve 1944–1957.* [The victims of show trials. Memorial book of the victims of Stalinism 1944–1957.] Ed. Dupka, György. Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 1993. 48–69.

<sup>85</sup> APPLEBAUM, Anne: *Gulag: A History.* New York: Anchor Books, 2003. 6.

<sup>86</sup> COURTOIS, 1999. 2.

Parliament, lawyers, priests, teachers, and officials were sentenced to many years in prison or to death by bullet, decimating the best of Transcarpathian Hungarians.<sup>87</sup> Records were kept of the activities of the clerks working between 1940 and 1944.<sup>88</sup> As a consequence of these show trials, it was much easier for the authorities to integrate the leaderless and intimidated Transcarpathian community into the regime.

In order to establish the command-and-control system locally, and to remove the “enemy”, they wanted to create a “legal” basis as an important step in the construction of the Soviet dictatorship. This endeavor was embodied in the infamous Decree No. 22, which was adopted on 18<sup>th</sup> December 1944 and on the basis of which the so-called Extraordinary Court, a quasi-people’s court was established.<sup>89</sup> The court was led by a 26-year-old former partisan, Vasil Rusin, who had no legal education whatsoever.<sup>90</sup>

Besides the Extraordinary Courts, the dreaded state security agency, the NKVD, was also active in Transcarpathia. All prisons and places of detention in the territory, together with all their property, service units and personnel, were placed under their supervision, removing them from the jurisdiction of the court and the prosecutor’s office. From then on, sentencing became the job of the state security and former sentencing bodies – the court and the prosecutor’s office – were only responsible for keeping order.<sup>91</sup> There was no legal or institutional control over the internal affairs bodies.

Arrests started in November and December 1944 with the imprisonment of the Transcarpathian representatives in the Hungarian Parliament. Transcarpathian members of the Hungarian Parliament’s Upper and Lower Houses were arrested and condemned under the accusation of having collaborated with the former system and being anti-Soviet. Many of them were sentenced to death and executed, for example, Kálmán Benda, András Bródy, Mihály Demkó, Endre Kricsfalussy-Hrabár, István Fenczik or the 76-year old Péter Demjanovics, who was also accused of having betrayed the Soviet people and sentenced to death by bullet despite his old age.

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<sup>87</sup> BOTLIK, 2000. 286–287.

<sup>88</sup> TSA, FP–14., op.1., od.zb.589., 1–70.

<sup>89</sup> TSA, FP–14., op.1., od.zb. 1.,a”, 15.

<sup>90</sup> OFICINSZKIJ, Román: Kárpátontúli Ukrajna. [Transcarpathia Ukraine.] In: *Kárpátalja 1919–2009 történelem, politika, kultúra.* [Transcarpathia 1919–2009. History, politics, culture.] Eds. Fedinec, Csilla, Mikola Vehes. Budapest: Argumentum – Hungarian Academy of Science Institute for the Study of Ethnic-National Minorities, 2010. 240.

<sup>91</sup> TSA, FP–14., op.1., od.zb.1.,a”, 11.

In order to carry out the sentence, in April 1945, he was shot dead while he was already dying at the Ungvár (Uzhhorod) hospital.<sup>92</sup> Further seven members of parliament (György Bencze, Ödön Zsegora, Jenő Ortutay, Béla Riskó, Gyula Földesi, Iván Spák and Sándor Ilniczky) were sentenced to 5 to 20 years imprisonment which they had to serve in the Gulag-camps of Siberia or on the Donbass. Many of them died in these camps.<sup>93</sup>

Many state officials and clerks were also arrested. Pensioners were not exempt from the measures of the Soviet retaliatory machinery either. For example, Zoltán Fekésházy, former sub-prefect of Bereg and Ugocsa counties, was arrested at the age of 64, in the spring of 1945, on the basis of trumped-up charges he was court-martialed and sentenced to 10 years of forced labor. The former vice-prefect did not reach the camp, he died on the train-ride there, due to the merciless treatment and inhumane conditions.<sup>94</sup>

From the 25<sup>th</sup> January 1946 – three days after Transcarpathia’s official integration into the Soviet administrative system – the Ukrainian SSR’s legal system and criminal code were introduced in the region. From then on, in the majority of cases, sentences were based on 54.§ of the Criminal Code of the USSR, according to which the following were considered to be crimes: treason, armed insurrection for the purpose of secession of the region from the Soviet Union, contact with a foreign state for counter-revolutionary purposes, helping the international bourgeoisie, anti-Soviet propaganda and agitation, active struggle against the working class and the revolutionary movement.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> BENDÁSZ, Dániel: A Munkácsi Görögkatolikus Egyházmegye a szovjet megszállás után és ma. [The Greek Catholic Eparchy of Mukachevo after the Soviet occupation and today.] In: *A kommunizmus áldozatai, rehabilitációs alternatívák Kelet–Közép Európában*. [Victims of communism, rehabilitation alternatives in Eastern-Central Europe.] Eds. Molnár D., Erzsébet, István Molnár D. Beregszász: Kálvin Printing House, 2016. 200.

<sup>93</sup> OFICINSZKIJ, Román: Alternatíva. Ellenzéki mozgalom. [Alternative. Opposition movement.] In: *Kárpátalja 1919–2009 történelem, politika, kultúra*. [Transcarpathia 1919–2009. History, politics, culture.] Eds. Fedinec, Csilla, Mikola Vehes. Budapest: Argumentum – Hungarian Academy of Science Institute for the Study of Ethnic-National Minorities, 2010. 226.

<sup>94</sup> DUPKA, György: *A mi Golgotánk. A kollektív bűnösség alkalmazása a kárpátaljai magyarokkal és németekkel szemben. (A 4. Ukrán Front Katona Tanácsa határozatainak végrehajtása NKVD-jelentések tükrében 1944–1946)*. [Our Golgotha. The application of collective guilt towards the Transcarpathian Hungarians and Germans. (Implementation of the decisions of the Military Council of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front in the light of NKVD reports 1944–1946).] Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 2012. 101.

<sup>95</sup> 58.§ in the Criminal Code of Russia is the same as 54.§ in the Criminal Code in Ukraine.



Such accusations were used in the arrest and sentencing of several of the leaders of historical churches. In these waves of arrests, the authority targeted Greek Catholic priests who did not intend to convert to the Orthodox faith. “Trials” were short: they read out personal data, and if you admitted that you were a Greek Catholic priest (and everyone did so), the verdict was ready: 25 years forced labor” – one of the victims remembered.<sup>96</sup> According to established Soviet jurisprudence – in the light of which the queen of evidence was the confession of the accused – the confessions were always extracted from the accused by means of abuse and blackmail with their family members. It was also characteristic that during the interrogations, statements that the defendants had never uttered were inserted in the confessions. One of the most typical examples of this is the trial of Greek Catholic priest and theology teacher Elemér Ortutay, who was tried and convicted in 1949. Father Ortutay, who held a doctorate in theology and religious studies, was accused of having received “special training” and his participation in the Hungarian scout movement was classified as an anti-state activity.<sup>97</sup> At the interrogations, he was asked by the prosecutor whether he had held mass on 6<sup>th</sup> December, on 30<sup>th</sup> January and 15<sup>th</sup> March. Upon a positive answer he drew the following conclusions: “[...] the accused has confessed to having supported the Fascists and Horthyist Hungarians because every day, so also on 6<sup>th</sup> December, Horthy’s nameday, on 30<sup>th</sup> January, the day Hitler took over power, on the Fascist Hungarians’ national day, he prayed for them, that is, he supported them.”<sup>98</sup>

The pastors of the strictly supervised Reformed church were also arrested and sentenced in several waves. The accusations were, among others,

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<sup>96</sup> ORTUTAY, Elemér: Bevezetés. [Introduction.] In: *Koncepciók perek magyar elítélteit. A sztálinizmus áldozatainak emlékkönyve 1944–1957.* [The victims of show trials. Memorial book of the victims of Stalinism 1944–1957.] Ed. Dupka, György. Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 1993. 34.

<sup>97</sup> ORTUTAY, Elemér: A kárpátaljai görög katolikus egyház helyzete, a vallás és a kisebbségi magyar sors. [The situation of the Transcarpathian Greek Catholic Church, religion and the fate of Hungarians living in minority.] In: *Koncepciók perek magyar elítélteit. A sztálinizmus áldozatainak emlékkönyve 1944–1957.* [The victims of show trials. Memorial book of the victims of Stalinism 1944–1957.] Ed. Dupka, György. Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 1993. 71.

<sup>98</sup> ORTUTAY, Elemér: „Holnap is felkel a nap”. Emlékeim. [‘The Sun will rise tomorrow as well.’ My memories.] Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 1993. 52.

“anti-Soviet propaganda, hindering advanced science and misleading the youth”. Lajos Gulácsy, Reformed pastor, sentenced in 1949, remembers the following: “According to Soviet laws, we were not allowed to discuss with youth under the age of 18, while I was teaching classes for their confirmation. At the trial, the primary evidence against me was a photograph. In this photograph I am sitting among the youth preparing for confirmation in Munkács (Mukachevo), as their teacher. [...] The judge said that was enough, and that meant 10 years’ imprisonment. This is how I got into the great empire as a prisoner sentenced to 10 years. I did seven years and three months. I came back home on 15<sup>th</sup> May 1956.”<sup>99</sup> Before taken to trial, several pastors were attempted to be bribed and integrated into the informant network, being offered episcopal titles, apartments, cars, and high salaries.

Roman Catholic priests were not exempt from arrests either. Priest Ágoston Horváth, who was kept among brutal conditions and inhumanly abused, and who was arrested in 1948 and sentenced to 10 years, remembers the conditions of his captivity as follows: “In ’46 they were already gathering the priests. For their anti-Soviet behavior. But we were innocent. [...] Then, that captain – I remember his name till this day – kicked me. I do not know why, he said nothing, he only kicked me. Then they undressed me, they threw me into a cell, and kept me there for two months, and then at court they passed the verdict: paragraph no. 58, anti-Soviet agitation.”<sup>100</sup>

According to available data, between 1946 and 1950, in Transcarpathia more than ten thousand Hungarians were retaliated against, most of them village farmers.<sup>101</sup> However, the deprivation of rights affected the whole of society. Alleviation came only from 1953, after Stalin’s death.

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<sup>99</sup> GULÁCSY, Lajos: Mélységből a magasba. Bizonyágtétel az elmúlt időkről. [From depths to heights. Testimony of past times.] Munkács: Press/room of the Transcarpathian Reformed Church, 2000. 14.

<sup>100</sup> HORVÁTH, Ágoston: A lágerben is szentmisét tartottunk. [We had masses even in the camps.] In: *Koncepciók perek magyar elítélteji. A sztálinizmus áldozatainak emlékkönyve 1944–1957.* [The victims of show trials. Memorial book of the victims of Stalinism 1944–1957.] Ed. Dupka, György. Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 1993. 43–44.

<sup>101</sup> DUPKA, György: A szovjet hatóság megtorló tevékenysége Kárpátalján (1944–1991). [The Soviet authority’s retaliatory activities in Transcarpathia.] Ungvár–Budapest: Intermix Publishing House, 2014. 78.

#### 4. Summary

When studying the Sovietization of Transcarpathia, it can be said that the process of building the Soviet system was based on the Moscow scenario, relying on the doctrines of communism. An integral part of this process was a series of measures of deprivation of rights, implemented in various forms, affecting society as a whole, which particularly affected Transcarpathian Hungarians, and which served as a tool for a ruthless showdown with the “internal enemy”. Examining the 1944 deportation of the male population of Transcarpathian Hungarian and German nationality, it can be said that the primary reason for the deportations was ethnic cleansing, which exhausted the principle of collective guilt. Members of the Transcarpathian Hungarian community, which came under the new state framework, were perceived as second-class citizens, one of the most blatant manifestations of which is the manifesto of November 1944, which declares Hungarians and Germans to be eternal enemies of the system.<sup>102</sup> It is a regrettable fact, and still painful for the survivors today, that just as the rehabilitation of the deportees has not taken place, the exclusionary passages of the manifesto have not been invalidated either. In April 1991 – a few months before Ukraine’s independence – the Supreme Council of the Ukrainian SSR adopted the law on the rehabilitation of victims of political reprisals; however, this only applied to those persons against whom a judgment was passed, so it was not effective in the case of those deported on ethnic grounds.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> TSA, F.P-14., op.1., od.zb. 1.

<sup>103</sup> Про реабілітацію жертв репресій комуністичного тоталітарного режиму 1917–1991 років. <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/962-12#Text>. Last accessed on 10<sup>th</sup> June 2022.



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**Struggle for Survival. The Transcarpathian Hungarians (1944–2022).** Studies.  
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This book presents the most important turning points, between 1944 and 2022, of the history of the Transcarpathian Hungarian community, referred to as the “little finger” of the Hungarian nation, our turbulent and painful past, our struggles for survival and self-identity, for our political, linguistic and educational rights, a community forced by the several changes of power within the region from being a majority nation into a minority status. Due to its geographical location and geostrategic significance, Transcarpathia often became a prey to the aspirations of great powers in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and thus the inhabitants of the region turned into citizens of five different states without ever having left their homeland, their home.

The so-called Soviet period between 1944 and 1991 started off with the deportation of tens of thousands of the Hungarian and German male population of Transcarpathia, therefore it is often called the most tragic period of the history of Transcarpathian Hungarians.

Of course, no one would have thought that our generation will also have to live through a total war, with all its horrors and tragedies. Transcarpathian Hungarians are loyal citizens of Ukraine, they have a strong sense of local identity, and their main desire is to be able to live peacefully, as Hungarians, in their homeland. It is impossible to understand the present without knowing the past! Let us, then, get to know the past of the Transcarpathian Hungarian community, and thus understand its present.

# Struggle for Survival The Transcarpathian Hungarians (1944–2022)

Studies

2022

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