

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

**European and Regional
Studies**

Volume 21, 2022

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania
Scientia Publishing House

Acta Universitatis Sapientiae

The scientific journal of Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania (Cluj-Napoca, Romania) publishes original papers and surveys in several areas of sciences written in English.

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ISSN 2066-639X

<http://www.acta.sapientia.ro>

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Printed by F&F INTERNATIONAL

Director: Enikő Ambrus

Supported by:



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The Dilemmas of the Post-War Transition for the Transcarpathian Calvinists in the Soviet Empire (1944–1949)

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Abstract. The present study examines the dilemma of the Calvinists living in Transcarpathia (which became part of the Soviet Union in 1946) that arose following its annexation to the Soviet Empire. The problem was caused by the fact that among the Protestant denominations in the Soviet Union in 1946-47, only Evangelical Christians-Baptists (ECB) had state registration, i.e. a legal operating licence. The study aims at revealing the dialectics of the dilemma arising among the Calvinists, according to which, in order to survive, they should either align with the ECB (i.e. imperial expectations) or, alternatively, even take the risk of termination and maintain their denominational separation. In addition, the research brings insights into how the choice of the Calvinists was influenced by the denominational autonomy and national traditions that had been enjoyed until then. The state authorities would have provided a chance for an easier and routine-like solution of the problem and classify the nearly 80,000 Reformed community members in Transcarpathia as ECB. However, the case generated an unexpected problem even in the Soviet bureaucratic system as the denominational affiliation was also linked to the issue of nationality. Therefore, at the state level, it was a problem of both a religious belief and national belonging. Likewise, the study highlights the extent to which the response of the religious minority in the present case was about religious affiliation and ethnicity. Finally, the present paper considers how the state's primary project had ultimately changed when exploring the dilemma and what conclusions and outcomes it entailed.

Keywords: church, Reformed Church, Calvinists, post-war transition, Soviet Union, Transcarpathia

„All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful.”
(1 Corinthians 6:12)

Introduction

The present study tells the story of how members of the Transcarpathian Reformed Church tried to re-establish themselves in a post-war transition setting. According to the traditional approach (and at first reading), they can be identified with Rogers Brubaker's triple configuration model. In it, the Transcarpathian Calvinists, after being separated from their motherland (kin-state), repeatedly found themselves in a new state formation that was not a mono-national nationalizing state in its classical sense. Rather, it can be viewed in the system of minority relations both from a sectarian and ethnic perspective (Brubaker 2006). This story, though, cannot be reduced to the three-pole relationship only because the appearance of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists' (ECB) congregation loyal to the Soviet state cannot, after all, be fully identified with the structure of state power or bureaucracy. Similarly, a small faction, the Eastern Group of Friends, had split within the Reformed Church, due to which the three-pole relationship system, which at first glance was considered classic, became a relationship of at least five factions. Moreover, it was the latter that, by separating itself and revealing its intention to 'switch' to the opposing side, made the system of relations, which had been considered static, dynamic. In our study, we also examine the extent to which in these systems of relations the national indifference towards the dual identity and/or denominational identification of the Transcarpathian Calvinists may be revealed (Egry 2015: 473). However, the diversified relationships raise a number of issues, which were examined in a set of research questions as follows in order to prevent their untraceable proliferation.

In this set of research questions regarding the Transcarpathian Calvinists, the following problems arise: how they were related to and integrated into the state; why did homogeneous group identities break up and why did some of them want to join the ECB unconditionally; why at the same time did others so strongly oppose the possibility of joining them? In addition, has the question of nationality arisen in either side and, if so, how or in what construction? After all, the Transcarpathian Calvinists showed an undoubtedly strong ethno-cultural affinity to the Hungarian nation, that is, we are talking about people belonging to the Hungarian national minority and not people of ethnic Hungarian origin (Brubaker 2006: 12). It is also worth examining what the logic of the given situation dictated and what the response of the Calvinists was. In their reply, was the possibility of the perspectives for the empire's response to the community considered? And, finally, what was the outcome of the decision made?

Formulation of the set of research questions arising on the imperial side is as follows: How did the imperial state assert its authority over the Calvinists? Why, as a result of what influences, and how did the position of the bureaucracy change from the primary will to unify with the Calvinists to their recognition as an independent denomination. How did it happen, what events and reasons prompted the – otherwise rigid – Soviet bureaucratic system to change its perspective? At the same time, the undeniably and strongly asymmetric nature of the relationship between the Transcarpathian Calvinists and the Soviet state cannot be ignored. This, in turn, reinforces the importance of the question of how, in one of the harshest periods of the Soviet imperial era (1948), the state bureaucracy had come to the conclusion that it neither liquidated nor merged the Calvinists, but legitimized them as a separate church.

In addition to the above-mentioned set of research questions, it is also apparent that the concept of identity cannot be avoided when tackling these issues. However, there are scholars who consider it obsolete (Fox–Miller-Idriss 2008). Nevertheless, in this particular case, separation of the factions, (self-)determination of their position, i.e. their self-identity, becomes unavoidable. Meanwhile, the manifestation of plural identity indicating a state of dilemma (Protestants – Calvinists – Hungarian nationality – Soviet subordinate) in a situation born of necessity becomes visible. For the survival of the group, however, they were forced to coexist in a system of compromise relations. Asking the question whether there was a hierarchy between the elements of the above identity chain generates new issues – namely from whose point of view are we examining the hierarchy?

In view of the above, in my study I seek to obtain the best understanding possible of the once prevailing situation and bring the description of the process of bilateral or multilateral interactions to the rational state of a former historical picture. In this situation, the bottom-up approach provides the best opportunity for the study. For this reason, it is essential to narrate the story continuously and rely on contemporary sources. Hence, the study will only become traceable in the light of the events. The fact that the spatial and historical context is by no means negligible leaves its mark on the limitations of the narrative. This is reinforced by the predominantly institutional approach, whereby we can avoid a purely subjective point of view.

As a result of the latter, however, only the group identity emerges in most cases, and strong contours indicate the differences between ‘our group’ and ‘their group’ (Jenkins 2002). These group constructions did not (primarily) result from a change of political power. They presuppose a strong denominational identity of the Calvinists that had existed earlier and that was not hostile to the ECB, but it merely protected elements of its own self-determination.

As Gábor Egrý emphasized, while strengthening their own group features, they also essentialize the differences (Egrý 2012: 72) that separate them from others, and this process also ethnicizes them (Feischmidt 2010: 11–12).

The Location of the Story – The Area of Imperial Excessive Politicization

The story took place in a special location, a real fringe area, or, in Morgane Labbé's wording, a frontier area that had been a meeting place for religions and political systems in each of the state formations (Labbé 2019: 162) that held it in the 20th century. Frederick Jackson Turner defined this frontier as 'the outer edge of the wave', which had been an ignored historical research (Turner 2011: 13), or if it was still addressed, it was most often done using a one-sided approach.

Its population was ethnically, denominationally, and identically diverse. However, this diversity had nothing to do with the name of the region, as its name had been changing since 1919, depending on which empire it belonged to. The current English name of the region is TransCarpathia, but the names SubCarpathia and Sub-Carpathia are also being widely used. Until the end of the First World War, the region had belonged to the administrations of the Ung, Bereg, Ugocsa, and Maramures comitats of the Kingdom of Hungary, and it was not a separate region. In 1919, in the first Czechoslovak Republic, it was organized into a political-administrative region called Subcarpathian Rus (Podkarpatska Rus) (Szakál 2019: 171–179). This name was given from an imperial point of view; as the region did not have any specific geographical features, it was named by the Prague government solely on the basis of its spatial location: *at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains*. The local Ukrainian/Ruthenian and Hungarian population used their own version of the Czech name, Subcarpathian Rus, because it defined the exact place where they lived geographically. At the time of the 1944 change of power, only one of the prefixes for the name of the region changed following World War II and after the Soviet troops conquered the Carpathian Basin. The prefix 'Sub' was rewritten to 'Trans' when the political region was under the sovereignty of the Soviet empire, as the geographical point of reference had already changed. Seen from Moscow, this area had turned into *a region beyond the Carpathian Mountains* and became TransCarpathia. In the meantime, in the perception of the local communities, they continued to identify themselves as SubCarpathians, as they had remained in the same geographical space, at the bottom of the Carpathians. Even today, officially, the Soviet imperial name is being used to describe the area, as the capital of the state that includes the territory at present is still to the east from the Carpathians, as it used to be in the former empire.

The Consequences of the 1944 Changes in the Political Power for the Denomination

The scholarly field of Ukrainian historiography has not dealt much with the history of the churches that existed in the Soviet imperial period in its westernmost periphery, in Transcarpathia.¹ Most of the published works deal with the Greek Catholic denomination (Leshko–Shlikhta 2016), or even if they study the problem of the Transcarpathian Calvinists, they are more concerned with the issue at a general level (Liubashchenko 1995, Iarots’kii 2010, Leshko 2003). Only a few refreshing exceptions provide specifics about the rural Reformed community in the area (Salamaha 2001, Bondarchuk 2010, Sherstjuk 2012, Vojnalovych 2005).

By the end of October 1944, the Soviet troops had completed the occupation of the area (Fedinec 2011: 51–52). There was no civil resistance to the invading Soviet Army, yet in Transcarpathia – which became an ethnically and religiously mixed imperial frontier – mass deportations took place from the end of November. They were not of a transfer character as the German–Polish–Hungarian–Czechoslovak population exchanges and deportations were euphemistically called after 1945 (Brubaker et al. 2011: 51–52). In the present case, there were race-, ethnicity- (Hungarian and German), and gender-based (male population) deportations. Similarly to the Jewish deportations of Hitler’s time, this was also aimed to achieve ethnic, racial (Slavic) homogeneity, as the fertile male population (aged 18–50) from the region had been deported with the help of the Soviet Army into various forced labour camps of the Soviet empire (Molnár D. 2014: 326–339). Thus, the national question had disappeared from the public eye because the remaining non-Slavic population was then classified as Hungarian-speaking Soviet citizens, a wording that was fully in line with the ideology of internationalism. From then on until 1991, there was no mention of the people of Hungarian nationality living in Transcarpathia, who were not only ethnically of Hungarian descent but remained (trapped) as a Hungarian national minority in the westernmost tip of the Soviet empire. Thereafter, the Cold War pushed any possible regional problems into the background. As a result, the so-called ‘Soviet Hungarians’ were in line with the multi-ethnic state ideology of the post-Stalin Soviet Union.

However, at the time of the deportations, the priests of the historic churches were not deported, but the number of Reformed believers had dropped significantly as the deportations affected more than 10,000 people (MRE ZSL 1947/1726: 3). According to the data, ‘internment and forced labour took away 20–25% of the congregations on average’² (MRE ZSL 1947/1726: 1).

1 The 2020 publication collected articles in Ukrainian historiography from 1991 to 2018 addressing religious repression against the population of western Ukraine between 1939 and 1989. One of the 55 titles listed was on the topic of Reformation in the region. See: DOVBANIA 2020: 18–32.

2 Translated by the author.

Meanwhile, the region was not immediately annexed to the Soviet Union. In the period from 28 October 1944 to 22 January 1946, a transitional state formation, the Transcarpathian Ukraine, existed in the area. The new political power was atheistic (as was the Soviet Union), and almost immediately it began to repress the historic churches of the area. It had stages, including secularization of education followed by the expulsion of religious education from schools and later its total ban; in parallel, the declaration of parish property to public property and of churches to state property took place. On 22 January 1946, the Soviet Union officially annexed the former *Podkarpattya*, which later became *Zakarpattya*. On 25 January 1946, the Constitution and laws of the Soviet Union of 1936 and of the USSR of 1937 entered into force in the area (Danilets'–Mishchanin 2013: 91). As a result, the Decree of the Council of People's Commissars of 20 January 1918 on freedom of conscience, ecclesiastical and religious communities came into force. Therefore, the control of religious organizations in Transcarpathia was entrusted to two state bodies set up in 1943–44.³

Establishing Contacts between the Reformed Community and the State Bureaucracy

From January 1946 onwards, the imperial bureaucracy sought to gradually bring the Protestant Churches and organizations in Transcarpathia under state control.⁴ To address this issue, the organization of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, legalized in 1944, was singled out because by this time it had already been cooperating closely with the state power everywhere, thus making it to some extent an instrument of imperial politics (Beliakova 2019: 427). At the end of January 1946, A. L. Andreyev,⁵ who had to prepare the so-called accession of 'independent Christian' congregations to the All-Union *Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists* (AUCECB), arrived in Transcarpathia. On 22 February, negotiations between the AUCECB and the 'independent Christians' began in Mukachevo (in Hung. Munkács). However, in the end, the Soviet imperial bureaucracy did not achieve its goal since, though the small Protestant denominations had signed the accession treaty under duress, later – citing compelling circumstances – they withdrew from it (Leshko 2002: 105–114).

3 These were the Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults.

4 Державний архів Закарпатської області (Derzhavnij arhiv Zakarpats'koї oblasti, DAZO) F. P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 6. Ark. 8.

5 A. L. Andreyev (1882–1966) at that time was Vice-President of the AUCECB and Chief Presbyter of the USSR.

For this reason, in the spring of 1946, the head of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults in Kiev (Mitsel' 1998), Petro Vilyhovij,⁶ visited Transcarpathia and was also in Mukachevo, where he held talks with the city's two pastors, József Kovács of the Reformed Church and Jenő Stumpf of the Baptist Church.⁷ The official from Kiev was interested in:

Whether the pastors of the Reformed Church in Transcarpathia considered the Soviet government or the Hungarian government to be legitimate for themselves. (...) Our answer was as follows: According to Scripture, all the faithful Reformed pastors are obliged to obey the higher powers whom God has ordained over them. Thus, seeing the changes and drawing consequences from them, the Hungarian Reformed pastors can do nothing but recognize the legitimacy of the Soviet government over themselves (MRE ZSL 1947/1726: 3).⁸

That is, the Reformed Church clearly recognized the legitimacy of the new power over itself.

Following this meeting, in the official letter No. XVI-268/1946 of June 1946, Serhij Lyamin-Agafonov⁹ asked the leaders of the three Reformed dioceses to submit a list of pastors who had been working there. We know from these submitted documents that Sándor Lajos was the bishop in the Diocese of Ugocsa and 24 pastors remained there.¹⁰ The Ung Diocese was led by Bishop Béla Gencsy, and it had 20 serving pastors.¹¹ The largest was the Diocese of Bereg, where 44 pastors served under the bishopric of Gyula Bary.¹² That is, based on the data, in the summer of 1946, 88 Reformed pastors served in Transcarpathia.¹³ However, these sources did not indicate the number of congregations. Yet, the report on the year 1946 submitted by the Council of Religious Cults to the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union on 27 February 1947 to Molotov included 99 Reformed congregations.¹⁴ In a report sent to Vilyhovij on 31 December 1946, Lyamin-Agafonov put the number

6 Between February 1945 and December 1959, Petr A. Vilyhovij was the Head of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults in Kiev, the USSR.

7 DAZO F. P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 11, Ark. 4.

8 Translated by the author.

9 It was not until December 1946 that Serhij Lyamin-Agafonov was appointed to the post of Regional Commissioner for Religious Affairs in the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults.

10 DAZO F. P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 19, Ark. 9–10.

11 Id. 11.

12 DAZO P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 19, Ark. 5–6.

13 In the light of the fact that the last official figures recorded 113 pastors in 1941, of which 23-25 fled in the fall of 1944, the rest could have remained in place, so the number of 88 pastors was completely realistic.

14 Российский государственный архив социально-политической истории (Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii, RGOSPI) F. 82, Op. 2, D. 498 L. 105. Отчетный доклад Совета по делам религиозных культов при Совете Министров СССР по состоянию на 1 января 1947 г.

of Reformed believers in Transcarpathia at 40,000,¹⁵ which was a significantly underestimated number, as according to official figures in 1941 the number of Reformed population was 92,949 (1941: 173–176, 191–197, 223–225). Moreover, we know from previous research that, unlike pastors, believers had not fled their homeland en masse in 1944 (Szamborovszkyné Nagy 2020: 35).

At the end of 1946, when Lyamin-Agafonov received his final appointment, he had already known whom he wanted to invite to the position of the territorial commissioner of the Calvinists in Transcarpathia. It was Gyula Bary, a pastor from the settlement of Velyki Berehy (in Hung. Nagyberég), the only bishop who had remained in his place even after the Soviet invasion. However, due to his illness, Gyula Bary could not comply with the December invitation of the Commissioner for Religious Affairs, but in consultation with István Györke, the Diocesan Archbishop of Bereg (Bary/1), he recommended the latter instead of himself and sent him to Uzhhorod (in Hung. Ungvár) (Bary/2).

The most important issue of the discussion in Uzhhorod was the election of the so-called ‘commissioner,’ of the Reformed Church who would have to represent his denomination before the state. A clergy meeting was held in Mukachevo on 20 January 1947 to clarify this issue, and two days later the bishops agreed to nominate István Györke for the position. Thus, elections were held in the congregations of all three dioceses, according to the results of which István Györke became the regional commissioner with 80 electoral votes, while József Pázsit was elected his secretary with 78 votes.¹⁶

On 22 February, Lyamin-Agafonov informed Vilyhovij about the developments.¹⁷ Two weeks later, the latter wrote this comment on the margins of his report: ‘To give instructions to comrade Sazanov: 1. To reject the election of István Györke as bishop. 2. To refrain from the election of another bishop until a special order is issued.’¹⁸ A few days later, in a reprimanding letter, Vilyhovij instructed his Transcarpathian subordinate to follow the instructions he had received from the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults regarding the Calvinists. In it, Vilyhovij ordered neither to be forgiving nor ‘to make friends’ with the Calvinists but to start the register of the Reformed pastors as soon as possible.¹⁹ Likewise, he initiated the control of the ‘Oriental Friends Group’ marked with the name of István Györke.²⁰ However, the Transcarpathian

15 Центральний державний архів вищих органів влади та управління України (Tsentral’nyi derzhavnii arkhiv vishchikh organiv vladi ta upravlinnia Ukraïni, TsDAVOVU), F. 4648. Op. 4. Spr. 17. Ark. 5.

16 DAZO, P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 18, Ark. 4.

17 Id. 3.

18 TsDAVOVU, F. 4648, Op. 4, Spr. 34, Ark. 130.

19 Государственный архив Российской Федерации (Gosudarstvennyy Arkhiv Rossiyskoy Federatsii, GARF), F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 1114. Ark. 91–92.

20 TSDAVOVU, F. 4648, Op. 4, Spr. 34, Ark. 134. zv.

Calvinists knew nothing about these events. Nor did they know about the fact that István Györke had resigned from his elected office on 15 March.²¹ Likewise, they had no knowledge about the fact that István Györke had been watched by the State Security Department since the day after his election. It was then that three members of the Oriental Friends Group – Simon Zsigmond, József Zimányi, and Barna Horkay – went to the KGB district office in Berehove (in Hung. Beregszász) on 26 March 1947. Here, they recounted their creed, which they wanted to pass on to Stalin. However, the Head of the District State Security Department told the three pastors that their office did not deal with religious matters and sent them to Lyamin-Agafonov in Uzhhorod. The three pastors visited him on 29 March, where they wrote down their thoughts for Stalin. The Religious Commissioner passed this text to Kiev almost immediately.²² Then, on 5 April, Lyamin-Agafonov sent a special notice to Gyula Bary in which he stated that Gyula Bary was still the senior of the Reformed Church²³ and ordered him to Uzhhorod. However, Bary (due to rail travel restrictions on 15 April in the settlement of Bátor) was able to visit Lyamin-Agafonov only a month later. During the meeting, Lyamin-Agafonov wanted to persuade the pastor of Velyki Berehy to temporarily take on the responsibilities of the territorial commissioner as the Kiev leadership had annulled the results of the 12 February elections. He then also informed Bary of Györke's resignation. Thus, in the end, Bary took over the responsibility of the so-called *sztársij*, that is, of a senior territorial commissioner. Meanwhile, after a two-month investigation, in May 1947, the state security bodies found that 'the Group of Friends is an anti-Soviet organization that helps fascist Hungary turn Transcarpathian Ukraine into an estate of the Kingdom of St István'²⁴ and had to be urgently prohibited. Vilyhovij submitted this proposal to Moscow, where, on the instructions of the Council for Religious Affairs (CRA) attached to the USSR Council of Ministers of 20 May 1947, the Transcarpathian Territorial Commissioner dissolved the illegal organization of the 'Oriental Friends Group'.²⁵ Not only did the above events provoke dissatisfaction of the state bureaucracy, but following the events, a full screening of the Transcarpathian Reformed community was ordered:

- a) Examine and analyse the financial condition of each parish, the number and nationality of the faithful; b) examine and disclose the monthly remuneration of pastors (both monetary and natural); c) examine the

21 GARF, F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 1114. Ark. 88.

22 GARF, F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 1114. Ark. 82–85. This creed later became known as the 'Letter to Stalin'.

23 GARF, F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 1114. Ark. 88.

24 TSDAVOVU, F. 4648, Op. 4, Spr. 34, Ark. 134.

25 Архів Управління Служби Безпеки України в Закарпатській області (Arkhiv Upravlinnia Sluzhbi Bezpeki Ukraïni v Zakarpats'kii oblasti AUSBU ZO), F. 2258, Op. 1, Od. zb. 5983. D. C-2274. Ark. 5, 7.

political views of the influential church members; d) investigate the fact of existence or non-existence of youth, women's and children's associations or organizations in parishes; e) compile the biography (schooling, education, time and place of ordination) of each pastor, their activities, encounters with believers, preparatory work with young people for confirmation.²⁶

The order also clarified that the question of the person of the church leader might be discussed only after a full examination of the above mentioned.

On the possible unification of the Calvinists and the Alliance of the Evangelical Christians-Baptists

In 1946, before negotiations on the Treaty concluding World War II with Hungary began, László Ravasz, Ministerial President of the Universal Convent of the Reformed Church of Hungary, wanted to ensure that the Hungarian-speaking Calvinists living in the divided Hungarian-inhabited areas of the Carpathian Basin could remain within a unified Reformed church organization. However, the proposal was not even discussed during the peace negotiations. It was then that Ravasz thought that the Presidency of the Convention should address a request to the Southern Baptist Convention in America since its President was visiting Moscow at that time, to at least help the Transcarpathian Calvinists (MREZSL 1947/5478: 2). 'The articles published in foreign church newspapers about this visit have reported that Baptists in Russia, who make up the majority and leadership of the Protestant alliance there, have good relations with both the Moscow state officials and the leaders of the foreign Protestant churches'²⁷ (MREZSL 1947/870). The Presidency first addressed the issue on 12 February 1947 and wanted to ask the Baptist Convention to 'take care of these congregations'. In particular, to ensure the continuity of preaching and administration of the sacraments' (Ibid). Finally, the letter was put on paper on 11 March and mailed to the President of the Baptist Convent, asking to 'integrate the Hungarian Reformed congregations in Transcarpathia into the Alliance of Protestants in Russia.'²⁸ (MREZSL 1947/1485: 3). At the same time, in a letter to the Transcarpathians, he had already called on the congregations to 'seek contact with the Protestants in Russia in order to build the kingdom of God together'²⁹ (MREZSL 1947/1485: 1). In other words, he asked the president of the Baptists to *integrate* the congregations, which could mean entry and accession, while the pastors of Transcarpathia were asked to only *seek contact*.

26 TsDAVOVU, F. 4648, Op. 4, Spr. 34, Ark. 146.

27 Translated by the author.

28 Translated by the author.

29 Translated by the author.

Finally, this ambiguous difference in wording had caused problems between the Transcarpathians and the Evangelical Christians-Baptists during the discussions.

Louie D. Newton's³⁰ reply letter to Budapest and to Jakob Zsidkov³¹ in Moscow was dated the same day from Atlanta: 12 April 1947 (MREZSL 1947/5476: 1–2). The Russian translation of the letters was received by Lyamin-Agafonov from Kiev on 19 May, in which (according to the English version) these words were also translated into Russian as an application for *accession*.³² This possible rapprochement between the Calvinists and the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) was then very useful for the Soviet imperial bureaucracy since they thought that the Calvinists would also be 'herded' into the AUCECB as it had been in the case with the 'independent churches'.

A source from a contemporary author reports that the Reformed pastors in Transcarpathia received two letters from the Universal Convention of the Hungarian Reformed Church.³³ On behalf of the AUCECB, Ivanov Ilia Grigoryevich³⁴ arrived in Uzhhorod on 2 June 1947 (Koroleva et al. 2013: 77). He came from Moscow with a merger proposal, according to which the Calvinists should have been fully subordinated to the Council. Negotiations with the Calvinists took place continuously from the first week of June until 17 July, both formally and informally. By the end of June, however, the negotiations came to a standstill, as, according to Vojnalovics, the pastors led by Simon Zsigmond were in favour of the unification and cooperation, while Gyula Bary and many others categorically opposed the idea of joining the Baptists (Vojnalovych 2005: 652). Indeed, Gyula Bary firmly opposed the unification, and, during the negotiations, he was only willing to accept the legal assistance of the AUCECB in the registration of the Reformed Church. He refused to expand on this, saying that László Ravasz's letter was no longer relevant in the current political situation and that with the unification the Calvinists would actually lose their own denominational identity.³⁵ In turn, Ivanov replied that the AUCECB could provide legal assistance only if the Calvinists accepted the full jurisdiction of the Moscow-based Council. After the negotiations came to a standstill, Béla Gencsy tried to continue the discussion, suggesting that the negotiations should continue even if they do not agree with the issue of full unification proposed by Ravasz. Finally, at a meeting in Berehove on 27 June, it was decided that:

30 Louie D. Newton (1892–1986) at that time (1947–1948) was the President of the Southern Baptist Convention in the United States.

31 Jakob Zsidkov (1885–1966) at that time was the President of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) in the Soviet Union.

32 DAZO. F. P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 18. Ark. 11–13.

33 DAZO F. P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 18. Ark. 20–21.

34 Ivanov Ilia Grigoryevich (1898–1985) at that time was the Chief Presbyter of the Moldovan USSR.

35 TsDAVOVU, F.4648, Op. 2, Spr. 34, Ark. 84.

– a written statement was sent to Lyamin-Agafonov in Uzhhorod saying that they were willing *to cooperate* with the Baptists;³⁶

– a letter was handed over to a representative of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists stating that ‘we are willing to begin the practical implementation of this cooperation’;³⁷

– they set the time and venue for the first formal hearing.³⁸

Gyula Bary kept his opinion to himself and did not go to the meeting but transferred his voting rights to the other two bishops. The meeting took place on 8 July in the village of Bat’ovo (in Hung. Bányú). It was attended by 58 pastors, who after the lengthy discussions adopted two resolutions:

1. We approve of the decision of the bishops of the Transcarpathian Reformed Church taken in Berehove on 27 June 1947 and consider it necessary to begin consultations with the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists in Moscow.
2. A delegation consisting of the following persons should be sent to discuss and sign the agreement: 1. József Vass, 2. Bertalan Ruzska, 3. Béla Gencsy, 4. Dr Lajos Sárkány, 5. József Nagy, 6. István Illyés.³⁹

The list of the delegation is interesting as nobody from the Group of Friends supporting the idea of unification had been included. The final protocol was eventually signed by 48 pastors.⁴⁰

Pursuant to the decision taken in the village of Bat’ovo, the delegation of the Reformed Church sat down again on 11 July in Berehove to negotiate with Ivanov and his fellow Transcarpathian comrade, Kovács F. (who acted as interpreter). However, the results were quite ‘poor’, although they were summarized in four items: items 1 and 2 contained only formulas of politeness (they were glad that negotiations could have begun and that the two churches were close to each other); in item 3, they gave each other an opportunity to get to know each other’s activities, and in item 4 Kovács from Transcarpathia was nominated as the contact person between the two churches in the future.⁴¹ However, the issue of the organizational unification of the two denominations was not formulated here either, or, if it had been mentioned, it was not recorded in the minutes. Eventually, Béla Gencsy managed to reconcile the views of the parties when he suggested that they should accept the *cooperation* (not unification) with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, but only under certain conditions. These conditions had already outlined a concrete action plan:

36 DAZO F. P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 18. Ark. 18–19.

37 Id. 20–21.

38 Id. 17–18.

39 Id. 25.

40 DAZO F. P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 18. Ark. 28.

41 Id. 29.

1/ The Calvinists will accept the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists (AUCECB) as a spiritual centre if they may delegate their own representative to the Council; 2/ The Calvinists recognize the administrative power of the area's chief presbyter and give the AUCECB the opportunity to oversee their work and have a representative in every diocesan council; 3/ The Calvinists retain all the features of their rites of worship but give the representatives of the AUCECB an opportunity to deliver speeches in their parishes; thus, it gives the Calvinists the right for preaching in Baptist communities; 4/ The leadership of the parishes is carried out by the Calvinists; 5/ The Calvinists have their own deans, who in spiritual matters are subordinate to the AUCECB only and administratively to the archdeacon; 6/ The spiritual guidance of the churches in Transcarpathia, including the Reformed Church, is carried out by a member of the AUCECB; 7/ The Reformed Church voluntarily contributes to the expenditures of the AUCECB; 8/ The Reformed Church accepts the instructions of the AUCECB only, and the Reformed Church of the area does not consider itself a subordinate of the General Council of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Budapest; 9/ The AUCECB shall assume all legal and spiritual responsibilities, including the statutory registration of the Reformed Church.⁴²

These conditions were handed over to Ivanov, as a result of which the points of the original draft unification had now been substantially amended. However, in his report submitted to the regional religious commissioner, Ivanov (before leaving Transcarpathia) described the discussions with the Calvinists as successful and expressed his hope that they would end in unification.⁴³ The text of the above conditions and Ivanov's report were both sent to Kiev.

Meanwhile, the membership of the Group of Friends continued its missionary activities in the form of conferences, prayers, and Bible circles. Vilyhovij may have felt that the events had slipped out of the hands of the Transcarpathian religious commissioner and called on him to act personally in order to end the activities of the Group of Friends. In September, Lyamin-Agafonov called in Simon Zsigmond (as the official leader of the Group) and told him that the Group of Friends had already been banned for more than three months, so if they continue their activities, it would then lead to retaliation. However, even after this call, evangelistic and missionary sessions continued. This made it clear for the leadership of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults that their representative in Uzhhorod had been helpless, so Ljamin-Agafonov was dismissed from his post at the end of September. The newly appointed commissioner, Dubrovsky, had not

42 TsDAVOVU, F. 4648, Op. 2, Spr. 34, Ark. 86–87.

43 DAZO, F. P-1490, Op. 1, Od. zb. 18. Ark. 31.

yet seen through the situation,⁴⁴ yet ‘in early October, women began spreading rumours that the male members of the Bible Group were being called to the KGB and interrogated’, recalled Barka Horkay (Horkay 1998: 152). Then, in October, two pastors, namely József Zimányi and a week later Barka Horkay were arrested.⁴⁵ The KGB considered them to be the most active members of the Group of Friends.

After six months of silence following the negotiations that ended in adopting a compromise document between the Calvinists and the Evangelical Christians-Baptists at the end of July, a U-turn was made in the directives of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults regarding the issue of rapprochement. The leaders of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults received the secret summary document of Vilyhovij, saying that the officials in Kiev had been disturbed because:

...the negotiations with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists gave an impetus to the ‘fanatical’ part of the Calvinists, and as a result gatherings, discussions, and ‘congresses’ were thriving. This prepares the next defamation against the Soviet Union... Therefore, no ‘rapprochement’ between the Calvinists and the Evangelical Christians-Baptists may be allowed, and this ‘friendship’ must be ended as soon as possible, especially between members of the so-called ‘revival’ movement and the Evangelical Christians-Baptists.⁴⁶

Vilyhovij, in his account of the last quarter of the year 1947, had already made a proposal to Moscow in accordance with which: ‘It is not appropriate to unify the Reformed (Calvinist) Church with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists [...] The processes taking place in the Reformed Church show that this church should be kept under a so-called “glass dome” and not hidden behind the umbrella of the Evangelical Baptists.’⁴⁷ This opinion of the USSR’s religious commissioner was also shared by his Moscow superior, Polyansky, who, in a resolution of 20 April 1948, refused to approve the unification of the Calvinists and the Evangelical Christians-Baptists. That is, the negotiations between the two denominations were interrupted by the state bodies. However, by the same decision, they instructed the appropriate bodies of the USSR to start the registration of the Reformed parishes.⁴⁸ Oddly enough, the Transcarpathian Calvinists thus avoided merging into the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists and remained as a separate denomination and church in the westernmost tip of the Soviet empire.

44 GARF, F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 1112. Ark. 138.

45 AUSBU ZO, F. 2258, Op. 1, Od. zb. 5983. D. C-2274. 5, 7.

46 TsDAVOVU, F. 4648, Op. 2, Spr. 55, Ark. 11–14.

47 Центральний державний архів громадських об’єднань України (Tsentral’nii derzhavnyi arkhiv gromads’kikh ob’ednan’ Ukraïni, TsDAGOU), F. 1, Op. 23, Spr. 5069, Ark. 34.

48 GARF, F. 6991, Op. 3, D. 1112. Ark. 177.

Summary

Examining the above events, we can agree with Gábor Egry's opinion. Accordingly, in these events, the relationship between the local community and the state appears at a given time and in a particular situation (Egry 2015: 437) (capturing of a new territory, emergence of a new denominational tendency in the empire) with regard to a particular event (negotiations of the Calvinists for the unification with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists). Entering a dialectical process, the local community and the imperial bureaucracy went from somewhere to somewhere else after assessing, exploring, and recognizing the situation.

Subsequently, when we turn to the problems raised in the first set of research questions, it becomes clear that we can see a discursive projection of group identity in the narrative (Egry 2015: 33). Therefore, we can, according to Brubaker's definition, clearly interpret the 'groupist' conception of ethnicity (Brubaker 2001) because the group does indeed appear here as a national minority (Brubaker 2006: 11), which has an undoubtedly identifiable homogeneous membership. Moreover, its interests were also well defined: to remain Calvinist and Hungarian. Nevertheless, when the imperial aspect emerged according to which it 'would have been good' for them to merge into the AUCECB, a break-up in the denominational dimension of group identity happened, as their views on unification had been divided. The membership of the Group of Friends focused on biblical teaching and considered progress in its own understanding more significant than the organizational autonomy of the denomination when it clearly took a stand in favour of unification with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists.

In other words, in the plural identity chain (Protestant – Calvinist – Hungarian nationality – Soviet subject) that resulted from being under pressure, the *Protestant* segment meant priority in the Group of Friends. However, nowhere in this resolution did the element of national indifference, such as fluctuations between different nationalities or the denial of nationality, appear although in 1944 they became part of the Soviet empire in its frontier area (Zahra 2017). What may be identified as indifference is the apparent indifference to tendencies within the Protestant denomination, according to which a group of Calvinists (members of the Oriental Friends Group) believed that according to their biblical interpretation of existence it was completely indifferent whether it took place within the church organization of the Calvinists or the Evangelical Christians-Baptists. Their concept of identity approved of the unification with a larger unit. The question of whether the full liturgical assimilation would also have been undertaken with the accession, however, remained open due to the cancellation of unification.

However, the other group of Calvinists (Gyula Bary and his fellow pastors) saw in the unification with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists not only the loss of the

traditional parish autonomy of the church organizations (dioceses and parishes) but also the loss of the identity of the Reformed faith itself. For them, it was unacceptable to expand the framework to such an extent that it would have meant abandoning the feature that determines their denominational identity, namely the synod-Presbyterian principle. Of the plural identity chain (Protestant – Calvinist – Hungarian nationality – Soviet subordinate), the traditional Reformed creed and adherence to the liturgy, that is, *Calvinism* remained the primary aim for them. Moreover, the ethnic aspect of the issue did not arise here either: they rejected the unification with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists not because they spoke a different language, as in 1946 there were ten Hungarian congregations of Baptists in Transcarpathia.⁴⁹

If we look for the answer to what the logic of the given situation dictated, we find that in 1944 (after five years) the Calvinists found themselves again under the rule of a foreign state because of border changes. The community was unable to confront the new empire in terms of both size and strength. Therefore, the logic of the situation would have dictated that in order to survive, they had to take advantage of the opportunity offered by the imperial bureaucracy and unify with the Evangelical Christians-Baptists. However, this logic of the situation was contradicted by the structural self-organization of the denomination, namely the aforementioned synod-Presbyterian principle, which would eventually have been liquidated by merging with a different Protestant tendency. Therefore, while the primary driving force of the Group of Friends was the unconditional acceptance of the logic born out of the situation, the other group (Bary's) was stimulated by not giving up the room for manoeuvre and by their self-organizing structure. Thereby, they were faced with this logic (refusing the authority-supported possibility for unification). In this polarized stalemate – perhaps inevitably –, Béla Gencsy formulated a balance policy, which was in fact a 'swing policy' because the 'here and there' principle actually became a 'neither here nor there' principle.

Chronologically, the first issue in the set of the Soviet imperial research questions is the assertion of the authority of the empire. Of them, the first condition was imposed by the Soviet ecclesiastical policy extended to Transcarpathia at the end of February 1946. According to this, only communities and pastors recognized and registered by the state could have been engaged in religious activities. This is exactly what Vilyhovij inquired about in the spring of 1946, when he raised the question in Mukachevo as to which government the Transcarpathian Calvinist pastors considered legitimate: the Soviet or the Hungarian. In this, however, we can again clearly see the issue of the definition of identity, in which, from the point of view of the empire, 'Soviet subordination' came first, overriding everything else. Thus, the Calvinists could do nothing else but recognize the

49 DAZO, F. P-1490. Op. 1. Od. zb. 1. Ark. 6.

legitimacy of the Soviet government (MRE ZSL 1947/1726: 3). From then on, the relationship between the Transcarpathian Calvinists and the Soviet state became clearly and strongly asymmetric, with the empire dictating its own conditions, to which the Calvinists adapted (or not).

Thus, in the spring of 1948, the Calvinists received permission to legalize their active parishes. They became part of the Soviet empire while retaining the roots of their local self-organization (denominational liturgy, preservation of traditions, language of worship), even if they had to establish the Council of the Twenty.⁵⁰ For in these councils, almost without exception, all those were present who had earlier been presented in the parish leadership. And even if living their faith was pushed back into their family homes and the church (the house of God), it had not disappeared. Thus, the Calvinists, who adhered to their traditions, represented their local identity in isolation, on the periphery of the Soviet empire, as opposed to the Evangelical Christians-Baptists, whose presence extended to the whole empire. This form of survival can be described as an isolated or inclusive existence, but in retrospect, it seems to have preserved for the Hungarian community not only the complete original denominational direction but also the mother tongue. For the officials and party members of the bureaucracy, who considered themselves an imperial elite, this stubborn clinging to the own self-organization and traditions was incomprehensible, and therefore they treated it as a 'foreign body'. They kept a close eye on the activities and daily life of the Calvinists in Transcarpathia, prepared thousands of written statements, reports, denunciations, and statistical statements, and left them to posterity.

The research also raised an issue to which the study did not provide a clear answer. Such was the case, for example, of Gencsy's alternative action programme. We found only a single reference in the minutes of this programme about the necessity of considering how the empire might respond to the actions of the community; in addition, what perspective and future this can provide/mean for the Calvinists later. Moreover, such 'secular' considerations did not emerge anywhere on the part of the denomination. In view of the above, it is perhaps not so surprising that following the footsteps of Gyula Bary, Béla Gencsy became the head of the Transcarpathian Reformed Church in December 1949. However, that is a different story.

50 The Council of Twenty was an extension of the church organization system of the Orthodox Church adopted by the Soviet system for all other denominations, under which 20 locally elected church members represented the parish to the state. It consisted of a caretaker, clerk, cantor, bell ringer, treasurer, and presbyters.

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(Record No. 1 of the meeting of representatives of the Transcarpathian Hungarian Reformed Church together with a member of the Presidium of the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists, Brother Ivanov I. G., and with the participation of an employee of the All-Union Economic Union, brother of F. I. Kovach, held on 11 July 1947 in Beregovo).

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BARY/1 Bary Gyula beregi ref. esperes levele a Területi Vallásügyi Meghatalmazottnak Ungvárra. 1.K.i./1947. sz. alatt (Letter from Gyula Bary, Reformed Bishop of Bereg, to the Territorial Religious Commissioner in Uzhhorod. Number 1.K.i./1947). The letter is from the private collection of Szabolcs Györke, the son of István Györke. [The author wishes to thank Szabolcs Györke for granting access to the materials.]

BARY/2 Bary Gyula beregi ref. esperes levele Nagytiszteletű Györke István úrnak egyházmegyei főjegyző, tanácsbíró Beregújfalun. (Letter from Gyula Bary, Reformed Bishop of Bereg, to the esteemed Mr István Györke, Archbishop's Chief Notary, Councillor of Beregújfalun). The letter is from the private collection of Szabolcs Györke, the son of István Györke. [The author wishes to thank Szabolcs Györke for granting access to the materials.]

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