



BRILL



brill.com/bdia

# Advocacy for the Hungarian Minority in Czechoslovakia

*The National Committee of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia from Its  
Foundation to 1995*

Balázs Tárnok | ORCID: 0009-0005-7622-5788

Director of Research, John Lukacs Institute for Strategy and Politics,  
Ludovika University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary  
*tarnok.balazs@uni-nke.hu*

Received 16 April 2025 | Accepted 21 May 2026 |

Published online 16 June 2026

## Abstract

This study examines the activities of the National Committee of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia (NCHC), from the early 1950s to its reorganisation as the National Committee of Hungarians from Slovakia (NCHS) in 1995. The NCHC advocated for the rights of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, particularly between 1984 and 1994. Using primary sources, notably the estate of Prof. Edward Chászár housed at the Ludovika University of Public Service, this research highlights the NCHC's international legal and political advocacy. This included lobbying international bodies such as the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and US foreign policy institutions, to highlight human rights violations against Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. The study also explores the internal transformations of the NCHC, its collaboration with other diaspora organisations, and the challenges faced during its transition to the NCHS. By documenting the NCHC's contributions, this research fills a gap in the scholarly literature on diaspora advocacy and minority rights in Central Europe.

## Keywords

advocacy – emigration – Hungarians in Czechoslovakia – minority rights – United States

## 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The National Committee of Hungarians from Czechoslovakia (NCHC) was established in the early 1950s to represent the interests of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia, particularly their minority and human rights. The organisation remained active for more than half a century, undergoing several internal transformations during its existence. In 1995, it became the National Committee of Hungarians from Slovakia (NCHS), reflecting the political and geographical changes that followed the dissolution of Czechoslovakia.

This study focuses on the period during which the organisation represented the Hungarian community in Czechoslovakia as a political and cultural entity. Special attention is paid to the years between 1984 and 1994, which may be regarded as a particularly active phase of the organisation. During this decade, the NCHC submitted numerous memoranda to international organisations, provided continuous updates to US foreign policy decision-makers regarding human rights violations affecting the Hungarian community in Czechoslovakia, and regularly published its own periodical.

Three significant internal transformations can be identified in the history of the organisation. The first took place in the mid-1960s, when several founding members either passed away or withdrew from public life, prompting structural changes in the operation of the organisation. The second major transformation occurred around 1984, when the NCHC was reorganised and its activities gained new momentum. The third, and most profound, transformation took place between 1994 and 1995, following the dissolution of Czechoslovakia. As a result, in early 1995, the organisation resumed its work under the name National Committee of Hungarians from Slovakia (NCHS), with a renewed leadership, continuing its activities into the early 2000s.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

This study constitutes a first attempt to explore the activities of the NCHC. It investigates only a segment of the NCHC's activities and does not attempt to provide a comprehensive account of the organisation's full history. However,

---

1 This is the revised and updated version of the Hungarian language article 'Felvidéki magyar "lobbi" Amerikában—a Csehszlovákiai Magyarok Nemzeti Bizottmányának tevékenysége az alapítástól 1995-ig' currently being published by the *Forum Social Sciences Review*, the only Hungarian-language social sciences journal in Slovakia.

it formulates a set of research questions that may guide future studies, particularly when the NCHC is examined in comparative perspective with other diaspora organisations and situated within the scholarly debates on diaspora advocacy.

The NCHC's work forms part of the broader efforts of the American and international Hungarian diaspora to protect the human and minority rights of Hungarians minorities beyond the borders of Hungary. For the communist leadership of Hungary, the international advocacy of these rights through international organisations was not a priority, and minority Hungarian communities themselves lacked the political representation necessary to undertake such advocacy until the political transition in the early 1990s. Therefore, this task was assumed by voluntary diaspora organisations, primarily those based in the United States. Scholarship on ethnic-based human rights advocacy in the United States is extensive (Shain, 1999; Smith, 2000; Paul and Paul, 2009; Thurber, Campbell and Dulio, 2018; Sheffer, 2014; Tárnok, 2025), but the NCHC has not yet been systematically studied. Its role in shaping US and international perceptions of Hungarian minority rights in Czechoslovakia is only partially investigated in this study. A more comprehensive picture needs further analysis in the context of the American ethnic advocacy.

The NCHC's activities should also be evaluated in light of the broader advocacy conducted by Central and Eastern European diasporas during the Cold War. Baltic, Polish, Czech, Hungarian and Ukrainian diaspora groups actively lobbied in the United States for a hardline policy against the Soviet Union (Garrett, 1978). In theoretical terms, the NCHC's work can be situated within the framework of the 'captive nations' movement. The Assembly of Captive European Nations (ACEN), as an umbrella organisation often described as a quasi-East European parliament in exile, brought together former statesmen who sought to keep the liberation of Eastern Europe on the international agenda (Mazurkiewicz, 2021). Future research should examine whether the NCHC was able to connect with ACEN's activities, and, if not, what factors hindered such cooperation.

A key theoretical question concerns the effectiveness of diaspora advocacy, and more specifically, ethnic minority diaspora advocacy, as well as the factors that determine its success or failure. Existing scholarship has shown that such advocacy is shaped by multiple variables, including issue salience, host-country political opportunity structures, and the degree of organisational cohesion (Rubenzer, 2008). Moreover, small but highly mobilised ethnic minority interest groups have been found capable of exerting significant influence on US foreign policy, particularly at the congressional level (Rubenzer and Redd, 2010). However, the extent to which the NCHC was able to shape American foreign

policy decision-making can be addressed only in part within the scope of this study and needs further investigation.

The activities of the Hungarian Human Rights Foundation (HHRF) have already been examined in the literature (Herner-Kovács, 2018; Ludanyi, 1990; Tóth, 2021; Hermann, 2022), as has the work of other Hungarian émigré groups (Lynn, 2013; Hermann, 2011). This study focuses on the activities of the NCHC that have never been documented in scholarly literature before. It thus aims to provide an initial entry point into this neglected chapter of Hungarian diaspora advocacy. A comprehensive analysis of the organisation's activities within the broader context of Hungarian diaspora advocacy in the United States remains a task for future research. Such work should include a systematic comparison of the NCHC's strategies with those of other Hungarian advocacy organisations, particularly the HHRF, in order to assess where their approaches diverged or converged.

In order to evaluate the NCHC's impact on US foreign policy, it will also be necessary to examine its relationship to other exile organisations, particularly those representing Czechoslovak émigrés (Raška, 2013). Future research should address how the NCHC interacted—or failed to interact—with Czech and Slovak exile groups, and how all these organisations responded to the changing political environment at the end of the Cold War.

Finally, while this article concentrates on the NCHC's historical role, the findings also carry contemporary significance. The voluntary, bottom-up, human rights-based advocacy of the NCHC stands in contrast to the state-coordinated diaspora policies developed in Hungary after 2010 (Balogh, Halász and Pap, 2025). The NCHC served as the voice of Hungarians in Slovakia at a time when the community itself lacked international representation. After 1989, it became a channel for the newly legitimised Hungarian political actors in Slovakia to reach US policymakers. Its primary aim was to draw attention to minority rights violations and to raise awareness, in line with the human rights advocacy paradigms of the time. Today, organisations such as the HHRF continue this work, but they operate alongside a state-led diaspora policy that pursues different objectives: strengthening Hungarian identity abroad, facilitating citizenship acquisition and implementing mobility programmes such as the HHRF's Reconnect Hungary birthright initiative<sup>2</sup> and the Rákóczi Association's Diaspora Programme.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://reconnecthungary.org>.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.rakocziszovetseg.org/2025/01/23/diaspora-programme-2025/>.

### 3 Methodology

Researching the history of the NCHC and its successor, the NCHS, presents several challenges, because publicly accessible source material is rather limited. This study is primarily based on documents from the estate of Prof. Edward Chászár, who served as chair of the NCHC's Foreign Affairs Committee and later as the secretary general of the NCHS. These materials are housed at the Ludovika University of Public Service (LUPS) in Budapest and include correspondence and organisational records.

It should be noted, however, that these documents do not give comprehensive coverage of the organisation's activities; in relation to the period between 1950 and 1985, the collection at LUPS includes only a limited number of documents, meaning that research into this period can currently yield only partial results. For this period, the analysis focused primarily on issues of the organisation's periodical called *Under Double Yoke*; for the years 1985–1989, *Under Double Yoke* issues and correspondence from Chászár's estate, along with memoranda published by the organisation, were studied; for the 1989–1995 period, the research drew primarily on Ede Chászár's correspondence.

Additional relevant materials can be found in the archives of the Indiana University of Pennsylvania (IUP), in the 'Dr Edward Chászár Special Collection', which contains further documents from Chászár's estate. It is also likely that some materials remain in the possession of the Chászár family, which could contribute to a fuller understanding of the organisation's history.

Therefore, both the 1950–1985 period and the years following 1985 require further investigation. This could include a more in-depth examination of the archival collections at LUPS and IUP, as well as the inclusion of other primary sources, such as contemporary press coverage, personal testimonies and diplomatic records.

### 4 The NCHC from Its Foundation to 1984

The idea of international advocacy for ethnic Hungarians living in Czechoslovakia emerged in the late 1940s, when Hungarian intellectuals who had emigrated from Czechoslovakia—including Béla Szilassy, former senator of the United Hungarian Party in the pre-WWII Czechoslovakia, Marcell Szilárd, former legal adviser to the United Hungarian Party in Czechoslovakia, and Rev. Christopher Hites, a former Benedictine teacher from Southern Czechoslovakia—founded the NCHC in Western Europe (Hites, 1985; Simon, 2005). Later, a significant portion of the Hungarian émigré community from Czecho-

slovakia resettled in the United States, and the organisation consequently transferred its operations there.

The official launch of the organisation can be dated to 1950. The three founders of the NCHC entered into close, formalised cooperation in 1953 (Hites, 1985; *Felvidek.ma*, 10.04.2017). At that time, Szilassy served as president, Hites as vice president, and Szilárd as secretary general (*Under Double Yoke*, Oct 1954: 1).

According to the NCHC's self-declared mission in the 1950s, its principal task was to fight against 'Czechoslovakism', which endangered not only the restoration of the Hungarian ethnic community but also the coexistence of Central European peoples and the survival of Western civilisation (*Under Double Yoke*, Apr 1954: 6). During these years, the leaders of the organisation were significantly influenced by the idea of a future Central European settlement. As Béla Szilassy, then NCHC president, wrote in 1955:

Sooner or later the reorganisation of Central Europe will take place. It is imperative for the Hungarian nation to use the time at our disposal to enlighten Western public opinion and to persuade the Western powers that without redressing the injustices committed against us in Trianon, peace in the Carpathian Basin cannot be established.

SZILASSY, 1955: 3

One of the fundamental principles of the NCHC was to refrain from involvement in Hungarian domestic political affairs (*Under Double Yoke*, Jan 1954: 1). This was because internal political divisions continued to afflict the Hungarian émigré community in the United States. However, the NCHC had a clearly defined mission: to advocate for the rights of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. Since this issue was not directly related to domestic Hungarian political questions, avoiding divisive topics allowed the organisation to establish the broadest possible unity. As Rev. Hites put it:

Just as the subjugated nation concentrated all its efforts and attention on a single existential issue—to prevent its absorption into the pan-Slavic empire—so too must the émigré community finally set aside all personal disputes, suppress all party-driven passions, and devote all its strength to supporting this effort with unified and purposeful action.

HITES 1955

From 1950, the NCHC issued periodic bulletins under the title *Under Double Yoke* (*Kettős Járom Alatt*). In the NCHC's view, the Hungarian community in

Czechoslovakia suffered under a ‘double yoke’: oppression by communism on the one hand, and the burden of ‘Czechoslovakism serving the interests of pan-Slav imperialism’, on the other (Szilassy, 1955). Through these newsletters, the organisation informed Hungarians from Czechoslovakia living in exile about the situation and challenges facing Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. These publications were issued regularly until the mid-1960s, after which there was a hiatus of nearly two decades.

Even in its early years, the NCHC engaged in legal and political advocacy. In 1951, members submitted a memorandum<sup>4</sup> to the United Nations drawing attention to the violations of rights committed against the Hungarian community in Czechoslovakia after 1945.<sup>5</sup>

During this time, and later, the NCHC had national representatives as well as local branches in the United States. Among the most notable were the chapters in Pittsburgh (led by Géza Szent-Ivány) and Cleveland (led by László Sirchich), both of which played a prominent role in the life of the organisation.

As was frequently emphasised in *Under Double Yoke*, the NCHC had no financial resources other than the support of its members and readers. Consequently, it had to raise funds continually to sustain its voluntary activities—particularly the costs associated with printing and distributing the periodical.

In May 1955, the Hungarian Liberation Committee was established by Hungarian émigrés, with the aim of representing the interests of Hungarians worldwide. The founders invited Béla Szilassy to serve as its president, given that the Hungarian émigré community from Czechoslovakia was the best organised community in exile (*Under Double Yoke*, Jun 1955, 1). In parallel, Szilassy began to curtail his activities within NCHC and the leadership of the organisation invited Rev. Hites to assume the responsibilities of the presidency in the capacity of executive vice president (*Under Double Yoke*, Jun 1955, 2).

By the late 1950s, the collaboration between Szilassy, Szilárd and Hites had weakened. Hites moved to California, and as a result of his professional obligations there his role in the organisation diminished. Szilassy’s involvement declined first because of his work with the Hungarian Liberation Committee; he was killed in a car accident in 1962. Marcell Szilárd died in 1963.

4 [https://adatbank.sk/kronologia-kategoriak/a-csehszlovakiai-magyarsag-torteneti-kronologia-ja-1944-1992/page/13/?site\\_section=chronology&searchcategory=a-csehszlovakiai-magyarsag-torteneti-kronologiaja-1944-1992&chapter=II.%20Egyenjogúsítás%20párthatározatokkal.%20A%20pártállam%20első%20másfél%20évtizede](https://adatbank.sk/kronologia-kategoriak/a-csehszlovakiai-magyarsag-torteneti-kronologia-ja-1944-1992/page/13/?site_section=chronology&searchcategory=a-csehszlovakiai-magyarsag-torteneti-kronologiaja-1944-1992&chapter=II.%20Egyenjogúsítás%20párthatározatokkal.%20A%20pártállam%20első%20másfél%20évtizede).

5 The source material that underpins this research includes only certain issues of *Under Double Yoke* from 1950–1985. It does not contain correspondence or documents relating to the organisation’s broader activities. For the activity of the Hungarian émigré community in the West, read Borbándi, 1985.

Following these developments, the NCHC leadership was assumed by László Sirchich, a former associate of Rev. Hites. Sirchich led the organisation for nearly two decades until his death in 1983.<sup>6</sup>

## 5 The Activities of the NCHC from 1984 to 1995

### 5.1 *The NCHC Leadership*

In 1983, Rev. Hites once again took on a role in the reorganisation of the NCHC. At the general assembly held in New York in April 1984, the organisation elected a new leadership: honorary president—István Révay (Austria); president—Rev. Christopher Hites (California); vice presidents—Márió Szilárd (New Jersey) and Stephen (Taubinger) Majláth (Brazil); secretary general—Kálmán Elek (Ohio); foreign policy advisor—Edward Chászár (Pennsylvania) (*Under Double Yoke*, Apr 1985, 12).

The organisation held leadership elections every two years. Until the general assembly in January 1995, which brought about a name change and significant restructuring, the most notable development was the election of Gábor Szent-Ivány as secretary general in 1986 (*Under Double Yoke*, Dec 1986, 15), a position he held until his death in 1993.

It is worth highlighting the key figures within the NCHC during this period, who undertook the burden of sustaining the organisation's operations and contributed significantly to the success of international advocacy for the interests of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia:

*Rev. Christopher Hites*, one of the founding members of the NCHC, served as vice president in the 1950s and as president from 1984 to 1995. He had been involved actively in the organisation's activities in the early 1950s, but ecclesiastical commitments took him to the Benedictine community in California, limiting his involvement in the NCHC for nearly three decades. He resumed a leadership role during the organisation's revival in 1984, becoming its president (Hites, 1985). The Benedictine priest emigrated to the United States in 1948. He taught in Cleveland, Ohio and later in Portola Valley, California, where he served as head of the local Benedictine school. He retired to Pannonhalma, Hungary in 1994, where he lived until his death.

*Prof. Edward Chászár*, head of the NCHC Foreign Affairs Committee from 1984 and secretary general from 1995. He led the organisation's international legal advocacy efforts. He emigrated to the United States in 1950 (*Felvidek.ma*,

---

<sup>6</sup> The source material for this research provides little information about this period.

Sep 18, 2011). From 1969 to 1991, he was Professor of Law and Political Science at IUP, where he directed a research programme on minority rights. He published numerous works on the subject (Chászár, 1999, 1986, 1988). After retiring in 1991, he settled in Washington DC, enabling him to provide active and personal support for the organisation's advocacy activities. He participated in the work of the UN Human Rights Commission for 14 years (Hungarian American Coalition, 2011). He remained active in the organisation until the early 2000s and passed away in 2011.

**Gábor Szent-Iványi**, lawyer, secretary general of the NCHC from 1986 until his death in 1993. He was a member of a historic family from today's Slovakia, emigrated to the United States in 1951, and lived and worked in Washington DC.<sup>7</sup>

**Prof. Charles Wojatsek**, NCHC national representative in Canada, played an active role in international advocacy and in drafting memoranda concerning the violations of the rights of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. A historian and Hungarian studies scholar, he emigrated to Canada in 1951 and taught at several universities, including the University of Montreal, the University of Colorado and the Bishop's University in Lennoxville, where he worked from 1966 onwards (*Kanadai Magyar Hírlap*, 04.02.2008).

**Prof. George Olgyay**, vice president of the NCHC from 1992 and president of NCHS from 1995. He emigrated to the United States in 1950 and was Professor of Political Science at Saint Michael's College in Vermont for 38 years. He participated in the NCHC's international advocacy work and in drafting memoranda submitted to international organisations (*The Burlington Free Press*, 09.11.2010).

As in previous decades, national representatives elected by the NCHC general assembly operated across the globe during this period. Their task was to support the organisation's work in their respective countries. Notable representatives included Honorary President István Révay (Austria), Péter Simek (Europe/Switzerland), Stephen (Taubinger) Majláth (South America/Brazil), Charles Wojatsek (Canada), and Julius Varsányi (Australia).<sup>8</sup>

## 5.2 *The NCHC's Objectives*

The leadership elected in 1984 articulated the organisation's goals as follows:

Our brethren living in Slovakia today have no opportunity to bring before the world public opinion the unprecedented ethnic denationalisation (ethnocide) and legal violations now being perpetrated by the Slovaks, following the Czechs.

<sup>7</sup> <https://opac-nevter.pim.hu/ro/record/-/record/PIM100476>.

<sup>8</sup> Professor of Law at the University of Adelaide. He actively participated in the NCHC's interna-

The natural law and the Magna Carta of human rights impose upon us, Hungarians from Slovakia, a duty to raise our voices in defence of our silenced brethren, who have been left at the mercy of this malicious campaign of denationalisation, and to denounce, using all available means, before the conscience of the free world the unbridled injustices that threaten the national existence of our kin at home.

We regard this service as our fundamental aim concerning present-day concerns. (...) A systematic effort is underway to destroy the good reputation of the Hungarian people in the eyes of the international community. We consider it our mission to persistently refute and correct the deliberate slanders and falsifications concerning our recent history.

As for our forward-looking perspective, we shall attempt to engage in reasonable dialogue with our Slovak counterparts, who in many respects suffer under similar circumstances. We will strive to resolve the artificially inflamed antagonisms inherited from the past and promote mutual understanding. By shedding light on our shared historical past and geographical interdependence, we hope to contribute to the building of a peaceful coexistence based on the recognition of common interests.

*Under Double Yoke*, Apr 1985: 3

### 5.3 *The Renewed under Double Yoke*

In 1985, the NCHC relaunched *Under Double Yoke (Kettős Járom Alatt)*, with the primary aim of drawing the attention of Hungarian émigré community to the plight of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia, which, according to the organisation, faced a threat of gradual extinction. In the first issue following the relaunch, President Rev. Hites wrote:

At a time when the official Hungarian government has been condemned to silence and paralysis by the command of the Great Slavic Patron, it is of vital importance that we, in exile, make the world aware that the Hungarian nation has not forsaken its brothers and sisters forcibly confined to Czecho-Slovakia; we regard them as an inseparable part of the living national body and shall resist, by all means, the efforts to eradicate them. The Hungarian diaspora must prepare itself for another historical turning point with the awareness and conviction that only that which we neglect or willingly abandon shall be lost.

HITES, 1985: 2

---

tional advocacy work and in drafting memoranda submitted to international organisations. See his main work, Varsanyi, 1976.

*Under Double Yoke* was financed through donations from the NCHC membership, which numbered in the thousands. Printing and shipping costs posed a significant financial burden in the United States (*Felvidek.ma*, 10.04.2017). The publication was issued until 1990, when its leaders recognised its successor in *Rákóczi Hírvivő*, a periodical established within the Rákóczi Association (*Felvidek.ma*, 10.04.2017). After discontinuing *Under Double Yoke*, the NCHC leadership continued to provide the Rákóczi Association with content related to the organisation.<sup>9</sup>

#### 5.4 *The International Legal and Political Advocacy Activities of the NCHC*

During the period under review, the NCHC engaged in active international legal and political information and advocacy efforts, targeting international organisations and US institutions influential in shaping United States foreign policy.

The primary and most significant focus of these efforts was the situation of the Hungarian minority in (Czecho-)Slovakia, particularly regarding the use of their mother tongue in education, the cultural sphere, official communication and visual bilingualism, highlighting practices in Slovakia that contravened international conventions. Additionally, the organisation disseminated news about the persecution and imprisonment of Hungarian political leaders in Slovakia, primarily Miklós Duray, concerns surrounding Slovak independence and its implications for minority rights, aspects of the Danube regulation and the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros project, which raising questions of international law, and the situation of Hungarians in Vojvodina during the Yugoslav conflict.

NCHC prepared several so-called memoranda and informational materials in English for expert and political conferences organised as part of the Helsinki Process,<sup>10</sup> which it submitted to officials of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and to national delegations participating in these events, providing detailed reports on the legal status of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. These memoranda were prepared in cooperation with the NCHC Foreign Affairs Committee for the following conferences:<sup>11</sup>

9 For a comprehensive understanding of the CSMNB's activities, it would be worthwhile to include archived issues of *Rákóczi Hírvivő* as part of future research.

10 [https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2005/9/8/1f70db04-45ed-42dc-9b97-3ae969a5a173/publishable\\_en.pdf](https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/2005/9/8/1f70db04-45ed-42dc-9b97-3ae969a5a173/publishable_en.pdf).

11 The drafting of the memoranda involved the head of the Foreign Affairs Committee, Edward Chászár, and committee members Charles Wojatsek, Julius Varsányi (until his death in 1988) and George Olgay, joined by Secretary-General Gábor Szent-Iványi and President Rev. Hites. The working method for preparing the memoranda and written legal briefing materials among the participating members of the NCHC Foreign Affairs Commit-

- a. the CSCE Meeting of Experts on Human Rights in Ottawa (1984), with a supplementary memorandum submitted in February 1985;
- b. the CSCE Cultural Forum in Budapest between 15 October and 25 November 1985, and its preparatory sessions;<sup>12</sup>
- c. the CSCE Bern Meeting of Experts on Human Contacts;
- d. the CSCE Vienna Follow-up Meeting (1986–1989), at which the NCHC submitted memoranda in November 1986 and early 1987;<sup>13</sup>
- e. the CSCE Paris Conference of 1989;
- f. the CSCE Ministerial Meeting in Stockholm in November 1992, where concerns were raised regarding the minority rights of Hungarians in light of Slovakia's emerging independence.<sup>14</sup>

Also related to its activities informing international organisations was Edward Chászár's participation in the work of the UN Human Rights Committee. For 14 years, he took part in the Committee's work as a representative of the International Studies Association, submitting written communications to the professional body and disseminating these reports to various national delegations and international intergovernmental organisations concerned with minority rights.

In addition to international organisations, the NCHC targeted institutions of key importance to the formulation of US foreign policy, informing them about the situation of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia. The NCHC regularly submitted written materials and participated in oral hearings before the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission),<sup>15</sup> reporting on the human rights violations of Hungarians in (Czecho-)Slovakia. In the early 1990s, this information included documents and evidence supplied by Hungarian political parties in Slovakia, especially those affiliated with Miklós Duray, but the NCHC also prepared independent, comprehensive reports for

---

tee consisted of circulating a draft, prepared by the designated lead author, for review and comments via correspondence. The members lived far apart from each other (Canada, Pennsylvania, Washington DC, California, Australia), and at that time, coordination by email was not yet a feasible option.

12 <https://www.osce.org/node/58534>.

13 <https://www.csce.gov/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/1989-vienna-1986-concluding-doc.pdf>.

14 <https://www.osce.org/mc/40342?download=true>.

15 The US Helsinki Commission is an independent US government agency established by Congress in 1975 with the purpose of monitoring and promoting compliance with the Helsinki Final Act and other commitments of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). The Commission is composed of nine members from the Senate, nine members from the House of Representatives, and three representatives from the executive branch.

the Commission. One notable example was the ‘Statement on the Situation of the Hungarian Minority in the Slovak Socialist Republic’, submitted in June 1987 (*Under Double Yoke*, Jun 1987: 21–22).

In January 1992, the NCHC, together with the Coexistence Political Movement in Slovakia (Miklós Duray’s political party), submitted a comprehensive document to the US Helsinki Commission detailing the legal status of the Hungarian minority in Czechoslovakia. In October 1992, they submitted another memorandum concerning the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros dam project, expressing concern over the diversion of the Danube in October 1992, which was viewed as a threat to Hungary’s territorial integrity and expected to cause environmental damage.

According to the NCHC leadership, the organisation’s regular briefings of the US Helsinki Commission contributed to the US démarche issued to Slovakia in September 1993 (Pridham, 2002: 212), as well as to the subsequent extensive report, *Human Rights and Democratization in Slovakia*.<sup>16</sup> This document highlighted the Slovak government’s infringements on the minority and human rights of Hungarians, including restrictions on name usage, limitations on visual bilingualism and the implementation of ‘ethnopolitical gerrymandering’.<sup>17</sup>

The NCHC also engaged in advocacy and information-sharing activities in Washington DC. Edward Chászár participated in several meetings at the US Department of State concerning Czechoslovakia and its national minorities, briefed members of the National Security Council at the White House, and submitted written communications to these institutions.

The NCHC closely monitored the political persecution and imprisonment of Miklós Duray in Czechoslovakia in the mid-1980s. On the initiative of Edward Chászár, the Minority Rights Programme at Indiana University of Pennsylvania—headed by Prof. Chászár—offered Duray a one-year fellowship, which provided an opportunity for the politically persecuted advocate of Hungarians in Czechoslovakia to inform the Hungarian diaspora in the United States about the situation of ethnic Hungarians in the country (*Under Double Yoke*, Dec 1988; Gecse, 2023: a51–155).

16 <https://catalog.libraries.psu.edu/catalog/1432608>.

17 This phenomenon refers to the fact that, during the administrative reform of Slovakia in the mid-1990s, county-level administrative units were established in a manner that disregarded the historical affiliations of certain regions. Instead, the new boundaries were drawn so that in none of the counties did the proportion of ethnic Hungarians exceed 25%, even though, at the time, ethnic Hungarians constituted approximately 8–9% of Slovakia’s total population; see Morvai and Szarka, 2012: 539.

In its legal advocacy activities, the NCHC cooperated with the HHRF, which had, since the 1980s, expanded its activities to include the defence of the human rights of all Hungarian communities beyond the borders of Hungary—not only those in Romania. Correspondence within the NCHC indicates that the organisation provided financial support to the HHRF on several occasions, with Edward Chászár playing a key role in securing the necessary resources.

After 1990, the NCHC adopted a more cautious approach to submitting memoranda, because the Hungarian political representation in Czechoslovakia had become increasingly active in using this tool vis-à-vis international organisations. This change was not only a matter of tactical consideration but also triggered internal debate within the organisation as to which issues the NCHC could raise independently and how it should align its activities with the official strategies of the Hungarian political parties in Slovakia. One of the sharpest manifestations of this debate occurred in early 1993, when the NCHC members drafted a memorandum proposing that the Council of Europe not admit newly independent Slovakia as a member. By contrast, Hungarian political parties in Slovakia submitted a joint memorandum supporting Slovakia's accession. This divergence raised fundamental questions within the NCHC: could the organisation represent a position openly at odds with the shared political goals of Hungarian parties in Slovakia?<sup>18</sup>

This situation cast the role of the NCHC in a new light: did the organisation consider itself an independent foreign policy actor in the Western world, or merely a mediating body conveying information to international organisations and US policymakers at the request and in the service of Hungarian political parties in Slovakia? This dilemma was closely tied to the broader process of post-Cold War realignment. The role of the émigré community—previously a political force in its own right—began to shift. Organisations such as the NCHC, which had earlier operated as independent political actors on behalf of

---

18 The debate held particular significance, because one of the key conditions for Slovakia's accession to the Council of Europe was the signing of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). Had Slovakia not joined the organisation, it would not have been bound by the obligations set out in the Convention. Some members of the NCHC believed that the dissolution of Czechoslovakia and the period of transition that followed presented a unique opportunity to discuss issues related to borders. They held that, while the political representatives of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia could not raise such questions, the American and international Hungarian diaspora/émigré community could. Others, by contrast, argued that advocacy on such matters—even if undertaken by the diaspora—could undermine the political agency and agency of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia during the process of democratic transformation and the search for international alliances.

the émigré Hungarian community, now had to reposition themselves to support the newly established legitimate political representation of Hungarian minorities beyond Hungary's borders, including Czechoslovakia. For the NCHC, it became imperative to coordinate its memoranda and foreign policy initiatives with Hungarian political actors in Slovakia so as not to undermine their activities in domestic politics.

## 6 The National Committee of Hungarians in Slovakia (NCHS)

Between mid-1992 and January 1995, a debate unfolded within the NCHC regarding the future of the organisation. The dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1993, coupled with the strengthening of Hungarian political representation in Slovakia, raised new questions concerning the role and operational form of the organisation. The leadership considered several possible scenarios for the ongoing operation of the NCHC.

One proposal envisaged the official dissolution of the organisation, with its activities continuing as a working group of the Rákóczi Association (Rákóczi Szövetség), a Budapest-based NGO established in 1989 by young Hungarian intellectuals whose parents and grandparents had emigrated or were transferred by force to Hungary from post-World War Czechoslovakia. Given that the NCHC previously welcomed the establishment of the Rákóczi Association in 1989 as a 'sister organisation' (*Under Double Yoke*, Jun 1989: 20), a closer cooperation between the two organisations appeared to be a logical continuation.

Another suggestion proposed that the NCHC merge into the Hungarian-American Human Rights Council (HAHRC) led by Charles Jókay, or, alternatively, that it cease to exist and delegate its functions to that organisation. A third option advocated for the transformation and renaming of the organisation: the NCHC would continue its activities under the name NCHS, accompanied by significant structural and personnel changes.

Hungarian political leaders in Slovakia supported the continuation of independent operations, arguing that there was a need for an organisation capable of articulating the political interests of Hungarians in Slovakia directly to the United States. This position was also shared by most of the NCHC membership, which ultimately led to a decision in favour of restructuring the organisation and changing its name.

The resolution that concluded the debate was adopted at the general assembly held in January 1995. The assembly decided to maintain the organisation's independent operation while changing its name to National Committee of Hungarians from Slovakia (NCHS). At this meeting, a new leadership was also

elected: George Olgay (Vermont) as president; Rev. Christopher Hites as honorary president for life; Edward Chászár (Washington DC) as secretary general; and Stefánia Geréby-Nemes (Ohio) and Stephen Majláth (Brazil) as vice presidents.

Following the transformation, the NCHS continued its activities. However, its operations were increasingly hampered by problems related to recruitment and generational renewal. Although the organisation aimed to involve new professionals in foreign affairs work, this objective was achieved only partially.<sup>19</sup>

## 7 Conclusion

The history of the NCHC constitutes one of the most significant yet hitherto underresearched chapters in the foreign policy advocacy of Hungarians in Slovakia. Throughout more than half a century of operation, the organisation played a vital role in defending minority rights and promoting the situation of the Hungarian community in Czechoslovakia on American and international platforms.

One of the NCHC's most important contributions lies in its sustained engagement with international decision-makers, especially with US foreign policy institutions and human rights organisations. Through its memoranda, informational publications and various initiatives, the organisation contributed to increasing international visibility of minority rights violations.

Uncovering the history of the organisation is not only essential for understanding the past but also for conducting a long-term analysis of the foreign policy strategy of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia today. The various periods of the NCHC's existence, particularly the years between 1984 and 1994, offer valuable lessons for contemporary international advocates of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia. Familiarity with these experiences is indispensable for the community in order to define a coherent foreign policy strategy that extends beyond political cycles.

Further research is required for a more comprehensive understanding of the NCHC's activities. First, it is essential to undertake a deeper analysis of the documents housed at the LUPS, as well as the detailed examination of the Dr. Edward Chászár Special Collection preserved in the archives of IUP, and to uncover additional primary sources related to the organisation's operations.

---

19 A more detailed analysis of the subsequent period requires further research; the present study examines the history of the organisation up to the conclusion of the transformation process in January 1995.

Second, interviews conducted with experts and public figures directly involved in or familiar with the NCHC's work, including family members of former leaders, could assist in reconstructing the organisation's operations and internal dynamics. Such sources could be particularly valuable in shedding light on internal decision-making processes that are not documented in written records.

Third, a more thorough examination of the NCHC's relations with US foreign policy institutions and other international organisations could enhance our understanding of the extent to which the organisation influenced international perceptions of the Hungarian minority in Slovakia.

Lastly, the content of the organisation's informational materials, particularly issues of *Under Double Yoke* and *Rákóczi Hírvivő*, requires further analysis.

To date, the history of the NCHC remains entirely unexplored. A scholarly monograph written with academic rigour could serve as a valuable source not only for the Hungarian community in Slovakia but also for the wider public, including other ethnic and diaspora advocacy groups in the United States and worldwide.

### Funding

Supported by the EKÖP-24-4-11-8 University Research Scholarship Programme of the Ministry for Culture and Innovation from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund.

### References

- Balogh, L., I. Halász and A.L. Pap. 2025. 'Minority Rights, Minority Protection, and Diaspora Policy in Hungary, 2010–2018', in Gárdos-Orosz, F. ed. *The Resilience of the Hungarian Legal System since 2010. European Union and its Neighbours in a Globalized World*, vol. 16. Cham: Springer Online. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-70451-2\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-70451-2_4)
- Borbándi, Gy. 1985. *A magyar emigráció életrajza—1945–1985*. Bern: Európai Protestáns Magyar Szabadegyetem.
- Chaszar, E. 1986. 'Minorities in Czechoslovakia: The theory and reality, or Hungarians in the Slovak Socialist Republic Today', *The Hungarian Quarterly*, 1 (3), April 1986: 3–14. [https://www.magtudin.org/Hung\\_Quart\\_Vol\\_1\\_No.\\_3\\_April\\_1986.pdf](https://www.magtudin.org/Hung_Quart_Vol_1_No._3_April_1986.pdf).
- Chaszar, E. 1988. *Hungarians in Czechoslovakia Yesterday and Today*. Budapest: Danubian Press.

- Chaszar, E. 1999. *The International Problem of National Minorities*. Toronto: Mathias Corvinus.
- Dr Edward Chaszar Collection. Special Collections and University Archives, Manuscript Group 106, Indiana University of Pennsylvania. <https://libweb1.library.iup.edu/depts/speccol/All%20Finding%20Aids/Finding%20aids/MG%2001%20Col/MG106Chaszar.pdf>
- Felvidek.ma*, 18.9.2011. 'Elhunyt Chászár Ede', <https://felvidek.ma/2011/09/18/elhunyt-chaszar-ede-nyugalmazott-egyetemi-tanar-a-felvideki-magyarok-sok-evtizedes-nyugati-szoszoloja/>
- Felvidek.ma*, 10.4.2017. 'Elúzve is győztesen: Hites Kristóf története'. <https://felvidek.ma/2017/04/10/eluzve-is-gyoztesen-hites-kristof-tortenete/>
- Garrett, S.A. 1978. 'Eastern European Ethnic Groups and American Foreign Policy', *Political Science Quarterly*, 93 (2): 301–323.
- Gecse, G. 2023. *Hogyan lett a Kutyaszorítóból Nyakörv? Beszélgetések Duray Miklóssal*. Kisebbségért—Pro Minoritate Foundation—Méry Ratio Publishing.
- Hermann, G. 2011. 'Az Amerikai Erdélyi Szövetség története, 1952–1977', *Magyar kisebbség: nemzetpolitikai szemle*, 16 (61–62): 7–111. [https://epa.oszk.hu/02100/02169/00041/pdf/2011\\_3-4\\_002\\_007-111\\_Hermann%20Gabriella.pdf](https://epa.oszk.hu/02100/02169/00041/pdf/2011_3-4_002_007-111_Hermann%20Gabriella.pdf)
- Hermann, G. 2022. 'Az igazság legyőzhetetlensége. A Magyar Emberi Jogok Alapítvány (HHRF) érdekvédelmi tevékenységének rövid története, kapcsolathálói, ideológiai és infrastrukturális háttere (1976–1989)', *Regio: Kisebbség Kultúra Politika Társadalom*, 30 (1): 44–71. <http://doi.org/10.17355/rkkpt.v30i1.44>
- Herner-Kovács, E. 2018. 'The power of second-generation diaspora: Hungarian ethnic lobbying in the United States in the 1970–1980s', *Diaspora Studies*, 11 (2): 171–188. Online: [https://brill.com/view/journals/bdia/11/2/article-p171\\_4.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/bdia/11/2/article-p171_4.xml)
- Hites, K. 1955. 'Egy évtized tanulsága', *Under Double Yoke*, 5 (2), Feb 1955.
- Hites, K. 1985. 'Újra a vártán', *Under Double Yoke* 13 (1), Apr 1985.
- Hungarian American Coalition. 2011. 'In Memoriam Dr. Edward Chaszar'. Press release, 29 September 2011. <https://hacusa.org/in-memoriam-dr-edward-chaszar/>.
- Kanadai Magyar Hírlap*. 04.02.2008. 'Búcsú Wojatsek Károlytól'. [https://www.epa.hu/0800/00843/00049/Kanadai\\_Magyar\\_Hirlap\\_2008\\_februar/kanadaihirlap.com/2008/02/04/bucsu-wojatsek-karolytol/index.html](https://www.epa.hu/0800/00843/00049/Kanadai_Magyar_Hirlap_2008_februar/kanadaihirlap.com/2008/02/04/bucsu-wojatsek-karolytol/index.html).
- Ludanyi, A. 1990. 'Hungarian Lobbying Efforts for the Human Rights of Minorities in Rumania: The CHRR/HHRF as a Case Study', *Hungarian Studies*, 6 (1).
- Lynn, K.K. 2013. 'The Hungarian National Council / Hungarian National Committee Magyar Nemzeti Bizottmány / Magyar Nemzeti Bizottság 1947–1972', in Lynn, K.K. ed. *The Inauguration of 'Organized Political Warfare': The Cold War Organisations Sponsored by the National Committee for a Free Europe / Free Europe Committee*. Reno, NV: Helena History Press, pp. 237–308.
- Mazurkiewicz, A. 2021. *Voice of the Silenced Peoples in the Global Cold War—The Assem-*

- bly of Captive European Nations, 1954–1972*, Leiden: De Gruyter Brill. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110661002>
- Morvai, T. and L. Szarka. 2012. 'A magyar tannyelvű iskolák választása Dél-Szlovákiában', *Kisebbségkutatás*, 21 (3): 536–567. [https://real.mtak.hu/19091/1/Morvai\\_Tunde\\_Szarka\\_Laszlo\\_\\_A\\_magyar\\_tannyelvu\\_iskolak\\_valasztasa\\_Del\\_Szlovakiaiban\\_u\\_143452.988235.pdf](https://real.mtak.hu/19091/1/Morvai_Tunde_Szarka_Laszlo__A_magyar_tannyelvu_iskolak_valasztasa_Del_Szlovakiaiban_u_143452.988235.pdf).
- Paul, D. and R. Paul. 2009. *Ethnic Lobbies and US Foreign Policy*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Pridham, G. 2002. 'The European Union's Democratic Conditionality and Domestic Politics in Slovakia: The Mečiar and Dzurinda Governments Compared', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54 (2): 203–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668130120116583>
- Raška, F.D. 2013. 'History of the Council of Free Czechoslovakia', in Lynn, K.K. ed. *The Inauguration of 'Organized Political Warfare': The Cold War Organizations Sponsored by the National Committee for a Free Europe / Free Europe Committee*. Reno, NV: Helena History Press, pp. 71–120.
- Rubenzer, T. 2008. 'Ethnic Minority Interest Group Attributes and U.S. Foreign Policy Influence: A Qualitative Comparative Analysis', *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 4 (2): 169–185. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1743-8594.2007.00063.x>
- Rubenzer, T. and S.B. Redd. 2010. 'Ethnic Minority Groups and US Foreign Policy: Examining Congressional Decision Making and Economic Sanctions', *International Studies Quarterly*, 54 (3): 755–777. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2478.2010.00608.x>
- Shain, Y. 1999. *Marketing the American Creed Abroad. Diasporas in the US and Their Homelands*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sheffer, G. 2014. 'The Effects of Diasporas' Nature, Types, and Goals on Hostland Foreign Policies', in De Wind, J. and Segura, R. eds. *Diaspora Lobbies and the US Government: Convergence and Divergence in Making Foreign Policy*. New York: New York University Press, pp. 31–58. <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479818761.003.0002>
- Simon, A. 2005. 'Szlovákiai Magyarok Nemzeti Bizottmánya', *Szlovákiai Magyar Adatbank*, 13 April. <https://adatbank.sk/lexikon/szlovakiai-magyarok-nemzeti-bizottmanya/>
- Smith, T. 2000. *Foreign Attachments: The Power of Ethnic Groups in the Making of American Foreign Policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Szilassy, B. 1955. 'Keressünk új utakat', *Under Double Yoke*, 5 (2), Feb 1955.
- Tárnok, B. 2025. 'Hungarian Diaspora Advocacy in the United States: Recent Challenges, Future Strategies', *Hungarian Journal of Minority Studies*, 7: 35–50. <https://doi.org/10.62152/hjms.2024.tb>
- The Burlington Free Press*, 9.11.2010. 'George Olgyay Obituary'. <https://www.legacy.com/us/obituaries/burlingtonfreepress/name/george-olgyay-obituary?id=27330945>.
- Thurber, J., C.C. Campbell and D.A. Dulio, eds. 2018. *Congress and Diaspora Politics: The Influence of Ethnic and Foreign Lobbying*. New York: SUNY Press.

Tóth, N. 2021. 'Posztmodern lovagok, avagy a Hungarian Human Rights Foundation és a nemzetközi szervezetek kapcsolata 1976 és 2000 között', *Kisebbségvédelem*, 6.

*Under Double Yoke*, 4(1) Jan 1954.

*Under Double Yoke*, 4(2) Apr 1954.

*Under Double Yoke*, 4(3) Oct 1954.

*Under Double Yoke*, 5(4) Jun 1955.

*Under Double Yoke*, 13(1) Apr 1985.

*Under Double Yoke*, 14(2) Dec 1986.

*Under Double Yoke*, 15(1) Jun 1987.

*Under Double Yoke*, 16(2) Dec 1988.

*Under Double Yoke*, 17(1) Jun 1989.

Varsanyi, J. 1976. *Quest for a New Central Europe*. Adelaide: Australian Carpathian Federation.