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GERMAN ETHNIC AND RACIAL POLITICS IN HUNGARY
DURING WORLD WAR II

The chief aim of the foreign minority policies of nazi Germany was to secure the acknowledgement of „völkisch” German minorities as an officially organised ethnic group (*Volksgruppe*) with autonomy rights. But during World War II the *integrative ethnic policy* with regard to the Germans was gradually pushed to the background by an *exclusion policy* which the nazi regime applied to the „inferior” peoples and races, and took the form of prosecution and extermination on the basis of ethnicity and religion.

Despite the discriminative „Jewish Laws” (1938, 1939), the Hungarian Jewry lived relatively undisturbed under the regime of governor Miklós Horthy. Dramatic change came in this regard with the German occupation of the country (19 March 1944). Then started the stigmatization, ghettoization and deportation of the Jews – predominantly to Auschwitz-Birkenau. The exact number of martyrs is still hotly debated. According to the most authoritative scholarly opinions, the number of deported Jewish victims can be put to between 440 and 550 thousand. Yet in political parlance and public history the round and symbolic figure of 600 thousand has become rooted. Another debated issue is whether the prosecution by the nazis of the Sintis and Roma was done on racial grounds, or they were treated as so-called anti-social elements. The number of Gypsies deported to extermination camps from Hungary can be put to a couple of thousand.

From the late 1930s the claim of instrumentalizing the German minorities in the service of the aggressive foreign political aims of the Third Reich became increasingly evident. In Hungary this role was assumed by the so-called *Volksbund* (People’s Association of Germans in Hungary). From the start of World War II, a new element in the policies of nazi Germany towards the foreign Germans appeared, which can be termed as the idea of „return” to the Empire („Heim ins Reich”). In order to accomplish the re-settlement

58 Vö. *Benno Zündorf*: Die Ostverträge. Beck, München, 1979.

59 1995:79. törvény a Magyar Köztársaság és a Németországi Szövetségi Köztársaság közötti, Budapest, 1992. február 6-án aláírt, baráti együttműködésről és az európai partnerségről szóló Szerződés kihirdetéséről (1995. szeptember 12.).

plans, the Germans concluded interstate treaties with almost all countries in Europe where German minorities lived. (The agreement with Hungary was signed on 29 May 1940, but it was never put into effect.) In the eastern regions occupied during the war an overt and brutal Germanizing policy was implemented, based on the *Generalplan Ost*, which had been elaborated in offices of the SS specially assigned to this task.

In the foreign policies of the Federal Republic of Germany, especially under the aegis of the Brandtian *Ostpolitik*, considerable emphasis was put on relations with the states belonging to the former German settlement area, such as Hungary, and on strengthening the bridge-function of those German minorities which had remained there after refuge and deportation in the war.