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„THE GYPSY ISSUE” IN HUNGARY DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS (II)

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Rezumat

Abordarea „chestiunii țigănești” în Ungaria interbelică (II)

În perioada interbelică, în mod prioritar, problema așezărilor țigănești a fost abordată de autoritățile ungare prin anumite reglementări aferente gestionării sănătății publice. Măsurile inițiale de stabilizare dirijată pentru așa numiții „țigani vagabonzi” au rezultat indirect cu crearea noilor așezări țigănești. Interesele conflictuale între instituțiile guvernamentale și autoritățile publice locale, au devenit la un moment dat evidente, întrucât ambele părți interesate așteptau alocarea fondurilor adiționale necesare pentru soluționarea „chestiunii țigănești” – din partea celeilalte. Implementarea decretelor emise de autoritățile centrale a fost adesea obstrucționată și s-a confruntat cu critici din partea oficialilor, medicilor și jandarmeriei responsabile de punerea lor în aplicare la nivel local. În perioada analizată, contextul abordat al „chestiunii țigănești” treptat s-a transformat: pe parcursul anilor 20 ai sec. XX, acesta eminent se focusa pe reglementarea modului de trai al „țiganilor vagabonzi”; mai târziu, în special după 1930, concomitent cu cele vechi, au apărut noi provocări aferente așezărilor țigănești, care creșteau atât sub aspect numeric, cât și dimensional. Autorul utilizează în acest studiu surse primare inexplorate: rezoluțiile aprobate de autoritățile ungare și publicațiile periodice interbelice ungare: *Csendőrségi Lapok* (Revistele Jandarmeriei), *Magyar Közigazgatás* (Administrația Publică Maghiară) și *Népegészségügy* (Sănătate Publică).

Cuvinte-cheie: așezările țigănești, „țigani vagabonzi”, sănătate publică, interese conflictuale, perioada interbelică în Ungaria, „chestiunea țigănească”.

Резюме

«Цыганский вопрос» в Венгрии в межвоенный период (II)

В межвоенный период венгерские власти решали проблему цыганских поселений в основном с помощью принятых постановлений, касающихся общественного здравоохранения. Изначально одобренные меры по расселению так называемых «бродячих цыган» косвенно привели к созданию новых цыганских поселений. Противоречивые интересы государственных и местных властей стали более очевидными, поскольку эти две части институциональной системы с пристрастием ожидали выделения сопутствующих необходимых средств для решения «цыганского вопроса» – каждая от другой стороны. Выполнение указов, издаваемых центральными властями, часто сталкивалось с препятствиями и критикой со стороны должностных лиц, врачей и жандармерии, ответственных за их реализацию на местном уровне. В течение межвоенного периода содержание «цыганского вопроса» постепенно изменилось: на про-

тяжении 1920-х гг. оно в основном означало урегулирование образа жизни «бродячих цыган», тогда как позже, после 1930 г., одновременно со старыми возникли новые вызовы, связанные с цыганскими поселениями, которые выросли в количественном отношении, занимая все большую территорию. Автор использует малоисследованные первоисточники: резолюции, одобренные венгерскими властями, и венгерские межвоенные периодические издания: *Csendőrségi Lapok* (Журналы жандармерии), *Magyar Közigazgatás* (Венгерское государственное управление) и *Népegészségügy* (Общественное здравоохранение).

Ключевые слова: цыганские поселения, «бродячие цыгане», общественное здравоохранение, конфликт интересов, межвоенный период в Венгрии, «цыганский вопрос».

Summary

“The Gypsy issue” in Hungary during the interwar years (II)

During the interwar years in Hungary, the authorities approached the issue of Gypsy settlements mainly through regulations concerning public health. Measures to try to settle the so-called “wandering Gypsies” resulted indirectly in the creation of new Gypsy settlements. The conflicting interests of government ministries and the local authorities became all the more apparent, as they both expected the provision of the accompanying necessary funds to resolve the “Gypsy issue” from the other party. The implementation of the decrees issued by the central authorities was often obstructed and faced criticism from officials, doctors, and gendarmerie responsible for their implementation at local level. During the period in question, the content of the “Gypsy issue” gradually changed: during the 1920s it mostly meant the settlement of “wandering Gypsies”; while later, in the 1930s, along with the old ones new challenges arose related to the Gypsy settlements, which increased both in size and number. The author uses little-researched primary sources: resolutions approved by the Hungarian authorities and Hungarian interwar periodicals such as: the *Csendőrségi Lapok* (Gendarmerie Journals), *Magyar Közigazgatás* (Hungarian Public Administration) and *Népegészségügy* (Public Health).

Key words: Gypsy settlements, “wandering Gypsies”, public health, conflicting interests, interwar years in Hungary, “Gypsy issues”.

The minister for trade did take measures to restrict the wandering tradesmanship of Gypsies with Min. of Trade decree no. 141.113/1931 on “*the restriction of Gypsies wandering tradesmanship and peddler*”¹. The ministry tried to make peddlery im-

possible for Gypsies without residence, and handled those Gypsies who had settled differently and with greater leniency. According to the ordinance, settled Gypsies could only work at their trade in the royal county in which they declared residence. They were only allowed to peddle alone, and could not take with them family members, apprentices or a cart². The decree was expressly welcomed by the minister of the interior, thinking that this would act to finally compel to settle those Gypsies who claimed wandering was necessary for their livelihood. The ministry of the interior decree no. 192.304/1931 instructed the authorities to consistently execute the minister of trade's directive and stated that the wandering trade licence of a "wandering Gypsy" was to be confiscated immediately, so as to prevent them from wandering and using the permit as an excuse³. In the columns of the *Csendőrségi Lapok* a retired non-commissioned officer wrote his musings on the topic regulating wandering trades and concluded that they were expressly positive and in his opinions the "wandering Gypsy" issue was closed, "In these past years one can hear less and less about wandering Gypsies, they have somehow disappeared. Maybe this great destruction (WWI) broke them in some unexplainable way, but maybe the continuous and unrelenting monitoring is to thank for their being forced to civilize and their acts of terror to disappear and become a distant memory. I know that younger comrades of mine still meet with them, but these are not the wandering Gypsies of the past. Especially not now since the honorable Minister of the Interior recently greatly restricted their so-called tradesmanship and attributed to this their group wandering" (Szobonkay 1931: 526). The directive was executed with differing enthusiasm from royal county to royal county, in places where things were stricter the Gypsies moved to the more lenient neighbouring county, or adapted to the new prescriptions and continued their trade (Bódi 1994: 111; Máté 2013: 161).

In contrast to what had been written above, an author in the *Magyar Közigazgatás* expressed his worry concerning the decree. He felt that forbidding the use of a cart or having the family accompanying a peddling Gypsy tradesman was unrealistic. These restrictions did not take into account the particularities of a wandering Gypsy tradesman's lifestyle, "The pot mender, the drill maker, the horseshoe nail maker have to take their tools, and materials with them, not to mention their family, the wife who cooks <...> The Gypsy issue is a difficult one,

but if the solution is facilitated in such a way as to rush the Gypsies, to make their livelihoods more difficult, then we shall make them wild, crude and drive them to desperation it is pointless. Only by taking their lifestyle conditions into account and understanding their particularities can we carefully begin the great task of reform, which will lead to permanent settlement" (Lucidus 1931: 4). He illustrated the problem with an example said to be real. A wandering Gypsy tradesman was hired to make drills for a state railway engineering department, and in accordance with the regulations he arrived by train and was able to prove this. Nonetheless, a few days later, his family arrived by wagon (Lucidus 1931: 4). The deputy lord lieutenant of the royal county of Veszprém reported that execution of the decree was running into difficulties, as the wandering Gypsy tradesmen were not complying with the prescriptions. He therefore instructed the local authorities to immediately inform the district high sheriff and the competent local gendarmerie command post of the arrival of wandering peddler Gypsies (Anon 1936a: 5). A gendarme first lieutenant believed the ordinance forbidding the wandering tradesman from bringing his family to be warranted. He explained that in his experience, while the tradesman was duly employed and plying his trade in the given town, his wife would beg, tell fortunes, sometimes steal or scout out locations for future burglary (Bakonyi 1935: 690).

Not only were specific points of the decree held to be mistaken, but at times the local authorities misunderstood them, and these issues came to light in the questions and answers column of the *Csendőrségi Lapok* paper too. According to the resolution the wandering tradesman permits were only valid in the royal county in which the Gypsy resided. However, several government offices issued trade licences for royal counties, in which the Gypsy wandering tradesman wanted to work (Anon 1932: 148). In this same paper, a non-commissioned gendarme officer called attention to another fault with the wandering trade licences, which was the false or forged information to be found in them. Several investigations revealed that a portion of the Gypsies had fake wandering tradesman licences, some with a photograph of the card caring individual but with the personal data of a Gypsy who had died or had left the country (Kürti 1932: 741-744). In summary, it took a very dim view of the new directive as they felt that it more enabled the "wandering Gypsies" than restricted them, "We often

hear that the wandering Gypsy type is disappearing. That this is in no relation to the truth is clearly proven by the above. The Gypsy wanders and as before while wandering he commits acts against personal and property integrity as before. The difference from the past is only that during the days he wanders under the guise of various trade licences and thus has a legal colouring, which as a condition makes their control but especially any strong action against them extremely difficult" (Kürti 1932: 741-744). The above mentioned were far from new complaints, according to some reports the forgery of personal identification was pretty much a traditional activity among the "*wandering Gypsies*". A retired gendarme captain wrote that the baptismal certificates and birth certificates of the Gypsy children were already forged as the parents deliberately baptise and register their children under different names in different villages, so as to have eight to ten different sets of identification (Gergely 1927: 127). A gendarme major wrote of the difficulty in identifying Gypsies and the forms of identification, "In my opinion, until every Gypsy has an official identification with a photograph and fingerprint of which the issuing authorities have a second copy, it will be impossible to completely solve the Gypsy issue" (Paksi-Kiss 1931: 749). In the royal county of Vas, the practice was different than the otherwise criticised common one, and Gypsies had a photographic identity card made in four copies, one of which was given to the Gypsy, and then one copy to the respective gendarmerie post, one to local government, and one to the high sheriff (Schermann 2000: 31).

With the advent of the 1930s, several public health decisions were taken to try to settle Gypsies, and these had an impact on both the nomads and those in Gypsy settlements. Typhus had again appeared in 1929 in Hungary. Though at first only in dispersed cases, the minister of public health and employment immediately composed the Ministry of Public Health and Employment circular decree number 39.136/1929 and labeled the "*wandering*" Gypsies responsible for the spread of the disease. "<...> the problem was probably again dragged into the country by lousy wandering Gypsies as it is proven beyond a doubt that typhus is spread by unclean people – here especially among Gypsies – among body lice spreading from person to person"⁴. There was a list of all the previous measures decreed concerning this issue, and then the authorities were instructed to regularly check on

"*wandering Gypsies*" and Gypsy settlements. Upon finding sick with typhus the local authorities were to immediately be instructed⁵.

The great economic downturn was no help to the preventative measures taken in an attempt to stop the spread of typhus. The number of homeless grew with the Great Depression and among their number public health examinations regularly found body lice. In 1932, the minister of public health and employment issued circular decree no. 38.890/1932, which began by ordering the increased examination of "*wandering Gypsies*" and Gypsy settlements citing the reason as their being places and groups "especially dangerous from the point of view of spreading the problem"⁶. In the following years, typhus struck, though the locations remained dispersed. In his circular decree 250.400/1934, the minister of the interior called attention to the importance of execution of earlier prescribed measures. He pointed out that disinfection measures, taken as prevention and precaution, were much less expensive for the respective authorities than if the given settlement became a centre of typhus⁷. According to the head of the epidemiology department of the National Public Health Institute, the data showed that the circular decrees of the ministry proved to be effective. In 1933 and 1934, the number of those with typhus moved between fifty and hundred. Almost without exception those infected were Gypsies, where the illness was often only a mild condition. In these cases, the infection could only be detected with a blood serum test (Anon 1935: 128-129).

There was a study published in Népegészségügy that revealed this result. Samples were taken from about one thousand "*wandering Gypsies*" from five districts and the results showed that about forty percent had had the typhus infection without showing any symptoms (Gärtner 1932: 269-275). During this period, the relatively few occasions of typhus nationwide remained limited to a few settlements, in relation to which the competent royal county chief medical officer commented:

"I believe the present relatively high number of cases is caused by the following reasons: the general economic strife and the unemployment that is a consequence of it, the constant wandering of unemployed vagrants, who regularly find lodging for a couple of filler among Gypsies. The bad economic conditions among the Gypsies result in increasing lice infections, begging and vagrancy. The exhaustion of town and royal county funds from which it

is difficult to draw on for delousing and other preventative measures. Despite the parameters of our legal authority and being located in the most dangerous place next to the border, and having 7000 Gypsies living in the area of our legal authority, the commonly known preventative measures and the removal of the sick from their environment to epidemic quarantine, the complete closure of Gypsy settlements and the weekly examination of all the Gypsy settlements increased in places of epidemic and the methodical and repeated delousing with a steam disinfection machine has successfully blocked the further spread of the illness and localised it to one or two smaller areas. During the present serious economic conditions, this work is hard and exhaustive" (Spiry 1934: 315).

In light of all these factors the chief medical officer proposed that the residents of Gypsy settlements receive regular serological tests that would be an early indicator of new typhus infections. He also pointed out that the state should provide funds or at least periodic aid to towns and royal counties in their efforts against typhus. The example he gave was that of funds used when epidemics appeared in Gypsy settlements under his authority and had to be placed under quarantine, which required the feeding and disinfection of the Gypsies consuming all of the royal counties taxes collected from dog licences (Spiry 1934: 316). The chief sheriff from the Gödöllő district reported that the typhus epidemic that broke out in the Gypsy settlement set back the given towns' budget for years. When a Gypsy residence settlement became infected with typhus, it was immediately surrounded with barbed wire and gendarmes were deployed to ensure the Gypsies could not leave the quarantine area. Those ill were taken to a quarantine hospital and the residents of the Gypsy settlement were provided with food for three weeks. The typhus epidemic was kept in check but the measures were a large administrative burden on the authorities, in addition to consuming three years' worth of famine relief funds (Vitéz Endre 1934: 3).

The "*wandering Gypsy*" issue remained on the agenda throughout the 1930's as the measures attempted to settle then did not achieve the hoped for results, and thus those responsible for their execution were often openly critical of them. Ministry of the Interior decree number 15.000/1916 was still in effect, though several paragraphs received harsh criticism in the columns of the *Csendőrségi Lapok*. A gendarme lieutenant called the passages that pre-

scribed the issuing of "Gypsy identification" unrealistic. One reason being the use of false names, which made it impossible to identify a given Gypsy and then there was the regular failure of some offices to issue papers. Furthermore, the paragraphs in question did not make the photographic identification on "Gypsy identification" mandatory, though this would have proved to be significant help in the identification of Gypsies (Bakonyi 1935: 688-691). In addition to this, the decree allowed the competent police authority to permit 'wandering Gypsies' to own plough pulling livestock, which turned out to bring with it all sorts of difficulties. "Without a doubt many Gypsies enjoy the good will of the authorities and abuse the horse ownership permit and wander and thus have the opportunity to steal, committing theft and other crimes. If nothing else, stealing fodder for their horse" (Bakonyi 1935: 689). Another gendarme was inspired by this colleague to write and he wrote his observations concerning the "*Gypsy issue*" and obsolete regulations found in the old decree. He began by pointing out problems with definitions.

"From the perspective of public administration and public security, the name Gypsy is a very general definition. Therefore, in the area under the office's jurisdiction, in establishing numerical data, I included all settled and possibly wandering Gypsies, those with wandering tradesman permits and those musical Gypsies too, who do not have a permanent restaurant or coffeehouse wages but who beg or do other, for ex. field work in addition to playing music, those living in tents – in hovels – and have other Gypsy qualities – customs – under the definition. I felt this definition was important because most of the minister's regulations concerned issues related to wandering Gypsies. In reality, there are no wandering Gypsies, because all Gypsies have a place of birth and registered location, nonetheless every Gypsy becomes a wandering Gypsy if he leaves his place of residence and spends his life loitering and begging and thus provides for himself and his large family" (Balogh 1937a: 181).

Only after this, did he begin to prove that the "*Gypsy issue*" still existed, and that it was a significant burden on the state. He suggested the complex regulation of the question and dealt explicitly with the cardinal tasks. He held the birth registry to be of fundamental importance as well as records of families. In the so-called "*Gypsy registry card*" there would have been thirty three lines of data, in addition to the personal data, physical attributes, and

a record of illnesses as well as other information. Furthermore, it would have a current photograph and fingerprints on the identity card (Balogh 1937a: 183; Balogh 1937b: 213). A second step would have been to settle the Gypsies throughout towns to help their assimilation, “In order that the larger Gypsy settlements cease the Gypsy habits decrease and so the Gypsies accommodate to the base population and change faster” (Balogh 1937b: 213). He noted that it would be warranted to primarily resettle them to towns with a notary as it would make their registry easier. A Gypsy family would get 150–200 quadrants [540–720 sq. m.] of land where they would have to erect a “*permanent type hut or hovel*” with the financial help of the town, in addition to the cultivation of a garden. Gypsy settlements created in such a fashion would be surrounded by a fence. The third step would be to mandate towns to ensure public works, daily labour, or if need arose trade work for the proportionally resettled Gypsies. Firewood would be provided for the Gypsy settlement in exchange for work given again by the town. Begging would have been banned, and the issuing of wandering tradesman licenses would have become much more difficult and the restrictions tied to it much stricter. He would have placed “*more trustworthy and more intelligent*” Gypsies at the head of Gypsy settlements, as a *vajda*, who would report to the authorities if he noticed any threats to public order or public health (Balogh 1937b: 213-214).

The criticism of the Ministry of the Interior circular decree number 257.000/1928 likewise appeared in the columns of an armed authorities paper, when a gendarme captain shared his experiences and suggestions. In his opinion, one of the difficulties was due to the decree’s annually prescribed police “*Gypsy raids*” not being held at the same time, as this allowed for the “*wandering Gypsies*” to easily escape these in the neighbouring royal county. The captain saw the only solution to this as conducting the annual supervisory act at the same time nationwide and according to a specific given procedure, which would have regulated the local “*Gypsy raids*” down to the smallest detail (Mátéffy 1933: 345-346). In some royal counties, circular decree 257.000/1928 was extended from not only pertaining to wandering Gypsies but to the settled Gypsy population as well. The deputy lord lieutenant of the royal county of Veszprém stated that the settled Gypsies were just as much a problem for the authorities as the “*wandering Gypsies*” and thus, he felt it warranted to extend the ordi-

nances of the decree to include them, “The Gypsies settled in one area regularly live a wandering life, which they inherited, are accustomed to or do so in the interests of accomplishing criminal activity, which seems to have become an instinct and, which is made easy through the use of draft animals. Gypsies – with few exceptions – are in respect to their acts, lifestyle, outside of the law, criminal, public dangers, and can only be stopped and forced into a proper lifestyle through strict, consistent and constant measures” (Anon 1936b: 5). Shortly afterward the deputy lord lieutenant of the royal county of Vas adopted the decree of the deputy lord lieutenant of Veszprém county almost verbatim and extended it to all the residents of Gypsy settlements. The reason for the action was again the conclusion that the residents of the Gypsy settlement were not much different than the “*wandering Gypsies*” from the perspective of public order (Anon 1938: 2-3).

In the following year, the deputy lord lieutenant of Vas County issued another circular decree, influenced by the deputy lord lieutenant of Veszprém, and it again concentrated on the settled Gypsies. The former had informed him that the time for the pilgrimage and feast in Csátka, to which Gypsies from throughout the country were arriving, was approaching and this posed problems of “irregular marriages”, public order and public health. Thus, the deputy lord lieutenant of Vas County composed the following directives, “I call upon you to prevent this gathering without fail and, during this time, under no circumstances to allow the Gypsies to leave their places of residence. It is in relation to this that I call Your attention to the Min. of Int. circular decree no. 257.000/1928, point 6, which regulates that the police authorities ensure that wandering Gypsies and other wandering groups not even approach close to the markets” (Landauer 2016: 481).

The high sheriff of the Gödöllő district wrote in the columns of the Magyar Közigazgatás about the ordinances related to “*wandering Gypsies*” and concluded that they are in need of amendment in several areas. Firstly, he noted that the solution to the “*Gypsy issue*” cannot be simply relegated to the local authorities, and that the state has a key role to play in the execution of Min. of Int. decree no. 15.000/1916, and it cannot be expected from the local authorities. The decree prescribes the settlement of the “*wandering Gypsies*” in addition to the given settlement ensuring work for them, with enough earnings to cover their needs. The high level of unemployment though makes this an impossibility

and the given towns and cities are unable to support the settled Gypsies (Vitéz Endre 1934: 4). He judged the situation that has evolved to be unsustainable and wrote the following lines, “Until the Gypsy issue remains one in which district or royal county expels the wandering Gypsies onto the territory of another district or royal county, the above quoted and nobly intentioned 1916 Min. of Int. decree will for the cited reasons remain unexecutable in practice, and the solution to the issue is hardly to be expected” (Vitéz Endre 1934: 5). His suggestion, in light of what he had written, was to place “wandering Gypsies” in concentration camps, force them to work and sterilise them. Children would be taken from their parents and would be placed in hostels or with non-Gypsy farming families. He felt that this would be the most efficient solution, as the maintenance of camps would need a far smaller administration than if every town separately tried to deal with the settlement of the “wandering Gypsies”. In concentration camps, their communal food supply would be more economical and the public health costs would be less (Vitéz Endre 1934: 4).

A few chief medical officers thought along the lines of the Gödöllő district high sheriff that the “Gypsy issue” was one that needed to be seen as a nationwide effort. He pointed out an old but less discussed phenomenon. He explained that the dramatic growth in the population of the Gypsy settlements made it necessary for some Gypsies to move into new Gypsy settlements on the peripheries of other towns (Heiczinger 1939: 900-903; Olay 1939: 335-339; Demtsa 1939: 897-900). One of the chief medical officers gave the example of the district of Salgótarján, providing the population growth in the past ten years as well as other prime indicators (Table 2). In 1937, of the forty-five thousand inhabitants of the district almost one thousand two hundred and fifty were classified as Gypsy, 2.75%

of the population. The district was composed of twenty seven townships of which fourteen had Gypsy settlements, in which the number of Gypsy residents was between ten and two hundred (Olay 1939: 335).

According to the chief medical officer the average number of live births was almost seventy percent more, while their average rate of mortality was forty percent more than of the average district populations. His observation was that this led to the evolution of new Gypsy settlements of which he wrote:

“The dramatically growing number of Gypsy settlement residents – depending on local conditions – means that with time they have to send off their excess to hereto untouched towns. The wandering of this Gypsy excess creates newer and newer settlements and thus assists the still localised Gypsy problem become a general one. The trickle of Gypsies into a town happens almost completely unnoticed and as to when a Gypsy settlement was born is very hard to tell. Using the excuse of temporary jobs, cob making, basket weaving, outhouse cleaning a 6–8 member family settles at the end of a village, in a barren area unused by anyone, erecting a makeshift, dug in or cob walled shack. In a few years their number grow so that they see the territory as their own property, and build permanent type shacks and the new Gypsy settlement begins its own life. This territorial conquest by the Gypsies in the past few years continues unabated. As I mentioned they have old settlements in 14 of the district’s towns but in the last 10 years they have trickled into three new towns. <...> If wider surveys reveal a degree of Gypsy overpopulation in the Salgótarján district the Gypsy question shall become a problem of general interest that needs to be addressed as soon as possible. More intensive medical services will cause an already increasingly

Table 2. The average of main population indicators in the Salgótarján district between the years 1928–1937 (Olay 1939: 335)

	Per 1000 individuals				Among 100 deaths		
	Live births	Deaths	Natural reproduction	Tuberculosis deaths (tbc.)	Under one year	1-7 years	Above 7 years
District population	26.3	13.4	12.9	1.12	32.2	9.8	58.0
Gypsies	44.6	18.6	26.0	1.70	35.6	25.8	38.6
Difference in favour of the Gypsies	18.3	–	13.1	–	–	–	19.4
Difference against the Gypsies	–	5.2	–	0.58	3.4	16.0	–

vital Gypsy population to disproportionately grow leading to very serious national economic and public health difficulties” (Olay 1939: 338-339).

Another survey counted the number of the royal county of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun and showed similar results about the territorial distribution. In this royal county, over ten thousand Gypsies were recorded. There were Gypsy slums in 60 percent of the towns and with the exception of one in all cities. The size of the Gypsy settlements stretches from a few individuals to eight hundred (Demtsa 1939: 897).

The reemergence of typhus year after year meant the Ministry of the Interior could not avoid the more precise regulations of the health conditions of “*wandering Gypsies*” and Gypsy settlements. However, the comprehensive handling of the “Gypsy issue” still remained. The columns of the *Csendőrségi Lapok* published several writings and even a three part series of articles from authors active in the gendarmerie; these argued and brought evidence from investigative work to illustrate the lack of solutions and the hopelessness of the problem (Anon 1939a; 1939b; 1939c; Kürti 1938: 716-720).

The newly issued public health resolution targeted not only the Gypsy populace, but “vagrants”, poor houses, and crowded dwellings. In the early days of 1939, the ministry issued decree number 247.700/19238 on “protection against lice”, which firstly prescribed the mandatory delousing of those suffering from typhus, or of those suspected of the infection or among those who have or are suspected, or having body lice⁸. The homes, means of transport, outer and underwear were to be deloused according to the order. The examination of these groups was the responsibility of the medical officer, who was required to report body lice or the suspicion of it to the public health authorities where the delousing was then ordered. Those individuals unwilling to cooperate with the delousing were to be reported and the armed authorities to force them to cooperate. The delousing of individuals was to happen according to the procedure as following,

“In the delousing of an individual care must be given to best possible protection of modesty of the individual while undressing, bathing or washing and dressing. When groups are deloused, the different sexes are to be deloused separately. In the delousing of individuals the hair, beard, moustache and all body hair is to be shorn short, or shaved. If the lice infection is only mild, with the exception

of the beard, moustache and hair on men, the cutting and shaving of body hair and women’s hair can be exempted. The shorn individuals are to be thoroughly soaped and then bathed, their bodies to be covered with soap, or one part soap four parts water and two parts petroleum based liquid and then thoroughly washed with warm water from head to foot. Those parts of the body not shorn of hair and women’s hair are to be thoroughly rubbed with petroleum, or Peruvian balsam, or with equal parts a mixture of petroleum, oil and vinegar and then wrapped with a clothing soaked in this same liquid for six hours. Those areas with hair are then to be washed with warm soapy water, the hair combed out with a fine comb soaked in warm vinegar. With Individuals thus deloused – especially in cases of severe lice infection – it is suggested that the body areas most prone to lice (scalp, back of neck, armpits, upper arm, thighs and groin region) be covered with 10% sulfur ointment. After the procedure in the first paragraph, deloused individuals can only dress in deloused clothing”⁹.

The disinfection of outer and under wear were likewise precisely prescribed, as was the delousing of beddings, homes and wagons. The ministry decree went as far as to make suggestions for the clothing of those conducting the disinfection, and even prescribed that they in all cases shave their moustaches and beards, and if need they themselves be disinfected at the end of the delousing procedures¹⁰. The leadership of the royal county of Pest-Pilis-Solt-Kiskun was not satisfied with the promulgation of the public health decree, they held that the “*Gypsy issue*” was one that needed a nationwide policy, and they sent a telegraph to the ministry of the interior expressing this. The deputy lord lieutenant expressed in his letter that until the Ministry of the Interior issues nationwide measures he is forced to deal with the question in his area of jurisdiction. As a first step, he planned the census of all the “*wandering Gypsies*” in his royal county, in addition to taking steps to make vagrancy impossible. His plan to do so was by revoking the horse ownership licences of the “*wandering Gypsies*”, in addition to issuing identification cards with photographs to them. They would only be allowed to leave their place of residence if a medical examination were to find them healthy and the local authorities permitted it. The officials were to record the reason for travel and the destination on the photographic ID. If a “*wandering Gypsy*” were stopped and did not have the necessary photographic ID or

permit he was to receive punishment and be escorted back to his residence by the authorities responsible for public security. Begging was banned, as was non-Gypsies giving alms to Gypsies. Gypsies were forbidden to eat animal carcasses, and the sites for animal carcass disposal were to be better supervised. The non-Gypsy population was forbidden from selling the carcasses of animals that had died from disease to Gypsies. “*Wandering Gypsies*” could only take on work if they had a valid photographic ID permitting them to do so, in addition to having to have a medical examination every two weeks (Demtsa 1939: 899-890). Nonetheless, the conclusion was that despite these measures the question could not be effectively settled. The opinion was that a final solution would be the proposal by the high sheriff of the Gödöllő district, that of placing the “*wandering Gypsies*” in concentration camps, “These written plans can only achieve an imperfect solution. Another concept would perhaps bring a more radical and final solution. In 1934, Sir Dr. László Endre, deputy lord lieutenant, wrote an interesting article. <...> I believe we agree with László Endre’s thoughts. I would add to this that in today’s world, in the golden age of public health, a work camp and concentration camp are better suited environments to achieve the goals than they were in the past” (Demtsa 1939: 890).

Conclusion

The majority of the decrees issued during the interwar years in Hungary that pertained to Gypsy settlements aimed at restricting and preventing the spread of typhus. Their regular promulgation happened when typhus struck again and again in impoverished areas. These ordinances were not equally and consistently executed and in some cases were completely ignored. The settlement of “*wandering Gypsies*” and their limitation to a permanent place of residence remained a goal throughout the period, and likewise the resolutions introducing measures to this aim were executed to varying degrees by the competent authorities, with some places exercising greater rigor and others greater leniency than prescribed. In both of these cases, the difference in interest between the ministries and the local authorities appeared and an attempt to relegate the responsibility to the other. The public health directives regularly gave the burden of financing the prescribed measures to the towns in question, which were either unable to finance or to an only limited degree. The expenses related to the settlement of the “*wandering Gypsies*” was likewise del-

egated by the ministry to the affected towns, where again they were either unable or unwilling to allocate the necessary funds. It became the towns’ interest to prevent the settlement of Gypsies in their territory. All the while they expected the solution to the “*Gypsy issue*” and the funds necessary for any local action from the central authorities. This difference in interests became apparent on many occasions, such as when officials, doctors, gendarmerie, expressed criticism of the ministries’ resolutions freely and openly in the local papers of civil administrative bodies. The settlement of “*wandering Gypsies*” meant in effect the creation of Gypsy settlements, which were unaffected by any regulations except for those relating to public health. The central governing bodies had no concept or directives concerning the future of the newly evolving and already existing Gypsy settlements. Thus, the affected towns had to rely on their own initiatives and would forcefully resettle these groups if they judged their placement to be in some way problematic. In some places, there were plans and attempts to eliminate the Gypsy settlements, the reasons for which covered a wide spectrum, including the forced assimilation and public health and public security worries. In this period, the examined content of the “*Gypsy issue*” changed, while in the 1920s it meant mostly the regulating of the “*wandering Gypsies*”, in the 1930s it meant rather the old and new challenges posed by the growing number and size of Gypsy settlements.

Notes

¹ A m. kir. kereskedelemügyi miniszter 1931. évi 141.113. számú rendelete a letelepült cigányok vándoripari és házalási tevékenységének korlátozásáról. In: Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára 1931. Budapest: Magyar Királyi Belügyminisztérium, 1932, p. 515-516.

² Ibid. 515-516.

³ A m. kir. belügyminiszter 1931. évi 192.304. számú körrendelete, a cigányok vándoripari és házalási engedélyéről. In: Magyarországi Rendeletek Tára 1931. Budapest: Magyar Királyi Belügyminisztérium, 1932, p. 1222.

⁴ A m. kir. népjóléti és munkaügyi miniszter 39.136/1929. N. M. M. számú körrendelete a kiütéses typhus ellen való védekezés tárgyában. In: Népegészségügy, 1929. Vol. 10, no. 13, p. 728-729.

⁵ Ibid. 729.

⁶ A m. kir. népjóléti és munkaügyi miniszter 37.890/1932. N. M. M. számú körrendelete a haj-

léktalan szegényeknek tetveség szempontjából való fokozottabb ellenőrzése tárgyában. In: Népegészségügy, 1932. Vol. 13, no. 7, p. 217-218.

⁷A magyar királyi belügyminiszter 250.400/1934. B. M. számú körrendelete a kiütéses tífusz tárgyában. In: Népegészségügy, 1934. Vol. 15, no. 4, p. 125.

⁸A m. kir. belügyminiszter 1939. évi 247.700/1938. számú rendelete, a tetveség elleni védekezésről. In: Magyarországi Rendeleték Tára 1939. Budapest: Magyar Királyi Belügyminisztérium, 1940, p. 79-84.

⁹Ibid. 80-81.

¹⁰Ibid. 81-83.

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