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**”THE GYPSY ISSUE”
IN HUNGARY DURING THE INTERWAR YEARS (I)**

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Rezumat

**Abordarea „chestiunii țigănești”
în Ungaria interbelică (I)**

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 obstructivă 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 concentra 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 (I)**

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 выполнение на местном уровне. В течение межвоенного периода содержание «цыганского вопроса» постепенно

изменилось: на протяжении 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 всё 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 (I)**

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 were often obstructed and faced criticism from officials, doctors, and gendarmerie responsible for their implementation at the 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”.

Between the two world wars in Hungary, the Gypsy populace did not comprise a homogenous group from either a social or societal perspective, as it did not form either a linguistic or a cultural one. Gypsies were to be found in the luxury apart-

ments of Budapest, living the lives of famed Gypsy first violinists, and then there were the ones found amidst the squalor of impoverished Gypsy settlements living the lives of *wandering Gypsies* residing there. Renowned Gypsy first violinists with ties to important figures in state governance created associations and published newspapers, and even created a music school. All the while, the inhabitants of Gypsy settlements had no way of exerting any social influence and struggled day to day to feed themselves and their families amid the wretched circumstances of most Gypsy settlements. The *wandering Gypsies* lived an itinerant lifestyle and often found themselves in the crosshairs of the various armed authorities. These various state agencies followed the ministerial instructions concerning Gypsies; there were resolutions directed at serving the interested of the Gypsy musicians, and at the same time resolutions aimed at settling *wandering Gypsies* and improving the public health conditions of Gypsy settlements (Hajnáczy 2020, 2021a; 2021b; Roman et. al. 2021: 129-157). The present study seeks to summarise these efforts and show that the dour image of inflexible directives and their relentless execution were far from the reality. The promulgated resolutions changed or reformulated their focus with the progress of time to accommodate the real or apparent challenges, and made obvious the conflicting interests between the ministries and the local level authorities. Furthermore professional journals dedicated to state craft often harshly criticised the officials, doctors, gendarmerie responsible for the execution of these directives. Nonetheless the leadership of local towns retained the freedom to act according to their own devices concerning the issue in question. Sometimes this meant more forward thinking measures than those in practice at the time, other times it meant much stricter actions. The composition of this study relied for the most part on primary resources, resolutions of the period and the official bulletins and periodicals of the period, from the *Csendőrségi Lapok* (Gendarmerie Journals), and *Magyar Közigazgatás* (Hungarian Public Administration) and *Népegészségügy* (Public Health).

Typhus fever appeared during the hard years of the Great War and then, throughout the 1920s sporadically, but appearing again and again. In their attempts to prevent and restrict the spread of epidemics, ministries drew up a series of regulations (Karsai 1992: 53-57; Pomogyi 1995: 91-113; Hajnáczy 2019). A section of the resolutions and

measures were applicable to the entire population, while others were aimed specifically at the so-called *wandering Gypsies* and Gypsy settlements and had directives aimed at them. In February of 1923, the Ministry of Public Health and Employment's circular decree 10.715/1923 announced that nationwide typhus fever had appeared in both the capital city and the countryside. The Minister ordered the deputy lord lieutenants and the mayors to take the necessary steps and to pay special attention to *the inspection of crowded residences, furthermore workers' groups, and the abode of wandering Gypsies*¹. The Ministry of the Interior's decree 83.274/1923 came into effect in the winter of 1923, and until the end of the typhus epidemic forbade *wandering Gypsies* from entering cities, in addition to strictly limiting their seasonal migration, *During the period of epidemic all manner of movement by wandering Gypsies, and their meanderings from place to place is to be prevented and their place of dwelling is to be always under observation*². Furthermore, it prescribed the public health supervision of Gypsies and in warranted cases disinfection and delousing. The Ministry of Public Health and Employment promulgated the circular decree 53.088/1923 and called upon the mayors and county deputy lord lieutenants to take action in accordance with the decree by the ministry of the interior and make its execution stricter. Disinfection and delousing were prescribed not only if a *wandering Gypsy* was proven to have typhus but in all cases when body lice were found among the clothing³. After the threat of epidemic had past, the minister of public health and employment issued his ministry's circular decree 114.464/1923, which placed emphasis on prevention, writing the following, *The spring of this year has seen the outbreak of typhus in the country's numerous towns, sporadic in some places, in others with a greater increase. As the extermination of lice and especially of their nits is extremely difficult, the centres of infection – and in advantageous circumstances – are able to infect again and thus it is most probable that the typhus spread will return with the colder weather*⁴. The decree instructed the county deputy lord lieutenants and the mayors to instruct their doctors to always consider the threat of typhus when diagnosing a feverish patient or one with lice. If typhus infection could not be completely ruled out, then the patient was to be given the Félix Weil blood test. Furthermore, *crowded lodgings, wandering Gypsies and other individuals wandering here and there* were to

be examined immediately, those with lice were to be deloused. In cases of typhus the protocols were to be followed and a weekly report was to be sent to the ministry with the number of infections⁵. The public health officers often neglected the Félix Weil blood test in the cases of Gypsies, unless the typhus symptoms were obvious. Thus many ill with typhus went without medical treatment and further spread the infection in their place of habitation or transmitted it to other Gypsy settlements creating other centres of epidemic. For this reason, the ministry issued the Ministry of Public Health and Employment decree 21.904/1923 in which it was prescribed that the public health doctors conduct Félix Weil blood tests in the cases of any prolonged fever (Nagy 2011: 218-219). The execution of this directive was lax in many places, and in some completely ignored, and in the following year the minister of public health and employment wrote in a Ministry of Public Health and Employment decree:

During the past year, it has been proven without a doubt concerning the occurrence of typhus that the illness is spread mainly by wandering Gypsies and in several circular decrees I detailed the preventative measures to be taken concerning them. Based on reports from local investigations by district public health inspectors I have to regretfully conclude that certain authorities have either completely ignored or superficially executed the repeatedly decreed preventative measures, and have either very neglectfully or not at all taken care to exterminate the lice – primarily body lice – transmitting the sickness from person to person. The public health inspectors have again found, even in the recent past, completely lice ridden Gypsy settlements, lice ridden crowded lodgings and even a high instance of lice infection in poor houses in state care. It is due to these omissions that despite the successful defeat of the epidemic last year, this year typhus infections have appeared in several locations, almost exclusively among Gypsies⁶.

The minister issued a series of directives in an attempt to solve the problem, firstly he stated that the competent doctors were to examine Gypsies and other suspected individuals weekly and those upon whom they found body lice were to immediately be disinfected and deloused. In cases of greater lice infection, all the Gypsies head and body hair was to be shaven off. The doctors were to conduct Félix Weil type blood tests on all Gypsies with fevers, even if they did not show the characteristic symptoms of typhus. Town leadership

was to record the Gypsies living there and those moving in, in addition to recording the mandatory medical examinations, disinfecting and delousing executed. Gypsies moving into a town and not in public records were to be immediately escorted to the health authorities by the gendarmerie to be examined for typhus and body lice⁷. This decree was reinforced by the strongly worded decree issued by the Ministry of Public Health and Employment number 144.535/1924 demanding the competent authorities immediate cooperation, *I call upon the county Deputy Lord Lieutenants (Mayors) to again execute in the most conscientious fashion the above referenced decree and to give special care that wandering Gypsies, Gypsy settlements, poor houses, crowded and mass housing be examined weekly and delousing procedures be continuous all winter. In the coming winter impoverished individuals living in overcrowded unclean housing increase the danger of infectious diseases, especially the spread of typhus and the authorities' constant, vigilant and doubled efforts are necessary⁸.*

Many town leaders were quick to comply with the administrative dictates of the Ministry of Public Health and Employment decree 47.083/1924, places such as Kaposvár. In the report compiled and then sent to the Ministry of Public Health and Employment, they recorded the names of the Gypsies, their professions, addresses, the results of the examination for lice, the date of the examination and the date of disinfection. All of Kaposvár's Gypsy settlements were recorded, the streets with Gypsy inhabitants and the results showed that of the 2654 Gypsy residents 48 had lice, and they were disinfected within one or two days (Nagy 2011: 239-247). Nonetheless, the conscientious execution of the decrees did not take place everywhere, a negligence which, if discovered by the Ministry of Public Health and Employment, resulted in a probing inquiry. The ministry began its berating letter to the deputy lord lieutenant of the royal county of Békés thus, *I was shocked to learn from the report of the district public health supervisor that in certain townships of the royal county of Békés, as per the preventative measures against the outbreak of typhus, for years, despite my repeated and repeatedly issued decrees, that is to say concerning the townships' Gypsies and poor, the delousing and weekly inspection in the prescribed mode and care have not been implemented* (Kereskényiné 2008: 112-113). The reason for the strongly worded letter was the discovery by the district public health inspector

of lice among those in Mezőberény's poor houses and Gypsy settlements. He found seven feverish Gypsy individuals in the Gypsy settlement among whom the blood test revealed typhus and diagnosed the recent death of a Gypsy woman as undoubtable typhus. What made the situation worse was that a few weeks prior a Gypsy woman had visited the Gypsy settlement in Mezőberény who had contracted typhus and taken it with her to Sarkad. Furthermore, it came to light that the local public health authorities had, on many occasions, not proceeded according to the protocols. A few weeks earlier, when two Gypsy boys were taken to the hospital in Gyula, the preventative measures were followed neither during transportation nor during the hospital examination. When a death occurred in the Gypsy settlement they did not record any suspicion of typhus, and so the home of the deceased was not disinfected (Kereskényiné 2008: 113). All these factors led the ministry to issue instructions to the deputy lord lieutenant in the strictest of tones, *In order to restrict the possibility of this scourge, brought about by the scandalously superficial execution of the procedures, I order the Deputy Lord Lieutenant to immediately and precisely execute the preventative measures suggested by the district public health inspector who visited the imperiled locations, that is to say to lockdown the two Gypsy settlements in Mezőberény, namely London and Paris, and to maintain lockdown until every shack and all the possessions found within the shacks and their residents are properly disinfected. This disinfection is to be repeated of every shack and all the possessions found within the shacks and the residents of the Gypsy settlements until such time as they are without lice, the lockdown can only then be eased. And this can only be done 15 days after the last typhus infection in the settlement. Those ill with typhus or those individuals yet to fall ill are to be immediately removed from the Gypsy settlement and with the maintenance of the strictest of protective care measures be taken to the townships epidemic hospitals, from which they can only be released and return home after complete recovery, appropriately disinfected, with a completely clean person and clothing and lice free. Mezőberény's two public health doctors are to personally inspect the Gypsy settlements daily for the purpose of discovering any new illness and to personally direct the disinfection and delousing efforts and to continuously supervise them* (Kereskényiné 2008: 113-114)

This was far from the end of the directives coming from the Ministry of Public Health and

Employment. They noted that Mezőberény's leadership had sent reports to the district's high sheriff about the inspection of the Gypsy settlements, but had not in fact executed these nor had they reported the suspected cases of typhus. The ministry demanded that in light of the situation that had evolved and the omissions made, the royal county's deputy lord lieutenant prosecute those responsible and to exact the strictest sentences (Kereskényiné 2008: 114). The case proceeded and the gendarmerie placed the Gypsy settlements under quarantine and Mezőberény's managing doctor was put on trial. During the trial, it came to light that the doctor had not personally seen to the inspection of the Gypsy settlements, but had entrusted it to the police medical officer. Once, upon receiving a decree cornering typhus, he tore it up in front of the police medical officer with the cry *I'm not a lice keeper!* When the district public health inspector made his on-site examination, the managing doctor effectively refused any cooperation (Kereskényiné 2008: 115-118).

Following the Great War the *wandering Gypsy* issue kept resurfacing regularly. The Ministry of the Interior decree number 15.000/1916 concerning the settlement, public order and public health regulation of the *wandering Gypsies* remained in effect and acted as a type of directive for decades. This was despite the fact that it was intended as a crisis measure during the First World War (Mezey 1986: 183-191; Hajnáczy 2019; Anon 1921b). In 1924 the *Csendőrségi Lapok* was refounded and it seemed that almost every second edition had a shorter or longer article or a paragraph written about the *wandering Gypsies*. A gendarme lieutenant gave his opinion of the topicality of the issue in an article stating, *The Hungarian government tried years ago to force the Gypsies to settle, which we are sad to say has only been partly successful...* (Kubay 1925: 42). A retired gendarme captain did point out that since the Trianon peace dictate strict new border controls are in place and the number of wandering Gypsies had decreased significantly, nonetheless he encouraged the armed authorities to be ever vigilant regarding the Gypsies, *Do not forget that they may return and grow in number* (Gergely 1925: 66). Another retired gendarme captain was more pessimistic and said that the situation in Hungary had not improved at all with Hungary being cut into a smaller state, *<...> There is no way that the Gypsy activities threatening public security have decreased on the territory of a mutilated Hun-*

gary compared to the period of peace, whether we look at the number of Gypsies or the seriousness of the crimes they commit (Gergely 1927: 125). Several gendarme officers reinforced the latter thoughts and during a discussion of an investigation stated confidently, *Without a doubt some are of the opinion that the Gypsy issue is no longer a problem for them and that intense occupation with them is not timely. However, we see that it is still a timely question and we are of the opinion that it will be for a long time* (Dorich et al. 1926: 430). One of the authors for the *Csendőrségi Lapok* made an attempt to group Gypsies, for which he took their residence as a fundamental axis (Tabl. 1).

The city leadership of Esztergom resolved to settle the *wandering Gypsies* in 1918, following the ministry of the interior decree 15.000/1916. The question resulted in heated debate at the town assembly, some stating that the plot of land to be allotted is not suited for the creation of a Gypsy settlement. The reasoning was that the land to be granted lay next to a path taken by livestock going to pasture, and that the creation of a Gypsy settlement would pose the threat of epidemic to the livestock. The *wandering Gypsies* were finally settled, but during the 1920s the Gypsy settlements were regularly moved about, for varying reasons. The *wandering Gypsies* were first settled next to the Danube embankment, but after claims that they had damaged the embankment, they were moved next to the Pilismarót ferry station. They could not remain there either as several town representatives judged their proximity to the ferry station to be a

threat to both the health of livestock and fire prevention (Miklós 2019: 337-338). Not everybody present at the meeting shared this opinion and one of the representatives argued in favour of the previous settlement decision thus, *Gypsies can only be settled in a location from which they can be easily supervised, their disinfection should be done weekly, but social reasons and those of public security require that the Gypsies be close to the city and supervisable and this present location best suits these requirements. The area of Szentgyörgymező next to the slaughterhouse and near to the cemetery was unfit as the Gypsies would have burnt all the wooden crosses and had their animals graze in the cemetery which is a desecration* (Miklós 2019: 338). There was a lot of self interest behind the speakers and their suggestions, as the representatives tried to ensure that the Gypsy settlement be the farthest from their constituency. The question arose again and again at town council meetings until Esztergom's leadership were able to reach a decision. They were settled again next to the Danube, now on the site of the former animal carcass disposal site (Miklós 2019: 338-339). The town leadership of Hajdúböszörmény also resettled the Gypsies from the edges of the town, citing their proximity to the cemetery, *The Gypsies of Varjas pit, as it lies neighbouring the Eastern cemetery, have caused much harm to the cemetery with the cutting down of trees and the removal of dried out trees, in fact with the former have committed desecration. In addition to this they have caused significant harm in those areas of the cemetery made use of for small*

Table 1. The grouping of the Hungarian Gypsies in the columns of the *Csendőrségi Lapok* (Strigonius 1924: 1-3)

Gypsy grouping	Characteristic residence	Possible crimes	Gendarmerie measures taken
Settled Gypsies	Have a permanent residence, living on the peripheries of towns in mud huts or tents	Theft, fortune telling, potion concoction, hiding Gypsy suspects from the authorities	Constant gendarmerie surveillance, identification after leaving place of residence
Gypsies residing for a longer period in one area	Settling in one area for weeks or months due to working at some mobile craft	Theft, hiding Gypsy suspects from the authorities	Constant gendarmerie surveillance, identification after leaving place of residence
Wandering Gypsies	Wandering from village to village in wagons	Theft, fortune telling, robbery, murder, hiding wares and livestock stolen by other Gypsy caravans from the authorities	Heightened, constant gendarmerie surveillance, expulsion from the area under the authority of the gendarmerie post

gardens and vegetables, etc. (Mónus 1998: 33). In this move, they also resettled the Gypsies living dispersed across the town into the newly created Gypsy settlement. One of the motivations behind this series of measures was the urging of the chief medical officer of the royal county and reasons of public health. They thought that if the Gypsies were moved to one location then their disinfection and the prevention of typhus epidemics would be easier (Balogh 1937: 213-215). However, the resettlement did not bring about the expected results. The city leadership provided no help with the construction of housing for the Gypsies, who then recreated the squalid conditions they had lived in previously (Mónus 1998: 34-35). In an attempt to handle the social and public health problems caused by the Gypsy settlement, the medical officer responsible recommended the elimination of the settlement and its replacement with new houses, he imagined the following, *the demolition of all shacks without proper roofs and roof support and the construction of new buildings with the materials (beams, duab) provided by the city – the construction of out houses – the proper maintenance of wells, their repair and covering with roofs – the allocation of enough wood that the Gypsies themselves can patch together beds – the removal of waste and other trash* (Gyergyói 1990: 95-96). There were cases where the city leadership judged the settlement of *wandering Gypsies* to be a success, such as in Kaposvár. The Gypsies received land in exchange for working ten days a year for the city, and they cooperated with this measure (Csóti 2009: 99).

The relocation of Gypsy settlements often met with the vehement protest of the non-Gypsy residency. In the town of Vésztő in Békés county in 1914, the Gypsies were moved next to the location known as the Nagy Sándor area, one populated by non-Gypsies. After about a decade and a half the residents of the Nagy Sándor area, eighty-five signatories, signed a petition addressed to the town's representatives demanding the immediate resettlement of the Gypsy settlement. The local authorities rejected their petition claiming that there was no other area of land to relocate the Gypsy settlement to, and rejected the idea of moving the children to a location distant from their schools (Kereskényiné 2008: 125-127). The residents of the Nagy Sándor area were not to be deterred by the decision of the chief notary, they composed another appeal, which was signed by seventy inhabitants and addressed directly to the deputy lord lieutenant of the roy-

al county of Békés. They listed seven complaints against the Gypsies residing next to them. First, among these, was that the trench that served to drain the groundwater had been blocked by waste from Gypsy settlements residents, and therefore the road next to this ditch had turned into a sea of mud. They went on to complain of the Gypsy residents collecting the carcasses of dead animals, parts of which were then carried about by dogs and brought the threat of disease and epidemic to domestic animals in the area. In addition to being a threat to the health of livestock in the area, they wrote of the danger to their own health, *The immediate proximity of the settlement is a danger to our health. The settlement consists of 30 or 32 huts, which all lie on about half an acre of land, there is no out-house, all the waste, human feces and animal carcasses, are thrown out to rot and completely infect the soil* (Kereskényiné 2008: 126). They also called attention to the threat of fire posed by the Gypsy settlement to those living in the area, as the huts did not have chimneys and their roofs were very flammable. They gave the example of several huts in this slum catching fire in the recent past, one of which burnt to the ground together with its owner. It was not only the fires burning in the shacks and the threat they posed that bothered the non-Gypsy residents, but that the smoke often drifted into and filled their yards. In concluding that the Gypsy settlement next door had caused significant financial loss to them, *We leave for last the damage caused to the value of our property due to the locating of the Gypsy settlement here. Our area was constructed in 1904, and was a quiet, peaceful place of residence, until 1914, when the Gypsy settlement was located here. For the reasons listed above there is such a bad reputation that we are unable to sell and escape from the bad neighbors forced upon us without financial loss* (Kereskényiné 2008: 126).

It was not only the inability to relocate the *wandering Gypsies* that caused a headache for the town leaders, but when Gypsies wished to settle in a town of their own free will. In the town of Vésztő in the royal county of Békés, in the early 1920's, *wandering Gypsies* arrived and with the complete exclusion of the authorities bought land in the area of the town known as Komlódifalva for two-three hundred kilograms of wheat. The Gypsies would have been unable to purchase this land legally as the town leadership had forbidden their sale for a decade in order to ensure land for impoverished World War One veterans from Vésztő (Kereskény-

iné 2008: 119). The town leaders took exception to the illegal acquisition of the land by the *wandering Gypsies*, in addition to criticising the lifestyle of the Gypsies which caused discontent among the local residents, *They build huts, and constantly commit animal health and agricultural ordinance infractions, and are the horrors of the area, and of the other residents of komlódfalva, who have asked for their removal on several occasions, and who raise a complaint of them day after day, mainly that day and night hosts of wandering Gypsies visit them, who steal their horses, and then have them graze in gardens without fences, and are afraid to confront these frightening individuals capable of all evil* (Kereskényiné 2008: 119). The newly settled Gypsies, after being confronted with the fact that the ownership of land requires an official permit, submitted an appeal to the town council which rejected it based on the above cited reasons. The Gypsies turned to a lawyer and appealed the decision but the town leadership again rejected the purchase permit and decided to expel the Gypsies from the town (Kereskényiné 2008: 119). Many non-Gypsy town residents were not only afraid of wandering Gypsies striking up residence, but also angered by the idea of the Gypsies already living in settlements on the peripheries of towns moving into more central areas. This is well illustrated in the “Questions and Answers” column of the *Magyar Közigazgatás*, a section devoted to clarifying questions frequently arising in daily administrative practice. A village notary wrote to the journal’s column and asked for advice, *A few Gypsy families have lived in our town for years now; they have their own houses, trade in horses and no serious complaints against their morality. One of them bought land and wants to build. Several residents have protested against this and do not want to tolerate the moving in and house construction of a Gypsy. It is mainly the neighbours in question that protest and have called an extraordinary town council meeting, at which they made a proposal in this case. Is there some sort of regulation which could serve as a compass and what is a notary’s responsibility in such a case?* (Anon. 1921a: 4). The editorial board of the weekly *Magyar Közigazgatás* replied and reiterated the relevant laws that, *Residents of a town upon their own property, remaining in adherence to construction regulations, may freely build. The town’s council cannot prohibit such an action* (Anon. 1921a: 4).

The Ministry of the Interior resolution number 15.000/1916, was composed during the First World War and remained in effect even in the second

half of the 1920s. In the Ministry of the Interior’s *Csendőrségi Közlöny*, it was in fact republished together with the later amendments in order to better inform the gendarmerie⁹. Nonetheless the desire for complex legal regulations concerning the *wandering Gypsy issue* became a popular topic in the columns of *Magyar Közigazgatás*, those in authority argue for the promulgation of a new decree and evaluated the execution of the previous directives thus:

During the war, when the minister of the interior János Sándor issued Min. of Int. no. 15.000/1916 for a census of the Gypsies and with this he took a very important step. Naturally the measures of the time took into account the extraordinary conditions, when in most families only women and children were at home and so wandering Gypsies were free to breach the peace. Data from the second census had arrived, but were routinely not processed and the results of this census remain unknown. More than ten years have passed since the promulgation of this directive, and one which remains unexecuted in many respects, but since then the conditions have significantly changed and newer regulations of the extraordinarily difficult question are again necessary. It is pointless to further explain what wandering Gypsies mean for the authorities and the population. It is maybe only the “children of the Pharaoh” who try to absent themselves from all work, strong men, able bodied women waste their lives begging, take their children out of school, and then send them to beg. In fact, the wandering Gypsy when not noticed will “lift” whatever he may find while begging. Let us not think that there are no wandering Gypsies in our maimed homeland. We can read of their wanton acts every day, therefore there is a great need for effective regulations to prevent the marauding of wandering Gypsies (Anon. 1928: 19-26).

The Minister of the Interior asked the royal counties for their suggestions (Purcsi 2004: 24-27) and issued the circular decree no. 257.000/1928 in 1928, on *the more effective regulating and mandating a new data collection of the wandering Gypsies*. The resolution was meant to be temporary while the competent authorities collected the necessary data and composed the final public order and public health regulations for the *wandering Gypsies*. The circular decree prescribed the earliest possible apprehension of *wandering Gypsies* by the armed authorities. Those having an address in Hungary were to be escorted to their homes in Hungary, while those arriving from outside the borders were

to be expelled. Wandering Gypsies were forbidden from entering the cities for reasons of public and animal health, and the competent armed authorities were required to provide data on the *wandering Gypsies* to be found in their territory. It called renewed attention to the public order regulations of resolution no. 15.000/1916 which remained in effect. For questions concerning public health, the Ministry of Public Health and Employment directives no. 53.088/1923 and 114.464/1923 were to be followed¹⁰.

Together, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Trade issued a decree dealing with wandering trades, in part to attempt to limit *wandering Gypsies* to one location. In the early 1920s, the issue appeared in the weekly paper *Magyar Közigazgatás* and the dealing with this question was thought to be long overdue, as the last regulations came from the late 19th century. According to the law, a Gypsy could conduct a wandering trade without a trade licence if he had identification issued by the police authorities, which proved his personal identity and lack of a criminal record. One question asking for clarification of the decree was *Can a settled, not wandering Gypsy, Gypsy smith or coppersmith, etc. work without having a trade licence or trade identification?* (Anon. 1924: 5) The editors of the paper gave the following explanation, admitting that they themselves were unsure of their position, *We were unable to decidedly ascertain if the III degree trade authority would maintain this legal practice today, though we do believe so. Though reasons of fairness are very much in favour of Gypsies who have settled, that is to say are under constant supervision not be at a disadvantage to those who continue to wander* (Anon. 1924: 5). Shortly following, the minister of trade in agreement with the minister of the interior issued Ministry of Trade decree number 71.103/1925 about the *practice of wandering trades*. They meant their resolution to be temporary until they created more thorough regulations concerning the issue. The decree did not name Gypsies, but handled all wandering tradesmen equally, people such as the window makers, wire tinkers, picture framers, pot menders and tub cutters. Those under state care, with an infectious illness, under police supervision or with a criminal record were not eligible for a wandering trade permit. Those able to acquire a wandering trade permit were given a photographic identification allowing them to ply their craft throughout the country. They were not permitted to have an apprentice and were

only allowed to practice the trade for which the licence had been issued in their official papers. Furthermore, cities could freely determine if at all, or where in their territory and when wandering trades could be plied¹¹.

Notes

¹ A m. kir. népjóléti és munkaügyi miniszternek 10.715/1923. N. M. M. számú körrendelete a kiütéses typhus ellen való védekezés tárgyában. In: Népegészségügy, 1923. Vol. 4, No. 6, p. 109-110.

² A m. kir. népjóléti és munkaügyi miniszter 53.088/1923. N. M. M. számú körrendelete a kóbor cigánynak kiütéses typhus és ruhatetvesség szempontjából való megvizsgálása tárgyában. In: Népegészségügy, 1923. Vol. 4, No. 13-14, p. 396-397.

³ Ibid. 396-397.

⁴ A m. kir. népjóléti és munkaügyi miniszter 114.464/1923. N. M. M. számú körrendelete a kiütéses typhus ellen való védekezés tárgyában. In: Népegészségügy, 1923. Vol. 4, No. 23, p. 656.

⁵ Ibid. 656-657.

⁶ A m. kir. népjóléti és munkaügyi miniszter 1924. évi 47.083. számú rendelete, a kiütéses typhus elleni védekezésről. In: Magyarországi Rendeletkötet Tára 1924. Budapest: Magyar Királyi Belügyminisztérium, 1925. p. 935.

⁷ Ibid. 935-936.

⁸ A m. kir. népjóléti és munkaügyi miniszternek 144.585/1924. N. M. M. számú rendelete. A kiütéses typhus elleni védekezés. In: Belügyi Közlöny, 1924. Vol. 30, No. 3, p. 45-46.

⁹ 2366/Res. VI-b 1927. számú belügyministeri körrendelet. Kóborcigányok ellenőrzése és nyilvántartásba vétele. In: Csendőrségi Közlöny, 1927. Vol. 12, No. 20, p. 218-222.

¹⁰ A m. kir. belügyminiszter 1928. évi 257.000. B. M. számú körrendelete, a kóborcigányok hatékonyabb megrendszabályozásáról és újabb adatgyűjtés elrendeléséről. In: Magyarországi Rendeletkötet Tára 1928. Budapest: Magyar Királyi Belügyminisztérium, 1929, p. 1025-1027.

¹¹ A m. kir. kereskedelemügyi miniszter 1925. évi 71.103. számú rendelete, a vándoriparok gyakorlásáról. Magyarországi Rendeletkötet Tára 1925. Budapest: Magyar Királyi Belügyminisztérium, 1926, p. 533-536.

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