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Article

Hungarian Gypsy Musician’s National Association: Battles Faced by Gypsy Musicians in Hungary during the Interwar Years

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Abstract

The governments of the Horthy era did not formulate a central Gypsy policy and, consequently, the so-called ‘Gypsy issue’ fell fully into the hands of the assigned ministries and local authorities. The public authorities acted at their own discretion: Largely, they acted according to their basic tasks and understanding, or simply ignored the issue. As a result, the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Welfare and Labour were the decisive authorities in this issue. Mainly law enforcement dealt with travelling Gypsies—a small portion of the estimated one hundred thousand Gypsies living in Hungary—the majority of whom lived in ‘colonies’ and were dealt with as an issue of public health. Regarding Gypsies, the same era is frequently judged by the legal action affecting these travellers and the often criticised measures regulating public security and health. The foundation of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association, which intended to represent the interests of nearly ten thousand Gypsy musicians, somewhat changed the picture that had developed, since the organisation enjoyed the full support of the heads of the Ministry of the Interior and the city of Budapest. Regulations were enacted to protect their interests and initiatives. Behind the patronage, one might note, was that after the Treaty of Trianon Gypsy music became part of irredentist ideology and the revisionist movement, and therefore the interests and claims of the Gypsy musicians fully fitted the age. The topic is very important for social inclusion today because Gypsy music continues to be considered part of Hungarian cultural heritage and thus gives Gypsies work and integration opportunities.

Keywords

cultural heritage; Gypsy association; Gypsy musicians; Hungarian Gypsies; Hungary; interwar period; jazz musicians

Issue

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1. Introduction

During the Horthy period those in political power did not formulate a national Gypsy policy and, thus, the so-called ‘Gypsy question’ was relegated to the competent ministries and into the hands of local authorities. State organs acted as they saw fit, usually acting as per their fundamental mandates and pre-defined legal purview, or by ignoring the question. This situation resulted in the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry for Welfare and Labour becoming the decisive actors in this question (Hajnáczy, 2017, pp. 225–228). The Gypsy population of Hungary was estimated to be one hundred thousand individuals (Cserti Csapó, 2015, p. 444), and among these those characterised as ‘wandering Gypsies’ were

an insignificant number. They were dealt with as a question of public order and security. Most Gypsies lived in Gypsy settlements and were viewed most often as an issue of public health (Hajnáczy, 2018; Karsai, 1992; Miklós, 2017, 2018). In the same period, Gypsies were often judged according to measures that directly concerned them, and as public opinion learned of the (often controversial) decisions made regarding the Gypsies. Their image is somewhat tempered by the creation of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association, re-established in 1935 as the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Federation following its dissolution in 1933. The organisation was created to represent the interest of almost ten thousand Gypsy musicians and enjoyed the full support of the directorate of the Ministry of the

Interior and the city of Budapest, where decrees were promulgated in their favour and helped further their initiatives. Behind this gallant support may have lain the fact that Gypsy music became part of irredentist ideology and revisionist action following the peace treaty of Trianon, and thus the interests of the Gypsy musicians were completely compatible with the spirit of the age (Zipernovszky, 2017). The Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association explicitly took on this patriotic role, as illustrated through its joining the Revisionist League ("Újabb csatlakozások a Revíziós Ligához," 1929, p. 5), declaring its admiration for Mussolini ("Zeneiskolánk," 1929, p. 14) and Lord Rothermere and its statements of unity with the Hungarian nation ("Felhívás," 1929, p. 17). Until recently there has only been fragmented data concerning the workings of this organisation, its effect on the situation of Gypsy musicians and its relationship with the authorities. The reason for this may have been that the focus was on the previously mentioned decrees issued in their favour and that no real records of this national organisation are to be found in the archives. However, the numerous press sources do provide an insight into the history of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association (Hajnáczy, 2019, pp. 9–12).

2. A Gypsy Musician Can Only Be a Musician Who is a Gypsy: The Establishment of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association and the Modification of Statutes

Gypsy musicians moved from the Hungarian Folk Musicians' National Association (Sárosi, 2012, p. 15), disbanded in 1918, into the National Hungarian Musicians' Federation as a faculty of folk musicians. They soon left this organisation in order to establish their own, which they named the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association ("Huszonöt év története," 1926, p. 9; "A magyar nóta a leghatalmasabb irredenta fegyver," 1926, p. 9). In its early years, the newly founded association was unable to achieve any significant goals, though it did protest on account of the tragic financial situation of the Gypsy musicians ("A Cigányzenészek a jazz band-ek ellen," 1922, p. 12). It would take a few more years before they were able to bring about effective change.

The first fateful general meeting and official election was in March 1923 and took place amid an air of tension and discord, as the members of the association had broken into two factions. The factions had spent the weeks before the meeting conferring long into the night among themselves as to what was to be done, all the while spying on the other faction's tactical moves and planning. One of the groups reassured the leadership of their unwavering support, while the other faction voiced their great dissatisfaction and criticised Gypsy musicians' financial situation and their inability to improve it. The president at the time acknowledged these criticisms; nonetheless, he most assertively pointed out that this disorganisation was a factor that prevented

any unified representation of interests when negotiating with hotel and coffee house proprietors ("Viharba fúlt a cigányok elnökválasztó közgyűlése," 1923, p. 2; "Viharosnak ígérkezik a cigányzenészek mai közgyűlése," 1923, p. 4). Despite the discontent, the existing leadership was able to remain in power, which may be due, in large part, to their following declaration:

According to the speaker, people with other occupations, former actors, stand at the head of orchestras and thus take away the Gypsies bread winnings. These gentlemen could earn their bread by other means, but the Gypsy only has his violin with which to make a living. It is for this reason that the leadership turns to the chief captaincy that they only grant work permits to those who are members of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association. ("Viharba fúlt a cigányok elnökválasztó közgyűlése," 1923, p. 2)

The association's proposal went as far as the Minister of the Interior, where it received significant support. The association amended its statutes in August and along with other items included the following paragraph: "Only those Hungarian Gypsy musicians may work within the territory of Hungary who are full members of the association" (Nagy, 2011, p. 248). The modified statutes were approved by the competent ministry the following month with decree number 147.173/1923 of the Ministry of the Interior (Nagy, 2011, pp. 248–253).

In addition to this important paragraph, the newly published statutes defined the aims, organisation and modes of operation of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association, as well as the rights and responsibilities of its members. Its dissolution could only be ordered by the Ministry of the Interior, in such cases as when the association were to "abandon its national and Christian foundations," (Nagy, 2011, p. 252) ignore the goals encoded in its statutes, or commit financial improprieties. The language of the association was given as Hungarian and its primary goals were defined as the following:

The aims of the association: To promote the material, moral and intellectual interests of its members, according to Christian principles, and provide legal protection for these. Through the reciprocal support of the members the attainment of better working conditions and protection of acquired rights, based on national and Christian principles, with the exclusion of political and religious debates. To limit, with the support of the Royal Hungarian Ministry of the Interior, the operation of uninvited musicians and those arriving from foreign lands. (Nagy, 2011, p. 248)

A further step was the establishment of a retirement fund, sometime in the future, for its members, in addition to providing aid in case of injury or illness and care for the funeral expenses of the association's members and their family. It stated as further tasks assisting in

finding employment for its members and publishing an official journal; there were to be celebrations and concerts to help partially finance the previously listed funds (Hajnáczy, 2019, pp. 167–178).

The statutes of the association made it its primary goal to found local groups, to support grass roots initiatives and to help their official registration. These measures were made the responsibility of the Board of Directors. A newly created group could be registered if it had at least thirty members and accepted the statutes and agenda of the association, in addition to agreeing to surrendering 80 percent of their membership fees. The organisational structure of the local groups was to mirror that of the central organisation, though it would be smaller (Nagy, 2011, pp. 248–252).

3. Battling with Foreigners and Amateurs: The Circular Decree of the Ministry of the Interior No. 137.000/1926

The remarks made at the January 1925 general meeting of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association very obviously illustrate that the amendment of the statutes (Nagy, 2011, pp. 248–253) far from solved the burning issues of the significant majority of Gypsy musicians. The atmosphere of the meeting was only further ignited by the motion of the chief secretary that Gypsy musicians' associations accepted members who were not Gypsies and had professions other than in music. In reply to the motion of the chief secretary, the secretary of the Debrecen local group gave an enraged speech, stating that such a move would take work from two-thirds of Gypsy musicians ("Tízezer cigányzenész kenyere veszélyben," 1925, p. 4). The representative from Győr agreed with these words and attacked the admittance of "amateurish musicians" ("Tízezer cigányzenész kenyere veszélyben," 1925, p. 4). The vice president of the Szolnok local group dismissed these as "musical illiterates," ("Tízezer cigányzenész kenyere veszélyben," 1925, p. 4) and stressed that only Gypsies could be allowed membership in the association. The president of the Debrecen local group spoke of the poverty afflicting Gypsy musicians and also reported the "piracy of the peasant wind bands" ("Tízezer cigányzenész kenyere veszélyben," 1925, p. 4). At the end of the meeting, the leaders of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association decided that, together with the presidents of the local groups, they would approach the Minister of the Interior and write a letter to the National Hungarian Musicians' Federation stating that "amateur musicians" were not to be admitted to either of the organisations ("Tízezer cigányzenész kenyere veszélyben," 1925, p. 4).

The prospects of the Gypsy musicians were made even more dismal with the explosion in popularity and spread of jazz music, which pushed them further to the side. Audiences and coffee house customers thirsted for the new music, though columns appeared one after another in national and local newspapers complaining of

the neglect of Gypsy musicians in favour of jazz music, calling attention to their subsequent beggarly fate (Sárosi, 2012, pp. 189, 199, 201, 205). The association did not sit idly by: It composed an interpolation to the Minister of the Interior requesting protection of their interests in the face of jazz music arriving from abroad and from Schrammel bands, demanding they be deported from the country ("A cigányzenészek sérelmei," 1925, p. 11; "Ravatalra viszik a magyar nótát," 1924, p. 9).

The interpolation from the Gypsy musicians to the Minister of the Interior did not go unanswered and the following year the Ministry issued circular decree number 137.000/1926 concerning the official work permit for professional musicians, which in effect meant the expulsion of foreign musicians ("A m. kir. belügyminiszter 137.000/1926 számú körrendelete," 1926, p. 1). The decree stated that the primary reason for the measure was "of public safety and general public order" ("A m. kir. belügyminiszter 137.000/1926 számú körrendelete," 1926, p. 1). In order that, in cities with a proper council and cities with legal authority, only those with a legal permit be allowed to perform music. A work permit could only be granted to those who were Hungarian citizens, committed patriots, over eighteen years old and had substantive musical knowledge. The competent police authority granted the permit to nationals, while musicians from abroad could only receive a permit from the Ministry of the Interior, the work permit being included in their residence permit. The decree further stipulated that a work permit could only be granted to members of the National Hungarian Musicians' Federation or the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association. If anyone were to perform without official permission, they could incur up to fifteen days incarceration and a fine up to one million Crowns. The decree did not restrict the work of musicians who had graduated from music academies and orchestras belonging to official bodies, institution or organisation ("A m. kir. belügyminiszter 137.000/1926 számú körrendelete" 1926, p. 1).

4. Battling with Jazz Bands Performing in Hungary: The Support of the Capital City and the Foundation of the Bihari Music School

The Ministry of the Interior circular decree restricting foreign jazz musicians did not lead to the end of complaints from Gypsy musicians, as their earnings hardly increased. This can partially explain their refusal to pay membership dues. In fact, those elements of the press who took up the cause for Gypsy musicians continued to pour forth more and more articles condemning jazz music and in an increasingly vitriolic style ("A cigányzenészeket meg kell védelmezni," 1927, p. 8; "Irtsuk ki a jazz-band-et," 1927, p. 13; "Olyan a jazz-band mint a járvány," 1927, p. 8; Sárosi, 2012, pp. 231–234). One of the daily papers interviewed the honorary president of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians' National Association, who gave vent to the seemingly unstoppable growing popularity of jazz music:

I deeply regret that here, in our Hungary, in the Hungarian capital, this alcoholic music has been able to so spread, it is so full of infectious bacteria. It is like an epidemic, like sickness, we can hardly wait for it to end....We ask the highest forums to take into account today's difficult and sorry state and come to the aid of Gypsy music caught in the vortex of this scourge. ("Olyan a jazz-band mint a járvány," 1927, p. 8)

In September 1927, the association called together several general meetings with other organisations and resolved again to appeal to the Minister of the Interior to forbid jazz bands spreading in Hungary ("A cigányzenészeket meg kell védelmezni," 1927, p. 8; "Cigányok a jazzband ellen," 1927, p. 8). This time though, the interpolation of the Gypsy musicians did not find a favourable reception from the Ministry of the Interior, and their situation became all the more desperate as opportunities for Gypsy musicians aboard narrowed. Austria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Switzerland completely closed their doors before Hungarian Gypsy musicians. The Gypsy musicians' association was unable to turn to the National Hungarian Music Federation for mediation with its desire to ban jazz, as the latter also represented Hungarian jazz musicians ("Egyórás vitám a cigányok elnökével a dzseszbenről," 1928, p. 8). Therefore, they began to turn to other forums in order to further their cause ("Cigányzene lesz a külföldi magyar borházakban," 1929, p. 10).

In June 1928 the association submitted an interpolation to the Theatre Affairs Committee of Budapest asking that they ban jazz bands from the hospitality venues and institutions they rented from the capital city (such as the Budapest Zoological and Botanical Gardens, or the Gellért Hotel's restaurant) or of which they are the proprietor. The councillor of the capital city told the press, in connection with the proposal of the association, that if the Theatre Affairs Committee were to pass the request the leadership of the city would also agree. He further explained that the contracts in effect could not be modified, however, in future contracts, they would stipulate that the renters only be permitted to employ Gypsy orchestras ("A Petőfi Társaság érdekes beadványa a bizottsághoz," 1928, p. 12; "A Petőfi Társaság síkra szállt a külföldi művész-vendégszereplések ellen," 1928, p. 7). At the meeting of the Theatre Affairs Committee the interpolation of the Gypsy musicians' association was unanimously supported by the legislators ("A főváros intézményeinél tilos lesz a jazz," 1928, p. 5; "Tilos a 'fekete zene' a főváros intézményeinél," 1928, p. 8), and the press reported that the request had been granted for the following reasons:

One of the city fathers claimed it to be his moral responsibility to defend [the city] against 'black music;' another city father, renowned for his purifying tendencies, was likewise up in arms against the outrage which is [the] morally corrupting negro music. He

mentioned prestigious musical authorities who had established that 'jazz is not music but clatter.' The invasion of jazz and negroes is 'musical destruction,' according to him, and a 'result of the world war,' which the 'forces of the entente had left behind in Europe together with other germs. ("Tilos a 'fekete zene' a főváros intézményeinél," 1928, p. 8)

Károly Bura was elected the new president of the Hungarian Gypsy Musician's National Association and in his inaugural speech he spoke of the inadequacies of the training of Gypsy musicians, a field he thought would be a milestone in the battle against the spread of jazz music. He stated:

We wish to care for the conditions for cultural progress too. To this aim we will soon establish a music school to serve the training of the new generation. We have received a promise that the outstanding talents graduating there will find a path to higher training and the podiums of world success abroad. Only trained Gypsy musicians can regain all that fashionable musical trends have taken from us, and only Gypsy music will be able to conjure up again a renaissance of Hungarian song and Hungarian tunes. (Bura, 1929, p. 1)

The leadership of the association first tried to have the training of Gypsy musicians at the Music Academy, but they were confronted with rejection, the reasons given being lack of space and the aversion of the teachers to such a task. Another possibility was for music schools to cooperate, but this was quickly rejected as they did not agree to talented Gypsy students taking part in general education alien to Gypsy music. The association also sought opportunities where adult Gypsy musicians could continue their musical education, which was not a possibility at music schools because they did not work with older, more experienced musicians.

After several unsuccessful attempts, the association decided that the founding of an independent music school was necessary ("Zeneiskolánk," 1929, pp. 1–2). Thanks mostly in part to the effective organisational work of János Íllovsky, member of the capital city Municipalities' Committee and honorary president of the association, the Bihari music school opened its doors in September 1929. The intercession of such a high ranking Budapest official helped the institution find a location and financial credit. The first year saw one hundred and sixty individuals apply to the music school, with a teaching staff of sixteen, though only one was of Gypsy decent ("Megnyílt a Bihari zeneiskola," 1929, pp. 3–4). The Bihari music school ensured education for both adults and children for one or two hours a week. Courses on music theory and instruments were part of the curriculum and a low tuition was asked from the students ("Felhívás," 1929, p. 1). A few months after teaching began though, difficulties arose, with students falling be-

hind on paying their tuition. Therefore, the school had to dismiss students who owed tuition (“A Bihari zeneiskola,” 1930, p. 6). Running the Bihari music school required significant effort from the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association, and the following year the general meeting had to be postponed in order that the amount allocated to it be given to the institution (Hajnáczy, 2019, p. 37). Despite the difficulties, the local group in Pápa organised the celebration of Hungarian song and used the income from the event to found the Bihari Music School II where thirty students enrolled (“A pápai helyi csoport II,” 1930, pp. 1–2; “Cigányaink estélye a színházban,” 1930, p. 3).

5. Internal Conflict, Divisive Factions, Counter Organisations: The Collapse of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association and Dissolution of the Local Groups

In May 1930, the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association organised the festival of Hungarian song at the Ferencváros Sport Club’s sports field with the income going to János Illovszky’s Bihari music school, in addition to a proper grave memorial for former president and Gypsy first violinist Béla Radics. Press reports stated that the most famous Gypsy first violinists were to lead a performance of almost one thousand Gypsy musicians (“A magyar nóta ünnepe,” 1930, p. 11; “Ezer cigány—Százegy magyar nóta,” 1930, p. 2; “Ezer muzsikus cigány hangversenye Radics Béla síremlékére,” 1930, p. 9). There was great interest surrounding the event, twenty-two thousand spectators participated and it was attended by many influential and famous individuals (“Huszonkétezer néző a magyar nótaünnepén,” 1930, p. 9).

The audience saw the festival of Hungarian song as a great success, however just as great was the internal division it caused in the background within the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association. The event’s chief organiser was the honorary president and founder of the music school, János Ilovszky, who the association’s president Károly Bura accused of embezzlement. It later came to light that the reasons for the accusation was Károly Bura’s name simply being listed among the rest of the first violinists on the event poster and not in a distinguished place and in bold lettering. This misunderstanding spiralled into a rivalry that became apparent at the next general meeting. The association broke into two factions, the opposition demanding the dismissal of the slandering president Bura, who stopped the meeting and left in a fury, and resigned only to rescind his own resignation the next day (“A magyar nótaünnep,” 1930, p. 15; “Bura Károly lemondott,” 1930, p. 7). Police presence became necessary at the meetings which, due to the vehemence of the quarrels, had to be adjourned again and again (“Botrányos cigánygyűlés Budapesten,” 1930, p. 13; “Bura Károly faképnél hagyta az elnökválasztó cigánygyűlést,” 1930, p. 6).

The Ministry of the Interior put an end to the internal conflicts of the association. An extraordinary general meeting was convened in August 1930, presided over by a ministerial secretary and at which the police ensured order. The event was accompanied by great press scrutiny. First to speak was the president of the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association, who repeated his accusation against János Ilovszky and followed this statement by demanding an audit, despite the fact that the matter had been clarified earlier: An accounting of the funds raised by Ilovszky had shown them to have been deposited for months in the account of Károly Bura. The accused János Ilovszky gave the following indignant reply:

We organised the festival of song...to raise a grave memorial to Radics, to be able to provide help to the Bihari music school, and...he began [this] vehement persecution of me, and then when I wanted to reveal the situation he would not let me speak. Is this what I deserve for my selfless and honest work?...I worked with my shirtsleeves rolled up for a month for the Gypsies and the hands I reached out in charity were battered with mud and stones. On St. Stephen’s Day we wanted to organise another festival of song in which all those from abroad could participate. This second festival of song would have been a moral success and, what is more, a serious financial one. (“A cigányzenészek kibuktatták Bura Károlyt az elnöki székből,” 1930, p. 56)

After the audience heard this speech, they gave voice to their dissatisfaction against Károly Bura. They accused him of not standing up for Gypsy interests on several occasions, such as the wrongful dismissal of a lawyer for the association in order to increase his own authority. In light of this, the ministerial secretary presiding over the meeting pushed for a vote of non-confidence. The votes were decidedly in favour of dismissing Károly Bura. The newly elected president then asked János Ilovszky to continue to fill the post of honorary president (“A cigányzenészek kibuktatták Bura Károlyt az elnöki székből,” 1930, pp. 56–57).

During this time the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association decided to take numerous measures, amongst which was a plan to solve the question of insurance for sick and unemployable members. They wanted to make it more reliable than other initiatives, as their plan was to include the National Social Security Institute (“Magyar Imre lett a Cigányzenészek Szövetségének elnöke,” 1932, p. 11). Furthermore, they wanted to settle contracts between hospitality institutions and Gypsy orchestras for the benefit and interest of both (“A Magyar Cigányzenészek Országos Egyesülete szakmáink tagjaihoz,” 1930, p. 3). They were also able to achieve the cancellation of the work permits of those Gypsies who did not pay their membership fees (“Cigányzenészek működési engedélye,” 1931,

p. 4). The organisation once again sent emissaries to the Ministry of the Interior to ask that coffee houses and restaurants be made to provide Gypsy performances at least half of the time and that those hospitality institutions employing Gypsy orchestras receive a tax benefit (“Cigányzenészek a cigányzenéért,” 1932, p. 7). The Ministry did not accept the proposal, though it did help create better conditions for Gypsy musicians indirectly through the modification of circular decree number 137.000/1926. This was thought necessary due to misunderstandings concerning regional authority. The decree prescribed work permits from the legal authorities in towns with proper councils and in cities. However, Ministry of the Interior circular decree number 118,494/1932 prescribed that in towns with a population exceeding ten thousand, musical performances were permitted by the legal authorities, which provided greater opportunities for professional musicians (Hajnáczy, 2019, pp. 186–187). The restriction of jazz music was again on the agenda and this time an attempt was made to create an alliance with the chief police captaincy (“A Magyar Cigányzenész Szövetség az idegen zenészek ellen,” 1932, p. 7; “A pusztuló magyar cigányság a főkapitány segítségét kéri,” 1933, p. 5). The Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association made enemies in the radio in the interest of Gypsy musicians, feeling that the honorarium paid for the broadcasts from coffee houses was too little; there were locations where they refused to play in protest, but the radio removed Gypsy music from its broadcasting schedule in response (“A cigányzenészek be akarják szüntetni a kávéházból,” 1932, p. 9; “A cigányzenészek és a rádió között kiélesedett a harc,” 1932, p. 5)

The Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association had noticeably lost much of its capability to represent Gypsy musicians’ interests. Internal conflicts, uncollectible membership fees, the cessation of local groups all meant the end of the organisation. Previous measures taken by the Gypsy musicians were not able to change this and the support of the authorities also dissipated. Officially the Ministry of the Interior proclaimed the dissolution of the association and its local groups with circular decree number 145.799/1933. It stated:

The local authority called to supervise together with the president of the association do ascertain...that the association has been unable to operate according to its statutes for a longer period of time, it has no offices, the members are scattered and inactive and thus a general meeting is unable to resolve the dissolution of the association. (Pomogyi, 1995, p. 177)

Following the issuing of the decree the various authorities dissolved the local groups, the majority of which had no assets (Hajnáczy, 2019, p. 44; Kereskényiné Cseh, 2008, p. 128) or had not been in operation for several years (Hajnáczy, 2019, p. 44; Pomogyi, 1995, p. 177). Following the dissolution of the association the Ministry

of the Interior modified decree number 137.00/1926, which hitherto prescribed that the approval of the association was necessary in order to issue a work permit to a Gypsy musician. Since this modification took place, the same work permit was issued under the following conditions:

The work permit to be issued to the Gypsy musician does not depend on any proof of associative membership, and his musical knowledge is to be vouched for by the Gypsy first violinist employing him, or the written certification of two Gypsy musicians having work permits. (“A Magyar Cigányzenészek Országos Egyesületének feloszlásával kapcsolatban,” 1934, p. 488)

6. Conclusion

The early twentieth century found the Gypsy musicians struggling with serious existential challenges and drifting towards the fringes of society. In 1918, they founded the Hungarian Gypsy Musicians’ National Association in order to further their “material, moral and intellectual” (Nagy, 2011, p. 248) interests with unified strength. During the interwar years, the association was characterised by constant conflict, at first with its competitors for the musical stage, later warping into fights for leadership and then, finally, between members and along the fault lines and layers of Gypsy music society. In these decades the target of attack became more and more the Gypsy musicians themselves, and the organisation served as the root of the conflicts, consumed in itself and unable to fulfil its mandate. The authorities played a decisive role in the battle of the Gypsy musicians, most of the time acting in support of the latter, trying to smooth over the internal tensions of the movement.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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