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Citation to *this* Version: Niessen, James P.. *The Culture of Welcome and the January, 1957 Austrian Refugee Quota Proposal*, 2016. Retrieved from [doi:10.7282/T3SX6GFF](https://doi.org/10.7282/T3SX6GFF).



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The Culture of Welcome and the January, 1957 Austrian Refugee Quota Proposal

James P. Niessen
Rutgers University
New Brunswick, NJ USA

As we observe the events of our time, a knowledge of Hungarian history irresistibly invites a comparison of the reception of refugees in 2015 and in 1956. In 1956 the Hungarians were received in many Western countries with compassion and generosity, while more recently the welcome accorded the refugees entering Germany in September 2015 was not widely replicated in other countries. There was as well a contrast in the reception of the idea that countries of resettlement should be guided by quotas for the number of refugees that they would accept.

This comparison inspired my investigation of the reasons for the widespread culture of welcome in 1956, as well as the idea of national quotas for resettlement in that earlier crisis. I must emphasize at the outset that I am not going to undertake a systematic comparison of the earlier and later crisis! But I also want to make explicit at the outset some of the ways that the two situations were radically different:

1. There were 200,000 Hungarian refugees in 1956, versus 1 million refugees in Germany in 2015.
2. The Soviet intervention and then the effective closing of the Hungarian border by early 1957 put a limit to the number; whereas the current refugee crisis is of indeterminate duration.
3. The political and rhetorical context of the Cold War determined the earlier dynamic in a way that was lacking in the current situation.
4. The economic prosperity of the West in the 1950s made it relatively easy to find the refugees jobs.
5. The Hungarian victims of Communism were more popular in the receiving countries than are the diverse Middle Eastern and African victims of ISIS, civil war, and poverty. We don't need to look far for the reasons of this if we consider the culture and religion (or "race") of the refugees, or indeed the Cold War dynamic that predisposed those in the West to sympathize with presumed regime opponents from the East.
6. "Refugee quotas" were largely understood in 1956-57 as numerical targets adopted by the receiving country on a voluntary basis, rather than those stipulated for the receiving countries from outside, and even associated with sanctions, by an international organization. As we will see, in a special exception to this rule the Austrian government did propose a mandatory quota-- but this proposal went nowhere.

We could enumerate other important contrasts. But I want to stop here and move to an examination of the special circumstances and course of events in the Hungarian crisis of 1956.

Hungary looks back today on a history of more than 125 years of emigration. There is consensus among historians that those leaving the Dual Monarchy from the 1870s onward, both Hungarians and other nationalities, were for the most part economically motivated. The most popular emigration destination, the United States, placed very little restriction on in-migration during this period because of the booming economy's demand for an expanding labor force. The widespread phenomenon of reverse migration (perhaps one third of emigrants returned to Hungary at least once) reinforces the economic character of this emigration.¹ In the case of the United States, the immigration legislation of the 1920s interrupted this pattern by restricting the admission of immigrant nationalities to a number (or *quota*)

¹ Julianna Puskás, *Ties that Bind, Ties that Divide: 100 Years of Hungarian Experience in the United State* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000), 18-35.

corresponding to their proportion of the US population in 1910. The precise number for Hungarians fluctuated from 5747 in the law of 1921 to 473 in the 1924 law and 869 in the law of 1927. In any case, by stipulating much smaller admissions than had been the case previously these laws discouraged reverse migration.²

The new laws reflected the resurgence of nativism and restrictionism in the American debate about immigration. The same debate took place in other countries, but with different timing that effectively shifted patterns of immigration from one country to another. Thus the Latin American countries and Australia attracted larger numbers of Hungarians after 1924.

Debates about emigration in Hungary, as the emigrants' country of origin, also reflected competing concepts of ethnic nationalism and economic opportunity. The Hungarian government tended to deplore emigration as a depletion of the nation, but was more tolerant of emigration in economically depressed areas where there was a perceived labor surplus and where the emigrants were non-Hungarians and their departure might help tip the ethnic balance.³ This pattern was hardly restricted to Hungary. Historian Tara Zahra has traced the same contemporary debate in the Austrian half of the Monarchy, and shown that it persisted into the Cold War era. She gives special attention to the rhetorical strategy of emigration opponents, who portrayed emigrants as dupes of unscrupulous transatlantic ticket agents and the capitalist importers of "slave labor." Enticement to emigrate, they argued, would lead to exploitation and poverty rather than prosperity.⁴

The organizational landscape that would deal with the refugee crisis was a product of multiple upheavals in Europe since World War I. The demise of the Russian, German, and Ottoman Empires as well as the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy prompted millions of Russians, Armenians, Jews, and others to flee, primarily toward the West. Fridtjof Nansen as the League of Nations' High Commissioner for Refugees established a role for international organizations in the protection for refugees in the face of a largely inhospitable attitude by the governments of countries to which they fled. The much larger numbers displaced during World War II lacked even this degree of protection.

UNRRA, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration, was established in 1943 to provide humanitarian assistance to victims of the war. There were an estimated 11 to 20 million refugees and internally displaced at the end of the war. UNRRA managed hundreds of camps and the return to their homes of millions of DP's who found themselves in the western half of Europe due to deportation by Germany or flight from approaching Soviet forces. The return home was not a universal desire of all DP's, however, especially in light of Communist takeovers in Eastern Europe. The Soviet Union favored repatriation of persons originating in its sphere of influence, but its Cold War rivals increasingly opposed it, as did the DP's themselves. Resettlement to third countries was not in UNRRA's mandate, however. In the light of this impasse and with the exhaustion of its funding and political capital, UNRRA became increasingly irrelevant after 1947.⁵

The IRO or International Refugee Organization, unlike UNRRA, included resettlement in its charge. It inherited over a half million DP's, and more arrived later. The IRO managed to find new homes and jobs for over a million persons by the end of 1951. But it was unable to find placements for a "hard core" of 175,000 DP's, and the new German states and Austria largely took charge of the remaining German DP's. The US dominated the IRO from the beginning. With the mission of the IRO largely completed, the US took the position that the Marshall Plan would serve to complete the

² Ibid. 190.

³ Ibid., 89-95.

⁴ Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (NY: WW Norton, 2016), especially chapters 1 and 6.

⁵ Michael Robert Marrus, *The Unwanted: European Refugees in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 317-24.

economic integration of DP's in Western Europe. The US thus pulled the plug on the IRO, and the Soviet Union was happy to see its end.⁶ The successor to the IRO was more fully integrated into the reporting and funding structure of the United Nations. The US sought thereby to shift the financial burden of refugee relief to other countries.⁷

The UN created the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees by a General Assembly resolution in December 1950. According to its statute⁸ and subsequent resolutions, the UNHCR's competence includes both resettlement and voluntary repatriation and it reports annually to the General Assembly, and has an advisory committee consisting of representatives of member states. In order to supplement the UNHCR's regular budget from the UN, the advisory committee in 1955 became the United Nations Refugee Emergency Fund (UNREF) Executive Committee. An important stipulation of the UNHCR statute was the determination of whether individual migrants came under the responsibility of the UNHCR. Key considerations were the voluntary character of the request for asylum and the willingness of the country of first asylum to naturalize the person.

Crucial to the UNHCR's success in resettlement was another organization, not under the UN but led by a directorate of many of the same countries, the Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration or ICEM. The constitution of ICEM defined its mission as "the transport of migrants" and "the promotion of an increase of the volume of migration from Europe by providing, at the request of and in agreement with the Governments concerned, services in the processing, reception, first placement and settlement of migrants." Communist states were excluded from participation: membership was restricted to "Governments with a demonstrated interest in the principle of free movement." Between 1952 and 1960 ICEM arranged transportation for 426,000 refugees, including 102,000 Hungarians in 1956-7. Both the UNHCR and ICEM were based in Geneva, with branch offices in various foreign capitals.⁹

During the first years of its operation UNHCR had a tense relationship with the American government because it was more independent than its predecessor organizations. The first High Commissioner, a Dutchman named Gerrit van den Hoeven Goedhart, "had begun to convince the major powers that their interests converged with those of the UNHCR." He died of a heart attack in July 1956 and was succeeded temporarily by his deputy, the American James Read. Read assumed office in July 1951 after previous service under the US High Commissioner in Germany. As we shall see, he set the direction the UNHCR would pursue under his new boss appointed by the Secretary General in December 1956, the Swiss citizen Auguste Lindt.¹⁰ The Director of ICEM in 1955-8 was another American, the diplomat Harold Tittman.

The refugee organizations had never limited their activity to Europe, but during this period the old continent received the bulk of attention. The UNHCR and ICEM both had branch offices in Vienna. Austria was one of the countries that collaborated regularly with the refugee organizations due to its long-term experience with refugees. According to an Austrian calculation compiled from various sources, nearly 1.9 million refugees entered Austria between 1945 and 1972, 1.3 million left the country via resettlement, deportation, or repatriation, and 559,553 were naturalized in Austria. The highest figures in all three categories were in 1945-6, and the next highest numbers for entries and departures

⁶ Ibid., 345.

⁷ Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and World Politics: A Perilous Path* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 41-2.

⁸ The statute was approved by the General Assembly on December 14, 1950 and the office began operation January 1, 1951. The text of the statute is available online at www.unhcr.org.

⁹ Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, *ICEM Hand-book 1960* (Geneva: ICEM, 1960), 6, 18.

¹⁰ Loescher, 75 and 81.

were in 1956-8.¹¹ An Austrian memorandum to the UN in November 1956 stated that in ten years “Austria has taken in more than a half million refugees, of whom approximately 190,000 still remain in the country.”¹²

The seeming discrepancy in these figures may reflect the fact that those who naturalized ceased to be refugees. The IRO and then UNHCR took responsibility for the non-German refugees, while the Austrian government filled many similar functions for the roughly 200,000 German expellees remaining after 1947, who lost the support and protection of the UNHCR when they were naturalized.¹³ In 1954-55, UNREF and the UNHCR initiated the expensive new role of funding housing in Austria for refugees. For those refugees who became Austrian citizens, the Austrian government instituted similar programs. The parallel programs indicate the close relationship between the UNHCR and the Austrian government.

The UNHCR’s mission of protection, integration, resettlement, and repatriation for refugees came to be interpreted by its largely Western sponsors in the light of American rhetoric about the containment of Communism under President Truman and then its rollback, or even liberation, under President Eisenhower. Containment, rollback, and liberation created no real possibility of American military intervention in the Eastern bloc. But they did inspire the program of “psychological warfare” through the support for émigré organizations under the umbrella of the Free Europe Committee and broadcasts to the countries under Communist rule. Sympathy for the plight of the “captive” or “enslaved” nations was an article of faith for Americans, their Western allies, and the Free Europe Committee. The United States Escapee Program (USEP), which would play an important subsidiary role in support of the Hungarian refugees, reflected in its very name the idea that emigration from the Communist sphere was an *escape*.

Western interest in the captive nations explains why the political crises in East Germany in 1953, then Poland and especially Hungary in 1956, were headline news in the press and captivated audiences of the broadcast media. Interest was of course especially strong in Austria. The Austrian State Treaty of May 1955 had provided for the restoration of Austria sovereignty and the withdrawal of the occupying Soviet, French, British, and American troops on condition of an Austrian declaration of neutrality, which occurred in October 1955 after the withdrawal of the occupiers. It is important to note that while the great powers had stipulated that Austria should not reunite with Germany or join any military bloc, the precise definition of neutrality was left up to Austria. The great powers held a summit in Geneva in July 1955 that initiated a modest lessening of tensions that not only facilitated Austrian neutrality but also the admission of Austria, Hungary, and fourteen other countries into the United Nations on the same day, December 14, 1955. Hungary took advantage of the “Spirit of Geneva” to pursue an improvement in relations with Austria. A key element in this initiative was the agreement in Spring 1956 to remove the barbed wire on the Austro-Hungarian border. The near completion of this initiative by October 1956 would be crucial for the relatively easy passage that Hungarians enjoyed during the last months of 1956.

A few thousand Hungarians crossed the border into Austria and requested asylum already in the first days after October 23. Some of them were AVH personnel and some were not especially political. Did these people fit the Geneva Convention’s definition of a refugee? The convention of 1951, which largely incorporates the definition in the statute of the UNHCR, states that a refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership

¹¹ Data compiled by Heimold Helczmanovszki, cited by Eduard Stanek, *Verfolgt, verjagt, vertrieben: Flüchtlinge in Österreich* (Wien: Europaverlag, 1985), 198-9.

¹² *Aide Memoire* attached to the letter of Austrian Ambassador F. Matsch to UN Under-Secretary Philippe de Seynes and “distributed to the diplomatic representatives of twenty countries in Vienna,” November 15, 1956. New York, United Nations Archives (henceforth: UNA). S-0445-0199-13246. Stanek himself warned of the imprecision resulting from statistical compilations derived from diverse sources. Stanek, 13-14.

¹³ Stanek, 41.

of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.” Or, were they economic refugees with no well-grounded fear of persecution? In a courageous but eminently practical application of its recently declared neutrality, the Austrian government declared on October 28 that it would grant refugee status and asylum to all Hungarians who requested it, without requiring an examination of each individual’s case.¹⁴ James Read himself would have preferred that Austria insist upon the international criteria for refugee status.¹⁵

The Austrian guarantee of asylum remained in effect when the flood of refugees swelled on November 4, and this guarantee may well have stimulated the flood of refugees. It certainly also helped keep the bureaucratic aspect of refugee administration to a minimum. The Austrian authorities and ICEM sought to register, but not to screen, every individual requesting asylum. It is on the basis of this registration process that we have largely reliable statistics.¹⁶ Austria prevented former Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy from entering the country, and armed émigrés from crossing into Hungary. The fledgling Austrian army received the order to shoot armed violators of Austrian territory. On the basis of this order Austrians fatally shot a Soviet soldier who had entered Austria near the town of Rechnitz in pursuit of a refugee. Austria returned the body to the Soviets, who chose not to make a major issue of the incident after their initial protest.¹⁷

The refugees entered Austria principally on the border with the province of Burgenland, across the Bridge at Andau made famous by James Michener’s dramatic, well-researched book-length report.¹⁸ Building on its initial preparations of the previous days but faced with a crisis of previously unimagined proportions, the government and society improvised emergency food and accommodations for the refugees. The Minister of the Interior, the Social Democrat Oskar Helmer, convened a daily crisis group to manage the situation. Provincial governors agreed to a distribution of the refugees around the country according to a quota. Volunteers and donations in money and in kind streamed in, from sources within the country and abroad. But Helmer anticipated, presciently as it turned out, that many more

¹⁴ Ferenc Cseresznyés, “Ötvenhatosok menekülése Ausztriába és Ausztrián át,” *Múltunk: Az MSZMP Központi Bizottsága Párttörténeti Intézetének folyóirata*. 1998, no. 1. 42-70; here: 43.

¹⁵ Report of the ICEM meeting in Geneva November 13, in Vienna, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv. Bundesministerium für auswärtige Angelegenheiten. Sektion II-pol. AdR/01. Karton 380. 1956 [folder] Flüchtlingswesen II.

¹⁶ Those not registered were the relatively small number of those who intentionally avoided detection or received special treatment because of their political prominence, and the perhaps larger number that crossed the border and returned to Hungary, which was later estimated by the Hungarian government at five to ten thousand. Budapest: Magyar Országos Levéltár, A Magyar emigráció számszerű megoszlása országonként. A 99/SE/1960 számú előterjesztés melléklete. Central Committee folder 288f. 7/78.

¹⁷ Erwin A. Schmidl, “Die österreichische Reaktion auf die Ereignisse in Ungarn 1956 und der Einsatz des Bundesheeres an der ungarischen Grenze,” in Ibolya Murber and Zoltán Fónagy, eds., *Die ungarische Revolution un Österreich 1956* (Wien: Czernin Verlag, 2006), 93-115; Ferenc Cseresznyés, “Ötvenhatosok menekülése , on the Rechnitz incident: 57-8.

¹⁸ James A. Michener, *The Bridge at Andau* (New York: Random House, 1957). The second, better documented but less riveting journalistic account is Martin Bursten, *Escape from Fear* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1958). The third important contemporary narrative is Friedrich Kern, *Österreich: Offene Grenze der Menschlichkeit. Die Bewältigung des ungarischen Flüchtlingsproblems im Geiste internationaler Solidarität* (Wien: Verlag des Bundesministeriums für Inneres, 1959). The author had access to Ministry of Interior records, and his lively account is very sympathetic to the role of the Austrians and especially his hero, Oskar Helmer.

refugees might follow in the following days, potentially overwhelming the emergency measures of the Austrians and creating a humanitarian crisis. He therefore cabled the UNREF Executive Committee and ICEM, already on November 4. His appeal reads in part:

As a result of the latest political events approximately ten thousand men, women and children from Hungary have sought asylum so far during the last week. The Austrian Federal Government is undertaking all possible efforts to accommodate these refugees as quickly as possible. This situation has given Austria a new very difficult problem not only as regards monetary assistance but also and above all for the coming months...early temporary acceptance of as great a number as possible of these refugees by European States is urgently requested. The Federal Government appeals to the feeling of solidarity in helping refugees which has been so often been evidenced in the past.¹⁹

The UNHCR followed through quickly, as is indicated by its cable to the UN Secretariat on November 5. The cable, sent to the UNREF Executive Committee and six governments that were not among its membership, reported the urgent appeal of the Austrian government for financial aid, adding:

In our and Austrian government's opinion extremely effective help would also be provided if governments sympathetic to trials of Hungarian people would agree to give at least temporary asylum to greatest possible number of genuine refugees. Your government is therefore urgently requested to give serious consideration to this possibility in addition to financial aid for these refugees. Services of this office are available to assist in selection. ICEM is preparing its services to assist in movement of refugees to countries willing to give asylum and is contacting its member governments. Early reply to this appeal would facilitate reception arrangements for refugees in Austria.²⁰

The UNHCR also informed the New York office that it was coordinating transport efforts with USEP, as well as ICEM, adding a request that the State Department be informed. It appears that the UNHCR was acting on its own in not only forwarding the Austrian appeal, but reinforcing it with an assurance of its own assistance and that of ICEM in expediting the resettlement of refugees. This constituted a clear preference for resettlement over repatriation.

The UNHCR's followup telegram to New York the next day indicated that promises to accept one to four thousand refugees had already been received from Sweden, Belgium, Holland, and Switzerland.²¹ The Council of Europe's Committee on Population and Refugees travelled to Austria to observe the continuously mounting refugee crisis, and held an emergency session in the Austrian parliament on November 12-13. Back in Strasbourg for a session of the Council's Consultative Assembly, the committee presented a report with an appeal even stronger than that of the UNHCR. While repeating the request for financial aid to support refugee relief, it emphasized resettlement: the Committee of Ministers should "request each Member State to receive the largest possible number of Hungarian

¹⁹ Quoted in Louise W. Holborn, *Refugees: A Problem of Our Time. The Work of the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees, 1951-1972* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1975), v1, 392. The German original is in Kern, 83.

²⁰ The text of the UNHCR appeal is quoted in the telegram HCR/125, Alexander to HICOMREF, shorthand for the office supervising Hungarian relief efforts for the UN Secretariat in New York (UNA S-0445-0198-13185), and reported in a followup letter from Read to the governments that is reproduced in Kern, 85. The letter dates the previous telegram November 6, but this appears to be erroneous because the telegram to New York was received November 5.

²¹ Hoveyda to HICOMREF, November 6, UNA S-0445-0198-13185.

refugees without requirement of the Austrian return visa...Member States should immediately grant to Hungarian refugees received in their territory...(a) residence permits, (b) labour permits..." and facilitate their integration into their new homes in many other ways.²²

UNHCR's rapid action on behalf of resettlement on November 4 seems to have occurred without the approval of the UN Secretariat in New York, and may have displeased the Secretary-General. At least that is a possible interpretation of a cable from Hammarskjöld's assistant, Andrew W. Cordier, on November 7: "Because of SecGens responsibility under resolution re Hungary he would appreciate prior consultation with him before steps are taken which have the effect of committing him. I refer particularly to relations with governments and the form of those relationships." But the cable concludes by softening the criticism: "We do appreciate the prompt response of your office in providing assistance for Hungarian refugees in Austria."²³ Gusztáv D. Kecskés has noted in his study on UN fundraising for the Hungarian refugees²⁴ the sensitivity among Hammarskjöld's staff concerning the purpose to which fundraising for aid to the Hungarians should be put: aid to people within Hungary, or to refugees. It is evident in the UN fundraising appeals that requests for funds in support of the refugees very often included the request that countries volunteer a "quota" of asylum offers. An examination of the UN debates on Hungary shows that humanitarian aid to the Hungarian people was not controversial, but resettlement was.

The second Soviet intervention prompted the United Nations to place the Hungarian crisis on the agenda. A Western resolution in the Security Council to condemn the Soviet intervention, call for its withdrawal, recognize the Imre Nagy government, and provide humanitarian help to the Hungarian people was immediately, and predictably, vetoed by the Soviet Union. The Security Council then referred the matter to the General Assembly. Therefore the General Assembly convened in emergency session to discuss the Hungarian crisis. It proceeded to pass, by a large Western majority, Resolution 1004 (ES II) of November 4 that repeated the majority view of the Security Council. The humanitarian provisions of the resolution are of greatest interest to us:

The General Assembly...

7. *Requests* the Secretary-General in consultation with the heads of appropriate specialized agencies to inquire, on an urgent basis, into the needs of the Hungarian people for food, medicine and other similar supplies, and to report to the General Assembly as soon as possible;
8. *Requests* all Members of the United Nations, and invites national and international humanitarian organizations to co-operate in making available such supplies as may be required by the Hungarian people.

²² "Report on aid to Hungarian refugees," 15th November 1956, Doc. 587. *Council of Europe, Consultative Assembly: Documents*. Eighth Ordinary Session (Third Part) 8th-11th January 1957. Documents, Working Papers. Volume V: Docs. 585 to 620. (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1957). 4 pp. The document was "adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, at its meeting on 19th November 1956." Recommendation 106, in *Council of Europe, Consultative Assembly: Texts Adopted by the Assembly*. (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1957).

²³ Cordier to Read, November 7, in UNA S-0445-0197-12902. The New York office made a note on the margin indicating this request for consultation was in reference to correspondence with Yugoslavia on the question of Hungarian refugees there. But the telegram gives some sense of how Read's proactiveness might have annoyed the Secretary-General. Read had served as interim commissioner for four months, and finally received a new boss a few weeks later.

²⁴ Gusztáv D. Kecskés, "Collecting Money at a Global Level: The UN Fundraising Campaign for the 1956 Hungarian Refugees," *Eastern Journal of European Studies* v5, issue 2 (December 2014), 33-60.

These passages seem, by referring in general to “the Hungarian people,” to focus on people within Hungary. But it was the judgment of the Secretariat that these paragraphs applied to both aid within Hungary and to the refugees. The Secretary-General shared a memo to his effect on November 5 that stated “The resolution applies also to those Hungarians who have fled from their country as the result of recent events.” After noting without comment the recent measures taken by the UNHCR, the memo adds that “the Secretary-General’s Representative should [also] consult directly with the Office of the High Commissioner.”²⁵

The session’s Resolution 1007 (ES II) of November 9, calling chiefly for humanitarian aid to the Hungarian people in similarly general terms, passed without opposition. Again the Secretariat and the UNHCR identified these passages as a mandate to also support the refugees. On November 10 the Secretary-General appointed his Under-Secretary for Social and Economic Affairs, Philippe de Seynes, as responsible for Hungarian relief. Eleven days later de Seynes formally assumed the additional title of Under-Secretary in charge of Relief to the Hungarian People, and he appointed Myer Cohen as his Executive Director for Relief to the Hungarian People.” But the location of that relief (in Hungary or among the refugees) was again left open.²⁶

While humanitarian aid to the Hungarian people was uncontroversial in the General Assembly, it was far less clear that aid to Hungarians within Hungary was practical or politically palatable, given the country’s continued instability and possibility that aid would strengthen the new, oppressive regime. But the raising of aid for the refugees also raised other difficult issues. The General Assembly’s Resolution 1006 (ES II) of November 9, unlike the others, devoted an entire section to the refugees:

The General Assembly....

1. *Requests* the Secretary-General to call upon the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to consult with other appropriate international agencies and interested Governments with a view to making speedy and effective arrangements for emergency assistance to refugees from Hungary;
2. *Urges* Member States to make special contributions for this purpose.

Then in the regular, eleventh session of the General Assembly, the General Assembly listened to a report by James Read, conveyed by the Secretary-General on November 19. He reported that 34,000 Hungarian refugees had arrived in Austria, and 6000 had already departed for resettlement. He annexed to his report a table counting monetary contributions and offers of asylum for 65,000 refugees by 28 countries. Many of the offers by smaller country were unrealistic or symbolic (Argentina offered to take 3000 children, and South Africa specified “several hundred artisans”), but other offers were quite substantial.²⁷

After the report, the US and three other countries proposed a draft resolution dealing exclusively with the refugees and passed as Resolution 1129 (XI) a Western motion that applauded the support of the Secretary-General and the High Commission for the refugees, continuing:

²⁵ Hammarskjöld to Cordier and Philippe de Seynes, Under-Secretary for Economic and Social Affairs, November 5. In UNA, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). S-1931, ACC 1975/0023-0002.

²⁶ UNA, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA). S-1931, ACC 1975/0023-0002.

²⁷ “Interim report by the Secretary-General on refugees from Hungary, transmitting a report from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,” November 19. Document A/3371, in United Nations. *Official Records of the General Assembly. Eleventh Session. Annexes.* v2. (New York: United Nations, 1957). Agenda item 67, pp 8-11.

[The General Assembly]

3. *Urges* Governments and non-governmental organizations to make contributions to the Secretary-General, to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees or to other appropriate agencies for the care and resettlement of Hungarian refugees, and to co-ordinate their aid programs in consultations with the Office of the High Commissioner;

This resolution not only called for aid to the refugees, but also support for their resettlement. The Hungarian and Soviet representatives took strong exception to the wording of this motion. Hungary proposed an amendment deleting three paragraphs, including this one, and revising the final paragraph to read:

Requests the Secretary-General and the High Commissioner to make and appeal to the Governments to render the necessary assistance to the refugees pending their return to Hungary.²⁸

The Soviet representative Kuznetsov spoke in favor of the amendment, stating:

When it became obvious that the anti-people's counter-revolutionary adventure had collapsed, many of the organizers of the pro-fascist putsch and their henchmen fled the country. They now form the bulk of the so-called refugees in whose fate such marked interest is displayed by the delegation of the United States in particular, and also by certain other delegations which have presented this draft resolution to the General Assembly.²⁹

He noted (correctly) that the American draft made no mention of repatriation, and that Hungary's Acting Foreign Minister had stated in November 12 cable that was shared with the General Assembly as Document A/3341:

In connexion with the resolution on Hungarian refugees, the Hungarian government states that it will make possible for Hungarian citizens who have fled abroad as a result of the battles to return freely and without harm.³⁰

It fell to the Turkish representative to point out the contradiction between Kuznetsov's statement and the amendment's call for speedy repatriation, suggesting that the purported fascists would "simply be liquidated" should they return home. The Hungarian amendment was defeated with support only from members of the Soviet bloc, after which the American resolution passed on November 21.³¹

It appears that when Auguste Lindt took office as new High Commissioner a few weeks later, he raised the question of refugees' freedom to repatriate with ICEM Deputy Director Pierre Jacobsen. The latter assured him that "ICEM does not seek to persuade anyone to immigrate...Immigration is not an

²⁸ "Hungary: amendments to document A/3374." Document A/L.214. In *ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

²⁹ United Nations, *General Assembly Official Records. Eleventh Session: Plenary Meetings*. (New York: United Nations, 1957). Pp.191-2.

³⁰ "Cablegram dated 12 November 1956 from the Acting Minister, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary to the Secretary-General." Document A/3341 in United Nations. *Official Records of the General Assembly. Eleventh Session. Annexes. v2*. (New York: United Nations, 1957), Agenda item 67, p. 4.

³¹ United Nations, *General Assembly Official Records. Eleventh Session: Plenary Meetings*. (New York: United Nations, 1957). Pp. 191-5.

alternative to repatriation in ICEM mind. The refugee should definitely have made up his mind not to repatriate before ICEM comes into the picture.”³²

But in the Assembly debate, the Eastern bloc representatives supported repatriation to the exclusion of resettlement, while the Western advocates of resettlement did the opposite.

Resettlement was gaining support among Western governments and in the General Assembly but also in the UN Secretariat. A tabulation by the New York office on November 12 recorded resettlement offers for 19,000,³³ while a UN Press Release on November 29 presented numbers similar to those that Read had annexed to his report to the General Assembly.³⁴ The distribution of the monetary contributions and the asylum offers, sometimes referred to as quotas, suggest that the UN was encouraging friendly competition between countries. On November 30 the Secretary-General presented to the General Assembly the replies of 35 countries to his appeal of November 15 for aid. His cover note stressed that some respondents [including those of the Soviet bloc] supported aid to the Hungarian people, others aid to the refugees, and others both of these.³⁵ The Council of Europe published a similar compilation of reports from 16 of its member countries about their aid to the refugees that they had sent to the Council secretariat between November 5 and 30.³⁶ In fact the number of resettled refugees reached 80,000 by mid-December.³⁷

The daily entry of refugees reached its high point on November 23 with 8537 and of departures on November 30, with 5410.³⁸ Afterwards the number crossing into Austria declined as the weather worsened and border security improved. Thanks to the offers of asylum and the rapid registration and transport of refugees by ICEM, resettlement was proceeding rapidly but it still could not keep pace with the new arrivals. Therefore the number of refugees in the Austrian camps was growing. After a detailed report to Parliament by the Canadian Minister of Citizenship and Immigration JW Pickersgill on November 26³⁹ and in response to a wave of popular sympathy in the Canadian press, Canada announced a generous increase in its quota. Surveys of the refugees reported that roughly half of them wanted to go to the US, however, and were reluctant to accept offers of asylum to other countries as long as there remained hope of gaining asylum in the US. In the words of an annoyed Austrian contemporary, “the stereotypical desire to emigrate to the US” was like a “contagious disease.”⁴⁰ This preference led many refugees to decline passage to other countries (because of an understanding that if they accepted it they would be unable to emigrate to the US), and even led some to go on hunger strike in hope of convince the US to accept them.

As noted earlier, America’s existing legislation limited the admission of Hungarian immigrants to less than a thousand per year. There was a strong tradition of immigration restriction, compounded during the Cold War by a suspicion that immigrants from the Soviet bloc may in fact be Communist spies. Through the interpretation of existing legislation the White House was able to announce on

³² Teleprint conference of Read (in New York) and Lindt, December 31, 1956. In UNA, S-0445-0198-13174.

³³ UNA S-0445-0200-13411.

³⁴ UN Department of Public Information, Press Release REF/100. November 29, loc cit.

³⁵ “Replies from Governments to the appeal by the Secretary-General for contributions in support of relief to Hungary,” November 30. Document A/3405, in United Nations. *Official Records of the General Assembly. Eleventh Session. Annexes. v2.* (New York: United Nations, 1957), Agenda item 67, pp. 15-23.

³⁶ “Communication from the Committee of Ministers on aid for Hungarian Refugees,” January 11, 1957: Doc. 620, in Council of Europe, *Consultative Assembly: Documents. Eighth Ordinary Session (Third Part) 8th-11th January 1957. Documents, Working Papers. Volume V: Docs. 585 to 620.* (Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 1957).

³⁷ Loesch, 85.

³⁸ Kern, 30, 51.

³⁹ “Special Session—22nd Parliament. The Situation in Hungary,” in Vienna, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv. . Bundesministerium für auswärtige Angelegenheiten. Sektion II-pol. Ungarn (9-49) – UN (1). AdR/01. Karton 407

⁴⁰ Kern, 53.

November 13 that the US would receive 6500 refugees, then on December 1 that it would receive 15,000 more, with the prospect of enabling legislation for additional admissions if this number were exhausted.⁴¹ Unfortunately for the continuous resettlement of refugees, the fact that the number 15,000 was chosen somewhat arbitrarily would lead to ongoing uncertainty about the ultimate ceiling on American admissions.

The President ordered the resurrection of a closed army camp in New Jersey, Camp Kilmer, as a processing center for the refugees, and appointed Mr. Tracy Voorhees as his personal representative to oversee their transportation and integration into American society.⁴² James Read met him in Washington not long after Voorhees' appointment, writing a week later from New York that "I was glad to see you back in the role of coordinator of United States efforts in this crisis, having worked with you before in a similar emergency." He sent Voorhees a two-page memorandum, providing the text of the relevant General Assembly resolutions, describing the role of the UNHCR, and the current flow of refugees. According to Read, 119,029 refugees had entered Austria by December 7; 47,718 had left for other countries; 2500 were arriving each day, and 3000 were leaving each day but the rate of departure might not persist to the end of the month. He therefore estimated that "at least 60,000 Hungarian refugees will remain in Austria for an indefinite time."⁴³

In light of the continuing crisis and to prepare the ground for new immigration legislation, the White House decided to send Vice President Nixon to Austria between December 18 and 24 to investigate the situation first hand. Nixon visited the now well-guarded Hungarian border twice, more than a dozen camps in Austria and Bavaria, and met with various officials. His scheduled meetings included nine with Austrian officials and ten with the refugees themselves. He met with High Commissioner Lindt and with representatives of ICEM, after his return to the US he introduced a TV broadcast to raise money for the refugees with a ten-minute address, and submitted a report with recommendations to President Eisenhower on January 1. Both in his public statements and in his report, Nixon argued for continued financial support and the reception of more Hungarians into the US. In his excellent brief study of the Nixon visit, Tibor Glant shows that the Vice President was thoroughly briefed and impressively active. The author reaches the sad conclusion, however, that Nixon chose on January 9 to abandon the Hungarian cause after the President decided not to pursue the recommended new push in favor of immigration legislation.⁴⁴

For its part the Austrian government was delighted by the opportunity to make its case for greater aid and receptivity to refugees. Two Austrian memoranda dated December 12 argued that the visit was a unique opportunity. "It must be made clear to Mr. Nixon that Austria cannot master the situation, because the number of refugees in our land is almost 75,000 and departures for other European countries have become almost impossible due to the approaching depletion of the corresponding reception quotas" and "under these circumstances only transport into overseas countries can provide significant relief"—meaning chiefly Canada and the US.⁴⁵ The US should be asked not only

⁴¹ "More Hungarian Refugees Offered Asylum in U.S.," US Department of State, *Bulletin*. v.35 (1956: Jul-Dec), 913.

⁴² The portion of the records of the President's Committee for Hungarian Refugee Relief that is preserved in Voorhees' personal papers has been digitized by the Rutgers University Libraries and is available online at <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/portals/hungarian/>.

⁴³ Read to Voorhees, December 7, in UNA S-445-0198-13174.

⁴⁴ Tibor Glant, "Vice President Nixon's Refugee Fact-Finding Trip to Austria in December 1956 in American Memory," in Glant's *Remember Hungary 1956: Essays on the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence in American Memory* (Boulder: Social Science Monographs, 2007), 147-97.

⁴⁵ "Stand der Flüchtlinge aus Ungarn am 10. Dez 1956; Übersicht über den Abtransport in andere Länder," December 12, and "Besprechung des Flüchtlingsproblems anlässlich des bevorstehenden Besuches des amerikanischen Vizepräsidenten NIXON," December 12. In one draft, the word for "demanded" was crossed out

to receive more refugees, but to accept a certain percentage of all the Hungarian refugees, for instance 50%!⁴⁶ During his visit Nixon seems to have altered the schedule to increase the number of camp visits at the expense of face time with members of the Austrian government. A story in the *Wiener Zeitung* with the headline “Nixon Now Understands the Refugee Problem” reported that the American visitors had a thorough discussion in a one-hour meeting with the Austrians on December 21, focusing primarily on economic matters.⁴⁷ The account of the meeting by Ferenc Cseresznyés confirms the emphasis on costs, and makes no mention of a quota proposal.⁴⁸

The text of Nixon’s report to the President gives further indication of what he might have been hearing from the Austrians or from the High Commissioner and ICEM. Nixon rejected suggestions from unspecified sources that the US should “take a fixed additional number of refugees” or “a certain percentage of all Hungarian refugees who are currently in Austria, and of those that might come to Austria from Hungary in the future.” It would be unwise, he argued, to place a ceiling on American generosity, and the future number of refugees was unpredictable. Rather, “All free nations should share to the extent of their capabilities in the responsibility of resettling the refugees”⁴⁹ The argument was somewhat disingenuous, since nobody outside the US was suggesting that a limit be placed on American hospitality and the flood of refugees into Austria had by this time slowed to a trickle.

Resettlement had still not caught up with the numbers in the Austria camps, however. By mid-January 1957 170,000 had passed into Austria and 100,000 had departed for resettlement, but the number in the Austrian camps remained 70,000.⁵⁰ For this reason Minister of the Interior Oskar Helmer, the Austrian refugee coordinator, and his deputy, State Secretary Franz Grubhofer, chose to attend and speak at the fourth session of the UNREF Executive Committee in Geneva in late January and early February. Citing the large number and mounting expense of refugees remaining in Austria, he made two concrete proposals:

1. Because of the country-of-first-asylum rule, many refugees were reluctant to forfeit the opportunity to enter the US by leaving for another country. Therefore, the US should allow “Hungarian refugees in European countries other than Austria to enter the United States.”
2. That “all freedom-loving countries should accept Hungarian refugees on a quota system and that funds should immediately be raised to reimburse Austria for her care and maintenance costs on the same quota basis. Austria most urgently requested the UNREF Executive Committee to recommend Governments to accept these principles. Countries of resettlement should accept refugees from Austria exclusively on the basis of numbers and not according to political, professional or health considerations, since any such selection would tend to leave the old and sick persons in Austria. Mr. Helmer pointed out that the situation was urgent and that action should be taken before the psychological depression induced by camp life had affected the Hungarian refugees in Austria.” Grubhofer proposed (perhaps inspired by the distribution formula that his ministry administered within Austria!) that countries of asylum accept refugees

and replaced by “requested.” Vienna, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv. Sektion II-pol 1957. AdR/01. Karton 404: Ungarn (3d GZl. 791.000-791.999). Folder Ungl.791.700-791-999

⁴⁶ “Information für den Herren Bundesminister,” December 12, supplement to 791.815-Pol in Karton 404.

⁴⁷ “Nixon kennt nun das Flüchtlingsproblem. Eingehende Aussprache im Bundeskanzleramt—Österreich tat was es konnte, kann das Flüchtlingsfrage jedoch nicht allein lösen—Herzliche Akklamationen für den Vizepräsidenten,” *Wiener Zeitung* December 22, preserved in Vienna, Österreichisches Staatsarchiv. Fach: 408. Bundesministerium f. Inneres. Nixon M. Richard, stellvertretender Praesident der Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika; Besuch in Oesterreich vom 19.-22.12.1956.

⁴⁸ Cseresznyés, 67-9.

⁴⁹ Office of the Vice President, “Report to the President on Hungarian Refugees,” January 1, 1957. Online at <https://rucore.libraries.rutgers.edu/rutgers-lib/33501/>.

⁵⁰ Kern, 60-1.

on a ratio of 1:1000 to their population. “He felt that no country should have difficulty in assimilating the proposed number of refugees.”

The Austrian complaints about too-demanding screening, the need for rapid resettlement, and that refugees be able to enter their destination of choice from their country of second asylum were familiar themes. The statistics about resettlement suggest that they were eventually respected to a considerable degree. The official record of the ensuing discussion suggests there was far more support for the first proposal than for the second one. Three members’ comments undermined the second proposal. The representative of Italy argued that the economic means of a country ought to count as much as its population, and the US noted that President Eisenhower had proposed in his message to Congress of January 31 that the annual immigration quota be increased, through emergency legislation, by 65,000. This was true, but misleading: the proposed increase would be for immigrants from all countries, not just Hungary.⁵¹ Finally, the Director of ICEM calculated that the vast majority of Hungarian refugees would be moved out of Austria by the end of June, 1957.

The resolutions passed by the fourth session of UNREF left the Austria proposal for mandatory quotas on the table, declaring simply that the burden of caring for the refugees should “be shared by the whole world,” and that “countries which are in a position to do so accept the settlement in their territories of an increased number of refugees.”⁵²

The minutes at our disposal appeared in the UN document distribution more than six months after the meeting, so that the full range of the discussion about the Austrian proposals is left to the imagination. It appears, however, that Austria was overreaching with the quota proposal. Not only did only critical remarks get into the public record and it failed in the vote, but any trial balloon offered to Vice President Nixon during his visit a month earlier seems unlikely to have gotten any positive response. And the passage of any proposal not supported by the US was not feasible, even if the US could theoretically be outvoted, because it was the principal financial backer of the UN and of refugee relief as a whole. The US would end up accepting roughly 40,000 Hungarian refugees or one-fifth of the total, a much smaller percentage of the US population than that of many other destination countries. On the other hand, the leader of the West footed 71% of the worldwide financial bill for Hungarian refugee relief.⁵³

The decreased flow of Hungarian refugees to Austria led in the new year to a declining sense of urgency in most of the West. The refugee organizations and the principal countries of second asylum developed procedures that got the situation under control. The urgency with which they did so was a product not only of the Austrian insistence that Austria was at the center of the storm and needed help, but also because experienced aid experts like Tracy Voorhees realized that the existing ***culture of welcome*** was the product of extraordinary circumstances and had a limited “shelf life.” Some enthusiasts’ description of the refugees as “freedom fighters” was clearly an exaggeration; perhaps only 15% fit this description. Clearly a much smaller percentage of them were Communist “spies,” and yet some American politicians used the fear of infiltration to stymie the American proposal for new legislation. The US, at least, returned to the Cold War norm of unease and suspicion of foreign

⁵¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “Special Message to the Congress on Immigration Matters,” January 31, 1957. Online at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=10967&st=&st1=> . Originally published in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Dwight D. Eisenhower*.

⁵² “Annex I: Report of the UNREF Executive Committee (Fourth Session—Geneva, 29 January to 4 February 1957),” in “Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees,” United Nations. *General Assembly Official Records, Twelfth Session. Supplement No. 11 (A/3585/Rev 1)*, pp. 23-42.

⁵³ Loesch, 87.

infiltration. An American historian argues: “Widespread fear...of domestic as well as foreign enemies stands as a key legacy of the Cold War.”⁵⁴

The aftermath of the Austrian quota discussion looks more positive than this conclusion might suggest, however. While Austria did not get the mandatory quotas it wanted, subsequent resettlement data show that Austria did achieve a tacit understanding that immigration to the US from countries of second asylum was acceptable. Two other difficult issues at the fourth session of UNREF, aid to the 20,000 Hungarian refugees in Yugoslavia and the Hungarian insistence on repatriation, took a turn toward compromise solutions. The government of Yugoslavia addressed concerns about the refugees’ living conditions and facilitated their resettlement in the West when Belgium, France, the US, and Canada stepped forward to receive several thousand of them. The good offices of the UNHCR also helped defuse the repatriation issue. The Kádár regime’s denial of any reprisals against those who repatriated were documented to be false in some cases, but perhaps 20,000 Hungarian refugees did choose to return to their homeland by the third anniversary of the Revolution—if not the 40,000 that Kádár himself claimed in his speech to the General Assembly on the fourth anniversary.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Robert J. McMahon, *The Cold War: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 118.

⁵⁵ Intergovernmental Committee for European Migration, *ICEM Hand-book 1960* (Geneva: ICEM, 1960), table on p. 20; United Nations. *General Assembly Official Records*. Fifteenth Session, 883rd plenary meeting. p. 338.