

After Orbán won the election for the second time in 2010, the number and amounts of grants and other programs targeting Hungarians living abroad began to increase substantially in 2016. The transparency of the grants decisions is disputable. There is no single, centralised, easily searchable and up-to date public database that offers clear and machine-readable information about the projects that were financed with taxpayers' money. While there are public calls for small grants where everyone can apply, the criteria upon which the big amounts are decided is not published. This project is based on scraped data and documents about Bethlen Gábor Fund (Bethlen Gábor Alap, BGA) decisions and payments to minority organizations from the National Tenders database. BGA is the largest state fund and is focused on supporting Hungarian organisations abroad.

### **Secret money for politicians in Slovakia**

In Slovakia, the Jan Kuciak Investigative Center (ICJK) found that organizations with ties to Slovak-Hungarian politicians received money from the Hungarian government. Slovak law prohibits the financing of political parties from abroad. But in 2016, hundreds of thousands of euros obtained from Hungary by a minority NGO were allegedly used to finance the political campaign of the SMK party which represents the Hungarian minority. Police have been investigating it since. The Gombasek Camp, organised in the namesake valley in south-central Slovakia, has for years been an annual music festival and intellectual forum for debates about the state of the Hungarian community in Slovakia. A few years ago, the organizers paid particular attention to its political neutrality and were not afraid that any political party would label them as biased. But this has changed. Since 2014, the Hungarian government has poured more than 250 millions of forints into the NGO organizing the event and the purchase of land in the Gombasek valley where the camp takes place every year. Head of the NGO is vice-chairman of the minority party. Hungarian government politicians and their strategic partners from the Slovak minority party SMK took part in the events as main guests and the camp itself is no longer considered to be politically unbiased. Viktor Orbán's favorite sport football has become one of the most supported areas by the Hungarian government in all the countries analyzed by this project. Hundreds of millions of forints from BGA went to the football facilities in Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Romania and Croatia. In Slovakia, millions of euros from Hungary, flowed mainly to the FC DAC Dunajská Streda, a football club in the namesake city in southwestern Slovakia, owned by Orbán's longtime friend Oszkár Világi. The DAC football academy run by Világi's daughter received money from BGA. The football club in Dunajská Streda has been a symbol of Hungarians in Slovakia for many years. Before the games, the Hungarian national anthem is

sung. In 2019 signatures were collected for the registration of the new minority political party and the party's election song was played at the stadium before the elections in 2020. Hungarian entities under government control also contributed to the construction of the new stadium in Dunajska Streda, the DAC arena.

Minority media in Slovakia is another important area of interest for the Hungarian government. Most of Slovak-Hungarian media space is supported by the Hungarian government via the BGA fund. Some organizations behind the supported portals and magazines are also on the Hungarian government's "List of institutions of national importance", thus, they can look forward to financial support in the amount of tens of millions of forints each year.

"There is basically a coup in the Hungarian media in Slovakia. Those who obviously support the Hungarian Community Party (SMK) are taking up more and more space. It follows exactly the pattern as it takes place in Hungary where the government occupied almost all the media and gained a lot from it," psychiatrist and writer who collaborated on analyses of the development of southern Slovakia in the Institute for Minority Research Péter Hunčík told ICJK.

### **Orbán's grip on Vojvodina, Serbia**

In Serbia, CINS found that the Hungarian government's support leads to widespread censorship in Hungarian minority media. RTV Pannon, the largest Hungarian media company in Serbia, received more than 9 million euros since 2012, almost half of it in 2019 alone. In addition to Pannon, BGA funds went to the oldest Serbian daily newspaper in Hungarian, *Magyar Szo* (*Magyar Szó*), the oldest weekly *Het Nap* (*Hét Nap*), and a number of other media. None of the three media, *Magyar Szo*, *Het Nap* and *RTV Pannon*, are critical of Orbán, the political party Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, the ethnic Hungarian political party (SVM) and its founder, the National Council of the Hungarian Ethnic Minority, but often convey statements by these institutions. Citizens who follow the programs of *RTV Pannon* can find out that Prime Minister Viktor Orbán got his fifth grandson and got vaccinated against the flu, or read a report on its news portal about Orbán's modesty as seen in the poetic description of him carrying bread under his arm barefoot while vacationing on Adriatic. In the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary election campaign, *Magyar Szo* portrayed the opposition as a group of people whose only goal was to overthrow Orbán and seize power. In addition, they transmitted SVM president István Pastor's statements that citizens should vote for a coalition led by Orbán's party. Orbán's government also relies on the church to convey its messages in the Hungarian community in

Serbia. From 2011 to 2020, Hungary paid 7.3 million euros to religious communities. They renovated churches, built kindergartens adjacent to religious buildings as well as Christian schools and dormitories.

In some cases, Orbán's generosity inspired the political support of priests. Before the 2018 elections in Hungary, Gabor Dolinski (Dolinszky Gábor), the deputy bishop of the *Evangelical Christian Church* in Serbia, participated in a public event alongside members of the SVM party. According to *Magyar Szó* (*Magyar Szó*) daily, Dolinski told Hungarians with dual citizenship that they had a duty to vote in the elections because of everything their home country had done for them in "material, economic and spiritual terms". He then advised his compatriots to apply for financial support and that after receiving the money, there will be no dilemma who to vote for.

Orbán's government is also a close partner of the strongest Hungarian political party in Serbia - the SVM. This party has a great influence on the *Council*. Namely, out of 35 members of the *Council*, 16 are from the ranks of SVM. They also share their address and premises with the *Karolj Biro Foundation* which was established by SVM. Due to legal restrictions, SVM cannot accept money from the *Hungarian Government*, but such restrictions don't exist for the foundation that the party had established. The *Karolj Biro Foundation* received 1.4 million euros of Hungarian money to buy a green-colored house in Art Nouveau style. Three minority organizations are based there.

### **Money for a new home in Croatia**

In Croatia, the Hungarian government is expanding its influence by predominantly financing the country's main organisation of Hungarians - the Democratic Community of Hungarians in Croatia (DZMH, Horvátországi Magyarok Demokratikus Közössége) and organisations connected to it. The president of DZMH is Róbert Jankovics, who is also a member of Croatian parliament representing the Hungarian minority. His election in 2016 was mired by allegations of bribery in exchange for voters and an investigation followed.

In 2019, two people were convicted at the first court instance of bribing non-Hungarian Croats to declare themselves Hungarian to be eligible to vote for the list that was led by DMZH candidate Jankovics. Since the elections in 2016 the DZMH, whose leaders are close to the Hungarian Prime Minister Orbán, became the main organization connecting Hungarians in Croatia with their mother state. Between 2011 and 2020, the BGA awarded grants to Croatian organizations in the total of around 26,2 million euros. Data on actual contract payments by BGA, which this project has found not to be reconcilable with the data on decisions to award money, shows that by the end of 2019 the Hungarian minority

community received at least 6,1 million euros. By then, the DZMH was allotted grants in the total of around 720 thousand euros, half of which were spent on real estate investments, renovations of old country houses and the building of new ones. An additional 9,5 million euros was awarded by BGA to DZMH's connected organisations, such as Europa AP, the Forum of Hungarian Teachers (Horvátországi Magyar Pedagógusok Fóruma) and the Hungarian Educational and Cultural Center (Horvátországi Magyar Oktatási és Művelődési Központ). All are connected to the DZMH through their leadership.

In 2017, the Hungarian state-owned company also established a foundation in Croatia, *Economica Hungarica*. It operates in accordance with DZMH's strategy for economic and rural development and offers funds to Croatian citizens of Hungarian origin for purchasing buildings and land or establishing a business. In three years *Economica Hungarica* has granted funds to 783 subjects of which six persons purchased a family home with the money, and 30 companies bought a total of 82 hectares of agricultural land.

Last year the BGA also expanded its football-financing portfolio in the country by approving almost 700.00 euros through Europa AP for the support and development of FC Vardarac (Várdaróc FC), a small football club from a village with a population of 630. The financing of FC Vardarac came after BGA has already approved around 16,1 million euros in past three years for the construction of 8 football fields and a stadium to the FC Osijek Football School (Škola nogometa NK Osijek) which is still under construction. FC Osijek is currently owned by László Szíjj, one of the wealthiest Hungarian businessmen with ties to the Hungarian government and two Hungarian funds.

### **A tractor without a farm in Slovenia**

Although it was planned to be built by the end of 2019, the football infrastructure in Lendava, the heart of the Hungarian national minority community in Slovenia, is still awaiting construction machinery. By October 2020, only one playing field with artificial grass next to a bilingual high school in Lendava was finished and functional. But by the end of last year, the BGA had already approved at least 10,4 million euros of project money for the intended football academy of FC Nafta 1903, currently placed 5th in Slovenia's 2nd League. Although BGA had already made payments to the football club in the amount of at least 5,7 million euros, the fund's public data on contract payments shows just one payment in 2019 in the amount of 300 million forints (about 430 thousand euros). According to data and documents on BGA's grant decisions, 60 percent of all funds intended for Slovenian organizations were awarded to FC Nafta 1903, at least 10,4 million euros. A good half of that money was allotted to the club with one decision signed on 27 December 2020. With

that decision another 2,1 million euros worth of projects were approved to the Hungarian Self-Governing National Community in Pomurje (Muravidéki Magyar Önkormányzati Nemzeti Közösség, MMÖNK), the main minority organization in Slovenia. Last-minute or end-of-the-year decisions and payments seem to be an occurrence at BGA. MMÖNK was granted more than a third of the total of 17,4 million euros project funds that were bound for Pomurje since 2011. Of this, 97 percent of the grants were allocated between 2016 and 2020. MMÖNK's annual reports for some of the most fruitful years reveal that often substantial Hungarian grants were paid to them at the end of the year, but were intended for the following year or years. »Foreign donations, earmarked and predominantly intended for investments, represent a bigger share of the budget each year. Such donations are very difficult to predict and represent an eternal dilemma during the preparation of MMÖNK's annual budgets,« they wrote in 2019. A year before, the organization had to cut 580 thousand euros from its planned budget due to an accounting mistake. Luckily, the unexpected »donations from abroad« were more than 475 thousand euros higher than expected.

MMÖNK told Oštro it cannot influence BGA's payment times. Sometimes MMÖNK also has issues fulfilling its grant contracts. In 2015, it applied to BGA to obtain 17,5 million forints (then around 50 thousand euros) to buy a smaller property where it would establish a model farm, managed in close contact with nature. But in a 2016 report on this spending the MMÖNK council president Ferenc Horváth explained to BGA that they were unable to find a suitable property for the agreed amount, so they purchased a tractor for 48.999,99 euros to be used on the future farm. The tractor wasn't used until August 2020 when MMÖNK, with consent of the BGA, leased it free of charge to a horse association in Lendava.

Source: [hungarianmoney.eu](http://hungarianmoney.eu)