

# In Need of an Extended Research Approach: The Case of the ‘Neglected African Diaspora’ of the Post-Communist Space

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*This paper seeks to extend the academic discussion and research of the global African diaspora by drawing attention to Africans living in post-Communist spaces. So far, both literature and foreign policies of countries of the former Eastern Bloc hardly ever made mention of this ‘neglected diaspora’. First, the paper underscores the relevance of specific research connected with African communities across Central and Eastern Europe, as well as present-day Russia. Second, it introduces the history, motivations, background and contemporary situation of the marginal but growing African population in Hungary. It will show how finally the Hungarian government implements a pragmatic foreign policy (partly) on Africa and African development co-operation. In this effort, it considers Africans who either had obtained a university degree before 1989 at a Hungarian university, or came to the country during the democratic rule, as true bridges: they can foster newly defined relations. The place, role and potentials of these African migrants in the unique Hungarian migration environment will also be discussed. Increased illegal migration flows towards the European Union via the Serbian–Hungarian border region of the Schengen Zone in the first half of 2015 and the policies the Hungarian government introduced in the wake of this unprecedented push makes the discussion even more topical, in particular, as of early April 2019, a government “Africa Strategy” was also published.*

*Keywords: African migrations; global African diaspora; Africans in Hungary; Hungarian foreign policy towards Africa, Africa Strategy*

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Opening Thoughts on the African Diaspora

“One of the accepted criteria of the study of the African Diaspora is the necessity of its focus on African and African-descended peoples.”<sup>2</sup> The new political, social and economic realities of our increasingly globalized inter-polar world have direct effects on international migration. Considering migratory trends and tendencies from the opposite angle, migration is truly a profound feature of the global context, which is best characterized by the accelerated pace of all types of movement. As Zeleza<sup>3</sup> rightly points out, “two critical developments” can be isolated. “First, the diversification of

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<sup>2</sup> G. A. Chambers. Mapping the Study of the African Diaspora: Classic Trends, New Themes, and Disciplinary Approaches, in, R. K. Edozie, G. A. Chambers & T. Hamilton-Wray (Eds.), *New Frontiers in the Study of the Global African Diaspora*, Michigan State University Press, East Lansing, 2018, pp. 23-33.

<sup>3</sup> P. T. Zeleza: Contemporary African Migrations in a Global Context, *African Issues*, No. 1, 2012, pp. 9-14.

sending and receiving countries has been growing. Second, skilled migration has assumed greater importance in relation to both the actual flows” and to migration policies at all levels. “African immigrants are now part of the transnational communities that can be found in virtually all regions of the world.”<sup>4</sup> The diasporas of Africans represent a major aspect of both international migration and the international relations of the continent. As Taylor underlines, “the very existence of the diasporas are now seriously considered by African states (and international development agencies) as important developmental assets.”<sup>5</sup> Not only because of the remittances that flow back into the economies of their home countries, but also as they possess the potential of building bridges in bi- and multilateral terms between their sending countries and their chosen new countries. A number of governments of receiving countries think in this way and are pressured to foster policies that on the one hand encourage the integration of migrants, as well as contribute to mutually beneficial economic, industrial and other investment deals, together with health service-related, educational or cultural projects. They tend to emphasize a ‘triple-win’ scenario, in which both the sending and receiving countries (the old and new homelands), as well as the migrants themselves can cultivate gains. Although there are still some more traditional perceptions that argue that “the influence of diaspora groups aggravates conflict in their home countries as they either directly or indirectly support the conflict of parties in terms of logistics or, in particular, finances”, there has been an emerging other view that “sees diaspora groups as having the potential to reduce conflict [...] foster[ing] democratization processes, contribut[ing] to positive economic development in their home country”.<sup>6</sup>

Yet another group of governments tend to see migrants as threat to national identity, and therefore, support anti-immigrant policies. To be able to study and understand the African diaspora is to research on migration in general, and to study global African migrations in particular. As Chambers underlines, “contemporary political and global economic realities have brought Africans in the diaspora into more contact and communication with each other than ever before”,<sup>7</sup> which confirms the very nature and existence of transnational identities in the global arena. These transnational African migrant communities are not only a developmental assets for countries of origin, but also mean numerous opportunities of geopolitical positioning for countries of destination. Although Chambers is right that: “While most of the discourse on the African diaspora has centered on the Americas and the African continent, there is a growing interest in the Indian Ocean region”,<sup>8</sup> basically nothing is said about the diaspora communities of Africans across post-Soviet countries. It is absolutely valid to include them in a wider academic discourse, as “the legacy of the African Diaspora in these places [too] further exposes the global scope of the dispersal”.<sup>9</sup> As in any case, migration flows in different phases and streams result in the creation of a diaspora. In comparative terms, in the course of history, different regions have experienced different flows and streams, thus, it makes sense also to look at the intensity and dynamics of the development of certain African diasporas in distinct areas. According to Palmer, in general terms, “diasporic communities possess a number of characteristics. Regardless of their location, member of a Diaspora share an emotional attachment to their ancestral land, [...] tend to possess a sense of ‘racial’, ethnic, or religious identity that transcends geographic boundaries, to share broad cultural similarities, and sometimes articulate a desire to return to their original homeland.”<sup>10</sup> Among the heterogeneous African diaspora communities we will use the term diaspora throughout the paper as defined by Oucho: “to denote people – usually of African descent – residing outside Africa, or within Africa in countries other than their own, as citizens and permanent or temporary residents, engaging in circulation as well as

<sup>4</sup> M. O. Okome: African Immigrant Relationship with Homeland Countries, in: J. A. Arthur et al. (Eds.), *Africans in Global Migration. Searching for Promised Lands*, Plymouth, Lexington Books, 2012, pp. 199-224.

<sup>5</sup> I. Taylor: *The International Relations of Sub-Saharan Africa*, New York, Continuum, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> L. Laakso & P. Hautaniemi (Eds.): *Diasporas, Development and Peacemaking in the Horn of Africa*, London, Zed Books, 2014.

<sup>7</sup> G. A. Chambers. *Ibid.* p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> G. A. Chambers. *Ibid.* p. 31.

<sup>9</sup> G. A. Chambers. *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> C. A. Palmer: *Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora*, *Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, January 2018, p. 216.

transnational lifestyles.”<sup>11</sup> This will be applied to the not-so-known African communities living in Central and Eastern European countries.

## 1.2. Setting the Scene for the Hungarian Case

In 2015, the government of Hungary took some convincing steps in order to revitalize relations with Sub-Saharan Africa by launching its ‘Opening to the South’ foreign policy chapter. In order to achieve this, it is open to target the still relatively minor, but occasionally vocal community of immigrants and the main civic organizations that either the immigrants themselves established and manage, or are in contact with them due to various legal questions and general representation (these latter ones are Hungarian NGOs with a profile and expertise on migrants’ rights). In its brand new initiative published on April 2, 2019, the Hungarian government published a 22-point “Africa Strategy”, which in a number of instances, clearly calls for more cooperation with both a circle of partner countries as well as their citizens.

While Hungary has been experiencing the pushing flow of irregular migrants, it also needs to get prepared for more foreign citizens choosing its territory to settle in the forthcoming decades. In fact, it needs to solve the burning demographic issue of a shrinking population, and therefore become ready for accommodating different people with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.<sup>12</sup> The former “emigration country” – as Sik and Zakariás<sup>13</sup> referred to it – with a traditionally very low record of internal migration is now seen as a transition country to get into the Schengen Zone of the European Union by illegal migrants from some Western Balkans countries (Kosovo, for instance) and Near Eastern countries (Syria and Iraq especially), as well as Northern Africa (or Sub-Saharan Africa via Northern African and Mediterranean routes). While this particular issue has been basically the most burning one for the country, the topic of Hungarians leaving the motherland and emigrate to other EU member states (among others) is hardly mentioned in political communication and heard in public discourse.

One of the questions this paper attempts to answer is whether or not and to what extent Hungary, being a comparatively “closed country” in Central Europe’s migration map has been managing certain aspects of international migration both from the perspective of its society and with regard to government policies. The research presented here hypothesized that younger generations are more open to the presence of immigrants and their participation in everyday life, which is an inevitable condition on the road of a more integrative society. The paper also visits the question of government policy aspirations in terms of the relevance of connecting longer-term strategic goals to the engagement and contribution of different diaspora in Hungary – in our case, the Hungarian African communities in light of a dynamic ‘global opening’ in foreign policy.

The paper opens with a first section taking a closer look at the unique features of Hungary from an international migration perspective. It then moves to discuss African immigration to Hungary using primary research results from the last couple of years, an output of the projects the author and his research team managed to compile. Interview excerpts will illustrate the set of arguments, followed by a summary of a questionnaire on Hungarian youth perceptions about African immigrants. The chapter also highlights the foreign policy dimension that can be useful for a future comprehensive immigration policy (which is still missing at the moment), with particular relevance to the ongoing implementation of a new Hungarian policy of ‘global opening’ to the ever so globalized world. The

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<sup>11</sup> J. O. Ouchou: African Diaspora and Remittance Flows: Leveraging Poverty?, in A. Adepoju (Ed.), *International Migration within, to and from Africa in a Globalised World*, NOMRA, Sub-Saharan Publishers, Accra, 2010, p. 140.

<sup>12</sup> Prime Minister Viktor Orbán in his latest address to the nation (évértékelő=annual national report) on 10 February 2019, launched a new public policy to upgrade the birth rate of the country by encouraging women to give birth to more children, and therefore, meeting some pressing demands for balancing the currently shrinking population. Immigrants are not the solution, the prime minister referred to, but the method he proposed.

<sup>13</sup> E. Sik & I. Zakariás: *Active Civic Participation of Immigrants in Hungary*. Country Report prepared for the European research project POLITIS, Oldenburg, Interdisciplinary Center for Education and Communication in Migration Processes, 2005, p. 6.

prospects for a Hungarian Africa policy will also be sewn into the line of thoughts presented. The chapter finally offers a conclusion and indicates some further steps of continued research.

## 2. Hungary is Not a Country of Destination for Many

Although international migration has always been a characteristic feature throughout its history since the foundation of the Hungarian state in the first years of the eleventh century, migration as an issue in post-socialist Hungary has been considered as “a diaspora and security problem and mostly viewed as part of foreign policy rather than economic policy.”<sup>14</sup> No doubt, with regard to labor market issues, for a call for a more economy-focused approach is valid, however, understanding migration in the global era needs an interdisciplinary approach. When arguing for integration of any kind, historic, social, ethnic, linguistic, cultural and foreign relations and human rights considerations have to be taken into account for a comprehensive migration policy. This prerequisite is even more articulated when we accept the valid observation of Castles and Miller<sup>15</sup> that “novel forms of interdependence, transnational society and bilateral and regional cooperation are rapidly transforming the lives of millions of people and inextricably weaving together the fates of states and societies.” In addition, policy-making in the field first draws our attention to the obvious issue of security, then, to how useful the given migrant can be for the economy of the receiving country intending to regulate migration flows.

As Juhász notes, the first wave of immigration to Hungary – including “scribes, foreign merchants, artisans, and agricultural settlers” – was “primarily motivated by economic considerations, as well as King Stephen the First’s (1000–1038) positive attitude towards immigration.”<sup>16</sup> Since the 1880s for about a hundred years, Hungary had been an emigration country: “between 1881 and 1900, 370,000 people emigrated to America. In the 15 years that preceded the First World War the total number of emigrants reached 1.4 million.”<sup>17</sup> The Treaty of Versailles signed with Hungary after the world war in the Grand Trianon Palace of Versailles on June 4, 1920, resulted in the loss of more than two thirds of its original territories (72 percent) and 64 percent of the total population of the country (21 million), due to Hungary’s alignment with the defeated central powers led by Germany. Coupled with the consequences of “large-scale forced resettlement movements” after the Second World War, “as a result of all these changes, on the one hand an ethnically highly homogeneous population was created on the territory of modern Hungary, on the other hand an ethnically mixed population with considerable Hungarian minorities emerged in the countries surrounding Hungary”<sup>18</sup>. The total number of Hungarians living beyond the borders of the country, the Hungarian diaspora is about 5.2 million, out of which 2.6 million ethnic Hungarians can be found in Hungary’s present-day neighbors (most of them, about 1.5 million in Romania), 1.8 million in North America (most of them, about 1.5 million in the USA), and the rest all across the world.

With the Soviet bloc disintegrating at the end of the 1980s, Hungary had to face a substantial inflow of refugees and asylum seekers from the neighboring countries, but mainly from Romania and former Yugoslavia as a result of the ongoing conflicts and war on their territories. This migratory push then turned into another flow of migrants with economic and study purposes from the same countries surrounding Hungary. “The annual number of immigrants between 1988 and 1991 ranged between 23,000 and 37,000, and about 80 percent of them were ethnic Hungarians from Romania, Ukraine and Yugoslavia.”<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Á. Hárs & E. Sik: *Hungary*, in E. Hönekopp & H. Mattila (Eds.), *Permanent or Circular Migration? Policy Choices to Address Demographic Decline and Labour Shortages in Europe*, Budapest, International Organization for Migration, 2008, p. 73.

<sup>15</sup> S. Castles & M. J. Miller: *The Age of Migration. International Population Movements in the Modern World*, New York, The Guildford Press, 1998. p. 1.

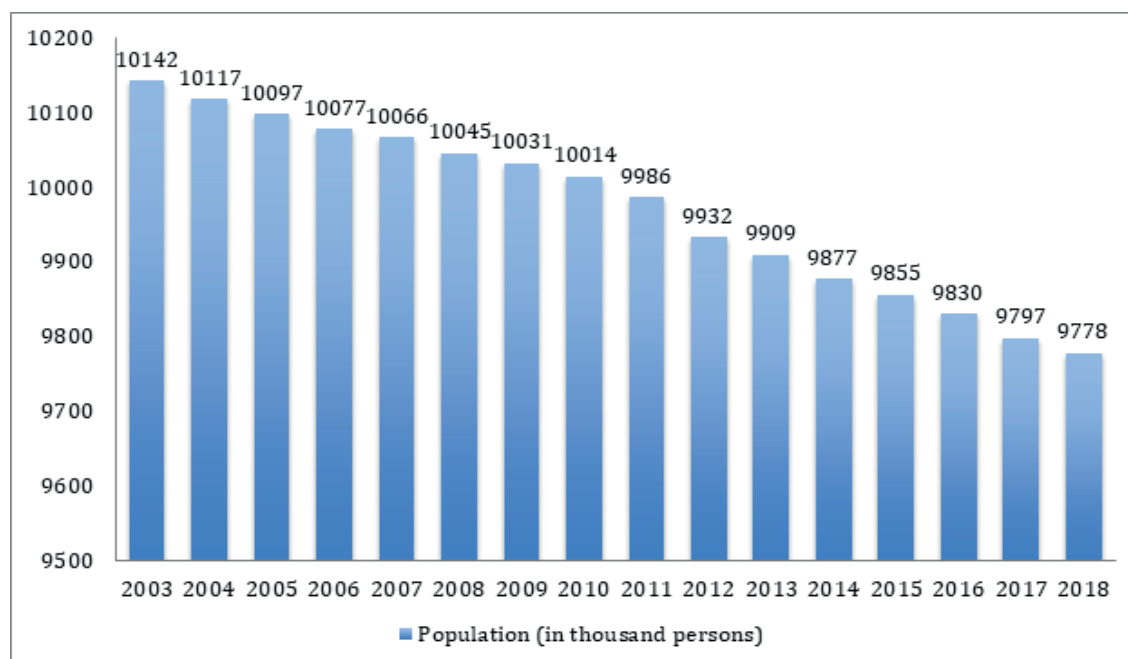
<sup>16</sup> J. Juhász: *Hungary*, in T. Frejka (Ed.), *International Migration in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, New York, United Nations, 1996, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> J. Juhász, *Ibid.* p. 70.

<sup>18</sup> Á. Hárs & E. Sik, *Ibid.* p. 73.

<sup>19</sup> Á. Hárs & E. Sik, *Ibid.* p. 74.

One of the most unique features of Hungary's migration scene derives from the above tendencies, the country's historic heritage and geographic location: "the overwhelming majority of immigrants are from neighboring countries and mostly have an ethnic Hungarian background."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, Hungarian society at large does not really have experience on a greater scale with people of far-away lands and cultures, which the population considers different "enough" from the majority society, as they had got used to receiving immigrants of European origin – mainly from the larger Hungarian cultural context. These immigrants speak no different language than the one the citizens of the motherland do, i.e. Hungarian. Up until the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century the proportion of the immigrant population – that is "foreigners who stay in the country over a year"<sup>21</sup> – compared with the native population shows a stable 1.5 to 2 percent according to the statistics of the Hungarian Central Statistical Office (HCSO) on an annual basis.<sup>22</sup> This is considered as rather low in a country with a total population of 9.778 million, according to the 2018 HCSO data. Since 1981 Hungarian population has been steadily decreasing (see Figure 1 for the last 15 years). "The fall in the population number due to natural decrease was somewhat moderated by the positive net international migration in the last two and a half decades. However, in the last decade, immigration surplus could compensate only less than half of the natural decrease."<sup>23</sup> Since the breakout of the 2015 'refugee crisis', the Hungarian government favors a strictly anti-immigrant policy, with nation-wide campaigns including slogans such as "If you come to Hungary, you must respect our culture!", or "If you come to Hungary, you cannot take away the jobs of the Hungarians!". As Drinóczi and Mohai underlines: "The billboard campaign and the 'national consultation' were successful political tools used to make the Hungarian population fearful of migration, or at least develop increasingly negative attitudes thereto due to economic and security reasons."<sup>24</sup> After the latest landslide victory of his party at the national elections in April 2018, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán clearly stated that: "We want that Hungary remains the land of Hungarians, the country of the 'magyars'".



**Figure 1. Demographic Changes in Hungary between 2003 and 2018**

Source of data: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

<sup>20</sup> A. Kováts & E. Sik: Hungary, in: A. Triandafyllidou & R. Gropas (Eds.), *European Immigration. A Sourcebook*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, p. 158.

<sup>21</sup> A. Kováts & E. Sik, *Ibid.* p. 159.

<sup>22</sup> The *International Migration Outlook 2012* of the OECD also confirms this figure. See OECD (2012): 236.

<sup>23</sup> G. Vukovich et al. (Eds.): *Population Census. 1. Preliminary data*, Budapest, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2012, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> T. Drinóczi & Á. Mohai: Has the Migration Crisis Challenged the Concept of the human Rights of Migrants? The Case of Ilias and Ahmed v. Hungary, in E. Kuzelewska, A. Weatherburn & D. Kloza (Eds.), *Irregular Migration as a Challenge for Democracy*, Intersentia, Cambridge, 2018, pp. 99-100.

Hungary's ageing and shrinking society, however, may also need immigrants – similarly to other European countries. However, in the last three years the number of legal immigrants (mainly foreigners who stay in the country for over a year, but also labor migrants who come for shorter periods) has not been on a painful increase. When the stock of this community of foreign nationals is looked at closely, for instance as in 2018, according to the figures provided by the Hungarian Central Statistical Office, most of the migrants came from Europe (64.4 percent), while 27.6 percent were from Asia (44.5 percent of the Asians are Chinese), 3.6 percent from America (57.3 percent of the Americans are from the U.S.A.), 3.6 percent from Africa, and 0.4 percent from Australia and Oceania.<sup>25</sup>

With regard to illegal migration, as Kováts and Sik note about the tendencies of the first years of the new millennium that: “most undocumented immigrants are weekly or monthly commuters from the neighboring countries [working] in the seasonal sectors (agriculture, construction) of the informal economy.”<sup>26</sup> Concerning refugees and asylum seekers, 2015-16 tendencies indicated an ever so heavy push on the borders Hungary shares with Serbia in the south and with Ukraine in the north – apart from the constant push on Italian, French, Spanish or British EU-borders. These are borders of the Schengen area of the European Union (EU), meaning the external border of the community, and therefore, here border control is the most comprehensive. Those member states – thus Hungary, too – with external EU borders had to face more challenges in recent years. The 2013 data of Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, showed that the number of those asking for asylum in the EU has risen by 50 percent compared with the year before. “The number asking for asylum has increased almost ten-fold compared to last year: some 17,000 by the end of October.”<sup>27</sup> As the article of EUrologus on the news portal index.hu of November 12, 2013 also suggested that experts can only guess why it is Hungary where such a huge increase had happened.<sup>28</sup> As of August 2015, more than 100,000 people reached Hungary, which was statistically the highest number ever. It seemed rather obvious that more people traveling from the Near East and North Africa decided to take the “Balkans Route” via Turkey, Greece, Romania, and even more Serbia, ending in Hungary. However, these migrants did not consider Hungary as their country of destination, but more as a transit territory toward Austria and Germany, and even farther towards the Western parts of the old continent. Hungary can still be considered not a “major destination for international migrants”.<sup>29</sup> According to a recent study investigating the refugee situation in Hungary offered a conclusion that: “Factors such as income, unemployment, trade or aid did not influence asylum-seekers in their choice of Hungary, nor did the increasing harshness of the Hungarian border, at least until the end of 2015, when the government started building a fence and significantly increased patrols along the border, nor in 2016.”<sup>30</sup> The authors of the study agreed with other scholars that many of these asylum-seekers “despite lodging their applications in Hungary, most likely view it as a transit country along their route.”<sup>31</sup> As for the numbers from the African continent especially, already in 2017, Hungarian authorities reported that out of a total number of 3,397, 2,532 people arrived in Hungary (comparing sending countries from where at least 5 persons arrived) representing 11 countries: the majority from North Africa, mainly from Algeria (710), Algeria (1,033), Egypt (218) and Tunisia (67). (Hungarian Statistical Office, 2017) Others from Sub-Saharan African territories included: Somalis (331), Ethiopians (32), Nigerians (83), as well as people from Sierra Leone (7), Mali (14), Cameroon (15) and Sudan (22).<sup>32</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Central Statistical Office: Foreigners in Hungary according to continents, countries and gender, as of January 1 of the given year, from 1995, Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2013. [http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat\\_eves/i\\_wvvn001a.html#2476](http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_wvvn001a.html#2476)

<sup>26</sup> A. Kováts & E. Sik, *Ibid.* p. 163.

<sup>27</sup> Politics.hu: Hungary struggles with huge rise in asylum demands. Politics.hu. November 15, 2013, <http://www.politics.hu/2013/11/15/hungary-struggles-with-huge-rise-in-asylum-demands/>

<sup>28</sup> Index.hu: Robbanás előtt a Magyar menekülthelyzet [Exploding refugee situation in Hungary], Index.hu, 2013, <http://index.hu/kulfold/eurologus/2013/11/12/robbanas-elott-a-magyar-menekult-helyzet/>

<sup>29</sup> OECD: International Migration Outlook 2012, Paris, OECD, 2012.236.

<sup>30</sup> A. Tétényi, T. Barczikay & B. Szent-Iványi: Refugees, not Economic Migrants – Why do Asylum-Seekers register in Hungary?, *International Migration, Special Issue*, November 2018. pp.15-16.

<sup>31</sup> A. Tétényi, T. Barczikay & B. Szent-Iványi, *Ibid.* p.16.

<sup>32</sup> See: [https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat\\_eves/i\\_wvvn002b.html](https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_wvvn002b.html) (30 October 2019).

### 3. Africans in Hungary

The situation was different before the democratic changes of the early 1990s – though not substantially different. As one of the ‘closed countries’ of the Eastern Pole of the Cold War, being a satellite of the Soviet Union, Hungary did receive thousands of foreigners during the 1970s and 1980s, among which young people undertaking university studies and holding state scholarships from the friendly Hungarian state represented several African countries. When searching for academic pieces in the scholarly literature on migration from Africa to Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs), one can hardly find anything specific to set off from. The pool scarcely covers this system of connections; it is indeed a neglected area of migration research. Most articles speak about African migration to Europe in a historical perspective, but hardly ever make mention of the former Soviet bloc, and this cannot be explained with the seemingly obvious reason of the substantially larger numbers having migrated to the more Western European states (many of them former colonizers) in the course of the centuries. One of the most frequently quoted papers about Africans in Hungary is Larry Olomofofe’s book chapter from 2001, which the present discussion also uses mainly because of its original sociological observations, which underline the findings of the research led by the author of the current chapter with his team between 2009 and 2013.<sup>33</sup> Another important and highly relevant piece is the summary of the first results of another ongoing research in Russia led by Dmitri Bondarenko at the Institute for African Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences. We could not agree more with Bondarenko et al. in pointing out that “without taking migrations to Russia [and to the post-socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe] into serious account any research on migration processes and their consequences at the European (or wider) level would be *a priori* incomplete and imperfect.”<sup>34</sup>

Concerning the geographical distribution of African immigrants in Hungary, the majority can be found in Budapest, the country’s political, financial and cultural center. In 2009 this meant about 65 percent of the total African community, in 2010 the figure was almost the same, 61 percent, and it has not substantially changed ever since. The second largest group is about 12-15 percent of the total African immigrant population staying in the Northern counties of the country. Almost all of the Africans live in larger urban settlements, mainly in the bigger university towns or in their agglomeration. As for the total numbers, Figure 2 shows the tendencies between 2001 and 2018. Up until 2000 there had been an increase of African inbound migration with over 2,600 people at its peak in 1998. Figure 3 then compares the number of Africans with the total number of foreigners in the country between 2003 and 2018.

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<sup>33</sup> I. Tarrósy: African Immigrants in Hungary: Connection with the New National Foreign Policy, Society and Economy, No. 2, 2014, pp. 285-305.

<sup>34</sup> D. M. Bondarenko, E. A. Googueva, S. N. Serov & E. V. Shakhbazyan: *Postsocialism Meets Postcolonialism: African Migrants in the Russian Capital*, Anthropological Journal of European Cultures, No. 2, 2002, pp. 87-105.

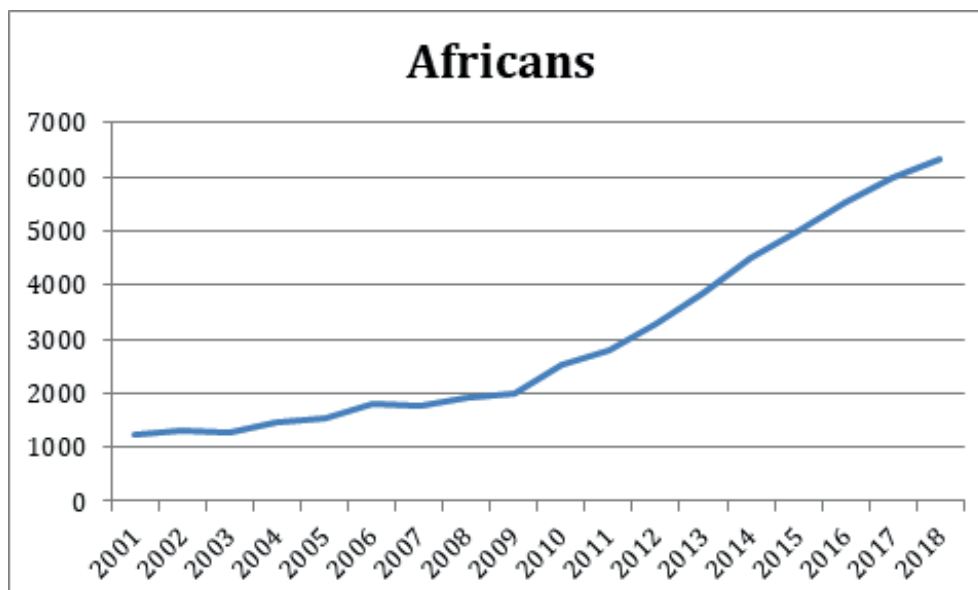


Figure 2. Number of Africans in Hungary between 1995 and 2018

Source of data: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

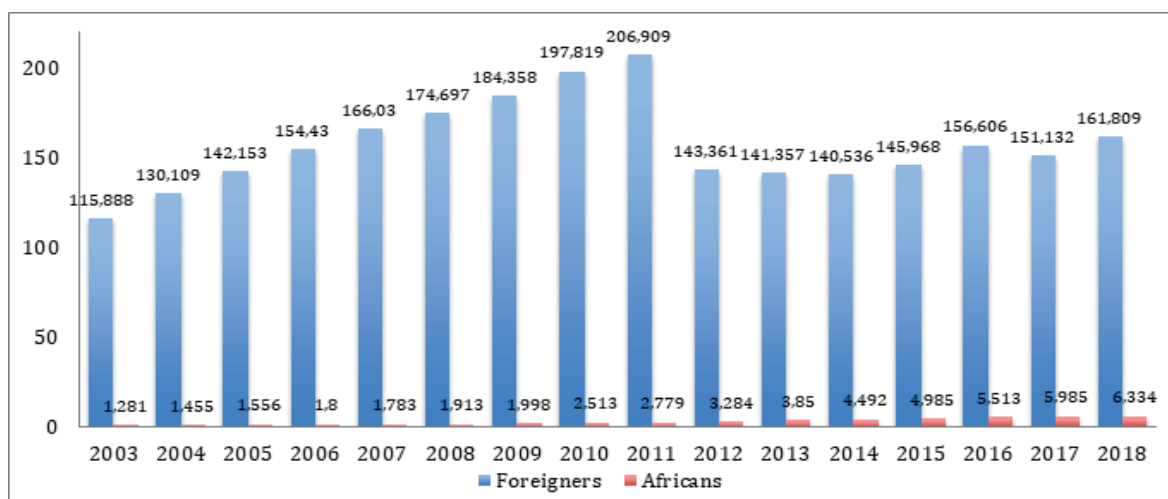


Figure 3. Number of Africans in Hungary in Light of Total Number of Foreigners between 2003 and 2018

Source of data: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

When looking at the countries of origin of legal African migrants in Hungary, a very colorful picture can be drawn as almost all the countries of the continent are represented. As Figure 4 indicates that the majority of the Africans who were staying in Hungary between 2009 and 2010 were from



countries of North Africa. The real figure of this group of Africans was above 40 percent both in 2009 and 2010. As for the most populous nation in Hungary, Nigeria led the list with more than 730 people in 2010. If the goals of migration are examined, out of the total immigrant population officially requesting residence permit during the first nine months of 2012 and the same period in 2013 respectively, 921 and 1,040 Nigerians stated study-related purposes, which meant 10 percent of the total number in the study-related category (altogether 8,927 and 10,400 respectively).<sup>35</sup> With regard to gender statistics, more than two-thirds of all the African migrants were male. In 2017, 20.54 percent of the African immigrants came from Nigeria and the rest from various African countries.<sup>36</sup>

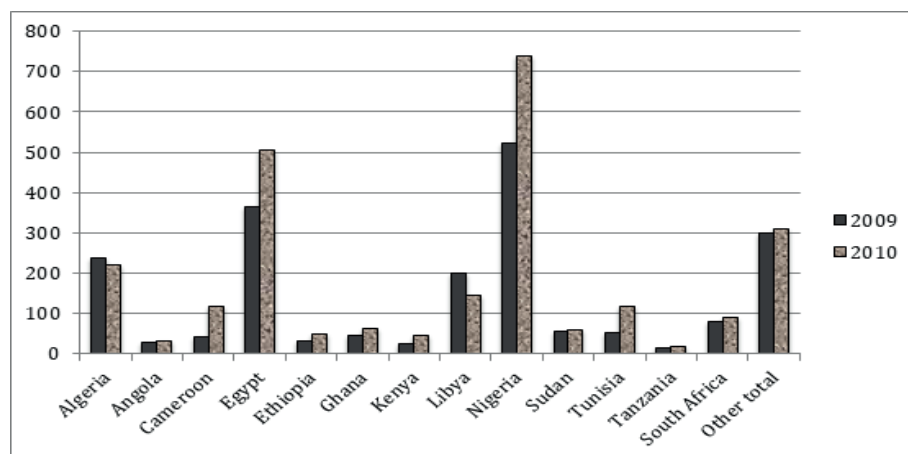


Figure 4. African Immigrants According to Countries of Origin, 2009–2010

Source of data: Hungarian Central Statistical Office

Supporting again Bondarenko et al., similarly to the situation in Russia and other post-Soviet states, “Nigerians are surely most advanced in the sphere of ‘diaspora building’”<sup>37</sup> in Hungary as well. Analyzing the African population in the Hungarian capital from the perspective of distinct African identities and potential conflicts, Olomofoe points out that “regional differences, i.e. ‘inter-state’, and internal ethnic/tribal differences, i.e. ‘intra-state’, are relegated to a minor position in the daily interactions”.<sup>38</sup> It is relevant to talk about a ‘community’ of Africans also in Budapest, with the obvious inter-state and intra-state differences among its nationals.

As a major sector of activities, the civil sector offers the opportunities for creating a community of black people. A 2011 IDResearch survey also confirmed that legal African migrants in Hungary are active in the cultural and NGO sectors, and they take part in humanitarian and philanthropic activities – for example, make efforts to fundraise (either in financial or in-kind terms, or both) for schools, orphanages in different African countries (mostly their countries of origin). France Mutombo, a Congolese-born Adventist pastor with a Hungarian wife has been one of the most active Africans in the country.<sup>39</sup> For more than 15 years he has been running the NGO Foundation for Africa, with which he manages a school and an orphanage in Kinshasa, Democratic Republic of the Congo.<sup>40</sup> He also arrived in Hungary to earn a university degree in the 1990s, and has become

<sup>35</sup> Based on the statistics of the Office of Immigration and Nationality (2013). <http://www.bmbah.hu/statisztikak.php>.

<sup>36</sup> Hungarian Central Statistical Office, 2018. [http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat\\_eves/i\\_wvn001a.html?476](http://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xstadat/xstadat_eves/i_wvn001a.html?476)

<sup>37</sup> D. M. Bondarenko, E. A. Googueva, S. N. Serov & E. V. Shakhbazyan, *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> L. Olomofoe: Africans in Budapest: an emerging subculture?, in: P. Nyiri et al. (Eds.), *Diasporas and Politics*, Budapest, MTA PTI, Centre for Migration and Refugee Studies, 2001, p. 63.

<sup>39</sup> The interview with France Mutombo was published in the Hungarian African Studies journal in 2009, see. “France Mutombo”, *Afrika Tanulmányok* 3(2), p. 56-62.

<sup>40</sup> I. Tarrósy: It Can Also Be Done from Central Europe – Hungarian Humanitarian Involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, *CIHA Blog* May 4, 2013, <http://www.cihablog.com/it-can-also-be-done-from-central-europe-hungarian-humanitarian-involvement-in-the-democratic-republic-of-the-congo/>.

a well-known African across the country showing a positive example to the Hungarian society at large about the substantial contributions and impact immigrants can make in their chosen new home country and beyond.

Drawing upon Olomoofe, the idea of a community of black people in Budapest “is constructed by ‘outsiders’, which hints at the existence of a racial/ethnic discourse, similarly to that about the Roma, within which black people are placed by the locals.” He argues that, “although many of these people have not encountered explicit racist behavior, implicit experiences of racism force Blacks together, creating a sense of solidarity.”<sup>41</sup> All this was affirmed by many of the interviewees of an IDR research project. Teddy Eyassu, for instance, an Ethiopian with a PhD in International Relations from Corvinus University of Budapest was attacked by skinheads in 1992 – two years after he had arrived in the country. The case was taken to court, and Teddy asked the judge to pardon those who beat him up. After the incident he developed friendship with the former attackers. In his interview,<sup>42</sup> Teddy recounted the following story:

*You can see other instances when Africans are offended still today. Two-three weeks ago, for example, one of the students who came to study in Budapest with a scholarship told me that he went to a pub with some friends. They saw a company there who was talking about them, which they did not understand because of their very limited Hungarian, but suddenly they heard them saying ‘néger, néger’ [meaning nigger]. Some members of that group had their cigarettes half smoked, then, threw the rest onto the shirt of one of the African boys. One of the attackers held a chair above his head intending to have a fight using it, and they all cried ‘monkey, monkey’. [...] There are atrocities, but you cannot generalize. This is truly not a feature of Hungarian society at large.*

The term ‘néger’ is commonly used for black people, and as Olomoofe rightly underlines, “is perceived as neutral by most people.”<sup>43</sup> It is in the Hungarian language, most probably deriving from centuries-long non-experience and knowledge about black people in general, that it does not have the negative connotation black people attach to it. This negative connotation is rather attached to the word ‘nigger’, which is also used in the language, but that is a very offensive term.

Among other factors, the “attitude of the natives does turn out a significant factor of migrants’ adaptation / non-adaptation”<sup>44</sup>, and for any successful integration from both sides open-minded and inclusive attitudes and perceptions are desirable. A well-known media personality, Sorel-Arthur Kembe, who has appeared on numerous TV channels either as an actor in soap operas, or a reporter in talk shows, is a son of a Congolese father (from Congo-Brazzaville) and a Hungarian mother. His father also migrated to Hungary for study purposes in 1973, and as opposed to many of his classmates who returned to their home country, he stayed and established his family. In an interview with the journal *Afrika Tanulmányok*, Sorel recalled his feelings about the atrocities he had experienced at the early 1990s: “I went through an interesting character development those days. First, I was afraid of the skinhead fellows, then, became angry with them, finally, I turned into unconcerned and rather impassive about them.”<sup>45</sup>

Most scientific views on contemporary Hungarian society, which is considered as ethnically homogeneous – apart from a rising percentage of the Roma, which is the largest ethnic minority in the country – seriously calculate with xenophobia in the context of immigration. “Homogeneity and closedness are partly the explanation of the stable and relatively high level of xenophobia which

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<sup>41</sup> L. Olomoofe, *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Also published in the Hungarian African Studies journal in 2009: “Tadesse Eyassu.” *Afrika Tanulmányok* 3 (3-4), p. 42.

<sup>43</sup> L. Olomoofe, *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> D. M. Bondarenko, E. A. Googueva, S. N. Serov & E. V. Shakhbazyan, *Ibid.* p.12.

<sup>45</sup> Interjú: Kembe Sorel-Arthur sportoló, műsorvezető, színész. *Afrika Tanulmányok* 5(3), p. 82, 2011.

has increased after the fall of Communism.”<sup>46</sup> As Hárs and Sik report, “time series analysis of the level of xenophobia shows that one third of the Hungarian population would close Hungary’s borders (open xenophobes). [...] The opposite group (“super-liberals”) is rather small (3%). The third group (“realists”) contains approximately two-thirds of the Hungarian population and has always been the dominant group.”<sup>47</sup>

Sliman Ahmed from Mauritania, who as a former socialist state scholarship holder obtained his degree in Engineering from the Budapest University of Technology in 1976, has always had a very positive view. As one of the most active NGO leaders being the president of the Sahara Foundation, he says he has a lot of Hungarian friends and supporters.

*I can only say positive things. Hungarians are hospitable and helpful. I saw Africans speaking only in English and asking for help in the street, the Hungarian they approached was using his arms and legs just to offer help in showing the requested direction. [...] If I ever return to Mauritania for good I will certainly bring along with me this Hungarian mentality and culture.*<sup>48</sup>

“To us, Hungary is our second home and irrespective of the fact that we were not born here, we live here, we have our families here, and we have exactly the same problems as our Hungarian friends,” comments on his identity Josephat Rugaika, President of the Hungarian Society of Tanzanians.<sup>49</sup> The young NGO with its experienced management – President Rugaika came to Hungary in 1975 to earn a university degree in Chemical Engineering – wants to build on the embracing attitude that was prevailing in the 1970s among the African migrants of the time. “There were different student associations for Kenyan, Ugandan and Tanzanian students, but we came together often to celebrate as a big family. This has not changed a thing; today we act in the same way. We consider, for instance, the Kenyans as our brothers and sisters”.<sup>50</sup>

Many of the Africans who got their university education during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s married Hungarians, and established their families in Hungary. Some of them draw our attention to another linguistic peculiarity, the outdated term ‘félvér’ (half-blood), which is still in use when referring to their children. Raymond Irambo, working today as an electrical engineer, who arrived in Hungary as another state scholarship holder from Congo-Brazzaville in 1982 feels that the Hungarian term possesses a negative connotation, in particular how it was used in kindergarten, as he remembers how the teachers uttered it when talking about his children. The majority of second-generation African-Hungarians prefer being called ‘white coffee’ to ‘half-blood’. Irambo’s children think their father is the coffee, their mother is the milk, and they are these two in one.<sup>51</sup>

#### **4. Foreign Policy of ‘Global Opening’<sup>52</sup>, the Potential for an ‘Africa Policy’<sup>53</sup>, Hungarian Africans and the Government’s “Africa Strategy”**

A rather self-confident step toward the implementation of a ‘global opening’ to the rapidly changing world was taken by the Hungarian government taking office in 2010. A new position of ‘Deputy State Secretary for Global Affairs’ was established within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, underscoring the strong intention to bring about changes in foreign policy and to reposition Hungary on the world map. A strategic document got green light after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council

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<sup>46</sup> E. Sik & I. Zakariás, *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Á. Hárs & E. Sik, *Ibid.* p.101.

<sup>48</sup> Excerpt from the interview published in *Afrika Tanulmányok*, see: “Interjú Szliman Ahmeddel, a Szahara Alapítvány vezetőjével.” *Afrika Tanulmányok* 4(2): 64, 2010.

<sup>49</sup> A. T. Horváth: Interjú Josephat Rugaikával, a hazánkban élő tanzániaiak doyenjével [Interview with Josephat Rugaika, the doyen of Tanzanians in Hungary], *Afrika Tanulmányok*, No. 3, 2012, p. 40.

<sup>50</sup> A. T. Horváth, *Ibid.* p.38.

<sup>51</sup> For more about Raymond Irambo and other Africans in Budapest see: J. Lángh: Budapesti afrikaiak [Africans in Budapest], *Afrika Tanulmányok*, No. 3, 2011, pp. 70-77.

<sup>52</sup> I. Tarrósy & Z. Vörös: Hungary’s Global Opening to an Interpolar World, *Politeja*, No. 2, 2014, pp. 139-162.

<sup>53</sup> I. Tarrósy & P. Morenth: Global Opening for Hungary – New Beginning for Hungarian Africa Policy, *African Studies Quarterly*, No. 1-2, 2013, pp. 77-96.

of the European Union was handed over to the forthcoming Troika-member Poland for the second half of 2011. In one of the most important foreign policy strategies since the political regime change, the Hungarian state clearly argues for a policy of ‘opening’ to the increasingly global and transnational world. It fosters the strategic decision about Hungary’s redefined stance on the ‘East’, including China, Russia and Central Asia, as well as the Middle East, but also on sub-Saharan Africa. In light of both a progressively evolving global ‘actorness’ of the EU on the supranational level and reaffirmed cooperation with the Visegrád countries, pursuing a stronger representation of regional interests, Hungarian foreign policy has a new perspective.

Within this context, Hungary wished to formulate its “own” ‘Africa policy’ – as one can be assured reading the policy document of global opening.<sup>54</sup> Good reputation and a wide network of personal contacts in many countries of Africa can certainly contribute to successful implementation, if the approach goes further beyond official government rhetoric. Those young Africans who arrived in Hungary during the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s with scholarships from the Hungarian state represent “an unbreakable link between our country and the continent,” according to the introductory text of the Budapest Africa Forum held between June 6-7, 2013, celebrating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), predecessor of the African Union (AU). These individuals – who, as Hungarian graduates with partial Hungarian identities, or at least with the feeling of attachment to their former alma maters and Hungarian culture, also bearing the knowledge of the local language – can function as “ambassadors” to foster bilateral ties. The policy of global opening has a definite intention to do this by admitting that “Hungary needs to review how to address the problems arising from the short-comings of our network of representations in Sub-Saharan countries,” and underlining that more diplomatic representation is needed for success.<sup>55</sup> On October 29, 2013, State Secretary Péter Szijjártó informed the Hungarian News Agency MTI that Hungary reopened its embassy in Abuja.<sup>56</sup> Today, the country operates 6 embassies across Sub-Saharan Africa. The latest it opened was in Luanda, Angola, where after more than three decades the Hungarian Prime Minister finally intended to pay a visit at the end of March 2019.<sup>57</sup> Despite serious diplomatic efforts, the bilateral meeting did not materialize, instead, the Primes Minister visited Cape Verde.

Hungary has a positive image in numerous African countries from two angles: first, it did not take part in Africa’s exploitation as a colonial power in a direct way (of course, it cannot escape from being part of the imperialist project as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy), second, with many of its former products, such as the Ikarus buses or Hajdu washing machines, and even the Elzett locks and the streamlined diesel rail cars of the Ganz company can hold extra credits for refining and redefining relations. A good combination of utilizing ‘nostalgic’ feelings both of university studies and products, the resident African diaspora in Hungary representing many nations, together with a strengthened and extended network of diplomatic representations as part of a coherent and consistent government policy, is the ingredients of success in the long run. All these, however, need to be coupled with direct and immediate commitments (as in the case of the Libyan crisis) as an EU and NATO members state.

Hungary has several serious and direct security policy and geopolitical concerns and interests, as far as migration, peacekeeping or NATO duties are taken into account. In the spring of 2013, the Hungarian government took part in the French-led military operation ‘Serval’ in Mali with experts of the Hungarian Armed Forces.<sup>58</sup> Also for Sub-Saharan African refugees, Hungary can be a poten-

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<sup>54</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary: Hungary’s Foreign Policy after the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Budapest, 2011, [http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign\\_policy\\_20111219.pdf](http://www.kormany.hu/download/e/cb/60000/foreign_policy_20111219.pdf).

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Hungary, *Ibid.* p. 48.

<sup>56</sup> See: <http://www.kormany.hu/en/prime-minister-s-office/news/hungary-reopened-its-embassy-in-abuja> (30 October 2019).

<sup>57</sup> See: [https://hirtv.hu/hirtv\\_gazdasagi\\_hirei/szijjarto-tobb-magyar-vallalat-is-beruhazasokat-hajthat-vegre-angolaban-2478193](https://hirtv.hu/hirtv_gazdasagi_hirei/szijjarto-tobb-magyar-vallalat-is-beruhazasokat-hajthat-vegre-angolaban-2478193) (30 October 2019).

<sup>58</sup> HVG: Magyarok Maliban: megjelent a kormányhatározat [Hungarians in Mali], HVG, 2013 [http://hvg.hu/itthon/20130308\\_Magyarok\\_Maliban\\_megjelent\\_a\\_kormanyhatar](http://hvg.hu/itthon/20130308_Magyarok_Maliban_megjelent_a_kormanyhatar)

tial target-country (in hypothetical terms rather, as long as more extended diaspora linkages offer better solutions in other countries across Europe). Organized crime, international terrorism, AIDS and tropical diseases can all reach Hungary, too. Therefore, to contribute effectively to the stability of the region and to reduce poverty in the long run is Hungary's best interest, while at the same time, presents a crucial moral obligation as well.

One of the most heated contemporary debates in the European Union is related to the ongoing refugee crisis. It is rather for internal (national) political gains to label asylum-seekers as 'illegal economic migrants', however, the entire issue of increased international migration needs to be taken seriously, but holistically, with all its complexities. "As long as there is violence in the respective countries of origin, asylum-seekers will continue to apply for refugee status in Hungary [too]."<sup>59</sup> Concerning any future Hungarian Africa policy, the migrant communities and the diaspora-related ties in general certainly need to be revalued in the coming years. As an additional element, building up future connections, soft power can play a role also in the case of Hungary. Education and research are key factors in the reshaping of Hungary's African presence, which can be a basis for further cooperation in the long run. Bilateral educational, cultural, and scientific agreements have been of great importance for Hungary for decades. The new Stipendium Hungaricum<sup>60</sup> public scholarship programme, thus represents one of the most significant tools for the pragmatic foreign policy of Hungary and for the evolving Africa policy as well. It is basically a revitalisation of the scholarship programme of the immediate Socialist past. It was presented that a number of African countries Hungary's relations had become loose after the regime change, but according to the government, these are "easy to rebuild, as nowadays young people [from] Africa [...] who have done their studies in Hungary keep good and extremely pleasant memories of the country and are more than ready to engage in cooperation."<sup>61</sup> By developing the Stipendium Hungaricum programme as a soft-power tool, Hungary's main goal is to be able to develop economic relations and increase its economic strength. At the Hungarian embassies, special commercial auxiliaries and experts have been pursuing targeted activities to increase the volume of trade. The MNKH Hungarian National Trading House CIs. is also responsible for the development of economic opportunities. Moreover, further important actors of the foreign-economy government machinery, such as the Hungarian Export-Import Bank Ltd. (Eximbank), the Hungarian Export Credit Insurance Company Ltd. (MEHIB), and the Hungarian Investment Promotion Agency (HIPA) also back these efforts.

As of April 2, 2019, the Hungarian government published its 22-point "Africa Strategy", which first and foremost is an export-oriented approach towards Sub-Saharan Africa. It also deals with other types of involvement ranging from continued participation in peacekeeping operations to providing an increasing number of scholarships to African students, to international development projects in the fields of water management, infrastructure development, cyber security and health sector-related technological contribution – to name a few.<sup>62</sup> Although this is definitely an important list of direct and concrete involvement activities, which can strengthen Hungary's commitments to African development, too, more obvious policies and actions are needed to reach out to the African diaspora living in the country and get them on board to intensify bilateral and multilateral relations with the respective African countries.

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<sup>59</sup> A. Tétényi, T. Barczikay & B. Szent-Iványi, *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>60</sup> See: <http://studyinhungary.hu/study-in-hungary/menu/stipendium-hungaricum-scholarship-programme> (30 October 2019).

<sup>61</sup> Országgyűlés Küllügyi Bizottsága [Committee on Foreign Relations of the Hungarian Parliament], 2015, 7.

<sup>62</sup> See in detail: Government of Hungary: About the Africa Strategy [Az Afrika stratégiáról], A Kormány 1177/2019. (IV. 2.) Korm. határozata az Afrika stratégiáról, in, Magyar Közlöny, No. 56., 2019.04.02., pp. 1861-1864.

## 5. Conclusions

“From the 1950s through the 1980s,” as Kane and Leedy phrase, “migration [from Africa] to Europe followed the historical connections between colonial powers and their former colonies.”<sup>63</sup> It is, however, not only because of, as they suggest, “the tightening of immigration laws in France and Britain at the end of the 1980s” that “migrants (especially refugees) began to land in countries without any colonial ties to their countries of origin.” As this paper has argued, the major political relations of the bipolar world did influence the migration of Africans toward the Eastern bloc of Europe and the Soviet Union from the 1960s up until the 1990s. Agreeing with Bondarenko et al., “in the global scale the coming of the postsocialist and postcolonial worlds in such a direct touch with each other makes clearer the complex and contradictory nature of globalization,”<sup>64</sup> and that of international migration as part of it.

Hungary offers a unique case for migration research. The country’s rather closed (due to the former socialist era among others) and homogenous society did not accumulate experience and knowledge about foreigners from faraway lands, for instance, from China, Vietnam, or sub-Saharan African countries. However, with the change of the political system at the end of the 1980s, the country has been encountering different flows of foreign nationals – but most of the immigrants are from Europe, and with a Hungarian ethnic background from neighboring countries. Not only the majority population, but also institutions of Hungarian public administration need to become more prepared for new groups of immigrants. This is of prime importance as the push of irregular migration, especially refugees and asylum seekers since 2015 has grown along the Schengen borders of the country (about half of its 1,400 mile-long national border). Apart from this new push, however, and as opposed to false perceptions, Hungary is still not a target for immigrants; rather a transit country. Besides, it is again an emigrant country – similarly to some previous historic periods. Recent figures show that “the proportion of adult Hungarians working abroad or choosing to live in foreign countries has tripled in the past two decades”.<sup>65</sup> Hungary again is “losing its best and brightest”.<sup>66</sup>

As many have said already what Kofi Annan formulated as: “there can be no doubt that European societies need immigrants,” the majority of whom are “industrious, courageous and determined. [...] They are not criminals. They are law-abiding. They do not want to live apart. They want to integrate, while retaining their identity.”<sup>67</sup> African immigrants in Hungary are no different from this. Although there are no exact figures about their professional composition, from surveys and NGO activities (mainly events and reports) it can be stated that a large group of them are well educated and highly qualified, many of them holding university degrees. Through their personal and organizational networks – as they are active in the NGO sector – they can make valuable contributions to Hungarian society, as well as to the development of bilateral connections and cooperation between their sending countries and the chosen new home country, in particular, to the success of the foreign policy of ‘Global Opening’ with its newest chapter on ‘Southern Opening’. The case of Budapest proves how they have constructed a ‘black community’, and as Olomoofe observes, a “distinct ‘Black Budapest sub-culture’”.<sup>68</sup> Even the government intends to approach and activate them to help build bridges as part of this new foreign policy doctrine.

The education of young people and efforts to include relevant information about international migration and the immigrants themselves in school curricula in the long run can be a key to clearer

<sup>63</sup> A. Kane & T. H. Leedy: African Patterns of Migration in a Global Era. New Perspectives, in: A. Kane & T. H. Leedy (Eds.), African Migrations. Patterns and Perspectives, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2013, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> D. M. Bondarenko, E. A. Googueva, S. N. Serov & E. V. Shakhbazyan, *Ibid.* p. 17.

<sup>65</sup> Politics.hu: Survey finds number of Hungarians mulling emigration tripled since regime change.” Politics.hu, 2013b <http://www.politics.hu/20130221/survey-finds-number-of-hungarians-mulling-emigration-tripled-since-regime-change/>

<sup>66</sup> Z. Dujisin: Hungary Losing Its Best and Brightest, Inter Press Service, May 23, 2013, <http://www.ipsnews.net/2013/05/hungary-losing-its-best-and-brightest/>.

<sup>67</sup> K. Annan: Migrants can help rejuvenate Europe, Financial Times, January 28, 2004.

<sup>68</sup> L. Olomoofe, *Ibid.*

understanding of the complexities of migration, and to successful integration.

All these are especially relevant, as the Hungarian government has been firmly advocating a country without immigrants in the future.