

LÁNYI Gábor¹:

“Ecclesiastical Authority Terror”. The Downgrading of the Szigetszentmiklós Reformed Parish to Mission Parish in 1956²

Abstract.

On 24 May 1956, Délpest Reformed Diocese – by the consent of the Danubian Reformed Church District– downgraded the Szigetszentmiklós Reformed Parish to the status of mission parish. The 700 members strong, almost 400 hundred years old parish’s chief elder was also relieved of his duties whilst the consistory was dissolved. The downgrading of the long-standing parish, the dissolution of the elected consistory, and the deprivation of its right to elect its minister gave rise to protests both inside and outside the parish. An array of scandals, disciplinary issues, and difficult as well as intricate lawsuits followed. The matter also generated waves in the entire Reformed Church since the presidium of the diocese overlooked the ecclesiastic rules and regulations, ordering the downgrade without the consent of the diocesan assembly –also assisted by the presidium of the church district–, accepting the new situation and appointing the mission minister.

The case of Szigetszentmiklós is a great example to understand the global picture of the actions taken against the disloyal ministers and consistories by the ecclesiastic governance intertwined with the one-party state.

Keywords: Hungarian Reformed Church during communism, church–state relations during communism, 20th-century history of the Reformed Church in Hungary, cold war, Albert Bereczky, Szigetszentmiklós.

¹ Associate professor, Károli Gáspár University of the Reformed Church in Hungary, Faculty of Theology, Department of Church History, Email: lanyi.gabor@kre.hu

² This article was subsidized by the Committee of National Remembrance.

“Ecclesiastical Authority Terror”: the phrase in the title stems from the decision of protest³ issued by the consistory of the Reformed Parish of Ócsa pleading against the parish in Szigetszentmiklós— counting 700 members and founded during the Reformation – to having been downgraded to the status of mission parish by the Reformed Diocese of Délpest with effect from 24 May 1956. The parish chief elder was relieved of his duties whilst the consistory was dissolved. There is a major difference between the mother and the mission parish in that the minister of the mission parish is not elected by the parish members but rather appointed by the bishop. Bishop Albert Bereczky commissioned this task to his old confidant, József Éliás.

The downgrade of the long-standing parish, the dissolution of the elected consistory, and the deprivation of its right to elect its minister gave rise to protests both inside and outside the parish. An array of scandals, disciplinary issues, and difficult as well as intricate lawsuits followed in the parish. The matter also generated waves in the entire Reformed Church since the presidium of the diocese overlooked the ecclesiastic rules and regulations, ordering the downgrade without the consent of the diocesan assembly – also assisted by the district presidium of the church district –, accepting the new situation and appointing the mission minister.

The case in Szigetszentmiklós is a great example of the many dilemmas over the manner in which we explore the past. Based on what has been said, we have grasped a story that might be considered typical when trying to understand the global picture of the actions taken against the disloyal ministers and consistories by the ecclesiastic governance intertwined with the one-party state and learning a lot from its dictatorial approach and methods due to this interconnection. Moreover, if we delve deeper into the story, the picture gets more nuanced. The surviving parish members remember the time spent by József Éliás in Szigetszentmiklós as being characterized by a boost in ecclesiastic life, community and spiritual renewal, and financial stability.⁴ The “spiritual and material decay” as the reason for the downgrade claimed by the diocese’s board was not completely devoid

³ Excerpt from the minutes of the Consistory of the Reformed Parish of Ócsa recorded during the session organized on 6 December 1956. Ráday Archives of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church in Hungary (RL) A/1b 930/1956.

⁴ Personal opinions of parishioners Magda Simon and István Szabó in Szigetszentmiklós – Szigetszentmiklós, 20 June 2017.

of grounds: the more than a decade-long series of futile attempts at reconstructing the church damaged during the world war made it obvious for everyone. So, the parish might have truly needed the intervention of the top ecclesiastic leaders. It is a completely different argument that due to the situation of the time the governance really felt entitled to carry it out extremely unilaterally and unnaturally against its own rules and rather according to its interests.

An objective opinion on the actors in the case is also problematic, being hindered even more by the exclusive official opinion revealed in the archive documents, whilst the counterarguments and motivations of the other party are almost completely hidden.

The socio-historical aspects of the case also deserve attention. During the period after the end of WW2 up to 1956, the social fabric of Szigetszentmiklós radically changed. The traditional agricultural feature of the village disappeared, and its reflection among the members of the local parish also deserves attention. The place of the "wealthy farmers" in the dissolved consistory was taken by a board made up of workers and small landowners appointed by the church officials. Thus, the case is a fine example of how the church leaders became the possibly unaware yet organic assistants to the one-party state's fight against the kulaks for the primary purpose of strengthening their personal power and granting comfortable positions forth loyal actors.

The case gives us an illustrative insight in to the operating mechanism of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church in the first half of the 50s, into the interests and intentions that gave rise to certain decisions and the personalities pulling the strings. It is greatly surprising how many important ecclesiastic figures of the time got actively involved in this otherwise seemingly marginal case –namely Sándor Fekete, István Finta, and József Adorján on the one hand and János Kardos, László Pap, and Andor Békési Panyik on the other. The manifestations of the latter greatly reflect the strong political rhetoric that started invading the ecclesiastic discourse of the time. And, finally, it is also interesting to see the imprint of the changes of 1956, the reformist movement and the restoration of Bereczki's leadership in the final twists of the case.

The object of my paper is to briefly present the most important turning points of the downgrade related to the above-listed viewpoints.

I. Prelude

The parish in Szigetszentmiklós was born at the time of the Reformation, building its church at the end of the 18th century after the issuance of the Patent of Toleration. At the end of 1944, the withdrawing German troops fired upon the church tower lest it should serve as hide-out for the Russian artillery, as a result of which the church became potentially life threatening.⁵ I have already mentioned the social changes that occurred in the village after the war. The Csepel lorry factory opened in the outskirts of the settlement in 1949, and consequently the population grew threefold by the mid-50s. The local strengthening of the working class challenged the traditional, farming character of the rural community. The post-war social changes were also reflected in the erosion of denominational affiliation. In 1949, of the around 6,500 inhabitants of Szigetszentmiklós approx. 60%, around 4,000 people declared themselves Reformed Protestant, while in 1956 the electoral register contained only 740 names.⁶

The damaged church was demolished in 1948. Rumour had it that most of the recovered as well as newbuilding materials purchased for the reconstruction were carried away by the people. The church reconstruction committee found in an unclear legal relationship with the consistory was said to have rather strived for their own benefit under the pretext of raising funds for the reconstruction. The general assumption was that the finances were not in order to which a strong decline in church attendance also contributed. The annual visitations carried out by the diocese, however, did not reveal any shortcomings due to – as the critics said – the good network of relations of the minister and some of the elders with the ecclesiastic officials.

⁵ The congregation also seems to remember that the church was shelled – see: PISKOR, Gyöngyi (2012): Arcok a gyülekezetből. In: *Hívó Szó* 4, 3. 9; the canonical visitation protocol of the visitation in Szigetszentmiklós between 7 and 8 May 1956. Library and Archives of Calvinist Church, Kecskemét. (KREL) A/26 7. box 267/12.

⁶ 1949 census – data on religion in percentages by settlement (1996): https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/NEDA_1949_vallasi_adatok/?pg=60&layout=s&query=szigetszentmikl%C3%B3s (last accessed: 17 August 2017); 1949 census – Demographic data (1950): https://library.hungaricana.hu/hu/view/NEDA_1949_09/?pg=192&layout=s&query=szigetszentmikl%C3%B3s (last accessed: 17 August 2017); the scores of the other denominations: Roman Catholic: 35%, Greek Catholic: 0.4%, Evangelical: 1.8%, Orthodox: 1.3%, Unitarian: 0.2%, Jewish: 0.2%, Baptist: 1.3%, other: 0.2%, no denomination: 0%.

The turning point in the prevailing situation was the forthcoming retirement of minister Dr Pál Tóth⁷ holding the position since 1922, and thus the position of minister became vacant. There is no written document about any candidate that would have been supported by the consistory of the time, but this could be highly probable.⁸ The issue of ministerial succession also began to interest the district officials besides the locals and the diocese, the former bringing up the name of József Éliás.

II. The Road to the Downgrade

At the time, József Éliás had been in good relations for decades with Bishop Albert Bereczky.⁹ As the senior pastor of the Good Shepherd¹⁰ Mission, he had raised his

⁷ Dr Pál Tóth was born in Ráckeve into the family of the local minister (11 October 1893). He studies both theology and law in Budapest. He served as an assistant pastor in Gödöllő, Fót, Alsóvadász, and in Rimaszombat, in today's Slovakia. His wife, Jolán Czinke, was the daughter of Dr Tóth's vicar in Rimaszombat, István Pálóczi-Czinke, who became bishop of the Reformed Church District Cistibiscan attached to Czechoslovakia, between 1921 and 1929. After the Treaty of Trianon, Dr Pál Tóth became assistant pastor in Miskolc, from where he was elected minister by the congregation in Szigetszentmiklós on 5 May 1922. See entry *István Czinke (Pálóczi)*. In: Zoványi, Jenő (ed.) (1977): *Magyarországi protestáns egyháztörténeti lexikon*. Budapest, MRE Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztály; Dr Tóth Pál datasheet. RL.

⁸ Magda Simon's interview, Szigetszentmiklós, 20 June 2017.

⁹ The State Security Service reports listed Elias among Bereczky's confidants and friends; see: Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security (ÁBTL) 3.1.5. O-9047/63–64, ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-9047/31–40.

¹⁰ The Good Shepherd Mission Committee was established by Bishop László Ravasz on 20 October 1942, appointing Gyula Muraközy as president. The original objective of the mission was to offer spiritual, social support and charity to the new members of the Reformed congregations converted from Judaism, but in the last years of the war its real aim became saving lives. József Éliás converted and having become a devout Reformed Protestant thanks to the mission movement was enrolled in the mission by Károly Dobos, Éliás becoming its minister registrar between 6 December 1942 and 8 September 1946. Later, after its reorganization (operating as the Good Shepherd Mission Foundation of the Hungarian Evangelical Churches), he became its managing minister until 1953. The rescuing work of the mission saving approximately 60,000 lives was a dangerous undertaking, bringing great recognition to its members after the war, especially to Éliás, who performed the operative duties. See József Éliás's datasheet, RL.

voice on the matter of the deported since 1951. Because of his strong criticism against the regime, he was removed from the head of the mission and became paid diocese minister in the Diocese of Belső [Inner City]-Budapest. The most active actor in the matter of Éliás's appointment to Szigetszentmiklós was apparently his dean, Sándor Fekete. Moreover, based on the available sources, it cannot be ascertained whether Fekete favoured this matter on behalf of Bereczky or, because he was already aware of their worsened relationship,¹¹ Fekete would have liked to remove Éliás from his own as well as Bereczky's milieu as the latter was Bereczky's confidant as well as a potential rival of the same age.

The publicly uttered idea about the plan to have Éliás elected in Szigetszentmiklós came up first at a meeting of the church district's deans held on 12 September 1955. Zsigmond Bükki, dean in the competent Diocese of Délpest, objected to the plan as, in his opinion, the rather right wing members of the consistory—many of whom had formerly been members of the Order of Vitez—would not invite József Éliás due to his rather leftist political views. Most of the consistory members present did not accept the objection, declaring that “one cannot possibly bow and bend before antisemitism”.¹² Eventually, Zsigmond Bükki unwillingly undertook the task of the election. During the first two weeks of November 1955, he tried to convince the consistory three times (in the sessions held on 1, 8, and 13 November 1956) to invite Éliás over, but he failed. Based on Sándor Fekete's inside information, the consistory members stated openly in their separate discussions that they objected against Éliás's origin. However, the consistory minutes only witness that most of the members would have been willing to decide on the invitation only after having heard several ministers. Fekete and Finta were only remote observers of the events, over-whelming Bükki with advice and their support since in Finta's opinion: “the church would suffer great damages if any mistake occurred in the elections”.¹³

¹¹ Agent codenamed *Kemény Zsigmond's* report on Albert Bereczky, 22 June 1956. ÁBTL 3.1.5. O-9047/388-396. According to the report, Sándor Fekete and István Finta were already part of János Péter's milieu, who was Bereczky's rival.

¹² Sándor Fekete's report to Albert Bereczky on the situation in Szigetszentmiklós, 14 November 1955. RL A/1c 1312/1955. The report was fully characterized by Fekete's subtle criticism against Bükki.

¹³ *Ibid.*

After Bükki's failure, whose incompetence was discussed in a lengthy letter written by Feketeto Bereczky, Feketestepped up. He suggested to Bereczky to reorganize temporarily (he underlined the word in his report) Szigetszentmiklós into a mission parish, and József Éliás would hold the interim position of minister until the appointment of the mission minister. In Fekete's opinion, the church officials' strong and firm attitude on the matter would have a great impact on the nurturing work of the parish, the diocese, and the "entire church".¹⁴

According to the plan, on 15 November 1955, Zsigmond Bükki suspended the recruitment procedure for the vacant position of minister, and the district appointed József Éliás¹⁵ interim minister until the election of the new minister, while Sándor Fekete himself was appointed chairman of the consistory.¹⁶

During the consistory session held on 29 January 1956, Sándor Fekete pointed out that churchgoing and collection box donations had increased in barely 3 months after József Éliás took over the service, trying again to determine the consistory to invite him as minister. The minutes report that this was the first time when Endre Csikesz spoke up on the matter; he later became the central figure of the resistance against the ecclesiastic governance. Cantor-teacher Endre Csikesz was the nephew of Sándor Csikesz, professor of theology in Debrecen.¹⁷ After the nationalization of schools, he did not accept his appointment letter only as cantor¹⁸ and was not willing to use the new hymn book

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Letter of the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest to the Bishop's office, 15 November 1955. RL A/1b 2445/1955; Albert Bereczky's letter to the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, 16 November 1955. RL A/1b 2445/1955.

¹⁶ Albert Bereczky's letter to Sándor Fekete, 19 November 1955. RL A/1b 2480/1955.

¹⁷ Personal communication of László Szalkay, minister in Szigetszentmiklós, Szigetszentmiklós, 20 June 2017. The family connection is also proven by obituaries: obituary of Endre Csikesz, Sr: [https://library.hungaricana.hu/en/view/Gyaszjelentések_DebreceniReffKollNagykonyvtara_CA_CSIZ/?query=SZO%3D\(S%C3%A1ndor%20M%C3%A1ria\)&pg=357&layout=s](https://library.hungaricana.hu/en/view/Gyaszjelentések_DebreceniReffKollNagykonyvtara_CA_CSIZ/?query=SZO%3D(S%C3%A1ndor%20M%C3%A1ria)&pg=357&layout=s) (last accessed: 17 August 2017).

¹⁸ Cantor-teachers had to choose which of the duties they would pursue, and the appointment letters clearly revealed the benefice for the church land that would be "offered up" to the state, as officially phrased. The same happened in Endre Csikesz's case, who challenged the diocese's decision approving the appointment letter before the church district officials. He argued that he had not previously been informed about the content of the appointment letter, which

of 1948. These acts clearly indicated that he objected against the new ecclesiastic direction, whilst not willing to accompany Halleluiah hymns meant that he also dissented¹⁹ from the Awakening movement.²⁰ Between October 1948 and January 1949, he was deputy chairman and led the activity of the committee for the reconstruction of the church suspected of misappropriation.²¹ Following the argument between Csikesz and Fekete, the consistory did not accept the last proposition regarding Éliás's invitation.²²

On 7 March 1956, over one month after the last attempt to be invited, Éliás reported to Zsigmond Bükki about the “negligence, malpractice, and abuse”²³ experienced in the parish.

The first to be mentioned were Dr Pál Tóth's managerial failures in relation to which Éliás requested disciplinary investigations;²⁴ further, the negligence that he had not paid any health insurance for the parish bell-ringer for almost three years, and his

contained obligations imposed on him that were incompatible with his position. The Council of the District rejected the petition during the session held on 5 December 1955, and the Presidium endorsed the appointment letter. See: the session minutes of the Council of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church drafted on 5 December 1955. RL A/1a.

¹⁹ The activity of the mission associations grew stronger mostly among the poorer peasants and workers in Szigetszentmiklós as early as the 30s, being encouraged by the vicinity of the capital. The awakening after the war also had the strongest impact on this social class. The parish minister, Dr Pál Tóth, tolerated rather than supported the presence of the mission associations and the awakening movement. The consistory made up of wealthier farmers sharing the traditionalist views of the national church had the same approach. See: Szalkay, László (2010): *Az ébredés előzményei és gyökerei a Szigetszentmiklói Református Gyülekezetben*. In: Szalkay, László (ed.): *„De én hálaadó szóval áldozom neked...” Tanulmánykötet Villányi Péter 70. születésnapjára*. Debrecen.

²⁰ A synthesis of the case in Szigetszentmiklós without any date or name (it might come from József Kovács, presumably from mid-1958). RL A/1b 2687/1958; Addendum by Dr Gábor Baráthy, attorney of the church district, to Endre Csikesz's case, 23 June 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/9.

²¹ Summary report on the visit on 7–8 May 1956. KREL A/26 box 7Ad 267/12.

²² Consistorial protocols of the Reformed Parish in Szigetszentmiklós (SZREP), 29 January 1955. 99.

²³ József Éliás's report to Zsigmond Bükki, 7 March 1956. KREL A/26 box. 7

²⁴ The correspondence between Dr Pál Tóth and József Éliás in relation to it. See: Dr Pál Tóth's letter to József Éliás, 18 February 1956. KREL A/26 box 7.

debt had already amounted to 7,000 forints.²⁵ The most serious matter was, nevertheless, the problem of the money and building materials collected for years for the reconstruction of the church. In Éliás's opinion, many of the parish members would like to "have a strict audit by the church district"²⁶ for the settlement of accounts. In order to determine Bükki to act further, Éliás also casually commented that he had already informed Bishop Bereczky about the problems and his suggestions.

This last remark might have prompted Bükki to call Éliás immediately to Cegléd and promise him the implementation of the downgrade plan suggested by Sándor Fekete, which would also be backed by the considerable health insurance debt as the parish could not possibly pay it on their own, needing public aid.

An interesting detail in Éliás's report on the meeting in Cegléd, which he sent to Bereczky, is the way he speaks about the people objecting to him being invited: "They deem that the church is still the area where the old could survive. After the appointment, they should come to realize that they were wrong."²⁷

After Bükki officially submitted the downgrade plan to the high district officials, district councillor Sándor Kéri asked for an attorney's expert opinion on the implementation of the plan.²⁸ Dr Lajos Virág, attorney of the church district already warned them that the downgrade would be illegal without the decision of the diocese's assembly, but as we shall see, his warning was overlooked by the competent officials. They did not commit the illegal deed out of ignorance.

On 27 April 1956, Zsigmond Bükki decreed a retroactive audit, a canonical visitation in Szigetszentmiklós,²⁹ which he justified with the change in person due to the retirement of the minister and the investigation of the real financial possibilities regarding the

²⁵ See Dr Pál Tóth's explanation in relation to this: Dr Pál Tóth's letter to József Éliás, 20 March 1956. KREL A/26 box 7.

²⁶ József Éliás's report to Bükki Zsigmond, 7 March 1956. KREL A/26 box 7.

²⁷ Spelt according to the original text –József Éliás's letter to Albert Bereczky, 19 March 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

²⁸ Expert report by Dr Lajos Virág, 24 March 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

²⁹ According to other references, it was the letter of assignment no. 267/1956, which is missing from the archive.

construction of the church.³⁰ The committee was led by the council chair of the diocese, József Adorján minister in Nagykőrös, 33 at that time.³¹ When the visitation committee wanted to investigate the reports of the reconstruction committee, it turned out that they were in possession of its former registrar, Endre Csikesz, who did not hand them over in spite of the committee's repeated requests.³²

The Sunday church service on 29 April closing the two-day visitation degenerated into a bluster almost escalating into violence. Based on the Book of Isaiah 28, verses 14–17,³³ József Adorján's sermon also tackled the problems hindering the life of the parish, "flashing the only possibility that facilitates evolution: Jesus Christ and the parish life renewed in him."³⁴

The consistory was also called in as usual after the service to be informed about the findings of the visitation. Nevertheless, József Adorján deemed that the faults found by the visitation were so serious that it would be worth presenting them to a wider audience because after the small meeting, the concerned consistory members would pass on altered information to the parish members. For this reason, he asked Éliás to organize the first part of the consistory meeting immediately after the service, and then they would move to the parsonage. Éliás favoured Adorján's idea, and he was entitled to make the change being the chair of the consistory. During the announcements after the service, Éliás declared the public consistory meeting open. He was the first to present the signs indicating a renewal in the parish's life, passing on the floor to Adorján.

When Adorján pointed out that the visitation committee would suggest to the diocese to determine the responsibility regarding the faults found, the dissolution of the consistory as well as the suspension and the impeachment of Endre Csikesz who

³⁰ The report of the canonical visitation in Szigetszentmiklós between 27 and 29 April 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

³¹ Originally, the committee should have been led by Zoltán Tánzos, registrar-in-chief of the district, who reported sick and was replaced by József Adorján; see József Éliás's declaration about case no. Bír. sz. 2/1958, 24 November 1958. KREL A/26box 7.

³² On the constant delaying of the delivery of the reports, see: Report to the Disciplinary Court of Reformed Diocese of Délpest, session held on 23 August 1956. KREL A/26 box 7, Bír. sz. 3/17.

³³ József Éliás's report to Albert Bereczky, 2 May 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

sabotaged the work of the visitation committee by not delivering the reports, one of the consistory members started clapping while making sarcastic remarks. Adorján did not let anyone interrupt him; he finished his report and announced the closing hymn. At this point, Endre Csikesz stood up and asked for the floor but was refused by Adorján, motivating it by "later, before the court".³⁵ Adorján announced the closing hymn again, but Csikesz would not accompany it. Meanwhile, another member of the consistory started shouting, holding the council responsible for the disappearance of the building material. Seeing that Csikesz would not be willing to accompany the hymn, Elias started singing psalm 23 aloud, and, while singing it, the peaceful, unconcerned members of the parish left the building. Endre Csikesz followed Adorján to the parsonage, where he informed him loudly about why he had not handed over the reports since the visitation committee did not identify themselves before him. As he said, his father, who worked as a teacher, refused the school inspector's access to class as he failed to identify himself.³⁶ Dr Pál Tóth was also there; however, there is no record about his behaviour. Meanwhile, other members of the consistory, their friends and family members also joined them at the parsonage. They surrounded Adorján, József Éliás and his wife, who felt threatened. Éliás worried even more as he had learnt earlier that morning that the scandal makers, i.e. "the so-called wealthier members of the consistory",³⁷ had met in a restaurant before the service and "discussed the matter over a glass of what did not really look like milk".³⁸ In Éliás's opinion, the scandal that Csikesz and his peers made was intentional in order to ridicule the district leaders and take the edge off the visitors' findings.³⁹ He also notes: "It is an astonishing coincidence that all the scandal makers but one are come from

³⁴ Report of the canonical visitation in Szigetszentmiklós between 27 and 29 April 1956, RL A/1b 930/1956.

³⁵ Adorján's remark is only found in József Éliás's confession: Report to the Disciplinary Court of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, session held on 23 August 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/17.

³⁶ Report to the Disciplinary Court of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, session held on 23 August 1956: József Adorján's confession. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/17.

³⁷ KREL A/26 box7, József Éliás's confession on 24 November 1958 regarding case no. Bír. sz. 2/1958.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

the wealthier farmers of the village.”⁴⁰ According to him, Csikesz flailed and screamed before Adorján’s nose: “One could rightly be afraid that József Adorján, who tried to invite calmly the members to the meeting, would lose his temper and step up forcefully as an ex-serviceman. I have also noticed that that was what Endre Csikesz would have wanted.”⁴¹

Fearing violence, Éliás shoved his way through the “crowd of screaming kulak women”⁴² – as he literally put it – and hurried to the town hall near the parsonage. Later, Dr Pál Tóth accused him of “wanting to have the police scatter the parish”.⁴³ At the town hall, he found Deputy Mayor József Boros Gere, who calmed him saying that he should not take the doings of Csikesz and the members of the consistory in cahoots with him seriously since they were merchants who were aware of the tactics “of making cheap impression”. He advised Éliás to tell the rowdy members where he had been and ask them to leave. Upon returning to the parsonage, Éliás asked Adorján to go to another room, and then firmly asked the members of the consistory to leave the parsonage. He considered that he was successful because those who were standing outside saw that he had been at the town hall, and the rumour spread among the people inside as well.

József Adorján also suggested during the service that ended in a noisy argument that cantor Endre Csikesz with holding the report of the reconstruction committee be released from his office. This was exacerbated by his aggressive behaviour during the service and at the parsonage due to which Dr Gábor Baráthy, attorney of the church district, suggested to the presidium of the diocese on 1 May 1956 that the cantor be released immediately and a disciplinary procedure be launched against him, which took place in two days’ time.⁴⁴ The reason for his release was that he was found guilty of professional misconduct as cantor when he refused to play the closing hymn at the

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² József Éliás’s report to Albert Bereczky, 2 May 1956, A/1b 930/1956.

⁴³ Dr PálTóth’s complaint filed against JózsefÉliás with the President of the Reformed Dioceseof Délpest, 8 April 1958. KREL A/26 box 7.

⁴⁴ Decision no. 367/1956 of the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpeston initiating the disciplinary proceedings, 3 May 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/1; Decision of the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest concerning the release of cantor Endre Csikesz, 3 May 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/2.

service. Following the notification of suspension, he added to this point of complaint⁴⁵ by tolling the bells the next Sunday morning at 7:37 as it was the practice when someone had died, thus causing alarm in the village.⁴⁶ According to the attorney of the church district, this did not only infringe clerical discipline, but it also breached Article 40 of the Criminal Code.

As the visitation at the end of April failed to gain insight into the reports of the church reconstruction committee, the diocese sent another auditing board on 7 and 8 May 1956.⁴⁷ At this point, Endre Csikesz was already willing to hand over the reports of the church reconstruction committee.⁴⁸

The new board's main objective was to determine the responsibilities, and eventually retired minister Dr Pál Tóth was held liable in the first place and the chief elder in the second place in all the audited matters due to the position they occupied in the parish because they allowed the church reconstruction committee to have the church demolished without any decision taken by the consistory and that they did not provide suitable storage for the materials from the dismantling and neither did they have them inventoried and preserved.⁴⁹ The third person held liable was Endre Csikesz, who temporarily chaired the reconstruction committee as interim chairman for no more than 4 months between October 1948 and January 1949.⁵⁰ Eventually, the board found the consistory collectively guilty for the lost building materials made a proposal for its dissolution.

⁴⁵ Upon starting the disciplinary proceedings against Dr Pál Tóth and János N. Gere, they added to the accusations against Csikesz. See the additions to the indictment by Dr Gábor Baráthy, attorney of the church district, in the case against Endre Csikesz, 23 June 1956. KREL A/26 box 7, Bír. sz. 3/9.

⁴⁶ Report to the Disciplinary Court of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, session held on 23 August 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/17.

⁴⁷ Report of the canonical visitation in Szigetszentmiklós between 7 and 8 May 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Ad267/12.

⁴⁸ Report to the Disciplinary Court of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, session held on 23 August 1956: confessions by József Adorján and József Éliás. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/17.

⁴⁹ Summary report on the visitation between 7 and 8 May 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Ad267/12.

⁵⁰ The fourth responsible person was elder Lajos Barada, who held the interim position of vice-chairman of the reconstruction committee starting with the session held on 23 November 195, and he did not observe the decision taken during this session, namely the tracing of the stolen building materials and issuing promissory notes for them. It may be telling that although he held the same position as Endre Csikesz, there was still no disciplinary proceeding against him. *Ibid.*

Based on the reports drafted on the occasion of the visitations held at the end of April and the beginning of May, the presidium of the diocese took the decision of downgrade on 24 May 1956 under his purview in spite of the attorney's warning, without the decision of the assembly.⁵¹ It downgraded the mother parish in Szigetszentmiklós into a mission parish, released its chief elder from the office, and dissolved its consistory. An interim managing board was appointed. The members were the ones József Éliás suggested to Sándor Fekete, except for one.⁵²

Moreover, after the first visitation ending in loud arguments, the members of the parish favouring József Éliás got mobilized and started collecting signatures for Éliás' selection.⁵³ More than half of the 740 faithful signed for Éliás, which Zsigmond Bükki forwarded to Albert Bereczky on 26 June 1956 so that he would take them into account and appoint Éliás mission minister.⁵⁴ The appointment happened that very day, on 26 May 1956.⁵⁵

III. Disciplinary Actions

One month after the declassification, on 28 June 1956, the head of the diocese started the disciplinary proceedings against retired minister Dr Pál Tóth and curator János N. Gere held liable during the visitations, with no decision from the assembly "given the immediacy of the case".⁵⁶ One and a half years later, the proceedings against Dr Pál

⁵¹ Decision no. 191-1956 of the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, 24 May 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956. Valid from 26 May 1956, date of the endorsement by the district.

⁵² Letter of József Éliás to Sándor Fekete, 24 March 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁵³ Letter written by Gyula Tálás, consistory member in Szigetszentmiklós, to Zsigmond Bükki, 30 April 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁵⁴ Letter of the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest to Albert Bereczky, 26 May 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁵⁵ Letter written by Albert Bereczky to the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, 26 May 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁵⁶ See the related documents: motion by Dr Gábor Baráthy submitted to the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest: proposal for the disciplinary proceedings against Dr Pál Tóth, 23 June 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. 267/15; motion by Dr Gábor Baráthy submitted to the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest: proposal for the disciplinary proceedings

Tóth was terminated⁵⁷ because the value of the missing materials could not be proven as there was no inventory drafted, and during the audit many materials were returned, or the parish members paid the equivalent value.⁵⁸

The disciplinary measures against the pastor and the chief elder were launched and they amended the accusations against Endre Csikesz, adding the charges for tolling the bells without permission as well as the findings of the second visitation.⁵⁹ Csikesz did not appear at the first disciplinary hearing of the diocese on 23 August 1956, and neither did he have himself represented. The witnesses, József Adorján, József Éliás, and Ferenc Balogh, were heard, and then the diocese court ordered his discharge from his position held in the church and deprived him definitively from holding any other office in the church in the future.

It is noteworthy that János Kardos became later Csikesz's legal representative.⁶⁰

against assistant pastor, János Gere, 23 June 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. 267/17; Dr Baráthy Gábor added to the counts in the case against Endre Csikesz, 23 June 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/9; the Presidium of the Reformed Church District of Délpest ordered the disciplinary proceedings against N. Gere János, 28 June 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. 267/18; the Presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest ordered the disciplinary proceedings against Dr Pál Tóth KREL, 28 June 1956. A/26 box 7. 267/16.

⁵⁷ Letter by Dr Gábor Baráthy to the Presidium of the Reformed Church District of Délpest, 14 October 1957. KREL A/26 box 7. 267/1956 Bír. sz. 4/1956.

⁵⁸ The consistorial books also recorded that the parishioners kept bringing back the building materials that they had borrowed— see, for instance, the Records of the Reformed Mission Parish of Szigetszentmiklós (hereinafter referred to as SZRMEP), 11 October 1957; there are no other court documents regarding the case against János N. Gere among the documents of the Diocese of Délpest. He might have probably broken off relations with the congregation and the church to avoid court proceedings. The new consistory in Szigetszentmiklósi united in session on 9 September 1956 and asked the diocese to dismiss all the charges against János N. Gere and the former consistory members, arguing that they were only common people who were misguided by the bad leaders, i.e. Pál Dr Tóth and Sándor Csikesz. It might be that the district did not continue the proceedings due to this letter. SZRMEP, 9 September 1957.

⁵⁹ Dr Gábor Baráthy's new counts in the case against Endre Csikesz, 23 June 1956. KREL A/26 box 7. Bír. sz. 3/9.

⁶⁰ The Budapest lawyer, who had already gained fame during the two world wars, was elected assistant pastor-in-chief of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church in 1948. He was

He helped Csikesz challenge the judgment on 15 October 1956. From then on, the case was challenged several times, mostly for formal errors, and was eventually brought before the General Convent and dragged on for 4 years, and the counts were also complemented in autumn 1956 by “life-threatening provocation and agitation” committed against József Éliás.⁶¹

On 18 October 1956, the presidium of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest brought the case of the downgrade of the parish in Szigetszentmiklós before the council of the diocese mainly to have the council acknowledge the presidium’s decree concerning the declassification. They also approved retroactively that the presidium had allowed the parish in Szigetszentmiklós to elect a chief elder and a consistory on 14 September 1956 instead of holding an interim parish session.⁶² The following day, the diocese’s assembly held on 19 October 1956 did not deal in detail with the issue of declassification. In his report, Dean Zsigmond Bükki saluted the new pastor of the diocese, József Éliás,⁶³ on the one hand, whereas he only marginally tackled the events in Szigetszentmiklós in a few lines, among the reports on other parishes. No mention was made about the declassification.

forced to resign being accused of serious breach of ecclesiastic laws and was replaced by Rolandt Kiss, a confidant of the communist party. After WW2, Kardostook on the position of defence barrister in several important show trials (e.g. Ferenc Szombathelyi, former Chief of Staff, Lajos Ordass, Evangelical bishop, the trial of the Hungarian Community [*Magyar Közösség-per*], Pál Esterházy in the Mindszenty trial). After 1956, he took on the defence of Sándor Rácz, President of the Great Central Workers’ Council of Budapest, and of Ilona Tóth, medical student. János Kardos’s grandfather was a cantor-teacher, and his father was a pastor in Szigetszentmiklós. He helped on several occasions in the legal complaints filed by the locals. The fact that he took on Csikesz’s trial can be a sign that he might have noticed deep down some resemblance between the show trials and this trial. See: KISS, Réka (2006): Egy védőügyvéd portréja a XX. századból (Kardos János). In: *Valóság* 8. 87–101.

⁶¹ See the letter by József Éliás to the disciplinary committee of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, 11 December 1957; the letter by József Éliás to the disciplinary committee of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, 23 February 1958. KREL A/26 box 7.

⁶² The 20 consistory members were supplemented to 28. See the report of the Council of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest on 10 October 1956, RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁶³ The report of the assembly of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest, 19 October 1956: the diocese’s report. RL A/1b 2331/1956, 12.

Bükki stated that the two visitations revealed "shocking problems and deeply rooted misery". After the diagnosis, the cure was going to be easier. Those who really loved the church and not themselves were truly open and started the new work whole heartedly. The pastor, the chief elder, and the consistory took over the duties, and now they can start "building the spiritual as well as the stone church", being careful to "deal with the past only as much as strictly necessary for the best interest of the future."⁶⁴

As the dean also mentioned it, the parish elected a chief elder and a consistory instead of the interim leadership pursuant to the approval of the consistory,⁶⁵ and on 14 October Éliás József, the new chief elder, and the consistory members were formally inaugurated.⁶⁶

IV. Revolution

These events were followed by the events on 23 October 1956, bringing changes to the ecclesiastic leadership as well. Bereczky's ecclesiastic apparatus had to resign, and the Danubian Church District was again led by Bishop László Ravasz, while the chief elder was again János Kardos.⁶⁷ In response to the letter containing the proposal to join sent by the Awakening Movement on 13 November, the consistory of Szigetszentmiklós sent an unusually long letter,⁶⁸ which actually contained the excerpt from the minutes of the consistory session held in 9 December 1956.⁶⁹ Upon József Éliás's suggestion, the

⁶⁴ Op. cit. 20.

⁶⁵ SZRMEP, 23 September 1956.

⁶⁶ Invitation to the investment of József Éliás and the new consistory and assistant pastor (14 October), 2–4 September 1956. RL A/1c 2038/1956; SZRMEP, 14 October 1956: The report contains the list of the pastors and church leaders that sent their regards on the occasion of the inauguration. The inauguration was performed by Dean Zsigmond Bükki.

⁶⁷ LADÁNYI, Sándor (1999): Vázlatos történelmi áttekintés a Magyarországi Református Egyház közelebbi múltjának alakulásáról. In: Barcza, József – Dienes, Dénes (eds.): *A Magyarországi Református Egyház története 1918–1990*. Sárospatak. 137.

⁶⁸ KISS, Réka (ed.) (2007): *Kelt, mint fent, Iratok a Református Megújulási Mozgalom történetéből /1956–1957/*. Budapest. 335–341.

⁶⁹ SZRMEP, 9 December 1956.

consistory unanimously welcomed the changes in the leadership. The letter emphasized that János Kardos “was born in their community, being the son of their former beloved pastor. The consistory hopes that the new leadership would carry the matters of this long-tried parish in its heart.”⁷⁰

Then, József Éliás, although he thought he was not among those who in the 2nd point of the letter “are considered by the public opinion a fighter and representative of the ecclesiastic governance system to be dissolved”, he still considered that it was good that the consistory confirmed him in this assumption in the situation requiring a general renewal and cleansing, and therefore he called in the members for a vote of confidence. Éliás and Vilmos Nádasi, assistant pastor, left the room for the members to be able to discuss freely. Ten minutes later, they were called back. Then, chief elder József Simon, Jr. uttered words of praise for Éliás’s service; in his opinion, the church that had been almost empty earlier, was crowded with people, the biblical courses that had earlier been attended by 5 or 6 people could no longer be kept in the same room as there were too many attendees, the money in the collection box donations increased three-fourfold, and the parsonage door is open to all, not only to the “privileged”. Consequently, the consistory unanimously granted József Éliás the vote of confidence.

In the response, they also attached the consistory’s most recent decision of commitment regarding the construction of the church, and then the last point referred to Endre Csikesz’s and János N. Gere’s “antisemitic agitations”. Apparently, it was not a novelty for Csikesz, as he had started when Éliás’s name was first uttered, and he had continued all along. The consistory rejected these kinds of views not only because they were against the Word and Christianity, but also because it could damage our national endeavours: “Endre Csikesz disregarded the change of times and circumstances; he intended to disseminate intentions that are judged today by both East and West. Such an endeavour is suitable precisely for supplying information to those who would rather talk about a counter-revolution than a revolution.” The consistory’s response wanted to inform that the anti-Semitic agitation was intended to be carried out using János Kardos’s name, but they also ascertained that this behaviour was far from János Kardos.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

The decision also stated that Csikesz and N. Gere were not among those prosecuted by the former church leadership. "The dead in the revolution did not sacrifice their lives for the interest of people of this kind."⁷¹

V. Critics

The changed ecclesiastic leadership's environment also encouraged the diocese's critics of the matter in Szigetszentmiklós to have their voices more powerfully heard. On 17 December 1956, Andor Békési, minister in Ócsa, sent a letter to the Presidium of the Danubian Church District, saying that the consistory of Ócsa dealt with the situation of its twin parish in depth, and felt it was its obligation to submit to the presidium's attention the matter that concerned the entire region, avoiding the whole official bureaucratic process.⁷² He stated that the neighbouring ministers and consistories fully agreed with their own opinion. He attached to the letter the excerpt from the minutes of the consistory session held one day before in Ócsa. The conclusions therein referred mainly to the minister's election. In their opinion, the "long-standing parish" was divested of its mother church status "only to have the official candidate forced upon them."⁷³ In Andor

⁷¹ The big picture also highlights that the consistory members unanimously accepted circular n. 1900–1956. I. 1 of the Convention Presidium, being urged to do so by József Éliás during the session held on 17 March 1957, the letter declaring the leadership changes taking place in November 1956 as illegal and restoring Bereczky's leadership. According to the report, upon the acceptance of Ravasz's circular letter dated 13 November, "the guise of legality misled us and many other congregations". During the same session, the consistory asked the diocese to take measures and prosecute ecclesiastic judge Dr Balázs Nagy Kálózi, who performed the visitation in 1955, and ascertained that everything was in order. In the consistory's opinion, the obstacle in the way of the congregation's unity was that the members of the consistory and their families would be entitled to feel offended since the diocese's visitation committees would each year cover up the former pastor's as well as the assistant pastor's negligence and then held the entire consistory liable for them at the end of April 1956. SZRMEP, 17 March 1957.

⁷² Andor Békési's letter to the Presidium of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church, 17 December 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁷³ Excerpt from the minutes of the consistory session of Ócsa held on 16 December 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956. The original minutes are missing from the archive of the parish in Ócsa along with other minutes of other sessions. Instead, one can find the following typewritten

Békési's opinion, this was the consequence of several illegalities and aggressiveness that "the long-standing parish got scattered", and the new ecclesiastic leaders did nothing so far to remedy the problems. Some acquaintances from Szigetszentmiklós of a consistory member in Ócsa were of the opinion that the entire congregation stood up united against the will of the higher officials and was deeply disturbed by the "aggressivity and unlawfulness of the ecclesiastic officials."⁷⁴ The consistory in Ócsa "followed the fight of the congregation in Szigetszentmiklós with great concern and sympathy during the attacks of the unlawful and inhuman pastoral elections. The full arsenal of ecclesiastic power terror was tried out on this old parish to force the official candidate upon them." The consistory and the congregation stood up against aggression, but when the "coercion, threats, and promises lasting for several months did not reach their aim, they committed the greatest unlawfulness: they deprived this long-standing parish from its mother parish character and downgraded it to mission parish".⁷⁵ The consistorial decision quoted the relevant regulations based on which the downgrade decision was illegal, since it was endorsed neither by the assembly of the diocese nor by the assembly of the church district. "It is absolutely clear that the illegal decisions were needed to have their candidate appointed against the congregations' will."⁷⁶ The consistory of Ócsa asked the new presidium of the church district to restore the parish in Szigetszentmiklós as a mother parish and organize proper pastoral elections. Thus, the district "would fulfil its moral obligation by removing the illegally appointed people and remedy their illegal deeds."⁷⁷

After receiving the letter from Ócsa, the presidium of the church district asked for a legal opinion from Dr Lajos Virág, who referred back to his expert opinion dated

note accompanied by Andor Békési's signature, dated 1 June 1957: "These minutes were taken away by the officials of the Ministry of the Interior when the pastor was arrested and were not returned."

⁷⁴ Excerpt from the minutes of the consistorial session held in the Reformed parish of Ócsa on 16 December 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁷⁵ Excerpt from the minutes of the consistorial session held in the Reformed parish of Ócsa on 16 December 1956. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

24 March 1956, in which he had warned Albert Bereczky that it was illegal for the downgrade to be resolved upon by the council of the diocese without the approval of the diocese's assembly. In his opinion, the downgrade had to be submitted to the diocese and the church district, and the "decision of the assemblies must annul the presidium's decision".⁷⁸ It mentioned that the minister must be legally elected, which was expected to lead to electoral struggle. He also mentioned the charges against the former chief elder and the consistorial members in relation to the building materials. It is interesting that he still considered the examination of the charges urgent so that "everything would be clarified by the time of the elections". This proves that the diocese attorney did not consider the charges form is management as having been properly proven.

Registrar Dr László Pap, the only one to have been given a vote of confidence among the old church leadership, promised the consistory of Ócsa that the following assembly would deal with the situation in Szigetszentmiklós and would "proceed according to the law."⁷⁹ Meanwhile, at the end of January 1957, the former Bereczky church leadership was restored due to official state pressure, but, as Bereczky had suffered a stroke in the summer of 1956, the episcopal duties were fulfilled by the senior dean, actually one of the main figures in the Szigetszentmiklós case, Zsigmond Bükki.

The church district assembly was convoked for the first time for 14 November 1957. The joint committee preparing the assembly dealt with the issue in Szigetszentmiklós on 12 November. They interpreted the relative article⁸⁰ saying that the change in the status of the parish would be only approved by the assembly of the church district, but it could not decide upon it as that would rest with the diocese. Therefore, the district assembly could not tackle this case until a diocese's assembly had not decided upon it.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Expert report by Dr Virág Lajos, 9 January 1957. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁷⁹ Letter sent by the Registrar-in-Chief of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church to Andor Békési, 14 January 1957. RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁸⁰ Ecclesiastic Code 1933. n. I. 18§.

⁸¹ Petition by Dr György Harsányi, lay registrar of the church district to the united committee of the Assembly of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church, 12 November 1957. RL A/1b 930/1956.

Nevertheless, the diocese's assembly did not deal with this matter for another year. The delays had a good reason: Dean Zsigmond Bükki fell ill. He took a sick-leave starting 1 November 1957⁸² and died on 9 July 1958.⁸³ The new dean, József Adorján, started his office only on 26 January 1959, and during the vacancy only the most stringent matters were dealt with. It is worth mentioning that when the dean's office moved, the minutes of the reconstruction committee of Szigetszentmiklós so hardly obtained from Endre Csikesz were lost⁸⁴.

VI. Surprise

Meanwhile, a surprising turn of events happened in Szigetszentmiklós as well: on 28 February 1958, József Éliás switched offices with the pastor of the academic church of Debrecen, József Kovács. Éliás first acquired the permission of the bishop of Tiszántúl for the switch, he had not discussed it previously with Albert Bereczky, the latter being confronted only with the application submitted for him to be signed. He approved it, but he scolded Éliás for his decision in a “fatherly” letter: “I have managed to place you in your office in Szigetszentmiklós in spite of fairly difficult circumstances and not really meagre factors. ... I cannot but sadly ascertain that you have misunderstood your duties deriving from the circumstances.”⁸⁵ He was sorry for the harsh-keyed letter “although there were cases in which the disciples had to be warned: you do not know what kind of soul you have,”⁸⁶ nevertheless asking for blessings on Éliás's new office.

⁸² Dean Zsigmond Bükki's application for sick-leave. Pest County Archives (PML) XXIII. 23-a 59, documents of the ecclesiastic rapporteur of the executive committee of the Pest County Council 1950–1989, 526/1957.

⁸³ Minutes of the Assembly of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest dated 18 November 1958: report by Deputy Dean Ferenc Soós. KREL A/26 box 1, pp. 2–3. There is a short report on Szigetszentmiklós, mentioning the dean's illness and death as the reason for the delay.

⁸⁴ Letter by Ferenc Soós to the clerical chair of the diocese court, 2 September 1958. KREL A/26 box 7.

⁸⁵ Albert Bereczky's letter to József Éliás, 15 March 1958. RL A/1c 2624/1958.

⁸⁶ i.e.

Éliás's 5-page-long response reveals further details about how he was appointed to Szigetszentmiklós.⁸⁷ In the light of this, after the "wandering times" while being a diocese minister, he was happy to be appointed minister. The place was appealing to him, but because of the situation created in the parish he tried to determine Sándor Fekete to withdraw his appointment several times, although the latter was, in his opinion, the main facilitator for his appointment to Szigetszentmiklós. He eventually accepted it out of obedience. "...what have I done? I've preached, I've been a minister to the church members, I've restored the parsonage, and meanwhile I've fought those wolves who were not only against the mission of Christ but were also the devious enemies of progress. Why would I hide it that the living congregation took shape there during my service, and today we would have long overcome the issues of all those against us if it hadn't been for October 1956 and the ecclesiastic consequences of it."⁸⁸ Éliás mentioned that for the spiritual and financial evolution of the congregation he had to pass on the office to someone who "is not defiled by the memory of any kind of ecclesiastical proceeding" as the primary reason for the switch of offices.⁸⁹

József Éliás's claims, the re-establishment of the course of affairs, and the financial affairs in the parish of Szigetszentmiklós were confirmed by the canonical visitation performed in October 1957, and the relaunch of congregational life was indicated by the positive changes in the number of names in the register of voters, showing an increase of 248 in 1956 and of 360 in 1957.⁹⁰ On 23 February 1958, during the last session under József Éliás, pointing out the restoration of peace in the parish and the normalization of the finances, the consistory requested that the leaders of the diocese grant back the mother parish status to Szigetszentmiklós.⁹¹

⁸⁷ József Éliás' letter to Albert Bereczky, 19 March 1958. RL A/1c 2624/1958.

⁸⁸ i.e.

⁸⁹ i.e.; Éliás wanted to meet Bereczky in person in order to clarify the misunderstandings between them, which could have happened at the end of April 1958, however there is no written document proving it. Related documents: József Éliás' letter to Albert Bereczky, 25 March 1958. RL A/1c 2625/1958.; Albert Bereczky's letter to József Éliás, 10 April 1958. RL A/1c 2625/1958.; József Éliás' letter to Albert Bereczky, 24 April 1958. RL A/1c 2664/1958.; Mrs. József Éliás' letter to Albert Bereczky, 29 April 1958. RL A/1c 2667/1958.

⁹⁰ The 1958 register of voters (drafted in 1957) contains 1,356 names. See: SZRMEP 11 October 1957. For the report of the canonical visitation, see: SZRMEP, 8 October 1957.

⁹¹ SZRMEP, 23 February 1958. 245.

VII. Aftermath

Sándor Kéri, district councillor, requested a new expert opinion on the matter from the district's attorney, Dr Géza Miklós, on 29 October 1958. In his letter, he explained that “the presidium of the church district sees no justified reason for which the parish would be organized as a mission parish and wants the diocese's assembly to deal with the case and Szigetszentmiklós to regain its mother parish status”.⁹² Moreover, as stated, one needs to find a way to avoid a re-election process for József Kovács, who was appointed by switch of offices, once the mother parish status has been restored.

In Dr Géza Miklós's opinion, the transformation into a mission parish was legally “non-existent”, i.e. it has not even happened as the diocese's assembly has never decided it. Thus, there was no legal possibility for the current minister not to be subject to an election process.⁹³

It was against this background that the Reformed Diocese of Délpest held its following assembly on 18 November 1958, chaired by Deputy Dean Ferenc Soós due to Zsigmond Bükki's death. The assembly dealt with the diocese's decision of downgrading the parish in Szigetszentmiklós to a mission parish under Point 39 of the agenda that it retroactively approved and declared all the decrees and measures deriving thereof legal.⁹⁴

The following point on the agenda explained that downgrading “was the consequence of a financial crisis and a weakness of faith” that we can speak of as a past matter. The following visitations indicated “rich and blessed results”. The “image of the parish” changed under the services of József Éliás and József Kovácsas the ministers mobilized the parish starting with 1956. For further strengthening and edification, the diocese's assembly approved the request sent by the consistory of Szigetszentmiklós and re-established the status of the mission parish into a mother parish, with the remark that

⁹² Letter by the Councillor of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church to Dr Géza Miklós, 29 October 1958, RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁹³ Dr Géza Miklós's letter to the Presidium of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church, 3 November 1958, RL A/1b 930/1956.

⁹⁴ Minutes of the Assembly of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest held on 18 November 1958: decision no. 39, KREL A/26 box 1.

the current minister appointed by switch of offices should be considered as the legally invited and formally inaugurated minister of the mother parish. Thus, according to the wording of the decision: "it declares the current status quo legal."⁹⁵

Bibliography

Primary Sources

ÁBTL – Historical Archives of the Hungarian State Security.

KREL – Library and Archives of Kecskemét Reformed Parish.

PML – Pest County Archives.

RL – Ráday Archives of the Danubian Church District of the Reformed Church in Hungary.

SZREP – Minutes of the Consistory of Szigetszentmiklós.

SZRMEP – Minutes of the Consistory of the Szigetszentmiklós Reformed Mission Parish.

References

KISS, Réka (2006): Egy védőügyvéd portréja a XX. századból (Kardos János). In: *Valóság* 8. 87–101.

(ed.) (2007): *Kelt, mint fent, Iratok a Református Megújulási Mozgalomtörténetéből (1956–1957)*. Budapest.

LADÁNYI, Sándor (1999): Vázlatos történelmi áttekintés a Magyarországi Református Egyház közelebbi múltjának alakulásáról. In: Barcza, József – Dienes, Dénes (eds.): *A Magyarországi Református Egyház története 1918–1990*. Sárospatak.

PISKOR, Gyöngyi (2012): Arcok a gyülekezetből. In: *Hívó Szó* 4, 3. 8–10.

⁹⁵ KREL A/26 box 1 – minutes of the Assembly of the Reformed Diocese of Délpest held on 18 November 1958, resolution no. 40. The decisions on the two points on the agenda were approved unamended by the assembly of the Church District on 18 December 1956, l. RL A/1b – minutes of the Assembly of the Danubian District of the Reformed Church held on 18 December 1958, agenda points 59 and 60.

- Szalkay, László (2010): Az ébredés előzményei és gyökerei a Szigetszentmiklósi Református Gyülekezetben. In: Szalkay, László (ed.): „*De én hálaadó szóval áldozom neked...*” Tanulmánykötet Villányi Péter 70. Születésnapjára. Debrecen.
- ZOVÁNYI, Jenő (ed.) (1977): *Magyarországi protestáns egyháztörténeli lexikon*. Budapest, MRE Zsinati Iroda Sajtóosztály.