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Balázs Juhász

“They would have liked to make a revolution!”: The taxi blockade and what is behind it nationally and in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county

Abstract

The change of regime took place peacefully in Hungary as a result of negotiations between EKA¹ (Opposition Round Table) and MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party). Because this was a peaceful transition, no revolution took place and an important factor was overlooked from the process of change of regime: the crowd. The result of this was the taxi blockade, which appeared as a delayed regime changing movement of the population and resulted in the first great ordeal after the change of regime. Why did the taxi blockade develop? Was it the result of the price rise or the way the prices were raised? But why was the price increase necessary? What were the main triggers? What happened? How did it go? Did the people get fed up with democracy and capitalism so soon? Was it a spontaneous or an organized protest? What was the general opinion of this blockade then and how is it perceived now? In this study I will answer these questions and debunk the legends associated with them. After outlining the national events I will compare the course of these happenings at regional and county-level. The regional example will be Borsod Abaúj-Zemplén County. Finally I will finish off with the assessment of the situation, where I will examine all three players of the taxi blockade (government, taxi drivers, society) and I will draw conclusions from them. My biggest source of help were books dedicated to this topic, local and contemporary newspapers and related studies.

Keywords: taxi blockade, price increases, passivity, national crisis, legends, regional course of the events

¹ EKA = “Oppositional Round Table”. During the period of the regime change, it was a forum for the opposition groups and parties opposed to the Kádár regime. They united to represent a more serious force against the government.

Why is it important to talk about the taxi blockade after more than 30 years? On the one hand, because the taxi blockade was the first real test of the change of regime and on the other hand, because a multitude of questions surrounds the event to this day. In this study I will explore these questions and present what the first test of democracy was like here in Hungary.

I. Introduction

“The whole thing came out of the way it was presented. There would be nothing here now if this had been communicated to the people correctly” (SZEKÉR–NAGYMIHÁLY, 2015:17) – or why did the taxi blockade develop? The first source of the problem was, which was also the first failure of the change of regime, that the government applied the same, old methods in a different system. Before the regime change, as part of the Eastern Bloc (the territory of the former communist/socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe after 1945) Hungary was vulnerable in every aspect, including the oil reserves. Compared to Western European countries, which had enough reserves for several months, the USSR maintained oil stocks enough only for 8–10 days. After the separation/demerging from the Eastern Bloc Hungary continued to be dependent on oil dependence and still possessed low levels of oil reserves. However, the purchase price increased, mainly in connection with the disrupted Soviet supplies and consequently the government was forced to buy oil from the world market for dollar at continually fluctuating prices which was the result of the Gulf crisis. Moreover, the official price (hatósági ár) was adjusted to previous Soviet prices and was lower than the purchase price imposed strict restrictions on the country’s economy. The country did not have a elaborated/mature economic program anyway and it was forced to raise the price of oil. During the price hikes neither the parliamentary parties nor the advocacy organisations (érdekképviseleti szervek) and the government did not inform the society beforehand. This was the usual procedure in the Kádár system, with the difference that in state socialism the preparation of changes was long and contemplated, taking into account social sensibility with the so called mood reports (hangulatjelentés). Following the change of regime mood reports ceased to exist, but the government’s attitude to informing the

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society (passivity) persisted. This passivity was intensified by the fact that the change of regime took place peacefully in Hungary as a result of negotiations between the EKA² and the MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party), and no decisive mass movement emerged, so the "people" participated in the events as outside observer. This passivity was two-sided and was present both from society to politics and from politics to society. As a result, in the eyes of the government the crowd was an external factor that had to be managed, so it thought in terms of managing society rather than cooperating with it.

This was confirmed by Pál Forgács, president of the Democratic League of Independent Trade Unions, who said that since the Parliament was unicameral, advocacy organisations did not have any opportunity to speak up, because there were only political parties in the parliament. Besides the meeting between trade unions and the government was just a show. As a consequence, the government did not inform the population about the inevitability of a price increase and its reasons. Péter Ákos Bod, the government's Minister of Industry and Trade, justified the sudden announcement by saying that since oil stocks were only enough for 3-4 days, if the government announced the price increase, people would buy up stocks and life would stop. So, he ordered a media blackout not expecting to encounter such resistance from the citizens. So, one of the problems was passivity and the other was incompetence in making the announcement. Due to Jozsef Antall's (prime minister of Hungary) hospitalization the decision to increase fuel prices by more than 60% on average was taken at an extraordinary cabinet meeting on Sunday, October 21, 1990 and this decision was protected by a media blackout.

There was a debate about whether it should happen in one or two steps. Péter Ákos Bod wanted to solve the price increase in two steps, as he considered the one-time large increase too big a shock. In the end, it was rejected and the Finance Minister Ferenc Rabár decided on a one-time large increase. The reason was nothing more than a stretched budget.

² EKA = "Oppositional Round Table". During the period of the regime change, it was a forum for the opposition groups and parties opposed to the Kádár regime. They united to represent a more serious force against the government.

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Péter Ákos Bod recalls: *“In March 1990, however, the International Monetary Fund expected a broadly balanced budget for that year in return for financing: under the loan agreement the maximum annual deficit could be HUF 10 billion. Therefore, towards the end of the year (this time it was after September) we could already see that the government should allocate sources to transport, defence and agriculture. But then we raise this money from somehow, because we could not let the deficit slip out of control. It was also impossible to know exactly how much the deficit was. Actually, we had to drive in fog. It was not decided either who would communicate it and how.”* (SZEKÉR–NAGYMIHÁLY 2015: 118, 121.)

The strategy to inform the public was not fully elaborated, moreover the ministry responsible for communication changed constantly.

Meanwhile, even before the government's announcement, the press took the gasoline price increase as a fact in newspapers and on the radio, comparing it to price cuts elsewhere (“prices here only know the way up”). It might have been another reason for the later protest. Népszava (one of the biggest Hungarian newspapers) published an article entitled “Betrayal: 56–62 forint petrol price is coming (Árulás: jön az 56–62 forintos benzin)” on the front page of the October 19 issue. Ekkor/Then the government remained silent and announced the price increase at a press conference on Thursday 25 October at two o'clock in the afternoon saying it would take effect from 12 a.m. the following day.

The third factor that may have been the reason of the taxi blockade was the existing but untapped sense of urgency that was left fallow in the process of change of regime, which allowed a rage resulting from a price increase and a communication failure to paralyze the country with such intensity. This was compounded by the difficult livelihood situation, the existential fear the majority experienced as a consequence of the change of regime and the previous increases (diesel price increase in July 1990, increase in the price of food), which were not so huge and sudden, but their accumulated effect may have contributed to the outbreak and support of taxi blockade. (SZEKÉR–NAGYMIHÁLY 2015)

II. But what happened?

On October 25, 1990, at 6:35 p.m., BRFK (Budapest Police Headquarters)'s Central Duty received an announcement that taxi drivers wanted to demonstrate against the petrol price increase approved by the government. Although the taxi drivers did not announce their demonstration 72 hours before, the last participants of another demonstration were just leaving Kossuth Square right at the time of contacting the police; so the presence of the police securing the event was still available at the location indicated by the taxi drivers. By 7:40 p.m., 500–600 taxis were staying on Kossuth Square. At 7:48 p.m., Police Captain Zoltán Majoros reported that he had contacted Pál Horváth, the representative of taxi drivers at Kossuth Square. According to their demand, they wanted to negotiate with Balázs Horváth (Minister of Home Affairs) about withdrawing the price increase and in case of a possible refusal they also envisaged that all road bridges in the capital would be completely closed. At 20:10, Minister of Transport Csaba Siklós had negotiated with the representatives of taxi drivers at the instructions of Balázs Horváth, which lasted only a few minutes. The taxi drivers did not accept the opinion communicated to them, according to which the government would not return to the matter until the following day. At 20:35 they started blocking bridges, the main traffic routes, and major junctions in the capital with cars and CB radioed their fellow taxi drivers for help, so the number of participants in the demonstration steadily increased. In response to their call private carriers, company car drivers and civilians joined with their vehicles within a relatively short period of time, so the demonstration expressed widespread public discontent. Since this assembly was not yet organized – but spontaneous or unorganized – decisive police actions might have been effective. By 21:00 all road bridges had been closed by taxi drivers. The police initiated discussion with representatives of the demonstrators, trying to dissuade them first. Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sándor Barna summoned Pál Horváth and told him that what they were doing was illegal and informed about the possible consequences of it, and that they had the right to disband the blockade. Once it became apparent, that it became a nationwide operation and had gained the sympathy of many, thus became a civil disobedience movement, it was clear

that the situation would have to be resolved through negotiations. However, he told the protesters that unless one bridge was left unobstructed and the underground was left unoccupied, violent intervention would follow. The demonstrators seemed to understand it and removed the blockade from the Lánchíd. There was no mention of the deployment of the Hungarian Army! At most, they would have borrowed equipment suitable for removal if they had decided to remove the cars at some hotspots. Balázs Horváth gave respite taxi drivers until noon on Friday morning: *“The government respects the right of association and assembly, but the government does not tolerate demonstrations that are contrary to the law and violate the law. The government’s position is that it is willing to negotiate, but it is not willing to assist in paralyzing a country’s transport. From today move on we will make attempts to clear up the bridges and restore the circulation of traffic to the country by any means possible. The government has legal means at its disposal for this.”* (SZEKÉR–NAGYMIHÁLY 2015: 28.

András Túrós made arrangements to have the military technical devices transported to the Árpád Bridge with the help of police vehicles. But at 12:00 p.m. the situation had become complicated, and a more serious resisting demonstration began to unfold on Árpád Bridge, which was violent in nature. The protesters also wanted to block the Budapest-Hegyeshalom railway line with trucks if no agreement could be reached. Having faced the national scale of the blockade as well as its social and political support, Balázs Horváth withdrew his morning statement and issued another at 12 noon, claiming that the government did not intend to resort to violence and he also called on police personnel to show tolerance. Balázs Horváth had this statement read several times in the media confirming that the government would not use any violent means, even lawfully. As of the afternoon of October 26 deploying the police to restore law and order was removed from the government’s list of possible solutions. (SZEKÉR–NAGYMIHÁLY, 2015.)

III. Did the government deploy the army and police, did it want to use violence?

There are many legends surrounding this topic and many say that the police would not have taken action if violence had taken place because they sympathized with taxi drivers. It is true that the government misjudged the situation, just as it did before announcing the price increase and did not think that the blockade would have so much support. The government first launched the police and then withdrew it, which may be interpreted as indecisiveness, but I would rather say that the Minister of the Interior was not aware of the public support of the actions. When he realized the true nature of the situation, he modified his decision not wanting conflicts with the demonstrators. It became clear that the whole case was not just the case of the taxi drivers, and the blockade was not considered by the citizens as a disturbance, but rather as the embodiment of their opinion. As a consequence, the removal of the cars hindering the functioning of the country would not solve the problem. The government and the private carriers reached an agreement on Saturday morning, according to which the blockade would be suspended during the weekend and the continuation/renewal of it would be depend on Sunday's negotiations. This agreement, however, was not respected by the Budapest Industry Body of Freight Carriers (Teherfuvarozók Budapesti Ipartestülete), which called for the continuation of the nationwide blockade, believing that the agreement was just a procrastination of a helpless government, who wanted to discourage taxi drivers from the blockade. Besides there was the possibility that second time they would not be able to create the blockade, as the government would be more prepared for this and the weekend could also serve for mobilizing pro-government masses and gaining more and more people in the country who would turn against the taxi drivers, thus reversing the anti-government sentiment on the streets.

In Friday evening Árpád Göncz asked the government to suspend the petrol price increase. The government didn't want to hear about it, but instead it promised to work out within three days a system of supplying taxi drivers with discounted fuel. The taxi drivers did not accept this solution, as they did not

demand alms and coupons, but a fairly reasonable price for gasoline that everyone (not just taxi drivers) can pay. Pál Horváth, the representative of taxi drivers said that they did not have problems with the government, nor with the parties, but just with the petrol price increase. Thus, every taxi spokesperson in every part of the country declared that the demonstration would end only if the price increase was suspended. The only exception was István Kamecz, spokesman for the ten taxi companies in Miskolc, who claimed that the acceptable offer from the government would be to adjust the fuel price to domestic incomes rather than to world market. The negotiations continued and by Saturday night a joint statement had been issued by representatives of the government and taxi drivers. The result of the negotiations before the Reconciliation Council (Érdekegyeztető tanács) was as follows: According to the government the events arising due to the price increase could not be classified as strike and violated the law on the right of assembly. Consequently the government considered this demonstration illegal and unacceptable, however it expressed its intention to negotiate and reach an agreement. The government saw a realistic opportunity to reduce the price of gasoline by HUF 10–12 per liter, but as a condition for starting the reconciliation of interests, they requested the elimination of the roadblocks in the country. Pál Horváth and the representatives of taxi drivers also had an interest in removing road blocks, because this state of affairs was no longer good for them and taxi drivers (SZAKONYI, 1990).

IV. How did the events take place?

It can generally be stated that the blockade took place peacefully with the exception of one or two extreme cases, thanks to the taxi drivers, the police, the government and the population. Such cases were when e.g. foreigners visiting Hungary tried to overturn taxis blocking the road, or an off-duty, drunk policeman brandished his pistol, or a German motorist in Miskolc did the same, but even in these cases order was restored with the help of the police. These confirm that the government tried to keep this demonstration as peaceful as possible, so that no one should feel that they were still living in state socialism. As a result, however, the police and the government were helpless and tried to solve the paralysis of the country caused by a fundamentally illegal demonstration through negotiations. It was shown by the statements of different actors of the events, like that of Sándor Barna, police commissioner, who declared that he would resign if force was used, or president Árpád Göncz, who forbade the use of the military, even though he had no right to do so (only in a state of emergency). These statements were made in response to questions of journalists, as reassurance and could be considered a guarantee in the circumstances of unclear government communication. Basically, it can be said that the majority of the population (78% according to the November 3 issue of *Népszabadság*) supported taxi drivers, which support consisted in accepting the fact of the blockade, not being outraged that the country had been paralyzed, and emotionally identifying and sympathizing with the demonstration. Many people felt that taxi drivers were standing up for them with this blockade, so they helped taxi drivers and provided for them. The peaceful nature of the blockade can be attributed to its short duration of only three days, as by Sunday emotions had already run wild and while the blockades were lifted all over the country and traffic started on certain lanes on bridges in Budapest, the situation in the countryside was increasingly tense, in some places civil war conditions prevailed, in Szeged Turkish, Yugoslav and Bulgarian truckers armed with pistols and Molotov cocktails vandalized. In Kecskemét, too, emotions ran rampant from both the demonstrators and the police. When they tried to lift the blockade, some of the taxi drivers lay in front of the cars, thus preventing the blockade from being lifted, and while the police

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took them away, they were struck a few times by the baton. In addition, the segment of the population that was supportive of the government's stance became visible. For example, the MDF (governing party, Hungarian Democratic Forum) organized a demonstration condemning the taxi movement, expressing their frustration that a small group was paralyzing the country in defense of its selfish interests. Taxi drivers were also condemned in Békéscsaba, mainly pensioners collected signatures against the blockade, stressing that while they lived on a few thousand forints, taxi drivers earned tens of thousands, so they had no reason to protest, which in turn caused great damage to the country.

On Sunday evening, in front of the building of the Ministry of Labor (spinach house) the two camps attacked each other verbally (e.g. people protested with banners reading CB-terror, Taxi drivers home!).

Police prevented the conflict from escalating into physical assault with a live line-up. Meanwhile, positions were converging at the reconciliation meeting, the government decided to reduce the price of petrol by HUF 12 until a decision would be made to release prices. They also agreed not to use force and not to punish participants. The taxi news center ordered taxi drivers and carriers to dismantle the blockade, bridges and border crossings became passable and the country was liberated by Monday morning.

This was indeed a real compromise agreement, through which the government gained acceptance for economic liberalization from both the taxi drivers' representatives and the broader population. The government was reluctant to reduce prices since future liberalization efforts would necessitate raising them again, thereby attracting criticism a second time. Nevertheless, the agreement successfully led to societal acceptance of the principle that fuel prices would increase if the dollar's value rose (SZAKONYI, 1990).

V. What happened in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county in the meantime?

The day before the announcement of the taxi blockade was similar in Borsod as it was throughout the country. Everyone who had a car rushed to the gas station and refueled as much as they could, some bought petrol for 50,000 forints and some bought 600 litres of petrol. Traffic tripled. By five o'clock on Friday the access roads to Miskolc had been completely blocked, traffic had stopped, neither buses nor trams could run, and the only hope of those who wanted to travel remained MÁV (Hungarian State Railways), which undertook an extra-scheduled, condensed train start and arranged for passenger transportation on a branch line to the plants in Diósgyőr. Meanwhile, in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county taxi drivers blocking roads gave access only to ambulances and police, and later to vehicles transporting bread and milk.

Only 10% of the workers were able to reach the December 4 Wireworks, causing a loss of half a million dollars per hour for the company. The heightened mood, uncertainty and the resulting buying frenzy was also felt here. By the afternoon there were more and more drunk people around the junctions and disturbances took place. News reports included a German motorist threatening taxi drivers with a pistol and was stopped by police. Some were breaking shop windows taking advantage of the situation. There was also a call-in to the editorial office of Miskolc's popular daily newspaper, *Déli Hírlap*: a man belonging to a neo-nationalist organization threatened to blow up one of the Shell petrol station in Miskolc if the police took action against taxi drivers. Fortunately, no violence was used in Miskolc either. Probably Dr. László Tuza, the city's police chief, was the first policeman in the country to state categorically that they were not preparing to lift the blockades. This could already be heard from him at ten o'clock in the morning on Friday, when worrying news came that the police in the capital would start cleaning bridges at noon. In addition, "fake news" also spread widely, for example, that there had already been shootings on Búza Square, as a result of which four were dead and six wounded had been transported to the hospital by ambulance. An hour and a half later, they asked from Sátoraljaújhely: is it true that they shot among

the crowd in Miskolc? So there was a lot of scaremongering, but there were fair negotiations between taxi drivers and the police from Friday morning, as a result of which taxi drivers let the Volán buses carrying the workers through. It is interesting to note that the people of Miskolc expected an agreement between the government and Budapest taxi drivers, and the end of the protest at 9 p.m. The population and some organizations of Miskolc (National Presidency of the Hungarian Democratic Christian Party, County Professional Federations of Trade Unions) showed solidarity with the taxi drivers, but there were a few organizations which opposed the taxi drivers' actions on the grounds of human rights violation and stood up for the government. Such were the Miskolc Organization of the Association of Christian Intellectuals and Christian Doctors or the Miskolc Organization of the IDF.

On Saturday night the agreement was reached, and after that the taxi drivers at the headquarters of Tempó Taxi, started to draft the message to their colleagues, consulted with dr. László Tuza, the city police officer, while maintaining contact with Budapest, where public transport was back in operation. By Sunday morning the roads in Miskolc had also been cleared and life had started again. However, a few cars were left on the roads in case the negotiations with the government did not come to fruition. Then, roads, junctions, and intersections would have been completely blocked again. When the agreement was signed in the capital the carriers also went home in the county seat of Borsod. From 6 am on Monday morning taxis could be called again (DÉLI HÍRLAP, 26, 27 and 29 October 1990; ÉSZAK-MAGYARORSZÁG, 26, 27 and 29 October 1990).

VI. Key Questions

VI.1. How did the press and the public see the taxi blockade then and how did they see it later?

Basically, in the press immediately after the taxi blockade, a positive assessment of the event was published, describing it as a spontaneous demonstration, triggered by the acts of the MDF government, and more specifically by Balázs Horváth, who replaced Jozsef Antall. On the other hand, in the memoirs of the anniversary, mainly in the 2000s, we read about a secret service operation, an organised destabilisation escort, or a government coup organised by the SZDSZ, where Balázs Horváth was the drunken interior minister who wanted to shoot into the crowd, and Árpád Göncz was the puppet of the SZDSZ (opposition party, Alliance of Free Democrats).

While in the 1990s people "stayed on the ground", they tried to understand what had happened, in the 2000s legends had begun to soar and their exploration became a focal point. (KERESZTES 2021.)

VI.2. Why did the taxi drivers protest?

It's interesting how all of these events unfolded from disorganized communication and became so extensive due to organized communication. I see this as the reason why it was the taxi drivers who demonstrated. They were organized thanks to good communication, CB and URH radios. Their motivation is also clear: Many people who became unemployed after the change of regime and the end of unemployment within the gates became taxi drivers (because they had a licence). There were about 20,000 taxi drivers in Budapest alone. They did not want to lose their jobs again, but the price increase of petrol threatened to do.

VI.3. What was the nature of the taxi blockade?

The system has been democratised in Hungary, but no strong advocacy organisations have emerged. As a result, if someone wanted to negotiate with the government, the only way was to exert pressure, so the blockade was a necessary mean, because without it the government would not have

negotiated. At first glance this was an illegal demonstration triggered by a decision of necessity. On closer inspection and given the situation at the time, it was a civil disobedience movement, the ultimate form of protest in parliamentary democracy, which had a *raison d'être* in this situation. While the government's price increase was formally legal, it was morally justified to take action against it. Civil disobedience is an act against the law, but it does not call into question the legitimacy of the state. Regardless of what the participants at the time believed the events to be, the conflict had to be resolved peacefully through negotiation, because if they failed to reach an agreement, the consequence would have been the collapse of the economy or the government's resort to violence. Both would have meant the end of democracy. The taxi drivers stood up not only for themselves but also for other people. They were the ones who started the whole thing to prevent mass strikes and violence, which was later revealed in several interviews, as well as the fact that they did not want to organise a demonstration around themselves, they wanted to resolve the situation peacefully. Later interest representational organisations and parties expressed that they would go on strike if the government did not negotiate with the taxi drivers or if they used violence (VDSZSZ, FKSZOSZSZ, National Trade Union Federation of Independent Transport Unions, Independent Police Union, MSZP, SZDSZ). However, the price increase was inevitable, so the convergence of the two legitimate positions was necessary, which took place in the Reconciliation Council (Érdekegyeztető Tanács). (SZAKONYI 1990.)

VI.4. Did the government perform well and what was the role of the press?

Basically, all the leaders kept in touch with the others (Antall-Horváth-Barna-Göncz), and crisis teams were set up to deal with the situation (economic, reconciliation, energy). Yet the leaders seemed to be talking past each other. The government did not perform well: there was a lack of communication and consultation before the decision of the price increase and its announcement, later it was not aware of the situation and its gravity and was indecisive throughout, thanks to Balázs Horváth. The government tried to solve the problem through peaceful negotiations and compromise. Despite efforts to communicate this stance, ambiguous statements and situations with uncertain

outcomes arose, further exacerbated by media coverage. The government's room for manoeuvre was as narrow in the media as it was in the economy. Pesti Hírlap stood as the sole media outlet backing the government, while the majority of the press consistently criticized the government's actions. Despite its continuous provision of information, the press frequently disseminated misinformation, setting the stage for anti-government public sentiment. The claim that Balázs Horváth was drunk and similar legends were also fabricated and propagated by the press to discredit the government. I'm not inclined to absolve Balázs Horváth; his indecisiveness and statements, particularly regarding the dismantling of the blockade, exacerbated the strained relations between the government and the taxi drivers, as well as between the government and the public. This indecision prolonged the negotiations and provided a platform for the predominantly anti-government press, potentially intensifying anti-government sentiments (SZAKONYI 1990).

VI.5. Was it a coup? The role of Árpád Göncz:

I believe that, on one hand, there were sufficient factors for the taxi blockade to emerge as a spontaneous movement, and ample opportunities for the taxi drivers to orchestrate it. On the other hand, one might question: who would have instigated such an upheaval, and who stood to gain from it? Would the SZDSZ have benefited? What would have been their motive for prematurely seeking the dismissal or overthrow of the government? If the government had failed and the SZDSZ took over, it would have been a kamikaze government, it would have had the hardship, it would have had to lead society and the economy through the post-change transition, it would have had to take austerity measures and meet the IMF's stringent requirements, which could have led to its defeat in the next election. It's conceivable that the SZDSZ did not consciously think this way from the beginning, but rather came to realize its potential as events evolved. Nonetheless, from the outset, the SZDSZ sought to capitalize on the anti-government sentiment. While I believe the demonstration began spontaneously, there's a possibility that certain parties wanted to turn it into an organised demonstration. This possibility is supported by the case of leaflets handed over to police officers on the Hungarian-Yugoslav border, and found at several points of Budapest, urging strikes among factories and institutions. What is certain, however, is that the labeled the demonstration as

an act of civil disobedience, deeming it justified in the circumstances, and consequently expressed solidarity with the demonstrators. In their view, the government attempted to prolong the negotiations, suggesting that had the government pursued standard negotiation procedures, a resolution could have been achieved by Friday. The whole situation could have been prevented if negotiations had occurred prior to the price hikes.

The SZDSZ considers Arpad Göncz to be decisive in achieving a peaceful resolution, asserting that his order regarding not deploying the army influenced the behavior of the government and the. On the contrary, I believe that Árpád Göncz's statement and directive did not significantly impact the outcome of the events. The government was already disinclined to resort to violence. The decision to change course was not due to Árpád Göncz's order but rather the widespread national support for the blockade, as stressed by Minister of the Interior Balázs Horváth and Budapest police captain Sándor Barna. Árpád Göncz's statement, urging the government to postpone the petrol price increase until Monday to allow for resumed negotiations, and simultaneously calling on taxi drivers to remove the roadblock, potentially played a minor mediating role. However, it might have also contributed to the taxi drivers' withdrawal from the agreement reached on Saturday night, because the president's statement was broadcasted on TV at a time when a compromise solution was starting to take shape (SZAKONYI, 1990).

VII. Conclusion

Amidst the taxi blockade, the nation struggled with issues such as food supply disruptions, overloaded telephone exchanges, compromised patient transportation, panic buying, and difficulties commuting to work. Air traffic was also grounded, and railways were blocked. However, this chaotic scenario was eventually resolved. The big question lies in what lessons the parties involved learnt from this experience. It's evident that there were lessons for everyone—society, taxi drivers, and the government alike. Both the population and taxi drivers gained insights into the challenges facing the nation, possibly fostering greater empathy, solidarity, understanding, and acceptance towards the government. The government learned three things: the importance of a cohesive economic strategy, effective communication at all levels and the reconciliation of interests. There's little need for further explanation, as the absence of these elements was the main reason for the outbreak of the taxi blockade.

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Anna Horánszky

A pilot programme for increasing civic activism of young people

Abstract

The paper presents the methodology and the results of a project which tried to enhance active citizenship among university students in four Hungarian cities. Before that I analysed the status of the civil sphere in Hungary and civil activism, with a special focus on the youth. Studies have established the apoliticalness and passivity of Hungarian young people, the reason of which is that they do not feel that political activity is effective.

Regarding the pilot project I stated that it is not possible to achieve significant changes with such small projects, but they gave opportunity to the interns to try and develop themselves. The self-confidence of some participants was strengthened, which is the basis of both assertiveness and the ability to take initiative in the community.

Keywords: civil society, youth activism

I. Introduction

Our modern society can be characterized by the lack of communities, which has many negative consequences. The aim of civil society, and especially organizations dealing with community development and community organization, is to remedy these shortcomings-among other things. During 2022 and 2023 I participated in a project which tried to enhance active citizenship among young people, which was carried out by the Dialogue for Communities Association (Dialóg a Közösségekért Egyesület) and its consortium partners. In this paper, I would like to present the methodology and results of this project based on my experience as a participant observer. I also conducted a questionnaire with other participants.

I start my writing by presenting the functions of civil society, and we take a look at the situation of the sector in Hungary. After that, I will turn to the questions of civil activism and volunteering and their development in our

country. I pay special attention to the topic of the civic activity of young people. The main objective of the paper is to present and analyse the “Aspektus” programme. After presenting the four partner organizations, I describe the programme itself. To evaluate the project's effects, I created a questionnaire asking the participants about their motivation, experience, and the lasting effects of their participation.

1.1 The civil sphere

The term civil sphere refers to individuals as citizens and civil society. The latter includes communities and groups not part of the spheres of the family, the state, or the market but are connected to them in many ways. The institutional form of civil society is the non-profit sector, but informal groups are also part of it. (HAVASI, 2022)

In today's Hungary, civil society and the civil sphere have a meaningful yet decreasing role. The civil sector includes many organizations whose activities are very diverse. Figure 1 shows the current distribution of civil organizations in Hungary according to their activities. We can see that most organizations operate in sports, culture, and hobbies, while organizations in the field of culture, territorial, settlement and economic development are at the forefront regarding their income.

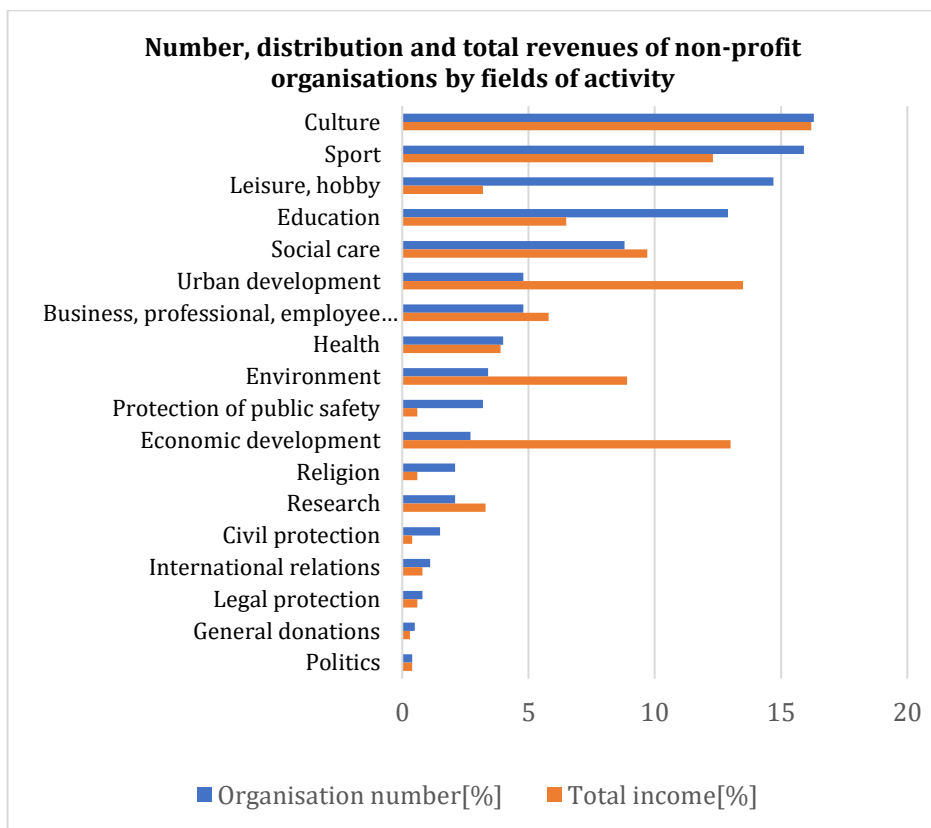


Figure 1. Number, distribution and total revenues of non-profit organisations by fields of activity

Source: own editing based on:

<https://www.ksh.hu/docs/hun/xftp/stattukor/nonprofit/2020/index.html>

In 2017, the non-profit sector employed 4% of the workforce in Hungary, and the size of its income was close to 5%. (KSH, 2019) The latter rate corresponds to the main average of a 1995 international civil survey, which was 4.6%. (SALAMON-ANHEINER, 1999.)

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Havasi (2020) compiled the following summary of the roles of civil society.

Civil society:

- provides protection and support for individuals, acts against atomization, creates community bonds, strengthens social cohesion, creates social capital
- is an intermediary tool through which individuals can achieve their goals in their daily lives and avoid dependence on the state
- shows society's ability to protect and organize itself and also the local alternative, controls the excesses of current power
- responds to community needs that neither the state nor its institutions can or do not want to fully meet, contributes with their professionalism to the implementation of various state and local government tasks
- encourages the democratic functioning of society by promoting pluralism and diversity.
- creates relationships between individuals, connects the group interests formed in this way with larger community and public interests, promotes the participation of individuals in the operation of community institutions (integrative function)
- provides and teaches specific standards of behaviour
- has role in social innovation
- gives individuals the opportunity for new experiences and relationships, increases self-confidence, gives them a sense of success, and fills them with a sense of usefulness.
- Its organizations bring citizens together in common matters, and they can influence public affairs not only through their activities but also through their mere existence.

1.2. Social participation and civic activity

The dimensions of civic activity that can be easily measured are membership in civil society organizations, the extent of voluntary work and activity in politics and social movements. In the EU in 2015, 12% of the adult population was politically active, while in Hungary, this number was 4.7%.³ In terms of organizational membership, Hungary's performance is weaker, even within the Central European region: in 2015, for example, organizational membership in Hungary was 38%, compared to 56% in the Czech Republic and 66% in Slovenia. In the same year, 14% of the population worked voluntarily, while in Slovenia, 35.7% and in the Czech Republic, 34.5%. (MEYER [et al], 2017).

1.3. Volunteering

Volunteering is the voluntary, free, and selfless provision of an action or service for the benefit of others or the community. Volunteers invest time and energy in activities or events that help those in need or proactively benefit the community. Volunteering is based on human goodwill; volunteers do not expect financial rewards or other benefits for their service. Volunteers can start projects that improve their living environment and the local infrastructure through cooperation with local municipalities and authorities. NGOs often offer training and programmes to their volunteers to develop their skills and knowledge. In this way, they can help communities and society more effectively and improve themselves. Volunteering is an opportunity to learn new skills, build relationships with new people, and discover yourself. (JÁVOR- BEKE, 2019).

Volunteering and participation promote positive social change, togetherness and cooperation within communities.

Some civil organizations also play a key role in promoting democratic participation. They are actively involved in voicing and stimulating the opinions of citizens, influencing political processes in this way.

Some organizations are active in the field of human rights protection. Some of them provide free legal aid to those affected by certain legal violations. The

³ Are you active citizen? 14/09/2017

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activities of human rights organizations cover the protection of individual rights and the support of minority rights. (MÁRKUS, 2016)

The civil sphere provides a free and independent platform for citizens to actively participate in public affairs and contribute to the development of society and the protection of human rights.

II. Civic activity of young people in Hungary

In Hungary, several studies (e.g. Aktív Fiatalok, Magyar Ifjúság Kutatás 2020, Magyar Fiatalok Kutatás 2021) have established the apoliticalness and passivity of young people, the reason of which is that they do not feel that political activity is effective. The majority of Hungarian citizens withdraw from public life, as do young people. They do not discuss political decisions and problems with their parents or peers, they do not independently form an opinion on this topic, and in fact, they often refrain from it explicitly.⁴

Annamária Sebestyén investigated the background of this phenomenon in her 2018 research, during which she conducted in-depth interviews with members of the Independent Student Parliament (FDP) and politically passive students. Parents of passive students do not want their child to turn to politics following their inner motivations for financial reasons. Their children become future-oriented and risk-averse. As a consequence, these youngsters focus on themselves and their own well-being, they think self-centeredly. They are not completely insensitive to society's problems, but they are not concerned enough to do anything about it. As a result, their main characteristics include avoiding conflict and accepting the current situation, no matter how bad it is.

The parents of FDP members, on the other hand, are supportive and let their children make their own decisions. New and unknown challenges are much more important in the lives of young people in the student parliament, instead of smoothing their future. Active young people look at social reality more sensitively and critically. They work on shaping existing frameworks and they try to achieve changes in their personal environment and in a wider circle according to their principles. (SEBESTYÉN, 2018).

Among other things, the Hungarian Youth 2021 (Magyar Fiatalok) research examined the voluntary activities of young people. The youth research was conducted in seven countries using an online questionnaire. Compared with the countries in the region, it was found that the age group examined in Slovakia is somewhat more passive than in the other three countries. (See figure 2)

⁴ <http://ncsszi.hu/ifjusag/magyar-ifjusag-2020>, Sebestyén, 2018

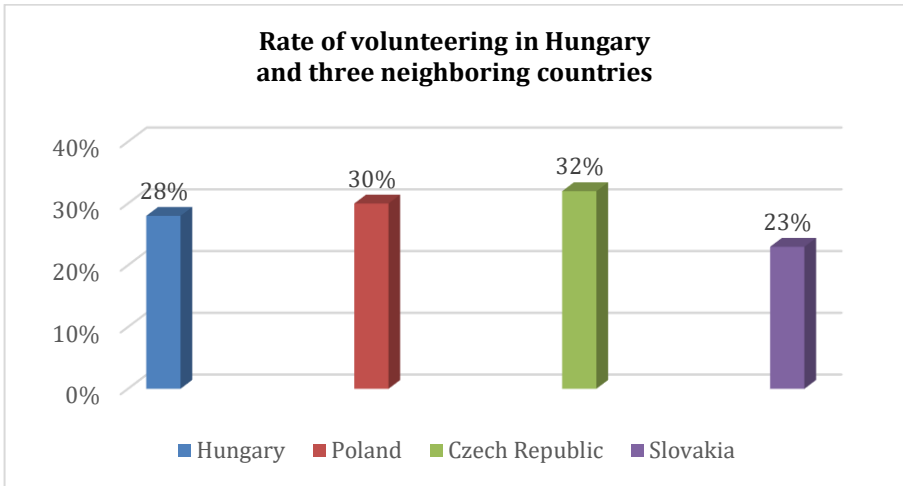


Figure 2.: Rate of volunteering in Hungary and three neighboring countries
Source: own editing based on Bíró-Nagy – Szabó, 2021

Of course, the fact that community service is mandatory for high school graduates in Hungary distorts the picture. This is also shown by the fact that, breaking down young people by age group, we can see that 15-18 year olds volunteer in a significantly higher proportion than the other two age groups. (See Figure 3.)

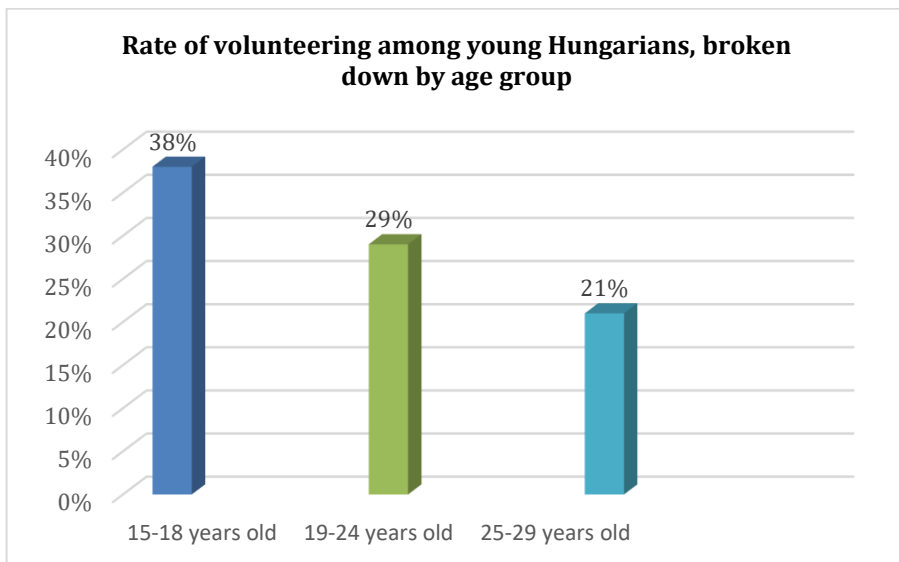


Figure 3. Rate of volunteering among young Hungarians, broken down by age group

Source: Own editing based on Bíró-Nagy – Szabó, 2021

III. Aspektus programme

I got acquainted with the civil sphere in 2022, when I came into contact with the activities of the Dialog Association. In the "Aspektus" Group project, they and three other associations worked together in different parts of the country. The partner organizations were: the "Emberség Erejével" Foundation from Pécs, the "Motiváció Műhely" from Szeged, and the "Alternatív Közösségi Egyesület" (Alternative Community Association) from Debrecen.

The "Dialóg a Közöszékékert Közhasznú Egyesület" was founded in June 2002. One of the goals of the foundation of the association was to enable the community developers operating in the county to work together more efficiently and not in isolation from each other. They worked in several settlements of Borsod-Abaúj- Zemplén county. In addition to strengthening relationships among local people, they also worked on getting to know local institutions and developing partnerships with them. In Miskolc, the association started its community development work in 2009 at the Avas housing estate. It is the city's largest high-rise prefab house (panelház) area with 30,000 inhabitants. The association works with a wide range of methodological tools. Recently it has been trying to introduce techniques that strengthen participatory democracy in the city-in partnership with the Miskolc municipality.⁵

The Association of Alternative Communities in Debrecen carries out similar activities as Dialog in Miskolc. They consider democracy to be vital, they want to create a social environment in which citizens are active, reactive and self-organizing, and where the sustaining power of communities prevails and they can cooperate with each other. They are also experimenting with different techniques of community development, such as forum theater and participatory budgeting. They pay special attention to high school students.⁶

The activists of the "Motiváció Műhely" are active in and around Szeged, primarily working with disadvantaged children. In addition to running their

⁵ <https://www.dialogegyesulet.hu/>

⁶ <https://altkozegy.hu/>

own study hall (tanoda)⁷, they launched a professional network of study halls, called “Tanoda platform”. They have created a number of education programmes aiming compensation of disadvantages and talent nurturing increasing equal opportunities in education. They also deal with social sensitization.⁸

The “Emberség Erejével” Foundation operates in a community office in Pécs to create a liveable society for everyone. The palette of their methods is very colourful; they have self-developed board games, escape rooms and online games. Special attention is paid to the issue of Roma self-organization and advocacy. Since 2017, the foundation has run a support programme to strengthen civil organizations (Erősödő Civil Közösségek). So far, 120 organizations in the South Transdanubia region have been supported by them financially or with training and mentoring.⁹ Their goals are, therefore similar to those of the previously mentioned organizations: rebuilding democracy, strengthening civil society and local communities, protecting and promoting human rights.

The “Aspektus” training and internship programme aimed to reduce social prejudices and alleviate systemic discrimination towards the Roma and communities living in poverty. The young people participating in the programme acquired skills with the help of which we designed and realized small projects. These projects could have included education, advocacy, fundraising, strengthening community life, and aiming social issues.

My participation in the “Aspektus” project lasted one year. In the first semester, I participated in four separate courses with twenty-five enthusiastic university students from different parts of the country. We learned about the various fundamental rights of people, the causes of segregation, and the possibilities of its elimination; we learned to work effectively in groups and gained knowledge about community organization and development. In addition to these, we also learned about the work of the four civil organizations and the characteristics of each region.

⁷ Study halls (run by NGOs and churches) provide talent development, tutoring and valuable leisure programmes for disadvantaged children. See more:

⁸ <https://motivaciomuhely.hu/hu/>

⁹ <https://www.emberseg.hu/>

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In the second semester we focused on the projects. The participating young people received continuous professional support and advice in developing their plans. Since each organization could finance four project ideas, plans were combined to ensure all students who applied could implement them.

Each intern had to organize an independent initiative and carry out two smaller joint projects with other interns in the city.

For my research, I edited an online questionnaire, which I sent to all young people participating in the programme. Only six of the twenty-five people filled in the questionnaire, which perhaps shows that they were most moved by this project.

The participants were between 18 and 30, Among them there were psychology students, students from various teaching majors, and sociologists and social workers.

The respondents were between 21 and 24 years old, they were social workers, a sociologist, an anthropologist and one person from a teaching major.

The project also aimed to involve young Roma people. This was achieved with more or less success, as there were just two Roma trainees in the programme.

Most of the participants heard about the project through the university, either directly from their teacher, or the association (Emberség Erejével) came to give a presentation about the opportunity. One person concerned had already become a volunteer of the association before (Motiváció)- through a teacher of the university.

According to the respondents of the questionnaire, the motivations for joining the project were the following factors:

- to know more about community development
- to get out of the comfort zone (or similar: gain experience, test yourself)
- to learn more and faster than at the university
- to meet new people, to do something useful
- to try out what it's like to work in the civil sector.

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There were also mixed answers to the question of what was the best part of the training:

- self-confidence (in other words: "the experience that there is no wrong answer, the programme made me braver")
- relationships, becoming a member of a community
- new knowledge, new methods
- the experience, that you learn as much from the participants as from the trainers.

I asked how the respondent's opinion had changed, what effect the project had on her.

Two of them mentioned that it helped them understand how the systems work, and one of them decided what she wanted to do in the future.

One respondent's answer reflected the achievement of the project's objective: "I realized how important political participation can be. I didn't even go to vote, if there is no good candidate, why should I go? I didn't even care about it. I'd be lying if I said I was completely immersed in it now, but it created a willingness in me. The "Aspi" made me realize how much it matters if I vote and take part in shaping my own future and not choose the easy way with closed eyes."

What small projects did the young people implement? Let's see the answers in their own words!

"My programme occurred in a segregated school, where we did crafts with children."

"I wanted to build a community. I didn't have a specific plan; we were picking up trash. The initiative didn't have an afterlife at the community level, but somehow I want to take it further."

"I held creative sessions for children from disadvantaged and middle-class families with the same themes."

"We helped Roma children who fled Ukraine."

"I implemented self-knowledge and emotional expression sessions for 6-8 children in a temporary home for families. I had many other plans, e.g. how important learning is, but I realized that there was no time for everything. My main goal was to encourage the children to ask for help, as they have all

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experienced abuse in some form. Looking back, this did not happen either as I would have liked. I mean that I have improved a lot in the meantime and if I started now, I could add even more. However, despite the minor difficulties at the beginning, by the end they expressed their emotions better, ...I achieved some kind of effect."

"I organized a correspondence programme between students attending an elite school in Miskolc and students from Kazincbarcika. ...unfortunately, personal meetings could not take place."

The last study trip took place in Szeged, where the participants told about their projects to each other. One of the interns from Miskolc organised self-knowledge sessions for disadvantaged Roma at the University of Miskolc, while popularizing university life. Someone held creative group sessions for children and mothers in a study hall. One of the interns from Pécs run a baby-mama club in which Roma and non-Roma women participated together. An intern started a level sticker movement, drawing attention to the LGBTQ+ community in the Pécs community. In Szeged all the interns were offered to help Roma refugees from Transcarpathia in a small town near Szeged instead of their own programme.

My plan was to establish a small community with the help of my love of cooking. Originally, I thought was that while the parents with small children cook, the children participate in various creative activities with the help of volunteers. Finally, I was able to reach a circle of women aged 40-50. During the cooking sessions, we talked a lot about the cooking and eating habits of different ethnic groups, and traditions developed within their own family. I managed to organize three sessions, adapted to different topics: traditional cooking, vegan, and healthy foods. As the participants fell in love with this small community, I have decided to continue to organize these events at my own expense. Over time, the team expanded, and now two middle-aged men are regular members of the community.

I had several goals with the project. On the one hand, I wished that the participants get to know each other better, and on the other hand, to get to know unfamiliar foods.

The most difficult task for me was involving people. I contacted local schools in order to spread my programme among mothers, but they did not

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respond to emails or thought that they could not help with this. Later they allowed me to put up a few posters in the hall of the schools.

During the planning of the project, I kept in contact with my mentor, she helped me with ideas and often motivated me. Before finalizing our ideas, we had the opportunity to present our plans to people who have been working successfully on similar issues for years. They helped a lot with their criticisms and questions. The implementation phase lasted from October to April. During this time, I received a scholarship and HUF 100,000 for the expenses.

Finally, I asked in the questionnaire whether the participants keep in touch with the association/foundation. The respondents maintain contact at some level, some of them more closely: "Friendships developed, I joined the organization's math work group."

There is a person who has a looser relationship for the time being, but would like to make it closer: "Considering that I'm graduating in December, I haven't been with them since the project ended... in the future I plan to attend their programmes because they are very close to my heart."

I have maintained my relationship with the association and its members, and to this day I hold my programme in the community coffee house on a monthly basis. We, participants from Miskolc, are members of the "Aspektus" Group as alumni and are currently cooperating with the Dialog Association on various fundraising projects.

IV. Summary

In today's Hungary, the potential inherent in civil society is not fully utilized. Civic activism, including youth activism is at a very low level. Some actors of the civil sector aim at the development of communities and the development of citizens' ability to assert their own interests. The paper presents a project that tried to encourage and support youth activism in four Hungarian cities. I revealed the lessons of the project with the help of my own experiences and an online questionnaire. The four implementing organizations recruited the participants through their university connections.

The project included trainings and study trips. After that, the interns received a scholarship and professional mentoring and had to plan and run their own project aiming community development and social inclusion. The implemented small, independent projects reflected the individual interests of the interns. It is not possible to achieve significant changes with such small projects, but they gave opportunity to the interns to try and develop themselves. The self-confidence of some participants was strengthened, which is the basis of both assertiveness and the ability to take initiative in the community. Almost all respondents remained in contact with the organizing NGOs, but no one except me remained in contact with their own target group members. The weak point of the research is that only 6 (with me 7) of the 25 participants filled out the questionnaire. It is possible that these participants were greatly influenced by the "Aspektus" programme. According to my plans I will contact the participants again in the future, then maybe I can make sure if this is really the case.

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Online resources

- Are you active citizen? 14/09/2017 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20170914-1> (letöltve: 2023.11.01.)
- <http://ncsszi.hu/ifjusag/magyar-ifjusag-2020> (letöltve: 2023.11.01.)
- <https://www.dialogegyeselet.hu/> (megnyitva: 2023. 11. 15.)
- <https://altkozegy.hu/> (megnyitva: 2023. 11. 15.)
- <https://motivaciomuhely.hu/hu/> (megnyitva: 2023. 11. 15.)
- <https://www.emberseg.hu/> (megnyitva: 2023. 11. 15.)

Péter Krisztián Kőrösy

The Covid-19 and the Special Legal Order (Constitutional Concerns)

Abstract

This study examines the constitutional concerns related to the special legal order introduced during the coronavirus epidemic. The introductory part of the study reveals the background of the conflict between the government and the opposition over the passage of the law on the protection against the coronavirus. The following chapter sheds light on the viewpoints of several legal experts who expressed their constitutional concerns about the law. Finally, the last chapter concludes, that through financial cuts affecting the local governments the Government may have intended to strengthen its “top-down” control of the public administration, which led to further centralisation of its political system by the 2022 parliamentary election.

Keywords: Coronavirus pandemic, special legal order, constitutional concerns, state of emergency

I. Introductory statements

The instance of implementing a special legal order is very rare in democratic countries. In Hungary on the 11 March 2020 the government declared a nationwide state of emergency, based on the 53rd article of the Fundamental Law, “to avert the consequences of a pandemic that threatens the safety of life and property, to protect the health and lives of Hungarian citizens.”¹⁰, which allowed the government to rule by decree. The opposition however saw this as a way for the government to further embed its power, even though other governments made similar decisions around the world, which were supported by the public.

The concerns about the rule of decree were further aggravated by the fact that the law¹¹ connected to the state of emergency contained no time limit

¹⁰ Government Decree 40/2020. (III. 11.) on the Declaration of the State of Emergency.

¹¹ Act XII of 2020 on Protection Against the Coronavirus.

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about how long the special legal order would last. Instead, a constitutional clause ensured that the Hungarian government would be forced to end the special legal order “if the conditions of the emergency are no longer present.”¹² The conflict between the opposition parties and the government resulted in that no time limit was included in the text of the law. In return, the opposition parties (except for Mi Hazánk) refused to vote for the law.

¹² Paragraph (3) of the 54th article of the Fundamental Law states that „A decree under paragraph (1) shall remain in force until the decision on the declaration of state of war or state of emergency, but for not more than sixty days after the initiation by the Government of declaration; if state of war or state of emergency is declared, such a decree shall remain in force until the end of the period of state of war or state of emergency at the latest.”

II. Act XII of 2020 on Protection Against the Coronavirus and the constitutional concerns

The goal of the law adopted on 30 March 2020 was to enable the government to take all emergency measures necessary to prevent and control the consequences of a mass outbreak of coronavirus.

Section three of the law authorised the government – in the event of a state emergency – to extend the validity of the government decrees of paragraphs (1) and (2) of the 53rd article of the Fundamental Law (tied to the approval of the Parliament) until the end of stated emergency. Furthermore, the parliament could have revoked its authorization based on paragraph (3), before the end of stated emergency.

Section four stipulated the Government to report at parliamentary sessions regularly on the measures taken to avert the emergency caused by COVID-19. In the absence of such sessions the Speaker of the Parliament and the leaders of the parliamentary groups had to be informed instead.

Moreover, section five ensured the continued functioning of the Constitutional Court, which could not be restricted, even under a special legal order. In addition, the law also stated, that by-elections and referendums (local and national) should be postponed until the state of emergency was lifted. "The special legal order is part of our constitutional system and is a self-defence mechanism necessary to maintain the functioning of the state and protect the population." (STUMPF, 2021. p.251.).

The declaration of a state of emergency has been the subject of several criticisms. There were voices that declared the measure itself unconstitutional. According to Zoltán Szente, "the state of emergency is unconstitutional as it was declared because of the »mass disease causing pandemic. In Hungarian law however the pandemic does not belong to the conceptual framework of elemental (natural) disasters and neither can it be interpreted as an industrial disaster." (SZENTE, 2020. p.14.).

Before the Parliament voted on the law the Eötvös Károly Institute called for attention that according to the bill there were no time limits of the authorisation of the government, so the state of special legal order could be

maintained indefinitely. The Institute referred to Article 54 (paragraph 3) of the Fundamental Law, which states that it is the exclusive competence of the government, just as establishing the termination of the emergency situation is also the responsibility of the government.

Gábor Halmai, just like Zoltán Szente, criticized the authorizing law sharply, calling it “a Hitlerian authorizing law”. From his standpoint the special legal order made it possible to establish a dictatorial authority to fight against COVID-19. He also referred to paragraph (3) of the 53rd article of the Fundamental Law which only mentions natural and industrial disasters but not pandemics. According to him the government had no constitutional rights to form decrees or to form the authorization law itself (Halmai, 2020). Halmai and his co-author Kim Lane Scheppele explained in a blog post that even though several other countries declared a special legal order to handle the COVID-19 pandemic, the Hungarian state of emergency was considered unique. In their opinion there was no need for the authorization law since the Act CLIV of 1997 on Healthcare, or the Act CXXVII of 2011 on Managing Emergencies provided sufficient power to tackle pandemics. (Halmai-Kim, 2020).

These days we cannot only come across the term “illiberal democracy” from Fareed Zakaria, but we can also talk about “illiberal constitutionalism” with regard to Hungary. According to Tímea Drinóczi in Hungary an “illiberal constitutionality” has been created in which some of the elements of constitutional democracy can be found, but not necessarily applied. At the same time “illiberal constitutionality” is not the same as autocratic exercise of power (DRINÓCZI, 2020. p.2.).

Stumpf writes: “In the government’s view the special legal order was necessary not because of political reasons, but because of the aversion of a catastrophe. It is not the state that poses threat to humanitarian rights but the dangers concerning public healthcare, and the task of the state is to set its defensive mechanisms into motion and to protect the fundamental rights to life and human dignity of its citizens.” (STUMPF, 2020. p.253.).

In my opinion the implementation of the special legal order can be interpreted as a dictatorial exercise of power, but during such a health and economic crisis this proved to be a fast and efficient way for national governments to deal with it. However, it is a fact that the authorization law

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made it possible for the Hungarian Government not only to avert the crises caused by COVID-19 but perhaps to further centralise its power. I would like to present the Government's power aspirations at the time of emergency through the examples of financial cuts which affected municipalities.

III. Local governance under the pandemic

The Government wanted to use its mandate to further strengthen its “top-down” control of public administration through a strong centralisation of state power, with particular regard to local governments, which was manifested in the fact that part of the financial crisis caused by the epidemic was assigned to local governments (withdrawal of vehicle tax, making car parks owned by municipalities free of charge).

According to Dániel Karsai the opposition parties gained ground during the municipal elections in October 2019 and consequently the Orbán-regime took a major hit. The opposition won in many cities, including the capital in which they also won the office of Lord Mayor. Following this, the government saw the potential to cause “suffering” to these settlements. (Karsai, 2020.).

Until the middle of June 2020 (the beginning of the legislative break) a total of 20 submissions arrived at the Constitutional Court¹³ regarding the state of emergency caused by the pandemic. In the case of the municipal vehicle tax, due to authority limits the CC rejected the submission without substantial considering the conflict with the international treaty, even after a substantive investigation they rejected it. The board made the decision out of turn, with several parallel justifications, without dissent. “The withdrawal of the proposal to limit mayoral powers shows that the Prime Minister, sensing opposition from within his party, has decided that it is better not to pursue further centralisation at the expense of municipal autonomy.” (STUMPF, 2020. p.251.).

Another goal of the government was to make sure the citizens would avoid using public transport, in order to decrease the chances of infecting each other. The government decree which entered into force¹⁴ in April 2020 ensured that under the state of emergency caused by COVID-19 people who decided to travel by car did not have to pay waiting charges on local public roads, local public roads owned by the municipality which were not enclosed from public traffic, squares, parks and other public spaces, national public roads, private roads

¹³ In the following text I refer to the Constitutional Court as CC.

¹⁴ Government Decree 87/2020. (IV. 5.) on the Different Rules for the Payment of the Waiting Fee Applicable During an Emergency.

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owned by the government which were not enclosed from public traffic, squares, parks and other public spaces.

This decree was later extended. However, it created the problem, that the income provided by the taxation of local parking places was nullified, which meant the local governments had to manage with a smaller budget. The opposition saw this decree as a way to “fiscally bleed out” local governments.

IV. Closing statements

The question therefore is to what extent did the Hungarian Government want to use the authorisation it received to bolster its economic power and further centralise its political system. I do not agree with Gábor Halmai's view that the implementation of the special legal order was unconstitutional, and I also think it is an exaggeration to call it a "Hitlerian enabling law". Despite this, I maintain that it is more than likely that the government had both political and motive to further centralise its power (for example the financial cuts affecting the local governments) after an unsuccessful municipal election in 2019 and before an upcoming parliamentary elections in 2022.

My standpoint is that in the future further epidemics, climate change disasters and migration difficulties will challenge the government in the future. For these reasons we should rethink and rebuild our interpretive framework regarding the Constitution.

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Venes Banquiles

Distantly Tapped: Populism, Disinformation Operation and Overseas Filipino Workers' (OFWs) Transnational Support to Radical Right Politics in the Philippines

Abstract

This article explores the place of populism in Philippine politics and how, through the social media, it takes the digital form. By briefly discussing Philippine presidency in post-World War II, the genesis of the 'aspirational classes' and the new middle class, and the omnipresent disinformation operation, the author aims to explore the rise of Rodrigo Duterte and his undying popularity. This article also aims at discussing how an amalgam of factors from the past up to Duterte led to the return of another Marcos, this time the son and namesake of the late dictator. Special emphasis will be given to the electoral mobilization of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and how, albeit remotely, the Filipino diaspora is led to contribute to the far-right politics of the Duterte-Marcos regimes. The author argues that to understand the peculiarities in the emergence of the radical right in the global South, in a country like the Philippines, theoretical perspectives should be decolonized; that is, the 'historico-cultural' contexts of the countries should be taken into account, and how these largely differ from the Western setting.

Keywords: digital populism, radical right, Duterte, the Marcoses, Overseas Filipino Workers, the Philippines.

I. Introduction

In a country whose political system is largely identified as oligarchic or patrimonial, the Filipino people in 2016 brought to the highest power a former mayor from a city in the southern tip of the Philippine archipelago. While largely identified in the Asian region as a state with strong tradition of liberal democracy, since the Second World War, the presidential office has been

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assumed by leaders of either liberal or illiberal inclinations.¹⁵ But across the parties, regional and down to the municipal level, official positions are attained through elite political families and ‘strongman leadership’ and is never a matter of ‘right’ or ‘left’ ideological persuasion¹⁶ (TALAMAYAN and PERTIERRA 2023). Outside this traditional sphere of elite political families, leftist movements have been established, and the people have consistently elected to the House of Representatives politicians who openly campaign on their leftist agenda. As for Duterte, his background is a mix of these realities.

While Duterte may have not been long seen on the stage of national politics except in his short stint in the Congress, he still comes from a political family, with his father having been a governor of the province of Davao and a cabinet member of the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. Despite this, his mother, Soledad, was a fierce opponent of the Marcos regime. She frequently organized protests in their home city of Davao and after the fall of dictatorship, was even offered to become the city mayor by no other than President Corazon Aquino, the woman who the Filipino people elected to lead the country when the EDSA People Power Revolution toppled the dictatorship and the Marcos family fled to their US-backed exile in Hawaii. Soledad declined the offer, and the mayorship was eventually assumed through an election by her own son, Rodrigo (RAFAEL 2022). That was the start of the uninterrupted reign of the Dutertes in Davao, with Rodrigo’s children to this day holding key government positions, and with his daughter Sara now the republic’s vice president. Needless to say,

¹⁵ In the Philippines, the political system operates under a three-branch framework. The nation follows a democratic structure where the people directly elect a president who serves as both the head of state and government. The president holds significant political influence and leads the executive branch. However, the country’s top position is limited to a single six-year term in office. The legislative responsibilities are carried out by the bicameral Congress, comprising the Senate and the House of Representatives, also called as the Congress. The Senate is elected nationwide, while members of the Congress consist mostly of representatives chosen from specific geographic districts and sectors. The Supreme Court of the Philippines oversees the judiciary and holds extensive jurisdiction to review decisions made by other governmental and administrative institutions.

¹⁶ It should be noted that of all those mentioned, the country’s party system still remains of ideological persuasions in the sense that certain parties are representatives of the people in the country’s different sectors, from public utility vehicle drivers to teachers. Thus, some parties are often identified with the left especially if they primarily work on activist causes: labor, women’s rights, gay rights, etc. Another important detail that should be emphasized here is the fact that the members of the Congress are both people who represent the country’s geographic districts and the sectors.

Duterte's presidential victory was the climax of the clan's political play. His election and his ideology are one of a kind: he does not come from the 'mainstream' elite of national politics, and his ideological positions shifted from left - often badmouthing the United States and appointing Communists to office - to right, glaringly apparent in his contempt of the Communist movement (TALAMAYAN and PERTIERRA 2023). Duterte surpassed the 'regional lines' of power and rose to become the country's president.

Rodrigo Duterte achieved a record-high, whopping 16 million votes from the Filipino electorate, with his main contender from the Liberal Party trailing behind with only 10 million votes (CERDA 2016). The 2016 national electoral turnout was 81% (CAMPBELL 2016), showing a polarizing candidate who campaigned on the 'law and order' ticket and promised the people safety and peace. Duterte then embarked on a six-year presidential term remarkably notorious for its bloody 'war on drugs', the president's hardcore bigotry and misogyny, its pro-China foreign policy, and ultimately the country's democratic backsliding.

As a word that will be often used in the subsequent parts of the paper, the word '*backsliding*' should be carefully defined and contextualized, as this already sheds light on the circumstantial differences on the genesis of the radical right in the global North and in the global South. In the former, it appears to be a co-constituting phenomenon (PAPPAS 2019; PRZEWORSKI 2019; RUNCIMAN 2018), often associated with collapse of the welfare state, and the *precarisation* and resentment of the working class. However, this definition hardly applies to the situation in the global South often because the descriptive variables used, such as the demise of the welfare state, are hardly found in this region of the globe- in the global South, this has simply never established itself (TALAMAYAN and PERTIERRA 2023). What is observed in the Global South is not a revival of radical right ideologies, as in Germany or in Italy, but simply the continuation and strengthening of these features. Lest we forget, most of this region went through periods of dictatorships, times when effective state institutions such as impartial bureaucracies and police forces were absent (BELLIN, 2004; BERNHARD and O'NEILL, 2018). In the Philippines, it was the period from 1972 until the late dictator was ousted through the peaceful EDSA People Power Revolution in 1986 (Philippine Official Gazette). As for the features of

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democratic backsliding in the Philippines, it is perhaps *“the systemic erosion of public confidence in institutions that guard and promote democratic values”* (TALAMAYAN and PERTIERRA, 2023:136), exactly what the Duterte regime, notwithstanding the events during the years of Martial Law, has achieved since he assumed his office in 2016. It is worth looking how the Philippines saw its democratic institutions and values slipped quite quickly into the abyss. Two events perfectly capture this phenomenon: Duterte’s bloody ‘war on drugs’ and his contempt of mainstream media. This will be dealt with in greater length in the latter part of the paper. What is worth emphasizing here is that while Duterte’s unconventional, unorthodox, and corrupt leadership struck communities in more advanced and stable democracies in the global North, he as a matter of fact remained popular and ‘approved’ by an overwhelming majority of his constituents, at least as far as the findings of credible poll agencies are concerned.

In the history of Philippine presidency, presidents typically leave their office with a declining approval rating. One simple explanation for this can perhaps be people’s frustration over unfulfilled promises that their presidential bet did not deliver by the end of the term. But Duterte, yet again making a record, left the Presidential Palace with a quite satisfied constituency. From his first year in office until he finished his term, Duterte sustained a high approval rating and remained the most popular president in Philippine history, recording twice his highest 91% approval rating amid the Covid-19 pandemic (PANTI, 2022), and leaving his office with 81% (GREGORIO, 2022). Enigmatic this politician indeed is that despite his popular and unpopular remarks in front of the public, such as likening himself to Hitler in his willingness to exterminate millions (LEMA & MOGATO, 2016), admitting that he sexually abused a female maid (GUTIERREZ 2018) and cursing the pope during the 2015 Papal Visit (RANADA, 2015), the Filipino people nonetheless remained faithful to him, by vote and by belief. And when I say Filipinos, it includes both those residing in the homeland, and the 10 million diasporas living in over 200 countries and territories.¹⁷

¹⁷Commission on Filipinos Overseas. (2022), Stock Estimate of Overseas Filipinos. Accessed 29 December 2022.
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Several scholars attempted to explain Duterte's undying popularity. Holmes (2017) argues that Duterte's high trust ratings mirror people's fulfilment of his campaign promise of fighting criminality and illegal drugs. According to the Philippine National Police, the victims killed in the name of the 'war on drugs' number at 6,252 individuals. But this stands in huge contrast with the data presented by human rights groups, showing that victims actually number from 27,000 to 30,000 (GAVILAN, 2022). Irrespective of the real account, what is on the table here are not just figures, but thousands of lives lost. Unfortunately, these horrendous figures helped Duterte furnish his image as the 'protector.' What can be more convincing to people that they are 'safe' than giving them numbers of the villains that were killed? The 'safety' that Duterte claimed that he himself was able to deliver to the people became the fulcrum of his fame as the country's protector. A legacy that Marcos, Jr., by going in tandem with Duterte's daughter, stuck to. Theirs was a message of "unity through continuity."

Another argument on Duterte's popularity is provided by Webb (2017), positing that it lies in his appeal to his 'subversiveness', as he brands himself as a representative and on the side of 'the people'. Further, Curato (2016, 2017) argued that his popularity is fuelled by people's desire for a better tomorrow and their contempt of technocratic reforms. On a last note, Kusaka (2017) argues that Duterte's popularity is perfectly entrenched in a '*social bandit-like morality*', which he described as 'the coexistence of compassion and violence under a patriarchal boss who maintains justice outside of the law' (49).

Looking at these arguments from an anthropological perspective, one can safely assume that Duterte's popularity, and people's support of his radical right politics, are due to a mix of factors: he taps on people's 'latent anxiety' (CURATO, 2016); he paints himself as someone just like the masses by antics such as cursing and cracking sexist jokes; his anti-liberal rhetoric; and the Philippines simply being a patriarchal society, with people trusting fully the 'male boss.' I will even argue that the Filipinos' obsession with male movie action stars can also be contributory to this, as the former actor by the name of Joseph Ejercito Estrada assumed the presidential seat from 1998 to 2001. Another famous action star, Fernando Poe, Jr. also almost made it to the 2004 presidential elections (CLAPANO, 2003). These former actors always

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played the ‘*superhero macho man*’ in the films that they starred in, often being with the poor and challenging the elite who oppress them. Duterte’s personality and campaign remarks must have been reminiscent of the ‘*superhero macho man*’ that Filipinos were hugely fond of that despite his sheer deviance from traditional values of respect and prudence, he nonetheless was elected by the majority. This is one point of argument that in looking at the emergence of radical right politics in the global South, the countries’ historical and cultural contexts should be considered, as Pinheiro-Machado, et. al. (2023) brilliantly argue.

To understand Duterte’s populism, it will be of great help to put his regime in the context of populist trends in the Philippines. Talamayan and Pertierra (2023) historicize Duterte’s popularity by looking at the history of Philippine presidency from 1935 to 2016, the inter and post-war years when this country in the Far East was a young republic that just broke the chains of Spanish colonial rule, but immediately fell to the hands of its new colonial master: the United States. Manuel Quezon, the country’s president from 1935–1944, operated under the banners of ‘*of the people and for the people*’, siding with them and fighting their enemies (the landlords). Further, the authors also placed former president Ramon Magsaysay, who occupied the seat from 1953–1957, in the ladder that contributed to Duterte’s popularity. Coming from a humble beginning - a former bus mechanic from a provincial lower-class family - Magsaysay captured the masses’ imagination, and he was received as one of theirs. His political actions were then largely identified as pro-poor, ‘*makamasa*’, dismantling the age-old landowning families by use of the state’s legal and military apparatuses (TALAMAYAN and PERTIERRA, 2023). Lastly, perhaps the most renowned populist in Philippine history was the late dictator Ferdinand Marcos, Sr., whose regime was characterized by corruption, authoritarianism, and exploitation, making its marks in the annals of Philippine history.¹⁸

¹⁸ While a good number of people who rose to the presidential seat can be labeled as ‘populists’, it is also interesting to note that there are also others who indeed were not populist, but somehow benefited from people’s fondness of electing candidates not necessarily based on ‘competencies’ but on how much they ‘resonate’ with them. Perhaps the classic example is former president Corazon C. Aquino, the wife of the slain Marcos critic Senator Benigno Aquino. Corazon was a housewife at the time of the revolution. According to public intellectuals, the assassination of her husband is what fueled popular emotion that led to her election as the successor of the ousted dictator. Since Benigno Aquino’s murderer, and who gave the order to kill, was never known nor

II. The Marcos Sr. Regime and The Genesis of Filipino Migration

Ferdinand Marcos, Sr. served as the 10th president of the Philippine republic from 1965 to 1986. Just like his predecessors, Marcos, Sr. was a full-fledged populist, promising the people to end *'the monopoly of privileges and power by [sic] the old oligarchy'*, describing graft and corruption as the *'nemesis of every development program'* (MARCOS 1973). While his presidency was surrounded by massive yet controversial infrastructure projects in rural and urban areas, these were simply overshadowed by, gross corruption, crony capitalism, and nationwide human rights violations. Seven years through the presidency, Marcos, Jr. declared Martial Law in 1972, which allowed him to consolidate power and mobilize the military in silencing his critiques and opponents: members of the Catholic Church hierarchy, academics, activists, journalists, and the Communists. Faithful to the 'populist rulebook,' he also made use of the 'politics of resentment': the logic of a common enemy in which 'us' are against 'them' (because 'them' threatens 'us') (see, STANLEY, 2020; PINHEIRO-MACHADO, [et. al.], 2023).

One of Marcos, Sr. regimes' key autocratic feature was his immediate 'nationalization' of media businesses and their transfer to his cronies who, themselves, were members of old elite families: the very class that he boasts of dismantling. Marcos, Sr. had plenty of cronies around him that each took over different sectors of local economy, from agriculture to power supply to the media. But lest it be forgotten, the then First Lady, Imelda Romualdez Marcos, also played a pivotal role in her husband's abusive and oppressive rule. Who will forget her 3000 pairs of shoes (REYES 2019), her extravagant parties, the family's multiple properties in New York (GERTH, 1986), or her 'edifice complex?' (de Villa, 2017). This all led Primitivo Mijares,¹⁹ Marcos, Sr.'s former

proven. Corazon's ascent to power remains a favorite issue that pro-Marcos camps pick: that the assassination was staged by the Aquinos so that one of them will end up in the presidential palace. Their son, Benigno Aquino, III also became the country's president from 2010-2016. Yet again, her mother's death in 2009 might have also contributed to his success.

¹⁹ A year after the book was published in 1976, Mijares tried to return to the Philippines but he went missing. He was never found. The body of his youngest son, 15-year-old Boyet Mijares, was

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press censor and propagandist, to label the Marcos rule as a 'conjugal dictatorship' (1976), as it was not only about the man who is Ferdinand, but also the dazzling woman Imelda. This severely haunting dire political climate was one of the reasons for the 'Filipino exodus' to the United States (ZARSADIAZ, 2017). At times when this country was caught between the global powers wrestling during the Cold War, but was nonetheless backed by Washington, the Filipino people sought refuge under the very government who was instrumental in the regime's operations. With the United States' obsession with and campaign against global Communism, Marcos, Sr.'s claim that the local Communists were a threat to national security had a powerful American backing. Thus, Proclamation 1081, the document formally placing the Philippine archipelago under Martial Law, appeared 'internationally' legitimate. What was ridiculous was that the local Communists did not pose such huge threat; they were just a bunch of radical intellectuals and peasant farmers who could no longer stand the oppressive conditions that the Marcos regime itself brought.

It was only after the peaceful EDSA People Power I that Marcos, Sr.'s rule came to end. Marcos was ousted by millions of people who, upon the instigation of the then Manila Catholic Archbishop Jaime Cardinal Sin, took their peaceful and prayerful protest to *Epifanio De los Santos Avenue* (EDSA), armed not with guns but with flowers and rosaries. The assassination of Marcos, Sr.'s staunchest critic, former Senator Benigno Simeon Aquino, II also touched the nation that the people elected her widow, Corazon Cojuangco Aquino, to take over the presidency after the Marcoses fled to their US-backed exile in Hawaii. So powerful this protest was that it led to subsequent similar actions across the globe - in South Korea in 1987, Myanmar in 1988 (RESSA, 2022) and China and Eastern Europe in 1989, when then Czech president Václav Havel thanked Filipinos for inspiring his country's democratic revolution against the Soviet regime (THOMPSON, 1995). Nevertheless, Marcos left record-high human rights violations. About 70,000 people were imprisoned and 34,000 tortured, according to Amnesty International, while 3,240 were killed from 1972 to 1981. Marcos also plundered \$10 billion from the state's coffers (FRANCISCO, 2016).

later found in the mountains of Antipolo city with signs of severe torture. Reports had it that his captors made Mijares watch his son's agony before he himself was killed.

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Up to this day, the Philippine government's efforts of recovering the Marcoses' ill-gotten wealth remains a battle, as the former first family keeps a tight grip on state institutions with their political tentacles. Whether or not the Marcoses have been really out of power continue to pique everyone's curiosity, as when after Marcos, Sr. died while in his Hawaiian exile in 1989 (GROSS, 1989) the bereft family went back home to the Philippines in 1991 with a 'red carpet' welcome by the people themselves. After their five-year US-sponsored exile in Hawaii, the family led by the matriarch Imelda, continued to occupy seats in key government positions from local to national level. The pinnacle of the 'Marcos comeback' was when Ferdinand Marcos, Jr. was elected as the country's president in May 2022. While populism has long been a feature of the Philippine post-World War II politics, scholars argue that the Marcos social media rebranding and Duterte's alliance with the family were what paved the way to this ridiculously historic victory.

III. The ‘Aspirational Class’, Disinformation Operation, Digital Populism

With Duterte and Marcos, Jr. now contextualized in the Philippine populist politics, what now needs a thorough analysis is how these two leaders innovated populist styles through the social media, and how this leads to the gradual yet relatively quick rise of radical right in the Philippines. Duterte has a deep and diversified base. He rose to power with a peace and security agenda, and an anti-elite and anti-liberal discourse but quite paradoxically rules with the avid support of most of the elite themselves (HEYDARIAN, 2018). But the elite is just a small denomination of the population. Thus, the majority of support that Duterte has comes from what scholars now call as the ‘aspirational classes’ (PERTIERRA, 2021). Scholars from the global South sought to conceptualize this in response to the now insufficient concept of ‘urban poor’ or ‘new middle class’, as these concepts no longer apply to the reality of low-income groups who are neither living below the poverty line, nor could be classified as middle classes considering the instability of their work and livelihood (PINHEIRO-MACHADO, [et. al., 2023]). According to the International Labor Organization, informal employment represents 56 per cent of the Filipino economy in 2017.²⁰

This shows that a huge portion of the Filipino workforce can be designated as the new *precariat*: workers under flexible, temporary, part-time, and unstable contracts.

When an outsider goes to the Philippines, it is easily noticeable how people make a living that can be surely described with those words above. They are exploited inside and outside the workplace, but they don’t develop occupation identity (BANKI 2013; MEARDI, SIMMS and ADAM 2021; SIEGMANN and SCHIPHORST 2016; STANDING 2011, 2013, 2014; Swider 2015; VAN OORT 2015). In this country, labour is so cheap that a middle-class family of five can have two maids but will struggle to gather sufficient funds when one of the family members gets hospitalized. The formation of this ‘new’ class identity, together

²⁰ See International Labour Organization (ILO). Size of the informal economy in the Philippines. Available at www.ilo.org/manila/eventsandmeetings/WCMS_634914/lang--en/index.htm.

with the new middle class, is essential in understanding the source of the Duterte-Marcos regimes' popularity, fuelled by disinformation operation.

In a 2021 report released by advertising firms *We Are Social* and *Hootsuite*, Filipinos topped the list of people who spend the greatest number of hours in social media and the internet. According to the report, Filipinos spend an average of four (4) hours and 15 minutes in social media use, and 10 hours and 56 minutes, almost 11 hours, in internet usage (CHUA, 2021). While the internet came before Facebook, the latter became more widespread than the internet itself (UY-TIOCO, 2019). These figures are simply overwhelming.

The populist administrations must have seen the potential of this that Duterte's electoral mobilization largely depended on social media campaign (RESSA 2023). And when the scandal of the now-defunct firm Cambridge Analytica blew up in 2018, the inner working of the Marcos family was also revealed (OCCEÑOLA, 2019).

In an exclusive interview with Maria Ressa, the first Filipino Nobel laureate and CEO of the embattled news agency *Rappler*, Christopher Willey, the former employee and whistleblower of Cambridge Analytica, said that the Philippines was the '*petri dish*' of disinformation. The whistleblower posited that because of the high social media and internet presence in the country, it became an ideal target to do experiments on manipulating voters' opinion and disseminating propaganda. Further, Wylie argues that another factor why the Philippines was chosen to be the 'testing ground' is because of the country's lax regulations; it is harder to do it in countries such as the US, the UK or in Europe because there is robust law enforcement. In Wylie's own words: "*and if it doesn't work, it doesn't matter, you won't get caught. And if it does work, then you can then figure out how to port that into other countries*" (OCCEÑOLA, 2019). High internet usage, relaxed regulatory actions, and corrupt politics were indeed a good mix in pushing political agenda in the social media. Marcos, Jr. surely seized the moment. In another whistleblower account, this time by Brittany Kaiser, Marcos, Jr. was reported to have personally tapped the firm to do a social media '*re-branding*' of the Marcos family (TOMACRUZ, 2020). In the Philippines, works of disinformation - false information which is intended to mislead - suggest that professionals are involved in trolling activities and production of viral contents (Cabañes and CORNELIO, 2017; ONG and CABAÑES, 2018, see also SORIANO, 2021).

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Disinforming was indeed a *modus operandi*, an operation; all it takes for politicians are a good sum of money to finance it, which happens to be easily doable due to nationwide corruption. As for Marcos, it needs no mentioning.

When you have a people browsing the internet for an average of 11 hours, it surely is easier to spread propaganda online than go for a city-to-city campaign. Facebook has become a feature of daily life (SORIANO, CAO, and SISON 2018; UY-TIOCO, 2019; UY-TIOCO and CABAÑES, 2021), so why not indeed make use of it when the majority is there. This is what exactly Duterte and Marcos did. And populist as they are, their fake news peddlers use the '*us-versus-them*' narratives to appeal to the masses. Political discourse then circulated on the social media (PERTIERRA, 2021) and now it does seem unstoppable. Significantly influential to this is Duterte's vehement contempt of mainstream traditional media in the Philippines, seen in the multiple legal suits that the state filed against Maria Ressa and *Rappler*, and the shutdown of the country's largest independent news agency, ABS-CBN (GUTIERREZ, 2020).

As the majority of Filipinos have social media accounts, both the poor and the 'aspirational classes', and the state-sponsored tarnishing of independent media, Duterte's rhetoric and Marcos, Jr.'s lies immediately reached the general public. Teehankee and Thompsons (2016) describe Duterte's rise to power as '*not a revolt of the poor ... [but] the angry protest of the wealthy, newly rich, well off, and the modestly successful new middle class (including call center workers, Uber drivers, and overseas Filipino workers abroad / OFWs)*'.

And what about Marcos? It's the cornucopia of populism, Duterte's support, and the family's rebranding and distortion of the Martial Law history. What greater political horror can it be than these two powers joining forces? Unfortunately, that's precisely what happened in the May 2022 National Elections; Marcos, Jr. the president, and Sara Duterte, the daughter of Rodrigo Duterte, the vice president (SICAT, 2022). Abroad, the Marcos-Duterte tandem were victorious. With 1.6 million registered Filipino voters abroad, Marcos garnered 475, 982 votes, while Duterte received 491, 427 votes (ABAD, 2022). Winning in a landslide at home and overseas, it is now worth asking how did the Marcos-Duterte tandem fare in overseas voting precincts.

IV. OFWs and their Transnational Political Participation

The participation of civil society is an important factor in the functioning of modern democracies (AMELUNG & BAUMGARTEN, 2016), a vivid sign that democracy ‘functions,’ but not a guarantee of its quality (KOEPECKÝ & MUDDÉ 2003). One of the points of inquiry of this article is how migrants, who belong to new middle class but can also be considered *precarriats*, influence “*people in power ... and their decisions that concern societal issues*” (EKMAN & AMNÅ, 2012:286). The Philippine political landscape in the past years’ sheds light on the effects of transnational governance arrangements that include non-state actors - one of them are the migrants - in global politics. A research area that remains underexplored (RISSE, 2013). The country’s huge migrant stock, which has been largely perceived as mere economic actors, is now a factor in the regimes’ transnational popularity. What encourages migrant participation is yet another issue that needs a succinct discussion.

There is a burgeoning literature on how states’ implement policies to engage their constituents living abroad (ØSTERGAARD-NIELSEN, 2003; DELANO & GAMLEN, 2014; PEDROZA & PALOP-GARCÍA, 2017; RAGAZZI, 2014), often intersecting with fundamental democratic principles such as political participation and representation (COLLYER, 2014). In 1973, when the number of OFWs increased, the then Marcos, Sr. administration launched the *Balikbayan*²¹ Program, when the state constructed *balikbayans* as tourists and consumers and accorded them utmost hospitality (ALBURO, 2005). Under the Duterte administration, the government built “OFW Hospitals” (RANADA, 2021) and established a new Department of Migrant Workers. In his inaugural speech, Marcos, Jr. promised better support for overseas workers by streamlining bureaucracies and providing employment to returning migrants due to the Covid-19 pandemic (VALMONTE, 2022). On one hand, the government for its part made ways to engage. On the other hand, what remains underexplored is how migrants

²¹ In the Tagalog language, “balik” means “return” and “bayan” means “homeland.” A balikbayan therefore means someone who is returning home, or a repatriate.

themselves politically participate especially through electoral channels (CIORNEI & ØSTERGAARD-NIELSEN, 2020).

Della Porta (2013) notes that although votes at elections count equally, the strength of popular opinions, emotional attachments, and expertise on different issues greatly varies. In the Philippines, the return of another Marcos seems to reflect a strong homogeneity in local and overseas public opinion, despite the fact that he mentioned neither past performances nor his political programs in his electoral campaigns; matters that campaigns should have informed the electorate (DELLA PORTA, 2013). Yet the 'strength' of public opinion was consistently seen in polls, culminating in his electoral victory. The Philippine 2016 and 2022 National Elections represents a peculiar example of diasporic political participation through elections. Duterte won a landslide in overseas voting (ABAD, 2021). And as a matter of recent fact, long before the official announcement of Marcos' electoral victory, vote counts already showed that the Marcos-Duterte tandem won in all countries and territories of overseas election except one: the Vatican City (ABAD, 2022), with the community mainly composed of Filipino Catholic priests and nuns.

There is an increasing number of studies that seek to explain emigrant turnout in home country elections, mostly focused on small-scale comparisons (BELCHIOR AZEVEDO LISI & ABRANTES, 2018; LAFLEUR & CHELIUS, 2011). Recent contributions (BURGESS & TYBURSKI, 2017; CIORNEI & ØSTERGAARD-NIELSEN 2020) however, concentrate on transnational turnout in a larger number of sending countries across time. These studies argue that the mobilization strategies of homeland political parties are a huge driving factor for transnational turnout. This is strongly corroborated by the case of the recent national election, where the victory of Marcos, Jr. largely depended on his strategic social media campaign and family rebranding. In a country where social media mythmaking prevails (CORONEL, 2022), mobilizing the citizens overseas has never been that easy. Some findings of other studies on transnational turnout, however, do not fit with the case of the Philippines, showing the gap in the literature. Two examples show this lacuna.

First, a number of studies suggest that there is a strong link between foreign remittances and home country political engagement (BOCCAGNI LAFLEUR & LEVITT, 2016; BURGESS, 2014; O'MAHONY, 2013). The common rationale of these

is that foreign remittances make migrants economic actors, which in turn empowers them to speculate as to the strength of the political system and how well it provides for the welfare of non-migrant families.

The Filipino case is entirely different. While in 2021 alone foreign remittance grew to \$28.81 billion (AGCAOILI, 2023), migrants do not seem to be driven to call the government to account for the corruption that continues to plague the country, as the majority of them voted for Marcos, Jr. who himself was convicted of tax evasion (LEMA 2021), and the family's records of ill-gotten wealth. The overwhelming turnout is also seen against the background of a pre-election survey that showed that graft and corruption were the migrants' 'main priorities' for the 2022 elections (VALMONTE, 2022). Secondly, Ciornei & Østergaard-Nielsen (2020) argue that migrants in developing countries undergo a steep political learning curve that drives their participation in home country politics, especially if their host countries have more solid democratic institutions. Yet again, the recent transnational turnout does not mirror this finding. In tackling participation, these examples highlight the relevance of context and cultures (LÖVBRAND, E., PIELKE, R., & BECK, S., 2011) and the importance of decolonizing theoretical approaches to the realities in the global South. The *status quo* in the Philippines does not just speak of state politics, but also of the 'politics of memory' elucidated by the "Marcos comeback", to which an 'authoritarian nostalgia' for his father's regime (RATCLIFFE & BAYANI, 2022) and a preference for someone who will continue Duterte's "legacy" (ABAD, 2022) contributed. As it is now clear, a profusion of factors shapes the OFWs' transnational political participation.

As people who also toil for their loved ones back home, Duterte and Marcos also tapped to the Filipino migrants' *'latent anxieties,'* as Curato (2016) calls it. They, too, care for the safety of their families from drug dependents and criminals; things that Duterte promised to terminate, and Marcos vowed to continue, this time in more humane terms: prevention and rehabilitation (ROMERO, 2022). The OFWs, too, were tricked by Marcos, Jr.'s rebranding and believed that he will bring back the glorious past, the 'golden era' that his father established during the years of dictatorship. Duterte and Marcos made use of the migrants' detachment from local realities and through their disinformation

operation fed them with lies; lies that that led them to contribute to the leaders' radical right politics.

V. Conclusion

“Without facts, you can’t have truth. Without truth, you can’t have trust. Without all three, we have no shared reality, and democracy as we know it—and all meaningful human endeavors—are dead,” said Maria Ressa (2023) the first Filipino Nobel Laureate. Ressa, with her news agency Rappler, is at the forefront of the battle for facts in the Philippines. Her words encapsulate the reality not just inside the archipelago, but also in the Filipino communities abroad. In the previous years, pseudo information in social media largely contributed to the gradual decline of democracy and the quality of human rights in the Philippines, manifested in the popularity of the bloodthirsty Duterte and the “Marcos comeback.” Disinformation does not just polarize Filipino society; it also disconnects it from truth.

As for the Filipino migrants, there is an addition: it alienates them from local reality. It is of the utmost importance to understand how an information ecosystem infested by political and historical lies shape local and diasporic transnational participation, especially among the new middle class and the ‘aspirational classes’. The irony of it all is that it is local corruption itself, which leads to poverty, that forced these Filipino migrants to seek for greener pastures abroad, and yet they put into power politicians whose principles stand in huge contrast with those being upheld by the countries in which they live and prosper.

By looking at the intersection of culture, migration, politics, and disinformation, this article sheds light on how an established democracy can be steadily toppled by taking advantage of the social media, and how Filipinos miles away from home are led to contribute to such a process. It also emphasizes the importance of decolonizing theoretical approaches to the rise of the radical right in the global South by looking at how local histories and cultures largely differ from the Western context, and how Western lenses hardly apply to the *status quos* in this region.

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Leon Bánk

From East to West: The circumstances of Hungary's accession to NATO

Abstract

This essay presents the circumstances of Hungary's accession to NATO. It covers all the major political events that took place during the governments of Antall, Horn, and Orbán. A separate chapter discusses the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the arguments of the anti-NATO parties.

Keywords: Hungary, NATO, Anti-NATO, debates, joining to NATO, 1990–2004

Since the outbreak of the Ukrainian–Russian war in 2022, the question of NATO enlargement has been raised many times: some are against it, and some are for it. I have wondered: what path led Hungary to NATO membership? This essay describes the political processes between the democratic transformation and NATO accession.

I. Historical Overview

With the end of the bipolar world, democratic changes also began in Hungary, and the first free elections after the Proclamation of the “Third Republic” were won by the MDF (Hungarian Democratic Forum) led by József Antall. The Antall government's foreign policy had three priorities:

1. Taking responsibility for Hungarians beyond the borders
2. Building good neighbourly relations
3. Euro-Atlantic integration of our country

The Warsaw Pact, which had made Hungary a military ally of the Soviet Union, had to be abolished if Euro-Atlantic integration was to succeed.

II. End of the Warsaw Treaty

“In 1956, the revolutionary government of Imre Nagy made a firm decision to withdraw Hungary from the Warsaw Pact, which was a unilateral declaration at the time. Today, and we agree on this, the Warsaw Pact, as a remnant of the European confrontation, needs to be revised.

Under the present circumstances, the military organization of the treaty becomes meaningless, and we believe that it can be dispensed with in the future and that its gradual phasing out by the end of 1991 may be desirable. Of course, this must be the result of concerted negotiations and efforts, and it would be inappropriate for anyone to take unilateral action in this process. We are convinced that our efforts should not be directed towards reforming this organization – which has not produced any substantial results for years – but towards creating a new common European security and cooperation structure, and to match TW to it. According to the prevailing view in the Republic of Hungary, our security must be built on European and regional cooperation, not on the balance of power and rivalry between military-political alliances. We want more security, not less. We want to be an ally not only of Eastern Europe but of the whole of Europe.”
(Proposal to disband the Soviet military bloc 1990.)

In June 1990, the Hungarian prime minister proposed in Moscow that the military bloc be immediately disbanded, but the Soviet leadership managed to postpone the inevitable. The end of the alliance was finally triggered by the reunification of Germany and the withdrawal of the GDR. Moscow announced on 12 February 1991 that the military alliance would be dissolved by 1 April. The decision to terminate the military pact was signed on 25 February 1991 at an extraordinary meeting of the Political Consultative Council in Budapest. As a consequence, all military organs, bodies, institutions and military activities of the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist on 31 March. On 19 June 1991, the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary was completed. On 1 July 1991, at the Prague summit of member states, the military bloc was officially declared dissolved, which meant two things:

1. Hungary regained sovereignty over its territory
2. Soviet Union all issues exclusively lost in the Cold War.

III. Euro-Atlantic integration of the Antall government

“Why was NATO the goal?” The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is both a Political and Military Alliance, by their definition:

“POLITICAL – NATO promotes democratic values and enables members to consult and cooperate on defense and security-related issues to solve problems, build trust and, in the long run, prevent conflict.

MILITARY – NATO is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. If diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military power to undertake crisis-management operations. These are carried out under the collective defense clause of NATO’s founding treaty – Article 5 of the Washington Treaty or under a United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organizations.” (What is NATO?)

The Antall government took several steps to integrate with the West, “setting the pace” among the former socialist countries. It was the first to join the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe was set up after the Second World War to be Europe’s “moral authority” and to tell European states how to operate internally according to principles and general rules.

In June 1989, the Council’s Parliamentary Assembly created a special guest status to promote cooperation with the countries under former Soviet influence. Hungary became a full member of the Council of Europe on 6 November 1990, while Czechoslovakia became a full member on 21 February 1991 and Poland on 26 November 1991.

These three countries saw that through coordinated integration they could easily achieve their goals of catching up with the West, so they created the Visegrad Cooperation, an organization linking the three countries.

As a lead-up to the Visegrad Three, Polish Foreign Minister Krzysztof Skubiszewski wrote a letter to Foreign Minister of Hungary Géza Jeszenszky proposing a forum for the Deputy Foreign Ministers of Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. The idea of “Visegrad Cooperation” was raised by

Joseph Antall in November 1990 at the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) conference overseeing the Helsinki Process in Paris, in the presence of Vaclav Havel, President of Czechoslovakia, and Lech Walesa, President of Poland. On January 21, 1991, the foreign ministers of the three countries met in Budapest, where József Antall explained that:

"[...] we consider trilateral cooperation, the development of a common position on all the important issues of our time, including the future of the Warsaw Pact, but also the Lithuanian issue, to be important. We support the coordination of our cooperation with Western European integrations [...]" (Sáringner 2017: 353.)

The Heads of State and Government of Hungary, Poland, and Czechoslovakia signed a cooperation agreement in Visegrad on 15 February 1991, establishing the Visegrad Cooperation, in which they set five common goals for the modernization and integration of their countries;

1. the restoration of state independence, democracy, and freedom
2. the elimination of the remnants of totalitarianism in all spheres of social, economic, and intellectual life
3. the establishment of parliamentary democracy and the modern rule of law, with respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms
4. the establishment of a modern market economy
5. full integration into the European political, economic, security and legal order.

József Antall said at the meeting that: *"[...] we do not want to create an organization that would give the impression that a new international organization is being created that could be an alternative to other European organizations. It is important that our negotiations with European organizations take place in parallel and independently. The three countries should coordinate on these issues at the same time. This also applies to military policy issues. In the West, we are expected not to work against each other, but to march side by side into Europe. Our Western partners welcome the opportunity to negotiate with democratic countries that are already negotiating with each other [...]"* (SÁRINGNER, 2017: 353–354.)

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The summit of the Visegrad Three was held in Prague in early May 1992, where József Antall said: “[...] the question always arises: what is it that binds us together? First, we are bound together by historical tradition, with its memories of good and bad. Secondly, we are linked by a geographical link, which also offers opportunities for economic cooperation. Thirdly, what binds us together is the Euro-Atlantic security system, which we absolutely need. And finally, the fourth is a practical issue: we sit together in the ‘dentist’s anteroom’ of the European Community. The Association Agreement, which we agreed on, makes it imperative that we have a common interest in working together. [...] It is essential that we make every effort to align ourselves with the standards of the European Community.” (SÁRINGER, 2017: 355.)

After the division of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993, it was confirmed in Prague on 11-12 January 1994 that the Visegrad Cooperation should be maintained in its unchanged form with the existing objectives. This was also hoped for by US President Bill Clinton, who the day before had reassured the Visegrad countries that the Middle East was a matter close to the heart of his administration and that the US leadership within NATO supported enlargement. So, the question from then on was which countries would join NATO and when.

The “gate-opening” of relations between the Antall government and NATO dates to 29 June 1990, when official contacts were established in Brussels between Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky and NATO Secretary General Manfred Wörner, during which preparatory steps were taken for the Hungarian Prime Minister’s visit. On 18 July 1990, József Antall travelled to NATO headquarters in Brussels, where he expressed his view that the security of Europe and the world lay in this organization. In November 1990, Manfred Wörner paid an official visit to Hungary and continued to meet the Hungarian Prime Minister and Foreign Minister on several occasions. The NATO leaders were given a comprehensive picture of the changes in Hungary and its future, which led to a positive image of Hungary in Brussels. NATO formally invited the Hungarian Prime Minister to the North Atlantic Council meeting at Foreign Minister level on 28 October 1991.

József Antall said at the meeting that: “[...] I will keep some great moments in my memory. Among them was when I presented the document on the revision and dissolution of the Warsaw Pact in Moscow last year. It is also an important moment for me that last year I was the first head of state or government of a former communist country to enter this building. [...] We are in favor of European integration, and with the Schuman Prize, I may not need to stress my commitment. But I have to say that European integration cannot be imagined without transatlantic cooperation. [...] For us, NATO is the key to Europe’s stability. We value international agreements, Helsinki, and the OSCE, but we see NATO as an effective security organization.” (SÁRINGER, 2018: 85.)

On October 19, 1993, József Antall wrote a letter to the President of the United States of America, William J. Clinton, and Manfred Wörner, in which he presented the Hungarian government’s position, namely that the preparations for the accession of the Visegrad Group to NATO should be made as soon as possible.

At its summit on 10–11 January 1994, NATO announced the Partnership for Peace initiative to develop closer political and military cooperation with the former socialist countries of Europe. At the Summit, President Clinton made the official statement, “The question now is not whether to admit new members to NATO, but when and how.”

The government was disappointed when the Partnership for Peace was announced, as it was less than the fast-track to membership it had hoped for; it was not clear whether participation in the program would bring our country closer to NATO membership or merely parallel the enlargement process, but the agreement itself could be good preparation for future membership. Hungary was one of the first countries to join the Framework Convention on 8 February, when Foreign Minister Géza Jeszenszky signed the agreement.

IV. The Horn government's integration into NATO

In the 1994 elections, the MDF-led government was replaced by a coalition of MSZP (Hungarian Socialist Party) and SZDSZ (Alliance of Free Democrats) led by Gyula Horn. Although a new government was formed, the three foreign policy priorities remained, as these goals reflected national interests rather than party interests.

In the government program, the Socialist-Liberal Democrats stressed that the country's goal was the full orientation towards the Euro-Atlantic area and that NATO membership was a prominent part of this, which they wanted to legitimize by referendum:

"The strategic goal of Hungarian foreign policy is to link the country to the Euro-Atlantic area. In this process, the relations, political, and military cooperation between Hungary and NATO play a crucial role. Our country's participation in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) and the Partnership for Peace program not only strengthens our security but also contributes to the creation of the conditions for NATO membership. The government intends to have Hungary's decision to join NATO confirmed by a referendum, following negotiations to define the conditions." (Declaration of the Hungarian Parliament on the Hungarian National Group of the Interparliamentary Union 1994: 187.)

In the autumn of 1994, a successful Hungarian-British military exercise took place in the framework of the Partnership for Peace, followed by the first Individual Partnership Program, which was adopted in Brussels on 15 November. In the following years, further exercises took place in Hungary within the framework of the Partnership for Peace, such as:

- Cooperative Light
- Combined Rescue
- Trimigrant.

From the beginning of 1995, there was a change in Hungarian foreign policy, the essence of which was that the government started to give de facto priority

to NATO integration rather than integration with the European Union. Foreign Minister László Kovács also began to hint in public statements that it was easier to integrate into NATO: *“NATO, on the other hand, has simpler requirements for accession than the European Union ... The difference for Hungary in terms of accession to the European Union and NATO is that it is much more difficult to meet the EU’s conditions.”* (22 February 1995. Diary of Hungarian Parliament 1995: 552.)

In September 1995, NATO published its official enlargement study in which its member states defined the political and military standards that future members must meet in order to join. Countries wishing to join NATO had to meet the following requirements: a democratic political system, parliamentarianism, a market economy and civilian control over military forces, and a minimum level of military compatibility. However, the most important criterion to apply – according to the Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty – was that they had to demonstrate their willingness and ability to “contribute to the objectives of the Alliance”.

Hungary has already demonstrated its commitment to NATO in the Partnership for Peace exercises and has further strengthened this commitment by joining the IFOR/SFOR operation.

In September 1995, at the request of the United Nations, NATO developed plans to manage the crisis in Bosnia and the International Force in Kosovo (IFOR), which was to be established in this context, assumed that nearby non-NATO countries would join the operation. Hungarian participation was considered essential in two areas: firstly, military cooperation in the international force and secondly, the provision of logistical support. After the Parliament’s affirmative decision, Hungary signed a “transit agreement” with NATO on 6 December, which legally settled the issues of the transit of IFOR forces. Hungarian participation was carried out in two areas under the IFOR banner:

1. Logistics level
2. Military level

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Participation in the operation in Bosnia was extremely important for Hungary, as it showed that the country could contribute to managing a crisis with concrete actions and successfully cooperate with other countries. From a technical and military point of view, the Hungarian Defence Forces could be part of a NATO-led live military operation. "Our participation in IFOR is worth more than a hundred exercises," said László Kovács during the visit of German Defence Minister Volker Rühle to Hungary in April 1996.

In April 1996, Hungary submitted its ideas for accession to NATO, stating that it wished to join the organisation in the first round and was able to comply with all the obligations. Since September 1996, the public had already known that NATO would invite its first new members at the 1997 Summit, as announced by US Secretary of State Warren Christopher in a speech in Stuttgart.

At the summit of 8 and 9 July 1997, the names of several countries emerged in the first part of enlargement, such as: Romania and Slovenia, but NATO eventually invited only Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary to join in the first round, a decision welcomed by Parliament on July 15 and expressed hope for the construction of a new European security system.

It was clear to both the military and political leadership that Hungary's assistance in resolving the crisis in the Balkanian wars played a major role in the country's invitation in the first round to join the military alliance.

In September 1997, bilateral negotiations on accession began, and this time specific issues were on the agenda in military, legal, economic, and financial terms. The answer to the question what is the point was in accession negotiations can be found in the comment of General István Szalai: "[...] accession is not a momentary change of status, but a lasting process of adjustment. It is precisely the timeframe and effectiveness of this process that must be worked out in the negotiations. This applies equally to intellectual investment and material investment. [...] In summary, I would say that it is in the negotiations that we need to work out exactly what accession will cost us." (NAGY. 1997: 14.). The negotiation process was completed by October.

In accordance with the government's program, Hungary held a referendum on accession on 16 November 1997: "Do you agree that the Republic of Hungary should ensure the country's defense by joining NATO?"

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The overwhelming majority of the Hungarian voters (85,3%) agreed and with 49.2% turnout rate the referendum was considered to be valid. In conclusion, the referendum fully legitimized the will to join NATO. Prime Minister Gyula Horn explained that “never before in this country have the people been asked if they want to join an alliance. Today it has done so, and the country can be proud of the result.” (Népszava, 17 November 1997.) The referendum itself was not required by any law, in the Czech Republic and Poland there were no referendums on the decision, in 1997 it was such a “Hungaricum”. The next day, on 17 November, the government sent a letter of intent to Brussels confirming the question of NATO membership. As a final step in the accession process, on 16 December 1997 the foreign ministers of the NATO member states signed a protocol on the three invited countries’ intention to join.

V. Anti-NATO

NATO accession was supported by consensus among parliamentary parties, both under the Antall government and under the Horn government. During this time, only a few NGOs and the far left and far right opposed the NATO accession. The largest of the anti-NATO NGOs was the Alba Circle – Nonviolent Peace Movement, which supported EU accession but opposed integration into the military alliance.

The Alba Circle did not opt for independence, but for total peace, and therefore did not support any military operations or reforms and believed that a “minimum army” would be desirable for our country. According to the pacifist organization, NATO’s global presence creates tensions, operates its military bodies at huge cost, does not solve world differences, but exacerbates them and “contributes to the waste of the wealth produced by states and humanity for military purposes”. The spokesperson for the peace movement said that Hungary is not under threat of war, we are an independent country, but joining NATO would mean losing our independence and would be a bad point in the eyes of the Russian leadership. Besides, if our country were to join the alliance, we would unwittingly draw a very sharp line between Hungarians in the motherland and abroad.

On the far left, the biggest voice of the anti-NATO crowd was Gyula Thürmer, who grew up in the Worker’s Party, the ideology and legacy of the MSZMP (Hungarian Socialist Worker’s Party), which was abolished at the time of the democratic changes. Thürmer, who before the regime change was former party secretary-general and secretary to Prime Minister Károly Grósz, was a “true” socialist politician, so he opposed almost everything, in this case including NATO. The Workers’ Party (Munkáspárt) believed that cooperation with neighboring countries should be strengthened, and neutrality sought rather than NATO. The party also objected to Hungary joining the Partnership for Peace. “Workers’ Party objects to joining NATO, saying that the Partnership for Peace is a partnership for war.” (Heves Megyei Hírlap, 19–20 February 1994.) In 1995 Gyula Thürmer published a book “Nem kell NATO!” (“We don’t need NATO!”), in which he argued against NATO membership. The core of his argument was based on the interest of the homeland and the

neutrality. He explained: "There is no danger, the country is not threatened by anyone. With NATO membership we give up a significant part of our sovereignty. After the Warsaw Pact we do not want to be find ourselves in a similar situation (csöbörből vödörbe)". (THÜRMER, 1995.) After the Madrid invitation letter, the Workers' Party welcomed the fact that the decision would be decided by referendum. Party spokesman George Zinner said that the party understood and respected the will of the electorate on NATO membership, (Népszabadság, 17 November 1997).

On the far right, the mouthpiece of the anti-NATO movement was MIÉP, the Hungarian Justice and Life Party, led by István Csurka. The party was founded after Csurka was expelled from the MDF in 1993 and formed his party with a group of supporters. From the very beginning, the party did not support any kind of Western integration because it was against the "Hungarian interest".

In 1994 the party's newspaper, the Magyar Fórum (Hungarian Forum) concluded that NATO membership was unfortunately a real threat and that "fortunately" until then the country had had a status in the "Partnership for Peace" programme. The reason of this latter was -according to the MIÉP- that the American Jewish lobby who wished for a rapid NATO enlargement had not yet been able to subdue genuine American interests, which did not benefit from rapid NATO admission. (Havi Magyar Fórum, June 1994: 45.)

According to István Csurka, the question was already decided at the NATO summit in Madrid: "Hungary was colonized in the first round." (Magyar Fórum, 10 July 1997: 2). The Party leader said that the whole idea of a referendum made no sense in the given circumstances, as Hungary's accession to NATO should be decided at a referendum, however the Hungarian government had already been negotiating the terms of accession in Brussels. "What message does this send to the Hungarian people? It means that your voice does not matter." (Magyar Fórum, 23 October 1997: 2.). NATO enlargement could lead to Russia taking up arms again, and in response America would take the same step, thus posing a military threat to the whole European continent.

The party leader added that the government was lying when they had said that NATO membership was a step forward to catching up with the West as this accession would only throw our country to colonial status. (Magyar Fórum, 13 November 1997: 2). MIÉP was therefore urging citizens to vote "no" in the

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referendum. 50.5% of eligible voters did not turn up at the polls, indicating a lack of interest in NATO, MIÉP concluded, “The decision is final but false.” (Magyar Fórum, 20 November 1997: 2.)

VI. Joining NATO

In the 1998 elections, the previous MSZP-led government was replaced by a coalition of FIDESZ, FKgP (Independent Party of Smallholders, Peasants, and Citizens), and MDF led by Viktor Orbán. The MIEP led by István Csurka was also elected to Parliament, which was the only anti-NATO party in Parliament, and their goal is to protect our national sovereignty as much as possible. (2 March 1999. Diary of Hungarian Parliament 1999: 719).

To join NATO, all Hungary needed was for the other countries to ratify its accession. The member countries timed it so that Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Poland could join the military alliance on the 50th anniversary of NATO. The anniversary was to have taken place on 4 April 1999, but the Kosovo crisis upset this plan and instead, the formal accession ceremony took place on 12 March 1999 in Independence, USA. The US Secretary of State chose this city because it is the site of President Truman's memorial library. The Hungarian delegation was led by Foreign Minister János Martonyi and included Ambassador Géza Jeszenszky. The foreign ministers of the three countries handed over the accession documents, bringing the military alliance to nineteen member countries.

“On 12 March, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Hungary deposited the necessary documents for NATO accession; on 16 March, the Hungarian national flag was raised in front of NATO headquarters in Brussels; and on 16 March, with speeches by the prime ministers of the three new members, Hungary took its place among the three countries as a full member of NATO. This marked the end of the Yalta world order and the beginning of a new era in Hungary's history.” (Viktor Orbán on NATO membership: 22 March 1999. Diary of Hungarian Parliament 1999: 1126.)

VII. Conclusion

After the fall of communism Hungary had its first opportunity in decades to catch up with Western Europe, and the Hungarian political elite saw the opportunity that “fell into our laps” with the end of the bipolar world and seized it. The Antall government laid the foundations for successful integration and showed Western leaders that our country was serious about rapprochement and capable of achieving it. Under the Horn government events accelerated in a way that could not have been expected before. In the Partnership for Peace, in IFOR/SFOR, we have shown that Hungary can be counted on to keep the peace, both militarily and politically.

The fact that Hungary decided to join NATO by referendum gave it the greatest legitimacy among the new members and showed that Hungary wanted to belong to the Western world. The Orbán government only had to wait for the ratification process. The work of Hungary's political elite is best reflected in the fact that our mother country officially became a member of NATO on March 12, 1999, together with the Czech Republic and Poland, in the “first wave”.

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Sándor Fekete

Britain and Conservative Party in the 1970's

Abstract

Although Britain's isolationism, non-Europeanness and difference from the rest of Europe (not only in traditions and habits but also in political practise) is evident, the two decades after the World War II. could be described first by cautious then by a less timid rapprochement between the two territories. Thatcher and the New Right ended the consensus that defined internal politics and the relationship between the Conservatives and the Labour which meant the braking up of the tranquillity of foreign affairs at the same time. Through three successive government cycles the majority of British voters thought that Thatcher had to go on. They might not be satisfied with internal or economic policies but considered Thatcherite foreign policy unanimously successful. Thatcher brought back the supremacy of the foreign policy of the British colonial empire: the employment of force, the ultimate defence of British interests and the notion of the 'British Glory'. Her great rhetoric talent, her style and the content of her speeches which many times were diplomatically improper, satisfied and made those indulge in nostalgia who were averse to British roles in Europe anyway. For the description of the Thatcherite diplomatic practice I would like to introduce the notion of 'anti - foreign policy', which means all the anti-diplomatic means that Thatcher used.

Keywords: Economic, society, politic, Conservative Party, election of Thatcher

I. Economy: crisis of the welfare state

According to a journalist, after the 1960s Britain was overcome by the strange feeling of 'hangover': crises became the part of everyday life.¹ By the 1970s, the social consensus that had emerged during the Second World War - which helped Britain recover after 1945 and became very strong in the welfare state of the following decade and a half (and to some extent hid the problems)

¹ See Egedy, G.: *Nagy-Britannia története*, Budapest, 1998, Aula, p. 369.

- had been broken, but not yet dissolved. It was more or less clear that the Keynesian economic policy that is based on full employment and state intervention into economy was no longer to be continued in the same way. And in the middle of the decade, in 1975-1976 it happened the first time (ever since there was a national census) that the population of Britain started to decrease. So, what did Britain look like in the 1970's?

Starting from north, from Scotland we have to consider two striking symptoms: the decline of the old centres of heavy industry and the upswing of the East Coast thanks to the oil industry. The Highlands had more or less managed to preserve their mystical atmosphere by limiting the revenue from technological innovations. However, after long, controversial debates a nuclear and a hydroelectric power station were established there. The capital city, Edinburgh with half a million inhabitants, remained the administrative and cultural centre, while Glasgow could keep its industrial importance. Although Scotland's situation had always been the worst on the island, by the middle of the 1970s it was 'surpassed' by North England (Northumbria, Durham, Newcastle-upon-Tyne). The rate of unemployment was higher there than in Scotland: 8.3% (1978).² The reason was the quick decline of traditional industries of mining, shipbuilding and iron metallurgy. Once the world-famous centre of textile industry, Lancashire (with its 7 million inhabitants) remained the most populous region (except Greater London). As cotton had lost its importance by that time, just those cities and villages could avoid the catastrophic decay that were able to switch over to other industries. However, it was just partly true for the biggest city of the region, Manchester: although many light industry and electronics factories were established, impoverishment and emigration continued unabated. The same process could be seen in Liverpool at that time, where the Irish immigration had continued from the World War II.

The 'heart' of England, the Midlands produced the greatest development of economy since 1945: the capital of the Black Country, Birmingham had become the second biggest city in the country, with over 1 million inhabitants and more than 5 thousand different industrial companies. Wales had a very important problem of mine closures and rising unemployment. At the beginning of the

² *Ibid.* p. 370.

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decade some people were overoptimistic about the development of steel industry in South Wales but these hopes were dashed by 1978-1979. One of the few regions that showed unchanged development was the sparsely populated East England. Because of the coastal region it could take its part from the oil industry as well as the trade with EEC countries. And at last, some words about London: at the end of the 1970s the Greater London Council recorded 7 million inhabitants, 17% less than in 1961.³ Most of the unemployed and homeless people were concentrated in the capital.

So, the 1970s was a quite controversial era with dynamic development and irresistible decline at the same time, however statistics show that generally decline was the stronger. Economic growth fell from an annual average rate of approximately 3% between 1951 and 1973 to around 1% between 1974 and 1979. In addition, the governments of the 1970s had to cope with the extremely high levels of inflation, reaching its peak of 26.9% in August 1975. Meanwhile, unemployment more than doubled from half a million in 1974 to over 1.3 million in 1979 which caused an annual average of 2,000 strikes, involving almost 4.5 million workers.⁴ The trade deficit of £110 million in 1965 had reached £1,673 million by 1975.⁵ Perhaps the most symbolic milestone in Britain's decline was when it was revealed that Rolls Royce, for so long the talisman of the nation's manufacturing excellence, had gone bankrupt.⁶

³ *Ibid.* p. 373.

⁴ Figures from Edgell, S. and V. Duke, *A Measure of Thatcherism: A Sociology of Britain*, London, 1991, HarperCollins, p. 3.

⁵ Figures from: Robbins, K., *The Eclipse of a Great Power: Modern Britain, 1870-1992* 2nd edn, London, 1994, Addison Wesley Longman, p. 429.

⁶ Evans, E. J., *Thatcher and Thatcherism* London and New York, 1997, Routledge, p. 9.

II. Society: forming of the under-class

In the 1970s not just the Keynesian consensus was to break but also the consensus between the working class and the middle class. More and more middle class people blamed the working class and the trade unions for the growing inflation and unemployment. At the same time, the prospects (at least in the minds of the working class) of becoming middle class seemed to be diminishing: according to a 1977 survey, 70% more people claimed to be a member of the working class than ten-fifteen years earlier.⁷

In the second half of the 1970s, however, many scholars recognised that the sharpest dividing line in British society was no longer between the working class and the middle class, but between British citizens and immigrants of colour. Coloured immigrants (from India, Pakistan, etc.) formed a new class: the under-class. Sociologists called the attention to the disadvantageous situation of Afro-Asian immigrants not without a good reason.⁸ They were the last ones who got a job and the first to lose it. They always complained about the prejudices of British authorities and police, while the rate of unemployment and living standards were far worse among them, than the national average. After London, the largest number of immigrants were settled in Birmingham, giving 10% of the population in 1976.⁹

⁷ See Egedy, G., *Nagy-Britannia*, p. 375.

⁸ *Ibid.* p. 376.

⁹ *Ibid.* p. 376.

III. Politics: limits of the two-party system

The modern British party system is the result of the 19th century's industrial revolution, the mass democracy and the universal suffrage. The main characteristic of this system is that basically two big political parties are competing; two big political parties are reacting to each other. First this meant the Conservative - Liberal (Tory - Whig) then the Conservative - Labour dominance. The problem, which may question this evident statement, is that there are other parties in the elections and in Parliament. To solve this dilemma, we can take Sartori's definition in connection with the two-party system: just two political parties have the real, actual chance to get the majority of seats in Parliament and only one of them - except some special cases- can get it.¹⁰

The British party system, during its twentieth century history, proved to be the most stable from 1945 to 1970. In this period Sartori's criteria are perfectly valid. The dominance of the two big parties could not be questioned: from 1945 to 1970, 85-90% of the votes were won by the Conservatives and Labours together. What is more, there was basically two-party competition in the constituencies too: during the general elections of 1951 and 1955 for example, there were more than two candidates only in one fifth of the constituencies. The stability of the party system was mainly maintained by the consensus between the two big parties, and between the working and the middle class.¹¹

At the beginning of the 1970s the strong position of the two parties was seriously endangered by 'third parties': Scottish and Welsh national parties and the most challenging Liberal Party, which had organisations and support all over the country. During the three general elections of the decade the support of the Conservatives and Labours together decreased from the above mentioned 85-90% to 70-75%. After a long period of time, in 1975 it happened again that the winning party (Labours) could not get the absolute majority of

¹⁰ Sartori, G., *European Political Parties: The Case of Political Parties and Political development*, Princeton, 1965, Princeton University Press

¹¹ Figures from Havas, P., *A brit pártok és pártrendszer a 90-es években*. Budapest, 1996, MTA Politikai Tudományok Intézete

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the seats and had to form coalition with the Liberals. The background of these changes was the breaking of the Keynesian consensus and the recognition that the old economic policy could not be continued. Governments in the 1970s could not cope with the problems so it was possible for Margaret Thatcher in 1979 to completely end with the consensus politics. At the same time the Labour Party strongly drifted towards the left. In these circumstances the two main parties got less and less votes altogether to such an extent that during the general election of 1983, the electoral coalition of the Liberals and the Social Democrats almost reached the result of the Labour Party. If there had been a proportional election system, the stable two-party system would have been ended.

Taking all these factors together, many political scientists assumed that the two-party system would become a three-party system, with the Liberals as the third party. Others believed that if the two-party system remained, Labour would be dominated by liberal-social democratic forces. However, the 1990s have disproved these assumptions. With the renewed strengthening of the Labour Party, the erosion of the two-party system stopped, and the transformation did not continue.¹²

¹² See Rose, R., *Politics in England*, London, Macmillan, 1989, who considers the 1970s as the era of multi-party system, contrasted to the period from 1945 to 1970.

IV. Conservative Party – Ideology and Structure

The Conservative Party has basically three main ideological values, and depending on the historical circumstances, sometimes the first, sometimes the second or the third gets a major role. The oldest one is *traditionalism*, rooted in the values of landed aristocracy. It puts the emphasis on patriotism, authoritarian principles, and is often opposed to social and political changes. It has reservations about the emancipation of women, the social integration of coloured people, legalisation of abortion or the facilitation of divorce. It supports strong, central power with no Scottish or Welsh autonomy. The second ideological value, *individualism* originates from the 'liberal market' theory of the Whig faction. It means the refusal of state intervention in the economy thus backing the principle of 'laissez-faire'. It rejects the idea of the welfare state by saying that it undermines the human capacity for enterprise. Mainly this idea provided the engine for the economic policy of the Thatcher era. *Progressivism* is the third ideological element, which became significant during the decades after World War II and which was connected mainly to the policies of R. A. Butler. Its supporters accept the idea of the welfare state and the Keynesian techniques of intervention into economy - the latter in opposition to individualism.

But evidently, the main purpose of the Conservative Party (like nearly all parties in the world) is to win the elections. So, depending on and being in accordance with this ultimate aim, those ideological values are put in the forefront of the party programme, which seem to be the politically most efficient. Thus, the Conservative Party has always been ready to integrate such political elements that had been rejected before. After World War II, Tories accepted the Keynesian consensus and the welfare state, which could hardly happen before 1939, as the liberal economic policy and individualism were the two main pillars at that time. Although these values were not forgotten after the war, only political pragmatism was dominant. So, without underestimating the significance of the Thatcherite change, we have to state that it was also based on one specific practical and pragmatist realization: it turned out that the

policies had been applied to economy and society for twenty-five years could not to be applied any more. It was more the crisis of the Conservative Party that forced the 'Iron Lady' to change the political guidelines than her wish to return to the 'original' roots.

Traditionally, the Conservative Party has an oligarchic inner structure, in which the membership has a quite insignificant role. Practically, the party (nowadays as well) can be identified with the Parliament faction, which elects the potent leader from its members. The organization of the constituencies forms a separate unit to which the membership is connected. Its main tasks are the selection of candidates and the preparation and organisation of the party's annual conferences. However, these conferences resemble more a political demonstration than a significant political forum. The third component of the party is the Central Office, which serves the leader and the faction. At the beginning of the 1990's there were efforts to make this rigid structure a bit looser and more decentralised. It turned out that the Thatcherite paternalist style of control resulted in discontent among the membership (nearly 1.5 million people). These reforms, implemented in 1993, were designed to bring about structural change and to activate and motivate the membership.¹³

What also seems to be a significant issue is the social and regional base of the Conservative Party. Regarding their social base, they often face allegations of favouring only the affluent - an accusation they have always sought to reject. But they have to admit that between the early 1920s and 1974 the social background of the Tory elite changed remarkably little. It is true that the landed aristocracy retreated from the Tory backbenches in the House of Commons during this period, but in other respects little changed. The solid upper-middle class remained dominant factor. But below the surface, a significant shift had occurred after 1974. The so-called 'Cambridge mafia'¹⁴, which entered the House of Commons in the 1970s and worked its way up the Tory hierarchy in the 1980s, was largely the product of the meritocratic lower-middle-class. Most of its members came to Cambridge on scholarships from rural grammar

¹³ In this topic I was guided by Havas's essay, *A brit pártok és pártrendszer a 90-es években*.

¹⁴ Adonis, Andrew: *The Transformation of the Conservative Party in the 1980s*. In Adonis, Andrew and Tim Hames: *A Conservative Revolution? The Thatcher - Reagan Decade in Perspective*. Manchester and New York, 1994, Manchester University Press, pp. 159-161.

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schools. In the party leadership sons (and a few daughters) of teachers, doctors, even small tradesmen increasingly replaced the sons of landowners, business leaders and wealthy professionals – although the latter two groups still retain a firm foothold.

Finally, in terms of regional support, the Tories seem to be rather limited, as they traditionally do not have much support in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland - they deserve the nickname "Little Englanders".

V. Challenges of the 1970s – election of Thatcher

The 1970s in Britain saw a time of economic crisis and political turbulence. Economic crisis took the form of continued economic decline, rising unemployment and social disorder. Despite the difference of the applied policies, the Conservative (1970-1974) and the Labour (1974-1979) period is common in the sense that they both ‘failed’ to solve the problems. In spite of Heath’s personal achievement in bringing Britain into the Common market, the failures of his administration of 1970-1974 are regarded as the worst period of the modern Conservative Party. The failure to curb inflation and trade unionism through industrial relations legislation, and two defeats at the hands of the coal miners, led first to the downfall of Heath and second to the rise and growth of Thatcherism.

After losing the two elections of February and October 1974, Heath was forced to hold a ballot for the Party leadership in February 1975. Although he had built up a strong and loyal support among a group of younger, often lower-middle class Tory MPs, called the ‘Heathites’, but had alienated many with his arrogant, autocratic leadership style and flawed tactics, that had that had contributed to the party losing three of the last four general elections. The leader of the opposition to Heathite Conservatism was Sir Keith Joseph, the former Social Security minister and controversial apostle of ‘New Conservatism’. His views were founded on the teachings of the gurus of monetarist economics, Friedrich von Hayek and Milton Friedman. It was not he, however, who challenged for the leadership. He recognised that he lacked the talent to become a successful national leader. He therefore supported, instead, Margaret Thatcher – fifty years old at that time – a likeminded, apparently malleable, former Education Secretary who had recently gained broader recognition within the party’s ranks by promising low cost 9 per cent house mortgages during the October 1974 election campaign and for skilfully opposing the government’s Finance Bill during the 1974 parliamentary session. There were other, more likely, alternatives to Edward Heath in 1975: William Whitelaw, James Prior or Sir Jeffrey Howe, but they remained loyal and did not

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contest in the first ballot. This enabled Margaret Thatcher to defeat Heath surprisingly by 130 to 119.¹⁵ The other contestant, Hugh Fraser received 16 votes, while 11 MPs abstained. This left Margaret Thatcher as the new front-runner and was the momentum behind her candidature, in campaign adeptly managed by Airey Neave. When Whitelaw, Prior, Peyton and Howe had announced their intentions to enter the contest, it was too late. In the second ballot on 11 February 1975 Thatcher won a decisive majority of 146 out of 279 votes leaving Whitelaw (79 votes), Prior (19), Howe (19) and Peyton (11) tailing in her wake.

In what was later called the backbench 'peasants' revolt', the Conservative Party elected the country's first female party leader in the backbenches. It would be hard to find a more apt description of an event in which the backbenchers revolted against their oppressive leader, who forced them out of power for many years. Their discontent grew so high that they did not hesitate to elect a woman for this prominent position – a thing that would not have happened in other circumstances. Driven by the prejudice of the impressionable woman, they thought they would get their way - an idea that proved to be wrong.

¹⁵ Young, Hugo: *One of Us*. London, 1991, Pan Books, pp. 94-99.

VI. The elections of 1979

After 1975, the Callaghan administration had to face a new Conservative Party led by a strong-minded female who presented to the electorate a radical manifesto entitled 'Time for a Change'. This document recalled the Heath's 'Selsdonite manifesto' of 1970. It broke with the party's post-war pragmatism and called instead for a radical 'counter revolution'. It declared that the last two decades had seen a definite rise in government spending; a dangerous growth of trade union power; a decline in freedom of choice, moral standards and law and order. It stated that the country was slowly moving leftwards with the danger of becoming an Eastern European – style socialist state. This interpretation was supported by the growth of 'radical right' opinions in the 1970s and the intellectual shift away from liberalism and Keynesianism. A surprising fact to see that the nationalist and racist National Front gained temporary popularity during the local elections of 1976, capturing 9% of the vote in the seats, with a membership of 25000.¹⁶

The Conservative manifesto of 1979 concentrated mainly on three areas. First, it dealt with economy, placing high priority to conquering inflation with monetarist approach. This involved reduced government borrowing and spending through the privatisation of a number of state-owned firms. It stated that it would adopt a laissez-faire approach to industry and would not intervene into economy. The party promised to promote self-employment by taxes reductions and deregulation. The second main point (closely linked to the economic programme) was to curb the power of trade unions, saying that "we want to democratise and reform them" They stated that Labour's Employment Protection and Trades Unions and Labour Relations Acts of 1974-76 had gone too far and that union leaders had been allowed to become too powerful during the preceding decade. Thus, the Conservatives planned to end the "corporatist" dialogue and give the unions back their status. And thirdly, the manifesto also offered an improvement in law and order, increasing spending on the police.

¹⁶ Figures from: Derbyshire, J. D. and I. Derbyshire, *Politics in Britain: From Callaghan to Thatcher* London, 1988, Chambers

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The manifesto was supported by most of the popular press and backed up by a well-financed advertising campaign planned by the hired Saatchi and Saatchi agency and directed by the party's new Director of Publicity, the successful television producer, Gordon Reece. Addition to the traditional Conservative voters, it also targeted the skilled working class 'floating voters' by launching a major poster campaign against unemployment under the slogan 'Labour Isn't Working'. The campaign put a great emphasis on displaying the leadership qualities of Margaret Thatcher.

James Callaghan and Labour, on the other hand, sought to project an image of competence and reconciliation in the face of the Conservative campaign, confronting the untried radicalism of their opponents. The party's manifesto, largely produced by James Callaghan and his private team, declared 'The Labour Way is the Better Way', and warned voters that unemployment would rise sharply and the welfare state would be endangered if a Conservative government was elected. It promised to further reduce inflation and unemployment. The Labour campaign was brilliantly led by the popular James Callaghan and might have been successful if the elections had been held seven months earlier. The 'Winter of Discontent' had, however, undermined the party's conciliatory image and had turned the public against the trade union movement. This enabled the Conservatives to gain a comfortable victory on polling day on 3 May. As J. D. Derbyshire and I. Derbyshire writes in their book, *Politics in Britain*: "The swing to the Conservatives was 5.1%, the greatest of any election since 1945 and an increasing volatility of the electorate. The largest swing towards the party took place in rural Wales, the Midlands and the South, and among skilled, upwardly mobile, manual groups and new voters... Overall, the Labour Party managed to draw in 75000 more votes than in October 1974 (although the turnout was admittedly higher than in 1979), but they were defeated by the switch of Liberal votes to the Conservatives as the nation experienced a temporary return to more polarised politics. The Conservatives gained 2.2 million more votes than in October 1974 and were left with an overall Commons majority of 43 seats."¹⁷

In the late 1970s and 1980s, therefore, the composition of the English electorate and the electoral geography of England shifted dramatically in favour

¹⁷ Derbyshire, J. D. and I. Derbyshire, *Politics in Britain*, p. 76.

of the Conservatives. It is important to stress 'English' and 'England', because in Scotland and Wales ostensibly similar changes did not work to the Tories' advantage, but those countries together comprised only 14 per cent of the UK electorate. The Tories' parliamentary power after 1979 was based on their virtual hegemony over constituencies in the south of England.¹⁸

Gradually, the failure of the Wilson – Callaghan government, the 'Winter of Discontent' and the Labour Party's inability to control problems lead to the Tory victory in 1979.

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¹⁸ Adonis, Andrew: *The Transformation of the Conservative Party in the 1980s*. In Adonis, Andrew and Tim Hames: *A Conservative Revolution? The Thatcher – Reagan Decade in Perspective*. Manchester and New York, 1994, Manchester University Press, pp. 152-153.

*Zsolt András Udvarvölgyi*¹⁹

The “Great War” that broke out a hundred and ten years ago.

Abstract

One hundred and ten years ago, on 28 July 1914, the First World War broke out, wreaking unprecedented destruction across the globe. For four years, until November 1918, the fighting raged around the world, and Hungary, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, ended up on the losing side. The paper briefly reviews the history of Hungary between 1914 and 1920, a period of bloody, critical, and hectic history, with reference to the unjust Treaty of Trianon, which mutilated the country. Even though the “wounds have healed”, I believe that it is always worth remembering the past and paying tribute to the innocent victims.

Keywords: First World War (World War I), Austro-Hungarian Empire, losses, Treaty of Trianon, Day of National Unity, remembrance

I. Introduction

One hundred and ten years ago, on 28 July 1914, the First World War broke out, causing unprecedented tragedy across the world and its effects are still felt today. Many of us may ask why, apart from the anniversaries, it is so topical to talk about the First World War, the consequences of the “Great War”, which lasted four years until November 1918, and the Versailles Peace Treaty. What happened in the world and in our country at the beginning of the 20th century? What is the message of the lost world war and Trianon for us today?

Thirty-six years ago, in 1988, one of the world’s leading heavy metal bands, the deservedly popular US-based Metallica, who have played several concerts in Hungary as well, released a new music video clip. In their track “One”²⁰ they reworked a well-known World War I story, the life of the tragic protagonist of

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²⁰ Metallica’s official music video for “One”, from the album “...And Justice for All.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WM8bTdBs-cw> (Accessed on 18 March 2024).

the film “Johnny Got His Gun”²¹. The American teenage protagonist, fuelled by patriotic sentiment, enlists in the army, and is soon sent to the trenches of the European front. After a battle he is brought home by his comrades with serious wounds, hanging between life and death, completely helpless: both arms and legs amputated, he becomes mute, loses his hearing and sight. He is forced to live on with his remaining body parts, grinding in hellish pain, but with his mind completely intact. Banging his head against the pillow, he can communicate with his parents, his girlfriend, his brothers and sisters and his doctors by using Morse code. After a while the Morse code becomes monotonous, incessantly beating, incessantly, “Kill me! Kill me! Help me! Help me!” The video clip, filmed from a shocking and moving story, has over 314 million views on YouTube, the largest online video sharing platform. It can be assumed that, like the writer of this article, many viewers were impressed by the film then and now and that the artists used modern technical means, light, and sound effects to make the horrors of the First World War visual and tangible for later generations. After watching the clip many people watched the film and read about the events of the “Great War”.

The greatest threat to our planet, the climate change-induced warming and the melting of glaciers has also produced some sad World War I “actualities”: The Hungarian press has also reported extensively too, that in 2018 Italian tourist Dino de Bernardin was hiking near his home in the Marmolada mountain range in the Alps, when he spotted a couple of protruding parts of a corpse in the glacier ice at an altitude of 2,800 metres. Expecting a more recent corpse he called the police, and only after digging up the body he realised that he had found not the victim of a recent murder, but a soldier shot dead in the First World War, his clothes shockingly intact and encased in ice. Around Serauta, there was heavy fighting between the armies of Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and it was in one of these skirmishes that the Italian trooper was killed, perhaps by a Hungarian bullet.²² Since then, the bodies of Italian and Austro-Hungarian soldiers have been found in many

²¹ Dalton Trumbo’s Johnny Got His Gun, 1971. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0067277/> (Accessed on 18 March 2024).

²² Blikk: Döbbenet! Első világháborús katonát találtak. [Shock! World War I soldier found.] in: <http://www.blikk.hu/aktualis/dobbenet-első-vilaghaborus-katonat-talaltak/hddf6y3> (Accessed on 28 July 2019).

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places in the depths of glaciers, who died heroic deaths in the Alps and in the Dolomites, on the Doberdo plateau, along the Isonzo and Piave rivers. Many have already been identified, facilitated by the fact that the ice has preserved the bodies in surprisingly intact condition. It is shocking and frightening to look at the mummified faces, the almost intact uniforms, equipment, and weapons.

With these two examples I have tried to illustrate those events, which took place more than a hundred years ago are within “foreseeable” distance of today. The details should not be forgotten, which is why the publication of high-quality and readable volumes on the First World War and its consequences, especially the Treaty of Trianon and their distribution to a wider readership (e.g. schools, higher education institutions, libraries, Hungarian minority organisations beyond the borders) is necessary.

II. The events in a nutshell

The area of Hungary at the outbreak of World War I was 325,411 km². Of this, the country proper covered 282,870 km², with the remaining 42,541 km² going to Croatia-Slavonia. The number of inhabitants of the country inside the Drava was 18,264,533 according to the last national census of 1910, while the number of inhabitants in Croatia-Slavonia was 2,621,954. The total number of inhabitants in the country in 1910 was therefore 20,886,487.²³

After the Sarajevo assassination on 28 June 1914 everything changed, the “happy times of peace” ended abruptly and although the aged Emperor Franz Joseph²⁴ (1830-1916) claimed that “I have thought everything over, I have considered everything”, this was far from a responsible statement on his part. Furthermore, the German Emperor Wilhelm II²⁵ was not a good oracle: “By the time the leaves fall my victorious soldiers will be home!” - with this sentence he sent his soldiers to war in the summer of 1914. He was convinced that the war would be over in a few months. He had not counted on 4 years of bloody fighting. The women bid farewell to their husbands and sons with tears, trusting in the grace of the God that they would return from the battlefield.²⁶ However, millions never returned home. The First World War claimed the lives of nearly 10 million people and left some 20 million wounded.

There were four main fronts in Europe: the Western, Eastern, Italian, and Balkan fronts. But guns were blazing on almost every continent from Africa to Asia. Unscrupulous inventors and military engineers developed and deployed new and modern weapons, many of them weapons of mass destruction. The use

²³ JATE Egyetemi Könyvtár: Az ezeréves Magyarország számokban. [The millennial Hungary in numbers.] in: A háború árnyékában. [In the shadow of war.] Szeged, Szegedi Egyetemi Könyvtár, 1998-1999. <http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/ha/gazd/stat/ezerev39.html> (Accessed on 28 July 2019).

²⁴ Franz Joseph I of Austria (1830-1916) was Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, and the ruler of the other states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1848 until his death in 1916.

²⁵ Wilhelm II (1859-1941) was the last German Emperor and King of Prussia from 1888 until his abdication in 1918.

²⁶ hírek.sk: „Mire a falevelek lehullanak...” - az első világháború emléktárgyai. [“By the time the leaves fall...” - World War I memorabilia.] in: Hírek. Televíziós hírportál. 2014. szept. 6. 15:59. <https://www.hirek.sk/belfold/bmire-a-falevelek-lehullanakr-az-első-világhaboru-emlektargyai> (Accessed on 28 July 2019).

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of tanks, aircraft, war gases, submarines, long-range guns, flamethrowers, and airships became widespread.

The military alliances at war were also mobilising a formidable civilian population over four and a half years of fighting: Russia 15.1 million, Germany 13.3 million, the Monarchy 8.3 million, France 7.9 million, Britain 5.7 million, Italy 5.6 million. Even the mobilised population of small countries such as Romania or Serbia reached one million. In terms of deaths, the continent lost a total of 8,144,000 people. In the matter of death toll, the biggest losses were in Germany (1,850,000) and Russia (1,700,000). They were followed by France (1,390,000), the Austro-Hungarian Empire (1,200,000) and England (997,000). Concerning the dead and invalids, the continent's combined loss was 27,584,000, almost 6.0% of the population of contemporary Europe. Add to this the fact that the war has left a lot of homeless people. Their number reached 6,150,000 in Central Europe alone. The biggest losses were in Russia (6,650,000) and Germany (6,100,000). Next came the Austro-Hungarian Empire (4,820,000), France (3,890,000) and England (3,300,000). Of the non-European belligerents, the US suffered 116,000 dead and nearly 206,000 wounded, for Japan, 400 thousand and 1,200 thousand respectively.²⁷

If we look behind the numbers, we see boys who died young, respectable fathers, millions of men shot dead, drowned, stabbed, lost forever, frozen, worked to death, starved to death! How many crippled destinies we see, how many amputee, blinded, war-disabled wretches who "survived" the war. Some were brought home from Siberia in a crate by their comrades... without arms and legs. Even then, medical science was capable of miracles, and I recommend only those with strong nerves to do some internet research on photos of operated patients in war hospitals...

By the autumn of 1918 Hungary had become a defeated nation, the Austro-Hungarian Empire was on the verge of collapse and the end was near. "On 24 October the imperial government lost control of Vienna and parts of the Empire

²⁷ Erdélyi Magyar Adatbank [Transylvanian Hungarian Databank]: Az európai államok embervesztése az I. világháborúban. [The loss of life of European states in the First World War.] in: Erdélyi Magyar Adatbank. Térképek. Köztes-Európa. 1999-2024. <http://terkeptar.transindex.ro/belso.php?nev=112>. [Accessed on 28 July 2019].

were preparing to secede. The Wekerle²⁸ government, taking advantage of the mood, denounced the treaties of 1867 on 31 October, ending the personal union between Austria and Hungary. During the collapse of the war, in October–November 1918, the national councils declared their independence and accession to the neighbouring nation-states (28 October 1918, Czechoslovakia; 7 November 1918, Poland; 1 December 1918, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the creation of the Kingdom of Greater Romania).

At the same time Austria and Hungary became independent (the Hungarian National Council was formed on 24 October 1918). Thus, the Armistice of Padua, which ended the hostilities of the World War, was signed on 3 November 1918 on behalf of a disintegrating Empire.

The Aster Revolution (“*Őszirozsás forradalom*”) was an uprising of soldiers and civilians dissatisfied with the protraction of the First World War, which began with street demonstrations, marches, and strikes in Budapest and other cities between 28 and 31 October 1918. The revolution was soon joined by the 32nd Infantry Regiment, which was in Budapest at the time, and its soldiers pinned an aster in place of the Habsburg coat of arms on their caps. Military units sworn to the National Council occupied the public buildings of Budapest. (A fanatical military group assassinated former Prime Minister Count István Tisza²⁹ in his home, the Roheim Villa.) After a few days the Revolution was victorious and Archduke Joseph³⁰ appointed Count Mihály Károlyi³¹ as Prime Minister on behalf of the emperor, who took the oath of office on 31 October. Just 5 days later, on 5 November, a provisional National Assembly was formed, consisting of members of the National Council, the Military Council and the Workers’ Council.

²⁸ Wekerle, Sándor (1848-1921) was a Hungarian politician, MP who served three times as prime minister.

²⁹ Count Tisza, István was a Hungarian aristocrat, lawyer, politician, MP who served as prime minister of Hungary from 1903 to 1905 and from 1913 until 1917.

³⁰ Archduke Joseph August of Austria (1872-1962) was a military officer, field marshal of the Austro-Hungarian Army and for a short period head of state or governor („*homo regius*”) of Hungary in 1918.

³¹ Count Károlyi, Mihály (1875-1955) was a Hungarian aristocrat, politician, MP who served as prime minister between 1 and 16 November 1918 and as president between 16 November 1918 and 21 March 1919.

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Meanwhile, a revolution was taking place in Vienna and on 12 November 1918 the Austrian National Assembly proclaimed a republic. The next day Gyula Wlassics,³² the last President of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament, immediately went to see Charles IV³³ in his hunting castle in Eckartsau and had him sign a declaration suspending his sovereign ruling rights in Hungary.”³⁴ The events that followed, right up to the consolidation of the 1920s under Prime Minister Count István Bethlen,³⁵ can rightly be regarded as one of the darkest chapters in Hungary’s 20th century history.

³² Baron Wlassics, Gyula (1852-1937) was a Hungarian aristocrat, politician, Member and President of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament.

³³ Charles I of Austria (or Charles IV of Hungary) (1887-1922) was Emperor of Austria, King of Hungary, and the ruler of the other states of the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1916 until 1918.

³⁴ Harmat Árpád Péter: A forradalmak kora Magyarországon 1918 és 1921 között. [The age of revolutions in Hungary between 1918 and 1921.] in: *tortenelemcikkek.hu*. 2015.09.27. 16:47. <http://tortenelemcikkek.hu/node/578> (Accessed on 21 August 2019).

³⁵ Count Bethlen, István (1874-1946) was a Hungarian aristocrat, politician, MP who served as prime minister from 1921 to 1931.

III. The Treaty of Trianon

I summarize the circumstances, main events and consequences of the Treaty of Trianon based on an excellent article published in Rubicon Online by Tamás Tarján M.:

The Treaty of Trianon was part of the Versailles Peace Treaty, which was prepared by a year and a half long conference after the end of the world war. The victorious Entente powers began their deliberations on 18 January 1919 in the castles around Paris, where the “big four” - French Prime Minister Clemenceau, British Prime Minister Lloyd George, Italian Prime Minister Orlando, and US President Wilson - dominated the proceedings. Representatives of the defeated parties also took part in the negotiations, but they had no real influence on the course of events, only signing the treaties that were to be signed from July 1919.

The Hungarian political leadership - the Károlyi government until March 1919 - was initially optimistic about the negotiations, but after receiving only lists demanding the evacuation of further territories - e.g. the Vix³⁶ note of March 1919 - it finally gave up hope. The Communists, who came to power under Béla Kun³⁷ on 21 March 1921, were not a presentable force for the Entente, although Clemenceau had given them a glimpse of the possibility of participation to withdraw the troops of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. In August 1919, when a large part of the country was under Romanian occupation, this in-between situation became a burden for the negotiating parties, but Admiral Miklós Horthy³⁸, who was building a new, conservative system with the help of the National Army, seemed a suitable partner. Only then, at the end of 1919, was Hungary sent an invitation to the peace conference.

³⁶ Vix, Fernand (1876-1941) was a French military officer, general.

³⁷ Kun, Béla (1886-1938) was a Hungarian Communist politician, revolutionary and People's Commissar of Foreign Affairs of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in 1919.

³⁸ Horthy, Miklós (1868-1957) was a Hungarian naval officer, admiral, politician, statesman who served as the Regent of the Kingdom of Hungary from 1 March 1920 to 15 October 1944.

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The Hungarian delegation headed by Count Albert Apponyi³⁹ arrived in Paris in January 1920 after a long period of work, with Count Pál Teleki's⁴⁰ so-called "red map" (an ethnographic map of Hungary based on population density in 1919), with dozens of ethnic, ethnographic, and historical works and arguments - all in vain. The Hungarian delegation was kept under house arrest during the negotiations and only on 16 January 1920, after the peace draft had been finalized, was Albert Apponyi, the chief speaker, given the floor.

At the conference Hungary had no opportunity to argue against the Czechoslovak, Romanian and South Slav territorial claims, the falsified ethnic data and questionnaires, and the Entente essentially needed nothing more than two proxies to sign the finished treaty. This act finally took place on June 4, 1920, in the Great Trianon Palace, where two completely insignificant politicians, Ágost Benárd⁴¹ and Alfréd Drasche-Lázár⁴² signed the Treaty of Trianon, thus sanctioning the dismemberment of historic Hungary.

The points of the Treaty of Trianon are well known. Hungary lost about two-thirds of its territory and population and went from being a middle power of 320,000 square kilometres and twenty million inhabitants to a small state of 90,000 square kilometres and seven million inhabitants. Romania took Partium and Transylvania ("Erdély"), the new South Slavic state took Southern Land ("Délvidék"), and Czechoslovakia took Upper Hungary ("Felvidék") and Transcarpathia ("Kárpátalja"). In every other respect the peace tied the country to the ropes, having imposed a massive reparation on Hungary as one of the war's culprits, having set its army at 35,000 and having violated the sovereignty of the losing state on several other economic and military issues.

The Treaty of Trianon, therefore, was a violent dictate, unilaterally imposed on Hungary, which ultimately denied all the principles in whose name it was born. Even though the official goal of the countries, that increased their

³⁹ Count Apponyi, Albert (1846-1933) was a Hungarian aristocrat, politician, MP who led the Hungarian delegation to the Paris Peace Conference.

⁴⁰ Count Teleki, Pál (1879-1941) was a Hungarian aristocrat, geographer, professor, politician, MP who served as Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Hungary from 1920 to 1921 and from 1939 to 1941.

⁴¹ Benárd, Ágost (1880-1968) was a Hungarian physician, politician, and minister.

⁴² Drasche-Lázár, Alfréd (1875-1949) was a Hungarian diplomat, ambassador, state secretary, politician, and writer.

territories was to achieve national self-determination and establish independent nation-states, their real goal at the peace conference was to gain as much of Hungary's territory as possible.

Instead of nation-states, multi-ethnic countries were created, where the minority Hungarians received the same discriminatory treatment as the majority Hungarians had been accused of under the Empire, only the roles were reversed. The peace was also detrimental to the stability of the region, since the escalation of the winner-loser conflict set the constraints - Hungary embarked on a path of revision, and the newly formed "Little Entente" was set up to defend the acquired territories - along which Central Europe later drifted into another world war.⁴³

We can also recall the exact figures: As a result of the peace treaty, the Kingdom of Hungary, with a total area of 325,411 km², was dissolved and Hungary, with an area of 282,870 km², lost just over two-thirds of its territory - 67%, and 71% including Croatia - to 92,952 km². It lost more than half of its population, and the country's population of 18,264,533 in 1910 fell to 7,615,117. After the referendum in Sopron and the territorial exchanges and referendums between 1920 and 1924, Hungary's territory increased from 92,952 km² to 93,075 km² by the time of the border changes in 1938.

⁴³ Tarján M. Tamás: A trianoni béke aláírása. [The signing of the Treaty of Trianon.] in: Rubicon Online. Történelmi magazin.
http://www.rubicon.hu/magyar/oldalak/1920_junius_4_a_trianoni_beke_alairasa/
(Accessed on 26 August 2019).

IV. What were the causes of Trianon?

In conclusion, I quote the summary of Ignác Romsics, a leading historian of Hungary, an academic and professor who has published dozens of authoritative books on the period over the decades:

"The disintegration of the Habsburg Empire and within it the historic Hungary was caused by a confluence of factors. The first and fundamental factor was the multi-ethnic character of the empire and Hungary and the discontent of the national minority elites.

The second factor was the irredentist policy of the new states, that emerged along the southern and eastern borders of the empire - Italy, Serbia, and Romania. That is to say, that all three sought to acquire the territories of the Empire in which members of their own nation also lived.

In peacetime the Hungarian state was strong enough to stifle all efforts against its integrity. However, the situation changed during the First World War. Ethnic separatism and irredentism in the surrounding states strengthened and the Hungarian state weakened. In this situation the will of the victorious powers was decisive. This was the third reason for the break-up of the Empire and the dismemberment of historic Hungary.

The fourth reason for Trianon, as it is usually mentioned, is the incompetence of the post-war Hungarian revolutionary leadership. In other words, the Károlyi government trusted in the fairness of the Entente and applied a policy of conciliatory rather than power with the Slovaks, Serbs, and Romanians, who had announced their intention to secede. History cannot be replayed. Hence, we cannot say whether Budapest's policy of defending the Hungarian territories from the outset could have persuaded the Versailles Peace Conference to take different decisions. What we do know is that when the Hungarian Soviet Republic ("Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság") attempted armed border defence in the spring and summer of 1919, it did not achieve any results. And we also know that the leaders of the Horthy regime, which finally signed the peace treaty on 4 June 1920, also considered the policy of armed resistance unrealistic."⁴⁴

⁴⁴ Romsics Ignác: Az Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia felbomlása és a trianoni békeszerződés. [The break-up of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the Treaty of Trianon.] in: Rubicon. 20. évf. 4-5. sz. 4-29. old.
http://www.rubicon.hu/megrendelhető/termek/cikkek/romsics_ignac_az_osztrak_magyar_monarchia_felbomlása_és_a_trianoni_békeszerződés/31/7/1 (Accessed on 26 August 2019).

However, many historians, analysts and those interested in the period also point to the Turkish counterexample. Turkey was extremely fortunate, that at a critical time, unlike Hungary, had a charismatic, energetic, determined Pasha, an army general, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk⁴⁵ at the helm. After the war he opposed the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which would have left only parts of Anatolia to the Turks. During the Turkish War of Independence of 1919-23 he gradually drove Greek, Italian, French and British troops out of the country, put down rebellions and abolished the Ottoman Sultanate. On 24 July 1923, after the victorious liberation war, the Turks signed the Treaty of Lausanne with the victorious Entente powers in the First World War, as a revision of the 1920 Treaty of Sèvres, which essentially laid the foundations for the modern Turkish state and proclaimed a republic on 29 October 1923. Of course, I am aware that the geographical, geopolitical, and military positions of Turkey and Hungary were different, and the interests of the victorious powers were divergent also. But perhaps it is worth playing with the idea, that with a more united and solidary Hungarian people and with leaders as strong-handed and charismatic as the Turks had, our country might have achieved more than the humiliating and unjust Treaty of Trianon.

⁴⁵ Atatürk, Mustafa Kemal (1881-1938) was a Turkish Pasha, military officer, army general, statesman, author, and the founding father of the Republic of Turkey, serving as its first president from 1923 until his death in 1938.

V. Remembrance, epilogue

From the 17-year-old Attila József⁴⁶ to Mihály Babits⁴⁷, from Dezső Kosztolányi⁴⁸ to Gyula Juhász⁴⁹, from Árpád Tóth⁵⁰ to Lőrinc Szabó⁵¹, from Jenő Dsida⁵² to Count Albert Wass⁵³, from Sándor Reményik⁵⁴ to Gyula Somogyváry⁵⁵ the best of Hungarian literature was concerned with the unjust peace dictate, the fate of the Hungarians stranded beyond the border and the further misfortunes of the motherland, too. Our poets and writers have penned breathtakingly beautiful lines, dozens of sublimes and moving poems, short stories and novels have been written and are still being written today.

Since the change of regime, we have been free to remember Trianon. Conferences, events have been organised, monographs and volumes of studies have been published on the First World War, the events of the turbulent period of 1918-1919 and the Treaty of Trianon, especially around the round anniversaries.

The Day of National Unity is a National Day of Remembrance in our country commemorating the anniversary of the signing of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon. 4 June, the day of the 1920 Treaty of Trianon, was declared the Day of National Unity by the Hungarian Parliament in Act XLV of 2010 on the Testimony to National Unity.

By adopting the Act, the Parliament declared that “all members and communities of Hungarians subject to the jurisdiction of several states are part of the united Hungarian nation, whose cohesion across state borders is a reality and at the same time a defining element of the personal and communal identity of Hungarians.” The law entered into force on 4 June 2010, the 90th anniversary

⁴⁶ József, Attila (1905-1937) was a Hungarian poet and literary translator.

⁴⁷ Babits, Mihály (1883-1941) was a Hungarian poet, writer, essayist, and literary translator.

⁴⁸ Kosztolányi, Dezső (1885-1936) was a Hungarian poet, writer, journalist, and literary translator.

⁴⁹ Juhász, Gyula (1883-1937) was a Hungarian poet.

⁵⁰ Tóth, Árpád (1886-1928) was a Hungarian poet and literary translator.

⁵¹ Szabó, Lőrinc (1900-1957) was a Hungarian poet and literary translator.

⁵² Dsida, Jenő (1907-1938) was a Hungarian poet and literary translator.

⁵³ Count Wass, Albert (1908-1998) was a Hungarian writer and poet.

⁵⁴ Reményik, Sándor (1890-1941) was a Hungarian poet.

⁵⁵ Somogyváry, Gyula (1895-1953) was a Hungarian military officer, writer and journalist.

of the signing of the peace treaty.⁵⁶ On this day, Hungarians all over the world, from New Zealand to Transylvania, from Canada to Vojvodina, from Argentina to Transcarpathia, or from Western Europe to the motherland Hungary pause for a moment and remember the past.

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Szabolcs Fonó

“This is in the interest of the country, and this overrides all party considerations”: The activities of Miklós Németh's government and its decisive role in the process of regime change in Hungary

Abstract

The following thesis aims to expand the basic knowledge of the history of the regime change based on an important, but mostly underappreciated aspect that is of key importance for the author in the process of peaceful transition that took place in Hungary in 1989. The work of the Németh government is not unknown, but several erroneous narratives dim the lights that this cabinet, which lasted barely a year and a half, was among the first to light on the altar of Hungarian democracy.

I tried to implement these errors by describing the government's most important measures in detail and drawing conclusions from them.

The main points I have presented are: the government's successful independence efforts from the state party; the dismantling of the Hungarian section of the Iron Curtain and the issue of GDR refugees; the disbandment of legitimate violent organizations, such as the Workers' Guard; finally, the government acknowledging and distancing itself from wrong and tragic decisions made in the party's past.

At the end of the article, I draw a comprehensive picture of the different interpretations surrounding the person and government of Miklós Németh and their causes.

Keywords: Miklós Németh, Prime Minister, transition, Hungary, 1989–1990

I. Introduction

When was the regime change in Hungary? This is a difficult question to answer, since we do not have before us a concrete event to which we can date the fall of the system of state socialism and the beginning of a political system based on multiparty democracy. This is also a divisive issue for historians: some consider the reburial of former Prime Minister and main figure of the 1956 revolution, Imre Nagy and his associates, some consider the proclamation of the Third Hungarian Republic, others the appointment of József Antall, first Prime Minister elected by the people as the fateful moment. But who made the peaceful regime change possible? Was it triggered by international pressure? Did international pressure trigger it? Did the Németh government do it?

Of course, this question is more complex. It is almost impossible to answer, as it can be examined from several directions. In this thesis, I would like to present and illuminate a forgotten period of Hungarian history with an enormous legacy.

If we talk about the transitional periods of Hungarian history, or more precisely, about its governments, two persons are undoubtedly mentioned: Mihály Károlyi, the leader of the First Republic in 1918, failing to create a democratic state that is internationally recognized due to weak leadership, soon to be overrun by the communists, and Béla Miklós Dálnoki, President of the Provisional National Government in 1944, set out to oppose the pro-German national socialist leader of the nation, Ferenc Szálasi. Their presidency was preceded by the rearrangement of the international balance of power and the resulting social transformation. They tried to lead the country under such circumstances. This situation also applied to the Németh administration in 1988. (Gombár 1998: 39.) The Soviet Union's status as a great power declined exponentially over the years and after Gorbachev came to power in 1985 Soviet power over Warsaw Pact countries increasingly existed only on paper; in practice it could not and did not intend to exert any real pressure on the member states. Military units remained stationed in the Eastern bloc, but far from being able to have a deterrent effect, the new leadership made it clear that it would not use violence against occupied states implementing reforms and seeking closer relations with Western countries.

Hungary had already pursued a separate path policy in the region in the previous decade(s),⁵⁷ the Kádár leadership was already open to contacts with Western countries, but the attitude towards the need for radical changes affecting the future of the country really began to take shape under the government of Károly Grósz. Accession to a free market economy, a multi-party system and free elections became obvious purposes, but the realization of these goals was planned later than they were actually achieved. This also shows the fact that the turn that took place in world politics in 1989 was not at all foreseeable for the politicians and leaders of the late eighties. Knowledge of this fact is extremely important for understanding all the actions that this study intends to describe.

The observer, armed with the power of present knowledge, is naturally inclined to jump to conclusions and establish casual relations in every historical event as if they were well-calibrated structure and to see the government of the historical transition as one who sought to save its power and secure its future position by masterfully tuned measures. Such opinions still exist today about the government of the regime change. It cannot be denied that among the representatives of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt – MSZMP) there were people who tried to secure positions for themselves in the new political and economic system. However, the ad hoc decisions and solutions of the reform-committed general staff of the Németh government did not show any tendency to rescue their power, only the activities of a dedicated political group set out to facilitate a peaceful transition and stabilization of the economic and social situation can be observed below:

⁵⁷ If we take as a basis the measures of the reform known as the New Economic Mechanism, which essentially repudiated communist principles and rethought them in a radical way.

II. The aspiration of the Németh administration to gain independence from the increasingly fragmented state party

The extraordinary situation of the government and the power vacuum were largely caused by the fragmentation of the state party. People were in two minds about whether the political system in Hungary was sustainable within the framework of communism. There were those who wanted to postpone the change for one or two election terms, to proceed slowly, with various compromises, using means of communism and to provide guarantees (i.e. quotas) for the survival of the power of the Socialist Party even after the free elections following the Polish model. They can be called pro-establishment politicians, and figures like General Secretary Károly Grósz or ideologist János Berecz could be an example to this.

The other line consisted of many circles of reform, who had opposing ideas, but were connected in their will to act and in their basic standpoint. They were radically trying to turn their backs to communism and put such values as basic human freedoms, social values and being part of Europe on their flag. This camp consisted of reformers, their number was growing spectacularly and they gained ground, headed by Imre Pozsgay and later Rezső Nyers and Miklós Németh (ÁGH-GÉCZI-SIPOS, 1999: 23–24).

Even if this difference between the two platforms within the party was marked, they did not form separate organizations, as this would have meant an open dissolution of the state party, which would have prevented agreement and cooperation with the democratic opposition in the future. The split of the state party would make it impossible for the transition to take place through agreement, as in that case the democratic opposition should have formed as a regime changing force. The crucial National Round Table (Nemzeti Kerekasztal) would not have been created, where the state party and the new ones made an agreement. So, the transition would have been totally different. Perhaps the society would have better involved and the atmosphere would have more evolutionary. The fracture within the state party caused the ongoing internal tension that allowed the government to rise above the party and function as an

independent, so-called “expert government” that focused its activities strictly on political issues rather than party interests. Kálmán Kulcsár, Minister of Justice of the Németh government puts it this way: *“The uncertainty within the ruling party, the process of disintegration of the party leadership, and its search for a path towards transition were one of the basic »environmental conditions« for the functioning of the first Németh government.”* (KULCSÁR, 1994: 120).

The most tangible proof of the government’s intention to change the regime is the fact that the government represented an independent field of power in the political system by April 1989, when the MSZMP and the Patriotic People’s Front (Hazafias Népfront) renounced their right to appoint government members in accordance with the nomenclature of the two parties in a letter written by Károly Grósz and István Huszár. (OPLATKA, 2014: 191). This decision strengthened the position of President of the Council of Ministers (Németh), since the government had performed exclusively ceremonial tasks for the past thirty years: the President read out the decisions of the Political Committee of the Party and the ministers were responsible for ensuring their implementation. (OPLATKA, 2014: 191). The first Németh government consisted exclusively of ministers from the previous government, which is why there was a general opinion that “Miklós Németh is the Prime Minister of the Grósz government.” (OPLATKA, 2014: 25). This situation did not arise by chance: the Secretary General’s goal in appointing Németh, who was barely forty years old and less influential, was to be able to control the Prime Minister like a puppet, so to speak, enforcing his own will and leaving no opportunity for his own political personality to develop. However, the young prime minister recognised this ambition from the outset and used every means to free himself and his government from the will of the secretary-general and the hardliners of the party, who did not want to introduce reform measures quickly enough, and who had a completely different worldview. The following case can be considered as a catalyst for a rupture:

Recognizing the fact that the future existence of the MSZMP as a united and determined party and its influence on the process of change was unrealistic, Károly Grósz tried to create a supportive base around his person, with which, as the leader of the party, he could possess real power regarding decisive measures. It was thanks to this effort that the Prime Minister permanently distanced himself and his government from party control.

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It happened that in April 1989, during a break in the Congress of the Communist Youth League, Grósz gave a television interview in which he stated that the country should be declared to be under an “economic emergency”, and that the Prime Minister agreed with this measure. Listening to the live broadcast Miklós Németh immediately called into the television studio and said that the government did not intend to take such measures, and the Secretary-General’s statements were false. The former Prime Minister still recalls that this quick phone call saved the country from immediate economic bankruptcy. This event was preceded by the Prime Minister noticing that Grósz often mentioned information at party meetings that no one except him (Németh) and his two advisers could have known. Later, specialists found several eavesdropping devices in his office, which he did not remove, and later used these devices to misinform the secretary-general and their team. From then on, Németh held his real meetings in the park, whilst taking a walk, and also informed future Prime Minister József Antall about the eavesdropping devices before handing over his office (OPLATKA, 2014: 176; Tőkés 1998: 332).

Following this incident the Prime Minister realised that he could not make another such drastic mistake, so he chose to dismiss six of his ministers in one month, including the Minister of Industry, Finance and Foreign Affairs. The deposed ministers were all allies of Grósz, slowing down and often completely hindering the work leading to development. The ministerial chairs were all filled with professionals, competent experts with reform ideas. The six new ministers were Gyula Horn, László Békési, Ferenc Horváth, Csaba Hütter, Ferenc Glatz and Ernő Kemenes. This unique event in the process of regime change and in the history of the state party was made possible by the fact that from that moment on the Central Committee of the MSZMP ceased to have influence over the government and its members were appointed not by the party, but actually by the head of government.

Thus, the relationship between the Prime Minister and the Secretary General deteriorated and for the first time in forty years the party and the government were able to function as two completely independent institutions. In May 1989 the Németh government declared itself a “national institution”, and its popularity and prestige increased: *“The government cuts itself off – institutionally – from traditional political forces as well as from newly organized*

ones, and relies solely on its own prestige. And what does God give – this prestige begins to grow almost by itself from this step. In normal cases, this would mean immediate failure for a government, since the normal functioning of political machines precludes the independence of a government dependent on political forces.” (GOMBÁR, 1998: 33).

By this point, the Secretary General's popularity had sunk even lower than János Kádár's, whereas the popularity of State Minister Imre Pozsgay had surged, making him the most notable figure in the reformist faction and a key figure in dealings with opposition parties; his prominence continued to increase steadily. For this reason, Károly Grósz was requested to resign his position as Secretary General voluntarily, but he refused to comply. To overcome this obstacle, reformers called for the creation of a four-member body which would constitute the real leadership of the party. This body was headed by Rezső Nyers as chairman, and its members included Pozsgay, Németh and Grósz, i.e. the ratio of reformers to pro-establishment was three to one. Twice within a year the general secretary of the party was sidelined and the party's policy was put on a new footing (ROMSICS, 2013: 75).

The party gave a green light to independent governance, the political strife between the party and the government loosened. Grósz's role in governance diminished, he therefore sought to organise a distinctly pro-establishment force around himself, which apparently had a small social base. However, he failed to put himself in a decisive position to steer the country's destiny with his loud speeches and gloomy predictions. Thus, like Kádár, Grósz was removed as an obstacle to political innovation and a more unified atmosphere between the now separate party and government was created.

III. The government stands up for the protection of human and international rights; with our back to the East, facing the West

The Iron Curtain was first built on the Hungarian-Austrian border in 1949, but was dismantled in 1955–56 in the name of the so-called “détente policy”. This made possible that after the defeat of the War of Independence in 1956 about 180,000 Hungarian citizens were able to escape to foreign countries. One of the conditions of the success of the Kádár regime was to prevent masses from leaving the country, so in March 1957 the entire western border was closed again. Until 1971, there was a minefield on the border, which was later replaced by a Soviet-style signalling system. By the end of the eighties, this system was outdated, there were no suitable parts for its repair, and maintaining the border fence entailed large annual expenses. Dissatisfied with the thousands of false alarms per year, border guards soon demanded the lifting of the Iron Curtain.

In the summer of 1989 strange international events took place in Central Europe. The eyes of the citizens of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), longing for a more free and better life, were focused on Hungary. The country has always been a popular tourist destination for East German holidaymakers, Lake Balaton was visited by tens of thousands of people every summer, as it was the most attractive and cost-effective destination among the countries of the communist bloc. The citizens of the GDR were attracted not only by recreation, but also by a sense of relative freedom that was unknown to them. Even under the Grósz government, it was possible to travel from Hungary to most countries in the world, thanks to the country's relaxed atmosphere, and from 1988 a world passport was issued.

The combined effect of these two factors and the democratic and human rights deficit in the GDR led to the problem that Hungary had to face in 1989, a challenge that caused headache for the Németh government and its solution is still considered to be its greatest achievement.

After negotiations between the border guard and the Ministry of the Interior, the dismantling of the border fence began on 2 May 1989. This was not

concealed from the public; in June the Hungarian Foreign Minister Gyula Horn and the Austrian Foreign Minister Alois Mock cut through the wire fence separating the two countries as a ceremonial event. It is true that István Horváth, the Minister of the Interior contacted the competent authorities, who forwarded the complaints of the border guards, but the real reason for the dismantling of the Iron Curtain was to keep the 1989 budget as tight as possible. The cost of maintenance indicated only by a code name in the documents of the draft expenditure seemed completely unnecessary and unjustified for Prime Minister Miklós Németh, who withdrew this item from the budget with a simple stroke of the pen. Originally, no political considerations preceded this spontaneous decision, but we can say that it was this pen stroke, that encouraged tens of thousands of people in the GDR to leave their homes for Hungary and move through Austria to the Federal Republic of Germany three months later.

Because of this, the government was later forced to take a rather risky measure, as Hungary and the GDR were Eastern bloc countries, members of the Warsaw Pact, so they had mutual obligations. The still-existing Soviet Union was officially the head of the unit, who (drawing empirical conclusions from past events) considered it his quasi-right to intervene and prevent initiatives dangerous to the survival of his sphere of influence. However, on September 11, 1989, the Soviet Union did not intervene – Gorbachev turned a blind eye to the refugees, allowing and tolerating the decision of the Hungarian government. Nevertheless, the decision was not without protest, as the GDR demanded that its citizens would not leave Hungary for the West and be deported back to their homeland. Prime Minister Németh was of the opinion that this option was unacceptable, and that German citizens would not be forcibly returned to their homes. The established Hungarian position was that if the two German states could not agree on the refugee issue, the Austrian border would be opened. As a party to the United Nations Refugee Convention, the Hungarian People's Republic used a loophole to suspend a legal obligation to the German Democratic Republic under the Warsaw Pact: it decided to protect human rights as a solution to the crisis and opened the border. Until the fall of the Berlin Wall in November, approximately 50,000 GDR citizens had travelled through Hungary to West Germany (OPLATKA, 2014: 275).

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A narrative that erroneously explains the aftermath of the event is worth dispelling. One of Németh's initial goals was to assess and disclose the country's secret debt. In order to maintain solvency the government was forced to introduce several price increases and austerity measures. The country, on the verge of bankruptcy, was forced to borrow from Western countries. Such borrowing agreements were signed with the governments of Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, which were concluded incidentally after the refugee crisis was over, so the borrowing was wrongly seen as a compensation for letting the refugees through. Some German textbooks mistakenly refer to this contract as a secret deal of compensation, blurring parallel political threads. To avoid this simplification -in vain- the Prime Minister took preventive steps even before the conclusion of the contract: *"The Prime Minister asked the German Chancellor in Gymnich to postpone the signing of the two loan agreements that had been drawn up much earlier."* *"Németh foresaw and wanted to avoid the reaction of the outside world thinking that Hungary was demanding a hefty price for opening the Hungarian border. A single unexpected turn in world politics could have had fatal consequences, jeopardizing the peaceful process leading to free elections. The loan agreement with the two German states was actually signed only four months later, during Chancellor Kohl's visit to Budapest, and the money was given then. The prime minister chose this solution despite the fact that the country was in dire need of money because its reserves were dwindling month by month."* (OPLATKA, 2014: 254).

However plausible the explanation of getting gratitude money for the refugees would be, this vulgar simplification of political actions is merely an afterthought. What happened was that the sovereign government, acting without secret agreements, acting as a forerunner of regime-changing ideas, kept human rights and the reorientation of the international relations system in mind, thus implementing one of the greatest decisions of its cycle, putting the first nail in the coffin of the crumbling Iron Curtain.

IV. Reorganising the spheres of competence of legitimate law enforcement organisations and ensuring the possibility of a peaceful transition

After the party's unfettered influence over the functioning of the executive branch was completely eliminated, the so-called "Fist of the Party" became irrelevant, but at the same time, as an armed organization, it posed an enormous threat on the road to a peaceful transition to democracy. Along with the intention of independence, the fact that disbandment or absorption into another law enforcement agency is inevitable in the near future has spread among the leadership of the Workers' Guard. There were also many rumours: what induced this fear among other things was what had happened in 1956: looting of weapons depots and organizing a violent uprising.

The government handled the situation with extreme caution: on the one hand previously this organisation had been kept under the supervision of the army, on the other hand the government knew that the decision to disband could have a great social resonance, since 60,000 people were affected by this. After the political disarmament of the party, the Workers' Guard first came under the jurisdiction of the government, within which it was managed by the Ministries of Defence and the Interior. Minister of Defence Ferenc Kárpáti, who was still reluctant to commit to reform, urged that the organization be transformed into a militia or disaster management, thus retaining the budget line allocated to the institution. Instead of further delaying the decision, Interior Minister István Horváth was the first to suggest that instead of restructuring, they should resort to dissolution. The proposal received support from members of the government, so measures to disband the Workers' Guard began immediately. All workers' guards were offered early retirement, which the Prime Minister himself communicated to the county leaders of the organization at the Gellért Hill centre. The relevant law was adopted by Parliament on 21 October 1989, fulfilling the stated goal that on the day of the proclamation of the Republic of Hungary and the anniversary of the '56 Revolution, the Workers' Guard should no longer exist in any form. However, even after the

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enactment the spread of scaremongering did not cease due to the allegedly unguarded arsenals.

However, was there any basis for fear? Was the strength of the Workers' Guard overestimated in 1989? The short-lived International, Legal and Administrative Policy Council, founded independently of the government by Károly Grósz, stated on March 31, 1989: *“On one hand, the participants believed that the organization should adapt to the new constitutional order and should not be an instrument of political struggle. On the other hand, with some contradiction, it was stated: »All the speakers in the debate agreed on the need for the continued operation of the Workers' Guard. [...] The Workers' Guard has a rich tradition, a respectable past, and its values must be preserved. [...] The armament of the Workers' Guard is suitable for today and the near future.« Then the committee expressed its belief that the MSZMP must defend the Workers' Guard »by political and moral means« »in today's conditions.«”* (OPLATKA, 2014: 272-273).

Thus, there was a clear intention to maintain the Workers' Guard, represented by the hardline faction of the MSZMP. Whether the party would have been willing to defend the survival of the organization by practical means in addition to formal statements is confirmed by current knowledge. Disarmament took place peacefully, without open conflict, thus removing the ominous obstacle that had made the realization of democracy impossible until then and deprived the state party, which wanted to retain its influence, of another means of power.

Although it can be established that the sense of fear was realistic indeed due to the traumas suffered earlier by the Hungarian society, the existence of the party's enforcement body violence was established from the very beginning with the aim of demonstrating strength, inciting fear to retain power, and it very well could have pursued this goal even in the last year of its existence without the action of the government.

V. Regaining trust: facing the past

"It is often said today that the current leadership can only be credible if it distances/disassociates itself from the legacy of the past. What we judge to be a mistake or a sin from the past must and can indeed be distanced from us. This applies both in politics and in economics. But we cannot deny our inheritance, we will have to carry its burdens for a long time to come. Whether we are given trust or not does not depend on us disassociating ourselves from our ancestors in words, but it depends on us whether we prove by actions that we want to do something totally different." (KULCSÁR, 1994: 138).

In order for a party that single-handedly holds state power to participate in the transition to a democratic system, it must account with both its economic and historical/political past. In the case of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, economic settlement, the state of public finances and the publication of real data on debts were among the primary goals of the Németh government. Dozens of economists and accountants worked to ensure that the government could present real data both to the public and to the world economic organizations to which they wanted to submit Hungary's intention to join in order to avoid total state bankruptcy. This aspiration and openness only partially satisfy the basic thesis.

A decisive step on the part of the government in terms of both splitting from the party and opening up to democracy was the establishment of contact with the Commission for Historical Justice (Történelmi Igazságtétel Bizottság) and the establishment of its own investigative committee composed of historians. The antecedents to these were clear: facing up to the past, revealing facts and truths, was the only way to actually achieve Gorbachev's "glasnost". The reburial of Imre Nagy was not only a symbolic event in the democratic atmosphere of Hungarian society: after June 16, 1989, it became clear that the expression of opinions critical of the regime were no longer forbidden and persecuted, since it became obvious that the country's leaders also not only criticized their predecessors, but they personally stood by the coffin of the great fighter for democracy at his reburial. Thus demonstrating to the general public that this government, although being the government of the same party that carried out the terrible reprisals, wishes to distance itself completely from this

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past and to do everything with its own hands to review and partially retribute all the damage done by their predecessors

Laying the truth on new foundations had a snowballing impact on legislation, as well as all other aspects of state life. The Minister of Justice and his team worked to create what we now call pivotal laws (*sarkalatos törvény*) and to draft a democratic constitution. The most important laws, all passed by the Németh government and voted by the parliament, were the laws on the right of association, assembly and strike, on freedom of religion and conscience, on freedom of the press, on churches, laying the foundations of free elections, referendums and popular initiatives, eliminating the category of crimes against the state, accounting for party assets and the acts concerning the transition (*átalakulási törvények*).

In addition to the legislation important measures of the transition were: establishing diplomatic relations with Israel and the Vatican, preparing a treaty with the IMF, cooperating with the World Bank, initiating the reduction of Soviet troops in 1989, abolishing censorship, abolishing the State Office for Church Affairs, starting an educational reform, conducting the first referendum, suspending the Bős-Nagymaros water-step project, and receiving international grants (OPLATKA, 2014: 414–420).

VI. Erroneous or distorted remembrance and reallocation of merit from today's perspective

Thirty-five years later, in a completely changed free Hungary, endowed with the sanctity of freedom of opinion, it is typical for courses or groups to produce their own narratives about events in the rich Hungarian history that leaves room for free interpretations. The fact that the short period of the regime change between autumn 1988 and spring 1990 was oversaturated with decisive events, caused a multitude of dual interpretations to emerge back then and they are still unfolding today, both in the perceptions of the participants and the general public. Earlier I mentioned those socialist-communist politicians who sought to secure their economic or power positions.

In addition to these, I think there is a lesser-mentioned group that tried to cement its *political position*: to reach as much publicity as possible, to convince voters that the person or his group (was) decisive in democratic change, thus giving the people a simple, tangible answer in the obscure moments of congested events to the personal actions of the forces involved in driving the course of change. This purely political manoeuvre, which serves momentary party interests, is not a new method of gaining sympathy, but it drastically pollutes the real causes, goals and the right of those behind them to be recognized.

Little is said about the Németh government in today's Hungarian public life. I consider the topic completely unprocessed in terms of literature, very few people have dealt with this topic since the early nineties, and this also adds to the oblivion that surrounds this period. Even if it is mentioned – unintentionally, in the absence of information and only in the knowledge of obfuscated facts – either they describe the system-changing government negatively, as the last soldiers of the party state, or they completely deny the existence of a cabinet of transition and date the change from 1990 onwards, attributing the merits to the later governance of the Hungarian Forum of Democrats (Magyar Demokrata Fórum – MDF) and József Antall, who also played a decisive role in the Opposition Round Table.

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"One of the motives for this may have been to "not take away the bread" from the newly created government, i.e. the government of that time should remain only the last "Bolshevik" government. This seems to be confirmed by the recent and contemporary political practice which, on the one hand, seeks to conflate the activities of the "Németh government" with those of the previous four decades, despite clear demarcation, and tries to deny its transitional character, and, on the other hand, considers the period from autumn 1988 to mid-March 1990 to be almost non-existent, especially as regards legislative results, and attributes all results to the National Assembly and government born after the elections." (KULCSÁR, 1994: 145–146).

The name and role of Miklós Németh in history books and memory of the people are sadly of marginal importance. However, his political insights may evoke deep thoughts about the ideal Hungary after the regime change: the former Prime Minister dreamed, among other things, of a directly elected office as President of the Republic, a bicameral National Assembly (with space in the upper house for representatives of religion, science and national minorities), and a decentralized state administration. The main reason for this oblivion surrounding him is probably the fact that the Prime Minister retired from politics shortly after the end of his term and continued his career in the economic sphere in accordance with his original qualifications. For a brief time, he joined the Hungarian Socialist Party, but he soon left.⁵⁸ He considered returning in 2000, but his former party would not support his candidacy, so he backed down. His withdrawal from current public life and his rare (but well-considered) speeches may be the reason why so few people reflect on him today.

The most important manifestation of system-changing self-consciousness can also be linked here. There was a strong opinion within the government already independent of the party, that the lifetime of the cabinet had to be the same as that of the existing system. Its role had to be limited to the dismantling of the system and its transition to multi-party democracy, after which it had nothing to do, it had to hand over the ground to the newly appointed government, and the majority of its members should be excluded from the new

⁵⁸ Miklós Németh thought of forming a Social Democratic or Christian Socialist party when he was in government.

apparatus. Thus, their time was finite, and by carrying out their task, their position of power was permanently eliminated. *"It is likely that later several members of the government (as well as part of the party leadership) thought that their role in the transition could qualify them to participate in a possible coalition government after the elections. However, I think that at that time many people already suspected that this government was also preparing its own end with the regime change."* (KULCSÁR, 1994: 135).

It is possible that we are talking about Hungary's last government free of ideologies, purely serving justice, the rule of law and democracy. Despite the fact that the ministers of the government were all members of the MSZMP, it can be observed that the one-and-a-half-year long term is not surrounded by ideological issues, these remained battles fought only within the party, and governance was conducted solely along the values of the system-changing spirit by competent, reform-committed individuals, who now are little known.

This may be the cause of the passivity and lack of knowledge that emerges when judging the government's role in changing the system, thus providing a breeding ground for political profiteering, the appropriation of merit and the spread of misinformation.

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Virág Havasi

In The Best Interest of the Child- the case of Hungary and the Visegrád group

Abstract

The article wished to identify common characteristics and differences in the social and child protection policy of the Visegrád group, a cultural and political alliance of Central-European countries (V4: Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland). The spending on social purposes is similar in the V4 countries, but less than the EU average, though Poland dedicates a little bit more funds on education as well as on families and children. This can be seen in the performance of the education systems and the social spheres. These countries have a modern child protection system with a good structure, yet ineffective in some respect and underfunded. It is reflected for instance in the deinstitutionalization process in Hungary and Poland, where it was understood rather as the reduction of the numbers of children living in institutions and not the provision of quality care for children.

Keywords: Central-Europe, social policy, child poverty

I. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to examine what common features we can identify in the social policy and the of the Visegrád (V4) countries, with special regard to child protection. After a general presentation of the V4 countries, we place them in the map of family policy regimes and examine how effective they are in child protection. After that, we examine what patterns are characteristic of them in terms of spending on children. We compare their data with that of Finland, a country that is not much more economically developed than the V4 countries and which is very effective in reducing child poverty and the quality of its education system is also high. We present the history and characteristics of the Hungarian and Polish child protection systems in more detail, paying special attention to topic of the deinstitutionalisation. The final

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section of the study presents the problems of the Hungarian child protection system, similar to which can be identified in the Czech system. In most cases we used pre-covid data so that we could analyse the results of the organic development of the preceding decades.

II. The Visegrád countries

„Central European countries are often grouped together based on their common political experience between 1945 and 1989, although they have diverse historical, economic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.” (Anghel et al, 2013, p 240) This applies to the Visegrád countries as well. The Visegrád Group (Visegrád Four or V4) is a cultural and political alliance¹ of four *countries* of Central Europe (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Czechia²). These countries face similar challenges and tasks and seemingly produce similar results in performing (or not performing) them. However, there are also many differences between them, out of which I will just name a few. Czechia had always been more developed economically, than the rest of the region. Regarding territory and population Poland surpasses the others. Slovakia as the youngest nation state gained independence in 1918 as a member of Czechoslovakia and then in 1993 as Slovak Republic. As opposed to the other three countries the majority of the Hungarian population is not of Slavic origin. The proportion of Roma inhabitants is the highest in Hungary with 3,2%, and not much less (around 2%) in Slovakia and Czechia. In contrast, Poland has a smaller Roma population (12,560).³

Following the change of regime an economic downturn took place in the V4 as in most of the ex-socialist countries. It took ten years for Slovakia, Hungary and Poland to reach the GDP level of 1989 while it was fifteen years for Czechia.

¹ At the time of writing the article the alliance practically do not exist due to the Hungarian foreign policy.

² Official names: Republic of Poland, Slovak Republic, Czech Republic

³ These results came from the last census of 2011. (<https://minorityrights.org>) The actual proportion and number are higher than the official data.

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(Tridico, 2011) The V4 countries joined the European Union (EU) in 2004. The economic crisis of 2008 shook this region, but did not affect Poland and the recovery was fast in Slovakia.⁴ **In 2019 the GDP per capita in PPS amounted to 73% of the EU-27 average in Hungary and Poland, 74% in Slovakia and 92% in Czechia**⁵. All in all, these countries are at quite similar level of economic development at the moment, however Czechia preserved a part of its previous advantage.

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_08_10/default/table?lang=en

⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/tec00114/default/table?lang=en>

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III. Family policies and the capacity of governments to educe child poverty in the EU member states

Different family policy typologies exist, we present the one developed for the Eurofund 2014 research based on broad literature review. Table 1. describes the features that defines each group and the European Union member states belonging to them. We can see that all the V4 countries belong to the same family policy regime characterized by long parental leave, usually relatively female employment rate and part-time work. (Gábos [et al], 2020)

Table 1.

Family policy regimes in the European Union

Most flexible	Mixed, flexible
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - high female employment rate - high rate of part-time work - good childcare provision - generous leave and benefits - good work–life balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -medium or high female employment rate - good childcare options, or significant recent efforts to boost them - mix of traditional policies and flexible policies
Belgium, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands, Sweden	Austria, Cyprus, Germany, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovenia
Mixed, mainly traditional	Most traditional/ family oriented
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - usually low female employment rate - low rate of part-time work - few children in childcare - long parental leave 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -few children in full-time childcare, -low female employment rate, or relatives commonly look after children - support to large families
the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia	Bulgaria, Estonia, Greece, Spain, Croatia, Italy, Lithuania.

Source: Gábos et al, 2020

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Governments can intervene through benefits and taxes to redress inequalities. The Table 2. includes the economic performance of EU member states, their ability to reduce child poverty through transfers and an objective indicator of child poverty. We highlighted in gray of those values that are worse than the average. These countries are less capable of reducing poverty or having more deprived children.

It seems that countries with higher income have a larger capacity to reduce pre-transfer child poverty, however the divide between the wealthy and not-so-wealthy nations is not clear-cut. Social transfers in the richest European countries more than halve or halve relative child poverty, though in the southern European countries they fourth it. In the poorer segment of the EU social transfers have a much more modest child poverty reduction effect (18-36%). Some countries are achieving more than their income levels would predict: Croatia, Slovenia, Hungary, Czechia reduces child poverty rates by 40-46 per cent (UNICEF, 2017).

The capacity of countries to reduce pre-transfer child poverty depends on multiple factors, like the size of transfers, their targeting, the initial levels of pre-transfer child poverty. Let's examine these factors for Hungary! Relative poverty has hardly changed since 2010; it is lower than the EU 28 average and lower than most CE countries as well (ARTNER, 2020). The reason for this is the relatively low value of the median; moreover, income inequalities are moderate in the country as indicated by the GINI coefficient. However, relative child poverty (at the 60% threshold) has begun to rise here, reaching 25% by 2014 up from 20% in 2008. On the one hand, the country's social spending has been reduced to 17,2% of the GDP by 2022, which is the second less proportion within the EU. Social benefits to households now accounts for 10,39% of the GDP, which is the 3rd lowest value in the EU. Family benefits public spending in Hungary decreased from 3,386% of the GDP in 2009 (6th position within the EU) to 2,392% (11th position) in 2021.⁶ In the investigated period the structure of spending has also changed, the emphasis has shifted substantially towards benefits that are dependent on employment

⁶ <https://data.oecd.org/socialexp/social-spending.htm#indicator-chart>

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wages, and the spending on universally guaranteed family benefits has decreased. As a result of the mentioned factors, the government's ability to reduce relative child poverty through taxes and transfers decreased: in 2008 Hungary could reduce it by almost 60%, while in 2014 by 45%. (UNICEF, 2017).

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Table 2.

Economic development (2019), multidimensional child poverty and percentage reduction in the rate of child poverty due to social transfers (2014) in European Union member states

	GDP per capita (in PPS U28=100)	reduction of child poverty due to transfers	multi- dimensional child poverty		GDP/cap % of EU average	reduction of child poverty due to transfers	multi- dimensional child poverty
Luxembourg	252	40	24	Cyprus	93	53	40
Ireland	189	58	23	Lithuania	89	33	44
Netherland	127	43	13	Slovakia	89	36	53
Austria	126	52	23	Slovenia	89	46	26
Denmark	126	61	18	Estonia	83	31	24
Germany	121	50	21	Portugal	79	24	45
Sweden	119	55	16	Poland	73	24	36
Belgium	118	44	21	Hungary	73	46	58
Finland	109	66	12	Romania	70	20	85
France	106	48	31	Latvia	69	27	46
Malta	104	26	35	Croatia	67	40	47
Italy	97	24	51	Greece	66	18	39
Czechia	93	43	38	Bulgaria	53	19	77
Spain	91	22	31	average		37,5	34,7

Notes: Reduction in child poverty is measured as the proportional difference between child poverty rates before and after social transfers, where child poverty rates are measured using income thresholds at 60 per cent of the median household income of the total population, before and after social transfers. Material deprivation is measured as children who are deprived of 2 or more of the following: nutrition, clothing, educational resources, leisure activities, social activities, information access, or housing.

Sources: ec.europa.eu, UNICEF (2017)

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The rate of multidimensional poverty shows a similar pattern: we can find the least children affected by it in the richest countries, within them Finland and Netherland have the best performance. Among the not-quite rich countries the rate of deprived children is higher on average, but we can find exceptions in this field as well, like Estonia, Slovenia and Poland. It is interesting that only Slovenia has better than average performance in both indices among the less affluent societies.

IV. Social protection spending in details in the V4 countries

In 2017 Hungary spent 18,1% of its GDP on social protection (excluding education but including healthcare). The proportion was similar to the three other Visegrád countries (however, Poland spent a little bit more with 19,2%). We can establish that the social protection spending is more in the V4 than in the rest of the CEE countries, but less than in the European Union as a whole, where it was 26,9%.¹

Having a look at the data on the social protection benefits in 2017, it is clear that almost all EU countries spent the most on old age related expenses (on average 10,8% of the GDP), followed by sickness and health care costs (7,8%). On average 2,2% of the total GDP was spent on family and children benefits while 0,7% on fighting against social exclusion.

Out of the V4 countries it is Poland who allocates more than the average amount of money on families and children (2,6% of its GDP), nevertheless all the four countries spend a mere 0,1-0,3% of their GDP on fighting against social exclusion.² This is not too much, especially in the case of Hungary, where the proportion of children living in severe material deprivation is rather high: 13,1% in 2019. The situation in the other three countries is somewhat better: the rate of children living in severe material deprivation account for 2,9% in Czechia, 2,6% in Poland and 8,6% in Slovakia³

Some scholars build their argument on the trade-off thesis, which posits that social and educational policies compete for the public sector funding support. (Beblavy et al, 2013 cites Castles, 1989; Hecló, 1985; Heidenheimer, 1981). I agree that education policies can be viewed as preventive and prospective, whereas social policies as retrospective and compensatory (Beblavy et al, 2013 cites Allmendinger and Leibfried, 2003), still both spheres have to combat together poverty and social exclusion. That is why I consider it

¹ https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=spr_exp_gdp&lang=en

² <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

³ <https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

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important to have a look at educational spending, though the quality and resiliency of the education system depends on other than financial factors. In 2015 Poland invested around 4,81% of its GDP in education, which equals the EU-27 average. The other three V4 countries' investment was lower (Cz 3,79 %, Hu: 4,26%, SK: 4,09%)⁴

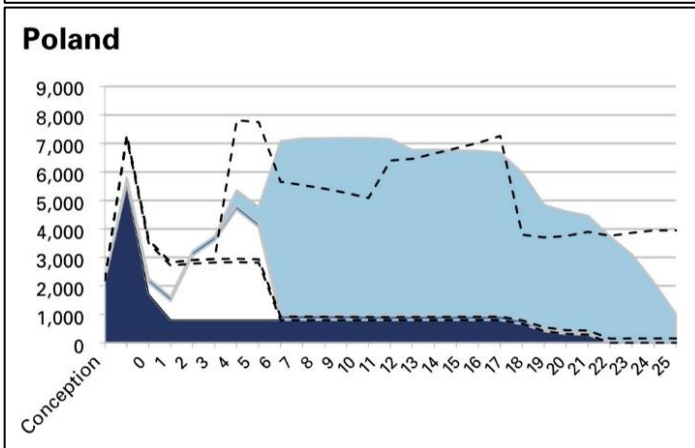
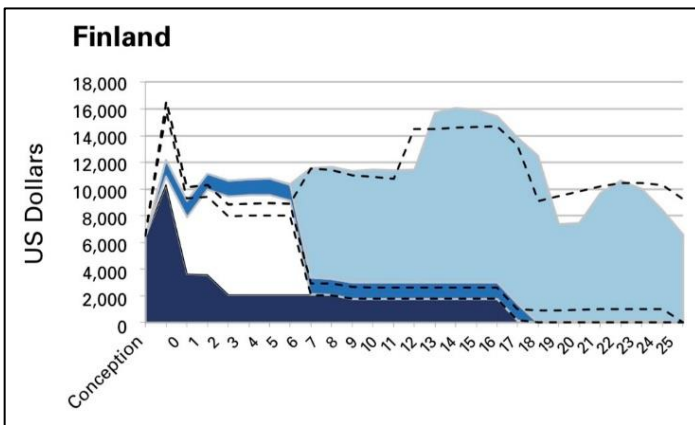
UNICEF created the age spending profile of 84 countries. For this it analyzed each countries investment in children (not including cost related to meeting the child's basic needs and rights.) Each profile reports a cross-section of average expenditure on children by age from conception to 25 years of age (x axes) at a given date in time (2015). The different items of expenditure are split into four groupings: cash benefits and tax benefits (dark blue); preschool childcare or education services (white); in-kind benefits (food packages, accommodation, child protection and family services) and labour market policies (such as active labour market policies or public works) (medium blue); compulsory and higher education (light blue). Figure 1. shows the results of four countries: besides three V4 countries we present Finland's profile, as comparison. We left out Czechia, assuming that the data of the UNICEF report is incorrect as it shows that Czechia spends less than half on children compared to other V4 countries.

⁴ https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=educ_uae_fine06&lang=en
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Cash benefits
 Preschool/childcare (PR)
 In-kind/public works (PR)
 Education (PR)

- - - - Education (PC)
 - - - - Preschool/childcare (PC)
 - - - - In-kind/public works (PC)



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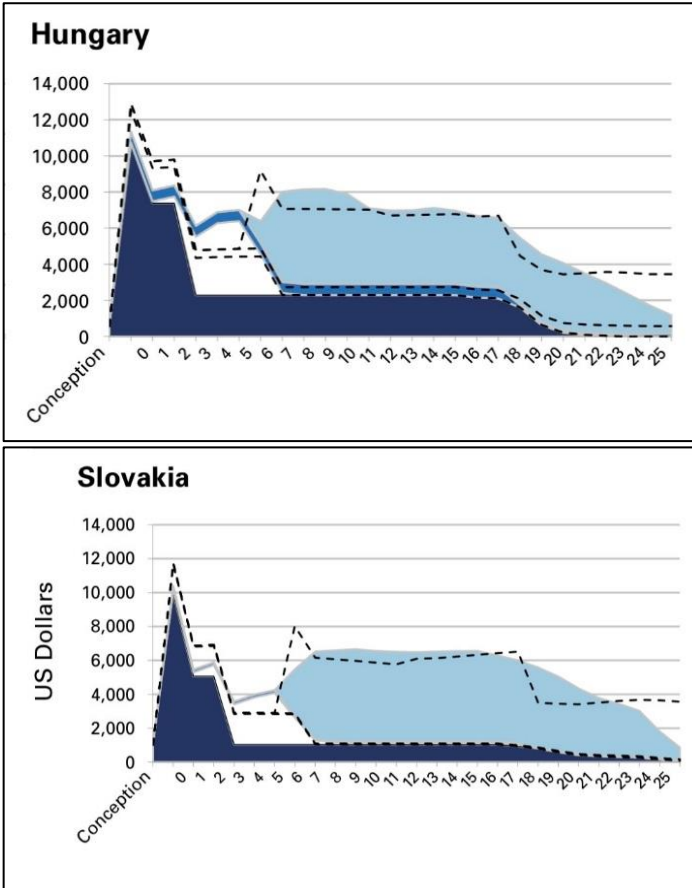


Figure 1. Average spending on child per age adjusted for enrolment (US \$, PP, 2015)

Source: Richardson et al, 2023.

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All four profiles are frontloaded, meaning that these countries have commitment to early investment. The frontloading is driven in particular by maternity payments. Poland and Finland though spend more on education (Finland especially during secondary education). We can also observe that Finland spends at every age more money, than the other three countries and Hungary spends more on cash benefits, especially in the very beginning than Slovakia and Poland.

V. (De)institutionalization of children (the case of Hungary and Poland)

John Bowlby's attachment theory which emphasised the negative consequences of institutional care compared to family-based care led to a decline in the use of institutional care of children in some parts of Europe (BROWNE [et al], 2012).

In the EU Daphne project in 2003 a research team surveyed 33 countries across Europe and identified the number and characteristics of children under three placed in residential care institutions without their parents for more than 3 months. The overall rate of institutionalisation per 10,000 was 13.39 (excluding the data of Turkey), but there were countries with no or less than 1% of children under 3 in institutions (Slovenia, Iceland, UK, Norway). Seven countries had between 11 and 30 children per 10,000 in institutions (including Poland). This number was between 31 and 60 children per 10,000 in institutions in the rest of the V4 countries (in Czechia 60, Hungary 44, Slovakia 31) ((BROWNE [et al], 2005).

In the lights of the results of this research, it is no wonder, that the V4 countries were among the 12 Member States that were recognised by the European Commission as a country with the identified need for deinstitutionalisation reform in child welfare.⁵ For the analysis of this question in more details we also give a brief overview of the Hungarian and Polish child protection systems.

In Hungary the first child protection legislation was approved by the Parliament in 1901 acknowledging the responsibility of the State for the care of children in need (KSH, 2012). At that time almost all children under 15 were placed in foster care (95%). After the second world war the post-war ideology assumed that institutions could serve better the developmental needs of children. Professionals working in institutions were regarded as more suitable than the often uneducated 'petit bourgeois' families. The proportion of foster

⁵ openingdoors.eu

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care provision decreased to 20% during the communist era when children lived in large-scale settings. The largest 'child-town', a gated settlement set up after the 1956 revolution accommodated 1,500 children. (ANGHEL [et al], 2013)

Hungary begun to reform its child protection system in the mid -1980s, with this being more advanced than most of the other transition countries. In 1986 social work education was re-established, and a new programme of social pedagogy challenged the previously dominance model. The Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour introduced national pilot programs providing experimental training for foster parents. SOS Children's Villages opened the first village in 1986 providing a new care model. (ANGHEL [et al], 2013) In 1990 the ratio of children placed with foster parents became 30% (KSH, 2012).

The political and economic transition after 1989 slowed down the reform process of child protection as other territories were given priority. Hungary ratified the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1991, but the UNCR-based law was passed six years later⁶. Since then, two major amendments took place in 2013 and 2018.

In Hungary basic social services are meant to prevent child endangerment and facilitate the upbringing of children in families. These are: individual case management, family in-team work, full or partial takeover of the child's care on a temporary and voluntary basis (short term care), day-time care of children (infant nurseries, alternative daytime programmes), disadvantage compensating services (study halls, sure start children's houses⁷).

When child endangerment cannot be resolved through voluntary cooperation, the child is taken under protection. This means that they stay with their family, but under surveillance measures. In Hungary 15.9 minors per thousand inhabitants of corresponding age were under child protection in 2020. Most of them were taken into protection for reasons of culpable behaviour of the child (10 093) or their parents (11 396). 5264 children however were registered for environmental reasons and 390 were abused (KSH, 2021). The most frequent reason of registering babies at the

⁶ Act XXXI of 1997 on Child Protection and Custody

⁷ see in more details: Havasi, 2015, Havasi, 2021)

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guardianship authorities is poor conditions, while it is neglect for children at the age of 6 and deviant behaviour for adolescents. The culpable behaviour of the child is typically truancy or delinquency in the case of Roma adolescents, while behavioural, psychological problems and diseases for non-Roma (NEMÉNYI- MESSING, 2007).

When the family fails to resolve the child endangerment situation with the support of social workers, the authority takes away the child, who is then placed in residential care. The Hungarian ombudsman found that one out of three cases the period of the child's protected status was too long- even 4 years- without any improvements in their conditions, which violates the rights of the child. (OBH 6015/2008) Removing children from their families for financial reasons is banned by law, but it happens though- in 30% of the cases according to the ombudsman⁸. Roma children appear to be affected by this practice more frequently than non-Roma (ERRC, 2007; NEMÉNYI-MESSING, 2007).

In 2020 the majority of children (70,2%) was placed with foster parents, but many of the foster families in Hungary reside in areas of deprivation (BABUSIK, 2002) and many foster parents are uneducated themselves. As a consequence, the children continue to be at risk of social exclusion lacking the access to quality education and other necessary services.

Children are placed in residential care theoretically only for as long period as it is absolutely necessary in order to establish the required conditions at home. Unfortunately, this is not the case. In 2017, for example 14,5% of the children receiving special care returned to their parents or relatives from children's homes and 19,9% from foster parents (KSH, 2018 a).

Whilst statistical data show a decline in the care population and a shift between institutionalisation and foster care, which are priorities of the present legislation, the realization of other aims is less successful, like family preservation, emphasis on local preventive services, focus on support and not punishment. Poverty undermined kinship care, which is now unsupported, because it was observed that parents, particularly of Roma origin, often

⁸ Openingdoors, 2019 a
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arranged long-term childcare with relatives for the financial benefits (Anghel et al, 2013).

Poland's child and youth service also started to develop early. It was well established in the 1920s when a number of progressive projects took place, like Kazimierz Jezewski's children's village and Janus Korczak's model of children's republic with self-government and court (Wroczynski 1976, Lifton, 1988 cited by Stelmaszuk, 2002) Jozef Babicki introduced a family-group model of residential care, Kazimierz Lisiecki developed an educational system for the Warsaw boys (KELM, 1983, cited by STELMASZUK, 2002). People working with children were well-trained and respected. Social workers and residential educators studied at the Polish Free University.

In communist Poland (1945-1989) -like in the communist Hungary- the child-care institutions were nationalised. The Soviet- modelled large institutions were intended to be permanent home for orphans and children from families considered to be dysfunctional or just not able to raise up the children (KOZDOROWITZ, 1998, cited by STELMASZUK, 2003). Between 70 to 200 children ('juveniles' or 'social orphans') lived together in large buildings separated from the community. There were many devoted educators and the large children's homes had good aspects: stability was guaranteed with long-term placement, there was weekend contact with relatives, efforts were made to find the child a 'friend' family, educators were constantly available for the children and often for many years and thus became important people for the children. Education was an important goal for children-in-care (STELMASZUK, 2003).

The political upheavals of the 1970s brought changes in the social field as well. The universities became open to Western ideas, educators (in part at least) moved away from the 'correctional' approach of 'juveniles' in favour of 'educational' approach. The government allowed the placement of children with relatives, and also 'experiments' in residential care and in adoption. Group homes were established and also SOS Children's villages. There were ideas about community programmes, crisis-and therapeutic centres. Many of these new forms however disappeared during the economic decline of the late 1970s (STELMASZUK, 2003).

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Right after the change of regime in 1990 the Social Welfare Act was passed. This marked the beginning of a new, but slow reform process in child protection. The demand for change came from practitioners and NGOs who involved the media in their campaigns. The child care reforms were implemented in 2000 with the Act on Family Support and the System of Foster Care. Local bureaus for children and family services were instituted. Local social workers are expected to work with the families and try to avoid the removal of the child. In case of serious problems the child must be transferred to some residential facility (WIRWICKA, 2001, cited by STELMASZUK, 2003). There are some problems though: e.g. the family assistants' role ends once the child is removed from his/her family. This practice reduces the probability of the child's reintegration to his/her family. Furthermore, the newly introduced services are underdeveloped and poorly financed and the methodology of social work is still based on the "diagnostic" approach rather than on a family strengthening approach or a solution-focused approach (OPENINGDOORS, 2018 b, 2019 b).

EU Structural Funds have been used in Poland to provide family and community-based care (e.g. Family Assistants Programme, 500+ Programme, Infant+ Programme, Mother 4+, Good Start Programme and Day Care Centres.) These programmes have not always been successful. For example, the family assistants focus on life skills rather than emotional and attachment competencies needed to strengthen relationships. This can be resolved with capacity building of family assistants. The day care centres (supporting children in vulnerable situations) have low outreach and function currently only in 18% of all communes in Poland. Furthermore, their focus is on the children only, though the strengthening of parental skills would be also necessary (OPENINGDOORS, 2018 b, 2019 b).

In 2017 the total number of children living in institutional care settings was 41,200, among them 3,200 was below the age of 10. There are institutions within the education system where children (approximately 30,000 in 2016) stay for longer periods of time and have limited contact with family members – and thus can be considered as children in institutional care (OPENINGDOORS, 2018 b, 2017b). The new regulation implied a reduction in the number of

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children in institutional care to 14 children per setting. Therefore, many new institutions were established either through the division of old, bigger institutions or as part of the new group homes. The new settings are often built next to each other (Openingdoors, 2017 b, 2018 b, 2019 b). **Foster care is an important alternative care option for children in Poland.** In 2017 approximately 55,761 children lived in 37,201 foster families (OPENINGDOORS, 2018 b). 'Family group homes' are also managed by foster parents. They accommodate bigger sibling groups. In 2016 there were 926 children living in such homes (OPENINGDOORS, 2017 b). The number of foster families has been decreasing recently due to the lack of public awareness, inadequate professional support (very few in-service trainings, and almost no psychological supervision provided), low remuneration of foster families, bureaucratic requirements.

Many scandals were published in the media, besides the monitoring performed by foster care coordinators is often viewed as obtrusive by foster carers (OPENINGDOORS, 2017 b). Other problem with foster care in Poland is that its **quality is not guaranteed.** The new legislation emphasises the right of children in care to maintain contact with their families. but in the case of foster carers contact with biological family is limited (OPENINGDOORS, 2019 b).

The process of deinstitutionalization (DI) has been taking place in very similar way in Poland and Hungary. DI has been an aim since the mid-1980s in Hungary and 1970s in Poland, and significant developments have been achieved since then, yet there are still 7 482 children and young adults growing up in institutions in Hungary and 41 200 in Poland (not counting those who live in educational institutions) in 2017. (KSH, 2018 a, OPENINGDOORS, 2018 b).

Both countries limited the number of children living in institutions (Poland at 14 and Hungary at 12 for group homes). Then they started to establish new institutions partly through the division of old, bigger institutions and the children practically remained under the same roofs and without any changes their everyday life.

According to the report of Opening doors For Europe's children the aim of DI both in Hungary and in Poland is understood as reducing the numbers of children living in institutions rather than providing quality care for children.

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There are also concerns that the EU funds for deinstitutionalisation of children are not used towards strengthening the child welfare system and the families, gatekeeping or reunification efforts but prevalingly for the modernisation of children's homes, building smaller institutions or placement into foster care (openingdoors.eu).

Although foster care is spreading, 67 % of children in alternative care lived in foster families in 2018 in Hungary and 57% in Poland, their support and remuneration is very limited, there are not enough foster parents and there are concerns about the quality of foster care in both countries.

VI. Problems of the child protection system (Hungary and the Czech Republic in focus)

Herein we will show the main problems, challenges and dilemmas of the Hungarian child protection system. The factors are interrelated, many of them derives from the basic problem, the underfunding.

- **Underfunding**

The expenditure spent on social protection in Hungary was 19,1% of GDP in 2016, while in the EU 28 average was 28,1%. On child protection Hungary spends 2,3% of its GDP (EUROSTAT, 2018).

- **Low salary of child welfare workers.**

Not only employees in the child protection system get low salary, every social worker does. They earn the less among the professionals.

- **Labour shortage in the social sphere.**

- **Overload.**

It is not rare that one social worker has 60-70 clients. (KOZMA, 2019)

- **Lack of professional knowledge.**

In child protection a very complex knowledge would be necessary, which the social workers cannot obtain during their university training. Professional training after graduation is compulsory, but the really useful trainings are costly and the low paid social workers cannot afford it to themselves.

- **Burn-out.**

The probability of burning out is high among Hungarian social workers, especially in the field of child protection. Supervision is missing or when a workplace ensures it, many social workers do not participate.

- **Not enough means in the hands of the social workers.**

- **Defensive pro-active as fear-based practice.**

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Stress, overburden, feeling of threat lead to defensive practice of the social workers in many cases. They try to avoid confrontation, “do not notice” the signs of child endangerment, in return they carry out administrative tasks perfectly (KOZMA, 2019).

- Preventive social care and community development in Hungary are underdeveloped, though the two new institutions (SSCHs and SHs) are operating in these fields, but their number is less than necessary.
- Organization of alternative daytime and holiday programs has only a legal definition, but the Government does not provide sources per capita, it is usually been granted only by NGOs.
- The definition of endangerment is broad. Its application results in children being removed from their families for material reasons, though this is banned by law. There are also territorial differences in the country in this respect. Roma children appear to be removed more frequently from their families for material reasons than non-Roma children. Alcoholism and neglect conceal the removal of children for material reasons. (ERRC, 2007, Neményi-Messing, 2007)
- The chance for children taken out of their family to go back to their own family is low. It is 10 percent or less, though in children’s homes where the ratio of Gypsy children is low, it is between 10 and 20% (NEMÉNYI-MESSING, 2007).
- Many foster parents are of Roma origins and with low educational level which is dysfunctional in some cases.
- There are not enough foster parents.
- Children spend long time in temporary placement in spite of the legal prescriptions.
- Roma children are overrepresented in the system, their rate is double than their share in the whole population (NEMÉNYI-MESSING, 2007).

The described also applies to the Czech Republic. Zurovcova and Vishwanathan describes the Czech system as follows. Services for the support of endangered families are under-developed or lacking like field assistance, emergence

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housing, zero or low interest loans, well-trained short-term foster care providers. The social workers are overloaded and are often seen by clients as resorting to repressive measures rather than supportive ones. They are not sufficiently prepared to work with Roma clients and the Roma are hardly represented among the social workers (ZUROVCOVA- VISHWANATHAN, 2007). All this can be said about the Hungarian situation as well. Other common characteristics of the Czech and Hungarian child protection systems are that the Roma children are overrepresented in them (BROWNE [et al], 2005; ERRRC, 2007) or that too many children are placed in state care for social reasons - 55% in Czechia and 30% in Hungary (ZUROVCOVA- VISHWANATHAN 2007; OPENINGDOORS, 2018 a).

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VII. Conclusions

The V4 countries share not only their geographic situation, common past in the communist era, but also share their present social challenges. Since 1989 they have started to close up to the EU average in terms of GDP/capita and Poland closed up to Hungary.⁹ The spending on social purposes is similar in the V4, though Poland dedicates a little bit more funds on education as well as on families and children. This can be seen in the performance of the education system and the social sphere. In terms of reducing multidimensional child poverty Poland is more effective not only compared to the other V4 countries, but also compared to the EU average. According to the PISA survey Poland is at the forefront of OECD countries in reading, mathematics, science and also in the capacity of the education system for handicap compensation. The Czech Republic, the richest of the V4 countries, is also at the top in these dimensions, albeit with worse results than Poland. The performance of the Hungarian and Slovak education systems is more modest, with PISA scores around or below the OECD average (however the performance of Slovak children is better in mathematics).¹⁰

In reducing relative child poverty, the Polish and Hungarian legal and social policy systems are more effective than the other two, which does not affect the issue of extreme poverty. Poverty rate (and child poverty rate) at \$2.15 a day is negligible in Poland and the Czech Republic (0.06% and 0,01% respectively), in the other two countries, the incidence is below 1% (0.35% in Hungary and 0.12% in Slovakia).¹¹ In terms of social inequality the V4 countries are still among the EU member states with a low level of inequality (Hungary is the 8th in this rank, Slovakia is the 1rst, Poland and the Czech Republic are in between).¹²

⁹ ec.europa.eu

¹⁰ see the data: Schleicher, 2019

¹¹ <https://pip.worldbank.org/home>

¹² see: GINI index (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/874070/gini-index-score-of-eu-countries/>)

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Among the four countries, Poland does not have a significant Roma population. One of the biggest challenges for the other three countries is the social integration of the Roma and people living in deep poverty- these two groups just partially overlap. We did not write about this topic in this article, but we note that despite the difficulties, the three countries concerned can boast better results than other countries with a significant Roma population in the European Union (like Greece, Portugal, Spain, France, Bulgaria, Romania).¹³

The V4 countries are among the high-income countries; however, they are less affluent within them. The steps taken in the field of preventing child poverty, reducing its consequences, and providing equal opportunities for children testify to the fact that they know the directions of the solution, but there are problems in the implementation of the goals, especially in their financing (to a lesser extent in the case of Poland).

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Andrea Osváth

Life in Cserehát: Szakácsi and the Everyday Life of the Guardian Tiger

Abstract

In my study I examine the present of the village of Szakácsi, the living conditions of its inhabitants, their employment opportunities, their children's education, their community and spiritual life, based on interviews with the leaders of the village (mayor, deputy mayor, municipal councillor) and the Greek Catholic parish priest who served here until 2022.

Keywords: development opportunities, job opportunities, schooling, community life organisation as a result of internal and external influences

I. Introduction

Szakácsi is part of the Cserehát region, a settlement in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, bordered by the rivers Bódva and Hernád from the North and Slovakia. This area is characterized by small villages and dead-end settlements located far from the main routes: the main transport Route 27, which branches off at Sajószentpéter from the county seat, and the Main Road 26 from Miskolc, the M3 motorway and the M3 main road as well.

The interior areas of Cserehát are not only far from the main transport routes, but also from towns and cities, the access to small villages is difficult, mostly done on poor quality minor roads. This is one of the main problems of the area: there are no easily accessible towns nearby. Miskolc, the capital of the county, is nearly 50 km away, but even Szikszó or Edelény can only be reached by car within a reasonable time, because the nearest towns are difficult to reach by public transport, with several transfers and waiting times. Bus trips are infrequent and there is no train service at all on this line.

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However, the scenery is beautiful: rolling hills alternate with forests and farmland, often interspersed with untouched grassy areas.

II. History¹

Bronze Age artefacts have also been found in the area of Szakácsi, proving that the settlement was already inhabited in this period. Its name was first mentioned in documents in 1300 under the name Zakachy, meaning cook. It is presumed that the settlement was inhabited by the king's servants, mainly kitchen assistants, hence the name.

Written records of the village first appeared in the 14th century. Like many others, this settlement gave its name to the Szakácsi family. In the 15th century, the Szakácsi Tokos family is mentioned in contemporary documents, then in the 16th century, we can read that the settlement was owned by the Rákóczis and belonged to the Upper Václav manor, so in the first quarter of the 17th century, Szakácsi was officially part of Abaúj County. In the 18th century, however, the Fáy family is mentioned as the owner of the village, and then it belongs to Borsod county again. Later, the names of Count Ábrahám Vay, János Ragályi and István Orosz are also mentioned as the owners of the manor.

The village was plundered several times during the Turkish occupation because its inhabitants refused to pay taxes to them. The village was rebuilt and repopulated only after the Turks were driven out. It was after the spread of the Reformation (late 17th century) that the Reformed church (though ruined), which still stands in the village, was built.

¹ <https://szakacsi.hu/tortenete/>

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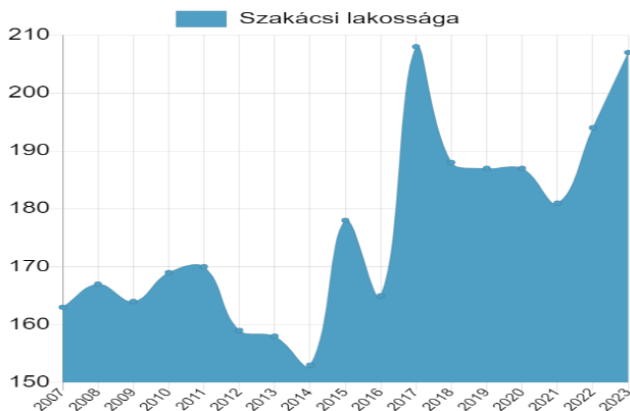


Figure 1. The population of Szakácsi

Source: <https://stat.dbhir.com/telepules/szakacsi>

After a wave of emigration in the 1990s, the population of Szakácsi has been slightly increasing in recent years (see Image 1). Currently there are 207 inhabitants, of which 92 are women and 115 men. The main reason for the emigration was unemployment, which led to a change in the composition of the population after the change of regime, with abandoned houses being bought cheaply by the gypsy inhabitants, who moved in and are now the only ones living in the settlement.²

According to the 2021 TeIR (National Regional Development and Spatial Planning Information System) data, Szakácsi is ranked as the 10th poorest settlement in Hungary in terms of net domestic income per inhabitant, which is HUF 325 783,90/year.³

² <https://stat.dbhir.com/telepules/szak%C3%A1csi>

³ Further data: Registered jobseekers per 100 persons aged 15-64: 11.1; Registered jobseekers with 8 or less years of primary education: 85.7%; Employment in high prestige occupational groups: 5.8%

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III. Employment Opportunities

There are no jobs in the settlement, some of the men are living from public works, as far as the government subsidy currently allows, and others are in the construction industry. They work for contractors in Budapest and return home to their families every two weeks.⁴ The women stay at home, raise the children and take care of the household.

"Public employment is the only job opportunity, but their numbers may be decreasing, so it's getting harder for us, the villagers, too." (Interview with the mayor).

"Some people go, they come home every two weeks to visit their family, they get 15 000 HUF a day, but they have to pay for accommodation and food, there's hardly any money left... I wouldn't go, it's more important to see my family every day, it hurts that the two big kids are not home every day, I can't wait for them to come home on the bus on Friday. It's good if they have a break or are sick... but not like that, it's just good that they are home..." (Interview extract from V.A.).

Ten years ago, there was an attempt to increase employment and improve the situation in the village by a Dutch entrepreneur, Elisabeth van Aerde, who came to the village and wanted to create a holiday resort by building luxury apartments for rent, because of the geographical location of the village and the beauty of the surroundings. Some of the buildings in the center of the village, renovated at the time, still bear witness to this.

In an interview in 2013, the investor said: *'You can develop where there is nothing,' says Elisabeth van Aerde, one of the investors in the tastefully renovated farmhouse that is now the headquarters of the business. "We chose Szakácsi for its touristic value, for example because of its location. We knew that it was a poor*

⁴ The current mayor from 2014 also recruited workers in the village as a contractor, which is how he got in touch with the local people and then ran for the role of the mayor. He does not currently live in Szakácsi either.

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*and little modernized area, however it was also unspoiled, meant a great asset for us."*⁵

Although Elisabeth van Aerde stayed in the village, she does not have a good relationship with the current leaders of the village: *"She was dreaming, but has not done anything... if you saw where she lives now with her son, in what a run-down, shabby house, you would be surprised."* (Interview with the mayor).

In the neighboring village of Irota, the Dutch entrepreneurs' dream of a luxury wellness center and apartments in the village was realized, however in Szakácsi was not.

⁵ Máté Halmos (2013) index.hu/belfold/2013/10/25/szakacsi/
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IV. Developments

From 2016 on infrastructure improvements were launched in the village: the roads were in such a state that "cows used the potholes as watering holes!" (Interview with the mayor).

This was the first step to develop the settlement, as suppliers refused to provide goods, materials for construction and development because of the state of the roads: since then, a grocery shop has been opened, a nursery will start in September 2024 through an EFOP tender, a football pitch has been built, which is used daily by the children living here.

A pig farm, which was part of a previous project and provided jobs for the local people, had to be closed due to rising prices and increasingly strict operating standards: *"Unfortunately, we had to close the pig farm that had been operating for years, there were price rises, we could no longer feed them and we had to maintain a control system that we could not cope with..."* (Interview with the mayor)

Even though the self-contained village houses were built with the help of the village CSOK, most of them are cut off from gas and water, there is no money to maintain them, families typically live together in one room, and the other rooms, bathrooms and toilets are completely excluded from the living space. In the room for the whole family, they have a fireplace and they heat the room with wood, which they collect from the neighborhood.

Therefore, following the mayor's idea, a community space has been created in the village, with a laundry room, a kitchen, a common area for watching TV, studying and playing games. The laundry room has an automatic washing machine and tumble dryer, and the women sign up to a list of villagers to schedule who gets to do the laundry when.

The kitchen, which is fully equipped and furnished - they can eat there - is typically used when the bottled gas at home runs out and there is nothing to cook with. At such times, mostly at the end of the month, the women take the raw materials and ingredients for cooking with them and their family has the opportunity to prepare and eat their food in the kitchen.

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But the common space is also a place for everyday fun: in the afternoons, with the help of the mayor and deputy mayor, village children study here, while parents do the washing and cooking. They can watch films; there's Wi-Fi, a fuse ball table and different games for a fun time.

"We have a kitchen, a laundry room, a soccer field for the kids, we can watch movies together, it's very nice..." (Interview with V.A.)

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V. School, kindergarten, nursery

The children go to school in Lak, a neighboring village, and are taken by bus in the morning and brought home in the afternoon. But there are some people in the village who send their children to boarding schools in Edelény. These families have realized that they can help their children if they put them in boarding schools, where they can learn from Monday to Friday with constant supervision in a suitable environment, in orderly conditions, so that they have the opportunity to learn a trade, to achieve more than their parents. They see this as the only way to stand out: learning can give them a profession, a job, a chance to move away from Szakácsi.

"... I sent my children, the two older ones, aged 10 and 12, to Edelény to study. There is a dormitory there, they are looked after, they eat hot food, they eat three times a day. If there is a problem, but anyway the teacher at the dormitory calls me. I don't buy phones for the children, to avoid trouble...it's fine...sometimes the teacher gives them his own phone so we can talk. ... I want to give my kids a trade, so they don't end up like me... a locksmith, a mason, something, just living off what they've learned" (Interview extract from V.A.)

The local government wanted to provide nursery care for the younger children, but they could not apply for this, only for a mini nursery: under the project TOP-1.4.1-19-B01-2019-00034, a new two-group mini nursery with 14 places will be established in the village, which will be 100% owned by the municipality and will open in September this year.

VI. Community life around the "Guardian Tiger"

The Roma of Szakácsi have not established a civil organisation either, which is a rare phenomenon in the Roma settlements of B.-A.-Z. county. However, they were not completely excluded from civil activities aimed at Roma integration: some of them were involved in some of the programmes of the Cserőke association from Tomor or the cultural association of 'Utcaszak'.

More than ten years ago, in a Hello Wood 2012 creative camp organised by MOME line - design workshop and Reflekt Studio, two hundred young people worked for a week in the Bánvölgye Forest Camp to create artifacts with cultural and social functions in disadvantaged settlements in Borsod, Heves and Nógrád⁶. The then mayor, Ilona Feketéné Bisztrán, considered this unusual initiative to be a unique way of raising awareness of the village, which has just under 200 inhabitants.

A sculptor, Miklós Gábor Szőke Gábor and his colleagues⁷ donated the tiger, consisting of hundreds of wooden slats and over ten metres long, to the village. It stands in the grassy area at the beginning of the village, just after the village sign, and immediately attracts the attention of visitors.

"The Guardian Tiger was created for one of Hungary's poorest villages during an artists' camp. The 13-metre-long cat was born with the involvement of local disadvantaged young people and became their totem and pride. A local Tiger Band was formed in honour of the statue and later a mini festival was organised. The innovative social project received a lot of media attention and the village received financial support from the government to improve their

⁶ Works from the Fa workshop of the art camp: Dragon-ground in Bódvalenke, Playground and space/park in Bereten, "Cloud with funnels" in Bátorfyereny, Swimming house on the Lázberci reservoir, "Málygetosz" in Mályinka, Landscape-boxing in the area of the Lázberci reservoir, Gossip trap in Uppony, Bota-net New community space in Borsodbóta, in the Church garden.

⁷ The team of creators: Ádám Farkas, Eszter Móricz, Tamás Nádasdy, Krisztina Sárkány, Zoltán Török

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living standards. When the village gathered to thank their Protecting Tiger, it was one of the most touching moments for the sculptor."⁸

On the day of the Tiger's installation in Sakachi, "the radio announced 'Today is International Tiger Day'. Perhaps this coincidence also reinforces the symbolic power of the wooden big cat to look after the 183 members of the settlement. The arrival of the tiger was a turning point for the people of Sakachi: the tiger was seen as a common cause in the eyes of the villagers, and people who had previously been in conflict with each other had to work together to organise the tiger-catching event."⁹

The construction of the Tiger was preceded by months of contact between the members of the artists' camp and the locals, and the development of cooperation and needs assessments. Involving local people in the construction is an essential part of the long-term process of making the work feel truly local. This is a prerequisite for being able to link further development points and events to the Tiger, which will reinforce their status and become the basis of their newly established customs, which will later become a tradition.

The idea of the current mayor to make this special symbol, which has a 'protective' function, the name of the village's village day, was already a reality: the idea of the annual 'Tigris' festival, which would be the main event in the village, would be a way of making the village's entertainment more attractive. Tiger Day, which is celebrated annually in the municipality.

It was also the result of this process that the above-mentioned Tiger Band was formed and the mini-festival was organised. Such a symbol can act as an acupuncture point in a community, helping to strengthen their sense of importance and sense of belonging, both in the short and long term.

"If we already have a tiger, let's organise a celebration around it, a village festival" (interview with the mayor)

⁸ Miklós Gábor Szóke sculptor's Facebook page The Guardian Tiger:

<https://gabormiklosszoke.com/the-guardian-tiger>

⁹ Tiger and Dragon in the Service of the Villages in Borsod (2012) in: <https://epiteszforum.hu/tigris-es-sarkany-a-borsodi-falvak-szolgalataban>

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Eleven years after the tiger was installed in 2012, the artist wrote on his FB page. „The wooden slats have become increasingly difficult to weather over the last 11 years; its "fur" has faded, it has lost its bright colours, several teeth have had to be replaced and it needs to be supported in a stable position. Here and there he has also lost his "hair", and several pieces of timber have rotted over time.”¹⁰



Image 1. The Tiger of Szakácsi

Source: <https://www.kozterkep.hu/47955/a-vedelmezo-tigris#vetito=536400>

Another community event at every Christmas has become a tradition thanks to the initiative of the current mayor and the deputy mayor: on the afternoon of 23 December, the community gathers in the community centre for a joint Christmas commemoration.

¹⁰ Miklós Gábor Szóke sculptor's Facebook page The Guardian Tiger:
<https://gabormiklosszoke.com/the-guardian-tiger>

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"The deputy mayor and I prepare gift boxes for every Christmas on 23 December, which we call Everybody's Christmas, it is a family Christmas, where we give people food that they can't buy, Cheese, salami, that sort of thing... although this year I don't know how we'll have the money, because it's usually about 30 000 HUF per parcel." (interview with the mayor)

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VII. Faith Life

At the request of the mayor, Lajos Kovács, a Greek Catholic parish priest and his wife, Katalin Kovácsné Balla served in the village between 2020 and 2022.

"I once met the local Greek Catholic priest, Father Lajos and his wife, at the petrol station in Sajószentpéter and got to talking to them. We agreed that year, as it was before Christmas, they would come to visit us in Szakácsi. They had a nice commemoration, everyone liked it." (interview with the mayor).

"It was a year ago this Christmas, that the Greek Catholic Church and the Hungarian Maltese Relief Service, together with the mayor of the village, started a joint work in Szakácsi. In the isolated village of Borsod, where the Church had almost ceased to exist, the hope of a new beginning was shining. ... Reverend Lajos Kovács, the priest of the Irota Greek Catholic Parish and his wife visit Szakácsi every week. Throughout the years they helped the spiritual development of the people living there through house dedications, religious lessons and a pilgrimage to Máriapócs, trying to give faith and hope to the abandoned and poor people." ¹¹

In the past, as Reverend Kovács says in the interview, there were sects in the village, neither Roman Catholics nor Reformed, although there is a church in the village.

"I was afraid in Szakácsi, the conditions there were terrible at the time. And then Lajos Oláh, the mayor, came to me and contacted me, saying that he wanted a church, a community, common occasions for the people there, and that I should help. He convinced my wife first, they had known each other before. At the same time the bishop contacted me as well, saying that if I really took care of the church there, I would get some money. In the meantime, the Maltese Relief Service joined, with whom they are not on good terms, but I invited them to all the programmes. However, they really had nothing to offer. On the first Advent in 2020 I blessed the food parcels I received/requested from the Caritas, had a few words with the

¹¹ Katalin Balla: Pastoring Romas for a Year in Szakácsi (2021): <https://www.migorkat.hu/hirek/egy-eves-a-romapasztoracio-szakacsiban>

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people there. I told them that I would like to give Bible lessons, I would come to them once a week and Lajos gave me the opportunity to do so. I was also nurturing the Irota Church, we won tenders, we developed the forest school, we improved the church, the parish, the cemetery and I also visited Szakácsi. And they came, women, especially: difficult questions came up. Contraception, husbands in prison, abortion, I felt sorry for them. Sometimes my wife came too. What they loved was the house dedications at Epiphany. We got together with these women." (Interview with the Greek Catholic parish priest).

The parish priest was transferred to Sajószentpéter in 2022, thus losing his connection with the local people, and there is currently no active faith life in the village.

"Cults used to operate there. They found a catch. The only thing I had to hold on to here was that nobody wanted to go to Sakachi, not even the Roma, so I was given a free hand. And they were open to help. The problem was that this happened at the end of my time in Edelény and I had little time left, I was transferred to Sajószentpéter in 2022 and so the relationship was broken, which I regret very much, because it ended when I had already gained the trust." (Interview with the Greek Catholic parish priest).

The Catching-up Settlements Programme has also been running in Sakácsi since 2020, under the care of the Maltese Relief Service. Its assessment is mixed, but there is no doubt that it has improved the housing conditions of many families. Other services for children are football and summer camps - organised locally.

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VIII. Summary

The situation of the Roma settlements in Borsod and the Roma in them is very similar and at the same time different. The main problems are similar everywhere: poverty, lack of job opportunities, crime, lack of community and solidarity, lack of faith in the future (Havasi, 2012) Szakácsi is one of the poorest settlements, with the lowest level of advocacy, which is reflected in the fact that not even a single NGO has been established here. However, the Greek Catholic pastoral care for Roma in 2020-22, the Tiger set up more than ten years ago and subsequent community initiatives show that the community is responding positively to both external and internal influences.

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György Gyukits – Daniel Kiss - Máté János Takács

Stabilising science’s shaky ground: Is there such thing as “Völkerpsychologie” and how can we analyse it?

Abstract

This article aims to reconstruct the basic tenets and intuitions of an approach of social science invented in the 19th century: Those of “Völkerpsychologie”. In its initial state the approach was misused by National Socialist propaganda, a fact that resulted in its branding as a pseudo-science by many researchers. This misinterpretation is profoundly erroneous and can deprive social and political sciences from precious and constructive possibilities of research. The article aims to clear up this sinister branding and to demonstrate its originally “innocent” foundations. After that the paper proceeds with the reprise and integration of these basic tenets with the feats of the by now highly developed social sciences evoking the help of the philosophy that characterised the context of Völkerpsychologie’s birth: Hegelianism.

Keywords: political theory, political behaviour, psychology, history of psychology

I. Introduction

The 19th century witnessed the substantial progress of natural sciences and the accumulation of empirical knowledge about topics like history and civilisational development. Under the aegis of *Völkerpsychologie* some innovative and ambitious German researchers like Heymann Steinthal, Moritz Lazarus and Wilhelm Wundt intended to launch a project aimed at creating a scientific discipline that would adequately explain the political, social and cultural changes in their societies in a way that would revolve primarily around the exploration of national or rather socio-communal characters. Nowadays it is dismissed as a pseudo-science that would have no voice in the choir of social sciences not even as one of its precursors, or in worse cases, it is even

considered an instrument of old political propaganda.¹ The first half of the 20th century witnessed the arousal of this audacious topic, unfortunately this time ending up corrupted by nazi ideology, mainly as a result of the works of Willy Hellpach.

Our objective in this paper consists of mapping some of the original intuitions of Steinthal, Lazarus and Wundt, then we shall proceed with the purification of the concept from the inappropriate deformations introduced by the National Socialist approach that “heavily influenced” German academic debates in the 1930s and the first half of the 1940s. Finally, we will build up the basics of a constructive reinterpretation of the concept of *Völkerpsychologie* by implementing the toolkit of the ever-evolving social sciences. Such an endeavour appears quite legitimated if we point out Wundt’s idea that considered *Volk*-psychology the necessary extension of individual psychology (interpreted here as the psycho-dynamics of an individual).² Formal logic says that since the contemporary approaches of psychotherapy are not exactly those that Sigmund Freud, Alfred Adler or Karl Jaspers used, but – as it is widely known – there have been reinterpretations, integrations, augmentations, and we can trace down in the history of psychology a general evolution of the ideas of these aforementioned forefathers. In an analogue manner it is justified to assume that after the analysis of the original basic tenets *Völkerpsychologie* requires to be subjected to processes of integration and reinterpretation in order to make a significant contribution to social sciences through this. Taking the first steps in this research prospect is the driving force and fundamental premise behind our scientific effort realised in this article.

¹ KLAUTKE 2013, 1.

² KLAUTKE 2013,111.

II. Clearing up definitions

First, it is imperative that we should properly define the German concepts that will be used throughout this paper. As unfortunate as it may be, there is no proper English translation for them, so while they will be properly explained, referred to and contextualised in due time, we felt important to briefly introduce them at the start in order to make our article more accessible to the Reader.

First of all, let us examine the German word *Volk*. *Volk*, in a literal sense means People but it covers a meaning much richer than that. It can be used as a synonym for nation or society as well, therefore it can be accurately applied when we refer to a specific political community, be that the populace of a country or other political entity, even more generally as a community (bigger than a single family) held together by the will to stay so, to survive and thrive as one. Since the original engineers of the theory used this complex term simply as *Volk*, in this article we shall apply it as they did.

Now that we have a clearer understanding of *Volk*, we can begin to define *Völkerpsychologie* as well. The compound word refers to the psychology of the *Volk*, meaning the behaviours and mentalities, values, paradigms commonly present in this previously defined community of people. According to the original intention of the founders, *Völkerpsychologie* is an approach (as it has never gotten the chance to become an academic discipline in its own right) that aims to understand the dynamics of the birth, development and decline of the *Volk*. This open-endedness guarantees a broad spectrum of applicability: anthropological, social, political, religious, and so on. Its vast possibilities are therefore worthy of attention.

Another German expressions that will appear in the present discussion is the duo of *Weltanschauung* – *Weltbetrachtung*. Both of them are generally translated to English as worldview, but *Weltanschauung* in its philosophical background is understood as a horizon that embraces the sum of the quantitative data, the content of knowledge, while *Weltbetrachtung* is a kind of worldview that finds itself bestowed with morality, it confers orientation, a purpose to the sum of data it embraces. Finally, the last crucial concept to process is the *Gesamtgeist* that could be translated as a general spirit or

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objective spirit. The concept comes from the influence of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, whose ideas were unavoidable to consider in 19th century Europe when the inventors of *Völkerpsychologie* were active. The concept of *Gesamtgeist* expresses the entirety of the accumulated knowledge, toolkit and cultural heritage of a *Volk*.

To properly understand what *Völkerpsychologie* means and what the role of the listed concepts is however, we need to refer to the roots of the concept, to the original, most influential authors of *Völkerpsychologie*. They were accomplished social scientists and philosophers who notthe absence of something from the “academic market” of their time. In order to determine whether it is still missing today, we must proceed with the reconstruction of their key assumptions and eventual shortcomings along the way.

III. The origins

According to the research of Egbert Klautke, the philosophers Heymann Steinhal and Moritz Lazarus were the founders of the concept of *Völkerpsychologie* as a discipline, since these liberal, emancipated Jewish men exhibited a strong German patriotism but also a great fidelity to their Jewish identity, as it can be seen from their substantial contribution to the Jewish reform movement.³ Their aim was the creation of a separate science with two main goals: First of all, it would be an academic discipline that could illuminate “*the creation, the development and the decline of nations*” through the exploration of the *Volkgeist* (spirit of the *Volk*) and the laws of its development. This *Volkgeist* is the expression of the *Volk* by language, myths, religion and habits.⁴ Such *Volkgeist* would have an essence (*Wesen des Geistes*) characterised by an ambivalence that consists of a development guided by law-like natural necessities and at the same time bestowed with the capacity to create progress, historic inventions that could not occur naturally,⁵ so it is rooted in nature but at the same time it transcends the context of its roots. Secondly, since according to them the human being by birth is a member of a *Volk*, this determines his spiritual development in many ways. The relation between individual and community is asymmetric however, since individual achievements are comprehensible only as fruits of the *Volkgeist*⁶ and “*customs, works of art and general culture*” are essentially “*products of the slow and incremental progressive development*” of such *Volk* spirit.⁷ Since Steinhal and Lazarus were active in the Hegelian era, as we have already mentioned, they could not escape from the influence of “The Phenomenology of Spirit”. Not only did they identify the *causa causans* of history in the *Volkgeist* (the spirit of the *Volk*),⁸ but they also had to deal with the concept of *Gesamtgeist* (general spirit / objective spirit) in their scientific discourse. They concluded that the “general spirit” of a *Volk* “*contained the accumulated knowledge of generations*” and such

³ KLAUTKE 2013, 26–27.

⁴ Ibid 38.

⁵ KLAUTKE 2013, 37.

⁶ Ibid 39.

⁷ Ibid 40.

⁸ Ibid 38.

reservoir of multidimensional knowledge and heritage serves as a condition for the possibility of the nation's survival, progress, and development transmitted through language.⁹ Steinhil and Lazarus could correctly grasp the situated character of the human being only as part of a context, emphasising the importance of the interaction that characterises the relation between the singular human beings and their environment. They also intuited how the diversity of contexts contributed substantially to the development of mankind, and since for them this "context" is characterised as *Volk*, in this perspective the natural condition of humanity consists of being separated into *Völker*.¹⁰

Despite the similarities with the ideas of Steinhil and Lazarus, Wilhelm Wundt as an experimental psychologist dissociated himself from their goal to create an independent academic discipline that alone would crown humanities. However, he conceived individual psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* as two halves of his own original discipline, psychology itself. Wundt argued that the systematic study of communities using qualitative and hermeneutic methods¹¹ was crucial to understanding the more complex products that the human mind had to offer, namely: language, myths, and morality.¹² The importance of the moral components functions as a common denominator among these three authors.¹³

⁹ Ibid 41.

¹⁰ Ibid, 42.

¹¹ Ibid 120.

¹² KLAUTKE 2013, 121.

¹³ Ibid 119.

IV. Willy Hellpach and the misleading impact of National Socialism

Willy Hellpach was a psychologist and physician, who as a PhD student of Wilhelm Wundt gained his academic degree in experimental psychology.¹⁴ Until 1934 he envisioned social psychology and cultural history as the key to study the historical-psychological development of human civilisation as he considered the analysis of language, myth, and customs way too limiting,¹⁵ but with the establishment of the National Socialist system he found a way in *Völkerpsychologie* to continue¹⁶ and even advance his academic carrier.¹⁷ The early (1920s) Hellpach was evidently not a racist at heart, since he stated that *Volkstum* (being a *Volk*) could not be reduced to only one race,¹⁸ instead, it was the common language that the *Volkstum* originated from. Later on, he incorporated into his *Völkerpsychologie* discourse the study of physiognomy, something he himself as a physician (together with his mentor Wilhelm Wundt) was quite interested in, and stated that the differences of tribal and national physiognomies were caused by social-psychological factors like language and temperament, what's more, he argued in favour of the possibility to change one's physiognomy by altering the social-psychological effects that person is exposed to.¹⁹ It is clear that Hellpach's work to national-socialise *Völkerpsychologie* in order to secure his academic promotion caused the denigration and rejection of this approach,²⁰ but it is rarely considered that Willy Hellpach in opening up the approach for National Socialist ideas put aside the original intuitions and tenets formulated by Steinhilber, Lazarus, and Wundt as they argued critically against any biological-racial definition of the *Volk*, and identified its foundation in the will of its members to be a community.²¹ So the

¹⁴ Ibid 192.

¹⁵ Ibid 193.

¹⁶ Ibid 194.

¹⁷ Ibid 203.

¹⁸ His preferred argument was against the Nordic, blue eyed, fair haired German stereotype as millions of Germans were/are not like this.

¹⁹ KLAUTKE 2013, 215.

²⁰ Since *Völkerpsychologie* had no chance to evolve into a discipline, for today it remained only as an approach.

²¹ KLAUTKE 2013, 269.

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work of Hellpach is misleading since it takes the original intuitions definitely off-track. After World War II *Völkerpsychologie* was branded as a propagandistic pseudoscience, a legacy of the Third Reich, and that caused its institutional failure in relation to other social sciences, while its approach was no less valid at the time than that of the now affirmed social sciences.²²

²² KLAUTKE 2013, 269.

V. Core Intuitions

There are a few key points in the approach of Steinthal, Lazarus, and Wundt that together give the framework and foundation of *Völkerpsychologie* and as it was mentioned we intend to reprise them in the current article in order to map their potential contributions to humanities. The first core intuition consists of recognising that the individual is situated in a context which is not reducible to their natural, climatic, and geographic environment. The interpretation of the natural environment is actually integrated into the individual's consciousness by their human community and this is how the human community that the individual is part of, the *Volk* itself, has learnt to deal with the circumstances (natural, social or historic they might be) surrounding it, and – as new researchers in the field of humanities added – conferred meaning and value to their endeavour among these individual yet collective experiences²³ by the creation of (in some degree) collectively accepted conceptual²⁴ and symbolic²⁵ constructs. And in the net of these constructs happens that the individual's mind by applying dynamics of noumenation and symbolisation²⁶ forms idiosyncratically and holistically structured meaning systems.²⁷ These meaning systems are characterised by a duplicity: For the articulation of named systems the experiences are constitutive, but at the same time the aforementioned systems regulate the very act of experiencing²⁸ by their influence over the interpretation dynamics of the human being. This idiosyncratically and holistically structured meaning system of an individual²⁹ is their *Weltanschauung*. The *Weltanschauung* connects the singular concepts and the quantitative data of the individual's life and knowledge, but because of its function it is also a form of *Weltbetrachtung*, since it confers a fitness³⁰ to

²³ JERVIS 1994, 861.

²⁴ BARETT – MESQUITA – OSCHNER – GORSS 2007, 386.

²⁵ SZABÓ 1998, 105.

²⁶ Ibid 93.

²⁷ WAKEFIELD 1995, 10.

²⁸ JANTZEN 2013, 146.

²⁹ Recall that individuals are always situated in a *Volk*.

³⁰ Bends it to a purpose.

connect data, meanings and concepts,³¹ but these frames tend to be shaped by the *Volk* of reference.

As it could be seen before, another key point that appears among the original triad of authors is the postulation of the *Gesamtgeist* as the general / objective *Volkgeist*, the accumulation of the knowledge of all the generations in the determined *Volk* that during its slow and progressive implemental development had produced all its tangible and intangible (cultural) products and expressions. It must be added that each and every individual *Weltanschauung* – *Weltbetrachtung* in the community exists as well as an expression of the *Gesamtgeist* of the *Volk*.

A third key point can be identified in the importance of language, as it has a leading role in the construction of the *Weltanschauung* – *Weltbetrachtung*. On one hand the language embraces the singular experiences and data in order to forge them into a unified conceptual frame.³² On the other hand it mirrors the culture itself, manifested as the summary of customs, values, moral principles, habits, and traditions.³³ Language functions as a pivotal medium of the *Gesamtgeist*'s temporary content, which in a first instance of the construction of an individual *Weltanschauung*–*Weltbetrachtung* is considered objective truth, but the permanency of such status is not guaranteed in the individual's future.³⁴ This is a condition for the possibility of the aforementioned progressive and implemental development of the *Gesamtgeist* and at the same time it carries the possibility for an individual to sever ties to their *Volk*. This occurrence constitutes an interesting subject for further research, but it is not the central problem of the current paper.

³¹ ENGLERT 2023, 3–4.

³² ENGLERT 2023, 3.

³³ KACHUR 2021, 45, 48.

³⁴ BYNON 1966, 469.

VI. Nature and Nurture

Willy Hellpach by linking the physiognomy and the social-psychological impacts touched upon a critical issue that must be appropriately discussed in order to shield the approach of *Völkerpsychologie* from the shadow of race theory. The aspect that must be broken down is the relation between the biological and the psycho-social, environmental realms.

First of all, as it was mentioned, the approach's forefathers Steinhal and Lazarus professed that the *Gesamtgeist's* existence as a collective reservoir of multidimensional knowledge is aimed at the *Volk's* survival, progress and development. At the same time, as we have seen, they refused the biological-racial contents of it. As the *Gesamtgeist* is legitimated by its teleological character, there can be no lesser or higher "races" among humans, only different ways in which to adapt to a particular environment, meaning that any *Volk's Gesamtgeist* is equally a part of humanity's common heritage³⁵ aimed at the already many times stressed survival, progress and development. The process of adaptation to different environmental experiences³⁶ – because of the neuroplasticity that the human brain exhibits – tends to produce specific neural connections. This occurs in a way compliant with the experience (structured by the objective event and its interpretation, which is logically influenced by the specific *Gesamtgeist*), a phenomenon that is clearly more stressed in the developmental age but practically ongoing in adulthood as well.³⁷ The existence of such tangible differences however does not make it possible to introduce a hierarchy among the vaguely *Volk*-typical neural connections as it is on one hand scientifically erroneous and on the other hand it was never the intention of our approach's founders to do so.

³⁵ That according to the Hegelian tradition would be called here *Zeitgeist*, "spirit of time".

³⁶ Physical, climatic, geographical, or social they might be.

³⁷ VOSS – THOMAS – CISNEROS-FRANCO – DE VILLERS-SIDANI 2017.

VII. The subject of Völkerpsychologie: The anatomy of the Gesamtgeist

In their endeavours a pivotal scientific goal of Steinthal and Lazarus was the understanding of the *Gesamtgeist's* development³⁸, so this can reasonably be considered the focal point of the whole *Völkerpsychologie* project. In their attempt to realise this goal their main concern was methodological: They deemed anthropology inadequate and one-sided for neglecting psychological and mental components, while also finding ethnology insufficient, viewing it merely as a branch of zoology applied to humans.³⁹ But before the delineation of a revisited methodology it is auspicious to further understand the nature of the field of analysis: the *Gesamtgeist* itself.

As the *Gesamtgeist's* reason to exist is the survival and progress of the *Volk*, it is necessarily articulated around the concatenation of the defining events and conditions⁴⁰ of the *Volk's* history and the relations among *Völker* that characterised such history because the consideration of its relations is crucial to understand a *Volk's* identity, since actors are mutually constructed by their interactions.⁴¹ But the process where mere events or conditions can become history, where sheer interactions can come to be relations requires one more component: The act to insert these items (events, conditions and interactions) into a frame of reference that transcends them.⁴² This takes the form of a somewhat shared meaning system that through its metaphoric structure links the factual items with an abstract meaning that confers them significance.⁴³ Based on what was said until now two conclusions must be affirmed: First, the dynamic, processual character of the *Gesamtgeist* appears evident, since history and relations are dynamic, so as long as the *Volk* is alive events are going to happen, conditions are going to manifest themselves, and the interactions

³⁸ KLAUTKE 2013, 28.

³⁹ Ibid 37.

⁴⁰ CSIKSZENTMIHÁLYI 2021, 26.

⁴¹ MENGSHU 2020.

⁴² ELIADE 2023, 14.

⁴³ SZABÓ 1993, 99–108.

among the *Völker* are going to continue.⁴⁴ Second, because of its dynamic and processual character, the *Gesamtgeist* is mutable, and always had to have been during the history of the *Volk* it belongs to, otherwise it would not be able to fulfil the very reason for its existence.

About the *Volk* we must conclude that since the birth of the community it has always been historically, relationally and even physically, geographically etc. situated. So in order to secure survival and progress, external impulses and phenomena are always categorised, since their rapid identification and understanding is crucial in order to choose how to relate to them. Those impulses and phenomena that proved themselves useful for the goals of survival and progress by increasing stability, efficiency and efficacy or simply by maximising the probability of procreation, are categorised as values⁴⁵ that obviously answer to other psychological needs as well, since the category of values could have many meanings depending on context, but here we apply it to the *Gesamtgeist*. It is almost futile to say that because of the processual character of the *Gesamtgeist* this categorisation is a perpetual process until the extinction of the *Volk*. The *Gesamtgeist's* efficacy resides in its capability to offer sufficient space and an adequate toolkit for the effective functioning of the people's macro- and microcosms. The aforementioned capability of the *Gesamtgeist* is directly proportionate to the *Volk's* resilience to their environmental, social challenges.⁴⁶ At this point appears as a logical conclusion that the resources of the *Gesamtgeist* are transmitted and cultivated through a dynamic process that includes not only language, but the whole spectrum of communication, since the *Gesamtgeist* orients day to day life⁴⁷, as it is also formed by everyday events.

⁴⁴ One object here by bringing up the example of those tribal communities that have no interaction with other collectives. But we must add that the absence of an interlocutor is still a relational condition with specific consequences that are to be considered during an analysis.

⁴⁵ CSEPELI 2023, 32.

⁴⁶ IMHOF 1992, 240.

⁴⁷ CSEPELI 2023, 39.

VIII. How to analyse the Gesamtgeist

As we have already discussed, Wundt's intuition was the application of qualitative-hermeneutic methods to the *Volk* in order to penetrate the depths of the *Gesamtgeist*. We retain that in order to consider all the aspects what we described before – encompassing the history, relationships, circumstances, peculiarities, the common ground of the still idiosyncratically and holistically structured individual meaning systems and cultural elements — adopting a systemic-immanent⁴⁸ approach is advantageous. Since this vision can consider the dialectic inter- and retroaction among the environmental-relational factors and the common ground between the idiosyncratically and holistically structured meaning systems, since this vision considers all the aforementioned factors as parts of one single system, and their inter- and retroaction as the development and progress of the system as a whole.⁴⁹ By applying this systemic-immanent approach the integrated structure of experiences⁵⁰ appears, and with it the *Volk*-specific *Gesamtgeist* reveals itself as well.

The application of the systemic-immanent approach requires the necessity to research those neuralgic points that the *Volk*-specific *Gesamtgeist* articulates around: These neuralgic points include delving into historic events regarding the subject *Volk*, its environmental factors and peculiarities, the anatomy of significant relations of the subject *Volk* with other *Völker*, and the material consequences of these. Additionally, it involves the examination of the reactions of the subject *Volk* to all these factors, their diffused way to interpret them, the logic of the language that shapes their intellectual structure, the narratives, cultural products, and values they adopted to survive, to develop, and meaningfully navigate reality in day to day life. Whithin the intersection of these the manifestation of the *Gesamtgeist* will be traceable.

⁴⁸ FINOCCHIARO 2009, 183.

⁴⁹ HEGEL 2018, 18–19.

⁵⁰ Experience = Event/Impulse + Interpretation

IX. Conclusion

In today's globalised and technologically advanced world the legitimacy of a research like this appears questionable. But empirical data shows that in many multicultural and multiethnic societies the difference of values and perspectives is still a source of tension, not rarely even the origin of conflict.

One of the authors of this paper has observed first-hand the implications of this in the social sphere of Padua in Northern Italy. To promote a deeper social, political, and relational understanding and to map further possibilities of cohesion, services, dialogue, and collaboration, intra or international they might be, an integrated approach and vast vision are necessary.

In this paper we reprised and revisited the original intuitions of Steinhil, Lazarus and Wundt in order to use them as a stepping stone for a planned future research, where the theory will presumably become more and more grounded in empiricism.

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