

Knowledge Production in Communist Hungary

The Case of Interwar Era Interpretations 1971-1983

by

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Submitted to

Central European University

Nationalism Studies Department

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts

Supervisors: Florian Bieber, András Kovács

Budapest, Hungary

2014

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Abstract

After the downfall of Stalinism in Hungary, the legitimacy of the Communist regime had to be restored. This work was carried out in a gradually softening intellectual atmosphere that was the consequence of the compromise-seeking attitude of both parties. My thesis discusses one result of this thaw: the change that occurred in the academic historical discussion concerning the interwar era during the period 1971-1983. The analysis shows first what political and institutional circumstances secured the framework of this new discourse. The second component of the research was concerned with the scholarly discussion in which fellows of the Academy participated with their publications. Clearly, there was a chronological logic in the opening up of certain historical topics during the years of liberalization, among which the interwar period was almost the last. The thesis discusses three important topics that were subject to research: the terminology concerning the political nature of the Horthy era, the evaluation of the social democratic party and the Hungarian-German relations. I claim that all these topics were bound to the Communist party's legitimacy that defined itself as opposed to the interwar political establishment since the party seized power. Moreover, the Communists' greatest political challenge, the 1956 revolution was interpreted as the recurrence of the condemned past. Although several taboos survived, the discursive change in the investigated period led to a more complex understanding of the Horthy era.

Acknowledgements

This thesis is a result of the longest research I ever had until now and I am very grateful for all who aided me in the course of this project. I had the chance to elaborate on my topic under the official supervision of Florian Bieber and András Kovács, I benefitted from our consultations greatly. I am equally thankful for Balázs Trencsényi, who found interest in this project very early, and oriented, encouraged me from the beginnings. The feedbacks of Mária M. Kovács and Szabolcs Pogonyi also contributed to the development of this project and they provided me kindly with recommendations when I applied for different grants to support this research. I had quite a few very inspiring consultations, expert interviews and informal conversations that helped me to polish this thesis therefore I would like to thank Nándor Bárdi, Stefano Bottoni, Stevo Đurašković, Gábor Gyáni, Karl Kaser, László Kontler, Jan Kubik, Josip Mihailović, James P. Niessen, Vladimir Petrović, Attila Pók and Marko Zubak for sharing their knowledge. My colleagues at the department provided me throughout the two years with a sparkling intellectual environment that stimulated me. I am happy to be part of this community, and grateful for all their questions and comments within or outside the classroom.

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List of abbreviations

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| ELTE | Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest, <i>Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem</i> |
| IH | Institute for History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, <i>Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézete</i> |
| IPH | Institute for Party History, <i>Párttörténeti Intézet</i> |
| HPC | Hungarian Communist Party, <i>Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja</i> |
| HSWP | Hungarian Socialist Workers Party, <i>Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt</i> |
| HSDP | Hungarian Social Democratic Party, <i>Magyarországi Szociáldemokrata Párt</i> |
| NSGWP | National Socialist German Workers' Party, <i>Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei</i> |

Introduction

Since the 1960s, Communist rule in Hungary gradually softened. In order to stabilize Communist rule after the 1956 revolution, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt, HSWP) sought for a social consensus: it offered relative wealth to a wide segment of the population ('Goulash-socialism') and limited pluralism in intellectual life. This offer had a definitive impact on historians dealing with sensitive questions of contemporary history. In this thesis, I aim at analyzing the changing academic interpretation of the interwar era in the historiography produced in Hungary throughout the 1970s and early 1980s.

As preceding period, the memory of the interwar period was an ambiguous and crucial one in Communist Hungary. Both Hungarian Communist regimes, that of Mátyás Rákosi and János Kádár, defined themselves as opposed to the right-wing interwar era. Therefore, the two decades of interwar Hungary had to be inserted into the new historical canon that was to be established. As I will show in this thesis, during the 1970s and early 1980s the descriptive concepts on the political-structural nature of interwar Hungary became more elaborate, more sophisticated, as opposed to the ideologically overloaded previous discourse, dictated almost exclusively by party historians. This new course opened the possibility to discuss certain topics that emerged concerning the interwar era in their dynamism, which was, as I argue, a major step towards mitigation of the ideological bias in the course of research.

Chapter 1. The main tenets of the research

1.1. Problematizing the interwar legacies

In Hungary, the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy joined with the disillusionment from the Great War led to the eruption of social and political tensions. As results of revolutions, two short-lived regimes emerged, first, a democratic, then a Soviet type republic. The latter became the most important point of reference of the pre-1945 history for the Communist regime in Hungary.¹ It lasted only 133 days and was overcome by a right-wing regime that defined itself as counterrevolutionary and which maintained unchallenged power until the Arrow Cross coup d'état, supported by Nazi Germany (October 15-16th 1944). As a result of the Paris Peace Treaties (Trianon, 1920), Hungary lost the two thirds of her territory and elevated the program of territorial revisionism to the primary goal of her governments. This position not only determined to a great extent the country's later participation in the Second World War as an ally of the Axis Powers, but influenced heavily the trajectories of Hungarian foreign affairs in the interwar period, that were bound to certain domestic affairs as well because of the German support of the radicalized wing of German minority in Hungary. The ultimate goal of revisionism, moreover, suggested the temporary being of the so-called 'Rump Hungary'. Yet, the Soviet sphere of interest conserved the borders without the possibility of contestation; therefore this dissonance could have been overlooked on the surface.

The fact that the Communist Party was banned in the interwar period and the very restricted nature of Hungarian armed resistance during World War II basically eliminated the opportunity of the illusion of continuity in the existence of the movement and the Communist

¹ A recent work that discusses the two revolutions together: Lajos Varga, "A forradalom konszolidációjának esélyei 1918-1919-ben [Chances for Consolidation of the Revolution in 1918-1919]," *Múltunk Politikátörténeti Folyóirat* 22, no. 3 (2010): 4–24.

party. The political setting and the representatives of Hungarian interwar mainstream completely paralyzed Communist activity on the level of publicity, but it was similarly difficult to argue for a permanent Communist presence regarding the underground movement. This political atmosphere makes it interesting to look at how non-Communist but leftist political actors of the interwar period were addressed in the emerging new narrative. Namely, Social Democrats, the most numerous non-communist entity of the political left remain condemned for their distinctness in the discussed period or, a form of rehabilitation was possible.

The only unquestionable moment of Communism in Hungary before the endgame of the Second World War was the 1919 Soviet Republic.² The “fabrication of legitimacy”³ was hindered by the twisted logics of taboo-making and taboo-releases, which cannot be described as two endpoints of a straight scale. It proved to be difficult to insert the memory of 1919 into the Communist canon: first and foremost because of the fast failure of the Soviet Republic (suggesting its insignificance in a historical view), secondly, because the Soviet Union was involved in the elimination of several leaders of the republic.⁴

Although legitimacy of Communist party rule was a key issue from the moment of its establishment, not all topics that could shed a positive light on the Party’s past were immediately utilized. Among others, the holocaust was a neglected topic up until the late

² Ignác Romsics, “Ungarische Geschichtsschreibung im 20. Jahrhundert - Tendenzen, Autoren, Werke. [Hungarian Historiography in the 20th century,” in *Nationale Geschichtskulturen - Bilanz, Ausstrahlung, Europabezogenheit. Beiträge des internationalen Symposions in der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz, vom. 30. September bis 2. Oktober 2004* [National Historical Cultures - Balance, Effect, Belonging to Europe. Contributions of the international Symposium of the Academy of Science and Literature in Mainz 30st September - 2nd October 2004], ed. Heinz Duchardt (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006), 195–219.

³ I use Péter Apor’s term here.

⁴ Pók in his article discusses three different approaches that emerged during the years of Communism: romantic class struggle that is dogmatist-nationalist at the same time (Aladár Mód), the one that destroys illusions and approaches from a pro-Habsburg angle (Péter Hanák) and one that concentrates on the preceding democratic revolution (György Litván, Péter Kende). In Attila Pók, “A Tanácsköztársaság helye a magyar történelemben [The Soviet republic’s place in the History of Hungary],” in *A haladás hitele. Progressió, bűnbakok, összeesküvők* [Credentials of Progression. Progression, Scapegoats, Conspirators], ed. Attila Pók (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2010), 107–18., 110.

1970s, which is to be explained in conjunction with the sociopolitical connotations of the interwar anti-Jewish discriminatory measures of the Hungarian state.⁵

1.2. Hypothesis

My chief concern is to understand the development of the Hungarian historiography concerning the discourse on the interwar period in the 1970s and the early 1980s. I supposed that the tautological Stalinist view about the political nature of the Horthy era changed seriously along with the softening of the Kádár regime. I based my assumption first and foremost on the compromise-seeking intelligentsia policies of the regime that allowed for scholars of other disciplines (e.g. sociologists) and for artists to address topics that were not discussed before.

The Stalinist view, that I claim to be contested in the 1970s, I discuss with a reflection on early Communist syntheses. This framework explained the entire interwar period from the aspect of its last stage, the Arrow Cross rule and the violent measures against Jews and Communists that resembled the atmosphere of the 1919 counterrevolutionary impeachments. Based on this logic, the entire Horthy era was approached as fascist, ultimate enemy of Communism.⁶ My analysis resulted indeed in the discovery of the departure from this paradigmatic thinking, discussing the political and institutional conditions of this discursive change.

⁵ “More subtly, the Communists consciously deemphasized the – in class struggle understanding - revolutionary nature of Nazi occupation, the fact that Eastern Europe's social revolution, completed under the Soviet aegis after 1947, was in fact begun by the Germans, sweeping away old elites, dispossessing a large segment of the (Jewish) urban bourgeoisie, and radically undermining faith in the rule of law. But the historical reality, that the true revolutionary caesura in modern Eastern European history came in 1939 and not 1945, could not be acknowledged.” In: Judt, Tony. Tony Judt, “The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Post-War Europe,” in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller and Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 100, <http://ebooks.cambridge.org/ref/id/CBO9780511491580A016>.

⁶ Péter Apor, “The Origins of Symmetry: A Micro-History of Birth of Communist Historiography in Hungary,” in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New Perspectives on the Postwar Period*, ed. Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, and E.A. Rees (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 265–83., 266.

In this thesis, I argue for the following: First, compared to the Stalinist period, historians of the advanced Kádár era had significant liberty, they were able and allowed to elaborate on a relatively sophisticated approach to several issues of the interwar period, such as the very nature of the Horthy-system, the role of the social democrats and the trajectories of Hungarian foreign affairs.

My second argument concerns the limitations and taboos, which derived from the still fragile legitimacy of the Kádár regime and the alliance of the socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Certain topics and issues just could not be talked about at all (several aspects of the peace treaty of Trianon, the ethnic Hungarian minorities outside of Hungary, the 1956 revolution). The existence of these taboos is most convincingly proven by the lack of publications in this period. Besides, other issues of 20th century history could be addressed only in a particular way (the 1918-1919 revolutions and the Hungarian Soviet Republic of 1919, the subsequent White terror, the end of World War II as liberation, etc.). Yet, as I aim to show, within these limitations, vivid and dynamic debates took place, sometimes even challenging the ‘rules of the game’. At the same time, old-fashioned Communist visions also survived.

Third, I will argue for the importance of institutions in the different ways of knowledge production. The flagship of the Hungarian historical scholarship, the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Magyar Tudományos Akadémia Történettudományi Intézet, IH) not only hired the best scholars in the country but it also enjoyed the most liberties. Thus, the most ambitious challenge to the Stalinist historiography emerged within the ranks of this institution. The other relevant centers of historical scholarship, the Institute of Party History (Párttörténeti Intézet, IPH) and the universities (among them the most important was the University of Budapest) were less ambitious and insisted more on Orthodox communist views for different reasons.

1.3. Methodology

The first set of methodological considerations derives from the intention to provide clear terminology. There are several notions, reoccurring in my text, that require clarification. The most important terminological issue is the usage of the terms socialist, state socialist and Communist. Throughout my thesis, I intend to refer to the reigning party in Hungary as Communist. This is, on the one hand, due to the fact that I put an emphasis on the ideological being of the discussed regime. On the other hand, I take into account the aspect suggested by Andrew Roberts:

My recommendation is that scholars of formerly communist countries refrain from referring to them as socialist or state socialist. Such usage stretches the concept of socialism too thin, turns communism into an empty category, and has negative consequences for existing democratic socialists.⁷

A further set of my methodological tenets is connected to the selection of sources. There are two initial restrictions regarding the investigated discourse. Firstly, I am interested only in the academic discourse. For the sake of this case study I concentrate on the most important academic journals, while being aware of relevant monographs as well. Both deliberate measures and unintended processes that led to the establishment of a scholarly less active and definitely more dogmatic historical attitude within the universities (most importantly, in Budapest), but this division will be introduced in detail later. Although I do not claim that non-scholarly works had no impact on the academic discourse, I exclude them entirely from this analysis.^{8,9} Similarly, my discourse analysis excludes the historical works that were produced by emigrant historians and by dissidents.

⁷ Andrew Roberts, "The State of Socialism: A Note on Terminology," *Slavic Review* 63, no. 2 (Summer 2004): 366.

⁸ A striking example is: György Száraz, *Egy előítélet nyomában [Tracing a Prejudice]* (Budapest: Gondolat, 1976). He coined the historical roots of antisemitism in Hungary and the Hungarian Jewish history in the first half of the 20th century. The book was written in a form of an essay, it does not claim any scholarly credentials. Historical scholarship did not approach directly the interwar events and the holocaust in detail before. The publication of this book signifies a starting point for such publications.

My second restriction concerning the source selection is my understanding of ‘historiography concerning the interwar period’; I would like to deal with Hungarian history starting from the legal establishment of the right-wing Horthy regime, to September 1, 1939, the outbreak of the Second World War. In the course of my research, it became clear that the discursive change regarding the preceding postwar regimes, the October Republic and the Soviet Republic occurred already in the 1960s, mainly based on the works of Tibor Hajdu, at that time fellow of the IPH, but later fellow of IH. Therefore I will only hint on these topics, where it is necessary.¹⁰

The last tenet is the establishment of limitations and exact aims of my research. My intended contribution to the literature of Communist knowledge production is twofold. First, I would like to point out several aspects of the systematic conditions of Hungarian historians. In this investigation, I can rely on a decent amount of literature that was mostly produced after the transition in 1989. These works usually concentrate on selected periods of the Communist years (the immediate postwar years, the Stalinist period, the Kádár era) or approach the situation of historians in the broader context of the intellectual sphere. However, I would like to go beyond a mere synthesis of the already existing body of literature and include primary sources when addressing institutional questions. I examined a few reports and policy papers that were issued by the Central Committee of the HSWP.

On the other hand, the investigation of published discourses about the interwar period in Hungary intends to shed light on the dynamics in changing narratives. As I argued above, I

⁹ In one of his articles, Attila Pók even argues, the boundary between professional and non-professional historians in Eastern Europe in the Communist period was rather blurred: Attila Pók, “Eastern European Historiography in the Twentieth Century,” in *Europa Und “Wir”. 10 Jahre Europa Institut Budapest [Europa and “Us”. 10 Years of the Europe Institute Budapest]*, ed. Ferenc Glatz, Schriftenreihe Des Europa Institutes Budapest 9 (Budapest: Europa Institut Budapest, 2000), 143–56.

¹⁰ Significant pieces of this discursive change are the following publications: Tibor Hajdu, *Károlyi Mihály* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1970); Tibor Hajdu, “Az 1918 októberi polgári demokratikus forradalom és a Tanácsköztársaság története kutatásának újabb eredményei [New Results of the Research Concerning the Democratic Revolution in October 1918 and the Soviet Republic],” *Századok* 103, no. 2–3 (1969): 287–305; Tibor Hajdu, *A magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság [The Hungarian Soviet Republic]* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1969).

incorporate only the output of members and fellows of the Academy here, disregarding the publications of scholars who were not in any affiliation with the institution that was appointed to represent the elite of research.¹¹ The time frame, 1971-1983, is defined by two seminal works, which were both authored by György Ránki, prominent historian since the early 1960s.¹² He was co-author of the first publication in Hungary, which coined the possibility to address the Hungarian interwar period in a less rigid way than the so-called Horthy fascism paradigm, the explanatory framework in usage.

The Horthy fascism paradigm was elevated to the level of political consensus after the publication of Erzsébet Andics' *Ellenforradalom és a bethleni konszolidáció* [Counterrevolution and the Bethlenian Consolidation] in 1946.¹³ This paradigm equated the interwar regimes of the previous Axis powers and discussed the 1920-1945 period as a monolith era that lacked any inner dynamics and was fascist from its beginning until its very end. The author applied the Marxist-Leninist explanatory framework, as she perceived it, to approach the nature of "Horthy fascism". Although this monolith approach was cautiously challenged, especially after the early 1960s, the breakthrough still did not occur. The possibility of new consensus crystallized at the beginning of the 1970s;¹⁴ in this evolution a crucial work was published as a chapter of a book that was also edited by Ránki in 1983. This

¹¹ György Péteri, "On the Legacy of State Socialism in Academia," *Minerva*, 33, no. 4 (December 1995): 305–24.

¹² György Ránki (1930-1988) was junior research fellow (1953-1957), then research fellow (1957-1960) at the IH. Shortly afterwards he became deputy director of the IH and took over the leadership de facto in 1986. He established important international relations of the institution (e.g. Institute of European History in Mainz, University of Indiana, Bloomington). He was active as a professor since 1964 at the University of Debrecen and also at Bloomington. He became ordinary member of the Hungarian Academy of Science in 1982. He was a great organizer and a renowned scholar worldwide, his name was the hallmark of the period when he was active at the IH.

¹³ Erzsébet Andics, *Ellenforradalom és a bethleni konszolidáció* [Counterrevolution and the Bethlenian Consolidation] (Budapest: Szikra, 1946).

¹⁴ Ignác Romsics, "Történetírásunk a két világháború közötti korszakról. 1918-1945 [Our Historical Scholarship on the Interwar Period 1918-1945]," *Századok* 114, no. 3 (1980): 440–65.

chapter – a piece written by Ránki - attacked explicitly the rigidity of the previously mentioned paradigm.¹⁵

Determined by the aspects above, the body of the literature I most extensively analyzed from the period 1971-1983 constituted of the most important historical journals and other academic publications. The chosen journals were either issued by the IH or had mostly fellows of the Academy as contributors and were renowned abroad. This restriction means the inclusion of articles from the following journals: *Századok* [Centuries], published by the Hungarian Historical Association and *Történelmi Szemle* [Historical Review], published by the IH itself.¹⁶

I was looking for popular topics that emerged concerning the interwar period. The results allowed me to identify the important directions of discussion. The fact that I concentrate strictly on the above mentioned aspects underlines the most important limitation of this research: I only ventured to detect features of the elite historical discourse in a given period, therefore my results will tell nothing of the historical consciousness of wider segments of society (not even the intelligentsia).

1.4. Structure of the thesis

After a methodological introduction and the discussion of the relevant topical issues of the existing scholarly literature (Chapter 1), I introduce step by step the conditions under which the investigated historical narrative was produced. In Chapter 2, I present the institutional setting, which requires not only a brief account on the interwar institutions, but both the discussion of the changes in the short democratic period 1945-1947 and the results of

¹⁵ György Ránki, “A vonakodó csatlós - vagy az utolsó csatlós? A német-magyar kapcsolatok néhány problémája, 1933-1944 [The Reluctant Ally or the Last Ally? Some problems of the German-Hungarian Relations 1933-1944],” in *Mozgásterek, kényszerpályák. Válogatott tanulmányok [Margins, Trajectories. Selected essays]*, ed. György Ránki (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1983), 475–524.

¹⁶ The Hungarian Academy of Sciences published further, more specific historical journals like the Military History Review or the Agrarian History review which are not addressed in my investigation.

Sovietization of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. Certain dynamics that I refer to (e.g. the imagined role of historians in the society and their interdependence with power centers) can only be interpreted in the *long durée* context. The chapter pays special attention to the redefinition of the role of universities and of the Academy. An equally important aspect is the scale and importance of international cooperation of the Academy, since both institutionalized and informal international partnership brings the researcher closer to comprehend the presence of intra-bloc and international (trans-iron curtain) intellectual input.

In order to become sensitive of the narrative changes, Chapter 3 contains the analysis of the syntheses (limited to the interwar period) produced in the Kádár era. These books aid me in displaying the master narrative of their times. Such ventures represent the clearest attempt of the Communist regime to rewrite, re-interpret and sterilize the past to a certain extent.¹⁷

Chapter 4 contains the analysis concerning the three topics through which I intend to display the discursive changes in details: the discussion about the political nature of the Horthy era, the performance of social democrats in the interwar period and the Hungarian-German relations with regard to diplomacy and the state allegiance of the German minority in Hungary.

1.5. Literature review

In this section, I intend to give a brief account on topical issues that are vital for my thesis. The review centers around two wider topics: the Stalinist developments of the Academy in conjunction with broader elite developments and historiography in Hungary.

¹⁷ Frank Hadler and Attila Pók, “‘A Daily Working Group Together in One House’: Research Institutes at the National Academies of Sciences in East Central Europe,” in *Setting the Standards. Institutions, Networks and Communities of National Historiography*, ed. Ilaria Porciani and Jo Tollebeek, Writing the Nation Series 2 (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 183–201.

1.5.1. Elite developments after the Second World War (with an emphasis on the Academy)

In order to make an analysis of historiographical output of the 1970s and the early 1980s, one should be aware of continuities and discontinuities in the ranks of historians whom I classify as a small segment of the elites. My investigation here is supported by literature that comes from two different approaches: one that genuinely scrutinizes elites, together with the middle class¹⁸ and one which allows me to delineate academicians.

The interwar period can be depicted as a dominantly authoritarian-conservative era in Hungary. Social mobility rates were rather low; elites (political, academic, etc.) remained narrow strata whose overwhelming majority supported the respective ruling regimes. The aftermath of the Second World War brought the general downfall of these elites and favored usually the politically committed when redistributing high positions and redefining statuses. There was a short interim period between 1945 and 1949 when only Communist dominance rather than overt rule was present.

Communist and other leftist thinkers were marginalized during the interwar period in the public sphere, in extreme cases, they were even exposed to political witch hunts and, in the case of Communists, party formation was impossible. This would strongly suggest that a revenge-like total clearance of elites, encompassing historians, could have easily taken place when the Communist takeover occurred. However, sociological and historical studies argue otherwise. It is not only the personal composition, but educational background can also be an important factor when analyzing pre- and post-Second World War elites. In this regard, there is little change in the Stalinist period in the Southeastern European context, as Sterbling argues. He also suggests that generational changes should be taken into account, when trying

¹⁸ Holm Sundhaussen, "Eliten, Bürgertum, politische Klasse? Anmerkungen zu den Oberschichten in den Balkanländern des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts [Elites, Bourgeoisie, Political Class? Notes on the Upper Strata in the Balkan Countries in the 19th and 20th Century]," in *Eliten in Südosteuropa. Rolle, Kontinuitäten, Brüche in Geschichte und Gegenwart [Elites in Southeastern Europe. Roles, Continuities, Turnabouts in History and Present]*, ed. Holm Sundhaussen and Wolfgang Höpken (München: Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft, 1998), 5–30.

to establish numbers about the presence of ‘bourgeois scholars’ at the post-Second World War Academy.¹⁹

Péteri argues conversely, when claiming that 1949 shows the momentum in the light of academic appointments when Communists gained complete political monopoly. However, he also draws attention to the rejuvenation of the fellows of the Academy. He points to the discrepancy between the pro-social sciences (economics, above all) rhetoric that is emphasized, as opposed to the dominance of humanities while at the practical level, humanities were rather reinforced.²⁰ Péteri observes similar tendencies concerning universities. He concentrates on the violation of autonomy, while claiming that the idea of the university is time-bound and accordingly a changing concept and that after de-Stalinization, universities regained much space for action. The conclusion of this latter article, however, is a step back from the previous one when admitting that the creation of a new elite from scratch was simply impossible.²¹ Gyáni shares the same observation when he refers to Hungarian historical scholarship as one that was “no hostage to proletarian dictatorship and socialist realism”.²² This practical approach is the closest to my idea about the connection between Communist politics of science, structural conditions and personal composition of historians who did belong in some way to the Academy.

Regarding the status of universities, a chapter of Grüttner proved to be most beneficial. It reflects on the implementation of Soviet model throughout the Eastern bloc and

¹⁹ Anton Sterbling, *Intellektuelle, Eliten, Institutionenwandel. Untersuchungen zu Rumänien und Südosteuropa* [Intellectuals, Elites, Institutional Change. Examinations concerning Rumania and Southeastern Europe] (Hamburg: Krämer, 2001), 37.

²⁰ György Péteri, “Academic Elite into Scientific Cadres: A Statistical Contribution to the History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1945–49*,” *Soviet Studies* 43, no. 2 (January 1991): 281–99, doi:10.1080/09668139108411926.

²¹ György Péteri, “Die kommunistische Idee der Universität - ein von den Erfahrungen Ungarns inspirierter Essay [The Communist Idea of University - an Essay Inspired by the Hungarian Experience],” in *Zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung: Universitäten in den Diktaturen des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Between Autonomy and Adjustment- Universities in the Dictatorships of the 20th Century], ed. John Connelly and Michael Grüttner (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 129–55.

²² Gábor Gyáni, “Történetírásunk metszetekben [Our Historiography in Etchings],” in *Történelemszövegszövegek* [Discourses of Historians], ed. Gábor Gyáni, *A múlt ösvényén* [On the Path of the Past] (Budapest: L'Harmattan, 2002), 39.

the consequences of the strict separation from Academy. He identifies five means of exercising control, holding that certain local variations existed: orienting the research and the curricula, initial cleansing of professors and students – later the control of recruitment, attack on different attributes of autonomy and limitation of international relations.²³

1.5.2. Historiography in Hungary

Several works have been already published about the general tendencies of historiography, however, post-Communist historical scholarships are not really keen on the self-reflection, when it comes to the scholarly work before the transitions. I discuss those publications that provided me with certain preconceptions regarding the discourses or gave beneficial insight to the institutional setting of historical scholarship.

There is a valuable work on Hungarian historical scholarship, written by Holger Fischer, a West German historian and Hungarologist. His volume was published in 1982 as part of the series *Untersuchungen zur Gegenwart Südosteuropas* (Inquiries of the Present of Southeastern Europe) and gives a sensitive analysis on the relationship of Academy and Party committees regarding the political expectations and the reality of historical scholarship – to the extent it was possible for him as an external observer. Fischer distinguishes sub-periods in the Academy's work under Communism, finishing his analysis by 1979. He claims that the ongoing period started around 1970, after serious climate and policy changes which started to occur already in 1968 and 1969 and refers here exhaustingly to primary sources (e.g. party directives and commission reports). He displays intimate knowledge on the output of individual historians both regarding monographs and scholarly articles. The author also constructed several figures in which he presents useful interrelations, like the proportionality

²³ Michael Grüttner, "Schlussüberlegungen: Universität und Diktatur [Concluding Thoughts: University and Dictatorship]," in *Zwischen Autonomie und Anpassung: Universitäten in den Diktaturen des 20. Jahrhunderts* [Between Autonomy and Adjustment- Universities in the Dictatorships of the 20th Century], ed. John Connelly and Michael Grüttner (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003), 265–76. 265-266.

of publications regarding the discussed periods or the number of historians who dealt with certain historical eras.²⁴

The latest comprehensive publication on the history of Hungarian historiography is delivered by Ignác Romsics, who is among the internationally well-known Hungarian historians of our days. His book, which has a strong emphasis on the developments of the 20th century, gives a valuable insight into the everyday life of the IH, reflecting shortly on the dominant historical trends as well. He does not include historical works that are done by non-professional historians.²⁵ There is only one similar venture to Romsics' with such a broad time scope in the post-transition Hungarian literature, that of Péter Gunst. However, it is less rich in data and the interpretation is rather static. His book is written in an essay-ish style, therefore it is poorly referenced. Gunst does not deal with scholars who were alive when he conducted his research (year of publication: 1995), consequently, the section about the Communist period is relatively short and is treated regardless its inner dynamics.²⁶

In the course of contemplating my bibliography, I found scattered examples of topic-specific investigations concerning the historiography of the interwar period. The issue of the 1919 Hungarian Soviet republic seems to be the most popular. Attila Pók analyzes different interpretations of the 1919 Soviet republic in Hungary. From the Communist period, he presents two diverging alternatives that are important for me to understand the shifts in legitimacy approaches and politics of history of the party.²⁷ Furthermore, Péter Apor started to

²⁴ Holger Fischer, *Politik Und Geschichtswissenschaft in Ungarn: Die Ungarische Geschichte von 1918 Bis Zur Gegenwart in Der Historiographie Seit 1956*, Untersuchungen Zur Gegenwartskunde Südosteuropas, Bd. 19 (München: R. Oldenbourg, 1982).

²⁵ Ignác Romsics, *Clio Bűvöletében: Magyar Történetírás a 19-20. Században--Nemzetközi Kitekintéssel [Under Clio's Spell: Hungarian Historiography in the 19-20th Centuries - with an International Outlook]* (Budapest: Osiris, 2011).

²⁶ Péter Gunst, *A magyar történetírás története [History of Hungarian Historiography]* (Debrecen: Csokonai, 2000).

²⁷ Pók, "A Tanácsköztársaság helye a magyar történelemben [The Soviet republic's place in the History of Hungary]."

publish extensively on the subject of incorporating the Soviet Republic into the post-1956 Communist historical remembrance, including his PhD dissertation.²⁸

There have been only few attempts taken to characterize the international embeddedness of the Hungarian historical scholarship. One of the aspects of such investigation is the physical presence at conferences abroad. The strongest stance in this regard is taken by Attila Pók, when he claims that in the softening Kádár regime "[t]he frequent appearances of Hungarian historians at conferences abroad, the numerous international congresses, symposium and other meetings in Hungary clearly demonstrated the openness of the system."²⁹ This subject is touched upon by Romsics as well with less clarity³⁰ but all in all, this is a rather neglected aspect of Hungarian historical scholarship of the post 1956 era up until today. Among the few works, Klimó's article has a narrower scope, this piece deals with the two school-building duos of Hungarian historians in the 20th century with international reputation, namely the works written by Bálint Hóman and Gyula Szekfű on the one hand and by György Ránki and Iván T. Berend on the other. The latter one is important regarding my thesis.³¹

The existing literature on the output of Hungarian historians of the 1970s answers several important questions while others are raised or left without answers. Regarding my most important need here, namely, to be able to clarify political and structural conditions

²⁸ Péter Apor, "A hitelesség fabrikálása. Az 1919 és 1956 közötti történeti folytonosság megformálása [Fabrication of credibility. Construction of the historical continuity between 1919 and 1956]," *Aetas* 25, no. 3 (2010): 67–95. His dissertation: Péter Apor, "Fabricating Authenticity: 1919 and the Hungarian Communists between 1949 and 1959" (PhD Dissertation, European University Institute, Florence, 2009).

²⁹ Attila Pók, "Scholarly and Non-Scholarly Functions of Historical Research Institutes," in *History-Making. The Intellectual and Social Formation of a Discipline. Proceedings of an International Conference, Uppsala, September 1994*, ed. Rolf Torstendahl and Irmline Veit-Brause, Konferenser 37 (Stockholm: Kungl. Vitterhets Historie och Antikvitets Akademien, 1996), 172.

³⁰ Romsics, *Clio Bűvöletében*.

³¹ Árpád Klimó, "Transnationale Perspektiven in der ungarischen Geschichtsschreibung des 20. Jahrhunderts. Von 'Hóman-Szekfű' bis 'Ránki-Berend' [Transnational Perspectives of Hungarian Historiography in the 20th Century. From 'Hóman-Szekfű' to 'Ránki-Berend']," in *Nationale Geschichtskulturen - Bilanz, Ausstrahlung, Europabezogenheit. Beiträge des internationalen Symposions in der Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Mainz, vom. 30. September bis 2. Oktober 2004 [National Historical Cultures - Balance, Effect, Belonging to Europe. Contributions of the international Symposium of the Academy of Science and Literature in Mainz 30st September - 2nd October 2004]*, ed. Heinz Duchardt (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2006), 221–40.

under which scholars have worked, this literature is more than exhaustive. However, topic-specific investigations or the comparative evaluation of Hungarian international presence seems to be missing. It would be an undertaking too great to fill such a gap. I only wish to contribute in a small scale to the better understanding of several aspects.

Chapter 2. The institutional setting

2.1. The Hungarian Academy of Sciences, 1825-1945

The Hungarian Academy of Sciences was established in 1825 and started to function in 1830. The Academy was built up initially of more or less independently running departments, but in the second half of the 19th century, the institution became gradually centralized. From 1869, it had three divisions: Linguistics and Aesthetics; History, Philosophy and Social Sciences and Mathematics and Natural Sciences.³² The devastating consequences of the Great War did not leave the Academy intact: the trust funds which helped to sustain the institution became close to worthless because of the hyperinflation that made the entire economy almost bankrupt. The intermezzo of the Soviet Republic theoretically concerned the ranks of the Academy as well but due to the rapid change of regimes, no long lasting modification took place.³³

After the territorial losses and becoming the militarily weakest state in the region, the Hungarian state proclaimed the issue of culture, science and higher education to be the most important fields where Hungary can and should prove her excellence. Accordingly, the share of these sectors grew significantly from the governmental budget. This ‘golden age’ of Hungarian culture politics largely overlapped with Count Kunó Klebelsberg’s office (1922-

³² József Kardos, “A Magyar Tudományos Akadémia autonómiája (1827-1949) [Autonomy of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (1827-1949)],” *Múltunk Politikatörténeti Folyóirat* 55, no. 1 (2010): 28–35.

³³ Andor Ladányi, “A Magyar Tanácsköztársaság tudománypolitikájáról [About Science Policy of the Hungarian Soviet Republic],” *Magyar Tudomány* 12, no. 3 (1979): 171–84.

1931) as minister of religion and education,³⁴ and his successor in office, Bálint Hóman (1932-1938, 1939-1942)³⁵ followed the path that he appointed.

Because of the territorial losses, two additional prewar Hungarian universities moved to Hungary, increasing the number of places at universities, which could indicate that these institutions, being provided with funding for further constructions and to the modernization of their facilities, offered social mobility for all segments of society on a larger scale than before. Indeed, the net of higher educational institutions became denser, but with the introduction of the *numerus clausus* (“closed number”) the government legally excluded the vast majority of Jewish applicants from the ranks of higher education.³⁶

2.1.1. The short democratic period, 1945-1947

History repeated herself, when, once again in 1945, the Academy faced the loss of the source of her incomes after a cataclysm. The land reform that took place in postwar Hungary concerned among others the large estates that were assigned to the Academy to cover her expenses in the aftermath of the Great War. This resulted again in economic dependence on the state’s grace, which severely influenced the state-Academy relationship and the relations among the members of the Academy. The conflict was exacerbated along both economic and self-perception issues, the latter addressing the role of members of the Academy in the actual

³⁴ Count Kunó Klebelsberg (1875-1932) held several governmental posts after embarking on the position of minister of religion and education. He engaged in various issues of science politics: he helped to create Collegium Hungaricum in several Western European capitals and cities to provide Hungarian students and scholars with the opportunity of institutionalized abroad research or studies. Similarly, he took care of the rationalization of the most important Hungarian institutions that had an interest in collecting: e.g. the Magyar Országos Levéltár (Hungarian National Archives), Országos Széchényi Könyvtár (National Széchényi Library), Magyar Nemzeti Múzeum (Hungarian National Museum), etc.

³⁵ Bálint Hóman (1885-1951) was appointed twice to minister of religion and education. He succeeded in securing an even greater share for the aims of cultural politics than his predecessor. He concentrated especially on accommodating students of disadvantageous social background.

³⁶ This act is infamous of being the first antisemitic act that was issued after the First World War. Although a fair portion of the students could dodge this legal boundary by applying abroad universities, the discriminatory feature or and the grievances it caused is not to be mitigated. The amendment of the law in 1928 was a mere gesture to the League of Nations and sustained the discriminatory measures, although the eligibility to admission were modified. Recently on this topic see: Mária Kovács M., *Törvénytől Sújtva: A Numerus Clausus Magyarországon, 1920-1945* (Budapest: Napvilág, 2012).

shaping of the politics of science. Although the parties agreed upon the necessity of reforms, the conservative reformers (overwhelming majority from humanities and social sciences) and the radical reformers (natural scientists) were unable to reach a common agenda. Moreover, natural scientists, led by the later Nobel-prize winning chemist Albert Szent-Györgyi, cherished Saint-Simonian dreams and truly believed that cooperation with a (not yet reigning) Communist regime was desirable and beneficial for its fellows.³⁷ This strife led almost to the permanent partition of the Academy.³⁸

2.1.2. Sovietization of the academic sphere

After the Communist Party seized power in 1948, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was among the institutions that were deprived of their previous autonomies. The institutional changes, that started to take place immediately, determined the setting for the entire Communist period. The mission of the Academy was redefined: following the Soviet template, the Academy was appointed to be the only organization to conduct research and to perform as the elite of science.³⁹ This decision was supported both by ideological and economic arguments, namely, the idea of concentration of resources.⁴⁰ Building upon the short-lived Teleki Institute that functioned as a research institute with a regional focus (established in 1941), in 1949 the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences was established, as the flagship of historical research in Hungary.

This strong stance on the side of research, in the spirit of the Soviet model, strongly divided of the spheres of the Academy and that of the universities. Universities were

³⁷ His hopes faded early after the Communist takeover and he continued his research in emigration.

³⁸ György Péteri, “Scientists versus Scholars’: The Prelude to Communist Takeover in Hungarian Science, 1945-1947,” *Minerva* 31, no. 3 (September 1993): 291–325.

³⁹ About the obsession with the Soviet model in reorganizing higher education and scholarship: John Connelly, “Stalinismus Und Hochschulpolitik in Ostmitteleuropa Nach 1945 [Stalinism and College Politics in Eastern Europe after 1945],” *Geschichte Und Gesellschaft* 24, no. 1 (March 1998): 5–23.

⁴⁰ Péteri, “On the Legacy of State Socialism in Academia,” 310.

dedicated strictly to secure the recruitment of the elite, partially the staff of the Academy.⁴¹ The management of the post-1948 Academy resembled the method of coordinating an enterprise, which was strengthened by five year plans and other clear quantitative expectations that were assigned by different party commissions. The controversies of such science policy are well displayed in György Kövér's chapter that discusses several aspects of the first five year plan of the Hungarian historical scholarship:

Let's imagine Hungarian historical scholarship as a model of two-sector economy, where economic history represents the means of production (sector A) and consumer goods (sector B) are equivalent with politics of history and ideology. The sectors are benefitted from funding according to the accentuation given by the designer. Since no one is in the position to review all the alternatives, especially if access to information is to a large extent restricted, each and every authorized designer is bound to enforce their own value aspects - of course, in the name of the community – on the community.⁴²

Regarding personal composition, the staff of the Academy went through significant changes as compared to the interwar situation. The first major change was the direct consequence of the war, namely, the general drop in the number of Jewish scholars. Some fell victim to the holocaust, others, being dislocated or spared in Hungary, left the country. Several non-Jewish Hungarian scholars had chosen the same path and left before the closing of the borders, hoping for a better life and career opportunities or fleeing from political impeachment. On the other hand, after 1948, the newly established regimes made a remarkable amount of arbitrary personal decisions for the sake of ideological purification amidst the ranks of the Academy. The aim was to remove bourgeois scholars from the peaks of science, although this principle was followed only to a limited extent.⁴³ Naturally, it would have been impossible to create

⁴¹ Grüttner, "Schlussüberlegungen: Universität und Diktatur [Concluding Thoughts: University and Dictatorship]," 265.

⁴² György Kövér, "A magyar tudomány első ötéves terve és a gazdaságtörténet-írás [The First Five-Year Plan of Hungarian Science and the Writing of Economic History]," in *Tudomány és ideológia között. Tanulmányok az 1945 utáni magyar történetírásról [Between Science and Ideology. Essays about the post-1945 Hungarian Historiography]* (Budapest: ELTE Eötvös Kiadó, 2012), 26.

⁴³ About the most remarkable changes see: Árpád Klimó, "The Sovietization of Hungarian Historiography. Attempts, Failures and Modifications in the Early 1950s," in *The Sovietization of Eastern Europe. New*

new scholarly elite from scratch. This pragmatic stance kept the regime from getting rid of all the “ideologically unreliable” or “class enemy” scholars. Even the dismissals proved to be temporary in several cases.⁴⁴ The system softened further after the delayed retaliations that followed the 1956 revolutions. Intellectual pluralism dynamically emerged within the IH from the early 1960s.⁴⁵

There was a second division between the Academy and the universities, which was an informal one but was of great importance. Especially in the Kádár era, the Academy became a shelter for those scholars who were either removed from their previous university position or simply banned from teaching. Importantly, they were allowed to conduct research and got access to sources. Occasionally they even got the chance to publish in the journals of the Academy and to travel abroad. Behind this policy, one can recognize the pragmatic considerations of the regime: “ideologically unreliable” persons were under the close supervision of their colleagues and their dissent thoughts, if ever written, were only distributed among a closed circle of scholars.⁴⁶

University, being a bastion of cadre recruitment had to be protected from dissent thought. Still, universities and colleges were seen as potential threats to the system, because reform movements within the socialist camp (Prague, Belgrade, Zagreb, etc.) usually crystallized around universities.⁴⁷ In Hungary, historical education was available at the following universities: Loránd Eötvös University of Budapest (ELTE), József Attila University (Szeged), Kossuth Lajos University (Debrecen), Karl Marx University of

Perspectives on the Postwar Period, ed. Balázs Apor, Péter Apor, and E.A. Rees (Washington DC: New Academia Publishing, 2008), 239–48. 245.

⁴⁴ The case of Domokos Kosáry, renowned researcher of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy was exemplary. He was sentenced to four years of prison, he spent at the end two years in there (1958-1960). He was clearly sidelined even after his readmission to the Academy. Still, Kosáry's expertise and moral authority were ever acknowledged and praised by his colleagues.

⁴⁵ This was not the least due to the generous hiring policy of Erik Molnár, head of the Institute (1956-1966).

⁴⁶ Hadler and Pók, “‘A Daily Working Group Together in One House’: Research Institutes at the National Academies of Sciences in East Central Europe,” 193.

⁴⁷ Péteri, “Die kommunistische Idee der Universität - ein von den Erfahrungen Ungarns inspirierter Essay [The Communist Idea of University - an Essay Inspired by the Hungarian Experience],” 154.

Economics (Budapest), Pedagogical College of Eger, Pedagogical College of Nyíregyháza, Pedagogical College of Pécs (part of the University of Pécs since 1982) and Pedagogical College Szeged, ELTE being the most important among them.

It was not by accident, that holding both a cathedra and a position in the Academy was so strongly discouraged, that only few examples can be cited from the entire period. It was still easier to teach at provincial universities or at Karl Marx University, while being academic fellows, as the case of György Ránki shows (he taught in Debrecen). There was only one historian, Péter Hanák (1921-97), who managed to teach at the most prestigious ELTE and to hold a position in the IH at the same time.⁴⁸

Historical institutes at the respective universities were assigned to write textbooks both for their own students and for secondary schools, being responsible for “spreading the new achievements of historical scholarship.” This extra task was demanding in terms of working capacity which contributed to the fact that professors were easier to hold back from engaging in actual contribution to the above mentioned new achievements. The separation policy regarding the Academy and the university was significantly backed by this measure, although assertive professors seemed to manage their individual research as well.⁴⁹ Notably, serious differences were displayed in the quality of research carried out in the universities and in the IH. As a general tendency, members of the Academy had better foreign language skills, a fact which was partially due to the language courses that were organized for the IH fellows only. It goes without saying that university professors rarely published anything that overcame dogmatism, along with the publications of IPH that was established as early as 1948.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ The here discussed measures and consequently, the new features of the university were present in their completeness at ELTE. Provincial universities and the Karl Marx University hosted several important research projects, but this had never determined primarily their profile.

⁴⁹ Fischer, *Politik Und Geschichtswissenschaft in Ungarn*, 27.

⁵⁰ The last historical moment when professors and lower-ranked university staff took a critical stance was during the 1956 revolution. Gábor Gyáni, *The Institute for History after 1956*, April 25, 2014.

Another symptom of the separation of university and Academy was that the establishment of a school around one professor seldom occurred.⁵¹

2.2. The new political context: Melting dictatorship

The 1956 revolution signifies a turning point in the history of Communist dictatorship in Hungary. Important personal and political changes were initiated, although not immediately. Following the failure of the revolutionary government of the reform communist Imre Nagy, restoration of a pro-Eastern bloc rule was carried out, with the active involvement of the Soviet army. However, it was impossible both to return to rigid Stalinist politics and to continue the liberalization that characterized Imre Nagy's political career in its full extent. The new first secretary, János Kádár, had to construct new means of control.⁵²

The new course condemned the 1956 revolution in its totality, labeling it counterrevolution and the participants of the uprising as fascists. With this discursive act, the party attempted to link the history of the genesis of the Horthy regime – the white terror, most importantly, that followed the downfall of the Soviet republic – to the events of the revolution. The official interpretation claimed that the counterrevolution was an attempt of the old elites to eliminate the achievements of the Communist state.⁵³ This wording helps me to argue for the great importance of the debates that I analyze above.

Among other elements of the system, there was no return to the same type of party politics regarding intellectuals. Because of their deep involvement in the 1956 events, writers could no longer function as a distinct group of intelligentsia with whom the regime

⁵¹ Klimó, "Transnationale Perspektiven in der ungarischen Geschichtsschreibung des 20. Jahrhunderts. Von 'Hóman-Szekfü' bis 'Ránki-Berend' [Transnational Perspectives of Hungarian Historiography in the 20th Century. From 'Hóman-Szekfü' to 'Ránki-Berend'].", 215.

⁵² Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században [History of Hungary in the 20th Century]* (Budapest: Osiris, 2010). 397-520.

⁵³ Apor, "A hitelesség fabrikálása. Az 1919 és 1956 közötti történeti folytonosság megformálása [Fabrication of credibility. Construction of the historical continuity between 1919 and 1956].", 67.

maintained exceptionally good ties.⁵⁴ The impeachments affected other intellectual circles as well, sometimes even years after the revolution. Though at the beginning of the 1960s, a gradual opening was to be observed and the mutual need for a new power balance resulted in a more relaxed relationship between the party and the intelligentsia, including historians.⁵⁵

2.2.1. Institutional presence and control of the party in the field of historical research

In the 70s, already a clear expectation existed towards historians: they were supposed to present solutions and answers about ideological questions that could possibly emerge concerning party issues.⁵⁶ Although the IH gained a fair portion of autonomy, it was still subject to five year plans⁵⁷ and other, occasional requests, which arrived from party bodies. Most active in this manner were the Agitation and Propaganda Committee and the Political Committee of the HSWP [Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt Agitációs- és Propaganda Bizottsága, Politikai Bizottsága]. Several lesser bodies that dealt with science politics and the Cultural Committee were involved occasionally as well. Besides assignments, policy statements were also issued. The communication between the IH and these organs was officially the job of the secretary of the party of the institute. However, the scholarly literature has not yet produced a comprehensive publication on these mechanisms and it would be beyond the scope of this thesis to map them in more detail.

Regarding the actual output of the IH, usually the heads of the departments exercised control over the materials to be printed. Just as in other fields of publication, although the state remained formally the main actor, it tried to keep the control indirect and distribute the

⁵⁴ Melinda Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány: a kora kádárizmus ideológiája [Food and Dowry: Ideology of the Early Kádár Era]* (Budapest: Magvető, 1998), 168.

⁵⁵ This policy was often equated with the persona of György Aczél (1917-1991). After the 1956 revolution, he gradually gained the post of main party ideologue and head of cultural politics.

⁵⁶ Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány*, 173.

⁵⁷ Kövér, "A magyar tudomány első öt éves terve és a gazdaságtörténet-írás [The First Five-Year Plan of Hungarian Science and the Writing of Economic History]."

responsibility to the local heads of editorial boards.⁵⁸ This practice must have functioned very well in the 1970s, since the worst case scenario – the withdrawal of a work after it became available for the public – occurred very rarely.

2.3. International relations of the Academy 1971-1983

Gradual opening towards international exchange was an important feature of the discussed period, comparing it to the extent of isolation that characterized the Rákosi era and the immediate aftermath of the 1956 revolution. The development of international relations relied heavily on foreign language skills and personal ambitions and connections. Learning foreign languages was increasingly encouraged within the IH and after organizing regular courses for the fellows exclusively (English, German, French), it became rather an expectation to familiarize oneself with at least one Western language. Conference participation became at least partially dependent on language knowledge. The fact that the Communist party became increasingly interested in enhancing the Academy's international relations is quite clear from the fact that reports were made about measurable achievements in this field starting from the early 1970s, which was not its concern before.

The HSWP Central Committee Agitation and Propaganda Committee published a resolution concerning the international embeddedness of the scholars at the Academy. According to a party report of 1972, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences had established relations with 13 socialist, 11 capitalist and 21 developing countries. Concerning the nature of the international relations, the authors of the documents claim that the main forms of cooperation lay in “exchange of publications, trading licenses and know-how-s, occasionally common scholarly events and – most importantly – short and long-term research trips.”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Kalmár, *Ennivaló és hozomány*, 147.

⁵⁹ Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt et al., *A Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt határozatai és dokumentumai, 1971-1975* ([Budapest]: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1978). 641.

The resolution points out that in 1972, 15872 scholars travelled abroad either to conduct research or to participate at conferences from the entire staff of the Academy. However, the authors maliciously noted that there were certain scholars who only wished to visit capitalist countries. On the other hand, the opportunities were multiplying fast to the capitalist countries and usually allowed scholars to stay longer than in the socialist countries.⁶⁰ Despite this tendency, the possibility of crossing the iron curtain was not open to everyone.⁶¹ Only ‘ideologically stable’ scholars were able to travel to the West, the opportunity was often accompanied by the assignment to report on fellow researchers. Still, every time a scholar left to such a trip, there was a risk that he or she would stay abroad. The tendency of growing opportunities, which is described in the resolution above, continued in the period that I discuss. It was of crucial importance that amidst the gradual loosening of ideological ties, Hungarian scholars were able to have less politically loaded discussions with their foreign colleagues. In this manner, Hungarian scholars were among popular conference participants in the West, because representatives of other bloc countries – e.g. Bulgaria – were to a lesser extent keen to take less politicized stances.

Besides the widening international relations with the Western bloc, the institutionalized forms of scholarly exchange existed with the bloc countries as well in the Kádár era. The most visible system of cooperation was the establishment of mixed historical committees. As a somewhat exceptional case, Yugoslav historians were also included in this project, although only since the late 1970s. About the mutual visits and conferences – most important elements of these relations-, the *Századok* published regular reports.⁶² Despite the

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Gábor Gyáni, “Történetíró a diktatúra korában. Ránki György élete és munkássága [Historian in the Times of Dictatorship. Life and Work of György Ránki],” in *A felhalmozás míve. Történeti tanulmányok Kövér György tiszteletére [The Work of Cumulation. Essays in the Honor of György Kövér]*, ed. Károly Halmos et al. (Budapest: Századvég, 2009), 539–51.

⁶² See for example: Emil Niederhauser, “A Magyar-Csehszlovák Történész Vegyesbizottság 10. ülészaka, 1972. december 6-9 [10th Session of the Hungarian-Czechoslovak Mixed Committee of Historians, December 6-9th 1972],” *Századok* 106, no. 6 (1972): 1469–73 and Éva Madaras, “A Magyar-Német Történész Vegyesbizottság

apparently continuous collaboration, significant co-authored books or scholarly articles did not result from it. The real cooperation was hindered by certain tabooized topics concerning the neighboring bloc countries, being unable to address historical or present grievances (e.g. minority question).⁶³

budapesti üléséről [About the Session of Hungarian-German Mixed Committee of Historians in Budapest],” *Századok* 107, no. 1 (1973): 217–22.

⁶³ Gyáni, *The Institute for History after 1956*.

Chapter 3. Historical syntheses of the Kádár era

The evaluation of the Horthy regime reached the lowest level in Stalinist times, insisting on the earlier discussed Horthy fascism paradigm. This was also a symptom of the intellectual climate that was allowed to express opinion only in a heavily polarized way.⁶⁴ To illustrate the ideological ballasts and the rigid explanatory framework, here I would like to introduce the comprehensive view and evaluation of the Horthy regime based on a synthesis that was written before my textual analysis began. This synthesis, *History of Hungary*, was constantly referenced in contemporary articles, due to the lack of proper comprehensive work or from practical considerations. Anyway, as the renowned emigrant Hungarian historian, István Deák pointed it out, this discourse implied “vicious oversimplification”.⁶⁵

I will discuss the relevant chapters of the 8th volume of *Magyarország története* series as well, being edited during the period I intend to deal with. I would like to discuss this grandiose work as one which embraced inter-institutional (most importantly, involving the Academy and the universities) scholarly work and one that is inclusive for new explanations, most notably, when it comes to a comparison with its predecessors.

Afterwards, I identify three important topics that were discussed in the journals of the Academy and that of the Hungarian Historical Association and other publications of the fellows of the Academy. The broader topics are the following: German-Hungarian relations, the evaluation of the activity of the Hungarian social democrats in the domestic political sphere and the different definitions or labels that were utilized to describe or evaluate the Horthy era. These topics provoked debates, as I will demonstrate, but often the mere fact that

⁶⁴ Attila Pók, *The Politics of Hatred in the Middle of Europe: Scapegoating in Twentieth Century Hungary: History and Historiography* (Szombathely: Savaria University Press, 2009), 96.

⁶⁵ István Deák, “Hungary,” *The American Historical Review* 97, no. 4 (October 1992): 1062.

they were coined as possible subjects of analysis signify the strive for a better understanding of the interwar period.

3.1. The guidelines: Communist syntheses and the interwar period

3.1.1. The first Communist synthesis

The desire for a compilation of comprehensive Hungarian history emerged in the early years of the Kádár regime. Although historians were not idle from 1949, the extensive publication of monographs and smaller works did not substitute for a handbook that would lay down the guidelines which oriented historians in choosing explanatory frameworks, most importantly, how to approach the different periods of Hungarian history if they want to be in line with an official view. The first manifestation of this goal, the two-volume *Magyarország története* [History of Hungary] was published in 1964.⁶⁶ The book was clearly intended both for scholars and for the public. The volumes contain many maps and illustrations to help processing the otherwise dense content. The author of the section concerning the interwar period was György Ránki.

The genesis of the system constituted the first set of issues to be explained. The Horthy regime was born after the downfall of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. The self-defined counterrevolutionary forces seized power, although they took only gradually over the governmental posts, having some interim, powerless governments in which the right wing of the social democrats could also participate.⁶⁷ Ránki stressed that the traditional elites returned amongst bloodshed, giving free hand to paramilitary forces in retaliation for the expropriations and redistributions. Ránki refers to the events as following: “The brutal and

⁶⁶ Iván Berend T. et al., *Magyarország története [History of Hungary]*, ed. Erik Molnár, Ervin Pamlényi, and György Székely, vol. 2, 2 vols. (Budapest: Gondolat, 1964).

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 2:364.

bloody-handed officer and kulak bands created the rule of terror in the country.”⁶⁸ He accused social democrats of giving a hand in concealing the reality of the white terror when participating in governments. Since pogroms and spontaneous outbursts of antisemitic feelings were concomitant with these actions, Ránki also deals with the role of antisemitism in formulating the ideology of the new regime: “Antisemitism was the tool which was used by the ruling classes to direct the attention from real social problems to a false track, the racial (“faji”) question. Their intention was to conceal the substantive class antagonisms.”^{69,70}

Important parts of this chapter are those which deal with the political nature of the interwar period. Ránki emphasizes that the new system was interested in preserving the positions of great landlords and great capital and this resulted in the “most reactionist social establishment in Europe”.⁷¹ Moreover, he claims that “the counterrevolution went necessarily together with the appearance of fascism.”⁷² In the following, he used various terms to refer to the general Hungarian setting: “absolute dictatorship”, “fascist-like while bourgeois conservative”. The author admits that in the later years of Bethlen’s prime ministry (István Bethlen 1874-1946, prime minister 1921-31), he tried to get rid of the influence of military circles, although he claims, that some fascist elements were ever-present. The author highlights the initiatives and ideological accentuations of prime minister Gyula Gömbös (1886-1936, in office 1932-1936) that Ránki claims to be the one which strove for a totalitarian fascist structure. He linked Gömbös’ administrative attempts in domestic politics with his foreign policy agenda which both supported such a political term.

As I already pointed out, this book was not solely intended for scholars. This circumstance at least partially explains the lack of clear and consequent terminology with

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 2:366.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 2:369–370.

⁷⁰ This approach remained the only recurrent one concerning 20th century antisemitism up until the ripe 1980s in the official Hungarian historical scholarship.

⁷¹ Berend T. et al., *Magyarország története [History of Hungary]*, 2:371.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 2:372.

proper definitions of the applied labels. Still, this unequivocal distinction regarding the nature of the policies of Gömbös allowed readers to feel certain dynamics in the ideological features of interwar Hungary. Except for this particular case, the dynamics of politics in the two decades either in foreign or in domestic affairs are usually downplayed.

The history of workers' political representation dominates the text. Ránki describes a time server, opportunist and unrealistic social democracy, among whom the educated and dedicated ones immigrated right after the Soviet Republic diminished: "And the party leadership got into the hands of open traitors of the working classes, that was theoretically uneducated and had politically insignificant 'party leaders'."⁷³ Shortly he reflects on the fact that workers also supported the Arrow Cross party on the eve of the Second World War, he claims that only uneducated, numerically insignificant groups of workers stood behind the extreme right who were misled by the demagogy that concerned a wide range of social issues.⁷⁴

The extent of this publication and the ambitious claim to reach out to both scholarly and non-scholarly circles resulted in many limitations. It would be unjust to expect the same type of wording and argumentation from a popularizing text than from one that is only assigned for peers. Bearing this in mind, it is still clear that the above discussed topics, along with the here not mentioned ones, are addressed with ideological bias. Ránki interprets certain trends with clear ideological preconceptions, just as the other authors of these volumes do in their respective chapters. At this point, political expectations eventually overshadowed professional expectations.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 2:378.

⁷⁴ This claim should be evaluated as a necessary reaction to the at that time growing Western literature on the claim that far-right parties were basically workers' parties. The wording of these parts shows a step back from the earlier standpoint, articulated by Aladár Mód in Aladár Mód, *400 Év Küzdelem Az Önálló Magyarországért [400 Years of Struggle for the Hungarian Independence]*, 3rd ed., vol. 2 (Budapest: Szikra, 1947), 208. Mód argued that fascism and its clearest advocate, the Arrow Cross was solely supported by the radical intelligentsia and the middle class.

3.1.2. *The second Communist synthesis*

A few years after the publication of *Magyarország története*, with the leadership of the IH, preparatory works of a new synthesis began. The initiators now targeted first and foremost the scholarly circles and participants of higher education. A ten-volume series was planned to cover the entire Hungarian history that intended to involve all the important institutions that employed historians.. However, the majority of the research was carried out by fellows of the Academy. This fact is not controversial at all: the editorial board and the occasional involvement of employees of other important institutions (like the national library) ought to contribute to the representative magnificence of the series, while the Academy, that was entitled to carry out research at the top level, delivered the results. The debates regarding the results of the workshop in charge began as early as the end of the 1960s. The interwar period was covered by volume number eight, published in 1976.⁷⁵ I argue that a fair portion of the articles were inspired either by the ongoing debate while the fellows of the Academy labored on the book, or by the claims of the already published work.

The first section of the volume deals with the democratic revolution and the Soviet Republic. This discussion extensively relied most importantly on Tibor Hajdu's monograph⁷⁶ that pointed to the proto-Communist mindset of Mihály Károlyi (1875-1955), leader of the 1918 democratic revolution, whose government was deemed to be the victim of the Great Powers' favor for the future little entente. The author acknowledges the attempts of non-Communist actors in the turmoil of these two years, radical theoretician Oszkár Jászi (1875-1957) and social democratic politician Zsigmond Kunfi (1879-1929), most importantly. The only great sin of the democratic government is that it wanted to save the old system, rather than striving for a revolution in this interpretation.⁷⁷ The narrative of the Soviet Republic is

⁷⁵ György Ránki, *Magyarország története 1918-1919; 1919-1945 [History of Hungary 1918-1919; 1919-1945]* (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1976).

⁷⁶ Hajdu, *A magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság [The Hungarian Soviet Republic]*.

⁷⁷ Ránki, *Magyarország története 1918-1919; 1919-1945 [History of Hungary 1918-1919; 1919-1945]*, 78.

not a praise: the author emphasizes that the goals of the Communists were utopian and unrealistic, when they wanted to go for a Communist revolution immediately, counting falsely on the eruption of world revolution.

About the birth of the counterrevolutionary regime, the wording resembles that of the previous:

The *fővezérség* [supreme command], led by Horthy...did not only continue the function of terror, but intervened directly in the work of the government and the administrative authorities in the course of 1919-1920. Generally, it played an active role in domestic politics, dictated to the government and the political parties; it was the representative of new, dictatorial, fascist tendencies.⁷⁸

The social democrats are depicted as time servers, who are not stable regarding principles – hinting on the political consequences of a pact of the leader of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party (HSDP), Károly Peyer and the Bethlen government. However, critics of the Communists in underground are present once more, when the author repeats the unrealistic expectations of Communists in political terms regarding the chances of an immediate socialist revolution.

Regarding ideology, the counterrevolutionary regime received many different labels. What seems to be consequent is that prime ministry of Bethlen was approached as a consolidated period, regarding which the following attributes are recurrent: restricted liberal initiatives, fascist elements, Christian course,⁷⁹ conservatism, conservative liberalism and the authoritarian elements. The fact that only fascist elements are mentioned concerning fascism signifies that evaluation of different periods of the Horthy era were not judged in the same manner. When it comes to the functioning of the system, (reactionist) dictatorship is the most recurrent label. In this narrative, the initially absolute fascist elements, first of all paramilitary

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 393.

⁷⁹ This was a popular label to the ideological background of the governing parties in the Horthy era. Importantly, this was also used as self-description. Its content is vague, but emphasizes Christianity (both Catholic and the greater reformed Churches) as opposed to Judaism. The mere usage of this expression displayed the antisemitic tenets in the mainstream world view.

forces were consolidated by incorporating the elements into the army or to the bureaucracy, although they did not lose their identities that was partially maintained via secret or half-legal fascist societies. Their presence in half-legality constituted the constant presence of certain fascist elements in the Bethlen era: “Bethlen’s governmental policies...could not have abandoned this strata, because in the course of exercising power, the conservative and dictatorial elements determined the political practice being mingled with fascist elements to various extents.”⁸⁰

The government of Gyula Gömbös and the ideology on which it was built is explicitly distinguished and is depicted as clear deterioration and radicalization, compared to the previous Bethlen and Gyula Károlyi (1871-1947, in office 1931-1932) governments. The author insists that the Szeged thought (only renamed Christian-national),⁸¹ which was born already in the times of the Soviet Republic remained in its extremity the dominant ideological framework:

This [the Gömbös government’s ideology – R. K.] was not only antidemocratic in a conservative manner and antiliberal, but contained already the elements of far-right radicalism. May this was not framed in a clear and unequivocal form, but in its tendencies, this was indeed visible.⁸²

This statement is somewhat refined with the addition that this course was divided into two trends: one that kept the name Szeged thought and one that was conservative-clerical. In other sections, the author discusses extensively the alliance and collaboration of state and church. Regarding the further radicalizing tendencies in the governments of Kálmán Darányi (1936-38) and Béla Imrédy (1938-39), the author cautiously points out the political control

⁸⁰ Ránki, *Magyarország története 1918-1919; 1919-1945* [*History of Hungary 1918-1919; 1919-1945*], 479.

⁸¹ The Szeged thought was born in the provincial Hungarian town while right-wing politicians and paramilitary troops plotted the destruction of the Soviet republic. It relies on the wish of the establishment of the rule of Hungarian ‘national’ middle class, while emphasizing aggressive nationalism, antibolshevism and antisemitism. Part of this thought became internalized on a governmental level after Horthy became the governor of Hungary.

⁸² Ránki, *Magyarország története 1918-1919; 1919-1945* [*History of Hungary 1918-1919; 1919-1945*], 573.

that is showed by Bethlen, who remained influential even after he resigned from the prime ministry.

Dwelling shortly on the attempt of the Communists to establish a legal party once more, the author rightly concentrates on the only visibly functioning political camp of the left, the social democrats. The picture of opportunist does not fade as the chronological discussion of the interwar events goes further. It is important that the decreasing significance of the party is not only explained by the pragmatic softening of policies but the practical loss of “natural allies”, the bourgeois radicals, who, themselves being divided, partially even contributed to the consolidation of the system. Furthermore, the author admits that the governmental propaganda was successful in blurring the differences between Communists and social democrats, which had an unfavorable bearing on the political possibilities of the party. Still, the social democrats are criticized for declining the cooperation with Communists. Additionally, they are judged for abandoning important principles and tasks for the sake of legal functioning, like the right to organize trade unions among state employees and agrarian workers. The latter fact is implicitly linked to the diagnosis that masses of workers remained ideologically uneducated at the end of the 1930s.⁸³ This led to the workers’ becoming misled and many supported the Arrow Cross.

Unlike in the first synthesis, foreign policy is discussed in more detail. Relations to Italy and to Germany were the focus throughout the entire period, emphasizing that Hungary could only look for the alliance of those countries that were dissatisfied with the Paris Peace Treaties. Italy was from early on a good candidate, while Germany was only economically important until the Nazi Party (Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei, NSDAP) seized power in 1933.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 847.

This volume was written in a very different style than the 1964 synthesis. The claims are richly referenced and the wording – although not entirely unified because of the multiple authors – resembles scholarly texts and debates more than political. The extent of the volume also means a great difference: the book discusses the 1918-1939 era in more than a thousand pages. Compared to the 1964 synthesis, the ideological bias shrunk clearly, which is not only due to the different audiences, but to the changing explanatory frameworks, more refined judgment on certain tendencies or personal issues. However, chronologically this volume was published in the middle of the period I examine here. It gives an insight into the stage of research about which more or less a consensus could have been reached regarding the interwar period. As I already pointed out, I treat this volume as one that provoked debates before its publication and afterwards as well.

Chapter 4. Scholarly debates about the interwar period, 1971-1983

During the extensive investigation of the scholarly literature that was produced in the given period, I established three topics that received special attention. In this section I will give an account of the argumentations and approaches that appeared in the works of the fellows of the Academy. The below discussed texts were either published in the form of articles in *Századok* or in *Történelmi Szemle*, or constituted a chapter of a book, maybe a monograph. The analysis deals with the identified topics separately, utilizing the sources in a problem-concentrated way. First, I clarify the stakes of the debate, the actual development that occurred in the evolution of the texts. However, I do not claim that there is a necessarily linear development. I treat this group of historians as more or less engaged fellows of one single workshop, in which constant interaction occurs, and the scholars' interest lies in contributing to the better understanding of the era, utilizing the growing body of available sources and secondary literature.

In the course of the making of the second synthesis, several issues provoked significant debates. Occasionally the results of these debates were published. One such publication constitutes the starting point of my research: the presentation and the contribution to the debate on 10th October 1969, which was published in a more extensive format in 1971.⁸⁴ The reason of my choice is to be explained by the attitude that is expressed in the spirit of these texts. A significant portion of the debate was about “The crisis of capitalism (1919-1944)”, presented by György Ránki and Miklós Lackó,⁸⁵ touching upon a series of issues (economic situation, diplomatic history, ideology and practice of the governmental policies). The number and quality of comments all indicated the importance of this

⁸⁴ Hanák, Lackó, and Ránki, “Gazdaság, társadalom, társadalmi-politikai gondolkodás Magyarországon a kapitalizmus korában [Economy, Society and Social-Political Thought in the Time of Capitalism in Hungary].”

⁸⁵ Miklós Lackó (1921-2010) became research fellow, later senior research fellow at the Academy in 1954 until his retirement.

publication. Regarding the topic of this thesis, several claims are relevant. In this debate, the emphasis is both on crisis and on restoration of the Horthy regime, claiming that the middle class whose composition is changing, joins the traditional ruling strata as driving forces.⁸⁶ It is not quite clear how the actual political activation of workers occurs on the political right, in the meantime the interwar social democracy is claimed to be opportunist and purified in an ideological sense.⁸⁷ Communists, on the other hand, are only briefly mentioned as ones who left the impression of being overtly radicalized. Lackó highlights the importance of the populist movement, as opposed to short-lived ideologies that combined social and nationalist agendas.

This debate and the fact that the results were published display the great impact and mobilizing power of the grandiose work of this piece of the synthesis. Since this was the first discussion that had such publicity concerning the key issues of my thesis, I regard it as a suitable starting point for the analysis of the evolution of the discourse under the impression of the pursuit for a more extended, academic synthesis.

4.1. The political system of the Horthy era: labels and concepts

As demonstrated above, the plainly fascist character of interwar Hungary was replaced by a more elaborated view in the 1960s. The scholarly discussion of the interwar period was exposed to the influences of the international debates regarding fascism. Since the concept of fascism was rather haphazardly utilized before, the internalization of certain elements of the fascism debate (usually the ones which could have been explained in Marxist terms) resembled mostly in the wording of the articles that were used when referring to the Horthy era. From among the few Hungarian theoretical works, the claim was consensually

⁸⁶ Hanák, Lackó, and Ránki, “Gazdaság, társadalom, társadalmi-politikai gondolkodás Magyarországon a kapitalizmus korában [Economy, Society and Social-Political Thought in the Time of Capitalism in Hungary],” 67.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 80.

internalized in the way Mária Ormos⁸⁸ put it: “fascist features were sometimes stronger, sometimes rather modest. The system remained in a sense mobile and plastic, and its constituencies fluctuated...It constructed with the help of new reactionary powers...a new form of governmental system.”⁸⁹

A new discursive strategy emerged: Hungarian scholars concentrated more on the practical manifestation of policies, the dynamics that was allowed by the earlier claimed flexibility of the system. The theoretical works remained in the minority concerning the nature of the Horthy regime. When it came to the discussion of domestic politics, the word ‘fascism’ and its various forms were usually utilized as descriptive notions that do not even require to be defined in detail, constantly emphasizing the different dimensions of ideology and governmental practice. This attitude also explains the fact that the nature of the system did not become the chief concern of the authors who contributed to the chapters of the 1976 synthesis, which – accordingly – does not provide the readers with a totally unified terminology, but rather various labels. But one tendency is clear: the Bethlen era is discussed with the aid of more modest notions than the governments following his successor, Gyula Károlyi.

4.1.1. The Bethlen era

Senior researcher László Márkus⁹⁰ highlighted that Bethlen wanted to maximize his own power in 1927 and the new franchise was forged accordingly. According to Márkus, he aimed at excluding even more politicians of the opposition. For this reason, Bethlen used the

⁸⁸ Mária Ormos (1930) was at that time a research fellow in the IH. Since the end of the time scope of this thesis, she pursued a career in university education as well. She had no chance to get a position at the ELTE because of her political involvement in the 1956 revolution but she was appointed at the newly established university in Pécs, in 1982. She conducted her research further and became ordinary member of the Hungarian Academy of Science in 1993, after the transition.

⁸⁹ Mária Ormos and Miklós Incze, *Európai fasiszmusok 1919-1939* ([Budapest]: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1976), 153–154.

⁹⁰ László Márkus (1920-2011) became research fellow (1958-1969), later senior research fellow (1969-1984) in the IH, in 1984 he retired. Before his employment he was an active journalist but after the 1956 revolution, he was removed from his last editorial position.

rightist group of liberals against social democrats as well, complicating the cooperation between the parties in opposition. The public voting was also utilized to obtain more votes; this practice favored always the governing party that could easily put pressure on the citizens even with the presence of gendarmerie or police. Important changes in the composition of the new parliament occurred, more clerks became members of parliament and the upper chamber was established. Márkus argues, that the weakening of party organizations of both right and left opposition was also an important result that supported antidemocratic tendencies. Bethlen targeted later on the provincial organizations of social democrats. All in all, Márkus draws the conclusion that the "[l]egislative work of the 1927-1929 period can be described as one that aimed at the fortification of the Bethlenian dictatorship."⁹¹ Márkus' article constitutes an exception, because it explicitly approaches the Bethlen era with the aim of defining its political nature. The labels that came to usage appeared in every single work that concerned the interwar period.

4.1.2. Gyula Gömbös and the Fascist Attempt

Miklós Stier⁹² focused on the second government of Gyula Gömbös, the far-right prime minister, who brought the creation of a fascist type of system closest in Hungary in the interwar period.⁹³ The role of trusted friends of ministers grew, which contributed to the erosion of democratic control over the government and the upper levels of bureaucracy. Gömbös and his circle systematically replaced elder and established members of the state bureaucracy in order to replace them with loyal and usually younger employees. Stier emphasizes the will of the prime minister to establish a fascist dictatorship. However, he is

⁹¹ László Márkus, "A kormányzati erők a bethleni uralmi koncepció szolgálatában [Governmental Powers in the Service of Bethlen's Conceptions of Rule]," *Történelmi Szemle* 14, no. 3–4 (1971): 465–82.

⁹² Miklós Stier was research fellow at the IH. Biographical databanks do not consult his career in detail.

⁹³ Rudolf Paksa, "Szélsőjobbaldali mozgalmak az 1930-as években [Far-Right Movements in the 1930s]," in *A magyar jobbaldali hagyomány 1900-1948 [The Tradition of the Political Right In Hungary, 1900-1948]*, ed. Ignác Romsics (Budapest: Osiris, 2009), 275–304.

clear in delineating the party of Gömbös (NEP, Nemzeti Egység Pártja – Party of National Unity) and his persona: there were pluralist tendencies to be observed, even if on a smaller scale. To support this claim, he emphasizes the counteractions of the Upper Chamber of the parliament and the individual actions of Miklós Kozma (1884-1941), Minister of the Interior. Kozma constantly fought the quickly centralizing tendencies that his prime minister was eager to pursue. Gömbös was reluctant to admit that the rapid *Gleichschaltung* of the party can lead to governmental crisis, despite Kozma's attempts to convince him.

Moving towards a more abstract analysis of the opportunities of Gömbös, Stier talks about the obstacles of an experiment to create a mass party; the phobia of the core group from non-gentroid elements. On the other hand, he deems a half-feudal bureaucratic apparatus inapt to act as the bureaucracy of a modern mass party. He also explains why Kozma was able to articulate sharp criticism: he was untouchable because of his embeddedness, friendship with Horthy and constant presence before the people. Emphasizing Gömbös' aim at introducing a fascist type of regime, Stier refrains from defining the entire era as fascist. The subject is discussed without mentioning any foreign works, which might have been relevant to the nature of a mass party or the fascist attempts (successful or not) in other European countries.⁹⁴

The theoretical literature, although not that numerous, succeeded in the internalization of most results that the international fascism produced, especially regarding the various dimensions of crisis as a trigger⁹⁵ and local particularities that both point towards the variations of the ideological adaptations and their significance at the level of practice. Still, regarding the evolution of the discourse, it is more important concentrate on the

⁹⁴ Miklós Stier, "A kormánypárt fasiszta jellegű átszervezésének csődjéhez (1935-1936) [To the Failure of the Fascist Reorganization of the Governing Party]," *Századok* 3–4, no. 105 (1971): 696–708.

⁹⁵ Miklós Incze, "Fasizmus és válság [Fascism and Crisis]," in *A fasizmus ideológiájáról. A fasizmus néhány ideológiai kérdése [About the Ideology of Fascism. Several Ideological Questions of Fascism]*, ed. Iván Harsányi and Judit Bakonyiné Ficzura (Budapest: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1983), 59–70. Incze Miklós (1922-2010) was initially an assistant professor (1946-1949), later head of a department at the Bolyai University in Cluj, then moved to Hungary. He became research fellow at the IH (1949-1957) and assistant professor at ELTE (1953-56). After the revolution, he was dismissed from both institutions; he worked for a period of time as archivist. He returned to the IH in 1966 as senior research fellow and held administrative positions as well.

implementation of the results of the domestic and international debates regarding the nature of the political system(s) that dominated in Hungary in the interwar period. In one way or another, all the works that dealt with chapters of the Horthy era operated with certain terminological tools. The scale ranges here widely: from discussions of the different parliamentary parties⁹⁶ to the economic performance⁹⁷ of the country. Although these texts are not included in my analysis, they also had guidance regarding the applied notions from the same sources. A great achievement of this is that the focus became stabilized on the descriptions of the functioning of the regime that liberated the authors from tenaciously insisting on the application of certain notions. Rather a wide range of commonly accepted terms came into existence that still persist and contribute greatly to the semantics of the contemporary discussions, the ideologically overloaded terms became emptied.

4.2. Social democracy in interwar Hungary

Throughout the interwar period, there was only one party with a clearly leftist agenda that could have functioned legally, this was the HSDP. However, their involvement in the democratic October republic and then in the 1919 Soviet Republic made them a memento of the turmoil that constituted the greatest catastrophe, according to the mainstream ideology of the Horthy era. The party could remain legal in exchange for compromise, which meant agreeing in serious limitations in organizing trade unions and agitation.⁹⁸ This agreement

⁹⁶ Most publications concentrated on Bethlens' governing party which topic is also covered by my analysis. Numerous articles dealt with Christian socialist parties that aimed at taking over trad unions before Gömbös's corporative plans as basis of workers' organization. See for example Jenő Gergely, "A Magyarországi Radikális Keresztényszocialista Párt (1919 szeptemeber - 1920 július) [The Hungarian Radical Christian Socialist Party (1919 September - 1920 July)," *Századok* 106, no. 3-4 (1972): 1043-74; Jenő Gergely, "A keresztényszocialisták politikai szerepe az ellenforradalom első éveiben 1919-1923 [Role of Christian Socialists In The First Years Of Counterrevolution 1919-1923]," *Századok* 110, no. 2 (1976): 225-72.

⁹⁷ See Iván Berend T., "A világgazdasági válság (1929-1933) sajátos hatásai Kelet-Közép-Európában [The consequences of the Great Crisis (1929-1933) in East Central Europe]," *Történelmi Szemle* 25, no. 1 (1982): 44-66.

⁹⁸ The agreement defined the conditions under which social democrats were allowed to participate in elections (with a maximum quota for parliamentary presence), to maintain local organizations, to organize assemblies and to publish. The HSDP agreed that it will not agitate or organize trade unions among state employees, employees of the railway and postmen. The party also had to restrain itself from organizing mass demonstrations, and to

exposed them to harsh criticism both in the interwar years (by Communists and emigrant social democrats) and during the Rákosi era. Social democrats were accused of being allies of the Horthy regime and rejecting open cooperation with the Communists after 1945. Truly, social democrats were very careful when it came to collaboration with Communists, since they feared that they might lose their legal status immediately, furthermore, the memory of being betrayed in the times of Soviet Republic was also persistent. However, throughout the 1970s, a slow “rehabilitation” of social democrats began, which was expressed via admitting the necessity of at least one left-wing party that can participate in elections.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the emphasis slowly changed regarding the connection to Communists to the several common actions that later escalated in people’s front politics.

István Pintér¹⁰⁰ claims that two wings of the workers representatives opposed each other clearly after the revolutions and only Hitler’s rise brought them together. The same difficulties were present just as in the international context in this relationship, but there were some particularities, among which Pintér concentrates on the issues of the 1930s. Pintér claims that in Hungary, the legal situation of social democrats and communists differed greatly, because the former was allowed to function while the latter was banned. This situation escalated in the social democratic alliance with the bourgeoisie: they abandoned a great portion of their ideas for the sake of legality.

The HSDP was anticommunist, although the illegal Hungarian Party of Communists [Kommunisták Magyarországi Pártja, HPC] had some influence on the trade unions that were organized by the HSDP. All actions against communists somehow concerned social democrats as well, deeming that Communist actions endangered the legality of the HSDP.

carry on with trade unions in a less visible, modest way. It was also important that no further persecutions occurred against social democrats. The evaluation of this pact was very controversial among the members of the political left.

⁹⁹ This pragmatic realization replaced the previous oblivion that was afraid to face the relative insignificance of the Soviet Republic in the history of Hungary and also the fact that the HCP was only a virtually existing group of ideologues.

¹⁰⁰ István Pintér was research fellow at the IPH. Biographical databanks do not consult his career in detail.

HPC went for establishment of the people's front, to stop fascism, restrain it and fight back after Hitler's electoral victory. In the eyes of Pintér, the leadership of the HSDP remained the main obstacle to the creation of the front, having the rightwing of social democrats as main critics.

Still, the HSDP was divided over this issue. HPC suddenly backed away from its previous opinion and declared social democrats to be not sociofascists, the HPC also encouraged workers to enter trade unions that were under the command of the HSDP, to help the creation of the people's front. Meanwhile, Pintér argues, Gömbös' maneuvers towards the HSDP broke the positive dynamics from time to time. In 1934, the HSDP clearly stepped back from cooperation but the HPC did not return to the earlier false preconceptions (social democrats being antirevolutionary).

Two further governmental actions influenced the two parties' relations according to Pintér's interpretation: the new franchise reform plans and the plan to dissolve all the trade unions, replacing them with corporative bodies. In the former case, the HSDP thought that the initiative can be a beneficial regarding its own chances to gain more seats in the parliament. In 1934, the international context brought about a turn, however, regarding the domestic setting, the trade unions counted still as the main sources of support for the people's front. Pintér claims, that the elections in 1935 and the above mentioned law of advocacy (draft) brought the reality of the people's front closer. The participation of social democrats and communists in the elections on separate list was unwise. The latter recognition resulted that in November 1935, the parties were ready to cooperate.¹⁰¹

Pintér spots the key points along which rightwing Social Democrats realized how impossible it was to cooperate with Gyula Gömbös and his government. The attempt at fascist restructuration of the Hungarian political scene is depicted as a key moment. This realization

¹⁰¹ István Pintér, "Az antifasiszta munkásegység problémái Magyarországon az 1933-1935-ös években [Problems of Antifascist Union of Workers in Hungary 1933-1935]," *Századok* 109, no. 2 (1975): 337–72.

still did not lead to changes in the attitude towards cooperation with the Communists. Although the social democrats proclaimed the priority of the fight against fascism, they still refused to act jointly with them. Pintér expresses a mild resentment when he emphasizes that social democrats urged against fascism in theory, but not in practice - no actions took place. The proclaimed aim was to reveal the “true face” of fascism. In the title of Pintér’s article, this row of actions is expressed by the notion “philosophical offensive”. The space for removing fascism’s disguise was provided by the party’s own journals. In the social democratic press, pluralism of opinions was still present. Pintér presents several essays and articles from different authors, to prove this diversity. As a matter of consensus, the birth of fascism was attributed to the crisis situation. When the ruling classes feel their domination endangered, they strive for fascism (similarly to the communist explanatory framework). In detail, the author familiarizes the reader with the views of two politicians. Zoltán Rónai (1880-1940)¹⁰² claimed that fascism fought a weakened revolution, therefore, fascism was the counterrevolution of the era. On the other hand, Illés Mónus¹⁰³ highlighted that fascism openly denied and violated rules of a civil democracy.

In his review, he is mostly concerned with the debates over the general attributes of fascism. The class-like feature of fascism is of the highest importance for György Tamási,¹⁰⁴ emphasizing the alliance of fascism and great capital. Debates over the social backings of fascism are also touched upon. There is a strong consensus: some workers are supporters of fascism, but mostly this system relies on the unemployed middle-class (who were subject to declassation). Most important sources of the analysis are articles of HSDP’s daily *Népszava* and *Szocializmus*, its theoretical journal. As Pintér points out, Social Democrats started to deal

¹⁰² Rónai was one of the influential social democrats who emigrated after the fall of the Soviet republic but remained important opinion-makers. He held a people’s commissary during the republic. He was a supporter of Zsigmond Kunfi and published extensively in the journal *Szocializmus* in the interwar years.

¹⁰³ Mónus was a leading social democrat thinker of the interwar period. As active journalist, he was editor of both *Népszava* and *Szocializmus* for few years in the 1930s. He belonged to the party elite after 1927 and remained the main ideologue.

¹⁰⁴ Poet and writer, author of several articles in *Szocializmus*.

with the issue of fascism after Hitler seized power and Gömbös had his first government. Accordingly, the majority of Social Democrats did not claim that the Horthy regime in the 1920s was fascist. Only a minority of them, including Sándor Garbai, Zsigmond Kunfi, Ernő Garamithe and the emigrant Manó Buchinger did so.¹⁰⁵

Miklós Stier discusses the possibilities of socialist ideological education in the first decade of the Horthy era, aiming to shed light on possibilities of party recruitment. As he points out, the HSDP was the only leftist party that could function legally, therefore, the task of education and its organization lay with them. The importance of this mission is shown by the fact that the party journal *Szocializmus* also dealt extensively with the issue of ideological education. Stier points to the fact that it was not easy to restart education after the fall of the Soviet Republic, but the structures of the HSDP remained more or less untouched. Gradually, the lectures became regular again among the trade union members. The unification of the party and trade union education was carried out between 1923 and 1926, only to be separated at the end of the decade again, as Stier argues. The administration often hindered the undisturbed delivery of public lectures and, in this way, the recruitment of further audience. Notably, cultural entertainment was also among the priorities of these events, which constituted the only organized form of ideological education at those restrictive times.¹⁰⁶

Although it is clear that the activity of social democrats was still discussed in a heavily politicized way, one can establish the fact that simple condemnation of the interwar deeds of the HSDP, omnipotent in the 1950s and 1960s, was no longer the case. The language, though, is heavily infiltrated with terms that carry ideological bias. The main forum for discussing this chapter of history was *Párttörténeti Közlemények* [Party History Bulletins], which were

¹⁰⁵ István Pintér, “Az HSDP vezetői fasizmusról és a fasizmus ellen hirdetett ‘szellemi offenzívá’-ról [The Leaders of the HSDP on Fascism and the Philosophical Offensive Against Fascism],” *Századok* 111, no. 3 (1977): 500–533.

¹⁰⁶ Miklós Stier, “Oktató-nevelő munka a Szociáldemokrata Pártban és a szakszervezetekben (1919-1930) [Education in the Social Democratic Party And In The Trade Unions],” *Századok* 110, no. 5 (1976): 802–41.

published by the IPH, under strict control of the HSWP. However, to a limited extent, the IH contributed to this work, in an ideologically more relaxed manner.

4.3. Hungarian-German relations

This topic binds the discussion of the interwar period most strongly to the narrative and evaluation of Hungary's participation in the Second World War. To find an explanation why Hungary joined the Axis, historians from the late 1960s on – rightly – turned to the early interwar era to trace back the question of orientations in foreign affairs. The Paris peace settlement is a cornerstone of any explanation, suggesting that Hungary had no other choice but to ask the support of greater, but also disappointed powers, meaning Italy and Germany. Also, the picture of an ever-united, totally hostile little entente is presented, who constantly opposed any Hungarian moves. This framework displays a rigid system which had ultimately emerged from the postwar settlement and separated Hungary from the chance of approaching the Western powers, among which France was the ultimate advocate and creator of the little entente. On the other hand, the question of the German minority, its “national awakening” and role in increasing the German pressure on the Hungarian governments gains an international dimension, when scrutinizing Hungarian-German relations.

Relying on archival sources, the 1970s brought about fresh interpretations regarding the trajectories of Hungarian foreign politics. Core questions targeted not only the diplomatic isolation of the first years of the regime and the reality of opening, but also tried to establish when Hungary's war allegiances became irrevocable bound to Germany. The scholarly attention was not only paid to the level of diplomacy but to economic relations and the manipulations via minority politics as well.

4.3.1. The German minority and their state allegiance

This issue was the territory of Lóránt Tilkovszky.¹⁰⁷ He dedicated his entire work to the discovery of the history of *Ungarndeutsche*, the Germans minority of Hungary. He was interested in the different advocacies and the inner division of *Ungarndeutsche* regarding loyalties. Tilkovszky rejects the simplifying and false preconception that the Germans would have functioned as a fifth column of Nazi Germany in the interwar period and that the entire German population would have been shaken in their state allegiances.

Tilkovszky gives a good insight into the temporal dynamics of Hungarian minority politics concerning *Ungarndeutsche*, pointing out not only the inner division of the community but also analyzing the trajectories of the Hungarian government. Tilkovszky claims that before signing the 1920 peace treaty, great governmental promises and gestures towards minorities were shown in order to preserve the territorial integrity of Greater Hungary. However, after the peace settlement, these concessions seemed only to endanger the integrity of the remaining land.¹⁰⁸ He points out that this sudden neglect accelerated the radicalization and resulted in the loss of the initial governmental advocate, Jakab Bleyer¹⁰⁹ of this issue to the cause of radical *Ungarndeutsche* self-advocacy.¹¹⁰ Although Bleyer's policies were not in accordance with pan-German expectations at that time, Tilkovszky directs attention to the early steps of his involvement with the movement.¹¹¹

Furthermore, the author is careful in balancing between discussing the internal and external factors that influenced the *Ungarndeutsche* politics of the Hungarian governments.

¹⁰⁷ Lóránt Tilkovszky (1927) was research fellow (1961-1969), later senior research fellow (1969-1985) at the IH. He had the opportunity to teach at the newly established University of Pécs since 1983. He turned to the issue of German minority already in the 1960s.

¹⁰⁸ Lóránt Tilkovszky, "Németország és a magyarországi német kisebbség (1921-1924) [Germany And The German Minority In Hungary (1921-1924)]," *Századok* 112, no. 1 (1978): 3-48. 9.

¹⁰⁹ Jakab Bleyer (1874-1933) was professor of German at the University of Budapest and minister of minority politics. His political views were more than acceptable for the government, since he was an outspoken antisemite, and he was clearly against the Soviet Republic.

¹¹⁰ Lóránt Tilkovszky, "Németország és a magyar nemzetiségpolitika (1924-1929) [Germany and Hungarian Minority Politics (1924-1929)]," *Történelmi Szemle* 23, no. 1 (1980): 52-90.

¹¹¹ Tilkovszky, "Németország és a magyarországi német kisebbség (1921-1924) [Germany And The German Minority In Hungary (1921-1924)]," 29.

There is only a slight criticism expressed towards Bethlen's minority politics and the rapid radicalization of the Bleier-wing is linked to the Károlyi and Gömbös governments, the post-Bethlen period in his interpretation. Here Tilkovszky puts forward the issue of growing opposition against the *Ungarndeutsche* politics. On the one hand, a rather general, chauvinist critique of generous (or so deemed) minority policies emerged, which claimed that this policy endangers successful assimilation and the homogeneity of Rump Hungary. Another serious objection was that this policy did not result in counter-acts from the side of neighboring countries (which would have been the aim and promise from the side of the government).¹¹²

Afterwards, without explicitly framing the statement, Tilkovszky suggests that the growing reluctance of the Hungarian government incited the Bleier-group, that had its main institutional basis in the German Cultural Association, to represent themselves in a more aggressive manner (e.g. the first *Ungarndeutsche* mass demonstration on May 22, 1932), which immediately raised pan-German fears in the ministry, contributing to the birth of a vicious circle regarding these policies.¹¹³ Additionally, Tilkovszky includes the moderate wing of the German minority in the analysis. He discusses Gusztáv Gratz's¹¹⁴ compromising policies as opposed to Bleier who sought the possibilities of the perceived emergence of *Ungarndeutsche* giving no heed to conflicts of interests. Still, since Bleier died in 1933, Tilkovszky does not attribute solely to him the development of radical *Ungarndeutsche* connections to the NSGWP.¹¹⁵

Tilkovszky brings up the inter-state relations as influencing factor of Hungarian minority politics with greater emphasis since the government of Gyula Gömbös (1932-1936).

¹¹² Loránt Tilkovszky, "Törekvések a magyarországi német mozgalom radikalizálására (1932-1933) [Attempts to Radicalize Germans of Hungary (1932-1933)]," *Századok* 113, no. 3 (1979): 421–77. 421.

¹¹³ *Ibid.* 430-443.

¹¹⁴ Gustav Gratz (1875-1946) was a publicist and politician of German origin. He held ministry twice: first he was minister of finances in 1917 in Maurice Esterházy's government and minister of foreign affairs in 1921 in the first government of Pál Teleki). After the mid-1920s, he became an advocate and representative of *Ungarndeutsche*. He had the unconditional trust of the government, since he had never expressed German nationalistic attachment. He became the most important adversary of Jakab Bleier.

¹¹⁵ Tilkovszky, "Törekvések a magyarországi német mozgalom radikalizálására (1932-1933) [Attempts to Radicalize Germans of Hungary (1932-1933)]." 443-446

Importantly, Tilkovszky hints on similar types of drivers that will occur in the subsection that is only concerned with the diplomatic relations: namely false preconceptions concerning the coincidence of Hitler's policies with Hungarian interests and the overestimation of significance of the Hungarian governments. Gömbös' misconceptions are best illustrated in Tilkovszky's analysis when he describes the duplicitous involvement of Hitler in settling the question of active pan-German agitation in Hungary: while he kept the official organs modest, non-official visits became more regular parallel to Gömbös' attempts to cool these initiatives generally down.¹¹⁶ Tilkovszky explains the *Ungarndeutsche*-politics of the Darányi government as continuation that of Gömbös: Darányi tried to act firmly but had no serious support from the Nazi German circles to succeed. Tilkovszky describes well how the Hungarian government lost gradually control of the radicalizing branch of *Ungarndeutsche*.¹¹⁷

The expulsion of Germans after the Second World War did not become a topic of historical research until the period this thesis discusses. Still, among the vague memories of the postwar events, the dogma of collective guilt remained on the interwar German population of Hungary that was claimed to collaborate whole-heartedly with the Nazi regime before and after the military occupation of the country. Tilkovszky's emphasis on the pluralism of *Ungarndeutsche* agendas points towards a more refined picture about the state allegiances.

4.3.2. Diplomatic relations between Germany and Hungary

Historians could benefit from the expanding opportunities of abroad experiences in terms of archival access. The 1970s were important years in discovering the diplomatic documents that gave insight into the world of possibilities and opportunities regarding Hungarian foreign affairs in the interwar era. The researchers visited mostly the archives in Rome, Paris, Bonn and London. Although here I will concentrate on the issue of German

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Loránt Tilkovszky, "A magyarországi németiség a Darányi-kormány idején [The Germans of Hungary During the Darányi Government]," *Századok* 115, no. 5 (1981): 883–923.

relations and the alternatives in foreign affairs, I should mention that an important proxy discussion about the Treaty of Trianon, concentrating on the competing Central Europe concepts of the Great Powers also relied heavily on the same sources.¹¹⁸

Two dominant pictures existed about Bethlen's political qualities. A well-elaborate, absolutely negative view was presented by Erzsébet Andics and her circle. The other concept, held by Mária Ormos, Gyula Juhász and László Márkus, deemed Bethlen to be a tactician regarding foreign affairs. This was an important claim, because it implicitly excluded such explanatory frameworks that would discuss Bethlen's move in the field of diplomacy as subjects to his domestic politics entirely.

Ormos, paraphrasing Bethlen, claimed that the era of active Hungarian foreign policy started with 1926. After the agreement with Italy (1927), Bethlen became more self-confident in the domestic scene as well and revision becomes openly the basis in foreign affairs. Ormos emphasizes, that Bethlen's new discourse contained several elements that resembled Italian fascism, however, these talks had little concrete results and were only exaggerated before the public. According to Ormos, this tactics is to be explained by Bethlen's conviction that the Italian relations will be long-lasting and the alliance is a common interest.¹¹⁹ Bethlen argued for the Italian interest in preventing any Slav coalition in Central Europe and offered Hungarian assistance but overestimated the actual significance of the Hungarian support. He hoped for stabilization of the Danube basin with the help of both Germany and Italy. This he deemed better for Hungary than French or Soviet control, maybe hoping that Italy would

¹¹⁸ To this debate see the works of Mária Ormos and Magda Ádám: Mária Ormos, "Francia-magyar tárgyalások 1920-ban [French-Hungarian Negotiations in 1920]," *Századok* 109, no. 5–6 (1975): 905–49; Magda Ádám, "Dunai konföderáció vagy kisantant [Danube Confederation or Little Entente]," *Történelmi Szemle* 20, no. 3–4 (1977): 440–84; Magda Ádám, "A két királypuccs és a kisantant [The Two Coup d' Etats and the Little Entente]," *Történelmi Szemle* 25, no. 4 (1982): 665–713; Mária Ormos, "Még egyszer a Vix-jegyzékről [Once More On the Vix-records]," *Századok*, 1979, 113, no. 2 (n.d.): 314–32; Mária Ormos, *Padovától Trianonig, 1918-1920* (Budapest: Kossuth, 1983).

¹¹⁹ Mária Ormos, "Bethlen koncepciója az olasz-magyar szövetségről (1927-1931) [Bethlen's Concept about the Hungarian-Italian Alliance (1927-1931)]," *Történelmi Szemle* 14, no. 1–2 (1971): 133–56. 137-138.

constitute a balance.¹²⁰ His plans – in the interpretation of Ormos – based on the consideration of different opportunities, which means that there were options to consider.

On the other hand, the logic of the above listed concepts show the utter overestimation of Hungarian potentials and possibilities in regaining territories as part of such policies. Therefore grandiose Italian-Hungarian plans were forged about Austria and the re-armament of Hungary. Bethlen already started to mediate between Italy and Germany – he supposed that the interests of the two countries should necessarily coincide in the near future.¹²¹ The roots of German orientation, although at first in the explicit form of Italian alliances, are clear here already, although the possible amelioration of French or English relations were also among the theoretical considerations. Ormos suggests that Bethlen, considering more options, stepped towards the proto-Axis powers, but his decision was based at least partially on misconceptions.

Analyzing the mid-1930s, Pál Pritz¹²² emphasized the continuities with Bethlen's line in foreign affairs regarding the governments of Gyula Gömbös, who followed the short-lived Károlyi government. Pritz discusses the Italian relations in different context than Ormos did regarding Bethlen. He highlights the importance of Gömbös' fascination with the Italian fascist political setting. Additionally, according to Pritz, the Italian relations lost their primacy with Kálmán Kánya being appointed to minister of foreign affairs in February 1933.¹²³ This personal change is interpreted as the moment when a will was articulated that deliberately started to neglect English and French relations, narrowing down the horizon of Hungarian foreign affairs gradually to the future Axis powers.¹²⁴ Pritz suggests that the misconceptions regarding the influence of Hungary and the harmony with the interests of Germany grew

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* 141.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* 153.

¹²² Pál Pritz (1944) held both administrative and research position in the IH. Between 1987 and 1989 he was a senior research fellow. After the transition, he taught at ELTE.

¹²³ Pál Pritz, "Gömbös Gyula első kormányának külpolitikája, megalakulásától Gömbös németországi útjáig [The Foreign Politics of the First Gyula Gömbös Government, From Its Formation Until Gömbös' Trip To Germany]," *Századok* 112, no. 1 (1978): 49–97. 51–69.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.* 52.

strong. This favor for German negotiations was not really supported by the cordial relations of the preceding years, since Germany showed only economic interests before. Yet, Kánya was convinced that the interests of Hungary and the *Führer* coincided to a large extent.

Furthermore, Pritz wanted to discover if the German alliance was the only possible outcome of the trajectories of the Hungarian interwar foreign affairs, concentrating on the foreign affairs of the Gömbös government. He draws attention to the isolating consequences of the revisionist politics and goes down to the issue of minority protection. Slowly, he arrives at the Hungarian plans and demands concerning Czechoslovak lands, most importantly, the former Hungarian territories of Slovakia and Carpatho-Ruthenia that were “taken away” from Hungary in the course of the Paris Peace Treaties. He discusses in detail the remaining sources of the 1938 meeting of Hitler and Horthy in Kiel and suggests that the Hungarian party participated in this meeting under the false impression of their demands being fully appreciated.¹²⁵

While Ormos and Pritz concentrated on diplomatic history, György Ránki approached German-Hungarian relations from the aspect of economics in the 1970s. Previously he published two smaller works on Hungary’s involvement in the Second World War that were more concerned with the purely diplomatic level.¹²⁶ Behind the orientations of the Hungarian foreign affairs he looked later always for the economic motivation first, which in this case were usually the need for export of agrarian goods and to purchase technology and industrial goods in exchange. Ránki never failed to emphasize the long lasting devastating effects of the Trianon treaty on the markets of the successor states of the Monarchy.¹²⁷ The economic aspect

¹²⁵ Pál Pritz, “A kiel-i találkozó (Forráskritikai tanulmány) [The Kiel Meeting [Source Critics]],” *Századok* 108, no. 3 (1974): 646–79.

¹²⁶ György Ránki, *Emlékiratok és valóság Magyarország második világháborús szerepéről [Memoirs and reality. On Hungary’s role in the Second World War]* (Budapest: Kossuth Kiadó, 1964); György Ránki, *1944 március 19: Magyarország német megszállása [19th March 1944, German Occupation of Hungary]* ([Budapest]: Kossuth Könyvkiadó, 1968).

¹²⁷ György Ránki, *Economy and Foreign Policy: The Struggle of the Great Powers for Hegemony in the Danube Valley, 1919-1939*, East European Monographs, no. 141 (Boulder : New York: East European Monographs ; Distributed by Columbia University Press, 1983) and Iván Berend and György Ránki, “Economic Problems of

found its best expression in his comparative research interest therefore he regularly discussed the temptation and reality of economic dependence of Central and Southeastern European countries together. Gradually the theoretical considerations of foreign politics, the different plans of France, England and Germany that would settle the power relations within the regions were put into the background and he concentrated on the economic connotations. He could step out from the handy one-sided explanatory framework that Germany was alluring because of the similar domestic political setting and the promise of revision. On the contrary, the latter element he even called into question. He directed attention rather to the complex issue of economic dependence which is only complemented with similar, although not quite identical plans for territorial rearrangements in Central Europe.¹²⁸

The new aspects that emerged concerning the possibilities of Hungarian foreign affairs relied on two sources: the access to further materials (mostly abroad) and to the application of the comparative economic history approach. Therefore not only political but primarily economic interests were also taken into account when evaluating the Hungarian performance. The intertwined nature of domestic politics with foreign affairs is in this way rightly displayed both in conjunction with economic decision-making and, in the case of the German population, minority politics. The narrative that one can compile based on these discussions does not suggest a linear development of blind and deliberate engagement on the side of Germany. Rather these pieces it confront the readership with the limited numbers of opportunities, the dynamics of internal and external pressures on foreign politics which was occasionally misled by illusions of a country that had more possibilities to act on its own purposes.

the Danube Region after the Break-Up of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 3 (1969): 169–85.

¹²⁸ György Ránki, “Kelet-Közép-Európa második világháborús történeti irodalmának kérdései” [Questions on the historiography of the Second World War in East Central Europe],” in *Mozgásterek, kényszerpályák. Válogatott tanulmányok [Margins and Trajectories. Selected essays]*, 424–474, ed. György Ránki (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1983), 432–434.

It is safe to claim that this discursive change was due to the intellectual investment (language skills, openness to new approaches) in the first place. The institutional framework and the political level contributed indirectly when the opportunities to travel to Western countries increased either with the purpose of conference participation or that of archival research.

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only complemented with similar, although not quite identical plans for territorial rearrangements in Central Europe.¹³¹

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4.4. Reflection on the changes: the chapter of György Ránki

Ránki published a selection of his essays and written presentations in 1983. Among the chapters, there is one that reflects on great portion of the above discussed

¹³¹ György Ránki, “Kelet-Közép-Európa második világháborús történeti irodalmának kérdései” [Questions on the historiography of the Second World War in East Central Europe],” in *Mozgásterek, kényszerpályák. Válogatott tanulmányok [Margins and Trajectories. Selected essays]*, 424-474, ed. György Ránki (Budapest: Magvető Kiadó, 1983), 432–434.

developments.¹³² He starts with delineating himself from both radical views: the self-absolving that opts for the concept of reluctant and the stigmatizing that for the last ally. This division, as he claims, was already present among the leaders of foreign politics of interwar and wartime Hungary.¹³³ He emphasizes the presence of two decisive factors: the external pressure and the Hungarian elites' interest in this cooperation, as an internal cause. He lists the following components of the latter condition: an economic interest, the hope to gain support in revising the Trianon treaty and the similarity of the ideological background.¹³⁴ Regarding the latter one, he makes a complex statement about the nature of the Horthy regime in close conjunction with the German-Hungarian relations:

[t]here is little doubt that equation of the politics, ideology and power structures of the two regimes [the Hungarian and the German, after Hitler's seizure of power – R.K.] would be a serious simplification. However, given the historical circumstances, it should not be overlooked, that both systems were antiliberal and antidemocratic. Moreover, even if we do not see the Horthy regime as fascist, though it contains important components of fascism, it was rather a conservative autocratic system.¹³⁵

Here the author explicitly claims that labeling the Horthy era simply fascist is not a valid scholarly statement anymore. In the second part of this chapter, he deals mostly with the trajectories of foreign politics, claiming that two watersheds signified serious losses of influence for Hungary in a slippery slope situation. The first such milestone is 1938, until then, as Ránki argues, economic interests dominated the relations and Hungary benefitted from it in a quite proportionate manner. However, after the Munich Agreement and the Anschluss, German interests started to dominate visibly, although still resulted in certain advantages for the Hungarian elite until 1941. This date is the second milestone, which

¹³² Ránki, "A vonakodó csatlós - vagy az utolsó csatlós? A német-magyar kapcsolatok néhány problémája, 1933-1944 [The Reluctant Ally or the Last Ally? Some problems of the German-Hungarian Relations 1933-1944]."

¹³³ *Ibid.* 476.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 478-79.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.* 479.

signifies the beginning of a period, when all the major decisions of Hungarian foreign affairs born under German pressure or withered because of the lack of German support.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* 480-93.

Conclusion

My research aimed to display a small segment of knowledge production in Communist Hungary, in the consolidated Kádár era (1971-1983). Reflecting on the regime's need for counter-posing itself to the interwar 'bourgeois' Hungarian state, I chose to focus on the historiography about the interwar era and the institutional conditions of scholarly work. Closing with the events of the Second World War, the interwar era was the last period that was a widely approached subject of historical research up until the transition.¹³⁷ I supposed that an investigation of this discourse with regard to its institutional context is apt to demonstrate the flexibility of knowledge production. Yet, it also points to its (politically motivated) limitations.

In order to support my claim concerning the delicate nature of the discussion about the interwar period, I summarized how the early Communist syntheses assessed different aspects of this era. The infiltration of ideological concerns and the adherence to vulgar-Marxist categories prove either a clear expectation or a presupposition from the historians' part. The genre of synthesis remained important for my research, since a new comprehensive work was released in the period of my analysis, in 1976, which generated many debates from which the new discussion, that I intended to introduce, emerged and benefitted.

A handful of scholars ventured on elaborating a new narrative that allowed for more space for pluralism in approaches and terminology concerning the interwar era during the period of 1971-1983. I arrived at this conclusion after analyzing the relevant publications of the fellows of the Academy concerning three topics. The notions to describe the political establishment of the Horthy era clearly multiplied, resulting in the impression of an

¹³⁷ Ideological sensitivity overshadowed the historical discourse about the post-1945 period. The Stalinist era remained mainly the dominion of the fellows of Party History Institute, which did not always meet scholarly standards. Among the taboos, one should highlight the 1956 revolution, which was simply subject of oblivion.

ideologically less heated wording. The fact that the paradigm-type of thinking, which turns easily into dogmatism, slowly withdrew, supported the shift in the narrative from definition to description. This change was not the result of a silent process: as the editor-in-chief of the 1976 synthesis, György Ránki emphasized several times that he was in favor for such an attitude.¹³⁸ This synthesis was in progress in the first part of my investigated period and inspired the development of the narratives after its publication as well.

The second topic concerned the evaluation of the interwar performance of the social democrats who had a quite problematic relationship with the remnants of the Communist party that was forced to illegality. This is a somewhat exceptional topic, since the two here displayed articles were written by a fellow of the IPH unlike all the other authors. Their wording showed differences and a definitely less dogmatic approach from that of the early syntheses as well.

The case of Hungarian-German relations, where discussions of domestic politics and foreign affairs became inseparable, displays best that the evaluation of the interwar period was connected to the narratives of the Second World War as well. The 1983 text of Ránki shows this organic relation in its complexity. The more elaborate understanding of the Horthy era and its inner dynamics led to explanations of trajectories of Hungary that were determined by both inner and outer factors. Especially in the legacy of György Ránki, these trajectories were displayed in a comparative manner, having an eye on the similar circumstances of the neighboring countries.

In my hypothesis, I claimed that liberalization of certain topics occurred during 1971-1983. This wording suggests that there was an articulated policy which was designed at the level of the political elite. Concluding my analysis, I would rather put the emphasis on emerging pluralism, which in my case studies seems to unite both policy considerations and

¹³⁸ “Magyarország két világháború közötti történetéről. Vita a Magyarország története VIII. kötetéről [About Interwar History of Hungary. Debate About the 8th Volume of History of Hungary],” *Történelmi Szemle* 17, no. 4 (1974): 655–63. 662.

the growing importance of the professional scholarly attitude that realized the broadening space and acted upon it. I want to emphasize again the softening of the dictatorship and its increasing tolerance regarding intellectual work.¹³⁹

The emerging plurality can be observed beyond the privileged Academy, too. Historians actively tried to utilize new means of pluralism, these attempts could appear in very different forms: turning to the rather de-politicized context of local history, experimenting with the publication of semi-scholarly literature or becoming active authors of samizdat publications. This pluralism followed a chronological logic regarding the *Zeitgeschichte*, the more sophisticated discussion of the 1918-1919 events preceded the new approaches regarding the interwar period. Nonetheless, the sense of more space for action in a fading dictatorship did not lead necessarily to great discontinuities: historians preserved the ethos of the supporter of nation-building and nation-legitimization, which survived the Stalinist times as well.¹⁴⁰

My thesis concerned a purely scholarly discussion in which only several historians were involved, being fellows of the highly respected Academy. However, their results were slowly disseminated in popular historical books and university textbooks or utilized by politicians – of course, in varying forms. Yet, this thesis is not concerned with wider perception and distorted implementation of the discourses; I was only interested in the creation of the narratives and its institutional conditions.

The Institute for History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences gradually started to resemble the autonomous, objective ethos of academic research in the 1970s, as my case study also confirmed. However, this gradual opening towards new narratives and challenging the previous paradigms was not present at the same time either within the ranks of the Institute for Party History or in the other important centre of historians: the universities, most

¹³⁹ Deák, “Hungary.”1059.

¹⁴⁰ Gyáni, “Történetírásunk metszetekben [Our Historiography in Etchings].”37.

importantly ELTE. Dogmatism, which was a basic principle when selecting the post-1956 staff at the university, reproduced itself. The artificial separation of the two spheres regarding resources and the opportunity for pluralism did not entirely disappear even up until nowadays, 25 years after the transition.

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