

HUNGARY'S PATH TOWARD AN ILLIBERAL SYSTEM

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Permanent and Changing Features of Foreign Policy in Hungary since 1989

Abstract. The author examines different features of Hungarian foreign policy objectives after the democratic changes in 1989-1990. He explains some of the domestic and foreign policy conditions that have influenced the implementation of those objectives, and highlights positive and negative effects of the existence and disappearance of public support behind the formulation and implementation of Hungarian foreign policy goals. He explains how far Hungarian foreign policy has managed to contribute to the democratic changes in Hungary, but the main focus of the article lies squarely on the question of how the “star pupil”, galloping into the lead amongst the newly formed Central and Eastern European democracies, has suddenly found itself lagging behind.

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Hungarian foreign policy played an outstanding role in paving the way to and forming the international conditions for the transition of Hungary to democracy during 1989-1990.¹ In this period one – perhaps the most important – of its tasks was to create the conditions that could lead to the country's European and transatlantic integration. The stance of successive Hungarian governments towards such integration demonstrates distinct developments in Hungary's foreign policy position not only in the European context, but also regarding the individual countries in the region. The paramount goal was to become integrated into existing Western institutions; however, the process leading up to that was at least as important as actually achieving membership. Adopting the norms and values promoted by the European Union, suitably adapting western democratic institutional frameworks and transposing the entire Euro-

¹ As a former Hungarian Ambassador and foreign policy adviser to two previous Hungarian prime ministers, the author participated in foreign policy making in various positions from 1990 until 2010. Some of the judgements, recollections and references here, therefore, come from his personal recollections, but all are supported with further evidences.

pean legislative system into Hungarian law all necessitated significant efforts, staunch commitment to engagement, and support from not only the political parties but indeed the whole of society. That support was the guarantor for the necessary means and conditions to enable transition to be carried through, and it helped create and hold together the unified political will required for it. The integration process, therefore, had a favourable impact on Hungary's external relations, on its approach to regional cooperation and on its neighbourhood policy. Reciprocally, existing partial successes in the democratic transformation prior to full membership obviously increased room for manoeuvre in Hungarian foreign policy. So it was, then, that European integration and democratic transition worked in an organic and self-reinforcing manner and in unity for a considerable time.

Despite the many gains and positive effects of integration on Hungarian society, following attainment of full membership of NATO and the EU signs of change began to appear in Hungarian foreign policy and with them domestic support for foreign policy objectives, dominant during the early years of transition, began to diminish. A markedly new tone, and in many cases controversial positions began to surface in the foreign policy decision-making process and its results. While the most important foreign policy goals had been achieved, new objectives were not formulated, so that the Hungarian political elite could not distinctly articulate what role and position it wished to take in the newly acquired organizations, nor even how to perceive their function and mission. Certainly the question was not easy for a country that after vastly different historical experience had changed its whole political regime barely two decades before. Perhaps unsurprisingly, no immediate consensus was reached, in fact quite to the contrary, for there seemed to be increasing disharmony among the political parties and politicians in their efforts to resolve foreign policy questions.

The direction and extent of the changes in Hungarian foreign policy in relation to the integration process can best be presented and perceived by the statements of two Hungarian Prime Ministers. The first statement was made by József Antall, the first freely elected Prime Minister after the democratic transition from 1990-1993,² who, following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, stated that for Hungary "[...] the only option available was to join the Western integration which, despite the inherent risks, could offer a guarantee to our region [...]"³ Two decades later Viktor Orbán,⁴ Prime Minister then and again today, stated in a speech of 15 March 2012 during the national holiday ceremony that "[...] we

² József Antall was chairman of the Hungarian Democratic Forum (*Magyar Demokrata Fórum*, MDF), a centre-right conservative party.

³ Ignác Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században* [History of Hungary in the 20 century]. Budapest 1999, 58, 146.

⁴ Chairman of FIDESZ-MPSZ, a centre-right conservative party.

[Hungary] will not be a colony [...] we demand equality for Hungarians, we will not be second-class citizens of Europe".⁵

There is an obvious difference in the mood and orientation of the two statements, highlighting a significant change in Hungarian foreign policy between 1990 and 2015. The purpose of this article is not to interpret statements intended for domestic consumption, but rather to examine the times of the two statements. I mean to determine what are the changing and permanent features of Hungarian foreign policy, to answer the following questions: How did the "star pupil", forging ahead amongst the newly formed Central and Eastern European (CEE) democracies, suddenly find itself lagging behind? Why is Hungary's ability to contribute to solving international problems diminishing? And is it true that Hungary has increasingly become a source of problems rather than solutions?

This article divides the last three decades of Hungarian foreign policy into three distinctive phases. The first covers the transition from the decades of limited sovereignty until the restoration of it, the second is about the integration process and the foreign policy consensus, and the third examines the dissolution of consensus in foreign policy, other considerations and recently emerged challenges for the future.

The Framework of Limited Sovereignty

With boldly courageous, if limited, economic reforms in place by the 1980s, Hungary had enjoyed relative affluence compared to other Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries. The ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (*Magyar Szocialista Munkáspárt*, MSZMP) had been able to provide a comfortable standard of living that was higher than those of neighbouring countries, and so had enjoyed loyal support from the people. In return, Hungary fully accommodated the Soviet Union's political, social, and foreign policy expectations as well as those in matters of state security. Despite the constraints of adjustment Hungary, of all Eastern bloc countries, distanced itself the furthest from any semblance of the Soviet economic model, and although with considerable limitations was able to increase its manoeuvrability in foreign policy⁶ and economics.⁷ Thanks to its own initiative and, in large part, to the receptiveness

⁵ Nem leszünk gyarmat! [We will not be a colony!] – Statement of Viktor Orbán, 15 March 2012, available at <http://www.miniszerelnok.hu/beszed/nem_leszunk_gyarmat_?utm_source=mandiner&utm_medium=link&utm_campaign=mandiner_201405>. All internet sources were accessed on 2 July 2015.

⁶ However, an independent Hungarian foreign policy did not exist in critical times such as 1981 when a State of Emergency was declared in Poland, or in 1984 during the boycott of the Los Angeles Olympic Games.

⁷ Hungary had become a member of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as early as 6 May 1982.

of Mikhail Gorbachev, Hungary was able to increase its latitude for international manoeuvre allowing it, for example, to be the first CEE region country to re-establish diplomatic relations with Israel.⁸ Hungary was also the first CEE country to establish any diplomatic relations with South Korea, the Holy See in Rome and South Africa. As well as new diplomatic relations, visits to Budapest by high-ranking Western diplomats and politicians became frequent enough to become quite the norm⁹ as the West came to consider Budapest as a potential new venue for dialogue with the East. By the end of the 1980s, Hungary and its foreign policy carried political weight far exceeding its actual size and general political power in the grand scheme of European discussions, but still Hungary's leaders had to remain cautious about the reactions of the Soviet leadership.¹⁰

Hungary used its extended room for foreign policy manoeuvre not only to formulate and assert its own national interests, but also to become a useful and reliable partner in European matters. Hungary learned to express its national interests within multilateral frameworks, shining examples being the proactive role played in the "Helsinki process" or its contribution to better understanding between the two sides of a divided Europe. After prior consultation with both Mikhail Gorbachev, Secretary General of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, and Helmut Kohl, West German Chancellor, Hungary was allowed to make an independent decision to open its borders to the many East German (GDR) citizens holidaying in Hungary and wanting to go West. With that single act, Hungary contributed much both to German reunification, and to the dismantling of the so-called Iron Curtain.

Hungary, on a path forced on it by history, suddenly gained an opportunity to disengage, thanks also to Gorbachev's policy of restructuring (*perestrojka*) and his personal decision to allow fundamental political, economic, and social change in the Central East European countries. In the period commonly referred to with the catchphrase "regime change", the two most important political manifestations Hungarian society experienced were that, on the one hand the transition came without bloodshed, and on the other that Hungary was the

⁸ Hungary, like all Eastern Bloc states except Romania, had severed diplomatic relations with Israel under pressure from the Soviet Union during the Six-Day War in 1967. Low-level diplomatic ties resumed in 1988 with an exchange of interest offices in Budapest and Tel Aviv. Diplomatic relations were fully re-established on 18 September 1989.

⁹ For instance Margaret Thatcher (UK), Helmut Kohl (West Germany) and Bettino Craxi (Italy) visited János Kádár, the Chairman of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, in the first half of 1984.

¹⁰ "Kádár wanted an agreement with EEC and for Western leaders he was an increasingly attractive interlocutor. Jaruzelski's coup against Solidarity made him unacceptable in international society, while Ceaușescu's human rights violations were a growing embarrassment. That left Kádár, and his well-known links to Andropov increased his value as an indirect conduit to the Soviet leadership at a time when direct contact was very limited." Roger Gough, *A Good Comrade: Janos Kádár, Communism and Hungary*. London 2006, 221.

country best prepared in the region to transform its own political system and then to absorb the changes. That readiness, particularly in the early 1990s, gave Hungary a significant competitive advantage, and with its relative 'maturity' the country was able to formulate foreign policy goals and make them known to its partners. The Western democracies too had a vested interest in ensuring that the momentum of change was irreversible. They placed "star pupil" Hungary in the forefront and made the country an example to the CEE countries which were finding it more difficult to change quite so expeditiously.

During that period Hungary's room for manoeuvre expanded considerably, allowing its effective contribution to decisions made about European matters. The possibilities and limitations were well reflected in a later statement by Prime Minister Antall: "Without Gorbachev's politics, we could not have carried out these changes, Gorbachev's legacy cannot be erased from history [...]".¹¹

Regaining Sovereignty – Emergence of Old and New Challenges

The new, democratically elected Hungarian government had barely assumed power in 1990 when the country's Western orientation became more and more evident, a natural enough thing for a country which had just regained its sovereignty and had already established numerous bilateral contacts with Western countries and organisations. Among others, Hungary had been admitted to the Council of Europe in 1990, had ratified the European Convention of Human Rights in 1992, became a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council from 1992-1993, had taken on the rotating chairmanship of OSCE in 1995 and in 1996 had become a full member of the OECD. Hungary had also continuously increased trade with countries of the European Community.¹²

However, the transition brought not only positive new developments to Hungary in the field of society and politics; it also had to face and come to terms with its own history, its neighbours and the sobering requirement of having to learn to live and cooperate with them. It proved to be a difficult task, especially considering that a number of neighbouring countries had been dissolved and so were obliged to continue within the framework of new statehood. New ties had to be established, while links with traditional neighbours, Austria and Romania, had to be recalibrated. Reviewing and reassessing relationships with those countries was not always easy since they too, like Hungary, were preoccupied with working to regain their sovereignty. However, the problem

¹¹ József ANTALL, *Modell és valóság* [Model and reality], vol. 2. Budapest 1994, 184.

¹² András KÖVES, *A KGST-kereskedelemtől az EU-csatlakozásig* [From Comecon trade to EU accession], *Közgazdasági Szemle* 50 (2003), 635-653, available at <<http://www.epa.oszk.hu/00000/00017/00095/pdf/04Koves.pdf>>.

of minority rights, placed in a common historical context, affected virtually all neighbouring countries and not all could agree how to even assess the problem, let alone find common ground to enable them to deal with such a thorny question. Again like Hungary, the neighbouring countries too found it difficult to process certain common historical memories. Hungarian government declarations in defence of Hungarian minorities – accorded by right of constitutional obligations – were received with suspicion by neighbouring countries as carrying the threat of limiting their own independence and sovereignty. Hungary, on the other hand, considered the point a practical benefit of transition, a way to compensate for the injustices of the Treaty of Trianon of 1920. For them, it would ensure protection of the collective rights of Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries.

For Hungarian foreign policy that point has been a major bone of contention from the very beginning of transition and continues to be a cardinal question to the present day. Following his election to office in 1990 Prime Minister József Antall caused great controversy when he referred to himself as “Prime Minister in spirit to 15 million Hungarians”,¹³ while the actual population of Hungary at the time was 10.3 million. Antall’s was the first official reference to the obligations and responsibilities to Hungarian minorities living outside Hungary made by a sitting Hungarian prime minister since the closing of the Paris Peace Treaty which ended the Second World War. The subject has strongly influenced Hungary’s relationships with her neighbours ever since.

Establishing a Framework for Integration

In parallel with its articulation of its western orientation, Hungary made requests to join practically all existing and realistically attainable political and economic organizations. With the consensus of the parliamentary parties that had supported the formulation and implementation of foreign policy objectives, Hungary managed to meet and incorporate into its own legal system all the conditions necessary for fully-fledged membership of those organisations. The settled will and determination of Hungarian political parties and people in promoting a Western orientation created a unique historical moment at which key decisions and bills were – in most cases – easily passed by Parliament and supported by the people. The positively cooperative political atmosphere surrounding the integration process paved the way for a consensus among parliamentary parties that lasted for quite some time and served as the foundation

¹³ Géza JESZENSZKY, Antall József, a nemzetpolitikus [József Antall, the nationality politician], *Valóság* 48 (2013), no. 1, 79-94, available at <http://www.valosagonline.hu/index.php?oldal=ci_kk&cazon=471&lap=2>.

for all the political decisions taken in relation to the integration process, from change of regime in Hungary to accession to the European Union in 2004.

Engagement in Security-Related Cooperation:
NATO

Following its accession to organisations and agreements dedicated to human, economic, and minority rights, the first real challenge that lay before Hungary was to join the “hard security” North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. In 1988, Gyula Horn, state secretary for Foreign Affairs, had become the first communist politician to address a political committee meeting of NATO's Parliamentary Assembly.¹⁴ In February 1990, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Horn delivered a statement to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in which he referred to the possibility of joining the “political organs” of NATO.¹⁵ The idea stirred up a good deal of controversy and elicited differing reactions from each side of the so-called Iron Curtain. Despite the controversies and differences of views, in the aftermath of the unsuccessful August 1991 Moscow *coup d'état*, the preliminary and informal discussions about NATO membership suddenly found more relevance and became more substantive. It became evident to politicians in the West that the development of the new democracies in Eastern Europe would not necessarily follow a straight line, and they considered that it would be prudent to expedite integration procedures and anchor new candidates by offering membership of integration organisations. Madeleine Albright, then US Ambassador to the UN, visited Budapest in 1994 with the US Chief of Staff, and remarked informally that “the question of membership [for Hungary] is not whether, but when and where”.¹⁶

However, the positive and high expectations were short-lived when the nature of Hungary's relationship with its neighbours was found to be “not in good order”. The message was clear: Hungary could join NATO only if it settled its differences with its neighbours. Therefore, NATO quickly drew the attention of the Hungarian leaders to the importance of preparations for and signing of basic bilateral treaties with them. All of a sudden, the success of Hungary's integration was in danger, although the process itself had not even really started.

The differing assessments of human rights matters and minority rights that had been swept under the carpet for so many years were the main source of

¹⁴ Gyula Horn would later become prime minister of Hungary, heading a socialist-liberal government from 1994 to 1998. He was also chairman of the Hungarian Socialist Party.

¹⁵ Janusz BUGAJSKI / Ilona TELEKI, *Atlantic Bridges, America's New European Allies*. Lanham/MD et al. 2007, 133.

¹⁶ James M. GOLDGEIER, *Not Whether But When. The US Decision to Enlarge NATO*. Washington/DC 1999, 52-53.

contention between former Czechoslovakia and Hungary as well as Romania and Hungary, and centred on the notion of guaranteeing individual or collective rights for minorities. Under Gyula Horn's socialist government, as a prerequisite to NATO membership but also in an attempt to improve its geopolitical relationships, Hungary finally signed bilateral treaties with Slovakia (1995) and Romania (1996). Because of numerous and harsh criticism from the opposition, Horn's government had to put in substantial efforts in the Hungarian parliament into adapting the basic treaties. According to the centre-right opposition, by signing the treaties Hungary compromised much that was in Hungary's interests, because "it did not adhere to the recommendations of the Council of Europe, nor insist on the withdrawal of the Beneš decrees".¹⁷ The opposition agreed to the treaties only on condition that modifications to them should be implemented immediately upon change of government, a position the opposition adopted despite the fact that not only NATO but the EU too were encouraging agreement with the neighbours.

In establishing the conditions for joining NATO, the Hungarian government, going beyond fulfilling its responsibilities as detailed in the basic bilateral treaties, received a boost through a new NATO mission resulting from the Dayton Agreement in which the US was to set up a military base in Tászár, Hungary, for the purpose of providing technical and logistical support to the Balkan peace-keeping mission.¹⁸ That gave Hungary another opportunity to prove it was prepared and able to take on such responsibilities in the regional context too, and ever since it has contributed substantially to peace-building efforts in the Western Balkan region. In fact, it brought the final seal of approval and Hungary was admitted to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization on 12 March 1999.

In retrospect, and despite the criticism of the opposition at the time, the Hungarian government made a valid and wise assessment by signing bilateral treaties with neighbouring countries to meet the conditions necessary for joining NATO, which was the first and strategic national interest of Hungary. With the signing of the bilateral treaties Hungary regained its status as a reliable country in the region, showing itself ready to make sacrifices, if need be. Hungary could once again focus its attention on the integration process and its acceleration.

¹⁷ Thomas AMBROSIO, *Irredentism: Ethnic Conflict and International Politics*. Westport/CT 2001, 132-136.

¹⁸ Hungary leased its Tászár airbase to the US to facilitate NATO's implementation force (IFOR) and later NATO's stabilization force (SFOR). In 1999, Tászár airbase was used by US fighter bombers for NATO air strikes against Serbia. In 2003, Tászár airbase was also used for the training of up to 3,000 exiled Iraqis by US forces.

A Long Way to the European Union

In chronological order of Hungary's integration aspirations, accession to the European Union was the second but equally important priority. Accession had become the most significant foreign policy goal, which similarly to accession to NATO would eventually receive the support needed from the Hungarian political elite, political parties and society as a whole. As in the case of NATO membership, the unwavering and unequivocal support of society and domestic politicians was crucial, since the transposition of a huge mountain of European legal documents into the Hungarian legislative system was an enormous undertaking, and would entail changes that would affect practically every aspect of life in Hungary. The acceptance and incorporation of those changes were finally rewarded with the country's admission to the European Union.

Hungary's intention to join was substantiated when in 1988 the country became the first in the CEE region to establish ties with the European Community. On one of his first official trips abroad on 16-18 July 1990, Hungarian Prime Minister József Antall met EU Commission President Jacques Delors in Brussels and handed him a memorandum which both laid out the Hungarian position regarding bilateral ties, and mentioned Hungary's intentions concerning future accession. The Association Agreement, already signed in 1991 to come into force in 1994, was followed by a formal request for membership on 1 April 1994.

During the less than ten year period between the start of the "screening process" and the closure of all the negotiating chapters, a number of attempts were made and put on the agenda of the EU to formulate exact political and other criteria for membership. In parallel with the the incorporation of EU legislation into the Hungarian legal system, the EU demanded a positive track record and outstanding performance in implementing democratic standards and norms, the rule of law, observance of minority rights and the strengthening and stabilizing of the institutions guaranteeing and protecting them. In fact Hungary had passed with flying colours, and its decision to join the EU seemed to incorporate an assurance that by the time of the signing of the Agreement on 16 April 2003 the country would be in total compliance with the criteria set out. Similarly to the case of its joining NATO, Hungary held a referendum on EU membership a few days before the signing of the accession agreement, on 12 April 2003. The result was favourable, with 83.76% of the voters approving membership, and Hungary became a full member of the European Union on 1 May 2004. That success saw the formal achievement of the goals set by Hungarian foreign policy of integration into the institutions of the European Union and NATO. It was inspired by the change of regime and achieved in large part thanks to the consensus among the political parties.

*Challenges:
Regional, Neighbourhood and Minority Policies*

Like the European integration process, regional policy occupied a prominent place in Hungary's foreign policy. One of the most important and successful of its elements has been the cooperation of the so-called Visegrád Group of countries (V4). The cooperation between Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Poland has garnered much respect in Europe and European institutions and proved a useful venue and framework for those four countries for exchanging their views on the integration process. Similarly to positive experiences of other regional groups like the Benelux and Nordic countries, preliminary discussion and coordination of viewpoints and questions which strove to achieve a unified voice has been beneficial to the participating countries and has resulted in V4 members being able to exert more influence while representing their interests in EU forums. The Visegrád Group, together with the Central European Initiative (CEI) and supplemented by numerous other bilateral agreements has provided Hungary with the required framework for regional cooperation.¹⁹

The other important priority for Hungarian foreign policy has been matters relating to minorities and national politics, and defence of the rights of Hungarian minorities living in neighbouring countries. Because of the topic's inherently sensitive nature it has always had great importance to relations between the respective countries. In 1993, Hungarian Prime Minister Antall emphasized that "our relationship with our neighbours is in large part determined by their treatment of their Hungarian minorities".²⁰ He recognized that the condition and treatment of matters affecting minorities is a question of security policy, and concerns the security of not only the countries in question but of all Europe. That view prevailed in Hungarian foreign policy until 1993, which saw the elaboration and acceptance of the first security policy document of newly democratic Hungary.²¹ In that document, the political parties represented in Parliament jointly stated that "the policy of intolerant nationalism which denies the existence of national minority rights has a significant destabilizing effect in the region".²² The Hungarian parliamentary parties took the view that the solution to the problem could be found in cooperation with the relevant international organisations and based on international law, and to facilitate matters

¹⁹ The CEI aims to achieve cohesion in areas of mutual interest and to assist its non-EU member countries in consolidating their economic and social development.

²⁰ Interview with József Antall, *Die Welt*, 16 August 1993.

²¹ 11/1993. sz. Országgyűlési Határozat a Magyar Köztársaság biztonságpolitikájának alapelveiről [Resolution no. 11/1993 by the Hungarian parliament on the principles of the Hungarian Republic's security policy], 12 March 1993, available at <<http://www.grotius.hu/publ/displ.asp?id=XEUMGG>>.

²² Ibid.

they incorporated some of the statements of relevant CSCE (later OSCE) documents into their resolution. Their references to CSCE documents clearly stated that the questions relating to national ethnic minorities cannot be considered exclusively as an internal problem of a respective country, and it was declared not only a regional matter, but rather a security and human rights matter affecting the security of the whole CSCE area.²³

Hungary's initial enthusiasm for a quick and efficient resolution of the question was dashed when it realized that neither the CEE countries nor other European countries with similar problems supported the provision of collective rights for national minorities. The failing negotiations with neighbouring countries could not persuade the western European partners – whose attitude was summarized by Viktor Meier in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* – that “the West does not think that Hungary's orientation to Western Europe would be best served by sharply isolating itself from its neighbours”.²⁴ Lack of western support, or even of some measure of sympathy, together with the concerns of neighbours over statements similar to Prime Minister Antall's remark about being “Prime Minister in spirit to 15 million Hungarians” significantly weakened Hungary's position during the basic treaty negotiations between Hungary and Slovakia as well as those between Hungary and Romania.

In contrast to Antall, as incoming Prime Minister in 1994 Gyula Horn spoke of “wishing to be the Prime Minister of 10.5 million Hungarians”,²⁵ which implied a reference to the ethnic minorities living within Hungarian territory but not to Hungarian citizens living outside the country's borders. Horn avoided conflicts with his neighbours and conducted a policy aimed at goodwill and understanding with the West, bearing in mind that in his foreign policy priorities, matters of neighbourhood policy and minority rights came second to the all-important Euro-Atlantic integration. Horn's approach therefore diverged from that of Antall, whose main objective had been to secure minority rights for Hungarians in neighbouring countries.

During Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's first term of office from 1998-2002, the explicit focus of Hungarian foreign policy – surpassing the politics of Prime Minister Antall – was distinct attention given to the problems of ethnic Hungar-

²³ Charter of Paris for a New Europe, Paris 1990, available at <<http://www.osce.org/mc/39516?download=true>>; Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, available at <<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/14310?download=true>>.

²⁴ Viktor MEIER, *Konsequent nur in Richtung Westen*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 11 January 1993.

²⁵ Zsolt KÉRI-NAGY, *A Magyar nemzetpolitika szerepe a térség stabilitása tükrében* [The role of the Hungarian nationality policy for the stability of the region], *Magyar Kisebbség – Nemzetpolitikai Szemle* 9 (2004), no.3, available at <http://www.jakabffy.ro/magyarkisebbsseg/pdf/2004_3_25.pdf>.

ians living beyond the border.²⁶ However, that position on minority questions was greatly hampered by the difficult composition of the governing coalition between Orbán's centre-right Fidesz Party and the ultra-populist Smallholders' Party (*Független Kisgazda, Földmunkás és Polgári Párt, FKGP*). Among other things it consisted in that spirit of "the representation of 15 million Hungarians", as well as the "grand national idea" represented by the FKGP. It was during that period that Fidesz changed the course of Hungary's policy on the Hungarian nation. While Fidesz members had walked out of Parliament in 1991 and had ridiculed the strong national sentiment prevailing at the commemoration of the Treaty of Trianon, a marked change of thinking later brought them completely in line with the foreign policy of former Prime Minister Antall. As one of the first acts of the second government in 2010, Orbán designated 4 June, the date of the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, as the official National Day of Unity.

The first Orbán government (1998-2002) broke with the practice of both Antall and Horn, where the provision of the rights of national minorities had been based on the basic treaties, in full harmony with international legal norms. Orbán's foreign policy introduced a newly coined "Hungarian Status Law" which regulated the institutional relationship of certain minority individuals and groups to the Hungarian state.²⁷ The manifestation of this status for the selected minority was the "Magyar Passport", bearing a map of an enlarged historical territory of Hungary, encompassing all ethnic Hungarians. The situation has often since resulted in friction and radical behaviour from extremist groups in neighbouring countries, even regarding reasonable cultural and political initiatives by Hungarian minorities.

New Features in Foreign Policy: the Growing Dominance of Domestic Policy

With membership of NATO and the EU secured, the institutional frameworks were set up for Hungary's most important foreign and security endeavours, which also formally completed Hungary's integration into the relevant organisations. Conditions of membership had been met at the time of accession, and it was pertinent to ask whether the other previous foreign policy goals were still tenable. Apart from achieving the most important goal of integration, formulating the question was unavoidable, due in large part to the disintegration of parliamentary consensus and support for certain goals. Deep differences became apparent, and earlier practices of decision-making could not be sustained.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ 2001. évi LXII. törvény a szomszédos államokban élő magyarokról [Law LXII of 2001 on the Hungarians living in the neighbouring states], available at <http://net.jogtar.hu/jr/gen/hjegy_doc.cgi?docid=A0100062.TV>.

No obvious single event caused the domestic discord leading to the discontinuance of the foreign policy consensus. Rather, it was the culmination of a process. Nevertheless, one significant element in it was the defeat of Viktor Orbán and his party in the 2002 elections, which forced Orbán into opposition. In democracies it is not unusual for the opposition to criticize the government, their decisions or how they are executed. However, the sort of radical behaviour in opposition of Viktor Orbán and his party after the first round of the 2002 elections, as well as how they conducted themselves thereafter from 2002–2010, gave no scope for cooperation nor understanding in matters of foreign policy. In his speech in 2002, still frequently cited, Orbán said that “the Homeland cannot exist in opposition”, signalling that domestic and foreign policy questions already accepted and in force would be revisited.²⁸

A slow but steady disintegration of the consensus on foreign policy objectives was a significant and regrettable negative development which damaged international relations and risked destabilizing relations with Hungary's partners. Of particular concern was the unpredictability and disagreement during the second half of the 2000s, when a uniform and clear voice would have been of more value to address challenges arising from the acceleration of European integration, management of the global economic and financial crisis, or the aggressive ambitions manifested by Russian foreign policy towards other successor states of the Soviet Union. By itself each problem would have been difficult enough to solve, and all required great perseverance and cooperation. Put together, however, they posed an enormous challenge, and loss of parliamentary consensus on Hungary's major foreign policy questions came at a most unfortunate moment.

Centre-left Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány governed from 2004 to 2006 and again from 2006 to 2009, and in that second term a new foreign policy document was drafted in a genuine effort to bring about renewed consensus on Hungarian foreign policy.²⁹ However, Gyurcsány's efforts proved futile, while other attempts to create consensus in any field of domestic or foreign policy came to an abrupt halt after a further hardening of the opposition Fidesz party's behaviour towards the government in the aftermath of events that took place in Autumn 2006.³⁰ An all-embracing domestic political crisis unfolded which

²⁸ A haza nem lehet ellenzékben [The homeland cannot be in opposition], Viktor Orbán's statement of 7 May 2002, available at <<http://2001-2006.orbanviktor.hu/hir.php?aktmenu=2&id=1159>>.

²⁹ Új külpolitikai stratégia készül [A new foreign policy strategy is being prepared], *HVG*, 13 July 2006, available at <<http://hvg.hu/itthon/20060713kulpol>>.

³⁰ The domestic political crisis began with the leaking of a tape-recording on 17 September 2006 in which PM Gyurcsány admitted the malfunctioning of his government's economic policy. PM Gyurcsány's words provoked outrage and a wave of protest, and resulted in the worst riots in Budapest in decades along with furious demands for his resignation. PM

aggravated the situation and entrenched positions on both sides of the political divide. The result was the opposition's stubborn refusal to cooperate with the government on any matter, great or small.

New Objectives in European and Transatlantic Integration

Following EU accession, Hungarian foreign policy executives seemed at a loss for what to do about the country's membership of NATO and particularly of the EU. They were unable to come up with any new ideas nor vision for the future, and in the absence of consensus and with the surfacing of more serious problems such as how to minimize the effects of the financial crisis, there was neither time nor energy to formulate new foreign policy. With no new and supportable objectives, the political parties started competing with each other to show, within the existing framework, who could better represent Hungary's national interests in Brussels. As proof and for the benefit of their constituents, members of Parliament drew the public's attention to the tangible benefits of EU membership. For obvious reasons, people were easily convinced by EU benefits that affected them directly, and noted which representative or political party had most success in EU budget appropriations. Things like the prohibition of the sale of Hungarian agricultural land to foreigners, the use of generous financial instruments by municipalities, access to structural and other funds or the tax-free home-production of the traditional Hungarian spirit known as *pálinka* were all convenient communication tools to describe the financial rewards associated with EU membership.

While both the government and opposition went down this route of communication, the perception of the benefits of European values, democracy-building and stabilization began to fade away. In time, some political parties even avoided mere mention of "the importance of belonging to Europe and European values" so often referred to during the accession talks. Gradually, official communications introduced the notion of "independence", of a new political direction setting European interests against "Hungarian national interests".

The signs of this new approach have already unfolded during the "first ever Hungarian EU presidency". Hungary prepared for it very enthusiastically and executed the tasks pertaining to it during the first half of 2011. Activities related to the presidency gained the full support of almost all segments of domestic policy, but the foreign policy benefits of the EU Presidency were almost neutralized by an entirely new foreign policy statement by the incoming second government of Viktor Orbán in 2010. The new Orbán government embarked on a more active foreign policy determined to present confrontational Hungarian

Gyurcsány called a confidence vote in parliament on 6 October 2006 while the opposition threatened to continue street demonstrations if he did not resign.

views to its transatlantic, European, and regional partners. The new foreign policy was aimed at supporting the implementation of the political objectives of the ruling Fidesz party which had won the elections with a two-thirds majority.

The complexities and difficulties of this new foreign policy became apparent immediately. A question was raised about one of the main conditions of EU membership, specifically adherence to and accountability for democratic rules and the rule of law. As it happened, the EU and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe criticized some of the modifications of the Hungarian Fundamental Law of 2010 which made up Hungary's newly issued Constitution, in particular matters concerning the independence of judges and the freedom of the media. Strangely, the government considered the criticisms as an "attack on the Hungarian people", and with the vehemence of a "revolutionary fighter"³¹ mounted a concerted international defence of the modifications in its new Fundamental Law. Hungary became a frequent topic within the institutions of the European Union.

The EU institutions, like the Council of Europe, on the one hand, and Hungarian authorities on the other hand began to discuss the situation of fundamental rights and the practices associated with them in Hungary. As a result of the discussions the European Parliament adopted a report by Rui Tavares, a member of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance in the European Parliament.³² The Tavares report formulated very specific criticisms of and recommendations for the execution of fundamental rights in Hungary,³³ calling on Hungary to restore the powers of the Constitutional Court and the independence of the judiciary, to restore parliamentary procedures to allow the opposition to participate in law-making, to re-establish media pluralism, to decriminalize homelessness, to protect vulnerable minorities, and to restore the hundreds of churches that had lost their legal status. And those were just a few of the problems.

In a session of the European Parliament held in Strasbourg on the day before the vote that adopted Mr Tavares' report in July 2013, Prime Minister Orbán refused to accept its criticisms. Before the European Parliament's decision, the European Commission had tried a variety of strategies to impose sanctions on Hungary, from bringing infringement actions to suspending cohesion funds for development projects there. But Orbán's government was able to avoid all serious sanctions by being even more legalistic than Brussels, making only

³¹ Fidesz politicians frequently referred to themselves as "revolutionaries at the polling booth".

³² European Parliament, Report on the Situation of Fundamental Rights: Standards and Practices in Hungary, (2012/2130(INI)), 24 June 2013, available at <<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//NONSGML+REPORT+A7-2013-0229+0+DOC+PDF+V0//EN>>.

³³ Ibid.

the smallest adjustments to its Fundamental Law in order to be in technical compliance with EU law.³⁴

Following the European Parliament's acceptance of the Tavares report, Hungarian foreign policy adopted an even more defiant stance against its detailed points. In an unexpected and uncomfortable manner, the responsibilities formulated and accepted during the accession talks now seemed to be in jeopardy.

The governing Hungarian coalition did not expect such a strikingly critical reaction from the EU institutions and some of the commissioners. Therefore, Hungary and its Prime Minister used new communication tactics, referred to as a "peacock dance",³⁵ or a new "Hungaricum"³⁶ of foreign policy, meaning that Hungary's government commented on the criticisms in one way to the Hungarian public and in another in its discussions with international partners. By doing so the Hungarian government of course hoped to reconcile its partners by suggesting its continued embrace and practice of European democratic norms, all the while, for domestic consumption, blasting the European warnings in such terms as "we will not be a colony of Brussels", "no one should dictate to us", "respect for Hungarians", and the like. Hungarian politics had indeed wandered far from the course of European values which it had formerly embodied, until the focus of foreign policy was replaced by "Hungarian national interests".

Representing interests in Brussels had become more and more a confrontational exercise for the Hungarians as they presented their views trenchantly and without any serious attempt to exhaust possibilities for agreement. Hungary appeared – contrary to the picture of strength it hoped to convey – as a country both unpredictable and unwilling to compromise. In many cases, its confrontational posturing was proof of its authority, at least to itself and for domestic political consumption.

The Hungarian government resorted to different tactics to maintain public support despite the obviously politically harmful consequences to it of pursuing European values. In spring 2015, two separate matters came to the fore in the public's attention: the possible introduction of the death penalty and differing views on migration, and both caused significant controversy for Hungary's relationship with the EU. The Hungarian positions on those two matters were advanced by EU officials as "grounds for divorce"³⁷, and there was even talk

³⁴ Kim Lane SCHEPPELE, Hungary and the End of Politics, *The Nation*, 6 May 2014, available at <www.thenation.com/article/179710/hungary-and-end-politics>.

³⁵ The definition comes from Prime Minister Orbán himself. It was presented in a statement on 30 May 2012. Orbán Viktor – Pávatánc avagy hogyan verjük át az EU-t [Peacock dance, or how do we fool the EU], available at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=0s5gzvb87ZY>.

³⁶ Recently, traditional and exclusively Hungarian premium products are called "Hungaricum".

³⁷ Matthew DAY, Hungary Could Be Thrown Out Of EU If It Brings Back Death Penalty, Says Jean-Claude Juncker, *The Telegraph*, 1 June 2015, available at <<http://www.telegraph>

in the European Parliament of theoretical introduction of sanctions against Hungary.³⁸ Hungary was officially reminded that "the European Union is not just an economic and political union", but also "a union of shared fundamental values".³⁹

Another example which demonstrates the fading of the importance to Hungarian foreign policy of quintessentially European matters is the introduction of the common European currency, the Euro. Although previous governments must accept their own share of responsibility, it seems that the postponement of the introduction of the European currency, an obligation accepted by Hungary during accession talks, was due primarily to lack of political will. The current government sees the introduction of the Euro as limiting its authority over Hungarian economic and financial policy. Although that argument has a certain amount of validity, it is easy to recognize that over the medium and long term Hungary would lose out, since EU institutions will prefer to give weight to decisions brought by members willing to cooperate and accommodate a higher level of integration.

A further example of Hungary's diminishing the importance given to European integration is to be seen in the circumstances within Hungary during the period of the country's EU presidency in the first half of 2011 and its foreign policy at that time. The leaders of the government, by then referred to as a "government of national unity",⁴⁰ neglected to capitalize on the golden opportunities inherent in the presidency. Their failure to do so was in part because they were burdened by the criticisms, arguments and differing opinions surrounding the amendments to the Fundamental Law.⁴¹ Furthermore, it had not been possible to call the summit of the European Neighbourhood Policy states, scheduled to take place in Hungary during its own presidency, and the role of the presidency had not succeeded in increasing the Hungarians' support for the EU. It was also an unfortunate coincidence in timing that the Hungarian government's critical and unfavourable opinion of the financial crisis management options of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the EU became fully known and made much of by the media during Hungary's

co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/hungary/11643564/Hungary-could-be-thrown-out-of-EU-if-it-brings-back-death-penalty-says-Jean-Claude-Juncker.html>.

³⁸ European Parliament News, Views on Hungary, Fundamental Rights and EU Values, Press Release, 19 May 2015, available at <www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20150513IPR55481/html/Views-on-Hungary-fundamental-rights-and-EU-values>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ A nemzeti egység kormánya [The government of national unity], 19 May 2010, available at <<http://nezopontintezet.hu/analysis/nemzeti-egyseg-kormanya/>>.

⁴¹ The "rock-solid Fundamental Law", as characterised by Fidesz politicians, was amended five times during its first three years of existence.

presidency.⁴² Despite the fact that Hungary could have obtained much more significant help on more favourable terms from the financial institutions than would have been possible on the money markets – although in parallel with a strict austerity package – the Orbán government openly and visibly rejected their offers of cooperation, mostly for the benefit of domestic politics. Cuts were applied to the livelihoods of its critics rather than to the wages, pensions and social benefits of public sector employees, which was considered a major affront to the EU and the international financial organizations, particularly so at a time when EU members were suffering considerable hardships as a result of their efforts to overcome the effects of the economic crisis.

However, there was one area of European integration in which an unequivocal, if silent, consensus was reached and maintained among all the parliamentary parties for a number of years. It was the unquestioned support given to further enlargement of both NATO and the EU, and foreign and security policy considerations of the parliamentary parties were based on recognition of the importance of further enlargement of both organizations. They kept repeating that “the more of its neighbours and countries in the region meet the conditions of membership in the integration organisations, the better for Hungary and regional stability”. It was therefore unsurprising that the governments of Ferenc Gyurcsány (2006-2009), Gordon Bajnai (2009-2010) and Viktor Orbán (2010-2014) strongly supported Croatia in its European integration endeavours, an honest and transparent plank of Hungarian foreign policy based on neighbourliness and excellent bilateral relations, historical traditions, moral principles and European values. That support was never contested by any of the Hungarian parties either in opposition or government, and it is of symbolic importance that the accession negotiations of Croatia with the EU were finalised on the final day of Hungary’s EU presidency.

New Dimensions and Alternatives

The preoccupation with and continuing criticism of the modifications to the Fundamental Law had a divisive effect and strained the bilateral and traditionally good contacts between Hungary and its major partners, such as Germany and the United States. Although many countries were critical of developments in Hungary, they did not immediately make their views officially known and when they eventually did begin to criticise Hungary there were two reasons why they did so. First, Viktor Orbán revealed his true vision of “democracy”,

⁴² Hungary was the first country in the European Union to be bailed out by the IMF, in coordination with the EU and the World Bank, during the global financial crisis. International Monetary Fund, IMF, EU, and World Bank Line Up \$25 Billion for Hungary, *IMF Survey Online*, 28 October 2008, available at <<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/survey/so/2008/car102808b.htm>>.

and second, Hungary's partners' concerns were raised about its foreign policy orientation, because Hungary had become worryingly close to Russia with regard to the Ukrainian-Russian conflict.

As far as the "democracy question" was concerned, Orbán laid out a long-term philosophical vision of governance in a much-noted speech on 26 July 2014 in Băile Tuşnadului in Romania (Transylvania). Orbán suggested that liberal democracy was in decline and praised the authoritarian "illiberal democracies" in China, Turkey, Russia and Singapore. He said Hungary would retain democracy, would not reject liberal principles like freedom of speech, but that it would be based on "a different, special, national approach".⁴³ He called today's key struggle "a race to invent the state that is most capable of making a nation successful".⁴⁴ While most EU leaders have toned down their criticism of Orbán's illiberal ways, the US has not, with former President Bill Clinton describing Mr Orbán as an admirer of "authoritarian capitalism". A few days after Clinton made his remark, current US President Barack Obama took Hungary to task in a speech to the Clinton Foundation, in which he noted that "from Hungary to Egypt, endless regulations and overt intimidation increasingly target civil society".⁴⁵ Victoria Nuland, a senior US diplomat asked, "How can you sleep under your NATO Article 5 blanket at night while pushing 'illiberal democracy' by day; whipping up nationalism; restricting free press; or demonising civil society?"⁴⁶ During Angela Merkel's visit to Budapest on 9 February 2015, her first in almost five years, the German Chancellor too expressed some well-framed criticisms about Hungary's "illiberal democracy", suggesting that it is a concept she could not even begin to understand.⁴⁷

As far as contacts between Hungary and Russia are concerned, the sight of Russian President Vladimir Putin standing side by side with the Hungarian prime minister during a joint press conference at the end of his official programme in Budapest in February 2015 sent a stern warning to the Ukrainian army suggesting that they would be well advised to surrender.⁴⁸ The Russian President's visit to Budapest took place only a day or two after a French-German brokered ceasefire agreement had been concluded in Minsk.⁴⁹ Putin provoked

⁴³ Orbán the Unstoppable, *The Economist*, 27 September 2014, available at <<http://www.economist.com/news/europe/21620246-criticised-abroad-viktor-orban-going-strength-strength-home-orban-unstoppable>>.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Andrew RETTMAN, US Diplomat Lashes Out at Hungary's Orbán, *EU Observer*, 3 October 2014, available at <<https://euobserver.com/foreign/125881>>.

⁴⁷ Nick THORPE, Merkel Condemns Ukraine Fighting on Hungary Visit, *BBC NEWS*, 02 February 2015, available at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-31090085>>.

⁴⁸ Putin visited Budapest on 17 February 2015. This was Putin's first visit to a NATO/EU capital after his visit to Vienna (Austria) on 24 June 2014.

⁴⁹ Ukraine Ceasefire: New Minsk Agreement Key Points, *BBC NEWS*, 12 February 2015, available at <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31436513>>.

much attention and criticism, but he proved (successfully, from a Russian point of view) that the West's political boycott could be broken, and in the capital of a NATO/EU member, to boot. Even Poland, traditionally one of Hungary's closest allies, publicly criticised the Russian President's visit.

With mounting criticism and mutterings of disapproval from the West, Hungarian foreign policy turned then to the East, which was presented as being recognition of the potential for smart economic growth which would surpass possibilities in Europe, and certainly not as being in response to disapproval from the West. The Hungarian government announced a policy of "Turning Eastwards", which would be consolidated by highly publicized contacts at the level of heads of state and government, among them those of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia and Turkmenistan. During such visits Hungarian officials did not neglect to lavish praise on such regimes. For example, to ensure absolute harmony during a visit to Budapest by Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao in 2011, the Hungarian police arrested a few dozen Tibetan political activists so as not to detract from the positive mood of the planned visit.⁵⁰

It must be noted that in itself the "Turning Eastwards" policy is an absolutely valid and supportable policy, provided that – in accordance with prior objectives – it stimulates the economy and strengthens foreign political ties and, most importantly, that it is not an alternative to European integration and neither replace nor jeopardizes it.⁵¹ Otherwise, the policy would be a tragic mistake and could be taken as a serious sign of a wrong-headed foreign policy direction.

In addition to the questionable motives for "Turning Eastwards" there is also the problematic matter of political miscalculation by the Foreign Ministry. An Azerbaijani soldier named Ramil Safarov had used an axe to kill a sleeping Armenian soldier during a NATO-sponsored training exercise in Hungary. The Azeri soldier was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment for murder. After serving eight years, in 2012 he was deported back to Azerbaijan on the understanding that he would serve the rest of his prison sentence there, but on returning to his homeland the convicted murderer was instead welcomed as a national hero and immediately pardoned by Azerbaijan's President Ilham Alijev. The Azerbaijani government considered this a successful diplomatic coup.⁵² The seriousness of what was in fact a gross diplomatic *faux pas* was followed by the severing of formal diplomatic ties between Hungary and Armenia,

⁵⁰ Ombudsman: Hiba volt a tibeti tüntetők elleni eljárás [Ombudsman: the treatment of the Tibetan protesters was a mistake], *HVG.hu*, 04 August 2011, available at <http://hvg.hu/itthon/20110804_tibeti_tuntetok_ombudsman>.

⁵¹ There is no data nor other evidence to support the claim that the "Turning Eastward" contributed to the stimulation of the Hungarian economy.

⁵² Hungary, Armenia and the Axe-Murderer: Blunder in Budapest, *The Economist*, 4 September 2012, available at <<http://www.economist.com/blogs/easternapproaches/2012/09/hungary-armenia-and-axe-murderer>>.

and the suspicion continues to linger that the whole matter was in fact a sort of barter, for financial gain. Although no proof has come to light, the episode has left a shameful stain on Hungary's reputation, with the impression that political interests far outweighed moral values. The whole affair exposed a critical malfunctioning of the system.

The government that has been in office since 2010 has carried out modifications to regional integration too. Prime Minister Orbán's first official bilateral visit after taking office, contrary to the practice of his predecessors, was not to neighbouring Vienna but rather to Warsaw. With that visit Orbán wished to make a distinctive gesture towards Poland. Though Poland has always been quick to praise the excellent Polish-Hungarian bilateral contacts, and rightly so, it has equally never wished to elevate the relationship above the level of its relationships with Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Accordingly, the Hungarian initiative never received reciprocity, and lately indeed Poland has definitively tried to maintain a certain diplomatic reticence from commenting on various Hungarian decisions and statements. There was only one exception, which was when proactive Polish diplomacy in the context of the Ukrainian-Russian conflict was surprised to hear the statement of the Hungarian Prime Minister about autonomy aspirations of Hungarian minorities living in the Transcarpathian region. Orbán's statement was publicly frowned upon, even by the former Polish Prime Minister and now President of the European Council, Donald Tusk.⁵³ Another new and unfortunate development occurred in the relationship between Poland and Hungary when Prime Minister Orbán paid a visit to Warsaw shortly after Russian President Putin's visit to Budapest. In a joint press conference the Polish Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz spoke about a "frank and difficult conversation" with her Hungarian counterpart,⁵⁴ which was a direct reference to the stance Hungary had taken during the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.⁵⁵

⁵³ Tusk: Orbánnak nem szabad támogatnia a széparatistákat és Oroszországot; Ukrajna bekérte a magyar nagykövetet [Tusk: Orbán must not support the separatists and Russia; Ukraine called the Hungarian ambassador in], *Galamus.hu*, 15 May 2014, available at <http://www.galamuscsoport.hu/tartalom/cikk/380710_tusk_orbannak_nem_szabad_tamogatnia_a_es_ukrajna_a>.

⁵⁴ "The unity of the Visegrád Group and its condemnation of the aggression is fundamental", Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz told a press conference following a meeting with Orbán. She added that the unity of the European Union countries and the Visegrád Group is of paramount importance to the situation in Ukraine. Hungarian PM Orban in Warsaw, *Radio Poland*, 19 February 2015, available at <<http://www.thenews.pl/1/10/Artykul/197620,Hungarian-PM-Orban-in-Warsaw>>.

⁵⁵ Piotr SKOLIMOWSKI, Hungary's Orban Gets Cold Shoulder in Poland After Russian Deal, *Bloomberg.com*, 19 February 2015, available at <<http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-02-19/hungary-s-orban-gets-cold-shoulder-in-poland-after-russian-deal>>. Cf. also Bogdan Góralczyk's contribution to this special issue.

A New Energy Policy

Of the many controversial strands in recent Hungarian foreign policy, energy policy is by far the most striking and contentious. Hungary's dependence on natural gas, petroleum and nuclear power is significant, and the country's most important energy provider is Russia. During the natural gas crises that erupted between the Ukraine and Russia, first in 2006 then again in 2009, Hungary was quite deeply affected by sporadic natural gas deliveries which were in fact completely shut down at one point in 2009.⁵⁶

It is therefore no surprise that during the 2000s, Hungary continuously tried to increase its energy security by participating in various natural gas transmission projects. The two most significant were the planned pipeline constructions to Europe known as "South Stream" and "Nabucco". The South Stream pipeline was to deliver Russian natural gas, while Nabucco was intended to transport Azerbaijani natural gas from the Caspian Sea. The second Gyurcsány government (2006-2009), also recognizing the need to diversify Hungary's energy sources, planned to participate in both projects. While participation in the South Stream project could have provided the benefits of a diverse route, the advantage of the Nabucco project lay in the diverse means of *transfer* as well as because it was the source of an optional route. However, the opposition, led by Fidesz, heavily criticized the government's commitment to the South Stream, and although Gyurcsány too supported the Nabucco project, the opposition presented vehement anti-Russian objections. The Gyurcsány government was accused of betraying Hungarian national interests and even treason.⁵⁷

Ironically, as soon as Orbán's second term in office began in 2010, his government's position changed completely. Orbán now wholeheartedly supported the Russian-initiated South Stream project, and eventually devoted less and less effort to keeping the Nabucco project alive. Even more telling was the total disappearance of any expression of anti-Russian sentiment. Effectively, active participation in the South Stream project became part of the "Turning Eastwards" policy. After the South Stream project was cancelled, Hungary began to support and coordinate an alternative project that would take Russian natural gas to Hungary and Austria through Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Serbia.

⁵⁶ Russia Cuts Gas, and Europe Shivers, *The New York Times*, 6 January 2009, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/07/world/europe/07gazprom.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0>; Mi lesz velünk orosz gáz nélkül? [What happens to us without Russian natural gas?], *Origo.hu*, 6 January 2009, available at <<http://www.origo.hu/itthon/20090106-oroszukran-gazvita-mi-tortenik-magyarorszagon-ha-emiatt-krizis-alakul-ki.html>>.

⁵⁷ Orbán gázvezetésekről egykor és most [Orbán about gas pipelines now and then], *Galamus.hu*, 24 April 2012, available at <http://www.galamuscsoport.hu/tartalom/cikk/133292_orban-gazvezetেকেkrl-egykor-es-most>.

While it is easy to accept the reasoning of the Hungarian government's wish to decrease energy dependence on outside partners, especially with unclear ownership structures, it is barely possible to understand why the Hungarian government signed a contract for nuclear energy with its Russian counterpart – but with neither tender nor even a feasibility study! According to the agreement, the Russian government provides a loan of 10 billion Euros for construction of a second nuclear power plant in Paks,⁵⁸ but when the agreement is implemented Hungarian energy policy will not only be much more exposed to the vagaries of Russian interests and supplies, but the possibility of using other sustainable energy resources will be limited. The controversy concerning the Russian-sponsored project is further exacerbated by the latest decision of the Hungarian government which is aimed at making confidential “certain business and technical data” in contracts signed between selected Russian and Hungarian organisations and subcontractors, the implementation agreements, and data that formed the basis of decisions during the preparation of the agreement of the Paks nuclear power plant.⁵⁹

In the Interest of Hungarian Minorities?

Prime Minister Péter Medgyessy's government (2002-2004) successfully incorporated some important amendments into the first Fidesz administration's “Status Law” regulating the institutional relationship between the Hungarian state and Hungarian minorities to make it acceptable by EU standards. That initiative immediately had a conciliatory effect on Hungary's difficult relations with neighbouring countries, although Medgyessy and his successor Ferenc Gyurcsány (2004-2009) were stumped for how to handle political demands for a referendum on dual citizenship. The demand, initiated by the World Federation of Hungarians, became in turn a new source of tensions with the neighbours. The adoption of the proposal for double citizenship would have guaranteed Hungarian citizenship to Hungarians living in neighbouring countries, if they identified themselves as ethnic Hungarians and were in possession of a “Magyar

⁵⁸ T/13628. számú törvényjavaslata Magyarország Kormánya és az Oroszországi Föderáció Kormánya közötti nukleáris energia békés célú felhasználása terén folytatandó együttműködésről szóló Egyezmény kihirdetéséről [Draft Law no. T/13628 on the promulgation of the agreement between the Hungarian government and the government of the Russian Federation regarding their cooperation on the peaceful use of nuclear energy], Budapest, January 2014, available at <<http://www.parlament.hu/irom39/13628/13628.pdf>>.

⁵⁹ According to the government, classifying the documents as secret serves Hungary's national security. However, the opposition parties said the investment project was the greatest corruption scandal of all time and extending the classification period to thirty years would be “a classified case of treason”. Paks: 30 évre titkosítva [Paks: classified for 30 years], *Válasz.hu*, 3 March 2015, available at <<http://valasz.hu/itthon/paks-30-evre-titkositva-110166>>.

Passport". However, the referendum did not lead to the passing of the double citizenship law, and the relationship between "domestic Hungarians" – particularly those on the political left – and neighbouring ethnic Hungarians entered a phase of deep resentment, which is still discernable today.

The centre-right and right wing political parties managed to make the most of that event, and began to monopolize the affairs of the Hungarian ethnic minorities. It was, therefore, no surprise to see that one of the first decisions of Viktor Orbán's second term in office (2010-2014) was the adoption of the very "Law on Dual Citizenship" that had been rejected in the referendum, for the granting of dual citizenship to more than two million ethnic Hungarians living in neighbouring states had become a symbolic matter for the incoming centre-right government. Hungary now allows ethnic Hungarians to apply for citizenship with no residence nor even visiting requirement provided that they have Hungarian ancestry and speak the Hungarian language, although the legislation does not automatically grant voting rights to the new "citizens". Despite the well-known sensitivities involved and some exchanges of views with the neighbouring states, Hungary did not enter into any substantial coordination, nor did it come to understandings with the countries concerned. The intention to enforce the new status was simply announced as a *fait accompli*. Slovakia issued the most vigorous objections and reservations, with Prime Minister Robert Fico saying that the Hungarian citizenship law presented a "security threat" to Slovakia.⁶⁰ At first, because Hungary held its rotating EU presidency in the first half of 2011, the Slovaks showed restraint and declined to create a diplomatic row, although they did turn to the European Commission and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to explain their concerns.⁶¹

The positive reactions by ethnic Hungarians to the introduction of the dual citizenship law were countered by the negative tone of government discussions with various Hungarian civil and minority party representatives. The reservations about the interethnic "Most-Hid" party in Slovakia or the messages sent to the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (*Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség*, RMDSZ) evoked a negative opinion amongst the respective Hungarian minority parties, thereby further fragmenting them. Nor did such policy improve ties between Hungary and its neighbours, because the concepts of autonomy (cultural or territorial) were not clearly defined, and without clear objectives and substance contradicted the provisions of the dual citizenship.

⁶⁰ Krisztina THAN / Martin SANTA, Hungary Citizenship Law Triggers Row With Slovakia, *Reuters.com*, 25 May 2010, available at <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/05/25/us-hungary-citizenship-slovakia-idUSTRE64O32220100525>>.

⁶¹ Véglegesítették Ficóék válaszcspását az állampolgársági törvényre [The retaliatory strike of Fico to the citizenship law was finalized], *Origo.hu*, 26 May 2010, available at <<http://www.origo.hu/nagyvilag/20100526-szlovakia-robert-fico-szlovak-ellenlepes-a-kettos-allampolgarsag-miatt.html>>.

Autonomy and dual citizenships have weakened each other, since certain politicians in neighbouring countries have feared that if their dual citizens receive territorial autonomy, the result might be undesirable and unacceptable independence. They worry that extremist political forces might then be mobilized in the countries concerned, which would further aggravate different views on bilateral minority matters.

Conclusions

Hungarian foreign policy has undergone major and significant changes over the past 25 years. In the period of regime change at the beginning of the 1990s it guided the democratic transition processes, while the successes of that process in turn increased its room for manoeuvre. With its committed membership of both the EU and NATO, two of its foremost integration priorities, Hungary uniformly and unequivocally anchored itself to the democracies of Western Europe, and has played a proactive role in establishing new forms of regional cooperation. Hungary has also been active in pursuing its policy objectives on minorities.

However, despite the fact that during the 1990s they adopted goals of foreign policy compatible with European integration, and implemented them, since then Hungary has distanced itself from those values. Its foreign policy has begun to show a preference for the representation of purely national interests, sometimes even in direct conflict with European values and interests. Indeed today, Hungarian interests are no longer fully embedded within European ones. Support for the new "national" Hungarian foreign policy has been taken for granted even without consensus among domestic political parties, and has been bolstered by the use of new methods with unproven efficacy and with much unorthodoxy.

Contrary to the value-based approach represented in Hungarian foreign policy before and after the accession to the integration organisations, it has become merely self-interested. European and transatlantic values are now rarely to be seen and are barely even acknowledged in the intent to establish or execute further foreign policy goals. The newly heralded vision of "illiberal democracy" and new directions and openings of foreign policy towards the "East", with Russia to the fore, have raised far from insignificant concerns among Hungary's partners and allies.

The result of Hungary's ostensibly self-interested foreign policy has been that its goals have become more unrealistic and its decision-making processes more unpredictable. Gradually, a "national" foreign policy has made a striking appearance, creating an exclusivity which serves the goals of domestic policy. It strengthens the cohesion of forces supporting the government and hopes to revitalize historical traditions that are actually built on illusions. A foreign policy

of such a sort rests upon domestic policy aimed at “recapturing” the “national” market from international partners and which is intended to serve the interests of the governing coalition parties.

With such an inward looking approach to a foreign policy that is influenced almost exclusively by domestic objectives, there is the risk that Hungary will cede from the “European core”. Hungarian initiatives to advance deeper integration with Europe are barely noticeable or have gone unheeded, and beyond frequent repetition of a vision projected for domestic consumption, Hungary has failed to find substantial ways of contributing to the “European project” or to become more competitive in the global economic setting. There is a real danger that, due to the likely development of a two- or multi-speed European Union, Hungary will lodge at the periphery and stagnate, facing the predictable negative consequences. If Hungary proves unable or unwilling to re-join the mainstream of European integration, formal and informal discussions and decisions about the future substance and structure of the Union as well as European crisis management will be shaped without active contributions from Hungarian diplomacy and with no genuine representation of its interests.

During most of the last 25 years, Hungary’s foreign policy in its interactions with its partners succeeded in gathering predictability, credibility and mutual trust and its major objectives were achieved. However, those invaluable assets seem recently to have been lost as Hungary has distanced itself from core European political values, instead adopting a confrontational approach which has markedly diminished the government’s room for manoeuvre and ultimately shaken the faith of its partners.

Hungary has contributed less and less to the solving of global international, European, and regional problems. Rather, in many instances it has itself become the source of a problem. The “star pupil” of the early 1990s has become confrontational in its foreign policy and has been unable even to preserve its leading regional role in economic reforms and modernization. Gradually, Hungary has become less and less competitive in the development of new, creative and more effective methods of fulfilling the various European sociopolitical goals, and it is no longer an example to be followed, neither by Europe, nor by the countries of the CEE region.