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# The Sovereignty of Hungary in the So-called Short 20<sup>th</sup> Century (1918–1990)



## The First People's Republic of Hungary

### *Popular sovereignty*

In the wake of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy's defeat in World War I, the multi-ethnic empire fell apart. After István Tisza admitted the defeat in the Parliament, the Hungarian opposition (similarly to the Czechs and the southern Slavs) formed the National Council from the Party of Independence and '48 headed by Count Mihály Károlyi, the Radical Bourgeois Party, and the Social Democratic Party of Hungary on 24 October 1918. King Charles IV was called upon to commission the National Council to govern the country. On 26 October 1918, the ruler appointed Archduke Joseph August as *homo regius* (verbatim: “the king's man”), that is, a regent with full power as head of the country. But since the new leader of the country still ignored the National Council, and even commissioned Count János Hadik on 29 October to form a new national government, the soldiers and civilians of Budapest and other big cities, malcontent due to the protracted world war and financial difficulties, began to hold street protests between 28 and 31 October 1918. As a result of the crises affecting both domestic and foreign policy, Archduke Joseph August appointed Count Mihály Károlyi as Prime Minister, who was the leader of the opposition by then. At first, Károlyi took his oath of allegiance to Charles IV, but, as it was demanded by the Entente and particularly the American Government, he revoked it. In his phone message on 1 November, Charles IV absolved the government from allegiance to him. On the same evening, in the presence of János



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Hock, the elected leader of the National Council, Mihály Károlyi took the oath again, this time to “Hungary and the Hungarian people”.<sup>1</sup>

Eventually, the solution to the problem of the form of state was modelled on Austria. In Vienna, the republic was proclaimed by the Austrian National Assembly on 12 November, and Charles IV signed a declaration renouncing the exercise of his sovereign rights. Two days later Charles IV made the same declaration as the King of Hungary. According to the Eckartsau Proclamation: “I do not want my person to hinder the development in Hungary, for whom I am filled with unchanged love. Therefore, I renounce all participation in state affairs, and hereby acknowledge, in advance, the decision to be rendered by Hungary on its future form of state.”<sup>2</sup> However, first, the proclamation was not addressed to anyone, and, therefore, it may even be considered a private letter. Second, the king only renounced the exercise of his sovereign rights and did not mention abdication. And third, neither was the proclamation countersigned by the minister nor did the National Assembly adopt a resolution on it. Nonetheless, according to the legal opinion given by five professors at the University of Budapest to Mihály Károlyi, the Pragmatica Sanctio became invalid prior to the king’s renunciation, and, therefore, the Hungarian nation regained its full sovereignty.<sup>3</sup> As there was no intention to convene the national assembly elected in 1910, and it was not possible to hold elections, the National Council was supplemented by the representatives of political parties, advocacy organisations, churches and rural national councils, and declared the thus formed Great National Council, expanded to 500, and later 1,000–1,200 members, a national assembly substituting the Parliament. On 16 November, the Great National Assembly promulgated its People’s Resolution: I. Hungary is a people’s republic independent from all other countries. II. The constitution of the People’s Republic of Hungary shall be adopted by the Constituent National Assembly, which is to be convened immediately based on the new electoral law. III. Until the Constituent National Assembly decides otherwise, the supreme power of the state shall be exercised

<sup>1</sup> BORSÁNYI 1988; BÖHM 1923; BREIT 1929; GRATZ 1935; HAJDU 1968; 2005; 1978; 2012; HATOS 2018; JUHÁSZ NAGY 1945; MÉREI 1969; SALAMON 2001; SCHÖNWALD 1969; SIKLÓS 1978.

<sup>2</sup> For the original copy of the Eckartsau Proclamation see [http://vmek.oszk.hu/02100/02185/html/img/1\\_015a.jpg](http://vmek.oszk.hu/02100/02185/html/img/1_015a.jpg) 2023.

<sup>3</sup> SCHWEITZER 2019: 75.

by the people's government headed by Count Mihály Károlyi, with the support of the management committee of the Hungarian National Council. IV. The people's government shall immediately adopt laws on: 1. direct universal suffrage including women and secret ballot as regards the National Assembly, and local governments of towns and villages; 2. freedom of the press; 3. adjudication by jury system; 4. freedom of association and assembly; 5. land allocation to the agrarian community. The National Council retained only vague controlling powers for itself.<sup>4</sup>

The true meaning of the expression "people's republic" was republic, while the "people" part of the term was meant to express the revolutionary circumstances. In the lack of parliamentary elections, since the exercise of state power was taken over by bodies that were not authorised to do so by the constitution, the Károlyi Government intended to legitimise the people's republic by the so-called "Aster Revolution". Armed groups confiscated flowers, mostly chrysanthemums (not asters, as they bloom earlier) prepared for All Souls' Day, and, marching over the streets of Budapest, forced every soldier to replace the rosettes on their hat with chrysanthemum. The petty officers' stars and sword knots were torn off and the officers' decorations were also taken away. Those who disobeyed were beaten, and some were even shot dead.<sup>5</sup>

The events of late October and the first half of November was labelled a democratic revolution by Marxist historiography, which evaluated Mihály Károlyi as a Hungarian Kerensky of a sort.<sup>6</sup> However, by definition, a revolution can be started against an oppressive, retrograde regime, but the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy functioned as a rule of law state. And the laws adopted by the Károlyi Government, including the new form of state, appear to be reforms rather than a change of regime. The people who took the streets had confidence in Mihály Károlyi because he was an anti-war political figure of the opposition, and there was hope that, as much as possible, he may advocate favourable terms at the peace talks with the victorious great powers due to his Western connections. In addition, he was expected to solve the social problems further increased by the war. The most radical group of society comprised of dissident soldiers, whose number reached 40,000–50,000 according to

<sup>4</sup> *Az 1910–1915. évi országgyűlés képviselőházának naplója* [Minutes of the House of Representatives of the 1910–1915 Parliament]. Vol. XLI, 24 July – 16 November 1918, 457–458.

<sup>5</sup> *Népszava*, 1 November 1918, 3; *Friss Újság*, 1 November 1918, 5; KASSÁK 1928–1932: II. 432.

<sup>6</sup> LENIN 1962a: 82; LENIN 1962b: 212; NEMES 1979.

some sources. For them, a change of government was a matter of life and death. Approximately 30,000 civilians also gained access to firearms.<sup>7</sup>

### *Occupation of certain territories of Hungary*

The Padua Armistice ending World War I was concluded between the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Entente powers represented by Italy on 3 November 1918. The armistice required Austria-Hungary's forces to evacuate all occupied territories. Thus, this treaty theoretically left Hungary's territorial integrity intact. However, the so-called Armistice of Belgrade signed by Mihály Károlyi on 13 November 1918, defined demarcation lines, leaving large parts of the country outside Hungarian control. Károlyi intended to represent the then independent state of Hungary but failed to reach any tangible results. Serbian, Romanian and Czech troops occupied larger and larger pieces of the country and, in violation of Article 17 of the agreement, they immediately replaced Hungarian administration.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the Entente still recognised neither the Károlyi Government nor the agreement concluded in Belgrade.<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the governance and the army leadership were characterised by incompetence and flurry. The first Minister of War of the Károlyi Government was an alcoholic colonel of artillery, Béla Lindner,<sup>10</sup> who, as it turned out, used to be a supporter of Franz Ferdinand. In fact, no one really knew why he had been selected.<sup>11</sup> His infamous phrase: "No more armies. I don't want to see soldiers ever again",<sup>12</sup> was as if the minister of finances announced that he never wanted to see money again. That is how Hungary carried out the world's fastest disarmament. The demarcation lines were not guarded. The situation escalated to the point where the Ministry of War could not assign two dozen soldiers to protect the special train that took the delegation headed by Mihály Károlyi to Belgrade on 6 November.<sup>13</sup> Tellingly of the anarchic circumstances, István Friedrich

<sup>7</sup> GELLÉRT 1919: 192. Cf.: BREIT 1925: 28; GRATZ 1935: 65.

<sup>8</sup> PÁLVÖLGYI 2020: 111.

<sup>9</sup> ROMSICS 2005a: 79.

<sup>10</sup> HORNYÁK 2005: 28.

<sup>11</sup> GARAMI 1922: 75.

<sup>12</sup> *Pesti Hírlap*, 3 November 1918.

<sup>13</sup> JÁSZI 1989: 61.

appointed himself State Secretary of the Ministry of War, and put the text of his arbitrary decrees on billboards all over Budapest. Lindner believed that the state secretary had been sent by Mihály Károlyi, while the prime minister presumed that he had been appointed by the minister of war. It is telling that even though the swindle was revealed at the government meeting held on 5 November, Friedrich remained state secretary for two more months.<sup>14</sup> Mihály Károlyi made Linder the scapegoat for the defencelessness of the country and the Belgrade failure, and removed him from his position on 9 November, but Lindner could nonetheless stay in the government as minister without portfolio (9 November 1918 – 12 December 1918).<sup>15</sup> Linder was replaced by Albert Bartha,<sup>16</sup> who, as opposed to his predecessor, strove to establish military discipline, but that was quite a challenging endeavour. For example, pursuant to order No. 32.334/el. 2-a of 30 November 1918, officers of the military were allowed to join political parties. The commanders' disciplinary powers were bestowed on juries, elected "men of confidence" (Hung.: *bizalmi férfiak*) were delegated, saluting was restricted, and so forth. These orders outright disrupted discipline. Moreover, the soldier's council headed by József Pogány kept hindering the operation of the ministry; waving red flags, Pogány and his soldiers even protested in front of the Ministry of War on 12 December. All that led to the resignation of Albert Bartha.<sup>17</sup> Bartha was replaced for a short while by Károlyi himself, who then appointed his brother-in-law, Count Sándor Festetics as Minister of War.<sup>18</sup>

The government even disbanded the existing disciplined, well-equipped and well-managed troops, who gained valuable experience during the five years of the war. As a result, it was no longer possible to establish any new, effective military force, the remaining troops were not even sufficient to fulfil duties related to policing. The general staff and chief officers were dismissed, the officers were allowed to participate in politics. In this way, the finest military experts were gone, and no one who remained had the ability to grasp all the military problems that the new leaders of the newly independent state of Hungary were about to

<sup>14</sup> GRATZ 1935: 67; SIKLÓS 1978: 234; BÖHM 1923: 80–81.

<sup>15</sup> BÖLÖNY–HUBAI 2004: 89.

<sup>16</sup> HAAS 2002.

<sup>17</sup> SALAMON 2014: 35; GRATZ 1935: 70.

<sup>18</sup> BÖLÖNY–HUBAI 2004: 89.

face. These faulty choices led to a situation where the demarcation lines were unprotected against the unlawful attacks of Serbian, Romanian and Czech troops who violated the Armistice of Belgrade. Consequently, Hungary was defeated once more, this time by the Little Entente, and the Czech, Romanian and Serbian authorities were operating on Hungarian soil, which significantly improved their negotiating position at the peace talks.

However, at local and regional levels military resistance was far from unfeasible. This is evidenced by the success of the counterattacks in Upper Hungary in November 1918 (Rózsashegy-Zsolna, Nagyszombat), and the blocking operations of the Szekler Division led by Károly Kratochvíl, which broke the Romanian advance for quite a while. Ultimately, the military action taken in Balassagyarmat also shows that military resistance was in fact possible.<sup>19</sup>

Mostly under pressure exerted by France, the Entente refused to recognise the Károlyi Government,<sup>20</sup> and, thus, completely exposed the country to land theft committed by foreign military units. Due to the anarchic circumstances that prevailed in Hungary, Serbian troops occupied larger and larger territories. They consciously strove to improve their negotiating position at peace talks as much as possible.<sup>21</sup>

The fall of the people's republic can be partially traced back to over-reliance on the Entente powers. The Vix Note was found unacceptable even by Mihály Károlyi, as it became obvious that the ethnical boundaries were also severely violated.<sup>22</sup>

### **The first Soviet-type dictatorship: The Republic of Councils in Hungary (21 March 1919 – 1 August 1919)**

Mihály Károlyi strove to escape the critical situation by appointing a social democratic government. While Károlyi was torn, on 20 March 1919, the social democrat Jenő Landler made a pact on behalf of his party with the communist leaders held on remand in the Budapest Strict

<sup>19</sup> RÉVÉSZ 2019; BARTHÓ-TYEKVICSKA 2000.

<sup>20</sup> ÁDÁM-ORMOS 1999: 23.

<sup>21</sup> *Magyarország katonai helyzete 1918. november – 1919. április* s. a.

<sup>22</sup> ORMOS 1983: 179; BREIT 1929: II. 5.

and Medium Regime Prison to jointly take over, and, after the merger of their parties, proclaim the republic of councils and introduce the “dictatorship of proletariat”. On the following day, on 21 March 1919, the coup took place. In the streets of Budapest, flyers spread the fake news that Károlyi resigned, and the communists and social democrats jointly established the Socialist Party of Hungary and took over. Their armed groups occupied the strategically important facilities in the capital city, and the Hungarian Republic of Councils was proclaimed by the social democrat Sándor Garbai and the communist leader Béla Kun. The official name of the new political regime was the Socialist Federative Republic of Councils of Hungary. It was the Hungarianized version of the name “Soviet republic”, where the term “Federative” indicated the willingness to be integrated into the Soviet Union in accordance with the principle of internationalism.<sup>23</sup>

Headed by Béla Kun,<sup>24</sup> the Party of Communists in Hungary had originally been established on 24 March 1918. Its members were tasked with training agitators and starting the plotting of the communist takeover in Hungary. When the news of the Aster Revolution was reported, the communists reckoned that the same process started in Hungary that had begun in Russia with the 1917 revolution. Béla Kun and his comrades came back to Hungary with the so called “rolling roubles”<sup>25</sup> and direct orders from the Soviet leaders. They were tasked with the establishment of a Soviet-type dictatorship in Hungary, which, eventually, would join the great Soviet Union. Accordingly, the Republic of Councils was modelled on the dictatorship executed in the Soviet state of Russia headed by Lenin. The most striking difference in comparison with Stalin’s later regime was that the state party system had not yet been established. It was made clear at the constitutive meeting of the Revolutionary Governing Council that Béla Kun and his comrades claimed the leadership of the party, too, for themselves until the party congress proclaiming the merger. Consequently, the Bolsheviks sent from Moscow to Budapest banned all civil parties and associations, cultural and religious organisations. Human rights were restricted significantly. Almost all somewhat valuable or useful assets

<sup>23</sup> For the federative thought see Kővágó 1979: 57–60.

<sup>24</sup> For his biography see Borsányi 1979.

<sup>25</sup> The term “rolling roubles” indicates the relatively significant financial support provided by the Soviet Union to communist parties striving to achieve takeover in other countries.

were confiscated. Only the newspapers that supported the Republic of Councils with proper propaganda were allowed to proceed their operations, all others were banned.

A literal translation of the constitution of the Soviet Union, the provisional constitution was promulgated on 2 April. It regulated the relationship of the various councils and their management committees and the conditions of their establishment, determined the new suffrage criteria and defined the election procedure. The workers' councils were elected by the voters of the villages and towns, while the higher authorities were selected from the ranks of the lower-level councils. The provisional constitution actually applied the internal regulations of the Bolshevik Party to the council elections. It also regulated the right of national self-determination, and pointed out that the proletarian state would be organised along federalist principles (which would have been realised by accession to the Soviet Union).

The "final" constitution of the Republic of Councils was introduced on 23 June 1919 under the name the Constitution of the Socialist Federative Republic of Councils of Hungary. It stood for a total break with the traditions of Hungary's historical constitution, and, contrary to the national traditions, was modelled on the constitution of the Soviet Union adopted on 10 July 1918. Although the full text was not a literal translation of the Soviet constitution, the Hungarian text derogated from its model at some points only to overbid it in terms of "revolutionary approach".

The starting point was the unity of state power. With reference to workers, soldiers and agricultural workers, the new leaders took undivided possession of the legislative, executive and judicial powers. It was also declared that no position or office would be given to the so-called exploiters of the proletariat.

This power was sustainable only through continuous terror. Criminal courts were abolished and replaced by revolutionary tribunals, mostly composed of proletarians judging on a political basis, who handed down their verdicts without any formality, completely arbitrarily, with immediate effect, ignoring all kinds of legal guarantees, based on nothing but the "revolutionary sense of justice". György Lukács published a statement on terror as a "source of law".<sup>26</sup> The sentences were sometimes excessively

<sup>26</sup> LUKÁCS 1987: 132.



lenient and at other times shockingly cruel. For example, while one accused was acquitted for pickpocketing, another was sentenced to death. In the case of a death sentence, the convict was executed immediately. A total of 570 persons were executed after being sentenced to death by the Revolutionary Tribunal. The “crime” committed by the victims was mostly “counter-revolutionary conduct”.<sup>27</sup>

The new regime disbanded the gendarmerie and the police and established the Red Guard as an internal force unit. Modelled on the Cheka, the Revolutionary Council for the Territories Behind the Front was established on 29 April 1919, which terrorised the population with “terror squads” (the latter was the official name of the units). The most powerful irregular force of the government terror was dubbed the “Lenin boys” by the people of Budapest, since Lenin referred to them as his sons during Tibor Szamuely’s visit to Moscow and sent them badges in recognition of their “work”. They rode on their infamous armoured train throughout the country and struck whenever they suspected any action threatening the regime. They strove to intimidate people even with their attire: leather pants, leather jacket, army cap. They also took possession of almost every weapon they could lay a hand on.<sup>28</sup>

The communist leaders – who, in theory, governed together with the social democrats<sup>29</sup> – turned almost everyone against themselves with a series of hasty measures that ignored even the most basic interests of the population. It was no secret that the ultimate goal of the Republic of Councils of Hungary was to accede to the Soviet Union, as indicated by the term “Federative” in the constitution and the name “the Socialist Federative Republic of Councils of Hungary”. As another evidence of this goal, a “Slovak Council Republic” was established upon the reoccupation of the Hungarian territories in Upper Hungary. As aptly put by Pál Pritz: “It was self-evident for the leaders of the Republic of Councils that they were first and foremost communists, and just coincidentally Hungarians”<sup>30</sup> (and, incidentally, they were not supported by the leaders of the Soviet Union for purely altruistic purposes either.)

<sup>27</sup> VÁRY 1922.

<sup>28</sup> B. MÜLLER 2016; BÍRÓ 2019; SARLÓS 1961.

<sup>29</sup> The new name given to the party created by the merger did not contain the expression “communist”, but the epithet “democratic” was also omitted.

<sup>30</sup> PRITZ 2019: 61.

The Revolutionary Governing Council dissolved all civil parties and associations.<sup>31</sup> All fundamental rights and equality before the law have been abolished. Citizens could not rely on their individual rights. They were completely dependent on the arbitrary actions of the communist leaders. The right to access to a court has been abolished even in the event of mass infringements. The operation of the Public Administrative Court was banned. The “law journal” of the Republic of Councils entitled *Proletárjog* declared: “The revolution does not argue with its opponents. It crushes them.”<sup>32</sup>

Regardless of gender, the right to vote and stand in elections could only be exercised by those who reached the age of 18 and made a living of socially useful work (as workers, employees, etc.) or were engaged in household works. The right to vote and stand in elections could not be exercised by: a) those who employed wage workers for profit; b) those who lived on income earned without work; c) merchants; d) pastors and monks;<sup>33</sup> e) the mentally ill and those under guardianship; f) those, whose political rights were suspended for a crime committed with malice aforethought. According to these rules, 50 percent of the population would have had the right to vote. In effect, voting rights were granted mostly to members of the trade unions and the governing party.<sup>34</sup> In the elections, votes could only be cast for a list of candidates selected by the party leadership without an opponent.<sup>35</sup> Even so, the results were subsequently corrected in some constituencies. The thus established local – village and town – councils delegated the district councils, and the county councils were formed from the district and town councils, thereby enhancing the influence of the city workers. Finally, the county and town councils appointed the members of the National Assembly of Federative Councils.<sup>36</sup> The right to vote only applied to local elections.

During its 133-day existence, a plethora of legal acts were adopted by the regime of the Republic of Councils. Among the communist leaders, however, there were hardly any qualified and experienced lawyers. People’s Commissioner for Justice Zoltán Rónai received a few acts from Béla

<sup>31</sup> György Lukács even banned the Kisfaludy Society, founded in 1836. See JÓZSEF 1967: 70.

<sup>32</sup> *Proletárjog*, 1919/2, 14.

<sup>33</sup> Despite the fact that the monks were indeed penniless, as they took a vow of poverty and were not allowed to own any private property. This made them poorer than workers.

<sup>34</sup> GRATZ 1935: 126.

<sup>35</sup> BÖHM 1923: 301; SZABÓ 1919: 63.

<sup>36</sup> VARGA 2019: 190.

Kun and the regulations issued in the Soviet Union in German from the foreign trade office in Vienna. Meanwhile, it was declared that lawyers will no longer be necessary in the new regime and law will soon fade away. Accordingly, a decree issued by György Lukács, the deputy people's commissar, terminated the university training of lawyers.<sup>37</sup> The hierarchy of legal sources was not clarified, not even the legislative authorities were clearly designated. It became customary for daily newspapers to regularly publish the issued decrees, which only furthered the disorder. For example, one newspaper published a decree that cohabitation should be declared marriage. And even though a statement of the Governing Council made it clear that no such regulation had been issued, several marriages were dissolved with reference to this non-existent legislation. Moreover, the provisions that were actually issued, drafted hastily with very limited legal knowledge, not only contradicted each other but in some cases were also completely senseless. For example, they banned the painting of Easter eggs at Easter, abolished the matriculation exam and grading in schools, and aimed at the nationalisation of honey, rags, wastepaper, glass ornaments, household items, cutlery, and so forth. The decrees published in the newspaper *Proletárjog* implemented more and more new ideas: the abolition of priestly celibacy,<sup>38</sup> and, with reference to eugenics ("racial improvement"), the termination of the right to marry of the mentally ill, those suffering from illnesses such as syphilis or tuberculosis, and later even the deaf. Moreover, bans on sexual intercourse and forced sterilisation also came into effect.<sup>39</sup> The Hungarian National Anthem was replaced by the Internationale. All national flags had to be surrendered and red flags were to be put on display everywhere.<sup>40</sup>

On every Saturday, proletarian families had to be given access to the bathrooms of all private apartments.<sup>41</sup> Fashion and all impractical customs were banned.<sup>42</sup> Despite Sándor Garbai's statement that a fifth of the Hungarian peasantry makes a living from viticulture, the prohibition of alcoholic beverages was made permanent.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the price and composition of the lemonade sold in the coffee shops

<sup>37</sup> HATOS 2021: 289.

<sup>38</sup> *Proletárjog*, 1919/1, 6.

<sup>39</sup> *Proletárjog*, 1919/13, 19, 21, 32, 40, 61.

<sup>40</sup> *Tanácsköztársaság*, 26 April 1919.

<sup>41</sup> *Budapesti Népbizottság Hivatalos Közlönye*, 28 March 1919.

<sup>42</sup> *Proletárjog*, 1919/31.

<sup>43</sup> *Proletárjog*, 1919/61.

of theatres and cinemas was determined with a precision worthy of a better cause.<sup>44</sup>

More and more decrees were passed on illegal asset confiscations labelled nationalisation by the new regime. It was announced that the only thing required for everyone to have everything they need is a rationalised and fairer distribution. No value creation or development was planned. Financial institutions, industrial, mining and transport plants, department stores, land holdings, schools, theatres, cinemas, libraries, works of art and pharmacies were nationalised without compensation. Even though the nationalisation concerning the industry was supposed to cover only factories with more than 20 employees, in many cases the workshops and tools of craftsmen were also confiscated.<sup>45</sup> As a result, production fell, and trade was paralysed.

Inter alia, residences, jewellery, works of art, gold coins and foreign money, oriental carpets, bank deposits, musical instruments, bicycles, furniture, microscopes, dishes, stamp collections, underwear were also nationalised. In the end, they took almost everything that was not nailed down.<sup>46</sup> No constructions of new apartments were started, but the existing apartments were taken into inventory by the so-called condominium commissaries (Hung.: *házbizalmi*). In principle, each adult could keep one room, and a family a maximum of three rooms, the rest of the apartment property had to be offered to the state. The apartments and parts of the apartments inventoried by the condominium commissaries and the caretakers were distributed among the supporters of the regime.<sup>47</sup> Abruptly disenfranchised from their rights to their property, the owners felt fraudulently deprived of their material and moral assets by the new regime.

The action called nationalisation was actually nothing but ill-conceived looting that caused more harm than good, even for the Republic of Councils itself. Since almost everything was confiscated, taxation ceased, and the regime strove to replace state revenues with the overexploitation of resources. At the majority of nationalised companies, production fell, and work discipline decreased. A part of the seized stock

<sup>44</sup> DENT 2018.

<sup>45</sup> RÁKOS 1953: 41.

<sup>46</sup> PIL 672. f. 348. ó. e.

<sup>47</sup> *Pesti Napló*, 1 April 1919, 4; *Pesti Napló*, 29 March 1919, 4; *Népszava*, 29 March 1919, 3; *Népszava*, 3 April 1919, 6; HATOS 2021: 185.

of goods simply drained away.<sup>48</sup> The restrictions affected not only traders, but also customers. Furniture, dishes, cutlery, outerwear and underwear, bedding, or other durable consumer goods could only be purchased with the written permission of the condominium commissary. Not a single economic or social problem was solved, rather they were increased.

Estates of over 100 acres were nationalised and divided into production units similar to state farms, mostly under the professional supervision of the old estate stewards. Since the land was nationalised and not distributed, the regime turned almost the entire peasantry against itself, as the news about the land allocations in neighbouring countries reached Hungary. The remaining privately owned small estates were planned to be combined into cooperative farms, but this endeavour failed due to the fall of the Republic of Councils. Confidence in the sanctity of private property, however, wavered. Various self-proclaimed organisations and persons passing themselves off as authorities have successively occupied other people's land holdings. Smallholder peasants rightly feared that their lands would also be nationalised. Due to the uncertainty, most of the peasants arranged themselves to wait instead of doing productive work.<sup>49</sup>

The population was constantly pestered, and several attempts were made to bring people under control and keep them in isolation. The operation of coffee houses was restricted so that there would be no forum for uncontrollable conversations. Phone calls, even emergency calls, were banned. Gathering in groups on the street was severely punished. A curfew came into effect every evening, and the lights had to be turned off. Violating the memory of the deceased, religious burials were abolished. Hungarian literature was no longer taught at schools. The scientists of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences were dismissed and replaced with soldiers of the regime.<sup>50</sup>

From the outset, the leaders of the Soviet Republic considered the churches their enemies. Therefore, in order to abolish religion and the churches, the Revolutionary Governing Council established a separate office at its first meeting, an organisation that excelled mostly in acquiring the property of the churches: the Office for the Liquidation of Religion (or “committee”, elsewhere “commission”)

<sup>48</sup> *Népszava*, 15 July 1919.

<sup>49</sup> KERÉK 1939: 162; MATLEKOVITS 1919: 1.

<sup>50</sup> HATOS 2021: 29.

headed by Oszkár Faber (an alumnus of the Piarist grammar school, who became an eager atheist and social democratic functionary). The estates of the churches were nationalised, including all real estate except temples, schools, hospitals, social homes. Even securities and cash were confiscated. Christian economic, cultural and religious organisations were liquidated, and religious education was banned. Despite the fact that they cared for the sick, pastors and nuns were banned from hospitals. The leaders at the local level communicated that the churches will also be confiscated and – just like in the Soviet Union – replaced by, for example, cinemas. The churches could no longer receive any support, not even for the maintenance of churches in monument buildings. Representatives of the workers' councils listened in to masses and religious services to keep the words of the priests under control. New textbooks were published, religious education was banned, monks and priest teachers were prohibited from teaching and caring for the sick. Priests and monks were told to give up their profession, get married, and take a re-education course. *Vörös Újság*, the official gazette of the Republic of Councils formulated the objectives of the Revolutionary Governing Council: "The priests have been dismissed from the army and the schools, now only the churches remain. Religion is not a private but a public matter, and indeed the primary duty of the proletarian dictatorship is to most relentlessly terminate the functioning of the church under any name." As Oszkár Faber put it: "Let me be clear: I candidly admit that our goal is the complete extermination of the church."<sup>51</sup> As a result of the terror against the churches, eleven priests and one nun were martyred.<sup>52</sup>

The Republic of Councils of Hungary was not recognised by the Entente. This is one of the reasons why Béla Kun accepted the possibility of a negotiated settlement when he received the so-called Clemenceau memorandum by telegram. According to that, if the army of the Republic of Councils retreats behind the defined northern and eastern borders, then the Romanians will return to the Trans-Tisza region and invite the leaders of the Republic of Councils to the peace conference. Thinking that the Entente would at least *de facto* recognise the country's communist regime, the leaders of the regime accepted the diktat. They were also convinced that the designated borders were of no importance, as the army of the Soviet Union would soon march into Hungary in any case.

<sup>51</sup> ADRIÁNYI 2005: 178; FAZEKAS 1997: 63; *Vörös Újság* 1919; FAZEKAS 2001: 17.

<sup>52</sup> HORVÁTH 2021: 189.

But the heads of the Republic of Councils were soon to be disappointed in each of their assumptions. The Red Army arrived only a quarter of a century later, and neither the Romanians nor the Czechs complied with the provisions of the Clemenceau memorandum but took advantage of the opportunity to occupy ever larger areas.

### Provisional governments

#### *Gyula Peidl's so-called trade union government (1 August 1919 – 6 August 1919)*

After the fall of the Republic of Councils, Gyula Peidl established a so-called trade union government. The new regime began to abolish the measures of the Republic of Councils and took the name “People’s Republic of Hungary”. But the council of the Paris Peace Conference popularly known as the “Council of Five” did not acknowledge the trade union government, and Romanian troops marched into Budapest on 2 August. In effect, with Transdanubia as an exception, the whole country came under the occupation of foreign troops. Even though Gyula Peidl made attempts to negotiate with the occupying forces, no results were achieved.

#### *Governments of István Friedrich (7 August 1919 – 24 November 1919)*

Finally, on 6 August, István Friedrich dismissed the Peidl Government with support received from the Romanian army. Appointed by King Charles IV as *homo regius*, Archduke Joseph August took over as a regent and appointed Friedrich to form a provisional government. The new government defined the form of state as the Republic of Hungary and began the investigation of the crimes committed under the Republic of Councils. Due to the anomalous nature of the situation, the government kept adopting various measures but could only enforce them in Budapest. The government’s sovereignty was very limited, as the rural public administration, postal service and press were controlled by the Romanian army. Meanwhile the country was almost uninterruptedly looted by the troops. However, the Allied Powers refused to acknowledge Friedrich’s government, too, as they feared that the return of Archduke Joseph

August foreshadows a Habsburg restoration. A mission headed by Sir George Russel Clerk – the diplomat who acted as a Private Secretary of the acting Secretary of State of Great Britain and was responsible for Eastern European affairs – arrived in Hungary in late October, and achieved the withdrawal of the Romanian troops from the regions of Northern Transdanubia and the Danube–Tisza Interfluve (they withdraw from the Trans-Tisza region only in April 1920).<sup>53</sup>

*Károly Huszár's government*  
(24 November 1919 – 15 March 1920)

In the wake of Clerk's successful negotiations, a new coalition government headed by Károly Huszár formed on 16 November. Immediately after the last units of the Romanian army left the capital city, at the head of his armed men, Miklós Horthy marched into Budapest on 16 November. On 25 November, the Entente notified Károly Huszár that the legitimacy of his government had been acknowledged. Thus, after more than a year, Hungary finally had an internationally recognised government.<sup>54</sup>

**A kingdom without a king**  
(1920–1944)

*The Trianon peace diktat*

The peace treaties ending World War I can be considered diktats, inter alia, because instead of resulting from negotiations, they were imposed on the defeated in violation of the principle of *audiatur et altera pars*, without any consideration of ethnical boundaries. Territories where the Hungarian population lived in a single block were annexed without referendum. The actual reasons underlying the provisions were raw political and economic arguments. That is why among the defeated, Hungary ended up in the most unfavourable situation.

<sup>53</sup> RÁNKI 1967: 174.

<sup>54</sup> Between November 1918 and June 1920, ten governments were established, with seven prime ministers and roughly the same number of ministers of foreign affairs, but all without considerable advocacy as regards foreign policy.



The Treaty of Trianon (Act XXXIII of 1921 on the enactment of the peace treaty concluded in Trianon on 4 June 1920 with the United States of America, the British Empire, France, Italy and Japan, as well as Belgium, China, Cuba, Greece, Nicaragua, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Romania, the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovans, Siam and Czechoslovakia) was made up of 14 parts and 364 articles. Part two defined the borders of Hungary. From the country's territory of 325,411 square kilometres (282,870 square kilometres without Croatia) more than two thirds (71 percent or 67 percent if Croatia is included) was lost: the territory of the "Truncated Hungary" was only 92,952 square kilometres. More than half of the population was trapped outside the new borders (the data of the 1910 census show that 7,615,117 people remained of the 18,264,533 people).

- Slovakia: 1,067,000 Hungarians, 30 percent of the local population
- Romania: 1,662,000 Hungarians, 32 percent of the local population
- Kingdom of Serbs, Croatian and Slovenians: 541,000 Hungarians, 28 percent of the local population
- Austria: 26,200 Hungarians, 9 percent of the local population

Almost half of the agricultural area and 52 percent of the industrial potential went to the successor states. The iron and steel industry, the textile industry, the glass industry, the mill industry, the wood industry and the paper industry suffered great losses. All the salt mines and iron ore mines, and most of the stone mines were lost.<sup>55</sup>

Ten remained intact of Hungary's 63 counties, and another 25 were more or less mutilated. Pursuant to Act XXXV of 1923 on the reduction of the number of civil servants and other employees in the mutilated counties and certain related measures, the 17 counties concerned were transformed into 7 counties by mergers. This left a total of 25 counties. Eleven of the 27 municipalities remained.

As a result, Hungary became the smallest and the most vulnerable state in Central Europe. Isolated both politically and economically, the country was surrounded by a ring of the Little Entente. The area of the states making up the Little Entente was in total 683,000 square kilometres with a population of 47 million (that is, an area larger than the size of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.) With an area reduced to 93,000 square kilometres and a population of 7.6 million, Hungary had to face this enormous hostile block. Almost half a million refugees

<sup>55</sup> BUDAY 1923: 16.

had to be taken in from the lost territories,<sup>56</sup> while the former economic, market, administrative and transport organisation was destroyed.

Chapter five of the Treaty of Trianon set forth the military restrictions. Hungary was obliged to abolish general conscription. No more than 35,000 men could be enlisted to the Hungarian Defence Forces, exclusively on a voluntary basis (1,750 officers and 1,313 petty officers, the rest privates). The establishment of a general staff and the organisation of army and corps levels were prohibited. The import of weapons was banned, they could only be manufactured in the single state munitions factory that remained in the country, under the Entente's control. The production of airplanes and warships was also prohibited. No more than 40,250 rifles, 525 machine guns, 140 mortars and 105 artillery pieces were authorised. The Hungarian army could no longer have armoured vehicles or aircraft. The Danube flotilla could retain a total of three reconnaissance squadrons. The naval fleet was confiscated and handed over to Italy. Sports and other associations were not allowed to provide military education.

Several types of unequal foreign trade obligations were imposed on Hungary. The countries of the Allied and Associated Powers were to be given the most-favoured-nation treatment by the Hungarian government unilaterally. Otherwise, no special trade policy preference was applicable, with the exception of Austria and Czechoslovakia, with which countries Hungary could enter into a preferential trade agreement for five years.

Hungary could not regain its full sovereignty since, to make reparations, the country's assets were confiscated, and its finances were brought under control. Compliance with the sanctions on the Hungarian Defence Forces had to be verified by the Allied Military Inspection Committee delegated to Hungary. Even the athletes of Hungary were banned from participation in the 1920 Antwerp Olympics.<sup>57</sup>

### *Temporary constitutional regulation*<sup>58</sup>

When Miklós Horthy marched into Budapest, the country had no form or head of state, no government recognised by the Allied Powers,

<sup>56</sup> PETRICHEVICH HORVÁTH 1924: 37.

<sup>57</sup> For a summary of the listed data see ROMSICS 2020: 181.

<sup>58</sup> The most important literature concerning the period: BETHLEN: 2000; BOROS 2002; 2006; DOMBRÁDY 2012; EGRESI 2008; GERGELY 2001; GERGELY-PRITZ 1998; GOSZTONYI 1992; GRATZ

no parliament, no borders, no public administration, no national bank, no money and no foreign missions. Armed groups of soldiers and aggrieved citizens raided several parts of the country, enforcing arbitrary judgements. The country's only gain was complete independence from the Habsburg Empire.

To stabilise the domestic political situation and legitimise the political system, the principle of legal continuity was invoked. The leaders of the country argued that the legal situation in the fall of 1918 returned, when the National Assembly dissolved itself and the king renounced “all participation in state affairs”. The period that followed was not recognised as legitimate, since no democratic elections were held, and the only legitimising force that underpinned the legislation in the meantime was the “revolutionary sense of law”.

The new regime first called a National Assembly election. The legal background was provided by the suffrage decree issued by the Friedrich Government in November 1919, guaranteeing the broadest scope of suffrage in the history of Hungary. It set forth a secret ballot, and equal and compulsory suffrage that included women and extended to 40 percent of the population. (For comparison: England: 47 percent, France: 28 percent, Belgium: 30 percent, Austria: 59 percent, Poland: 48 percent, Romania: 21 percent, Yugoslavia: 23 percent.)<sup>59</sup>

On the issue of the form of state, the National Assembly was completely united: a republic unable to maintain borders and internal public order was rejected by all. Despite the unanimous support of the kingdom, however, there was considerable division between the legitimists who supported Charles IV and the “free electors” who opposed them. According to the legitimists, Charles IV's rights were not terminated by his ominous proclamation, since in any case the return to legal continuity invalidates a declaration forced by revolutionary circumstances. The free electors, on the other hand, argued that with the demise of the Austro–Hungarian Monarchy, the *Pragmatica Sanctio* also lost its *raison d'être*, and thus the country's right to a free election of a king had been restored. Ultimately, the matter was resolved by external circumstances. According to the Allied Powers and neighbouring countries, a Habsburg restoration

2002; HORTHY 1990; MONTGOMERY 1947; L. NAGY 1995; NEMESKÜRTY 1996; ORMOS 1998; PÖLÖSKEI 1977; PRITZ 1995; PÜSKI 2006; 2015; ROMSICS 2005b; 2017; SZINAI 1988; UNGVÁRY 2013; VARGA 1991.

<sup>59</sup> GERGELY 1999: 48.

would have qualified as a *casus belli*. Therefore, after Charles IV's second attempt to return,<sup>60</sup> the National Assembly proclaimed the dethronement of the House of Habsburg (Act XLVII of 1921 on the termination of His Majesty Charles IV's sovereign rights and the House of Habsburg's succession to the throne).<sup>61</sup>

But the question of who to become the king of Hungary was still pending, as the free electors could not come to an agreement on a single candidate. Therefore, it was agreed that a temporary head of state would be elected until the decision on the king was made. Miklós Horthy, a man recognised by the Allied Powers and with access to armed forces suitable to maintain order, seemed a logical choice.<sup>62</sup>

On 1 March 1920, the National Assembly, relying on old historical traditions, elected Miklós Horthy as regent, who then retired from everyday political battles. He appointed Pál Teleki as Prime Minister, who was followed by István Bethlen as the head of government for nearly a decade. During the nearly ten-year period dubbed the Bethlen consolidation,<sup>63</sup> the detachments of soldiers were mostly disbanded (their centres were liquidated by military operation on several occasions). A land reform was introduced (Act XXXVI of 1920 on the provisions governing a better distribution of land holdings). Although the largest estates remained untouched, approximately two million people received land, mostly 1–5 acres. The regime strove to provide accommodation and jobs to the tens of thousands of people who fled to Hungary from the annexed territories. The Communist Party (along with all kinds of extremist movements) was banned by Act III of 1921 on a more effective protection of the state and social order.<sup>64</sup>

### *Economic and political stabilisation*

Established in 1924 to achieve economic stability, the Hungarian National Bank contributed to the economy recovery with a loan of 250 million kronen. In 1927, an independent and stable currency, the pengő was

<sup>60</sup> ORMOS 1990: 51.

<sup>61</sup> VARGYAI 1964; KARDOS 1998: 23.

<sup>62</sup> GOSZTONYI 1992: 33.

<sup>63</sup> ROMSICS 2019: 210.

<sup>64</sup> DRÓCSA 2021b: 99.

introduced. A mandatory pension system and health insurance were established, the elementary school network and public healthcare system were developed. The reform and development of educational, research and cultural public institutions was overseen by Bethlen's Minister of Culture, Count Kuno Klebelsberg.<sup>65</sup>

The defining political figure of the internal affairs of the 1920s, István Bethlen believed that a country should be managed by the social strata with sufficient financial base, developed national self-awareness and patriotic feelings. Therefore, even though he recognised the need for a limited extension of rights, Bethlen rejected mass democracy and declared himself to be a supporter of conservative democracy and cautious progress. As he pointed out in a speech given in 1922: "We want democracy, but not the rule of the raw masses, because those countries where the rule of the masses overcomes the entire nation, are subject to destruction." The wealthy and educated "have the most resistance [...] to all pressures". Accordingly, he narrowed the right to vote, for example, by tightening the conditions of age, education, permanent residence and citizenship, and by restoring open ballot in rural areas. This reduced the number of eligible voters to 29 percent ("Lex Bethlen" – Decree 2200/1922. ME of the Prime Minister).<sup>66</sup> Conservative politics was also strengthened by the organisation of the Upper House<sup>67</sup> in 1927 and the expansion of the regent's powers. The public administration was also reformed in a rather cautious way (Act XXX of 1929 on the regulation of public administration). According to Bethlen, Hungary still lacked the conditions that could guarantee the functioning of a political democracy with a broader social base. He argued that the expansion of political rights is only possible in parallel with the raising of intellectual and living standards.

However, the Trianon syndrome and the trauma caused by the defeat in World War I left the most considerable mark on the Horthy era. Almost all social strata agreed on the legitimacy of the demand for a revision based on the ethnical principle.<sup>68</sup>

The room for manoeuvre of Hungarian politics was influenced, inter alia, by Hungary's geopolitical position in Europe. Since 1917,

<sup>65</sup> HENCZ 1999; HUSZTI 1942; T. KISS 1999.

<sup>66</sup> SZABÓ 1999: 87.

<sup>67</sup> PŰSKI 2000: 11.

<sup>68</sup> ZEIDLER 2001; 2002.

the regime in Russia was based on communist terror. The countries defeated in World War I had to face a series of demonstrations and mass movements in the cities. Mussolini began to establish his fascist dictatorship in Italy from 1922. In Poland, Marshal Piłsudski became *de facto* dictator in 1926. In the 1930s, the power system developed in a similar way in the newly independent Baltic states. In Portugal, Salazar established an authoritarian dictatorship, and the events took the same course in Spain, where a bloody civil war was fought between 1936 and 1939. In the Balkan monarchies, the rulers themselves ensured the rule of governments based on dictatorial methods. In Austria, Chancellor Dollfuss experimented with a dictatorship similar to Salazar's regime until he was assassinated by the Nazis. The Nazi takeover in Germany (1933) and the Anschluss (1938) also had a shock effect on Hungarian domestic politics. Hungary became a direct neighbour to Nazi Germany and, shortly after, to the Stalinist Soviet Union.

Despite all these unfavourable domestic and foreign policy trends, the prime ministers following István Bethlen did not introduce any type of totalitarian regime but adhered to the historical constitution of Hungary.<sup>69</sup> In his Decree 145 500/1933 BM, Minister of the Interior Ferenc Keresztes-Fischer prohibited the use of the swastika badge in any form. Horthy condemned fascist ideas, *inter alia*, in a radio speech. Apparently, Act III of 1921, the so-called "order law" was suitable not only to convict communists, but also the leaders of the Arrow Cross Party, including Ferenc Szálasi.<sup>70</sup>

In the interwar period, the Hungarian state continued to function on the basis of the Holy Crown Doctrine and the historical constitution. In compliance with old traditions of the country, Regent Miklós Horthy was a temporary head of state, and the sovereignty of the country was still embodied by the Holy Crown. On this matter, the legitimists and the free electors fully agreed.<sup>71</sup> After the adoption of Act I of 1920 on the restoration of constitutionality and the temporary regulation of the exercise of state supreme power, a decree was issued under the title "Names of state authorities, officials and institutions and the use of the Holy Crown

<sup>69</sup> HORVÁTH 2020: 136.

<sup>70</sup> DRÓCSA 2021a: 255.

<sup>71</sup> EGRESI 2007: 244.

on state coats of arms”.<sup>72</sup> The latter decree set forth that the Holy Crown was still to be used as a symbol of Hungarian state power.

Act XXXIV of 1930 on the simplification of jurisdiction was drafted in accordance with this principle. Article 1 of the Act declared the following: “Judicial power is exercised by the state courts in the name of the Holy Crown of Hungary.” During the debate of the bill, the Minister of Justice Tibor Zsitvay added the following to the rapporteur’s proposal: “When, based on this bill, judgments will be pronounced in the name of the Hungarian Holy Crown, the judge will have all the magical powers that resonates through the veins of each and every Hungarian, rooting in that first decree and St Stephen’s crown: there will then be patience, thus thoroughness, conscientiousness and social sense; there will be adjudication, that is, adherence to the law and there will be true judgments.”<sup>73</sup>

As regards this provision, the explanatory memorandum specified the following: “According to the public law understanding developed over the centuries, the Hungarian Holy Crown is the embodiment of the thousand-year-old Hungarian statehood, the sovereignty that includes the ruler and the entire Hungarian nation. The supreme power of the head of state includes the judiciary, which, too, is rooted in the Holy Crown. Externally, the judicial power is also embodied most perfectly in the Holy Crown.”<sup>74</sup>

The doctrine of the Holy Crown and the historical constitution have always been respected by the Hungarian nation. As opposed to Italian fascism and German National Socialist ideas, the arguments that József Mindszenty, Sándor Pethő, Gyula Szekfű and other right-wing, conservative thinkers formulated were underpinned, inter alia, by the Holy Crown Doctrine.<sup>75</sup> This was one of the reasons why the extremist (communist and fascist) parties and movements, which challenged the country’s constitution and historical traditions and threatened the

<sup>72</sup> *Budapesti Közlöny*, 21 March 1920.

<sup>73</sup> The 411<sup>th</sup> sitting of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly on 20 June 1930, Friday, 427.

<sup>74</sup> The explanatory memorandum of Act XXXIV of 1930 on the simplification of jurisdiction. For the Hungarian text see <https://net.jogtar.hu/ezer-ev-torveny?docid=93000034.TVI&searchUrl=/ezer-ev-torvenyei%3Fpagenum%3D49>

<sup>75</sup> NAGY 2015: 189; GRIGER 1936: 40; PETHŐ 1937: 71–73; SZEKFŰ 1938: 76.

country's sovereignty through their external support, did not win over the sympathy of a significant part of the population.<sup>76</sup>

## The Arrow Cross dictatorship (1944–1945)

### *German occupation of Hungary*

Until the beginning of 1944, Hungary was practically an island of peace while Europe was ravaged by World War II. There were no significant shortages in the supply to the population, and the parliament functioned with opposition parties. Freedom of the press was restricted only in relation to war reports. Although the Jewish laws drastically limited their legal capacity, the lives of Hungarian Jews were not in imminent danger.<sup>77</sup>

At 4:00 a.m. on 9 March 1944, following the orders given under “Operation Margarethe I”, the Wehrmacht and the SS units invaded Hungary. They took possession of the strategically important points and facilities: airports, bridges, traffic junctions, radio stations, police stations. A German officer was appointed to head the Hungarian army with full power and unlimited control over the entire Hungarian transport network, roads, railways and airports. The control and command of the Hungarian army were taken over by German liaison officers assigned to the units of the Hungarian Defence Forces. Declaring the eastern part of the country, and then also other areas as an operational zone further strengthened the positions of the German military leadership, ensuring almost unlimited power in the affected area. In addition to being present, the German army seized several public buildings and put a heavy burden on the Hungarian economy. Their supplies cost the Hungarian budget 200 million pengő per month. The Germans took a huge amount of food, raw materials and, to a lesser extent, industrial products out of the country without payment.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>76</sup> Supported by Germany, the parties who embraced the spirit of the Arrow Cross gained 19 percent of the votes at the 1939 elections. See PINTÉR 1999: 202. In the 1945 elections, despite the support of the Soviet Union, the Hungarian Communist Party gained no more than 16.85 percent of the votes. See BALOGH 1999: 228.

<sup>77</sup> VÉRTES 1997.

<sup>78</sup> VARGYAI 2001: 322.



“Operation Margarethe I” anticipated the resistance of the Hungarian army, making it clear that “all resistance must be mercilessly crushed”. All who resisted was to be shot dead, and those who were disarmed was to be interned in Germany. Even non-resisting units had to be placed under lock in their barracks. According to the orders given by the Hungarian military leadership, the Hungarian Defence Forces were not to show resistance. Nonetheless, major and minor clashes did take place, and the German army was clearly treated as enemy. As a result of these clashes, deaths totalled half a hundred on the German side, while the Hungarian army lost less than ten people. Adolf Hitler appointed Edmund Veesenmayer to Hungary as Ambassador and Imperial Representative “responsible for all developments in Hungarian politics”. According to his instructions: “The plenipotentiary representative of the empire shall ensure that the entire public administration of the country – even during the stay of the German troops – is handled by the government under his control, so that the country’s resources, primarily its economic potentials, are maximally exploited for the goals of joint warfare.”<sup>79</sup> For this reason, all civil organisations in Hungary were subordinated to the imperial commissioners.<sup>80</sup>

Hungary clearly lost its sovereignty, although Regent Miklós Horthy remained in office according to his agreement with Hitler. In exchange for the appointment of a government that met German demands and the free use of the Hungarian army, Hitler promised Horthy that there would be no arrests, the German troops would not occupy the Buda Castle, and the Hungarian Defence Forces would not be disarmed. Obviously, Hitler only partially kept these promises, as the Gestapo, with the effective cooperation of the Hungarian authorities, began a quick and thorough purge, and nearly 10,000 people were detained within a short time.

Many well-known politicians and public figures, as well as high-ranking military officers, were also arrested. In a few days, all political organisations were dissolved, apart from the parties that participated in the government and some far-right parties. Part of the general staff of the Hungarian Defence Forces was replaced, 29 of the 41 lord lieutenants (Hung.: *főispán*), and two-thirds of the mayors of major cities were removed. New directors and managers were appointed to head, inter alia, the Radio, the National Bank, the Opera, the National Theatre.

<sup>79</sup> ZSIGMOND 1966: 430–431.

<sup>80</sup> SZITA 2014: 79.

Listening to foreign radio stations was prohibited. Modelled on the German system, government commissioners were appointed to head the radio, the press and the Hungarian news agency MTI. With the introduction of censorship, many newspapers were banned (for example, *Népszava* and *Magyar Nemzet*), their editors were executed or sent to concentration camps. In the end, almost every important institution was headed by leaders who cooperated with the occupying authorities.<sup>81</sup>

The total economic exploitation of Hungary also began. The German authorities primarily confiscated food, but also all industrial products that seemed necessary for continuing the war.<sup>82</sup>

The regent accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Miklós Kállay, who even refused to assume the customary role of a caretaker prime minister until the appointment of the new government. After lengthy negotiations, on 23 March 1944, Regent Miklós Horthy appointed Döme Sztójay as Prime Minister, who gave the most important portfolios to the representatives of the Party of Hungarian Renewal led by Béla Imrédy and the Hungarian National Socialist Party. Ferenc Szálasi and his Arrow Cross Party had not yet received a ministerial portfolio.<sup>83</sup>

For almost three months, the regent lived in complete seclusion without interfering in the events. His activity resuscitated with the protest against the deportation of the Jews at the end of June. He then tasked Colonel Ferenc Koszorús to prevent a gendarmerie coup and the deportation of the Jews of Budapest.<sup>84</sup> Taking advantage of the situation that resulted from the exit of Romania, the regent dismissed the Sztójay Government and appointed Colonel Géza Lakatos to form a new government. At the same time, Horthy secretly tasked the government with regaining the country's sovereignty and prepare for the exit from the war. They began to replace pro-Nazi leaders and attempted to free those arrested for political reasons. In September, an armistice delegation travelled to Moscow. On 15 October, Horthy announced at the Crown Council (a council of ministers chaired not by the prime minister but the regent) that he was requesting a ceasefire. The Crown Council supported the regent's decision. While a radio proclamation was broadcasted, Horthy also communicated his decision to Veessenmayer. However, due to the

<sup>81</sup> VARGA 2012.

<sup>82</sup> DOMBRÁDY 2003: 375.

<sup>83</sup> KARSAI-MOLNÁR 2004: 157.

<sup>84</sup> BONHARDT 2015: 28.

German preponderance, lack of proper organisation and a series of treacheries, the exit attempt was unsuccessful.<sup>85</sup>

### *Szálasi's takeover*

Blackmailed with the life of his only living son after his failed exit attempt, Horthy dismissed the Lakatos Government and appointed Ferenc Szálasi, the leader of the Arrow Cross Party, as Prime Minister without ministerial countersignature. Apparently under blackmail, Horthy retracted his manifesto of the previous day and resigned as regent. He was then transported to Germany and held under house arrest.

As the only political force left to collaborate unconditionally with Hitler's regime, the Arrow Cross Party leader Ferenc Szálasi was the Germans' last card to play. And Szálasi not only had access to a force trained by professional officers, but also had cadres more or less apt to fill the necessary positions after taking over the country.

Also from a public law aspect, Szálasi's regime was a complete break with Hungarian constitutional development and traditions. His newly created power structure and executive functions were foreign in the Hungarian political culture, with maladjusted terminology.

According to Hungarian constitutional law (Act XIX of 1937 on the extension of the regent's powers and the election of the regent), if the position of the regent fell vacant, the Council of State was to be convened, composed of the prime minister, the chairman of the Upper House and the speaker of the House of Representatives, the primate of Hungary, the heads of the Royal Curia and the Royal Administrative Court, and the chief of general staff of the Royal Defence Forces of Hungary. Szálasi formally convened the Council of State, took the oath of office in its presence, and forced a compromise declaring that the regent's position was to remain vacant for the time being. Disregarding the act referenced above, Szálasi appointed the governing council himself from the ranks of his most loyal followers.

At the sitting of the National Assembly convened for 3 November, only 55 far-right representatives of the 372 members of the House of Representatives attended. New members were appointed to the Upper

<sup>85</sup> VIGH 1984: 257.

House, so that it could meet the requirement of the minimum number of members and continue functioning. Szálasi took the oath of office in the presence of the “truncated parliament”. With painstaking care, using even the Holy Crown, he ensured that the ceremony was carried out as solemnly as possible.

Szálasi had the Parliament approve his new position as “leader of the nation” (Hung.: *nemzetvezető*) under the formal control of a so-called government council (composed of two ministers and a member of the House of Representatives pursuant to Decree 3668/1944 ME of the Prime Minister). In this way, similarly to the German Führer model, Szálasi bestowed the power of regent and the chief of general staff of the army upon himself. Nonetheless, he took over as a dictator with a pledge of “responsibility”. He intended to act as the head of state and delegated the tasks of the head of government to his deputy prime minister. His orders were published as the “Leader of the Nation’s Resolutions”.<sup>86</sup>

### *Structure of the “Hungarist State”*

Serving a foreign power, Szálasi’s dictatorship had the sole task of mobilising the country’s last reserves in accordance with German military goals. Accordingly, as the territory of the country decreased, the Arrow Cross leadership’s measures were more and more cruel and hasty.

In Szálasi’s government, seven portfolios were given to members of the Arrow Cross Party, three to the far-right members of the Hungarian Life Party, and one each to the National Socialist Party and the Party of Hungarian Renewal. Two of the ministers were army generals without a party membership. Strikingly, most of the ministers had no administrative experience and were notably underqualified compared to previous governments. Full mobilisation (ages 10–70) was introduced by the government and the entire country was declared an operational area (Decree 4800/1944 HM of the Minister of War). The latter, of course, was merely a repetition of the order issued by the Germans on 15 October. The civil administration was subordinated to the military administration. A significant number of the lord lieutenants and officials considered unreliable were deposed and replaced, just like the head of the important institutions. Civil servants had to take an oath

<sup>86</sup> ORMOS 1981: 539.

of allegiance to Szálasi. The Arrow Cross Party was granted a special position: the political management and control of state bodies was taken over by the delegates and organisations of the party.<sup>87</sup> In case of conflicts, Szálasi clearly anticipated his decision: “The party is always right.”<sup>88</sup>

The role of the “truncated parliament” thus became completely formal. All important issues were regulated by decrees. Szálasi strove to overcome the increasingly anarchic conditions by appointing more and more ministers, government commissioners, and new office chiefs, taking also advantage of the massive influx of the careerists and fortune hunters to his party.

After Miklós Horthy renounced all his rights related to the regent’s office on 16 October 1944, Szálasi also took over the administration of the head of state’s affairs as prime minister. At the sitting of the House of Representatives convened for 2 November, with the attendance of one sixth of the members, the bill that became Act X of 1944 on the powers of the head of state was approved. On the following day, the Upper House passed the bill without a dissenting vote or amendment. The new act advanced Szálasi to the position of head of state that he invented. Act X of 1944 assigned the powers of the regent to the leader of the nation, as well as the powers of the head of government if no prime minister is appointed by the leader of the nation. This resulted in the concentration of top state power: Szálasi successfully combined the powers of prime minister and head of state.

The Arrow Cross Party determined the state organisation in a double sense. The party’s organisational presence in state affairs ensured the realisation of the theorem that “the party exercises control over the state power”. According to a measure issued by the “leader of party-building” József Gera, “the Party’s task is to support the law enforcement authorities, ensure the continuity of production, and everyday control of the enforcement of the decrees already issued and yet to be issued by the [...] leader of the Arrow Cross Party [...] and the ministries. Embodying the political will of the Nation, the Party is represented by the organisational leaders to the local bodies of the executive. The party service is disciplinary subordinated to the head of the organisation [...] as the party service’s controlling and executive body. The party organisation and the state law enforcement agencies operate in a co-ordinate

<sup>87</sup> Kovács 2009.

<sup>88</sup> MNL Bm. Szálasi-per 2. t. V. 172–173. Cf. KARSAT–KARSAT 1988.

relationship, however, if the head of the organisation, by virtue of his supervisory authority and as a representative of the political will of the Nation, issues an order to the state law enforcement agencies in order to protect the public interest, the latter are obliged to implement it.”<sup>89</sup> Thus, dominating and integrated into the bodies of the government and public administration, the Arrow Cross Party exercised continuous political control over the operation of the state (the so-called party commissioners became heads of the presidential departments in the ministries, and the party’s local delegate, secretary, or leader were the men in charge of the local public administration). Also, the party simply took over a number of state functions from the public administration. For example, it essentially appropriated the state security activity, which was largely carried out by the bodies of the Arrow Cross Party. The party service of the Arrow Cross Party, the armed national service, the National Accountability Office, the national accountability detachment, the camp security service pushed the traditional state security agencies to the periphery and handled investigations, interrogations, deportations and internments, prosecution and punishment at their own discretion (inter alia, by means of the “right of slaying”, “decimation”, and the introduction of collective responsibility of families and relatives).<sup>90</sup>

The exclusivity of the Arrow Party was also guaranteed by a decree issued by the Minister of the Interior, which banned even the operation of the allied far-right political parties, thus establishing a state party dictatorship. In the executive, the top governing and coordinating bodies of the Hungarian state were also established within the party: the state chiefs of staff, the national chiefs of staff and the branch chiefs of staff. By then the only loyal members of the legislature were the far-right representatives. Essentially, the legislature, as a traditional state body, served no other purpose but to sanctify Ferenc Szálasi’s “constitutional” position. As a synonym for the Upper House, the National Association of Upper House Members was also established. A “shadow government” operated alongside the government, but the executive fully came under the influence of the party. The so-called working staff of the leader of the nation was formed from the party’s leadership apparatus, under the management of the deputy of the leader of the nation, the head of work order. Within the framework of the working staff, national policy

<sup>89</sup> MNL Bm. Szálasi-per 4. t.

<sup>90</sup> Kovács T. 2006.

offices were established, which took over a significant part of the powers of the ministries. The country-building committee prepared a plan for the transformation of the country, in which the *dicasterii* would have been instrumental. The country would have been divided into county councils, village and township councils, headed by *dicasterium* chairmen appointed by the leader of the nation.

Copying the action of the occupying German authorities, Szálasi declared the whole country an operational area. This meant that the entire public administration and all the civil authorities were subordinated to the military authorities. And it became a daily routine for the men of the Arrow Cross Party to arrest Hungarian citizens with the help of the German authorities. For example, the lord lieutenant of Fejér county was also detained in such manner.<sup>91</sup>

### The period of the Soviet-type dictatorship in Hungary (1945–1990)

#### *Authorities of the occupying Soviet forces*

Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Russian Empire aspired to conquer East Central Europe.<sup>92</sup> Devoting a disproportionate part of the country's resources to the development of the army, the Soviet Union continued the expansive policy of its predecessor.<sup>93</sup> Even the constitution of the Soviet Union was drafted to facilitate the annexation of more and more “member states”. The attempts to spark a “revolution of the proletariat” in the wake of World War I did not succeed in any other country,<sup>94</sup> Stalin gave orders

<sup>91</sup> KOVÁCS T. 2006; LACKÓ 1966; PAKSA 2013; ROZSNYÓI 1977; 1994; SZITA 2002; TELEKI 1972; 1981; VINCELLÉR 2003; 1996; ZINNER–RÓNA 1986.

<sup>92</sup> The Russian Empire's intent to conquer was recognised also by Marx and Engels: “Is it possible that the gigantic and bloated empire would stop halfway when it is already on its way to becoming a world empire? Even if it wanted to halt, that would not be allowed by the circumstances [...]. Since it does not coincide with the natural boundaries, the wavy, broken line of the empire's western border needs to be adjusted, and it would show that Russia's natural border extends from Danzig, perhaps from Stettin to Trieste [...]” See MARX–ENGELS 1964: 13.

<sup>93</sup> KENÉZ 2008: 321.

<sup>94</sup> They strove to conquer Poland in 1920, which would have opened a path to Germany. See KOVÁCS I. 2006: 168.

to prepare for an offensive campaign in the latter half of the 1930s.<sup>95</sup> On 19 August 1939, shortly before the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact was signed, Stalin said the following in his speech delivered at a meeting of the Politburo and the Comintern: “[...] as shown by the experience of the last twenty years, in a time of peace the European communist movement does not have the strength to lead the Bolshevik party to takeover. Only a great war can give rise to the dictatorship of this party.”<sup>96</sup>

In 1939–1940, the leaders of the Soviet Union provoked a territorial dispute with almost every neighbouring country. In a long war, it annexed strategically important Finnish territories, occupied and annexed Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia,<sup>97</sup> attacked Poland from the rear, then divided it among themselves with Germany,<sup>98</sup> and took Bessarabia from Romania. It even strove to assert a territorial claim against Turkey. The Nazi Germany dared to act as an aggressor because it concluded a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union. In addition, until 22 June 1941, the Soviet Union supplied Germany with strategically important raw materials, oil and food. Without the help of the Soviets, Hitler could not have succeeded in occupying a significant part of the European continent.<sup>99</sup>

As a result of the peace treaties ending World War II, the Soviet Union kept these territories as if they had not been acquired on the basis of military aggression in accordance with the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact and contrary to international law, but had always belonged to the Soviet Union. Moreover, additional territories (such as East Prussia and Transcarpathia) were also annexed. In total, Stalin’s regime gained a territory of 400,000 square kilometres.

During the peace talks, no questions were asked by the Western allies concerning the responsibility of the Soviet Union in the outbreak of World War II and the genocides committed by the Soviet armed forces. The Baltic states were brought under control as Soviet republics, and part of the indigenous population became victims of forced resettlement

<sup>95</sup> SUVOROV 2008: 258. After his meeting with the Lithuanian minister of foreign affairs, Molotov said the following in July 1940: “A genius, Lenin was not wrong to assure us that World War II will allow us to take over all of Europe, just as World War I helped us to take over Russia.” Quoted by SAKHAROV 2000: 165.

<sup>96</sup> *Novij mir*, 1994/12, 230.

<sup>97</sup> BOJTÁR 1989: 35; RAUCH et al. 1994: 179.

<sup>98</sup> KOVÁCS I. 2006: 168; PACZKOWSKI 2006: 5.

<sup>99</sup> HELLER–NEKRICH 2003: 326.



and deportation. As a result of the Russification campaign, the number of Poles in the former Polish territories decreased from 5,274,000 to 1,430,000 in 1962.

Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Poland, Hungary and Romania were not formally annexed, but their sovereignty was abolished. The leaders of each country were appointed in Moscow, and “Soviet advisers” were sent alongside the heads of the state administration and the armed forces. Soviet soldiers and party leaders could enter and exit the territory of the satellite states as if those were part of the Soviet Union. According to Stalin’s infamous statement addressed to Milovan Đilas:<sup>100</sup> “This war is not like the wars of the past. Whoever occupies a territory will force its own social system on the people of that territory. If the army can march in, the conquerors’ system will be imposed. There is no other possible way.”<sup>101</sup> And that is what happened in Hungary, too.

The Soviet Union did not accede to the 1929 Geneva Convention on Prisoners of War either. Even though a regulation concerning prisoners of war was drawn up as a unilateral declaration in 1931, it primarily contained propagandistic elements rather than legislation. For example, on the grounds of the equality of prisoners of war, officers were denied different treatment.<sup>102</sup> A few days after Nazi Germany invaded the Soviet Union without a declaration of war, the Council of People’s Commissars issued a classified decree on prisoners of war. The question arises as to why this legislation was confidential? If the intention was to follow it, then why didn’t the regulation include guarantees and allow the International Red Cross and representatives of neutral countries to inspect the prisoner-of-war camps? In fact, a single provision of the decree was implemented in practice, according to which the interned civilians also qualified as prisoners of war – as if the Soviets had already been preparing for mass internment of civilians.<sup>103</sup> With the exception of that provision, not a single part of the decree that gave prisoners of war any rights was observed. On Stalin’s orders, the Red Army carried out warfare typical of the Tatars. Surrendering enemy soldiers were shot

<sup>100</sup> Milovan Đilas (1911–1995): communist politician of Yugoslavia. He turned against Tito’s political regime from 1954 and was imprisoned in 1957. He was pardoned and released in 1965.

<sup>101</sup> ĐILAS 1989: 105.

<sup>102</sup> STARK 2017: 34.

<sup>103</sup> Based on a translation by Éva Mária Varga, the text of the decree was published by BOGNÁR 2012: 503–507.

dead and plundered. The commanders treated even their subordinates inhumanely, not sparing the lives of their own soldiers. In addition, the occupied territories were exploited to the greatest possible extent. Stalin announced this practice in advance in his letter to the British Government dated 7 June 1943: “The Soviet Government believes that the not only the Hungarian Government is to be held accountable for the armed assistance provided by Hungary to Germany [...], but, to a certain extent, the Hungarian people must also take responsibility for it.”<sup>104</sup> On 14 December 1943, in response to Edvard Beneš’s anti-Hungarian statement, Molotov confirmed: “The Hungarians must be punished.”<sup>105</sup>

Following Stalin’s orders, the Soviet army therefore did not come to Hungary as a liberator.<sup>106</sup> This was also evidenced by the Soviet official terminology: the inscription on the reverse of the medal issued for the siege of Budapest includes the word “capture” (as opposed to the term “liberation” used in case of Prague). Hundreds of thousands of the civilian population were taken to “malenki robot”. Around 600–700 thousand people, soldiers, civilians, and even women and children, were taken to various camps in the Soviet Union. A third of them died due to the inhumane conditions of detention.<sup>107</sup> A blind eye was turned to the fact that the Soviet soldiers brutally raped hundreds of thousands of women, from little girls to 70-year-olds, not even sparing expectant mothers.<sup>108</sup> After the capture of Budapest, Marshal Malinovský allowed his soldiers three days of free looting, which they “proactively” extended both in time and space, to the entire country.<sup>109</sup> Following the Red Army, special NKVD/SMERSH units entered the country, tasked with stealing art treasures and plundering Hungarian banks.<sup>110</sup> Enemy assets were treated as *res nullius*. In addition to collecting the costs of reparations

<sup>104</sup> Quoted by JUHÁSZ 1978: 158.

<sup>105</sup> Quoted by GOSZTONYI 1990: 152–153.

<sup>106</sup> As a witness of the events, Sándor Márai formulated the following opinion: “For many who had been persecuted by the Nazis, this young Russia brought about a deliverance of a sort, a way out of the Nazi terror. But as for freedom, it was not something the Russians could bring, as they lacked it themselves. But not everyone realised that just yet.” See MÁRAI 2006: 12.

<sup>107</sup> TÓTH 2001: 562; KORMOS 2001; VARGA 2006.

<sup>108</sup> Rape is a message to the defeated: not only your country and homes are defenceless, but so are your wives and daughters. That makes the humiliation of the enemy complete. See PETŐ 1999: 2000: 203; FÖLDESI 2009: 140.

<sup>109</sup> KOGELFRANZ 1990: 96.

<sup>110</sup> NKVD = Narodny Komissariat Vnutrennih Del (the interior ministry of the Soviet Union); SMERSH = Smerty Meckim Spionam (Death to Spies).

and occupation, the Soviets pursued a policy that can rightly be called looting. Entire factories were dismantled, railway carriages and means of transport were seized, and all these were transported to the Soviet Union alongside other stolen goods. Even ordinary privates were allowed to send home a ten-kilogram package from time to time. One may wonder how a soldier who did not receive a pay could assemble a ten-kilogram package? The Red Army's supply of food and clothing was constantly interrupted, so the Soviet soldiers could only supply themselves by plundering the civilian population.<sup>111</sup>

There were several ways by which Hungarian citizens could end up in various camps in the Soviet Union. The largest group was made up of the so-called prisoners of war, about a third of whom were in fact civilians. 20,000 to 30,000 people were deported from Transcarpathia based on order No. 0036 of the 4<sup>th</sup> Ukrainian Front issued on 12 November, which set forth that "ethnic Hungarian and German men of military age live in many villages, who are to be arrested and sent to a prison camps, just like the soldiers of the enemy".<sup>112</sup>

Pursuant to the order of the Committee for State Security of the Soviet Union issued on 16 December 1944 concerning the territory of Romania, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia: "All German men between the ages of 17 and 44 must be mobilised and sent to work in the Soviet Union, as well as all German women between the ages of 18 and 30 [...]"<sup>113</sup> As a result, approximately 70,000 German nationals and people classified as ethnic Germans were deported.

The special Soviet courts-martial extended their authority even to the civilian population and handed down thousands of convictions, sentencing people to 10, 20, or 25 years of forced labour in camps of the Gulag system. These people suffered a fate even worse than the so-called prisoners of war, as the conditions in the Gulag camps were even more dreadful than in the camps of the Gupvi.<sup>114</sup> With reference to the armistice, this practice was continued even after the issuance of the relevant decree by the Provisional National Government (Decree 1440/1945 ME of the Prime Minister on the amendment and supplement of Decree 81/1945 ME of the Prime Minister on people's courts).

<sup>111</sup> UNGVÁRI 2005: 282.

<sup>112</sup> DUPKA–KORSZUN 1997: 15.

<sup>113</sup> DUPKA–KORSZUN 1997: 33–34.

<sup>114</sup> BORDI 1995: 64.

Controlled by the Hungarian Communist Party, the Political Police Department (PRO), and then the State Security Department (ÁVO) also contributed to this procedure, which was illegal in all respects. The PRO and the ÁVO thereby committed a serious violation of law, since section 17 of Act V of 1878 (the Hungarian Criminal Code on crimes and misdemeanours) expressly forbade the extradition of Hungarian citizens to the authorities of other states.<sup>115</sup> The court-martial proceedings were unlawful in all respects. The rights of the defence were denied, and the entire trial was conducted in an accelerated procedure with the assistance of an interpreter who could hardly speak Hungarian. At the end of the trial, the interpreter used his fingers to show the number of years the defendant was sentenced to. In most cases, the convictions were based on the infamous section 58 of the Soviet Criminal Code.<sup>116</sup>

In trade with the countries of the socialist bloc, prices were always set in favour of the Soviet Union. The Soviet state became the owner of the seized German assets and quite a few companies, from which “joint ventures” were established.

According to estimates, at the then exchange rate, the Soviet Union withdrew approximately 14 billion dollars from the occupied European socialist countries between 1945 and 1955, which amount is exactly the same as the aid provided by the United States<sup>117</sup> to the countries participating in the Marshall Plan.<sup>118</sup>

### *Periods of the Soviet occupation of Hungary*

#### Combatant troops

From 22 September 1944 to 11 April 1945, Hungary was under a double military occupation. The country became a permanent battlefield, the site of clashes between combatant troops. Following the operations of the Red Army, the former public administration largely disintegrated. The reorganisation of the area behind the front, including the establish-

<sup>115</sup> SZAKÁCS–ZINNER 1997: 178.

<sup>116</sup> BOGNÁR s. a.

<sup>117</sup> MARER 1974: 14; 1979: 248.

<sup>118</sup> European Recovery Program: the USA's aid in the economic recovery of nations after World War II.

ment of the Provisional National Government, aimed at providing the best possible supply to the fighting troops. The Soviet army subjected all the resources of the country to this goal. The retaliatory actions of the Soviet authorities, as well as the preparatory measures of a total dictatorship had already started in this stage.<sup>119</sup>

Soviet military occupation  
(2 January 1945 – 15 September 1947)

Hungary was to sign the armistice without any remarks or conditions (as enshrined in law by Act V of 1945 on the promulgation of the armistice agreement, signed in Moscow on 20 January 1945). To monitor the implementation of the armistice, a so-called Allied Control Commission was established in Hungary from the ranks of the Soviet army until the signing of the peace treaty. In practice, the representatives of the United States and the United Kingdom held a mere observer status in this organisation, which operated under the unlimited authority of Marshal Kliment Yefremovich Voroshilov of the Red Army, member of the Politburo. The Soviet occupying authority had the power to appoint the members of the government and the president of the republic, control the operation of parties, the publication of newspapers, the operation of radio stations, post offices, telegraph and telephone, and authorise entries and exits to and from the country. The Allied Control Commission was able to carry out its diverse tasks with the help of hundreds of thousands of occupying soldiers, a central, district, county, city and factory network, and Voroshilov's huge bureau of 700–800 people. They even had an intelligence and management apparatus. Various departments, trade unions and institutions were set up to control specific economic and political areas. The costs of the huge army and apparatus had to be covered by the Hungarian state, which exceeded 30% of the national income in 1945–1946. In addition, the Allied Control Commission actively intervened in the affairs of the country. The scope of the Soviet Criminal Code was extended to Hungarian citizens, and countless innocent people were arrested and sentenced on the basis of section 58 thereof (among others, Pater Szaléz

<sup>119</sup> RÉVAI 1991: 12.

Kiss<sup>120</sup> was sentenced to death and executed, and Béla Kovács, the General Secretary of the Independent Smallholders' Party was arrested and deported to the Soviet Union on 25 February 1947).

“Military units required to maintain traffic lines  
with the Soviet occupation zone in Austria”  
(15 September 1947 – 15 May 1955)

The so-called Paris Treaty was signed on 10 February 1947 by Minister of Foreign Affairs János Gyöngyösi. Hungary once again lost most of the territories with a Hungarian majority, which had been recovered during the revision. In fact, according to the provisions adopted at the peace conference, three more villages were annexed to Czechoslovakia: Horvátjárfalu (Jarovce), Oroszvár (Rusovce) and Dunacsún (Čunovo), on the grounds that a “defensible bridgehead” could be established next to Pozsony (Bratislava) to prevent a possible attack against the Slovak capital.<sup>121</sup> In addition, the minority protection conventions of the Trianon Treaty were not recognised, thus leaving the Hungarian residents almost completely exposed to the terror of the communist dictatorships established in the successor states.

Reparations worth 300 million dollars were set forth, exceeding the country's financial means, divided between the Soviet Union (200 million), Yugoslavia (70 million) and Czechoslovakia (30 million). Surprisingly, in contrast to the Treaty of Trianon, the number of the Hungarian army was maximised at 70,000, and the maintenance of heavy weapons and air force was also allowed.<sup>122</sup>

The Allied Control Commission was officially dissolved by the Paris Treaty, and, theoretically, Hungary regained its independence. In fact, the military occupation of the country continued, since according to the first paragraph of Article 22 of the Paris Treaty, until the peace treaty concluded with Austria entered into force, the Soviet Union could station

<sup>120</sup> Pater Szaléz László Kiss (1904–1946): Capistran monk and teacher, a popular preacher, founder of the Christian Democratic Youth Work Community. Martyr of the seal of confession. Sentenced to death and executed by the Military Tribunal of the Army of the Soviet Union.

<sup>121</sup> This change of border later made it possible for Slovakia to build a barrier dam and unilaterally divert the Danube to build the Gabčíkovo hydroelectric plant.

<sup>122</sup> FÜLÖP 2022; HAAS 1995: 179.

troops in Hungary to ensure communication with the Soviet occupation zone in Austria.<sup>123</sup> The peace treaty did not regulate the types of weapons, the troops and the routes that were to be provided. Thus, under the authority of international law, the Soviets kept a much larger number of military units in Hungary than they otherwise would have needed to secure the routes. This task could have been adequately performed by a contingent of a few thousand. In fact, however, a much larger Soviet force was stationed in Hungary: four divisions (two rifle divisions, one bomber and one fighter division) according to some sources.<sup>124</sup> Barracks and other areas were seized to accommodate the Soviet army and provide them with airports, shooting and training grounds. The Hungarian authorities received almost no information about the actual number of the Soviet personnel and weapons.

### Warsaw Pact

*The State Treaty for the Re-establishment of an Independent and Democratic Austria* was signed in Vienna on 15 May 1955 by the ministers of foreign affairs of the United States of America, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and Austria. According to the Austrian State Treaty: “The forces of the Allied and Associated Powers [...] shall be withdrawn from Austria, if possible, within 90 days of the entry into force of this treaty.”<sup>125</sup> The forces of the four great powers were quickly withdrawn. The parties began the preparations in due time. As pointed out in an open order by Marshal Georgy Konstantinovich Zhukov, the Minister of Defence of the Soviet Union: “All Soviet troops stationed in Austria are to be transferred to the territory of the Soviet Union by 1 October 1955. The total number of armed forces of the Soviet Union must be reduced by the number of troops withdrawn from Austria.”<sup>126</sup>

One day before the effective date of the Austrian State Treaty, the Soviet Union – with the participation of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Hungary, the German Democratic Republic and Romania – adopted a 20-year treaty of friendship, cooperation and

<sup>123</sup> HALMOSY 1985: 84.

<sup>124</sup> BALLÓ 2005: 72.

<sup>125</sup> HALMOSY 1985: 300; ROSKA 1986.

<sup>126</sup> *Szabad Nép*, 1 August 1955, 3.

compulsory mutual assistance in Warsaw. The haste was no coincidence, as the Warsaw Pact was necessary to justify the legitimacy of the Soviet occupation, although it did not specifically provide for this.

A military-political instrument, the Warsaw Pact ensured the subordination of the armies of the socialist countries to the Soviet Union. Inter alia, this was indicated by the fact that Soviet officers occupied all the important leadership positions within the organisation. No position important from an operational aspect was assigned to a senior officer from an eastern European country. In each member state, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces was nominally the minister of defence of the given member state, but his powers only extended to conveying the instructions of the combined staff of the united armed forces to his own ministry.<sup>127</sup> Thus, of all the institutions, the army was integrated to the greatest extent into the Soviet system.<sup>128</sup>

The Soviet propaganda emphasised that the Warsaw Pact was concluded as a response to NATO. However, there was a significant difference between the two military-political alliances: while NATO pursued a defensive military policy, with the creation of the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet Union sought to establish a military block that directly provided it with huge masses of trained manpower reserves for new areas of deployment, and access to military bases and warehouses, which it could eventually use for the political, economic and military suppression of its “allies”.<sup>129</sup> Recognising this, Imre Nagy wrote the following in Snagov: “the Warsaw Pact is a tool of the chauvinistic aspirations of the Soviet great power, with the help of which the participating [...] countries are subordinated to this policy. The Warsaw Pact is nothing more than the imposition of the Soviet military dictatorship on the participating countries [...] and the military instrument of the dependence and subordination of the Stalinist days in the relationship between the socialist countries.”<sup>130</sup>

In accordance with the strategic plans of the Soviet Union, the designated forces of the member countries of the Warsaw Pact were

<sup>127</sup> GATI 1990.

<sup>128</sup> Oddly, the original copy of the treaty was published only in Russian, Polish, Czech and German. The Albanians, Bulgarians, Romanians and Hungarians were not even regarded as worthy of an official (authentic) draft in their native language.

<sup>129</sup> OKVÁTH 2003: 64; KIRÁLY 1995: 235.

<sup>130</sup> Quoted by HORVÁTH 2001: 608.



ready to invade Western Europe and destroy many Western European cities with nuclear weapons. The troops of 170,000 of the German Democratic Republic could have launched an attack at any time within two hours – that is, much faster than NATO leaders could imagine. According to documents discovered in East Germany, they were to reach the Spanish border in 30 days.<sup>131</sup> Subordinated to the Soviet Army Group South, the poorly armed, albeit rather large Hungarian force was supposed to advance in the direction of the Alps. They would have served as bullet shields for the Soviet elite units.<sup>132</sup>

In the first half of the 1960s, the Soviets also installed nuclear weapons on the territory of Hungary. According to a military exercise held in 1965, the arsenal of weapons, several times more powerful than the Hiroshima atomic bomb, would have destroyed Vienna, Munich, Verona and Vincenza (and, of course, made Hungary itself a nuclear target.)<sup>133</sup>

The Hungarian army was reorganised on the Soviet model. Uniforms and weapons were also modelled after their Soviet counterparts.<sup>134</sup> Political officers and the party hierarchy appeared under the control of Soviet advisers.<sup>135</sup> Almost all the highest-level Hungarian military leaders were trained in the Soviet Union. All party-member and non-party soldiers were kept under observation, and reports were written on them to the political officers. The third level of control was provided by the secret police, with undercover agents and informers in every troop compartment, barracks and bureau.

In addition to offensive operations, the Soviet army could also be deployed at any time to regulate socialist countries. Various war action plans were prepared in that regard even before the 1956 Hungarian revolution and war of independence.<sup>136</sup> During the 1956 revolution and war of independence, the Soviet troops acted in Hungary as if facing an enemy at war.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>131</sup> JACKSON 1994: 108.

<sup>132</sup> BALLÓ 2005: 122; OKVÁTH 2006: 34.

<sup>133</sup> MÓZES 2006: 6; VÁNDOR 2009: II. 9.

KIRÁLY 1995: 230–231.

<sup>134</sup> BACZONI 2008: 5; GOSZTONYI 1991: 103.

<sup>135</sup> GERMUSKA 2008: 1465.

<sup>136</sup> KIROV 1996: 123.

<sup>137</sup> HORVÁTH 1996: 101; GYÖRKEI–HORVÁTH 2001: 11.

As a sort of recognition of the Hungarian resistance, Marshal Zhukov was awarded the same “gold star” campaign medal for taking Budapest in 1956 as when he captured Berlin.<sup>138</sup> After the resistance of the Hungarian insurgents was broken and the Hungarian army was disarmed, Soviet military administration was introduced throughout the entire country. Patrols were led by the town kommandaturas, and guard duty was performed. The KGB arrested and interrogated Hungarian citizens. The Soviet Union only gave permission to arm two regiments of the Hungarian army after separately requested so by János Kádár.

### Temporary occupation (1957–1991)

In 1957, the Soviet leaders “legalised” the occupation of Hungary by the Red Army. On 27 May 1957, the leaders of the Hungarian state were made to sign a document setting forth that “with the intention to settle the issues related to the temporary stay of the Soviet troops on Hungarian soil”, the two governments were to conclude a treaty. The agreement was promulgated by Law Decree 54 of 1957 on the treaty signed by the Government of the People’s Republic of Hungary and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on 27 May 1957 concerning the legal status of the Soviet troops temporarily staying in the territory of the People’s Republic of Hungary, and Law Decree 22 of 1958 on the promulgation of the treaty signed by the Government of the People’s Republic of Hungary and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on 24 April 1958 concerning the mutual legal assistance in matters related to the temporary stay of Soviet troops in the territory of the People’s Republic of Hungary.<sup>139</sup>

Comprising of 19 sections, the text is a typical framework legislation, which specified<sup>140</sup> neither the number of troops and the types of weapons,

<sup>138</sup> And János Kádár received the “Hero of the Soviet Union” medal from Khrushchev on 3 April 1964.

<sup>139</sup> Although the said law decrees were published in the *Hungarian Gazette* at the time of their adoption, they were included neither in the *Hatályos Jogszabályok Gyűjteménye* [Collection of the Effective Legislation] nor in the volume entitled *Nemzetközi szerződések 1945–1982* [International Treaties 1945–1982] (Budapest, 1985).

<sup>140</sup> This issue was covered by an intergovernmental agreement concluded in Budapest on 1 April 1958.

nor the military bases. Moreover, it was concluded for an indefinite period of time and could only be terminated or modified by mutual agreement of the two parties.

The number of military bases of Soviet troops were increased. In Budapest alone, the number of military facilities used by the Soviets were increased by six. It is worth comparing the text of the agreement with the agreements concerning the stationing of U.S. military units in Europe.<sup>141</sup> The Soviet troops used the buildings, the 48,000 hectares of land, the electricity, the water, the heating and the sewer network free of any charge and without informing the Hungarian authorities (about the nuclear charges, for instance).

As a rather interesting episode, Khrushchev offered to withdraw the Soviet troops in 1958 (as he did in Romania that same year). There are several versions of the famous meeting, which had been classified until 1989. According to one of them, Kádár wasted no time replying: “It will be better this way, Comrade Khrushchev, let your soldiers stay with us...” Indeed, Kádár had already used the occupation to stabilise his own regime.<sup>142</sup> However, Khrushchev’s recollection of the events is slightly different: “Comrade Kádár”, I said, “have you ever considered the presence of our troops in Hungary? [...] We rely on your judgment and do whatever you suggest.” Kádár replied: “Comrade Khrushchev, there is no one more apt to make this decision than you. In our country, the presence of your troops causes no resentment at all. And I say this with all sincerity.”<sup>143</sup>

According to Péter Gosztonyi, however, Kádár’s comeback was somewhat “wittier”: “You know what, Nikita Sergeevich? Keep Rákosi there with you, and we shall keep making room for your soldiers here.”<sup>144</sup>

### The liquidation of the democratic institutional system and the establishment of the Soviet-type dictatorship (1944–1949)

After Horthy’s failed exit attempt, the country had no government capable of negotiating. Therefore, on the instructions of the Soviet

<sup>141</sup> PATAKI 1995; 2000; CSAPODY 1991: 27.

<sup>142</sup> SIPOS 1990: 14; 1994: 200.

<sup>143</sup> KHRUSHCHEV 1974: 216.

<sup>144</sup> GOSZTONYI 1993: 273.

occupying authorities, the representatives of the so-called Provisional National Assembly were first elected. The representatives mostly came from the ranks of the parties and organisations participating in the anti-fascist Hungarian resistance (Hungarian Communist Party, Social Democratic Party, Independent Smallholders' Party, National Peasants' Party, Civil Democratic Party, trade unions). Since the task of organising the elections was largely carried out by communist activists, the Communist Party won a 39% majority in the hastily conducted "voting".<sup>145</sup> Yet, in comparison, this solution still seemed the most democratic, since, for example, the sovereign power was exercised by the Independence Front in France, the president of the republic in Czechoslovakia, the king in Romania, and the government swiftly put together by the Soviet leadership in Poland. In Hungary, however, as it was not preceded by an ordinary election, the temporary nature of the new parliament was recognised, and, since only the eastern half of the country was represented, it could only adopt resolutions. On the other hand, with the name "National Assembly" and Debrecen as the choice of location, seemingly Hungarian public law traditions were also taken into account. Nonetheless, the fact that the constituent sitting was scheduled for 21 December, Stalin's birthday, clearly indicated that conditions had changed. Beyond electing the government and approving the (repeated) armistice request, the Provisional National Assembly did little to no meaningful work, and after a day and a half of deliberations, it was only reconvened in September 1945 to posteriorly legalise the decrees passed between the two sessions.<sup>146</sup>

The list of the members of the Provisional National Government was drawn up in Moscow, and the Provisional National Assembly accepted it without debate. Four of the 12 members of the government were members of the armistice delegation in Moscow, four ministers were communist politicians, while the rest was delegated by the coalition parties. The Communist Party had already won the Ministry of the Interior, where Gábor Péter took over the Political Police Department in January 1945, which later operated under the name State Security Department (ÁVO). In order to limit the powers of the non-communist prime minister to the greatest possible extent, the Provisional National Government was defined as a collegiate body with independent powers. In any case, real

<sup>145</sup> PALASIK 2017: 23; IZSÁK–KUN 1994: 14.

<sup>146</sup> GYARMATI 1995: 77; SZERENCÉS 2000: 553. Cf. HUBAI–TOMBOR 1991.

deliberation and decision-making was rare within the government. The most important issues were decided at the so-called inter-party discussions, where the will of the Communist Party prevailed in most cases, underpinned by the blackmail and open threats of the occupying Soviet authorities.<sup>147</sup>

The *de facto* international recognition of the new statehood and government resulted from the conclusion of the armistice. The *de jure* recognition arose from the conclusion of the peace treaty.

The Provisional Government signed an armistice with the Soviet Union on 20 January 1945. According to the agreement, Hungary declared war on Germany and was obliged to pay 300 million dollars in reparations – two-thirds to the Soviet Union and one-third to Yugoslavia – within six years, mainly in crops and goods. On 15 March, in accordance with the instructions of the Soviet leadership, the government issued the land reform decree on the division of estates larger than 100 acres.<sup>148</sup> The propaganda of the time referred to satisfying the centuries-old hunger for land of the Hungarian peasantry. In reality, this action was implemented in an unlawful manner, based on irrational economic considerations.<sup>149</sup>

The mandate of the Provisional National Government was terminated on 15 November 1945, when, after the election of the new National Assembly, a new coalition government was formed, headed by Zoltán Tildy, a politician of the Independent Smallholders' Party.

The National Assembly elections held on 4 November 1945 were won by the Independent Smallholders' Party by an overwhelming majority (57%). The Social Democratic Party won 17.4%, the Hungarian Communist Party 16.9%, and the National Peasant Party 6.8%. Despite this, a coalition government was formed under Soviet pressure, not reflecting the election results.<sup>150</sup> Although the prime minister came from the ranks of the Independent Smallholders' Party, the portfolios were distributed equally. In addition to the Ministry of the Interior, the communists also acquired the Ministry of Transport. In this way,

<sup>147</sup> KOROM 1981: 403; BALOGH 1988: 25.

<sup>148</sup> FÖLDESI 2009: 206. As Voroshilov, the leader of the Allied Control Commission remarked in a letter written to his wife in the spring of 1945: even the Hungarian communists only began the land reform “due to our merciless pressure”. See KUN 1997.

<sup>149</sup> SZAKÁCS 1998: 287; HONVÁRI 2013: 98; GYARMATHY 1996: 64.

<sup>150</sup> BALOGH 1994: 220–221.

they gained control over the postal service, the artery of politics and economy. The communists acquired the Ministry of Welfare, too, for propaganda purposes. Three portfolios (industry, justice, trade) were given to the social democrats cooperating with the communists. The Smallholders' Party gained the agricultural portfolio, the military affairs – which was not of particular importance under the given circumstances – the foreign affairs, the financial portfolio struggling with the inflationary crisis, the public supply portfolio (which was also responsible for the service and supply of the Soviet army and, therefore, rather unpopular), the reconstruction portfolio struggling with extraordinary difficulties, as well as the hastily created but not too significant communication portfolio. The Peasants' Party had to be content with the ministry of culture. In the National Assembly, an extraordinarily odd situation developed, contrary to all basic principles of democracy. Each party became involved in the government coalition, leaving no opposition. The positions of the government led by the Smallholders' Party were also weakened by the withdrawal of significant powers, which were bestowed upon the newly established General Economic Council. Although the body was chaired by the prime minister, with the ministers of industry and transport as members on a coalition basis, the communist Zoltán Vas exercised actual control as the general secretary. In the difficult economic situation after World War II, the General Economic Council extended its authority to the entire economy, by introducing economic control and gaining the power to adopt decrees independent of the government: it passed government-level laws in the fields of raw material production, energy and food supply, financial management, export–import regulation and decisions concerning reparations.<sup>151</sup>

The communists were initially shocked by their poor performance in the elections, as Mátyás Rákosi's reports to Moscow had envisioned a glorious victory. However, the party soon changed tactics. The so-called “salami-slicing” approach was implemented with increasing cruelty. The communists imprisoned or deported politicians who refused cooperation, one after the other. Many associations and parties were dissolved and banned. Freedoms and rights were completely abolished over the course of two or three years. Larger and larger parts of the

<sup>151</sup> HONVÁRI 2000: 457.

economy were subjected to direct control through the process labelled “nationalisation”, which in reality meant unlawful confiscations. People were deprived of their private property and businesses, and became vulnerable state employees. Meanwhile, under the control of the political police, tens of thousands of show trials were conducted, handing down countless death sentences and imprisonment. A great number of police decisions ordering internment were also rendered. Despite its absolute majority, the ministers and members of parliament of the Independent Smallholders’ Party were forced to play the role of the opposition in a continuous rearguard struggle.<sup>152</sup>

As the first slice of the “salami”, legitimists were pushed out of politics. On 31 January 1946, based on a bill submitted by the Hungarian Communist Party, the National Assembly passed a law on the form of state of Hungary, which henceforth became a republic, headed by the president of the republic with extremely limited powers. The republic was proclaimed on 1 February. Zoltán Tildy was elected as president of the republic and replaced as prime minister by Ferenc Nagy, the leader of the Independent Smallholders’ Party.<sup>153</sup>

In the following year, February 1947, under the pretext of “exposing” a rather insignificant political organisation, the so-called Hungarian Community, based on confessions coerced by torture, the ÁVO arrested several members of parliament who belonged to the central force of the Smallholders’ Party. On 25 February, the Secretary General of the Smallholders’ Party, Béla Kovács was detained and deported by the Soviet military police. On 30 May, Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy, who was staying in Switzerland at that time, was forced to resign – he was threatened to be held accountable for “participation in a conspiracy” if he returned home. The speaker of the National Assembly, Béla Varga, also chose emigration. The Independent Smallholders’ Party practically disintegrated. The office of the prime minister was taken by Lajos Dinnyés, who cooperated with the communists.<sup>154</sup>

Addressing the leaders of the Communist Party in the National Assembly of Hungary on 1 July 1947, Member of Parliament Dezső Sulyok summed up what the events as follows: “We are completely and

<sup>152</sup> PALASIK 2017.

<sup>153</sup> HORVÁTH 2017a: 7.

<sup>154</sup> CSICSERY-RÓNAY–CSERENYEY 1998: 46.

irreconcilably different from each other in that we believe in democracy built on the basis of individual freedom, while you believe in slavery based on a totalitarian economic and state system.” Interjections reached such a level by then that Sulyok declared: “After this, I consider freedom of speech in the Hungarian Parliament to have ceased, and I shall refrain from speaking.”<sup>155</sup> Sulyok then left the meeting hall and emigrated abroad to avoid arrest.<sup>156</sup>

Disintegrated due to the salami-slicing approach, the National Assembly was dissolved by the president of the republic and new elections were called for 31 August 1947. The Communist Party, through the Ministry of the Interior, falsified the results in several ways. Among them, the most serious fraud was committed, on the one hand, by removing half a million right-wing voters from the electoral roll, making them unable to exercise their right to vote. On the other hand, approximately 300,000 “blue ballots” were distributed to the communist activists, who, going from polling station to polling station, casted votes for the Communist Party by the dozen.

The Hungarian Communist Party won the elections with 22%. The Democratic People’s Party finished second with 16%. The Independent Smallholders’ Party got 15%, the Social Democratic Party 15%, the Hungarian Independence Party 13%, the National Peasants’ Party 8%, and the Independent Hungarian Democratic Party 5%. The Smallholders’ Party and its successor parties still won 54.5% in the elections. This means that even in 1947, more people voted on the civic parties. Nonetheless, due to the salami-slicing approach, the will of the left-wing lead by the communists prevailed.<sup>157</sup>

The Communist Party then abolished each party one by one: first the opposition parties, then in 1948 the Social Democratic Party was absorbed, and the Hungarian Workers’ Party was established. As a result, only one party, the Communist State Party could remain. In 1949, the elections no longer caused any problems, as a single party list remained to vote for.

<sup>155</sup> *Nemzetgyűlési Napló*, 1 July 1947, 290.

<sup>156</sup> SZERENCSE 2009.

<sup>157</sup> SZERENCSE 1992: 7; FÖLDESI–SZERENCSE 2001: 9; FEITL 2016: 209.



### The totalitarian dictatorship (1949–1990)<sup>158</sup>

At defining totalitarian dictatorship, we must first clarify that it is an independent and legally terminal public law order, as opposed to a state of emergency, which is introduced in case of war or other extraordinary event, under conditions defined by the provisions of the constitution, and where the constitutional order is restored as soon as the extraordinary situation terminates.<sup>159</sup> The totalitarian dictatorship, on the other hand, is a new, independent category of public law, which – during its reign of 70 years in the Soviet Union and 40 years in Hungary – revealed no immanent trend of movement that would indicate that the existing regime changed drastically.<sup>160</sup> In any case, the totalitarian dictatorship is a closed, irreformable system, which is proven by the failed attempts in that regard.<sup>161</sup> The consistent rejection of reforms was not a political mistake, but it was inherent in the regime's logic.<sup>162</sup>

A small power elite was able to establish the totalitarian dictatorship by the application of modern, 20<sup>th</sup>-century administrative techniques. The form of social rule that came to being in this way tolerated no limitation and aspired to take control over every aspect of life.<sup>163</sup>

#### *Key elements of the totalitarian dictatorship*

In every sphere of the political regime, the exercise of power manifested in raw, unvarnished and uncontrollable dictatorial governance. This exclusivity necessarily led to the total elimination of the autonomous

<sup>158</sup> This section is primarily based on the research results of Mihály Bihari and Zbigniew Brzezinski. See BIHARI 2005: 91; FRIEDRICH–BRZEZINSKI 1956.

<sup>159</sup> BUZA 1936: 11–12.

<sup>160</sup> Neither Imre Nagy's 1953 government programme nor the economic reforms of 1968 affected the essence of the system.

<sup>161</sup> VAJDA 1989: 15.

<sup>162</sup> That is why Czechoslovakia was invaded in 1968. Brezhnev and his advisors were well aware that the freedom of the press would entail unforeseeable consequences for them.

<sup>163</sup> The list of the duties of the members of the Communist Party included the following: "[...] there is no vacuum in class struggle. Where socialism fails to advance, the powers of capitalism will penetrate. Where the party resolutions are not implemented, a gap is opened for the enemy." See PATKÓ 1953: 165.

political room for manoeuvre of society, which was achieved by simplifying the technique of the exercise of power. Denying the principle of the division of power, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary was concentrated in one hand, building a hierarchic and extremely centralised state system, controlled and supervised by the one-party state. Thus, the various state and party functions intertwined.

The central power intended to control every single aspect of life, even the areas that used to be distant from politics.<sup>164</sup> Headed by the “general secretary” as a dictator with unrestricted power, a small elite made every decision concerning politics, the economy and culture.<sup>165</sup> At the 17<sup>th</sup> congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (16 January – 10 February 1934), the general secretary was not even formally elected.<sup>166</sup>

Headed by the general secretary (first secretary),<sup>167</sup> the Bolshevik-type party became a body guaranteeing the concentration of power and totalitarian dictatorship. A body above the laws codified by the state, the party supervised and controlled the whole state structure and every sphere of society.<sup>168</sup>

Applying also terroristic means, the secret police exercised control over society, the state and even the party, liquidating not only actual enemies, but also potential enemies selected arbitrarily. In a totalitarian dictatorship, fear is the factor that upholds and reproduces the concentration of power. Politics were criminalised, and anyone could be held accountable under any pretext (including the highest-level leaders),

<sup>164</sup> The Soviet-type dictatorship aspired to control even outfits, hairdo and fashion.

<sup>165</sup> Lenin was referenced in terms of this issue, too: “The Soviet socialist centralism does not contradict the principle of one-man-rule and dictatorship, since the will of the class is sometimes implemented by a dictator who can do more by himself and who is far more needed.” Quoted by HELLER–NEKRICH 2003: 150.

<sup>166</sup> Tellingly of Stalin’s one-man-rule and terror, 98 died violent deaths of the 71 members and 68 alternates elected at the 17th congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. From among the 1,225 delegates with voting right and 711 with advisory right attending the congress, 1,108 became victims of the terror. See TAKÁCS 1992: 81.

<sup>167</sup> As a characteristic feature, dictatorships have no predeveloped regulation for selecting the general secretary/first secretary. Moreover, communist leaders always tried to get rid of their rivals. Until Stalin’s death, they were simply liquidated. Later they were content with dismissing “claimants to the throne”. KENÉZ 2008: 259.

<sup>168</sup> See the chapter on the one-party state.

and even sentenced to death with the greatest of ease.<sup>169</sup> Total control over society covered every area. Typewriters were kept under control even in 1988. Writing samples were collected. Copying devices and larger quantities of paper could only be purchased with permission.

Almost every detail of the economy, production and distribution was controlled by the ruling elite. The so-called “nomenklatura” became the privileged class. There had been no other regime in human history that applied a system of financial rewards and sanctions of such a broad scope. The leaders of the Soviet-type dictatorship were actually aware that they control an oppressed country with unlawful methods.<sup>170</sup>

The ruling elite had the monopoly of communication and information. They strictly held mass communication and propaganda in their own hands.

The ideology, mostly called Marxism–Leninism, was imposed on the population as a kind of “state religion”.<sup>171</sup> From kindergarten to university, from adult education to the media, official doctrines have been drilled into people’s minds: doctrines that have all the answers and solve all problems of humanity. It was claimed that the Communist Party was the “vanguard of the proletariat”, and that the communist (socialist) system would build the “perfect society” as envisioned by Marx and Lenin, where everyone would have access to earthly goods according to their “needs”. In fact, however, power was never exercised by the proletariat, but by the party elite. Even if we were to believe that the leaders of the party governed on behalf of the proletariat, it could only have happened in a mythological form, as in France where “God reigned through the mediation of Louis XIV”.

The totalitarian dictatorship not only terrorised society, but also tried to transform it according to its own interests. The population

<sup>169</sup> In the Soviet Union, three successive leaders of the political police were executed by shooting: G. G. Yagoda, N. Y. Yezhov, L. P. Beria. Stalin had almost the entire party leadership executed, from Bukharin to Zinoviev. In Hungary, the ministers of interior were particularly at risk. László Rajk was executed, János Kádár was sentenced to life imprisonment. Sándor György committed suicide to avoid arrest, Mátyás Rákosi was interned in the Soviet Union.

<sup>170</sup> NYÍRŐ 1990; HUSZÁR 2007; GYARMATI 1991.

<sup>171</sup> According to Leszek Kołakowski, “no modern society can exist without some sort of legitimacy. In a totalitarian society, this legitimization can only be ideological. Total societies and total ideology presuppose each other.” Quoted by SCHMIDT 2008: 12–13.

was militarised<sup>172</sup> and atomised. According to Marx, alienation is characteristic of capitalist societies. However, in the socialist society, people were isolated from each other, since all horizontal relations were abolished. The communists made people feel like insignificant cogs in a machine. All independent initiatives, self-organisation and society's defence reflexes were banned. (In the Criminal Code, even legitimate self-defence was restricted.) Communists intended to destroy society's organic, bottom-up contract, its independent existence and civil society. That is why they tried to eliminate the churches and religiosity. Parties, associations, civil movements and organisations were banned. They tried to weaken the family, traditions, old habits, attachment to the homeland, national feeling. Unconditional obedience was demanded from all citizens. They tried to create a new type of man, the "Homo Sovieticus".

It followed from all of this that during its 70 years, the Soviet-style dictatorship did not manage to create humane social conditions. Individuals were tied up, almost imprisoned, facing barriers at home, at work, at school, even in their personal lives. No one could be free. The authorities and their "volunteer" collaborators monitored and controlled everyone. Applied with varying intensities but constantly, the terror was not only immoral, but also extremely harmful. It also caused an inestimable loss in human lives and the standard of living.<sup>173</sup> To show the effect of the regime on individual initiative, it is enough to refer to

<sup>172</sup> Stalin wore boots and paramilitary clothing. The party leadership imitated their leader in this, too. In any case, Stalin compared the party to the army: "Considering the structure of the leadership, our party consists of approximately 3,000–4,000 leaders at the highest level. They form the general staff of our party, so to speak. In addition, there are 30,000–40,000 leaders at the middle level, they form the corps of party officers. Next, the lower command staff of the party, about 100,000–150,000 people. They are, to a certain extent, our party's non-commissioned officers." See *Pravda*, 27 March 1937. Socialist countries maintained the largest armies, spent the most money on weapons, and applied general conscription. In addition, they operated numerous organisations and movements preparing for paramilitary or military service (e.g. Ready for Work, Ready for Battle [Hung.: Munkára, harcra kész (MHK)], the pioneer movement and its equivalent for younger children (Hung.: kisdobos mozgalom), Young Guard, Workers' Militia). Education was also subordinated to the militarisation of society (national defence education became a separate subject). In the Soviet Union, from the 1940s, workers in several sectors were required to wear uniforms: among others, lawyers, diplomats and clerks at tractor stations. After co-education was abolished, the wearing of uniforms was required even in schools. See KUN 2012: 284.

<sup>173</sup> RAYFIELD 2005.

the opinion of Zbigniew Brzezinski,<sup>174</sup> an expert of the President of the United States. According to Brzezinski, during its 74 years of existence, the mighty Soviet Union did not produce a single invention (possibly with the exception of certain innovations in military technology), which would have been competitive on the world market.

### **The socialist constitution (Act XX of 1949)**

Until World War II, Hungary had been one of the countries with the most significant public law traditions in Europe.<sup>175</sup> The organic development of the Hungarian historical constitution was blocked and led to a forced path by Act XX of 1949. Considering the so-called Stalinist constitution of 1936 as its model (practically copying it), the said act on the constitution of the People's Republic of Hungary was very similar to the constitutions of other European socialist countries, most notably those of Poland (22 July 1952) and Romania (24 September 1952), and the Basic Law of the German Democratic Republic (6 April 1968).<sup>176</sup>

In Hungary, after the 1949 elections held on 27 May, the government officially established the commission for drafting the constitution (Government Resolution 290/1949), which actually consisted of two members: János Beér and Imre Szabó. According to István Kovács's recollection: "At the committee meetings, but especially during the preparatory personal consultations and reports, the officials were not at all interested in the political or professional justification of the individual chapters. They, however, requested detailed information on all issues where

<sup>174</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski (1928–): American political scientists of Polish origin, university teacher. See GATI 2013.

<sup>175</sup> HORVÁTH 2014: 23.

<sup>176</sup> As forerunners, we could mention the constitutions of the People's Republic of Yugoslavia (31 January 1946), the People's Republic of Albania (14 March 1946), the People's Republic of Bulgarian (4 December 1947), the People's Republic of Romania (13 April 1948), the Republic of Czechoslovakia (9 May 1948), and the German Democratic Republic (30 May 1949). Countries with completely different legal traditions also received Stalinist constitutions: the constitution of the People's Republic of Mongolia passed in 1940 and the constitution of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam passed on 31 December 1959.

the draft differed from the text of the Soviet constitution.”<sup>177</sup> Accordingly, there were no more than a few deviations from the Stalinist constitution. Section 53 was drafted when Ernő Gerő summoned the drafters of the constitution to his office, and then typed the new passage he invented: “The People’s Republic of Hungary effectively supports scientific work serving the cause of the working people, as well as art depicting the life and struggles of the people, reality, and proclaiming the victory of the people, and promotes the development of the intelligentsia loyal to the people, with all available means.”<sup>178</sup> The other small deviation occurred in relation to the last sentence of Section 12 of the Stalinist constitution. The original text referred to the principle “if a man will not work, he shall not eat”. However, in Hungary in 1949, it was well known that this sentence originates from the Second Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians. Of course, Bukharin and his comrades quoted from another letter that Lenin wrote to the Petrograd workers.<sup>179</sup> Eventually, the Hungarian drafters took the liberty of formulating a completely new paragraph: “Workers serve the cause of socialist construction with their work, their participation in working competitions, the intensification of the discipline of work, and the improvement of work methods”<sup>180</sup> [paragraph (3) of Section 9].<sup>181</sup>

The draft was to be published on 5 August 1949,<sup>182</sup> and then the communists managed to conduct a national debate in only five days,<sup>183</sup>

<sup>177</sup> KOVÁCS 1989: 12.

<sup>178</sup> GELLÉRT KIS 1987: 7.

<sup>179</sup> LENIN 1971: 394. Lenin must have been rather fond of this saying, since he quoted it on other occasions, too: “There are many unnecessary people in every large consumption centre: we feed officials who rub shoulders with us, disguised bourgeois and speculators. Such unnecessary consumers violating the basic law of “if a man will not work, he shall not eat”, must be rounded up on a regular basis.” See LENIN 1972: 421. According to Karev, Lenin considered this principle to be the main argument for socialism. See KAREV 1962: 68.

<sup>180</sup> Just a slip of tongue: instead of the technique, the methods were to be developed. This was to become the Stakhanovite movement.

<sup>181</sup> Stalin gave direct orders for the text of the Polish constitution and amended the draft more than fifty times. For example, he replaced the word “private property” with the term “personal property”, which later caused problems for Polish lawyers. See PERSAK 1998: 27.

<sup>182</sup> In fact, the text of the draft constitution was published by *Szabad Nép* on 7 August 1949, on page 2–3.

<sup>183</sup> On 10 August, the *Szabad Nép* published letters and telegrams from “readers”, addressed to Mátyás Rákosi. According to the editor’s commentary: “And there is something present in each comment: the awareness that this constitution, like all our achievements so far, was created on the basis of our liberation, that is, the victories of the Soviet Army and the help of the Soviet Union. Words of gratitude speak to the great liberator from each factory, because it provided

so the bill was presented to Parliament on the 10<sup>th</sup>, where committee negotiations followed on the 12<sup>th</sup>. On 18 August, at the proposal of Mátyás Rákosi,<sup>184</sup> the bill was passed with unanimous enthusiasm.<sup>185</sup> In a dictatorship, the drafting and adoption of legislation works like a well-oiled machine. In this case, haste was indeed necessary. The constitution entered into force on 20 August 1949, and thus from that day onwards – until 1990 – St Stephen and the founding of the state were no longer celebrated on 20 August: it became the day of the Stalinist constitution.

Act XX of 1949 on the constitution of the People's Republic of Hungary can almost be classified as a “Potemkin” or a fictitious constitution modelled on the Soviet constitution of 1936, which had been created by the Soviet masters of propaganda. We could say that not a single provision of the constitutions was enforced. In most cases, an “uncodified” authoritarian practice was decisive instead. The ruling elite operated without any sign of constitutionalism.

Fictitious constitutions are largely political rather than legal documents. According to Lenin: “It is a legal instrument of agitation.”<sup>186</sup> The constitution was very similar to Stalin's works, of which the brochure entitled *A leninizmus kérdései* was the first to be published in Hungary. It is a “catechism”, prose authored in a form of questions-and-answers, intended not to prove but to reveal, confusing the present and the future: a political program in the guise of constitutional law. It defines set goals, applying reverse “historization” to justify the present. Two leading lawyers of the era, Imre Szabó and István Kovács acknowledged, too, that the constitution “[...] is primarily a political document, which ultimately expresses political conditions in the form of rules of conduct”.<sup>187</sup>

This applies particularly to the preamble. The first socialist constitutions (those of Bulgaria, Romania and Yugoslavia) included no preamble, while the constitution of Vietnam (1946), Czechoslovakia and the German

a model for this creation of ours, as for all others so far: the Stalinist constitution.” See *Szabad nép*, 10 August 1949, 3.

<sup>184</sup> In his speech, Mátyás Rákosi managed to put together quite a mixed metaphor: “The Constitution is a new guarantee, and on this rock we will build our world.” See *Országgyűlési Napló*, 1949, Vol. I (8 June 1949 – 22 December 1949), 175. One must wonder whether he knew where this simile originates from?

<sup>185</sup> ÁDÁM 1990: 34.

<sup>186</sup> BIHARI 1973: 58.

<sup>187</sup> SZABÓ 1966: 16; KOVÁCS 1962: 342.

Democratic Republic began with a preamble. A ceremonial introductory part can be found in almost all socialist constitutions drafted after 1949, and it has even gained an increasing role. The 1954 Chinese constitution regulated the leading role of the party in the preamble.<sup>188</sup>

The preamble of Act XX of 1949<sup>189</sup> broke with Hungarian public law traditions and disregarded Hungary's previous constitutional development, history and culture. Introducing the draft constitution to the National Assembly on 17 August 1949, Mátyás Rákosi, made the following statement to justify all that: "Until now, the Hungarian people have not had a constitution. What was generally called a constitution, was in fact nothing but a collection of various legal customs and legislation. In the drafting of our constitution, the preparatory committee, in accordance with Stalin's teachings, strove to record all that exists."<sup>190</sup> According to the 1949 constitution, due to the intent of the legislature to completely erase the past, Hungarian history began in 1945, when "[t]he armed forces of the great Soviet Union liberated our country from the yoke of the German fascists". Only the Republic of Councils was mentioned from the Hungarian historical past.<sup>191</sup> The aspiration to irrationally erase the historical experiences of humanity was a manifestation of the denial of the past.

Tellingly about the servility of the editors, the Soviet Union is mentioned three times in the preamble, that is, every four lines on average.

Applied to cover up the real goals and intentions, so-called "new speak" terms can be discovered in the preamble and almost every chapter of the constitution. For example, a sentence of the introduction declares the following: "relying on the Soviet Union, our people have begun to lay the foundations of socialism, and on the path of people's democracy, our country is advancing towards socialism." The term "people's democracy" is pleonasm, that is, redundancy in linguistic expression, accumulation

<sup>188</sup> Kovács 1982; Constitution of the People's Republic of Albania, 1949; Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, 1949; Constitution of the Republic of Poland, 1949; Constitution of the Czechoslovak People's Republic 1949; Constitution of the People's Republic of Romania 1949; Constitution of the Polish People's Republic, 1952; Constitution of the People's Republic of Romania 1952; ZHOU et al. 1954; Kovács 1985.

<sup>189</sup> VARGA 1970: 249.

<sup>190</sup> *Országgyűlési Napló*, 1949, Vol. I (8 June 1949 – 22 December 1949), 168.

<sup>191</sup> APOR 2005: 3.



of terms with the same meaning and therefore unnecessary. As it was invented by Stalin, communist leaders, including Mátyás Rákosi, adopted this concept.<sup>192</sup> The theory of people's democracy was developed by György Lukács,<sup>193</sup> and it was included also in the constitution of Hungary: "People's democracy is a state with whose help, as a result achieved by the Soviet Union and relying on the Soviet Union, the working people are on the pathway from capitalism to socialism under the leadership of the working class. In terms of the function of people's democracy, it is a proletarian dictatorship without a Soviet form."<sup>194</sup>

According to Tamás Földesi, the concept that thus became official, was the most frequently used category of Marxist political literature after World War II. The 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (17–31 October 1961), the 1960 Declaration of Communist and Workers' parties, and the draft program of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union discussed the history of socialist countries using this terminology.<sup>195</sup>

The legislative part of the constitution consciously aimed for framework law regulation, leaving loopholes and using undefined terms to give authorities a free hand: "In the People's Republic of Hungary, the majority of the means of production are owned as social property by the state, publicly owned institutions, or cooperatives" [paragraph (1) Section 4]. The question is what is the legal definition of the means of production, and what is included in the "majority"?

The provisions of the actual normative text had never been applied in practice, such as paragraph (1) of Section 10 of the constitution ("The supreme body of state power of the Hungarian People's Republic is the National Assembly) or the rules concerning the freedom of the press and the right of assembly enshrined in Chapter VIII.

Paragraph (2) of Section 70 of the constitution stipulated that "[t]he Council of Ministers is obliged to introduce the bills necessary for the implementation of the Constitution to the National Assembly", but no action was taken by the set deadline. The legal institutions declared in the constitution were either never regulated by separate acts

<sup>192</sup> KOGELFRANZ 1990: 15–16.

<sup>193</sup> GIMES 1948; LUDZ 1972: 545.

<sup>194</sup> RÁKOSI 1949: 3; 1952: 263, 359.

<sup>195</sup> FÖLDESI 1962: 80.

(for example, the referendum [Section 20]),<sup>196</sup> or the separate legislation regulated the grandiloquent principles in an unconstitutional manner (right of association, law decrees concerning associations, the press act).

It is a general requirement for all constitutions to limit the power of the state and to ensure the fundamental rights of the citizens.<sup>197</sup> As opposed to that, the starting point of the socialist constitution and constitutional law was the concept of unified state power, denying the principle of separation of powers and “checks and balances”. (As a symbolic step, the government moved into the Parliament, and the Labour Movement Institute moved into the building of the Curia.) Since the issuance of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen (1789), the following requirement is almost a commonplace: “Every community in which a separation of powers and a security of rights is not provided for, wants a constitution.”<sup>198</sup> As opposed to that, Yakov Mihailovich Sverdlov formulated the following explanation: “It is most right that in our country the legislative and executive powers are not separated, as in the West. In this way, all problems can be solved expediently.”<sup>199</sup>

There were no institutions tasked with safeguarding the constitution. Even the mere concept was rejected on the grounds that there was no need to limit the “power of the people”. Therefore, the Administrative Court was downsized between 1945 and 1950. As a first step, drafted on the instructions of the Hungarian Communist Party, Act VIII of 1945 on the National Assembly elections removed adjudication concerning electoral affairs from the jurisdiction of the Administrative Court. This, of course, was no coincidence: the communists already knew then that they would manipulate the elections.

Therefore, from 1950 onwards, the Administrative Court no longer functioned (Act II of 1949 on the abolition of the Administrative Court; Government Decree 4080/1949 on the entry into force and implementation of Article II of 1949 on the abolition of the Administrative Court, and on the establishment of the rules for the financial, personnel and

<sup>196</sup> When the question of a referendum arose during the debate on the Gabčíkovo–Nagymaros Dam in the National Assembly elected for the period between 1985 and 1990, Minister of Justice Kálmán Kulcsár had to admit that, although it is regulated by the constitution, in the absence of an implementing law, no referendum can be called.

<sup>197</sup> KUKORELLI 1994: 19.

<sup>198</sup> HAHNER 1999: 86.

<sup>199</sup> Quoted by SOLZHENITSYN 1997: 361.

jurisdictional arbitration committees).<sup>200</sup> The head of the Administrative Court, János Csorba was deported in 1951.<sup>201</sup> Unlawful decisions could no longer be challenged in court by citizens.<sup>202</sup> And even the possibility of public control or citizen control of the state administration was abolished. On the level of theory, the decision was justified as follows: “Today it is natural that what the government of the people’s democracy deems right cannot be changed by any kind of judicial or formal legal decision.”<sup>203</sup> However, Act IV of 1957 on the general rules of the state administration procedure enshrined some exceptions to that principle. Law Decree No. 26 of 1972 on the amendment of the Code of Civil Procedure even prescribed the rules of procedure for challenging the decisions of state administrative bodies in court.

To cover up the Soviet-style dictatorship, parliamentary elections were still held, but the list of the members of the Parliament was always drawn up in advance by the party leaders. Elections, thus, stood for nothing but a formal procedure.<sup>204</sup>

The parliaments of the socialist countries, including Hungary, were modelled on the system developed in the Soviet Union, in the absence of any kind of constitutional traditions, during the period of war communism. The so-called “supreme body of power” held sittings twice a year according to the 1918 Soviet constitution, and annually according to the 1924 constitution. Referring to Marx’s theory about the nature of the Commune as a state organ, Lenin formulated an opinion in favour of the supreme representative body in which “the representatives themselves are obliged to work: they are to implement the laws themselves and monitor their actual influence on everyday life, bearing direct responsibility to their constituents”.<sup>205</sup> The National Assembly could not exercise any of its powers enshrined in the Constitution, even though the division of powers was denied, and the fiction of the unity of power, the primacy of the parliament was to be asserted. In fact, the National Assembly

<sup>200</sup> According to the official position, the administrative courts were bourgeois institutions, and thus had no place in socialism. See RÁCZ 1990: 172.

<sup>201</sup> RÉVÉSZ 2020: 240.

<sup>202</sup> STIPTA 1997: 166.

<sup>203</sup> Quoted by PETRIK 2011: 197.

<sup>204</sup> FEITL 1994: 73; IZSÁK 2013: 63; FEITL 1999: 278; KUKORELLI 1981: 188; HORVÁTH 2017b: 181.

<sup>205</sup> LENIN 1965: 45.

had almost no decision-making powers left.<sup>206</sup> It did not even function continuously, but usually held two or three few-days-long sittings a year. Accordingly, it passed very few acts: for example, only two in 1982, and those concerned the budget and the annual balance sheet. The National Assembly had no actual control over the budget, it had no say in the national economic plan, and often even formal election of the president and members of the government was dispensed with.<sup>207</sup>

The government was indicated as the “Council of Ministers”<sup>208</sup> by Act XX of 1949 and defined as the “supreme body of state administration”. Denying the legislative–executive–judicial triad, the communist state reduced the division of representative, administrative, judicial and prosecutorial bodies to a mere division of labour. This eliminated the independent category of executive power. The government has lost its former significance and no longer made the most important political decisions. That said, for shorter periods the party’s first secretary held the position of prime minister,<sup>209</sup> and in extraordinary situations (1953, 1956),<sup>210</sup> the role of the government was decisive even against the party leadership. But apart from these cases, the government functioned more like a bureaucratic apparatus implementing the decisions of the party leadership. There was a rapporteur for each portfolio in the Central

<sup>206</sup> According to István Bibó’s opinion: the parliament “has no authority and no moral credibility, because it is based on a constitution that, in the eyes of the Hungarian people and in the face of history, has forever been linked to the one-party system, this empty straw coat of arms subject to public hatred”. See BIBÓ 1990: 161.

<sup>207</sup> FEITL 2019.

<sup>208</sup> Act of 15 March 1946 of the Soviet Union prescribed that, to make the different terminologies more in line with European customs, the name “Council of People’s Commissars” (which was invented by Trotsky) was replaced by the name “Council of Ministers”, and the name “ministry” replaced the name “people’s commissariats”. See KUN 1988: 496; RAYFIELD 2005.

In Hungary, pursuant to (the incidentally unconstitutional) Resolution No. 26 of 1956 of the Presidential Council of the People’s Republic, on Khrushchev’s proposal, in order to further distance themselves from Imre Nagy’s government, the Council of Ministers was replaced by the “Revolutionary Workers’–Peasants’ Government”. (In the Soviet Union, for some time after 1917, the Council of People’s Commissars was first called the “Provisional Workers’–Peasants’ Government” and then the “Workers’–Peasants’ Government”.) Act II of 1957 amended the Constitution accordingly. The constitutional amendment of 1972 added the word “government” in brackets to the term “Council of Ministers” [Paragraph (1) Section 33 of Act I of 1972 on the amendment of Act XX of 1949 and the consolidated text of the Constitution of the People’s Republic of Hungary].

<sup>209</sup> Mátyás Rákosi: 1952–1953, János Kádár: 1956–1958, 1961–1965, Károly Grósz: 1988.

<sup>210</sup> Both times Imre Nagy was the Prime Minister.

Committee, who in fact was the person in charge of the given area. The prime minister was only a member of the Political Committee, except when the general secretary of the party held this position.<sup>211</sup> According to Miklós Németh's summary on the government's deliberations: "government meetings until May 1989 started as follows: I opened the meeting, described the Political Committee's agenda and the decisions made there. If these affected a ministry, I explained what task was assigned to that ministry. There was some discussion about this, not really a debate, but rather lukewarm opinions and comments – quite understandably, one or more members of the government usually dozed off during the meetings [...] generally speaking: the government meetings had no stake whatsoever, because the decisions were not made by the government but the Political Committee."<sup>212</sup>

Obviously, it was not for the election results to determine who the President of the Council of Ministers would be. This was well illustrated after the elections of 1953: even though Mátyás Rákosi won the biggest "victory" in the history of Hungarian elections, a few weeks later he was summoned to Moscow and replaced by Imre Nagy as head of the government.

The resignation of Imre Nagy also took place under rather strange circumstances. He submitted his resignation in person on 9 March 1955, in the presence of Antal Apró<sup>213</sup> and Béla Szalai, then in writing addressed to István Dobi, the chairman of the Presidential Council of the People's Republic on 28 March.<sup>214</sup> On Rákosi's instructions, István Dobi did not accept the resignation so that the Central Leadership of the Hungarian Workers' Party could replace Imre Nagy in April.

The appointment of the Kádár Government is even more telling. The legitimacy of the Imre Nagy Government was not brought into question until 4 November 1956. It was recognised by revolutionaries, democratic parties, revolutionary bodies and even – both "de jure" and "de facto" – by the Soviet Union, as it exchanged notes verbales and negotiated with Imre Nagy's government through its representatives. In contrast, the so-called "revolutionary workers'–peasants' government" headed by János Kádár met neither the legal nor the constitutional

<sup>211</sup> SÁRKÖZY 2017: 185.

<sup>212</sup> OPLATKA 2014: 39.

<sup>213</sup> Antal Apró had been a member of the government from 1952 to 1971.

<sup>214</sup> MNL-M-KS 276. f. 62/1. ő. c.

regulations.<sup>215</sup> Thus, the Kádár Government could only be established through the Soviet occupation.<sup>216</sup> Incidentally, Kádár himself acknowledged this at the closed meeting of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on 12 February 1960: "at some point, this Revolutionary Workers' and Peasants' Government came into being, and at that time, in certain situations, it had a total of 8 ministers. And, in part, its came into being was not by full constitutional forms, but partly through a personal meeting and partly over the phone."<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>215</sup> FEITL 1993: 102.

<sup>216</sup> That is why it is called the Quisling Government. Having concluded a pact with Hitler, Vidkun Abraham Quisling facilitated the occupation of Norway. His name thus became the synonym of collaborative behaviour.

<sup>217</sup> MNL 288. f. 30. ó. e. 1–49, 25.

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