ATTILA PÓK

ASSET OR LIABILITY FOR EUROPE?
FACES OF HUNGARIAN NATIONALISM

NISE ESSAYS 8

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If we assume that European integration is beneficial for the continent, is Hungarian nationalism an asset or liability for Europe in this process?

This essay addresses this admittedly provocative question by way of will then give a brief survey of major turning points in Hungarian history and of influential historical narratives of, respectively, the Hungarian people and the Hungarian state. These two narratives do not overlap, and their differences give a particular dynamism to Hungarian collective identity in general and Hungarian nationalism in particular. This leads into a number of case studies of the instrumentalization of Hungarian nationalism in Hungarian politics, both before and after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc. The essay concludes with a balance sheet of Hungarian nationalism in the light of the opening question.

In presenting some distinctive features of Hungarian nationalism from a European perspective, this essay starts with the thought-provoking question: if we assume that European integration is beneficial for the continent, is Hungarian nationalism an asset or liability for Europe in this process?

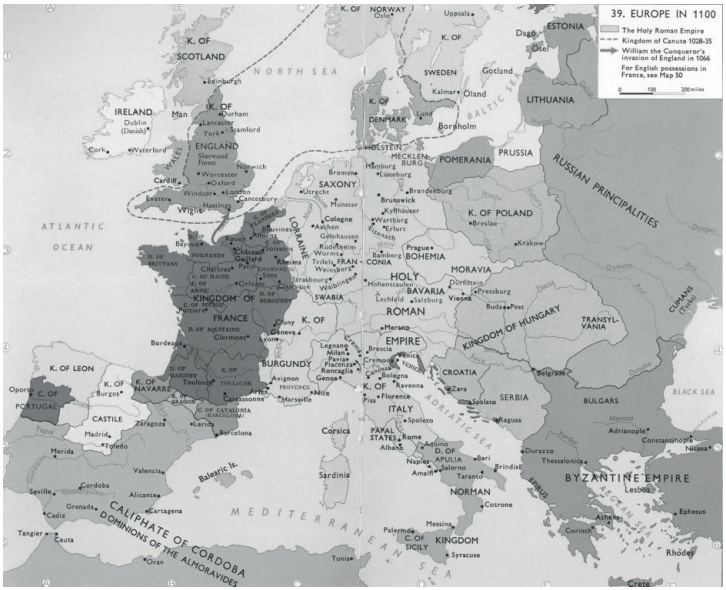
One Nation, Two Stories

I approach this question by way of, first, a short survey of major turning points in Hungarian history, and, second a précis of some influential historical narratives – myths – of, respectively, the Hungarian people and the Hungarian state.[1] The narratives of the Hungarian people and of the Hungarian state do not overlap; their differences give a particular dynamism to Hungarian nationalism. It should be understood that my discussion of nation and nationalism takes its cue from Rogers Brubaker, in that 'ethnicity, race, and nation are not things in the world but perspectives on the world: ways of seeing, interpreting, and representing the social world'.[2] My aim is, not to show the 'substance' of Hungarian national identity and nationalism, but rather to survey the development and developing meanings of Hungarian collective identitity.

What makes our task particularly difficult is that the territory of the state changed repeatedly since its foundation 1022 years ago. Furthermore, Hungary has never been inhabited by Hungarians alone, and many Hungarians lived, and still live, outside its borders. Thus, the shifting patterns of congruence and divergence of the two narratives of the Hungarian state and of the Hungarian people over the centuries constitute a very influential factor in the shaping of a collective identity. In the Middle Ages, Hungary was regarded as a European great power, reaching a peak of its political, economic and cultural influence during the reign of Matthias Corvinus (1458–1490). For 150 years, however, starting in the middle of the sixteenth century, it was divided into three parts: the north-western part controlled by the Habsburgs, the central parts conquered by the Ottomans, and the Eastern province of Transylvania poised between the two, but in practice dependent on the latter. After a successful European cooperation pushed back the Ottoman Empire from

the early eighteenth century on, Hungarian statehood found its place within the Habsburg Monarchy. Following the defeat and dissolution of that Monarchy in the First World War, Hungarians first got a taste of being a small state. Interruptions and fundamental reorganizations, restructurings of state and society have constantly attended the life of Hungarians. In the twentieth century alone, there have been nine consti-

The first Hungarian king, Saint Stephen (ruled 1000 to 1038). [Wikimedia Commons]



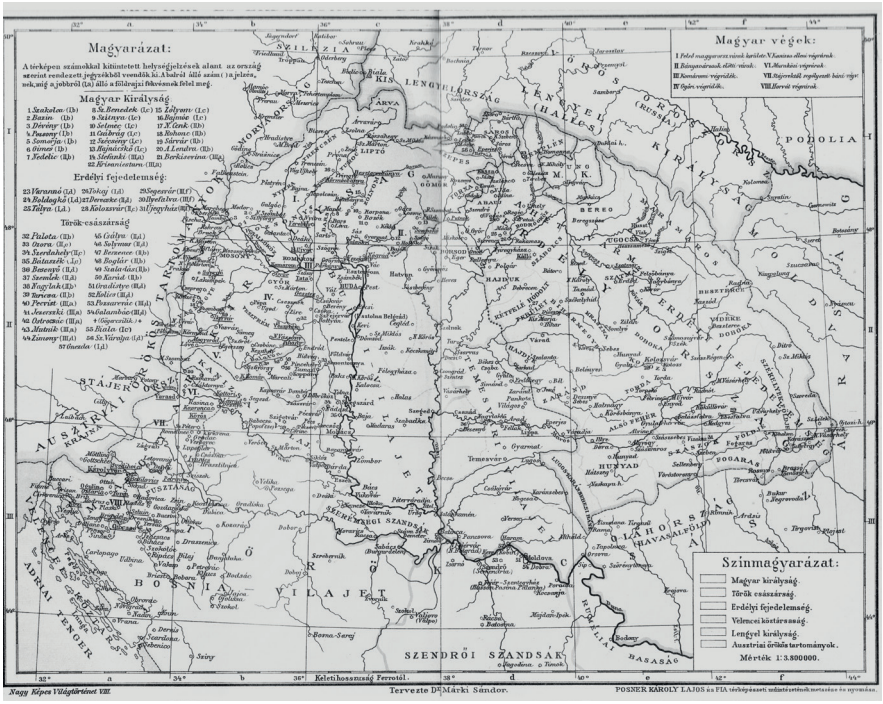
An emerging great power: Hungary around 1100. [https://hungarynews.files.wordpress.com/2013/11/europe_1100_ad.jpg]

tutional changes (to be discussed further on). In other words, every twentieth-century generation had to get used to at least three or four different regimes, not to mention occasional shifts within one system. Nonetheless, despite historical changes that have become increasingly frequent as we approach the present, it is long-term continuity that, as I intend to argue, is a most important feature of Hungarian collective identity.

Archaeological and linguistic evidence allows us to speak of Hungarians as an ethnically defined group since about the first millennium BC. First hunters and fishers, they became horse-riding nomads herding large animals on the steppe and subsequently settled as farmers. They migrated from their original homeland beyond the Urals to the South Russian-Ukrainian steppe and, during the ninth century (some say partly as early as the fifth and sixth centuries), to their present homeland in the Carpathian

Matthias Corvinus, Hungary's great Renaissance king (ruled 1458 to 1490). [Wikimedia Commons]

Basin. Their language connects them to the Finno-Ugric ethnic family, but their identity was shaped also by contacts with Turkic culture. The medieval Hungarian state was founded by King Stephen, who converted to Latin Christianity, and whose dynasty, the Árpáds, ruled the country from 1000 until 1301. Both the Árpáds and their successors the Angevins maintained the great power status of Hungary until the middle of the sixteenth century. Medieval sources list Hungary in the same category as France or England. The doctrine of the Holy Crown emphasized cooperation between king and the nation (i.e., in medieval parlance, the nobility) and remained a guiding principle in Hungarian political thought from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century.[3] This binate concept was an element of continuity and stability but also became increasingly anachronistic as the concept of the nation came to include all layers of society. Although constitutional rule was adopted (e.g., popular parliamentary representation, accountability of the government), the West-European legacy of the rule of law was never fully implemented in actual political and social life in Hungary. The reason for this is that, both during the tripartite division of the country (from the mid-sixteenth to the early eighteenth century, and during its subsequent integration into the Habsburg Monarchy (up to 1914), protecting the right of the state versus the individual was a priority. It was held that only a strong state can maintain the integrity of the Hungarian nation, and can guarantee the survival and sovereignty of the Hungarian national community. It is also part of this mentality that citizens in crisis situations tend to look to the state either as an omnipotent saviour or as a scapegoat. Thus, while Hungarian political thought is embedded in Western traditions, political practice is prone to embrace authoritarian methods.



The Ottoman Empire in control of Central Hungary (around 1629).
[Wikimedia Commons]

Homeland and Progress

From the expulsion of the Ottomans from the Carpathian Basin and the integration of the state of Hungary into the Habsburg Empire, Hungarian politics were dominated by conflicting interpretations of the national interest; this continued until the end of the Second World War, or even until the last Soviet soldier left the Hungarian territory in 1991. Put most simply, the national issue boiled down to four principal sources of conflict:

- Hungary's place in the Habsburg Empire;
- Hungary and the great powers;
- Hungarians and non-Hungarians in the Habsburg Empire, and after 1918, Hungarian minorities in the successor states of the Habsburg Monarchy;
- the tension between liberalism and nationalism.

In all these, four dates are of key significance: 1848, 1867, 1918 and 1945.

Two phenomena brought the conflicts to come to a head in the revolutionary year of 1848: the Croatian, Serbian, Romanian and Slovakian national movements, and the recovering strength of the counterrevolutionary political forces in Vienna. The confrontation reached its peak with the abolition of Habsburgs monarchical rule on 14 April 1849: the constitutional model of the state was left open, but Lajos Kossuth, the foremost leader of the revolution, was elected governor.

During the Habsburg reprisals following the defeat of the Revolution and the War of Independence, the lower nobility, which had formed the basis of the pre-1848 Age of Reform, were deprived of their economic, social and political strength. The Habsburgs' modernization measures (such as the implementation of the emancipation of the serfs, which originally had been decided by the revolutionary parliament, and the dissolution of the guild system) was held by many contemporaries, and not without reason, to be aimed at breaking 'the backbone of the nation' and met with very strong – but largely passive – resistance.

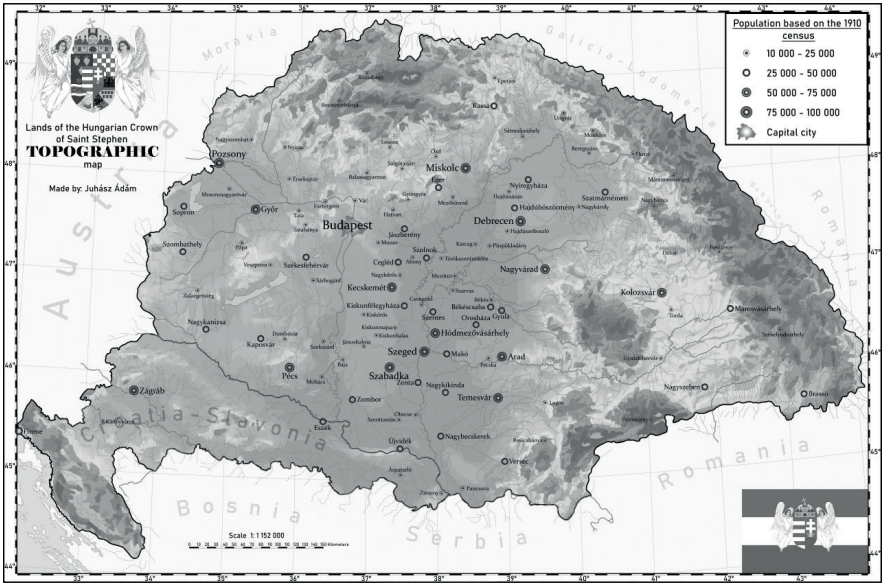
Until 1867, all political activities in pursuit of national objectives were closely linked to economic and social modernization. Following the con-

stitutional settlement of 1867 (the *Ausgleich*), Hungary enjoyed political sovereignty over its territory, but decision-making concerning military and foreign affairs and their financing was shared with the other half of the Monarchy. As one of the unwanted consequences of this structure, Vienna-initiated modernization measures (e.g. decreasing the rights of Hungarian local and regional public administration versus central governmental institutions) were frequently perceived by the Hungarian political elite as threats to Hungarian sovereignty. Thus, national pursuits and modernization objectives often came into conflict. Péter Hanák, a leading expert on this period of Hungarian history, often uses the expression 'dual structure'[4] to refer to the coexistence of two social hierarchies during the 1867-1918 period: the traditional feudal hierarchy with its high prestige, and the bourgeois hierarchy with its burgeoning economic strength. This prevented the emergence of a coherent national middle class, a necessary pillar of modern society. Often regarded by the public as alien and un-Hungarian, the incentivization of capital accumulation, industrialization, or a liberal market economy often came into conflict with political currents that regarded themselves as representing the interests of the nation. These parties and movements wanted to safeguard the traditional (feudal) structures and thereby opposed modernization attempts often carried by Jewish and German sections of society. This had serious consequences: very few major figures in Hungarian cultural and political life succeeded in reconciling modernization plans with national aspirations, and even then, they usually got no further than theorizing and planning. The central focus of political life was to promote Hungarian national sovereignty against the Habsburgs and the domestic national minorities. Those who criticized this view for any reason (e.g., in endorsing elements of Habsburg policy, or voicing reservations about the assimilation policy towards ethnic minorities) were often accused of 'betraying' the interests of the nation.

The 1867 Settlement[5] was the overture to a period that brought prosperity to numerous (but by no means all) sections of society. Paradoxically, the half-century between 1867 and World War One witnessed both an unprecedented wave of urbanization and large-scale emigration of landless, pauperized agricultural workers to America. By 1900 however, Hungarian national liberalism was no longer the driving force of social and economic

Lajos Kossuth, leader of Hungary in 1848–1849. [Wikimedia Commons]

modernization but increasingly an ossified ideology stubbornly defending traditional political and social structures.



Hungary in 1910.
[https://mapsontheweb.zoom-maps.com/post/623067082583687168/]

Continuities and Discontinuities in the Twentieth Century

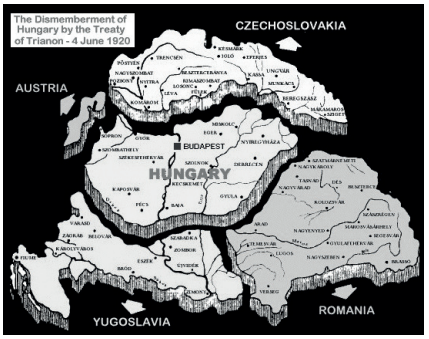
The tension between continuities and discontinuities is best studied through twentieth-century events as reflected in the politics of history and memory following the political transition of 1989-1990.

During the twentieth century alone, Hungary underwent nine changes of its political system, six forms of state, four border revisions, three revolutions and two world wars involving three territorial invasions. This direct public experience of history is something politicians cannot afford to ignore. In Hungary's political transition in 1989-1990, positions taken on historical themes contributed decisively to the formation of political parties and their programmes, and to the elucidation of differences between political groups and schools of thought.

Trianon

There is general agreement, both among politicians (whatever their ideological stance) and among historians (whatever their theoretical and methodological position) that the decisive event in the twentieth-century history of Hungary was the signing of the Trianon Peace Treaty on 4 June 1920. The Treaty of Trianon forced Hungary to cede two-thirds of the country's pre-war territory (its area decreasing from 282,000 to 93,000 square kilometres, not counting Croatia) to other successor states of the Habsburg Empire. The population of the country was reduced from 18.2 to 7.6 million, the Hungarian-speaking population was reduced by a third (3,3 million people). The treaty, imposed on Hungary as part of the dual Monarchy, destroyed the 'empire' of Saint Stephen. Hungary's economic and trading system collapsed, and it was forced to pay reparations. Ever since, the road leading to this national tragedy has remained an issue of central topicality and urgency, in political thought, in historical scholarship and among active politicians. The formal and informal discussions surrounding 'Trianon' have greatly shaped and are still shaping Hungarian nationalism.

The obvious starting point in these debates is Hungary's role in the outbreak of World War One. This is closely connected to the much larger question: was the Habsburg Empire doomed to fail? Would the social and



Defeated ans dismembered, Hungary 1920. [https://hu.pinterest.com/pin/474918723209035200/]

political tensions within the empire have destroyed it sooner or later, even without the Great War, or was the empire the victim of the war effort or of a conspiracy that brought about its military defeat? Mainstream scholarship puts the emphasis on the centrifugal forces tearing apart the Monarchy versus the centripetal factors keeping it together. Still, politically motivated exchanges up to now deal a lot with the responsibility issue. As far as the immediate antecedents are concerned, scholars tend to agree that during the first weeks following the Sarajevo assassination, the Hungarian Prime Minister opposed the war. István Tisza argued against the Monarchy's decision to start the war on several occasions, e.g., in a note to the emperor on 8 July 1914. He pointed out that in case of a war of Germany and Austria-Hungary against the Entente powers, the Monarchy's main force would have to be sent against the Russians, leaving insufficient manpower to deploy at the Romanian border. In turn, 'the Romanian army will enter Transylvania, there will be insurrections in the regions inhabited by the Romanians, and our army fighting against Serbia will be attacked on the flank and the rear. The certain defeat of that army will open the way for the enemy towards Budapest and Vienna and decide the entire campaign'.[7] Emperor Franz Joseph could not be convinced and as Tisza remained in his position, he shared the responsibility for the declaration of war against Serbia. In the event, up to the late summer of 1918, the outcome of the war, despite great suffering and hardship, was quite open: the Russian revolutions and call for peace seemed to help

the Central Powers' cause. The military and political situation, however, changed rapidly and Tisza, who had resigned from his position as Prime Minister in June 1917, confirmed the statement of the leading figure of the independist opposition, Mihály Károlyi, in the Hungarian parliament on 17 October 1918: the Central Powers have lost the war!

The events of the following weeks brought about a fundamental transformation of Hungarian life and left a deep imprint on Hungarian national identity and Hungarian nationalism. The Austro-Hungarian Monarchy dissolved, and Hungary had newly born states as neighbours: Austria, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia. New institutions took over the leadership of the Hungarian state that turned into a republic on 16 November, rural and urban revolutionary movements demanded social and political reforms and during October alone about 44.000 people fell victim to the Spanish flu. The leading figure of the turbulent transformation process was an aristocrat of one of the wealthiest families of Hungary: Mihály Károlyi. He and his government had to face unsurmountable difficulties: the traditional elite of Hungary were unable to deal with the economic crisis, with the social tensions and first of all with finding the ways and means to try to defend the territorial integrity of the country. Károlyi invited Social Democrats and a number of intellectuals (representatives of the small Bourgeois Radical Party, founded in 1914) to join his government, which attempted to negotiate with the representatives of the victorious Entente powers and with the leaders of the national minorities while trying to curb the discontent of soldiers returning from the frontlines, of the peasantry and of the urban poor. The new leaders of the country promised social reforms, to be implemented as soon as conditions would allow. Their actions and their rhetoric echoed Károlyi's prophetic words in the Parliament on 16 October: 'We have lost the war, what is important now is to make certain that we do not lose the peace'.[8]

A major change occurred when the influential journalist Béla Kun, prisoner of war in Russia, returned home and founded the Communist Party of Hungary on 24 November 1918. This new political force was underestimated by Károlyi and his inner circle. Neither his readiness to initiate the long-due distribution of large estates among peasants, nor his preparations for elections based on universal secret suffrage, could quell the

discontent. An ultimatum handed over by the head of the French military mission in Budapest on 20 March 1919 was a fatal blow to this government as it was interpreted as a call to recognize substantial territorial losses in favour of Romania in the east of the country. This demand terminated all illusions about implementing Wilson's principle of national self-determination in Eastern and Central Europe. In turn another illusion substituted the old one: the possibility of support from revolutionary Russia. Within a few hours a plot of social democrats and communists removed Károlyi from power and a Soviet Republic under the leadership of Béla Kun was proclaimed. The new regime tried to abolish private property and to set up a communist model with the total centralization of power. The experiment collapsed under external (military) and domestic (social, political) pressure after 133 days. Most of the top-level leaders emigrated, and Romanian troops occupied the Hungarian capital, Budapest. A counter-government was set up in the south of the country, and their army, led by Vice-Admiral Miklós Horthy, a former aide to Emperor Franz Joseph, became the strongest force in Hungary. By March 1920, Horthy became the new leader of the country as governor of a Hungarian Kingdom without a king. The political message of this peculiar state form was to assert the long-term continuity of the Hungarian kingdom and statehood in spite of the dramatic territorial and population losses.

All these rollercoaster changes had a decisive impact on Hungarian collective identity, on Hungarian nationalism, and also on the external perception of Hungarian national endeavours. Bryan Cartledge, British ambassador to Hungary from 1980 to 1983, summarizes their impact as follows:

> Despite its brevity, the Béla Kun experience made a profound impact on the Hungarian national psyche. It instilled a hatred of Communism and, by association, a deep hostility to the Soviet Union which, twenty years later, helped to account for Hungary's tolerance of right wing extremism, apparent indifference to the horrors of Nazism and popular acquiescence in the eventual occupation of Hungary by Nazi Germany. Communism was perceived to be the greater evil, Stalin's Russia the greater threat. Károlyi's abdication in favour of the Communists, moreover, tainted the cause of democratic liberalism thenceforth

equated with weakness and partly accounted for the predominantly reactionary complexion of Hungarian politics during the inter-war period.[9]

Let me here point out a relatively neglected cultural echo of this episode. It was during the turbulent months of late 1918, early 1919 that Béla Bartók was working on one of his masterpieces, *The Miraculous Mandarin*. Bartók was under the spell of the sweeping changes, to the point of accepting membership in the 'Music Directorate' within the Cultural Commissariat of Kun's Soviet Republic.[10] This position, he hoped, could help in better integrating music education into school curricula based on folk tunes of the Carpathian Basin. He had devoted more than a decade to collecting these tunes. For him, the harmonious coexistence of Hungarian, Slovak, and Romanian folk tunes served as the basis of a regional collective identity closely connected to an integrative, non-exclusive national identity. At the same time, in *The Miraculous Mandarin* he wanted to prove that love and passion are stronger than murderous violence. In the ballet three tramps try to use a prostitute as a lure to rob and kill her customers; but the mandarin cannot be killed until his desire is fulfilled and the prostitute turned into a true lover. Bartók was both a real Hungarian patriot, passionately standing up for peace and cooperation among Central European peoples and at the same time he also presented the complexity of passions that shape people's individual and collective behaviour.[11]

In the 1920s, Hungary had to rebuild its state and its economy from almost nothing. The Hungarian minorities were not given the promised right of self-determination in any of the successor states. The imposed treaty inevitably provoked revisionist aspirations, driving the country's leaders to a series of fatal decisions in the second half of the 1930s. The communist regime established after the Second World War made the trauma of Trianon a taboo subject, to be mentioned only in attempts to make Hungarians reconcile with the victors. Following the political transition in 1989-1990, the suppressed feelings of national grievance erupted with elemental force. Since 1990, the national post-Trianon catastrophe has been regarded in many circles as the source of all of the country's subsequent social and economic woes, and assigning the blame has become a key historical and political question. Attempts to find the culprit, how-

ever, have tended to underestimate the extent of the Hungarians' own responsibility for the catastrophe.

Why is the Trianon trauma still so powerful in present-day Hungary? First of all we have to be aware of the fact that this trauma is part of a very widespread interpretation of twentieth-century Hungarian history as a series of catastrophes, due to both internal and external factors. Let me refer to a few further factors:

- Scholars agree that if the peace treaty had respected the principle of national self-determination, it would have been possible to define, for example, a Czechoslovak-Hungarian border that would have corresponded with linguistic and ethnographic dividing lines between Slovaks and Hungarians. With some population exchanges a similar solution could have been achieved between Serbs and Hungarians as well. The Austrian–Hungarian border was drawn basically along ethnic lines and is no longer challenged. To follow this principle in Transylvania certainly would have been more difficult. Still, we might argue that the imperfect implementation of a legitimate principle keeps this memory alive.

- The European political and territorial changes of 1989-90, i.e., the collapse and dismemberment of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union, the reunification of Germany, and the independence of Kosovo demonstrated that changes in the region were still possible. In the collective national memory this certainly revived the story of the Hungarian border adjustments between 1938 and 1941, when with the support of Nazi Germany more than one third of the territories lost was regained, with a population of about 5 million, 50% of which were ethnic Hungarians. This way close to 80% of the lost Hungarian population returned to Hungary. Post-1945, these territories were again detached from Hungary, leaving at least 3 million of a total of 15 million ethnic Hungarians to live as national minorities in the countries surrounding the Hungarian state, which itself has a population of slightly under 10 million. Their status and political aspirations are key issues of Hungarian domestic politics. Various discourses keep referring to the origins

of the 'truncation' of the national body. This is an issue , not only for politics on all levels, but also for nearly every single family in Hungary. It is hard to find any Hungarian citizen who does not have relatives and/or close friends in these Hungarian minority communities.

- Mainstream political thinking, however, concurs that the Treaty of Trianon, and the 1947 Paris Peace Treaty that replaced it, were unjust to the Hungarians. Hungarians feel indisputably justified in demanding rights of self-determination for their minority communities in neighbouring countries. To hope for any more is illusory, and demands to that effect would be ill-considered.[12]

Voluntary or Forced? Hungary in the Second World War

The assessment of Hungary's political system between 1919 and 1945 and the part the country played in the Second World War have been among the most prominent historical themes in the political discourse since the political transition of 1989-90. The Horthy era has also generated questions of continuity and discontinuity. Miklós Horthy, 'regent' and head of state between 1920 and 1944, is one of the most controversial figures of modern Hungarian history. For those on the right, Horthy's system, despite the lack of democracy, was much more legitimate than the communism imposed on Hungary from outside and may stand as an antecedent of the democratic system created in 1990. Those on the left regard the policies pursued by Horthy and his regime as a dead end and reject any continuity with it, particularly because of its involvement in the killing of the majority of Hungarian Jews. They prefer the short democratic periods between 1945 and 1948 and in 1956 as the direct antecedents of today's democracy.[13]

The most oversimplified, schematic assessments of the Horthy regime started to be reviewed by Hungarian historians in the 1980s. They assessed the nationalism and irredentism of the Horthy era in comparison with similar phenomena in other small states of the region. Leading historians have given accounts of the authoritarian political system and the broad powers of the regent not as steps towards totalitarianism but as a show

of strength against political movements that were infused with extreme right-wing, fascist, and Nazi influences. Few, however, dispute that in pursuing his revisionist aims, the close ties Horthy forged with Germany were not in Hungary's long-term interests.

The Communist System and the 1956 Revolution

In 1944-1945 the Allies agreed that Hungary would be assigned to the Soviet sphere of domination. For the first time in its history, the country would belong not to the West but to an autocratic Eastern European civilization. Within a few years, exiled communists returning from the Soviet Union together with their comrades who had remained underground in Hungary or returned from Western Europe ruthlessly built up a Stalinist dictatorship under the leadership of Mátyás Rákosi, 'Stalin's best pupil'. This process can best be summed up as a war waged by the state against its own citizens camouflaging as rapid, all-encompassing modernization. An unprecedented enforced social mobility rapidly restructured society, but even those who were given a great chance to climb up on the social ladder shared a pervasive fear. Deprived of economic independence and personal freedoms, nearly every section of the Hungarian police state was kept under permanent terror. Everything was pervaded by the centrally controlled messianic communist ideology, one aspect of which was a total reinterpretation of the past. The new view of history was fixated on Hungary's belonging to Eastern Europe and an interpretation of the previous four hundred years as nothing more than the story of independence struggles against the Ottomans, Habsburgs and the Germans which led into a happy end with the country's 'liberation' by the Soviet Union. After the death of Stalin in March 1953, the party leadership relaxed the terror, trying to gain support, especially from rural society. Some space was given to individual entrepreneurship, without, however, affecting the social-political foundations of the communist dictatorship.

On 23 October 1956, in an atmosphere shaped by Khrushchev's de-Stalinization and the anti-Soviet, anti-Communist movements in Poland, the people of Hungary rose up in rare unanimity against the oppressive system. As the leading Western powers remained passive, the Soviet Union brutally suppressed the movement on 4 November. The assessment of the

event and its run-up are still controversial. Despite its failure, the 1956 uprising was definitely a turning point in world history, because in the long term it made an irreparable breach in the wall of the communist bloc. During its immediate aftermath, however, the Soviet Union strengthened its great power status. In addition to being a reaction against oppression, the revolution was also a moral act: a fight to protect human dignity. 1956 was also a fight for Hungary's internal and external self-determination, and Hungarians are still very sensitive to what they see as attempts to restrict the independence that was recovered with such a struggle. There are extensive discussions to find the proper theoretical framework to describe what actually happened in late October, early November in Hungary. I do not think that these events can be described just as an 'uprising', 'rebellion' or 'counter-revolution'. Hungarian people undertook a 'revolution' and a 'fight for freedom' in 1956, because they did want to overthrow a system of government together with its social and cultural foundations. For Hungarians, the legacy of 1956 is both the pride of a small nation challenging the Soviet-supported dictatorship and the controversial memory of the Kádár system that was then put in place (see below). In the history of Hungarian nationalism, the memory of the 1956 revolution exposes the question of the relationship between patriotism and Communism. Can a communist behave patriotically? Or is a patriot by definition not a communist? György Litván (both an active participant and a historian of the revolution) distinguishes two left-wing (reform socialist and national democratic) and two right-wing (national conservative and radical right) factions among the leading figures, all of whom mistrusted the Soviet Union and demanded the immediate withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary. During this brief, magical moment of Hungarian history, communists and anti-communists alike shared a common criticism of Soviet imperialism. In the struggle for the memorialization of 1956, many anti-communists attempted to portray all communists as serving only Soviet interests, whilst one group of Polish and Hungarian communists regarded 1956 as a nationalist reform-communist attempt to preserve the true values of socialism freed from Stalinist despotism. As part of the same struggle for interpretive dominance, yet another group of Hungarian communists refers to 1956 as a 'counter-revolution' which aimed to restore the ultraconservative regime of the years 1919–1944. The official Hungarian account previous to 1989 referred to a civil war barely

averted with the help of Soviet troops. After 1972, János Kádár attempted to replace the term 'counter-revolution' with 'national tragedy', however, the former term remained part of the party's official language up until 28 January 1989. On that day, for the first time Imre Pozsgay, a member of the Politburo of the state party, referred to 1956 as a justifiable national uprising on one of the country's most popular radio programmes. What made this comment all the more significant was that this qualification of 1956 harked back to positive Hungarian traditions, became the nucleus of a 'counter-memory', and subsequently contributed to the historical delegitimization of the Kádár regime. At the same time this fundamental re-evaluation of 1956 with its reworking of the politics of remembrance paved the way for negotiations between the representatives of oppositional groups and the country's rulers. This resulted in a number of symbolic events: Imre Nagy, who had been executed on 16 June 1958, was solemnly reburied together with other victims at one of the most important public spaces of the Hungarian capital, Heroes' Square, on 16 June 1989. On 23 October 1989, the 33rd anniversary of the start of the revolution, the Hungarian People's Republic was proclaimed a republic, thus aligning with Hungary's democratic traditions. Many years later, when Imre Mécs was asked who had made negotiations possible and who had chosen the participants, his answer was brief and unambiguous: the masses thronging Heroes' Square on 16 June 1989.[14]

Unfortunately, commemorations of 1956 have become divisive over the last thirty years. In the summer and autumn 1989, the memory of 1956 was the common foundation for action by highly diverse political currents critical of the communist regime. But since the early 1990s, differing interpretations of the causes, course, and consequences of the 1956 revolution have been exploited to legitimize political goals. The political rhetoric, from highly different quarters, refers to the 'unrivalled unity' of the Hungarian nation in its 1956 rejection of the Soviet system. But on closer scrutiny, these interpretations reflect more diversity than unity. From a reform communist perspective, the tone-setting patriotic members of the communist leadership were able to understand the challenges of the time (XXth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, Polish social movements) and reacted to them. The regime was thus able to renew itself, it was only a small minority of its leaders who were ready to serve

Soviet imperialism without reservations. The radical anti-communist narrative of 1956 refers to young people of Budapest (pesti srácok= Pest chaps) as the driving force of the revolutionary process.

The Kádár System

Although the Kádár system is looked on by many Hungarians as greatly different from the earlier Rákosi system, both shared the same principles, long-term objectives and system of government. Their tactics, however, were substantially different: what his predecessors effected by force and open terror, Kádár, after the initial bloody reprisals, did by bribery and gradually wearing down the real opponents. Over a period of thirty

János Kádár's grave. The inscription: *"I was there where I had to be, I did what I had to do"*. [Wikimedia Commons]

years, the system of 'Goulash Communism', which established better living conditions on shaky foundations, guided Hungarian society, traditionally highly nationally-minded as it was, towards the acceptance of pragmatic survival strategies. The Hungarian middle class and rural society were broken up by the enforced introduction of the cooperative system. Hungarian society has still not shaken off the consequences of this. Kádár's apparent liberalism, so unusual in the communist world, made him a favourite in the West, but was much criticized by conservative, dogmatic leaders within the Soviet Bloc.

An assessment of the continuities and discontinuities of the Kádár system (1956–1988) is an essential part of the search for the antecedents of post-communist democratic political systems. The academic and political-social debate on the Kádár era falls into two politically-motivated areas. One involves the social base of the state party: prior to the transition, about 20% of the active working population of Hungary were members of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP). The question is: does this large number reflect coercion and fear of reprisals? The number of 'real' communists (members of the Hungarian Communist Party in spring 1945 and of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party at the end of 1956) was no more than 30,000. The successor to the MSZMP, the Hungarian Socialist Party and the Workers' Party (a mini party of conservative communists) had a similar combined number of members at the end of 1989. Another view concerning the social basis of the Kádár regime argues that – at least during the period of stabilization of the system (from about 1962 to 1980) – not only the steadily-expanding party membership but also a large part of Hungarian society, even if they did not necessarily support it, did not actively oppose the objectives and political methods of the Kádár system.

The other question concerns the decline and fall of the system, with the four main causes in order of importance:

1. The fundamental rearrangement of the international political and economic environment in 1988-1990;
2. The structural faults and deficiencies in the pillars of the socialist-communist system;

3. The activity of the opposition and of various groups of dissidents;
4. The work of reform communists within the party.

Which factor contributed, and to what extent, to the demolition of the monolithic party state? There is so far no consensus to the answer. Discussions largely revolve around the cohesive strength of Hungarian nationalism. One extreme view argues that the change was an implosion, i.e., the system collapsed due to its irreparable internal tensions; the other extreme explains everything by external factors. Well-known attempts in the international literature to place the events of 1989-90 into a broader context were made in the field of political science, but I shall here concentrate on the work of historians. Mark Kramer gives the best overview of the materials available in the archives of Russia and the countries of the former Soviet Bloc.[15] Both his work and the publications of his Hungarian colleagues László Borhi[16] and Csaba Békés[17] support the view that the transition process went against the intention of the great powers; as such, they complement Kotkin on the Soviet Bloc's 'implosion'[18] rather than explosion. From the perspective of the shaping of Hungarian nationalism, this approach sees the events of 1989-90 as evidence for strong national unity in times of crisis: at the crossroads of conflicting great power interests the nation can stand up for its collective interests. From an extensively argued sober economic historical perspective, the work of Iván. T. Berend traces the roots of the transition back to 1973. His point is that in order to understand the events of 1989-90

> we must first unravel, out of the numberless threads that make up the fabric of history, the dramatic changes in economic processes brought about by the shock to the world economy caused by the oil crisis of 1973. The economic base of state socialism was visibly undermined from the 1970s on, accelerating its collapse. For a full understanding of this process, it is important to give a relatively detailed explanation of the international economic situation, the Western reaction to a changing economic world, and the Eastern inability to adjust to it. These developments are not only the main factors in the collapse of socialism, but also explain the requirements and trends of postcommunist transformation. This is, therefore, the proper point of departure for analyzing the two crucially important decades around the turn of the

century. The year 1973 was indeed the beginning of a new chapter of greater European economic history, which, in the case of Central and Eastern Europe, led to the collapse of their state socialist regimes.[19]

This approach gives further food to arguments that keep pointing out the inability of Hungarians to act together, arguing that they are always split into factions fighting each other, and that as a result explain both achievements and failures mainly from external factors.[20]

In my view, so far the most challenging historical acount of the overall European significance of 1989 has been offered by Philipp Ther. He describes the illusions connected to the neoliberal reforms imposed on post-communist Eastern Europe. During the early 1990s it was widely assumed that the market economy and democracy were interconnected. Ther argues that brusque neoliberal reforms could be implemented as a 'shock therapy' largely for lack of a full-fledged democracy in these countries. He also connects the East Central European experiences of the early 1990s to the post-2008 crisis in South Eastern Europe. All these events have substantially shaped the overall post-1990 history of Europe; thus, from Ther's perspective, 1989-90 is not simply the East trying to catch up with the West, but the beginning of a period of powerful interactions between the Eastern and Western parts of the continent.[21]

Instrumentalizations of Hungarian Nationalism, the Role of Myths

Following this concise survey of major turning points and some key issues in the shaping of Hungarian nationalism, I can turn to a similarly concise survey of five major 'myths' in Hungarian nationalism. I need first to address a few theoretical and methodological issues.

Some Theoretical Considerations on Myths

Historical myths present a peculiar bridge between the past and the present; they are much more embedded in the present than in the past, they document and illustrate, most of all, the time and place when they are used. Why one myth rather than another obtains a certain function at a certain place and time remains a most interesting question. The greater the density of turning points, fundamental changes and rapid transformations in a country's history, the greater the demand seems to be for historical-political myths. In everyday political debates, myths are used by all those concerned, irrespective of respectable historical scholarship. Myths themselves are highly valuable sources for the study of the social mentality of the imagination of national communities – something which is hard to access with the traditional tools of historians.

The major driving force in political mythology is the need for a speedy and efficient legitimation of emerging political actors in times of rapid change. Max Weber's well-known analysis of charismatic legitimation states that the authority of charismatic leaders is rooted in their assumed suprahuman and supranatural abilities.[22] It is immaterial whether they possess truly special talents, the essential issue is how their followers experience it. The contents of the myth can be fully or partially refuted but our major concern is why and how myths can make people act.

Carl Schmitt's theory of political theology can also guide us in dealing with these problems. He argued that all major concepts of modern state theory are secularized theological concepts. The 'salvation' of ethnic, social or religious communities is a frequent theme in historical-political myths. The other element in Schmitt's theory is the centrality of the concepts of 'friend' and 'enemy': for him collective identity and collective

action is shaped and inspired by the definition of the enemy.[23] In most myths the destruction of the constructed enemy appears as the major precondition of salvation. The epistemological scepticism or occasionally even nihilism of postmodern thinkers (such as Ankersmit, Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard or White) presents myths as an alternative perception and presentation of the past not superior or inferior in comparison with the traditional scholarly approach. There are also a number of categorizations of politically instrumentalized historical myths that I have found useful in my work. To name but three:

- Raoul Girardet writes about four major groups of these myths: conspiracy theories, the presentation of some time periods as 'golden ages', the hero-saviours who in critical, crisis situations save, even redeem their communities, and the myth of the homogeneous unity of nations, classes and other communities.[24]
- George Schöpflin's work on national myths identifies the themes of ethnogenesis, sacral significance of certain territories, national sufferings as means of European or global redemption, salvation, all of them especially powerful in Eastern and Central Europe.[25]
- Closely connected to this are the insightful observations of Wolfgang Schivelbush in his *The Culture of Defeat*. Invoking Reinhart Koselleck, he makes the point that 'History may in the short term be made by the victors, but historical wisdom is in the long run enriched more by the vanquished [...] Being defeated appears to be an inexhaustible wellspring of intellectual progress'.[26] He also refers to Nietzsche's 1871 warning that great victories pose great dangers and that the triumph of the German Empire would entail the demise of German culture. Twentieth-century wars namely aim at much more than military victory; the humiliation and destruction of the enemy nation is a major target. Consequently, defeat is generally not considered to be just a military affair but can become tantamount to the perdition of the nation.

1918–20: The Myth of the Leftwing-Liberal Communist–Jewish Conspiracy and its Counterpoint

In a broader historical-political sense the Hungarian present starts with 1918–20 in Hungary, while the responsibility for the tremendous loss of territory and ethnic Hungarian population as stipulated by the Trianon Treaty is still on the political agenda. While this does not mean mobilization for a reconquest of these territories, this memory is a critical issue widely used in daily political conflict. I give two examples. In 1990 József Antall, historian and prime minister of the first democratically elected post-Communist government, defined himself as the prime minister of 15 million Hungarians; the population of Hungary is 10 million, the total number of Hungarian national minorities in the Carpathian basin is about 3 million, with another 2 million elsewhere in the world. And in December 2004 a referendum was held about offering 'dual citizenship' to members of the Hungarian minorities in Slovakia, Romania, the Ukraine, Serbia and Croatia. While the referendum failed to win majority approval, those voting against were frequently and publicly labelled as traitors of the national cause.

In the post-1918 political vacuum a democratic revolution was followed by a Communist–social democratic dictatorship; in collective memory these revolutions have been closely connected to the territorial losses. The predominance of Jews in the leadership of the 'Soviet Republic' resulted in a powerful twentieth-century Hungarian political myth: that of a leftwing-liberal, communist–Jewish responsibility for the truncation of Hungary. As rancour targeted the victorious Entente powers, the new neighbours of Hungary, and the liberal political elite that was unable to defend the country, a complex myth took shape of a network of conspiracies. Serious research based on primary sources started in the early 1960s, with a number of Hungarian historians producing numerous publications refuting these points, but these entrenched recriminations are still present in more or less veiled forms, e.g., in election campaigns. The picture would not be complete if I did not refer to the positive counterpoints to these hate-driven negative myths. In other words: positive myths that were appreciative of the deeply tragic collective memories. One of the most persistent of such myths is the idea of a decisive Hungarian contribution to the defence of European culture and civilization against

Ottoman-Turkish barbarian imperial expansion from the late fourteenth to early eighteenth centuries. Hungary, it was felt, had sacrificed itself as a stronghold of Western Christian civilisation and thus would have deserved a reward for that in the aftermath of World War One. The idea that the victorious Entente powers should have seriously considered these Hungarian historical merits instead of giving in to anti-Hungarian Slavic and Romanian propaganda, was an essential element of interwar Hungarian political thought and was revived after 1989–90. The cult of King Matthias Corvinus (r. 1458-1490), as the greatest golden age of Hungary, was closely connected to this idea: he was the last Hungarian ruler who successfully defended Hungary's position as a great power against both the Ottoman Turks and the Habsburgs.

The Myth of Constructive Hatred: 1949-1956

In the Second World War Hungary lost close to one million people, about 10% of its population. More than 50% of this number were victims of the Holocaust. These unprecedented series of tragedies also called for the clarification of historical antecedents and the Communist political take-over established the official explanation: the responsibility lay with imperialism ('the most advanced form of capitalism') and fascism ('the open terroristic dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic, most aggressive groups of financial capital') and their Hungarian accomplices. This powerful myth combined a dogmatic Marxist-Leninist internationalism with traditional Hungarian nationalism. The dominant interpretation of Hungarian history permeating scholarship, politics and education for about three decades after 1948, presented the 400 years after the mid-sixteenth-century collapse of the strong mediaeval Hungarian state as a series of national struggles for independence. The united 'progressive' forces of the nation struggled against the Ottoman Turks, then against the Habsburgs, later against Nazi Germany until in 1945 the Soviet Union brought liberty and the preconditions for building up a sovereign, democratic and prosperous Hungary. The year of the Communist takeover in Hungary was the centenary of the 1848 revolution and struggle for liberty against the Habsburgs. The frequent references to Communists as the heirs to the patriotic leaders of this revolution were a strong effort to strengthen the legitimacy of Communist rule. An appar-

ent problem of this powerful myth was that in 1849 the Habsburgs had crushed the Hungarian aspirations with the help of Russian troops. The obvious explanation was to describe this as a Czarist intervention that ran counter to the feelings of the Russian people. To prove this, much effort was made to present the tragedy of a certain Captain Gusev in the Russian army who refused to follow the Czarist command, openly sympathized with the cause of the Hungarians and therefore with a number of his fellow-soldiers was tried and executed in late July 1849. By now we know that the story was wholly invented by a Hungarian writer,[27] but at the time it was widely popularized, with even a street in down-town Budapest named after this fictitious hero.

The Communists argued that only they were capable of realizing the social and political aims of the revolutionaries of 1848. They pointed out the significance of the struggle against the enemies and traitors of the revolution, using the revolutionary myth as a source of legitimacy also for show trials. As László Rajk (1909–1949), Minister of Interior, himself victim of the most important Stalinist show trial in Hungary, argued a good year before his arrest: 'We defend ourselves against the internal enemy with full vigilance […] we shall be worthy of our freedom-fighter ancestors. Whoever stands in our way, will be annihilated'.[28] It was this powerful, 'democratic' and 'constructive' hatred rooted in the revolutionary myth that for a time appealed to numerous contemporaries who wanted to believe in the feasibility of a fast, sweeping reconstruction of Hungarian society. A leading left-liberal intellectual, Gyula Schöpflin (1910–2004), reported on a conversation in late 1945 with József Révai (1898-1959), one of the four top leaders of the Hungarian Communist Party. Schöpflin raised the issue of the psychology of fascism, arguing that it was important to find out what turns uneducated, normal people, even creative intellectuals, into SS soldiers or concentration camps guards. The Communist ideologist very angrily retorted: 'This is incorrect […] fascists are to be hated, not to be analyzed!'.[29] Still, very soon this myth-constructing, hate-driven propaganda backfired, and the accumulated hate-potential was mobilized against the Soviet puppet regime. Communist political propaganda kept emphasizing the solid unity of all the 'progressive', 'peace-loving', 'anti-imperialistic' forces against the tiny but dangerous minority of reactionary, war-mongering imperialists.

This myth, however, did not work in the longer run. All the concepts it used were empty, failed to connect with traditional national myths and were unable to mobilize elements of collective memory.

In 1956, however, the leaders of the revolution successfully appealed to the myth of the revolutionary unity of the nation in its struggle against oppression. The armed freedom fighters numbered no more than 15,000 but a revolutionary spirit temporarily permeated society. During the two weeks of the revolution the myth of the unity of the nation, with frequent references to the heroism of the forefathers of 1848–49, was a more powerful weapon than guns. The memory of Imre Nagy as a symbol of Hungarian national unity was one of the most productive twentieth-century Hungarian national myths. The reform-Communist key-figure of the revolution was not a strong leader, proving unable to direct the course of events, but his refusal to compromise following the Soviet invasion of Hungary and his execution on 16 June 1958 turned him into a martyr, even a redeemer of the nation. The call for his rehabilitation was a robust common platform for critics of all colours of the Kádár-regime.

1989–90, the Myth of the Negotiated Revolution

My third example deals with the transition period in 1989–90 and its collective memory. If we want to define a symbolic date for the end of Communism in Hungary, that is the reburial of Imre Nagy on 16 June 1989. This reburial probably would not have been possible if three months earlier the commemoration of 15 March had not demonstrated the strengh of the opposition. 15 March is the anniversary of the 1848 Hungarian revolution, a pillar of Hungarian collective memory. A succint definition called it a 'lawful revolution'[30] as, according to the Hungarian interpretation, the Habsburgs had obstructed the implementation of Hungarian demands, legitimate by contemporary legal standards, so the Hungarians had no other choice but armed self-defence. The memory of 1848 was combined with the memory of 1956, the tradition of summarizing the chief demands in 12 points was also a surviving 1848 tradition used in 1956 as, indeed, again in 1989. In terms of the use of public spaces, symbolic references to 1848 were the deepest sources of legitimacy both in 1956 and 1989-90. The crowd representing the people is a nineteenth-

century romantic myth well exploited in 1989, in spite of the fact that the whole transition process was much more a series of deals than a traditional revolution. Professor Tőkés invented a nice phrase in the title of his book on the Hungarian transition: 'the negotiated revolution'.[31] Still, I think that one of the reasons for the contested memory of 1956 and 1989–90 is that no sweeping, powerful myth acceptable to all political groupings and social layers of the Hungarian nation exists. If I may be provocative: this is a good negative example for the use of myths in the process of legitimization.

The Myth of Adverse Fate

Close to four decades ago a well-known Hungarian sociologist[32] published the results of a very interesting comparative investigation of the national anthems of about 120 states/nations in the world. It turned out that in both music and text Hungary stands out: instead of heroism, pride and mobilizing passionate enthusiasm, the Hungarian anthem is sad, melancholic, it even reflects some apology for collective sins. The text of Ferenc Kölcsey, among others, says:

> Fate, who for so long didst frown
> Bring him happy times and ways
> Atoning sorrow hath weighed down
> sins of past and future days […]
> …for our misdeed
> anger rose within thy breast…

The text includes numerous references to past glory, the vicissitudes of the present (1820s to the early 1840s): external threat, internal strife, groans and sighs. The idea of a possible death of the nation is a powerful motif among of nineteenth-century, Romantically minded intellectuals. The great German thinker J.G. Herder had made a reference to the possibility of Hungarians vanishing and this left a deep imprint in collective memory (although I do not think that apart from specialist scholars anyone has ever read the actual reference). Still, it is frequently referred to as an internationally influential assessment of Hungarians and led to much soul-searching. On the other hand, the myth of the peculiar Hungarian

'adverse fate' could also boost the collective identity of this socially deeply stratified national community.

The Myth of 'Organic' Historical Development

József Antall, prime minister of the first democratically elected government after 1989–90, stated in his programme speech on 22 May 1990: 'The last forty years represent a break in the history of our nation. Now we intend to return to our European heritage'. Let me add to this an apparently totally different quotation from an outstanding twentieth-century Hungarian historian: 'In the continuity of Hungarian history March 21, 1919 represents a much larger break than the 1918 revolution'.[33] Continuities and discontinuities form a recurring topos in historical-political discourses in Hungary. Yet another example: the large-scale, extravagant celebration of the 'millennium' in 2000: the 1000th anniversary of the foundation of the Hungarian state and the adoption of Christianity; this celebration took place during the rule of the conservative coalition. The central symbol of the festivities was the Hungarian crown, a symbol of Hungarian sovereignty and unbroken continuity of Hungarian statehood. However, the medieval Hungarian great power collapsed in 1541 and in the following out of the 459 years until 2000 Hungary only enjoyed sovereignty for 51 years in limited form (during the dual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, 1867–1918), and formally real sovereignty was accomplished on one third of the pre-1918 territory for 82 years. The total balance of the 1000 years is thus a mixed one: 541 years real independence versus 326 years of subservience and 133 years of somehow curtailed sovereignty. Still, the politically motivated myth called for unambiguity. Following the Second World War, the Hungarian royal crown (the 'Holy Crown') had ended up in Fort Knox in the US; it was returned to Hungary in early 1978 on condition that it be kept in the Hungarian National Museum as a historical relic. However, the conservative government decided to open the millenary celebrations of the year 2000 by a festive transfer of the Holy Crown to the aula of the Hungarian parliament, thus emphasizing its role in the legitimization of the Hungarian state. The liberal and socialist opposition passionately opposed this, arguing that in a modern democracy like Hungary, legitimacy is rooted in the will of the people rather than in the continuity with a medieval monarchy sanctioned by the pope-bestowed crown.

The Power of the Past

Returning again to the continuities and discontinuities in shaping Hungarian nationalism, my closing example is an attempt at summarizing four major interpretations of the main course of Hungarian history and the substance of Hungarian nationalism that in my view prevailed during the last 75 years.

They can be best presented by their respective choices of key events of Hungarian history.

The first can be described as a romantic, dogmatic nationalist approach focusing on the legacy of fights for independence. In its Marxist version (which dominated both historical scholarship and the political uses of history in Hungary from the late 1940s to the early 1960s) it was combined with the celebration and remembrance of class struggles. The memory of peasant uprisings (1437, 1514), of the anti-Ottoman, anti-Habsburg, anti-German (after 1989-90 anti-Soviet) movements and uprisings are fused into the remembrance of centuries of struggle for national sovereignty and social freedom. According to this view no one (be it Germans, Russians or Brussels bureaucrats) can crush the aspirations of freedom-loving Hungarians.

The second approach focuses on failures and tragedies: the collapse of the Hungarian state as a result of the Ottoman Turkish expansion by 1541, the tragic ending (executions and imprisonment of military and political leaders) of the 1848-49 revolution and struggle for liberty, the immense territorial loses after World War One, the defeat of the 1956 revolution, and finally the disappointments following the euphoria of 1989-90. This approach inquires who are to be blamed for this long series of tragedies. As Peter F. Sugar, a prominent expert of Eastern and South Eastern European history, wrote in 2000:

> for the last 250 years Hungarians always felt insecure and acted in the belief that their number one duty was to defend the nation's existence and assure its survival. This is the common denominator behind the various forms Hungarian nationalism took in the past.[34]

Sugar takes this idea even further, citing a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Hungarian poets who, in various forms, expressed their fear of the inevitable, permanent decay of the nation. Sugar then arrives at the conclusion that 'this deep-seated pessimism gives Hungarian defensive nationalism its peculiar and unique character'.[35]

The third approach could be portrayed as that of a liberal democratic republican tradition: rooted in the memory of the dethronement of the Habsburgs in April 1849, the proclamations of the Republic in November 1918 and February 1946, the legacy of the 1956 revolution and of the 'lawful', 'negotiated' revolution of 1989-90.

The fourth, currently dominant Christian-national-patriotic interpretation of Hungarian history is best reflected by the historical personalities appearing on Hungarian banknotes in circulation. They include the founder of the Hungarian state, Steven the Saint (r. 1000-1038, 10 000 HUF), Matthias Corvinus, the Renaissance king (r. 1458-1490, 1000 HUF), Gábor Bethlen, the successful Prince of Transylvania (r. 1613-1629, 2000 HUF), István Széchenyi, the outstanding liberal aristocrat, prominent innovator, key player of the 1848 revolution (5000 HUF) and Ferenc Deák, initiator of numerous reform plans for nineteenth-century Hungary and the father of the 1867 Compromise between the Hungarian and the Habsburg elites (20 000 HUF). The message is that the Hungarian nation and state need personalities who in difficult situations can bring about the unity of the nation. Experts of consolidation serve the national interests better than hot-headed revolutionaries. There is however one exception: Ferenc Rákóczi, who led an anti-Habsburg movement and insurrection from 1703 to 1711 and appears on the 500 HUF note.

Continuities and Discontinuities of Hungarian Nationalism in an East Central European Context

Let me conclude by returning to longer-term political-historical contextualizations. Just a few examples: in Yugoslavia, the commemorations of the 600th anniversary of the death of Prince Lazar in 1989 meant a return to the founding myths of the Serbian kingdom, which soon replaced the cult of the 'Yugoslav' partisans of the Second World War. The repatriation of the heart of the Bulgarian Tsar Boris, who died in 1943 in suspicious circumstances, was a symbolic break with the Communist legacy in Bulgaria in 1993. The reburial of the Hungarian admiral Miklós Horthy, regent of the country from 1920 to 1944, was intended to demonstrate the continuity between pre- and post-Communist times. In 1994, the ceremonial burial of two Polish generals of the 'Homeland Army', Tadeusz Bór-Komorowski and Władisław Sikorski, symbolized a de-legitimization of the Communist regime in Poland. Many of the monuments put up to Soviet 'liberators' disappeared; new ones were put up which commemorated anti-Communist national heroes (Józef Piłsudski in Poland, Jozef Tiso in Slovakia, Ion Antonescu in Romania, Pál Teleki in Hungary) or acts of violence committed by Soviet foreign policy (in Hungary in 1956 and in Czechoslovakia in 1968). All those measures were strong reactions against the Communists' attempt to engineer a complete break with the traditions of the so-called reactionary past, and against Soviet attempts to construct the new 'fraternal community' of socialist countries.

In the official Communist master narratives of national history, expressed in political speeches and in centrally controlled schoolbooks, the struggle against the foreign exploiters was always the focal point. According to this rhetoric, the best patriots were those personalities who had pursued goals of national and class struggle in parallel and combined with one another. Even before the collapse of the Soviet empire, as Soviet ideological pressure lessened, there appeared – if not so much in scholarship, then all the more so in journalism and everyday speech – long banished visions of the historical achievements and tragic sacrifices of the East Central European elites in the inter-war period. After the changes of 1989-1990, this process accelerated. To put it sharply: the chances of a person, movement, institution or party of gaining prominence in the new national pantheon were greater the more anti-Communist they were deemed to have been.

This was also a reaction to the Communist ideological practice, which had been to brand all anti-Communists equally as 'fascists'.[36] The great danger now lay in the fact that occasionally representatives of the extreme right were shown in a positive light because of their anti-Communist attitude.

Intellectuals in post-communist East Central Europe have often asked themselves what place the communist regime had in the continuity of their national histories. Was it really true that communism had been imposed from outside in all countries of the region, or did it also have internal social and political roots in the countries themselves? Could the Communist era be seen as part of a country's national history at all? Was it not instead, in spite of its many victims, only an unimportant temporary episode, historically speaking, even though it lasted a long time? Is it possible to speak of 'organic' national histories which airbrush the communist period? One frequently posed question, closely linked to this problem, is this: was Communism an attempt to overcome the (economic and intellectual) backwardness of the region in question, or did it, on the contrary, widen and deepen the existing gap between Eastern and Western Europe?

A further part of this complexity is the responsibility (or rather, the credit) for the end of communism. Was it the strong and unbreakable backbone of the nation, which had resisted all the maliciousness and demands of the Soviets? Were there true patriots whose unwavering and consistent anti-communism finally led to success? Or was it not, rather, the pragmatic and patriotic communists who had recognized that the communist model had no future, and had started to dismantle the system when the decline of the Soviet Union and the international political situation permitted this?

Nowhere in the former Soviet bloc countries was there an appropriate legal framework for the punishment of the crimes committed by the communist system. No system functions without supporters, but it is difficult to formalize the extent of responsibility of officials at different levels within the hierarchy. As social-psychological research shows, this is almost unavoidable. If we view the trauma of system change as a mass-psychological phenomenon, then a society's recovery from such a trauma

is essentially impossible without social cohesion.[37] Social-psychological experience teaches that such cohesion is best achieved with the help of scapegoats.[38] The scapegoat function can be transferred onto individuals, smaller or larger groups, but also onto entire countries or ideologies. A decisive part of post-communist historical discourse was therefore devoted to making communism in general fulfil the role of 'constitutive other' for a post- and anti-communist generation of East Central Europeans, helping them to find their proper place. Communism as an ideology, and the personalities, groups and parties which represented it, were made responsible not only for the economic and social decline of the countries under its rule, but also for national tragedies.

Besides the responsibilities of individual communists and groups of communists, the question of how to evaluate the role of the Soviet Union in the Second World War was a further central topic in all countries of the former Soviet camp. To what extent was the Soviet Union a liberator? Was it not just a new conqueror? Is Soviet guilt comparable to Nazi guilt? How can one compare the Gulag to the Nazi concentration camps? This reprised the German *Historikerstreit* of the 1980s, but nowhere in the former Soviet satellite countries did they lead to a cathartic discussion which would have facilitated the post-Communist cohesion of these societies. Instead, it led to new political divisions or deepened old ones.

Even today, more than three decades after the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, a great number of issues relating to the history of communist rule and the causes and consequences of its collapse are heavily debated in scholarly, political and social forms of 'doing history'. I list a few hot issues:

- Who initiated the changes, when did the changes start?
- Are the peaceful transitions (velvet and negotiated revolutions) assets or liabilities?
- The criminality of communism, the limits and possibilities of transitional justice;
- Communism as a deviation from an organic course of history;
- Anti-communism as heroism;
- How former heroes become villains and former villains become heroes;

- Official reburials, renaming of public spaces;
- Ambiguities concerning the carriers of communist systems and concerning the responsibility for the collapse.

The situation is further complicated by the conflict between the official, heroic interpretations of the destruction (rather than the collapse) of communism vs. the ongoing resentment and popular disappointment at the experiences of ruthless post-communist capitalism.

The long years of theoretical and political efforts by communist ideologues and politicians failed to fuse Communist ideas with national ideologies in East Central European societies. It proved impossible to convince those societies that the internationalism of the 'proletarians of the world' could be harmonized with the defence of national interests. Practical experience has shown the opposite.

The experience of systemic change in East Central Europe, and the process of European integration do, however, show that after the great collapse of communist internationalism, intellectuals in East Central Europe should face the challenge of developing supranational identities. Can the rejection of communism serve as a solid basis for confronting the ambiguities and uncertainties that affect Europe and the world? From the perspective of the spring and early summer of 2022 it seems that, in assessing the constraints and opportunities for Eastern and Central European nations and states, we have to deal with the peculiarities of capitalism and its ability for renewal rather than with the legacy of communism.

Let me recall here the last major chronological turning point in the formation of post-communist Hungarian nationalism: the spring of 1990. When parliament became the real centre of Hungarian politics following the first free elections after four decades, it had to deal with questions of historical legitimacy. Some historians who had been elected to parliament or appointed to important political posts made a considerable contribution to this discussion. One of the first items on the agenda was a new coat of arms for the state. This prompted a clash of widely varying viewpoints. Several historians favoured the coat of arms without the crown that had been adopted in 1849 at the proposal of Lajos Kossuth, because

it represented the changes during later revolutions as well as in 1849. It was under these armorial bearings that the republic had been proclaimed on 16 November 1918, following the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, and the same happened when it was proclaimed again on 1 February 1946 and during the 1956 Revolution. Nonetheless, the overwhelming majority of parliamentary deputies (228 out of 291) voted for the arms surmounted by the royal crown. Their principal argument was that the crown represented, not royal power but the continuity of Hungarian statehood. A similar question concerned the date of the official state holiday. There were three options: 15 March (commemorating 1848), 20 August (in honour of the founder of the state, St Stephen), and 23 October (commemorating the outbreak of the 1956 Revolution). In line with the government's proposal and the decision on the coat of arms, the deputies declared St Stephen's creation of the Christian Hungarian state in the year 1000 to be the most important event in Hungarian history, and this was made the symbol of the Hungarian state and nation.

Most liberals, socialists and 'Young Democrats' preferred 15 March. In the event, 15 March and 23 October were recognized as national holidays. Despite their emotional and moral significance, they are commemorations of what were, at least in the short term, failures. By contrast, 20 August is the symbol of unmatched continuity and persistence.

A 2022 Attempt at a Balance Sheet of Hungarian Nationalism

In returning to the question posed at the outset, let me apply a SWOT analysis.

The great Strength of Hungarian nationalism is that both its achievements and its tragedies could strengthen its unifying power. Both the blocking of Ottoman-Turkish expansion at Nándorfehérvár (today's Belgrade) in 1456 and the catastrophic defeat by the Ottoman Turks at Mohács in 1526 are important elements of Hungarian cultural memory. Similarly, the glory of the 15 March 1848 revolution and anti-Habsburg freedom struggle coexists with its tragic defeat including the execution of thirteen of its generals. Remembering Trianon unifies society as much as the long-standing motif of the role of Hungary as a defender of Christianity.[39]

A *Weakness* of Hungarian nationalism is its defensive character, such as the frequently expressed grievances about the unwillingness of the West to appreciate the Hungarian efforts to defend Europe. This grievance is often phrased in a discourse of defensive self-criticism, such as the previously-mentioned national anthem, or this statement by Viktor Orbán:

The Hungarian Prime Minister, Victor Orbán meets US President, George Bush in the White House, May 1, 2001. [Wikimedia Commons]

> Believe me […] our whole continent is undergoing a process of transformation. The communities which will be successful, survive and be strong are those with strong identities: religious, historical and national identities. This is what I stand for, and this is what I am trying to protect. I regret to say that we must do so from time to time not only against the faithless and our anti-national rivals, but also from time to time we must do so against Europe's various leading intellectual and political circles. But we have no choice: we must protect our identities.[40]

An *Opportunity* is offered by the ambitious, confident and flexible attitude of this nationalism. As such, it might contribute towards new strategies for strengthening Europe in the global context. Consider for example a recent political statement of the Hungarian Prime Minister on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the Trianon peace treaty (4 June 2020):

> There is not a single nation in the world that could have endured such a century. But we are stubborn, tough and resourceful, therefore we have not only endured, but today we are winning again![41]

Citing Viktor Orbán again: 'Twenty-seven years ago here in Central Europe we believed that Europe was our future. Today we feel that we are the future of Europe.'[42]

The *Threat*, however, is that this same energy could also harm the process of European integration. Let me quote a sociologist's warning question:

> Why did the same ethnic origin, common descent, and shared religious belief define the new Hungarian national identity, instead of intellectual achievements, economic successes, common interests, or guaranteed civil rights?[43]

I think that the future of Europe, to a great extent, depends on the full integration of Central Europe, including the politics of Hungarian nationalism. The warning should be taken to heart that European integration has been a project of modernity, in whose design history and tradition had no part to play.[44] Still, the success of this integration is by no means

decided in Central Europe alone. Hungarian nationalism can be both an asset or a liability for European integration, it can either weaken or strengthen European positions in global political and economic conflicts. The outcome depends on the ever-changing political environment and on readiness, both of the leading EU members and of the Central European countries, especially Hungary, to come to terms with each other. The features of Hungarian nationalism discussed in this paper are not just a matter of the past, but they also shape our present.

ENDNOTES

1 Recent surveys of Hungarian history in English include L. Kontler, *A History of Hungary: Millennium in Central Europe*, Budapest, 2002; M. Molnár, *A Concise History of Hungary*, Cambridge, 2001.

2 https://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674022317.

3 E. Tóth, *The Hungarian Holy Crown and the Coronation Regalia*, Budapest, 2001. For the ideological aspects: L. Péter, 'The Holy Crown of Hungary, Visible and Invisible', *The Slavonic and East European Review* 81/3 (2003), pp. 421–510.

4 P. Hanák, 'Hungary in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: Preponderancy or Dependency?', *Austrian History Yearbook* (1967), pp. 260–302.

5 It is difficult to properly express the meaning of the German word *Ausgleich* in English: The German word refers to setting up a balanced situation meeting the interests of both sides, whereas compromise refers to giving up respective demands in order to make cooperation possible. Settling is more neutral, it simply expresses that obstacles to cooperation have been successfully removed. The most recent comprehensive book on the topic: P. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire: A New History*, Harvard, 2016.

6 In his path breaking and up to the present-day indispensable work, *The Dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy* (Chicago, 1929) Oscar Jászi, the distinguished Hungarian social scientist and politician in exile since May 1919 first used these concepts to describe the economic, political and social tensions within the Habsburg Monarchy.

7 Cited by B. Cartledge, *The Will to Survive. A History of*

Hungary, London, 2006, 311.

8 Cited by Hajdu and L. Nagy in P. Sugar, P. Hanák & T. Frank (eds.), *A History of Hungary*, Bloomington & Indianapolis, 1990, 295.

9 Cartledge, *The Will to Survive*, 330.

10 https://magyarnarancs.hu/tudomany/egy-huron-120343, https://www.europaiutas.hu/europaiutas/20013/3.htm T. Tallián, 'Tibor Bartók 125', Muzsika, 49/3 (2006) https://epa.oszk.hu/00800/00835/00099/2039.html.

11 The most powerful short opera by Bartók (the libretto written by Béla Balázs, a creative writer of Bartók's generation) was first shown in May 1918 in Budapest. *Bluebird's Castle* is the story of a prince who reveals terrible secrets to his fourth wife as he is opening up doors of his palace, a psychoanalyst type of dive into the depths of human soul.

12 The scholarly case has been made by Romsics. See I. Romsics, *Dismantling of Historic Hungary: The Peace Treaty of Trianon, 1920*, Wayne, 2002, 201; See also L. Romsics, 'Hungarian Nationalism before and after Trianon', *Cahiers d'etudes Hongroises* 14/ 2 (2008), 237–248.

13 For some recent research challenges the democratic nature of the 1945–1948 period, see Gy. Gyarmati, T. Valuch & I. Romsics (eds.), *Hungary under Soviet Domination 1944–1989*, New York, 2009.

14 Mécs represented the opposition in the talks with the leaders of the party of the Hungarian communists, the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, See M. Rainer, 'A Progress of Ideas: The Hungarian revolution of 1956', in: L.W. Congdon & K.B. Király (eds.), *The Ideas of the Hungarian Revolution, Suppressed and Victorious 1956–1999*, New York, 2002, 7–41.

15 https://www.wilsoncenter.org/blog-post/final-years-ussr-research-opportunities-and-obstacles-moscow-archives.

16 L. Borhi, *Dealing with Dictators: The United States, Hungary, and East Central Europe, 1942–1989*, Indiana, 2016.

17 http://www.coldwar.hu/chronologies/1945-1991/Part-5-Chronology-1988-1991-with-sources.pdf.

18 S. Kotkin, *Uncivil Society. 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment*, New York, 2010.

19 I. Berend, 'The economic factors in the collapse of state socialism and the new international environment, 1973–1989', in: *From the Soviet Bloc to the European Union: The Economic and Social Transformation of Central and Eastern Europe since 1973*, Cambridge, 2009, 6–49.

20 A classical formulation of this view was given by the most famous Hungarian liberal thinker of the nineteenth century, Isrtván Széchenyi who compared Hungarians to a swarm of bees fighting against each other. It is cited by one of the greatest twentieth-century Hungarian historians, Gyula Szekfű in his widely read *Három nemzedék* (*Three Generations*, first published in Budapest, 1920, 369). In this work Szekfű gives a complex picture of the divisions and conflicts of nineteenth and early twentieth century Hungarian society in general and the political elite in particular.

21 P. Ther, *Europe since 1989: A History*, Princeton, 2016.

22 F. Parkin, *Max Weber*, London, 2002, 84–87.

23 For me the best summary of Carl Schmitt's views is M. Lilla, *The Reckless Mind. Intellectuals in Politics*, New York, 2001, 49–76.

24 R. Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques*, Paris, 1986, 9–24. Cited by I. Romsics (ed.), *Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek a 20. századi magyar történelemről* (Myths, Legends, Misbeliefs on Twentieth Century Hungarian History), Budapest, 2002, 21.

25 G. Schöpflin, 'The functions of myth and a taxonomy of myths', in: G. Hosking & G. Schöpflin (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*, London, 2000, 28– 35.

26 W. Schivelbush, *The Culture of Defeat. On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery*, New York, 2003, 4.

27 B. Vörös, 'Illés Béla Guszev-ügye, avagy hogyan lett az írói kitalációból történelmi tény 1945 és 1951 között' (Béla Illés' Gusev issue, or how a writer's invention turned into a historical fact from 1945 to 1951), *Múltunk* (2006).

28 Gy. Gyarmati, *Március hatalma, a hatalom márciusa. Fejezetek március 15. ünneplésének történetéből* (The power of March, the March of power. Chapters from the history of the commemorations of March 15), Budapest, 1998, 98.

29 Á. Széchenyi & Gy. Schöpflin, 'Szélkiáltó. Schöpflin Gyulával beszélget Széchenyi Ágnes' [Shouting with the wind. A conversation between Ágnes Széchenyi and Gyula Schöpflin], *Mozgó világ* (1990), 10.

30 The term was coined by Prof. István Deák to describe the 1848 Hungarian revolution.

31 R. Tőkés, *Hungary's Negotiated Revolution: Economic Reform, Social Change and Political Succession*, Cambridge, 1996.

32 E. Hankiss, *Diagnózisok* (Diagnoses), Budapest, 1983.

33 I. Romsics, *Hungary in the 20th Century*, Budapest, 1999, 122.

34 P. Sugar, 2000, 151.

35 Ibid., 155.

36 T. Judt, *Postwar. A history of Europe since 1945*, New York, 2005, 215.

37 J. Mills & A. Polanowski, *Ontology of Prejudice*, Amsterdam, 1997; Zs. Enyedi & F. Erős (eds), *Authoritarianism and Prejudice, Central European Perspectives*, Budapest, 1999.

38 R. Girard, *Le Bouc émissaire*, Paris, 1982; T. Douglas, *Scapegoats. Transferring Blame*, London–New York, 1995. For an exceptionally rich survey of the classical literature on this, see F-C. Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness*, Cambridge (MA), 1994, 251–255.

39 From about the middle of the thirteenth century the defence of the country has been identified with the defence of Christianity. Popes like Gregory IX, John XXII or Benedict XIII praised Hungarian kings as *athleta christi*, who fought the Turks to protect *christina religio* and *terra christiana*. A Franciscan monk of Pest (Osvaldus de Lasko) wrote at the beginning of the sixteenth century about Hungarians: '…this strong people, whose blood and bones covered mountains and valleys of various countries was destined by God as a protective shield against the Big Turk. Their courage and heroism assured for the holy Christianity the so much demanded peace.' I. Romsics, 'A kereszténység védőpajzsától az uniós tagságig' (From the protective shield of Christianity to EU membership), in: I. Romsics & M. Szegedy-Maszák (eds), *Mi a magyar*? (What is a Hungarian?), Budapest, 2005, 204–205.

40 V. Orbán, 'Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's acceptance speech after receiving the "Person of the Year" award', *Krynica*, 7 September 2016. http://www.kormany.hu/en/the-prime-minister/the-prime-minister-s-speeches/prime-minister-viktor-orban-

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41 https://abouthungary.hu/speeches-and-remarks/primeminister-viktor-orbans-commemoration-speech-trianon.

42 https://visegradpost.com/en/2017/07/24/full-speech-of-v-orban-will-europe-belong-to-europeans/.

43 A. Örkény, 'Hungarian National Identity: Old and New Challenges', *International Journal of Sociology*, 35/4 (2006), 28-48.

44 E. Brix & E. Busek, *Central Europe Revisited: Why Europe's Future Will Be Decided in the Region*, London, 2021.

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